



Saoithe: Paddy Daly, Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh, Niamh Parsons, Ann Riordan

The Sweet Nightingale

New Series, no 12, February 2020

Shanties in Dún Laoghaire

On Saturday 2 November last, the Howth Singing Circle were invited, for the second year, by the Dún Laoghaire Vinyl Festival to perform a session of Sea Shanties. The venue was the atmospheric surroundings of the old church in Haig Terrace now the National Maritime Museum and the singers sang, fittingly, below the impressive edifice of the old Baily Lighthouse light. Despite the awful weather, a good audience attended and sang lustily along from their Song Sheets and were very complimentary as they left after the performance.

The ever-reliable Eddie Philips nudged our vessel from its berth and 'Away From the Roll of the Sea' before Tom Finn lustily led 'The Greenland Whale Fishery', the choruses swelling in the vastness of the old church. Paddy Daly paid tribute to the late seamen and dockers' union leader, diver and naval archaeologist Des Branigan who was closely associated with the development of the Museum and the Maritime Institute. Paddy read the poem 'Cork on the Sea' with great feeling as it described the badge Branigan designed for the Marine, Port & General Workers' Union which featured the knot of St Brendan the Navigator and the Starry Plough.



Some of the objects and subjects in the National Maritime Museum

Helen Lahert led a poignant version of 'Three Score & Ten', reminding the audience of the continued sacrifice of fisher folk and seafarers. Laurence Bond provided a lusty version of 'Blood Red Roses',

perhaps the closest we came to actually sounding like a crew hauling sheets or turning capstans. It roused the audience who were then well-primed to provide solid chorus work as Brian Doyle sang 'The Leaving of Liverpool'. An undoubted highlight was Daire Ó Baoill's beautiful, soaring performance of 'Mhéis Mé Ó' which utterly captivated audience and crewmates alike. Frank Spiers followed with Ewan MacColl's 'Come All Ye Fisher Lassies', a song first heard in the celebrated Radio Ballad Singing the Fishing'. Frank, a yachtsman with a heritage from Portsoy and other fishing ports mentioned in the song, hit the nail of the song full square. Jack & Angela Plunket led 'Bully in the Alley', a contrast to many of the more familiar songs but one thoroughly appreciated by the audience. Eugene McElowney then got everyone to puff their chests and cheeks to 'Blow the Man Down', an old favourite that everyone knew.



Shanties belting out from below the old Baily Light to an appreciative and responsive audience; Ann Riordan berating the congregation and instructing them to go down to the galley for an enjoyable de-brief after singing their exertions



Gerry O'Connor introduced a more gentle, reflective mood with 'Old Whitby Harbour' and Ann Riordan read the poem 'The Santa Domingo' that told the story of the many seamen who are badly exploited and often arrive in port with no pay and little by way of provisions. The poem was commissioned by the International Transport Workers' Federation who published it in over fifteen languages in tribute to the late Tony Ayton, Ireland's first ITF Inspector, who reclaimed millions of dollars in unpaid wages for seafarers stranded on our shores. Niamh Parsons pleaded 'Leave Her, Johnny, Leave Her', another favourite that was followed by the 'Star Wars Shanty' that brought smiles to all and some terrific responses to the calls.

Luke Cheevers brought the performance to a close with 'Billy O'Shea' rejoined by an audience now fully warmed up and enthusiastic to sing along – the essential purpose of the day. Howth Singing Circle

were grateful to Neil Goodman and Brian O'Flaherty for the invitation to perform at the Vinyl Festival; to the staff of the National Maritime Museum for their assistance and courtesy; to those who joined the crew without the opportunity to lead a song – Fergus Carey, Mary Doyle, Úna Kane and Walter Kennedy; and, mostly of course, to those who stood on the quay and sang along as we sailed past. All were engaged when the session concluded in the traditional fashion with the singing of 'The Parting Glass'.

One poem that was included in the Shanty Session was 'Last Request' which was written in honour of John de Courcy Ireland, a significant figure in the development of both the National Maritime Museum and Maritime Institute, an internationally acclaimed and highly decorated maritime historian, polyglot and writer, for many years Secretary of the Dún Laoghaire Lifeboat, life-long socialist and campaigner for peace and environmental protection. First published in 1997, it has become a frighteningly real possibility: When the last ocean dried / it requested that its salts be /scattered over Jacques Cousteau / and John de Courcy Ireland.

