Irish Songs for Alto Sax

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Ten Irish tunes, easiest first, from The Rakes of Mallow to St. Patrick's Day. Most are written with the key signature of G major for alto sax, which sounds in concert B♭, the same concert key the rest of the band uses. The last page shows the fingering for every note used, B3 to B5.

How to read it: each box is one note, with the letter on top and its octave number beside it; Danny Boy and The Last Rose of Summer have the words underneath, and a dash means hold the word over another note. A gold bar under a box marks a long note (two beats or more). Each part of a tune is written once; in a dance tune, play each part twice. Hear every tune, slow or full speed, at thefingeringchart.com/alto-saxophone/irish-songs/

1 The Rakes of Mallow

EASY Polka · G major (concert B♭ major) · 9 notes, F♯4 to G5 · 2/4 time

1	G4	B4	G4	B4	G4	B4	C5	B4	A4	G4	F♯4	A4	F♯4	A4	F♯4	A4	B4	A4	G4	F♯4
2	G4	B4	G4	B4	G4	B4	D5	D5	C5	B4	A4	G4	F♯4	G4	A4	B4	G4	G4		
3	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	C5	B4	C5	D5	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	C5	B4	C5	D5	A4			
4	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	C5	B4	C5	D5	C5	B4	A4	G4	F♯4	G4	A4	B4	G4	G4		

Tip: A polka is bouncy and quick, but learn it slowly. Several bars end with four fast notes; keep them even and land firmly on the beat after each group.

Music: traditional, printed in London as early as 1742.

2 The Wearing of the Green

EASY Song · G major (concert B♭ major) · 8 notes, G4 to G5 · 4/4 time

1	G4	A4	B4	B4	B4	A4	B4	D5	D5	B4	B4	A4	A4	B4	A4	D5	E5	C5	G5	F♯5	E5
	D5	B4	G4	A4	G4	G4	A4	G4	G4	A4											
2	B4	B4	B4	A4	B4	D5	D5	B4	B4	A4	A4	B4	A4	D5	E5	C5	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	B4
	G4	A4	G4	G4	A4	G4	G5	F♯5													
3	E5	D5	D5	B4	D5	B4	G4	A4	B4	B4	B4	A4	B4	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	D5	B4	D5	B4
	G4	A4	B4	A4	A4	B4	A4	G4	A4												
4	B4	B4	B4	A4	B4	D5	D5	B4	B4	A4	A4	B4	A4	D5	E5	C5	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	B4
	G4	A4	G4	G4	A4	G4															

Tip: The tune moves mostly by step, so the hard part is the rhythm: count the dotted notes carefully and keep the repeated notes at the start of each line light and even.

Music: traditional Irish air. The best-known words are by Dion Boucicault (1864).

3 The Last Rose of Summer

EASY Song (air) · G major (concert B♭ major) · 8 notes, G4 to G5 · 3/4 time

1	G4 *'Tis*	A4 *the*	B4 *last*	G5 *rose*	F♯5 —	E5 *of*	D5 —	D5 *sum-*	B4 *mer,*	G4 *Left*	A4 —	B4 *bloom-*	D5 —	B4 *ing*	A4 *a-*	G4 —	G4 *lone;*	G4 *All*	A4 *her*
2	B4 *love-*	G5 *ly*	F♯5 —	E5 *com-*	D5 —	D5 *pan-*	B4 *ions*	G4 *Are*	A4 —	B4 *fad-*	D5 —	B4 —	A4 *ed*	G4 *and*	G4 *gone.*	D5 *No*	B4 —		
3	G5 *flow-*	G5 —	F♯5 *er*	E5 *of*	D5 *her*	D5 *kin-*	B4 *dred,*	D5 *No*	B4 —	G5 *rose-*	G5 —	F♯5 —	E5 *bud*	D♯5 *is*	E5 *nigh,*	F♯5 —	G5 —	G4 *To*	A4 *re-*
4	B4 *flect*	G5 *back*	F♯5 —	E5 *her*	D5 —	D5 *blush-*	B4 *es,*	G4 *Or*	A4 —	B4 *give*	D5 —	B4 —	A4 *sigh*	G4 *for*	G4 *sigh.*				

Tip: Play it slowly and smoothly, like singing. The third line climbs to the top of the tune; take a full breath before it and keep the air steady through the long notes.

Music: traditional Irish air. Words: Thomas Moore (1805), published together in 1813.

