

## **Carolan and the Concerto Connection**

An Examination of Baroque-era Classical Compositional Techniques in the Works of Turlough O'Carolan, using *Carolan's Concerto* as a Case Study

Sean Perry

MU-6002 Graduate Seminar

12 April 2026

## Abstract

Turlough O'Carolan, a legendary blind Irish harpist-composer from Baroque-era Ireland, thrived as an itinerant harper during the era that saw the fall of Irish harping traditions. Although harping had historically been deeply valued by the Irish aristocracy, the English occupation of Ireland during the Baroque era led to a decline in the practice's popularity. While many itinerant harpers struggled to find patronage, O'Carolan found unparalleled success through adapting his compositional style to incorporate Baroque Classical elements. However, though O'Carolan has been the subject of extensive biographical research, there's a dearth of theoretical analysis regarding his compositions. No studies have yet proven his music's connection to Baroque Classical compositional techniques. This paper examines the evidence of Classical influences in Turlough O'Carolan's compositions, using *Carolan's Concerto* as a case study.

While the primary goal of this project is to demonstrate O'Carolan's Baroque influences, I also intend for my work to aid in bringing to light the cultural biases held by the Classical community. The vast majority of Classical musicians are unfamiliar with Turlough O'Carolan's name and works, because O'Carolan's compositions have not been compared to those of his contemporaries. I find it objectionable that his music has been so widely disregarded in the Classical sphere, especially considering that many of O'Carolan's works are early examples of cross-genre composition.

## Introduction & Rationale for Research

Above all else, I'm an Irish fiddler. I have extensive Classical training, including two Bachelors degrees in music; yet despite this, I wage a constant internal battle, caught between the worlds of these two genres that so rarely intersect. As an undergraduate, that served as a point of contention between me and my peers: Although my fiddle training had instilled in me a wonderful ear, an advanced aptitude for improvisation, and well-developed memorization skills, I lacked depth of knowledge about Classical violin techniques and repertoire. All too often during my undergraduate studies, as the one and only music student at my university with a folk music background, I found myself feeling like an outsider.

I made efforts to engage my peers in Irish traditional music (Irish trad), but nothing ever caught on. I didn't say it aloud, but that silently ate away at my soul. It was painfully obvious that my past musical training situated me as a foreigner, and that, despite my best efforts, imposter syndrome would never let me feel that I belonged in the Classical world. That sentiment led me to add a very personal encore to the end of my Junior Violin Recital—a work that bridged the divide between the two worlds I was caught between: *Carolán's Concerto*, one of the earliest known examples of Irish-Classical genre fusion.

Like me, Turlough O'Carolan was caught between the worlds of Irish trad and Classical. Despite being generations apart, this has led me to develop a long-term interest in the man. However, though O'Carolan has been the subject of extensive biographical research, there's a dearth of scholarly analysis regarding his compositions. Literature purports that he favored the compositions of Arcangelo Corelli and Antonio Vivaldi, and that he attempted to integrate Classical music theory into his compositions; yet no literature exists to prove those claims.

Hence the goal of this paper: To prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the evidence of Classical influences in Turlough O'Carolan's compositions, using *Carolan's Concerto* as a case study.

## Methodology

As aforementioned, the point of my paper is to address hearsay: Edward Bunting, along with Colette Moloney, Aloys Fleishmann, Donal O'Sullivan, and other researchers, note that O'Carolan's music utilized Baroque Classical concepts; yet no extant academic research supports this claim. To address this issue, my methodology required ample research in three primary categories: Biographical, Compositional, and Analytical.

I began by gathering biographical sources specific to Turlough O'Carolan. My research eventually led me to a wide range of books about O'Carolan himself, as well as published volumes of transcriptions of his work dating back to 1724. As I continued my research, I came across biographical inconsistencies about O'Carolan's life, and encountered difficulties accessing incomplete and archived documents. I was unfortunately unable to access all of the information that I had originally hoped to find, and thus plan to continue my research in the future.

After securing biographical source materials, the next step in my research process was to learn about the standard stylistic compositional practices of both Irish traditional harping music and Baroque Classical music. While I have ample personal experience with learning, performing, and teaching Irish dance music, I was largely unfamiliar with Irish harping practices prior to my research. The majority of my research on Irish harping tradition was informed by the work of Edward Bunting, Sean Williams, and Siobhán Ní Chonaráin. Much of my research on Baroque compositional practices was drawn from examination of Baroque-era Treatises.

