The Victorian Folk Music Club Incorporated

FINDING CHORDS 101

Wattle Day Workshops 2020

What we will learn

- A simple three step process
- How to find the key and mode for any tune or song
- 3 basic chords in every key / mode
- From sheet music or by ear

Chord neighbourhoods

Home

Half away

Away

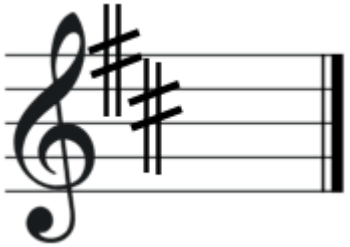
One simple process

- Step 1: Find the ‘home’ chord (key and mode)
- Step 2: Find the changes
- Step 3: Find the ‘away’ chords

STEP 1

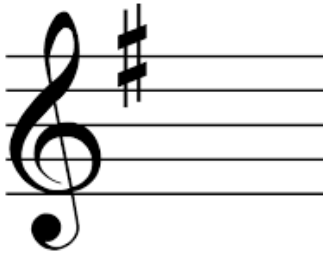
Find the key and mode

Most common keys for Celtic tunes



D major

E Dorian



G major

A Dorian

☝ Lots of key signatures in BBS are wrong!

‘Home’ chords

Key / mode	Home chord
D major	D
E Dorian	Em
G major	G
A Dorian	Am

BBS examples

- G major
  - Bonnie Doon (3)
  - Blackthorn Stick (7)
  - Clare Jig
  - Bog Down in the Valley
- A Dorian
  - Rakes of Kildare (8)
  - Tenpenny Bit (15)
  - Rocky Road to Dublin (31)
  - Junior Crehan’s (79)
- D major
  - Shandon bells (19)
  - Off she Goes (28)
  - Rose Tree (45)
  - Soldier’s Joy (55)
- E Dorian
  - Lannigan’s Ball (16)
  - Kid on the Mountain (34)
  - Pat Horgan’s #2 (36)
  - The Rights of man (77)

What about Minor?

- Classical minor not so common in older Celtic tunes
- More common in American and European folk songs, and more modern folk songs such as:
  - The House of the Rising Sun
  - St James Infirmary
  - Charlie is my Darling
  - Tumbalalika
  - Havah Nagilah
  - The Shearer’s Dream (Joy Durst)
  - Brisbane Ladies (Joy Durst)
  - The Streets of Forbes (Joy Durst)

Keys and modes for songs

- Can be anything!
- Singer chooses what suits their voice
- Most common are C, G, D, F, Bb and Eb
- Guitarists:
  - For Bb, capo 3 and play as though you are in G
  - For F, capo 3 and play as though you are in D

