

From the Bridge - Irish Traditional Music in New York City

An essay by Don Meade

Irish women and men, including many “Scots Irish” from Ulster, were well represented in the early waves of European emigration to North America. New York City was often where they disembarked but not often where they stayed. A hunger for farmland drew many to the mountainous frontiers. But a large proportion of the Irish who came to New York fleeing the Great Hunger of the late 1840s never got farther west than the Hudson River. Millions of Irish newcomers continued to arrive at Castle Garden or Ellis Island in the following decades, giving New York a larger Irish population than any other city in America.

Among the Irish in New York there have always been pipers, fiddlers and other musicians who played the songs and dance tunes of the old country in the New World. We can have no direct knowledge of the music played before the invention of modern recording technology, but there were always dance halls, saloons and social clubs where traditional musicians were welcome. Irish immigrants and their children dominated the ranks of popular entertainers in late 19th century New York. Irish traditional musicians and dancers were regularly featured on the variety and vaudeville stage, and the Irish influence on contemporary popular music was enormous.

One of the most prominent traditional musicians on the 19th century American stage was **Thomas F. Kerrigan**, an uilleann piper originally from Granard, County Longford. He told Francis O’Neill, the great collector and chronicler of Irish music, that he “came to this country in 1863, and spent the first five years in traveling,” declaring that “my people have been pipers for more than 200 years.” He performed for years with step dancer Neil Conway, whose obituary recorded that the duo “played all the principal variety houses in the USA and Canada.” Kerrigan later teamed up with dancer/singer Dan McCarthy, with whom he published songs.

In the early 1870s, Kerrigan ran a bar on the Lower East Side of Manhattan where the Taylor brothers, famous makers of loud, concert-pitch uilleann pipes, turned out their first American sets in a basement workshop. By 1876, he had moved uptown to 316 West 42nd Street, only a block or so from Times Square. There he managed and performed nightly in “Kerrigan’s Pleasant Hour” until shortly before his death in 1898. An obituary in the *Irish World* hailed the Pleasant Hour as “one of the best-known resorts in the city” where “there were to be found the most famous reel, jig and clog dancers.”

The influence of Irish traditional music and dance on popular entertainment in New York is illustrated by the career of **Edward “Ned” Harrigan**, an actor, singer, playwright and theatre owner who was a founding father of American musical theatre. Harrigan was famous for his partnership with singer/actor Tony Hart and for his lyrics to tunes by Dave Braham. But in his early years on the New York variety stage, Harrigan wrote many comic songs set to traditional Irish melodies, including “Muldoon, the Solid Man” and “Since the Soup House Moved Away.” Irish dancers and pipers (including Kerrigan) frequently appeared on the program of Harrigan’s Theatre Comique, as well as Tony Pastor’s Bowery “Opera House” and later theatres.

Buffalo native **Kitty O’Neil** was among the most prominent variety theatre dancers of the 1870s and 1880s. She danced Irish reels and English clogs but was best known for her “sand jig,” a shuffled specialty that epitomized the blend of Irish and African American influences on American tap and soft shoe dancing.

Patrick J. “Patsy” Touhey was one of very few Irish traditional musicians whose career spanned the eras of the old variety theatres, the organized vaudeville circuits that replaced them, and the dawn of modern recording technology. Touhey was born Patrick J. O’Toole in Cahertinny, Kilconickny near the town of Loughrea in County Galway. His father, grandfather and two uncles were uilleann pipers. The family emigrated around 1868 and settled in Boston. Patsy’s father James died not long after, but the youngster studied piping from Bartley Murphy, one of his father’s students.

As a young man, Patsy made his way to New York, where his interest in the pipes was revived when he heard piper John Egan playing in a Bowery music hall. He and Egan launched a partnership that took them on the road with “Harrigan’s Double Hibernian Company,” a troupe that combined variety entertainment with a painted “Hibernicon” panorama. Touhey, as he now billed himself, went on to have a highly successful career as a piper and comic actor in full-scale theatrical plays and vaudeville, where he worked with several partners, including his wife Mae (Mary Gillen), whom he married about 1905.

Touhey was an early enthusiast of Thomas Edison’s cylinder recording technology. Edison offered him a contract, but the terms were not to the piper’s liking. He preferred to record his own one-off cylinders, which he advertised in 1901 in New York Irish newspapers. Fans could request any of 150 airs or dance tunes and receive a dozen cylinders for \$10. That wasn’t a small sum in 1901, and it is not clear how many he sold, but dozens of Touhey cylinders have survived. The new 78 rpm disc recording technology appeared near the end of Touhey’s life and he recorded only three sides before his death in the Bronx in early 1923. These cylinders and discs reveal a musician of immense virtuosity and technical genius, one whose style still influences contemporary uilleann pipers.

James C. McAuliffe was not a piper of the calibre of Patsy Touhey but he had the honour of being the first uilleann piper to appear on a commercial recording, an Edison cylinder cut in 1899. The Irish music collector and Chicago police chief Francis O’Neill was a great admirer of Touhey’s playing but dismissive of McAuliffe: “Patsy Touhey could not get enough for his time from the record people. His theatrical business is more profitable. They found a cheaper man McAuliffe and cheaper work of course.” Most of McAuliffe’s sixteen Edison and three Columbia cylinders can be heard online, so readers can make their own judgment. McAuliffe was born around 1860 in the parish of Athlacca in east Limerick. He learned the pipes from the traveling piper “Pappy” Tracey. With other family members, he emigrated to Hoosick Falls, a logging and manufacturing town in upstate New York. At some point, McAuliffe found his way to New York City, where he is said to have played at Kerrigan’s Pleasant Hour. In the early years of the new century, he was an active performer and a partner in a saloon in the coal country around Scranton, Pennsylvania. Nick Whitmer’s research for the Lives of the Pipers website reveals that McAuliffe likely had one wife and family in Hoosick Falls and another in New York City, where he died in 1910.

Michael Anderson was another piper in New York of the late 19th and early 20th century who had a great reputation. He was a professional performer who could have been recorded but he refused the opportunity. “I won’t let them have my music” he was said to have declared. Born near Ballymote, County Sligo in 1865, Anderson emigrated to New York at 14. He learned both piping and pipe-making in America and turned out sets modeled on those of the Taylor Brothers, with whom he studied. Anderson returned briefly to Ireland in 1903–04 and visited again in 1912 and in the 1930s. He returned home to Ballymote for the last time in 1946 and died the following year.

Michael Anderson is remembered by traditional musicians today mainly through “Anderson’s Reel,” a widely played tune he popularized, and because he was acknowledged as an influence by the great Sligo fiddler Michael Coleman. Another of Coleman’s musical influences was the Sligo fiddle player **John O’Dowd** (or Dowd). “Dowd’s Favorite” served as the title of a reel recorded by Coleman, and “Dowd’s No. 9” was another reel recorded by Coleman protégé Hugh Gillespie. Michael Anderson, Redie McLaughlin Johnston and her family, and piper Michael Carney were among the musicians who were advertised as performing at a benefit for the seriously ill O’Dowd on December 31, 1915.

John Kimmel, “The Irish Dutchman,” was a virtuoso of the ten-key melodeon (one-row button accordion). The Brooklyn native played an instrument invented by his German forebears, but his repertoire featured the traditional reels, jigs, and hornpipes of Ireland, as well as marches, popular song airs, polkas and minstrel show tunes. His prolific recording career began in 1904 during the cylinder days and continued in the 78 rpm era. When the Roaring 20s expired with the Great Depression, Kimmel’s career on record ended. His playing strongly influenced Irish-American box players, notably Boston’s Joe Derrane, and had a lasting impact on button accordionists in Québec.

1920s

New York City in the 1920s was the Irish music capital of the world. The city was thronged with Irish immigrants, hard-working folk with enough disposable income to patronize dance halls and cabarets where Irish music was played, and to buy Irish music recordings to play at home. Hundreds of Irish music 78 rpm discs were released in the 1920s, and the bulk of them were recorded in the New York area, home to a diverse assortment of musicians from every county in Ireland. These discs sold well in the USA, and many were sent home to relatives or reissued on British labels for sale in Ireland.

The impact of these recordings was immense. The New York musicians played with fast-paced virtuosity and added a touch of big city glamour to the old rural dance tunes. Traditional musicians in Ireland began to emulate the music they heard on the records, making the repertoire of the 78 rpm recording artists from New York a *de facto* national standard that persists in Ireland and the Irish diaspora to this day.

Pride of place in any discussion of 1920s Irish music in New York must go to a trio of talented fiddle masters from south County Sligo: **Michael Coleman**, **James Morrison** and **Paddy Killoran**. The Sligo men were so good, and their music so infectiously appealing, that many fiddlers who hailed from other counties, in Ireland as well as New York, became adherents of the Sligo style. Among them was Longford native **Packie Dolan**, who was

befriended by Coleman and recorded a few fiddle duets with the master before forming his own recording band.

County Leitrim flute player **John McKenna** was another New York recording star of the 78 rpm era whose repertoire and style had a deep and lasting impact on Irish traditional music on both sides of the Atlantic. Less well known today but just as distinctive in style, was **Tom Morrison** (1889–1958) from Whitepark near Glenamaddy in north County Galway. His punchy, drivingly rhythmic playing was accompanied on many of his sides by percussionist John Reynolds, who was a pioneer of *bodhrán* playing on record. Morrison also had a marvelous partnership with pianist Ed Geoghegan, who demonstrated his skill as a melody player when they recorded a duet arrangement of the jig “The Tenpenny Bit” in 1924. Morrison also recorded notable duets with fiddler Michael Coleman and melodeon great P.J. Conlon.

Uilleann piper **Tom Ennis** (1888–1931) came to New York from Chicago, where his father, the piper John Ennis, had been a police officer and a major contributor to the famous Irish music collections of Francis O’Neill. Tom became a vaudeville entertainer, a profession interrupted by service in World War I, during which he is said to have been injured in a poison gas attack. Following the war, he returned briefly to life on tour but in 1920 settled in New York City, opened a music shop at 15 Columbus Avenue, and was joined by his father.

In 1923 Tom Ennis turned the music shop over to the famed step dancer Tommy Hill and set himself up as a saloon keeper, not far away at 446 West 54th Street. He first called his place “Ennis’ Pleasant Hour,” in tribute to Thomas Kerrigan’s famed establishment, and later “Celtic Hall.” Tom Ennis returned to Chicago and died young at the age of 41. His recordings, including many duets with fiddler James Morrison, vary in quality, but at his best, as on the selection “The Sligo Maid ; The Fermoy Lasses,” his playing could be brilliantly entertaining.

The area near Columbus Circle in Tom Ennis’ day was heavily Irish in character, and home to many talented traditional musicians and dancers. A window into the social life of the Irish musical community of the neighbourhood is preserved in “**The Craft**,” a poem written by John Ennis and printed in 1921 in the New York *Advocate*. Ennis’ rhymes praise the music and dancing of attendees at a soirée hosted by the McLaughlin family of County Roscommon.

