

The Flip Side

Well, what do we have here!

Karen Robinson

with Larry Bjornson • David Burton • Dave Staples

Love's a Moving Target	4:26
Easy Does It	3:38
The Songwriter	2:37
Detention Blues	3:04
Ode to Gertie Ryan	5:33
Roof of My Car	2:57
The Redhead	3:57
X & Y Chromosomes	5:05
Pack Up Now	4:39
Tadpole Blues	4:20
Old Time Music	3:59
My Phone	3:52
Write a New Love Song	3:47

Songs arranged by Bjornson, Burton, Robinson and Staples, except for *My Phone* which was arranged by Bjornson and Robinson, *Roof of My Car* arranged by Bjornson, Burton, and Robinson, and *Detention Blues* and *Loves a Moving Target* arranged by Bjornson, Burton, Robinson, Staples and Arseneault
Produced by Karen Robinson

Recorded and engineered by Scott Ferguson of FMP Matrix Studios, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

Mixed and mastered by Scott Ferguson with Larry Bjornson, David Burton, Dave Staples and Karen Robinson

Graphics: Rand Gaynor

Text editing: Amos Sarrouy

Photos: Rebecca Clarke Photography, Scott Ferguson video stills, Bruce Sarty, Karen Robinson

All songs written by Karen Robinson (SOCAN)
Except *Old Time Music* co-written by Karen Robinson and Ann Fearon

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Made in Canada



Karen Robinson

With Larry Bjornson • David Burton • Dave Staples

The Flip Side

Well, what do we have here!

Musicians

Karen Robinson: lead vocals, background vocals. Acoustic rhythm guitar (*The Redhead*, *X&Y Chromosomes*) whistling, slide whistle, upset chicken, pig duet w. Larry (*Ode to Gertie Ryan*) snaps & claps w. Burton (*Easy Does It*, *Roof of My Car*, *X&Y Chromosomes*)

Larry Bjornson: acoustic bass, arco bass. Banjo, pig duet, hawk, Randy the auctioneer (*Ode to Gertie Ryan*) acoustic guitar (*X&Y Chromosomes*)

David Burton: drums, percussion, all songs except *My Phone*. Snaps & claps w. Karen (*Easy Does It*, *Roof of My Car*, *X&Y Chromosomes*)

Dave Staples: piano, synth, temple blocks, calliope (*Write a New Love Song*, *Easy Does it*, *The Songwriter*, *Ode to Gertie Ryan*, *Old Time Music*, *Pack Up Now*, *Tadpole Blues*, *X&Y Chromosomes*), organ (*Detention Blues*), Rhodes (*The Redhead*), accordion (*Loves a Moving Target*, *Write a New Love Song*)

JP Cormier: mandolin (*Write a New Love Song*), guitar (*Old Time Music*, *Tadpole Blues*, *The Songwriter*), banjo (*the Songwriter*)

Holly Arsenault: piano (*Detention Blues*, *Loves A Moving Target*)

Mike Cowie: trumpet (*Detention Blues*, *Pack Up Now*)

Danny Martin: trombone (*Easy Does It*, *Pack Up Now*)

Chris Mitchell: tenor sax (*Tadpole Blues*)

Bob MacDonald: pedal steel guitar (*Old Time Music*, *X & Y Chromosomes*)

Bruce Timmins: electric guitar and dobro (*The Songwriter*), electric guitar (*X&Y Chromosomes*)

Paul Simons: piano (*The Redhead*)

Hannah Sarrouy: ukulele (*The Redhead*)

Andrew Gillis: harmonica (*The Redhead*)

Gina Burgess: violin (*Loves a Moving Target*)

Ken MacKay: clarinet (*Pack Up Now*)

Bob Nicholson: tuba (*Pack Up Now*)

The Saggy Bottom Boys: Bjornson, Burton, Staples, Robinson (*Easy Does It*, *Ode to Gertie Ryan*, *Old Time Music*, *The Songwriter*)

Joe Kane's Rooster and The Early Birds (*Ode to Gertie Ryan*)



Larry Bjornson, David Burton, Karen and Dave Staples.

Listen to the album before you read this.
Then listen again.

