

SUCH A GETTING UPSTAIRS

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Such a Getting Upstairs is believed to have been composed by Joe Blackburn in the early 1830s for blackface performers.¹ The song then traveled to England with the American minstrel shows where it became attached to the English Morris Dance community between 1836 (when it is thought to have been first performed in London) and the early 20th century.² Such a Getting Upstairs is thought to refer to sexual activities that occurred on the floor above a tavern and then evolved into meaning ‘commotion’, ‘disturbance’, or ‘ruckus’ that was notable, exciting, and fun.³

Another theory for the origin of ‘Such a Getting Upstairs’ is from a comical flight upstairs caused by a flood in a small British town as reported in the **Sherborne Journal** (Dorset, England) October 23, 1839 and reprinted in **The Times** (London) October 26, 1839, p.6.⁴ ‘Sich a Gittin Up Stars’ appears in George P. Knauff’s **Virginia Reels**, Vol 3 (1844, Baltimore) and ‘Such a Getting Up Stairs’ appears in Elias Howe’s **Various Collections** (1840-1861, Boston) firmly placing it in the American fiddling repertoire during the most active time of the Oregon Trail (c. 1846-1869).⁵

The Morris Dance lyrics collected from Headington, Oxfordshire, Cotswolds:

Some likes coffee,
Some likes tea,
Some likes a pretty girl, just like me;
Such a getting upstairs and a playing on the fiddle,
Such a getting upstairs I never did see.

Cecil Sharp included Such a Getting Upstairs in his collection, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, as *Some Love Coffee*, No 274 (sung by Mrs. Laurel Jones, Burnsville, NC, September 17th, 1918):

Some loves coffee, some loves tea,
Some loves money, but they don’t love me.
Singing in the lonesome cowboyyee,
Singing in the lonesome sea.

Cecil Sharp’s ‘Some Love Coffee’ is in the play-party section of his collection. This ‘I love coffee, I love tea’ play-party song was a playground jump roping rhyme pre 1970s; post 1970s as a playground hand clapping rhyme in the same family as ‘Shimmy Shimmy Co Co Pa’ and ‘Down Down Baby’.⁶

¹[https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Getting_Upstairs_\(1\)](https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Getting_Upstairs_(1))

²<http://pancocojams.blogspot.com/2013/10/such-getting-upstairs-history-of-song.html> comment by Billy Weeks on Mudcat, September 25, 2010, 10:46 am

³*ibid.* Mudcat: Getting Upstairs thread general consensus

⁴Unfortunately, I could not verify this article in the *The Times* or the earlier *Sherborne Journal* since they are behind a paywall. I believe the flood became attached to the tune because the tune was already popular, rather than the flood inspired the tune’s lyrics, but this may be more because of the personal bias that sexual relations are more worthy of song than floods (or just more fun).

⁵Goertzen, Chris. *Virginia Reels and the History of American Fiddling*, p 73.

⁶pancojams, *op. cit.* Comment by Azizi Powell, October 29, 2013, 9:11 pm. Yes, I very much remember doing hand clapping rhymes on the school playground with the lyrics ‘I love coffee, I love tea’, ‘Shimmy Shimmy Co Co Pa’, and ‘Down Down Baby’ in Massachusetts in the 1980s.