The analytical portion of my research was arguably the most time-consuming: Not only did I source various transcriptions of O'Carolan's work, but I reproduced audio of each viable transcription through painstaking digital note-by-note transcription. After comparing all viable transcriptions, I settled on the transcription found in S. A. & P. Thompson's *Hibernian Muse*, and proceeded to analyze elements such as its ornamentation, structure, and form.

## Historical Context

### Itinerant Harping in Ireland

Through seventeenth-century Ireland, the harp was considered by the gentry to be the principal musical instrument (O'Sullivan 1958, 15), and "many of the Irish harpers were blind, for music was one of the few professions in which sight was not essential" (Yeats 1984, 2). The majority of the harpers were born into nobility and began their harp training as a child. Once old enough to begin their careers as itinerant musicians, "the harpers rode on horseback from place to place" (O'Sullivan 1958, 15), often accompanied by a guide.

Itinerant harpers made their living by performing music at the *Big Houses* of nobles in exchange for lodging. "Bardic schools honoured not only the Irish ancient lineage but also the nobles of English origin" (O'Sullivan 1958, 4), meaning that itinerant harpers performed and composed music not only for Irish patrons, but also for English. "The descendents of the Protestant settlers... seem to have been just as devoted to the Irish music of the harp as were the old Gaelic families" (O'Sullivan 1958, 15).

However, by the late seventeenth century, itinerant harping traditions had begun to die out due to escalating restrictions imposed under British rule. Irish music was directly attacked under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), who "is alleged to have issued a proclamation

to ‘Hang all harpers where found and burn the instruments’” (Williams 2020, 58). Although the Irish continued to celebrate their culture and music, “in both instrumental and sung form in spite of the strictures placed against the people” (Williams 2020, 60), the harpers bold enough to continue their trade “found it more and more difficult to secure patrons, and turned elsewhere for their livelihood” (Yoakam 2009, 25).

### The Life of Turlough O’Carolan

Perhaps the most legendary of the itinerant harpers was Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738), “one of the last itinerant bards” (Yoakam 2009, 23) of Ireland. O’Carolan’s career as an itinerant harpist spanned “one of the most interesting, as well as one of the most tragic, epochs of Irish history” (O’Sullivan 1958, 3), and his career was markedly different from those of his contemporaries. Unlike most other itinerant harpers, O’Carolan was not born into nobility—nor did he begin his harp training as a child.

Hailing from the humble village of Nobber in county Westmeath (Thompson 1787, 3), O’Carolan was the son of “a small subsistence farmer” (Yeats 1984, 2). During his adolescence, “the smallpox... deprived him of his eyesight” (Thompson 1787, 3), and, left with few viable career paths, “his education as a harper was taken in hand by his benefactress, Mrs. McDermott Roe” (Fleischmann 1998, XXVI), his father’s employer. In 1691, O’Carolan began his itinerant travels, finding tenure at the houses of the old Irish and Anglo-Saxon nobility (Fleischmann 1998, XXVI).

Perhaps due to starting his musical studies quite late, he was not a particularly skilled harpist and “never achieved distinction as a player” (Moloney 2000, 120). Despite his lacking performance skills, O’Carolan “was unquestionably a great genius, both as composer and a poet” (Bunting 1840, 72-3). He was innovative, and “was particularly fascinated with European

classical music of the period” (Moloney 2000, 120). This fascination led him to unprecedented success in an era in which Irish itinerant harping traditions were dying: O’Carolan became the first to depart from a purely Irish compositional style through his adoption of Baroque Classical techniques (Bunting 1840, 71). While many itinerant harpers struggled to find patronage, O’Carolan’s innovation and adaptability granted him unparalleled success.

Sadly, O’Carolan was a heavy drinker, and his alcohol dependency very likely contributed to his early death (Thompson 1787, 5). O’Carolan died at the age of 68 “in March 1738, at the house of Mrs. McDermott, of Alderford,” leaving behind “six daughters and a son” (Thompson 1787, 5). “He lies buried at Kilronan, in the county of Westmeath” (Bunting 1840, 72). To this day, he remains one of the most prolific composers in Irish history (Moloney 2000, 120), and is remembered both through music and folklore.

