

# “Mayday!”— Notes on the Songs

1. **Hard Times**: George knew this song would be the opening song for the album from the first time he heard Si's original version. It's a perfect scene-setter for these times, even though Si wrote it more than 20 years ago, shortly after the September 11 attacks. But the message is still the same: "Hard times....It's OUR time."
2. **Anyone Can Be President**: This song went through a metamorphosis from its original version, which Si wrote years ago. When Si was in the fourth grade, he was taught that any American kid can grow up to be president. He doesn't remember his teacher mentioning that this applied only to white men. This song has two messages: it's still a very select few who could ever run for president, but given what we've got now, just about anyone could do a better job.
3. **Stranger in This Land**: Si Kahn, solo acoustic guitar and vocal, as he recorded it many years ago. The power of its message, and of Si's performance, needs no enhancing. Far too many people whose grandparents found at least some measure of freedom by immigrating to the United States now want to deny that opportunity to others. They should take a good look in their mirrors.
4. **Care for All**: When Si and George started going through songs for this project, this one leapt out. It has a quiet feel to it, provided by Rich DePaolo's wonderful guitar work. There is a stillness that complements Si's words—reassuring, and hopeful, in such uncertain times. It raises a fundamental question for all of us: Will we be there for our sisters and brothers in their time of need?
5. **In the Heart of the Country**: Si has done lots of writing with other artists, but writing with others has been a challenge for George, and one he has rarely undertaken. For this one, Si knocked off a verse and chorus and then George took it and ran, creating a moving song for the growing resistance, with lovely harmonies by Beyanca Guilme and Rich DePaolo that give this song a haunting sound.
6. **Ask the Penguin, Ask the Seal**: Remember when Trump put a 10% tariff on two completely uninhabited islands in the Antarctic Ocean? Who could one ask about the impact that had? Obviously, Ludwig van Beethoven. Molly MacMillan gave us the grand piano and organ foundation, Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner of Magpie were a natural choice for the lead vocals, and Tim Ball leads the string “section” on this rousing sendup of “Ode to Joy.”
7. **The Gap**: In the 1930s, corporate CEOs on average made less than 30 times what most people in the same workplace did. Today, CEOs make hundreds to even thousands of times as much - even as wages for everyday workers are being driven down, down, down. Just what is it these CEOs do that makes them worth so much more than all the rest of us?
8. **Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is**: Si wrote this song for the Maryland Humanities Commission's film about the closing of the giant unionized Sparrows Point steel mill in East Baltimore. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" was the slogan of the national campaign by African-Americans to boycott stores that wouldn't hire them as workers. Baltimore was one of the cities where that campaign was most powerful. This is a driving, bluesy song with Rich DePaolo on guitars and a chorus of voices joining Si for the refrain.

9. **At the Crossroads:** The plight and life of the wandering performer is a lonely one, often filled with disappointment. In his early days, Robert Johnson was just an average guitar player and barely noticed in the circuit. Then he disappeared for a year, and when he came home, he was incomparable. According to legend, he had gone to the crossroads (which is where one does such things) and sold his soul to the devil in exchange for that ability. But what if there is no one making an offer for yours?
10. **You Can't Count on the Numbers:** Si and George wrote several new songs together for this album, and this came at the end of the recording process, when the album was just about finished. The numbers the current administration keeps putting forth are suspect at best, misleading at a minimum, and "subject to revision" often. Dave Davies added the trombone and Tim Ball played fiddle, with a gaggle of accountants telling us that "You Can't Count on the Numbers."
11. **Fight for Your Union:** A powerful vocal performance from Si drives the point of this song home. The reason we have a middle class in so many countries is that they had strong unions which fought, not just for their own members, but for all people. In the United States, we have Social Security, Medicare, and other national programs that are vital to the wellbeing of poor and working people. That's why the billionaires and the multinational corporations are working so hard to destroy our unions and these programs with them, so that through disgraceful tax breaks they can become even richer and more powerful than they are now.
12. **Going Going Gone:** Public it's ours, private it's theirs. Right now, the Trump administration is selling off our national heritage to the corporations and billionaires at deeply discounted rates. But what if "We the People" could auction off those elected officials who are doing that to us, and use the proceeds to make our lives better? This is a bouncy country tune with Tim Ball providing some wild fiddling and Molly MacMillan on grand piano.
13. **One Voice:** In his song "There Is Power in a Union," Billy Bragg, who appeared on George and Si's 2024 album *Labor Day*, sings: "Money speaks for money / The Devil for his own / Who comes to speak for the skin and the bone?" The answer is: we do! May we always raise our voices, not just for truth, but in song. A full horn section, the full band, and everyone singing with Si on this rousing number.