



Pub Songs, Love Songs

Traditional Irish music for St. Patrick's Day

Music is perhaps one of the first things that one associates with Ireland – from traditional sessions in pubs to modern rock bands such as U2 and The Cranberries.

Traditional music has always been an important part of life in Ireland. It experienced a big revival* in the 1960s, when Irish bands such as the Dubliners and the Chieftains emerged. Since then, it has been fused with rock, punk, new age and many other genres so as to bring it to a wider audience. It continues to be played in pubs as well as in big concert halls all over the world.

The variety of traditional Irish songs is wide, but some kinds are especially popular: pub songs (often describing drunken adventures), rebel songs (about the – mostly failed – Irish rebellions against British rule) and of course love songs and slow ballads. Bridge brings you a handful of some of the most popular tunes to help you celebrate Saint Patrick's Day.

Zuzana Pernicová (CR)



*A gold watch she took from his pocket
And placed it right into my hand...*

I counted out his money, and it made a pretty penny
I put it in my pocket and I took it home to Jenny...*

"**The Black Velvet Band**" describes an unfortunate adventure: The hero meets a beautiful girl, who turns out to be a thief. She steals a watch and passes it to him, and he is arrested for the theft and deported to Van Diemen's Land. Van Diemen's Land is the former name for the island of Tasmania, which used to serve as a British penal colony*.

"**Whiskey in the Jar**" tells another story of a man betrayed by a woman. The hero robs a captain and brings the stolen money to his girlfriend Jenny. When he falls asleep, she replaces the bullets in his pistol with water and calls for the captain to come and arrest him. Judging by such songs, one should never trust Irish girls.

The version on the CD was recorded by the Dubliners, one of the best known traditional Irish bands. They started in 1962 in a Dublin pub and named the band after James Joyce's book *Dubliners*. Although they are soon going to celebrate their 50th anniversary, they still perform and tour Europe.

*Isn't it the truth I told you,
Lots of fun at Finnegan's wake*...*

*I'll tell me ma when I go home
The boys won't leave the girls alone...*

"**I'll Tell Me Ma**" is based on a song that children used to sing while playing a game in the streets. The version on the Bridge CD is performed by the Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor. Though mostly famous for her pop and rock songs (and her controversial opinions), she recorded an album of traditional Irish songs, called *Sean-Nós Nua*, in 2002.

The humorous pub song "**Finnegan's Wake**" is about an alcohol-loving Irishman, Tim Finnegan, who falls from a ladder when he is drunk and cracks his skull. People think that he is dead and organize a wake for him. Things get wild at the wake, guests end up fighting and throwing bottles at each other, and some whiskey spills over Finnegan's body. To everybody's surprise, it brings him back to life. (After all, the word whiskey comes from the Irish Gaelic expression meaning "water of life".) James Joyce named his novel *Finnegans Wake* after the song.

The version on the CD, recorded by The Woods Band in 2004, uses a modern folk-rock arrangement of the old tune.

and Murder Ballads



Sinéad O'Connor



*As they were a-walking
by the foamy brim*
The eldest pushed
the youngest in...*

"Two Sisters" tells a dark tale: An older sister is jealous of her younger sister who is happily in love, so she pushes her into a river to drown. The drowning girl is spotted by a miller*, but instead of helping her, he just steals her gold ring. Both the evil sister and the miller are eventually punished, but it is a bit too late for the unfortunate young girl.

The song was recorded by Clannad, a Northern Irish band mixing Irish folk with pop and new-age music. Enya used to be a member of Clannad before setting on a solo career, and the band is fronted by her older sister Moya Brennan. (Hopefully they have better sisterly relations than the heroines of the song.)

*As I went out through
Dublin City, at the hour
of twelve at night
Who should I see but the
Spanish Lady washing
her feet by candlelight...*

In "Spanish Lady" the narrator remembers how he used to spot a pretty Spanish girl in Dublin. She was probably rich and he never dared to speak to her. However, even when he grows old, he still cannot forget her. The song has not been forgotten either and has even inspired the name of some pubs.

*No maid I've seen like the brown
colleen**

That I met in the County Down...

In "Star of the County Down" the narrator sees a pretty girl in the County Down (one of the Northern Irish counties). He falls in love at first sight and decides to win her heart. He even promises to wear good clothes and stop smoking a pipe to impress her. However, we never learn whether his efforts are successful or not.

*So fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be with
you all...*

As the name suggests, "The Parting Glass" is traditionally sung when parting and saying goodbye. It is a slow song to close a concert with, or to finish a long night in a pub. And also a fitting song to finish the Bridge CD – with a version recorded by the folk-punk band The Pogues.

GLOSSARY*

- revival** – when sth becomes more popular
- penal colony** – a colony where criminals are deported as a punishment
- a pretty penny** – a lot of money
- wake** – the occasion when the family and friends of a dead person meet before the burial to drink and talk about the person's life
- foamy brim** – rushing water
- miller** – a person who makes flour
- colleen** – Irish word for a girl

GARFIELD



dormancy ['dɔ:m(ə)nəsi] – time of sleep, inactivity or not growing