

Shaving a Dead Man

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff, labeled 'A', contains a single line of music. The second staff, labeled 'B', contains a single line of music. The third staff contains a first ending bracket labeled '1.' and a second ending bracket labeled '2.'. The fourth staff contains a single line of music.

"Shaving a Dead Man", originally known as "Shaving a Dead Nigger" and, more recently "Protecting the Innocent" is an old-time breakdown from West Virginia. The tune first received its "... Dead Man" title only in the 1970's in an attempt to purge it of racism. The "Protecting the Innocent" title above comes from a story told about West Virginia musician Claude Keaton.

"Mr. Keaton was listening to the tune on a cassette recorder one day at work when a co-worker, who was black, asked him its name. Thinking of the TV program called 'Dragnet,' he said..."

Shaving as well as nail trimming and other cosmetic actions are often done on a male corpse as preparation for burial.

Dwight Diller had this to say about "Shaving..."

"This banjo tune, I feel sure, came from the black tradition. This is in no way a fiddle tune. A fiddle just will not work in order to get proper sound or get the notes to mesh properly."

I have to agree. The tune is idiomatically a banjo tune. I have included a melody in standard notation but I extracted it from the banjo tablature version that I got from John Letscher. It is often played in Oscar Wright's "Dead Man's" E-tuning g#BEBE but is also played in f#ADAD for a real low "growling" sound.

It was recorded by Fuzzy Mt. String Band as "Protect the Innocent" on **Fuzzy Mt. String Band**, Ron Mullenex and Gerry Milnes as "Shaving a Dead Man" and Oscar & Eugene Wright on **Old Time Fiddle and Guitar Music from West Virginia**.