Women's Songs

Our November session, hosted by Niamh Parsons and Helen Lahert celebrated songs and poems for and about women and gathered regulars, new voices and people welcomed back after a long absence. We heard songs and poems of defiance and rebellion of hard work and fights for rights, loss of loved ones and advice to daughters, all sung and recited with passion.

Caitriona Crow in 'Millworker' reminded us that 'millwork aint nothing but an awful boring job' and Siobhán Moore sang 'The Doffing Mistress'. Martina Ní Chearnaigh sang of the mother watching her child leave, never to return, in 'Weary O' and Máire Ní Bhaoill sang 'The Flower of Gortade' unrivalled mid the daughters of Erin. Deirdre Madden sang a great version of 'Black Coffee' and Eugene McEldowney, 'The Bonny Boy'. Tommy Lehane sang to 'Caitlín' and Seán Ó h'Éarcháin, 'The Roses of Picardy'. Laurence Bond sang of the woman waiting for a boy down 'Salters Road' and Eddie Phillips gave the stunning song 'You Have Lives'. Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh sang about 'Adam in Paradise' while Helen Lahert sang of the pillars of society doing their business with 'The Backroom Lady'. Walter Kennedy sang of the river as a lady with "weet Thames Flow Softly" and Ann Riordan read a poem reminding us to tell our daughters of their strengths beyond beauty. Eileen Clancy recited Jonathan Swift's poem of two women, Vanessa and Stella. Francy Devine sang of steadfast love in 'The Dark Eyed Sailor' and Andy Burke of the feisty 'Wife of the Bold Tenant Farmer'. Tom Finn gave us 'The Gartan Mothers Lullaby' and Fergus Carey sang 'Mothers, Daughters, Wives'. Niamh Parsons on guitar, accompanied by Siobhán Moore, was the haunted woman of the hill in 'Clohinne Winds' and Tony Fitzpatrick reminded us of the bravery of the Dunnes Stores workers fighting against apartheid in Ewan MacColl's 'Ten Young Women and One Young Man'. Joyce Mahon sang 'I Am Woman' and Siobhán Moore treated us to her beautiful interpretation of 'The Irish Girl'.

The women in these songs and poems were mothers and daughters, mistresses, revolutionaries and workers, mourning the loss of their children to immigration and feeling invincible in older age. It was a night of high-quality songs excellently sung.

Helen Lahert

Doireann Glackin & the Annual Dinner

This year's Annual Dinner was held in 30 Church Street, a new restaurant and one that provided a meal that everyone enjoyed. An open fire and pizza oven provided a cosy, welcoming atmosphere for what proved to be a most enjoyable occasion. Our Special Guest was Doireann Glackin and she proved

to be just that with two sets of excellent fiddle playing, good singing and some informative and humorous sleeve notes to her items.



Ann Riordan, Doireann Glackin & Daire Ó Baoill who ran the night and Doireann displaying her tremendous fiddle playing skills



Above: Doireann in fine voice and Daire delivering 'An Bunnán Bu'

Some folk felt that the Annual Dinner may have run its course but Ann Riordan organised another much appreciated evening. Plenty of people got to sing or play in addition to Doireann's two sets. The restaurant was a popular choice and next autumn – to celebrate our Twentieth Anniversary – no doubt the Dinner will take place again – perhaps with some surprises.



Andy 'Lockjaw' Burke playing tribute to Seán Ó Riada and a somewhat bleary image of Eddie Phillips but then he was boozing; and Helen Lahert bringing poignant memories of Brendan 'Bull' Moore with 'The Nightingale'

