

IEL 41

IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC



Folens

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IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

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The Bothy Band

The Bothy Band ride a red van. With black pudding sandwiches for breakfast, coke and hamburgers for lunch, and dinner sometimes as the rest of us yawn our way to breakfast, their work is the music and songs of Ireland.

Meet the Bothy Band and I'll later tell you about the straw-floored and mud-walled bothies!

Here is long and lanky Keenan of Ballyfermot. He'll look at you with a crooked grin as he puts his tool box carefully in a corner of the van; he sometimes says his whole life was built around the elbow pipes lying in that timber box. Made from ebony, soft leather, Spanish cane and brass, I can tell you the Irish uileann (or elbow) pipes haven't an equal in any other country where pipes are made or played, whether in the high or even low lands of Scotland, the glens of Southern Brittany, Northumbria, Bulgaria or the East, near or far. I know, because I've heard the pipes of all these wonderful countries, and

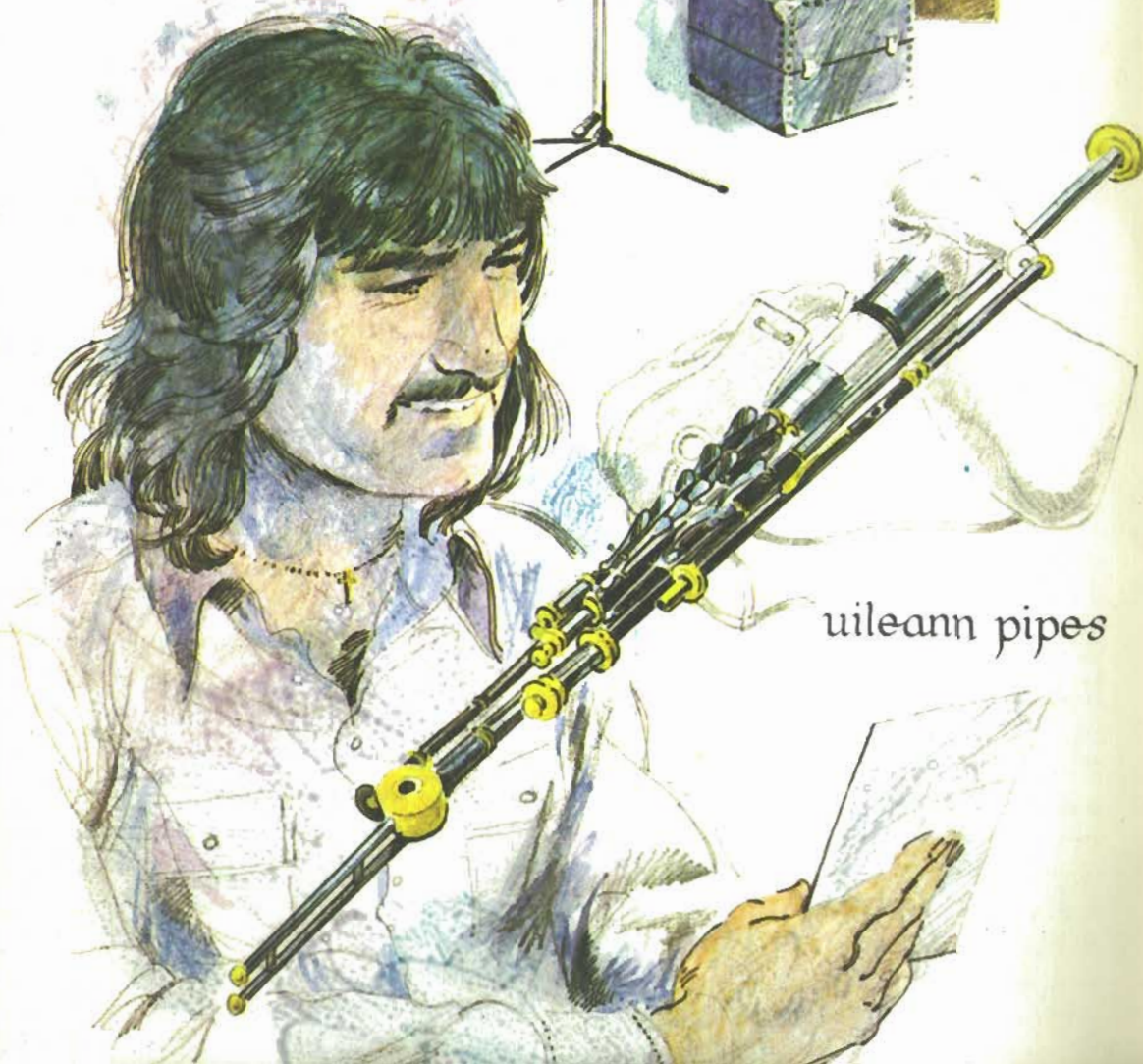
beautiful as they are, not one of them can touch the almost magical sound of Piper Keenan from Ballyfermot, Piper Séamus Ennis of North County Dublin, Piper Liam O'Flynn from Kildare, or Piper Martin Rochford from Bodyke in East County Clare.

Piper Keenan keeps in his pocket a yellowed, faded photograph which haunts him — or so he says. It's of a travelling piper, who after playing a reel called Rakish Paddy in front of his caravan of a fine summer's evening in 1947, looked into a camera, smiled shyly for a moment, and gave those of us who like Irish music a glance at one of the most wonderful music makers ever to grace the roads of Ireland.

Johnny Doran he was, and when he stopped his caravan on a fair day in Ballinasloe, a race meeting in Limerick, a market square in Claremorris or a narrow street in Miltown Malbay, the people would gather round as he took out his pipes,



Paddy Keenan



uilleann pipes

buckled the bellows under his left elbow, tuned his drones and began to play.

His music was magical, they said; it was like the call of the curlew on the mountain.

Often, as he played a lament for the dead and forgotten people of Ireland, tears would roll down the lined faces of the farmers who listened, because they knew that the piper's music was speaking out to them — speaking to their hearts.

Friend, whose eye wanders along these words — if ever you should wander by the walls of Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, remember that on a stormy, November morning in 1948, the Piper Doran was lacing his boots when a wall was blown over on top of the caravan which was his home, and he never walked, nor played the pipes again.

He is gone, but his music and his memory live on, and whenever Piper Keenan of the Bothy Band looks at the old photograph, the Piper Doran lives. . .

Now some say Matt Molloy looks like Napoleon, and I think I agree!

Known to his friends as "Ribbs Molloy", he's thin and strong, and looks out at the world with black and penetrating eyes, blowing a black timber flute made by a Roscommon craftsman some time between the two World Wars. *Molloy's music carries.*

The high notes of his reels and jigs have a round and pure quality to be

heard from no other, and listening to him play is like hearing an echo from long ago Ballaghadreen — an echo of the wonderful music which has been played by the flute players of that place since the time of the great hunger, and before. . . .

Arms folded, he sits behind the driver of the red van, talking to Triona of the honey-hard voice. She is always last out of the van, but first on stage, sitting behind her mini-harpsichord as the others shuffle around her to their places.

