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## *Cherish the Ladies*

MICK MOLONEY

*In 1987, the Ethnic Folk Arts Center Concert Tour, Cherish the Ladies, changed the landscape of Irish traditional music in America. This essay by Mick Moloney, appeared in the program book for the 1989 tour.*

### **The Background: Irish Traditional Music in America**

Irish traditional music has endured a long and often difficult, lifetime in the United States. Brought to this country's urban industrial centers by Irish immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries, traditional Irish music has developed a unique character in America, and has in turn exerted a profound effect on the music in Ireland itself.

The traditional music, typically played on instruments such as the fiddle, accordion, concertina, flute, tin whistle, *uilleann* pipes, tenor banjo, and piano, dates back several centuries, and draws on an enormous repertoire from both Ireland and America. Much of this music - hornpipes, jigs, reels, and other dance pieces - was composed by musicians in Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries, though a considerable number of tunes date from an earlier time, extending back as far as the early 17th century. In various regions in Ireland, polkas and mazurkas proliferate, and at one time marches, schottisches and barn dances were also popular, although these are rarely played nowadays. Beautifully expressive slow airs, normally played in free meter, form an important part of the national repertoire, as do the stately baroque-like compositions of the 17th and 18th century harpers.

By the dawn of the recording era in the early part of this century, traditional Irish music had already achieved widespread popularity in America, particularly in the Northeast and North Central U.S. In 1913 Columbia Records issued the first American recordings of traditional music played by Irish musicians. At the time, Irish communities clearly felt the need for such material. Musicians who were popular in Irish neighborhoods found a large and eager market through the recording industry.

The 1920's and 1930's saw the issuing of hundreds of traditional instrumental recordings by major and minor record companies. The era was perhaps most notable for the landmark recordings of the great trio of County Sligo fiddlers, James Morrison, Paddy Killoran and Michael

Coleman. Their recordings, as well as those of their contemporaries, such as fiddler Paddy Sweeney, piper Tom Ennis, flutists John McKenna and Tom Morrison, and Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band in Boston had a profound influence on traditional music on both sides of the Atlantic. They helped maintain and expand repertoires and created stylistic models that were emulated faithfully by new generations of musicians.

The 1940's, however, proved disastrous for the traditional music. Commercial American and Irish American styles predominated, and the major record companies ceased putting out records of traditional music. Despite efforts of dedicated individuals and small companies such as the Copley Record Company in Boston, Irish traditional music went into a marked decline.

The 1950's ushered in a new era for Irish music in America. Late in the decade three brothers from County Waterford named Clancy, and a friend from County Armagh named Tommy Makem, all actors by profession, were losing money in a small theater in New York City. The American urban folksong revival had produced a thriving coffeehouse, concert and folk club scene in New York at that time, and the young Irishmen hit upon the idea of running Irish folksong evenings at the theater in order to raise funds. As they came from musical families and all remembered songs from their childhood, they had no trouble getting a program together. Influenced by the sounds of the American folk revival, they put together guitar and banjo arrangement for old songs and ballads. This represented a radical departure in the public performance of Irish folk songs; popular Irish folk singers such as Delia Murphy, Willie Brady and Charlie McGee had used the guitar earlier in the decade for rudimentary accompaniment, but they had little lasting influence. Before long the Clancy's had made their first LP, produced by Kenneth Goldstein and Diane Hamilton for Tradition Records, and were appearing on an ever-widening circuit of folk clubs and colleges. Prominent American musicians, such as Pete Seeger, Bruce Langhorne, and Eric Weisberg, joined them in sessions and on subsequent Columbia recordings, and their musical and singing arrangements improved rapidly. An appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show cast them into the national spotlight; it wasn't until then, according to Liam Clancy, that Irish-American audiences accepted their music.

Their style was characterized by a lusty, lively delivery, and the songs they chose were all Irish or Scottish folksongs or songs written by British and Irish composers in the folk idiom. This material was largely unfamiliar to Irish-Americans from the second generation onward, whose concept of Irish music had been shaped largely by commercial Irish-American recordings and particularly by the nostalgic, sentimental material made popular by singers like Bing Crosby and Dennis Day. However, as soon as the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem achieved national prominence, many Irish-Americans began to take an active interest in these "new" songs, and in the

men singing them. They were handsome, clean-cut Irish lads the likes of whom no respectable Irish-American could possibly object to; and here they were the first Irish born entertainers since John McCormack to achieve international recognition.

Columbia soon issued their records back in Ireland as well, and the new, vital, fresh approach to familiar folksongs caught on there immediately. On their first tour of Ireland they played to packed houses everywhere and were greeted, as Liam Clancy recounted, with a hysteria akin to Beatlemania. Their skill as actors enabled them to fashion a highly sophisticated, yet thoroughly informal, stage performance which was likely to appeal to any audience.

