

Top 10

ACCORDING TO YOUR LEVEL

# Irish Songs to Learn English



SCAN, READ & LISTEN 09

UPPER INTERMEDIATE B2

## GLOSSARY

- 1 **impromptu:** improvvisato
- 2 **trad music:** musica tradizionale
- 3 **to grab:** prendere
- 4 **to hail from:** essere originario di
- 5 **will:** volontà
- 6 **breathless:** senza fiato
- 7 **to tease:** tentare
- 8 **to deny:** negare
- 9 **to long:** bramare
- 10 **cover:** versione
- 11 **to top:** essere in vetta
- 12 **charts:** classifiche
- 13 **whomever:** chiunque
- 14 **fancy:** di lusso, costoso
- 15 **misadventures:** disavventure
- 16 **highwayman:** bandito, brigante
- 17 **enduring:** duraturo, durevole
- 18 **to enhance:** aumentare
- 19 **to produce:** mostrare
- 20 **rapier:** stocco, broccio
- 21 **to stand:** rimanere in piedi, stare in piedi
- 22 **to deliver:** consegnare
- 23 **bold:** coraggioso, audace
- 24 **deceiver:** imbroglione
- 25 **whack for the daddy-o:** una bevanda per il compagno
- 26 **jar:** vasetto, barattolo
- 27 **chorus:** ritornello
- 28 **hollow:** buca
- 29 **to skip:** saltare
- 30 **misty:** nebbioso
- 31 **a-thumping:** palpitare

L'accento irlandese ha una qualità vocale gioviale e festosa che rende l'inglese musicale. Non c'è quindi modo migliore di esercitarsi con la grammatica e il vocabolario che con una selezione di musica irlandese.

Everyone is familiar with the **impromptu**<sup>1</sup> **trad music**<sup>2</sup> *seisiún* (session) held in many Irish pubs, but since Dublin band U2's massive success in the 80s, the country's rock and pop music has travelled around the globe. It is a great resource for improving your English with examples of all uses of grammar and a wide range of vocabulary. It is also a way to immerse yourself in the fascinating culture of Ireland. We list ten of the most popular songs below, so **grab**<sup>3</sup> your headphones and take a musical trip to the Emerald Isle.



Fergal Kavanagh runs the website [www.tuneintoenglish.com](http://www.tuneintoenglish.com), the web's largest free resource for learning English through pop music.



### A2 - Pre-Intermediate: The Corrs: *Breathless*

Hailing from<sup>4</sup> Dundalk, north of Dublin, this quartet of three sisters and a brother had their biggest hit in 2000 with a song largely composed of imperatives. Lexically simple and entirely in the present (simple and continuous), it also uses the modal 'can'.

*I cannot lie  
From you I cannot hide  
And I'm losing the will<sup>5</sup> to try  
Can't hide it (can't hide it)  
Can't fight it (can't fight it)  
So go on, go on  
Come on, leave me **breathless**<sup>6</sup>  
Tempt me, **tease**<sup>7</sup> me  
Until I can't **deny**<sup>8</sup> this  
Loving feeling (loving feeling)  
Make me **long**<sup>9</sup> for your kiss  
Go on (go on), go on (go on)  
Yeah, come on, yeah*



### A2 - Pre-Intermediate: Sinéad O'Connor: *Nothing Compares 2 U*

The Dublin-born singer-songwriter is best known for her 1990 **cover**<sup>10</sup> of a Prince song, which **topped**<sup>11</sup> the **charts**<sup>12</sup> all over the world. It opens with a present perfect + 'since' clause, with four examples of the modal 'can' in the first verse.