Among the guests featured at the party was a young melodeon player named **Rose “Redie” McLaughlin**, later better known by her married name, Johnston. Redie was a friend and collaborator of Michael Coleman, whose first 78 rpm disc (the only one known to have been issued by Tom Ennis’ Shamrock label) included a track titled “Reidy Johnson’s Reels” in her honor. Redie also has the honor of being the first woman known to have been recorded on a traditional Irish music 78 rpm disc.

One distinguished guest at the party written up in “The Craft” was **Michael Carney** (1872–1938), a Mayo-born uilleann piper who recorded a handful of 78 rpm discs as well as some rare cylinder recordings. In his youth in Irishtown, Carney was a flute player but took up the pipes after emigrating at around the age of 20 to America, where he closely studied the technique and style of Patsy Touhey. A stroke around 1910 left him paralyzed from the

waist down, after which he devoted himself to making as well as playing the pipes. Carney was highly regarded by his fellow Irish musicians, including the fiddler James Morrison, with whom he recorded some duet sides.

Eddie Burke was one of the leading uilleann pipers in New York from the 1910s through the 1930s. He was born in 1877 and spent the first ten years of his life near Cloonfad, a Roscommon town near the borders of Mayo and Galway. His family then emigrated to Manchester and, in 1910, to New York where they settled in the Bronx. Eddie came from a piping family and kept the tradition alive in New York. He was written up frequently in *The Advocate*, often in connection with dances for the Cloonfad Ladies Club. He was an associate of the McLaughlin family of musicians and dancers, fellow immigrants from Roscommon, a circle that included the pipers John and Tom Ennis. John Ennis included Burke in his 1921 poem "The Craft," published in *The Advocate*.

Eddie Burke, with his pipes, was next called to play.
Amiable Eddie, always cheerful and gay;
Equally at ease with the pipes or the flute;
And his audience is always attentive and mute.
Near the rich Plains of Boyle Eddie first saw the light
(As did Kerwin and Vizzard and Gorman, so bright),
A section that never was conquered or bullied;
And which kept the traditional music unsullied.
He played "Trim the Velvet" and the "Mullinvat Reel"
And some lively old tunes that made his audience feel
Like dancing; and he might have been playing away yet,
But there were others to hear from, so he made his exit.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Burke played at many events with the Mayo piper Michael Carney, and at benefit concerts for Carney, who was wheelchair-bound. He was a frequent performer on radio programs and at the Innisfail Ballrooms at 56th Street and Third Avenue in Manhattan, where he was honored in 1929 with an "Eddie Burke Association" ball. *The Advocate* ballyhoo for the event referred to him as "the most popular Cloonfad man in America" and "a popular member of the Bricklayers' Union."

Eddie Burke never married and lived with his sisters in Astoria, Queens. Though he survived until 1967, his musical career ended with World War II.

Uilleann piper **James W. "Jimmie" McLaughlin** was born in New York in 1908. His father Myles, also a piper, was an immigrant from County Roscommon and part of a large family of Irish musicians and dancers in New York. Among Jimmy's paternal aunts was Rosie "Redie" Johnston, a celebrated melodeon player and the first female musician to be recorded on a 78 rpm disc. Jimmy received some piping mentoring from Tom Ennis and began his own performance career by 1921 when "Master James McLaughlin" was advertised as performing at an Irish music and dance festival.

In addition to his father Myles, Jimmie was mentored by New York piper Tom Ennis. In January 1924, when he was only 15, he recorded a 78 rpm disc for the Gennett label. His

performances included the jig selection “Judy Hynes ; Sullivan’s jig” and the reels “Road to Galway ; Jenny Bang the Weaver.” Though a recording career never followed, McLaughlin was an active performer through 1934 on radio and at concerts and dances. He married Veronica Kelleher in 1941. She died the following July and Jimmie joined the army, after which he disappears from the public record.

Another piper of note in New York in the 1920s but little remembered today was **Michael Gallagher** (1886–1971) from Killarga, County Leitrim. Gallagher was an active performer and radio artist but made only a handful of recordings. Those discs, however, demonstrated extraordinary technical mastery. His rendition of “The Colliers” and “The Salamanca” reels, mercifully without the usual piano accompaniment, is a masterpiece of staccato “closed” fingering and tasteful regulator work. In the New York dance halls of the 1920s, it was difficult for a piper to be heard, and Gallagher for such gigs adopted the melodeon, a one-row button accordion with multiple reeds for each note.

The melodeon was an ideal instrument for unamplified playing in bars and dance halls, and there were a number of very good melodeon players in New York, including Eddie Herborn, who with banjo player James Wheeler, recorded the first 78 rpm disc of genuine Irish traditional music in 1916 for Ellen O’Byrne De Witt’s pioneer Irish record label. But the king of the melodeon was **Peter James “PJ” Conlon**, an immigrant born in 1892 near Milltown, County Galway who recorded some fifty commercial recordings between 1917 and 1929. PJ’s eldest sister, Mary Ellen also played the melodeon and recorded a 78 rpm disc of her own in 1923.

Conlon began his recording career playing a German-made instrument like that used by John Kimmel but later switched to a more powerful eight-voice accordion from Baldoni Bartoli, an Italian-American firm whose instruments became the preferred choice among Irish-American “box” players. He played at a fast pace but always in complete control, and with a penchant for ornamentation and melodic variation. The Depression put an end to his recording career, but Conlon continued to perform in bars and dance halls. A benefit concert was organized for him in 1935 at the fiddler James Morrison’s Celtic Hall in west Harlem. Though he lived until 1967, Conlon was not musically active after 1951. His influence on later Irish players was immense and it could well be said that modern traditional Irish style on the button accordion started with P.J. Conlon.

Another noted melodeon player of the 1920s was Joe Flanagan of the **Flanagan Brothers**, a group that included his brothers Mike on the tenor banjo and Louis on the harp guitar. The Flanagans were exceedingly popular, not only for purely traditional music but for vaudeville-style comic patter and Irish-accented Tin Pan Alley pop songs. In this line of work, on records at least, the Flanagans had competition from **Frank Quinn**, a Longford-born New York policeman who sang and played both fiddle and melodeon. Quinn’s popularity for renditions of songs like “If You’re Irish, Come into the Parlor” has obscured his very real talent as a traditional instrumentalist. Some of Quinn’s solos and collaborations with Fermanagh-born fiddler Joseph Maguire or New York-born banjoist Eddie Dunne Jnr., often backed by piano aces John Muller or Ed Geoghegan, are among the best recordings of the era.

If little is known about Frank Quinn's life, even less is available about concertina player William Mullaly, who was born in 1884 near Mullingar in County Westmeath and arrived in New York in 1910. Mullaly's lasting fame rests on the ten 78 rpm sides he recorded for Victor and Columbia in 1926 and 1927. These discs, enhanced by fine piano from Ed Geoghegan and Ed Lee, made Mullaly virtually the only Irish concertina player to record before the 1960s.

Two other talented mystery men of the 1920s recording boom are fiddle players John "Jack" Gerrity and James McInerney. Not much is known about these two, and their output was small. McInerney, likely a Cavan man, issued only two discs. Gerrity was not much more prolific. Gerrity did, however, appear frequently in the pages of *The Advocate* in the 1920s, with notices of his performances with Tom Ennis, PJ Conlon, flute player Eddie Meehan and other leading New York musicians.

1930s – World War II

The Roaring '20s were a true "Golden Age" for Irish musicians and music lovers in New York. But the good times ended abruptly with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the decade-long Great Depression that followed. Mass unemployment, bank failures and economic collapse meant there was little money in the pockets of Irish New Yorkers to spend on nights out dancing or fritter on frills like 78 rpm records.

Record companies cut back severely on recording sessions for traditional musicians. Many artists who cut discs in the 1920s made no more after that. Things did pick up a bit in the mid- 1930s with many superb recordings released during the lean years. Fiddler **Michael Coleman** made only a few trips to the studio during the Depression but some of his most admired recordings, including the reels "Bonnie Kate ; Jennie's Chickens," "Lord Gordon" and "The Tarbolton" set, emerged from 1934 collaborations with tenor guitar player Michael "Whitey" Andrews.

Paddy Killoran's recording career didn't even get off the ground until 1931, when he began making discs with his Pride of Erin Orchestra, featuring fellow Sligo fiddler Paddy Sweeney. Sweeney (1894–1974) is usually said to have been a native of Moylough but the 1901 Irish census lists his family as residing in the adjoining townland of Powellsborough in the parish of Achonry. As a boy, he was influenced by the legendary local fiddler John O'Dowd. In New York in the early 1930s he played frequently with melodeon great PJ Conlon and other musicians, as well as partnering Killoran. His only solo discs, including the first-ever recording of "George White's Favorite," were released in 1937.

The eponymous George White was a piccolo player and, in the mid- 1930s, a partner of Longford-born fiddle player **James Clark** (1887–1938) in operating a bar and restaurant on 60th Street near Columbus Avenue, where Paddy Sweeney served as musical director. Clark led a varying group of "Irish Entertainers" who played for the "Smiles and Tears of Erin" program, first on WHOM and later WLWL, a station run by the Paulist Fathers from their church on 59th Street. Clark, who died young at the age of 50, made only a handful of now-rare recordings, but they included some of the finest fiddling of his era, as evidenced by "Dowd's Favorite," a three-part reel on which he was accompanied by George White's wife Eileen on the piano.

Melodeon player **Margaret McNiff-Locke**, born in 1886, was one of the lucky musicians offered their first recording opportunity during the Depression. She married her fellow Leitrim native Michael Locke in Boston in 1912 and lived in New Hampshire. A classical composer who heard her play arranged an introduction to Columbia Records, who scheduled sessions in New York in 1930 and 1932 from which were issued five discs featuring Margaret with Sligo fiddler Joseph Tansey and a banjo strummer named E. Colclough. She concluded her recording career in 1933 with four sides that also featured her daughter Mary McNiff-Locke on the five-string banjo.

Four renowned fiddle players – **James Lad O’Beirne** of Sligo, Donegal native **Hugh Gillespie**, Roscommon man **Larry Redican** and Mayo-born **John McGrath** – all arrived in New York in 1928, just in time for the Great Depression. Work, both musical and otherwise, was scarce but all four persevered and made major contributions to the musical life of their adopted city.

John McGrath (1900–1955), who also played button accordion, would go on to lead dance bands, play for step dancers at *feis* competitions, and teach music to hundreds of students in Manhattan and the Bronx. McGrath was a friend of Michael Coleman, who shared an apartment with the Mayo man for some time. McGrath never made a commercial recording himself but “John McGrath’s Composition,” the only tune indisputably attributed to him, lives on as a fiddlers’ favourite.

Larry Redican (1908–1975) joined flute players **John McKenna** and Eddie Meehan, and pianist Frank Fallon on a few 1937 recordings by the “Rosaleen Quartet.” Most of Redican’s music making, however, was heard in private sessions, at Gaelic League *céilidhe* or step dancing *feiseanna*. More mention of Redican’s musical life in New York will be made when writing of the post-World War II era.