Within months of their first tour, a whole folk music industry had been generated, centered in Dublin. Mirror image groups mushroomed and found ready part-time employment in bars, belting out third-rate copies of Clancy Brothers songs, with untuneful guitar and banjo accompaniment. Many of these groups recorded with small local record companies or with Irish subsidiaries of the big international companies.

Concurrently, *Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann*, a musicians' organization in Ireland, was working valiantly to revive interest in the country's traditional instrumental music (as well as traditional song and dance forms), which they felt to be in grave danger of extinction at the hands of modernization. They organized *seisúns* (music sessions), workshops, and classes, and they revived the *fleadhanna cheoil*, music festivals where musicians and enthusiasts would gather in a town over a weekend for music making and fun. Within the *fleadhanna*, they reintroduced as an important component highly formalized musical competitions which set standards and created incentives for the younger artists. Within a few years the work of Comhaltas had achieved a significant impact in raising public awareness of the traditional music, though their real influence was still largely confined to traditional music aficionados and players. That was to change when, in the early 1960's in Ireland, a classically-trained Irish composer named Sean O'Riada initiated a reformation of the traditional ensemble style. He abhorred the unison straight-forward playing of *ceili* (dance) bands because of their "destruction of the utterance of the individual genius," which he saw as the hallmark of the finest aspects of Irish traditional music. With the classical chamber music ensemble as his model, he proposed a sort of national folk orchestra where traditional instruments such as the *willeann* pipes, the tin whistle, concert flute, concertina, fiddles, and the *bodhrán* (goat-skin drum) would create textured musical arrangements of old tunes, with a new emphasis on harmony to support melodic lines. To fulfill this vision, he created an ensemble named *Ceoltoiri Cualann* (later to evolve into the Chieftains), which broadcast steadily on Irish radio in the early 1960's, creating a new style of performance attractive to the middle classes, and gradually accepted-though not without resistance - on the traditional music scene.

The efforts of *Comhaltas*, assisted on one hand by the folksong boom sparked by Makem and the Clancys, and on the other by Sean O'Riada's pioneering arrangements, had spectacular results. *Comhaltas* put in place the grass-roots networks, establishing ties with traditional musicians' organizations in America, and before long the revival had spread to the United States. Irish music schools, such as those run by Maureen Glynn in Queens and the late Martin Mulvihill in the Bronx, fed into the *Comhaltas* network, turning out many extraordinary players who have themselves gone on to win major championships and inspire a whole new generation of Irish-American musicians.

While *Comhaltas* created new mechanisms for community-level music-making, a new type of professional Irish folk group emerged during the '60's which combined the best of the Clancy's approach with that of *Comhaltas* and Sean O'Riada: good harmony singing with increasingly subtle and more inventive instrumental accompaniment. Groups such as Sweeney's Men and the Johnston's were the new pioneers, with enormous popular appeal in Ireland. New instruments such as the bouzouki and the mandola entered the performing musical tradition, appearing on stage beside older instruments like the *uilleann* pipes, the fiddle and the flute. The pinnacle of this newer development was perhaps best represented in the recordings of the group Planxty in the early 1970's. Exciting groups such as DeDanann, the Bothy Band, Clannad and Stockton's Wing were to follow, all featuring top-quality instrumentalists and singers. Many of the singers who performed with these groups were women and several such as Dolores Keane, Maura O'Connell and Mary Black, have developed illustrious solo careers in the 1980's, both in Europe and America. All are powerful, compelling singers with majestic stage presence, whose visibility has helped to strengthen the place of female performers in the Irish folk scene.

With all these parallel developments, the Irish music scene in America has continued to grow. In this decade, *ceilis*, *seisuns*, and instructional schools abound in Irish-American communities; more formal performance ensembles are popular on the concert and club circuit. The recent massive immigration of young Irish into the urban centers of the northeast has fortified the Irish-American music scene. At present, according to older Irish-Americans, more musicians are playing Irish music in America than ever before.

### **Sean Nos: The Old Style Vocal Tradition**

The beautiful *sean nos* (old-style) song tradition in the Gaelic language represents an important cultural link with Ireland's Celtic past. The style of performance which characterizes the genre is rooted in the western *Gaeltachtaí* (Gaelic-speaking areas) of Ireland, particularly in Connemara and County Galway. *Sean nos* is a wonderfully stylized vocal form, characterized by complex florid ornamentations and embellishments, and variation of rhythms and melodic lines.

Many of the songs date back at least to the 16th century; some of the oldest were created by poets who represented an outgrowth of the bardic tradition of poetry that existed in medieval Ireland. Although Ireland's bardic schools disappeared following the British conquest, the poetic tradition survived in Gaelic-speaking communities. Aside from these songs in Gaelic, a large number of Anglo-Irish songs dating from the 18th and 19th centuries are included in the repertoires of most sean-nos singers. Most of the songs are love songs, often with melancholy themes.

