

STILL ON THE ROAD 2020 THEME TIME RADIO HOUR

Previous [2020 US Summer Tour](#) – all shows were cancelled due to the Coronavirus
pandemic
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SEPTEMBER

21 Washington, District Of Columbia The Abernathy Building

**40520 Studio B
The Abernathy Building
Washington, District Of Columbia
Los Angeles, California
21 September 2020**

Theme Time Radio Hour, Episode 102: Whiskey

Diana Krall

It's nighttime in the city. There's a hint of jasmine in the air.
A startled cat runs across the piano keys.
My neighbor keeps walking around upstairs.
A man slowly falls out of love.

It's Theme Time Radio Hour, with your host, Bob Dylan.
We're going to need more ice.

Selected BobTalk

Hello, friends, and welcome back to Theme Time Radio Hour. I'm your host, Bob Dylan. To paraphrase Alexandre Dumas, in "The Count of Monte Cristo," "I'm so delighted to see you here. It makes me forget, for the moment, that all happiness is fleeting."



Bob Dylan and Heaven's Door

You may wonder what brings us back after so long, with an all-new episode of Themes, Dreams, and Schemes. Well, the answer is simple. Recently, I met some distillers and blenders, and together we cooked up our own brand of Tennessee bourbon, double

Bob Dylan: Still On The Road – 2020 Theme Time Radio Hour

barrel, and straight rye whiskey. Maybe you've read about it, it's called "Heaven's Door." Now, I'm not going to pull your coat too much about it, because me telling you how good it is, is like trying to tickle yourself. It just doesn't work. You have to taste it, then it speaks for itself. But, we all thought it might be a good idea to do an episode of Theme Time all about those various amber intoxicants.

There's no shortage of songs, and it has been fun to get the gang back together. Though it's been so long, I'm not even sure if we should call it Theme Time Radio Hour anymore. I mean, does anybody still have a radio? Some folks might even be listening on a smart toaster. I don't know. Theme Time Device Hour just doesn't sound right.

Tell you what, we're going to keep the name and not worry about where you listen to it. So, let's crack open a fresh bottle of Heaven's Door, and we'll learn where NASCAR came from, and what exactly is meant by "coming through the rye," and a whole lot more. Let's start things off on the quiet side.

1953	Wynonie Harris	Quiet Whiskey (Henry Glover / Wynonie Harris / Fred Weismantel)
	Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers	If the River Was Whiskey (Charlie Poole)
1973	Willie Nelson	Whiskey River (Johnny Bush / Paul Stroud)
1927	Sylvester Weaver and Walter Beasley	Bottleneck Blues" (Walter Beasley / Sylvester Weaver)
1920s	Edmund Tagoe and Frankie Essien	Whiskey Sununu Odia
1972	Bobby Charles	He's Got All the Whiskey (Bobby Charles)
1946	Timmie Rogers	Good Whiskey (And a Bad Woman) (Kuller & Rogers)
1996	Laura Cantrell	The Whiskey Makes You Sweeter (Amy Allison)
1967	Frank Sinatra	Drinking Again (Johnny Mercer / Doris Tauber)
2005	Rod Stewart	I've Been Drinking (excerpt)
1952	Jimmy Witherspoon	Corn Whiskey (Jerry Leiber / Mike Stoller)
1953	Billie Harbert	Ain't That Whiskey Hot (Billie Harbert/J. Baker/R.Baker)
1997	Alfred Brown	One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer (Rudy Toombs)
1982	Harry Choates	Rye Whiskey (traditional)
	Julie London	Coming Through the Rye (traditional)
	The Stanley Brothers	Mountain Dew (traditional)
1971	Van Morrison	Moonshine Whiskey (Van Morrison)
	Dean Martin	Bourbon from Heaven (excerpt) (MrsCrocetti)
1956	Louis Armstrong	Mack the Knife (excerpt) (Kurt Weill/Bertold Brecht)
	Lotte Lenya	Alabama Song (Whiskey Bar) (Kurt Weill/Bertold Brecht/ Elisabeth Hauptmann)
1985	Tom Waits	Jockey Full of Bourbon (Tom Waits)
1983	George Jones	Tennessee Whiskey (Dean Dillon / Linda Hargrove)
1996	Thin Lizzy	Whiskey in the Jar (traditional)
	The Clancy Brothers	The Parting Glass (traditional)
1954	Miss Byllye Williams	Hangover Blues
	Tuff Green	Let's Go to the Liquor Store (Tuff Green)

Selected BobTalk

"Whiskey on the shelf." That was leather lung blues shouter Wynonie Harris, with a raucous tale of quiet whiskey. I was looking at the song writer credits on my copy of that record, and Wynonie got his name on there, as did Henry Glover, who was a fascinating character. There's also a guy named Bob Schell, who wrote a couple of other things for the King label. But the fourth guy's name really caught my eye: Fred Weismantel. Who's he?