4 Star of the County Down

MEDIUM Song · E minor (concert G minor) · 8 notes, B3 to D5 · 4/4 time

1	B3	D4	E4	E4	E4	D4	E4	G4	G4	A4	G4	A4	B4	A4	G4	E4	D4	B3	D4	B3	D4
2	E4	E4	E4	D4	E4	G4	G4	A4	G4	A4	B4	A4	G4	E4	E4	E4	B4	C5			
3	D5	B4	B4	A4	G4	A4	A4	A4	G4	A4	B4	A4	G4	E4	D4	B3	D4	B3	D4		
4	E4	E4	E4	D4	E4	G4	G4	A4	G4	A4	B4	A4	G4	E4	E4	E4	B4	C5			
5	D5	B4	B4	A4	G4	A4	A4	A4	G4	A4	B4	A4	G4	E4	D4	B3	D4	B3	D4		
6	E4	E4	E4	D4	E4	G4	G4	A4	G4	A4	B4	A4	G4	E4	E4	E4					

Tip: It is in a minor key, so listen for the low notes at the end of each line that pull it home. Lines 3 and 5 start high; get their first note ready before you reach them.

Music: traditional (the tune also known as Dives and Lazarus). Words: Cathal MacGarvey (1866–1927).

5 Brian Boru's March

MEDIUM March · A Dorian (concert C Dorian) · 6 notes, G4 to E5 · 6/8 time

1	E5	C5	B4	A4	A4	E5	C5	B4	A4	A4	D5
2	B4	A4	G4	G4	D5	B4	A4	G4	G4	E5	
3	C5	B4	A4	A4	E5	C5	B4	A4	A4		
4	A4	C5	D5	E5	D5	C5	A4	A4	A4		
5	G4	C5	D5	E5	D5	E5	D5	E5	D5	C5	
6	G4	B4	C5	D5	B4	D5	B4	D5	B4	G4	
7	A4	C5	D5	E5	D5	E5	D5	E5	D5	C5	
8	A4	C5	D5	E5	D5	C5	A4	A4	A4		

Tip: It is in 6/8, so count two big beats in each bar. The first part is built on a short dotted figure (long, short, long); keep it crisp and march-like rather than lazy.

Music: traditional. A version was published in the Dublin Monthly Magazine in 1842.

6 Danny Boy (Londonderry Air)

MEDIUM Song (air) · F major (concert A♭ major) · 13 notes, C♯4 to A5 · 4/4 time

1	E4 *Oh,*	F4 *Dan-*	G4 *ny*	A4 *boy,*	G4 *the*	A4 *pipes,*	D5 *the*	C5 *pipes*	A4 *are*	G4 *call-*	F4 —	D4 *ing*	F4 *From*	A4 *glen*	B♭4 *to*	C5 *glen,*	D5 *and*	C5 *down*	A4 *the*	F4 *moun-*
	A4 *tain*	G4 *side.*	E4 *The*	F4 *sum-*	G4 *mer's*															
2	A4 *gone,*	G4 *and*	A4 *all*	D5 *the*	C5 *ro-*	A4 *ses*	G4 *fall-*	F4 —	D4 *ing,*	C♯4 —	D4 —	E4 *It's*	F4 *you,*	G4 *it's*	A4 *you*	B♭4 *must*	A4 *go*	G4 *and*	F4 *I*	G4 *must*
	F4 *bide.*	C5 *But*	D5 *come*	E5 *ye*																
3	F5 *back*	E5 *when*	E5 *sum-*	D5 *mer's*	C5 *in*	A4 *the*	C5 *mea-*	A4 —	F4 *dow,*	C5 *Or*	D5 *when*	E5 *the*	F5 *val-*	E5 *ley's*	E5 *hushed*	D5 *and*	C5 *white*	A4 *with*	G4 *snow,*	C5 *It's*
	C5 *I'll*	C5 *be*																		
4	A5 *here*	G5 *in*	G5 *sun-*	F5 *shine*	D5 *or*	F5 *in*	C5 *sha-*	A4 —	F4 *dow,*	E4 *Oh,*	F4 *Dan-*	G4 *ny*	A4 *boy,*	D5 *Oh*	C5 *Dan-*	A4 *ny*	G4 *boy,*	F4 *I*	D4 *love*	E4 *you*
	F4 *so!*																			

Tip: The last line starts on the highest note of the song ("here in sunshine or in shadow"). Practice that line on its own, and keep the air flowing through the long notes so they don't fade.

