

Marcus Martin's Version of "Lady Hamilton"

by [Kenny Kosek](#)

I learned *Lady Hamilton* from a 1941 Alan Lomax field recording of Marcus Martin of Ararat, NC. made in Asheville N.C. Manco Sneed, another North Carolina fiddler plays the same version. Blanton Owen makes the case for J. Dedrick Harris being the source. During the late 1800's Harris' playing was celebrated enough in his native Tennessee for him to be the official fiddler for the Governor Bob Taylor accompanying him on campaign tours. Harris relocated to Western North Carolina in the 1920's where he was a great influence on local fiddlers among them Manco Sneed and Marcus Martin. This is a crooked tune - there are extended phrases that require 6/4 or 2/4 measures and parts that vary from the standard 8 bar fiddle section structure. It has an eccentric fourth part in a different key, a recurring quarter tone between major and minor third and is played moderately slowly. In short - everything you want in an esoteric old time fiddle tune.

Field recordings often present compromised fidelity. Through the prism of decades, distance, culture and primitive electronics, the field subject's tone is a probability rather than a certainty. Mr. Martin's fiddle registers about a whole tone flat. Whether this is an anomaly caused by the original recording device, probably a wire recorder, or generations of tape transfer, or the way the fiddle was actually tuned, I don't know. The result is, to me, an exalted and otherworldly tone, a brass viola/violin, a bowed sarrusophone.

(This is basically a saxophone with a double reed. It was invented by a Frenchman named Sarrus or Sarrous who was a contemporary of Sax, inventor of the saxophone. It didn't catch on.)

Of course its being a "Lady" tune places its ancestry in the British Isles and there are several Scottish "*Lady Hamiltons*", at least one of them composed for the mistress of Lord Horatio Nelson, hero of Trafalgar. In fact, "*Lady Hamilton Dalrymple*" is a *G minor* Strathspey with a very similar first phrase and a ballpark (Forbes Field) similarity in shape. It was composed in the 18th Century by Robert MacIntosh and is related to the more recent Irish reels *Eileen Curran* and *Sailor Set Ashore*. Remember although Martin's performance is in the key of *G major*, the value of B is pushed practically down to a Bb in the first two phrases.

Notes on the transcription

The / indicates a slide up into the note. In measures 2, 3, and 12 the slide starts at Bb and gets to somewhere (about a quarter tone) south of B natural. The F natural in measure 26 is actually played as the quarter tone between F and F#. The parentheses in measures 15 and 19 indicate ghosted notes. These should be played very lightly, merely hinted at. Note the B note pedal in measures 11 and 12 of the second part. It might take some practice especially playing the octave B's in tune. This is a little unusual but not unique in Southern rural tunes - "Sunny Home in Dixie" by the Pilot Mountaineers has a similar riff. I play the fourth part, the one in C starting with measure 30 in second position - open e, then g and c with the first finger, going back down to 1st position in measure 34.

Marcus Martin's performance is in form AABBCD AABBA. He uses different bowings on repeats of the same parts so the notated bowing is an approximate compilation and not written in stone. The fourth part develops a fun rocking bow on measures 30, 31 and 34, 35 best effected by using the middle of the bow.

LADY HAMILTON (from Marcus Martin)

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Lady Hamilton" by Marcus Martin. The score is written in treble clef and consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The second staff starts at measure 5 and includes first, second, and third endings. The third staff begins at measure 9 and features a change in time signature to 6/8. The fourth staff starts at measure 12 and includes a change in time signature to 3/4. The fifth staff begins at measure 16 and includes first and second endings. The sixth staff starts at measure 21, and the seventh staff begins at measure 25. The music is characterized by a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and includes various rests and phrasing slurs.

Lady Hamilton

The musical score for "Lady Hamilton" is written in 2/4 time and consists of 39 measures. It is presented in four systems of a single treble clef staff. The first system (measures 2-29) begins with a double bar line and contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system (measures 30-33) features a melodic line with several slurs. The third system (measures 34-39) continues the melody with more complex rhythmic patterns, including a triplet of eighth notes. The piece concludes with a final double bar line at the end of the fourth system.

bio

Kenny Kosek is one of the most recorded fiddlers in America today, having been the featured soloist on hundreds of albums, soundtracks and jingles. He can be heard on recordings by James Taylor, Jerry Garcia, David Byrne, Chaka Kahn, Willie Nelson and John Denver. His most recent CD, "Angelwood", on Rounder records was called "a lovely piece of work with a strong hint of the spiritual." (Dave Hinckley, Daily News); "an album that will surprise and delight fans of fiddle music in all its many forms." (Bluegrass Unlimited) and "Kosek's signature sound - a swinging, smooth and creamy hot rise that is as hard as it rocks, has exponentially enhanced every project he's leant it to." (Village Voice).