



Uachtaráin: Willy O'Connor (RIP) & Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh (RIP)
Saoithe: Paddy Daly, Niamh Parsons, Ann Riordan

The Sweet Nightingale

New Series, no 29, January 2024

Peace & Health For 2024!

We thank everyone who has supported Hawth Singing Circle throughout 2023 and wish you all Peace and Health for 2024.

Aft Hae I Rov'd... Hawth Burns Nicht 2024

This year's Hawth Burns Nicht will take place on Saturday and Sunday 20 & 21 January in the Abbey Tavern. Its title is 'Aft Hae I Rov'd ...', a line taken from Robert Burns's 'Ye Banks & Braes', a favourite song of our late President, Diarmuid Ó Cathasaigh. Tickets will be €25. Our Guest line up is very impressive and promises a marvellous night of music and song. Our old friend, fiddle player Paul Anderson from Tarland, Aberdeenshire, joins last year's star performers singer and instrumentalist Steve Byrne (Arbroath) and bagpiper Gary West (Pitlochry). Another bagpiper Loïc Denis from Lanester near Lorient in Brittany, a guest at early Burns Nicht in the Abbey, comes back to add a Breton flavour to the night. Finally, the beautiful Robyn Stapleton (Stranraer) also returns, her singing remembered as one of the Hawth Burns Nicht highlights over the years.



Paul Anderson high in the Grampians. Robyn Stapleton in Galloway, and Gary West & Steve Byrne at the Carryin Stream Festival, Edinburgh, 2022

**Tickets are €25 and will be available immediately after Christmas.
The event will sell out so avoid disappointment**

Welcome Back Eddie

Howth Singing Circle primarily relies on those of you who attend or support our sessions and events. Those events run from our monthly sessions to singing walks, appearances at events and festivals – usually for charitable purposes, and our celebrated annual Burns Night. All this requires organisation and we have a hard-working and committed Committee.



Eddie Phillips spreading smiles at John Boyd Dunlop's grave in Deansgrange and singing at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Drogheda with Antoinette Daly

We are delighted that Eddie Phillips has re-joined that Committee. A stalwart of Howth Singing Circle, Eddie has probably sung more songs 'to the theme' than anyone else in the last two decades. He always enthralled but is probably most famous for completing his song with a step dance at a HSC Dinner in the King Sitric! Eddie and Michael King will undoubtedly bring much to the Committee.

'And Fast They Fell The Corn' – September

Paddy Daly opened our annual Harvest Session – led by Laurence Bond and Helen Lahert – with a rendition of 'The Churn' by Henry McDonald Fletcher – 'and keen the glancing hooks they wield and fast they fell the corn'. Walter Kennedy followed with Seán O'Casey's 'A Bunch of Red Roses' and Úna Kane recited W.B. Yeats's 'The Wild Swans at Coole' – 'The trees are in their autumn beauty, the woodland paths are dry'. Michael King did a shoehorn into the harvest theme with hare hunting and 'The Creggan White Hare' and Brian Doyle sang 'To Be a Farmer's Boy'. Anne Ó Murchadha recited 'The House Where I was Born', Joe Donoghue, 'Lonely Banna Strand' and Tom Dollard, 'The Old Bog Road' – 'Oh to swing a scythe today through fields of Irish wheat'.

Geraldine O'Reilly sang 'Sally my Dear' and Stiofán Ó hAoláin a lovely rendition of the Pecker Dunne song 'Wexford Town'. Feargus McDonnell sang 'Slieve Gallion Braes', Máiríde Woods reminded us of the fate of migrant fruit pickers with Woodie Guthrie's 'Deportees' and Malachy O'Reilly roused us with 'Courting in the Kitchen' (Tom the thief having robbed his mother's song). Francy Devine read a poem from his new collection in collaboration with American photographer Glen McClure, *At One With Wonder*.

