



*Uachtaráin: Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh (RIP)*  
*Saoithe: Paddy Daly, Niamh Parsons, Ann Riordan*

# The Sweet Nightingale

New Series, no 17, February 2021

## Burns Nicht 2021 – The Warld O'er ...

Although many things have happened since the last edition of *The Sweet Nightingale*, we feel that reflecting on the Howth Burns Nicht 2021, 'The Warld O'er ...', should take pride of place. When it was grudgingly accepted that the normal Burns Nicht in the Abbey Tavern would be impossible, the HDC Committee approached Edinburgh Folk Club (EFC) and The World's Room (TWR), the city's singers' club, to ask would they like to join in a joint Zoom presentation. John Barrow (EFC) and David Francis (TWR) gave a positive response and the next few months were spent asking musicians to video various items – music tends not to be well-treated on Zoom – and to approach singers about performing live on the night.



Allan McMillan's striking poster for the Burns Nicht and Sandy McGhie, Channel 7A, Edinburgh

It must be acknowledged that, among the over forty people who were involved in the planning and preparation, Sandy McGhie of Channel 7A in Edinburgh at the EFC/TWR suggestion, proved vital in the technical demands of editing, lining up and, on the night, streaming the videos. The HSC and all those who participated in or watched the Concert have reason to thank Sandy for his skilful management of things. We might also add piper Gary West's son Charlie for his ability to synchronise the piping of Gary and our own Noel Kelly, surely the two on the screen together a highlight? The piping in of the haggis - elegantly carried by Carole Prior in a snowy, stormy Balerno and filmed by Allan in sub-zero temperatures – and its Address by Morag Dunbar in her inimitable style was terrific viewing and epitomised the night's behind-the-scenes co-operation and teamwork.

The HSC needs to place its thanks on record but first here are two reviews of the Concert and the Sunday Singing Session.

**The Concert can now be viewed on YouTube by typing in Howth Burns Nicht Concert or direct at**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTrp.166Mz20&c=344s>

## HSC Burns Nicht 2021 - 'The Ward O'er...'

*'Again the silent wheels of time their annual round have driven'*  
Robert Burns, 'To Miss Logan, With Beattie's Poems, For A New-Year's Gift, 1 January 1787'

The HSC Burns Nicht 2021 took place on Saturday 23 January. Co-hosted with Edinburgh Folk Club (EFC) and The World's Room, Edinburgh's singer's club, the event was presented online via Zoom and streamed live on Facebook. While inevitably the digital format may have lacked the buzz and immediacy which are such a feature of these occasions at the Abbey Tavern, the new dispensation brought its own compensations, not least in terms of access, audience reach and range of performers. As was evident from the constant stream of live messages on Zoom and Facebook, the online audience was a multiple of what could be accommodated in the Abbey Tavern and it was truly drawn from 'the ward o'er'. The theme of the night – 'the ward o'er' - was apt and timely. Taken from 'A Man's a Man For A' That', Burns' classic anthem to solidarity and brotherhood, it placed a welcome spotlight on the radical messaging of many of his songs. It also chimed well with the current moment when pandemic, Lockdown and climate crisis have driven home the inescapable truth that, as the eloquent graffiti on the Burrow beach reminds us, 'We are all in this together'.

The evening opened with two short Burns songs from Gilly Hewitt - 'A Rosebud by My Early Walk' and 'The Silver Tassie' (aka 'My Bonnie Mary'). Appropriately both songs have close Edinburgh connections: the first was written in honour of fourteen-year-old Miss Jean Cruikshank with whose family Burns lodged in Edinburgh; while 'the Silver Tassie', a Jacobite ballad reworked by Burns, references Queensferry now the site of the iconic Forth Rail Bridge which featured on the cover of the attractive programme for the evening. The other image on the cover, Howth and its Baily Lighthouse, was later referenced in Dave O'Connor's rendition of 'Hannah Healy, the Pride of Howth', a little-known ballad collected in Waterford in 1840.



Sandy McGhie's video captions say it all

'The Slave's Lament' performed by Niamh Parson's with sensitive accompaniment by Graham Dunne encapsulated the main theme of the evening. Burns' empathetic evocation of the voice of a slave first published in 1792 has a topical resonance in the light of contemporary debates about slavery and colonialism. A few years back the song was the subject of a memorable video installation by Graham Fagen at the Scottish Portrait Gallery. Later in the evening, there was a further reminder of the enduring nature of the Scottish radical tradition, of which Burns was part, with Steve Byrne and Francy Devine's rendering of 'Gulabein', Geordie McIntyre's tribute to the late Hamish Henderson (1919-2002), poet, activist and soldier closely associated with the EFC. Henderson's 'there's more nor a roch wind blowin through the great glen o' the ward the day' (from 'Freedom Come All Ye') echoes both Burns and the evening's theme.