Hugh Gillespie (1906–1986), from the townland of Dreenan near Ballybofey, County Donegal, had the good fortune to be introduced to Michael Coleman only days after his arrival in New York. The Sligo master took a shine to the youngster from Donegal and formed a close friendship with him. Coleman tutored Gillespie in the intricacies of his bowing style and took him on as a partner in radio work. Gillespie also played in bands with his accordionist brother, Jim. In 1937, Coleman introduced Gillespie to a Decca studio manager who agreed to set up a recording session for the younger fiddler. The first tunes he recorded – “Master Crowley’s Reels” – became a classic side, one that included a rare example of Donegal repertoire on record in the 78 rpm era. Many other tunes on Gillespie’s ten Decca discs were ones he had learned from Coleman, and that Coleman had previously recorded himself. Hugh wisely chose to give them new titles so that listeners who already had the Coleman version might be tempted to purchase his own. The war years of the 1940s put an end to Gillespie’s recording career, along with almost all other Irish traditional artists. But he continued to play, and to teach music to youngsters, both in New York and after returning to live in Donegal with his wife in 1964.

Of the four fiddling “greenhorns” who arrived in 1928, **James Lad O’Beirne** has perhaps the greatest reputation among traditional musicians. Born in 1911 in the townland of Bellanalack near Ballymote, County Sligo, “Lad” was only 16 when he disembarked in New

York. But as a son of fiddle master Philip O’Beirne, one of Michael Coleman’s chief influences, he was soon welcomed into elite musical circles. The connection to Coleman was strengthened when he married the older fiddler’s niece Mary in 1942. O’Beirne never made a solo commercial disc of his own, though he did cut a handful of 78 rpm sides, including one fantastic hornpipe duet with a band led by Louis Quinn. Cassette copies of some of Lad’s privately made home disc recordings circulated for years, and some of those discs have now been added to ITMA’s collection. Lad’s reputation as one of the greatest of Irish fiddlers is largely based on the impression he made on fellow musicians at house parties, private sessions and on trips back to Ireland. Paddy Reynolds, Andy McGann, Vincent Harrison, Louis Quinn, Ed Reavy and Sligo brothers Séamus and Manus McGuire are among the many musical associates who attested to Lad’s genius as fiddler and composer. Several of Lad’s unnamed compositions are now in general circulation among traditional players the world over. When he passed away in 1980, Lad, like Coleman, Morrison and Killoran, was laid to rest in St. Raymond’s cemetery in the Bronx.

Louis E. Quinn came to New York from south Armagh in 1931. In a 1977 interview with musician and scholar Mick Moloney, Quinn provided an interesting look back at his life in New York: “I started to play traditional music immediately, during the Depression, as a means of getting something to keep alive, to eat with.” He formed a close friendship with Lad O’Beirne, who joined him in late 1933 at a recording session by “Louis E. Quinn and his Shamrock Minstrels.” They only made three discs, but the band was busy with dance gigs for county associations and other functions and on live radio broadcasts. Louis married in 1945 and raised a musical family of seven children.

Researchers into the history of Irish traditional music in New York in the 1920s and 1930s owe a great debt to **James Hayden**, a flute-playing immigrant from Ballyraggett, County Kilkenny whose column in *The Advocate* (the only New York Irish weekly easily available online via www.fultonhistory.com) provide a detailed chronicle of the Irish music scene of his era. Hayden also had a radio program on station WARD, (later on WEVD) and managed a performing troupe known as *The Advocate* Players, who staged shows in parish halls and theatres in all the Irish neighbourhoods of New York and nearby New Jersey.

The Advocate of 26 November 1932 printed a formal group portrait of Hayden’s Players in the build-up to a “monster radio show” at St. Vincent Ferrer’s auditorium on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The performers included some of the most popular and well-known Irish singers, musicians, and dancers of the day. Tommy Hill, a champion step dancer for whom Michael Coleman named a set of hornpipes, poses with a cummerbund full of medals. The McNulty Family – Ann (“Ma”), Eileen and Pete – smile broadly, as does young Eddie Dunne, Jr., a precocious banjo player who recorded with Frank Quinn. The girls on the floor include both Hayden’s daughters, Dorothy and Ann and Tommy Hill’s, Dorothy and Rita. Dorothy Hayden would go on to succeed her father as a radio host for decades, and to serve as the first female grand marshal of the New York St. Patrick’s Day Parade.

The McNultys had a long career on stage and record. Annie Burke McNulty (1887–1970), who arrived in New York in 1910 from Kiltewan, County Roscommon, was widowed in 1928 on the eve of the Depression. The family band was her ticket to economic survival. With a blend of rhythmic melodeon music, Irish steps and American tap dance and old-time Irish

popular songs, the McNulty's became the "First Family of Irish Music," beloved by audiences in the city and on the Rockaway Peninsula, New York's "Irish Riviera." Traditional purists might turn up their noses at the McNulty's vaudevillian style, but the New York Irish audience embraced them. In their heyday in the 1930s and early 1940s, they were undoubtedly the most popular Irish music performers in America.

The young fiddle star of James Hayden's *Advocate* Players was Catherine Brennan, later **Catherine Brennan-Grant** (1915–1979). Born in New York, she got classical violin instruction studying in a Limerick convent school but embraced traditional music when she arrived back in New York in 1927. She became a regular performer on radio and onstage, both as a soloist, a vaudeville trouper and a member of "The Maids of Erin," an all-girl group managed by her cousin Bessie O'Neill. Catherine was a good friend of Michael Coleman and a teacher to Andy McGann, making her an important link between the pre-World War II New York Irish musicians and the generation who would carry on in the 1950s and after.

THE POST-WAR YEARS

As America emerged from World War II, New York City seemed as Irish as ever. Even as upwardly mobile Irish-Americans began their long exodus to the middle-class suburbs, new immigrants from Ireland's depressed economy helped maintain the five boroughs' Hibernian character. On 1 January 1946 Mayo native Bill O'Dwyer, elected with the help of the heavily Irish Tammany Hall political machine, was inaugurated as New York City mayor. O'Dwyer's rags-to-riches rise from labourer, cop and bartender to a position of power and influence was emblematic of a time, to use the title of Terry Winch's song, "When New York Was Irish."

After the war, however, traditional music was in retreat from the prominent place it had occupied in Irish-American life in the 1920s and 1930s. But traditional music and dance lovers were still a numerous and enthusiastic minority within the New York Irish community. There were now fewer dance halls featuring traditional music but you could still hit the floor in Manhattan at the Jaeger House, the City Centre, the Tuxedo Ballroom or the Caravan, or up in the Bronx at the Star o' Munster Ballroom. It wasn't all jigs and reels though. As in the pre-war years, a successful Irish dance hall had to cater to those who preferred modern American dances as well as those who wanted a "Stack of Barley" or Clare set.

Traditional music lovers in New York supported music and dance teachers, multiple musicians' clubs and well-attended *feis* competitions. Fiddlers James Morrison, Hugh Gillespie and John McGrath were among the "professors" conducting classes for hundreds of youngsters whose parents wanted the next generation to play the fiddle or button accordion.

Clubs, *Céilidhe* and *Feiseanna*

There is a long history of Irish musicians' clubs in New York, going back at least as far as the early 1920s Irish Music Clubs that met at Farrell's Hall at 110th Street and Third Avenue, where Michael Coleman, Michael Gallagher, James Hayden and other stalwarts gathered and posed for a group photo. The pages of *The Advocate* record announcements of the formation of other, apparently short-lived, clubs in Manhattan and the Bronx in the 1920s

and 1930s. Lad O'Beirne served as the president of The Irish Music and Social Club of Greater New York in the immediate post-war years.

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, a network of Irish traditional music clubs each met once a month throughout New York City. The Paddy Killoran Club assembled at the Irish Institute in mid-town Manhattan. The Turlough O'Carolan and Peter Conlon clubs were based in Queens and the Michael Coleman club in the Bronx, while Brooklyn had the Tom Morrison, Patsy Touhey and Fr. Fielding Clubs. Armagh fiddler Louis Quinn's club met at the Irish American Society in Mineola, Long Island. These groups maintained relations with similar outfits in Chicago, Philadelphia and other Irish urban centres before becoming branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in the early 1970s, a merger shepherded by Louis Quinn.

In addition to the musicians' associations, there were the various branches of the Gaelic League, each of which conducted a monthly Saturday night dance. Some of the city's top traditional musicians, including fiddlers Larry Redican, Paddy Reynolds and Andy McGann, provided the music. The set dancing revival was years in the future and the Gaelic League functions featured *céili* or long dances like The High-Cauled Cap, Siege of Ennis, Waves of Tory and Haymakers Jig. The St. Brendan's branch met in Brooklyn, the Philo-Celtic Society in Queens, the New York Gaelic Society in Manhattan and the Bronx Gaelic League in that mainland borough.

Feis competitions in dance and music sponsored by the Gaelic League and the United Irish Counties association were another opportunity to hear traditional musicians play in public. At today's American step dancing competitions, piano accordionists armed with drum machines seem to provide most of the music. A New York *feis* in the 1940s or 1950s, however, would have the likes of James Morrison, Paddy Killoran, John McGrath, Jackie Roche or Paddy Sweeney playing the fiddle for the dancing competitors.

Paddy Killoran in the Post-War Years

Sligo fiddle great Paddy Killoran was still going strong in the late 1940s and through the 1950s. His dance band was so busy that he could not take all the proffered bookings. And if major labels weren't interested anymore, there were smaller companies that still served the niche market for Irish traditional tunes. Killoran's 78s from the 1950s included solo sides with backing from guitarist Jack McKenna, duets with his old bandmate Paul Ryan on viola, and with Sligo-born flute player Mike Flynn. To make sure there would continue to be an outlet for traditional music, Killoran co-founded the Dublin Records label in 1956. The Manhattan bar/restaurant Killoran had taken over from James Clark did not survive the war but in the late 1940s he opened a new "cabaret" with Clare man Jim Cleary on Willis Avenue in the South Bronx.

Celtic and Avoca Records

The Dublin label had been preceded in the late 1940s and early 1950s by Celtic Records, a business based on 42nd Street that was launched by Rhode Island-born pianist, singer and flute player Frank Fallon. Celtic releases included discs by Fallon's own band, his brother Pat's "County Leitrim Céilí Band" and other traditional musicians based in New England and New York, including accordionist Mickey Carton and his singing sister Mary, who were

hugely popular performers on the “Irish Riviera,” the strip of summer resorts on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens.

Soon after the Dublin label was launched, it was joined in the Irish market by Avoca Records, an offshoot of Francis X. Cashin’s Brooklyn-based Blarney Castle cosmetics and perfume company. In 1958, Avoca issued *Irish Violin*, an LP recording of Brooklyn fiddler (and James Morrison protégé) Jackie Roche, as well as *Irish Violin and Accordion*, Roche’s collaboration with box player Timmy Cronin. These were the first LP-format discs of purely traditional Irish music recorded in the U.S., though many tracks were initially released as 78s or, for juke box use, 45 rpm discs. Roche also maintained a popular dance band in which saxophone, piano, drums joined his fiddle, Timmy Cronin’s accordion and Jack McKenna’s electric guitar with a repertoire that mixed foxtrots, quicksteps and waltzes with more traditional tunes.

