

The Four Posts of the Bed

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. It consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and a boxed section marker 'A'. The second staff ends with a first ending bracket over the final two measures. The third staff begins with a second ending bracket over the first two measures and a boxed section marker 'B'. The fourth staff contains a sequence of chords: E7, A, D, A7, D. The fifth staff begins with a first ending bracket over the first two measures, a second ending bracket over the next two measures, and a boxed section marker 'C'. The sixth staff contains a sequence of chords: D, A7, D, A7. The seventh staff ends with a first ending bracket over the first two measures and a second ending bracket over the next two measures.

"The Four Posts of the Bed", also known as "Four Corners of St. Malo", "Four Corners Reel", "Four Posts of the Bed", "*Les Quatre Coins du Lit*", "*Les Quatre Coins de St Malo*" is an Irish, English, Scottish, Shetlands and Canadian polka, reel or 'Programme Piece' in D Major. The parts are played ABB (Martin, Phillips) or AABB (Martin).

Both duple and triple meter versions of this tune exist.

The melody is popular in the Shetlands, though probably not of Shetland origin.

Acadian fiddlers on Prince Edward Island (who play it as "The Four Corners") describe it as a tune from France, one of the oldest in the French-Canadian repertoire and recall that words were sung to it.

On an early recording made for Comhaltas, Donegal fiddler John Doherty relates the story of "The Fours Posts of the Bed" and then plays the tune. His story tells of an itinerant fiddle player who finds refuge for the night in a cottage which lacks a bed for him. Not wanting to be inhospitable, the man of the house fashions a bed and in return the fiddler composes a tune to thank him.

A fiddler often dramatizes a 'four-poster' bed in the second strain of the tune by giving four taps with the frog-end of the bow on the each of the four quarters of the belly of the fiddle, interspersed by a right-hand pizzicato. As has been noted by any fiddler who attempts to play this tune in the traditional manner, tapping the metal end of the frog on the belly of the violin often produces nicks and dings in the wood (or worse). To prevent this damage fiddlers in Donegal shout in Gaelic "*Aon, do, tri, ceathair*" (one, two, three, four) as they tap the four corners of the violin with their bow in the vertical position but with the fleshy part of their middle finger covering the end of the frog.

It was printed in Jordan's **Whistle and Sing!**, vol. 1 (1974), Martin's *Ceol na Fidhle*, vol. 1 (1991), Martin's **Traditional Scottish Fiddling** (2002) and Phillips' **Fiddle Case Tunebook: British Isles** (1989).

It was recorded by Dave Swarbrick.