

6th November 2021

Singing

**“There was a jolly miller once,
Lived on the river Dee;
He worked and sang from morning till night;
No lark more blithe than he.”**

Isaac Bickerstaffe, Love in a Village

Love in a Village is an opera composed and arranged by Thomas Arne, which premiered at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, in 1762. The libretto by Isaac Bickerstaffe offers us the best-known of the opera's songs, *The Miller of Dundee*, from which the opening quotation today is taken. The opera has a typically complicated plot, but thankfully, it all works out OK in the end – as things often do in operas. I know little more of the opera than that, but I would like to know what was it that caused the jolly miller to sing “from morning till night” while he worked.

Sing When You're Winning is a studio album by Robbie Williams, released in 2000. I'm happy the Miller of Dundee can sing all day long, and that Robbie Williams can sing when he's winning. But is it possible to keep singing where when times are hard, when you feel you have nothing to sing about, and you're losing the game, and even the larks fall silent?

The song, *My life flows on in endless song*, by Robert Lowry and Doris Plenn, asks that question in its refrain:

*No storm can shake my inmost calm while too that Rock I'm clinging.
Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?*

A question? If so, it's a rhetorical one, given the affirmations of faith in the song's verses: “My life flows on in endless song”; “I catch the sweet, though far off, hymn”; “Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing”; “All things are mine since I am His! How can I keep from singing?”

Maybe the Miller of Dundee had faith like that; or maybe life and love were so good to him he had no choice but to sing; or perhaps he was winning all the time. But I hope and pray that when I'm losing again and have to face my own “tumult and strife”, I'll be able to carry on singing the songs of faith, maybe not from morn till night, but enough to reassure me that I'll never be able to keep from singing for long.

A prayer for today

*Keep me singing, loving God, in the choirs of life and love, enjoying the music,
trusting the words, and always keeping my eye on the conductor. Amen*