Spilling the Behans

Tony McGale and Gerry O'Connor led us off in the first session of the new decade with 'Spilling the Behans', a tribute to the song-writing and singing contribution of Kathleen Behan and her boys. Tony's expertise shone through with his choice of material and folk to either sing or recite it. A large crowd certainly enjoyed themselves and Tony and Gerry set a warm, welcoming tone throughout. There were over thirty contributors not including the Three in a Row presented by Macdara Yeates – 'Easy & Slow', 'The Patriot Game' and the squib 'Cheer Up Russell Street'. Among many highlights were Laurence Bond waking us from our cells with 'The Ould Triangle'; Larry O'Toole's galloping down the last behind Millhouse until Arkle took the prize; Luke Cheevers's inimitable version of 'The Captains & the Kings'; Deirdre Madden's sensitive interpretation of 'When All the World Was Young'; Éamonn Hunt's soulful, 'My Laughing Boy'; Fergus Carey's rousing 'Me Red Headed Mot From Ringsend'; and Tom Finn's emigrant building workers' anthem, Dominic's 'McAlpine's Fusiliers'. Mick Simpson stole the show among the recitations and poems with his very dramatic and exceedingly funny delivery of an excerpt from Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy*: Mick was that offender! Áine Bean Uí Chathasaigh, Paddy Daly with his Lighthouse Keeper's complaint about Brendan's house painting skills, Mick Fowler, Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh, Manus O'Riordan and Ann Riordan also recited or recalled anecdotes from the endless Behan collections

Some non-Behan material crept in late on – something neither mother nor brothers would have quibbled about as by then there was a warm, your own front room atmosphere. Peter Byrne made heads turn towards sleep with his gentle 'John o Dreams', the scallywag Eddie Phillips set off 'Boozing' – again; and Walter Kennedy invoked Zozimus. Two of the best contributions came late with Daire Ó Baoill's powerful, macaronic version of 'James Connolly' and Siobhán Moore's ear-catching 'The Galway Rebels Boys' about Liam Mellows, Irish Volunteers and Athenry – a far cry from the fields but a beautiful, poignant song.

So, a great start to the year and a huge triumph for Tony himself. Gerry worked attentively behind the scenes to facilitate things and the night ultimately displayed everything that is good about the Howth Singing Circle – and singing sessions generally.



Tony McGale & Gerry O'Connor spilling Behans all over the place and the large audience rehearsing shanties

Cathal Caulfield & Tales of Humour, Wonder & Woe

Cathal Caulfield proved to be an excellent Young Singer/Musician in Residence being involved in the Fiddle Bus to Antrim, performing a great set at the Burns Nicht, running monthly sessions and generally being active and supportive in his role despite the demands of his studies – in which he excelled – and general musical life. As part of his brief, Cathal selected comic songs from the vast Tommy Munnelly Collection in the National Folklore Collection held in University College Dublin. Cathal has recorded these songs thanks to the Irish Traditional Music Archive and produced them in a booklet entitled *Tales of Humour, Wonder & Woe*. Cathal was assisted for the Howth Singing Circle Committee by Laurence Bond and Francy Devine who guided the work to publication.

Tony Fitzpatrick's CD, *Sailors & Whalers*

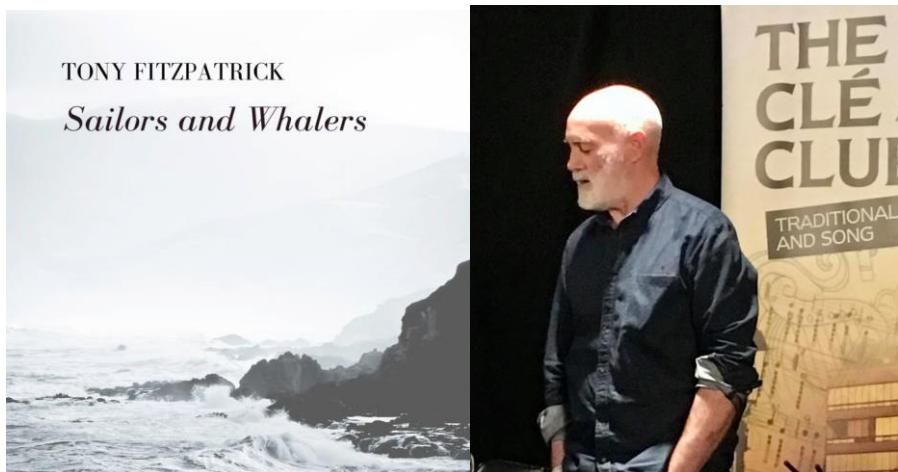
It is always a pleasure to listen to the seemingly effortless, clear and perfect pitch of Tony Fitzpatrick's voice and his repertoire of songs continues to amaze. So, it was with anticipation that I began to listen to his first recorded album, *Sailors & Whalers*. I was not disappointed.

