



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

# The Sweet Nightingale

New Series, no 14, September 2020

## The Silence of Covid 19

We begin this *Sweet Nightingale* by trusting that everyone is healthy and safe. We have missed your company and songs.

As this is being typed, 11 August, matters are still very uncertain as regards when we might be able to hold our monthly sessions again. We will begin what will be our Twentieth Anniversary season by hosting an Open Zoom session on Thursday, 10 September –contact and registering details to follow.

We have attempted to maintain contact with HSC regulars through posting material on our FB page and by holding a number of private Zoom sessions. These sessions were restricted to a maximum of twenty screens with invitations confined to those who have been regular monthly attenders. The sessions proved enjoyable, their privacy and small scale allowing for conversation and craic as well as for singing. An Open Session will presumably be different and probably larger in scale, although we do not imagine Howth attracting the sort of numbers other similar singing clubs have done.

**So, we hope to see and hear some of you on 10 September.**

## Twentieth Anniversary

The limitations imposed by Covid have stymied much of what was being planned to celebrate our Twentieth Anniversary. We will, however, hold a number of events and we would like as much assistance as possible.

We invite anyone to let us have your thoughts on some of the following questions, please –

- what are your favourite Howth Singing Circle memories?
- which singers or songs stand out when you reflect on your times at the HSC/
- do you have Pier House memories you would like to share?
- do you have Sea Anglers' Club you would like to share?
- do you have Abbey Tavern you would like to share?
- what do you recall of Burns Nights, Singathons and Singing the Fishing Sessions, Fiddle Buses or any other HSC activity;

- what songs typify the HSC for you?
- Have you any photographs or recordings you can share with us?

Please let us have some of your memories as they will assist us plan various events and we may include things in future editions of *The Sweet Nightingale* or any special publication.

## Where Did Your Shillings Go ?

Our Treasurer Ann Riordan drew up our annual accounts and, as is Howth Singing Circle tradition, we feel it is appropriate that we let those attended our sessions what happens to their voluntary contribution of €4. Our total income was €6,699 and our outgoings were €7,538.39 resulting in a deficit for the year of €839.39. This leaves a balance of €1,786.74. Our balance has been reducing slowly over the last few years but it must be remembered that the Howth Singing Circle receives no funding from any quarter. The Club is totally reliant on the contributions collected at our monthly sessions. We hope you feel that your money has been well spent. Last year, in addition to the monthly sessions and excellent guests, we performed in the National Maritime Museum for the Dún Laoghaire Vinyl Festival and at the Green Schools Project in the Royal Marine, Dún Laoghaire. The Tannahill Weavers were our Burns Night guests and Doireann Ní Glaicin at the Annual Dinner.

So, thank you again for your continued support which will be even more vital to us in this special year.

## Howth Singing Circle, Zoom Session, 4 June

Deciding on a session of no more than twenty screens, we dipped our toes into the virtual world. Helen Lahert and Daire Ó'Baoill acted as Fear agus Bean an Tí and welcomed the participants, explaining the difficult but fair method used to choose from our regulars. Eugene McDowd launched the night with 'A Bunch of Thyme' and Úna Kane followed with 'My Ringsend Rose', Brenda O'Riordan dedicated her rendition of 'The Flower of Magherally-O' to Tony and Ann and Laurence Bond sang Alistair Claire's 'Old Man's Song'. During a night that held a great mixture of poetry, story and song, the first poem was from Mary Doyle who recited 'Drew Dillinger', 'Hieroglyphic Stairway': 'What did you do when the earth was unravelling?', an appropriate choice for the times that are in it.