Timmy Cronin started his musical life as a fiddle student of James Morrison but switched to the D/C# button accordion and took further tuition from Eddie Meehan, a multi-talented musician better known as a flute player on recordings with John McKenna. As a youth, Cronin performed with James Hayden’s *Advocate* Players. He later played with Paddy Killoran’s band and formed his own “Irish orchestra.” Cronin was also a champion step dancer, so renowned that when tap dance star Gene Kelly needed some instruction in Irish steps, Timmy was his tutor. He continued to teach Irish dancing until the last day of life in 1970.

Lad O’Beirne and His Circle

Much of the best Irish music heard in New York in the post-war era was not played in public but at private gatherings. Rare home-made acetate discs and reel-to-reel tapes recorded at house parties preserve some of this music. One particularly remarkable recording of Killoran and friends, including Sligo flute player Jim McGowan, was made on the eve of the fiddler’s visit to Ireland in 1959–60. Killoran took the recordings, including greetings to relations at home, with him on the trip.

Perhaps the greatest collection of Irish fiddle players ever assembled in one neighbourhood lived and played in the south Bronx in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Lad O’Beirne was the dean of this college of fiddle masters. Reels and jigs echoed from O’Beirne’s apartment every Friday night, windows thrown open to ventilate parties that drew the likes of Paddy Killoran, Paddy Sweeney, Tim Harte, Tom Connolly, Larry Redican, Louis Quinn, Vincent Harrison, Martin Wynne, Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds. Cavan-born Philadelphia resident Ed Reavy was a frequent visitor, bringing his latest compositions to New York for the delectation of his musical peers.

Martin Wynne (1913–1998), from Everlawn, Bunninadden in south County Sligo, arrived in New York in 1948 after spending some years before and after the war in London, where he played with fiddler Joe O’Dowd in dance halls run by their fellow Sligo man Johnny Muldoon. Martin was immediately welcomed into New York’s elite Irish music circles among players who already knew his reputation as a composer of newly minted “traditional” melodies. A shy and retiring man, Wynne did not record or play in dance bands in New York. But he loved a good session and was always ready to share a tune with younger players, most notably Brian Conway, who credits Martin with teaching him the intricacies of the old

Sligo bowing style. In 1989, Martin returned to Sligo, where he was made the honorary president of *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*, held that year in Sligo town.

Andy McGann, born in west Harlem in 1928, was the young Yankee in the group of immigrants in Lad O’Beirne’s circle. His parents were good friends of Michael Coleman, who gave the boy a music stand and much encouragement. Andy got more hands-on instruction from Catherine Brennan-Grant, who gave Andy a foundation in classical violin technique, lending a polished elegance to his Sligo-style traditional music repertoire.

Paddy Reynolds landed in New York from County Longford in 1948 and briefly settled in Brooklyn before moving to the Bronx. He had already led his own dance band back in Ireland, while simultaneously working on the Ballyshannon hydroelectric project, but was awed when he encountered Lad O’Beirne’s fiddling and re-made himself in New York as a Sligo stylist. Paddy formed a firm partnership with Andy McGann, often taking gigs referred to them by Paddy Killoran when the old master had too much on his plate.

As a step dancer and fiddle player, Andy McGann had stiff competition from another American-born youngster, **Joey Flynn**. While Andy had been a protégé of Michael Coleman, Flynn came from James Morrison’s school. Unlike McGann, Flynn remained involved in step dancing, becoming a dance teacher himself. He was, however, a marvelous and under-appreciated fiddle player. Flynn never made a commercial recording, but he played a virtuosic rendition of “Bonnie Kate” for Irish radio host Ciarán Mac Mathúna when he visited New York in 1962, providing a hint of just how good he was.

Vincent Harrison (1927–2009) was born in Tullycooley, Dromahair, County Leitrim. His chief musical influences as a youth were his fiddle-playing mother Mary, her flute-playing brother Hughie Travers, and Drumkeeran fiddler Joe “Lackey” Gallagher. Soon after arriving in New York in 1954, his older brother Joe, who had preceded him to the Bronx, directed him to Lad O’Beirne. Vincent and Lad struck up a lasting musical friendship and recorded some duets on O’Beirne’s home-made disc recorder. Vincent was also a close musical friend of Martin Wynne. In 1988, he returned to Ireland, where he lived in Clontarf, Dublin near his sister Moira and took great pleasure in passing on his musical knowledge to younger players in the capital.

Larry Redican (1908–1975) was first mentioned in these notes in connection with his brief career as a 78 rpm recording artist before the war. But his real heyday was in the 1950s and 1960s. Redican was particularly in demand to play for dancers. The world of New York step dancing was upended in the 1950s with the arrival from Belfast of teachers Peter and Cyril McNiff, who introduced a new style that radically slowed the tempo to allow for more fancy footwork. To play for this kind of dancing required rock-solid tempo and precision, and Larry Redican was the one recruited by the McNiffs (along with Louis and Sean Quinn) to play with them on a 1961 tour of Ireland. He also joined Andy McGann to play for the McNiff dancers on St. Patrick’s Day-themed television programs hosted by Arthur Godfrey or Ed Sullivan. Redican also played the tenor banjo. He delighted in unearthing old tunes from printed collections and composed a few himself that are still popular with today’s traditional players. He passed away doing what he loved best, playing the fiddle, at the Irish American Society in Mineola, Long Island.

The biographical tribute to Larry Redican written by his late son Larry Jnr., recounts a night when the newly arrived County Tipperary button accordionist and composer **Paddy O'Brien** played for a crowd of fellow musicians in the Redican home in Brooklyn. O'Brien was a pioneer exponent of the B/C tuning system, which allowed him to play in keys most Irish-American box players with their D-row instruments avoided. From his arrival in 1954 until his return to Ireland in 1962, O'Brien was the New York fiddlers' most-favored accordionist, welcome at all elite musical gatherings and much in demand for dance gigs.

Seán Maguire in New York

Larry Redican Jnr.'s memoir of his father also tells of a night when Belfast fiddle great Seán McGuire wowed the crowd in their Park Slope, Brooklyn living room with an energetic solo performance. McGuire, perhaps the only fiddler back in Ireland who really impressed Lad O'Beirne's circle, made several visits to New York City and we are fortunate that some of his playing from those trips has been preserved among the many reel-to-reel tapes donated to ITMA by the families of Louis Quinn and Charlie Mulvihill.

Charlie Mulvihill (1917–1975) was born in Manhattan, where his concertina-playing father Tom, an immigrant from Miltown Malbay, County Clare, drove trolley cars and ran a Prohibition-era speakeasy. Charlie started playing concertina when he was about nine years old and took up the button accordion soon after. On his return from army service in World War II, he and his new wife Noreen settled in the south Bronx, where he joined the company of the neighbourhood's many great Irish musicians. Lawrence Dolan, traditional music columnist for *The Advocate*, recalled those days in his 23 August 1975 obituary:

"Our fond recollections of Charlie go back to the early 40's when we were neighbours in the South Bronx. We often thrilled to the traditional music set forth at the Irish House - formerly the Leitrim House, on East 138th Street between Willis and Alexander Ave. Charlie would often join in with other great Irish musicians such as Paddy Killoran, Paddy Sweeney, Jack McKenna, Jack Murphy, Bessie Sweeney, Harry Carroll, Joey Flynn, John McGrath, etc. The floor was always jam-packed with those up for the Caledonian Sets. The jigs and reels of Ireland were never performed any better than in those days at the Irish House, when Charlie joined his friends on the music stage."

Charlie Mulvihill was highly regarded by his fellow musicians for his huge repertoire and knowledge of the names and histories of traditional tunes. He was one of the few D-row accordionists who could really play alongside the city's top fiddlers on equal terms. He and fiddler Paddy Reynolds were recorded together in 1971 on "Sweet and Traditional Music of Ireland," the first LP issued by Paddy Noonan's Rego Irish Records label. Charlie and Paddy also often played together in the summer at Mullen's Mountain View Farm (now the Blackthorn) in the Irish Catskills resort town of East Durham. And it was at Mullen's that Charlie fell fatally ill in 1975. He passed on his musical talents to his children, pianist Geraldine and fiddler/singer/guitarist Tommy Mulvihill.

One of the fiddlers Charlie Mulvihill played a lot with was **Denis Murphy**, a native of Lisheen, County Kerry who spent much of the years from 1942 to 1959 in New York. Murphy is known today as one of the great champions of Sliabh Luachra polkas and slides, but in the

Big Apple he fitted in well with the Sligo-style fiddle players of the Bronx and even recorded a few 78 sides for Frank Fallon's Celtic label, some with flute player Charlie Higgins in the Ballinamore Céilí Band.

East Galway in New York

If the Sligo fiddle masters were the most renowned Irish musicians in New York, a post-war influx of immigrants from east County Galway gave the local music scene a different accent. Flute player **Jack Coen** (1925–2012) arrived in New York in 1949 from a small farm in Drimnamuckla South, a townland just outside the village of Woodford. He was the second of nine children in a musical family. According to Jack:

"If the boys and girls wanted to dance, they'd come to our house. My father [Michael Coen] played a concertina ... he was the only musician around that village. It was the poor people's entertainment in Ireland."

He started on the tin whistle when he was about eight years old, later graduating to the fife, which he played in the parish fife-and-drum band. Flute-playing neighbor Jim Conroy and older members of the fife band got him started on the wooden concert flute. After practicing on borrowed instruments, he got his own flute in a Dublin pawnshop.

Jack arrived in New York in 1949 and after lodging for a few months with an uncle in the Bronx, he moved to East Rutherford, New Jersey, where he worked in a produce market for a year and a half before returning to the Bronx to take up a job on the railroad. Good fiddle players were thick on the ground in the Bronx in those days, but flute players were few, and Jack found himself welcome at house sessions and dances. Button accordionist Paddy O'Brien and fiddler Larry Redican were perhaps his closest musical associates and when the New York Céilí Band was founded in 1958, Jack was among the members. He also joined Joe Madden's dance band in the early 1960s, playing the traditional numbers alongside fiddlers Paddy Reynolds and Denis Murphy.

Starting in the 1960s, Jack taught the whistle and flute to many young students in the Bronx. Joanie Madden of the celebrated band Cherish the Ladies was his best-known student. Joanie, like many of Jack's pupils, started on the metal Boehm system flute as wooden models were hard to find. To fill that gap, Jack and a couple of carpenter friends started turning out their own wooden flutes in the late 1970s.

In the revival years of the 1970s, Jack resumed public performances at local concerts, festivals and pub sessions, and was recruited by banjo playing folklorist Mick Moloney to perform at the Smithsonian Institution's 1976 bicentennial Festival of American Folklife. That same year, Moloney recorded Jack and his brother Charlie playing in Jack's Bronx home. The tracks were issued as the Topic LP *The Branch Line*, a masterwork of east Galway traditional style. In 1991, Jack was honored as a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts, the U.S. government's highest honor for a traditional musician. Two years later, he joined fiddler Séamus Connolly, accordionist Martin Mulhaire and pianist Felix Dolan on *Warming Up*, a recording that faithfully recreated the style and repertoire of

the 1950s and 1960s. Jack's final recording, released in 2001, was a duet outing with his son Jimmy, who flat-picked the melodies on the guitar. Jack Coen passed away in 2012, survived by Julia, his wife of forty years, and their five children.