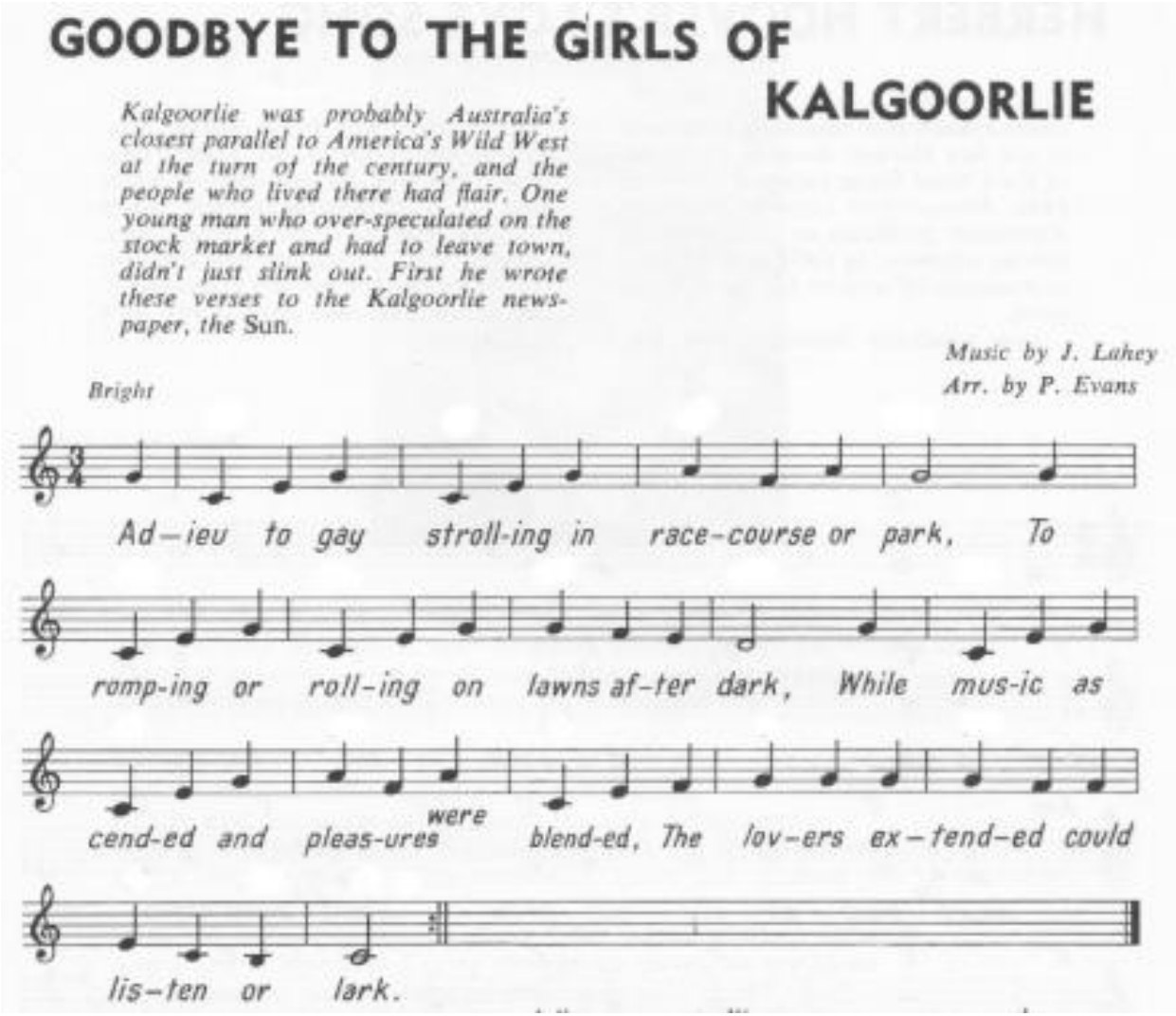
STEP 2

Find the changes

Finding the changes

- Find the right Home chord
- Just keep playing the Home chord quietly all the way through the tune / song and notice where it doesn’t fit
- When you can hear the places, write them down on the sheet music or lyrics (or just remember them!)

Example 1



GOODBYE TO THE GIRLS OF KALGOORLIE

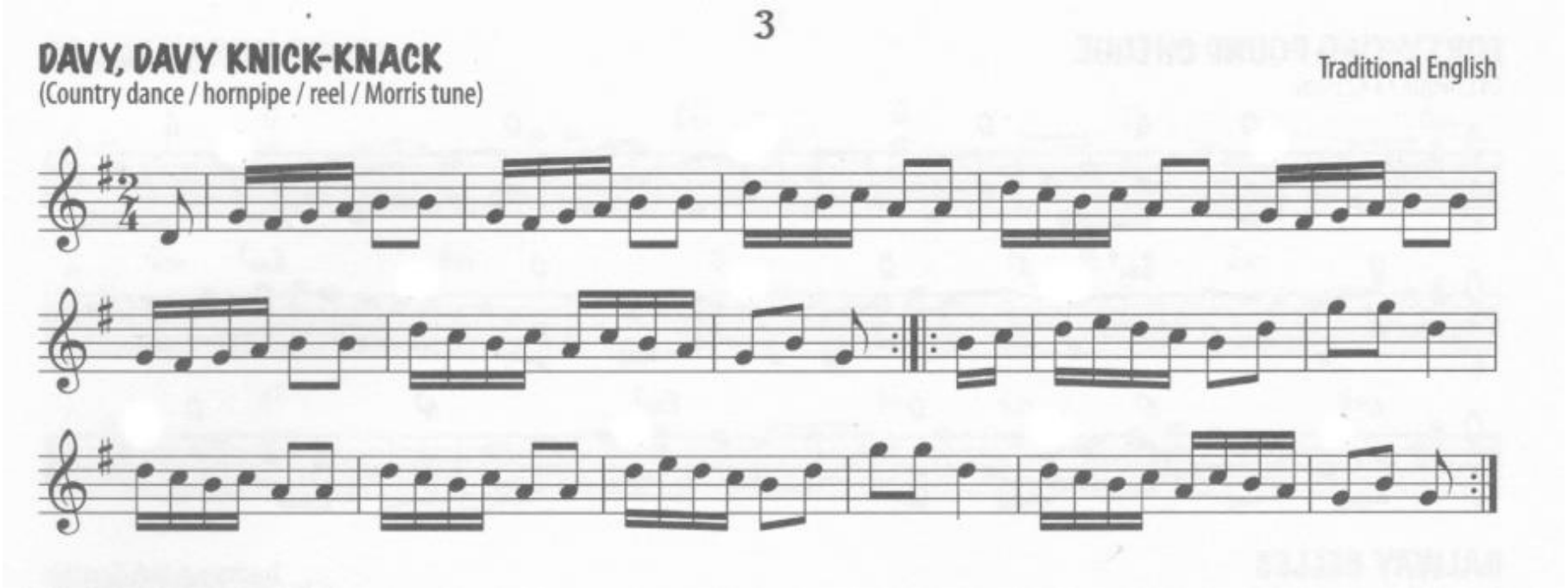
Kalgoorlie was probably Australia's closest parallel to America's Wild West at the turn of the century, and the people who lived there had flair. One young man who over-speculated on the stock market and had to leave town, didn't just slink out. First he wrote these verses to the Kalgoorlie newspaper, the Sun.

