

Greensleeves

START

ALAS, MY LOVE, YOU DO ME WRONG TO CAST

ME OFF DISCOURTEOUSLY FOR I HAVE LOVED YOU

WELL AND LONG DELIGHTING IN YOUR COMPANY

GREENSLEEVES WAS ALL MY JOY GREENSLEEVES WAS MY DELIGHT

GREENSLEEVES WAS MY HEART OF GOLD AND WHO BUT MY LADY

GREENSLEEVES

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Lyrics

(possibly by Henry VIII of England in the 1500's.)

GREENSLEEVES

Alas, my love, you do me wrong
To cast me off discourteously
For I have loved you well and long
Delighting in your company

Chorus

Greensleeves was all my joy
Greensleeves was my delight
Greensleeves was my heart of gold
And who but my lady greensleeves

Your vows you've broken, like my heart
Oh, why did you so enrapture me?
Now I remain in a world apart
But my heart remains in captivity

[Chorus]

I have been ready at your hand
To grant whatever you would crave
I have both warged life and land
Your love and good-will for to have

[Chorus]

If you intend thus to disdain
It does the more enrapture me
And even so, I still remain
A lover in captivity

[Chorus]

My men were clothed all in green
And they did ever wait on thee;
All this was gallant to be seen
And yet thou wouldst not love me

[Chorus]

Thou couldst desire no earthly thing
But still thou hadst it readily
Thy music still to play and sing;
And yet thou wouldst not love me

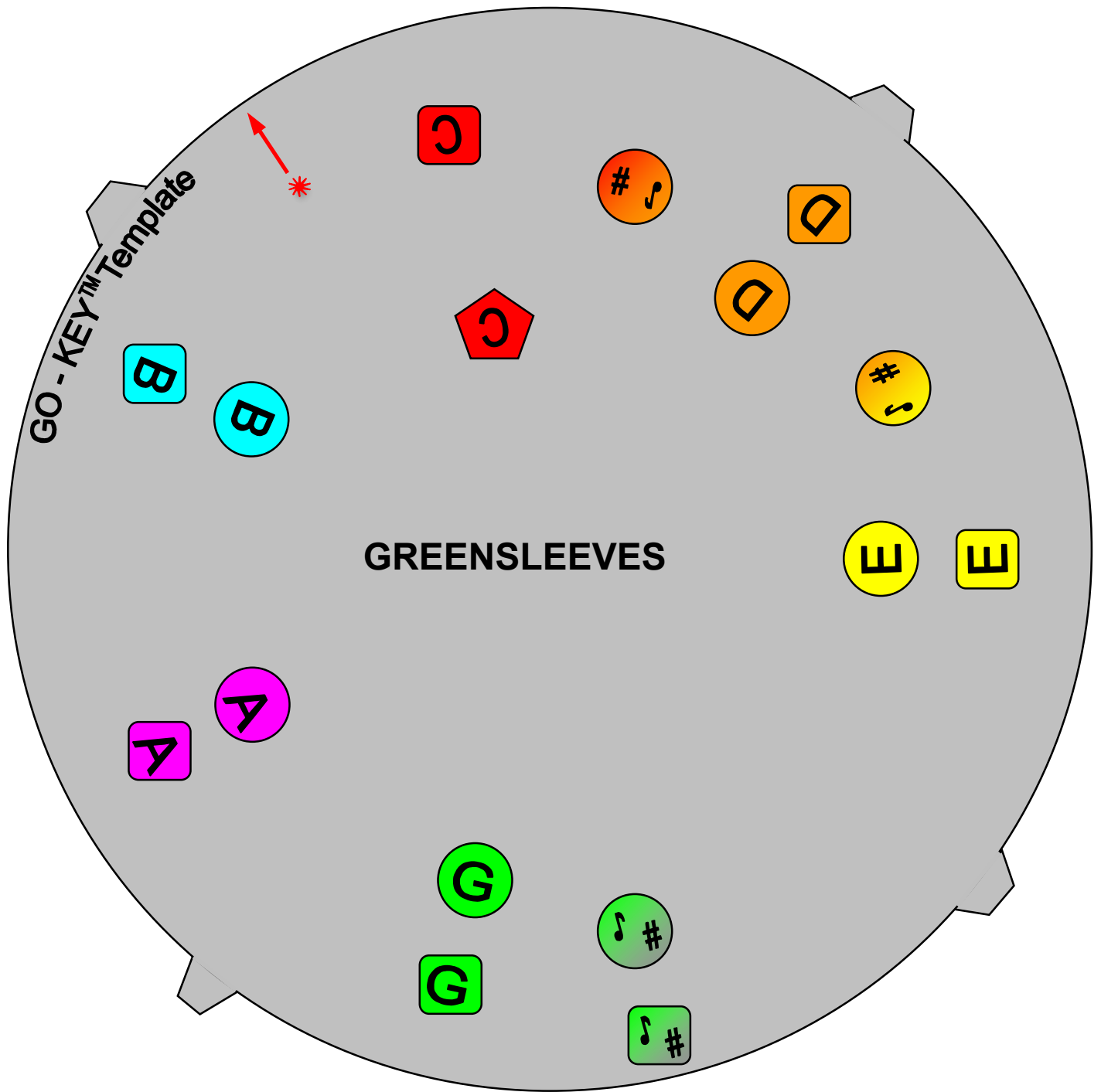
[Chorus]

