

The Song Collector

Chumbawamba

The Folk Society meet on Thursday nights
Clear their throats and put their coughs to flight
To sing the dusty cobwebs from the room
A repertoire both in and out of tune
Don't assume a singalong, or worse
This history in song and countless verse
Pays homage to the man who, long ago
Collected all the songs the singers know
Collected all the songs the singers know

Edward Alexander, man of action
Armed only with his reel-to-reel contraption
One hundred years ago in mac and boots
Set out to faithfully preserve the region's roots
And every night in some small village inn
Fortified with fortitude and gin
Mr Alexander, for a shilling
Would thus record your song, if you were willing
Would thus record your song, if you were willing

So word got round, and soon there formed a queue
And the line of willing singers grew and grew
Brass for oohs and aahs? You can't go wrong
When there's someone paying a shilling for a song
When all his tapes are filled up, Edward leaves
There's a history preserved, so he believes
But all the so-called singers back inside
They know they took a city scholar for a ride
They know they took a city scholar for a ride

For they shook the man for every coin he'd got
With words and tunes all made up on the spot
Invented tales not twenty minutes old
So history, like ale, is bought and sold.
The old contraption's packed away and boxed
And a century is marked upon the clock
So tradition holds that Edward's great collection
Is honoured with a weekly resurrection
Honoured with a weekly resurrection

And now the old Society sing the songs
Word for word, and kept where they belong
As once again, they eulogise the past
You can hear the ghosts of history laughing last
You can hear the ghosts of history laughing last