Music by J. Lahey
Arr. by P. Evans

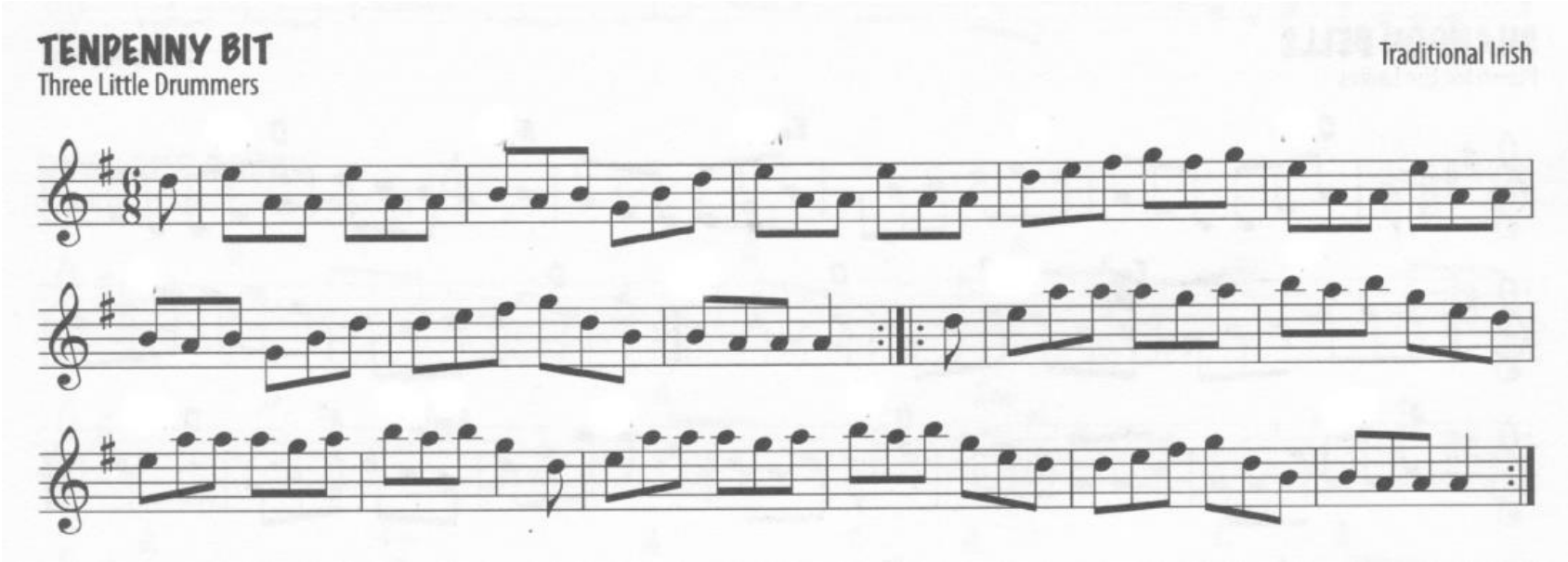
Bright

Ad-ieu to gay stroll-ing in race-course or park, To
romp-ing or roll-ing on lawns af-ter dark, While mus-ic as
cend-ed and pleas-ures were blend-ed, The lov-ers ex-tend-ed could
lis-ten or lark.

Example 2


3
DAVY, DAVY KNICK-KNACK
(Country dance / hornpipe / reel / Morris tune)
Traditional English

Example 3



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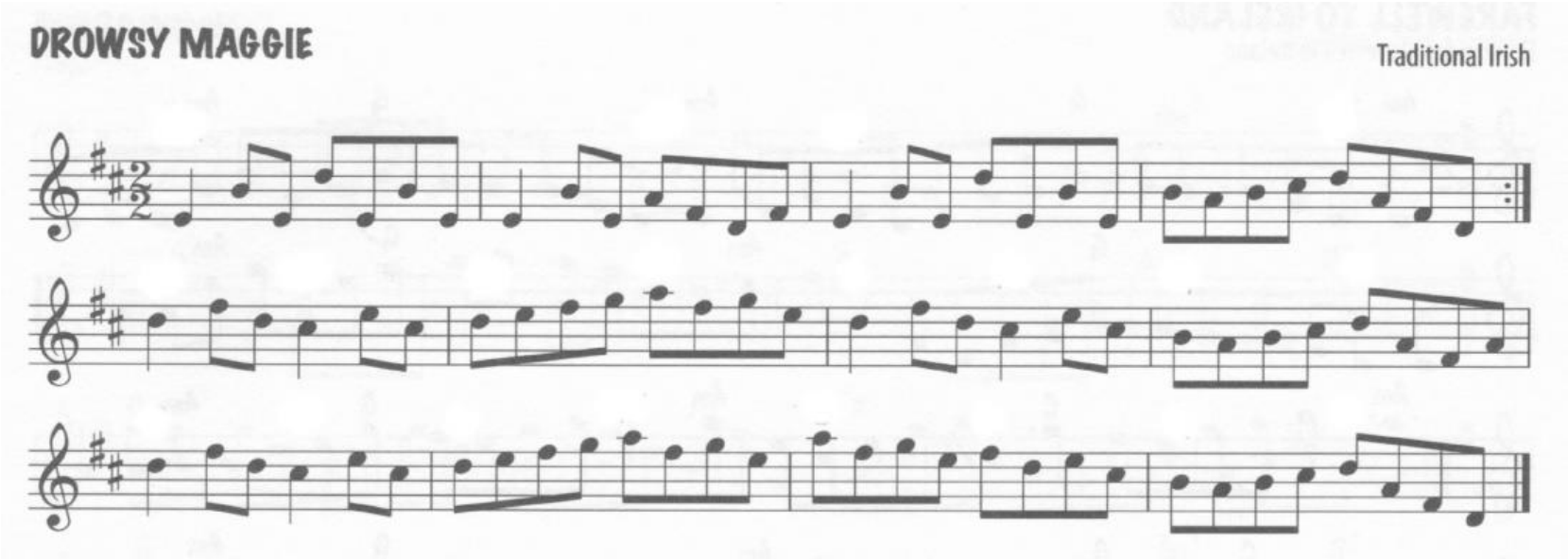