Not that the evening was all politics. There were love-songs aplenty: songs of love consummated, lost and unrequited, songs of parting and betrayal, and even a bit of tongue-in-cheek misogyny, if that is not too anachronistic a reading of 'The Carl o' Kellyburn Braes' (Burns' version of 'The Farmer's Curst Wife') sung by Carole Prior. Kirsteen McCue's lively rendition of 'Corn Rigs' written by Burns to the tune of an old Scottish dance tune spoke of a night of love among the sheaves of wheat. Jimmy

Hutchinson's 'The Soldier's Return' provided us with that rarity, a soldier returned from the war and a happy re-union while Shona Donaldson's exquisite singing of 'Ye Banks and Braes' (aka 'The Banks of Doon') gave us false love and betrayal. False love, betrayal and grief were also the theme of the heart-rending Irish amhrán grá 'Dónal Óg', movingly sung by Caoimhe Hogarty.

A novelty this year was the inclusion of songs from the four provinces of Ireland: 'Dónal Óg' represented Connacht and 'Hannah Healy' Leinster. Munster was represented by 'Between the Mountains and the Sea' written and performed by Tim Dennehy in honour of poet and playwright, Sigerson Clifford (1913-1985), best known as the author of 'The Boys of Barr na Sráide'. The song chosen to represent Ulster, 'Gleanntáin Ghlas Ghaoth Dobhair', an emigration ballad written by Donegal fiddler Proinsias Ó Maonaigh, to the air of 'Paddy's Green Shamrock Shore', was ably performed by Dara Ó Baoill.

Given Burns' love of the fiddle and the influence of contemporary fiddle tunes on his songs, it was fitting that Burns Nicht 2021 was graced by a number of leading Irish and Scottish exponents of the instrument. Illustrating the influence of Burns in Ireland, Liam O'Connor of the Irish Traditional Music Archive played 'O Love It Is a Killing Thing', an air collected in Munster to which, according to P.W. Joyce, people in Limerick used to sing 'My Love is Like a Red Red Rose'. Liam continued with a reel ('Farewell to Ireland'), in acknowledgement of Scotland as the source of most of our reels. The mighty Paul Anderson followed with fiddle tunes from Burns' time – 'Major Graham of Inchbrakie' (the original tune for 'My Love is Like a Red Red Rose'), the Rothiemurchus Rant' and 'My Love She's But a Lassie Yet'. Later John Kelly (fiddle), Larry Egan (box) and Mick Mullen (guitar) had our feet tapping again to two more reels, 'Last Night's Fun' and 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley'.

No Burns Nicht would be complete without an Address to the Haggis which this year was ably performed by Morag Dunbar and followed by the Selkirk Grace by David Francis. The haggis was piped in by Noel Kelly of the St Lawrence Howth Pipe Band and Gary West from Pitlochry and now Edinburgh to the tune of 'A Man's a Man for A' That'. In a remarkable feat of synchronisation, Noel and Gary performed a number of other tunes together, 'The Scottish Soldier', John McLellan's 'Lochan Side' and G.S. McLennan's 'Jig of Slurs'. Gary rounded off with a stirring rendition on the small pipes of the classic reel, 'The Mason's Apron'.

In the midst of celebration, there were quiet moments too and moments of reflection such as Ann Riordan's sensitive reading of Séamus Heaney's 'The Given Note' and Helen Lahert's recitation of Burns' lyrical 'Sweet Afton'. Noel Kelly's performance of the beautiful lament, 'Tommy Tully's Air' had an added poignancy in these Covid times as we remembered absent friends including Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh and all those imithe ar shlí na firinne.

While there was no supper, it was an evening full of food for the heart and the soul. A personal favourite was Allan Prior's rendition of 'Westlin Winds'. While the revival of this beautiful song is closely associated with Dick Gaughan, it has always been popular in the north of Ireland – Len Graham, who visited the HSC some years back, recorded a version as 'Western Winds'. However, Allan Prior has now made it his own. 'Rantin, Rovin Robin' sung by Scott Gardiner is a humorous, autobiographical song written by Burns to celebrate his twenty-eighth birthday (25 January 1787). It brought us back to the commemorative purpose of Burns Nicht which this year concluded with a haunting version of 'The Parting Glass' sung by Mairi Campbell, followed by Auld Lang Syne. All in all, a splendid celebration of Burns' birthday, ably compered by Francy Devine and David Francis. Well done to all concerned. Maith sibh uile.