Tony McGale regaled us with the tale of 'Shaky Hand Pete and Forty Niner Joe' and Martina Kearney sang the beautiful 'Bright Silvery Light of the Moon'. Gerry O'Connor sang 'Dumbarton's Drums' and Eileen Clancy recited Derek Mahon's consoling poem 'Everything is going to be Alright'. Francy Devine read us his own 'Cuckoo Flower and Orange Tip' and Antoinette Daly sang 'High Germany'. Máire Ní Baoill gave us 'Sweet Lough Neagh' and Paddy Daly recited 'The Garden Where the Lilies Grow'. Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh performed 'Woes for Prince Charlie' and Ann Riordan recited Séamus Heaney's 'Mint': 'my last things will be first things slipping from me'. Walter Kennedy remembered his *Irish Press* days in the Sixties and roused us with Frank Ifield's 'I Remember You'. Brian Doyle was at 'The Roseville Fair' and Áine Bean UíCathasaigh told the story of the Chinese woman with the hole in her bucket, which, rather than wasting water, helped the seeds to sprout and thrive along her way and Eddie Phillips made us nostalgic for the pub with his version of 'There's the Day'.

Máiríde Woods, sang 'It Isn't Nice' – 'but if that's freedom's Price we don't mind'. Ann Gourlay reminded us not to ask our children to strive for extraordinary lives in a poem by William Martin and Helen Lahert with 'An Buachaillín Donn' and Daire Ó'Baoill with 'The Old cross of Ardboe'

accompanied on the shruti box, rounded up the night. And as no Howth Singing Session would be complete without it, we virtually linked arms to sing 'The Parting Glass'.

Helen Lahert

## Zoom Sa Gaeilge, 23 July

Bhí sar-oíche ag Ciorcal Ceoil Bhinn Éadair ar an 23/07/2020 nuair a cuireadh an chéad seisiún Zoom oscailte ar líne i láthair. 'Oíche Ghaelach' téama na hoíche agus ba é Daire Ó Baoill as Tír Chonaill fear an tí le cúnamh ó Eíin Ní Bhaoill ó am go ham. Ag coinneáil leis na Conallaigh, bhí Clíona Ní Ghallachóir as Míin an Chladaigh, Co. Dhún na nGall mar aoi speisialta agus ba dheas an taispeántas a chur sí ar fáil le cnuasach amhrán thar tréimhse na hoíche. Ceoltóir sean nós den chéad scoth í Clíona; a bhfuil cliú agus cáil bainte amach aici thar na mblianta agus a lán gradaim buaite aici i gcomórtais, an Oireachtais agus Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann san áireamh.

Nuair a tugadh cuireadh den chéad triúr an t-urlár a ghlacadh, chuir Helen Lahert tús le imeachtaí na h-oíche le leagan binn de *'Jimí Mo Mhíle Stór'*, ag leanstan le Joe Gallagher leis an *'Ciarraíoch Maillithe'* agus ansin thug Brenda blaiseadh álainn dúinn de *'Gleanntáin Ghlas Ghaoth Dobhair'*. Thug Dáire cuireadh speisialta do chailín óg; Aela bheith i láthair ar an oíche agus go deimhin chuaigh sí síos go mór leis an lucht éisteachta le leagan aoibhinn de *'Is fada liom uaim í'* agus *'An bhean udaí thall'*.



Clíona Ní Ghallachóir lena trófaí craobhchomórtais agus Daire Ó Baoill

Ghlac said seo leanas páirt in imeachtaí na hoíche idir amhráin agus dánta agus chuir said go mór le pléisiúr agus taitneamh na hócáide agus tá Ciorcal Ceoil Bhinn Éadair faoi chomaoín acu uilig. Diarmuid, Mairtín, Antoinette, Andy Burke, Bernie Dermody, Eddie Philips, Maire Ní Bhaoill, Walter Kennedy, Virginia Blankenhorn, Brian Doyle, Phyl O'Connor, Kay Burke, Donal Cronin, Una Kane, Mairíde, Eileen Clancy agus Dave.

