

TOPIC

# Easter Week and after

SONGS OF THE IRA

## DOMINIC BEHAN

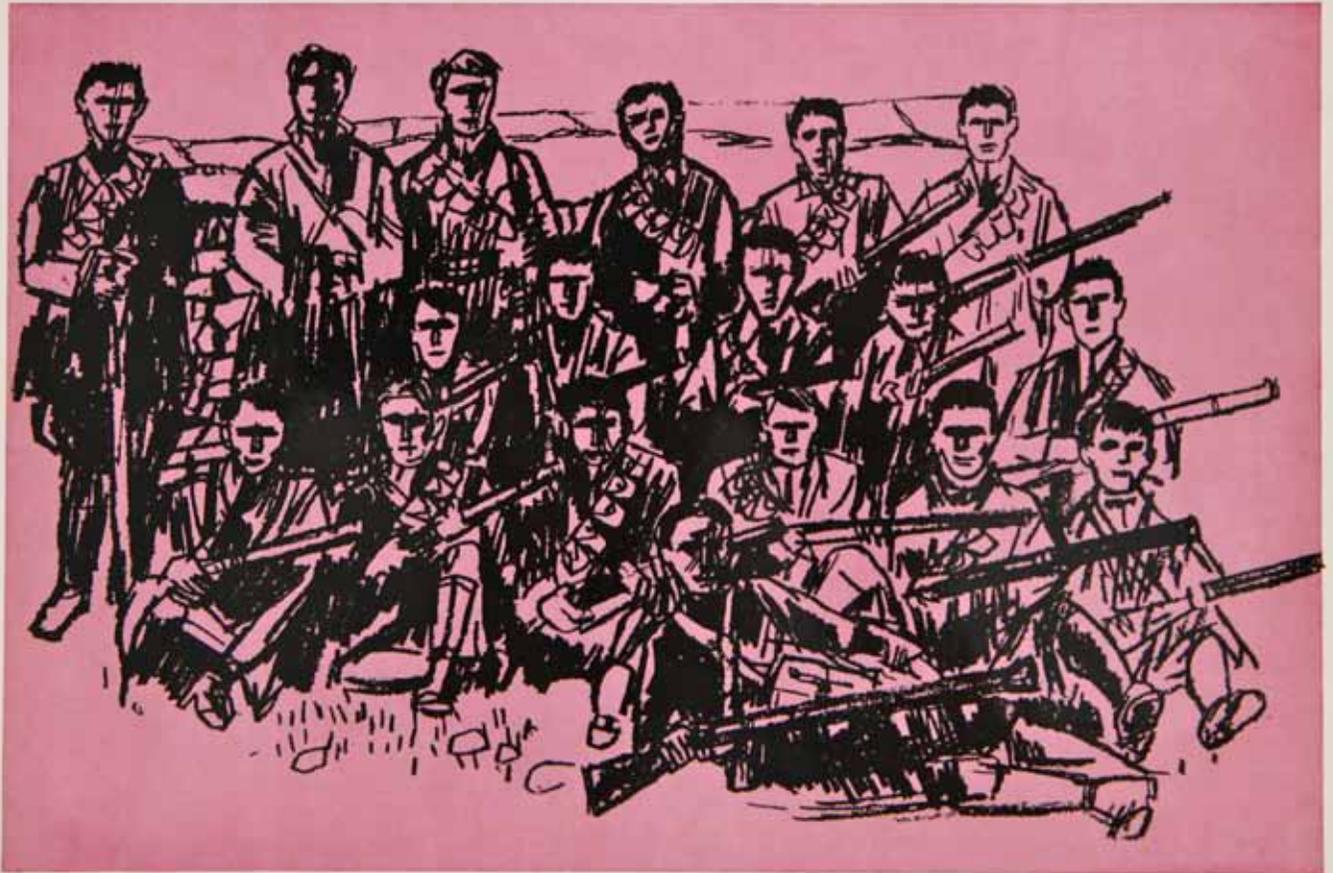
TSDL044

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**EASTER WEEK AND  
AFTER  
SONGS OF THE IRA  
DOMINIC BEHAN**

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*Accompanied by John Hasted on  
guitar, banjo and accordion*



