Gwyneth Walker Ballads Alive!

Songs of Love and Adventure

for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto Soli and Piano

Ballads Alive!

Songs of Love and Adventure

duration: 25 minutes

Ballads Alive! was created as a gift for the many fine, dramatic singers whom the composer has met during her concert travels. The songs incorporate gestures and staging into the presentation. The performers are asked to observe these written instructions, while also adding additional drama if desired. The goal is "personality on the stage!"

A *Tiny Sparrow* is a lament of a heart-broken young lady whose lover has left her. The singer wishes to become a tiny sparrow who can fly away from her pain. Instead, she must stay on earth, living in "grief and sorrow."

Shady Grove is an 18th century American folk song especially popular in the Bluegrass genre. The lover yearns for his darling Shady Grove, whom he pictures is waiting for him back home.

The traditional English ballad *Ravens on a Tree* tells the story of three (hungry) ravens perched in a tree, viewing a slain knight in the field below – their possible next meal. There are deterrents to this plan, however. The knight's hounds keep watch at his feet, a gentle doe (perhaps symbolic of his wife) comforts him, and the knight's hawks circle protectively overhead. Discouraged, the ravens depart, hungry, still seeking their breakfast.

Molly – the Fishmonger is a song about a young woman named Molly Malone who plies her trade as a fishmonger in the streets of Dublin, Ireland. This is a family business which her parents did before her. Sadly, Molly dies of a fever. But...her ghost reappears with the wheelbarrow, still selling fish!

The Fox, a crafty (vulpine) wife, heads off to town to fetch dinner for her family. Arriving at Farmer John's home, she finds ducks and geese kept in a pen. Selecting one of each as her choices, she heads back to her den, where the tasty meal is enjoyed by all. [Shopping on the farm is not so very different from today's supermarket experience!] The voices in this song are often narrative, describing the hunting venture. But also, the singers portray "Old Mother Flipper-Flopper" (the farm wife – Contralto), the Fox herself (Soprano) and then, in the den, the little fox babies ("eight, nine, ten" – Mezzo-Soprano and Contralto).

Barbara Allen (or, "Barb'ry Allen") is an English ballad. The main character (Barbara) is a much-admired young lady whose beauty leads those who see her to exclaim "Well-a-day!" (meaning "great happiness today!"). Sweet William, a rejected suitor, dies of a broken heart. Barbara shows little sympathy. But she later realizes that she loves him, so she, too, dies of a broken heart. The two young people are buried side-by-side in the churchyard. From their graves grow the vines of rose and briar, which entwine in a lovers' knot.

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The Composer

Walker is beloved by performers and audiences alike for its energy, beauty, reverence, drama, and humor. Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly 30 years, she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont. She now divides her time between her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut and the musical communities of Sarasota, Florida and Randolph, Vermont.

Gwyneth Walker has been a proud resident of Vermont for many years. She is the recipient of the Year 2000 "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Vermont Arts Council as well as the 2008 "Athenaeum Award for Achievement in the Arts and Humanities" from the St. Johnsbury (VT) Athenaeum. In 2012, she was elected as a Fellow of the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Walker's catalog includes over 300 commissioned works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus, and solo voice. A special interest has been dramatic works that combine music with readings, acting, and movement. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by E. C. Schirmer (choral and vocal music) and Lauren Keiser Music (orchestral and instrumental music).

Further information concerning Gwyneth Walker and her works is available at www.gwynethwalker.com

A Tiny Sparrow

Come all ye fair and tender ladies, take warning how you court your men. They're like the stars of a summer morning, first they appear, and then they're gone.

If I had known before I courted, then never would I have courted none. I'd have locked my heart in a box of golden, and shut it fast with a silver pin.

I wish I were a tiny sparrow, and I had wings, and I could fly. I'd fly away to my false-true lover, and when he'd ask, I would deny.

Alas I'm not a tiny sparrow. I have no wings, nor can I fly. So I'll sit down here in grief and sorrow, and try to pass my troubles by.

And on this earth, in grief and sorrow, I am bound until I die.

Ballads Alive!