Jack's younger brother **Charlie Coen** (born 1933) followed him to New York in 1955. After working as a bellhop in the Catskills for a few years, he entered a seminary and was ordained in 1968. His clerical duties did not greatly interfere with his music making, and in 1976 he accomplished the rare feat of taking three All-Ireland championships (concertina, whistle and flute slow airs) in one day. Father Charlie would later win an English-language singing championship as well. Charlie also played with Mick Moloney's Green Fields of America troupe and, in addition to his duet recording with his brother Jack, made his own solo recording on the Green Linnet label in 1979. In the 1990s, he produced a concert series at the Rhinecliff Hotel a few miles up the Hudson River from the city, that introduced a generation of young musicians in the area to the Irish tradition.

Another new arrival in 1949 was flute player **Mike Rafferty** (1926–2011) grew up on a farm in the townland of Larraga in the musical parish of Ballinakill, where he learned his music from his father Tom, a blind flute player and uilleann piper. Mike arrived in New York from Ireland in 1949 and moved across the Hudson to New Jersey, where he and his wife Terry would raise five children. In the 1950s and 1960s, Mike's music making was largely confined to the home, but sessions in the Rafferty basement were legendary. Button accordionist Joe Burke was a frequent visitor. A dent in the ceiling marked the spot where dancer and flute player Michael Flatley elevated a bit too high during one of many musical parties.

Mike returned to public performance in the 1970s and was another of the senior New York musicians brought to festival stages by Mick Moloney. He was also an active music teacher at home and at the Catskills Irish Arts Week, and enthusiastic supporter of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which named a New Jersey branch for him. After many years playing a silver flute, Mike acquired a new wooden model from maker Patrick Olwell, which allowed him to reacquire the old-time traditional tone and timbre. In retirement, he recorded an outstanding series of privately released recordings. On three of these CDs, Mike was joined by his flute and accordion playing daughter Mary, on another by fiddler Willie Kelly, and on 2004's *Speed 78* by Kelly and button accordionist Joe Madden. In 2010, he was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship.

Mike's wife Teresa faithfully videotaped the many house sessions in the Rafferty basement as well as performances by Mike and other musicians at festivals and concerts. Teresa's video trove, which has been digitised and made available to the Irish Traditional Music Archive, has been one of the most important sources of live recordings used in this online exhibit.

A remarkable group of button accordionists from east Galway arrived in New York in the 1950s. **Martin Mulhaire** (1936–2020) grew up in Eyrecourt, where his father Tommy, who played a number of instruments and led a band, was his musical mentor. He took up the B/C accordion when he was 12 and was All-Ireland champion by 17, by which time he was

already beginning to compose a sizeable collection of reels and jigs, many of them now session standards. Recruited to the Tulla Céilí Band by Paddy Canny and P.J. Hayes, Martin was with the band for a tour of England, an All-Ireland championship at the Dungarvan *fleadh*, and a 1958 trip to New York, where the band played Carnegie Hall and recorded a Dublin Records LP, *Echoes of Erin*. The band went home to Ireland, but Martin stayed in New York, where he and his wife Carmel raised a family. Reels and jigs took a back seat for years while Martin worked as a carpenter during the day and played electric guitar on weekends with the Majestic Showband, a group that also included uilleann piper Matty Connolly on the electric bass.

Button accordionist **Joe Mills** was a founding member of east Galway's Aghrim Slopes Céilí Band. He played and recorded with that acclaimed group until he emigrated to the USA in 1958. Joe spent some time leading a dance band in Philadelphia but settled in suburban Pelham, New York and became an active attendee of Irish Musicians Association sessions. He was also a composer of note. "The Congress Reel" (although perhaps an adaptation from an older jig) is one of his tunes as is "The Bloody Hollow" (often called "Jack Coen's Jig"). Mills also insisted that he was the composer of the well-known "Cooley's Reel," which he called "Luttrell's Pass" and said he had taught it to Joe Cooley.

Sean McGlynn (1937–1983) emigrated in 1959 to Boston, where he played button accordion in the band that played for Irish dancing at Bill Fuller's New State Ballroom. After four years, he and his wife Maura relocated to Queens, New York and later to suburban Mineola, Long Island. He did not enter competitions and never made a commercial recording, but he had the respect and admiration of the entire traditional music community and was greatly mourned when he was shot to death by an unknown assailant in 1983.

Joe Burke (1939–2021) from Kilnadeema near Loughrea was the most acclaimed Irish button accordionist of his time. He was a frequent visitor to New York and lived in the city from 1962 to 1965. During that time, he became a fast friend and musical companion of fiddler Andy McGann. In 1965, they got together in a recording studio with Bronx native Felix Dolan, the best piano accompanist in New York, to lay down the tracks for *A Tribute to Michael Coleman*, issued the next year on Burke's own Shaskeen label. The album was a stunning display of virtuosity and telepathically close duet playing, recorded in just a few hours.

Joe Madden (1938–2008) from Portumna arrived in New York in 1959, not long after taking second place to Joe Burke in the All-Ireland button accordion championship. Paddy Killoran heard of the young man's talent and offered him a job. Joe's daughter Joanie tells the story:

"When my father came to America he got a call from Paddy Killoran to play in his band that he had over thirty gigs for him. He went to hear Paddy on the qt to check him out and when he heard him mixing all the music up with trad music and modern music he said no way and no thank you! A week later, my dad got a letter from his mother saying his father had a heart attack and they were in desperate need for money. He called back Paddy and asked him by chance were the gigs still available and he said, "Joey, I was hoping you would call me back." He went off to do the thirty shows with Paddy and then stayed with him for a few years, and then Paddy got sick and wound up in the hospital.

Paddy asked my father to visit him in the hospital he said, "Joey, I'm finished" and he asked my father to take over the band and take over all the shows that he had, and that's when Joe Madden's orchestra was formed."

Joe kept the band together, playing hundreds of gigs for weddings, parties and County association balls through the 1970s and kept playing with smaller groups until 1985.

The New York Céilí Band

There wasn't much work in New York in the late 1950s for a true céilí band. So, when the cream of the Big Apple's Irish traditional musicians decided to form the New York Céilí Band in 1958, they weren't looking to turn a profit but were perhaps looking to prove that New Yorkers could play at least as well as the celebrated bands winning competitions in Ireland. The line-up was impressive, to say the least. Anchoring the group was Paddy O'Brien, arguably the greatest Irish button accordionist of all time. The all-star fiddle section included Larry Redican, Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds. Jack Coen and Mike Dorney played flutes, Chris Darcy the drums and Gerry Wallace the piccolo while Felix Dolan was at the piano. Unfortunately, the tracks the band recorded in the studio were never commercially released. When they journeyed to Boyle, County Roscommon to compete at *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* in 1960, McGann and Darcy were not able to make the trip. Paddy O'Brien, Jack Coen and Larry Redican won the trio championship but the New York Céilí Band, *sans* percussion, were placed third. Not the victory they'd hoped for, but according to Charlie Lennon, a great encouragement to other overseas bands like his own Liverpool Céilí Band to enter future competitions.

Other Post-War Arrivals

Uilleann piper **Matty Connolly** was born in New York City in 1940 and moved to Scotstown, Co. Monaghan six years later. His mother Helena, a fiddle player, was a major musical influence but took up the uilleann pipes after hearing Fermanagh man Sean McAloon. The local curate, Fr. Bernard Maguire, sponsored a pipers club that met in Our Lady of Fatima hall in Knockatallon and Matty was one of five members who graduated to full sets of pipes. He moved back to New York in the early 1960s but there were virtually no pipers active in the city at the time, and no one to help make reeds or maintain the instrument. For years he put the pipes aside, taking up an electric bass to play dance gigs with the Majestic Showband, a group that included button accordion ace Martin Mulhaire on electric guitar and that played three nights a week at the Red Mill in the Bronx. Matty would eventually return to traditional music in the 1970s and won the All-Ireland championship on the pipes in 1980.

Fiddler Johnny Cronin (1934–1991) was in his time the most prominent County Kerry musician in New York. Born in Reaboy, Gneeveguilla in the heart of the musical Sliabh Luachra district, Johnny was strongly influenced by the legendary Pádraig O'Keeffe, who taught the fiddle to Johnny's older brother Paddy. He also took up the button accordion but mostly gave that instrument up after an injury to his right hand. In 1956 he emigrated to Boston, where his brother Paddy was already established, before going on to Chicago and, finally, New York, where he spent the remainder of a too-short life. He played often at the Bunratty Bar in the Bronx and Tom O'Reilly's in Manhattan and formed a musical partnership with Kilkenny native Joe "Banjo" Burke that produced a 1977 Shanachie LP.

Johnny was reunited with his brother Paddy at a 1990 Boston College fiddle festival which yielded the live recording *The Green Fields of America*.

Irish immigrants to America tended to follow well-worn paths laid down by relatives and neighbours who had already found work in the New World. However it came to be, Donegal people were drawn more often to Philadelphia than to New York City, where it has always been rare to hear the highlands or Scottish-inflected reels of Ireland's northern-most county. Melodeon player **Tom Doherty** (1913–1998) from Mountcharles was one of the exceptions. He took an emigrant ship in 1948 and settled down in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Tom was already a well-practiced master at playing for dances, having spent some time doing so in Glasgow, and got offers to play in New York dance halls. He knew the perils of that line of work too well, however, and preferred steady employment in a cold storage facility. Later in life, Tom would become a regular at the Monday night sessions at the Eagle Tavern and the annual Irish festivals at Snug Harbor, Staten Island. He made a solo recording, *Take the Bull by the Horns*, for the Green Linnet label and returned to Ireland in 1992 to perform with other American-based musicians at a Cork University traditional music festival from which emerged the live recording *Dear Old Erin's Isle*.

Though musically a thorough Clare man, flute player **Mike Preston** (1926–2008) was born in Ballymote, County Sligo before his father relocated the family to Crusheen to take up work on the railroad. Mike would follow his father's line of work, but his true vocation was as a member of the Tulla Céilí Band, with whom he played for ten years before emigrating to America in 1961. After a short time in Boston, Mike moved to the Bronx, where he lived until his death. The Tulla band's trip to New York in 1958, when they played at Carnegie Hall and recorded an LP, was Mike's first introduction to the city. On his return to New York, however, most of Mike's music making would be done at private parties and informal sessions. Not until the Irish traditional music revival that began in the 1970s would he be featured on recordings and in performances at concerts and festivals. The capstone of his musical career was a reunion with the Tulla Céilí Band when the group toured the east coast of the USA in 1997.