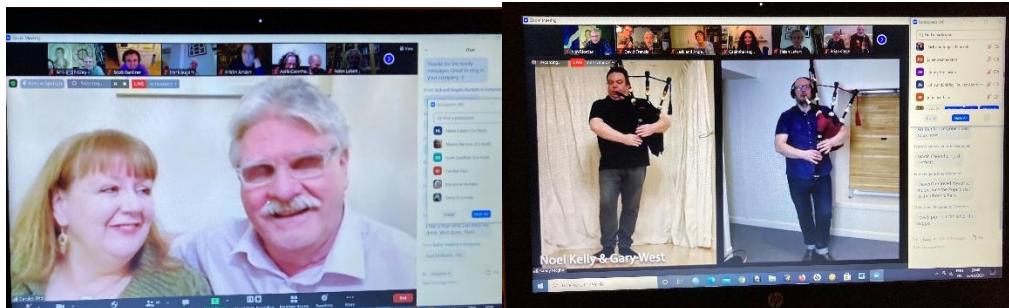
Focal scoir: 'You'd miss the oul' raffle, all the same'.

**Pauric Travers**

## Burns Nicht Weekend Singing Session

The Burns Nicht Weekend concluded with an Open Singing Session on Zoom in lieu of the usual Fare Thee Weel Session. As with the Concert, it was simultaneously streamed on Facebook and attracted thousands of views in North America, Australasia, Asia and Europe with many warm comments of appreciation for individual singers or the Session generally. A woman in New Hampshire said, 'I felt as if I was there in the room with you all!', a comment that reflected the inclusive intention of the session.

The afternoon was ably managed by Scott Gardiner and Niamh Parsons, Scots and Irish singers alternating. Many who had wished to perform were disappointed as so many had joined the session. None could, however, have been disappointed by the quality of what they heard. Beauty in these matters is, of course, in the ear of the beholder as it were and, to my ears, among the highlights were the rendition of Burns's songs: Frank Speirs 'The Tree o Liberty'; George Duff, 'Wantonness For Ever More'; Eugene McEldowney, 'Dainty Davie'; and Morag Dunbar, 'We're A Noddin'. Caoimhe Hogarty began with James Hogg's 'Baith Sides o the Tweed' and Dave McCracken, safely ensconced on the Northumbrian side of the water, invited everyone to 'Come By the Hills'. Bob Blair, Carole Prior – with Violet Jacobs' 'Maggie' poem she had set to music, the Allans and Sleaters, Ian Russell, David Francis and Kathy Hobkirk were among other Scots performers. Helen Lahert was distracted from muting/unmuting/spotlighting duties long enough to deliver Francy Devine's 'The Dark & Slender Boy' while Gerry O'Connor ordered 'Lights Out'.



Carole & Allan Prior, Balerno, Edinburgh, and Noel Kelly, Bettystown, Louth, and Gary West, Edinburgh, piping the haggis in

What a joy it was to hear Margaret Bennett sing 'Hi Horo's na Hore Eile' written c1880 by Iain Mac Ghill'eatháin [John MacLean], the Balimartin Bard from Tiree, and drawing on the same air as Burns's 'Ae Fond Kiss', which Margaret went into. Tim Dennehy provided a tour de force with Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin's 'Dónal Binn Ó Conáill Caoin' [Gentle, Kind Daniel O'Connell] written on O'Connell's return to Iveragh having been elected the first Catholic MP in 1828. Margaret and Tim's contributions complemented each other, while Máire Ní Bhaoill sang Séamas Ó Grianna from Rann na Feirste's 'Thios I Lár a' Ghleanna' to add a beautiful Donegal dimension. It was great to hear songs in *gàidhlig* agus gaeilge. Drawing the session towards an end, Niamh Parsons sang Burns's 'The Slave's Lament' and Scott Gardiner provided the afternoon's ainly Bothy Ballad, 'McFarland & the Sprotts o Burnieboozie'. Tony Fitzpatrick provided Robert Tannahill's 'The Braes o Balquhidder', a song purloined by Francie McPeake to create 'Will Ye Go Lassie Go', while Kristin Borgehed and her partner Nathan entertained us from Småland in Sweden. June Considine read her brother Dermot Bolger's poem 'Séamus Ennis in Drumcondra' while John Bentham in Leicestershire was 'Where the Stormy Winds Do Blow'.

