



KelticDead Music

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

To the Four Ayrtys 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**. Much of the content is derived from made public or public domain information, and validation and verification of the subject matter is left up to the reader.*

Sighebeg, Sighemor “Shee-beg, Shee-mor”



This tune is spelled in a variety of ways due to the fact that Gaelic, for many thousands of years, was a “non-literate” language, and only recently (after the Independence of Ireland in 1948) was there an initiative to provide a consistent script for the language. The tune is one of Turlough O’Carolan’s greatest melodies, and means “Small sacred hill in the greater Sacred hill region.”

The word “sighe” (also spelled as “Si,” “Shee,” “Sigh”) means sacred or spirit-hill, and signifies that the hill is a burial hill (a “caryn” on top of hill) of a person of the old world. These spirit hills are usually said to have “shey” folk or “fairie” folk who inhabit and guard over the caryn.

The melody was one of the first tunes composed by Turlough Ocarolan (1670 to 1738). Turlough was blinded by smallpox at 16, and he became a minstrel, which in those days was a noble profession.

He became known as Ireland’s last and greatest bard, and it is believed he made over 200 musical compositions in his lifetime. Sadly, in those days because of the harsh Penal Laws imposed by the British in Ireland, many of his compositions were lost or credited to someone else, because Penal Laws forbade the Irish from owning property and having rights even to their faith, speaking their own language, and their music.



Sighebeg, Sighemor

The Life and Times of Turlough OCarolan

Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin was born in 670 near Nobber, County Meath.

In English, his name was Terence Carolan. Some sources say his father, John Ó Cearbhalláin, was a blacksmith (an iron founder according to Encyclopedia Britannica), and other sources say his father was a farmer (New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians). Whatever his trade John Ó Cearbhalláin moved his family to Ballyfarnon to take employment with the MacDermott Roe family when his son, Turlough, was 14 years old.



34 Ocarolan's Court, Kilronan, Ballyfarnon, Boyle Co., Roscommon.

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

Unfortunately, when Terence was about 18, he was stricken with smallpox which left him completely blind. 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.

Carolan's first patron was George Reynolds of County Leitrim. George actually did not think the young Carolan could play very well, and he suggested that Carolan try his hand at composition while he was away on a trip. There was a legend of a great battle fought in the hills in County Meath where the legendary Finn McCool and his Fenian men fought a great battle against an opposing army. Carolan composed "Si Bheag, Si Mhor," which means "Hill small, Hill large." Reynolds was impressed by Carolan's melody, and it became Carolan's greatest known composition, long after his many other "planxty" (tunes for patrons) were written.

In Carolan's time, there were three musical traditions in Ireland - art music, folk music, and the harper tradition. The harper tradition served as a link between art and folk music and was the main conduit for the oral tradition. Carolan created a unique style by combining these art forms, and then adding elements inspired by Italian music which was then fashionable in Ireland. He was a great admirer of Vivaldi and Corelli, whose modern music he would have heard in the homes of his noble Irish patrons, and this admiration is reflected in the melodic construction and forms of many of his pieces. In fact, it's said that his "Carolan's Concerto" was a winning response to a compositional challenge from Geminiani, an acquaintance, colleague, and contemporary.

Some experts say Carolan was never highly regarded as a performer. His fame came from his gift for musical composition and poetry and his usual method was to compose the tune first and then write the words. This was the opposite of traditional Irish practice. While music had always been held in high esteem, prior to Carolan, poetry always took precedence.

A collection of Carolan's tunes was published in his own lifetime, possibly in 1721, by John and William Neale of Dublin, an extraordinary achievement for an Irish harpist at the height of the penal laws. The National Library of Ireland has the only copy.

Sighebeg, Sighemor

OCarolan was fond of whiskey, women and wit. He did finally settle down to marry Mary Maguire, and they lived on a farm near Mohill in County Leitrim. They had seven children.

Mary died in 1733, and just five years later, Carolan fell ill himself, and returned to the home of Mrs. MacDermott Roe where he spent his remaining time in her care. Carolan bridged the gap between his Gaelic harp with folk music and that of continental music in his time. Turlough OCarolan deserves his title of being Ireland's "National Composer."



The Legend and Story about Sidhebeg, Sidhemor

In that region of Ireland around Squire Reynolds' home, a great battle was said to have been fought in ancient times in a valley between two hills. It said that it was a battle where Fionne MacCumhail (Finn MacCool) who was Old Ireland's greatest legendary warrior hero and his band of Finian warriors (Fiana Eirionn) were defeated.



Finn MacCool is the leader of the Fianna (Fenian) bands of young roving hunter-warriors, as well as being a seer and poet. He is said to have a magic thumb that bestows him with great wisdom. He is often depicted hunting with his hounds Bran and Sceólang, and fighting with his spear and sword. The tales of Fionn and his fianna form the Fianna Cycle or Fenian Cycle (an Fhiannaíocht), much of it narrated by Fionn's son, the poet Oisín.

According to the most popular account of Fionn's death, he is not dead at all, but rather, he sleeps in a cave, surrounded by the Fianna. One day he will awake and defend Ireland in the hour of her greatest need. In one account, it is said that he will arise when the Dord Fiann, the hunting horn of the Fianna, is sounded three times, and he will be as strong and as he ever was.

As a note, a car(y)n on small hill in the area was found in modern times and excavated. This carn was 5 feet 6 inches long, 3 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. Two human skeletons were found within that tomb; one male and one female. Both skeletons were facing the former royal seat of Tara. Though of great age, the woman's teeth were found to be in a perfect state of preservation. Though this carn is still shrouded in mystery, this ancient burial place could be proof that such a battle did indeed happen.

Sheebeg, Sheemor

Sighe Beg, Sighe Mor

Arrangement by KelticDead Music

Traditional, Variant: Turlough O'Carolan



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

KelticDead Music Group:

There are many variations of this melody by musicians over the years. I arranged this one to play easily with the Irish Bouzouki and the Celtic whistles.

Shaun Young arranged the sheet music for the Irish-Tuned, Low Octave Bouzouki an MK1 Low Octave D Whistle, a Kerry Mezzo D whistle, and bodhran.



Shaun Young

For this and other "KDM Story Broadside" visit

<https://kelticdeadmusic.org/story-broadside/>

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>