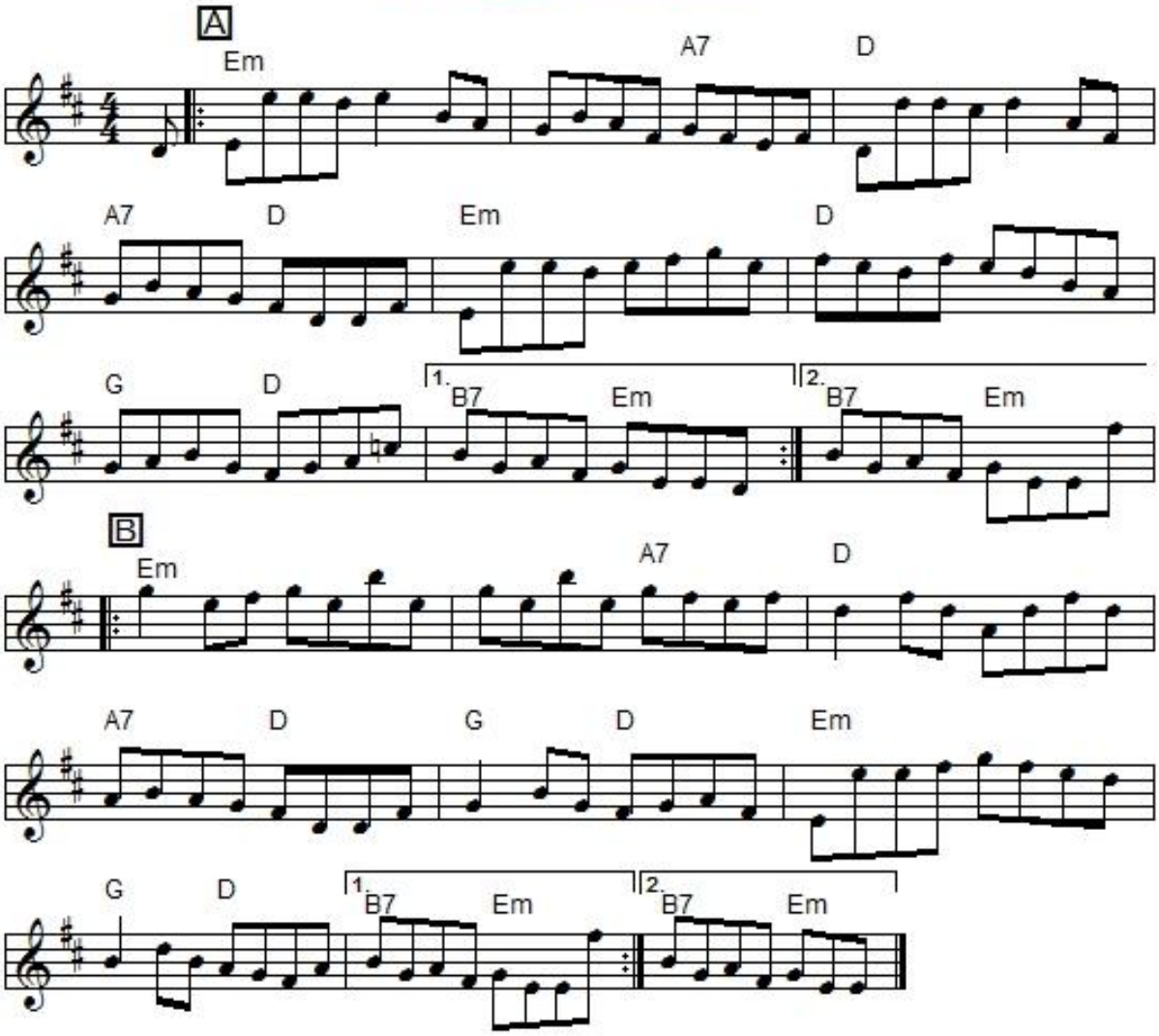
The Tarbolton Reel



"The Tarbolton Reel" is a two-part Scots reel named after the Tarbolton Lodge, the Masonic Lodge in the village of Tarbolton, South Ayrshire, Scotland, near the River Ayr. The name "Tarbolton" is from *Tor-Bealtiunn in Gàidhlig*, meaning "Hill of Beltane" where Druidic festivals were held on May 1st celebrating the midpoint between the spring equinox and the summer solstice. Robert Burns (1759-1796) and his Bachelor's Club used to meet at the Tarbolton Lodge, where Burns was initiated into Freemasonry.

The renowned Sligo fiddler Michael Coleman (1891-1945), also a respected step-dancer, would play this tune in a set: "The Tarbolton/The Longford Collector/The Sailor's Bonnet" and it has become ensconced as a set in the sessions in Sligo, New York City, and many other places ever since. Coleman emigrated to NYC in 1917 after doing a three year stint with a vaudeville company playing the fiddle while dancing. It could be that Coleman learned the tune in America, from Scottish fiddlers on Cape Breton playing in Boston. In addition to its popularity in Ireland and the States, the tune is played in sessions around Québec, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, and Ontario.

It was recorded by The Bothy Band on **The Bothy Band** (1975), The Chieftains on **Chieftains 7** and others.

It was printed in Harker's **300 Tunes from Mike Rafferty** (2006), MacDonald's **The Skye Collection** (1887), O'Neill's **The Dance Music of Ireland** (1907), Robertson's **The Athole Collection of Scottish Dance Music** (1884) and Rubenzer's **Midwestern Irish Session Tunes** (2000).