Ag deireadh na hoíche, thug fear an tí é féin; Daire Ó Baoill, leagan deas de *'Thíos cois na trá'* dúinn agus dar ndóigh; ag coinneáil le traidisiún, ceoladh *'The Parting Glass'* le deireadh a chur leis an seisiún - mar a dhéantar i dtólamh gach oíche i gCiorcal Ceoil Bhinn Éadair. Tá ard mholadh tuillte ag lucht eagraíochta na hoíche agus go mbeidh taispeántas eile dá shórt againn gan mhoill.

Daire Ó Baoill

## Howth Singing Circlers 1: Eddie Phillips

*for our Twentieth Anniversary, The Sweet Nightingale will profile some of our regular personalities and learn a little about their musical journeys.*

Howth Singing Circle monthly sessions often have a theme. On some occasions, virtually every song reflects the theme while on others, few if any do. What is guaranteed, however, is that Eddie Phillips will sing something on the theme learned especially for the occasion. That said, of course, he has his favourites some of which involve rolling with the sea or 'bloody well boozing'! So, in recognising some of those who have brought so much to the Club and who better to start with than Eddie Phillips!

Eddie is a native of Baltinglass, County Wicklow, and sat in the same classroom in the Technical School as Larry O'Toole. Baltinglass has a lot to answer for! Eddie's first musical memory is of his mother, Maureen Synott, whistling or giving 'a bit of a song' around the house. Music mostly came via the radio, however, with Eddie still able to sing Cliff Richard's 'The Young Ones' and recalling Elvis, The Beatles and The Stones. That said, he did not disagree with Walton's suggestion of 'If You Feel Like Singing, Do Sing an Irish Song' and loved RTÉ's 'Ceilí House' weekly broadcast.

Moving to Dublin, Eddie and some pals used to attend the Universal Folk Centre (UFC) in Parnell Square. You can catch an RTÉ reflection on the UFC here - <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2019/1111/1090045-universal-folk-club/> The UFC's 'urban expression' of the tradition engaged young Eddie who would 'be walking on air at two in the morning leaving the club'. Eddie was an attentive listener and his musical tastes were wide. Another favourite was Mr Gay & The City Gents, 'a jazzy' group.



*Two of Eddie's musical memory – a recording drawn from the Universal Folk Centre and Fiddle Bus 5 at the graveside of Mickey McIlhatton in Glenravel Churchyard*

Eddie did not really sing in public until he discovered the Howth Singing Circle. At parties or family gatherings, there would be 'sing-songs' and he 'loved the idea of singing' but often 'found it hard to learn a song'. An example of the sort of song he was now singing was Bob Dylan's 'Hey, Mr Tambourine Man'. Once he began attending the monthly sessions in Howth, he determined to learn songs and he has now done that and acquired a wide repertoire not only of different songs but material drawn from differing genres. Eddie served on the HSC Committee but also has other interests not least his involvement with the Bayside Writers' Group with the seventh edition of

*Migrating Minds* in the offing. The late John O'Malley was a central figure in Bayside and attended HSC sessions too. During Lockdown, Eddie has been wood carving in his shed accompanied by the fiddle music of Paul Anderson, a musician he met through the Fiddle Bus.

Eddie was on the first Fiddle Bus to Naul and Skreen and the last Fiddle Bus to North Antrim. He loved discovering the background of famous fiddle players, their tunes and life stories and found visiting the grave of 'The King of the Glens', Mickey McIlhatton in the beautiful, peaceful surroundings of Glenravel Church graveyard. Through the Club, Eddie got to know the singing of Steve Byrne and Ballymoney's Mark Dunlop whose CD *Islands of the Moon* provided him with several songs including 'The Lag's Song', a tribute to the singing of Luke Kelly and song writing of Ewan MacColl, and the humorous 'Quaker's Dong'. Another favourite, and one that links Eddie's musical journey together, is the late Al O'Donnell's version of 'Matt Hyland', the first song he learned for the HSC. He also acquired 'Jock o' Hazeldene', Eddie's 'R's' rrrrrolled morrrre than most in his rrrrendition!