## Context on Irish Music

### Traditional Irish Musical Forms

Irish music tends to follow specific, repetitive forms; especially is true of dance music, which most often is structured in binary ||:AABB:|| form. This particular binary form was not unique to Ireland, and could be found in numerous other Baroque musical forms such as the allemande, bourrée, courante, gavotte, sarabande, gigue, and minuet. However, the same cannot be said of the structure of Irish non-dance music, such as slow airs.

Bunting believed that the vast majority of Irish airs follow an ABCA<sup>1</sup> form: The first phrase soft and subdued, using “the common cadence” (Bunting 1840, 16) at its end; the second more energetic and in a higher register; the third returning to the tonic; and the fourth a variation upon the first (see *Table 2*). However, Bunting approached Irish traditions “from a scholarly

antiquarian art music background” (Chonaráin 2008, ¶5), and his perceptions of Irish folk song were therefore somewhat artificial in nature.

## Irish Harping Traditions

Irish harping traditions extend back to antiquity, and its origins are uncertain. “The harp was one of the most favored instruments of the bards” (Williams 2020, 55), who fulfilled important societal roles such as “genealogist, accountant, geographer, political advisor, [and] musician” (Williams 2020, 53). Harping repertoire categorization has historically been oversimplified, falling into three primary categories: *Goltraí* for laments, *geantraí* for dance, and *suantraí* for lullabies (Chonaráin 2008, ¶5). However, the categories of Irish harping songs are realistically much more complex.

As outlined by Edward Bunting in the introduction to his 1840 *A Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, Irish harping ornamentation and musical terminology “have no prototypes or parallels whatever in the continental practice or vocabulary” (Bunting 1840, 19). This is because Irish harping traditions predate the Italian and German schools of Western musical theory. As such, the Irish formulated their own musical terminology and concepts (Bunting 1809, 7). Irish harps were tuned to the key of *leath glass*—also referred to as *uan fuigheall*—known in English as the key of G major (Bunting 1840, 28). Irish harpers also frequently reinforced their melodies “with lower strings plucked on the first and fifth degrees of the scale, decorated with... melodic ornaments” (Williams 2020, 56).

# O'Carolan's Compositions

## Historic Publications

Very little of O'Carolan's music was published during his lifetime: The bards of Ireland upheld a purely oral tradition, and "the greater number of their songs and poems were never put on paper" (Hyde 1985, 21). Additionally, Classically-trained musicians often looked down upon folk music, viewing it and its practitioners as less-than. This prejudice even pervaded the work of Irish scholars, such as Dr. Donal O'Sullivan, who wrote in his book *Life, Times, and Music of an Irish Harper* that "Carolan's blindness and his lack of formal music education prevent us from regarding him as a composer in the accepted sense of the term" (O'Sullivan 1958, 145).

Given the circumstances, only one known book of O'Carolan's music was published within his lifetime: *A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes proper for the Violin, German Flute or Hautboy*, published in 1724 by John and William Neal. All other collections of O'Carolan's music were published posthumously. In 1747, nine years after O'Carolan's death, his son published a "a small Volume" (Bunting 1796, iv) of his works. This compilation, titled *Compositions of Carolan*<sup>1</sup>, was issued under the patronage of Dr. Patrick Delaney, D.D., "Professor of Oratory in Dublin University" (Hennessey 2026),

By the time that scholars took note and began to record the Irish harping repertoire, "it was too late, and the greater portions of O'Carolan's songs... were lost and gone from the people's recollection" (Hyde 1985, 21). Many publications of the Irish harping repertoire from the latter half of the 18th century have not survived to the present day, or are unavailable to the public. In my research, I found evidence of two such publications: Edmund Lee's 1778 *A*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Compositions of Carolan* has only partially survived, and is now known as the *Carolan-Delaney Fragment*. It contains 14 undated and untitled pages (Chadwick 2004) and is listed in the National Library of Ireland's (NLI) database under call number LO 1635.

*Collection of Irish Airs by the celebrated composers Carolan and Conolan*, and an unnamed 1780 publication attributed to John Lee.

One of the key figures in preserving the Irish harping repertoire was Edward Bunting. He published three collections of ancient Irish music (1796, 1809, and 1840), of which both the 1796 and 1809 collections feature settings of *Carolan's Concerto*. The 1796 setting was “obtained by Bunting from the harp-playing of Arthur O'Neill,” (O'Sullivan 1930, 21). However, a large portion of Bunting's draft manuscripts have been lost, including all manuscripts of *Carolan's Concerto*.