Mary Doyle appropriately recited Séamus Heaney's 'Blackberry Picking', Ron Baker read a poem of his own, 'Life Seasons', and Paddy Chambers sang a poignant rendition of Sinéad O'Connor's 'Jackie' which he was in the process of learning when she died. Conor Sweetman gave us 'The Bachelor Farmer' and Laurence Bond, 'The Reaping of the Rushes Green', Róisín Gaffney sang from her home place 'The

Mullingar Recruit', a song that got her kicked out of a pub in Portrush, the only time she ever was, she assured us.



Laurence Bond presenting Harvest Baskets to Paddy Daly and Máiríde Woods

Willy Ryan sang us a Pat Keane song 'The Mower and the Girl from Bansha', Geraldine O'Reilly gave us a lovely version of 'The Holy Ground' and Helen Lahert reminded us that there can be no harvest without the rain, singing Henry Lawson's 'Andy's Gone with Cattle'. Liam Ó Dróma roused us with An Spailpín Fánach', Malachy O'Reilly, visiting from Australia, sang a song about the shearer's strike, 'The Ballad of 1891' – 'when through the west like thunder, rang out the union's call. the sheds will be shorn Union or they won't be shorn at all'.

Róisín Gaffney sang 'The Hill of Knockshebane', a ballad she wrote based on a story about the murder of a landlord in 1868 near Killucan, Mullingar where she is from. Paddy Chambers, accompanying himself on guitar, gave us a John Spillane song 'All the Ways you Wander', Walter Kennedy sang Pete Seeger's 'Turn Turn Turn' and Francy Devine sang 'When the Snows of Winter Fall'. Mary Kenny sang a plaintive 'The Fairy Boy', Stiofán Ó hAoláin 'An Mhaighdean Mhara' and Willy Ryan 'The Quiet Land of Eireann'. Conor Sweetman reaped the corn in a great slow version of 'The Rocky Road to Dublin' before we finished with our traditional 'The Parting Glass'. And if all this variety of songs and poetry was not enough, we had the free Harvest Baskets raffle won by Paddy Daly, Ron Baker, Máiríde Woods and Anne Ó Murchadha. Thanks to all who contributed from their own harvests.

Helen Lahert

Sorcha Ní Scolaí – October

What a gorgeous night Sorcha Ní Scolaí provided. Gently managed by Michael King and Ann Riordan, Sorcha performed two sets and another twenty-four singers were squeezed into the evening. Both the songs and the singers were of quality with some welcome new voices adding variety and freshness. Walter Kennedy commenced things with 'The Tinkerman's Daughter' and Dónal McElwee busied himself 'Building Up & Tearing Old England Down' before Máire Ní Bhaoill sang Máirtín Ó Direáin's 'Faioseamh a Gheobhadsa'. Feargus McDonnell calmed the room with the 'Gartan Mother's Lullaby', Rionach Ní Uallacháin gave an interestingly phrased version of 'She Moved Through the Fair' and Tom Dollard gave a magnificent rendition of Francis Sylvester Mahony's 'The Bells of Shandon' – 'On this I ponder where'er I wander, / And thus grow fonder, sweet Cork, of thee; / With thy bells of Shandon, / That sound so grand on the pleasant waters of the river Lee'.

Sorcha Ní Scolaí then took the floor, her beautiful, effortless singing enthralling all before she took up the uilleann pipes to conclude her first set. She began with ‘Róisín Dubh’ and followed with a favourite of her grandfather, the wonderful Séamus Mac Mathúna, ‘Loneely Shanakyle’. She played Carolan tunes and favourites like ‘Rakish Paddy’, her technical brilliance capturing everyone – the intensity of the admiring silence was palpable. Her brother Naoise joined her to perform ‘Lonely Banna Strand’, a tender and thoughtful version in which their two voices intertwined.



