

= Old Dan Tucker =

" Old Dan Tucker " , also known as " Ole Dan Tucker " , " Dan Tucker " , and other variants , is a popular American song . Its origins remain obscure ; the tune may have come from oral tradition , and the words may have been written by songwriter and performer Dan Emmett . The blackface troupe the Virginia Minstrels popularized " Old Dan Tucker " in 1843 , and it quickly became a minstrel hit , behind only " Miss Lucy Long " and " Mary Blane " in popularity during the antebellum period . " Old Dan Tucker " entered the folk vernacular around the same time . Today it is a bluegrass and country music standard . It is no . 390 in the Roud Folk Song Index .

The first sheet music edition of " Old Dan Tucker " , published in 1843 , is a song of boasts and nonsense in the vein of previous minstrel hits such as " Jump Jim Crow " and " Gumbo Chaff " . In exaggerated Black Vernacular English , the lyrics tell of Dan Tucker 's exploits in a strange town , where he fights , gets drunk , overeats , and breaks other social taboos . Minstrel troupes freely added and removed verses , and folk singers have since added hundreds more . Parodies and political versions are also known .

The song falls into the idiom of previous minstrel music , relying on rhythm and text declamation as its primary motivation . Its melody is simple and the harmony little developed . Nevertheless , contemporary critics found the song more pleasant than previous minstrel fare . Musicologist Dale Cockrell argues that the song represents a transition between early minstrel music and the more European @-@ style songs of minstrelsy 's later years .

= = Lyrics = =

" Old Dan Tucker " as originally published exemplifies the masculine boasting songs that predominated in early minstrelsy . Modern analysts emphasize the song 's rawness , racism , and disdain for social taboos . In ersatz Black Vernacular English , the song uses short , active words such as runnin and cryin , to portray Dan Tucker as a rough @-@ and @-@ ready black man in the mold of Jim Crow , Gumbo Chaff , and ultimately the tall tale frontiersman :

I come to town de udder night ,
I hear de noise an saw de fight ,
De watchman was a runnin roun ,
Cryin Old Dan Tucker 's come to town .
Gran ' Chorus .

So get out de way ! Get out de way !
Get out de way ! Old Dan Tucker .
You 're too late to come to supper .

Tucker is an animalistic character , driven by sex , violence , and strong drink . He is ugly , unrefined , and unintelligent , even infantilized . As a stranger in town , his devil @-@ may @-@ care actions show his problems with or ambivalence to adapting to local mores . More broadly , Tucker 's disdain for social norms allows the song to send up respectable middle class American society , as evidenced by the final verse :

Tucker was a hardened sinner ,
He nebber said his grace at dinner ;
De ole sow squeel , de pigs did squall
He ' hole hog wid de tail and all .

Other verses are simply nonsense that do not go along with the main narrative . Their lines seem to serve no other purpose than to make a rhyme or extend the patter scheme . The third verse is one example :

Here 's my razor in good order
Magnum bonum ? jis hab bought ' er ;
Sheep shell oats , Tucker shell de corn ,
I 'll shabe you soon as de water get warm .

Dan Tucker is both the teller and subject of the story . Verses 1 , 3 , and 5 of the 1843 edition are in

the first person , whereas verses 2 , 4 , and 7 are in the third . This reflects the song 's intended performance by an entire minstrel troupe . The lead minstrel played Tucker and began the song , but backup singers took over at times to allow Tucker to act out the scenario , dance , and do another comedy bit . There was probably an element of competition to the various dance and music solos . The third @-@ person verses also allowed for commentary to suggest to the audience how they were to judge the character and his antics .

Individual companies probably selectively performed verses from the song or added new ones . For example , the Virginia Serenaders added verses about the Irish , Dutch , and French . At least four versions of the song were published with different lyrics during the 19th century . A parody called " Clar de Track " appears in some playbills and songsters .

= = = Folk versions = = =

" Old Dan Tucker " entered American folklore soon after it was written . Its simple and malleable nature means that singers may begin or end it at any point or invent new verses on the spot . In fact , hundreds of folk verses have been recorded . This is a common folk variant :

Old Daniel Tucker wuz a mighty man ,
He washed his face in a fryin ' pan ;
Combed his head wid a wagon wheel
And he died wid de toofache in his heel .

