

Themes in Irish Folk Music

All cultures share universal themes in their folk and contemporary songs. The most common by far is love, for nothing makes one feel so good and so bad as does love. This course will examine recurrent themes of traditional Irish folk ballads and lyrical songs through the lens of Irish history and culture, covering the period from Medieval times to the present. We will examine songs of the sea, the supernatural, of prison and martyrs, of immigration/emigration; historical figures, love, rebellion, humor, children, and (of course) drinking. Emphasis will be on lyric and ballad, with only an incidental approach to the instrumental music. The eight sessions will be a mixture of discussion, listening to CDs, watching videos, hearing live performances by guest musicians if available, and impromptu sing-songs. The eight sessions will combine cultural, historical, and geographical information about the songs, as well as information about some of Ireland's most renowned recording artists. Some songs will be broadcast to the group in conjunction with the lyrics so that anyone who cares to (and it is very much encouraged) can sing along. Participants are encouraged to bring to class recordings and/or lyrics of songs relevant to the theme(s) under discussion and share them with the group. We will have internet access, so feel free to bring a laptop or other device to assist in researching key points as they arise through discussion. Seating will be in a table discussion setting rather than an auditorium arrangement.

Part One – Songs of the sea and the supernatural

Part Two – Songs of prison and martyrs, historical figures, and rebellion

Part Three – Songs of immigration/emigration, humorous songs, and children's songs

Part Four- Songs of love and drinking

Leader: Bill O'Neal is a retired high school teacher of English and semi-professional musician/singer who has regularly performed Irish folk music here and in Ireland for nearly four decades.

Mondays: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., 8 weeks: September 23 through November 18 (no class on 9/30)

Location: Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, Maximum 14 seats