

MONEY IN WORDS AND MUSIC

By Fred Hobbs

Money is funny. So many words and music lyrics to describe this universally prized item. Strangely, several food-like references are commonly used in monetary slang including dough, bread, cabbage and clam. Denominations bear descriptions such as fin (for a \$5 bill); and sawbuck (a 10 “spot.”) Common around some circles is the term “moolah.” (Webster doesn’t list it, so your guess is good as mine about the spelling.)

In one way or another virtually every day, the word “money” or some related monetary term is used in a conversation. Attitudes and expressions about money are many and varied. Leaving aside such “chestnuts” as “money is the root of all evil”, here is a sample of quotable “takes” from a quick Google search to make the point:

English author and art critic John Ruskin offers a gentle and somewhat “Polyannish” view. He has written, “A little thought and a little kindness are often worth more than a great deal of money.”

Two of Hollywood’s legends revealed much about their real lives through their attitudes toward money. “I don’t want to make money; I just want to be wonderful,” said Marilyn Monroe. And Judy Garland confessed: “I can live without money, but I cannot live without love.” Judging from the tragic deaths of these two great stars, each nonetheless made large sums of money, but struggled in fulfilling the desire to be loved or to be truly wonderful.

A much more realistic frame of reference regarding money came from two oft-quoted celebrities. Oscar Wilde put it this way: “When I was young, I thought that money was the most important thing in life. Now that I am old, I know it is.”

And, oh, how these two observations from the great 20th century homespun philosopher Will Rogers, resonate loudly and clearly in this 2012 election year. “Politics has become so expensive,” said Rogers, “that it takes a lot of money even to be defeated.” And, he concluded, in a twist of words from an earlier bit of sage counsel, “a fool and his money are soon elected.”

Until the relatively recent advent of such dubious musical forms as “rap”, lyrics in popular music centered often on love and romance, but money was a common theme, as well. Dean Martin crooned, “Money Burns A Hole in My Pocket”; country legend Lefty Frizzell issued the musical invitation, “If You’ve Got the Money, I’ve Got The Time”, and two distinctly different songs with the same title were released years apart. “Money, Money, Money” was featured in the Broadway and Hollywood movie hit, “Cabaret” by the likes of Joel Grey and Liza Minnelli; and Pink Floyd recorded a version of “Money, Money, Money” with a lyric including these lines: “Money. Get Away. You’ll get a good job with good pay. Get that cash. With both hands make a stash.”

Embodied in these words and music about money is the notion that whatever measure of happiness it may bring is, at the very most, transitory. That being the case, perhaps the best philosophical approach to money in life comes from editor and author Helen Gurley Brown, who passed away recently: “Money--if it doesn’t bring you happiness, at least it helps you be miserable in comfort.”