

The Sloop John B

West Indies Folk Song

D *Dsus4* *D*
We come on the sloop John B;

D *Dsus4* *D*
My grandfather and me;

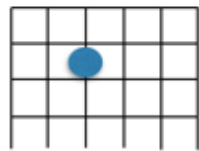
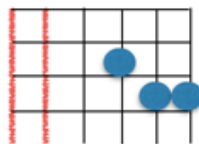
D *A* *A7*
Around Nassau town we did roam.

A7 *D* *D7*
Drinking all night;

D7 *G* *Em*
Got into a fight.

Em7 *D* *A*
Well I feel so broke up;

A7 *D*
I want to go home.



D *Dsus4* *D*
The first mate he got drunk;

D *Dsus4* *D*
And broke in the Cap'n's trunk.

D *A* *A7*
The constable had to come and take him away.

A7 *D* *D7*
Sheriff John Stone;

D7 *G* *Em*
Why don't you leave me alone, yeah yeah?

Em7 *D* *A*
Well I feel so broke up;

A7 *D*
I wanna go home.

CHORUS

D *Dsus4* *D*
So hoist up the John B's sail.

D *Dsus4* *D*
See how the mainsail sets.

D
Call for the Captain ashore;

A *A7* *D* *D7*
Let me go home, let me go home.

D7 *G* *Em*
I wanna go home, yeah yeah.

Em7 *D* *A*
Well I feel so broke up;

A7 *D*
I wanna go home.

CHORUS

D *Dsus4* *D*
The poor cook he caught the fits;

D *Dsus4* *D*
And threw away all my grits;

D *A* *A7*
Then he took and he ate up all of my corn.

A7 *D* *D7*
Let me go home;

D7 *G* *Em*
Why don't they let me go home?

Em7 *D* *A*
This is the worst trip;

A7 *D*
I've ever been on.

CHORUS

History

An ancient folk song chronicling boating misadventures, “Sloop John B” was transformed into a chamber-pop classic when the Beach Boys recorded the tune and released it on their groundbreaking 1966 album *Pet Sounds*.

Before then, the song—originally called “The John B. Sails”—had traveled far and wide. It originated in the Bahamas, and the English writer Richard Le Gallienne introduced it to larger audiences when he referenced the “quaint little Nassau ditty” in his 1907 novel *Pieces of Eight*. He then transcribed the original version’s five verses and chorus for the article “Coral Islands and Mangrove-Trees,” which appeared in the December 1916 issue of *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*.

By the late 1920s, the song had become something of a national anthem in Nassau, and the writer and poet Carl Sandburg saw fit to include it in *The American Songbag*, his 1927 compilation of folk songs. But it wasn’t until the late 1950s that popular folk artists began to record it under a handful of alternate titles: “Sloop John B” (Kingston Trio, 1958); “I Want to Go Home” (Johnny Cash, 1959); and, though no such disaster is reported in the lyrics, “Wreck of the John B” (Jimmie Rodgers, 1960).

On *Pet Sounds*, the Beach Boys transformed the song into a lush pop classic, its woodwind instruments and glockenspiel mingling with more typical rock instruments such as electric guitar and drums. Not only did the Beach Boys’ version breathe new life into the old folk song, it—and the rest of *Pet Sounds*—provided a sonic blueprint for the arrangements of such contemporary indie acts as the High Llamas, the Decemberists and Grizzly Bear.



This arrangement brings back “The John B. Sails” in its original form, stripping the quaint little ditty to its essence, and making it very easy to play. Though the song lends itself to any 4/4 strumming pattern, try using the Calypso-approved strum included with this review on <http://acousticguitar.com/sloop-john-b-has-seen-a-sea-change-throughout-the-years/>. Or, if you’re feeling slightly adventurous, sing the lyrics while playing the basic fingerpicking pattern shown to the right of the strum the same site.

Ahoy, mates!



by Adam Perlmutter on <http://acousticguitar.com/>

Songs as you go