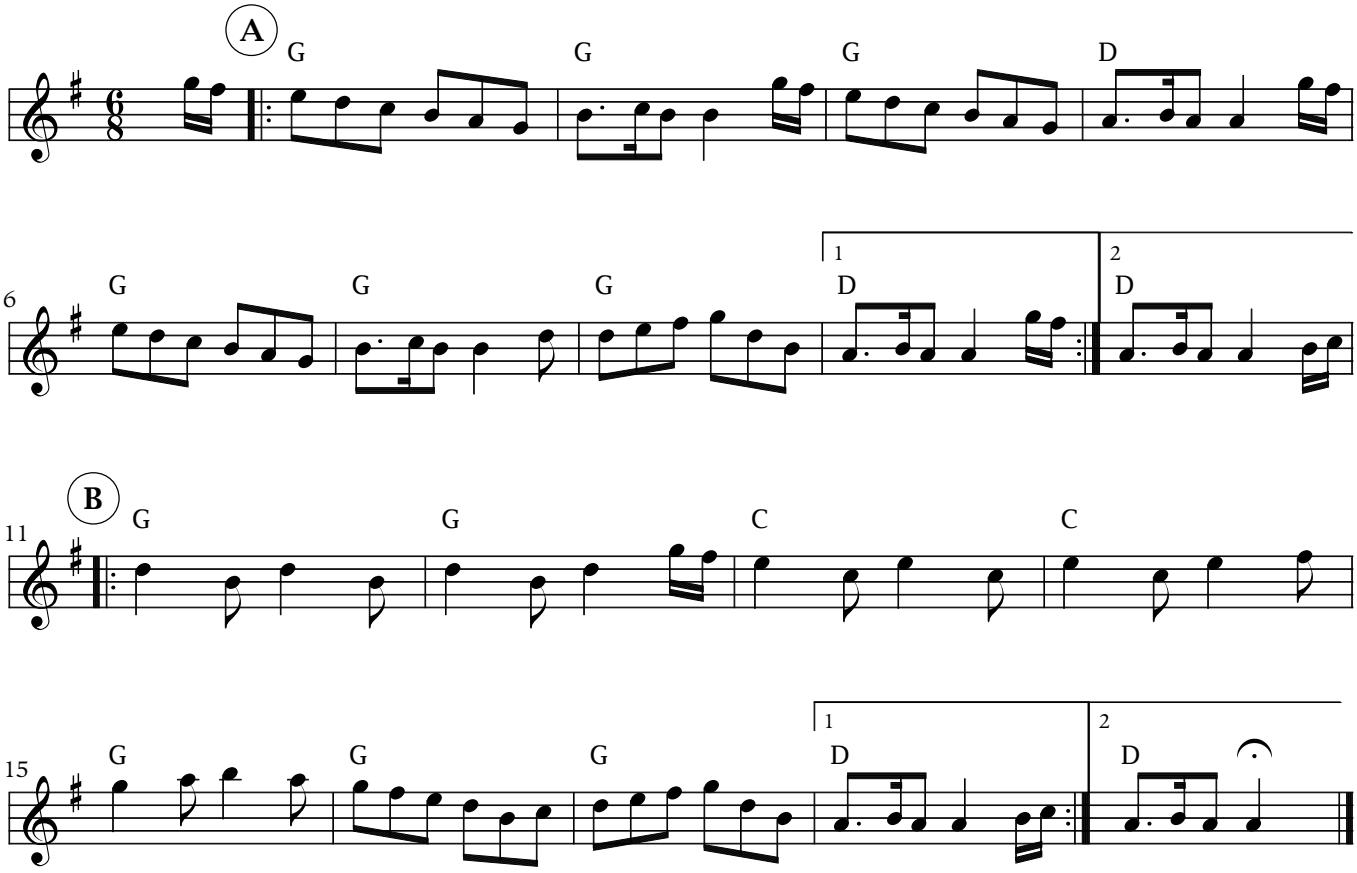
Garryowen

Traditional Scots / Irish, late 1700s



"Garraí Eoin" (Owen's, or John's, Garden) is a neighborhood of Limerick, Ireland, named after the area's 12th-century St. John's Church and its associated public park lands overlooking the River Shannon.

Based on a Scots tune called "Auld Bessie" published by James Aird in 1795, "Garryowen" gained popularity when included in the pantomime *Harlequin-Amulet; or, The Magic of Mona* by William Powell, first performed on 22 December 1800 in London. The tune was such a hit that it was described across the Atlantic four years later, in the Baltimore *Musical Journal,* as "The Favorite Irish Air Performed on the Harp in Harlequin Amulet."

The original Garryowen lyrics, from around 1800, commemorate a wild night of "revelry" in the area (according to *Limerick; Its History and Antiquities* by Maurice Lenihan, Dublin 1866). Using the "revelers" point of view, the song begins "Let Bacchus' sons not be dismayed, but join with me each jovial blade" and continues by describing drunken young men gleefully beating up local police and going after the mayor. (!!!)

The melody has also been adopted, often with revised or newly written lyrics, by military units in the UK and Australia; the Irish Regiment of Canada; the Italian Army (on parade); and by several units in the US including the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the US Army under Lt. Col. George Custer. US President Theodore Roosevelt called Garryowen "the greatest fighting tune in the world," and it was played at his inauguration in 1904.

The tune has been referenced in countless classical music compositions, literature, and films and television programs, and is almost always heard during depictions of "Custer's Last Stand."

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