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- 1 Erin Go Brath
- 2 It's a Grand Old Country
- 3 The Recruiting Sergeant
- 4 Slean Libh
- 5 Sergeant William Bailey
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- 7 Roscarbery
- 8 The Boys of the County Cork
- 9 Johnston's Motor Car
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*Recorded by Bill Leader 1958*

*First issued by Topic 1959*

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*Notes by Paddy Tunney for the 1965 issue:*

Dominic Behan, playwright, balladeer, satirist and singer was born into a brilliant family of Dublin rebels. His ancestors were Fenians and his uncle, Peadar Kearney, was author of our National Anthem, 'A Soldier's Song' and many other spirited rebel ballads.

Big brother Brendan projected the image of romantic Ireland far beyond her shores and, thanks to his Republican views, his fine singing voice was as well known behind the prison bars of England and Ireland as in the drinking bars of his native city.

So it is easy to see that Dominic is very well qualified to sing the songs of the Irish Republican Army.

Now that his giant of a brother no longer bestrides the Irish literary scene like a colossus, the full weight of the Behan bardic tradition falls on the shoulders of little Dominic. But God made the back for the burden and surely he carries his load lightly.

The songs he has selected for this record number sixteen and all tell the story of the Irish Republican Army from the Easter Rising of 1916 to the present day. It is the story of hopes and aspirations, the heartbreaks and bitterness of a race that strove hard but stopped short of full nationhood.

There are four of his uncle's compositions included and two of his own. The remaining ten are the spontaneous heart-cry of a people in revolt.

Dominic's peculiar singing style lends itself to the interpretation of rebel ballads. It is shorn of intricate ornamentation and depends on a directness of form and a simplicity of phrase rarely found among Irish traditional singers. There is also a jauntiness about it reminiscent of the Orange songs and singers of Ulster. These qualities, coupled with the delightful incisiveness inherent in the man, make a moving and immediate impact.

### **ERIN GO BRATH**

'Ireland so Fine' in the English, was written by Dominic's uncle, Peadar Kearney. There are other songs with the same title but this one tells the story of the fighting in Dublin during Easter Week with the wry humour of that city.

### **IT'S A GRAND OLD COUNTRY**

This song written by Peadar Kearney has a popular tune and was intended to be a morale booster for the risen people. It is also quite enjoyable.

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### THE RECRUITING SERGEANT

This is an anti-recruiting song and was composed by Seamus O'Farrell in 1915. The tune is that of The Peeler and the Goat. It was branded a 'treason' song by the British and anyone heard singing it in public rendered himself liable to six months' imprisonment. Anti-recruiting songs were a great vogue in Ireland as is demonstrated by "Teddy McGrath", "The Kerry Recruit" and Kickham's beautiful 'Glen of Aherlow'.

### SLEAN LIBH

'Fare-You-Well or Safety-To-You', in the English was also composed by Peadar Kearney. It descends almost to bathos and has none of the hot blood of revolution in it. It is an unhappy choice.

### SERGEANT WILLIAM BAILEY

This is another anti-recruiting song and was written by Peadar Kearney. The tune is similar to the one used for a ballad of Stafford Jail written after 1916 and the mass imprisonment of the Republican soldiers in English jails. It went this way :-

"Now in Stafford Jail we're lodging  
for being rusty with the King.  
To-rel orrell orrell orrell aye"

The tune is catchy and the humour real Dublin.

### BARRY'S COLUMN

The flying column was the Commando arm of the Irish Republican Army and Major-General Tom Barry was commander of one of the first to be formed in the country. Today he is still alive and his exploits during the War of Independence have passed into legend with the tales of Finn MacCool and Cuchuliann. His 'Guerilla Days in Ireland' makes thrilling reading. The tune of this song is the one used by P. J. McCaul for his spirited 'Follow me up to Carlow.'