There were many other fine performances on an afternoon of company and occasion, the presentation of images from the Howth Singing Circle's twenty years stirring many memories to add to the reflective mood. Ann Riordan managed the Zoom technology throughout – ably assisted by Niamh and Helen – the huge effort unseen by the audience but without which there would be nothing

to see. To everyone who joined the Zoom session and exercised great discipline in providing applause and reaction without disturbing performers, and to all who logged in on Facebook, collective thanks for contributing to what will be remembered as a memorable weekend. Most of all, of course, thanks must go to our gentle hosts Scott and Niamh who wedded Celt and Pict so well together. As 'The Parting Glass' reminded, the afternoon certainly brought joy to all.

Baxter Aitken



*Among the thousands internationally who watched the Burns Nicht Concert, there were some surprising (masked) faces!*

## Go Raibh Maith Agat Do Gach Duine

Reflecting on the Howth Burns Nicht, the HSC offers a huge 'Bualadh Bos' to many, many folk –

- the Edinburgh Folk Club and the World's Room for their tremendous support as joint organisers;
- all our performers whether live or by video;
- all those who sang at the Sunday Fare Thee Weel Session and indeed to those who could not be fitted in to the session;
- Charlie West and the ITMA (Irish Traditional Music Archive) staff who videoed or edited videos as well as the partners and friends who recorded others;#
- Allan McMillan for his imaginative poster design and Mark from CRM Design & Print for the brochure design and production;
- David Francis, John Barrow and Scott Gardiner from the Edinburgh end for their management of the sessions and fantastic support;
- Ann Riordan for her management of the Zoom technology, aided on both nights by Helen Lahert & Niamh Parsons;
- Sandy McGhie of Channel 7A in Edinburgh for editing and streaming all the videos on Saturday and contributed so much more besides;
- those who generously donated to the Howth or Edinburgh clubs;
- and the literally thousands (from Japan to Australia, Canada and the United States, all over Europe and all parts of Scotland and Ireland) who looked in at the sessions on Facebook and offered supportive comments.

We sincerely hope we have not missed anyone. The Burns Nicht weekend was a huge, international effort with over forty people directly involved in its performance and production: a wonderful effort.

Already viewed by over 15,000 folk, the two sessions can still be accessed on the Howth Singing Circle and other FB pages and the Concert recording is on YouTube. So, thank you all again for creating a company of friendship (sisters an brithers) and fun over the weekend. We'll leave the last words tae Rabbie!

*Then let us pray that come it may,  
(As come it will for a' that,)  
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,  
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.  
For a' that, an' a' that,*

*It's coming yet for a' that,  
That Man to Man, the world o'er,  
Shall brothers be for a' that.*

## A Thrill of Hope, The Weary World Rejoices – December Session

With 'a thrill of hope' Howth Singing Circle's December Zoom session gathered for our Christmas session. The title was chosen to recognise the hope and joy that we all feel when we meet together to sing, albeit in an online environment at present. It was good to see so many of our regulars plus some new faces to start the Christmas season. For many years, Tom Crean was co-host at our December sessions. As part of our Twentieth Anniversary celebrations, we will be paying tribute to members who are no longer with us, and it was fitting that we celebrated Tom's life. He made a great contribution to the world of traditional singing from his days in the Press Gang, as a founding member of the Tradition Club, and his many years performing at traditional singing clubs, such as An Goílín and the HSC. An abiding memory in Howth is the night when he was presented with a boxed set of two half-crowns by Antoinette Daly, to compensate him for the money expended on Miss McAnally! It was very moving to hear him sing 'I'd Only One Half-Crown' and our thanks go to the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) for providing the recording.



*Tom Crean and his last half crown and singing 'The Parting Glass' in the Pier House with Niamh Parsons, Barry Gleeson & Ann Riordan*

As usual, there was a high standard of singing from all participants, with songs ranging from 'Christmas, 1916', 'Shepherd's Arise' and Seán Ó Dhuibhir a Ghleanna' to 'The Kerry Christmas' with all genres in-between. The night's highlight was the 'Three-in-a-Row' spot from Dave O'Connor of Ballyboughal. He kicked off with the 'Hawk Song', and, of course, gave a great rendition of an old Howth favourite, 'Hannah Healy, the Pride of Howth' followed by 'The Trader'. He topped off his set with the recitation 'The Cock of Gormanstown' which he dedicated to our late President Diarmuid ÓCathasaigh. This was a moving and fitting tribute to Diarmuid by an old friend. In another HSC December tradition, Mick Fowler sang 'All Hail' his beautiful carol, which we premiered a number of years ago at the Hospice Singathon and adopted as a 'our' carol. So, thanks again to everyone who came to the session and who created such warm and seasonal atmosphere.