### Modern-Day Transcriptions

While there are plenty of modern transcriptions of O'Carolan's work, I did not wish to center my analytical research around modern transcriptions precisely because of Irish music's oral tradition: “Tunes which are handed down orally are liable to continuous change in a multitude of different ways” (Fleischmann 1998, XXIV). Over time, small changes accumulate due to minute changes, substitutions, and memory lapses; thus, I cannot trust that modern settings of O'Carolan's work remain entirely faithful to their origins. For example, while modern settings of *Carolan's Concerto* retain the same overarching melody, they don't always follow the same structure or include the same components as in earlier settings (see *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*).



Figure 1: *Carolan's Concerto* as provided by TheSession.Org, one of the most popular tune archive websites among Irish trad musicians. To hear the audio of this transcription, please visit the following link:

■ [Carolan's Concerto TheSession.mp3](#)

## O'Carolan's Influences

O'Carolan's compositions were triply influenced by the styles of traditional Irish music, the Irish harping repertoire, and Western Baroque Classical music. Much of O'Carolan's music is modal and heptatonic, often featuring gapped scales, tuneful melodies, and clear phrasing

(Moloney 2000, 120). His tunes “influenced by traditional music [were] usually in repetitive forms” and utilized “a relatively small [melodic] range,” whereas his compositions “influenced by either the harpers or classical music... [were] usually through-composed and [had] a larger range” (Moloney 2000, 120).

### O’Carolan’s Exposure to Baroque Classical Music

Although it is not known when O’Carolan’s first exposure to Classical music took place, O’Carolan certainly encountered Classical music during his travels—most notably, in Dublin. During O’Carolan’s life, Dublin was a remarkably large city housing sixty- to- seventy thousand people. It had largely been overtaken by the Protestant Anglo-Saxon descendants, and had become a unique Anglo-Irish city. There, Carolan found great enough support that “one of [Dublin’s] publishing houses issued a volume of his compositions” (O’Sullivan 1958, 17). This publication was none other than John and William Neal’s *Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes*, the only known publication of O’Carolan’s works issued during his lifetime.

Famed Italian violinist Francesco Geminiani “paid long visits to Dublin, and in 1733 settled down in a splendid house with concert-room attached” (O’Sullivan 1958, 144), where he continuously resided until 1740. It was here that O’Carolan met Geminiani: “It is reported, that when Geminiani was at Dublin, he had the curiosity to try the genius of Carolyn, by procuring a piece of Italian Music to be played to him, excellent in itself, but purposely vitiated in certain places” (Thompson 1787, 5). O’Carolan, unaware of the challenge, purportedly noted that “here and there it limps and stumbles,” (O’Sullivan 1958, 146) and then, in a testament to his compositional prowess, rectified the errors.

# Carolan's Concerto

## Myths Behind the Music

As legend goes, in the early eighteenth century, noble Lord Mayo concurrently hosted O'Carolan and an unnamed "celebrated Italian performer" (O'Sullivan 1958, 147) at his estate. The Italian musician "played Vivaldi's fifth Concerto on his violin. This finished, Carolan, with wonderful exactness, repeated it on his harp, though he had never before heard it; and, to increase the surprise of his auditory, added another concerto of his own, extemporary, in which he copied the taste of the Italian composer, in a manner quite astonishing" (Thompson 1787, 5). Presumably, this is the work now known as *Carolan's Concerto* (O'Sullivan 1958, 137).

However, despite its name, some scholars believe that *Carolan's Concerto* may not have been one of O'Carolan's own compositions. O'Carolan was both a composer and an arranger, and it is "difficult to explain how so many of his compositions have parallels in earlier sources" (Fleischmann 1998, XXVII). Fleischmann specifically points to a work known as *The Ridotta*, composed circa 1775. This tune, a dance tune, does share some similarities: It is set in the same key and time signature as *Carolan's Concerto*, and features both a near-identical opening motif and a similar descending sixths sequence in the B part; however, despite those similarities, the works are distinctly different (see *Figure 2*). Not only is *The Ridotta* half the length of *Carolan's Concerto*, but its structure is fundamentally different. It features a binary AA||BB|| form and its opening motif is reused throughout the work, whereas *Carolan's Concerto* is through-composed and does not reuse the melodic material from its opening motif.