New songs are a blank slate of possibilities. One can choose so many directions to finish them. When we got together to create arrangements, I would play a new song to the band section with just my voice and guitar. Then, we would unfold an arrangement together. The plan was to do one album (*When We're Together*, released Sept 2021), but soon we were carried into the second album which is THIS ONE! Shared between the two albums is a cornucopia of musical styles that I hope delights you. We stretched from rap to blues and Dixieland to classic country, plus more than one nod to the long-ago style of cheeky and often slightly-off-colour British ukulele player/songwriter George Formby. The songs are quirky and often funny.



Roof of My Car

Easy Does It is the song I mentioned in the notes for *Nothing To It* on my last album, *When We're Together*. I wrote this version while commuting an hour each way to work, with a recorder on the seat beside me. Many songs have come to me while driving. Nova Scotia highways are often uncongested and I think it is the white noise of the highway over long stretches that opens the mind and senses to allow songs in. Just like **Roof of My Car**, I pulled over on a wooded road between New Glasgow and Truro to finish writing it. Every time I perform it, someone will come up afterward to tell me their experience doing just that. The verse about the laptop computer was added from one of those real-life stories.

As a nod to that mysterious process where songs suddenly “appear”, we have **The Songwriter**, which is, by the way, a really fun sing-along song. So is **My Phone**.

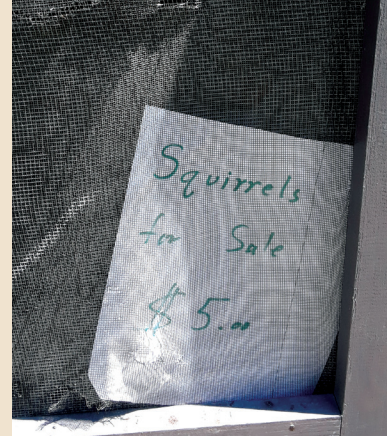
Back to **Easy Does It**. I played it for a song writers circle and a colleague suggested it would be interesting to try writing a more sensual version of the same song.

Nothing To It was the result. Unlike *Easy Does It*, *Nothing To It* came less from inspiration and required effort, research, and deliberate thought. Both songs stand well on their own despite being quite different. That further illustrates my comment on how a song is a blank slate that can go many ways.

My husband Bruce was the inspiration for several songs. **Love's A Moving Target** started as he passed purposefully through a room on his way to do something. As I watched him, I started to laugh as the thought appeared that “my love is a moving target”. In it, Staples’ accordion and Gina Burgess’ violin help tell the somewhat Parisian adventure of what happened when Cupid got fired.

The Redhead started from my realization that I was actually jealous of a squirrel Bruce was feeding and teaching to do tricks. His retirement did change the dynamics around our house, but the song itself is a flight of fancy. My daughter, Hannah, a skilled musician and songwriter in her own right, plays the ukulele on the recording, with Paul Simons’ piano dancing like a playful squirrel, and Andrew Gillis providing harmonica accents. How about the squirrel chorus?

My Phone started as a word game Bruce and I would play when one of us would misplace our cellphone. The original version had only guitar top rhythms and a short section of a hammer-down string melody that mimicked a phone ringing. When I played the song for Larry and Burton, I thought they would respond with “It is fun, but not something we can work with for these albums”. Ha! Next thing I knew Larry (a.k.a. “Li’l Lar”) created a rap arrangement with my help (a.k.a. “Certified”) along with Scott’s technical skill and resources. Later, Scott and I created the video, which by now



The Redhead

will have been released on Youtube, and with me playing all of the characters thanks to Scott's technical know-how. Did we have fun? The yellow coat was my Mum's from the '50's and the car is Bruce's 1956 Jaguar that he is restoring.

Detention Blues: Living on the wrong side of the law, the protagonist is telling her story to a less than interested prison staffer, represented by Mike Cowie's expressive trumpet, signing her in to her new "lodgings". Like many of the songs on this album, I recorded sound effects: This time, the heavy door slam echoing in Halifax's Lord Nelson Hotel underground parking lot.

