

New Verses for an Old Song

John Leeder

This song has been published previously in *CFM* (39.2, p. 14), but for convenience I'm including the lyrics here. The tune, of course, is the well-known "Red River Valley". There are versions of the parody across Western Canada, but the Manitoba version is the one I learned first, and possibly the original, being that the original song had its origin in Manitoba.

Forty Below in the Winter

trad. (to the tune of "Red River Valley")

Oh, my grandpa came west in the eighties,
To the prairies, where grain grows like grass,
But the freight rates and Wheat Board got Grandpa,
And he's headed back East, second class.

For it's forty below in the winter,
And it's twenty below in the fall,
And it rises to zero in springtime,
And we don't get no summer at all.

It was raining and hailing this morning,
At the corner of Portage and Main;
Now it's noon, and the basements are flooding,
And the dust storms have started again.

Come and pay for my fare if you love me;
I will hasten to bid you adieu,
And farewell to the Red River Valley,
And its natives all shivering and blue.

My friend Brian Sullivan heard me do the song at a jam, and wanted to learn it, but he couldn't remember the verses, so he made up new ones, a modern tongue-in-cheek look at Canadians' attitude to Winter. After the last couple of winters we've had in Calgary, the version has acquired a certain currency here, and it was well-received in Sudbury and Elliot Lake last spring, as that area's winter has been similar.

new verses by Brian Sullivan

Well, we spend lots of time playing hockey,
And we love having dogs who pull sleds;
If it wasn't for Tim Horton's coffee,
We would probably go out of our heads.

If it's not forest fires, then it's blizzards;
If we're not getting drought, then it's flood;
While the blackflies make lunch of our bodies,
The mosquitoes are sucking our blood.

Come and sit in my truck if you're shivering;
Please don't leave to go back to Moose Jaw (or The Pas);
Just remember the Red River Valley,
And the cowboy who helped you to thaw.