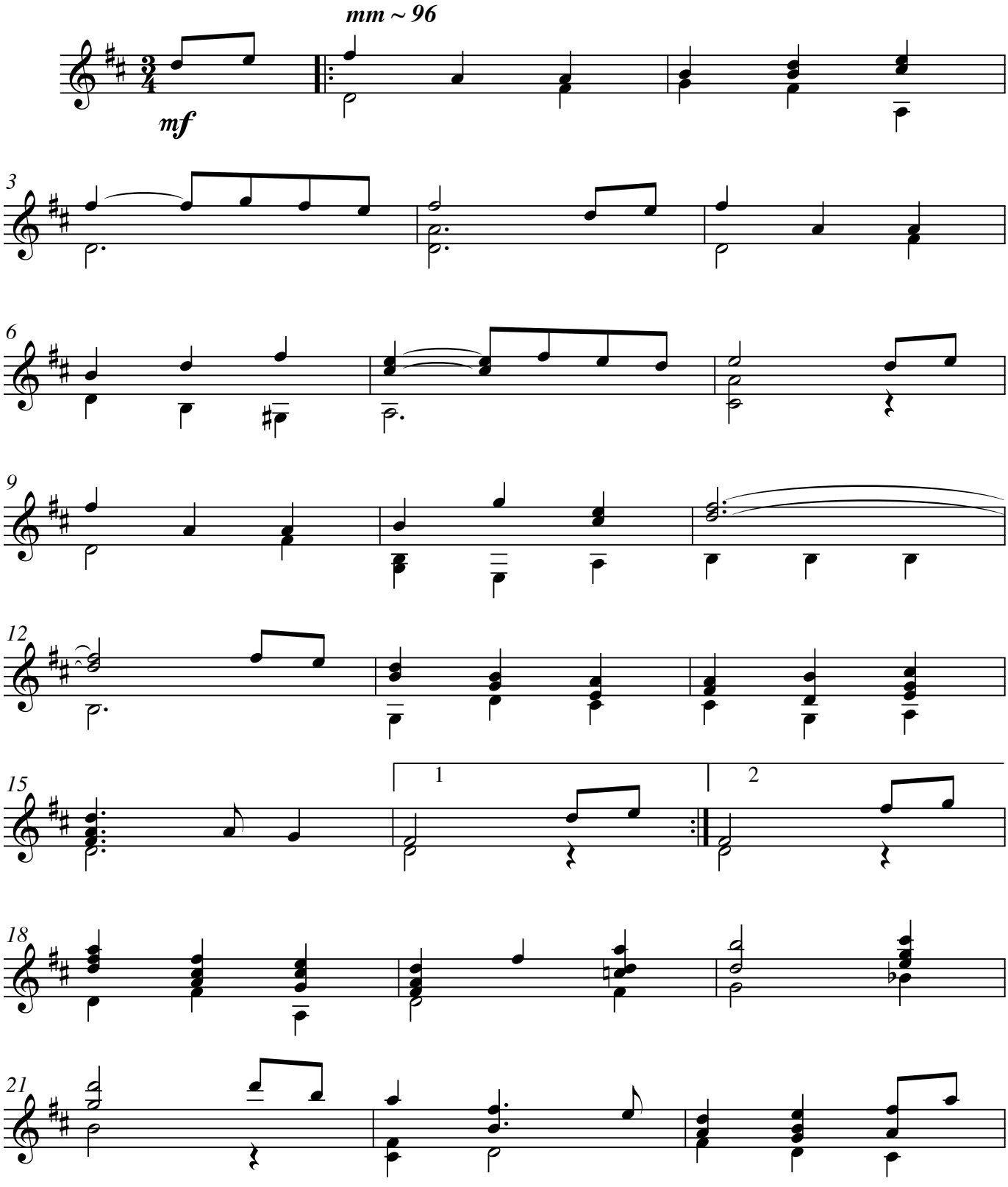
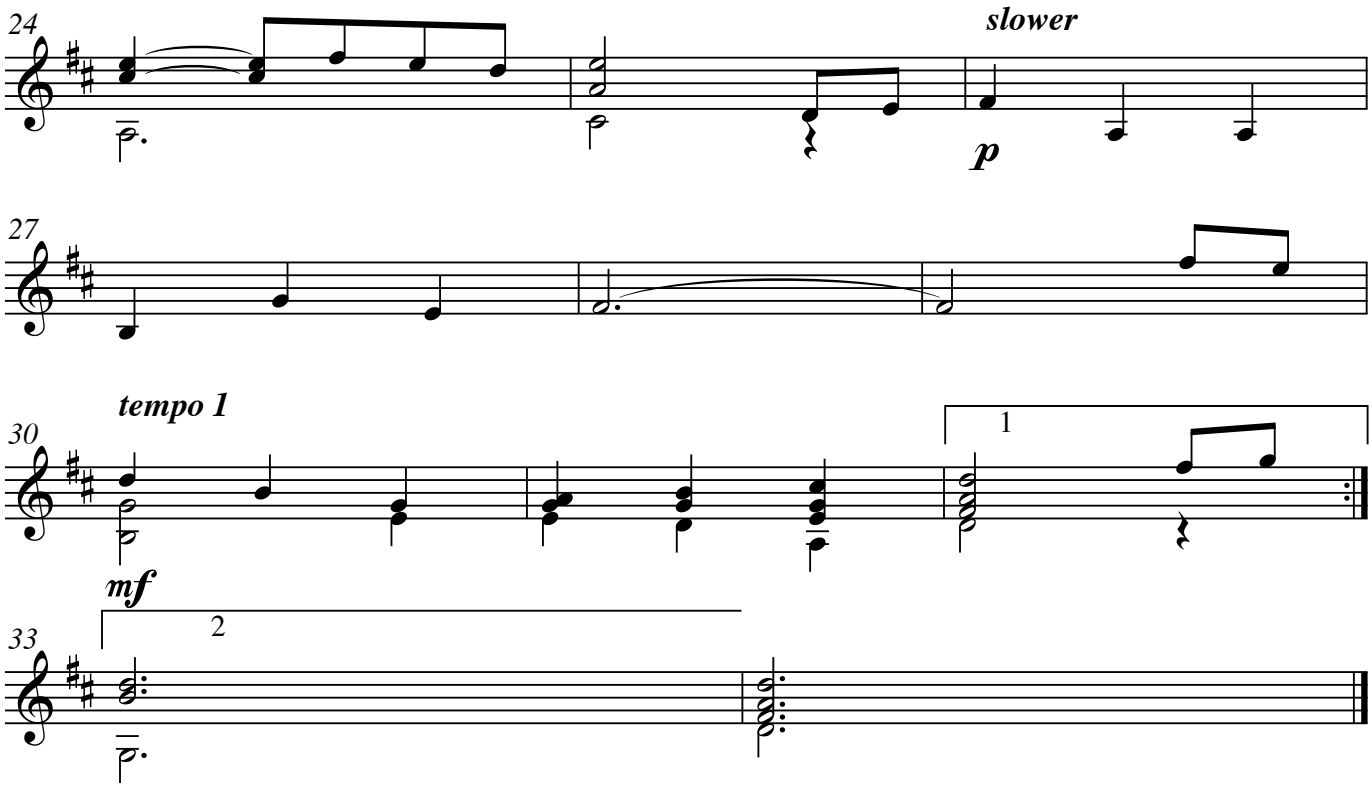
FOR IRELAND I'D NOT TELL HER NAME

(Ar Eirinn Ni Neosfainn Cé Hí)

traditional melody





This is one of the best-known "slow airs" in the traditional repertoire. The melody has many relatives throughout Ireland and Western Europe (a variant has been heard as far "east" as Romania!)

Speaking about this air a few years back, an Irish native speaker told a radio interviewer " [It's] a story about a priest who fell in love with his brother's wife. He said, 'For the whole of Ireland I wouldn't tell her name.' "

Well, maybe, but the version of the song that appears in the *Ceolta Gael* collection is clearly of the type referred to as an "aisling" or "vision", in which Ireland is personified as a beautiful young damsel in distress - often referred to as a "spéir-bhean" or "heavenly woman" - who calls on the poet/singer for assistance: "Roisin Dubh" - "The Little Black Rose" - is a better-known song of the same type. The allegorical nature of "aisling" songs and their relationship to the Irish political situation in the days when open discussion of the topic - in English - was unwise at best has been well documented, although as Donal O Sullivan points out, the poets writing in Irish "placed no restraint whatever on the expression of their views about the English."