

John Barleycorn

Words & Music:
Traditional English
Arr.: Steve Winwood

This is an old, old song from The Isles and a wonder metaphor for planting to harvest. It is ideally done a capella - check out the version by Finest Kind - but I've included the Steve Winwood arrangement chords for instrumentalists. A guitar arrangement of this is in the September 2007 issue of Acoustic Guitar.

[capo 7]

D C G Am A5 Am A5 [2x]

D Am C G Am A5 Am A5
There were three men came out of the west
D C Am G Am A5 Am A5
Their fortunes for to try.
D Am C G Am A5 Am A5
And these three men made a solemn vow:
D C Am G Am A5 Am A5
John Barleycorn must die.
C Am Am7 Am
They've plowed, they've sown, they've harrowed him in,
C D Esus4 E Esus4 E
Threw clods upon his head.
Dm Am C G Am A5 Am A5
And these three men made a solemn vow:
D C Am G Am A5 Am A5
John Barleycorn must die

D C G Am A5 Am A5 [3x]

They let him lie for a very long time,
'Til the rains from heaven did fall.
And little Sir John sprung up his head
And so amazed them all.
They let him stand 'til Midsummer's Day
'Til he looked both pale and wan.
And little Sir John's grown a long, long beard
And so become a man.

They've hired men with scythes so sharp
To cut him off at the knee.
They rolled him and tied him by the waist
Serving him most barbarously.
They've hired men with sharp pitchforks
Who pricked him to the heart.
And the loader he has served him worse than that
For he's bound him to the cart.

They've wheeled him around and around in the field
'Til they came onto a barn.
And there they made a solemn oath
On poor John Barleycorn.
They've hired men with the crab tree sticks
To cut him skin from bone.
And the miller he has served him worse than that
For he's ground him between two stones.

And little Sir John and the nut brown bowl
And his brandy in the glass.
And little Sir John and the nut brown bowl
Proved the strongest man at last.
The huntsman, he can't hunt the fox
Nor so loudly to blow his horn.
And the Tinker he can't mend kettle nor pots
Without a little Barleycorn.