The songs were generally sung in the old world context, in intimate house gatherings in the Gaelic-speaking areas. Songs were passed on mainly through family and community. They were learned orally, and more recently through such written sources as songbooks and manuscripts. Women often acted as tradition-bearers, though rarely identifying themselves as performers. As in other aspects of music and singing, men were the predominant public performers. National competitions such as the *Oireachtas*, sponsored by the Gaelic League, and the All-Ireland competition, sponsored by *Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann*, have in recent years served as official arbiters of acceptable style.

Unfortunately, in America the tradition has been barely visible. This is partly because the Gaelic language makes the tradition less accessible, but also simply because appropriate contexts - such as intimate rural house parties - have never existed in this country. In recent times, conscious revitalization initiatives have created new performance contexts. Concerts and festivals have provided platforms for the few singers who are willing to perform publicly. Yet the language still provides a barrier to appreciation by general audiences, as does the unfamiliarity of the vocal style. While a few successful performers - notably the late Joe Heaney and James Keane - projected a powerful personal presence which transcended these linguistic and stylistic barriers, *sean nos* singers in general have been received indifferently, even within Irish communities.

The Sean O'Riada Mass, introduced into Irish liturgy in the wake of the reforms of Vatican II, provided a new context which legitimized the performance of sean nos singing. The Gaelic language achieved a badly needed level of affirmation. Such a mass in Boston was to represent the first public appearance of Bridget Fitzgerald, Cherish the Ladies' sean nos singer from Connemara. Like many other Gaelic-speaking women who knew songs, Bridget never really considered herself a performer until that time. This new context was perhaps the most vital catalyst for Bridget's emergence as a confident bearer of the *sean nos* repertoire.

### **Irish Step Dance in America**

There are three forms of Irish traditional dance in America: *ceili*, set and step dance. *Ceili* dancing is a very popular form of social figure dancing, with a rigidly fixed repertoire established (and some would say canonized!)

by the Gaelic league in the early days of this century. *Ceilis* are held quite frequently in church halls, community centers and the like in Irish neighborhoods throughout America. Set dancing is an informal style of social figure dancing originally derived from the *quadrille*. It survives in western counties in Ireland, and has recently undergone a major revival, which is in the process of spreading to the U.S.

The third category, step dance, has fared extraordinarily well in the United States, being taught formally by dancing teachers in practically every Irish community of note in America. The dancing schools have their antecedents in the dancing masters who travelled around Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries. The masters received money and hospitality in return for their teaching services. There was a great deal of competition between rival masters; they vied with each other in introducing new steps and routines, and on occasion would challenge each other in public competitions at fairs and sporting events.

In America the number of Irish dancing schools has increased dramatically in the past 20 years. There may now be close to 25,000 children taking dancing lessons in the U.S. and Canada. Most of them have Irish ancestry, and a high proportion are the sons and daughters of first-generation Irish who came over in the 1940's and 1950's.

The most common performance situation in competition, usually held at regional *feiscanna* (festivals) Organized by Irish-American organizations or by dancing schools. Winners and runners-up in the national North American championship are eligible to compete in the World Championships held each March in Dublin. As in the traditional music competitions, Irish-Americans have lately achieved considerable success at the World Championships. In 1970, Donny Golden of Brooklyn became the first American to place in the World Step Dance Championship, and in 1975 Chicago's Mike Flatley won the World Men's Step Dancing Championship. In 1987, Liam Harney of Boston accomplished the same feat.

Both women and men dance reels, jigs and hornpipes; they also dance set pieces, each with its own unique series of steps. The slip-jig, however, has undergone a unique transformation on both sides of the Atlantic: while the dance was formerly done by men in rural Ireland, over the past three or four decades it has evolved into an exclusively woman's dance. Danced in the soft-shoe, today's slip jig is strongly influenced by ballet technique.

### **Women in Irish Traditional Music: A New Phenomenon**

One of the most fascinating developments in the varied history of Irish traditional music in America has been the extraordinary rise in the number of girls and young women performing the music in the 1970's and 1980's, particularly in the eastern United States. Up until 1970, Irish traditional music was almost exclusively a male domain. There were, of course, some

notable exceptions. In Ireland, when the louder and more durable melodeon became favored over the more delicate concertina as a dance music instrument, the latter became a “women’s instrument” in many parts of the country. Until fairly recently, in fact, the concertina tradition was kept alive by outstanding musicians like Mrs. Crotty from Kilrush in West Clare, who provided inspiration to the current generation of young concertina players. There were other great women musicians as well, such as fiddlers Aggie White, Kathleen Harrington, Julia Clifford and Josephine Keegan. But they were very much in the minority.

