

Dec 2004

Is it the same old song?

In the words of the old soul classic..."Well it's the same old song, but with a different meaning since you've been gone". Over the last few years there has been a steady stream of classic old songs being revived by the current generation of United fans. It's been great fun for those of us old enough to remember these the first time round, but with one small annoyance – either you lot have changed the words or we oldies have forgotten them.

Some songs are changed deliberately to update an old tune to a new context and there's not usually a problem with that. Commonly this is done for new players. A recent example of this is Louis Saha for whom we've adapted *Skip to my Lou Macari* to become *Skip to my Louis Saha*. Much further back, the extra verse to the Big Jim Holton song was a stroke of genius when a short, skinny Gerry Daly joined us, so "Six foot two, eyes of blue, big Jim Holton's after you..." became "Five foot eight, underweight, Gerry Daly's fucking great..." Perhaps the most famous adaptation was *Eric the King*, which was originally *Denis the King* of course. Those of you who thought our own songmeister, Pete Boyle wrote that should remember he was barely born when we were singing: "Weeeeeeee'll drink a drink a drink to Denis the King, the King, the King" though fair play to Boyle for all the Eric related verses.

However, the annoying changes for us old gets with long memories are those where the change makes no sense. I can just about cope with *Take me Home United Road* though you may still find me singing "Take me home to Warwick Road". That made sense when Warwick Road went past the front of the ground. However, since that section of the road has been renamed Sir Matt Busby Way I can understand a change of words might be a sensible idea, otherwise a generation of fans might think we want to be taken home to the cricket ground.

But can anyone explain why *My Old Man* no longer says fuck off? It can hardly be that we're being sensitive over one swear word considering the rest of the words in that song? The original words were 'My old man said be a City fan, I said 'fuck off, bollocks, you're a cunt'...'. Now the words go 'My old man said be a City fan and I said 'bollocks, you're a cunt'...'. Unfortunately that change of words doesn't quite scan into the original tune, which might be the reason why there's now a tendency to link each rendition with a chorus of "All together now".

Another one seems to have changed because it was too difficult to remember all the verses in the right order, but if you do it tells a little story about fighting to take the Kippax Street off city fans. The original goes:

"Use your head and use your feet, ...And we will take the Kippax Street
If I die on the Kippax Street, ...There'll be 10 blue bastards at my feet...
If my bones do not mend, ...Carry me back to the Stretford End..."

When all the old words are put together, they make a nice, every day tale of the Red Army planning to go down and take the Kippax using their heads and feet, while declaring that if they die they'll take 10 blues with them first and then their body should

be carried back to the Stretford End. The final verse was added afterwards to celebrate the deeds:

“When we go down to Maine Road, ...City fans will shit their load.”

Many of the old songs tell a similar story and another that's lost part of the tale is *Stretford End Arising*. I could remember the original words were different, but I'm grateful to Howard for telling me the full reason behind them:

I see the Stretford End arising,
I see trouble on the way,
Don't go out tonight, if you don't wear red and white,
Coz I've seen the Stretford Enders fight.

In the current version it says "...if you're not red and white" rather than mentioning wearing red and white. Originally the words related to the week or so leading up to derby day in the past when it was common for Reds and Blues to go out on the streets wearing colours to show who they'd be supporting come Saturday (and it was always Saturday back then). If you weren't wearing red and white it meant you must be a city fan, so you'd be in trouble from the roaming Red Army, all proudly wearing red and white. This was obviously long before we became too cool and casual to wear colours. The final line shows the pride that we had in the ability of the Stretford Enders to fight come derby day and it's both more powerful and rhymes better than the fairly lazy end of repeating the second line (...I see trouble on the way).

Sometimes we argue about the old days and exactly who was singing which words. For example, I'm convinced (though not proud) that there was a period when we all sang the proper words to *You'll Never Walk Alone* on the terraces. This was long before the song became known as a traditional Liverpool song. Other contemporaries say we only ever sang the anti-scouse words:

“Walk on, walk on with hope in your arse and you'll never walk again...”

Maybe I was too young and naïve to realise there were different words being sung around me and therefore stuck to the Gerry Marsden version. Similarly, I remember we used to hum the Dambusters March very loudly on the Stretford End and I would have said it was merely a daft terrace anthem in those days, before it became associated with Leeds fans and their oh-so-amusing Munich obsession. Equally, I'm prepared to admit I may have missed the subtleties of the famous United fans' irony and perhaps even then we were making a serious point to those who find it acceptable to make fun of a plane crash?

From the same era, I remember the original words to a recently revived song being:

“Bertie Mee said to Don Revie, have you heard of the North Bank, Highbury.
No said Matt, you cockney twat, but he's heard of the Stretford Enders”

Only a subtle change from the current version that has it as a two-way conversation between Bertie Mee and Matt Busby, but a significant level of subtlety because it includes the hinted insult directed at Don Revie that he was an upstart manager of a successful, but very dirty Leeds team, which had no history of its own. Who would ever have heard of Leeds' Spion Kop?

It's great to hear the old songs being sung at the game, especially at away grounds or in bars whenever Reds gather together, particularly on Euro aways. So, if you notice an oldie near you singing different words, try asking them if there's a tale to go with it. Or it might be the onset of senility and they've simply forgotten the words. In which case, buy them another beer because they've got no brain cells left worth saving.

Portia Vale