Tony, originally from Drimnagh, sings with a passion imbued with a love of life and roots embedded in Dublin tradition, with influences from his father, a staunch trade unionist, his wife Anne Gourlay, 'the constant listener' from Dundee in Scotland and his three sons, Graham, Ruairí and Darragh, as well as the community of singing circles in Dublin and beyond. Graham accompanies Tony on flute and whistles.

Given Tony's amazing repertoire it is not surprising that he has chosen an interesting collection, from the songs of Ewan MacColl, 'Tunnel Tigers' and 'My Old Man', the latter sung with passion and understanding given his own father's experience in the trade union movement. Tony was keen to include some songs from Liam Weldon and chose 'The Town of Castle D'Oliver' from Liam's singing and 'Jinny Joe', written by the maestro for his son and sung with passion by Tony, this rendition particularly poignant given that this recording was at the request of Tony's sons: 'Where will you be my blue eyed son, when your daddy's race is run'.

There are familiar old favourites like 'The Night Visiting Song', learned from the singing of Luke Kelly and the traditional, 'Flower of Magherally O' from County Down. With the influence of his life-long partner from Dundee, the album could not have been without a Scottish song and 'The Balaena' brings in a shanty with a wonderful banjo accompanied change of tempo in the middle. There are surprises

like the haunting ‘Birds and Ships’, new to me, a lover of Woody Guthrie songs. This one was written by Woody but not recorded until his daughter gave it to Billy Bragg and Wilco, who added the music. Tony also sings songs like ‘Ratcliffe Highway’, which he learned from Luke Cheevers at An Góilín and ‘Greenland Whale Fisheries’, a shanty learned at Howth Burns Night and something of a Club anthem. He finishes the album with ‘The Last Leviathan’, written by Andy Barnes in 1980 and as relevant as ever today: ‘I am the last of the great whales and I am dying’.



The CD cover and Tony in fine voice at the Clé Club in Liberty Hall

While Tony’s unaccompanied singing is sufficient unto itself – he sings a number unaccompanied with his signature concertina introduction – the addition of Andrew Meaney on guitar, Rory O’Rourke on fiddle, mandolin and banjo, and Tony’s son Graham on flute and whistles, is executed delicately, never overpowering Tony’s voice. The fiddle and flute add haunting notes and the minimal, muted guitar accompaniment to songs like ‘My Old Man’ and ‘Birds and Ships’ is superb. The choice of music and the mix of instruments serve only to enhance these beautiful songs and Tony’s singing of them. The album was recorded and mixed by Brian Murphy.

It is available online at the Bandcamp site given below. All proceeds go to the Simon Community.
Helen Lahert

<https://tonyfitzpatrick.bandcamp.com/album/sailors-and-whalers>

A Wonderful Website on John Kelly of Capel Street

Aoife Kelly, daughter of John Kelly – well-known to Howth Singing Circles through the Fiddle Bus and his performances at the annual Burns Night – has developed a wonderful website on the music and life of her grandfather John Kelly, the fiddle and concertina player from Rehy West, Kilbaha, Clare, who became well known in Dublin through his shop The Horseshoe in Capel Street. Kelly was a pivotal figure in traditional Irish music throughout the twentieth century and still significantly influences musicians today. Aoife designed the website ‘in order to share her family’s knowledge with the wider Irish traditional music community’. It can be accessed at

Pages inform readers who John Kelly was and acknowledge the many contributors. Kelly’s repertoire is presented through fifty audio and visual clips with airs, hornpipes, jigs, marches, reels, slides and slip-jigs. Many of the images have previously been unseen and each item carries the tune’s provenance, sometimes with John Kelly himself providing the explanation. In this way, the site becomes both personal and provocative, an intimate meeting with an inspiring figure with insights into how difficult it was for traditional musicians to gain any sort of recognition for their art – particularly in Dublin

where they and their music were openly derided by many. Pages provide details of Kelly's family background in Clare, his musical influences from the loop Head area and his mother's Scattery Island. It is a lifestyle lost, tough and demanding, subsistence farming and harsh season's setting life's rhythms and yet it produced such beautiful music, almost regal at times and quite at odds with what might be expected from an isolated rural community. Kelly's comments on his musical 'welcome' are probably shocking to young musicians but they underline the debt contemporary musicians owe to those who ploughed a lonely furrow – especially those who maintained and developed the tradition in the capital.

