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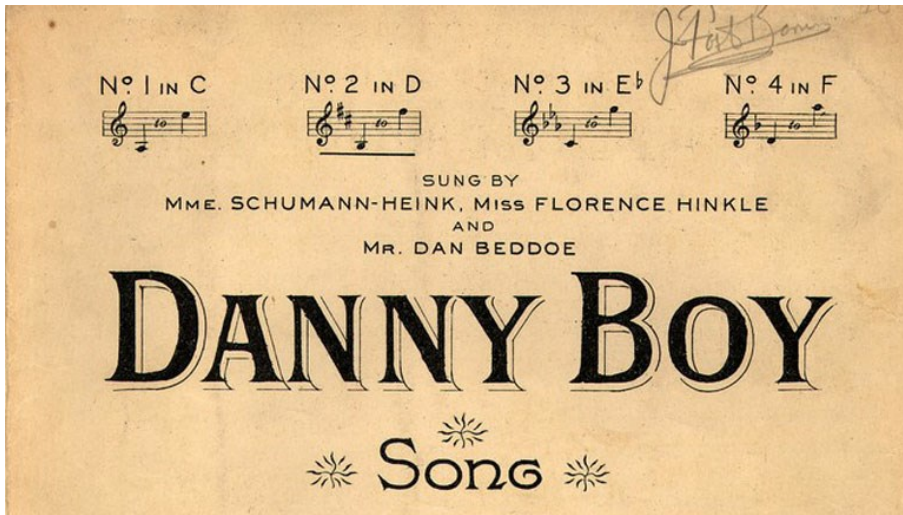
NEWSLETTER

THIS JUST IN

Happy 100th Birthday, Danny Boy

The timeless song is hymned in a fascinating, multivalenced BBC4 documentary broadcasting this Sunday, December 1.

By MOJO STAFF | NOVEMBER 29, 2013



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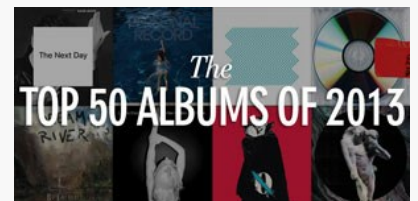
DANNY BOY, THE SONG of loss and exile that became one of humanity's great anthems, is explored in a BBC4 television documentary. Danny Boy: The Ballad That Bewitched The World broadcasts at 8pm this Sunday, December 1, and celebrates a century since the song's birth in 1913.

Here's the film's director (and MOJO writer) James Maycock with an exclusive preview, reflecting on the timeless magic of a song most closely associated with the world's Irish communities, but in fact written by an Englishman – Frederic Weatherly – and as Maycock argues, part of the entire planet's cultural dowry.

"I believe that for Danny Boy



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“Danny Boy is about loss, departure, even death. But crucially, it’s also uplifting.”

to have had such a huge cultural impact, it has to have tapped into the fundamental stuff – emotions and experiences that affect us all. Danny Boy is certainly about loss, departure, even death. But crucially, it’s also uplifting

– offering us that tantalizing hope of a possible reunion with the departed.

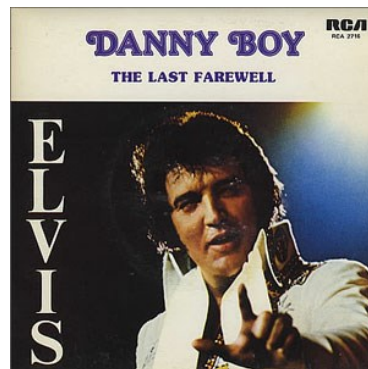
“So there is definitely an emotional equilibrium, a yin and yang, at play. Indeed, in the film, musician Joe Jackson explains how the song itself shifts from major to minor keys. Just as the Danny Boy lyrics flit between sadness and optimism, so its music is melancholic but also contains a hugely rousing, life-affirming chorus. Intriguingly, the highest note of that big chorus is reached on the line – ‘come ye back’ – exuberantly underscoring the chance of meeting again, accentuating the positive.

“Inevitably, the song has resonated most with those who have experienced loss – loss that includes ‘losing’ one’s own country – but who still believe in a bright new day. So Danny Boy means a great deal to members of the Irish diaspora forced into exile, particularly in the States. Black Americans, too, have recognized the loss-hope dynamic in the tune. It’s cathartic, like the blues.

You can hear it in some of the versions in the film – from saxophonist **Ben Webster’s elegiac jazz ballad** to a wonderfully languid doo-wop cover by **Steve Gibson & The Red Caps**. **Jackie Wilson** also reveals the song’s versatility, twisting Danny Boy into a late 1950s basement party smoocher. With him it becomes, as interviewee Bonnie Greer points out, about the transience of youth – *make the most of this, because it won’t last forever*.

“What particularly intrigued me when I started making this film was the number of versions recorded by country artists. It didn’t feel like coincidence. I knew they weren’t covering Danny Boy just because it was a standard. They had to be tapping into the heartbreak centre of the song.

“In the film, I use **Johnny Cash’s 1965 recording of Danny Boy** as the prism to investigate the appeal of the song to country artists. His daughter, Rosanne Cash, speaks of why it’s such a natural fit for poor white southerners and their tough, intense lives. While Larry Kirwan of



Elvis Presley's Danny Boy single. The song was sung at Presley's funeral.



