RESEARCH ONLINE

Illawarra Unity - Journal of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History

Volume 10
Issue 1 *Illawarra Unity*

Article 11

1-1-2010

The songs of Don Henderson

Maurie Mulheron

Follow this and additional works at: http://ro.uow.edu.au/unity

Recommended Citation
Mulheron, Maurie, The songs of Don Henderson, *Illawarra Unity - Journal of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*, 10(1), 2010, 79-80.
Available at:http://ro.uow.edu.au/unity/vol10/iss1/11

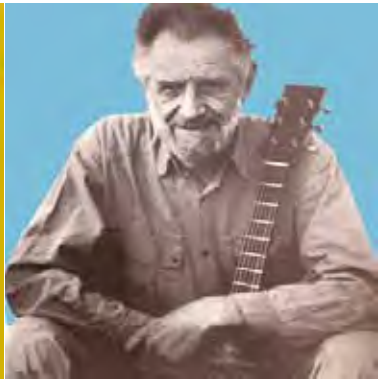
Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

RESEARCH ONLINE

The songs of Don Henderson

Abstract
A few years ago at the National Folk Festival, the Don Henderson Project was launched to collect and preserve the songs of a remarkable figure of the Australian folk-music movement. The result is a new two-CD collection, The Songs of Don Henderson. One of the project's aims was to ensure that new generations of singers and songwriters were aware of the many songs Don left behind after his death in 1991; songs that spanned most of his working life from the late 1950s until the late 1980s. And it was largely his working life that provided the rich material that inspired him to write in a style that might be compared to the legendary Woody Guthrie but which probably owes as much to the traditions of Paterson and Lawson.

This journal article is available in Illawarra Unity - Journal of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History: http://ro.uow.edu.au/unity/vol10/iss1/11



The Songs of Don Henderson

Reviewed by Maurie Mulheron

A few years ago at the National Folk Festival, the Don Henderson Project was launched to collect and preserve the songs of a remarkable figure of the Australian folk-music movement. The result is a new two-CD collection, *The Songs of Don Henderson*. One of the project's aims was to ensure that new generations of singers and songwriters were aware of the many songs Don left behind after his death in 1991; songs that spanned most of his working life from the late 1950s until the late 1980s. And it was largely his working life that provided the rich material that inspired him to write in a style that might be compared to the legendary Woody Guthrie but which probably owes as much to the traditions of Paterson and Lawson.

During the folk-song revival of the 1960s in Australia, Don Henderson's songs were there. "It's On", a beautifully sardonic song that achieved a life of its own, was sung on the

streets during the anti-Vietnam War protests:

And if governments think that it makes better sense
To save on education and spend on defence;
Could easily be argued, on the same grounds
That elections should be, the best of ten rounds!
And it's on!
All reason and logic are gone!
Winning the fight won't prove that you're right,
It's sad, it's true, but it's on!

There are 40 songs in the collection. The first CD contains original Don Henderson recordings, and the second contains his songs interpreted by other artists. The songs represent the depth and breadth of Don's life, and his loves and concerns, from a 'talking blues' about miners striking at Mt Isa and a ballad about the collapse of the Westgate Bridge, to the humorous "Washday Monday Blues". Of particular interest are demo versions of two songs written in collaboration with British progressive rock musician John 'Poli' Palmer and writer Craig McGregor for a rock opera, *Hero*, performed by the Australian Opera in 1976. I particularly like Mark Gregory's version of *Boonaroo*. But then again the story of the Boonaroo, the merchant ship that members of the Seamen's Union refused to sail on because it was carrying weapons to Vietnam, has always been one of my favourites. It's a story about a courageous union that took a principled, moral stand, refusing to be bullied.

Many individuals and a host of organisations such as the Queensland Folk Federation, the Brisbane Labour History Association, the Illawarra Folk Club and the CFMEU became sponsors. But it is Gregory who should take much of the credit for coordinating this extraordinary project. The CD can be bought online from **www.donhenderson.com.au**