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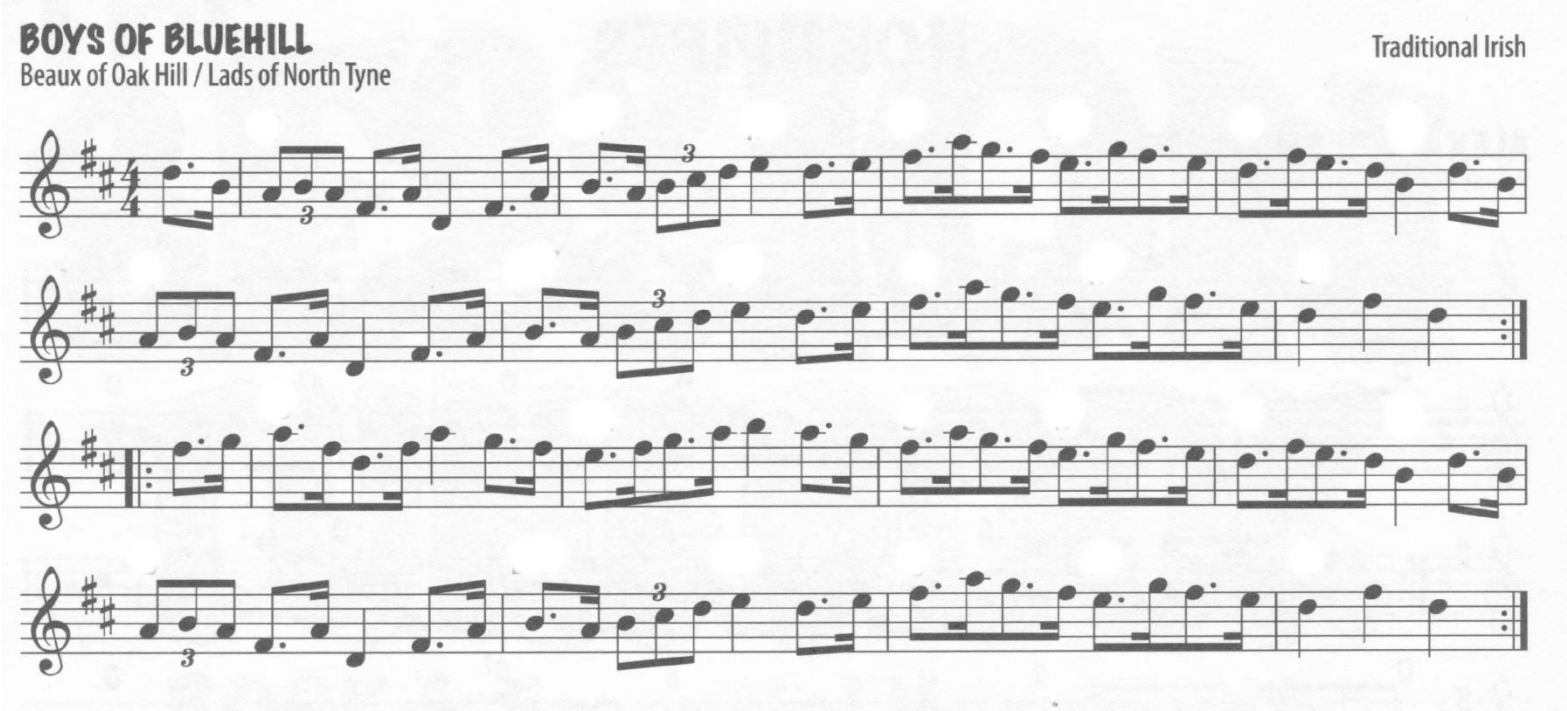
BOYS OF BLUEHILL
Beaux of Oak Hill / Lads of North Tyne
Traditional Irish

