

The Young Sailor Cut Down in His Prime

A cautionary tale about the perils of the pox. This song has evolved through many versions starting in Ireland about 1790. A detailed analysis is available here:

http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FWo3805.pdf

which is the sleeve notes for a 1960 record collecting 20 versions – and our version here is not one of those 20 either! The tune, with similar words, is also known as ‘Streets of Laredo’ sung by Marty Robbins Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves, Tom Jones etc.

As I was a-walkin’ down by the Royal Albion,
Cold was the morning and dark was the day;
Who should I meet with but one of my shipmates,
All wrapped in white linen and colder than clay.

Chorus

*So beat the drums slowly and play the fife merrily,
Play the death march as you carry me on;
And over the side as you lower my coffin,
Say “There’s a young sailor cut down in his prime.”*

Get six of my shipmates to carry my coffin,
Six of my shipmates to carry me high;
And six pretty fair maids to carry white roses,
That no one might smell me as I pass them by

Now had she but told me before she had ruined me
Had she but warned me all in a good time
I might have a-taken those pills of white mercury
But now I’m a sailor cut down in my prime

On a stone at my grave you will see these words written
“Now all you young sailors take warning by me
And don’t go a-courting flash girls of the city
Flash girls of the city were the ruin of me.”

Say “There’s a young sailor cut down in his prime.”