Turns out he started out as an arranger with the Glenn Miller Orchestra. From there, he co-wrote some of the rockiest jump blues of the '40s and '50s, like the one we just heard. He went on to write for Johnny Ray, and in the late '60s, did some of the horn shots for Steam, on their "Na Na Na, Hey Hey Hey, Kiss 'Em Goodbye" album. A nice run, good going, Fred.

In 19 and 20, Charlie Poole, that North Carolina wizard of the banjo put it together with an even older song, "The Hesitation Blues," and recorded this version. Charlie Poole reinvented this playing style after injuring his hand in a drunken bar room bet. The man knew how to take lemons and make lemonade, and I'm pretty sure he added a healthy shot of hooch to that. Here's my label mate, on Columbia Records, Charlie Poole.

Charlie Poole makes a river of whiskey sound pretty good. However, a river of molasses, that's a different story altogether. On January 15, 19 and 19, 2.5 million gallons of molasses ran through the streets of Boston's North End. A tank that was being used in the manufacture of rum exploded. People say, "slow as molasses," but a 40-foot high wave of molasses flooded the Boston streets at an amazing 35 miles an hour, leaving 21 people dead. Some people in that part of town swear they can still smell molasses in their basements.

Charlie Poole made a river of whiskey theoretical, but when Willie Nelson sings about "Whiskey River," you have no doubt that it exists. Even though everybody thinks of it as one of Willie's songs, I know I do, it's one that he didn't write. It was written by a guy they called the Country Caruso, Johnny Bush.

Johnny and Willie knew each other back in the early '60s. This was when Willie was writing songs like "Crazy," and "Nightlife." Johnny had this distinctive voice that songwriters loved. It had a little catch in it, like a built-in heartbreak.

Willie loved his singing. He financed Johnny's first record and used his band to back him up. He was doing pretty good, and "Whiskey River" was climbing the charts, until his voice started failing him. He turned to drugs, and developed stage fright, on top of everything else. But his friends never gave up on him, and he never gave up on himself.

Medical treatment, hard work, and supportive friends like Willie, brought him back, and since then he's released new music, and received many accolades. Johnny Bush swam in the whiskey river, and lived to tell the tale. Here's his loyal friend Willie to tell you all about it.

Willie Nelson swimming upstream in that whiskey river. You're listening to Theme Time Radio Hour, full of whiskey dreams, bourbon schemes, and rye themes.

Now, me, I like it simple. A couple of fingers of Tennessee whiskey, maybe over ice. Repeat if necessary. Another guy who likes simple was our good friend Bobby Charles. He never got fancy, but he always got his point across. Like in this song, by a fellow who's got all the whiskey. And that's not all he's got.

He's got all the whiskey, and he won't give you none. Bobby Charles, here on Theme Time Radio Hour, where we are playing songs all about those intoxicating amber fluids that are fermented from grain, and mostly stored in oak barrels.

Funny how times change. There are things in this next song that seem woefully out of touch today. For instance, Timmie Rogers, that's not Jimmy Rogers, that's Timmie Rogers. He wants an old whiskey and a young woman, and not the other way around, because he says, "Be sure you get a young chick, because gals do not improve with age." An adage he shared with Errol Flynn.

It would be easy to write Timmie Rogers off for such sexist thoughts, even in 1946, when this record was made. But consider this, he was also a groundbreaking comedian, considered the first African American to do an act that didn't depend on racist props, exaggerated caricature, or grotesque costuming. Most black comics dressed like tramps, and other type of low characters, so as not to be, as the club owners put it, too aggressive for the white audiences.

Timmie wasn't having any of that. He just came out in his tuxedo and he told jokes. He also played the ukulele. Maybe you remember his catchphrase, "Oh, yeah!" which he developed in 1949 and used on television shows with people like Jackie Gleason, Flip Wilson, and Johnny Carson.

Don't judge Timmie too harshly, he was backwards in some ways, but he led the charge in other.

We've all heard the phrase "beer goggles," where one brew too many might make you think a guy or a gal in a bar is a seven when they're actually a three. Well, here's Laura Cantrell, with a more sophisticated version of the same phenomenon. I suppose you could call it "spirit spectacles."

“The whiskey makes you sweeter than you could ever be to me,” a song written by Amy Allison, daughter of longtime Theme Time favorite, Mose Allison. Amy has a similar dark sense of humor like her father, but Amy is more like a country fan than her old man Mose.