Tadpole Blues was the title of a completely unrelated instrumental played by a jazz combo where I was the drummer. It seemed to me a title like that deserved to be a song with its own lyrics. Why might a tadpole have the blues? (Or, rather, "the greens"?). JP Cormier had been around when I'd first played that song. He encouraged me to perform it at the Stan Rogers Music Festival in Canso, so it was

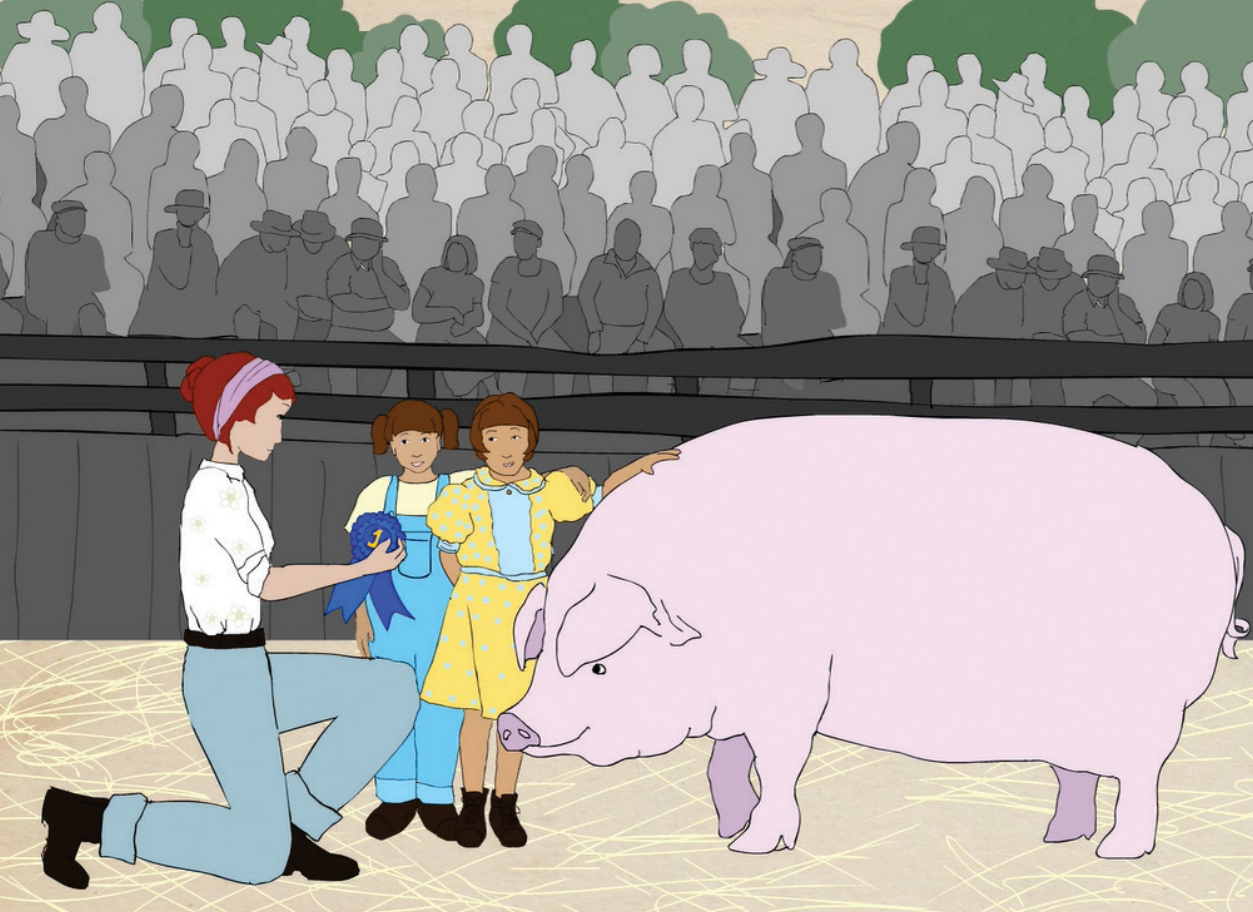
From the My Phone video



From the Tadpole Blues video

important to me to have him play on this recording. You'll hear his talents on 4 songs on this album and on *Stories and Wine* on the previous album. Both JP and Chris Mitchell made their contributions in perfect one-takes. Chris played several songs on both of my previous albums. This time, he grinned after imaginatively adding two "burps" at the end of *Tadpole Blues* to signify two frogs jumping into a pond. Check out the video Scott and I made too, with Scott's video editing skill and my costumed antics as "Lily and the Pads". Lily is quite a diva and keeps stepping in front of me.

