In My Tradition: Ballads and Folk Lyrics

Rosaleen Gregory

Here are four more songs from my repertoire.

Cairistiona Unaccompanied.

I learned this beautiful Hebridean lament with its haunting tune from Maggie MacInnes' singing on *Cairistiona*, a 1984 LP by George Jackson and Maggie MacInnes (Iona Records). Maggie sings the entire song in Scottish Gaelic, but English translations of the one-line verses are to be found online in Celtic Lyrics Corner, together with the chorus (in Gaelic).

Down by the Salley Gardens With guitar.

Words by W.B. Yeats, to a traditional Irish melody.

Just as the Tide was Flowing Unaccompanied.

A song I learned as a musical illustration for a paper given by Dave in 2010 at the International Ballad Conference, which was held on the Dutch island of

Terschelling. The theme of the conference, appropriately, was "Water", and Dave's paper was on "Sea Songs from Two Oceans", comparing maritime songs collected by Frank Kidson in Yorkshire and Phil Thomas in British Columbia. "Just as the Tide was Flowing" was collected by Kidson on the Yorkshire coast and printed in his book *Traditional Tunes* (1891).

The Sweet Nightingale (alias The Wild Rippling Water) Unaccompanied.

This song is generally known as "The Sweet Nightingale", but, oddly enough, when I learned it many years ago at Keele University in the English Midlands, it was in this rather hokey Americanized version known as "The Wild Rippling Water". However, it has a nice tune, which is why I've kept on singing it.



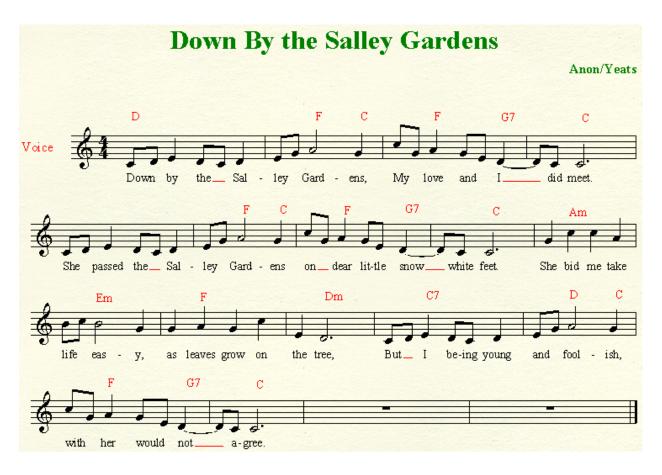
Won't you answer, Cairistiona?

CHORUS:

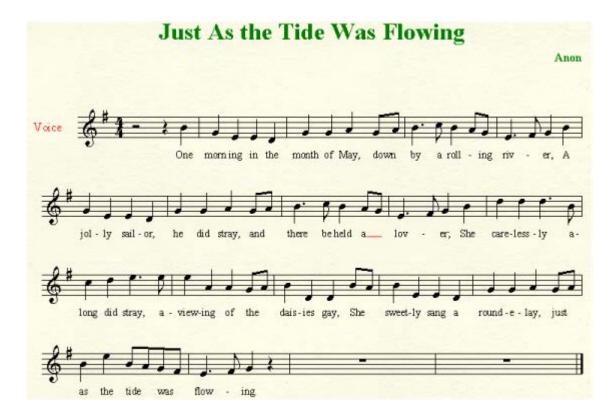
E ho hi (pronounced 'hee') hu ru bhi i Ho ro o hi, ho ho ro ho E ho hi hu ru bhi i.

VERSES:

If you'd answer, I would hear you
Ships I see in the sound of Islay
They are seeking Cairistiona
Not to make a wedding for her
In deep clay they're going to lay her
To Glencoe I once did journey
The waves were high, and deep the channel
I cannot judge my leap in distance
And if I could, I would gain nothing
Cairistiona for me won't be waiting.



Down by the Salley Gardens my love and I did meet; She passed the Salley Gardens on dear little snow-white feet. She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree; But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree. In a field down by the river my love and I did stand, And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand. She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs; But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.



One morning in the month of May, down by a rolling river, A jolly sailor he did stray, and there beheld a lover, She carelessly along did stray, a viewing of the daisies gay; She sweetly sang a roundelay, just as the tide was flowing.

Her dress it was as white as milk, and jewels did adorn her skin, It was as soft as any silk, just like a lady of honour. Her cheeks were red, her eyes were brown, her hair in ringlets hanging down, Her lovely brow without a frown, just as the tide was flowing.

I made a bow and said, "Fair maid, how come you here so early? My heart by you it was betrayed, and I could love you dearly. I am a sailor come from sea, if you'll accept my company, To walk and see the fishes play, just as the tide is flowing."

No more was said, but on her way we both did gang together; The small birds sang, the lambs did play, and pleasant was the weather. We both being weary sat us down, beneath a tree with branches round; Then to the church we soon were bound, just as the tide was flowing.



As I was a-walkin' and a-ramblin' one day, I spied a fair couple a-makin' their way; One was a lady and a fair one was she, An' the other was a cowboy an' a brave one was he.

"Oh where are you goin' my pretty fair maid?"
"Jest down by the river, jest down in the shade,
Jest down by the river, jest down by the spring,
See the wild ripplin' water, hear the nightingale sing."

They hadn't been there but an hour or so, Till he drew from his satchel a fiddle and bow, He tuned up his fiddle all on the high string And he played his tune over and over again.

"Now," said the cowboy, "I should have been gone."
"No, no," said the pretty maid, "jest play one more song.
I'd rather hear the fiddle played and all on that one string
Than to see the waters glide and hear the nightingale sing."

She said "My dear cowboy, will you marry me?" He said "My dear lady, that never can be, I've a wife in Arizona and a lady is she, One wife on a cow ranch is plenty for me."

"Oh I'll go to Mexico, I'll stay there one year,
I'll drink the sweet wine and I'll drink lots of beer,
If I ever return, it will be in the spring
To see the bright ripplin' water, hear the nightingale sing."

"Come all you young maidens, take warning from me, Never place your affections on a cowboy so free. He'll go away and leave you, as mine did to me, And you'll rock the cradle, sing 'Hush-a-bye baby'."