*Eddie leading 'The Roll of the Sea' in the National Maritime Museum and, in the Angling Club, getting and his celebrated all-singing, all-dancing presentation of 'Phil the Flutter' at the Annual Dinner in the King Sitric*

Eddie feels he has 'met a lot of wonderful and talented people' through the Howth Singing Circle. He has enjoyed the monthly sessions, the walking tours and the annual dinner, performing at all with distinction. From slightly nervous beginnings, Eddie has become a much-respected stalwart, regularly producing something new and always giving a truthful and considered performance. Eddie Phillips highlights for many would include his Burns Nicht songs, leading the 'Roll of the Sea' in the National Maritime Museum in Dún Laoghaire and his spontaneous step dancing for the last verse of 'Phil the Flutter's Ball' at an annual dinner.

**Eddie Phillips has brought so much to the Howth Singing Circle and we salute him for that.**

## **MiseFosta and FairPlé on RTE's Primetime**

*Musicians' Union of Ireland Executive member **Niamh Parsons** Executive has previously brought the work of FairPlé to the attention of readers of The Sweet Nightingale. She updates the campaign against sexism and sexual harassment with traditional and folk music through Misefosta and RTE's recent coverage of events on Prime Time. Howth Singing Circle applauds Niamh's work in these campaigns*



Following the rise of disturbing stories online under the #misefosta hashtag (Ulster Irish for #MeToo), Paul Murphy digs deeper on *RTÉ Prime Time Investigates* into how the #MeToo movement has finally arrived into the Irish Traditional music scene. Supported by FairPlé, a campaign set up by Karan Casey to highlight gender imbalance in Irish traditional and folk music, the programme interviewed some brave young female musicians who told their stories. In such a small music scene where everyone knows everyone else, these young musicians have shown that now is the time to stand up for themselves and for all victims of abuse and harassment.

The FairPlé movement began in early 2018 when MUI member, singer and researcher Karan Casey, along with other prominent female traditional and folk musicians, began to question why so few women performers were not headlining festivals. After a few meetings, FairPlé (Plé being Irish for Discussion) was set up with the aims to achieving gender balance in the production, performance, promotion, and development of Irish traditional and folk music. Initial reaction was that most in the music scene were either not aware of the imbalance, or in some negative cases, felt these musicians were just 'looking for more gigs'. But the movement grew and FairPlé arranged from concerts highlighting some of the best female performers in Irish traditional and folk, debates and an academic research symposium among other events, see <https://www.fairple.com/report>. Sexism, lack of respect in a male-dominated world and sexual harassment were among the topics discussed at length. As these musicians do not have a governing body, it was difficult for victims to find somewhere to report instances because of the lack of formal structures.



*Niamh Parsons with, on the right, her sister Anne*

Then along came #MiseFosta. While many of us older women knew of these instances, annoying at the very least, criminal at the very worst, we did what woman had always done, ignored it, brushed it under the carpet, hie it from everyone, or sometimes spoke among ourselves but did not report anything. One of the problems is that we all know each other, or know of each other, and have met at various fleadhs, festivals and gatherings over the years. Some of these instances came from highly respected and powerful musicians.

Úna Monaghan, harper, composer, researcher and sound engineer from Belfast put out a call for anonymous stories [https://youtu.be/WmfQ2\\_BZpVM](https://youtu.be/WmfQ2_BZpVM). She received 121 stories: 'Every single one of those stories, almost, can be dismissed in one of many ways; either as someone's bad behaviour; as a misunderstanding; as something that happens in society in general and should be shrugged off ... the evidence does not come from individual stories it comes from taking a lot of collective stories'.

Recently, younger women and men started to come out publicly under the hashtag #MiseFosta. The #MiseFosta movement is a loose grouping of about twenty, mainly younger men and women whose aim is to address sexism, sexual harassment and sexual assault within the community. These sometimes shocking stories were unsurprising but it was the first time it was public. These brave

young people, in telling their stories, spurred more people to come forward. *RTÉ Investigates* took up the story and highlighted these issues with Paul Murphy investigating for RTE's *Prime Time*. On the programme, some musicians speak out of their experiences, their fear of reporting instances because they may forfeit their own musicianship, their freedom to play in sessions, and their hopes and dreams of pursuing a career in music being compromised.

