

Holding Fast to the Right (by Siegfried Knöpfler, August 2006)

Several articles in the March 2006 issue of Autoharp Notes report on the UK Autoharp Day in Sherborne on 22/23 October 2005 where we had as guest tutors Heidi and John Cerrigione, meeting in England also Neal and Coleen Walters, the other half of Doofus, the famous Old Time / Folk band from New England. Apart from still working with the handouts I got during the workshops, this event had an additional "aftermath" for me, on which I reported to Cyberpluckers (the international e-mail list for autoharpers on the Internet). The following is a slightly reworked version of part of my posting.

The whole band played a concert on Saturday night. One of the songs in the Doofus concert was "Hold fast to the right". I knew this song quite well because it was printed in Autoharp Quarterly many years ago. In case you don't know, it is an Old Time song from around 1930 (or earlier), attributed to Sarah Carter, A. P. Carter's wife. It has at least 4 verses. The first one is as follows:

Kneel down by the side of your mother, my boy,
you have only a moment, I know.
But stay until I give you some parting advice,
it is all that I have to bestow.
Hold fast to the right, hold fast to the right,
wherever your footsteps may roam!
Oh, forsake not the way of salvation, my boy,
that you learned from your mother at home.

(The song can be listened to on the Internet:
<http://cdbaby.com/cd/cerrigione>)

Well, several years ago I scribbled with a pencil new words between the staves on my AQ copy; and some time later, using my music notation program, MusicTime, I made a tidy music sheet and stashed it into my autoharp case, planning to expand on my words later on. And so it happened that at that weekend in Sherborne, I had the sheet ready to show it to the "Doofs" after the concert. (They were amused.) Being home again, I couldn't suppress the thought that it was now time to finish the project. And instead of doing my chores I succumbed to a creative urge, alas. Well, here is the result: (The first verse is what I had ready in Sherborne.)

[In order to guide you with the rhythm, I put, in some difficult places, an accent (`) in front of a syllable to be stressed.]

Hold Fast To The Right #2

An Englishman came flying over the Pond
and he `went to the car rental booth.
Seeing `his driver's license, the lady remarked:
"There's a `difference, I tell you the truth:
Hold fast to the right, hold fast to the right,
wherever your tires may roam!
Oh, forsake all the ways of that driving on the left
that you learned from your father at home!"

I invented this story, disembarking in Calais,
after driving on many an English road
for to get to the workshop and safely back again
myself and my autoharps load.
"Oh, `do always right, holding fast to the left",
I said to myself on my roam,
"Do hold `fast to the left, don't step fast on the gas!
That is also a difference from home!"

Coming back from a UK Autoharp Day,
so exhausted, but spirits so high,
the Belgian speed limit's a horrible drag
until `finally Germany's nigh.
And `then I drive re-ally fast on the right,
passing `by on the left, to my home,
till at `last the Cathedral comes quickly in sight
in a `warm Cologne `evening's gloam.

Reprise:

And I `hold to the right, going fast on the right
when my `tires in Germany roam.
Drive as `fast as you can and hold fast to the right,
that's indeed what I learned here at home.

Siegfried Knöpfler, October 2005

[Regarding subtleties, you have certainly noticed that I have quite often split crotchets (quarter notes) into quavers (eighth notes), especially in the first two lines of the second verse. The spelling "re-ally" means to pronounce the word with 3 syllables.]