



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

The Sweet Nightingale

New Series, no 38, July 2026

Morag Dunbar RIP

It was with deep sadness that Howth Singing Circle learned in May of the passing of Morag Dunbar. Well known throughout the Irish singing community, in Howth she was a much-loved presence at our annual Burns Nights, her Address to the Haggis being legendary. In 2020, Morag's huge contribution to Scottish music was recognised when she was inducted into the Traditional Scottish Music Hall of Fame for a 'Services to Community' Award. We extend our condolences to her companion-on-arms at our events, Janet Weatherston, and to her family and countless friends. Thank you for so much, Morag.



Morag with Willie Gibson (Irvine), Ard Mhéara Mícheál Mac Donncha and Francy Devine

Oíche Ghaelach Le Caoilfhionn Ní Mhadagáin

Bhí oíche den chéad scoth ag Ciorcal Amhránaíochta Bhinn Éadair ag an Oíche Ghaelach i dTeach Tábhairne na Mainistreach (Abbey Tavern) ar an 2 Aibreán 2026, nuair a cuireadh fáilte mhór roimh Caoilfhionn Ní Mhadagáin – amhránaí & ceoltóir óg cumasach, atá ag dul ó neart go neart i saol an cheoil & saol na h-amhránaíochta le cúpla bliain anuas.

Bhí an lucht féachanna faoi gheasa ag Caoilfhionn, lena h-amhránaíocht bhinn, mothúchánach sa chéad leath den oíche, trína léiriú de na h-amhráin 'Tomás Bán Mac Aogáin', (a d'fhoghlaim Caoilfhionn ón ghrúpa Lúnasa), 'Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire' agus 'Amhrán Mhuinseo' (foghlamtha ó Brian O' Rourke & Eva Carroll). Chuir an bhosca shruti (shruti box) go mór leis an chur i láthair i mbealach nádúrtha, a chruthaigh atmaisféar álainn, bríomhar, ceolmhar.

Cuireadh tús leis an dara leath den oíche le ceol álainn beirte ó Chaolfhionn agus a deirfiúr Caoimhe, ar an gconsairtín agus ar an gcláirseach. Bhí gach duine faoi dhraíocht ag an bheirt cheoltóir agus ag lorg tuilleadh, tuilleadh, tuilleadh. I measc na n-amhráin a chan Caoilfhionn sa dara leath, bhí 'A

Chomaraigh Aoibhinn Ó', a d'fhoghlaim sí ó Aodán Ó Ceallaigh (An Rinn); 'Slán agus Beannacht le Buaireamh an tSaoil' (Amhrán Macarónach) agus 'The Freestate Farmer' (foghlamtha ó Bridget Delaney).



Caoilfhionn ar an consairtín agus a deirfiúr Caoimhe ar an gcláirseach

Bhí rogha iontach amhráin & dánta curtha i láthair ag an lucht féachanna le linn na h-oíche, ina measc: 'Bean na Stocaí Bána', 'Goirtín Eorna', 'Fear a Bhata', 'Óró 'sé do Bheatha Bhaile', 'Táimse 'gus Máire, Dán: The Lakeisle of Inisfree', Amhrán d'Aoine an Chéasta, 'We're all Related', 'Cuach mo Londubh Buí', 'Aragon Hill', 'Sweet Lough Neagh', Dán iontach faoi 'When Abdul Moneim Khalifa Met Darach Ó Catháin', 'Galway Bay' (in ómós do Dolores Keane, Music in your Breasts, Óró Bog Liom Í, Dán faoi Lower Leeson St/ Earlsfort Terrace/UCD, 'Teddy O' Neill', Is í do Mhamó, 'No Town' & 'Black is the Colour'.

Bhí oíche ar dóigh ag gach duine agus d'imigh na h-amhránaithe, na filí, agus na h-éisteoirí abhaile lán de cheol, amhráin, cairdeas agus cuideachta.

Gabhann Ciorcal Amhránánaíochta Bhinn Éadair buíochas do Chaolfhionn Ní Mhadagáin agus a teaghlach (Brónagh, Caoimhe & Brian) a thug an-tacaíocht don oíche ar fad.

Níl aon dabht ach go gcloisfear tuilleadh faoi Chaolfhionn i saol an cheoil & saol na h-amhránaíochta amach anseo...

Máire Ní Bhaoill

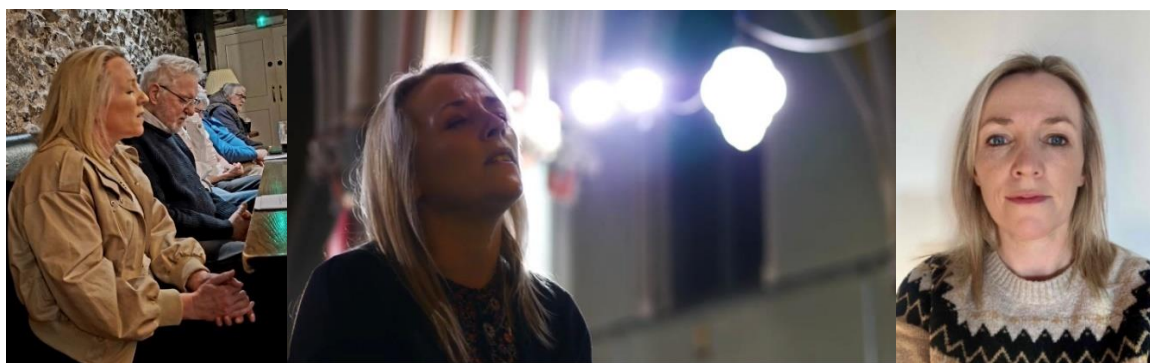
Fionnuala Maxwell & Lovely Leitrim Songs