She flicks a switch under the keyboard and current from 4 U.2 batteries flows through the instrument, giving life to the note of A under her finger. A sharp eye might notice the home-made silver ring on that finger, and a knowing eye might notice the *triscelle* carried by that ring: to one man it is just a shape with no meaning, to another, it's like a broken signpost pointing nowhere, but to Triona it is a strong *thing* from behind time — it's like the living breath of the Celt who will not die, of the Breton musicians and poets and writers who refuse today to let their own culture drown. Triona married one of them, Serge, and she wears the home-made ring with the *triscelle* to remind her that the traditional music of her native Donegal and that of Brittany are, in a way, one.

And now my friends, I want to spend a moment with Mr. Super-cool Mícheál — her brother. Cheek

Johnny Doran



on chest and eye on Tríona, he tunes his guitar A-string to her, and then to the D, the E, and the G. The notes are triggers to Mícheál, reminding him of odds and bits and ends and pieces of the 297 traditional songs in Irish he tape-recorded and wrote down when he worked as a collector for the Folk Music Department of University College Dublin a few years ago. Before that he lived for a while in the Outer Hebrides, learning Scottish Gaelic and tuning his ear to its traditional music, so very like our own.

On a visit to Edinburgh on a summer Saturday, he wandered into a tavern by the name of "Sandy Bell's", and gazing over his lemon juice at a wall in the back room, his eyes fell on a photograph of eight Scottish traditional musicians in torn clothes. Mícheál remembered it, and the faded print underneath which said:

THE BOTHY BAND
1898

And the bothies of North-East Scotland — who is it will ever know how many ragged Irish labourers they housed? Seasonal workers from Donegal and from many of the other eight counties of Ulster came across to work for pennies on the hot summer farms, and at nightfall they would gather in the straw-floored, stone outhouses to play fiddles, melodeons, pipes and concertinas until their hearts were as high as their backs were heavy. Music it was that kept the ragged labourers free.

And that was how the Bothy Band got its name: when in 1975 six traditional musicians got together in Dublin with a plan for making their music their work, Mícheál remembered the photograph on the back-room wall of "Sandy Bell's" in Edinburgh. The second-hand red van was bought soon afterwards, as well as six microphones, an amplifier, a 10-channel mixer and two loudspeakers to carry the blended instruments and voices to the listeners in far-away seats.

Tinker's Music how are you?

Now out in front of a Bothy Band stage is a small sea of faces — English faces one night, Swedish another, Dutch again, or maybe American, French, Cork or German faces, in concert halls and folk clubs from Derry to Dusseldorf to Dallas.

What is it, you might ask, that draws so many people to Irish traditional music?

Twenty years ago Johnny Doran's stage was the street of a fair day and a farmer's evening kitchen. Today the Chieftains jet to Copenhagen, the

Matt Molloy



Dubliners to New Zealand, Dé Danann to Wuppertal; flute player Micho Russell of Doolin in the County Clare, who never travelled farther than Ennis until five years ago, can now spend six weeks playing in Breton folk clubs whenever the fancy takes him.

What a man is Micho to watch!

A bit more than half a century young, he'll look at you out of a bright and wonderful brown face, and when he lopes with long steps on stage, wearing brown shoes a size too big and bought because they were got at the right price, the audience sits up and smiles because each listener can feel that here is a REAL and warm person.

Not for him the well-fitting Dingo jeans with hand-made brown boots and a £10 haircut; Micho's charm is to be seen not only with the eye, but with the heart, in the long and haunting notes he blows on the flute, in the honey-rich verses of his strange ballads and in the shy smile where the mouth-piece of the black timber flute was, a moment ago. . . .

I could speak with you for a day about Micho, but then there are so very many other wonderful musicians like him — there is Solus Lillis, the concertina player from Kilmihil in East Clare, Jackie Daly the melodeon driver from Kanturk, there is Seán Ó Conaire of Rosmuc who sings and looks like a mighty dark warrior from three hundred years ago; there is travelling tinsmith and master fiddler Johnny Doherty of green and hilly Glencolumbkille, there is Iarla Ó Lionaird aged twelve from Baile Bhuirne who can sing *An Cailín deas donn* as it must have sounded when all of the County Cork spoke Irish, there are the brothers Dunne from Limerick who busk in Galway's Eyre Square on August Saturdays, watched over by the statue of poor Pádraig Ó Conaire, who better than anyone else knew how to travel the secret ways of Ireland.

I remember a time, and not so long ago at that, when men like these were laughed and jibed at for playing what some people called "tinkers' music", but all that changed.

There has been a Folk Revival

That is to say, during the past 20 years a great number of Irish people have discovered their own traditional music and song, and have been surprised at how much pleasure and excitement it has added to their lives.

People who used to look towards Hollywood or Holyhead for dance music or soul music, found at their own back doors, so to speak, music which had a special meaning for them. Not only that, but many found

Breton musicians



Triscelle



Triona

themselves learning to play instruments, sing ballads and lilt tunes.

Thus, a whole new world of leisure was opened out to them — winter evening music sessions by the fire, swapping tunes and drinking cups of tea, camping trips at Whit to the Fleá Cheoil, October journeys to the Oireachtas in Dublin and the Pipers' Club in Thomas Street near Guinness' Brewery, Sunday travelling to a remote place and the house of an old singer who was said to have a store of little known ballads. . . . searching junk shops for old 78 r.p.m. records of traditional fiddlers like Michael Coleman, made in primitive New York studios in the 1930's, buying a wheezy "Wheatstone" concertina cheap, and restoring it to its original charm in sound and in appearance of black ebony and soft leather.

And what friends were made, and what fine times were shared by the new followers of Irish folk music during those early years of the folk revival in the 1950's! A good many lives are to this day still intertwined, because of a few reels played at a Mullingar Fleá or a song shared in a Galway folk club.

Parked in the corner of a field just outside the village of Naul in North County Dublin is the mobile home of Séamus Ennis. When the time comes for somebody to write about the revival of interest in Irish folk music which began in the early 1950's, the

name and fame of Séamus Ennis will rank high.

It was he who cycled from Finglas in Dublin to Connemara in 1951, to begin his great work of collecting traditional music and songs for the Irish Folklore Commission. With notebook, pen and the clumsy Ediphone recording machine of those days, Séamus travelled Ireland and was made welcome wherever he went. Nobody has ever counted the songs and tunes he so beautifully wrote down from people, many of them since dead — fiddle music from Pádraig O' Keefe of Gleanntán near Castleisland and from Denis "the Weaver" Murphy of nearby Gneeveguilla, 235 songs in the sean-nós from Colm Keane of Glinsk in Connemara and piping tunes of the Famine times from Willie Clancy of Miltown Malbay in West Clare, and so very much more.