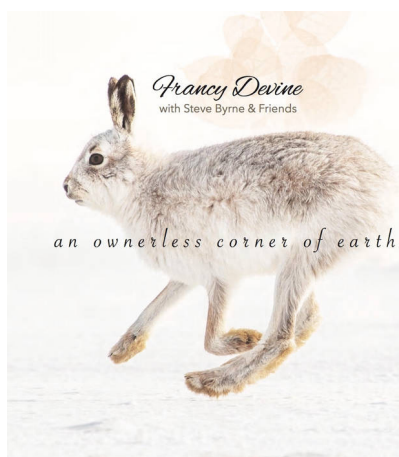
Karan Casey said, 'I think Mise Fosta actually has shown someone like myself how silenced my generation has been about these issues and I think they are really brave and we owe them an awful lot, I think we all need to start having a genuine conversation about sexual assault and how it happens within the arts'.

**Niamh Parsons**

You can watch the *Prime Time* programme or news item at  
[www.rte.ie/player/series/prime-time/SI0000000825?epguid=IH000383005](http://www.rte.ie/player/series/prime-time/SI0000000825?epguid=IH000383005)  
[www.rte.ie/news/investigations-unit/2020/0723/1155183-misefosta-calls-halt-to-sexual-wrongdoing-in-traditional-music/](http://www.rte.ie/news/investigations-unit/2020/0723/1155183-misefosta-calls-halt-to-sexual-wrongdoing-in-traditional-music/)

## **MUI Review of *An Ownerless Corner of Earth***

This is singer Francy Devine's long awaited second offering coming a full six years after his acclaimed 2014 debut, *My Father Told Me*, which was top rated by the *Irish Times* and others. Devine's new double CD is grounded not just in the wealth of his talent but in the breadth of his collaborators, principal among whom is accomplished Scottish Traditional Singer of the Year, musicologist and producer, Steve Byrne. The opening track, 'The Old Poachers Song', was written by Meath man Jim Connell, a man who knew a thing or two about that noble art, being the author not just of the world famous Socialist anthem, 'The Red Flag', but of a classic volume on his other metier, *Confessions of a Poacher*. More on point as far as the overall project is concerned, the opening sets not just the title, 'An Ownerless Corner of Earth' as well as the free born tone of the album, but also inspires the image of a mountain hare on the cover.



The late, great Liam Weldon's arrangement of 'One Starry Night' (track 3) provides what is, for this reviewer, the standout moment of the first CD in this 26-track compilation. It's always a challenge to inject originality and inspiration into such a beautiful song, so well covered already by other fine singers. However, Devine, in a perfect fit for his voice, and accompanied by guitarist Graham Dunne, singer Niamh Parsons and others, passes with flying colours. His poem, 'Gazing at Lochnagar' (track 6) provides an opportunity to appreciate another of Devine's other talents. Even more so it is the chance to hear what has to be one of the most moving pieces in the canon of Scottish fiddling, 'Neil

Gow's Lament for the Death of his Second Wife', played by award-winning Scots fiddler and composer, Paul Anderson. Irish fiddling is well represented too by the outstanding Liam O'Connor on both fiddle and viola in the musical backdrop to another intensely rich poem of Devine's, 'When Abdul Moneim Khalifa Met Darach Ó Catháin' (track 9). The final track on CD 1 is Steve Byrne's delivery of the well-known 'Tramps and Hawkers' (track 13). Like many of my generation, I'm hotwired to the version sung by the late Luke Kelly. Nevertheless, I still remember the first time I heard Byrne sing this a few years ago in Liberty Hall and his rendition here is as fresh as on that evening.