Our May session kicked off to a great start with Brian Doyle's rendition of 'Down by the Glenside'. Mick King sang a beautiful song from Drogheda's Mary Ann Carolan, 'Bold Doherty' and our evening was properly launched with Eithne Ní Chloscaidh's lovely rendition of Len Graham's 'One Morning in May'. Eddie Philips gave us 'The Banks of Claudy' and Philip O'Connor, given the 'mounting war hysteria' in the world, sang 'The Band Played Waltzing Matilda'. 'Heather Down the Moor' was very ably sung by Máire Mhic Aogáin and Ciarán Ó Maoileoin, gave us the traditional Scottish ballad, 'Willie O' Winsbury'.

Una Kane was in fine voice with 'Grace' and Brian McManus sang Richard Thompson's poignant 'The Dimming of the Day'. Erfan Shams recited a beautiful Rumi love poem and Walter Kennedy brought us 'Down to the Well with Maggie'. Lorcan Farrelly, as always, thrilled us with one of his own creations about the beautiful coastline of 'Fair Fingal' and Andy Burke explained that his song, 'My Son in Amerikay' was written by Alf Mac Lochlainn, 1926-2018, who was Director of the National Library for a number of years.

Michael McCabe played a lovely Carolan tune, 'Sí Beag Sí Mór' on his feadóg stáin. Aoife Caomhánach followed with a stunning version of Karine Polwart's song 'Rivers Run & Rivers Flow'. Máire Ní Bhaoill

then introduced our Special Guest Fionnuala Maxwell from Drumsna, County Leitrim. Many of us had met Fionnuala previously in her wonderful singing class at the Joe Mooney Festival in Drumshanbo and had learned songs from her amazing repertoire. Fionnuala, a singer, songwriter, collector and teacher, an All-Ireland Fleadh winner and adjudicator, has carried out significant heritage work, gathering the songs of Leitrim and bringing them back through workshops with local children, instilling in them a keen sense of place. Fionnuala comes from a strong singing tradition from her grandparents' house on the Sligo-Fermanagh border, where she was surrounded by music from the wireless, and her relations, who regularly called on Fionnuala to: 'Sing us a verse of a song'. They inspired Fionnuala to sing from a very young age and to be especially proud to sing songs from her own area. Fionnuala is the force behind the 'Leitrim Larks: Lend us an Ear Project', which aims to preserve and promote traditional songs and singing in County Leitrim.



Fionnuala's first song, learned from Pauline Sweeney and dedicated to the late Michil Ned Quinn was the lovely 'Boys of Mullaghbawn'. She followed this with one of her own, the funny and true; 'In Ireland We Are All Related' and then an emigration ballad, written by Molly Reynolds, who made the extraordinary out of the ordinary 'Farewell Bornacoola'. Fionnuala mentioned that children love to learn songs with familiar place names, and this song has place names aplenty, 'from Dromad to Cloone through to Rooskey's broad arches'.

After the break we were all looking forward to hearing more from Fionnuala and we were not disappointed. She started with 'Path Across the Ocean', a song of emigration and longing for home, 'Will I ever get a glance lovely Eireann of thee' which she learned from the singing of Séamus Mac Mathúna (RIP). To cheer us up, Fionnuala followed with 'Ould Paddy McCarthy', 'The turf grew spontaneously in Winter to hate, the shins of Ould Paddy McCarthy'. Máire Ní Bhaoill had a difficult act to follow, but it was no bother to her as she sang 'The Magherafelt May Fair' beautifully. Helen Lahert followed with a song she learned from Fionnuala in Drumshanbo many years ago, 'Van Dieman's Land'.

Feargus McDonnell gave us the wonderful 'Sliabh Gallion Braes' and Niamh Parsons sang of seeking pleasure and drinking ale 'When I was a Young Girl'. Amy Kate Stewart sang Gerry Rafferty's 'Her Father Didn't Like Me Anyway', Séamus Mc Manus sang Mick O Grady's 'The Long-Distance Kid', which he got from Fergus Whelan and Mack McAllen took us walking in the Summer down 'The Curra Road', a Ger Wolfe song he learned from Zoë Conway. Ann O'Donohoe welcomed in the May with The Watsons' 'Hal-An-Toe'. We went back to Lorcan Farrelly and were rewarded with his wonderful song of the swifts, 'The Catcher on the Wing, the Reaper in the Sky'. Ciaran Ó Maoileoin gave us the last song from the floor with the mighty 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'.