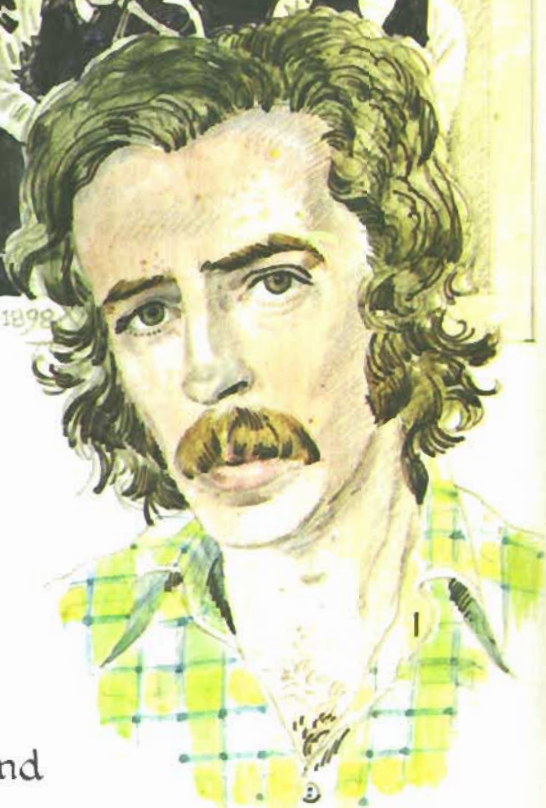
Séamus went to them, not so much as an official of the Irish Folklore Commission, but as a fellow musician who loved and understood their music, wanting to record it for posterity.

Twelve lines back, I had the two small words "sean-nós"; can I now tell you that they mean "old way" — the old way of singing the big songs of Ireland? About love, about land, about war, about wine, about everything our people who went before us talked, laughed and cried about — these songs have floated down through the years to us, carried



The Bothy Band 1998

Micheál



The bothies of Scotland



from mouth to mouth from forgotten times.

It is not possible for any writer to capture their greatness, just as five lines and four spaces cannot contain what is in them; the only way to experience that is to hear them sung. If you do, try not to be put off by their strangeness. For like many of life's good things, you must penetrate the surface to see what lies underneath. A great song has a small part of the world hidden between its words and notes, waiting for the good singer to unlock it for the one who cares to listen.

The singer sings the song while the song sings the singer, you might say!

There were collectors of folklore, song and music before Séamus, who with notebook and pen did great work during the early part of this century, but his work is so outstanding that the Irish nation owes him a great debt indeed.

His was the first voice on Radio Éireann to bring the fullness of Irish folk music to the public; his was the first voice on BBC radio to bring the traditional music of these islands to listeners from Skye to Southampton to Sligo, and to this day, dressed in black suit, waistcoat and wide-brimmed grey hat, he drives a battered blue Ford over North Dublin roads to play and sing and yarn for those who care to listen.

But for everyone who listens, he is lost to a thousand others.

On October 14, 1951 eleven traditional musicians sat around a table in an upstairs room at number 14 Thomas Street in Dublin and formed an organisation which they called **Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann**. Among them was Leo Rowsome, a master piper and pipe-maker who spent his days making pipes in a back room of his Dublin home and his evenings teaching beginners in the Pipers' Club in that upstairs room. His was a noted Wexford family, and when Leo collapsed and died while listening to a young Dublin fiddle player called Paddy Glackin in Riverstown, Co. Sligo, in 1971, there was an end to a line of great Wexford pipers.

The organisation of traditional musicians he helped to build lives on, and from the eleven who sat around the Thomas Street table in 1951, it has grown to a membership of 14,000, with branches in America, Scotland, England, Canada and Australia.

Thus, there is a great fraternity of Irish traditional musicians and singers who are determined to preserve the music that is theirs, and pass it on to generations to come.

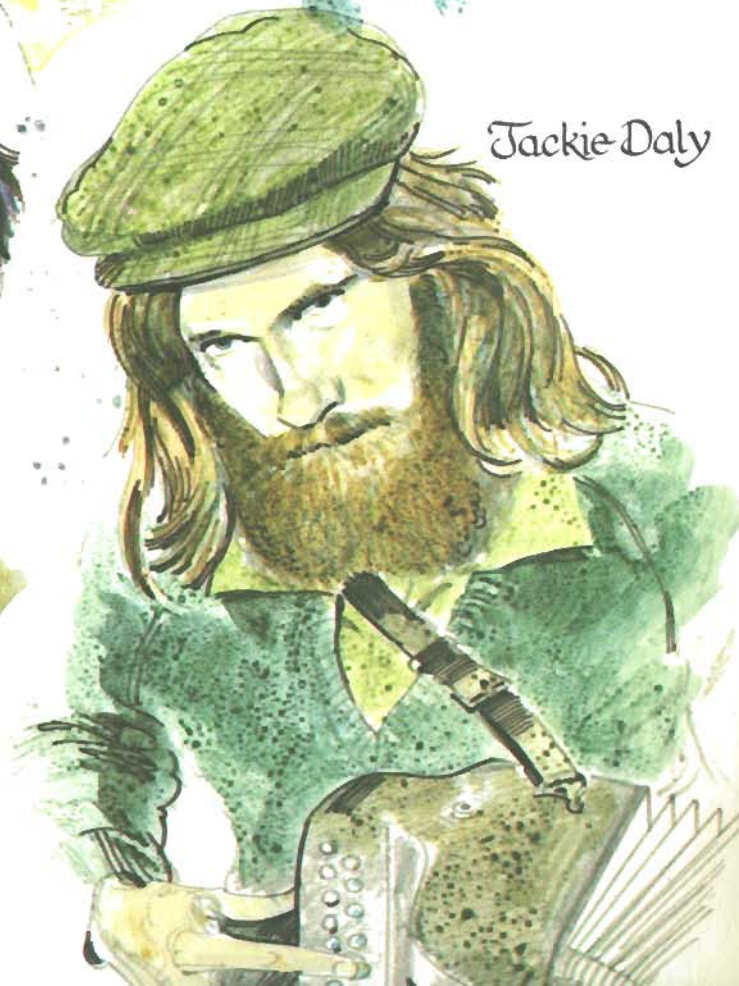
Just think for a moment of the traditional music maker of 1951. He made his music for small numbers of neighbours and friends in his own place, and was often unknown ten miles away.

But the first Fleá Cheoil in Mullingar during the Whit week-end

Micho Russell



Jackie Daly



of 1951 changed all that. The founders of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, with a mighty sweep of their arms and hearts, drew hundreds of forgotten musicians and singers and dancers and listeners to the streets of Mullingar there to play together, talk together and live together for three days and three nights.

And for the very first time, the Donegal fiddler heard the Belfast piper and the Leitrim flute player swapped reels with the Clare tin whistler, and the Dublin man who loved the street songs handed down by the great Zozimus, heard the haunting sean-nós songs of Rosmuc and Rinn. The grey veil of isolation was gently drawn aside, and men stood up, smiled and loved the music of their fellow musicians. They went home with a song in their hearts, remembering tunes they had learned or half learned, and looking forward to the next year's Whit week-end.

So the Fleá Cheoil went on year after year, feeding the walls and streets and citizens of Loughrea, Boyle, Ennis and Buncrana with reels, jigs, hornpipes and fun. And like all beautiful things in this life, there were problems. You had the waster who came to get drunk and make noise where there was music. You had the narrow-minded musician who came only to win a prize. You had the ignorant adjudicator who had the cheek to award marks in a competition to musicians for whose music he had neither understanding nor feeling.