Revival Years: 1970s–1990s

The fortunes of Irish traditional music in New York, and in America as a whole, have always been closely tied to emigration. Every new generation that left Ireland in search of better prospects across the water brought its share of pipers, fiddlers, and other musicians. The new arrivals helped keep old traditions alive in the New World even as most second and third-generation Irish Americans lost touch with their musical roots.

Until the 1920s, when a country quota system was adopted, immigration to the USA from Ireland was practically unrestricted. The country quotas greatly favoured western Europeans, however, and did not greatly impede new Irish immigration. But U.S. immigration laws were radically revised in 1965. In the name of racial and geographic equity, country quotas were abolished. In the years that followed, legal immigration from Ireland became far more difficult. In the pre-Celtic Tiger 1980s, there was a significant influx in New York of young Irish men and women who overstayed short-term visas and worked off the books in construction or hospitality. Many were able, through lottery visa programs tailored to help the Irish, to legalize their status. Ireland's booming 1990s economy kept

more young people at home, however, and anti-immigration sentiment in the USA makes it unlikely that any more special favors could be granted to would-be Irish immigrants.

One might think that shutting off the source of new blood from Ireland would spell the gradual decline of traditional music making among the New York Irish. In fact, that's not what happened. Instead, many of the children and grandchildren of immigrant musicians in New York continued to play, and to teach, traditional music to even newer generations. In addition to this hard-core Irish community base, traditional music also found new followers in the 1970s, both as players and listeners, among young Irish Americans in search of cultural roots, and from folk music enthusiasts of all ethnic backgrounds.

The Folk Boom and After

New York's Greenwich Village was the centre of the 1960s international folk music scene, and it was in the Village that the Irish wing of the movement found its voice. The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, with their hearty unison singing backed by guitar and five-string banjo, became stars of the folk era, trading theatrical ambitions for vocal celebrity. Their act may not have been the "pure drop" of Irish music and song, but it was a long way from Tin Pan Alley and Bing Crosby. The Clancys and Tommy Makem succeeded in making old Irish ballads cool, and they provided a bridge to traditional instrumental music and song for some of their listeners, including many who had no Irish connections at all.

Connemara-born *sean nós* singer Joe Heaney's fame in the English folk scene earned him a prestigious booking at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island. Joe's singing didn't get as much attention as Bob Dylan's decision to perform that year with an electric band, but he found an appreciative audience in America and decided to settle in New York City. He worked as a doorman in a luxury building in Manhattan and lived in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn until 1982, when he moved to Seattle to teach Irish song at the University of Washington. In his New York years, Joe was a frequent performer at the Eagle Tavern in Greenwich Village.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the commercial folk boom faded but Irish traditional music continued to flourish in New York. In the Irish neighbourhoods of the city's outer boroughs and suburbs, traditional music teachers gave group classes to hundreds of young players. In Manhattan, the Irish Arts Centre, founded in 1972 by Dublin-born radical activist Brian Heron, drew American-born descendants of Irish immigrants eager to study Irish language, music, and dance.

As traditional musicians found new opportunities to perform or record in this era, some immigrant musicians who had put aside their instruments in the 1960s were inspired to take them up again. Matty Connolly and Martin Mulhaire had for years found their main musical outlet in the showband scene but could again concentrate on playing the uilleann pipes and button accordion.

Flute player Mike Rafferty acquired a new wooden flute and launched an outstanding series of recordings with his daughter, Mary on button accordion and flute, as well as a later disc with fiddler Willie Kelly. Mike's wife, Terry faithfully videotaped the many house sessions in the Rafferty basement in Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, as well as Mike's performances at festivals and concerts. Terry's video trove, which has been digitised and made available to

the Irish Traditional Music Archive, has been one of the most important sources of live recordings used in this online exhibit.

Some New York Irish musicians found demand for their services elsewhere and moved accordingly. Fiddle great Brendan Mulvihill (a son of Martin, the music teacher) teamed up with Brooklyn-born button accordion virtuoso Billy McComiskey in the 1970s and took up a long-running residency at the Dubliner pub in Washington D.C. where, with Kerry-born singer/guitarist Andy O'Brien, they performed as The Irish Tradition. The trio toured as well, and their return visits to New York to perform at the Eagle Tavern in the 1980s were always the occasion for a gathering of the area's young musicians, eager for a post-concert session in the bar.

Among the many musicians who arrived in New York in this era and enriched the Irish traditional music scene were guitarist/singer John Doyle, singers Susan McKeown and Karan Casey, guitarist/bouzouki player/singer Eamon O'Leary, Sligo fiddler Fiona Doherty, Killarney button accordionist Johnny Cronin, Mayo button accordionist and flute player Dermot Grogan and button accordionist John Whelan.

Clubs and Comhaltas

In the early 1970s, Irish Musicians Association leader Louis Quinn convinced most members of the surviving branches of the group to affiliate with Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Éireann, the international Dublin-based organization that directs *fleadh* competitions. The Michael Coleman branch in the Bronx, the Killoran-Clancy branch in Queens, Louis Quinn's own club in Mineola, Long Island and the Martin Mulvihill and Mike Rafferty branches in New Jersey all conducted monthly sessions and/or set dancing nights throughout this period.

New York-based competitors at Comhaltas' annual *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* scored some notable successes in the 1970s and 1980s, in both group and solo contests. New York-born All-Ireland champions of those decades included fiddlers Kathleen Collins, Eileen Ivers and Brian Conway, tin whistle player Joanie Madden, button accordionists John Nolan and Billy McComiskey and uilleann piper Matty Connolly.

Bar Sessions, Festivals and Concerts

Many New York Irish bar owners in the 1970s and after found that traditional music attracted customers. Bar gigs and sessions proliferated, both in traditionally Irish neighbourhoods and in tourist-oriented Manhattan. From the mid- 1970s on, touring traditional groups from Ireland, and local New York performers played for eager concert audiences in New York. While some bigger names could play large halls, one of the most important smaller venues was the Eagle Tavern, a west Village bar with a back room used for weekly sessions, céilí dances and concerts from 1976 until the bar closed in 1993. The concerts then found a new home for another decade at Tony Brady's Blarney Star bar downtown on Murray Street.

In 1975, the Irish Arts Centre moved from rented quarters in the East Village to a derelict building on West 51st Street near Eleventh Avenue in what had once been an Irish working-class district known as Hell's Kitchen. The building, gradually renovated by volunteers, became a hub for Irish theatre and music, including traditional music concerts and sessions.

Uilleann piper Bill Ochs directed the music classes and taught hundreds to play the whistle. In 1981, the Centre hired ethnomusicologist Rebecca Miller to run an annual Irish traditional music festival at the Snug Harbour Cultural Centre on Staten Island. The festival featured the best of local and touring Irish performers and became a fixture on the city's cultural calendar for the next decade.

The Snug Harbour festivals inspired a similar annual weekend festival in Schoharie County in the northern Catskill Mountains. Schoharie county folklorist Janis Benincasa used Becky Miller's model and brought together traditional musicians from the New York City area, Albany, and the Catskills for a day of concerts, sessions and workshops. After three years of these events, the focus shifted to the historic Irish-American resort town of East Durham in adjacent Greene County, where the Catskills Irish Arts Week was launched in 1995. The Michael J. Quill Irish Cultural and Sports Centre, named for the late Transport Workers Union leader and labor martyr, sponsors the week, which stages classes, concerts, lectures, dances, and sessions throughout the town. With an interruption for the Covid pandemic, it has continued to the present day.

Recordings and Documentaries

In 1975, record collector and old-time music enthusiast Rich Nevins and fiddler Dan Collins, a former student of John McGrath, launched Shanachie Records in the Bronx. One of their first projects was to reintroduce Irish music lovers to some of the glories of the 78 rpm era with the compilation LP *The Wheels of the World* and reissues of recordings by Sligo fiddle greats Michael Coleman and James Morrison. Shanachie also issued new music from New York-based performers, including an LP of Dan's sister Kathleen Collins, the first American woman to win an All-Ireland fiddle championship. Other classic Shanachie discs in the 1970s included three LPs featuring fiddler Andy McGann: a solo record, an album of fiddle duets with Paddy Reynolds accompanied by a young Paul Brady on guitar, and *The Funny Reel*, a reunion of McGann, button accordionist Joe Burke and pianist Felix Dolan, the trio who had recorded *A Tribute to Michael Coleman* in 1965. Kerry fiddler Johnny Cronin and Kilkenny man Joe "Banjo" Burke teamed up with New York Céilí Band veteran Gerry Wallace on piano for another 1970s Shanachie classic.

Green Linnet Records, based in suburban Connecticut, was launched in the mid--1970s by folk singer/uilleann piper Pat Sky and Lisa Null, and was later headed by Wendy Newton. In addition to signing touring bands and issuing recordings made in Ireland, Green Linnet released many recordings from New York-based performers. The 1979 Green Linnet album *The Apple in Winter* introduced Brian Conway and Tony DeMarco and their classic Sligo-style fiddle duets. Eileen Ivers (like Conway, an All-Ireland fiddle champ from the Bronx), uilleann piper Jerry O'Sullivan and button accordionists Billy McComiskey, James Keane, and Tom Doherty were among the many whose music appeared on the label. Mick Moloney also worked with Green Linnet to issue recordings that documented and celebrated older immigrant musicians in New York and elsewhere in the U.S., including Limerick fiddler and music teacher Martin Mulvihill.

The wealth of traditional music talent in New York in the 1980s inspired film maker Pat Mullins to team up with ethnomusicologist Rebecca Miller to produce *From Shore to Shore: Irish Traditional Music in New York City*. This 1998 video documentary (later supplemented

by the follow-up production *From Shore to Shore – Retrospective Reels*) told its story through archival photos and films, home movies, live recordings, and interviews. Most of New York’s leading older immigrant musicians were featured, as well as many of the young up-and-coming traditional players. Now available as a single DVD, *From Shore to Shore* is a marvelous portrait of a vibrant musical community and ITMA are grateful to Pat Mullins for granting permission to present excerpts as part of this exhibit.

Musician and scholar Mick Moloney was based in Philadelphia in the 1970s and 1980s but was a frequent visitor to New York City. In 1981, with Dublin filmmaker Roy Esmonde, he produced *Did Your Mother Come From Ireland?*, a video documentary on the New York Irish traditional music renaissance of the 1970s that was presented in Ireland by RTÉ. Martin Mulvihill and his students, particularly the spectacularly successful competitive fiddler Eileen Ivers, were among those featured in the video.

Bill Ochs (1946–2016) was one of the leading teachers and performers of the Irish traditional music revival in America that began in the 1970s. He was a tireless advocate for the legitimacy of the tin whistle as a serious instrument, and of the music of Clare whistle legend Micho Russell. And Bill was personally responsible for keeping the uilleann piping tradition alive in New York. Born to a Jewish family in New Jersey, Bill was entranced by the sound of the uilleann pipes when he heard the music of Liam O’Flynn. But by the early 1970s, there was almost no one in America to whom he could turn for help in learning the instrument. Rebuffed by Tom Busby in New York, he studied with Tom Standeven of Philadelphia and journeyed to Ireland to receive guidance from Willie Clancy and Liam O’Flynn. Bill became a more-than-proficient player and was recruited by Mick Moloney as the first uilleann piper to perform with The Green Fields of America troupe. He also served as a piping mentor to Jerry O’Sullivan, Tim Britton and many younger pipers. When the Irish Arts Centre was launched in 1976, Bill headed the music department and launched a four-decade career as a teacher of the tin whistle. He published a popular tutor, *The Clarke Tin Whistle* and produced a double-CD of music by Micho Russell, as well as *Ireland’s Whistling Ambassador*, a video documentary on Micho.