Figure 2: *The Ridotta*, as it appears on page 359 of Aloys Fleischmann’s *Sources of Irish Traditional Music*, Volume I. To hear the audio of this transcription, please visit the following link:

■ [The Ridotta, Fleischmann.mp3](#)

Fleischmann also reasons that *Carolan’s Concerto* appeared in print too soon after O’Carolan’s death, and in a region too far away, for it to have been one of O’Carolan’s genuine compositions. However, O’Carolan did have one known volume of his work published in his lifetime; it is arguably possible that more of his music was published during the early eighteenth century than we are modernly aware of. Additionally, in early publications of *Carolan’s Concerto*, such as in John Lee’s 1780 collection, the work is titled *Mrs. Poer*. O’Carolan primarily wrote compositions for his patrons and their relatives (Yeats 1984, 3), and he is credited with composing a separate tune titled *David Power*. This, combined with the knowledge that “the tunes with ‘Carolan’ in the title were probably composed for patrons” (O’Sullivan 1958, 137) argues to reason that *Carolan’s Concerto* was composed for Mrs. Elizabeth Power, wife of David Power from County Galway (O’Sullivan 1958, 148).

### Carolan’s Concerto in *The Hibernian Muse*

The earliest verifiable transcription of *Carolan’s Concerto* that I was able to access was included within a 1787 publication from the Thompson publishing house. The Thompsons, an English family of well-respected eighteenth- and- nineteenth century music printers and

publishers, had a shop located “at the North West corner of St. Paul’s Church Yard” (Kidson 1900, 125). The shop was established by Peter Thompson in the early 1750s, and after his death in the late 1750s, his widow Anne and sons Samuel and Charles continued the business (Kidson 1900, 126). In 1780, Anne’s grandson Peter (named after Peter senior) was added to the firm; later that decade between 1786-1787, Samuel, Anne, and Peter (S. A. & P.) Thompson published *The Hibernian Muse*<sup>2</sup>. It is unknown who transcribed or compiled the various works in this publication; however, Carolan’s Concerto appears on page 50 under its alternate title, Mrs. Power (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: A digitized microfilm scan of Carolan’s Concerto from S., A., & P. Thompson’s *The Hibernian Muse*. To hear the audio of this transcription, please visit the following link:

■ Carolan's Concerto Thompson 1787.mp3

---

<sup>2</sup> Full title: *The Hibernian Muse: A collection of Irish airs, including the most famous Compositions of Corolan.*

## Structural Analysis (Using *The Hibernian Muse*)

As found in *The Hibernian Muse*, Carolan's Concerto is notated in cut time, following a through-composed form (Moloney 2000, 122) and consisting of a total of thirty-two measures. While Moloney argues that the work consists of eight equal-length four-measure phrases, I disagree. Using her logic, the work's overarching structure lacks musical sense and direction, with phrase six ending on the Supertonic, leaving a feeling of incompleteness. I argue, rather, that the work consists of five four-measure phrases followed by two truncated three-measure phrases and one extended six-measure phrase that prolongs the cadence at the Dominant before arriving at the Tonic (see *Table 1*).

Phrase Structure in Carolan's Concerto			
Phrase	Length	Beginning Modality	Ending Modality
1	4 measures	Tonic	Dominant
2	4 measures	Tonic	Dominant
3	4 measures	Submediant	Dominant
4	4 measures	Tonic	Tonic
5	4 measures	Dominant	Dominant
6	3 measures	Tonic	Dominant
7	3 measures	Tonic	Dominant
8	6 measures	Tonic	Tonic

Table 1: My personal analysis of the phrase structure of *Carolan's Concerto*.

The phrases of *Carolan's Concerto* make far more melodic sense when divided in this fashion: The seventh phrase acts as an echo of the sixth, slightly varying its melodic content

before leading into the final phrase of the work. This structure stands in stark contrast to the air form of ABCA<sup>1</sup>, as outlined by Bunting (see *Table 2*).

Phrase Structure in Standard Irish Airs			
Phrase	Length	Beginning Modality	Ending Modality
1	Phrase length equal among all phrases, consistently either 4 or 8 measures	Tonic	Tonic
2		Tonic	Dominant
3		Tonic	Submediant
4		Tonic	Tonic

Table 2: Phrase structure of Irish airs as outlined by Edward Bunting in his 1840 *A Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*.