**Kay Burke & Ann Riordan**

## 'Come All Ye Maidens Young & Fair' - January

On 7 January, in the midst of a new severe lockdown with Covid cases rising, Howth Singing Circle soared into 2021 on a high. Niamh Parsons and Helen Lahert hosted a session of women's songs 'Come all ye Maidens Young and Fair' to celebrate Nollaig na mBan. While everyone misses face-to-face contact in the intimate setting of the Abbey Tavern, the silver cloud is that we get a chance to listen to singers from Donegal to Wexford and Pittsburg to Aberdeen.

Claudia Anderson started the night by reminding us that 'A Woman's Work is Never Done', Fergus Carey sang 'Petticoat Sailors' and Úna Kane, 'Nancy Spain'. Tom Finn sang of 'The Boys of Killybegs' as they fight to make a living from the sea. Brenda O'Riordan gave us blue-eyed Sally, 'The Flower of Magherally' and Mike Mecham recited a John Clare poem, 'To Mary' which listeners thought would work well put to music. 'Maiden Name', a Philip Larkin poem from Ann Riordan, reminded us that

‘marrying left your maiden name disused’. Séamas Sheils gave us a rousing rendition of Woodie Guthrie’s ‘Union Maid’ and Phyl O’Connor a lovely version of ‘The Maid on the Shore’. Máiríde Woods sang of last night’s spangles and yesterday’s pearls, in Gillian Welch’s ‘Bar Room Girls’ and Angela Murray sang ‘As I Roved Out On a May Morning’. Tony McGaleys regaled us with his own exploits in ‘Foxrock Frollix’, Gavin Byrne gave us ‘The Night Visiting Song’, Bob Blair delivered Jack Foley’s ‘Bonnie Lassie o the Mornin’ and Marianne McAleer lamented the loss of her William since he crossed ‘The Bay of Biscay O’. Nora Rhodes, a young singer from Pittsburgh sang ‘Kemp Owen’, Antoinette Daly sang ‘On Top of Spaghetti’, while in Henry Lawson’s ‘Past Caring’, Gerry O’Connor reminded us of the hardships women faced in the Australian outback.

Carole Prior sang ‘A Man’s a Man for a’ That’, Niamh Parsons gave us a lovely rendition of Helen Grehan’s song ‘Where Soldiers Go’ and Daire Ó Baoill sang ‘An Mhaighdean Mhara’. Martina Kearney sang the lovely ‘Mary from Loughrey’ and in tune with the weather, Francy Devine sang ‘When the Snows of Winter Fall’. Eileen Clancy was ‘simply surrounded by lovers’ in Percy French’s poem ‘Ach I Don’t Know’. Brian Doyle gave us the ‘Lough Tay Boat Song’ and Noeleen Berry ‘The Bunch of Thyme’ and in celebration of all the sessions around the country that continue to keep the tradition alive by Zoom in lockdown, Eugene McElowney couldn’t keep from Singing.

Helen Lahert reminded us that strong women beget strong women in ‘I Am Me Mammy’s Daughter’ and Michael O’Leary sang Robert Burns’s ‘Green Grow the Rashes Oh’. Walter Kennedy sang ‘Over the Mountain’ and George Henderson waded through the moss and the mire to his ‘Hexhamshire Lass’. Frank Calleary sang a song from his own pen, ‘The Heart’s Own Thief’, Eddie Phillips sang the lovely ‘Kilmore Carol’, Laurence Bond, Holly Near’s ‘Nicolia’ and Seán Ó Cinnéide sang Charles Kickham’s ‘The Irish Peasant Girl’. Vincent O’Connor was happy as Larry in ‘Me Old Country Home’ and Liam Ó Droma sang ‘An Cailín Áilainn’.

Ian Russell, lamenting the loss of Hogmanay due to Covid restrictions, finished the night in style with the Scottish equivalent of ‘The Parting Glass’, Robert Burns’s ‘Auld Lang Syne’. By night’s end we had heard thirty-nine singers and poetry readers. Thanks to Ann Riordan for excellent background technical support.