In America one can go through *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*, the massive compilation of biographies of Irish musicians published by Captain Francis O’Neill in Chicago in 1917, and find only a handful of references to female Irish musicians. From O’Neill’s time until 1970, only a few women were involved in a major way in the Irish music scene, notably Eleanor Neary (piano) from Chicago and Kathleen Brennan Grant (fiddle) from New York. New York-born fiddler Kathleen Collins was one of the first of the new breed of woman musicians to emerge. She won the All-Ireland Senior Fiddle Title in 1967, the first American-born musician to accomplish this feat. Chicago-born Liz Carroll won the Junior All-Ireland Title in 1974 and the Senior Title the following year, and Eileen Ivers from the Bronx won the Senior Fiddle Title in 1984. In fact, scores of American-born women have now competed and won in Ireland, to the point where their success has become almost commonplace.

How did so many young women suddenly become involved in Irish music in America? One could cite the success of the women’s movement in the society as a whole in opening male-dominated areas of life to women as one reason. Another reason, no doubt, was the fact that the massive revival of Irish traditional music in the 1960’s in Ireland, and later in America, made traditional music a socially acceptable vehicle for the expression of ethnic identity for a significant population of Irish immigrants. Irish step dancing had been a popular vehicle for this kind of identity expression for many years, and now parents, particularly first-generation immigrants, felt that Irish music as well as dancing could help preserve the children’s link with Irish culture. Both in Ireland and in America, young girls have always constituted about 80% to 90% of the pupils studying Irish dance. This same pattern quickly asserted itself in the music on both sides of the Atlantic. Many of the boys would drop out at adolescence, often due to negative peer pressure and ridicule. The girls, on the other hand, would usually find positive peer reaction and continue learning and playing.

### **Cherish the Ladies**

The impressive achievements of American-born women in Irish traditional music have come to full fruition in Cherish the Ladies, whose members are among the most gifted performers in America. All have a direct living



# *Cherish the Ladies*

A National Concert Tour featuring an ensemble of some of the country's finest Irish-American women performers, produced by the Ethnic Folk Arts Center with the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts

*1989 Tour*

## 1989 Tour Schedule

### **Saturday, April 15**

Woodside, NY (Queens)  
St. Sebastian's School Hall

*Sponsored by Woodside on the Move*

### **Sunday, April 16**

Centereach, NY (LJ)  
Centereach High School

*Sponsored by the Hallockville Folk Arts Center for Suffolk County & the Ancient Order of Hibernians*

### **Friday, April 21**

Syracuse, NY  
Carrier Theater, Mulroy Civic Center

*Sponsored by the Cultural Resources Council*

### **Friday, April 28**

Providence, RI  
Roger Williams Park Casino

*Sponsored by the Providence Ceili Club*

### **Saturday, April 29**

Mastic/Shirley, NY (LI)  
William Floyd High School

*Sponsored by the Hallockville Folk Arts Center for Suffolk County & the Ancient Order of Hibernians, in cooperation with the Mastic/Shirley Neighborhood Network*

### **Sunday, April 30**

Hampton Bays, NY (LI)  
St. Rosalie's Church

*Sponsored by the Hallockville Folk Arts Center for Suffolk County & the Ancient Order of Hibernians*

### **Friday, May 12**

Arcade, NY (Buffalo area)  
Arcade High School

*Sponsored by the Arts Council for Wyoming County*

### **Saturday, May 13**

Lockport, NY (Niagara County)  
Lockport High School

*Sponsored by the Niagara Council of the Arts*

### **Sunday, May 14**

Rochester, NY  
Mercy High School

*Sponsored by the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Tom Finucane Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann*

### **Saturday, May 20**

Harrisburg, PA  
Harrisburg Area Community College

*Sponsored by the Susquehanna Folk Music Society*

### **Sunday, May 21**

Lincroft, NJ  
Brookdale Community College  
Performing Arts Center

*Sponsored by Student Activities and Performing Arts Center, Brookdale Community College*

### **Saturday, June 3**

Albany, NY  
Albany Hibernian Hall

*Sponsored by the Sean O Riada Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann*

### **Sunday, June 4**

New York City, NY  
Julia Richman High School

*Sponsored by the Ethnic Folk Arts Center and Traditional MusicLine*

### **Friday, June 16**

Arkville, NY  
Erpf Catskill Cultural Center

*Sponsored by the Erpf Catskill Cultural Center*

### **Friday, August 4**

Sullivan County Community College  
Loch Sheldrake, NY

*Sponsored by Sullivan Performing Arts*

### **Part II: July - December**

Midwest    New England    Mid-Atlantic

## *Welcome to Cherish the Ladies!*

**D**uring a conversation in the Spring of 1984, Mick Moloney drew our attention to the remarkable number of Irish-American women now performing traditional Irish music in the United States. We were immediately struck by this unique phenomenon, which contrasts sharply with all of the other ethnic communities with whom we have worked where, almost without exception, the instrumentalists are men.

