

Billy Vanero

As sung by
Luther Royce
08-01-1941 White Lake, WI

Billy Vanero

Bil-ly Van - er-o heard them say, in an Ar-i - zo-na town one day, That a
band of A-pa-che Ind-ians was on the trail of death, Heard them
tell the mur-d'ring done, three men killed at Rock - y Run. "They're in
dan-ger at the cow-ranch," he whis-per'd un-der his breath.

Verse 1.

Billy Vanero heard them say, in an Arizona town one day,
That a band of Apache Indians was on the trail of death.
Heard them tell the murd'ring done; three men killed at Rocky Run.
"They're in danger at the cowranch," he whispered under his breath.

Verse 2.

Cowranch forty miles away, in a little spot that lay
In a deep and shady valley, in the mighty wilderness.
Sharp and clear, a rifle shot woke the echoes of the spot.
"I am wounded," cried Vanero, as he swayed from side to side.

Verse 3.

And then he never spoke, as he dipped a bit of oak
From the warm blood that was flowing from a wound above his side,
"Take this message, if not me; straight to little Bessie lead."
And he tied himself to his saddle and gave his horse the rein.

Verse 4.

Then at dusk, the horse of brown, wet with sweat, came padding down
To that little lane at the cowranch, and stopped at Bessie's door.
But her cowboy was asleep, and his slumbers were so deep,
Little Bess could never wake him, though she tried forevermore.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 210, and HST.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by Luther Royce, age 28, White Lake, 1941.

When the Wisconsin poet, Eben E. Rexford, author of Silver Threads among the Gold, submitted The Ride of Paul Venarez to the Youth's Companion for publication, little could he dream that years later his poem would come back to Wisconsin in disguise, to be recorded as an anonymous folk song. At White Lake, less than sixty miles north of the poet's home of [Shiocton?], a recording was made of the Ride of Billy Vanero, from the singing of Luther Royce. This song came to Wisconsin from Kentucky. Royce had learned it from a collection "on old pieces of paper in handwritin'," from his Kentucky grandmother.

In referring to the Ride of Billy Venero, as collected by John Lomax among the cowboys in the southwest, Louise Pound states, "Another piece well executed for folk-song and dealing apparently with genuine cowboy material is The Ride of Billy Venero. But this, with a few localizings and adaptations, is unmistakably The Ride of Pul Venarez by Eben E. Rexford." She credits Prof. E. F. Piper of Iowa City, Ia., with first identifying The Ride of Billy Venero with Rexford's poem.

After its publication, The Ride of Paul Venarez seems to have had great popularity as a recitation. One wonders who adapted it and dressed it with a tune.

[editor's note: HST footnotes Pound, pp. 226-7 and 229 for this information]

Alternate titles/related songs: "Bill Vanero," "The Ride of Billy Vanero," "The Ride of Paul Venarez."

Sources:

Larkin, Margaret, collector and editor. *Singing Cowboy: A Book of Western Songs*. Piano arrangements by Helen Black. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931.

Lomax, John A., collector. *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. 1916. New edition with additions. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1922. "Bill Vanero."

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

Pound, Louise. *Poetic Origins and the Ballad*. The Macmillan Company, New York 1921.

Randolph, Vance, collector and editor. *Ozark Folksongs*. Vol. II. Columbia, Mo.: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1946-50.

K.G.