Songs of Love and Adventure for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto Soli and Piano

Gwyneth Walker

1. A Tiny Sparrow

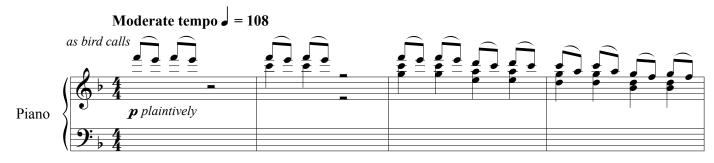
American Folk Ballad

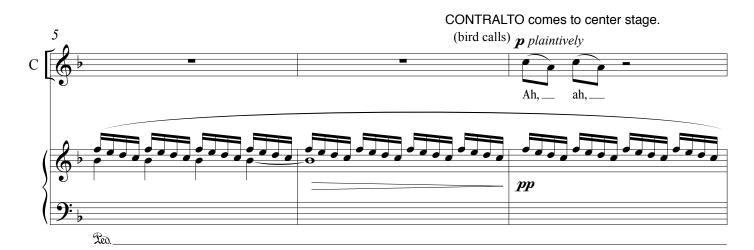
This song is a lament of a heart-broken young lady whose lover has left her. The singer wishes to become a tiny sparrow who can fly away from her pain. Instead, she must stay on earth, living in "grief and sorrow."

The singer identifies with the bird, a small and weak creature. Thus, each singer enters with sorrowful bird calls, "Ah, ah..." As all three singers come on stage, they stand apart, suffering alone. By the fourth verse, however, they join together in group singing. Then, each departs, as a bird flying away.

The sorrow of this song is expressed not only through the music, but also through the bleakness of the empty stage at the start and finish.

SINGERS (birds) are offstage, or to the side of the stage.













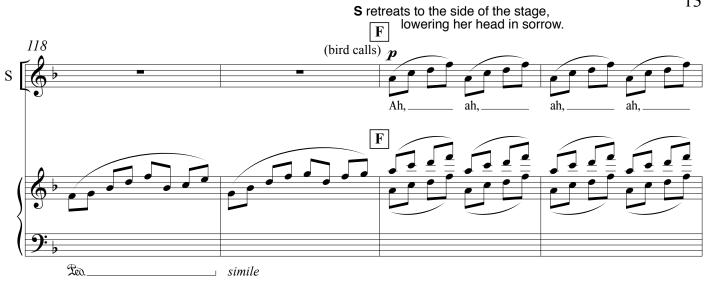


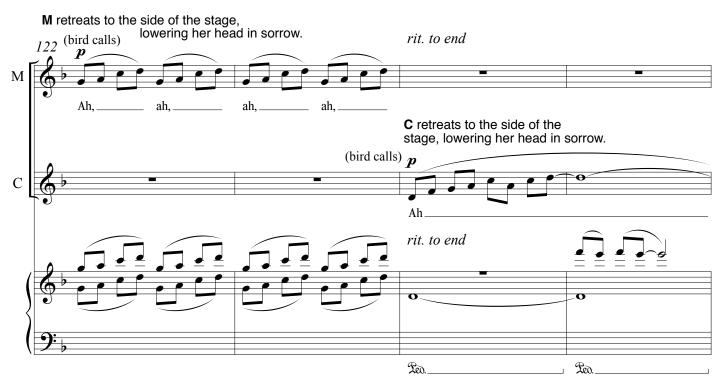


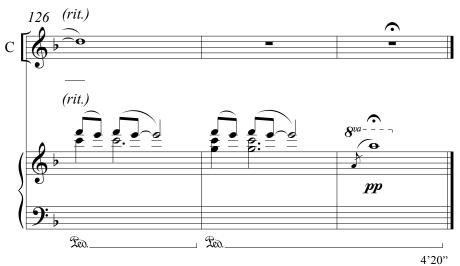












Bound for Shady Grove

Refrain:

Shady Grove, my little love, Shady Grove, I know. Shady Grove, my little love, I'm bound for Shady Grove.

Cheeks as red as a blooming rose, And eyes the darkest brown. She's the darlin' of my heart, The sweetest girl in town.

Refrain

I wish I had a big fine horse, And corn to feed him on. And Shady Grove to stay at home, And feed him when I'm gone.

Refrain

I went to see my Shady Grove, She was standing in the door, Her shoes and stockings in her hand, And her little bare feet on the floor.