In order to recognize and celebrate this development in Irish music, we asked Mick to organize a concert series featuring some of these women. The quality of music at the three sold-out concerts and the enthusiastic audience response convinced us that the time was ripe to share the music with a wider public.

We recorded many of the women in 1985 on two albums for Shanachie Records: *Cherish the Ladies*, and *Fathers and Daughters*. The albums were huge successes, updating and further enriching the tradition of Irish music in America. Additional concerts followed and, in response to queries from all around the country, we helped shape a touring ensemble, culling nine individuals from the many excellent women performers then on the scene, and set upon organizing a national Cherish the Ladies tour.

Our Fall 1987 national tour took the new Cherish the Ladies ensemble throughout the East Coast, Midwest and West Coast. Playing in venues ranging from small Irish community centers, schools and churches to large performing arts complexes, Cherish the Ladies reached many thousands of people. It was wonderful to witness the development of the ensemble during the course of the tour. Though Cherish the Ladies started essentially as an ad hoc collection of soloists, as the tour progressed the ensemble coalesced into a distinctive performing unit with its own personality and repertoire. Audience and critical response was resounding; a writer at Philadelphia's *Irish Edition* remarked that the group gave "one of the finest traditional performances I've ever attended." High praise was also won from the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Boston Globe*, *Irish America*, and many more newspapers, magazines and radio programs.

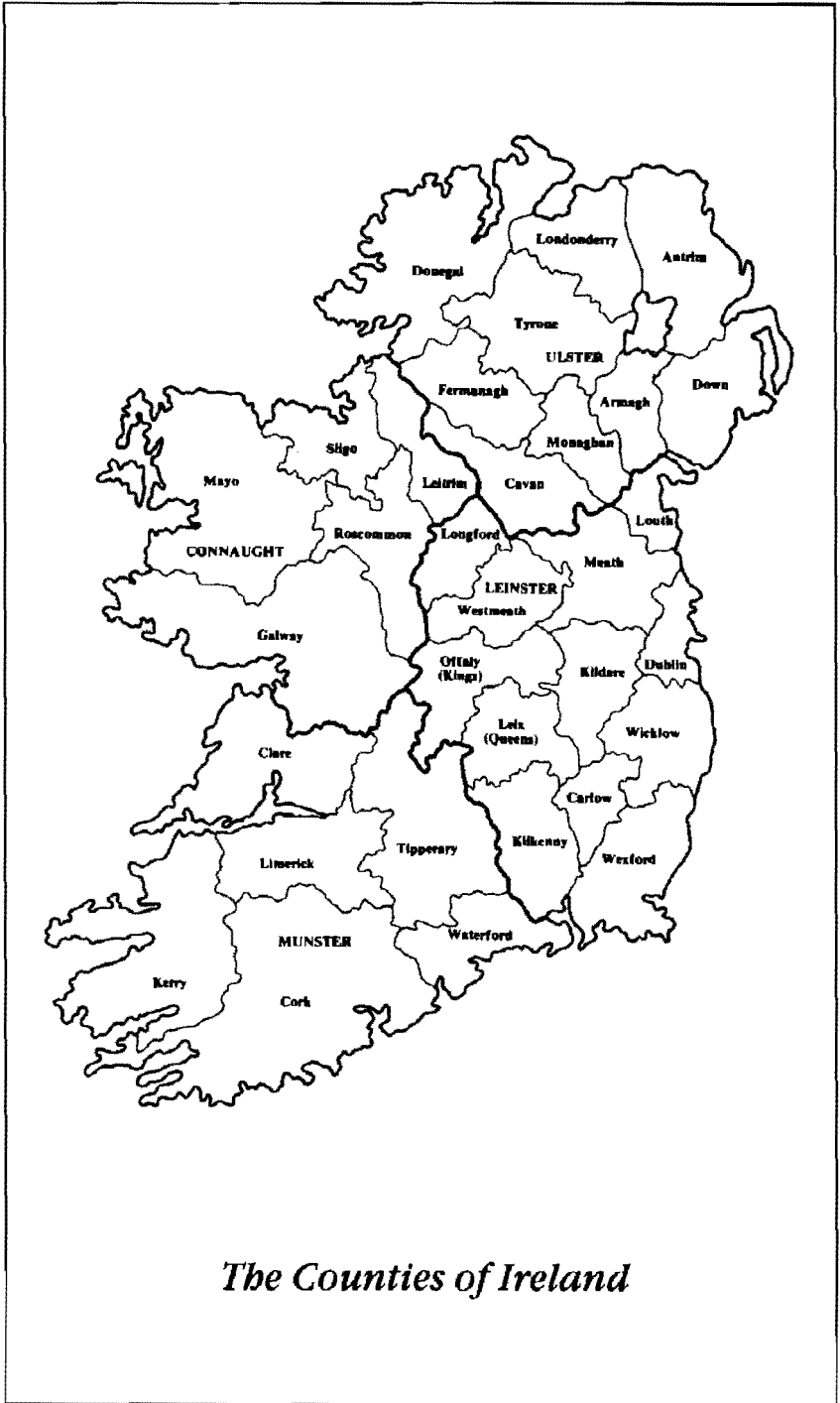
As advocates of traditional music, perhaps what we find most inspiring is that young performers have taken up the traditions of their parents and grandparents, and have made the traditions their own. The members of Cherish the Ladies are a testament to the continued vitality and adaptability of traditional culture in modern life.