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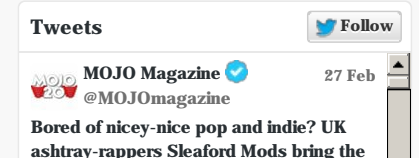
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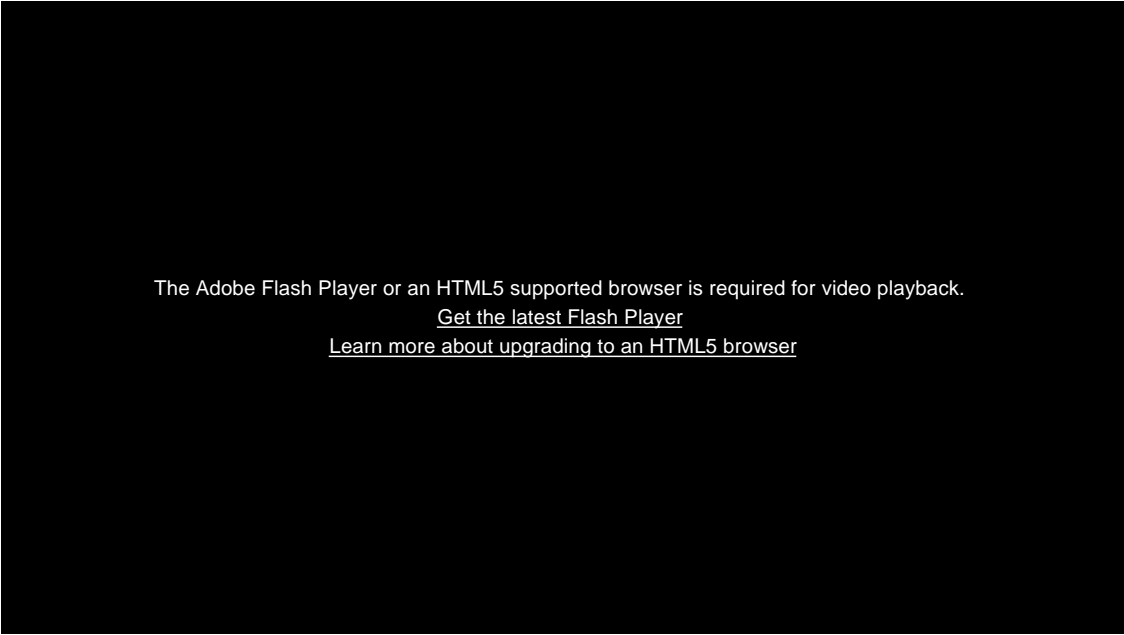
the Irish-American band, Black 47, explains how 19th Century Irish immigrants brought their fiddles and music to the Appalachians. This subsequently influenced bluegrass – then country. With an ancient Irish tune, the Londonderry Air, at the song’s musical heart, it was all beginning to make sense.

“Songs like Danny Boy that last 100 years are rare. They appear simple, but are beautifully complicated. You need a bunch of keys to unlock the mysteries of Danny Boy, but I believe one of its most essential elements is its emotional dialectic – loss and hope, joy and pain, sunshine and shadow – and these lie at the very centre of all our lives.”

Watch the preview:



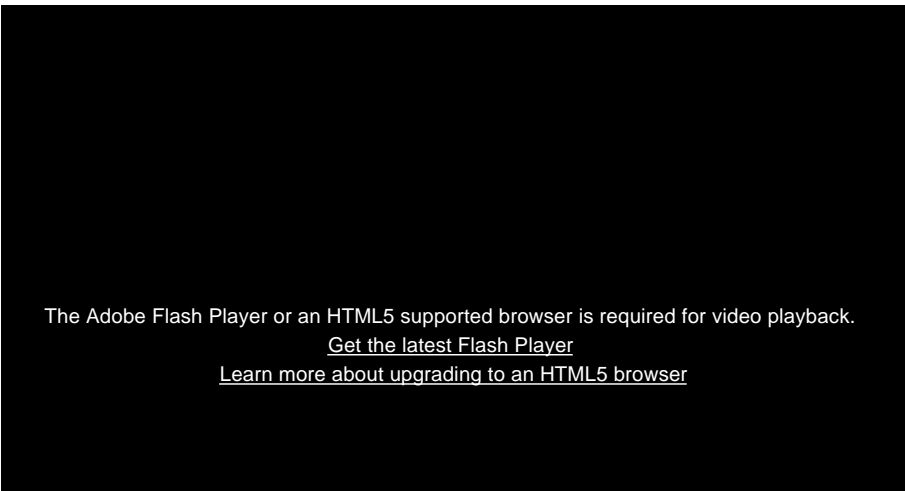
A screenshot of a tweet from MOJO Magazine (@MOJOMagazine) dated 27 Feb. The tweet text reads: "Check out our world premiere of the". Below the text is a button that says "Tweet to @MOJOMagazine". The tweet is displayed in a light grey box with a white border. Above the tweet, there is a link "grot ow.ly/u30et" and an "Expand" button. To the right of the tweet are icons for reply, retweet, and favorite.

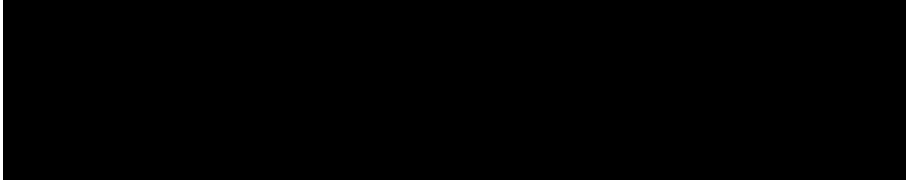


Danny Boy: The Ballad That Bewitched The World broadcasts at 8pm this Sunday, December 1 on BBC4. [For more details of the broadcast.](#)

[For more about Danny Boy.](#)

And, finally, for the ultimate version of the song [[thanks to Lee Price and his blog, 21 Essays](#)]...





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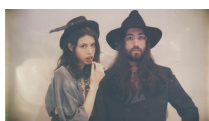
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