Refrain

Peaches in the summertime, Apples in the fall. If I can't have the girl I love, I don't want none at all.

Refrain

2. Bound for Shady Grove

American Folk Song

"Shady Grove" is an 18th century American folk song especially popular in the Bluegrass genre. The lover yearns for his darling Shady Grove, whom he pictures is waiting for him back home.

The dramatic approach to this song involves the prop of a sitting stool (approx. 30" high) which serves both as a place where Shady Grove (Contralto) sits (as if on a pedestal of reverence), and also as a resonant wooden surface upon which the singers hand-tap rhythmic accompaniment, in a vigorous folk style, to piano interludes. [The stool simulates a conga drum, perhaps!]

The refrains are sung by all three singers standing in a row at the front of the stage. For the verses, Shady Grove sits (admired) on the stool-perch, with the others singing about and toward her. During the interludes, the three singers may circle the stool (in barn dance style), tapping on the stool as instructed in the score. The singers take delight in their percussion roles!

The SINGERS come on stage and place a stool at center/front stage. (Pianist repeats the first two measures as needed to complete the stage business.) The SINGERS establish a "country" personality.

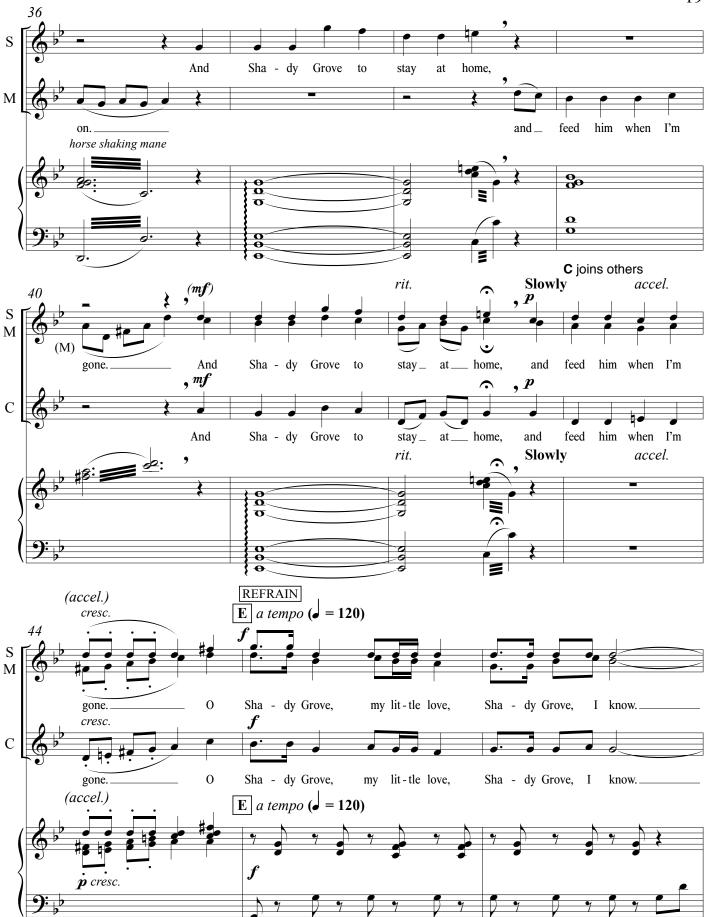






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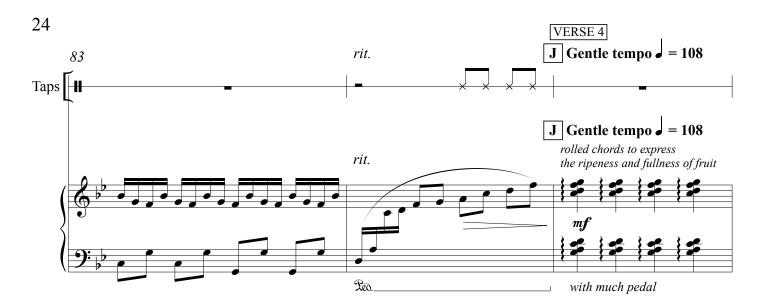


