

This Merry Pleasant Spring

**Music, Words and Song for Springtime
from 16th and 17th Century England**

This collection is the first of two books of music, words and song for Spring. There was too much material to fit into one book, so I've divided it between this collection and "In the Merry Month of May".

I've started with a selection of songs describing the beginning of Spring. The Western wind (Zephyrus or Favonius) was the harbinger of Spring, driving away Winter's frost, bringing warmth and causing plants and animals to spring into new life.

The consort song "This Merry Pleasant Spring" describes the Spring birds and the sounds of their songs. I've followed this with some pieces about the nightingale and the cuckoo – associated with Spring, lovers and unfaithfulness.

Spring was famously of course a time for lovers – the fine weather meant that people no longer had to stay indoors against the cold, but could go abroad in the fields and spend time together. Perhaps the most famous of these is Morley's "It was a Lover and his Lass", sung in Shakespeare's "As You Like It". "Love's Emblems" is another playhouse song from John Fletcher's "Valentinian". "Of Sweet and Dainty Flowers" describes a lover making a garland of spring flowers for his beloved.

I have included some songs about sheep shearing – this was traditionally done at the beginning of June, and usually accompanied by music, dancing and a feast of seasonal food – pies, custards, flapjacks (a sort of cheesecake), curds and cream – dairy products that were now in abundance.

Spring was a time for outdoor festivities, excursions, feasts, dancing and much more. Whitsun marked the end of Spring and the beginning of Summer. A 'Whitsun Ale' was a parish celebration held originally to raise money for Church funds. The whole village would take a day off and as the name suggests a large quantity of ale would be brewed for the festival. A King and Queen of the Day would be appointed, there would be archery competitions, games and Morris Dancing.

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Playing Catches

When reading the catches start with the top stave and read through to the end. Go back to the beginning and read the second stave, then the third, and the fourth if there is one. The catch works as a round, so when the first person has finished the first stave they move onto the second, and the next person then begins at the beginning.