Comhaltas grew and became strong. The musicians who founded it continued to make music as they had always done, while control of the organisation slowly passed from their hands, to people who were good at the business of arranging musical events and competitions. Money came from the Government, and Comhaltas grew bigger. Classes for beginners started up all over the country. You had the county Fleá and the provincial Fleá, the all-Ireland Fleá and the Fleá Nua, all featuring competitions of many kinds, where an adjudicator could make a player into an All-Ireland Champion in five minutes, or convince a real traditional musician that his music was no good at all.

All this kind of thing helped to produce a result that frightened many musicians: as time passed, one player began to sound like another, and you had accordions, banjos, guitars, soup-spoons, two shilling pieces and beer bottles used to batter out reels, jigs and hornpipes in one big musical brawl after another. The many regional styles of playing began to get blurred, and too often there was no way of knowing where a player came from by listening to his music.

To put it in a nutshell, all Irish traditional music began to sound the same!

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann has done much good work for Irish folk music, and is directed today from behind an executive desk in a

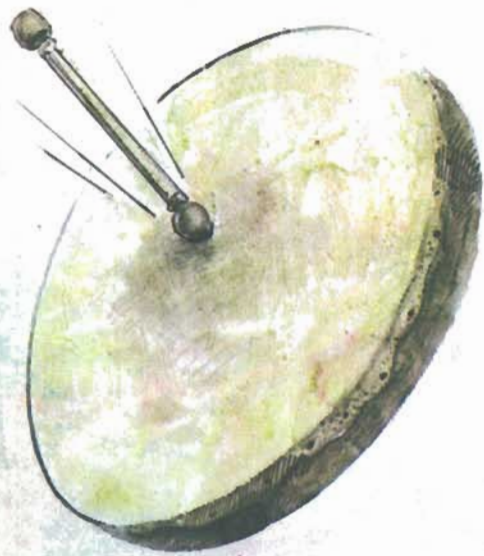
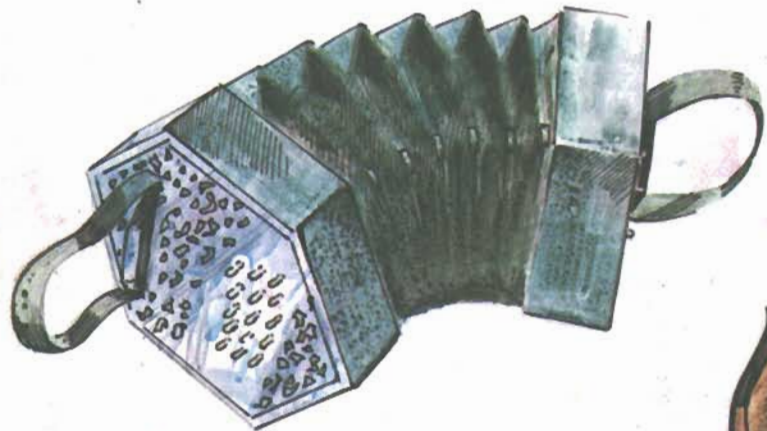
whistle



fiddle



concertina



bodhrán

flute



splendid building in the fashionable Belgrave Square of Monkstown in South Dublin City . . . while, parked in the corner of a field twenty-six

miles away, is the mobile home of the tall piper who drives the battered blue Ford . . .

Chief and Chieftains

There is an entry in the Casualty Register of King's College Hospital in London which reads as follows: "Ó Riada Seán, a patient from Cork in Ireland, admitted September 18th 1971, accompanied by relatives, friends and doctor. All spoke a foreign language. Nobody understood same."

The foreign language heard by the London nurse was Irish, and so began the last heartbreaking chapter in the life of Seán Ó Riada, a man who put new fire and muscle into Irish folk music during the ten years before his death in 1971.

He began this work by inviting eight good players to his flat in a place called "Gallopig Green" in Dublin. It was 1960, and he wanted to try out an idea he had — a new way of presenting Irish folk music.

Now at that time Céilí Bands were popular — anywhere from four to fourteen players would get up on the stage at nine o'clock, and all playing together, all the time, would flake out reels, jigs and hornpipes until the early hours of the following morning, while the dancers battered

away below. It was good, but not great; enjoyable but not very exciting, and a bit rough and ready too!

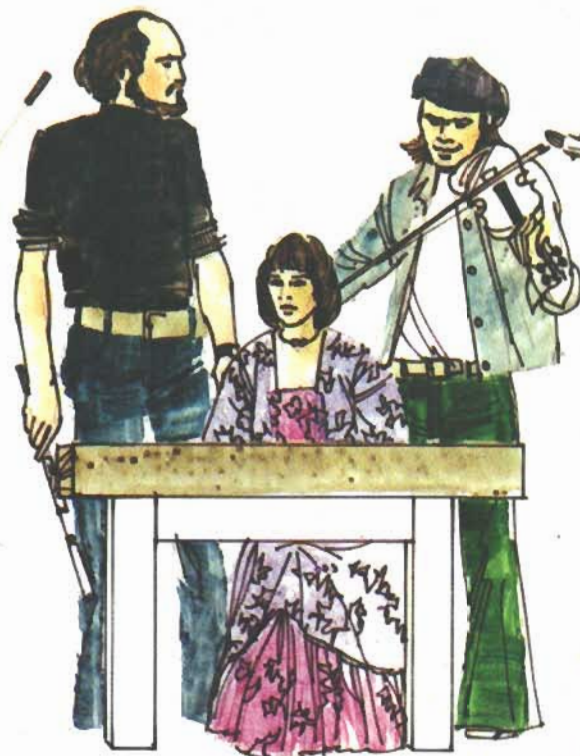
Ó Riada and his nine musicians were different. He called them **Ceoltóirí Chualann**, and they would go on stage in front of an audience that might include farmers, government ministers, students, diplomats, drop-outs or drop-ins — anybody!

Seán would stand up, look at the people and speak: of the day in 1738 when blind Carolan arrived at the hall door of Mrs. MacDermott-Roe in Ballyfarnon, there to compose and play on the harp for her his last air — his *Farewell to Music*.

Seán would talk about the Gaelic chiefs and poets who ruled before Kinsale, before their way of life — *an saol Gaelach* — was smashed. He would remember the starving poor who staggered to the steamer in Cóbh after the Great Hunger, clutching their rags, their few belongings and their fiddles, to remind them of what they were leaving. And Seán would speak of Garret Barry, the blind, itinerant,



Paddy Keenan



Matt Molloy

Triona O'Donnell

Kevin Burke



Donald Luny



Michael O'Donnell

The Bothy Band

The Chieftains



Paddy Moloney

proud piper who made music all over Clare eighty years ago, and now lying in a grave without mark or stone in the village of Inagh, five miles from Ennis. . . . he would talk about the good songs and the happy times that were had around warm fires, in kitchens and castles and cross-roads.

Then the flute player would begin, or maybe the piper, and the bodhrán player, beating out an ancient rhythm with knuckles across the two foot diameter of cured goat skin. One by one, or by two, the other instruments would join in or out, building a fiery and wonderful music that touched and excited and thrilled all those people who were hearing it for the very first time.

It was magical, they said!

Ó Riada would take the listeners with him on his own personal journeys into the lanes and corners of Irish music. You could say he plugged the people into their past, and they were moved, deeply.