Well, I will pray to God on high
That thou my constancy mayst see
And that yet once before I die
Thou wilt vouchsafe to love me

[Chorus]

Ah, Greensleeves, now farewell, adieu
To God I pray to prosper thee
For I am still thy lover true
Come once again and love me

[Chorus]



History and Origin

"**Greensleeves**" is a traditional English folk song and tune. A broadside ballad by this name was registered at the London Stationer's Company in September 1580, by Richard Jones, as "A Newe Northern Dittye of ye Ladye Greene Sleeves". Six more ballads followed in less than a year, one on the same day, 3 September 1580 ("Ye Ladie Greene Sleeves answere to Donkyn hir frende" by Edward White), then on 15 and 18 September (by Henry Carr and again by White), 14 December (Richard Jones again), 13 February 1581 (William Elderton), and August 1581 (White's third contribution, "Greene Sleeves is worne awaie, Yellow Sleeves Comme to decaie, Blacke Sleeves I holde in despite, But White Sleeves is my delighte"). It then appears in the surviving *A Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1584) as *A New Courtly Sonnet of the Lady Green Sleeves*. To the new tune of *Green Sleeves*.

The tune is found in several late-16th-century and early-17th-century sources, such as Ballet's MS Lute Book and *Het Luitboek van Thysius*, as well as various manuscripts preserved in the Seeley Historical Library at the University of Cambridge.

There is a persistent belief that *Greensleeves* was composed by Henry VIII for his lover and future queen consort Anne Boleyn. Boleyn allegedly rejected King Henry's attempts to seduce her, and this rejection may be referred to in the song when the writer's love "cast me off discourteously". However, the piece is based on an Italian style of composition that did not reach England until after Henry's death, making it more likely to be Elizabethan in origin.

Lyrical Interpretation

One possible interpretation of the lyrics is that Lady Green Sleeves was a promiscuous young woman and perhaps a prostitute. At the time, the word "green" had sexual connotations, most notably in the phrase "a green gown", a reference to the grass stains on a woman's dress from engaging in sexual intercourse outdoors. An alternative explanation is that Lady Green Sleeves was, through her costume, incorrectly assumed to be sexually promiscuous. Her "discourteous" rejection of the singer's advances supports the contention that she is not.

In Nevill Coghill's translation of *The Canterbury Tales*, he explains that "green [for Chaucer's age] was the colour of lightness in love. This is echoed in 'Greensleeves is my delight' and elsewhere."

Alternative Lyrics

Christmas and New Year texts were associated with the tune from as early as 1686, and by the 19th century almost every printed collection of Christmas carols included some version of words and music together, most of them ending with the refrain "On Christmas Day in the morning". One of the most popular of these is "What Child Is This?", written in 1865 by William Chatterton Dix.

Early References

In Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (written c. 1597; first published in 1602), the character Mistress Ford refers twice to "the tune of 'Greensleeves'", and Falstaff later exclaims "Let the sky rain potatoes! Let it thunder to the tune of *Greensleeves*!" These allusions indicate the song was already well known at that time.

In Popular Culture

- The tune was the basis for "Home in the Meadow," a recurring song throughout the 1962 epic film *How the West Was Won*.
- In some parts of the world, including Australia, India, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, and areas of the United States, the "Greensleeves" tune is popular as a standard chime for ice cream vans.
- The tune was used (as "My Lady Greensleeves") as the slow march of the London Trained Bands in the 16th and 17th Centuries. Later the 7th (City of London) Battalion London Regiment, which claimed descent from the Yellow Regiment of London Trained Bands, adopted the tune as its quick march during World War I, replacing "Austria" (to the same tune as *Deutschland über Alles*), which had been used until then.
- According to one source, Ralph Vaughan Williams composed a *Fantasia* on "Greensleeves" based on the "Greensleeves" melody, in 1934. However, according to others, the 1934 *Fantasia* is actually an arrangement made by Ralph Greaves (1889–1966) from Vaughan Williams' opera *Sir John in Love* in 1928; they point out that the *fantasia* also incorporates a folk song called "Lovely Joan" in the middle section. There are also several other, later arrangements by various writers, but no version by Vaughan Williams himself.
- A rendering of the tune, titled the "Lassie Theme" was used extensively in the *Lassie* television show, especially the ending credits.
- In Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination and Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (An public exam like the SAT in America, GCE in England and Gaokao in Mainland China), This song is used as background music for the candidate to tidy up their answers.