

Folk Song: The Fish in the Sea

“The Fish in the Sea” is a traditional folk song that has been sung for generations by sailors, fishermen, and coastal communities. Its exact origins are difficult to trace, though it likely began as a Scottish fisherman’s song. This is common with many folk songs, because the lyrics and melodies were passed from person to person through daily life rather than being written down. What we do know is that this song belongs to the rich tradition of sea shanties and work songs that helped sailors keep rhythm while hauling lines, rowing, or completing long, tiring tasks on the water. Its playful, call-and-response pattern made it easy for crews to join in, and its simple lyrics brought a sense of togetherness during long days at sea.

As the song traveled from ship to ship, different versions began to appear, and the song even went by different names, such as “The Fishes’ Lamentation” and “Windy Old Weather.” Sailors often changed the verses to match their own experiences or to add some lighthearted fun, and the song would be passed throughout the crew, each man adding a verse about a different fish. Because of these added verses, the song could continue for as long as they needed while they worked together. This flexibility helped “The Fish in the Sea” survive for so long because it could be reshaped to match the community singing it. Folk collectors later wrote down a few versions in the early twentieth century, which helped preserve the melody and gave it a place in modern folk music.

Today, “The Fish in the Sea” is still enjoyed for its cheerful rhythm and its glimpse into maritime history. Families, classrooms, and folk musicians continue to sing it because it is easy to learn and fun to share. The song reminds us that music was once a part of everyday work and that simple melodies can build connection, lift spirits, and carry stories from one generation to the next.

The Fish in the Sea Lyrics

Come all you young sailor men, listen to me,
I'll sing you a song of the fish in the sea
And it's-
Windy weather, boys, stormy weather, boys.
When the wind blows, we're all together, boys;
Blow ye winds westerly, blow ye winds, blow,
Jolly southwester, boys, steady she goes.
Up jumps the eel with his slippery tail,
Climbs up aloft and reefs the topsail
And it's-
Windy weather, boys, stormy weather, boys.
When the wind blows, we're all together, boys;
Blow ye winds westerly, blow ye winds, blow,
Jolly southwester, boys, steady she goes.
Then up jumps the shark with his nine rows of teeth,
Saying, "You eat the dough boys, and I'll eat the beef!"
And it's-
Windy weather, boys, stormy weather, boys.
When the wind blows, we're all together, boys;
Blow ye winds westerly, blow ye winds, blow,
Jolly sou'wester, boys, steady she goes.
Up jumps the whale, the largest of all,
If you want any wind, well, I'll blow ye a squall
And it's-
Windy weather, boys, stormy weather, boys.
When the wind blows, we're all together, boys;
Blow ye winds westerly, blow ye winds, blow,
Jolly sou'wester, boys, steady she goes.

Fish in the sea

HRS 068

captan shanty - Barbershop style

traditional - arr Joris van der Hertem

Con spirito ♩ = 68

Stem

8

1. Come all you young sail - lor - men, lis - ten to me. I'll
2. Up jumps the eel with his slip - pe - ry tail,
up jumps the shark with his nine rows of teeth. Saying,
3 4. Up jumps the whale the larg - est of all, 'If you

Stm.

8

3

sing you a song of the fish in the sea, and it's...
Climbs up a - loft and reefs the top - sail, and it's...
'You eat the dough boys, and I'll eat the beef and it's...
want a - ny wind, well, I'll blow ye a squall' and it's...

5

Con. bs.dr.

T.

8

La la...enz

T.

8

Win - dy wea - ther boys, stor - my wea - ther, boys.

Ba.

La la...enz

Bs.

La la...enz

Refrein

Windy weather boys,
stormy weather, boys.
When the wind blows we're all together, boys.
Blow ye winds westerly,
blow ye winds, boys.
Jolly sou' wester, boys,
steady she goes.

Con. bs.dr. 

T. 

T. 
 When the wind blows we're all to - get - her, boys. Blow ye winds wes - ter - ly,

Ba. 

Bs. 

Con. bs.dr. 

T. 

T. 
 blow ye winds, boys. Jol - ly sou' wes - teer, boys, stea - dy she goes. 3. Then

Ba. 

Bs. 

1. Come all you young saillormen,
listen to me. I'll sing you a song of the fish in the sea, and it's...

2. Up jumps the eel with his slippery tail,
Climbs up aloft and reefs the topsail, and it's...

3. Then up jumps the shark with his nine rows of teeth.
Saying, 'You eat the dough boys, and I'll eat the beef and it's...

4. Up jumps the whale the largest of all,
want any wind, I'll blow ye a squall' and it's...