Cherish the Ladies

Some of the best young traditional musicians in New York in the 1980s were daughters of immigrants who had arrived in the early 1960s, including many whose fathers were musicians themselves. In 1985, this phenomenon inspired musician and scholar Mick Moloney (based at that time in Philadelphia) to propose to Ethel Raim of the Ethnic Folk Arts Centre (now the Centre for Traditional Music and Dance) that a concert be staged to present the best of the young female Irish traditional musicians in New York. Moloney called the show “Cherish the Ladies” after an old Irish jig, and the concert was so successful that further “Cherish the Ladies” shows and a companion Shanachie LP followed, as well as a “Fathers and Daughters” concert and album featuring the ladies with their dads.

The most ebullient performer at the Cherish the Ladies concerts was Joanie Madden, daughter of the Galway accordion player and band leader, Joe Madden. A superb flute player and an All-Ireland champion on the tin whistle, Joanie resisted her father’s warning that traditional music could only be a sideline to a “real job,” and turned Cherish the Ladies into a touring band that has continued to perform and record to this day. New York guitar,

tenor banjo and mandolin player Mary Coogan has been a stalwart with the group since the beginning. Other New York-based veterans include the flute and accordion players Mary Rafferty and Maureen Doherty Macken, flute player/singer Deirdre Connolly, fiddlers Eileen Ivers, who left to form her own band, and Winifred Horan, who went on to play with the group Solas.

Teachers

The healthy state of genuine Irish traditional music in New York in the 1970s and after owed a great deal to the work of the area's music teachers, most notably Maureen Glynn, Martin Mulvihill and Pete Kelly.

Maureen Glynn was born in 1952. Her father John was an accordionist who, along with fiddler Paddy Reynolds, conducted traditional music classes in Brooklyn. John died suddenly when Maureen was only 18 and the parents of his students urged her to take over the school. For the next two decades Maureen taught accordion, piano, fiddle, tin whistle, and other instruments in Brooklyn and Queens. In 1984, Shanachie Records issued "New York All Stars," an LP featuring 70 of Maureen's award-winning students. Maureen was married to Kerry fiddle legend Johnny Cronin. After Johnny's death, she moved with her second husband Martin Connolly to Ennis, County Clare, where she performed and taught music until her own tragically early death in 1998.

Martin Mulvihill was born in 1919, the youngest of ten children in his family in Ballygoughlin in west County Limerick. He got some formal instruction from a local violinist, and traditional tunes from his mother. After a stint in the Irish army, he moved in 1951 to Northampton in England, where he played the fiddle in dance halls and learned to play piano and button accordions while he and his wife Olive raised four children. The family relocated in 1965 to the Bronx, where Martin's cousin Jerry Mulvihill, a noted step dancing teacher, advised him to take up music teaching. This sideline became a full-time job and Martin expanded his classes to include students in New Jersey. Green Linnet released an LP of Martin's students and he recorded a couple of albums of his own. He also compiled a self-published, hand-written tune collection that is perhaps the best representation in print of the Irish traditional repertoire as it was played in the 1970s and 1980s. Martin Mulvihill passed away in 1987 while on a visit home to Limerick.

Pete Kelly was the youngest of twelve children in a family from Curries, Ballymoe in County Galway. He took up the fiddle at the age of twelve and later played with Ivy Castle Dance Band before emigrating to England, where he attended college and was introduced to classical music. After a stint with the Premier Acres showband back in Ireland, he entered Manchester's North School of Music and played with a ballroom orchestra. In 1959, Pete moved New York and served a couple of years in the army. After his discharge, he joined the Irish Musicians Association and formed a céilí band with button accordionist Pat Murray and friends, and with John Glynn and Paddy Reynolds made television appearances on the Ed Sullivan and Merv Griffin shows. Pete began his music teaching career in 1962 in the Bronx, later expanding to Queens, New Jersey, and Long Island. In 1970, he formed The Shannonaire, a young musicians' orchestra that he took on tour to Ireland seven times over the next decade. The group also released a privately produced LP, *Let the Children Play*. In

the years before his death in 2020, Pete played regularly with his own céilí band, a group that included button accordionist Martin Mulhaire.

The Present Day

In the 21st century, the Irish of New York no longer live in many of the city neighbourhoods that echoed with the sound of jigs and reels in the 78 rpm era or the heyday of the traditional music revival. Almost all the Irish bars that once lined Broadway in Inwood and Bainbridge Avenue in the Bronx are gone. You don't hear many brogues on the streets of Woodside and Sunnyside in Queens these days. Immigration from Ireland is down to a trickle, and Irish Americans continue to heed the siren call of the suburbs.

But if the city has lost some of its Celtic character, there are still strongholds where the Irish have sunk deep roots and show no signs of leaving. Irish tricolours still wave alongside the Stars and Stripes on Katonah Avenue in Woodlawn in the Bronx, on McLean Avenue just over the city line in Yonkers, on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens and, especially, in and around Pearl River in suburban Rockland County. In those core Irish neighbourhoods, families still send their kids to traditional music classes, and a corps of dedicated teachers continue to turn out new generations of talented young musicians.

Teachers

The Erin Loughran School of Irish Music and Arts conducts classes in Woodlawn and across the Hudson in Pearl River. Teachers include Erin herself on the fiddle, Seagda Coyle on the button accordion, Brenda Dowling Kane on flute, tin whistle and concertina, Fiona Staunton on whistle and flute and John Paul Reynolds on the tenor banjo. The Acosta School of Irish Music and Dance, led by piano accordionist Annmarie Acosta, is based in the Rockaways and attracts students from Brooklyn and Queens. The Pearl River School of Irish Music staff includes fiddler Rose Flanagan, flute and whistle player Margie Mulvihill and button accordionist Patty Furlong. Mayo tin whistle player Dawn Doherty teaches at the Aisling Irish Centre in Yonkers and fiddler Niall Mulligan gives classes at the New York Irish Centre in Long Island City, Queens and at the Irish American Society in Mineola, Long Island.

Outside of the core Irish districts, the enthusiasm for Irish traditional music that gripped many young New Yorkers of all backgrounds in the 1970s has faded. But the Irish Arts Centre, now ensconced in a magnificent new building around the corner from their old home in Manhattan, continues to offer well-attended traditional music classes to adult learners of all ethnic backgrounds, continuing the work of the late Bill Ochs, who passed away in 2016.

Concerts, Sessions and Festivals

The long-running weekly concert series staged at the Eagle Tavern and Blarney Star bars became a monthly series in 2004 sponsored by Glucksman Ireland House at New York University. The Covid pandemic shut down all public programming at NYU in 2020 but monthly traditional music concerts will have a new home at the New York Irish Centre, a cultural hub in Long Island City headed by Broadway theatre veteran George Heslin.

With the Covid pandemic receding, the annual Catskills Irish Arts Week will resume in-person classes, concerts, dances and sessions in July of this year. Now in its 27th year, the

CIAW is unique in North America among Irish music summer camps in that it takes place not on a college campus but in the bars, restaurants, dance halls and festival grounds of East Durham, a resort town three hours up the Thruway from New York City that has preserved its Irish character. Attendees walk the same streets and play in some of the same places as Joe Cooley, Paddy Killoran and other Irish music legends did in decades past.

The tradition of music sessions continues in New York City pubs, though the constant commercial churn and ever-rising rents of the city have closed many of the nightspots that drew traditional music lovers not long ago. Kate Kearney's, where Andy McGann had a Saturday night residency for many years is gone, as is Ciarán Staunton's nearby O'Neill's pub on Third Avenue, where lively weekend sessions carried on for many years. Would-be sessioneers can still find a tune, however, at pubs that include the 11th Street Bar in the East Village, Grace on 14th Street, the Landmark Tavern in Hell's Kitchen, Sláinte on the Bowery, Paddy Reilly's on Second Avenue, Keane's Bar and Restaurant in Woodlawn, An Béal Bocht Café in Riverdale, and the Wicked Monk in Bay Ridge.

One of the more memorable session spots in the city early in this century was Mona's on Avenue B in the East Village. Conducted by Paris-born fiddler Patrick Ourceau and Dublin bouzouki, guitar and banjo player Eamon O'Leary, the Mona's sessions were a late-night, professional-level rendezvous for local and visiting musicians. Some of the best music played there was captured live in 2003 and issued on the CD, *Live at Mona's* with sleeve notes by Mick Moloney. Ourceau has since decamped to Toronto and Mona's is now known for old-time jazz sessions but Eamon O'Leary remains in New York, where he plays weekly with fiddler Tony "the Tradfather" DeMarco at the 11th Street Bar's Sunday sessions, and performs with Jefferson Hamer as the duo The Murphy Beds.

The Media

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the New York Irish supported a plethora of weekly newspapers that published advertising and articles about traditional music. *The Advocate*, *Gaelic American*, *Irish World*, *Irish American*, *Irish News*, *Irish People* are gone now, most preserved only on microfilm. The sole survivors are the *Irish Echo*, first published in 1928, and its younger rival, *The Irish Voice*, which was founded in 1987 at a time of renewed, if often illegal, Irish immigration to New York. In recent decades, both papers have featured traditional music columns that review recordings and concerts and spread the word about current musical events.

Paul Keating, a son of Clare immigrants who pens the "From the Hob" column for the *Voice*, has been a leading musical activist since the 1970s, when he was involved in the Irish Arts Centre, helped to launch traditional music sessions at the Eagle Tavern and was a leading figure in the revival of set dancing. Dan Neely, an ethnomusicologist, fiddler and tenor banjo player, covers the traditional music beat for the *Echo*. Both writers are also organizers and publicists for the traditional music organization Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which supports several branches in the New York area, and have been administrators of traditional music summer schools.

Back when radio was cutting-edge technology, Irish radio programs abounded, and live traditional music could be heard throughout the week in New York. Television and the

internet have displaced the old wireless, but one weekly Irish radio program has been carrying the traditional torch since 1986. *A Thousand Welcomes* on WFUV, based at Fordham University in the Bronx, has been hosted since its first broadcast by Kathleen Biggins, who began her radio career while still a Fordham undergraduate. Kathleen is a professional journalist with CBS now but never gave up her traditional music broadcast, which presents new and classic recordings, as well as interviews and announcements of local musical events, every Sunday morning.

New York Irish Traditional Musicians of Note

There are far more fine traditional musicians active in the New York area than can be included below, and this writer hopes he will be forgiven by those not mentioned!

