



2025 International Client Seminar

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A Song for Ireland

Lessons for Life in the Law from the Emerald Isle

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Lessons for Life in the Law from the Emerald Isle

“Talking all the day with true friends/ Who try to make you stay/Telling jokes and news/Singing songs to pass the night away.” So goes “A Song for Ireland” by Mary Black.

This song, and many more from the Emerald Isle, remind us of lessons for life, whether your career be in the law or elsewhere. The songs speak of humility, loss, hope, joy, redemption, resilience, and friendship. In this presentation, a companion piece to 2024’s “Smokey Joe’s Blue’s Saloon,” we will focus on the challenges of life, and the joy and celebration that the Irish have found in their music that can help us overcome those challenges.

Our five panelists, coming from all walks of life, will share their personal stories about how they dealt with all manner of challenges. Our attendees will share stories and advice about:

- Challenges growing up:
 - Family
 - School
 - Career
- Challenges at work:
 - Management
 - Colleagues
 - Underlings
 - Career advancement
 - Time management
 - Mistakes made
 - Problem solving
 - Problem cases
- Mental Health Challenges:
 - Depression
 - Stress
 - Loneliness
 - Bereavement
- Work-life balance
- Challenges with Family now:
 - With aging parents
 - With adult kids
 - With little kids
- Relationship challenges:
 - Friends
 - Partners/ spouse
- Financial challenges
- Dealing with trauma
- Dealing with harassment or discrimination
- Finding one’s identity

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- Finding joy
 - How to find time to do the things that make you happy
 - How to deal with stress
 - Using music to bring joy

Traditional Irish Music¹

Ireland's musical tradition goes back well over a thousand years. For nearly all of this time, it's been an oral tradition passed on from one musician to another. It's only been fairly recently that the music has been recorded in written and audio forms. The music can be found played in homes, pubs, reception halls, and concert halls, but many would argue that the best place to see it is in more casual settings. It's music to listen to, to dance to, to laugh with, and to cry with. Whatever the occasion, there is a song or instrumental piece that will fit the mood.

Ireland has several different styles of song: some sung in Irish, some in English, and some a mix of the two. Some of the ones that were sung in Irish are no longer performed. These include the death lament (*caoineadh na marbh*) and the Fenian or Ossianic heroic lay (*laoi Fiannaíocht*). One form that still exists is the lilt (*portaireacht*), which is dance music sung to non-word syllables (e.g., deedle-deedle-doo). There are many different types of songs used for different occasions, such as songs of leaving, ballads, and the lirts. Singers often use lots of expressive, small changes in tempo to evoke more feeling in the songs, and add ornamentation to basic melodies.

The instrumental music is typically dance music. The instrumental music types are jigs (in 6/8 meter), reels (in 4/4 or 2/2 meter), hornpipes (in 4/4 meter), polka (in 2/4 meter), and the march (in 2/4 or 6/8 meter). Of these, the reel is the most popular. The music may be played by a solo instrumentalist, or a group of musicians. The music is fast and played with lots of ornamentation. These ornaments are used to provide variations when the tune repeats during one of the dances.

Besides the dance music, instrumentalists will sometimes play "slow airs" that are taken from songs and meant for listening, not dancing. These are usually played in 3/4 meter with lots of subtle changes in tempo for more expressive music.

The most popularly used instruments in Irish traditional music are the fiddle, the wooden, side-blown flute, tin whistle, uilleann pipes, concertina, and diatonic accordion. Percussion isn't used frequently, but when it is, they usually use the bodhrán (a frame drum), bones, or spoons. The harp, a symbol of Irish national identity, has been played in Ireland for over a thousand years and has had a long oral tradition associated with it. By the 19th century, however, the use of the harp was in decline. It wasn't until the 1970s that harp playing became reclaimed, and it is now much more common.

It's a Wee Bit More than Whiskey in a Jar

Irish folk songs teach us about the importance of community, resilience in the face of hardship, the power

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of storytelling through music, the deep connection to the Irish landscape, themes of love and loss, and the celebration of heritage and identity, often reflecting historical events and personal experiences passed down through generations.

Here are some key takeaways from Irish folk songs:

- **Oral History:**

Folk songs act as a record of Irish history, culture, and social issues, preserving stories of migration, famine, and political struggles through song lyrics.
- **Emotional Expression:**

Irish music is known for its ability to convey a wide range of emotions, from joy and celebration to grief and longing, often through melodic variations and vocal ornamentation.
- **Importance of Place:**

Many songs reference specific locations in Ireland, highlighting the deep connection people have to their land and natural environment.
- **Community and Social Bonding:**

Singing together is a way to foster a sense of belonging and shared identity, particularly in the pub culture where many traditional songs are sung.
- **Resilience in the Face of Adversity:**

Many Irish folk songs address themes of hardship and loss, yet often convey a message of hope and perseverance.
- **Storytelling through Music:**

The narrative structure of Irish songs allows for detailed storytelling, with characters, plotlines, and vivid imagery conveyed through lyrics and melody.
- **Musical Techniques:**

Irish folk music features unique musical elements like intricate rhythms, ornamentation, and specific melodic patterns that contribute to its distinctive sound.

The Parting Glass

Our presentation will be done in a recreation of a real Irish pub, and with real musicians playing guitars we will delve into the joy and the wisdom of many Irish songs such as Rare Auld Times, Sally MacLennane, Caledonia, the Wild Rover, and the Fields of Athenry (a love ballad sung by Irish fans at World Cup matches), we hope to leave our attendees with this favorite song of both Ireland and Scotland about what matters most at the end of one's life:

Of all the money that e'er I had
I spent it in good company
And all the harm I've ever done

Alas it was to none but me
And all I've done for want of wit
To mem'ry now I can't recall
So fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be to you all

So fill to me the parting glass
And drink a health whate'er befall,
And gently rise and softly call
Good night and joy be to you all

Of all the comrades that e'er I had
They're sorry for my going away
And all the sweethearts that e'er I had
They'd wish me one more day to stay
But since it falls unto my lot
That I should rise and you should not
I gently rise and softly call
Good night and joy be to you all

If I had money enough to spend
And leisure time to sit awhile
There is a fair maid in this town
That sorely has my heart beguiled.
Her rosy cheeks and ruby lips
I own she has my heart in thrall
Then fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be with you all.

A man may drink and not be drunk
A man may fight and not be slain
A man may court a pretty girl
And perhaps be welcomed back again
But since it has so ought to be
By a time to rise and a time to fall
Come fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be with you all
Good night and joy be with you all

¹ This section is taken from a blog post by Rebecca Hunt for the Boston Public Library; <https://www.bpl.org/blogs/post/traditional-irish-music/>. Revisions to her piece have been made to correct obvious errors and in accordance with The Bluebook, A Uniform System of Citation, used in the legal profession for citation and references.