^{*}pronounce "bare" as "bar" for authenticity

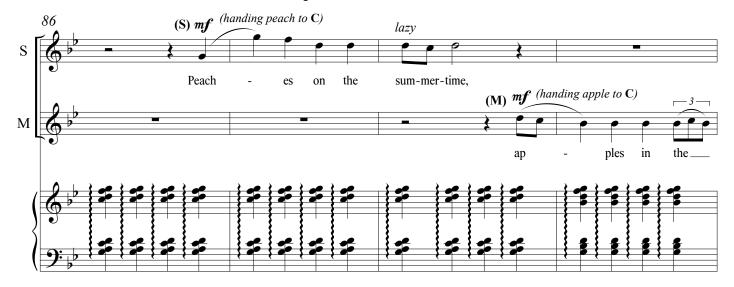
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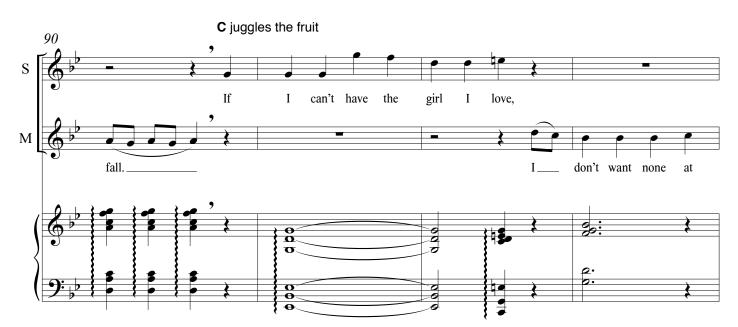






"Shady Grove" **(C)** holds out her hands, one to each side, to receive the fruit gifts.











Ravens on a Tree (The Ravens' Breakfast)

There were three ravens sat on a tree,
Down-a-down, derry down-a-down.
They were as black as black could be, with a down...
Then one of them said to her mate,
"Where shall we our breakfast take?"
with a down, derry, derry, derry down-a-down.

Down in the yonder green field, Down-a-down, derry down-a-down, there lies a knight slain under his shield, with a down... His hounds they lie down at his feet, so well do they their master keep, with a down, derry, derry, derry down-a-down.

And now here there comes a fallow doe, Down-a-down, derry down-a-down, So full with young as she can go, with a down... She lifted up his wounded head, and kissed his cheeks, which still were red, with a down, derry, derry, derry down-a-down.

Slowly, slowly, let us steal over to the knight, our morning meal... slowly, slowly, as we go...ah! ah! ah! His hawks they fly so eagerly that no fowl (such as we) can draw nigh. Away!

And we three ravens sit on our tree,
Down-a-down, derry down-a-down.
We are as hungry as hungry can be, with a down...
The knight he is protected so,
with hounds and hawks and fallow doe,
that we cannot a-dining go!
with a down, derry, derry, derry down-a-down.

"But where shall we have breakfast?!?"

3. Ravens on a Tree

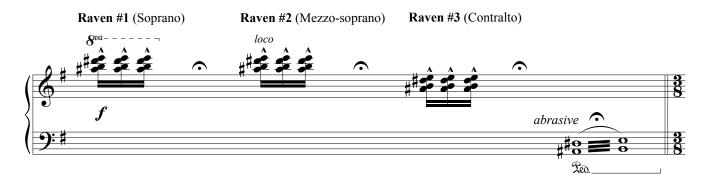
English Folk Ballad

This traditional English ballad tells the story of three (hungry) ravens perched in a tree, viewing a slain knight in the field below – their possible next meal. There are deterrents to this plan, however. The knight's hounds keep watch at his feet, a gentle doe (perhaps symbolic of his wife) comforts him, and the knight's hawks circle protectively overhead. Discouraged, the ravens depart, hungry, still seeking their breakfast.

It is envisioned that the ravens are perched on a branch (a log or broom handle placed on the floor will suffice). They are restless, and shift places with one another, in minuet style, during the piano interludes. As the plans for a meal evolve, the ravens put on bibs, grab knives and forks, and advance toward the slain knight. They are frightened away by the hawks, dart back to the safety of their tree, and eventually walk off stage, arm in arm.

The musical setting creates a contrast between the uncouth ravens and their often-genteel music, eliciting dainty dance steps.