If the first CD is owned by the hares, then the second belongs to the other part of that dubious 'sporting' equation - the lurcher, or, to be more precise, Jim Connell's favourite of the breed, 'My Nellie' (track 1). And if 'One Starry Night' is the standout moment of the first part of this work, then Devine's own composition 'Dark and Slender Boy' (track 2, has to be that of the second CD. Inspired by the well-known traditional air 'An Buachaill Caol Dubh', his English version is true to the sensibility of the original and, like 'One Starry Night', a perfect fit for his voice. Likewise, the singer's own 'Magaidh Ruaidh' (track 7), suggested by the wonderful Kathleen MacInnes's interpretation of the Scots Gàidhlig 'Ceud Failt Air Gach Gleann' air. Devine is joined on the penultimate track (12) by Northumbrian shepherd and singer Dave McCracken in the late Terry Conway's 'Fare Thee Weel Regality'. Like many, I was blown away when I first heard this sung, in my case by the Unthanks. It's still one of my all-time favourite songs and can never be sung too often. *An Ownerless Corner of Earth* is both entertainment and, with erudite sleeve notes, an education and while Devine's first album might have been his 'Prentice Piece' (to borrow from the work of singer Dick Gaughan), this, his second, is the work of a master craftsman at the height of his powers.

**Michael Halpenny**

This review first appeared in *SoundPost*, newsletter of the Musicians' Union of Ireland vol. 18, no. 2, Summer 2020 [www.siptu.ie/bulletin/pdf/1590679100FinalSoundPost.pdf](http://www.siptu.ie/bulletin/pdf/1590679100FinalSoundPost.pdf)

## **Bendle's Bit**

The following piece is adapted from 'Bendle's Bit' first published in *Tatters*, Newsletter of Tigerfolk, July 2020, see [www.tigerfolk.com](http://www.tigerfolk.com)

At a weekend sing we go to there is a very popular session that encourages people to tell the story behind the song they are going to sing. This was inspired by Lincolnshire song collector, singer and accordionist Brian Dawson (1939-2013) and in whose memory it is held. For, as many of you know, Brian was well-versed in fascinating introductions to nearly every one of his songs and, in some cases, the introduction could be longer than the song! What this is leading into is the story behind a song on Francy Devine's CD *An Ownerless Corner of Earth* called 'The Labour League'.

It was well over a decade ago that Brian and Francy were both guests at a singing weekend at Bradfield in South Yorkshire and where they met for the first time. An interesting sort of a do, set in lovely countryside, with a wealth of talented singers, it is where friendships between Francy and Brian and Francy and ourselves were forged. The two of them met up over the years mainly up at Cullerlie, a weekend sing near Aberdeen, but also once in Leicestershire, for a number of us had been invited over to Ireland for an epic singing weekend and a reciprocal visit was organised. This took place in Shephshed at the beautiful watermill but the Irish were slightly outnumbered on the song front and as Brian said he would like to come along and catchup with folks, he was consequently invited 'to bat for Ireland'. Both of them have an affinity to Lincolnshire, Brian being a 'Yellow Belly' – the traditional name for a person from that county and the same term applied in Ireland to a person from Wexford – through and through, whereas Francy had been raised and spent



his formative years on the county's edges in Peterborough with a Lincolnshire mother and Scots/Irish father. Furthermore, both Grace Winter Devine, Francy's mother, and Brian had both taught at the same school – Brocklesby Park School – although at different times. As time went on Grace moved over to Ireland and lived with Francy and Ann, so it was not unusual on our trips across to see them to take bits and pieces from Brian for Grace. Grace, in return, would furnish Brian with Lincolnshire expressions, phrases and words in dialect she recalled from her childhood as he was an avid collector of all things Lincolnshire and an active member of the Dialect Society.



