Panhandle Prairie

from the album Pepper's Ghost









I accompany this song with 5-string banjo in a mountain (clawhammer) style. I tune the banjo in an open B minor chord: f#BF#BD and the song is in B Dorian – mostly. It is a two-chord song. I give the chords here as Bm7 and E9. That is the best description I can give for people looking to vamp chords on guitar. The banjo is not strumming chords -- it is playing an intricate web of single notes. In quick waltz time. I play banjo solos -- 8 bars after m.96 and a full 32 bars after m.160.

The song is my own version of a very old ballad that shows up in history. Folklorists might tag it as a variant of "The Unfortunate Rake" which is the name of an early broadside ballad. Other songs in the catalog would include: St. James Infirmary (or Hospital), The Dying Crapshooter's Last Request, Streets of Laredo, The Dying Cowboy -- or simply "Dead Cowboy." I like to think of it as a great ghost story.

My setting is the Great Dust Bowl of the 1930's -- though I don't say that expicitly. Many from Appalachia resettled in the panhandles of Oklahoma & Texas looking for easy riches in the 1920's by busting up the thick prairie sod with iron plows -- only to be blown away with the wind and dust storms of the 1930's.