STEP 3

Fill in the Basic chords

The Basic chords

Key / mode	Home chord	‘Away’ chord	Half ‘away’ chord
G major	G	D7	C
D major	D	A7	G
E Dorian	Em	D	(Bm)
A Dorian	Am	G	(Em)

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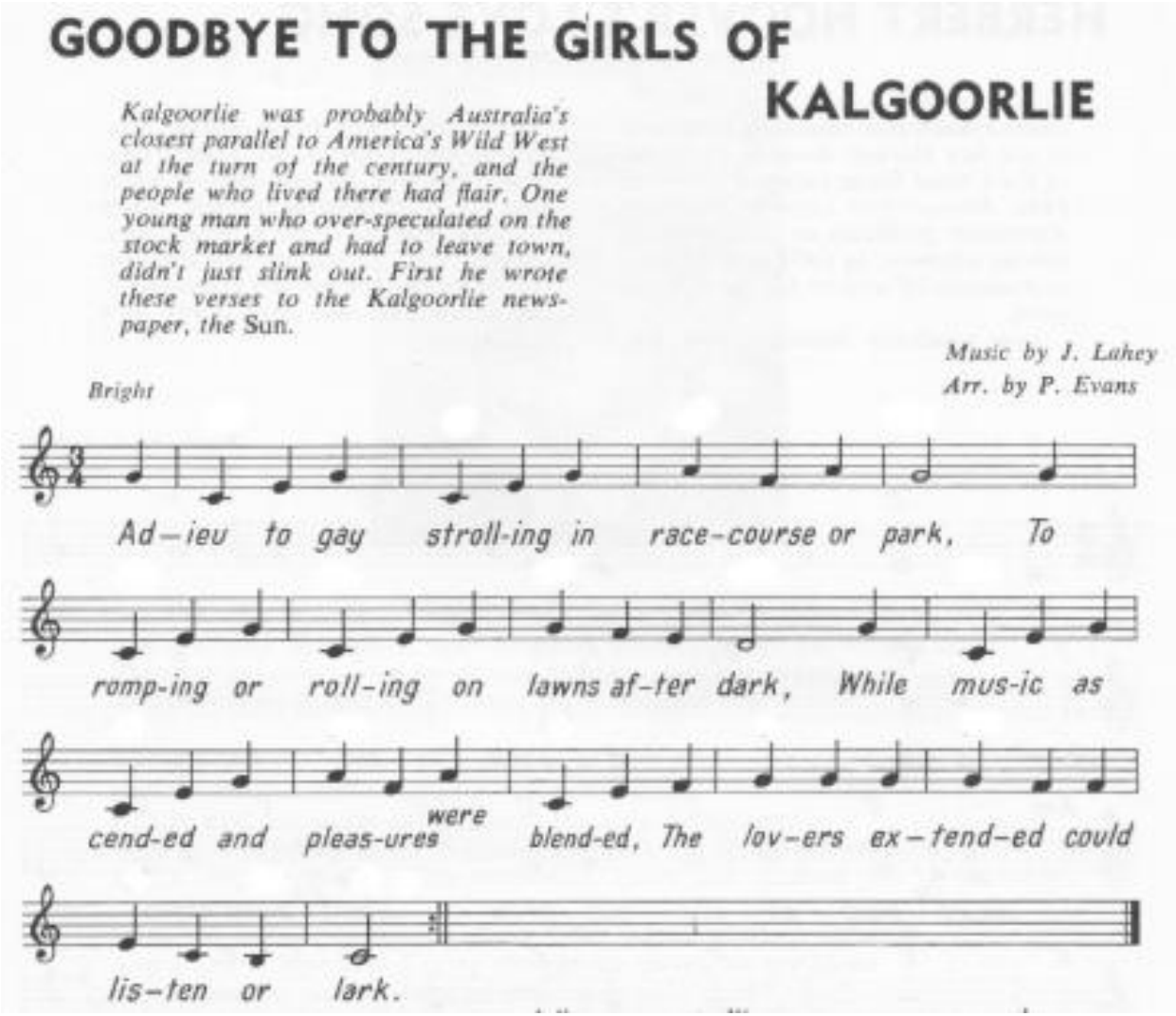