*Ann Riordan believing every word John Bentham says – and why wouldn't she? – and the late Jimmy Kelly on the Club's Walk in Glasnevin singing at Luke's grave*

When Francy was pulling together material for his current double CD he came across 'The Labour League' which originally appeared in the Amalgamated Labour League's *The Labourer* on 10 May 1879. He found it in a publication by Rex C. Russell, *The 'Revolt of the Field' in Lincs; The Origins & Early History of Farm Workers' Trade Unions* published by the Lincolnshire County Committee, national Union of Agricultural Workers in 1956. Now for the likes of me delving deep and to this extent is foreign territory but, as many of you know, Francy is assiduous in his research and likes nothing more than ferreting things out. The tune that it was sung to was unknown to him and so he turned to Brian to see if the tune listed in *The Labourer*, 'The Union Jack of England', was known to him. He also asked Brian if he knew of Rex. As far as the tune was concerned Brian had no knowledge but as for Rex, well, yes he knew him, not only that but he was still alive and that he was shortly going to visit him in hospital! Rex at this time was ninety-six years of age and when Brian asked him he had no tune for the song but was overcome emotionally knowing that 'some bloke in Dublin still had me book'. Consequently, Francy set the words to an appropriate tune. As a matter of interest Rex wrote extensively on Lincolnshire on a variety of subjects including headstones, the enclosure system, sedition and cock fighting. As a footnote. Rex died aged ninety-eight and outlived both Grace and Brian who passed away just over a year previously and within a month or so each other.

I hope you agree that as an introduction to a song it would have been just the sort of material Brian would have used.

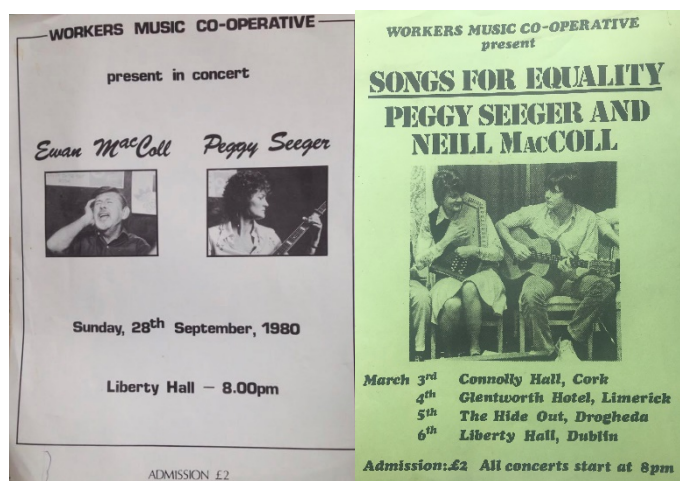
**John Bentham**

*Brian Dawson, 16 August 1939-22 November 2013, was a member of The Meggies, founders of The Grimsby Folk Club in the 1960s; The Redwings, The Higgeldy Piggeldy Band; The Grimsby Morris Men; The Plowgild Folk Dance Group; and The Broadside with whom he recorded a number of albums. He was an expert in Lincolnshire dialect and the Lincolnshire folk song collecting of the Australian composer Percy Grainger. He was friends with folklorist and collector Ethel Rudkin and helped in organising the Cleethorpes Folk Festival. As he might well have wished for, Dawson collapsed with a heart attack during a performance at Howsham Village Hall on 9 November 2013 and died aged 74, in Scunthorpe General Hospital. A great performer, generous with other performers, in addition to his recordings much of his legacy has been preserved through the efforts of friends like John Bentham. It was a privilege to have known him and shared a song - FD*

## **Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger & the Irish Workers' Music Co-op**

In September 1980, the Irish Labour History Society (ILHS) held an international conference in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra called 'The Making of the Irish Working Class'. The ILHS Committee discussed arranging a social event on the Saturday night for the five hundred delegates and it was agreed to invite Ewan MacColl & Peggy Seeger to make a presentation of labour songs. I rang Blackthorne Records and, to my surprise, MacColl answered the phone and we quickly agreed fees, flight and travel arrangements. The ILHS Committee then baulked at the size of the fees – not by any means extravagant but as most academics in those days appeared without fee and just travel and accommodation – something they had not considered. A Sunday night concert in Liberty Hall was suggested to balance costs but this was rejected until I said that 'another organisation' would take responsibility for such a concert.