A common chorus variant goes :

So , git outa de way for old Dan Tucker ,
He 's come too late to git his supper .
Supper 's over and breakfast cookin ' ,
Old Dan Tucker standin ' lookin ' .

For decades " Old Dan Tucker " was used as part of a dancing game . The players formed a ring , and one man moved to the center . He selected women to swing around according to the lyrics :

Here 's old Dan , he comes to town ;
He swings the ladies round and round .
He swings one east , he swings one west ,
He swings with the one he loves the best .

The third woman chosen then became his new partner , and her old partner now took the role of " Old Dan " .

These folk versions can be quite ribald . This one , recalled by a man from his boyhood in Benton County , Arkansas , in the 1910s , is one example :

Old Dan Tucker was a fine old soul ,
Buckskin belly and a rubber ass @-@ hole ,
Swallowed a barrel of cider down
And then he shit all over town .

Another version , sung by Charles Edward Carpenter ? a Lawrenceburg , Tennessee business man and World War II Veteran (born in Crewstown , TN) ? to his children and grandchildren in Middle Tennessee during the mid- to late 1900s speaks of Old Dan Tucker 's love of a hard drink . The last line appears to have been sung in the first person (" Oh my goodness , what 'll I do ?) :

Old Dan Tucker , he got drunk ,
He fell in the far (fire) and kicked up a chunk ,
A red hot coal fell down his shoe ,
Oh my goodness , what 'll I do ?
Go on home , ole Dan Tucker ,
You 're too late to get your supper .

" Old Dan Tucker " entered the folklore of slaves as well . This version from Orange County , North Carolina , was recorded in the 1850s :

Marster and Missus look ' might fine ?
Gwine to take a journey , gwine whar dey gwine ,

Crab grass a @-@ dyin ' , red sun in de west ,
Saturday 's comin ' , nigger gwine to rest .

= = = Political versions = = =

The original " Old Dan Tucker " and most folk variants are not political in nature . However , as early as 1844 , the Hutchinson Family Singers were performing " Get off the Track ! " to its tune , billed as " A song for emancipation " One verse and the chorus say :

Ho ! the car Emancipation
Rides majestic thro ' our nation ,
Bearing on its train the story ;
Liberty ! a nation 's glory .
Get out the way ! Every station !
Freedom 's car , Emancipation !

That same year , supporters of Henry Clay at a Whig rally sang a version that makes references to Clay (" Ole Kentucky ") , Martin Van Buren , and James Buchanan :

The people 's fav 'rite , Henry Clay , is now the ' fashion ' of the day ;
And let the track be dry or mucky , we 'll stake our pile on Ole Kentucky .
Get out of the way , he 's swift and lucky ; clear the track for Ole Kentucky !

In 1856 , supporters of John C. Frémont 's run for the Republican Party nomination adopted the tune as his campaign song with the changed refrain " Get out the way , old Buchanan " . William Jennings Bryan 's campaign song for the 1900 Democratic National Convention in Kansas City , Missouri , changed the lyrics to say :

Voters , come and hear my ditty ,
What was done at Kansas City :
David Hill , the New York lion ,
Nominated Billy Bryan .
Get out of the way , you Grand Old Party ,
You 're so old , you 're getting warty .

A version popular during the American Civil War adds references to Abraham Lincoln :

Old Abe is coming down to fight ,
And put the Democrats to flight ;
He 's coming with the wedge and maul
And he will split ' em one and all .
Get out the way , you little giant
You can 't come in , you 're too short and pliant .

= = Structure = =

" Old Dan Tucker " is a breakdown , a dance song wherein the rhythmic accent falls on the second and fourth beats rather than on the third . The song is largely Anglo @-@ American in nature , although it has black influences . Its repetitive melodic idiom matches that of earlier minstrel standards , such as " Jump Jim Crow " , " Coal Black Rose " , and " Old Zip Coon " .

The song consists of 28 bars . It begins with a boisterous eight @-@ bar introduction . Four bars follow to frame the coda . The remainder consists of sixteen bars with lyrics , half devoted to verse , and half to refrain . Each phrase gives way directly to the next with no rests between sections .

