

Notes on the Tunes

1. *Beauty in Tears (related to Lllwyn Onn or The Ash Grove)*

This tune is attributed to “O’Carolan” in **O’Neill’s Music of Ireland (The 1850)**, (Chicago: Lyon & Healy, 1903), No. 635; however, it is not included in the virtually definitive **Donal O’Sullivan** collection, **Carolan: The Life, Times and Music of an Irish Harper**, (Cork: Ossian Publications, 2001 edition). It happens to be an old Welsh folk song, even while it is considered a Carolan tune in Irish circles and played as one. It has many accepted variants, goes by many titles, and is played by folk musicians far and wide, and because it works so well on 5-string banjo it deserves a place in this collection.

Notice the chord arpeggios, ringing open and fretted notes, and chord pinches which emulate the legato style of harping. For rhythmic variation one can also roll the notes in the chords instead of plucking them simultaneously, using either forward or backward roll patterns.

2. *Blind Mary*

An air and planxty attributed to Carolan (O’Sullivan, No. 182) but without incontrovertible proof. He might have composed it for blind fellow harper and teacher, Máire Dhall (Blind Mary), one of the few women in the harping profession and whom he presumably knew. It can be played slower than I’ve recorded it here, or even faster, but keep it relaxed and don’t rush the ornaments. [O’Sullivan, op, cit. n. 1, 205.]

Notice the *appoggiatura* and *mordent* combination in the second full measure performed by a hammer-on-pull-off combination with the fretting hand. The reason the first two notes (B and C) are not written as *acciaccatura* or grace notes is because I don’t play them that quickly, and they subtract time from the principal note (B) that comes last. Appoggiatura can either be ascending or descending to a principal note, or ascending-descending as is the case here. I also use a descending appoggiatura twice in both sections, each time pulling off from an F# to an E-note, an interval of a major second. I like the way these ornaments feel under my fingers, also the way they sound in combination, giving the tune a more Baroque quality.

3. *Bridget Cruise (Third Air)*

This lovely air or lament is one of many planxties composed for Bridget Cruise, who inspired Carolan to compose many tunes in her honour. It is in 3/4 time, a listening piece, and predates the waltz and mazurka, two popular dance forms originating in continental Europe.

4. *Captain O’Kane (The Wounded Hussar)*

This tune appears in the O’Sullivan collection (No. 133) on the good authority of previous tune collectors, but with a curious note, “None of the above sources attributes this air to Carolan, but its style resembles his.” [O’Sullivan, op, cit. n. 1, 271.] O’Sullivan shares it in E Aeolian, and here is contemporary rendition (B Aeolian). Try to get the most resonance by adhering to the suggested fretting-hand fingerings and holding down strings as long as possible. This produces a more *legato* tone from the banjo. Banjo or violin mutes (or metal tie clips) may also be used if one is so inclined. The second part is repeated in many versions, but I prefer to have the two parts balanced in length.