Seán Ó Riada died in London in 1971 and was buried in Cúil Aodha in the Gaeltacht of West Cork — in his own place. He was forty. He is remembered in stone, in the chiselled stone of the late Séamus Murphy,

Why Kerry slides in Hamburg

Now, I've been going on about the folk revival in Ireland as if such a thing didn't happen in any other country around that time, but it did!

Go into a record shop in any big German city and you're sure to find

and the shadows of his music rise from the records he made. Listen to any of today's or yesterday's folk groups, and you will hear of him: Planxty, Dé Danann, Ceoltóirí Laighean, the Bothy Band, Na Fíli, the Chieftains.

Of all the Irish traditional groups, the Chieftains are the best known and the most popular. Their stage is a vast one — the big concert halls of Europe, North America and other places afar. Their music is basically O'Riada's, for five of their seven were among the eight Ó Riada invited to his flat in "Galloping Green" in 1960, to teach and coax and encourage into *his* way of music.

The Chieftains are Ireland's best known ambassadors and on stage have some of the charm and greatness they inherited from Ceoltóirí Chualann, yet you could listen through their concerts, records, TV appearances or radio shows without hearing much of the man who taught them to play as they do, or of how it was in those times.

Well friends, that is the way of the world I suppose, and they say that eaten bread is soon forgotten!

Kerry slides, Roscommon reels or West Cork jigs on the expensive circular pieces of plastic that find their way into so many German flats, youth hostels and homes. And why is

Ancient Irish harp
with steel strings



Melodeon



bag pipes

it that so many young Germans come to Ireland every summer, buying tin-whistles and learning to play *Toss the feathers* or *The humours of Ballyconnell*?

To find the answer, you will have to look at the dark face of Fascism in the Germany of the 1930's. Other pages at other times will tell you how the brown-shirted Nazis destroyed much of the old ways of life of the German people, and as the fearful year of 1939 approached, crude military music and vulgar beerhall songs had taken the place of the traditional music and songs of Germany which had been lovingly passed on from generation to generation to generation.

When the flames of the Second World War went out in June 1945, many of the old ways of life had gone. A new generation of Germans grew up in a new Germany, few of them knowing what had been lost. Dollars had come to rebuild their country; American music and the American way of life followed.

When in the early nineteen and sixties Irish folk groups such as the Dubliners and the Fureys came to play in Germany, they discovered a vast audience which was prepared to love their music, whatever its faults. Young Germans found it exciting, entertaining, unpretentious, human and real, and came along to as many concerts of Irish music as they could find. Without any real body of traditional music of their own, they

embraced ours with a welcome that surprised the Irish who went to play there. As time passed they began to learn Irish ballads and play tin whistles, fiddles and bodhráns, and during the past few years many have begun to resurrect their own folk tunes and songs which many had thought lost forever.

So it is that a wonderful bond of music and friendship exists today between many of the traditional music makers of Ireland and Germany.

And that's a fact!

*They put the rope around his neck
And a swasher behind his ear,
The prison bell was tolling
But Tim Evans didn't hear,
Now go down, ye murderers
Go down*

At 9.00 a.m. on Thursday 9 March 1950, Tim Evans was hanged in London for the murder of his wife and child, and seventeen years later was given a posthumous free pardon by Queen Elizabeth — it had been discovered in the meantime that he was innocent and another man had been hanged for the crime as well.

Thus it happened that a civilised society, in the recent past, destroyed a whole family.

Ewan MacColl is a Scottish ballad-maker who was so incensed at this kind of tragedy that he devoted his life and work to the poor, the oppressed, the lonely and the

Flea competitors



forgotten. His way was to write popular ballads that would lash out at those who profited by the sufferings of others. He wrote and sang about the death of Tim Evans, calling the judge and jury "Murderers" in the last verse. He wrote and sang about Vietnam, about nuclear warfare, about Jesus Christ, landlords, hunger and poor housing. Where there was injustice and cruelty, MacColl's pen and loud voice were there to sing about it in folk clubs, on the streets, or wherever he could find an audience. He was one of the big people of the folk revival in Britain, and to talk fully about his work and songs I'd have had to begin 20 pages back and go on for another 20! I would like to tell you though, about one of his inventions — the radio ballad.

His idea was to capture, in an hour long radio programme, the *real* story and experience of jobs and ways of life that were being destroyed forever by "progress", and one of those he picked was the life and times of the **travelling** people.

With tape recorder, notebook and pen, he travelled and lived with the people some call "tinkers", recording their voices, their songs, their stories and misfortunes, their contacts with the police, farmers, townspeople, the sounds of their wagons and of the passing trucks, of their horses, their babies and their old.

After several weeks living as they lived he came back to a studio in

Birmingham and compiled the most moving story in sound I have ever heard of the travelling people, for which he wrote a ballad that is still sung today.

Born in the middle of the Aston
Moor
in a horse-drawn wagon by the old
A5,

The big twelve wheeler shook my bed
You can't stop here the policeman
said,

You'd better get born somewhere else
So move along, get along, move
along, get along,

Move, Shift, Go

We have with us our own
travellers. The late Johnny Doran
was one as was his brother Felix, as
were some of the greatest people
whose music has honoured us and
our country.

Who will speak of them in song now?
Who will?

I once hitch-hiked from Vancouver to New York; the journey cost me the \$7 I had and I was 9 days on the road. I got lifts from four miles to five hundred and was asked by every single driver where I came from; each one, on hearing I was Irish, told me that he or she had some Irish blood, some family tie with Ireland!

It has amazed me ever since, that in such a vast continent as North America, a lonely traveller such as I then was should meet all those people who had a smile for an Irishman and

Tarla Ó Lionaird



a story to tell of their Irish connections.

What a small place North America can be!

Our starving thousands who went on one-way journeys there after the famine (or to be more exact, the failure of just one crop — the potato) brought their music with them —

The sheep run unsheared
And the land is gone to rushes,
The journeyman's gone and the
winder of creels
So away o'er the Atlantic go you
handymen-tailors
You fiddlers who flaked out the old
mountain reels. . . .

The African who came to America in chains also brought his music with him and like the hungry Irish immigrant, he depended on it as the only solid link with his past, with his country.

Black American jazz musicians were the first to put their country on the music-map of the world, and the greater part of American folk music has its origins in Ireland and in Africa.

Today, folk music is more popular in America than it has ever been; the good exponent can make a living by his music and many of the big universities offer degree courses in folklore and ethnomusicology. Irish traditional groups go there on tour all the time and are welcomed for the music they have preserved in this age of progress.

The reason for the revival of

interest in folk music there is the same as our reason, the German reason, the British reason — people found themselves in danger of losing an important part of their culture and they decided to work against that loss.

Their problem here is greater than ours: the first Americans and their way of life was smashed at Wounded Knee as ours was at Kinsale. To this day, the survivors are forced to live in ghettos and in reservations, robbed of all that was theirs. The American folk revival we hear about is mainly of the music the European settlers brought with them to America.

There is no Ewan MacColl or Séamus Ennis to speak for the music of the first Americans.

It has gone, and we are all poorer for its passing.