[Prop on stage: A tree branch (stick or broom handle) at front/center stage. The RAVENS will stand on the branch.] Three RAVENS appear on stage, one at a time. They pause during the fermatas.



The RAVENS take perch on the tree branch.











RAVENS switch places on the branch, gracefully, in a minuet style.



RAVENS take bibs out of their pockets and prepare to dine.

They tie the bibs around their necks and tighten them on the 2nd beat of each measure (3 total, as indicated by the arrows).









RAVENS grab knives and forks... to dine. They sharpen their knives on the accented chords (as indicated by the arrows).



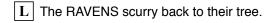


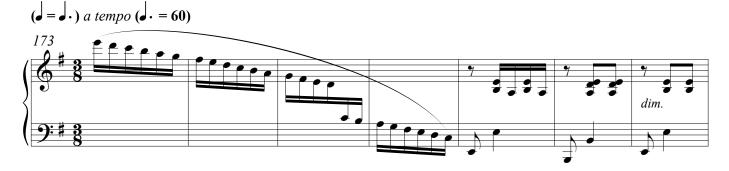
The RAVENS protect themselves (with hand gestures) from the hawks guarding the knight.



















Molly – The Fishmonger

In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty, I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone. As she wheeled her wheelbarrow through streets broad and narrow, crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!"

"Alive, alive O! Alive, alive O!" crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!"

I am a fishmonger, and sure 'tis no wonder, for so were my father and mother before.

And they both wheeled their barrows through streets broad and narrow, crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!"

"Alive, alive O! Alive, alive O!" crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!"

She died of a fever, and no one could save her. And that was the end of sweet Molly Malone. But... my ghost wheels a barrow, through streets broad and narrow, crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!"

"Alive, alive O! Alive, alive O!" crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!" "Alive, alive O! Alive, alive O!" crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive O!"

4. Molly – The Fishmonger

English Folk Ballad

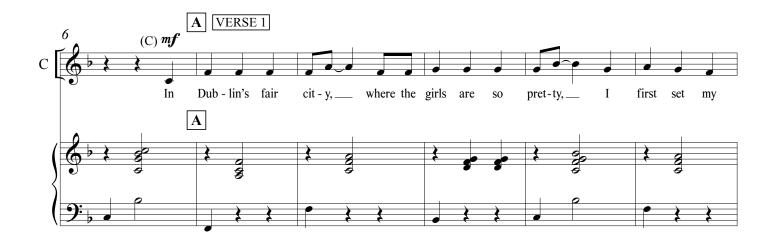
This is a ballad about a young woman named Molly Malone who plies her trade as a fishmonger in the streets of Dublin, Ireland. This is a family business which her parents did before her. Sadly, Molly dies of a fever. But...her ghost reappears with the wheelbarrow, still selling fish!

In this presentation, the three singers represent Molly Malone (Contralto) and her parents (Soprano and Mezzo-Soprano), who double as the storytellers. Molly also sings as her ghost (!). A central prop is an old wheelbarrow, which Molly wheels as she sells fish.

The wheelbarrow is placed near one side of the stage, where Molly stands during the singing of the verses. The other singers sing from the other stage side. During the refrains, all three singers stand together at front center stage.

MOLLY MALONE (M) enters, pushing a wheelbarrow (filled with fake fish).