### ROSCARBERRY

The Third West Cork Brigade was one of the most active in the province of Munster during the War of Independence. It well deserves its honour in song and in story. The tune is the one used by Jim Kells Ingram for his fine tribute to the men of the 1798 rebellion, 'The Memory of the Dead.'

### THE BOYS OF THE COUNTY CORK

A simple song in praise of the fighting men of rebel Cork. It is sung to a traditional tune and is suitable for parties where everyone can join in. If Cork bore the brunt of the Black and Tan war that county does not intend to let us forget the fact.

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### JOHNSTON'S MOTOR CAR

This song was composed by William Gillespie of Sessiaghoneil, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, a man who is still alive. Two weeks ago he assured me that Dr Johnston of Stranorlar had the biggest and best motor-car in the area during the War of Independence. And so this very practical joke was played on him. This is one of the few incidents when the ruthlessness of the campaign in the North was tempered with a little levity. The tune is one used widely by local poets for their home-spun products.

### SEAN TRACY

The soldier Sean Tracy was one of the idols of the War of Independence. A Tipperary man by birth, he saw action all over the country and was an inspiration to all freedom fighters when courage was flagging. At length he was killed in a battle with the Black and Tans in Talbot Street, Dublin. There are many songs written about Sean Tracy but this one most poignantly expresses the grief of the people. Dominic made an excellent choice here.

### TAKE IT DOWN FROM THE MAST

This is a song of bitterness and frustration written after the base betrayal of the country by the signing of the Treaty in 1921 and the sale of the Six Counties to Britain. The tune is traditional.

### THE OUL' ALARM CLOCK

Is a humorous song describing the I.R.A. bombing campaign in England during 1938-39. It is typical of the light-hearted approach by the I.R.A. soldiers serving 'overseas' at that time. Words are by Phil Kelly and the tune is 'The Garden Where the Praties Grow'.

### THE CASTLE OF DRUMBOE

This is a fine song telling the story of a most tragic incident in our country's history. Four Republican soldiers were arrested in Donegal, came before a drum-head court-martial of the 'Freak-State' Officers who were drink-crazed and irresponsible, and were finally shot at dawn by a drunken firing squad. In many cases the 'Free-state' forces were more ruthless and sadistic than the notorious Black and Tans, in their tracking down of Republicans. The tune is traditional and the words bone-bare and truthful.

### THE MERRY PLOUGHBOY

This song is modelled on the English version that sings the glory of the British Tommy. The words were written by Jeremiah Lynch and the tune is 'The Jolly Ploughboy' of course.

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### SEAN SOUTH

Sean South was killed in action while attacking Brookeborough R.U.C. Barracks on New Year's Night 1957. He was a Limerick man and his death seemed to stir the people's imagination deeply. There are at least two other songs written in his memory. This song was composed by Dominic and the tune is 'The Banks of Yarrow'.

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### THE PATRIOT GAME

Feargal O'Hanlon, aged 17 from Ballybay, Co. Monaghan, a draughtsman with Monaghan Co. Council, was killed in action during the Brookeborough Barracks attack also. The song is one of the best and certainly the hardest hitting to come out of Ireland since the Civil War. Words and music are by Dominic Behan

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*Notes by Dominic Behan for the original 1959 issue:*

On Easter Monday 1916 a handful of young men and women marched into the General Post Office in Dublin, broke every pane of glass in the building, and proceeded to barricade all openings with sandbags. A young man in a green military tunic and riding breeches, and wearing a hat turned up at the side, left the building, carrying a poorly printed document, which before pasting on the outside wall of the building, he read aloud to the crowd of people who had gathered in the street. The man was Patrick Henry Pearse, Poet, Teacher, and now, Soldier. The document was the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, and addressed “to the people of Ireland, from the provisional government of the Irish Republic”. It was to the effect that, as from that moment, a National government would govern the country, and, by force of arms, drive the English invaders from Ireland.