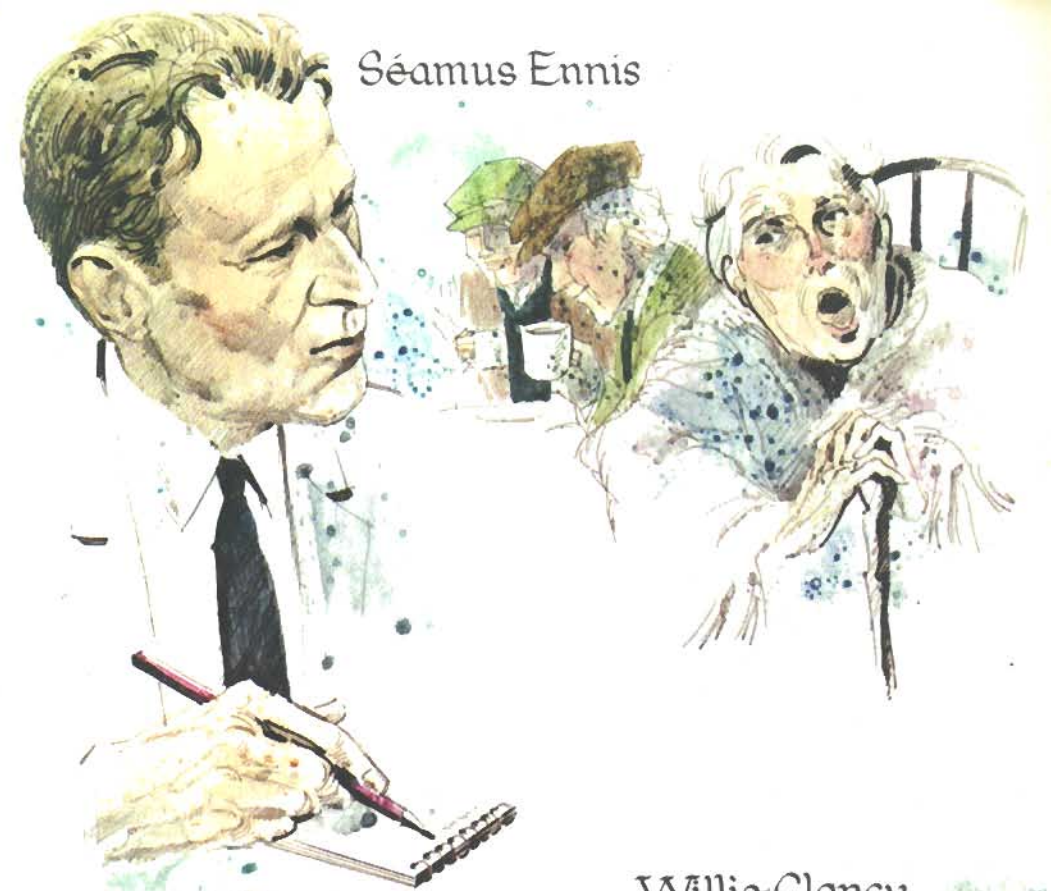
Let us leave America, Mac Coll and Germany now and spend a moment with Dónal Lunny.

He sits by the window and by the driver of the red van, contemplating the passing landscape and the tunes and songs that float in and around each other inside him.

Dónal is a craftsman in sound; his canvas is the rare ballad and the strong singer, the five part reel and the articulate piper, the possibilities of musical harmony and the scope of the modern recording studio.

Dónal pilots the Bothy Band, devising arrangements for four voices and eleven instruments and producing the best possible sound

Séamus Ennis



Willie Clancy



Denis Murphy

when they go into studio to make a new record or on stage to make a concert.

Playing guitar, bodhrán, and mandolin, his favourite and best is that wonderful traditional instrument of Greece — the **bouzouki**. (By the way, don't confuse it with the anti-tank weapon of the Second World War — the bazooka!) Dónal's instrument was hand made for him in London, and listening to him accompany a player like Matt Molloy one might wonder how people tolerated the crude piano and drums accompaniment that plagued the Irish traditional players for so long.

Since the Céilí Band was invented in 1926, some flute and fiddle players got into the habit of thinking their music lame, and so needing a crutch, and sometimes two — piano and drums. Many the great session of music was marred by the three-chords-only "player" of an out-of-tune piano or the rusty rattle of a side drum and cymbals. Mind you, bad as that was, it was good compared to the tyke who wielded the pair of two shilling pieces on the ribs of the brown beer bottle!

It is only in thinking of all the bad work that has been done that Lunny's style of accompaniment stands out and high — it is sympathetic to theme, to form and to mood, and seldom interferes with the music being played.

This can be seen, or rather heard, in his accompaniment of Frank

Harte's ballads. Frank is an architect by trade and a singer by instinct who lives on the bank of a river that has seen many a great Dublin ballad maker come and go — the Liffey. For one of his records he chose some of the Old Dublin street songs that survive to the present day, to which Donal added a wonderfully gentle and tasteful accompaniment, and how poor Bidy Mulligan of the Coombe or Dicey Riley would have loved it!

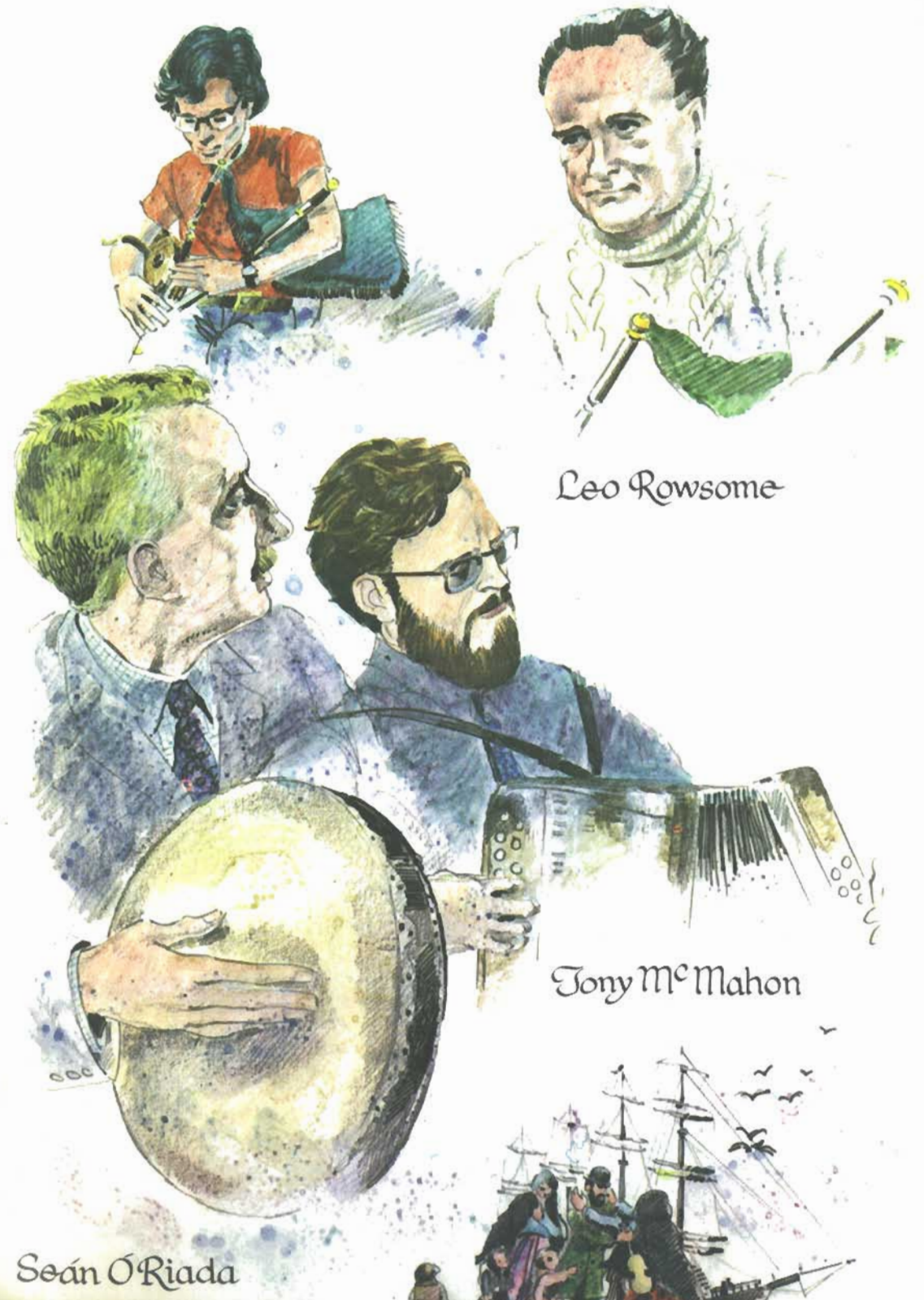
And they were the ladies . . .!

