We’re in the Same Boat Now

Words and Music © Bob Rae

Some folks come here yesterday,
Some folks come from far away,
Whether yesterday or far away,
We’re in the same boat now.

We’re workin’ in farms and in factories,
We’re keepin’ faith with our history,
Try to make a world where everyone is free,
We’re in the same boat now.

Chorus:
Go to the schoolyard and look around,
Faces are yellow, black, white and brown,

There’s no denying the truth we know:
All people, all colours make the best rainbow,
It’ll take all our love to make it grow,
We’re in the same boat now.

We share the earth reaching to the sky,
The fish that swim and the birds that fly,
Rivers and trees and the air up high,
We’re in the same boat now.

Come by car, come by train, come by plane,
We’re in the same boat now.
Arabic chorus: Friendship’s Way, December 1993
(transliteration: George Sawa)
Mā bene’dar nensa el-hayāt illī nerāfḥa
koll ennās, koll el-ālwān, ajmal min koll āqwās,
matlū minna ‘lhob, ‘āshan yekbar
ihnā bizāt es-safīna.

(a little adjustment is needed to get the words to fit
the tune)

Hebrew chorus: Friendship’s Way, December 1993
Anu ovdim ba’ir ubakfar,
anu notzrim emunat la’avar,
anu bonim olam hofshi l’kulam,
anu bes’fīna yakhdav.

Spanish chorus:
(J. Cohen and Pilar Caliz, July 1994)
Ven al colegio y tu verrás
el arco iris en nuestras caras está
ven en coche, en avión, u en tren,
es el mismo barco ya.

Bob and Arlene Rae and their three daughters with the children at Friendship’s Way, December 1993.

A Rae-Day in Jaffa,
Bob Rae’s Song Travels to Jaffa

Some of you may have heard Ontario Premier Bob Rae’s
song, “We’re in the Same Boat Now” in one sung version or
another. I learned it a few years ago with a group of Mariposa
in the Schools artists, when we recorded it for our 20th
anniversary album Circle of Friends, with Ken Whiteley (who
produced the album) singing the lead vocals and all of us on the
chorus.

In December 1993 (as some of you know from a previous
EthnoFolk Letters column), I spent a month as a visiting
lecturer in Jerusalem, and it happened to be the same month
Bob Rae and his family were visiting Israel. I mentioned the
song to Mara Messenger at the Canadian Embassy one day,
and she exclaimed, “Oh, did Bob Rae write that? I always
thought it was Eric Nagler!” We talked about playing it for
him at a reception, and I gave her a copy of the MITS
recording. A short time later, the Raes were invited to
Friendship’s Way, the Jewish-Arab Association for the Child
and Family, in Jaffa (Yafo, the Yafo part of Tel Aviv-Yafo).

Friendship’s Way is a unique organization. Its activities
are too wide and complex to describe here, but here is a
sentence from their information flyer: “Friendship’s Way uses
education as a means to promote equality and to build

positive, lasting relationships between Arabs and Jews.” It is
a programme which combines the practical with the philo-
sophical.

So, what’s the connection? Well, Mara contacted Beth
Martin at FW, and when the Raes arrived at the centre, they
were greeted by Arab and Jewish children singing “We’re in
the Same Boat Now”—in English, with choruses adapted into
both Hebrew and Arabic especially for the occasion. When I
saw the Raes a few hours later at the reception in Jerusalem,
they were extremely moved and excited at the song’s having
shown up in such unexpected circumstances!

I include it here partly because it’s a good story, but more
because it’s a good song. Now that it has a chorus in Hebrew
and Arabic, as well as one in Spanish, which I wrote with a
friend this summer for a children’s concert in Spain, perhaps
readers can come up with a few more—French? Ojibwe?
Perhaps the thought of Arab and Jewish children singing
together that they’re "in the same boat now" seems especially
poignant—but just think of all the other groups one can
imagine learning not only to sing it, but to navigate a safe
passage for all of us.

—Judith Cohen

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