

Transport Yourself!

"Leaving on a Jet Plane"

"The Trolley Song"

"The Wells Fargo Wagon"

"Slow Boat to China"

"Chattanooga Choo Choo"

Traveling back in time with MGM

A story from the Songbook Archives to put you in a traveling musical mood:

In 1924, Harry O. McGee of Indianapolis, IN built a promotional vehicle for a new auto painting company that would eventually be purchased by MGM film studios. Famously known as the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer "Trackless Train," this train-shaped truck toured from New York to Los Angeles (and eventually it traveled internationally) promoting "Good Roads and Good Movies."

The photos pictured below feature Gus Kahn, one of the most successful and prolific lyricists from the first half of the 20th century. In addition to penning the lyrics to hits like "It Had to Be You," "Carolina in the Morning," "Toot, Toot, Tootsie, Goodbye," and "I'll See You in My Dreams," he also wrote several hits for films, primarily MGM produced features. Fittingly, he earned the right to conduct MGM's "Trackless Train" as he traveled along his celebrated musical career. Learn more about Gus Kahn in this online exhibit: TheSongbook.org/gus-kahn.



Song: Leaving on a Jet Plane (1969)
Songwriter: John Denver

Brief Context: John Denver wrote "Leaving on a Jet Plane" in 1967 during a layover at Washington airport. His inspiration came from "Not so much from feeling that way for someone, but from the longing of having someone to love." The song was originally titled "Babe I Hate To Go" and was recorded on his debut album *John Denver Sings*. He made several copies of the album and gave them out as presents for Christmas.

Activity: Movement (breathing & upper body)

What do you need?

- Perfect Harmony "Leaving on a Jet Plane" video

Suggested Seated Movement

1. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth: move arms up and down above head
2. Sway side to side
3. Hold arms out to the side and "fly" like a jet plane!
4. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth: move shoulders up and down
5. Sway side to side with hands in front
6. Hold arms out to the side and "fly" like a jet plane!
7. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth: reach arm up and down, one at a time
8. Sway side to side with both arms above head
9. Hold arms out to the side and "fly" like a jet plane!
10. Close eyes, deep breath in, move arms about head, release arms down, breathe out through your mouth



Song: The Trolley Song
Musical: Meet Me in St. Louis

Brief Context: "The Trolley Song" is famously sung by Judy Garland in the 1944 film *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Lyricist Ralph Blaine was told to write a song about trolleys for the movie and was having a hard time coming up with inspiration. He decided to visit the Beverly Hills Library and found a book with a picture of a St. Louis trolley car with the caption: "Clang, clang, clang went the jolly little trolley."

Activity: Singing

What do you need?

- Perfect Harmony "The Trolley Song" video
- Perfect Harmony lyrics sheet

Fun Fact

"The Trolley Song" was shot in one take. Judy Garland actually flubbed a line, but Arthur Freed, the producer of "Meet Me in St. Louis," decided to keep it anyway because of the "pure, driving emotion of her delivery."



The Trolley Song

With my high starched-collar and my high-topped shoes

And my hair piled high upon my head

I went to lose a jolly hour on the trolley

And lost my heart instead

With his light brown derby and his bright green tie

He was quite the handsomest of men

I started to yen so I counted to ten

Then I counted to ten again

Clang, clang, clang went the trolley

Ding, ding, ding went the bell

Zing, zing, zing went my heartstrings

From the moment I saw him I fell

Chug, chug, chug went the motor

Bump, bump, bump went the brake

Thump, thump, thump went my heartstrings

When he smiled I could feel the car shake

He tipped his hat, and took a seat

He said he hoped he hadn't stepped upon my feet

He asked my name, I held my breath

I couldn't speak because he scared me half to death

Buzz, buzz, buzz went the buzzer

Plop, plop, plop went the wheels

Stop, stop, stop went my heartstrings

As he started to leave

I took hold of his sleeve with my hand

And as if it were planned

He stayed on with me and it was grand just to stand with his hand holding mine

Through the end of the line

Song: The Wells Fargo Wagon
Musical: The Music Man

Brief Context: Growing up in Mason City, Iowa, the musician and playwright Meredith Willson remembered Wells Fargo wagons delivering all sorts of goods to the townspeople — maple sugar, a gray mackinaw, or a crosscut saw. The feeling of excitement and anticipation stayed with him, and he wrote the song, "The Wells Fargo Wagon," for his Tony Award-winning play, "The Music Man." ([Wells Fargo in song](#))

Activity: Listening

What do you need?

- Video of "The Wells Fargo Wagon" from *The Music Man*
- Perfect Harmony visual prompt

Music History Spotlight - The Making of "The Music Man"

The Music Man became a smash hit on both stage and screen, but did you know that it took several rewrites before the classic American musical finally hit Broadway? When asked about how he created *The Music Man*, Meredith Willson would always speak of his hometown: "The ideas in *The Music Man* are exactly as I remember them from my childhood. I didn't have to make up anything. I simply remembered Mason City as closely as I could."