This was the culmination of more than seven-hundred years of patriotic struggle against the British Empire. Against the greatest odds they fought for one gallant week, and, since Britain had begun to shell the civilian population, in order to prevent further loss of life, the Government decided to surrender. The seven man Cabinet, together with eight others were tried and shot the following week. The names of those brave men who willingly signed their own death

warrant, when they affixed their signatures to the proclamation, were: Thomas MacDonagh, Eamonn Ceannt, Thomas Joseph Clarke, Sean MacDiarmuida, Joseph Mary Plunkett, P.H.Pearse and James Connolly.

The ‘Liberal’ government of Prime Minister Asquith, sought by the execution of these brave men, to stamp out, once and for all, any threat of future revolt to British rule in Ireland. If such was the intention, then no government was ever more mistaken. Within weeks, despite almost unbearable forms of repression, the nation had shown where the allegiance of the Irish people lay. Thus began the Irish war of independence, which, after fifty-one years, is still in progress, and will by all accounts continue to be waged until the statement contained in the proclamation of Easter Week is accepted by Britain.

Through all this time, the war has produced some of the most awful occurrences imaginable: homes have been burned to the ground; children murdered; prisoners shot out of hand; and women raped. Most of these atrocities were committed by a highly paid gang of criminals recruited for the purpose of Lloyd George. They were known in Ireland as the ‘Black and Tans’, so-called by virtue of the fact that they were dressed in black tunics and brown knee breeches. The deeds committed by this force were so dreadful that at least one British Commander-General Crozier

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resigned in protest, while Viscount Gough described their doings as “bloody and terrible anarchy”

At the present time, twenty-six of the thirty-two counties of Ireland are ruled by a native government, elected democratically every five years, the six north eastern counties are controlled by what is known as the Stormont government, and owing allegiance to the British crown. This came about as a result of the Partition of Ireland Act, which was agreed to by a section of a rebel delegation which met representatives of the British Cabinet in London on the 27th June 1921. It in turn provoked a bitter civil war which ensued until 30th April 1923.

On the 30th April 1926 Eamonn DeValera ordered (on behalf of the Republican forces at war with the Free State government) a cease fire. A section of the I.R.A. refused to accept the order and continued in active opposition. Their activities were intensified in 1939 when (on behalf of the I.R.A.) war was again declared on England. In 1955 a campaign of attacks on military installations took place in the North of Ireland. During one of these attacks, Feargal O’Hanlan and Sean South were killed.

The war in the North continues and will do so “until (in the words of a Sinn Fein director) every vestige of British military occupation has been removed”.

This period, like any other in Irish history produced its share of ballad makers and ballads. They are, like all ballads, popular stories told in simple metre, and set to (mostly) traditional airs, “that aboriginal, or self-sown music which is referable to no individual author, but seems to be the very fruit of the very soil itself”. Together they will give a good account of the fifty years since Easter 1916. I have chosen only those which I think clearly reflect the trend of events over the prescribed period, and those of the tawdry or shoddy sentimental I have omitted. My only hope is that I have selected wisely.

Dominic Behan

## THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

ERIN GO BRATH: Erin Go Brath means ‘Ireland so fine’. The song was made up by Peadar Kearney in 1920 while he was serving a sentence in Ballkinler Camp.

A GRAND OLD COUNTRY: Words by Kearney. The tune is most likely a variant of ‘The Garden where the Praties Grow’ by Johnny Patterson, a well known Dublin circus clown.

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**THE RECRUITING SERGEANT:** It was usual for recruiting sergeants to wait outside public houses for young 'eligible' men, and when they were drunk press a shilling (the symbol of acceptance) into their hands. In 1917 14 young men were sentenced to terms of from 6 to 12 months for singing this 'seditious' ballad. The tune is a variant of 'The peeler and the Goat' and was also very popular in Glasgow after 1916.

**SLEAN LIBH:** This song which was very popular after 1916 was written by Kearney for his friend Michael Heeney, composer of the music of 'A Soldier's Song', upon his death in 1909.