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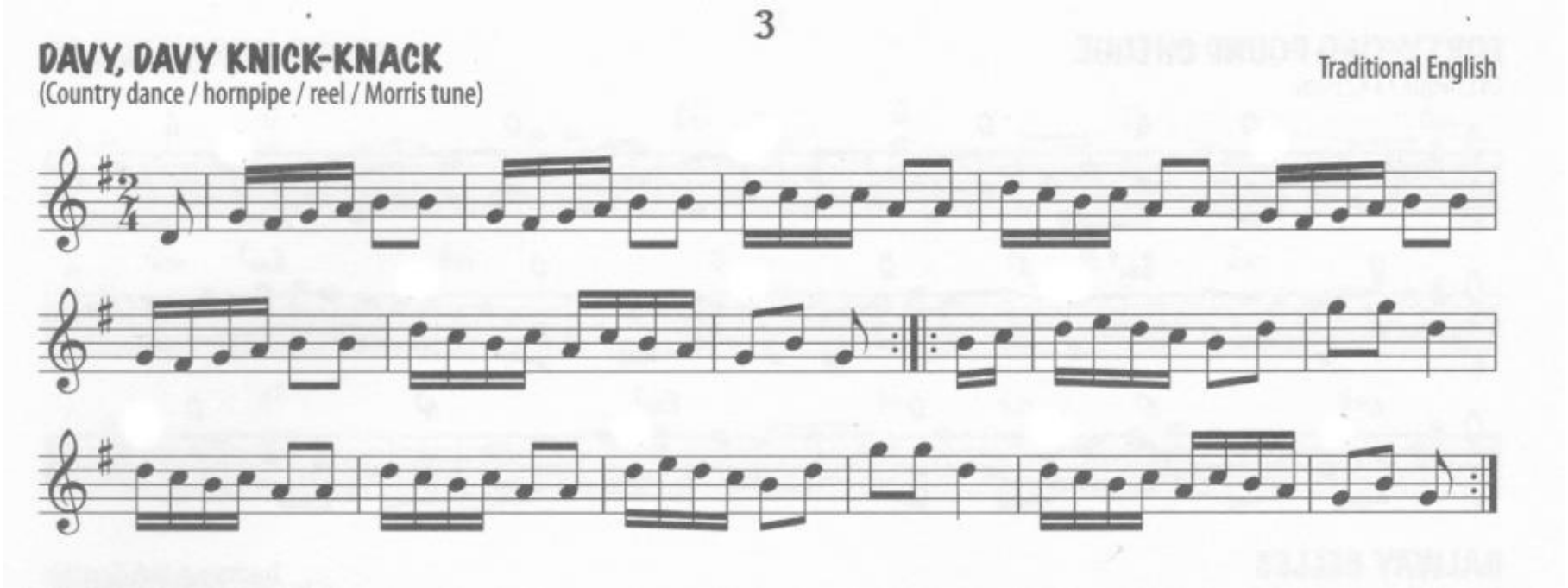
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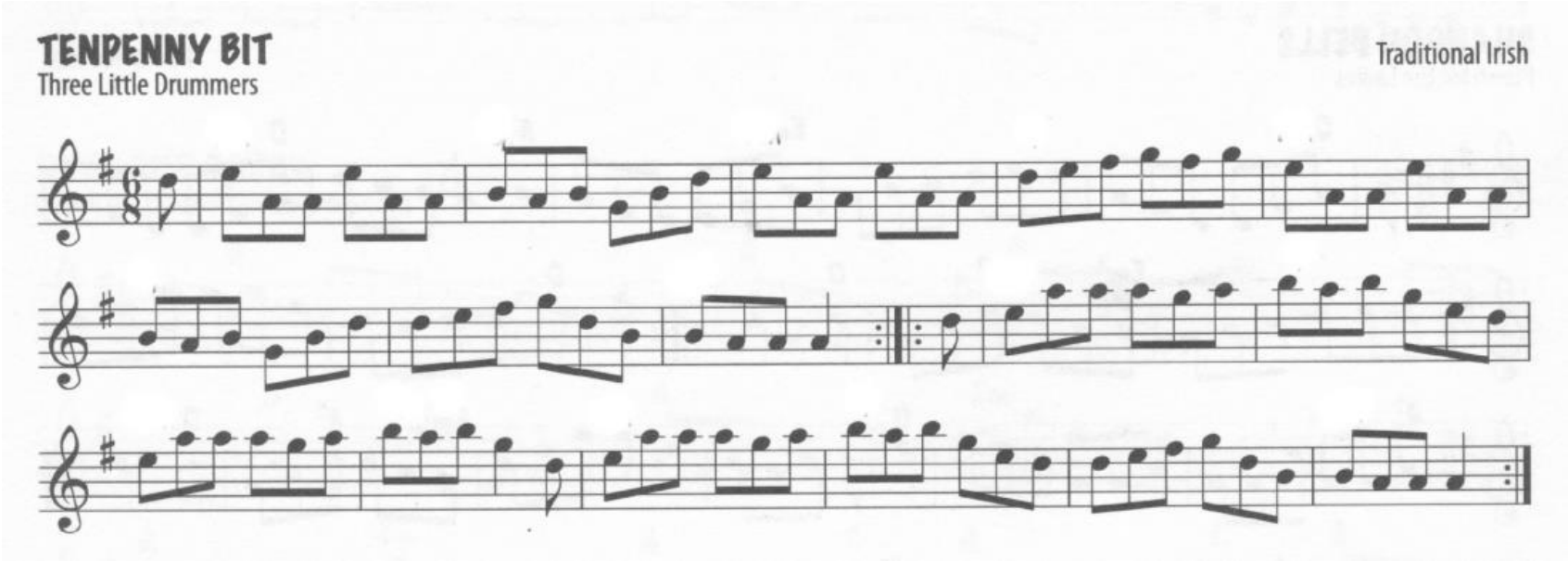