## Ornamental Analysis

Bunting noted in the introduction to his 1840 *Collection* (pages 24-28) that most traditional Irish airs feature specific melodic and ornamental patterns. *Carolan's Concerto* shows a marked lack of these patterns, featuring only six throughout the entire work: Three inferred uses of the *barlluith* (metered shake/trill), four uses of the *leath leaguidh* (half- or whole-step grace note), four uses of the *bulsgan* (left-hand melodic stacked thirds), two uses of the *glass* (left-hand melodic stacked fourths), seven uses of the ascending and descending *sruith-beg* (little stream; half-scalar run), and one single use of a partial ascending *sruith-mor* (great stream; multi-octave scalar run). This sparse use of ornamentation is notably unusual within the Irish traditional repertoire.

However, there appears to be overlap between some of the Irish ornamentation as described by Bunting and the Italian ornamentation as defined by Francesco Geminiani in his *A Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick* (1749). Geminiani outlines “Ornaments of Expression, which are fourteen in Number” (Geminiani 1749, 2), including a *plain Shake* and an

*Anticipation*. It appears that the *plain Shake*, explained as “proper for quick Movements” (Geminiani 1749, 2) and notated similarly to a modern trill, may be similar in concept to the Irish *barlluith*. This particular ornament is featured on the very first note of the Carolan’s Concerto (see *Figure 4*), and is used occasionally throughout the work. Further, it appears that the *Anticipation*, explained as “invented... to vary the Melody, without altering its Intention” (Geminiani 1749, 3) and notated much like the modern grace note, may be the same type of ornament as the *leath leaguidh*. Such *Anticipations* appear thrice within Carolan’s Concerto, in measures twelve, fifteen, and nineteen (see *Figure 5*).



Figure 4: Measure one of Carolan’s Concerto, featuring two notated examples of the *plain Shake* ornament



Figure 5: Measures twelve, fifteen, and nineteen of Carolan’s Concerto, featuring notated examples of the *Anticipation* ornament

## Harmonic Analysis

As stated by Giorgio Antoniotto in his *A Treatise on the Composition of Musick*, “the concord founds,” modernly termed consonant intervals, “are the thirds, perfect fifths, and octaves” (Antoniotto 1760, 47). This concept is embraced from the outset of Carolan’s Concerto (see *Figure 6*): The first featured interval is an octave (G5 and G3), followed by that of a perfect fifth (G5 and D3), then another octave (G5 and G2).

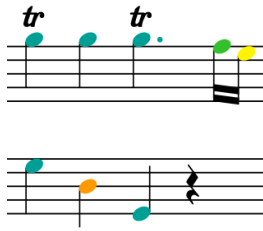


Figure 6: The first measure of Carolan's Concerto, color coded to aid in intervallic identification

Each of the next six measures begins with a consonant third or sixth (an inverted third), often spanning multiple octaves (see *Figure 7*). These intervals include F3 with D5 (measure two), F3 with A4 (measure three); C4 with E5 (measure four); B3 with G5 (measure five); F3 with A5 (measure six); and E3 with C6 (measure seven). Omitting ornamentation, measures nine, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen also begin on consonant thirds. All other measures in the A section of the work begin on perfect octaves.



Figure 7: Measures two through seven of Carolan's Concerto, with downbeats color coded to aid in intervallic identification

Baroque compositional practices frequently used contrary motion to drive melody and harmony (Antoniotto 1760, 47). This can be seen in *Carolan's Concerto* by observing the melody and bass of measure seven (see *Figure 8*): When the melody jumps upwards from C6 to E6, the bass falls from E3 to C3. When the melody falls from E6 to B5, the bass jumps up from C3 to G3. As the melody continues to climb from B5 to D6, the bassline drops an octave from G3 to G2. Each motion of the melody is contrastingly paired with opposite motion in the bass.



Figure 8: Measure seven of Carolan's Concerto, color coded to aid in note identification

## Summary & Conclusion

Due to lacking historical records from the Baroque era, it's impossible to know exactly how O'Carolan composed or performed his music. However, theoretical analysis of *Carolan's Concerto* provides evidence that its inspiration originated not only from Irish tradition, but also from compositional techniques used in Baroque Classical music. Its structure, underlying harmonies, and ornamental choices all provide evidence of its deep connections to the music theory that governed Classical European music during the Baroque era. As *Carolan's Concerto* is only one of O'Carolan's great many harp tunes, I plan to continue my analytical research in the future to further strengthen the evidence that O'Carolan's compositions connect the realms of Irish tradition and Classical innovation.