The Ethnic Folk Arts Center is proud to offer this second tour as a tribute to the dedication, perseverance and virtuosity of women artists throughout the country, and in particular to the many Irish-American women who have carved out their own place, instilling new life in the tradition of Irish music. As one of the women suggested back in 1985, what better name for the project than the fine old Irish tune, "Cherish the Ladies"!

Ethel Raim

Martin Koenig

*Directors, Ethnic Folk Arts Center*



*The Counties of Ireland*

## The Performers



**Mary Coogan** was born in 1958 in Yonkers of Irish and Irish-American parents. Her mother emigrated from County Roscommon in 1948. Her father, who was New York-born, plays the accordion, so Mary heard a lot of Irish music growing up. She began playing the guitar at about 15, starting out with American folk songs. Around 1980 she began taking part in Irish sessions around New York City and the Catskills, and in a relatively short time she has become one of the leading Irish women guitarists in the country; she is sought out by many top musicians in New York for her innovative chording and nimble fingerwork. Mary is an active musician at New York sessions, and performs frequently at Irish concerts and festivals. She lives in Newburgh, New York, where she teaches elementary school.

**Maureen Doherty** was born in Brooklyn in 1960. Her father, Tom Doherty, is one of the few remaining old-style two-bass melodeon players; a superb musician, Tom emigrated from his native County Donegal in 1948. He encouraged Maureen's interest in the music early on (she also had an uncle who was a fiddler) and she began lessons with Maureen Glynn, who lived close by. She started on the accordion and then took up the flute when about 16. Maureen now plays the silver flute which, like several other East Coast musicians, she originally picked up because of the unavailability of a good wooden one. Maureen feels her style of playing is probably closer to the Galway style—somewhat smoother, more fluid than the more predominant Sligo style. She also plays the tin whistle, and in the past few years has been playing more and more accordion. Although she works full-time as a fixed-income coordinator at Paine-Webber in New York City and considers her music "just a hobby", she is widely regarded as one of the leading young flutists on the New York scene and performs often with her father, Maureen Glynn and others.

**Siobhan Egan** is a member of the Egan family of Philadelphia, one of the most accomplished families in Irish traditional music. Siobhan, the eldest of six children, was born in Philadelphia in 1967 and moved to Foxford, County Mayo in the early 1970's. Although her parents are not musicians, they have been great enthusiasts and have often attended *ceilis* and concerts in Philadelphia and Ireland. Siobhan first began taking lessons in Foxford with Martin Donoghue. In 1978, she won the All-Ireland solo flute title for her age group, and with her brother Seamus and her sister Rory Ann she won the All-Ireland trio title. Upon returning to Philadelphia in 1980, Siobhan, Seamus and Rory Ann began performing steadily, and Siobhan continued learning informally with musicians around the city. She now plays a number of instruments but specializes on the fiddle. She is an interesting example of an American-born Irish musician who emigrated to Ireland during her formative years; her playing reflects the influence of both the American styles and repertoire and the distinctive music of rural County Mayo. In 1986, the Egan Family recorded their first album, which was released under Seamus' name on the Shanachie label. Siobhan has just recently finished performing in Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theater Company production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

**Bridget Fitzgerald** was born in Loughanbeg, Inverrin, in County Galway. She grew up in the Gaeltacht, the Irish speaking area famed for its rich *sean nos* (old style) singing tradition—an *acapella* vocal style characterized by its complex subtle ornamentation and embellishment. She learned songs in Irish and English from her mother, her uncle Johnny, and her godfather, from other singers, from records and from books. She immigrated to Boston in 1964 and lives in Massachusetts with her 9 year old son Michael. Her sister, Sally Coyne, is also an excellent *sean nos* singer.