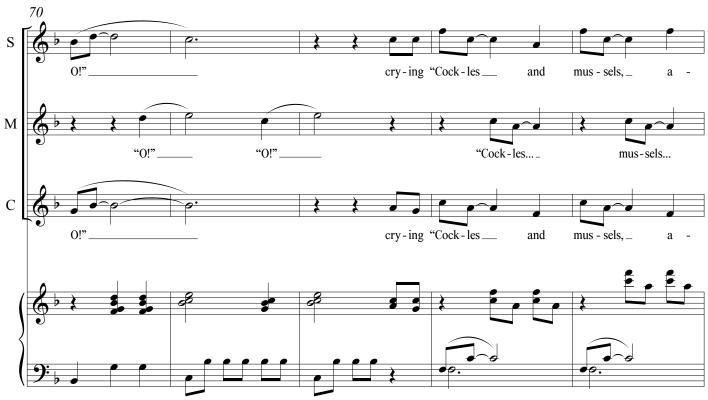




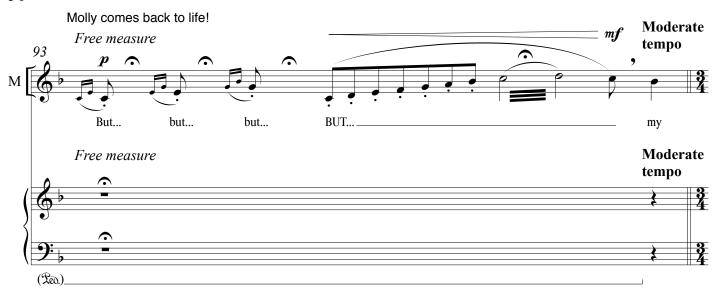


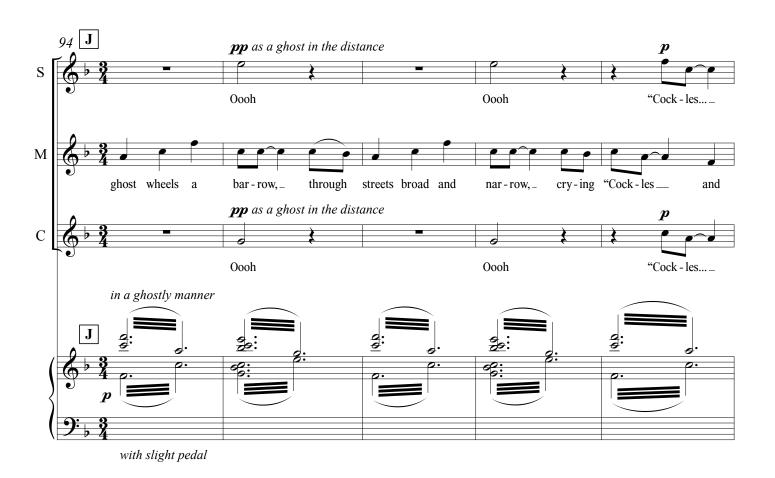
Walker | Ballads Alive! | 4. Molly – the Fishmonger











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The Fox

The fox went out on a chilly night, she prayed to the Moon to give her light, for she had many a mile to go that night before she reached

the town-o, town-o, town-o. Many a mile to go that night before she reached the town-o.

She ran till she came to a great big pen.
The ducks and the geese were kept therein.
She said, "a couple of you
gonna grease my chin
before I leave this town-o, town-o,"
"A couple of you gonna grease my chin
before I leave this town-o."

She grabbed the grey goose by the neck, and threw a duck across her back; she didn't mind the quack, quack, quack, and their legs all a-dangling down-o down-o down-o

down-o, down-o. She didn't mind the quack, quack, quack, and their legs all a-dangling down-o. Then Old Mother Flipper-Flopper jumped out of bed; out of the window she cocked her head, crying, "John! John! The goose is gone, and the fox is on the town-o, town-o, town-o." "John! John! The goose is gone, and the fox is on the town-o."

Then John he went to the top of the hill, He blew his horn both loud and shrill. The fox said, "I'd better flee with my kill, or they'll soon be on my trail-o, trail-o, trail-o."

The fox said, "I'd better flee with my kill, or they'll soon be on my trail-o."

She ran till she came to her cozy den; there were the little ones, eight, nine, ten, saying "Mom, Mom, go back again, 'cause it must be a mighty
fine town-o, town-o, town-o."
"Yes, yes, go back again,
'cause it must be a mighty fine town-o."

Then the fox, a good wife, without any strife, cut up the goose with a carving knife.

They never had such a feast in their life...
and the little ones chewed on the bones-o, Bones-o!

5. The Fox

Middle English Poem

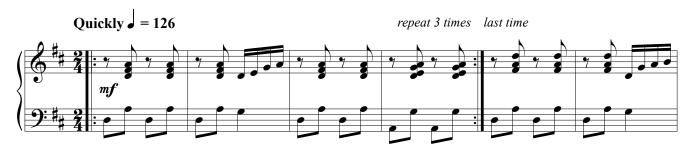
The Fox, a crafty (vulpine) wife, heads off to town to fetch dinner for her family. Arriving at Farmer John's home, she finds ducks and geese kept in a pen. Selecting one of each as her choices, she heads back to her den, where the tasty meal is enjoyed by all. [Shopping on the farm is not so very different from today's supermarket experience!]

