

# *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

updated: 4/4/19

This list contains a "basic vocabulary" of tunes that would be played at any Irish traditional session in the world. It is not meant to be exhaustive in the sense that these and only these tunes will be played - you'll discover that each session has its own idea of what constitutes a tune that all players at that session are expected to know.

But based on my experience of 40+ years of participating in sessions, I think the following list should provide a pretty good point of departure for anyone just coming into the music and interested in session participation. Certainly I would hope that you would add to this list at your own speed and level of interest, but it is a place to start.

The lists start on page 4.

=====  
Some Preliminary Thoughts (in no particular order)  
=====

= You don't have to learn all of these tunes at the same time. Whatever your learning pace has been heretofore, continue with it. Sometimes trying to cram too much new material into your cranium is counter-productive. Some of these tunes have been around for 300 years so you don't have to rush into learning them - they're not going anywhere!

= Some folks find it easier to learn tunes in groups or "sets". That's perfectly acceptable, but the danger is that your idea of a tuneset may not be shared by other folks at your session. Comparing notes with your session buddies - so that you're all on the same wave-length as to what might get played when - is highly recommended. (Of course everything might change when you visit a session somewhere else, so a certain degree of flexibility is good to develop.)

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

**= Tune names exist for a reason. Try to become familiar with as many names as you can so that you'll have an idea what to expect if someone mentions "Trip to the Cottage" or "Green Mountain". You don't have to be able to play them yet, but being able to recognize them will be a big help. (I personally find tunes easier to remember and play if I know their names - don't ask me why. On the other hand, some really great players never know names of the tunes they play!)**

**= If for whatever reason you don't like a tune, don't bother learning it. Chances are you'll never play it correctly. You may however want to re-visit it after you've learned a few others and see if your opinion of it has changed.**

**= A session is not ordinarily an opportunity for learning or for practicing - it's for playing. The learning/practicing happens at home. If you're at a session and someone starts a tune you're not confident about, back off - time to let your fingers relax and put your ears to work. A very quick way to lose the respect of other players is to try faking your way through a tune you don't really know. We've all done it and we feel really lousy about it afterwards. (NOTE: Irish traditional music is never played with a "harmony" part or counter-melody like some American music customarily is. If you're not prepared to play what everyone else is playing, stay out. Anything that's not melody or backup chords is unwelcome.)**

**= Speed comes with practice and experience but is not an end in itself. If it's my session, I'll try to keep the session tempo reasonable but if it gets out of control, OK to remind me to slow down a little. (This isn't recommended procedure at ALL sessions!)**

**= The old-timers used to remind us constantly that you can always start slow and speed up. The opposite is nearly impossible. Keep that ancient wisdom always before you as you progress in your playing abilities!**

**= VERY IMPORTANT**

**I can't recommend it strongly enough to any novice traditional musician: learn ABC. This is a plain-text program for moving and storing music on the Internet; there are tens of thousands of ABC tune files out there that you can eventually take advantage of. You don't have to know how to read music to use ABC (in fact, if you**

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

don't know and would like to learn, it's a great help). A good ABC program will enable you to open the ABC file, view the notation, and play the tune back (and once you've downloaded the file, you can even adjust the playback speed - what could be better for learning?)

The source for all good ABC info is Chris Walshaw's website  
[staffweb.cms.gre.ac.uk/~c.walshaw/abc/](http://staffweb.cms.gre.ac.uk/~c.walshaw/abc/)

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

All of the tunes below are on my webABC site ([www.capeirish.com/webabc/](http://www.capeirish.com/webabc/))

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>REELS</b>                   |  |
| <b>Bag of Spuds (Am)</b>       | <b>Kilmaley (Glen Allen) (G)</b>       |
| <b>Banshee (G)</b>             | <b>Maid behind the Bar (D)</b>         |
| <b>Bird in the Bush (G)</b>    | <b>Mason's Apron (A)</b>               |
| <b>Bonnie Kate (D)</b>         | <b>Merry Blacksmith (D)</b>            |
| <b>Boyne Hunt (D)</b>          | <b>Miss McCloud's (McLeod's) (G)</b>   |
| <b>Bucks of Oranmore (D)</b>   | <b>Mountain Road (D)</b>               |
| <b>Chicago (Am)</b>            | <b>Otter's Hole (Bm - D)</b>           |
| <b>Congress (Am)</b>           | <b>Over the Moor to Maggie (G)</b>     |
| <b>Cooley's (Em)</b>           | <b>Pigeon on the Gate (Em)</b>         |
| <b>Cregg's Pipes (G)</b>       | <b>Rolling in the Ryegrass (D)</b>     |
| <b>Cup of Tea (Em - D)</b>     | <b>Saint Anne's (D)</b>                |
| <b>Drowsy Maggie (Em - D)</b>  | <b>Salley Gardens (G)</b>              |
| <b>Dunmore Lasses (Em)</b>     | <b>Ships are Sailing (Em)</b>          |
| <b>Father Kelly's "#1" (G)</b> | <b>Silver Spear (D)</b>                |
| <b>Foxhunter's (G)</b>         | <b>Star of Munster (Am)</b>            |
| <b>Golden Keyboard (Em)</b>    | <b>Swallow's Tail (Am)</b>             |
| <b>High Reel (A mix)</b>       | <b>Teetotaller (Temperance) (G)</b>    |
| <b>Humors of Tulla (D)</b>     | <b>Wind that Shakes the Barley (D)</b> |
| <b>Hunter's Purse (Am)</b>     | <b>Wise Maid (D)</b>                   |
| <b>Jackie Coleman's #1 (D)</b> |  |

