



KelticDead Music

Stories, Tunes and Songs in the Traditions of our Celtic Dead

To the Four Ayrts to Guide Us, and
For the Four Winds to Get Us There!

The mission of the **KelticDead Music** initiative is to find tunes and songs from around the world that have Celtic, Folk, World, Americana, and Seafaring origins, and arrange them into simple sheet music formats for folk musicians to use and share. In addition, the KDM initiative provides the in-depth stories with possible lyrics that follow the video-based, **KDM Broadside**s for a more complete music-education experience.



KelticDead Music Broadside

*All the selections and sheet music content provided in the **KelticDead Music** initiative are from traditional, made-public, made-public with credits, or cited credits where applicable. This material content is the personal interpretations of the subject and provided by **Patrick O-Shaun Young, KelticDead Music**.*

Sighbeg, Sighmor



Made public photograph of a statue of Turlough O Carolan (1670 - 1738).

Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin was born in 1670 near Nobber, County Meath in Ireland. His Gaelic name is translated into English as Terence Ó Carolan. Later, he recaptured his first name in Gaelic, and he was commonly known as **Turlough Ó Carolan** in English translations.

Some sources say his father, John Ó Cearbhalláin, was a blacksmith (An “iron founder” according to Britannica), and others say he was a farmer (“New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians”). It was not unusual to be both in that time, and John moved his family to Ballyfarnon to take employment with the MacDermott Roe family in their Alderford iron factory when his son, Terence, was 14 years old.

Mrs. MacDermott liked the boy and saw to it that he was educated along with her own children. Observing that he appeared to have a talent for music and poetry, she also arranged for him to have lessons on the harp.

Salley Gardens

When Turlough was about 18, he was stricken with smallpox which left him completely blind. This was a common disease in those days. However, this handicap did not stop his studies, and after three years, Mrs. MacDermott gave him a harp, a horse, a guide, and the money to launch a career as an itinerant harper, playing for patrons throughout the Irish countryside. This profession in the 17th and 18th Centuries was considered to be respectable in Ireland.

In Carolan's time, there were three musical traditions in Ireland as art (with music), folk music, and the harper tradition. The harper tradition served as a link between art and folk music and it also facilitated an oral tradition which has become common in folk music today.

The tune, Sidghbeg, Sidghmor, is said to be the first tune that Carolan composed.

At 21, after leaving Alderford, Carolan stopped at Squire Reynold's house at Lough Scur. Mr. Reynolds, who had been a harper and a poet himself, was not that impressed by Carolan's musical abilities.



Mr. Reynolds asked Carolan if he composed. When Carolan replied he did not, Squire Reynolds remarked he "might make a better hand of his tongue than of his fingers."

Reynolds planned to leave for a few days, and he suggested to Carolan to make a tune out of a local legend in the area about an ancient "battle between the kings of the gentry [fairies]." (O'Sullivan, Vol. 2, p. 123). In that area, there were two ranges of hills; sighbeg and sighmor. The term "sigh" (or "sidgh" pronounced as "shee") loosely translates as a "sacred hill" and usually these places had "carns" (stacked rock tombs) placed upon them (also called "mots" or "raths"). Many believed that these places are inhabited by the Daoine Maithe, the "Good People", and the country folk in the area dared not to venture there or to call those ancient ones by the name of "shee" folk (or fairie folk).



Another way of saying the title of the tune is to say "a small hill in the greater hill area." According to the local tales and legends a great battle took place in those hills in ancient times, where Fionn Mac Cubhail (Finn MacCool) and his Fianna Eirionn (his army of Fenian men) were defeated. One of Fionn's heroes (perhaps Fionn himself), was killed and was entombed on Sighbeg in a carn, and the celebrated champion of the opposing army was entombed on another hill in Sighmor. These hills were separated by a plain where the battle was believed to have been fought.

It is said that both champions had been mortally wounded in the battle.

Sighbeg, Sighmor

Fionn mac Cumhail (/ˈfɪn məˈkuːl/ FIN mə-KOOL; Ulster Irish: [ˈfʲiɲ̪ˠ mʲək ˈkuːlʲ] Connacht Irish: [ˈfʲiɲ̪ˠ-] Munster Irish: [ˈfʲuːɲ̪ˠ-]; Scottish Gaelic: [ˈfjũːɲ̪ˠ maxk ˈkʰũ.əl]; Old and Middle Irish: Find or Finn mac Cumail or mac Umail), is often anglicized as **Finn McCool** or **Fionn MacCool**. He is a hero in Irish mythology, as well as later in Scots and Manx folklore.

He was the leader of the Fianna (Fenian) bands of young roving hunter-warriors, and he was also a seer and a poet. He was said to have had a magic thumb that bestowed him with great wisdom, and he is often depicted hunting with his hounds Bran and Sceólang, or fighting with his spear and sword. The tales of Fionn and his fianna are part of the tales of the Fianna Cycle or Fenian Cycle (an Fhiannaíocht) that was narrated by Fionn's son, the poet Oisín.



While some tales say that Fionn died in the battle, some accounts say he's not dead at all, but rather, he sleeps in a cave surrounded by his Fenian men. One day he will awake and defend Ireland in the hour of her greatest need. Some believe that Fionn will arise when the "Dord Fiann" (the hunting horn of the Fenian) will sound three times. At that time, he will arise and be as strong as ever.