*L to R: Siobhan Egan, Joanie Madden, Bridget Fitzgerald, Cathy Ryan Henry, Maureen Kennelly, Mary Coogan, Eileen Golden, Muiread Powell, Eileen Ivers, Maureen Doherty. Photo by Paul Kohnik.*

**Eileen Golden**, born in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn in 1958, is one of the finest step dancers in the United States. She began dancing at the age of seven and has won numerous honors in dancing competitions, including the North American title. Eileen frequently performs with her brother, Donny Golden, and has appeared often with the Irish traditional touring ensemble, The Green Fields of America. She has performed throughout the U.S. and has participated in traditional American cultural tours through Asia and Africa under the auspices of the United States Information Agency. In addition to dancing, Eileen works as a general manager of a court stenography company in Manhattan.

**Cathy Ryan Henry** has long been recognized as an outstanding folk singer in her hometown of Detroit, Michigan. Her father, Tim Ryan, came from a family of singers in Newport, County Tipperary, and her mother, Mary Ryan nee Rice, was born in Rusheen, County Kerry, to a family steeped in Irish music and storytelling. Cathy remembers that there was always music in her house; her mother and father exposed her to a wide range of Irish music and other musical styles. They began taking her to the Gaelic League and Irish-American Club at a very early age, and it was here that Cathy first became inspired to sing and perform traditional music. Her unique vocal style is a result of absorbing these Irish influences while also growing up in a community populated by Americans from the Southern and Western regions of this country. Cathy moved to New York in 1979, where she is now pursuing a full time professional music career. In addition to Cherish the Ladies, she is also a member of the four-piece traditional band Station Island, along with John Whelan, Jerry O'Sullivan and Mark Simos.

**Eileen Iwers** is the most successful American born musician ever to compete in the demanding All-Ireland championship held annually in Ireland. She is a seven-time All-Ireland Fiddle Champion and only the third American ever to win the coveted All-Ireland Senior Fiddle Championship (1984). Eileen was born of Irish parents in the Bronx in 1965, started playing the fiddle at the age of nine, and spent several years with the Martin Mulvihill School. In recent years Eileen has emerged as one of the country's most gifted young fiddlers in any musical genre. To date, she has appeared on several albums, as well as releasing her own feature album, *Fresh Takes*, along with accordion player John Whelan and guitarist Mark Simos. Eileen tours extensively, both as a

solo artist and with the Green Fields of America, and has appeared at major folk festivals and concert halls throughout the United States and Canada, including New York's own Carnegie Hall.

**Maureen Kennedy**, born in 1960, learned to dance in her native San Francisco. Her father was a prominent teacher of Irish dance, and she and her sister began learning the traditions at an early age. Since 1982, Maureen has lived in Brooklyn, where she studied with step dancer Donny Golden. She has won numerous awards in the United States, including the Western States and California championships. In addition to performing step dancing and leading celtis throughout the New York area, Maureen now teaches and performs ballroom dancing with Fred Astaire Studios, and in May, 1987 won the National Ballroom Dancing Championship title in Florida.

**Joanie Madden** was born in the Bronx in 1965. Her father Joe, a fine accordion player, won the All-Ireland Championship in 1958, and emigrated from County Galway in 1959. Joanie was brought up listening to her father and his friends play at family parties and celebrations. At the age of thirteen she took up the tin whistle and began lessons with Galway flute player Jack Coen, who lived just around the corner. Within five years she became All-Ireland Champion on both tin whistle and concert flute, and in 1984 became the first American to win the All-Ireland Senior Tin Whistle Championship. Since that time, Joanie has become one of the most sought-after flute and whistle players in the United States. In addition to a full time performing schedule, she has appeared at Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall and the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife. She has recorded on several albums and is currently working on her first solo release.

**Mairiad Powell** was born in New York in 1965. She began step dancing at age 5 with Roger Casey and studied for 12 years with Kenny Verlin. She has since performed and competed in various concerts and competitions throughout the United States, Canada and Ireland. Among the country's finest step dancers, Mairiad has won numerous awards, including the North American Title. In addition to working as an exercise physiologist she has her T.C.R.G. (certification as a dance instructor), and teaches at her own step dancing school in Yonkers, New York. She is presently working towards a dual Master's degree in Elementary Education and Special Education.



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## About the Ethnic Folk Arts Center

The Ethnic Folk Arts Center, founded in 1966, is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the traditional ethnic music and dance of urban immigrant communities in New York and throughout the United States through research, documentation and presentation. The Center records and brings to the stage performing artists who carry on the rich and varied traditions of Greek, Irish, Italian, Puerto Rican, Jewish, Eastern European, Central Asian, Scandinavian, and other ethnic communities in the United States.

