

Danny Boy



1. Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling
From glen to glen, and down the mountain side.
The summer's gone, and all the roses falling,
It's you, it's you must go and I must bide.
But come you back when summer's in the meadow,
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow,
It's I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow,
Oh Danny boy, oh Danny boy, I love you so.
2. But when ye come, and all the flowers are dying,
And I am dead, as dead I well may be,
You'll come and find the place where I am lying
And kneel and say an "Ave" there for me.
And I shall hear, though soft you tread above me
And all my dreams will warm and sweeter be,
For you will bend and tell me that you love me,
And I shall sleep in peace until you come to me.

Frederic Edward Weatherly, KC (1848 – 1929) was an English lawyer, author, lyricist and broadcaster. He is estimated to have written the lyrics to at least 3,000 popular songs, among the best-known of which are this sentimental ballad "Danny Boy" set to the tune "Londonderry Air", the religious "The Holy City" and the wartime song "Roses of Picardy". In 1910, Weatherly's father and only son died within 3 months of each other. He had penned some verses but was unable to find suitable music for them, but in 1912, he states in his memoirs, his sister-in-law Margaret Enright sent him the music of the Londonderry air with a suggestion he might put words to that melody. Fred claimed to not have heard this traditional Irish air before but said it was one the most beautiful melodies he had ever come across. With modifications, his 1910 words could be fitted to it and Danny Boy was published by Boosey and Hawkes in 1913. The original air is believed by some to date back to Rory Dall O'Cahan, an Irish harpist who lived in Scotland in the late 17th century.

Various suggestions exist as to the true meaning of "Danny Boy". Some have interpreted the song to be a message from a parent to a son going off to a war or uprising or leaving as part of the Irish diaspora.

The song has been covered by a diverse range of male singers, including Mario Lanza, Bing Crosby, Andy Williams, Eric Clapton, Johnny Cash, Sam Cooke, Elvis Presley, Harry Belafonte and Tom Jones among many others. All used the original lyrics.

This song is special to me because it was a favorite of two special men in my life. In 1969, dulcimer maker Walt Martin asked me if I could work out an arrangement on guitar. The guitar tab given here is close to what I worked out for Walt. My second encounter with "Danny Boy" came after my marriage when I found that my father-in-law, Joseph Jeffery, sang it in a beautiful tenor voice. The guitar tab is approximately the way I play it.