Music: the Londonderry Air, first published in 1855. Words to Danny Boy: Frederic Weatherly (1910), set to this tune in 1913.

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7 Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór

MEDIUM Harp tune · D major (concert F major) · 12 notes, D4 to B5 · 3/4 time

1	D5	E5	F♯5	E5	D5	D5	D5	E5	D5	B4	A4	F♯4	A4
2	B4	A4	B4	C♯5	D5	E5	D5	E5	F♯5	F♯5	E5	D5	F♯5
3	B4	E5	A4	D5	F♯4	E4	D4	E5					
4	B4	E5	A4	D5	C♯5	D5	D5	D5	E5				
5	F♯5	F♯5	E5	D5	E5	D5	E5	F♯5	A5	B5	A5	F♯5	E5	D5
6	E5	A5	F♯5	E5	D5	B4	A4	B4	A4					
7	F♯4	E4	D4	F♯5	B4	E5	A4	A5						
8	B5	A5	G5	F♯5	E5	D5	E5	D5	C♯5	D5	D5			

Tip: Think of it as a slow waltz: one strong beat at the start of each bar. The long notes give you time to breathe; use them, and let the tune float rather than march.

Music: usually credited to Turlough O'Carolan (1670–1738), as his first composition.

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8 The Irish Washerwoman

HARDER Jig · G major (concert B♭ major) · 12 notes, D4 to B5 · 6/8 time

1	B4	G4	G4	D4	G4	G4	B4	G4	B4	D5	C5	B4
2	C5	A4	A4	E4	A4	A4	C5	A4	C5	E5	D5	C5
3	B4	G4	G4	D4	G4	G4	B4	G4	B4	D5	C5	B4
4	C5	B4	C5	A4	D5	C5	B4	G4	G4	G4		
5	G5	D5	G5	G5	D5	G5	G5	D5	G5	B5	A5	G5
6	F♯5	D5	F♯5	F♯5	D5	F♯5	F♯5	D5	F♯5	A5	G5	F♯5
7	E5	G5	G5	D5	G5	G5	C5	G5	G5	B4	G5	G5
8	C5	B4	C5	A4	D5	C5	B4	G4	G4	G4		

Tip: A jig runs in steady groups of three eighth notes. Keep all three even, start well below full speed, and only speed up once you can play the whole tune without stopping.

Music: traditional jig, in print by 1790.

9 The Kesh

HARDER Jig · D major (concert F major) · 11 notes, C♯4 to F♯5 · 6/8 time

1	D4	D4	E4	F♯4	E4	E4	F♯4	A4			
2	B4	A4	A4	D5	A4	A4	B4	A4	F♯4	A4	F♯4	E4
3	D4	E4	D4	D4	E4	F♯4	E4	F♯4	E4	E4	F♯4	A4
4	B4	A4	A4	D5	A4	A4	F♯4	E4	C♯4	D4		
5	F♯4	F♯4	A4	A4	B4	D5	B4	A4	F♯4	E4		
6	F♯4	F♯4	A4	F♯4	D4	E4	F♯4	E4	E4	D4	E4	
7	F♯4	E4	F♯4	A4	G♯4	A4	B4	D5	B4	A4	F♯4	A4
8	D5	C♯5	D5	E5	D5	E5	F♯5	D5	D5	D5		

Tip: The second part jumps around more than the first. Practice it two bars at a time, and keep the groups of three even even when the notes skip.

Music: traditional jig.

10 St. Patrick's Day

HARDER Set dance (jig) · G major (concert B♭ major) · 11 notes, D4 to G5 · 6/8 time

