

Book Review

The Biochemists' Songbook, by Harold Baum. Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1982, ISBN 0-08-027370-X.

This little book, dedicated to Professor Sir Hans Krebs FRS in honour of his 80th birthday, is inspired by the idea that biochemistry is fun. It contains (perhaps unluckily) thirteen songs, in each of which a biochemically instructive poem(?) is coupled with a well-known tune. The author recommends that the singing is done at a blood alcohol level of 35 mg%, though after attempting to learn about enzyme kinetics to the tune of "The Red Flag", or modifying "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" to "The Battle Hymn of the Aerobes", or replacing Macnamara as the leader of the band by pentose phosphate, you may feel that 350 mg% would be better. And if you take it all seriously enough (or simply lack the talents of a Baker or a Pavarotti) you can even send for a cassette tape on which Gary Bond will do all the work for you (did *he* buckle down to learning the TCA cycle before attempting "Waltz Round the Cycle" to the tune of "Waltzing Matilda"?) The words of the songs are ingenious, and vary from the terrible to the diabolical — how about "We're Here Because Urea"? They are laid out facing the music (mercifully simple accompaniments are provided): turn the page and you find a summary diagram of the relevant biochemistry, though I suspect that these pages will be the least used parts of the volume. This book will be a resounding success — indeed it already is, with three reprintings to its name. The mind reels at the precedents it sets. Who will do the same for students of organic chemistry, quantity surveying or European politics? And would anyone like my ticket for "Tannhäuser"? — I'm just off to the rugger club for a quick drink . . .

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