

The COOLIN

traditional harp tune
6th string = D

Very freely (mm ~ 60)

The musical score is written in treble clef, D major (two sharps), and 3/4 time. It begins with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The piece is marked *Very freely (mm ~ 60)*. The notation includes several triplets (marked '3') and first endings (marked '1'). The score is divided into six systems, with measure numbers 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 indicated at the start of their respective lines. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, often beamed together, and includes various ornaments such as grace notes and slurs. The 6th string is specified as D.



This is one of the best-known of the “big songs” of the Irish tradition; Captain Francis O’Neill refers to it as “the queen of Irish airs”. The title is the English rendering of “Cuilfhionn”, meaning “fair-haired”. The reference is said to be to the prohibition by the English (as early as 1297, repeated in 1539) of certain hair styles worn by the Irish (and the Anglo-Irish) which were considered to have political or religious connotations. (This is only one of several interpretations.)

The tune is undoubtedly an ancient one and could conceivably date back as far as 1297. Quoting the *Fiddler’s Companion*: “The original song, told from a young maiden’s point of view, berates those Anglo-Irish who conformed to the edict by cutting their hair, and praises the proud Irishman who remained true to ancestral custom.” (The version known today dates back to a 1781 performance by the harper Fanning, notated by the collector Edward Bunting.)