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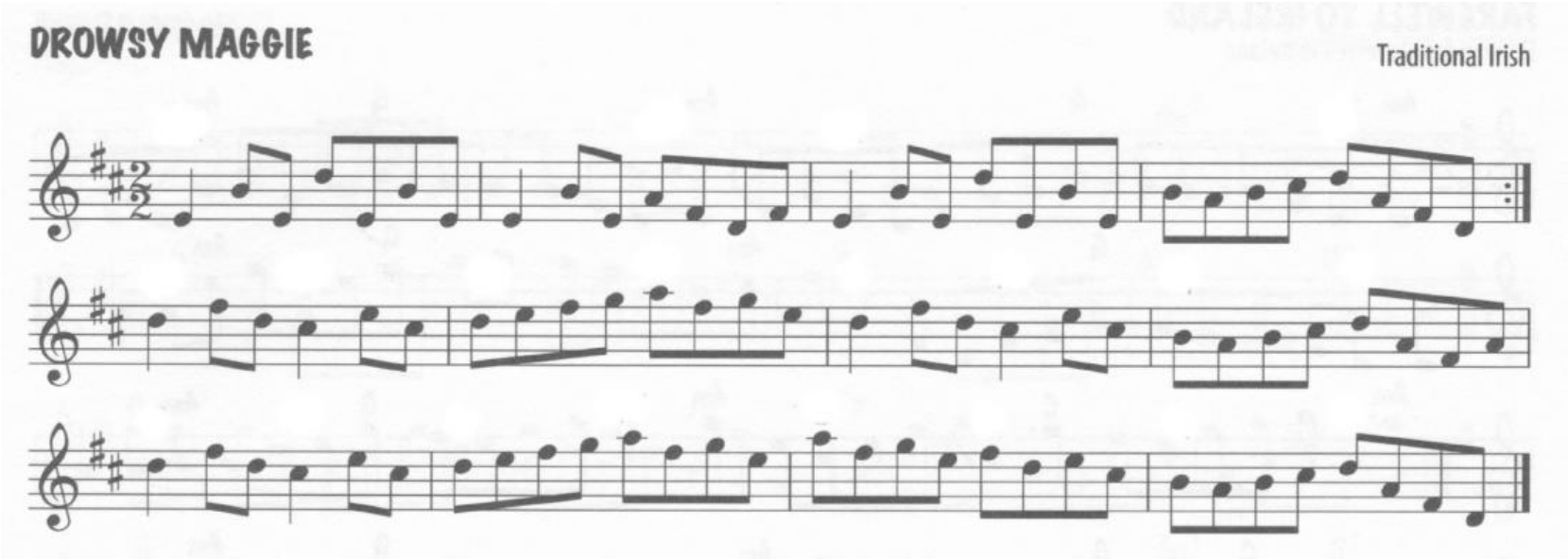
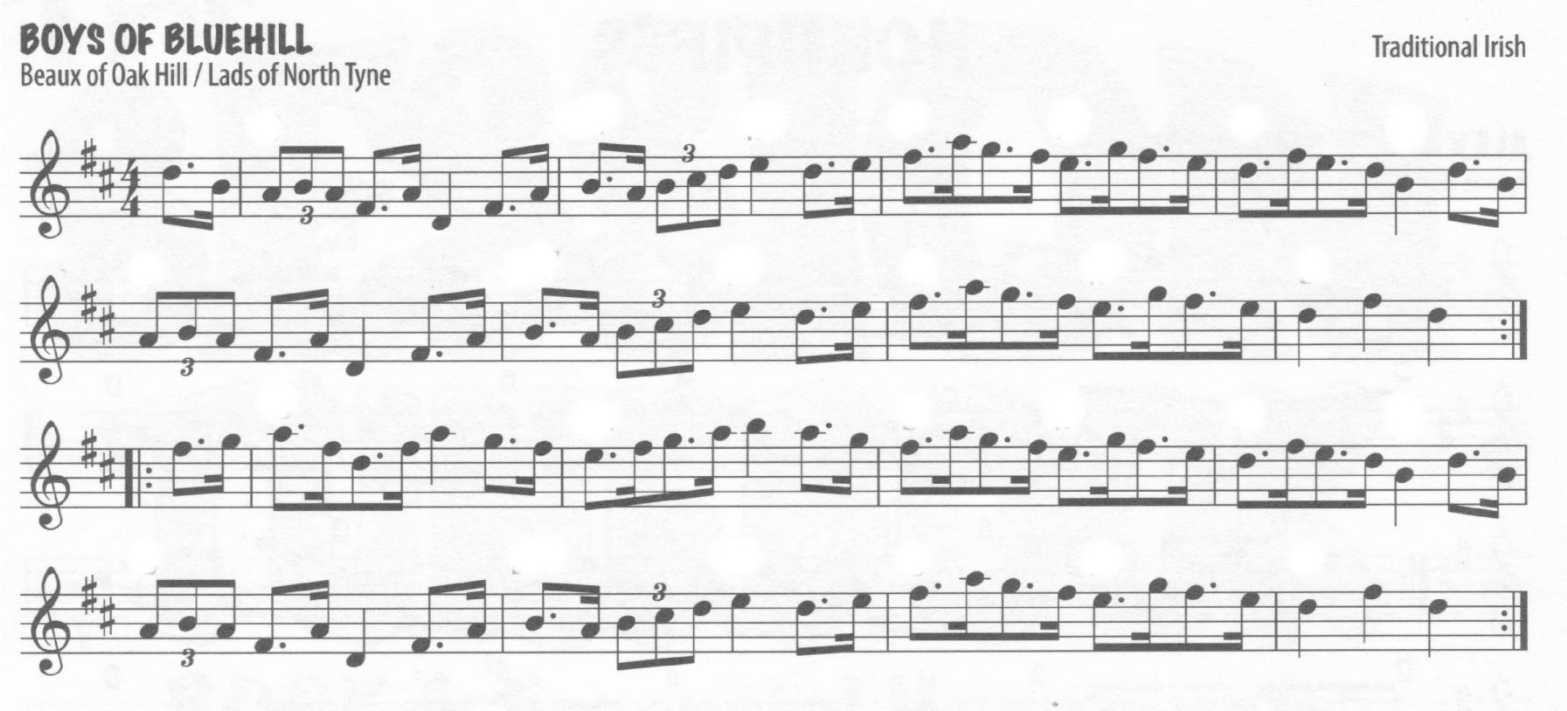