We returned to Fionnuala for the last two songs of the night, 'The Fairy Child' learned from the singing of Aughavas native Nan Fitzpatrick (her brother Bill Fitzpatrick wrote 'Lovely Leitrim') and to finish, 'My Own Leitrim Home', written by Thomas Flynn from Kesh. Fionnuala was given a hearty and grateful thanks, clap and cheer, before we joined hands to sing 'The Parting Glass' as Gaeilge agus as Béarla.

Helen Lahert



Billy Bragg, Francy Devine, Jennifer Reid, Nick Hart & Jackie Oates (photograph Josie Sommer)

Steve Johnson's *Morning Star* Review of Songs For The Workers

On 7 May, Francy Devine was asked by the English Folk Dance & Song Society to lead a presentation of 'Songs For The Workers' at the EFDSS headquarters at the Cecil Sharp House, Camden, London. A sold out crowd were enthusiastic for the songs, singers and the many historical images projected behind the performers. Steve Johnson's review of the night in the Morning Star newspaper is published below.

Music has always played a part in the struggles of workers and the labour movement and in keeping with this tradition this concert at Cecil Sharp House to celebrate International Workers' Day brought together different artists to sing a variety of industrial, agricultural and protest songs highlighting the value of collective solidarity. Compered by Irish singer and labour historian Francy Devine, the event also featured an impressive backdrop of photographs showing scenes from past and present struggles from Britain and internationally.

The first half featured songs from Devine and younger folk performers Jennifer Reid, Nick Hart and Jackie Oates. Starting with Reid's performance of a mill girl's song, other highlights included Devine's performance of the Ewan MacColl song 'Jamie Foyers' in tribute to volunteers of the International Brigade, a miners' song from Reid, 'Th' Coaler', and Oates's rendition of the classic American Labour song 'Joe Hill'. The coming together of all the artists to then sing 'Raise Out the Banners' was an uplifting moment before the interval.

Peggy Seeger was to have headlined the second part of the concert but unfortunately due to illness was unable to attend with Billy Bragg acting as her replacement. However, after starting with his own 'Between the Wars', he paid tribute to MacColl and Seeger with their song 'Kilroy was Here'. Assisted by the other artists and with particular emphasis on the 1984 miners' strike we then got to hear songs like 'Power in the Union', 'A Miner's Life' and 'Solidarity Forever' culminating in 'The Red Flag' sung to Jim Connell's original tune, 'The White Cockade'.

The concert ended with the other artists joining Bragg in singing his version of the 'Internationale', one which may not be to the taste of many *Morning Star* readers, including this reviewer. However, this does not take away from the inspirational nature of an event which combined great songs with historical narrative.

Ian Russell, RIP

The world of traditional and folk music was deeply saddened by the passing of Ian Russell on 16 May. He was a long-serving editor of the *Folk Music Journal* and, as Director, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, was a dynamic force for organising a wide variety of events like the Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend and the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention. Ian was a guest at a memorable Howth Burns Night graced by the Breton cousins Loïc and Guénahel Denis, biniou and bombarde, and the Handsworth Long Sword Dancers from Sheffield. Much of Ian's early field work was based around the traditions of carol singing and dancing in the Sheffield area. Ian was an occasional visitor to our monthly sessions when he was in Dublin. Among the many obituaries recalling Ian Russell's outstanding contribution to traditional culture, this one in the *Guardian* is worth the read: www.theguardian.com/music/2026/may/31/ian-russell-obituary



Ian Russell and the Handsworth Longsword Dancers

Celebrating One Hundred Years of Irish Radio

In June, Brian Doyle and Walter Kennedy led a night to celebrate a century of Irish public service broadcasting – 2RN to Raidió Éireann, the GPO to Donnybrook. A memory jerking booklet was produced with many songs heard on the wireless and many evocative names of programmes, presenters and performers. Members of the audience added to the nostalgia with stories recalled from working for the old P&T (Posts & Telegraphs) inside the GPO, recollections of great radio moments and discovering from a session with primary school children that none of them knew what a radio was – never mind a wireless! It was perhaps an untypical session but a most enjoyable one with a gathering sense that we were collectively witnessing the demise of a great tradition of steam radio!

Buíochas Mór

We thank those who have contributed to this *Sweet Nightingale*: Helen Lahert, Niamh Parsons and Ann Riordan (photographs); Máire Ní Bhaoill; and the Howth Singing Circle Committee – Laurence Bond, Paddy Daly, Francy Devine, Brian Doyle, Michael King, Helen Lahert, Niamh Parsons, Eddie Phillips and Ann Riordan.



Laurence Bond talking about Charles O'Neill and 'The Foggy Dew' and then singing O'Neill's original working. Seònaid Ó Murchadha in whimsical reflection with Walter Kennedy and Brian Doyle steering the ship



Eddie Phillips performing in City Hall, 2018, and at Howth Burns Night 2026

next session

Singing The Fishing

annual session in aid of St Francis Hospice

Saturday 18 July, 3-6pm, Abbey Tavern