The Center is supported in part by federal, state, city and private funding agencies, as well as by individual contributions. In order to continue our unique programs, we depend on the generosity of our audiences and friends. If you have enjoyed this event, won't you please assist us in our work? To send your tax-deductible contribution or for more information on the Center's membership program and its activities, please call us at (212) 691-9510 or write us at:

*Until June, 1989:*  
Ethnic Folk Arts Center  
325 Spring Street, Room 314  
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*After June, 1989:*  
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## Credits & Acknowledgements

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The Ethnic Folk Arts Center would like to extend its gratitude to the local sponsoring organizations, and the countless individuals who have volunteered their time and energy to make these events possible.

Special thanks to Aer Lingus, Shanachie Records and Eamonn Doran's Restaurant for their contributions to the Cherish the Ladies raffle; to the advertisers who have assisted this publication; and to the many individuals and organizations for their invaluable assistance in this project: Angela Carter—Irish Books & Graphics; Kathleen Collins; Kathy Condon; Michael Denney—Greater Washington Celli Club; Paul Kolnik; Stephanie Ledgin—Traditional MusicLine; Ed McKeenna—Irish-American Cultural Center of New York; Rebecca Miller; His Excellency Padraic MacKernan, Irish Ambassador to the United States; Peggy Naughton; Rich Nevins, Randall Grass and Dan Collins—Shanachie Records; Martin Ruane and James Farrell—Irish Consulate, New York; Laurel Screnoble—University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archives; Holly Sidford—New England Foundation for the Arts.

We also wish to extend our gratitude to the women in the ensemble and the artists throughout the country whose dedication to traditional music and dance enriches all of our lives.

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Historical photographs: Photographers unknown, except Bronx Seisun, by George P. Gunning, Jr.; other photos courtesy of the Irish Echo, Shanachie Records, Mick Moloney, Kathleen Collins, and the University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archives.

ancestral link with Ireland. Irish traditional cultural is deeply important to all of them, and provides the bond that links them to their Irish-American friends and fellow artists.

In tonight's concert, you'll hear old tunes and new tunes, some popularized, adapted or composed in America, and others more recently "imported" from Ireland. This basically represents the Irish-American musical repertoire these days - tunes learned from all sources: from other musicians, from books and other tune publications, records and, of course, cassettes made on the ubiquitous cassette recorder, which in the last two decades has revolutionized the way in which music is passed on. Nowhere is the living link between the tradition in Ireland and the tradition in America better illustrated than in the brisk trading and copying of cassette tapes recorded at sessions anywhere between Dublin and Los Angeles.

As individuals and in various groups, many of the women in Cherish the Ladies have had spectacular success in formal competitions in America and in Ireland. This has been of great value for all of them in the sense that it has helped legitimize the expatriate tradition they represent. However, the importance of music and dance for these young women goes way beyond the realm of competitive performance. They are all currently at the heart of the very informal social "scene" which has been the mainstay of Irish music in America for many decades - a "scene" which simply involves musicians getting together to enjoy friendship, music, conversation and good times.

It is interesting to note the evolution of the ensemble itself, having developed from an informal grouping into a professional touring ensemble. Whereas *seisun* tunes were formally the staple of their repertoire, Cherish the Ladies has increasingly incorporated arrangements of tunes in a style more closely associated with such groups as the Chieftains and DeDanann. The addition in 1988 of Irish-American singer Cathy Ryan moves them further in this direction, widening the group's repertoire and creative possibilities. The result is an exciting new ensemble that honors the traditions while keeping in step with modern developments in the Irish-American community. The group's instrumental and singing prowess and diversity, augmented by the exciting virtuoso performances and choreography of the three dancers, makes their presentations entertaining, powerful and appealing to a wide range of audiences.

It has been particularly delightful to watch the individual members of the group develop their own personal stage performing skills over the past three years. Their musical arrangements invariably combine complexity with taste and subtlety, and their verbal presentations are informational and witty, and often hilarious. Their repertoire runs the whole gamut from cerebral to boisterous.

So here they are: from New York, Philadelphia and Boston, musicians, singers and dancers whose virtuosity and enthusiasm bode well for the

survival and growth of Irish traditional culture in America for many years to come.

## NOTES

A few sources for recordings, collections, and more information on Irish music:

1. Shanachie Records, 37 East Clinton Street, Newton, NJ 07860
2. Green Linnet Records, 70 Turner Hill Road, New Canaan, CT 06840
3. Rounder Records, 1 Camp Street, Cambridge, MA 02144
4. *Treoir* Magazine (published in Dublin by *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*; available in the U.S. through Mr. John Droney, 70 Westminster Drive, West Hartford, CT 06107)
5. Captain Francis O'Neill, *Music of Ireland - 1850* (Chicago 1903) (Reprinted 1969 by Rock Chapel Press, c/o Shanachie Records)
6. Brendan Breathnach, *Folk Music & Dances of Ireland* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1971)
7. Ciaran Carson, *Pocket Guide to Irish Traditional Music* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1986)