

Edward Bunting

Edward Bunting (1773–1843) was an Irish musician and folk music collector. He was an organist from the age of 11 and was employed to notate the airs at the Belfast harp festival. He collected 40 tunes at the festival including “Sí bheag Sí Mhór” “Eibhlí a Rún” “The Fairy Queen” and “Lord Mayo”. After the festival he went around Ulster and Connaught collecting more tunes.

Bunting published almost 300 tunes in 3 volumes. In 1776 he published “A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music” which contains 66 tunes adapt for piano including “Carolan’s concerto”. In 1809 he published “A General Collection of the Ancient music of Ireland” which contains 77 tunes in romantic piano arrangements some with specially written songs in English. This volume includes “Planxty Irwin”. “The Ancient music of Ireland” from 1940 is the most important historical source of information on the old gaelic harpers as he lists the fingering and damping techniques used. It contains just over 150 tunes arranged for piano such as “Tabhair dom do Lamh”.

Bunting is important as he was the first collector to gather the tunes in a informative, systematic way and his work is invaluable although some is inaccurate as he was a classical musician and his publications are irish tunes arranged for piano and he sometimes added in notes and features that are more suited to classical piano playing. His material is unique and has been the basis for other composers such as Thomas Moore.