



© 2012 BY
PEYER DERRYMAN
ARCHIVED AT LOUANDPEYER.COM

Yorgesson Yule

The other day my wife Kristi and I were reminiscing about Christmas music from our formative (?) years. She brought up a song which her mother dearly loved and played at one time or another every Christmas for years on an old 78 rpm record player. The song was released in 1949, but I first met Kristi's parents in 1979, and they were still playing it then, thirty years after its debut, and continued to play it for many years after that. I bought an mp3 of it and Kristi and I are continuing the tradition. It's right up there on the party mix with Dylan's version of *Must Be Santa*.

Kristi's mother was a devout Lutheran. Was the song a deeply spiritual Lutheran holiday carol? No. She also was proud of her Norwegian heritage; was it a nostalgic song about Christmas in Norway? No. The song? *I Yust Go Nuts At Christmas*, by Yogi Yorgesson.

The song is one more dysfunctional family Christmas song in a long tradition of such holiday ditties; I've written a few of them myself. It's tempting to write songs like these because Christmas is so over the top when it comes to sentimentality, it's necessary to blow the treacle out of the brainpipes now and then. One of the verses in *I Yust Go Nuts At Christmas* is, for example,

*Yust before Christmas dinner
I relax to a point
Then relatives start swarming
All over the joint
On Christmas I hug
And I kiss my wife's mother
The rest of the year
We don't speak to each other.*

This verse and others in the song remind me of my own vastly less popular *Big Dead Bird* song which has such regrettable verses as:

*Smelly Uncle Charlie
He brings his wife.
The one he calls Fartblossom
And chases with a knife*

*The kids go build a roadblock
For Santa's sleigh
Gonna have a big dead bird for dinner
On Christmas Day.*

Anyway, popular even today in many a goofy household, *I Yust Go Nuts at Christmas* is still one of Dr. Demento's most requested Christmas songs. Written and sung by Yogi Yorgesson, it is delivered with an exaggerated Scandinavian accent, more Swedish than anything else. I wondered if Yorgesson was really Swedish, so I did the usual bit of Googling.

No, he wasn't Swedish; in fact he was Norwegian. His real name was Harry Edward Stewart. According to a short but sweet online biography written by Steve Howard (see "yogiyorgesson" URL, below), Harry's father, Hans Skarbo, had emigrated to the US with Hans' older brother Nels and a sister, settling in the Tacoma, Washington area. When Harry was two, his mother Elise died in childbirth. Hans was grief stricken and unable to care for the children, so he put Harry up for adoption with the Stewart family. Harry's older brother George (b 1906) and sister Frieda (b 1902) were raised by Hans' brother, Nels. It's not clear why Harry was handled differently than his siblings, who, incidentally, were led to believe that Nels and not Hans was their biological father.

At any rate, I would guess that these unfortunate or at least unusual family circumstances helped provide Harry material for a lot of his goofball family-based songs, including such titles as *Aunt Freida is Enjoying Poor Health*, and *Someone Spiked The Punch At Lena's Wedding*. (Though my favorite title of his is another Christmas song, *I Give Up, What Is It?*)

The banjo-playing and goofy songwriting Harry Stewart made his way down to Los Angeles in his early 20s, looking for a radio job. Without much luck looking for work, the inspiration came to him to reinvent himself as Yogi Yorgesson, the Swedish mystic, who would gaze into his inverted fishbowl to answer questions from the audience in a thick Swedish accent. How do ideas like that *come* to people?

Yumping ahead a few years, in 1949 his Christmas songs, *I Yust Go Nuts at Christmas* and the flip side, *Yingle*

Bells, became pretty big hits, particularly in — of course — Minnesota. He put together a tour of that state, but his "Yogi" mystic character bombed. So he went back home and reinvented himself once more in a sort of "Red Green" style of rural bloke, though he apparently kept the stage name of Yogi Yorgesson. He booked another tour of Minnesota and surrounding states in 1951 and did much better.

I found a few ads in Minnesota and Wisconsin newspaper archives for his show. Wisconsin's *Monroe Evening Times* for Friday April 20, 1951, had an advertisement for Yogi Yorgesson playing at Turner Hall on Sunday the 22nd with his "Old time comedy orchestra." Cover charge was \$1.50 (about \$14 in 2012 money).

The *Austin Daily Herald* of Austin, MN, dated Wednesday, April 25, 1951, had an article titled "Yogi Yorgesson at Terp Tuesday," which would have been May 1st. It said he was to appear at the Terp ballroom in Austin. "This is one of more than 60 one-night stands Yogi and his Scandahoovians are playing on a five state tour through the Midwest... Yorgesson hits include *My Little Old Shack in Minneapolis Minnesota*, *Real Gone Galoot*, and *Nincompoops Have All the Fun*."

Harry Edward Stewart developed other characters and had a colorful life in the entertainment business, but unfortunately it was too brief. He apparently fell asleep at the wheel of his car after a performance in Ely, Nevada, in May of 1956, and was killed when it rolled over. He was only 48 years old, which, in my advanced years, seems very, very young.

As of this writing, there are online sites where you can hear samples of Harry's songs, and others where mp3's can be purchased. According to the site from which I took much of the info for this column, CD's can be ordered of all his songs. See the URL's below. Happy Holidays, and please drive yudiciously your yeeps.

- www.madmusic.com/song_details.aspx?SongID=851
- www.yogiyorgesson.com/
- www.wikipedia.org/
- www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/
- *Monroe Evening Times*, 4/20/51
- *Austin Daily Herald*, 4/25/51