**Helen Lahert**

## **Oíche Ghaelach - Feabhra**

Bhí Oíche Ghaelach den chéad scoth ag Ciorcal Ceoil Bhinn Éadair ar an 4 Feabhra 2021. Aela Ní Ghaoithín a bhí mar aoi speisialta ag an oíche agus b’aoibhinn an réimse amhráin a chuir sí ar fáil. Cheol sí leagan álainn de na hamhráin seo leanas; ‘Tóigfaidh mé mo Sheolta’, ‘An Bobaire’, ‘An Chéad Mháirt de Phómhair’, ‘Sé fáth mo bhuartha’, ‘Seachrán Charn tSiail agus Máire Bhruinneall’. Bhí beagnach daichead i láthair ó gach cearn den domhain agus iad ag ceol agus ag aithris go binn i nGaeilge. Tá an ciorcal ceoil faoi chomaoin ag Daire Ó Baoill a bhí mar fhear an tí ar an oíche agus chinntigh sé gur imeacht sáreagraithe a bhí ann. Bhí seo le feiceáil ón aiseolas dearfach a tháinig ar ais.

In February, Howth Singing Circle enjoyed its first Oíche Ghaelach of the year hosted by none other than our own member and Donegal native, Daire Ó Baoill. He was ably assisted by our HSC tech guru, Ann Riordan, who kept the Zoom gremlins at bay. Aela Ní Ghaoithín, our special guest on the night, was an astounding success with her wonderful renditions of the following sean-nós songs: ‘Tóigfaidh mé mo Sheolta, An Bobaire’, ‘An Chéad Mháirt de Phómhair’, ‘Sé fáth mo bhuartha, Seachrán Charn tSiail agus Máire Bhruinneall’. The event was very well attended between regular HSC members and guests who wished to participate in the Oíche Ghaelach. Thirty-nine singers contributed to a fabulous night of songs and recitations.

Stalwart HSC member, Walter Kennedy, started the night with a beautiful rendition of *An Lon Dubh is an Chéirseach*, followed by Máiríde Woods's lively rendition of *'dTigeas a Damhsa'*. Howth songbird, Helen Lahert gave a sweet rendition of *'Jimí mo Mhíle Stór'* and Úna Kane followed with a great performance of the renowned Munster song; *'do Bhios-sa Lá i bPort Láirge'*. *'Beir mo Dhúthracht'* was beautifully sung by Máirtín Taidhg Jack joining us from sunny California. Eddie Philips aptly sang *'Gabhaim Molta Bríghde'* in keeping with the traditions of St. Bridget. Dungloe native Deirdre Ní Chnaimhsí treated us to a gorgeous rendition of *'Na Francaigh Bhána'* and recounted the ballad's origins. Other memorable performances included Weston-super-Mare's Marianne McAleer's stunning version of *'Amhrán na Leabhar'*, while Brian Doyle recalled his school days with his rousing rendition of *'Labhair an Teanga Ghaeilge Liom'*.



*Daire Ó Baoill agus a mháthair Éibhlín agus Aoi Speisialta Aela Ní Ghaoithín*  
*while below Claudia Anderson (Chicago), Jimmy Delaney broadcasting live from Crumlin, County Antrim, and Marianne*  
*McAleer (Weston-super-Mare),*



Treats were abundant throughout the night as Clann Uí Fhaoláin [Rachel, Éire and Culainn] from Wexford took the floor and serenaded us with their beautiful, unique and harmonious version of *'Tá Mo Chleamhns a Dhéanamh'*. *'Uaireanta'* was passionately performed by Frank Callery and another visitor, Kayla Reed, sang a melodic sean-nós song called *'An Buachaill Deas Óg'*. Clíona Ní Ghallachóir, our previous Aoi Speisialta [Special Guest] delivered the beautiful ballad *'Mal Dubh an Ghleanna'* snf Ballyboughal's John Keeley gave an endearing rendition of Skara Brae's *'An Cailín Rua'*.

It was heart-warming to hear Imelda White, all the way from California, share an old poem from her school days called *'An Gleann Inár Tógadh Mé'* - definitely Donegal connections there! Eileen Clancy recited a fresh, 2021 adaptation of *'Cill Aodáin'* while Liam Ó Droma entertained us with his rendition of the pre-pandemic version. It was a beautiful mixture of all things *'anois teacht an Earraigh'*. Donegal's Phyl O'Connor treated us to *'Siúbhán Ní Dhuibhir'* and Angela Murray sang a mighty version of *'Máirín de Barra'*. Francy Devine performed his own composition inspired by the island of Iona. Brídanna Ní Bhaoill joined us from Rann na Feirste and held the attention of the house with her fine rendition of the poem *'Éire'* while her cousin Daire concluded the night with the sean-nós ballad; *'An Draighneán Donn'*.