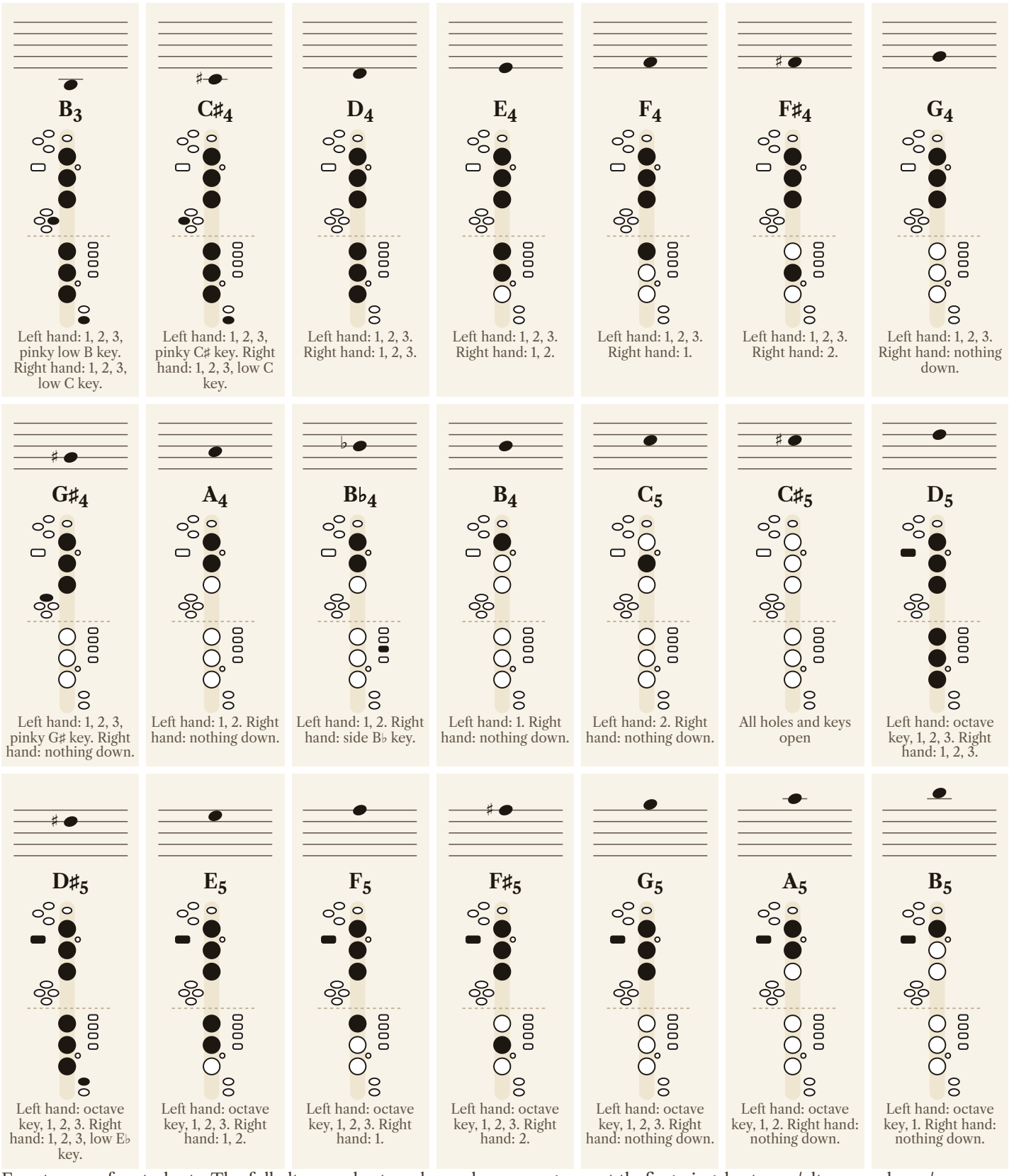
1	D4	G4	A4	G4	G4	B4	C5	D5	E5	D5	D5	B4	G4
2	A4	G4	A4	B4	G4	D4	E4	F♯4	E4	E4	D4		
3	G4	A4	G4	G4	B4	C5	D5	E5	D5	D5	B4	G4	
4	A4	G4	A4	B4	G4	D4	E4	F♯4	G4				
5	D5	E5	F♯5	G5	E5	F♯5	D5	E5	D5				
6	D5	E5	F♯5	G5	E5	F♯5	D5	E5					
7	D5	E5	F♯5	G5	E5	F♯5	D5	E5	D5				
8	D5	B4	G4	G4	B4	C5	D5	E5	D5	D5	B4	G4	
9	A4	G4	A4	B4	G4	D4	E4	F♯4	E4	E4	D4		
10	G4	A4	G4	G4	B4	C5	D5	E5	D5	D5	B4	G4	
11	A4	G4	A4	B4	G4	D4	E4	F♯4	G4				

Tip: The dotted rhythm (long, short, long) at the start of most bars is what makes it dance; keep it springy. Count the bars in the longer second part so you don't lose your place.

Music: traditional set dance and march.

Fingerings for every note in these tunes

21 notes, from B3 up to B5. Written pitch. A written C on the alto sax sounds as concert E♭. Filled keys are pressed; open keys stay up.



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