*Special thanks to Eilidh Nicole and Debra Keller-Perry.*

*Le mo ghrá go léir, a Sean.*

## Works Cited

1. Antoniotto, Giorgio. 1760. *L'Arte Armonica -or- A Treatise on the Composition of Musick*. London: John Johnson.
2. Bunting, Edward. 1970. *The Ancient Music of Ireland*. Waltons' Piano and Musical Instrument Galleries.<sup>3</sup>
3. Carolan, Turlough. "Compositions of Carolan : Nos. 6-19." National Library of Ireland. Accessed 1 March 2026. <https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000619142>
4. Chadwick, Simon. "Sources for Gaelic harp music: Carolan fragment." Early Gaelic Harp Info. 26 November 2004. Accessed 18 February 2026. <https://www.earlygaelicharp.info/sources/carolan.htm>
5. Chonaráin, Siobhán Ní. "The Slow Air in the Irish Music Tradition." Comhaltas. 2008. Accessed 12 April 2026. <https://comhaltas.ie/the-slow-air-in-the-irish-music-tradition/>
6. Fleischmann, Aloys, Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, and Paul McGettrick. 1998. *Sources of Irish Traditional Music, c. 1600-1855*. Garland.
7. Geminiani, Grancesco. 1749. *A Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick*. London.
8. Hennessey, Vivian and Jack Hennessey. "Dochtúir Dubhshláine - Dr. Delaney." IrishPage.com. Accessed 8 March 2026. <https://irishpage.com/songs/carolan/delanote.html>
9. Hyde, Douglas. 1985. *Amhráin Chúige Chonnacht, I-III : Ó Cearbhalláin, Amhráin Molta Na mBan, Amhráin Óil = The Songs of Connacht, I-III : Songs of O'Carolan, Songs Praising Women, Drinking Songs*. Irish Academic Press.

---

<sup>3</sup> Note: This source includes all three of Bunting's Irish music collections c. 1796, 1809, and 1840

10. Kidson, Frank. 1900. *British Music Publishers, Printers, and Engravers*. W. E. Hill & Sons.
11. Lee, Edmund. "COLLECTION OF IRISH AIRS BY THE CELEBRATED COMPOSERS CAROLAN AND CONOLAN." Irish Traditional Music Archive. Accessed 19 February 2026.  
<https://itmacatalogues.ie/Portal/Default/en-GB/RecordView/Index/96278>
12. Moloney, Colette, Nicholas Carolan, and Irish Traditional Music Archive. 2000. *The Irish Music Manuscripts of Edward Bunting (1773-1843) : Introduction and Catalogue*. Irish Traditional Music Archive - Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann.
13. Neal, John, and William Neal. 1724. *A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes Proper for the Violin, German Flute or Hautboy*. Folk Music Society of Ireland.
14. O'Sullivan, Donal J. 1930. *The Bunting Collection of Irish Folk Music and Songs, Part II*. Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society, Vol. XXIV.  
[https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/prints.itma.ie/journal\\_folk\\_song\\_society/ITMA068256.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/prints.itma.ie/journal_folk_song_society/ITMA068256.pdf)
15. O'Sullivan, Donal. 1958. *Carolan : The Life, Times, and Music of an Irish Harper*. Routledge and Paul.
16. Thompson, S. A. & P. 1787. *The Hibernian Muse : A Collection of Irish Airs, Including the Most Famous Compositions of Corolan*. S. A. & P. Thompson.
17. Williams, Sean. 2020. *Focus : Irish Traditional Music*. Second edition. Routledge.
18. Yeats, Gráinne and Turlough Carolan. 1984. *Complete Collection of the Much Admired Old Irish Tunes, the Original and Genuine Compositions of Carolan, the Celebrated Harper & Composer (1670-1738) : Suitable for Most Instruments*. Ossian Publications.

19. Yoakam, Kelly L. K. "Harp Music and Irish Nationalism: Turlough O'Carolan's Musical Legacy (1760–1840)." Master's thesis, Michigan State University, 2009.

<https://qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/harp-music-irish-nationalism-turlough-ocarolans/docview/304940365/se-2>.