With a magical night of performances nearing an end, our late President agus ár gcara dhílis, Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh was foremost in our minds and hearts. A true son of Ireland, Diarmuid would be in his element to hear such wonderful songs and recitations as Gaeilge. We are delighted that our friend, Áine (Diarmuid's dear wife) joined us and it was particularly special that she was present for a fitting

tribute to Diarmuid when Daire Ó Baoill sang an Irish version of 'The Parting Glass' in his memory. Translated by Daire's mother Eilín Ní Bhaoill. The lyrics to 'Slán Leat Fhéin go Deo' follow here.

**Daire Ó Baoill**

O gach bonn airgid, a chaith mé riamh,  
Chaith mé é, go farsing fiail.  
Is gach olc a rinne mé i mo shaol,  
Mo thrua níor chéas mé ach mé fhéin.

Is gach nigh rinne, mé diabhaill céill.  
Gach Beannacht cuirim, i do threo,  
Ach tá mé anois, ag scaradh leat.  
Gach rath is slán leat fhéin go deo

O gach aon chara, a bhí i mo shaol  
Is brónach scoilt, atá i ndán.  
Is gach aon stóirín a bhí liom seal,  
Tá mé ag guí, is ag fágail slán.

O tharla mé, i gcuram Dé  
Thart ata mo shaol, is mo ré.  
Gach beannacht cuirim i do threo,  
Gach rath is slán leat fhéin go deo.

Is ait an saol, níl ann ach seal.  
Is léir domh fhéin, níl ann ach cuairt.  
Is ait an ród, ina siúlann muid.  
Is gach lá go dtagann brú is buairt.

Ach mar a bhí, is mar atá,  
Ba bhrean an ceol, is ba bhrean an gleo.  
Ach tá mé anois, ag scaradh leat.  
Gach rath is slán leat fhéin go deo

*this session was thought to be our best Zoom gathering yet with extremely good singing – not least from Aela ; a warm, welcoming atmosphere; lots of humour and a real sense of being part of a company - eds*

## Fergus Russell Attains Biblical Proportions

Towards the end of 2020, Fergus Russell celebrated his seventieth birthday. Fergus served on the Howth Singing Circle Committee for a number of years and was a familiar Fear an Tí at Howth Burns Nichts where his rousing rendition of 'The Bonnie Light Horseman' used to, literally, raise the roof. Everyone at Howth Singing Circle extends their best wishes to Fergus who is missed at our sessions.



*Fergus Russell on stage in 2014 and with Santa's Little Helpers Mick Fowler & Gerry O'Connor at our Christmas Night in 2015*

## Locked Down – A Poem From Mick Fowler

Mick Fowler sent us a poem he wrote between 18 October-9 November last year with which many will identify.

### Locked Down

(in memoriam Derek Mahon)

'Coherent miseries, a bite and sup,  
We hug our little destiny again', Séamus Heaney.

I

Here in Lockdown we are doing all right.

I rise from the night and see the bright  
Light begin to break across the sky,  
Catch Bowman saluting Mahon by-the-by  
And wafflers on Sunday Miscellany.

The bushes in the back garden  
Are trimmed enough to harden  
Them for a harsh winter.  
A copper beech is spreading  
Its leaves into our garden, shedding

It's Autumn colours .

II

The simple gesture is not allowed,  
The shake of a hand, an embrace,  
The natural part of a human race  
With no such thing as a crowd.  
We stay at home, and conform  
Thus get used to new norms  
While loons ignore the simple rules  
Besmirch the flag and act the fool.

Absorbing the restrictions  
Ignoring rising frictions  
We move through the motions  
Forego the fraught notions  
Of freedom from the virus.  
Society does retire us  
In our vulnerable state.  
The days, oh, the days  
Swift into months fade -  
We fear a fatal mistake.

We are alone, and looking back  
Will think on what we lacked –  
Good company, the pint of black,  
To sing a song and have the craic.

III

But the Human Spirit in all  
Will fight back and walk tall  
And come the spring  
Will remember, but will bring  
A New Order to everything –  
Better health and better care,  
Look out for those who fare  
Less than us, and have failed  
And just came through to no avail.