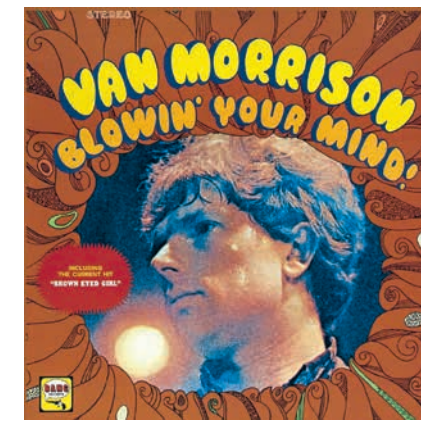
*It's been seven hours and fifteen days  
Since you took your love away  
I go out every night and sleep all day  
Since you took your love away  
Since you been gone  
I can do whatever I want  
I can see **whomever**<sup>13</sup> I choose  
I can eat my dinner  
in a **fancy**<sup>14</sup> restaurant  
But nothing  
I said nothing can take away  
these blues  
'Cause nothing compares  
Nothing compares to you*



### B1 - Lower Intermediate: The Dubliners: *Whiskey in the Jar*

This is a traditional Irish story song recounting the **misadventures**<sup>15</sup> of a **highwayman**<sup>16</sup>, beginning with a perfect example of the past continuous form. Its **enduring**<sup>17</sup> appeal was **enhanced**<sup>18</sup> when Dublin rockers Thin Lizzy adapted it as a rock song in 1972, and it was later rerecorded by American superstars Metallica.

*As I was a goin' over the far famed  
Kerry mountains  
I met with captain Farrell  
and his money he was counting  
I first **produced**<sup>19</sup> me pistol  
and I then **produced** me **rapier**<sup>20</sup>  
Saying **stand**<sup>21</sup> and **deliver**<sup>22</sup>  
for I am the **bold**<sup>23</sup> **deceiver**<sup>24</sup>  
Musha-ring dumma-do-damma-da  
**Whack for the daddy-o**<sup>25</sup>  
**Whack for the daddy-o**  
There's whiskey in the **jar**<sup>26</sup>*



### B1 - Lower Intermediate: Van Morrison: *Brown-Eyed Girl*

The Belfast native's early hit is one of the defining songs of the 60s. Using vocabulary of movement to describe happy times spent with his girlfriend, it begins with a past simple question and introduces the **chorus**<sup>27</sup> with the 'used to' form.

*Hey, where did we go?  
Days when the rains came  
Down in the **hollow**<sup>28</sup>  
Playin' a new game  
Laughin' and a-runnin', hey, hey  
**Skippin**<sup>29</sup> and a-jumpin'  
In the **misty**<sup>30</sup> morning fog with  
Our, our hearts a-**thumping**<sup>31</sup>  
and you  
My brown-eyed girl  
And you, my brown-eyed girl  
Do you remember when  
we used to sing?  
Sha-la-la, la-la, la-la, la-la,  
la-la tee-da  
Just like that  
Sha-la-la, la-la, la-la, la-la,  
la-la tee-da, la-tee-da*







### B1 - Lower Intermediate: Hozier: *Take Me to Church*

Hailing from Wicklow, south of Dublin, this singer-songwriter exploded onto the international scene in 2013 with his debut single, a love song mired in<sup>32</sup> religious discrimination. It uses the 'should have' + past participle form to express regret.

*My lover's got humour  
She's the giggle*<sup>33</sup> *at a funeral  
Knows everybody's disapproval  
They should've worshipped*<sup>34</sup> *her  
sooner  
If the heavens ever did speak  
She's the last true mouthpiece*<sup>35</sup>  
*Every Sunday's getting more bleak*<sup>36</sup>  
*A fresh poison each week  
We were born sick  
You heard them say it  
My church offers no absolutes  
She tells me, "Worship  
in the bedroom"  
The only heaven I'll be sent to  
Is when I'm alone with you  
I was born sick  
But I love it  
Command me to be well  
A-a-a-a-a-a, amen, amen, amen  
Take me to church  
I'll worship like a dog at the shrine*<sup>37</sup>  
*of your lies  
I'll tell you my sins*<sup>38</sup>, *and you can  
sharpen*<sup>39</sup> *your knife  
Offer me that deathless death  
Good God, let me give you my life*



### B1 - Lower Intermediate: U2: *One*

Ireland's most famous musical sons deserve<sup>40</sup> an article all to themselves, with fifteen studio albums to date. Their 1987 hit *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For* is ideal for the present perfect, and 1991's *One* opens with a series of question forms in the present continuous, simple and future, also using the intensifier 'too'.

