

SHADY GROVE



The tune Shady Grove is associated with the Upper South area in the Appalachian Mountains having been revitalized by Jean Ritchie in the 1950s and Doc Watson in the 1960s (among others). Sources claim the tune dates back to 1600s British Isles with its first American version published in the early 20th century.¹ Shady Grove is in the same tune family as Boyne Water, Barbara Allen, and Matty Groves each being so old that it is unclear which tune came first.² The tune's simple strophic form and dark Dorian mode have inspired at least 300 stanzas easily allowing the performer to change the song from an innocent lovesick ballad to a dark cautionary tale.^{3 4}

Chorus:
Shady grove, my true love,
Shady grove, I know,
Shady grove, my true love,
I'm bound for the shady grove.

When I was a little boy,
I wanted a whittlin' knife;
Now I am a great big boy
An' I want a little wife...

Verse:
Peaches in the summertime,
Apples in the fall,
If I can't get the girl I love,
Won't have none at all.

Wish I had a banjo string,
Made of golden twine,
And every tune I'd pick on it –
Is 'I wish that girl were mine.'⁵

—Kitty Steetle

¹<https://alexbledsoe.com/2010/02/08/shady-grove-and-the-tradition-of-living-songs/>; <https://www.loc.gov/item/afcreed000106/>

²*ibid.*

³Ritchie, Fiona and Doug Orr. **Wayfaring Strangers: The Musical Heritage from Scotland and Ulster to Appalachia**, 2014, p xv.

⁴I always thought that 'Shady Grove' was a symbol of the afterlife, much like 'going home' and 'trains' are symbols of dying. I did not find this mentioned while doing research but I cannot be the only one who came up with that, right?

⁵Lomax, Alan. **Folk Songs of North America**, New York, 1960, p 234.

SHADY GROVE (MAJOR VERSION)

Musical notation for the Major Version of Shady Grove. It is written in D major (two sharps) and 2/4 time. The melody is similar to the original but in a brighter mode. Chord symbols (E, A, D) are placed above the staff to indicate accompaniment. The notation is divided into four systems, with measure numbers 5, 8, and 13 indicated at the start of the second, third, and fourth systems respectively.

There's another "Shady Grove" that I like, similar to the above but in a more major mode. It apparently can be traced back to autoharp player Kilby Snow, but I think I first heard it from the Chicken Chokers. Fun fact: you can sing verses from "June Apple", "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss", "The Blackest Crow", and many other songs to this melody (and vice versa), and people do.

—Josh Larios