

From Tradition:

The Wind Blows High

These days a very well-known song in the "Celtic" repertoire is "I'll Tell Me Ma", the Belfast children's street song popularized in North America by the Clancy Brothers (who used a line from it, "The Boys Won't Leave the Girls Alone", as an album title) and in a slightly different version in Ireland. (There is a small Canadian connection: the late Ron Nolan, a folksinger in Belfast before he came to Calgary, tells us that he used the name of his friend Albert Mooney in his rendition of the song, and it's become standard.) More recently, The Rankin Family and many other groups have recorded it in Canada — what Canadian "Celtic" band doesn't include "I'll Tell Me Ma" in their repertoire?

Because the popular version has taken such a hold on singers, it's easy to forget that this is a widespread children's song, existing in many different incarnations. The version below I learned from my mother, who heard it from children on her first teaching job, in a one-room rural school in Chisholm Township, near Alderdale, Ontario, in the early 1930s. While it omits many of the verses of the popular version, and adds one (albeit mostly a nonsense verse) which that version doesn't have, it's recognizably the same song. [JL]

*The wind, the wind, the wind blows high,
The rain comes scattering from the sky;
She is handsome, she is pretty,
She is the girl from London city;
She goes courting, one, two, three;
Pray and tell me, who is she?
I went into the parlour,
I took her on my knee,
I said, "My ducky darling, what'll we have for
tea?"
"A china cup and saucer, a marigolee,
A dish to put the pudding in, a ding dong dee."*