Example 5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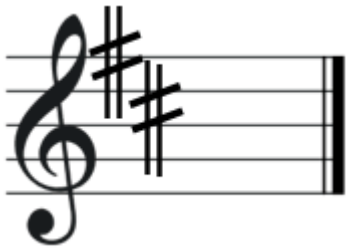
Refinements

- Sometimes the Basic chords aren't enough!
  - See 'All the chords in major' in the Appendix
  - If none of these work, try the 'away' chord of the normal 'away' chord
- Sometimes tunes / songs change key in the middle!
  - Celtic tunes often switch to Dorian in the second (B) part
  - Some tunes may switch to a different mode in the middle of one part – for example, Staten Island (BBS 48) goes to D Mixolydian in the middle of Part B
- Maybe you have the wrong mode?
  - If Em or Am works at the start but the Basic chords for Dorian don't work, try minor (see Appendix)

APPENDIX

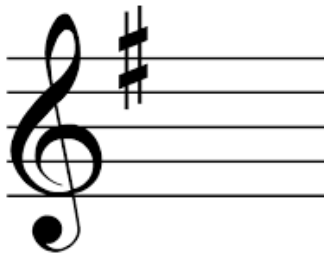
More information than you want

Try for D



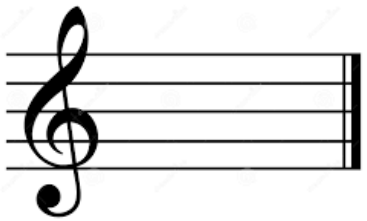
Try this chord	If it sounds right, key and mode could be
D	D major
Em	E Dorian
Bm	B minor

Try for G



Try this chord	If it sounds right, key and mode could be
G	G major
Am	A Dorian
Em	E minor

Try for C



Try this chord	If it sounds right, key and mode could be
C	C major
Dm	D Dorian
Am	A minor

Keys and modes for Celtic tunes

‘Major’

- D
- G
- A

Not ‘major’

- E Dorian
- A Dorian
- A Mixolydian
- D Mixolydian

Mixolydian (less common)

- The King of Laoise (BBS 69) — D Mixolydian
- Banish Misfortune (BBS 27) — D Mixolydian
- Another Jig Will Do (BBS 33) — D Mixolydian

- Old Joe Clark — G or A Mixolydian
- Athol Highlanders part 4 — A Mixolydian

Basic chords for Mixolydian

Key / mode	Home chord	‘Away’ chord	Half ‘away’ chord
G Mixolydian	G	F	C
D Mixolydian	D	C	G
A Mixolydian	A	G	D

Basic chords for minor keys

Key / mode	Home chord	‘Away’ chord	Half ‘away’ chord
A minor	Am	E7	Dm
E minor	Em	B7	Am
D minor	Dm	A7	Gm

All the chords in major!

Scale degree	E major	A major	D major	G major	C major	F major	Bb major	Eb major
I	E	A	D	G	C	F	Bb	Eb
ii	F#m	Bm	Em	Am	Dm	Gm	Cm	Fm
iii	G#m	C#m	F#m	Bm	Em	Am	Dm	Gm
IV	A	D	G	C	F	Bb	Eb	Ab
V	B7	E7	A7	D7	G7	C7	F7	Bb7
vi	C#m	F#m	Bm	Em	Am	Dm	Gm	Cm
vii	D#dim	G#dim	C#dim	F#dim	Bdim	Edim	Adim	Ddim

Other modes

‘Major-ish’

- Ionian (major)
- Mixolydian
- Lydian

‘Minor-ish’

- Dorian
- Aeolian (Natural minor)
- Phrygian
- Locrian