

The John B. Sails

Arrangement © Robert Force, 2005

A noted collector and performer of American folk music, the poet Carl Sandburg published a book in 1927 entitled, *The American Songbag*. In it he presented a Bahamian folk song published in 1916 by Richard Le Galliene in *Harper's Magazine* called, The John B. Sails. The Weavers sang the tune in 1950 as the Wreck of the John B. On their 1958 debut LP (which charted in *Billboard* for 195 weeks!) The Kingston Trio recorded the Weaver version. Johnny Cash recorded it a year later as I Wanna Go Home. The Brothers Four recorded it in 1963 using the original title. In 1966, the Beach Boys changed the name to the Sloop John B and charted for 11 weeks in *Billboard*. Because of all of this the song became a hit heard by millions and, over the years, a folk standard. Here's a popular folk lyric mix:

G C G C G
We come on the sloop John B my grandfather and me

G D
'Round Nassau town we did roam
G C
Drinking all night, got into a fight
G D G-333
Oh I feel so broke up, I want to go home

– CHORUS -- (Sing often-- most people only know this part!)

G C G C G
So hoist up the John B's sail, see how the mainsail sets

G D-754 644-533-543 (staccato/cut time; ends on D-543)
Call for the Captain ashore, let me go home

000-111-222-333 walk bass up to: C-754 (a sliding bar chord gives it panache!)
Let me go home, I wanna go home,

G D G-333
Oh, I feel so broke up, I wanna go home

The first mate he got drunk and broke in the Cap'n's trunk
The constable had to come and take him away
Sheriff, John Stone, why don't you leave me alone
Oh yeah, I feel so broke up, I wanna go home

The poor cook he caught the fits, threw away all my grits
Then he took and he ate up all of my corn
Let me go home, why don't they let me go home,
Oh, this is the worst trip I've ever been on

Sometimes I change the verses, especially the last line to say this is the BEST trip I've ever been on. Many people know the chorus, want to sing along, and usually I am in a GREAT place to be singing it! To vary the tonal mix I use two G forms: 333, 533 and two D forms: 543, 754. Also: Em 111, F#m 222; C 643; and thow in a Cm (of sorts) 644.