

# Newcomers' Corner

## The Barbarian Birthday Song

At a recent fighter practice, two members of our populace were celebrating birthdays and were treated to a couple of verses of the Barbarian Birthday Song, which in turn got me to thinking about the origins of this wonderful melody. The song has many names: The Viking Birthday Song, The Mongol Birthday Song, The Barbarian Birthday Song, and who knows how many other variations. It is what we call a filk. This is a musical genre in which we borrow the tune of an existing mundane song and change the words to something more suited to the SCA. It's sung to the tune of "The Song of the Volga Boatmen" a traditional Russian folk song composed by Mily Balakirev. The song, also called The Volga Burlak's Song, was inspired by Ilya Yefimovich Repin's famous painting, Burlaks on the Volga, depicting the suffering of the people in the depth of misery in Czarist Russia. Include a sound effect after each "happy birthday!" (Bang mugs on the tabletop, growl, or make noises that would be natural to people doing hard physical labor such as rowing or swinging sledgehammers). Choose verses that are suited to the recipient or learn them all!

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Doom and gloom and dark despair  
People dying everywhere!  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
May the candles on your cake  
Burn like cities in your wake.  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Your servants steal, your wife's untrue  
Your children plot to murder you  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Burn the castle and storm the keep  
Kill the women, but save the sheep  
For your Birthday! (thud!) Happy  
Birthday! (thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Birthdays come but once a year  
Marking time as Death draws near  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Now you've aged another year  
Now you know that Death is near  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Now that you're the age you are  
Your demise cannot be far  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Black Death has just struck your town  
You yourself feel quite run-down  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Burn, then rape by firelight  
Add \_romance\_ to life tonight  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Indigestion's what you get  
From the enemies you 'et  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
We love children, yes we do  
Baked or broiled or in a stew  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
May your deeds with sword and axe  
Equal those with sheep and yaks  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
This one lesson you must learn  
First you pillage, then you burn  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
While you eat your birthday stew  
We will loot the town for you,  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy  
Birthday! (thud!)  
We brought linen, white as cloud  
The women sit and sew your shroud  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
Just be glad the friends you've got  
Haven't found out you-know-what  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
I'm a leper, can't you see  
Have a birthday kiss from me  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
It's your birthday never fear  
You'll be dead this time next year  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
So far Death you have bypassed  
Don't look back, he's gaining fast  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
You must marry very soon  
Baby's due by next full moon  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

It's your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)  
When you've reached this age you know  
That the mind is first to go  
On your Birthday! (thud!) Happy Birthday!  
(thud!)

Sung to the tune of "The Song of the  
Volga Boatmen".

### SONG OF THE VOLGA BOATMAN

composed by Mily Balakirev

#### **Refrain**

Yo, heave ho! Yo, heave ho!

Once more, once again, still once more

#### **Verse 1**

Now we fell the stout birch tree,

Now we pull hard: one, two, three.

Ay-da, da, ay-da!

Ay-da, da, ay-da!

Now we fell the stout birch tree

Yo, heave ho!

Hey, hey, let's heave a-long the way

to the sun we sing our song

#### **Verse 2**

As the barges float along,

To the sun we sing our song.

Ay-da, da, ay-da!

Ay-da, da, ay-da!

To the sun we sing our song.

Hey, hey, let's heave a-long the way  
to the sun we sing our song

#### **Verse 3**

Volga, Volga our pride,

Mighty stream so deep and wide.

Ay-da, da, ay-da!

Ay-da, da, ay-da!

Mighty stream so deep and wide.

Volga, Volga you're our pride.

Check out [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) for several renditions of this song. The song was popularized by Feodor Chaliapin, the most famous Russian opera singer of the 20th Century, and has been a favorite concert piece of bass singers ever since. Glenn Miller took the song to #1 on the US charts in 1941.

Source: [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)



## WHAT THE HECK IS FILK MUSIC?

by Nick Smith (of LA Filkharmonics)

What is this stuff called filk? My own favorite definition is simply "the folk music of the science fiction/fantasy fan community.", but if you ask four filkers you will get seven definitions. :-> Here's what Nick Smith had to say about it awhile back:

Well, it's sort of like folk music. It is a mixture of song parodies and original music, humorous and serious, about subjects like science fiction, fantasy, computers, cats, politics, the space program, books, movies, TV shows, love, war, death. . .

Filk music started off forty or fifty years ago, at science fiction conventions, where people got together late at night to have good old-fashioned folk music song circles. Well, late night circles being what they are, some folks got a little silly and started singing song parodies about their favorite SF books and authors. Fans started writing song parodies about themselves or each other. Some started composing serious songs about favorite topics. Some authors started composing original songs for their books. If the author didn't list a tune, fans made up one. Sometimes two. Sometimes several.

Eventually, Filk songs were written for just about every major science fiction or fantasy work. Some of them were actually good enough that people wanted to learn them, or just listen to them more than just at conventions. At that point, song books and recordings started being made.

Over the last decade, Filk Music has reached the point where there are entire Filk Music gatherings, conventions, recording companies, and publications. Filk Music includes song parodies, original songs, and slightly musical poetry. It's a fun way to indulge in a little musical creativity, especially if you are a science fiction or fantasy fan as well as musically inclined. If you are only a fan, but not musical, you can still listen. Filk circles aren't pushy about requiring you to play or sing. If you are only musical, but not a fan, no one will hold it against you. Remember, we're in this thing for fun!

