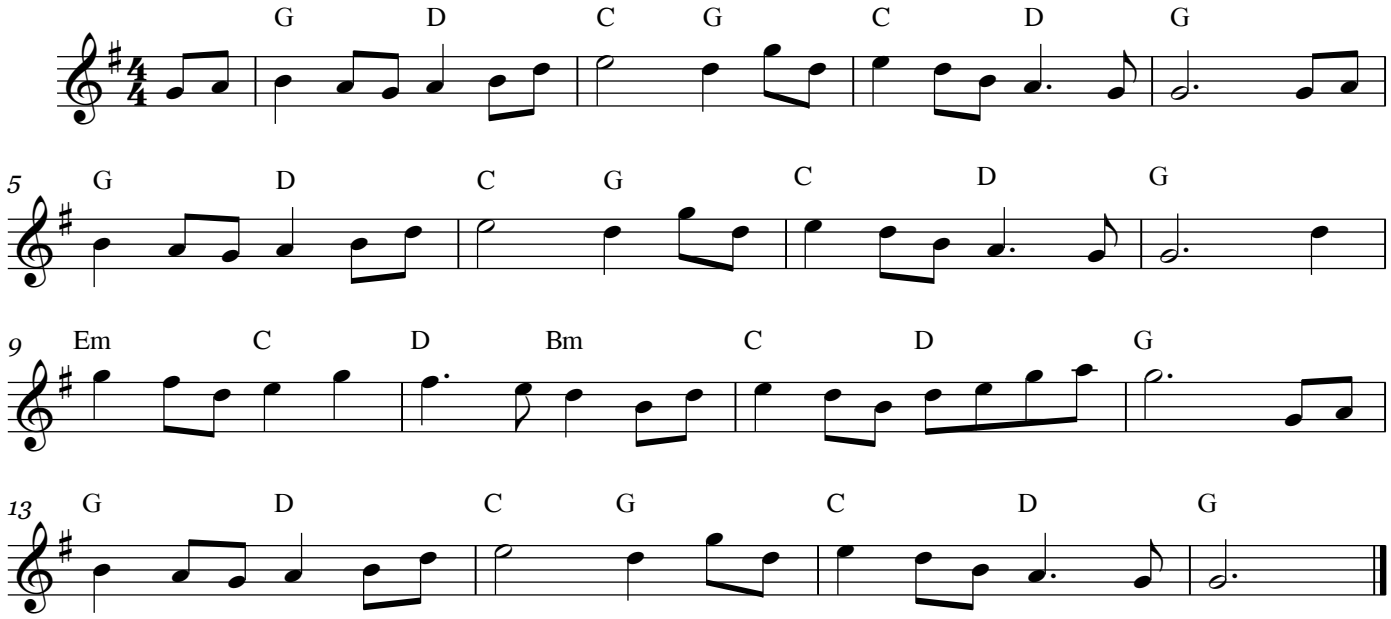
Down By The Salley Gardens

Words by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) Tune: trad. Irish (Maids of Mourne Shore)



Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her did not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

Famous Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote this poem in 1888; it was originally titled "An Old Song Re-Sung." He mentioned in a note that it was "an attempt to reconstruct an old song from three lines imperfectly remembered by an old peasant woman in the village of Ballysodare, Sligo, who often sings them to herself." The verses were set to the air "Maids of Mourne Shore" in 1909 by Irish musicologist Herbert Hughes. Hughes was a prolific collector of Irish tunes and songs, and is also remembered for setting words to The Gartan Mother's Lullaby and My Lagan Love (in 1904, with poet Joseph Campbell, also known as Seosamh MacCathmhaoil), and She Moved Through the Fair (in 1909, with poet Padraic Columb).

(Note on the title: "salley" is an Anglicization of the Irish word "saileach" meaning willow.)

Arranged by Diane Moss, 2009. Group Tunes for Crystal Mountain Folk Harp Festival, June 2009