The face of Dublin changes week by week; you may admire a fine building from the top of a high bus on a Monday morning and come back on a Friday to find it gone — demolished.

But the soul of Dublin is made of stuff more enduring than red bricks or grey stone, and the Dublin people of other times, poor old Bidy Mulligan and her likes, stay on with us in the ballads of the Frank Hartes and the Liam Weldons.

And why wouldn't they? Weren't they the work of master song craftsmen like Zozimus, that blind street singer with the low voice and dark face who bounced his ballads off the walls and pavements of Dublin's Liberties over a hundred years ago, singing them as it were into the very sky.

And wherever good Dublin ballad singers gather to this day, there also are the ballads of tall and blind Zozimus.



I mentioned Liam Weldon a while back. Weighing fifteen stone, he is wide and strong and big in ten different ways! In a back room of his home in Ballyfermot he can be found doing beautiful work in leather, hardwood and goat skin — making bodhráns and practice sets of uilleann pipes for a living.

Weldon is a man who cares about life. Anything he does gets the full power of his heart and mind, whether cooking Howth prawns for his wife Nelly and eight children, making a bodhrán for a Breton student, a pipe chanter for a neighbour's child or a new song for himself to sing and Ireland to hear!

As a ballad singer and ballad maker he is outstanding. He sat down one day in May 1966 and wrote one of the most moving ballads I've ever heard, *Dark Horse on the Wind*. This was his own personal commemoration of the 1916 Rising, telling how, fifty years later, the ideals of the men of 1916 had been forgotten or betrayed.

Now charlatans wear dead men's shoes

And rattle dead men's bones,
Ere the dust had settled on their tombs

They sold the very stones.
In that song, written in 1966, he also forecast the terrible things there were to happen in Ulster:

In grief and hate our motherland
her dragon's teeth has sown.
The warriors spring from the earth
To maim and kill their own.

Weldon may be seen on afternoons, sauntering in the Liberties — looking in old shop windows, talking with men he knew there as a child, looking around him at a face of Dublin that may be gone when their years are upon him. And here now is his big song for your eyes and heart.

Dark Horse on the Wind
a ballad by Liam Weldon.

O Those who died for liberty have
heard the eagle scream
O the ones who died for liberty have
died but for a dream
O Rise! Rise! Rise! Dark Horse on
the Wind.

For in no nation of the earth more
broken dreams you'll find.

The flames leaped high — reached to
the sky till they seared a nation's soul
In the ashes of our broken dreams
we've lost sight of our goal.
O Rise! Rise! Rise! Dark Horse on
the Wind.

And help our heartsick Róisín her
soul again to find.

Now charlatans wear dead men's
shoes

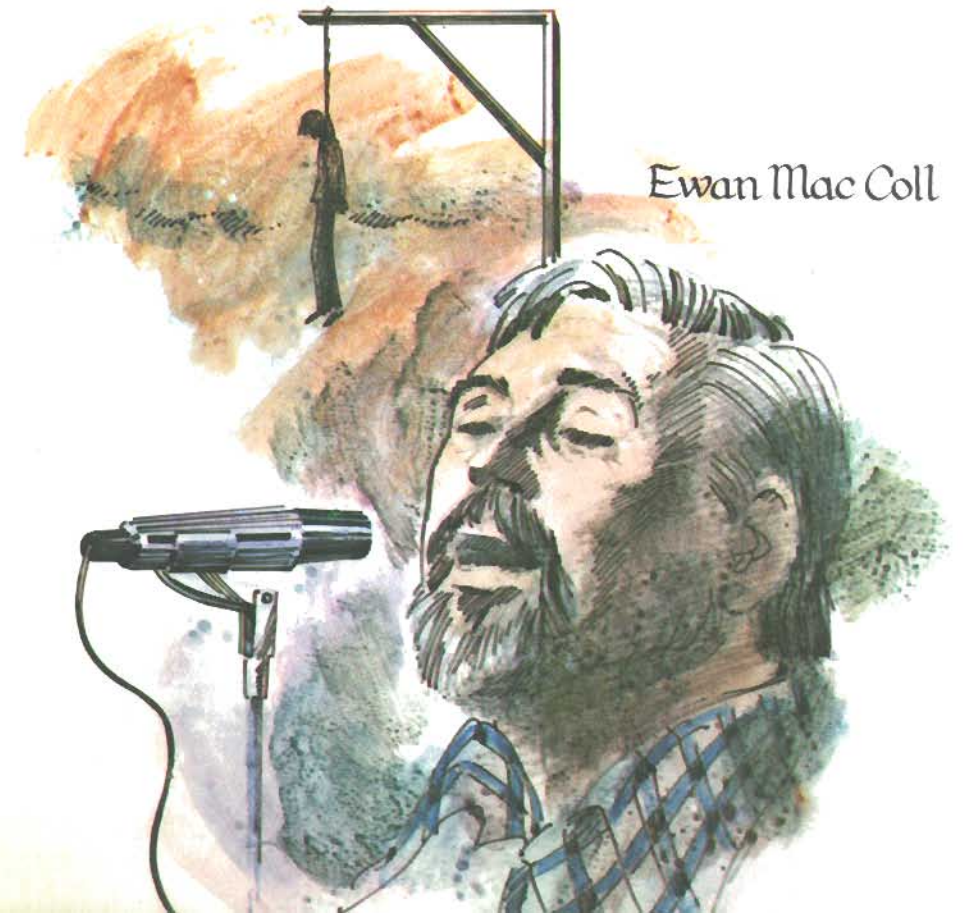
Aye, and rattle dead men's bones.
Ere the dust has settled on their
tombs

they've sold the very stones
O Rise! Rise! Rise! Dark Horse on
the Wind.