What Nick didn't tell you is that the name started out as a typo of "folk" and was gleefully adopted by all and sundry as a term for what is after all a somewhat unusual subset.

More about filk can be found at the [Interfilk Site](#) , [Filk 101 q & a](#) on Filk.com , Gary McGath's essay on ["what is filk?"](#) , and D Glenn Arthur Jr.'s ["What is 'Filk'?"](#) For some early history see [Tracking Down The First Deliberate Use Of "Filk Song"](#) , [Lee Gold's essay on the history of the term, "filk"](#) , and a [history of filk in Germany](#).

Chronicler's Note: Several of the founding members of the SCA came from science fiction fandom so naturally they brought this musical genre with them.

## BURLAKS ON THE VOLGA

By Ilya Yefimovich Repin



**Илья Yefimovich Repin** (Russian: Илья́ Ефи́мович Ре́пин, was born on 5 August 1844, in Chuhuiv, Russian Empire (now in Ukraine) and died on September 29, 1930, in Kuokkala, Finland. He was a leading Russian painter and sculptor of the Peredvizhniki artistic school. An important part of his work is dedicated to his native country, Ukraine. His realistic works often expressed great psychological depth and exposed the tensions within the existing social order. Beginning in the late 1920s, detailed works on him were being published in the USSR, where a Repin cult developed about a decade later, and where he was held up as a model "progressive" and "realist" to be imitated by "Socialist Realist" artists in the Soviet Union.

Repin's parents were Russian military settlers. In 1866, after apprenticeship with a local icon painter named Bunakov and preliminary study of portrait painting, he went to Saint Petersburg and was admitted to the Imperial Academy of Arts. From 1873 to 1876 on the Academy's allowance, Repin sojourned in Italy and lived in Paris, where he was exposed to French Impressionist painting, which had a lasting effect upon his use of light and color, though, his style remained closer to that of the old European masters, especially Rembrandt, and he never became an impressionist himself. Throughout his career, he was drawn to the common people to whom he traced his origins, and he frequently painted country folk, both Ukrainian and Russian, though in later years he also painted members of the Imperial Russian elite, the intelligentsia, and the aristocracy, including Tsar Nicholas II.

A **burlak** (Russian: Бурлак) was a Russian epithet for a person who hauled barges and other vessels down dry or shallow waterways from the 17th to 20th centuries. The word *burlak* originated from Tatar word *bujdak*, 'homeless'. According to another version, the word originated from old middle-german *bûrlach* (working team with fixed rules, artel). Burlaks appeared in Russia at the end of sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century. With the expansion of freight-hauling, the number of burlaks increased.

The chief of a burlak gang was called *Vodoliv* (Russian: Водолив), next in line was the *Dyadya* (Russian: Дядя, captain), followed by the *Shishka* (Russian: Шишка, first in the line of haulers), while the last in line was called *Kosny* (Russian: Косный, last in the line of haulers). There were

*seasonal* burlaks, who worked from spring to autumn, and *temporary* burlaks, who worked occasionally. Burlaks did not work in winter, when most Russian rivers were frozen over. A typical symbol of a burlak was a spoon on a hat.

The main areas of the burlaks' trade in the Russian Empire were the Volga river, from Moscow to Astrakhan, the White Sea route, from Moscow to Arkhangelsk, and the Dnieper river, in Ukraine. Most burlaks were landless or poor peasants from Simbirsk, Saratov, Samara, Yaroslavl, Kostroma, Vladimir, Ryazan, Tambov and Penza areas.

Burlaks joined up in an *artel* (typically from four to six, sometimes ten to forty, and occasionally up to 150 people) mainly in winter, despite that at this time clients paid the lowest price, because in winter burlaks were often otherwise unemployed. The final payments were in autumn, after finishing work.

With the coming of the Industrial revolution, the number of burlaks declined: in the beginning of the nineteenth century about 600,000 burlaks worked on the Volga and Oka rivers; in the middle of nineteenth century, 150,000, and by the beginning of the twentieth burlaks had all but disappeared.

The burlak was a popular hero of Russian proverbs ("Dog, do not touch the burlak—he is a dog himself"), songs (Russian: *Ekh, dubinushka*, famously performed by Feodor Chaliapin, *The Volga Boatmen's Song* etc.), and artwork (*Burlaks on the Volga* by Ilya Yefimovich Repin).

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Another Book Review By Lady Mariia Kotov

***The Historian*** is another fictional novel by Elizabeth Kostova about a quest, reaching through the past five centuries, for the historical Dracula. It has now been published in 28 languages. This book explores Dracula history through the eyes of several scholars and in doing so brings to light many of the accepted scholarly resources on Vlad's life, which most folks have never been exposed to. It covers a great deal of detail on the historical antagonism between Western Civilization and Islam and how Vlad was involved in it. It describes how to the people of Wallachia he was at some times considered a savior for protecting them from the Islamic Incursions. All of the story is told through letters, excerpts from books and academic literature, and above all, the narrator's reconstruction's of stories told to her by her father. The author has taken very little liberty with the actual history of these times and includes an extensive bibliography so that an interested reader can pursue the actual Primary sources if they wish. Again, I wish to reiterate that this is a work of fiction. It is a totally different slant on the Dracula legends that come to us in Stoker's tradition and provides some good historical information disguised in the form of a good story!

I think for SCA readers this book has some great historical insight into the areas covered (primarily Romania, Istanbul, and Bulgaria). It also has some useful persona related information.