Kelly's 'Musical Connections' were vast and interviews he gave to his son John and other family members provide fascinating insights into those he played and collaborated with like Brendán Breathnach, Bobby Casey, Willie Clancy, Andy Conroy, Mrs Crotty, Johnny Doran, Nell Galvin, Patsy Geary, Seán Ó Riada, and Joe Ryan. There are stories of places he played in like O'Donoghue's and The Four Seasons and groups he was associated with like the Castle Céili, Éamon de Buitléar and Ceoltóirí Laighean, Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann. Many memories will be evoked by the pages on Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy with Mary Kelly's photographs and videos a central resource for this and many other pages.

This is an exceptional resource that rewards any visitor. Beware though as 'a quick five minutes' will rarely be that as you mine gem after gem, stirring memories of tunes, players and occasions, and learning all the time to respect and be grateful for the legacy and heritage musicians like John Kelly bequeathed to all of us, a stunning bequest that has been heard from Kilbaha to Kyoto, Rehy West to Rangoon, Capel Street to Chicago, Quebec and Alice Springs. And long may it continue – replenished when needs be by this wonderful source of music, family history and sheer joy in the listening and viewing.



Deirdre Madden, Francy Devine & Catriona Crowe 'Crossing the Bar' at the December session

Burns Nicht 2020: Will There Be One in 2021

A full reflection on Burns Nicht 2020 will appear in the next edition of *The Sweet Nightingale*. Our Special Guests were the Tannahill Weavers and George Duff from Edinburgh – with the usual, much-appreciated contributions from the St Lawrence Howth Pipe Band and our ‘Resident Band’ of John Kelly (fiddle), Larry Egan (box) and Mick Mullen (guitar).

The question was raised as to whether there would be another Burns Nicht – our costs are rising and our organisers ‘getting auld’. The price of a Burns Nicht ticket has never risen from €20 and we would like to know what you feel about it being raised to, say, €25 or even €30.

We would also like you to tell us what changes you might suggest we make to the Burns Nicht and Fare Thee Weel Session to improve them? And who would you like to see as main guests if we go ahead next year?

Twentieth Anniversary !

The Howth Singing Circle commences its twentieth season next September. We would love to hear your ideas as to how we should celebrate this. We will start the year with a ‘Back to the Beginning’ session led by Siobhán Moore and Dave Moran who organised the first singing session to commemorate Brendan ‘Bull’ Moore in the Red Herring (the old Evora and now a gym) which then led to the start of our Circle the following September.

So, please, let us know what you think.



An early edition of The Sweet Nightingale – how many can you identify?

And a happy night from the Pier House sessions

Buíochas Mór

As ever, *The Sweet Nightingale*, as with all HSC activities, does not just appear and we are grateful to the following: Richard Tobin, Allison O’Rourke and staff of the Abbey Tavern; Finola Young for many supports; Noel Kelly, St Lawrence Howth Pipe Band; Christy Hammond of CRM Design & Print for

various print jobs; and your Committee – Laurence Bond, Paddy Daly, Brian Doyle, Helen Lahert, Daire Ó Baoill, Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh, Gerry O'Connor, Niamh Parsons and Ann Riordan.

Programme For 2020

6 February – Daire Ó Baoill – Oiche Gaelach with Special Guest Máire Ní Choilm

5 March – Brian Doyle with theme to be announced

2 April – Special Guest Liam O'Connor, Director, Irish Traditional Music Archive

7 May – Laurence Bond with Special Guests Paddy & Caoimhín Branigan

4 June – to be announced

Saturday 18 July – ‘Singing the Fishing’ walking tour of Howth Harbour

3 September – ‘Back to the Beginning’ with Siobhán Moran & Dave Moran

Howth Singing Circle

First Thursday Every Month, Abbey Tavern, 9pm

All Welcome



Dancing the nicht awa at the 2020 Howth Burns Nicht