*Is it getting better  
Or do you feel the same?  
Will it make it easier on you now  
You got someone to blame*<sup>41</sup>?  
*You say, one love, one life  
When it's one need in the night  
One love, we get to share it  
Leaves you, baby,  
if you don't care for it  
Did I disappoint you?  
Or leave a bad taste in your mouth?  
You act like you never had love  
And you want me to go without  
Well it's too late tonight  
To drag*<sup>42</sup> *the past out into the light  
We're one but we're not the same  
We get to carry each other,  
carry each other.  
One!*



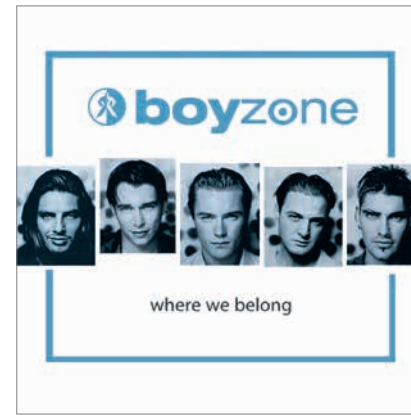
### B2 - Upper Intermediate: The Pogues & Kirsty MacColl: *Fairytale of New York*

Although they formed in London, no list of Irish music would be complete without this hugely influential trad-punk band, fronted<sup>43</sup> by Shane McGowan. His poetic lyrics deal with the country's long history of emigration and its sense of isolation, most famously on this now-evergreen<sup>44</sup> 1987 Christmas song. Using the past simple and continuous, it recounts a festive season spent far from home, and also features the 'could have' + past participle form for past possibilities.

*I could have been someone  
Well so could anyone  
You took my dreams from me  
When I first found you  
I kept them with me babe  
I put them with my own  
Can't make it all alone  
I've built my dreams around you  
The boys of the NYPD*<sup>45</sup> *choir*<sup>46</sup>  
*Still singing Galway Bay  
And the bells are ringing out  
For Christmas Day*

#### GLOSSARY

- <sup>32</sup> **mired in:** bloccato in, impantanato in
- <sup>33</sup> **giggle:** risatina
- <sup>34</sup> **to worship:** adorare
- <sup>35</sup> **mouthpiece:** portavoce
- <sup>36</sup> **bleak:** squallido
- <sup>37</sup> **shrine:** santuario
- <sup>38</sup> **sins:** peccati
- <sup>39</sup> **to sharpen:** affilare



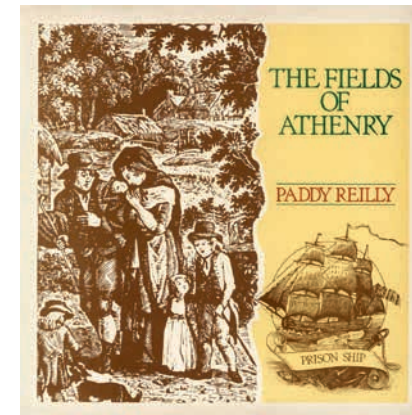
### B2 - Upper Intermediate: Boyzone: *No Matter What*

Irish boybands Boyzone (fronted by Ronan Keating) and Westlife became massively popular in the 1990s, recording mostly covers. This song featured in the movie *Notting Hill* and focuses on the idiom 'no matter', meaning 'regardless<sup>47</sup>'.

*No matter what they tell us  
No matter what they do  
No matter what they teach us  
What we believe is true  
No matter what they call us  
However they attack  
No matter where they take us  
We'll find our own way back*

#### GLOSSARY

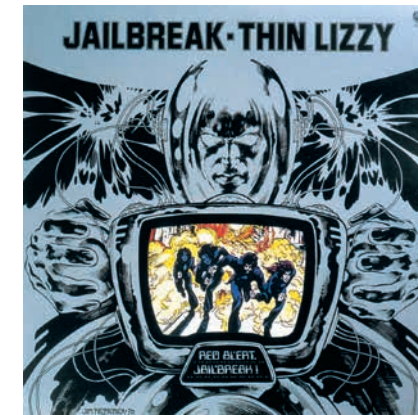
- <sup>40</sup> **to deserve:** meritare
- <sup>41</sup> **to blame:** culpare
- <sup>42</sup> **to drag:** trascinare
- <sup>43</sup> **to front:** guidare
- <sup>44</sup> **evergreen:** sempreverde
- <sup>45</sup> **NYPD:** acronimo di New York Police Department
- <sup>46</sup> **choir:** coro
- <sup>47</sup> **regardless:** in ogni caso, a prescindere
- <sup>48</sup> **famine:** carestia
- <sup>49</sup> **morn:** domani (abbr. morning)
- <sup>50</sup> **to lie:** giacere
- <sup>51</sup> **to lie low:** passare inosservati
- <sup>52</sup> **to release:** pubblicare
- <sup>53</sup> **staple:** base, principale
- <sup>54</sup> **cats:** tipi
- <sup>55</sup> **to drive crazy:** impazzire