Rhythm is perhaps the most important component of " Old Dan Tucker " . It begins with a cadenced introduction and little melody . Even when the tune begins in earnest , it is flat and non @-@ harmonized and does little more than provide a beat on which words are uttered . The refrain is syncopated in a way that had only previously been used in the minstrel song " Old Zip Coon " . The intense rhythm on the line " Get out the way ! " generates a forward momentum and is answered by instruments in one example of the song 's black @-@ influenced call and response .

" Old Dan Tucker " was , of course , intended for stage performance . The verses are not only to be

played but also acted out and danced to . Minstrels could begin leaping about at the introduction and coda , beginning the full music at the vocal section . Performers probably included instrumental versions of the chorus while they played , a rare practice in early minstrelsy .

Musicologist Dale Cockrell argues that " Old Dan Tucker " in fact represents a bridge between the percussive blackface songs of the 1830s and the more refined compositions of songwriters such as Stephen Foster . Cockrell says that , unlike previous minstrel songs , " Old Dan Tucker " is meant for more than just dancing ; its tune is developed enough to stand on its own . Contemporary critics certainly noticed the difference . Y. S. Nathanson called it " the best of what I have denominated the ancient negro ballads . The melody is far superior to anything that had preceded it . " Nathanson compared the song to works by Gaetano Donizetti and Daniel Auber .

= = Composition = =

The origin of the music of " Old Dan Tucker " has always been obscure , and no sheet music edition from 1843 , its year of its first publication , names a composer . The first performance of the tune (but not lyrics) may have happened as early as 1841 . The music may in fact be from the oral tradition or may have been a product of collaboration .

Nevertheless , " Old Dan Tucker " has been credited to at least three different songwriters : Dan Emmett , J. R. Jenkins , and Henry Russell . In his old age , Emmett related the traditional story to his biographer , H. Ogden Wintermute : " I composed Old Dan Tucker in 1830 or 1831 , when I was fifteen or sixteen years old . " The biography claims that Emmett first played the song in public at a performance by a group of traveling entertainers . They lacked a fiddle player , and the local innkeeper suggested young Emmett to fill in . Emmett played " Old Dan Tucker " to the troupe manager 's liking , and he debuted on the Mount Vernon , Ohio , village green in blackface to perform the song on the Fourth of July . Wintermute claims that the name Dan Tucker is a combination of Emmett 's own name and that of his dog . However , there is no evidence for any of this . Instead , Emmett may merely have written the words . Even these seem to partially derive from an earlier minstrel song called " Walk Along John " or " Oh , Come Along John " , first published in various songsters in the early 1840s . Some verses have clear echoes in versions of " Old Dan Tucker " :

Johnny law on de rail road track ,
He tied de engine on his back ;
He pair 's his corn wid a rail road wheel ,
It gib ' em de tooth ache in de heel .

The Charles Keith company published " Old Dan Tucker " in Boston , Massachusetts , in 1843 . The sheet music credits words to Dan Emmett but says that the song is from " Old Dan Emmit 's Original Banjo Melodies " . The lack of attribution of the melody may be another sign that Emmett did not write it .

= = = Possible slave origin = = =

A story dating to at least 1965 claims that " Old Dan Tucker " was written by slaves about a man named Daniel Tucker who lived in Elbert County , Georgia . Tucker was a farmer , ferryman , and minister who appears in records from the late 18th and early 19th centuries . The story , as related by Mrs. Guy Rucker , the great @-@ great @-@ granddaughter of one of Tucker 's neighbors , claims that Tucker became quite well liked by the slaves in his area through his ministry to them .

According to this interpretation , the lyrics address Tucker directly . The chorus , " You 're too late to get your supper " is a kindhearted taunt to a man who often arrived after dark , forcing his hosts to scrape up a meal for him . The song 's occasional lewdness is explained by the natural impromptu nature of its supposed origin .

" Old Dan Tucker " does show evidence of black influence . For example , bizarre imagery in folk versions of the song (e.g. , " toothache in his heel ") may be a sign of legitimate black input (or of someone poking fun of slaves who had an incomplete knowledge of English) . " Old Dan Tucker "

most closely resembles African music in its call @-@ and @-@ response refrain .

Daniel Tucker was buried in Elbert County in 1818 . The Elbert County Chamber of Commerce today promotes his grave as a tourist attraction due to his possible connection with the character from the song .