X & Y Chromosomes' genesis (pun intended) came from a hilarious conversation about real or imagined differences between men and women. We were long-term spouses from all sides so we had some experience after all. At first my plan was to have a male vocalist sing the man's part, but then it became obvious that it would be even more entertaining if I sang the entire song.



Ode to Gertie Ryan I wrote for a concert for an all-women blacksmith's convention on International Women's Day. I wanted a song that fit the occasion, but despite being raised in a rural farming area, I had never met female blacksmiths until that conference. Instead, I drew upon the complexities of annual agricultural exhibitions. Having lived through the women's movement of the '70's there was a lot swirling around in my head, from playing off the name Gertrude Stein to things I knew about my relatives' and ancestors' lives. Throw in cultural changes I've witnessed and the challenge of making up rhymes that are silly! Then, when the guys and I started arranging it, we couldn't resist taking it over the top with sound effects. Listen for the merry-go-round's calliope (by Staples), and *La Marseillaise* and Randy the Auctioneer (Larry, who joined me for the pig duet too). The rooster and chicken chorus is from our neighbour Joe's flock. I asked him what time of day to come over to record them, and he answered "Well, they're early birds." Hence their name. Up and coming artist, Ada Denil, created the animated video with me. It should be on Youtube by now too.

Artwork by Ada Denil from the
Ode to Gertie Ryan video



The Saggy Bottom Boys: Karen, Larry Bjornson, David Burton and Dave Staples

Pack Up Now is Dixieland, with Danny Martin's trombone, Mike Cowie's trumpet, Bob Nicholson's tuba and the magic ingredient of Ken MacKay's clarinet pulling it all together. It is serious fun.

Old Time Music is as classic a country tune as we could make it with Bob MacDonald's authentic pedal steel guitar. Playing with Bob (He also plays on *X&Y Chromosomes*) was heartwarming because I'd had the pleasure of singing back-up vocals on ATV's world-syndicated series, *Maritime Country*, where his dad, Len, played pedal steel. That show is also where I met Paul Simons who more recently played piano for my jazz trio and for this album's *The Redhead*. *Old Time Music* is about the joy of making music together.

Write a New Love Song is the opposite of comic relief. Oh, the smiles when I first played this song story to the band! It really seems to come from an earlier time. Think Celtic lirls and fabric milling socials. We decided to make it sound somewhat like a '78 RPM record. Larry said it's a little gem among all the others. It is the punctuation at the end of the album if you listen to the songs in order. My maternal grandfather,

Daniel Sweeney, was an Irish fiddler and storyteller who performed up and down the eastern seaboard until he married Lydia Surette of Yarmouth, NS at the start of the 20th century. We grandchildren learned songs and stories at his knee. Each time he finished a song for us he would sit back with his hands on his knees, with a smile and a contented "*There*". So I ended the song and album in his memory with "*There*".

We did a lot of grinning. I confess the songs are filled with in-jokes and magic moments that mostly Staples, Larry, Burton, Scott and I will recognize, but I hope the overall result, the music and the fun we had, speaks to you too.

A few times we had to cancel from a Covid-19 upsurge, or a possible exposure, or until testing results came back negative. Overnight we'd cancel a planned 2-days at the studio, and head back into lock down. Scott had the skill to enable us to edit via Zoom a lot, shifting to other tasks until we could safely get the band together again.

I almost forgot to tell you about The Saggy Bottom Boys! Here's a picture of "the Boys", Larry, Burton, Staples and me, recording the back-up choruses for several songs in 4-part harmony, just as the song *Old Time Music* says.

I can't think of a more creatively satisfying time in my life, when I've had more fun, worked with more wonderful people, or had the joy of creating layer upon layer of artistic forms of expression, from music, story songs, to arrangements, to videos, costumes, character portrayal, to music performance.

I treasure how we laughed and how we all worked as one. The ideas flowed in harmony just as did the music. I hope this album brings you more than a chuckle.