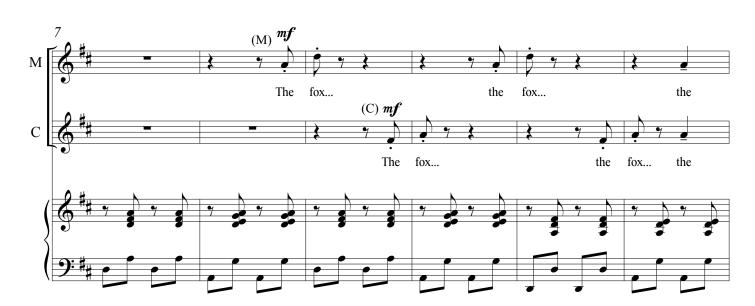
The voices in this song are often narrative, describing the hunting venture. But also, the singers portray "Old Mother Flipper-Flopper" (the farm wife – Contralto), the Fox herself (Soprano) and then, in the den, the little fox babies ("eight, nine, ten" – Mezzo-Soprano and Contralto).

The new dramatization of this traditional ballad enjoys interjecting contemporary props into the farm-oriented lyrics. The fox pushes a grocery cart as she enters. Her "foxy" attire includes very high heels! Perhaps a "smart phone" with GPS might be used as guidance to the farm. "Old Mother Flipper-Flopper" calls her husband on her cell phone. The little foxes might wear their headphones (for MP3 players), as they "groove" listening to their music.

The three foxes enter separately, first **C**, followed by **M** then **S**. A new fox appears with each repetition of the first 4 measures. They join together to sing.

All foxes are on stage.



















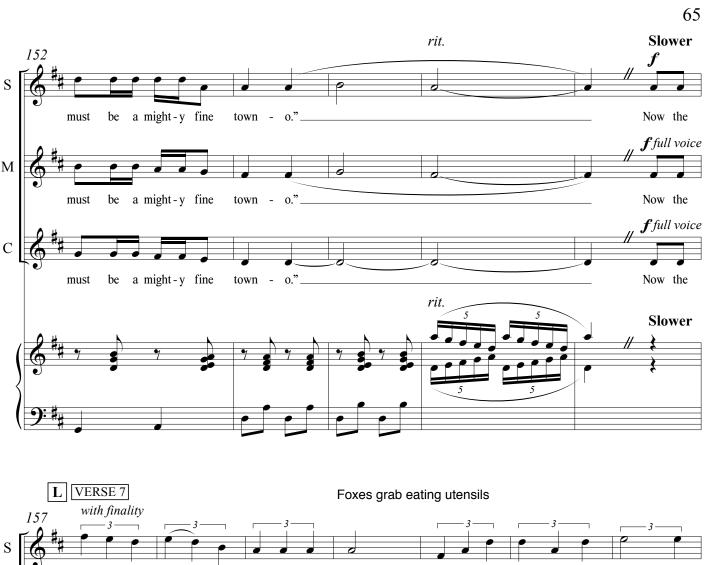


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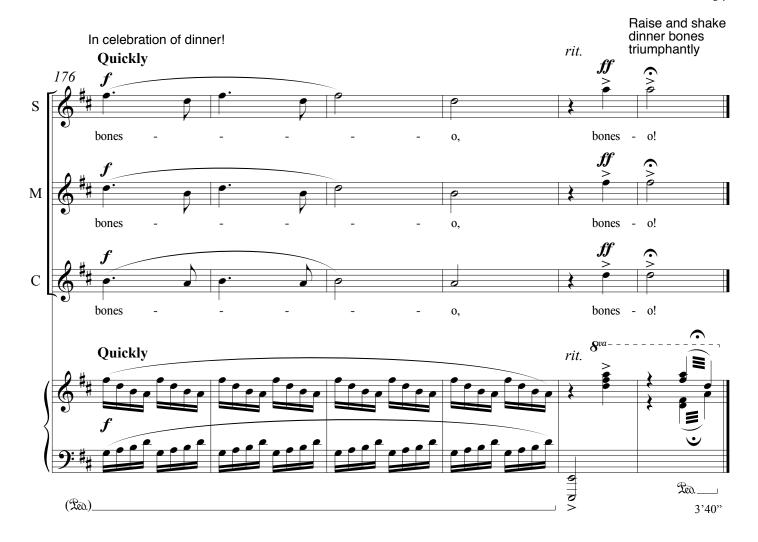