= = Popularity = =

In December 1842 and January 1843 , Dan Emmett portrayed the character Old Dan Tucker in solo and duo performances ; the playbills do not indicate whether he included the song in his act . The Virginia Minstrels probably made " Old Dan Tucker " a regular part of their show beginning with their first performance at the Bowery Amphitheatre on February 6 , 1843 . Their minstrel show also included a comic scene loosely based on the song , " Dan Tucker on Horseback " , about a black riding master . The piece starred Richard Pelham in the title role and Frank Brower as a black clown . " Old Dan Tucker " did not appear on a Virginia Minstrels playbill until a March 7 and 8 performance at Boston 's Masonic Temple . There , the playbill described it as " OLD DAN TUCKER , a Virginian Refrain , in which is described the ups and downs of Negro life . " As early as February 15 , Emmett billed himself as " Old Dan Emmett " .

By the end of March , " Old Dan Tucker " was a hit , and it quickly became the Virginia Minstrels ' most popular song . Robert Winans found the song on 49 % of the minstrel playbills he surveyed from the 1843 ? 1847 period (behind only " Miss Lucy Long ") , and research by musicologist William J. Mahar suggests that it was behind only " Mary Blane " and " Lucy Long " in its frequency of publication in antebellum songsters . The next year , Dan Tucker returned in the popular " Ole Bull and Old Dan Tucker " , which pits him against Ole Bull in a contest of skill . Sequels such as " De New Ole Dan Tucker " and " Old Dan Tucker 's Wedding " followed . Other companies adopted Tucker for comedy sketches , such as burlesques of La sonnambula by Buckley 's Serenaders in 1850 and Sanford 's Opera Troupe in 1853 .

The song became so identified with Emmett and the Virginia Minstrels that it became part of their foundation myth . Billy Whitlock and George B. Wooldridge both claimed that the troupe members played " Old Dan Tucker " in their first impromptu performance together :

. . . as if by accident , each one picked up his tools and joined in a chorus of " Old Dan Tucker , " while Emmett was playing and singing . It went well , and they repeated it without saying a word . Each did his best , and such a rattling of the principal and original instruments in a minstrel band was never heard before .

Emmett repeated this story in the May 19 , 1877 , New York Clipper , although other details changed . The press began to refer to Emmett as " Ole Dan Tucker " , and Emmett eventually adopted the nickname . The Virginia Minstrels sometimes went by " Ole Dan Tucker and Co . " They were called " Old Dan Tucker & Co . , " either by themselves or by the press , as early as February 16 , 1843 .

The song 's disdain for the customs of the upper classes hit a chord with working class audiences . On January 28 , 1843 , The New York Sporting Whip reported that the song had been adopted by a Philadelphia , Pennsylvania , street gang called the Hallow Guards . As their leader , Stovepipe Bill , led them against a military raid , he sang the verses followed by the gang singing the chorus . Two years later , The Knickerbocker remarked , " At this present moment , a certain ubiquitous person seems to be in the way of the whole people of these United States simultaneously . " Nathanson claimed that " Old Dan Tucker " had " been sung , perhaps , oftener than any melody ever written . "

In 1871 , 28 years after its first published edition , Board and Trade listed editions of " Old Dan Tucker " in print from seven different publishers . The song had by default fallen into the public domain . In later decades , " Old Dan Tucker " became a standard of bluegrass and country music , with recordings by such artists as Fiddlin ' John Carson , Uncle Dave Macon , Pete Seeger , and Gid Tanner and his Skillet Lickers . It is referred to in John Steinbeck 's novel The Grapes of Wrath . More recently , rock musician Bruce Springsteen made a recording . Children 's music collections frequently feature the song and it has been covered by children 's group The Wiggles with Australian country performer Troy Cassar @-@ Daley . In Joel Chandler Harris ' Uncle Remus , it appears in

the context of powerless Crawfish trying to be heard in an assembly of animals , and Harris writes , " but dey might ez well er sung Ole Dan Tucker ter a harrycane . " In the 1935 novel *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder , the character Mr. Edwards sings the song as his trademark ; accordingly , the *Little House on the Prairie* television series from the 1970s and 1980s uses the song as a leitmotif for the character .