The 'other organisation' did not exist and myself, Éamon Thornton from Drogheda and Berliner Helga Woggon hurriedly formed the Workers' Music C-operative. It was a considerable risk as we stood to lose quite a bit. We hurriedly got out a crude poster and printed tickets at £2 – what a bargain! The demands of the ILHS event meant that we then gave little thought to the concert other than Peggy's request that they stay 'somewhere quiet' as Ewan's health was not the best. I was going to be in Drumcondra all weekend as, for many, the Conference was residential and my two children, Caoimhe and Fiachra, then aged seven and five, would be with their childminder in her parents' home in Meath. The problem was thus solved, Ewan and Peggy took my house in Bayside.



The Conference was a massive success but exhausting for those of us doing the organising – late night drinking and singing adding to the fatigue. MacColl & Seeger were a big hit on the Saturday night but by Sunday we were worried that no one would turn up in Liberty Hall. We had sold only a handful of tickets and many of those who might have attended had been in Drumcondra all weekend at the Conference and were as exhausted as we were. The Liberty Hall concert now seemed a

terrible idea and we had little energy or enthusiasm for it. Arriving for the sound checks, we found that less than fifty tickets had been sold for a hall then holding over 700! Apart from our own worries, MacColl & Seeger deserved better and we began apologising. MacColl was having none of it: 'Relax, Comrades, you have done a great job all weekend and if only fifty turn up, we'll still have a concert!'

By a quarter to eight, we could not cope with the throng turning up. Some of the early arrivals – the two Johnnys – Flood and 'Clancy' MacDonnell – and Paul O'Brien immediately manned the ticket desk, ushered folk to seats and generally did whatever needed to be done. And still they came! Hundreds of them! MacColl & Seeger had not played Dublin for a while and there was a massive hunger to see and hear them. We undoubtedly broke all the Fire Regulations as by just after eight, the auditorium and balcony were crammed to overflow with some having to stand. We had a strict policy of no entry or leaving when a song was being performed and this caused some problems among those who, having been stripped of their two quid, thought they were being prevented from getting in!

The atmosphere was electric and we had a huge sense of achievement. We made a considerable sum of money almost all of which we blew on a tour for Seeger and Neil MacColl the following year under the title 'Different Therefore Equal'. Events were held in Connolly Hall, Cork; Glentworth Hotel, Limerick; The Hide Out, Drogheda; and Liberty Hall. Unhappily, they coincided with a national petrol drivers' strike and few were able to attend. The Workers' Music Co-op was though now established and – mainly through John MacDonnell's efforts – ran a weekly singing event in the Irish Post Office Engineering Club; promoted support activities for strikes and campaigns – most notably the Dunne's Stores Anti-Apartheid Strike and the British Miners' Strike of 1984-1985; published song sheets; ran a day trip to Meath to celebrate Jim Connell and the writing of 'The Red Flag'; and ran further memorable gigs for MacColl & Seeger.

**Francis Devine**

## **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; John Benthams, Tigerfolk, Long Eaton; Michael Halpenny; Eddie Phillips; John Swift, Musicians' Union of Ireland; Finola Young for many supports; 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.





*Daairí Farrell in the Sea Angling Club and Lankum [Lynched as they were then] at the Annual Dinner in Aqua*



*Damien Dempsey in The Abbey and Laurence Bond bestowing the Presidency on Willie D. O'Connor*



*The beautiful and sadly missed Joan Harmon  
and Cian Ó Súilleabháin, one of Howth Singing Circle's great personalities*



*From our 2015 Concert – The Drôle – Peadar Ó Riada, John Kelly and Éamon McGivney-  
followed by The Voice Squad – Phil Calleary, Fran McPhail and Gerry Cullen*

**Next Session by Zoom – Thursday, 10 September at 8pm**