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>JIGS</b>                             |  |
| <b>Banish Misfortune (D mix)</b>        | <b>Morrison's (Em)</b>                 |
| <b>Battering Ram (G)</b>                | <b>Munster Buttermilk (G)</b>          |
| <b>Blackthorn Stick (G)</b>             | <b>My Darling Asleep (D)</b>           |
| <b>Blarney Pilgrim (D mix)</b>          | <b>Off She Goes (D)</b>                |
| <b>Calliope House (D)</b>               | <b>Out in the Ocean (G)</b>            |
| <b>Cliffs of Moher (Am)</b>             | <b>Paddy in London (Am)</b>            |
| <b>Connaughtman's Rambles (D)</b>       | <b>Rose in the Heather (D)</b>         |
| <b>Donnybrook Fair (G)</b>              | <b>Sackow's (Trip It Upstairs) (D)</b> |
| <b>Dusty Windowsill (Am)</b>            | <b>Saddle the Pony (G)</b>             |
| <b>Frost is All Over (D)</b>            | <b>Shandon Bells (D)</b>               |
| <b>Geese in the Bog (Am)</b>            | <b>Smash the Windows (D)</b>           |
| <b>Haste to the Wedding (D)</b>         | <b>Swallow Tail (Em)</b>               |
| <b>Haunted House (Em)</b>               | <b>Sweet Biddy Daly (A)</b>            |
| <b>Humors of (East of) Glendart (D)</b> | <b>Ship in Full Sail (G)</b>           |
| <b>Kesh (G)</b>                         | <b>Tar Road to Sligo (Bm-D)</b>        |
| <b>Langstrom's Pony (A mix)</b>         | <b>Tenpenny Bit (Am)</b>               |
| <b>Leg of the Duck (D)</b>              | <b>Tobin's (D)</b>                     |

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

| <b>HORNPIPES</b>                          |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Boys of Blue Hill (D)</b>              | <b>Jack's the Lad ("Popeye") (G)</b> |
| <b>Chief O'Neill's (D mix)</b>            | <b>King of the Fairies (Em)</b>      |
| <b>Cronin's (G)</b>                       | <b>Kitty's Wedding (D)</b>           |
| <b>Cuckoo (G)</b>                         | <b>Off to California (G)</b>         |
| <b>Cuckoo's Nest (G)</b>                  | <b>Plains of Boyle (D mix)</b>       |
| <b>Fairhaired (Redhaired) Boy (A mix)</b> | <b>Rights of Man (Em)</b>            |
| <b>Fisher's (D)</b>                       | <b>Soldier's Joy (D)</b>             |
| <b>Flowers of Edinburgh (Em)</b>          | <b>Stack of Barley (G)</b>           |
| <b>From Galway to Dublin (Em)</b>         | <b>Stack of Wheat (G)</b>            |
| <b>Greencastle (G)</b>                    | <b>Staten Island (D mix)</b>         |
| <b>Harvest Home (D)</b>                   | <b>Sweep's (Belfast) (D)</b>         |
| <b>Home Ruler (D)</b>                     | <b>Tuamgraney Castle (Am)</b>        |
| <b>Honeysuckle (D)</b>                    | <b>Wicklow (D mix)</b>               |

| <b>SLIP JIGS</b>                      |
|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Barney Brallaghan (D)</b>          |
| <b>Boys of Ballisodare (G)</b>        |
| <b>Fig for a Kiss (G)</b>             |
| <b>Foxhunter's (D)</b>                |
| <b>Kid on the Mountain (Em)</b>       |
| <b>Riding a Mile (G)</b>              |
| <b>Rocky Road to Dublin (A minor)</b> |

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

|  |
|--|
| <b>POLKAS / SLIDES</b>                                   |
| <b>Bill Sullivan's Polka (A)</b>                         |
| <b>Britches Full of Stitches [P] (G, occasionally A)</b> |
| <b>Captain Byng [P] (G)</b>                              |
| <b>Denis Murphy's Polka (D)</b>                          |
| <b>Denis Murphy's Slide (D)</b>                          |
| <b>Dingle Regatta [S] (G)</b>                            |
| <b>Girl I Left Behind Me [P] (G)</b>                     |
| <b>John Egan's ("Kerry #2") [P] (D)</b>                  |
| <b>Lakes of Sligo [P] (D)</b>                            |
| <b>Maggie in the Woods [P] (G)</b>                       |
| <b>Maids of Ardagh [P] (D - A)</b>                       |
| <b>Mairi's Wedding [P] (G)</b>                           |
| <b>Merrily Kiss the Quaker [S] (G)</b>                   |
| <b>Peg Ryan's ("Kerry #1") [P] (D)</b>                   |
| <b>Port Láirge (Rose Tree) [P] (D)</b>                   |
| <b>Rakes of Mallow [P] (G)</b>                           |
| <b>Red Wing [P] (G)</b>                                  |
| <b>Scattery Island [S] (D)</b>                           |
| <b>Spanish Lady [P] (D)</b>                              |
| <b>Star Above the Garter [S] (G)</b>                     |
| <b>Sweeney's Polka (A)</b>                               |
| <b>Worn Torn Petticoat [S] (Am)</b>                      |

## *BB's Basic Irish Session Tune List*

### **FINAL NOTES:**

= For those of you who look at the above list and find yourself fainting, console yourself with the thought that I could have included 5,669 MORE tunes but didn't. Also for consolation purposes: if I learned them, you can learn them!  
= Don't forget ABC - easy to learn and genuinely helpful.

### **REALLY FINAL NOTE:**

Email me at [bill@capeirish.com](mailto:bill@capeirish.com) if you need more help.

Have fun and good luck!

**BB**