**SERGEANT WILLIAM BAILEY:** Sergeant William Bailey, another recruiting sergeant, was secure in his post at Dunphy's pub, until after Easter Week, he found the bottom knocked out of his jobby by the new conditions. Peadar Kearney wrote the words. The tune is based on the ballad 'Smith of Bristol' by T. Sullivan.

### THE TAN WAR

**BARRY'S COLUMN:** The flying columns were possibly the most important of the I.R.A. the precursors of guerrilla warfare. Major General Tom Barry, who commanded one of the best known columns in

Ireland, is a legendary figure. He had been injured several times during the 'Tan War. He is the author of the popular book 'Guerilla Days in Ireland'. It is not known who wrote the words of the song. The tune is traditional and is the same air as P.J. McCall used for 'Fiach O'Byrne'.

**ROSCARBERRY:** The Third West Cork Brigade was a most active one and is famed in song and story. Responsible to a great extent in consolidating the power of the republican courts, and enforcing its authority. Charles Hayden told me that his father wrote the words. Air: 'Who Fears to speak of '98'.

**THE BOYS OF THE COUNTY CORK:** From all over the world men came to fight for the life of the young Republic. And yet, it is maybe true to say, that the largest sized county suffered more at the hands of the 'Tans than any other. The words of this song are by Tom Murphy set to a traditional tune.

**JOHNSTON'S MOTOR CAR:** Johnston's Motor Car is supposed to have been written by Dr. Martin Thompson around the 'commandeering' (with his aid) of his motor car. The tune is a variation of the old Dublin ballad 'Down by the Tanyard Side'.

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SEAN TRACY: Sean Tracy was a Lt. General in the I.R.A. He was attending an Army Council meeting in Talbot Street, Dublin on the 14th October 1920, when the ‘Tans surrounded the place and Tracy was shot in the ensuing street battle.

### THE CIVIL WAR

TAKE IT DOWN FROM THE MAST: The words of this song are anonymous: the tune traditional. It was very popular in Dublin after the signing of the treaty in 1921.

THE CASTLE OF DRUMBOE: On 14th March 1923, 4 Republicans were executed by Free State forces. They were Charles Daly, John Larkin, Timothy O’Sullivan, Dan Enright. The words of this song are by Olionan to a traditional tune.

THE MERRY PLOUGHBOY: The Rebellion found great support among the farm labourers all over Ireland and, eager to take part, they left home and came to Dublin where they enrolled in flying columns. Words: Jeremiah Lynch. Tune: ‘The Jolly Ploughboy’.

THE OUL ALARM CLOCK: In 1939 the I.R.A. again declared war on England. The war consisted of attacks on military posts, the blowing up of munition

dumps etc. in England. Gelignite was most frequently used. Phil Kelly wrote the words to the air of ‘The Garden Where The Praties Grow’.

SEAN SOUTH: A student, a fine Gaelic poet and a volunteer in the I.R.A., was killed during the attack on Roslea Barracks in January 1957. Words by Dominic Behan to the traditional air ‘The Banks of Yarrow’.