For in our nation of the earth more
pharisees you'll find.



Jim Evans



Ewan Mac Coll

In grief and hate our motherland her
dragon's teeth has sown
Now the warriors spring from the
earth to maim and kill their own.
O Rise! Rise! Rise! Dark Horse on
the Wind.

For the one eyed Balor still reigns
King in our nation of the blind.

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Dark Horse on the Wind is the first
song on the A side of a MULLIGAN
record. One hundred and one
Templeogue Road is the office of
Mulligan Records, is the home of
The Bothy Band and is known to
some of us as Mulligan Mansions!

We live at a time when huge
international record companies are
in the business of force feeding
bubble-gum music to millions, and
so nothing but praise is due the small
record companies like Gael-Linn,
Claddagh and Mulligan whose work
gives a platform to traditional
musicians and singers, and not for
the ugly motive of profit.

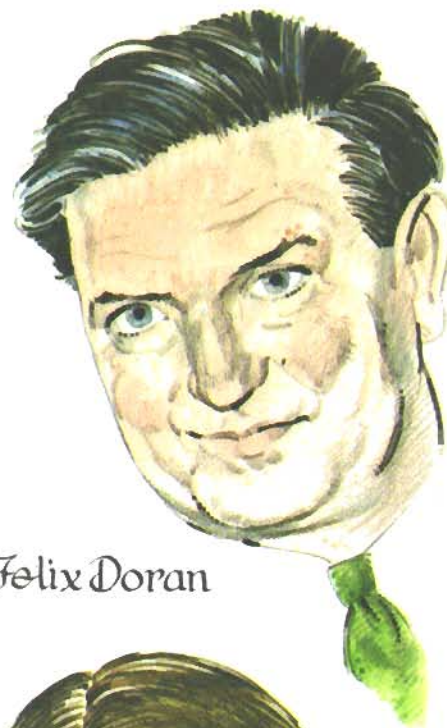
The wonderful music of Ó Riada is
there for us today because of the
imagination and foresight of Gael-
Linn and Claddagh Records, and
Mulligan was started recently by

Mícheál Ó Domhnaill and Dónal
Lunny to add a wider range of
popular performers to what we
already have. Liam Weldon is one,
Matt Molloy another, and between
my writing this and your reading it,
more good sounds will have been
transferred to the round pieces of
plastic whose centres show a red on
white line drawing of the grinning
dwarf which is the emblem of
Mulligan Records!

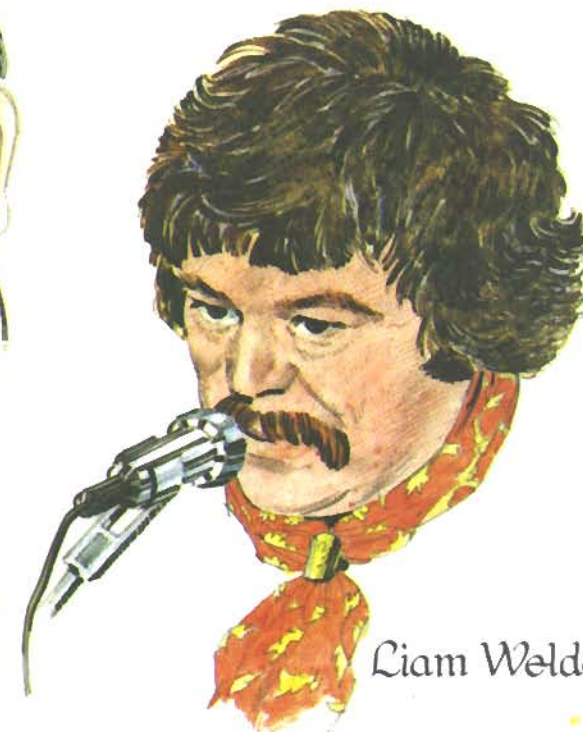
Two storeys over the Mulligan
office is the sleep-room of Kevin
Burke. He is the only member of the
Bothy Band you haven't yet met, so I
would like to spend a moment with
him.

Kevin wears a chimney-sweeper's
greasy cap which looks as if he uses it
to wipe the squelched insects of
summer and the winter's congealed
mud from windows and windshield
of the red Transit van. You will know
him by his extraordinary head-gear
and by his lonesome way of playing
Sligo dance music on the fiddle.

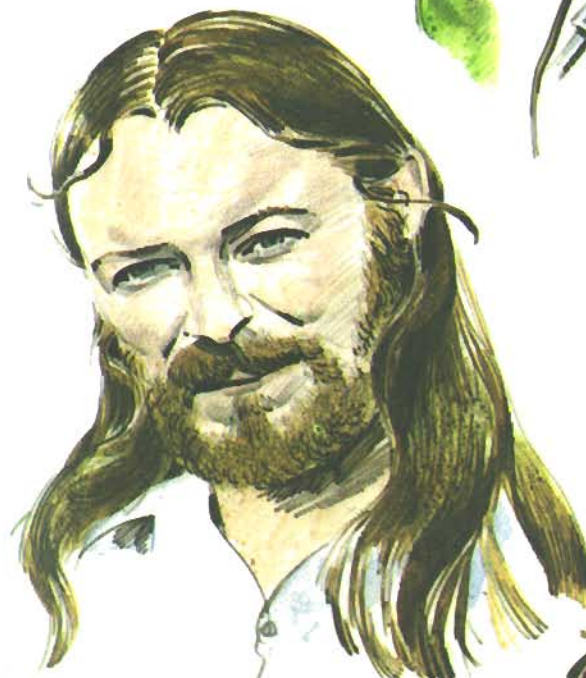
*From beneath the peak of his cap,
chin resting on the fiddle's yellow
wood, he smiles softly out at the
world.*



Felix Doran



Liam Weldon



Dónal Lunny



Well, friends, you've met the Bothy Band, I hope — Matt Molloy and Kevin Burke, Paddy Keenan and Dónal Lunny, Tríona and Mícheál Ó Domhnaill.

Each of them stands in a way for a hundred others whom I love equally well and, as I write of them to you, my heart is with all traditional music-makers scattered across the face of Ireland and of other places. And remember that wherever you live in Ireland, one of them will not be far away.

We live in an age of great change and even though our music is alive and well, many of its old ways are passing. I myself sat and talked and played and drank tea with Sonny Brogan and Willie Clancy, Denis Murphy and Seán Ó Riada; they were my friends and I thought they would be there forever. Yet, one by one they died, and though I miss them greatly, I've had their kind company as I write these words to you.

But what good are words — my black soldiers of ink on white pages — to sing and speak of the music of Ireland? If only I could play for you instead, I would have little need of them.

The music of Ireland is yours and is all about you. All you have to do is go out and turn the keys that dangle from the closed doors of life, and gently push open the others. For life is like that — good things seldom come to us, rather we must come for them.

And if these words should open your heart to the long notes of a good song or a good tune, then I will be well pleased with my words!

So, I give them to you now, and with much friendship.