

The Skye Boat Song

Slow Air

Trad.

The image shows five staves of musical notation for 'The Skye Boat Song'. The music is written in treble clef with a 6/8 time signature. It begins with a repeat sign and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is a slow air, characterized by its gentle, rocking rhythm. The notation includes various note values such as quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and phrasing slurs. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The Skye Boat Song is a traditional Scottish song recalling the escape of the young pretender Charles Edward Stewart [Bonnie Prince Charlie] after his defeat at Culloden in 1746 and commemorating the many Scots who died and were exiled for the Jacobite cause.

The adherents of Scottish nationalism regard the event as an important national legend.

Words to the tune were written by Sir Harold Boulton to an air collected by Miss Annie MacLeod [Lady Wilson] in the 1870's. It seems that Miss MacLeod was on a trip to the isle of Skye and was being rowed over Loch Coruisk [Coire Uisg, the 'Cauldron of Waters'] when the rowers broke out into the Gaelic rowing song 'Cuchag nan Craobh' [The Cuckoo in the Grove]. A talented composer and singer, Miss MacLeod remembered fragments of the song and fashioned them into an air which she set down in notation with the intentions of using it later in a book she was to co-author with Boulton.

Sir Harold joined Miss MacLeod at Roshven House, Invernesshire, soon after to work on their book. It was he who wrote additional lyrics in a Jacobite mold, introducing the heroic figures of Bonny Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald.

It is often sung as a lullaby, in a slow rocking 6/8 time or as a rowing song [called iorram - pronounced-irram]. The 1st beat is very pronounced and corresponds with lifting the oars out and swinging them forward as you straighten your arms and lean forward. 2 and 3 are the pulling stroke - Imagining this when you are playing will give you the right tempo).

Chorus

Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing,
Onward, the sailors cry.
Carry the bairn/lad that's born to be king,
over the sea to Skye.

Verses

Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar,
Thunderclaps rend the air;
Baffled, our foes stand by the shore,
Follow they will not dare.

Manys the bairn fought on that day,
Well the claymore could wield,
When the night came, silently lay
Dead in Culloden's field.

Though the waves leap, soft shall ye sleep,
Ocean's a royal bed.
Rocked in the deep, Flora will keep
Watch by your weary head.

Burned are their homes, exile and death
Scatter the loyal men;
Yet e'er the sword cool in the sheath
Charlie will come again.