

## Leadbelly : The Titanic

by Huddie Ledbetter - Leadbelly  
Friday 15 October 1948

Leadbelly remarked in the 1940s that "*The Titanic*" was the first song he ever learned to play on a 12-string guitar, which was later to become his signature instrument. He first played it in 1912 when performing with Blind Lemon Jefferson (1897-1929) in and around Dallas, Texas. Leadbelly noted that he had to leave out the verse about Boxer Jack Johnson when playing before a White audience.

Ledbetter was imprisoned three times, for murder, attempted homicide, and assault. From 1934 to 1939 he was paroled to the American folklorist John Lomax (1867-1948), and during the 1940s he sang in night-clubs, accompanying himself on his 12-string guitar. He died in New York City on 6 December 1949.



### **The Titanic**

Huddie Ledbetter ("Leadbelly")

It was a midnight on the  
sea,  
The band was playing,  
"Nearer my God to Thee,"  
Fare thee, Titanic, Fare  
thee well!

Titanic when it got its  
load,  
Captain, he hollered "all  
aboard!"  
Fare thee, Titanic, Fare  
thee well!

Titanic was comin' 'round  
the curve,

when it run into that  
great big iceberg,  
Fare thee, Titanic, fare  
thee well!

Titanic was sinkin' down,  
Had them lifeboats  
around,  
Fare thee, Titanic, fare  
thee well!

Had them lifeboats around  
Savin' the women and  
children lettin' the men  
go down,  
Fare thee, Titanic, fare  
thee well!

Jack Johnson want to get  
on board,  
Captain he says, "I ain't  
haulin' no coal!"  
Fare thee, Titanic, fare  
thee well!

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### References

Sleeve Notes: Lead Belly's Last Sessions.  
Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia

### Samples, Source Material and Transfers

*The Titanic*, recorded 15 October 1948

This rare 1948 recording is included courtesy of Joe Showler, from the CD *Titanic Songs*, TSCD 22798, Unsinkable Music, Toronto 1998.

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### Acknowledgements

Joe Showler, Canada

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