Take a look at an early draft of Meredith's lyrics for "The Wells Fargo Wagon". Are they what you imagined?



All: Oho the Wells Fargo Wagon is a comin' down the street only a block away
one it is a home a-klap-kloppin' down the street walks into a smile today
Oho the "ells Fargo Wagon is a -- comin' down the street

Oh Please let it be for me
Oho the "ells fargo wagon is a -- comin' down the street
I wish, I wish I knew what it could be

- 1st verse*
2nd
3rd
4th
All
5th
6th
7th
1. I got a box of maple sugar ~~last Thanksgiving~~ *on my birthday*
 2. And I got me a grey Mack-inaw
 3. And I got me some grapefruit from Tampa
 4. Montgom'ry Ward sent me a bath tub and a cross cut saw
- Oho the "ells fargo wagon is a-comin' now, is it a
Pre-paid surprize or C.O.D.
5. It could be curtains
 6. Or dishes
 7. Or a double-boiler

Buddy: Or it could be....
Sumpn' special....
Just for me.

All: Oho the Wells Fargo Wagon is a -- comin' down the street
Oh don't let him pass my door
Oho the Wells Fargo wagon is a -- comin' down the street
I wish I knew what he was comin' for

1. I got ~~xxxxxx~~ some salmon from Seattle last September
2. And I got me a new rock-in' chair
3. And I got me some raisins from Fresno
4. The D.A.R. sent me a canon for the Court House Square

Q&A: Oho the "ells fargo wagon is a-comin' now, I don't know
How I can ever wait to see--

- 5th Verse*
6th
7th
5. If it's a rabbitt-
 6. A freezer
 7. Or a magic lantern

Buddy: Or it could be
Sumpn' special
Just for me

All: Oho you "ells Fargo Wagon keep a-comin'!
Oho you Wells Fargo wagon keep a-comin'!
Oho you Wells Fargo Wagon ~~xxxxxx~~ don't you dare to make a stop
Until you stop for me...

Driver: WHOA.

All: Crowd: Ra yy!



An early draft of Meredith Willson's lyrics for "The Wells Fargo Wagon". Meredith is also pictured leading the Mason City Marching Band at the Iowa parade.

Photos from the Meredith Willson Papers housed at the Songbook Library & Archives.

Song: Slow Boat to China (1948)

Songwriter: Frank Loesser

Brief Context: Songwriter Frank Loesser [lessor] published the popular song "Slow Boat to China" in 1948. In 1993 Frank's daughter, Susan, wrote the following reflection of the song in a biography about her father:

"I'd like to get you on a slow boat to China" was a well-known phrase among poker players, referring to a person who lost steadily and handsomely. My father turned it into a romantic song, placing the title in the mainstream of catch-phrases in 1947.

Activity: Singing & Engaged Discussion

What do you need?

- **Perfect Harmony "Slow Boat to China" video**
- **Perfect Harmony lyrics**
- **Perfect Harmony visual prompt**

Suggested Discussion Prompt

- **How do you like to vacation?**
 - **Do you like to take cruises and relax?**
 - **Or, do you prefer something more active like hiking or camping?**



Slow Boat to China

**I'd love to get you on a slow boat to China,
All to myself, alone.**

**Get you and keep you in my arms evermore,
Leave all your lovers weeping on the far away shore.
Out on the briny with a moon big and shiny
Melting your heart of stone.**

**I'd love to get you on a slow boat to China,
All to myself, alone.**

**I'd love to get you on a slow boat to China,
All to myself, alone.**

**Get you and keep you in my arms evermore,
Leave all your lovers weeping on the far away shore.
Out on the briny with a moon big and shiny
Melting your heart of stone.**

**I'd love to get you on a slow boat to China,
All to myself, alone.**



Perfect 
Harmony

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Song: Chattanooga Choo Choo (1941)
Songwriters: Mack Gordon and Harry Warren

Brief Context: "Chattanooga Choo Choo" is a 1941 song written by Mack Gordon and Harry Warren. They wrote this song while they were aboard the Southern Railway's Birmingham Special. The actual Cincinnati Southern Railway train that gave this song its name is now a museum artifact. The song was first featured in the movie *Sun Valley Serenade* and made popular by Glenn Miller and His Orchestra.

Activity: Listening

What do you need?

- Perfect Harmony "Chattanooga Choo Choo" video'
- Perfect Harmony visual

Fun Fact

The original Chattanooga Choo Choo train that inspired this song was a wood-burning steam locomotive owned by the Cincinnati Southern Railway that traveled from Cincinnati to Chattanooga - it was a newspaper reporter who dubbed it the "Chattanooga Choo Choo."





A model of the Chattanooga Choo Choo from the Model Train Museum

