

AN ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLICATION

green peas and barley o

children's street songs and rhymes from belfast

performed by children from St. Mary's Primary School, Belfast
collected by Brendan Colgan • produced by David Hammond



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children's street songs and rhymes from Belfast · performed by children from
St. Mary's Primary School for Girls and Boys

collected by BRENDAN COLGAN · produced by DAVID HAMMOND

For Michael O'Donnell

July 1976

.. More of "Ulster's Flowery Vale" ..

David Hammond

SIDE ONE

1. Did you ever, ever, ever
A sailor went to sea, sea, sea
My Mammy told me
Three, Six, Nine
(partner games)
2. The Bangor Boat's Away
Ma, Ma
(partner games)
3. The wind, the wind
Vote, vote, vote
I've a boy in America
Big Banana Feet
(skipping games)
4. Fair Rosa (ring game)
5. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
One, two, three a walla
When the war is over
Over the garden wall
(ball games)
6. The May Queen (group game)
7. I'm a little tea pot
There's a wee girl in our class
(ring games)
8. The big ship sails
Poor Toby is dead
(group games)
9. Green Peas and Barley O (ring game)
10. The cat's got measles (group game)
I sent a letter (ring game)

SIDE TWO

1. Sally is a bad girl (ring game)
2. Red Rover
London Bridge
(group games)
One potato, two potato
My mother and your mother
(picking games)
Who do you want to swing with? (ring game)
3. Dusty Bluebells (ring game)
4. On the hillside stands a lady
Charlie Chaplin
Granny in the kitchen
Induction Corporation
High Low, Dolly Pepper
Eighty Datesy
(skipping games)
5. Green Gravel (ring game)
6. See that finger?
Do you want an apple?
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Our wee school
Our wee Peggy
What's the time?
Stick your head
Donkey
It was on a month of Sunday
(nonsense rhymes)
7. Down in the jungle
Wallflower
(ring games)
8. I'm Diana Dors (ring game)
9. The Doffing Mistress
10. You'll easy know a doffer

These songs and games were recorded in a part of Belfast only a stone's throw from the centre of the city. They are old and we can trace their lineage through the centuries, an eternal backdrop to a changing world.

They are only a drop in the vast ocean that swirls around the streets of Belfast, blithe and carefree, making nonsense of the doddering accusations that children nowadays are incapable of entertaining themselves. This lore is their own, not learned in school or from adults, but passed on from child to child.

In their symphony of jingles, tongue-twisters, macabre rhymes, jokes, vulgar verses, there is much that is pointless, even distasteful, to adults. But that hardly matters, for this children's lore, clinging to tradition and reverent of custom, exploring notions of love, birth, death, courtship, innocence and change, is remote from the adult world. Indeed, viewed from the adult eminence, the songs and games have a total irrelevance to what we are pleased to call ordinary life. Adults cannot offer themselves to the endless repetition that verges on the hypnotic; to the spontaneity that starts a new game as quickly as it abandons one that is only half played. They become impatient with games where nobody wins or loses, where there are no referees, no scoreboards, no prizes.

You need little in the way of facilities, just a gable wall, a kerbstone, a few flags on the footpath, a corner of the school playground. The tunes are immediate, snatched from the radio or the jukebox or blown along on the wind of tradition.

This record is offered, not to promote children's songs and games for nothing would destroy them more quickly than adult intervention of any kind, but as a small observation of how children play and an awareness that children are people with an instinct for freedom and independence.

DAVID HAMMOND

The area surrounding St. Mary's Primary School in Divis Street is one of the oldest in Belfast. It contains numerous streets and proved a rich source of traditional street games. Able and less able pupils contributed to this collection. Moreover, boys as well as girls were eager to perform the games, some of which have highly intricate movements and lengthy accompanying rhymes and songs. Most of the children seemed to know the games and rhymes by heart and performed them effortlessly.

Many songs in the collection contain up-to-the-minute rhymes, but some children questioned their parents and grandparents about **their** games and discovered that the older folk recognised the majority of today's games as those which they themselves had enjoyed as youngsters. The children became more

aware of themselves and their background, and recognised that these rhymes and songs had persisted for generations, and were part of a valuable folk culture which Belfast was in danger of losing.

There are many reasons why this tradition is threatened: the parking of cars in the street; the lack of sufficient playing space in the new housing development complexes; the popularity of television; the movement of families to new environments. And, of course, to all these is added the violence and menace of life in Belfast.

Anyone who stops in the street to watch the laughter, movement, spontaneity and happiness of children taking part in the street games of today must surely hope that this tradition will survive. It is hoped that this tradition will survive. It is hoped that this collection will contribute to the preservation of what may well be a vanishing way of life.

BRENDAN COLGAN

Any profits which may eventually accrue from this record will be donated to the Save the Children Fund.

Some of the songs on this record were recorded from the sound track of the B.B.C. film "Dusty Bluebells." The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is grateful for permission to include them.

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Sound Engineer: Desmond Johnston

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