

Roll On, Columbia

words by Woody Guthrie
Music based on "Goodnight Irene"
by Huddie Ledbetter and John Lomax
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In the Spring of 1941, Woody Guthrie was hired by the Bonneville Power Administration to write songs about the building of the Grand Coulee Dam. Woody wrote 26 songs in 30 days - many of which have become classics. In Woody's words:

I saw the Columbia River and the big Grand Coulee Dam from just about every cliff, mountain, tree, and post from which it can be seen. I made up twenty-six songs about the Columbia and about the dam and about the men, and these songs were recorded by the Department of Interior, Bonneville Power Administration out in Portland. The records were played at all sorts and sizes of meetings where people bought bonds to bring the power lines over the fields and hills to their own little places. Electricity to milk the cows, kiss the maid, shoe the old mare, light up the saloon, the chili joint window, the schools, and churches along the way, to run the factories turning out manganese, chrome, bauxite, aluminum and steel.

-California to the New York Island, ed. Irwin Silber,
(Guthrie Children's Trust Fund, New York: 1958)

This next song is one of our best known Northwest folk songs:

The image shows the first three staves of musical notation for the song 'Roll On, Columbia'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a sharp sign, and the text 'VERSE G' above it. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. Above the first staff, the chord 'G' is written above the first measure, and 'D7' is written above the second measure. The second staff continues the melody, with a 'G' chord written above the sixth measure. The third staff continues the melody, with a 'C' chord written above the sixth measure. The lyrics are written below the staves in a cursive script.

VERSE G

Green Doung-las firs where the wa-ters cut through,
down her wild moun-tains and can-yons she flew. Can-
a-dian North-west to the o-cean so blue, It's

The image shows a musical score for the song "Roll on, Columbia, roll on!". It consists of five staves of music in G major (one sharp). The first staff is the main melody, starting with a D7 chord and ending with a G chord. The lyrics are "roll on, Co-lum-bia, roll on." The second staff is labeled "CHORUS" and starts with a D7 chord, with lyrics "Roll on, Co-lum-bia, roll on,". The third staff continues the chorus with a G chord, lyrics "Roll on, Co-lum-bia, roll on. Your". The fourth staff has a C chord and lyrics "power is turning our darkness to dawn, (so)". The fifth staff has a D7 chord and lyrics "roll on, Co-lum-bia, roll on!".

Other great rivers add power to you,
 Yakima, Snake and the Klickitat too,
 Sandy Willamette and Hood River too,
 Roll on, Columbia, roll on. CHORUS

Tom Jefferson's vision would not let him rest,
 An empire he saw in the Pacific Northwest.
 Sent Lewis and Clark and they did the rest,
 Roll on, Columbia, roll on . . . CHORUS

It's there on your banks that we fought many a fight,
 Sheridan's boys in the blockhouse that night,
 They saw us in death but never in flight,
 Roll on, Columbia, roll on . . . CHORUS

At Bonneville now there are ships in the locks,
 The waters have risen and cleared all the rocks,
 Shiploads of plenty will steam past the docks,
 So roll on, Columbia, roll on. CHORUS

And on up the river is Grand Coulee Dam,
 The mightiest thing ever built by a man,
 To run the great factories and water the land,
 It's roll on, Columbia, roll on. CHORUS

These mighty men labored by day and by night,
 Matching their strength 'gainst the river's wild flight,
 Through rapids and falls they won the hard fight,
 Roll on, Columbia, roll on.