Barbara Allen

In Scarlet Town, where I was born, there was a fair maid dwelling, made every youth cry "Well-a-day!" Her name was Barbara Allen.

'Twas in the merry month of May, when green buds they were swelling, Sweet William on his deathbed lay, for love of Barbara Allen.

He sent his servant unto her, to the place where she was dwelling. "Oh, you must come to his deathbed now, if you be Barbara Allen."

So slowly, slowly got she up, and slowly came she nigh him. The only words that she said to him: "Young man, I think you're dying."

He turned his face unto the wall, and death was in him welling. "Adieu, adieu, to all my friends. Be kind to Barbara Allen."

As she was walking o'er the fields, she heard the death bell knelling. And every stroke it seemed to say: "Hard-hearted Barbara Allen!"

"Oh mother, mother, make my bed, and make it long and narrow. Sweet William died for me today. I'll die for him tomorrow."

They buried Barbara in the old churchyard. Sweet William lay beside her. And from his grave grew a red, red rose. And from her grave, a briar.

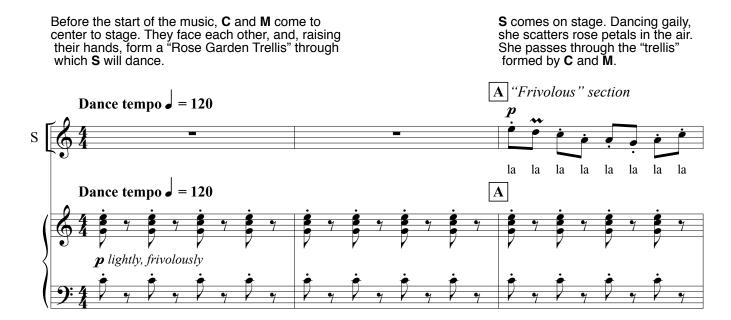
They grew and grew to the steeple top 'till they could grow no higher. And there they twined in a lovers' knot – the red rose and the briar.

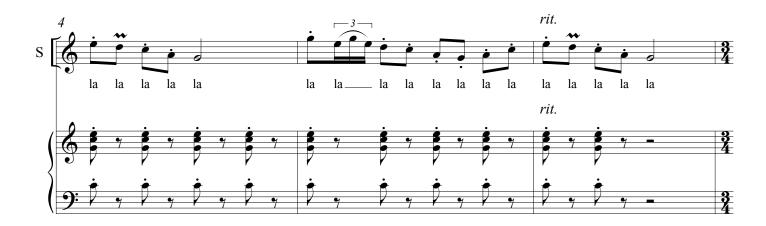
6. Barbara Allen

English Ballad

"Barbara Allen" (or, "Barb'ry Allen") is an English ballad. The main character (Barbara) is a much-admired young lady whose beauty leads those who see her to exclaim "Well-a-day!" (meaning "great happiness today!"). Sweet William, a rejected suitor, dies of a broken heart. Barbara shows little sympathy. But she later realizes that she loves him, so she, too, dies of a broken heart. The two young people are buried side-by-side in the churchyard. From their graves grow the vines of rose and briar, which entwine in a lovers' knot.

The dramatization of this ballad portrays three characters: Barbara (Soprano), her mother (Mezzo) and Sweet William (Contralto). The various images from the lyrics (church bell tolling, Barbara slowly walking over to visit William on his deathbed, the rose and the briar) all find their way into the musical expression. A special element is the final gesture where the three singers join their arms together overhead, as the rose and briar vines reaching skyward.









^{*}Thought to be the city of Reading, UK

Walker | Ballads Alive! | 6. Barbara Allen















Walker | Ballads Alive! | 6. Barbara Allen





