

## The Rum Runners Song

Words: Jack Fleetwood 1931

Music: George Halkyard 1993

(Recorded by *Full Circle* on their 1994 cassette *End of An Era*)

Down on the dock, boys, a schooner pulls in,  
Her holds are all ready for whiskey and gin;  
Come all you strong men with shoulders of steel,  
And dance in a line to the Barleycorn reel.

*Refrain:* Come load up the ship, boys, the Yankees are dry,  
For some there's a fortune while others will die.

What's in those cases stacked down on the shore?  
Rye, gin, and scotch whiskey all ready to go;  
Where is it bound for? To Washington State,  
Where monied Americans thirstily wait.  
There's thousands of bottles of U.D.L.'s best  
There's rye that's the cheapest or choice of the rest;  
There's Dewar's and Haig's and there's Sandy McNish,  
For tickling the palate or forgetfulness.

*Refrain*

So it's up with the anchor and let us away,  
With our load of good whiskey from Cowichan Bay,  
It's out on the Gulf and south to the Sound,  
Watching for Revenue Boats coming round.  
We meet the gas-boats in the dead of the night,  
We transfer our cargo and hope there's no fight,  
For the Revenue Men will dart out from the Isles,  
Or lure the unwary with their cunning wiles.

*Refrain*

So here's to the Volstead, oh, long may it last,  
And here's to those small boats, oh, may they go fast,  
They'll outrun the Coast Guard and land the good liquor,  
On a beach where the signal is just a lamp's flicker.  
We're paid off in greenbacks, our good Federal notes,  
We knocked off a bottle to ease our parched throats,  
This time we were lucky and landed our load,  
In Davey Jones's Locker we could have been stowed.

*Refrain*

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of several systems of music with lyrics and guitar chords. The first system is marked 'V. 1' and includes the lyrics 'Down on the dock, boys, a schooner pulls in, Her holds are all ready for whiskey and gin;'. The second system continues the lyrics 'Come all you strong men with shoulders of steel, And dance in a line to the Barleycorn Reel.' and is marked 'Chor.'. The third system is marked 'V. 2-4' and includes the lyrics 'What's in those cases stacked down on the shore? Rye, gin, and scotch whiskey all ready to go;'. The fourth system continues the lyrics 'Where is it bound for? To Washington State, Where monied Americans thirstily wait. There's'. The fifth system continues the lyrics 'thousands of bottles of U.D.L.'s best There's rye that's the cheapest or choice of the rest, There's'. The sixth system is marked 'to Chor.' and includes the lyrics 'Dewar's and Haig's and there's Sandy McNish, For tickling the palate or forgetfulness'. Chords are indicated above the staff lines: D, G, D, A7, Bm, G, D, A7, D, G, D, A7, D, G, D, A7.

Jack Fleetwood, now 80, was born in 1914 in the Cowichan Valley, on Vancouver Island, and wrote the original words of "The Rum Runner's Song" (see below) at the age of 17, 1931. At that time he put the words to a then popular Irish song, but although the words were written down, the tune wasn't, and the memory of which one was used has subsequently been lost.

Thanks, in part, to Jack's involvement with the Cowichan Folk Guild, of which he and his wife Mable are Life Members, his song-poetry is resurfacing.

George Halkyard, then a member of the Cowichan/Nanaimo folk trio *Full Circle* and a founding member of the Guild, put new music to the song, and the group recently recorded it on their cassette, *End of an Era*.

The song was inspired by the exploits of Canadian rum runners who supplied American gangsters such as the Eggers Boys and Baker and Sowash. Besides having to look out for Revenue Men there was also a very real threat of being hijacked by the bootleggers from the American side....

"Baker and Sowash murdered Captain Gillis and boy<sup>1</sup>, cut 'em open<sup>2</sup> and threw 'em off Sidney Island and they were hung for it. The Eggers Boys, I remember Milo and Ariel and Theodore Eggers, Jesus Christ, they were tough bastards.... They don't know how many small-boat operators that the Eggers did in, and finally they all got done in. I think, in a shoot-out Milo shot his own brother, then one of them was murdered, then they picked Milo's headless body up in Hood Canal. I remember them coming into Cowichan Bay and loading liquor.<sup>3</sup>

The Liquor was bought at the local liquor store, that wasn't against the law.

"A lot of [the liquor] came from U.D.L., United Distillers Limited, New Westminster. They made a fortune on that. But U.D.L. was a very popular and very cheap Rye, and of course Scotch was, what was it?, a \$1.75 or \$2.00 for a 26 oz. here [such as] Sandy McNish<sup>4</sup>, and you could get a damn good Scotch, Haig's or Dewar's, for three bucks.... Yes, and we used to sing that when we'd had a few drinks."

From a later interview:

<sup>1</sup> "...from their boat the *Beryl G* which [Jack thought] might have been a fishing boat powered with a Star engine."

<sup>2</sup> "...weighted them down with rocks so their bodies were never found."

<sup>3</sup> "...in 1924 the same year Captain Gillis was murdered."

<sup>4</sup> "...sold for ten dollars in the States."

## The Rum Runners Song (Original Version)

Hey! down on the dock boys the schooner pulls in,  
Her holds are all ready for whiskey and gin;  
Hey! come all you strong men with shoulders of steel,  
And dance in a line to the Barleycorn reel.

*Refrain:* For some there's a fortune but others will die,  
Come load up the ship, boys, the Yankees are dry.

Hey! what's in the cases stacked tier upon tier?  
Why, rye and Scotch whiskey and gin but no beer;  
And where is it bound for? Why, Washington State,  
Where the tipplers' throats parch, so they hardly can wait.

*Refrain*

There are thousands of bottles of U.D.L.'s best  
The rye that's the cheapest and Choice of the West;  
There's Dewar's and Haig's and Sandy McNish,  
To tickle the palate or lure a lush dish.

*Refrain*

So it's up with the anchor and let us away,  
With our load of good whiskey from Cowichan Bay,  
And it's out to the Gulf and south to the Sound,  
And watch for the Revenue Boats coming round.  
*Refrain*

We meet the small gas-boats in the gloom of the night,  
Unloading the cases we hope there's no fight,  
With Revenue Men who will dart from the Isles,  
Or lure the unwary with cunning and wiles.  
*Refrain*

Then drink to the Volstead, oh, long may it last,  
And drink to the small boats, oh, may they be fast,  
To outrun the Coast Guards and land the good liquor,  
At beaches where signal is just a lamp's flicker.  
*Refrain*

We're paid off in greenbacks, good Federal notes,  
Then we knock off a bottle to slack our parched throats.  
This time we've been lucky and landed our load,  
Maybe next time in Davey Jones's Locker be stowed.  
*Refrain*

Both the main quote and the original version of "The Rum Runners Song" are transcribed from a field recording that Jack Fleetwood made with Mike Ballantyne on April 27, 1991, with additional quotes from later interviews.

*Full Circle's* cassette, *End of an Era*, is available for \$12.00 (includes postage) from Sue Postans, 2415 Holyrood Drive, Nanaimo, BC V9S 4K7.