

The Bard of Armagh

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature. The melody is as follows:

Staff 1: D A7 D A7 D A7 D G

Staff 2: D A7 D A7 D A7 D G D

Staff 3: A7 D A7 D A7 D

1. Oh list to the lay of a poor Irish harper
And scorn not the strains of his old, withered hands,
But remember his fingers, they once could move sharper
To raise up the memory of his dear native land.
2. At a fair or a wake, I could twist my shillelagh
Or trip through a jig with my brogues bound with straw
And all the pretty colleens around me assembled
Loved their bold Phelim Brady, the bard of Armagh.
3. Oh, how I long to muse on the days of my boyhood,
But four score and three years have flitted since then,
But they bring sweet reflections, as every young joy should
For, the merry hearted boys makes the best of old men.
4. And when Sergeant Death, in his cold arms shall embrace me
And lull me to sleep with sweet Erin go bragh,
By the side of my Kathleen, my young wife then place me
Then forget Phelim Brady, the bard of Armagh.

"The Bard of Armagh", also known as "Phelim Brady" is an Irish air in 3/8 time and D Major. It is played in one part.

'The Bard of Armagh' was the name given to an early 18th century harper, Phelim Brady. Paul de Grae explains: "After the passing of the Popery Act in 1697, the South Armagh bishop Dr. Patrick Donnelly adopted the name and persona of the wandering bard Phelim Brady in order to be able to visit his flock in disguise". "The Bard of Armagh" has been attributed Dr. Donnelly, but also to Thomas Campbell, who wrote a version of "The Bard of Armagh" in 1801, and, according to de Grae, is the one more likely to be sung today. There was more than one song by this title extant at the same time and de Grae finds evidence of this in an article in **The Newry Journal**, which relates an interview by a local historian with the last Irish speaker in the area, Sally Humphrey (died c. 1918). He recited the words of the more common "Bard of Armagh", after which Sally became indignant and recalled the Ulster Gaelic folksong of that name from her youth with the same air. "She regarded the modern ballad in English a poor, unworthy and senseless imitation".

The air can be found throughout Britain and Ireland and is the same as that of "The Unfortunate Rake" an 18th century lament which tells of a dying young man. Other songs set to the tune are, in Ireland, "The Convict of Clonmel" and "When I was on Horseback" and in America, "The Streets of Laredo", "The Cowboy's Lament" and "St. James Hospital" (in Sharp and Karpeles' **English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians**). English derivations of the song can be found printed in broadsides from the mid-19th century, including "The Unfortunate lad" and "The Bad Girl's Lament". A Scottish version is "Road to Dundee".

The source for this version was Mary O'Neill. Mary was Sergeant James O'Neill's sister, who also emigrated to Chicago. They are no relation to Chief Francis O'Neill, but fiddler James assisted greatly on Chief O'Neill's first two volumes and Chief O'Neill wrote in a letter to A.P. Graves that Mary was skillful on the mandolin and violin.

It was printed in O'Neill's **Music of Ireland: 1580 Melodies** (1903).