

Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young at Heart Chorus Members

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Aging is something to Sing About

There are hundreds of songs, from operetta to country music, written about growing older. They touch hearts, tell stories and inspire. Your favorite song about aging says a lot about you and how you feel about growing older. Make your listening of these songs a journey of self-discovery.

Adriane Berg, who writes extensively about successful aging and healthy longevity, compiled a review of a few of her favorites. You can find and listen to them on YouTube. See what feelings these songs trigger in you.

For Cheerleaders of Aging- Songs on Thriving and Surviving:

At the top of Berg's list is *I'm Still Here* from Sondheim's *Follies*. Carol Burnett tells us the song is about "survival, coming through, making it. By which I mean being happy with yourself."

But Shirley MacLaine's version is considered the ultimate rendition. And while the song is ostensibly about a woman in show business still touring after a certain age, MacLaine makes it about anger, banging on the piano unmercifully.

Berg could listen to Elaine Stritch's haunting version of *I'm Still Here* over and over again. She's not surprised that Sondheim asked her to sing it for his 80th birthday. There is something genuine, resigned and world-weary about the song coming from Stritch. You could call it wisdom.

For Those Militantly Young- Songs That Deny Aging:

Berg says, "Yes, I fight the stereotypes of ageism, frailty, decline and uselessness because *That's How Young I Feel!*" The original song by Angela Lansbury is her vote for the best version. Despite the bravado of the lyrics, much like "60 is the new 30," there is something tragic here, too. Feeling young is not being young. There is a difference. You'll see the blatant recognition of this in the TV appearance of Carol Channing and Tommy Tune, doing a hippy-versus-older-diva intergenerational version of the song.

Another side comes out in performances by older women that start by wearing a cover-up, like a coat and end with body-revealing. Andrea Martin took the house down in *Pippin*, just before she did a circus act at age 66 while singing *No Time At All* (another great song about aging). These costume tricks are spot-on metaphors...age is a coat that says I am old, but if you could see underneath, look how young I feel.

For Those Longing for the Past- Songs That Wax Nostalgic:

Gerontologists tell us that after a certain age, we enter a phase called "life review." Of the songs that resonate with that theme none stands out more than Frank Sinatra singing *It Was a Very Good Year*. Berg was struck by how much this is an older man's song. Not just because the lyrics tell of young women and sexual relationships, but

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because most older women do not miss their much younger selves. For us, it is mostly good riddance. You can't help aching at the embarrassment of youth when you hear Janis Ian sing *At Seventeen*.

To lighten the moment, check out Gilbert & Sullivan's operetta *Patience* for an anatomically correct recounting of how we go from young to old through sarcopenia (muscle loss that leads to sagging of the skin). Picture this; Lady Jane, a self-proclaimed "corpulent" older woman, takes center stage. She drags in a cello, representing a woman's body as a literal instrument. She then tells us that there will be too much and too little of her as she morphs from trim beauty to withered legs and chubby torso. "Don't dally too long," she admonishes her lover, "Soon, it will be too late." Empathize as British contralto Anne Collins opines about the "coming by and by."

For the Sentimentalists- Songs That Are Wistful:

You can come to tears hearing composer Kurt Weill and lyricist Maxwell Anderson's *September Song* about love in the last moments of our life. "It's a long, long while from May to December." In today's age of longevity, the way extends ever longer. Still, to every life, there comes the point when there isn't much time left. That time is precious.

Of all the songs on the aging hit parade, the mood woven by *September Song* is most influenced by the style of the singer. Listen to the Sinatra version...then the Durante version from 1972 and from 1955. See how the song changes with the age and character of the singer.

If you like a bit of spice in your last hurrah, check out Willie Nelson singing *On the Road Again*. You cannot help feeling deeply about your end game and how you see it. If you are still not in tears, listen to Roy Clark's rendition of *Yesterday When I Was Young*, and think of the difference in sentiment now and when you first heard the song. It was written in 1954, in French, by Charles Aznavour (singing it again at age 92) and recorded a myriad of times over the past 66 years, including by Aznavour in English.

For the Self-Actualized- Songs About Acceptance and Gratitude:

Here's a song to cheer you up, sung by Maurice Chevalier from the show *Gigi*—*I'm Glad I'm Not Young Anymore*. Note that this resonated well with the Silent Generation. Boomers are more likely to identify with George Jones, who also embraces his aging as he sings, "My body's old, but it ain't impaired. Well, I don't need your rockin' chair." Ironically, the best-selling book by anti-ageism activist Ashton Applewhite is called *This Chair Rocks*. For a final number, how about *Those Were The Days My Friend*? (Excerpted from an online article by Adriane Berg in *Bottom Line*)

I always knew I'd
get old. How fast it
happened was a bit
of a surprise, though.