Thus when the final call is read  
We mourn, oh, mourn so many dead.  
Through no fault of their own  
Caught the virus in a Care Home,  
And we cannot join in grief.

The dew still sparkles on each leaf,  
The fern to scrub will fade,  
Rise again in Spring,  
And birds- oh, joy!- will sing  
In spite of this savage age,  
And rage, and any other thing.

Old now, and older still  
From this new and bitter pill,  
To rise each day to the light  
I think we are doing all right.

## **'I Spent It In Good Company'** **The First of the Howth Twentieth Anniversary Videos**

As part of our Covid-thwarted Twentieth Anniversary celebrations, the Howth Singing Circle have assembled two video presentations to reflect the huge range of our activities over the years. The items and performers selected illustrate the various phases of the Club – Pier House, Angling Club and Abbey Tavern; Burns Nichts; Singing Walks; Fiddle Bus; Young Singers; charity events; and our Presidents, Willie O'Connor and Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh.

A huge amount of work has been undertaken to assemble these videos under the direction of Séamas Sheils of the online traditional music and song magazine, *Fonn*. We are very grateful to Séamas whose technical expertise has enabled us to undertake and successfully achieve this project. The first video will be launched on Thursday 18 March.

Introduced by Committee members Helen Lahert and Ann Riordan, here is the content of Video 1.

Theme	Performer & Song, Tune or Poem
1 Pier House	Bull Moore & the Ben Éadair Buccaneers, 'The Nightingale'
2 Music	Siobhán Moore, 'The Irish Girl'
3 Community	Tony Fitzpatrick, 'Greenland Whale Fishery'
4 Guests	Declan Hoey, 'Pretty Susan: The Pride of Moyclare'
5 Walks	Mícheál Quinn, 'Dobbins Flowery Vale'
6 Angling Club	Jimmy Smyth, 'Cuchulainn's Son'
7 Young Singer	Ruth Clinton, 'The Malahide Fishermen'
8 Oíche Ghaelach	Aodan Ó Ceallaigh, 'I Am A Young Fellow'
9 Poetry	Paddy Daly, 'The Old Piece of Rope'
10 Burns Nicht	Síobhán Miller, 'Green Grow the Rashes O'
11 Fiddle Bus	Loïc Denis, 'Breton tunes'
12 Local Songs	Dave O'Connor, 'Hannah Healy: The Pride of Howth'

<b>13 Presidents</b>	Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew'
<b>14 Abbey Tavern</b>	Niamh Parsons & Graham Dunne, 'Unicorns'
<b>15 The Parting Glass</b>	Laurence Bond, Helen Lahert, Brian Doyle, Gerry O'Connor



Laurence Bond, Helen Lahert, Brian Doyle and Gerry O'Connor sing 'The Parting Glass' to conclude Video 1, 'I Spent It In Good Company', and Ann Riordan presents various items

## Buíochas Mór

As ever, *The Sweet Nightingale*, as with all HSC activities, does not just appear and we are grateful to the following: Baxter Aitken; Kay Burke; Mick Fowler; Séamas Shiels, *Fonn*; Richard Tobin, Allison O'Rourke and staff of the Abbey Tavern; Pauric Travers; 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.

## Next Events

**Thursday 4 March – Gerry O'Connor & Kevin Hall, 'Crying Crakes, Sea Coal & Eldorado: A Tribute to Graeme Miles'**, in association with the Ironopolis Singers, Teesside

**Thursday 18 March – Laurence Bond and Tim Dennehy launch 'I Spent It In Good Company', Howth Singing Circle Twentieth Anniversary Video 1**

**Thursday 1 April – Francy Devine & Séamus Shiels, "Purely For the Pleasure of the Song": Sam Henry & Songs of the People', Three in a Row from Mark Dunlop (Ballymoney & Cardenden)**



Robert Kelly and Cian Ó Súilleabháin, with Jack Daly and our late President Willie O'Connor in the background

## Twentieth Anniversary Memories, 2002-2006



Paddy Daly's Pier House memories with Andrew Clarke and Seán Óg McKenna surprising Eugene McEldowney



Nan & Jack Barron listening to Antoinette Daly while we all gathered for 'The Parting Glass'



Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh bowled over by Liz Reilly's new banner with Vera Rickard and Victor Byrne looking on, while on our Trip to Tipp, Dave & Vera Rickard played beautiful music

Thank you everyone  
for your support over the last twenty years  
and we hope we can all sing together in person soon  
in the meanwhile  
Stay Safe