

BILL BLACK'S "MOSTLY GEMS"

330 tunes in Irish traditional style

With links to sound files and ABC



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BILL BLACK'S "MOSTLY GEMS"

WELCOME!

These tunes have been composed at different times over a span of 25 years or so. Many of them appeared in *Music's the Very Best Thing*, also known as the *Bill Black Tunebook volume 1*, which was published in 1995.

I have decided that this edition of BBMG will be an online version, for three reasons:

- (1) the flexibility allows me to make corrections, additions, or editorial changes quickly
- (2) the ability to link the text to other resources, e.g. sound files or other web pages
- (3) the elimination of printing costs

The link at the bottom of each page is to the [BBMG home page](#), which is basically a table that has further links to the MP3 sound files (just click on the tune title) and an ABC file for all the tunes. The table also includes the incipit (= first four measures) of each tune.

The URL is

www.capeirish.com/webabc/working/source/folders/bbmgb/bbmgb_table.html

You can use your browser/PDF viewer's search, find, go-to-page, and "show thumbnail" commands to make navigating through this volume faster and easier. You can practice as much as you like without affecting the online original.

You are free to print these pages out for your own use, but note that doing so will remove any links on the page. You can still access the sound and ABC files using the URL shown above.

For those of you capable of handling a spreadsheet, I have created an Excel version of the index. The advantage of an Excel file over the PDF version is that it's sortable, e.g. in case you want all the reels listed together. URL: www.capeirish.com/bbmgb/bbmgb-book_index.xlsx

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As much as I would like to, I can't claim that each of these tunes is a masterpiece. There should however be a sufficient number that you find interesting and might even come to consider worthy of playing. I hope all of the tools I have provided will help you get what you want out of this material!

A reminder: all contents of this book are copyrighted. No permission is required for use in sessions, concerts, etc., (with credit as appropriate), but recording permission is reserved and must be requested in writing (email preferred).

Have fun and if you have any questions, comments, etc. email me at bill@capeirish.com.

Bill Black
Bourne MA
January 2018

BILL BLACK'S "MOSTLY GEMS"

FOREWORD

This collection contains 330 original tunes composed in what I sincerely hope is a reasonable facsimile of the Irish traditional repertoire as I have grown to know and love it in the course of the past forty years.

Irish traditional music, like other "folk" music, is simultaneously simple and complex. Attempting to recreate it presents a composer with the dilemma of producing something that is both "original" (in the sense of not sounding exactly like something else) and yet adheres as closely as possible to the structural requirements (e.g. metric, harmonic) that constitute the traditional canon. In that respect traditional music is closer in spirit to classical music, as contrasted with [e.g.] jazz, where pretty much anything goes.

I realize this is over-simplifying it, but the fact is that as a traditional composer or performer you're not going to have the chance to compose like Thelonious Monk or perform like Miles Davis (or vice-versa). The rules are a lot stricter for us. If traditional structures and harmonies appear hopelessly limiting to a jazz musician, we can take consolation in the fact that what we do in choosing to compose or play our kind of music is no less "musical" because the rules we follow do not look kindly on 11/4 meters or flatted elevenths in our arpeggios. ("The Pooka's Delight" and "The Camel's Hump" in this collection represent what can happen to an unwary composer who strays too far from the safety of the traditional style.)

The proof that what might appear to be musical strait-jackets are in reality nothing of the kind can be found by examining my "webabc" site, which contains at present about nine thousand tunes from various sources. The variety of music evident there - some composed, more "traditional" in the sense of having no identifiable parent - seems to me to demonstrate clearly what can be done with a limited palette of notes (two octaves plus), keys, and meters.

Such an examination of the existing corpus of traditional tunes will also I hope give the lie to the old wheeze about Irish trad music all sounding the

(continued)

BILL BLACK'S "MOSTLY GEMS"

FOREWORD (cont.)

same. Clearly this is a function of a listener's unfamiliarity with the music rather than anything inherent in the music itself.

I hope that in this collection I have been able to combine the "new" (i.e., what I bring to the music) and the "old" (i.e., what the music brings to me). It has been very enjoyable putting these tunes together, and even more of a delight to hear them played by other musicians, which of course is the true test of how "traditional" they really are.

Finally, with regards to tune names:

Sometimes finding an appropriate title for a tune is more difficult than actually putting it together. (Unlike some of my composing colleagues, I won't have anything to do with tunes "gan ainm" ["nameless"]!) Many of these are named for musicians with whom I have had the opportunity to play, or for individuals who have appreciated and supported the music, or for places, or animals, or for not anything in particular except that I liked the sound of it.

The important thing is that it has a name. As the great collector Breandán Breathnach said when supplying a name to a "gan ainm" - "mé fein a bháist é" (" 'twas I who christened it"). All of my 330 offspring in this volume have been duly christened!

In some cases I have put what I believed was a unique name on one of my tunes only to discover later that the title had been used earlier. In that case I have re-titled mine in the present volume and on the website.

Bill Black

Bourne MA

Jan. 2018

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biography: bb-bio.html

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BILL BLACK'S "MOSTLY GEMS"

After the Blizzard

© BB
file ID: 001after_b



I don't recall exactly which blizzard this tune is named for - we don't get them all that often on Cape Cod, but when we DO get one, it can be an interesting experience for a few days (as in "Where the heck are those @!&* snow plows??")

Alice by the Window (h'pipe)

©BB 12/05
file ID:002alice



This was an 80th birthday tune for the "grande dame" of traditional music on Cape Cod, Alice van Buren. "By the window" refers to the fact that that's where she liked to sit playing her mandolin during sessions! After a long battle with dementia, Alice passed away in 2015.

BILL BLACK'S "MOSTLY GEMS"

Andrea's Hornpipe

© BB 12/07
file ID: 003andrea

$\text{♩} = 320$

A A 3 A F#m A 3 G
A 3 A E A E A
A Bm A E7 A E A D G
A Bm A E7 A E7 A E A

This tune was composed as a raffle prize and a nice lady named Andrea was the winner. I'm not sure how much we raised - or for what cause - but I hope it was a lot!

Andy Brooks' (reel)

© BB
file ID: 004andy_b

Dm C Dm F Dm C
Dm C Dm Am Dm
D Bm D Bm A
D G Bm A D Bm A D

Andy is the son of Jann Brooks, a fine singer and musician who was living in Canada when last I heard.