

Harry Chapin, There Only Was One Choice

There's a kid out on my corner -- hear him strumming like a fool
Shivering in his dungarees -- but still he's going to school
His cheeks are made of peach fuzz -- his hopes may be the same
But he's signed up as a soldier out to play the music game
There are fake patches on his jacket -- he's used bleach to fade his jeans
With a brand new stay pressed shirt -- and some creased and wrinkled dreams
His face a blemish garden -- but his eyes are virgin clear
His voice is Chicken Little's -- But he's hearing Paul Revere
When he catches himself giggling -- he forces up a sneer
Though he'd rather have a milk shake -- he keeps forcing down the beer
Just another folkie -- late in coming down the pike
Riding his guitar -- he left Kid brother with his bike
And he's got Guthrie running in his bones
He's the hobo kid who's left his home
And his Beatles records and the Rolling Stones
This boy is staying acoustic.
There's Seeger singing in his heart
He hopes his songs will somehow start
To heal the cracks that split apart
America gone plastic
And now there's Dylan dripping from his mouth
He's hitching himself way down south
To learn a little black and blues
From old street men who paid their dues
'Cause they knew they had nothing to lose
They knew it
So they just got to it
With cracked old Gibsons and red clay shoes
Playing 1-4-5 chords like good news
And cursed with skin that calls for blood
They put their face and feet in mud
But oh they learned the music from way down there
The real ones learn it somewhere
Strum your guitar -- sing it kid
Just write about your feelings -- not the things you never did
Inexperience -- it once had cursed me
But your youth is no handicap -- it's what makes you thirsty
Hey, kid you know you can hear your footsteps as you're kicking up the dust
And the rustling in the shadows tells you secrets you can trust
The capturing of whispers is the way to write a song
It's when you get to microphones the music can go wrong
You can't see the audience with spotlights in your eyes
Your feet can't feel the highway from where the Lear jet flies
When you glide in silent splendor in your padded limousines
Only you are crying there behind the silver screen
Now you battle dragons -- but they'll all turn into frogs
When you grab the wheel of fortune -- you get caught up in the cog
First your art turns into craft -- then the yahoos start to laugh
Then you'll hear the jackals howl 'cause they love to watch the fall
They're the lost ones out there feeding on the wounded and the bleeding
They always are the first to see the cracks upon the walls
When I started this song I was still thirty-three
The age that Mozart died and sweet Jesus was set free
Keats and Shelley too soon finished, Charley Parker would be
And I fantasized some tragedy'd be soon curtailing me
Well just today I had my birthday -- I made it thirty-four
Mere mortal, not immortal, not star-crossed anymore
I've got this problem with my aging I no longer can ignore
A tame and toothless tabby can't produce a lion's roar
And I can't help being frightened on these midnight afternoons
When I ask the loaded questions -- Why does winter come so soon?
And where are all the golden girls that I was singing for
The daybreak chorus of my dreams serenades no more
Yeah the minute man is going soft -- the mirror's on the shelf

Only when the truth's up there -- can you fool yourself
I am the aged jester -- who won't gracefully retire
A clumsy clown without a net caught staggering on the high wire
Yesterday's a collar that has settled round my waist
Today keeps slipping by me, it leaves no aftertaste
Tomorrow is a daydream, the future's never true
Am I just a fading fire or a breeze passing through?
Hello my Country
I once came to tell everyone your story
Your passion was my poetry
And your past my most potent glory
Your promise was my prayer
Your hypocrisy my nightmare
And your problems fill my present
Are we both going somewhere?
Step right up young lady -- Your two hundred birthdays make you old if not senile
And we see the symptoms there in your rigor mortis smile
With your old folks eating dog food and your children eating paint
While the pirates own the flag and sell us sermons on restraint
And while blood's the only language that your deaf old ears can hear
And still you will not answer with that message coming clear
Does it mean there's no more ripples in your tired old glory stream
And the buzzards own the carcass of your dream?
B*U*Y Centennial
Sell 'em pre-canned laughter
America Perennial
Sing happy ever after
There's a Dance Band on the Titanic
Singing Nearer My God to Thee
And the iceberg's on the starboard bow
Won't you dance with me
Yes I read it in the New York Times
That was on the stands today
It said that dreams were out of fashion
We'll hear no more empty promises
There'll be no more wasted passions
To clutter up our play
It really was a good sign
The words went on to say
It shows that we are growing up
In oh so many healthy ways
And I told myself this is
Exactly where I'm at
But I don't much like thinking about that
Harry -- are you really so naive
You can honestly believe
That the country's getting better
When all you do is let her alone
Harry -- Can you really be surprised
when it's there before your eyes
when you hold the knife that carves her
you live the life that starves her to the bone
Good dreams don't come cheap
You've got to pay for them
If you just dream when you're asleep
There is no way for them
to come alive
to survive
It's not enough to listen -- it's not enough to see
When the hurricane is coming on it's not enough to flee
It's not enough to be in love -- we hide behind that word
It's not enough to be alive when your future's been deferred
What I've run through my body, what I've run through my mind
My breath's the only rhythm -- and the tempo is my time
My enemy is hopelessness -- my ally honest doubt

The answer is a question that I never will find out
Is music propaganda -- should I boogie, Rock and Roll
Or just an early warning system hitched up to my soul
Am I observer or participant or huckster of belief
Making too much of a life so mercifully brief?
So I stride down sunny streets and the band plays back my song
They're applauding at my shadow long after I am gone
Should I hold this wistful notion that the journey is worthwhile
Or tiptoe cross the chasm with a song and a smile
Well I got up this morning -- I don't need to know no more
It evaporated nightmares that had boiled the night before
With every new day's dawning my kid climbs in my bed
And tells the cynics of the board room your language is dead
And as I wander with my music through the jungles of despair
My kid will learn guitar and find his street corner somewhere
There he'll make the silence listen to the dream behind the voice
And show his minstrel Hamlet daddy that there only was one choice
Strum your guitar -- sing it kid
Just write about your feelings -- not the things you never did
Inexperience -- it once had cursed me
But your youth is no handicap -- it's what makes you thirsty, hey kid
Strum your guitar -- sing it kid
Just write about your feelings -- not the things you never did
Dance Band...