One of the best things about a nice, stiff drink, is its ability to be the perfect companion for solitary evening of melancholy rumination. As Frank Sinatra explains in this evocative number, co-written by Doris Tauber, along with the Song Bird of Savannah, Johnny Mercer, “Drinking Again.” Here’s Frank.

From his 1967 album, “The World We Knew.” That following year, Jeff Beck recorded an album called “Truth,” with a young singer named Rod Stewart. They cut a track for that record called, “I’ve Been Drinking.” and took song writing credits. They didn’t include it on the album. As a matter of fact, it didn’t come out until 2005, when it was a bonus track on a reissue. Give a listen, see if it sounds familiar.

Earlier in the program, I told you that most of the liquids we were talking about today were aged by law in oak barrels. Well, here’s a song about the big exception. Corn whiskey must be 80 per cent corn mash, as opposed to bourbon’s 51 per cent, and since it is not required to be barrel aged, it is often clear in color, and lacks the rich flavor that bourbon has. But, it does have its fans, among them Jimmy Witherspoon. Here’s Jimmy, from September 30th, 19 and 52. Three years to the day before James Dean died. Jimmy Witherspoon, “.” You’ve got to love a song with hand claps as good as these.

I’ve always wondered if they had a guy near the microphone really filling that glass in the end of that song. That’s a swinging little LA band, backing up in ‘Spoon, there. Tiny Webb on guitar, Maxwell Davis on tenor sax, and Earl Jackson on piano.

You’re listening to Theme Time Radio hour, with a jug of moonshine liquor.

I always wondered why it was called moonshine. I thought maybe it was because it was made at night. A few years ago I met up with Van Morrison on Philopappos Hill, in Greece. That’s up above the Athens Basin. They call it the hill of the muses. Anyway, he told me this crazy story about brandy, smuggled into England in the 1700s in Wiltshire. Wiltshire is a county in Southwest England. It’s where Stonehenge is, and in the 18th century, smuggling French brandy, it was a big business there.

Locals would hide the barrels in local ponds, and retrieve them at night with long rakes, when the law men and revenueurs finished searching the area. If any of these revenueurs returned while they were doing it, they would pretend to be simple-minded. They would point to the moon’s reflection in the pond and tell the constabulary that they were trying to rake in a wheel of cheese. The gullible lawmen would laugh at the foolish moonrakers, and leave. Now, Van swore to me that this is where “moonshine” got its name.

This song is not only about moonshine, but also mentions Hot Pants, Arkansas, bubbles in the water, and streamline promenade. Here’s Van the man, in “Moonshine Whiskey.”

You might know this next song by David Bowie, or The Doors, but it is originally from a short opera called “Mahagonny-Songspiel,” written by Bertolt Brecht, with music by Kurt Weill, in 1927. Actually, Elisabeth Hauptmann, another collaborator of Brecht’s, wrote the English lyrics to this particular song as a parody. In this song, Lotte Lenya played Jenny, a prostitute, who is leaving her small town for a wild and woolly city, not unlike Vegas in its heyday.

Lotte was an Austrian singer who lived much of her life in the United States. She was the great love of Kurt Weill’s life. She must have been, he married her twice. Lotte utilizes a singing technique called *sprechstimme*, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as a style of dramatic vocalization intermediate between speech and song. You know, half speaking, half singing. I’ve been known to use that, myself.

On April 13th, 1956, Lotte Lenya met another distinctive voice when she visited a Louis Armstrong recording session. Satchmo was recording a version of “Mack the Knife,” a song Lotte’s husband wrote with Bertolt Brecht. You’re going to hear Louis adlib a “hello” to Lotte in the song. But here’s the lady herself, full of ambition and *sprechstimme*. Lotte Lenya, in “The Alabama Song.”

Lotte Lenya, and for the life of me, I still don’t know what that song has to do with Alabama, or *sprechstimme* [laughter].

You’re listening to Theme Time Radio Hour, and we played a version of this next song on our Tennessee episode. by, one of my favorite outlaws, Edgar Allan Poe, no, I mean David Allen Coe. But, I can’t imagine doing a show about

whiskey and not playing this song. I also can't imagine not playing George Jones, so I can kill two birds with one stone. Maybe one of them should be a raven! (snorts).

George took this up to number two on the country charts in 1983, and just a couple of years later, in 2015, Chris Stapleton took it to number one on that same chart, after doing a duet of it with Justin Timberlake, on the CMA Music Awards.