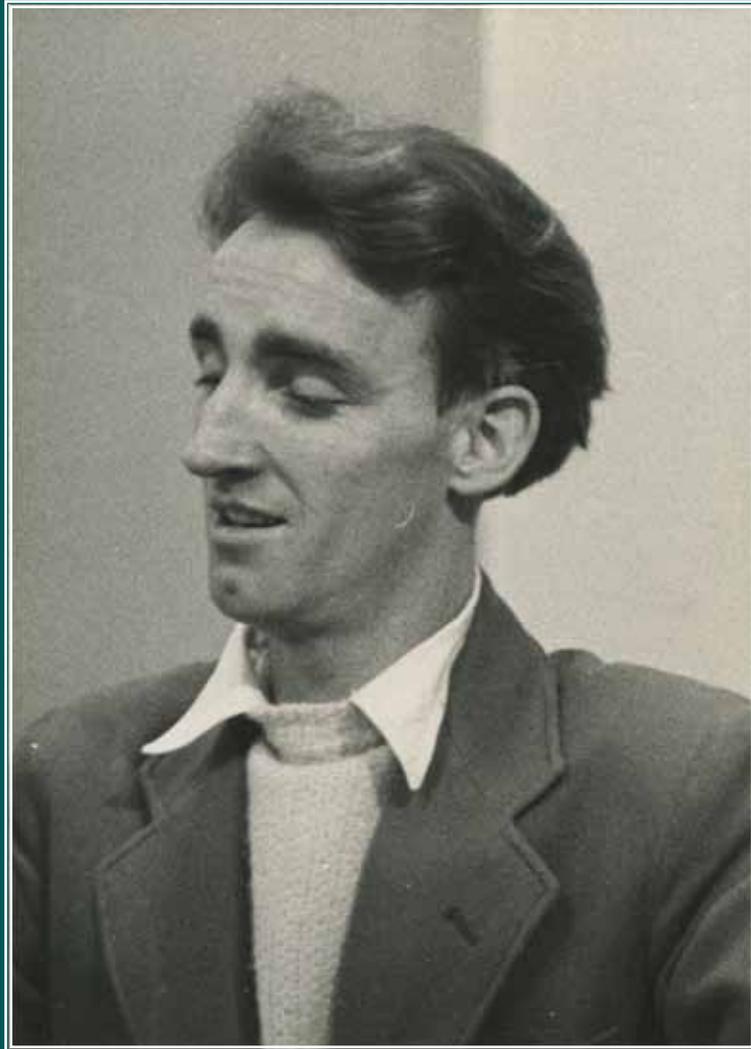
THE PATRIOT GAME: Feargal O’Hanlon, a farm labourer aged 17 from Ballybay, Co. Monaghan was killed in action with Sean South. Words and Music by Dominic Behan.

First published by Topic Records 1959

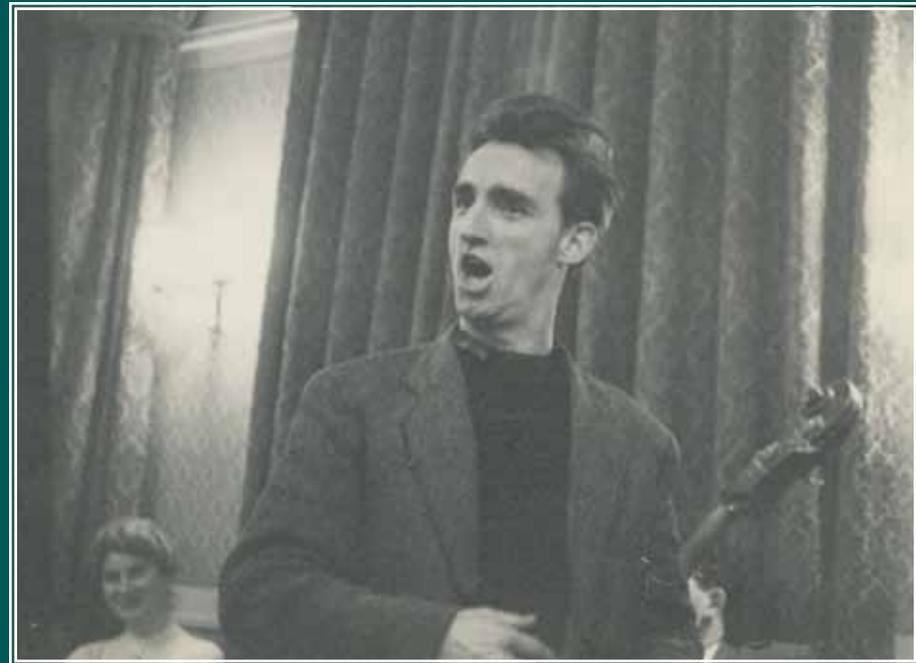
In the years since this record was first issued and since its notes were written, some of its subject matter may have acquired references that were originally neither intended nor foreseen. It remains in the Topic catalogue because of its documentary interest, and both music and notes should be understood in the terms of their period.

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Dominic Behan



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And After

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