As a note about this legend of Sighbeg, Sighmor, a cairn on Sighbeg has recently been excavated to reveal a tomb about 5 feet 6 inches long, 3 feet wide and 4 feet in height. The entrance could only be entered by a person crawling into it lying at full stretch. Two human skeletons were found, one male and one female. Both were facing the former royal seat of Tara in Ireland and the set of teeth on the woman was found to be in a perfect state of preservation.

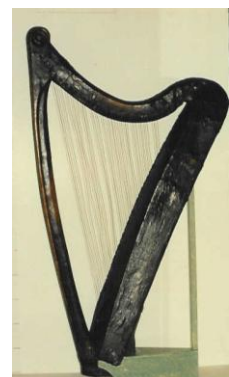


When Squire Reynolds came back from his trip, he was very impressed by young Carolan's first composition. Many of the tunes and songs that Carolan played and sang in his life were not credited to him due to the harsh Penal Laws against the Irish and the Catholics. However, of the 214 compositions that were finally credited to Turlough O Carolan, Sighbeg, Sighmor is his most famous one by far.

O Carolan's style of play and the world he lived in.

The Museum Register describes the physical attributes of O Carolan's harp as a "Curved key piece bound on the front with an iron plate with one corner rivetted through the fore-pillar and two horizontal plates on either side rivetted on the pillar, one binding it to the key piece." The Royal Irish Academy register continues, "As in all Irish instruments of the same class, its strings, thirty-five in number, are of wire; the pins to which they are attached are of brass."

As a harper and a poet, Turlough was always welcomed and honored by the wealthy landowners. He would honor his host (or patron) with a tune and song, and then move on to another patron.



Sighbeg, Sighmor

It was not a bad career choice at that time, but as an Irish Bard, he was often plagued with the stigma of not being able to own his music due to the Penal Laws. As a consequence, many of his compositions were lost.

In the great houses of the Irish gentry, he heard many Italian Baroque music pieces which was becoming popular with the aristocracy as the country became more English. Carolan liked the style of music, but he could never become a classical composer due to his blindness preventing him to study harmony, counterpoint, and musical form. In addition, he played a diatonic harp which prevented him from playing a lot of the classical music of the day with its accidentals and key changes.



However, he composed many of his tunes and songs as a mix of folk and classical elements. For example, as most traditional Irish tunes usually have two repeating sections of equal length Carolan typically made the second section longer than the first and extended the selection with twists and turns which gave his compositions a "Baroque sound."

Like most bardic harpers in his day, Carolan usually composed a lot of his music by memory, and did not write them down. This fact also contributed to the confusion as to the origins of the tunes or who composed them. After Turlough's passing in 1738, the Bardic-harpist traditions were fading, and by 1792 a committee was formed to gather Irish harpers together and write down the tunes. Edward Bunting, a nineteen-year-old church organist, was hired as the transcriptionist, but he only notated the melodies and not the basses. Because of this, our knowledge of how the harp was played is very limited.



This also led to having many interpretations of Carolan's music after his passing. The melody of Sighbeg, Sighmor, for example, has a wide range of variations from the melody that may have been originally composed by O Carolan.

In the years that followed his death his tunes were popular with other harpers, and still later by fiddlers, pipers, and whistle players. Many were still lost, but the efforts by Bunting and others helped save and identify some.

Surprisingly, Carolan was never highly regarded as a performer. Instead, his fame came from his gift for musical composition and poetry. He usually composed the tune first, and then, wrote the words afterwards. Turlough O'Carolan died at the house of his patron Máire MacDermott Roe and Charles O'Connor (a former pupil of O Carolan's) recorded his passing in sadness as *"Saturday, the 25th day of March, 1738. Turlough O'Carolan, the wise master and chief musician of the whole of Ireland, died today and was buried in the O'Duignan's church of Kilronan, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. May his soul find mercy, for he was a moral and religious man."*

A plaque in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin honors him as "the last of the Irish bards," the man who brought to a close the centuries-old tradition of the wandering poet minstrel.

Salley Gardens

Sidghbeg, Sidghmor

or Si Beg, Si Mor

Arrangement by KelticDead Music

From Turlough OCarolan, Traditional



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzkdampQ95w>

As mentioned in this KDM Broadside, like most bard-poet harpists in his day, Turlough played from memory. This meant that even he would vary the tunes he played to fit any situation. After his death, this tradition continued in Celtic-folk music, and I arranged the tune to play with the Irish-tuned Bouzouki, and the Asturias D whistle with a step board base while trying to keep to the original theme. I did not attempt to play it in the “Baroque” style to which Turlough preferred. These variants are what makes folk tunes fun in every generation.



**Shaun,
That KelticDead Guy
Patrick O. Young**

KelticDead Music Initiative

is a private, on-line music-education initiative. All the music projects are recorded with live, acoustic instruments and performed in accordance with simplified sheet music arranged in eight bar formats (whenever possible) in accordance with the guidelines that are within the Celtic music traditions. For more music videos and stories visit ...

<https://KelticDeadMusic.org>