"Whiskey in the Jar" is an Irish folk song. Most people probably heard it first by The Dubliners, but Metallica learned it from the Thin Lizzy version.

And here, it made me realize, we can't do a subject on this show without hearing from the Clancy Brothers. And even though the Clancys were as Irish as leprechaun teeth, the next song actually has its roots in Scotland, where it was known as the Stirrup Cup, a final drink for the Scottish fox hunters, before they mounted and rode off to chase the quarry. If Frank was singing it, he might have called it "One For The Road."

Seeing as we're getting near the end of our show, I can think of no one I'd rather share a parting glass with more than the Clancy Brothers.

Everybody's got a cure to recommend a hangover, it's like hiccups. They don't always work. But, here's another type of hangover, the kind you get from drinking alone, from a love gone wrong, and no hair of the dog or poached egg and milk, or eating a Bermuda onion like an apple is going to cure it.

Byllye Williams, she spells it B-Y-L-L-Y-E, she knows the cure, but it might not be in her reach. Miss Williams is a little known singer, who was born in Michigan, but made her living in Chicago, recording for Cornelius Toole's Theron record label. She died at the age of 36, and only recorded a few sides, but was a popular attraction at many of the top night spots around Chicago's loop, including the 113 Club, Millie's Cocktail Lounge, The Groove Circle Inn, McKay's Disc Jockey Lounge, The Sunny Side Room, Duke Slater's Viceroy Tavern, The Elbow Room, Manny Alameda's Ringside Lounge, Faye's Rose Bowl, Cadillac Bob's Flame Show Bar, just to name a few.

Here's Byllye Williams, painting a bleak picture of that morning after, when the bottle, her heart, and her bed are all empty. "Hangover Blues." No drums, piano's out of tune, guitar way in the background, doesn't matter. Perfect. Everybody's so busy fixing their mistakes, and auto-tuning, they wouldn't know how to make a record like this anymore. That was Chicago's Byllye Williams. She's got empty bottles in the sink, but it ain't no use, she's all alone.

I'm going to let a musical legend from Memphis, named Tuff Green, give us our marching orders. Tuff got his start playing bass with Jimmie Lunceford, one of the truly exemplary swing bands, and added the bottom to all sorts of important records. That's him on B.B. King's "Three O'clock In The Morning Blues." Roscoe Gordon's "No More Doggin," which was actually recorded in Tuff's living room.

In the background is a big instrumental hit that Ace Cannon had, on High Records in 1962, that he had the good sense to entitle, you guessed it, "Tuff."

Tuff's band was legendary, Mose Allison, Amy's father, said they were the first rock and roll band he ever saw when he first caught them in 1947. On the record we're about to hear, recorded in Memphis in 1949, for the Bullet label, you'll hear Phineas Newborn Sr., as well as his son on piano, who went on to play with legends like Charlie Mingus, Lionel Hampton, and Zoot Simms.

Tuff Green, standing at the nexus of swing, soul, jazz, jump, blues, and rock and roll. How is he not a household name?

Tuff Green. Not sure I'm happy with his shopping list. I'd add a couple of things if I were him, but then again, my liquor store knows me pretty well. I don't see anything wrong with that.

Charles Bukowski might beg to differ. Bukowski was a beloved poet of the gutters, whose alcohol-drenched stories and poems about low-lives, drunkards, whores, and forgotten men and women who populate the Skid Rows, and tent cities of every country in the world, allowed him to remain an outsider even after selling millions of books. In his novel, "Mother" (sic) he had this to say about becoming too well-known at your local package store:

"I like to change liquor stores frequently, because the clerks got to know your habits if you went in night and day and bought huge quantities. I could feel them wondering why I wasn't dead yet, and it made me uncomfortable. They probably weren't thinking any such thing, but then a man gets paranoid when he has 300 hangovers a year."

Well, it's just about time for us to say goodbye. I can't believe it, that it's over so soon. I didn't even get to much of records I wanted to play, and I never had a chance to talk about Bourbon Street, or the French dynasty from whence it

got its name. I never got around to Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, or if rye bread is related to rye whiskey, which by the way, it is. But there's plenty more to say on this subject, so why don't you gather up some friends, lay in a couple of bottles, crack some ice, rustle up some snacks, keep the party going.

As for us, we'll be up here in the Abernathy Building, and when you least expect it, we'll be back with more Dreams, Themes, and Schemes. So, until then, here's a toast David Crosby taught me: Some ships are wooden ships, and other ships may sink. But the best ships are friendships, and to those ships, we drink. So stay safe, we'll see you soon, bottoms up. For heaven's sake, it's Heaven's Door.

Notes

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The session date here is the original broadcast date.

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