

**TRACK I**

By Beth Wilson

**Vinyl Tracks: Rail in Song**

It was undoubtedly a festive atmosphere on that summer day back in 1828. Thousands of excited spectators had gathered the day before, and were now filling every window along the street and every inch of the street itself. The procession commenced at 8:00, with the grand marshal, dignitaries, trade groups and bands heading for the designated spot.

After sixteen months of planning, construction of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was about to commence.

The choice of Independence Day was no coincidence, and Charles Carroll of Carrollton – the only surviving signer of the country’s famous declaration – was there for his final public act, laying the cornerstone to inaugurate America’s railroad era. There were speeches, there was prayer, there was even an eloquent reading of the Declaration of Independence. And, of course, there was song. The Carrollton March, composed for the occasion by Philip Antony Corri (a.k.a. Arthur Clifton), set the historic moment to music.

The era of rail travel in the United States was about to begin, and the American soundscape would never be the same. Since its emergence, the railroad has been a faithful muse for songwriters, inspiring melodies and lyrics that capture familiar themes of progress, wanderlust, opportunity and heartache.

Rail has a distinct sound that’s been effectively captured in many songs. Listen for the percussion that mimics the train’s clickity clack in Louie Jordan’s *Choo Choo Ch’Boogie*, or the harmonica that imitates the train’s whistle in Muddy Waters’ *All Aboard*. The sound of the train’s approach, that long whistle, is emulated by string in

the Stanley Brother’s *Train*. And, of course, there’s that replicable rhythm of the moving train – witness the boom-chicka-boom guitar style of Johnny Cash’s repertoire, laden with train themes and references.

Rail is the ultimate medium for storyteller, with characters ranging from laborers to engineers to conductors to brakeman to porters to hobos, and with plots involving legendary trains or particular rail experiences.

But most often, rail in song serves as a metaphor, representing the journey, the struggle, the escape, the salvation. Here at RAIL Magazine, we found that our favorite rail song fit into two categories:

**Rails of Opportunity, Anticipation & Hope**

The lyrics and melodies in these songs are all about connecting people to good things ahead. These passenger trains are beginning journeys, arriving somewhere, or are due to arrive. Or they’re simply on the move, presenting all sorts of possibilities.

*Canadian Railroad Trilogy*

Written and performed by: Gordon Lightfoot (1967)

For they looked in the future  
and what did they see?  
They saw an iron road running



Image courtesy: www.lightfoot.ca

from the sea to the sea  
Bringing the goods to a  
young growing land  
All up from the seaports  
and into their hands

*Chattanooga Choo Choo*

Written by Mack Gordon and Harry Warren

Performed by Glenn Miller (1941)

Although the train departs  
Pennsylvania Station  
'bout a quarter to four,  
it’s all about arriving in Tennessee  
... choo-chooing me home.

*Daybreak Express*

Written by Duke Ellington

With the aid of trumpet and saxophone, you hear the early morning train slide slowly out of the station, its whistle blowing. Gaining speed, the locomotive races down the track and continues on its musical journey until the clanging bell sounds its arrival. Genius.

*Land of Hopes and Dreams*

Written and performed by: Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band (2001)

(This Train)  
Dreams will not be thwarted  
(This Train)  
Faith will be rewarded  
(This Train)  
Hear the steel wheels singin’  
(This Train)  
Bells of freedom ringin’

*Marrakesh Express*

Written by: Graham Nash

Performed by: Crosby, Stills & Nash

Wouldn’t you know we’re riding  
on the Marrakesh Express;  
they’re taking me to Marrakesh.  
All aboard the train!

*Ramblin’ Man*

Written and recorded by Hank Williams, Sr. (1951)

I love to see the towns a-passin’ by  
And to ride these rails ’neath

god's blue sky  
Let me travel this land from the  
mountains to the sea  
'cause that's the life I believe he  
meant for me

*Waitin' for the Train to Come In*

Written by: Sunny Skylar and  
Martin Block

Performed by: Peggy Lee, 1945

I'm waitin' in the depot  
by the railroad track  
Lookin' for the choo-choo train  
that brings him back  
I'm waitin' for my life to begin  
Waitin' for the train to come in

*Rails of Heartache, Misery &  
Loneliness*

The trains here carry a heavy load  
— despair, whether from lost love, lost  
freedom or just simply loss. The shrill  
train whistle often mimics harsh pain.  
The trains in these songs are usually  
departing, or simply passing through  
without stopping.

*500 Miles*

Written by Bobby Bare, Charlie  
Williams, Hedy West

Performed by Peter, Paul and Mary  
(1962)

If you miss the train I'm on

You will know that I am gone  
You can hear the whistle blow  
A hundred miles.

*Charlie & the MTA*

Written by: Jacqueline Steiner and Bess  
Lomax Hawes (1948)

Performed by: The Kingston Trio (1959)

Charlie handed in his dime  
At the Kendall Square Station  
And he changed for Jamaica Plain  
When he got there  
the conductor told him,  
"One more nickel."

Charlie could not get off that train.

*Downtown Train*

Written and performed by: Tom Waits  
(1985)

Will I see you tonight  
on a downtown train?  
where every night is just the same;  
you leave me lonely  
all of my dreams just fall like rain  
upon a downtown train

*Folsom Prison Blues*

Written and performed by: Johnny  
Cash (1955)

I hear the train a comin'  
It's rollin' round the bend  
And I ain't seen the sunshine  
Since I don't know when ...

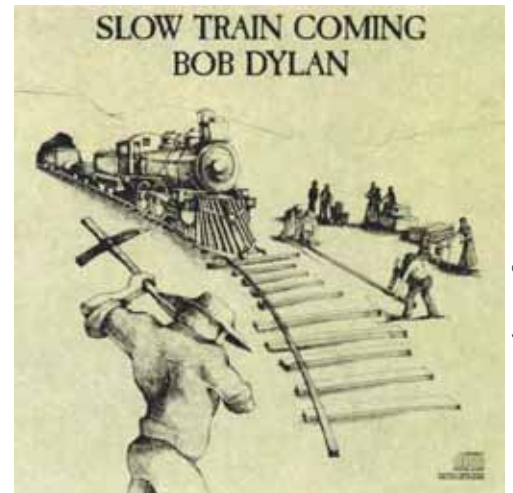


Image courtesy Columbia Records


*Last Train to Clarksville*

Written by: Tommy Boyce, Bobby Hart  
Performed by: The Monkees (1966)

'Cause I'm leavin' in the morning  
And I must see you again  
We'll have one more night together  
'Til the morning brings my train.  
And I must go, oh, no, no, no!  
Oh, no, no, no!  
And I don't know if I'm ever coming  
home.

*Slow Train Comin'*

Written and performed by: Bob Dylan  
(1979)

They talk about a life of brotherly  
love, show me someone  
who knows how to live it.  
There's a slow, slow train comin' up  
around the bend. 

## GUESS THE STATION

*This edition's station challenge is the perfect complement  
to a summer getaway by train. Its quaint, yet elegant charm  
would match the splendor enjoyed any storybook princess.  
Your guess is no laughing matter; e-mail your answer to:  
raileditor@ctaa.org.*