### B2 - Upper Intermediate: Paddy Reilly: *Fields of Athenry*

If you've ever watched Ireland participating in a sporting event, you have probably heard the supporters singing this. The 1979 ballad uses narrative tenses to tell the fictional story of a man sent to a penal colony in Australia for stealing food for his family during the Great Famine<sup>48</sup> of the 1840s.

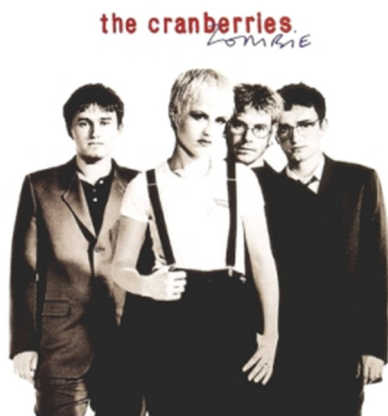
*By a lonely prison wall  
I heard a young girl calling  
"Michael, they have taken you away  
For you stole Trevelyan's corn  
So the young might see the morn*<sup>49</sup>  
*Now a prison ship lies*<sup>50</sup>  
*waiting in the bay"  
Low lie*<sup>51</sup> *the fields of Athenry  
Where once we watched the  
small free birds fly  
Our love was on the wing we had  
dreams and songs to sing  
It's so lonely 'round  
the fields of Athenry*



### B2 - Upper Intermediate: Thin Lizzy: *The Boys Are Back In Town*

Considered by many to be the first heavy metal band, this Dublin trio led by local icon Phil Lynott released<sup>52</sup> this staple<sup>53</sup> of Irish rock in 1976. The opening verse sets the scene for a fun-filled reunion, with a variety of tenses including the past perfect.

*Guess who just got back today  
Them wild-eyed boys that had been  
away  
Haven't changed, had much to say  
But man, I still think them cats*<sup>54</sup> *are  
crazy  
They were askin' if you were around  
How you was, where you could be  
found  
Told them you were livin' downtown  
Drivin' all the old men crazy*<sup>55</sup>  
*The boys are back in town,  
the boys are back in town  
I said, the boys are back in town,  
the boys are back in town,  
The boys are back in town,  
the boys are back in town*



**A2 – Pre-Intermediate:  
The Cranberries: *Zombie***

The hugely successful Limerick band's 1994 emotional reaction to an IRA bombing campaign is in the present simple and continuous, and contains examples of question forms. The chorus uses just five distinct words.

*But you see, it's not me, it's not my family  
In your head, in your head, they are fightin'  
With their tanks and their bombs and their bombs  
and their guns  
In your head, in your head, they are cryin'  
In your head, in your head  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie  
What's in your head, in your head?  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie-ie, oh*



**A2 – Pre-Intermediate:  
The Script: *Hall of Fame*  
(feat. will.i.am)**

In 2012 this Dublin pop band teamed up with American rapper will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas for this hugely successful feel-good motivational anthem. The first verse ends with a 'will' future clause and 'going to' in the present continuous, with the chorus using 'gonna', slang for the 'going to' future form.

*Yeah, you can be the greatest, you can be the best  
You can be the King Kong bangin' on your chest  
You can beat the world, you can win the war  
You can talk to God, go banging on his door  
You can throw your hands up, you can beat the clock  
You can move a mountain, you can break rocks  
Some will call that practice, some will call that luck  
But either way you're going to the history books*

*Standing in the Hall of Fame  
And the world's gonna know your name  
'Cause you burn with the brightest flame  
And the world's gonna know your name  
And you'll be on the walls of the Hall of Fame*