Sorcha Ní Scolaí – beautiful singing and wonderful piping

Stiofán Ó hAoláin sang about his second cousin ‘Matt Hyland’, Máirídhe Woods flipped Dylan & Baez’s re-work of ‘The Silver Dollar’, Ron Baker’s bajolele played ‘Ar Eirinn Ní Neosfainn Cé Hí’ and Joe O’Donoghue lamented the leaving of his ‘Dear Native Town of Dunmore’. Liam Ó Droma gave a lively version of ‘Sabhdh Ní Bhruinneallaigh’ and Des Geraghty a compelling, macaronic version of ‘Fear a Bhatha’. Tony Whelan sang the powerful Young Uns ‘Cable Street’ contrast to Eddie Phillips’s lively ‘Bean Pháidín’. Kay Burke read Welsh poet Gillian Clarke’s seasonal ‘Plums’, Bernie Demody took the boat and train as the ‘Aran Exile’ and Mick King finished the night by rattling ‘The Ould Triangle’.

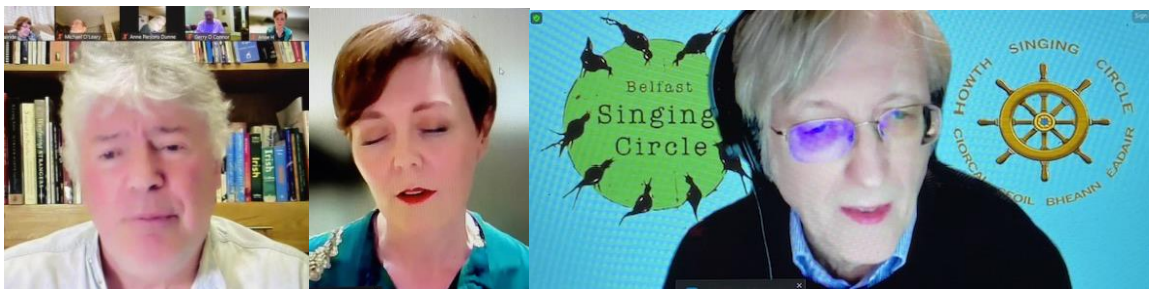
There were many other singers but the star of the night was Sorcha. She began the second half with a jig on the pipes and sang, in Irish and English, the audience enjoying supporting her as she roved ‘Down By The Glenside’. The unanimous view was that we had been privileged to hear the skilful piping and beautiful singing of a rare young talent. It will be a night that lives long in the memory.

Zoom Session With Belfast Singers

On Thursday, 16 November, we hosted a joint Zoom session with the Belfast Singing Circle. It honoured our commitment to those distant friends who joined our Zoom sessions during Covid that we would not forget them and would provide occasional nights to reconnect. The night was managed by Séamas Sheils on the technical side and delightfully hosted by Michael King from Howth – with assistance from Helen Lahert – and Stephen Connor from Belfast. We have now run joint sessions with Aberdeen TMSA (Traditional Music & Song Association); Cork Singers’ Club; Edinburgh Folk Club; the Ironopolis Singers, Teesside; and the World’s Room, Edinburgh. All were interesting and enjoyable nights.

Mark McGuckin, Anna Monks and Lucy Donaghey began the night, Mark’s rendition of ‘Sweet Laurel Hill’ a delight. Rita Gallagher sang Glenties poet and novelist Patrick MacGill’s poignant ‘Lament From The Trenches’ and Walter Kennedy Katherine Tynan’s ‘The Wind that Shakes the Barley’. Tony Fitzpatrick went a-roving with Spencer; Séamus Mac Ruairí was lonely at Waterloo; Ciara McGleenan had only a leaf from a rose bush; and Kate Crossan sang what proved to be the only amhrán gaeilge on the night. Séamas Sheils lamented Joe Hill and Luke Kelly; Jack Plunkett sang ‘Ill Never Forget You’ and Anne Parsons Dunne strolled by Lough Bran.

Anne Holloway then performed Three in a Row with 'The Maid of Culmore', 'The Magherafelt May Fair' and 'The Stolen Bride', charming performances of a lovely set. Helen Lahert sang Paul Simon's 'Kathy' Song', Claudia Anderson comforted 'The Wounded Huzzar' and Dave McCracken pleaded that we forget him not. Stan Brewer and David Thompson took us along the banks of Kilrea and Finn while Stephen Connor minded the hedges of County Down. Pete Burnham got another round while Alison O'Donnell and Michael O'Leary sang beautifully. Dominic McHugh spoke of Madden's Bar, Daire Ó Baoill remembered 'Sheephaven Bay' and Gerry O'Connor shone down on Sennen. Eddie Phillips ploughed the raging main to get to Claudy, Feargus McDonnell wandered through Slivegallion and Bernie Dermody regretted the few chances squatters like her got. Niamh Parsons did the second Three in a Row: '1848 Where Soldiers Go', 'The Banks of the Bann' and 'Farmer Laffan'. Úna Kane, 'The Dublin Minstrel' and Michael King, 'Song For Ireland' wrapped up a night of fine singing, interesting songs and warm friendship.



Stephen Connor, Anne Holloway and Séamas Sheils

Over forty stayed with the session throughout and looked in from Boston and Chicago, Warkworth and Tasset in Northumberland; Gaoith Dobhaor, Letterkenny, Fanad and Inishowen [Hup Desertegney!]; Iran and Spain; Laois, Leitrim and Louth: quite a spread.

Thank you everyone and, sure, won't we do it again!



Some of those who attended our Zoom session with Belfast

Christmas Session With Ceoltóirí Chluain Tarbh

Our Christmas session guests were our old friends from Ceoltóirí Chluain Tarbh led by Niamh Parsons. The night was full of fun and nonsense ably managed by Santa Claus [aka Gerry O'Connor] and Ann Riordan. The Choir sang mainly carols, their repertoire including 'Down in the Forest', 'The Boar's Head', 'The Coventry Carol', 'The Angel Gabriel', 'The Solstice Carol' and 'Shepherds Arise'. For many, their best rendition was of the seldom heard 'Beautiful Star of Bethlehem', a presentation featuring lovely harmonies. They finished the night with 'Barrett's Privateers' and 'Where Are You My Annie'.

The night – as is now our tradition – finished with Mick Fowler leading everyone in 'All Hail! All Hail!', the carol he wrote and which we have adopted as our Club Carol. Tom Dollard recited Kavanagh's 'Christmas Childhood' and sang a moving version of Moore's 'Oft in the Stilly Night'. Eddie Phillips gave us 'The Kilmore Carol', Michael King walked the strand with 'Arthur McBride' and Úna Kane lamented that 'Far Away Someone is Waiting'. Andy Burke, with harmonica introduction, mourned Shane McGowan with 'Kitty' and Kay Burke recited Cecil Day Lewis's 'The Christmas Rose'. Anne Parsons Dunne sang Tom Lehrer's 'Christmas Song', Gerry Quinlan amused with 'Humpty Dumpty' and Walter Kennedy gave us Tim Dennehy's 'The Kerry Christmas Carol'. Feargus McDonnell – who contributed two tickets for EPIC to the free Christmas raffle – sang 'The Gartan Mother's Lullaby' and Seán and Willie Ryan from Clontarf gave us 'Loving Hannah' and Mary Chapin Carpenter's 'Come Darkness, Come Light'.

Among the many other fine performances, Tony Fitzpatrick's homage to Luke Cheevers recalled many Howth Burns Nights as he sang 'Slip Jigs & Reels'. Eddie Phillips and Ann Riordan provided the terpsichorean accompaniment.

Buíochas Mór

We thank those who have contributed to this *Sweet Nightingale*: Paddy Daly, Helen Lahert, Niamh Parsons, Ann Riordan and Séamas Sheils (photographs); Howth Sea Angling Club; and the Howth Singing Circle Committee – Laurence Bond, Paddy Daly, Francy Devine, Brian Doyle, Michael King, Helen Lahert, Gerry O'Connor, Niamh Parsons, Eddie Phillips and Ann Riordan



Des Geraghty and Gerry Quinlan and Michael King rattles the 'Ould Triangle' with Ann Riordan