FIDDLE

Eileen Ivers

In the 1970s, fiddler Eileen Ivers, prize pupil of Limerick teacher Martin Mulvihill, was an unbeatable *fleadh* competitor. In the 1980s she was a founding member of Cherish the Ladies and performed with Mick Moloney's Green Fields of America troupe. In the 1990s, she formed a recording and touring partnership with English-born button accordion ace John Whelan, who was then living in New York, and starred in *Riverdance* on Broadway. In more recent years, she has fronted her own band, Eileen Ivers and Immigrant Soul, a musically eclectic group that includes two other worthy traditional players in button accordionist Buddy Connolly and fiddler/guitarist/trumpet player Matt Mancuso.

Brian Conway

Bronx native Brian Conway is the standard bearer of the Sligo fiddle style in America. A student of Martin Mulvihill and Martin Wynne, he was also much influenced by Andy McGann. In addition to his 1979 duo recording with Tony DeMarco, the All-Ireland champion has issued two solo recordings, a collaboration with the late button accordion great Joe Burke, and "The Pride of New York," an all-star collaboration with Joanie Madden, Billy McComiskey and Brendan Dolan. Now retired from his career as prosecuting attorney, Brian devotes himself to performing and teaching.

Rose Flanagan

Brian Conway's sister Rose is an outstanding fiddler in her own right. Like Brian, she started lessons with Martin Mulvihill and got private tutoring from Sligo fiddle legend Martin Wynne. Rose is one of the leading Irish music teachers in the New York area and has also served on the faculty of the Catskills Irish Arts Week, the O'Flaherty Retreat, the Swannanoa Gathering and other summer music schools. With Baltimore flute player Laura Byrne, she released the album *Forget Me Not*.

Tony DeMarco

A native of Brooklyn from a mixed Italian and Irish family, Tony learned a lot of his music from Longford-born fiddle great Paddy Reynolds. House sessions with Brian Conway and Martin Wynne steeped him in the Sligo tradition but Tony has a style very much his own, full of melodic variation and a touch of bluegrass influence. He issued a solo recording, *The Sligo Indians*, for Smithsonian Folkways and leads a long-running Sunday session at the 11th Street

Bar. Tony also organizes an annual New York Trad Fest concert that presents Irish and other ethnic traditional music.

Willie Kelly

Willie and his brother Joe, now a Capuchin monk, were students of Martin Mulvihill. Willie is a devotee of the older style of fiddlers from east Galway and east Clare and formed a musical partnership with flute player Mike Rafferty. With Mike, he made the recording *The New Broom*. Willie and his wife Siobhán, a flute player from east Clare, have raised a large musical family and taught students young and old in New Jersey and at the Catskills Irish Arts Week

Bernadette Fee

Bernadette “Bernie” Fee grew up in a family immersed in Irish music and dance. She is still active with the Parents and Students Irish Dancing and Music Association of North America, and annually leads a troupe of step dancing students up Fifth Avenue in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Bernie is an active performer in the traditional music pubs of the city and suburbs and occasionally wows a festival crowd by simultaneously dancing and playing the fiddle.

Katie Linnane

Katie grew up in Pearl River, New York, where her mother Kathy was an Irish music teacher and also studied with Willie Kelly. Now married to uilleann piper Ivan Goff, she also performs regularly with flute player Kevin Crawford and other top musicians at Swift Hibernian Lounge in Greenwich Village.

Jake James

Jake took up the fiddle at age seven in Queens, where he studied with Niall Mulligan. A two-time All-Ireland champion on the fiddle, he is also an outstanding bodhrán player and step dancer. Jake’s various talents have made him a much-sought-after stage performer and he has toured throughout North America, Ireland and Japan.

Ken and John Vesey

Ken is a member of a large musical family in New Jersey. A veteran *fleadh* competitor in his youth, he has an All-Ireland fiddle championship on his musical CV and performs regularly with his singing sister Kathleen and his button accordionist brother John, who like Ken was tutored by Martin Mulvihill.

Dylan Foley

Though he now lives in Tennessee, Dylan established his mighty reputation as a fiddle player in New York. He grew up in the Hudson Valley town of Highland where his parents Tom and Anne encouraged his musical bent. He took lessons from Rose Flanagan and listened intently to two Hudson Valley master musicians, Roscommon-born flute and whistle player Mike McHale and concertina player Fr. Charlie Coen. He is a senior All-Ireland champion and, according to no less an authority than Brian Conway, “one of the finest fiddlers of his generation.” He has recorded with The Yanks, with Dan Gurney and with flute player Josh Dukes.

Sean Quinn

In some of the posed group photos of 1950s New York Irish musicians, there is one lone youngster with a fiddle among the older men. That was Sean Quinn, oldest son of Louis Quinn. Sean is perhaps the only one in those photos left alive, and he is a font of information on the Irish music scene of the 1950s and 1960s. Like Andy McGann, Sean took classical instruction, but he pursued it further, attending the famous Juilliard School and acquiring professional-level ability as an orchestral player. Sean never lost touch with his Irish roots, however, and as a teenager in 1965 became the first American-born musician to win an All-Ireland fiddle championship. With his musical siblings, Sean played in the Quinn family band, who toured Ireland in the 1960s and made an LP recording. He remains an active performer and teacher and has issued several recordings that include his own compositions in traditional style.

Patrick Mangan

A native of Brooklyn, Pat Mangan took violin lessons as a child and learned his Irish music from Brian Conway. Under Conway's tutelage, he matured into a technically brilliant fiddler with a thorough grounding in the Sligo tradition. He parlayed those skills into a professional career in music, joining *Riverdance* on Broadway at the age of 16. He has since performed in over 30 countries but is back in New York, where he frequently performs in the Broadway hit show *Come From Away* and recently played with Clannad star Moya Brennan at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

John Reynolds

John Reynolds was born in Manhattan to Irish immigrant parents. He was sent for classical violin lessons as a child but took more interest in music when he attended Irish music classes given by Roscommon accordionist John Glynn. After Glynn passed away in 1971, John got further instruction from Galway fiddler Pete Kelly. He was much inspired by the playing of Seán McGuire and John is, in fact, one of very few Irish fiddle players who can even attempt some of McGuire's technically challenging showpieces. With Pete Kelly or Paddy Reynolds, John was frequently employed in the 1970s and early 1980s to play for dancing *feiseanna* throughout northeast USA. He also found himself much in demand to play with ballad singers and showbands. His more strictly traditional playing was featured with the band Morning Star, which included Kerry singer Mary Courtney and flute/whistle player Margie Mulvihill. John married Margie and has played with her in the Pride of Moyvane Céilí band for many years.

BUTTON ACCORDION

James Keane

James grew up in a fiddling family in Drimnagh, Dublin and bucked tradition by taking up the button accordion at the tender age of six. He and his brother Seán, who would later play the fiddle with the Chieftains, were among the founders of the famed Castle Céilí Band in the early 1960s. Later in that decade, James found himself much in demand during the "ballad boom," often playing multiple gigs in one night. He moved to New York in 1968 and spent years partnering singer Jesse Owens and touring with the Canadian band Ryan's Fancy. He then settled down in Queens and worked a steady day job but continued to issue new solo

recordings, to play in some of the city's pubs and in concert with Mick Moloney or singer Robbie O'Connell and at festivals.

Billy McComiskey

Billy has been living in Baltimore for many years now, but he'll always be a Brooklyn boy at heart and still makes frequent visits back to New York City and the Catskills. Seán McGlynn from Tynagh in east Galway mentored Billy's musical development and Billy's most cherished possession is the vintage black Paolo Soprani accordion he inherited from McGlynn. In addition to an All-Ireland championship, Billy has won a National Heritage award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the USA's highest award for a traditional musician. Billy has issued two solo recordings and has appeared on many others with Liz Carroll, Brendan Mulvihill Mick Moloney and "The Pride of New York" band.

John Nolan

John was born in the Bronx to an accordion-playing father and started lessons with John Glynn when he was 12. He played in the group The Big Wheel with fiddler Pat Keogh, and later made a duet recording with Pat. He was the toast of East Durham in 1982 when he returned from Listowel as the first American senior All-Ireland button accordion champion. John is an expert at tuning and repair of button accordions. He is also an active and successful teacher whose prize pupil, Séagda Coyle, may yet outshine the master.

Tom Dunne

Button accordionist and fiddler Tom Dunne came in 1992 from Tombrick, Ballycarney, County Wexford to New York, where he and his late wife Ann shared a tiny apartment on West 3rd Street in the heart of Greenwich Village. In his youth, there was hardly a fleadh or traditional music festival in Ireland that Tom missed, something attested to by much vintage documentary footage. He was a successful competitor and a music teacher, and one of his old students, John Redmond, is another outstanding button accordionist in New York today. In 1967, Tom struck up a close friendship with Kerry fiddler Paddy Cronin, took up the fiddle himself and is today perhaps the best exponent of Paddy's style and repertoire. Tom recorded one CD on the accordion with the late Joe "Banjo" Burke and another on the fiddle as a tribute to Paddy Cronin.

Dan Gurney

Dan, an accordion player, grew up in the Hudson Valley town of Rhinebeck, a short train ride from the big city. He started out on a toy button accordion but by age seven was playing the real thing. His chief musical inspiration was Fr. Charlie Coen, then attached to a parish in nearby Red Hook. The musical priest instilled in Dan a passion for old-time traditional music played without flash or excessive speed. He has recorded a solo CD, an album with fiddler Dylan Foley and one with the band The Yanks. He currently lives in Dublin with his flute-playing wife Christina Dolphin and young daughter, Saoirse.

Patty Furlong

Patty, an accordion player, grew up in the Bronx. Her father played the old D/C# Irish-American button accordion but wanted Patty to play the piano accordion, which he thought was more "American." Patty preferred the button box and eventually got her way. She started on the C#/D system but alternates now with a B/C box. As a student of Martin

Mulvihill, she was a successful fleadh competitor, taking a teenage All-Ireland championship. Her trio partners of the day were Margie Mulvihill and Rose Flanagan, who are today her partners in teaching at the Pearl River School of Music. She performed in the original Cherish the Ladies concerts, had recorded a solo CD and once featured as a guest performer with the Chieftains.

John Redmond

John came to New York in 1988 from Ballindagban, County Wexford where as a youngster he took lessons from Tom Dunne and won an All-Ireland champion as a teenager. He has recorded two solo albums – *East to Northeast* and *Box Sets*, teaches at the Woodlawn Arts and Music House and has been a Traditional Irish Musician in Residence at Lehman College. He leads a Sunday session at An Béal Bocht in the Riverside section of the Bronx.

John Kennedy

John was born in Inwood at the northern tip of Manhattan and raised in Dumont, New Jersey by his father Gerry from Inagh, County Clare and his mother Margaret from Claremorris in Mayo. With his cousin Eileen Clune, John made the long journey from northern New Jersey to Brooklyn regularly to study Irish music with Maureen Glynn and play in youth céilí bands. John's musical specialty for over two decades has been playing for set dances in New Jersey and New York, and he has also taught the button accordion. He was inducted into the Mid-Atlantic Comhaltas Hall of Fame in 2022.

UILLEANN PIPES

Jerry O'Sullivan

Jerry was born in New York City and now lives in White Plains. His first instrument was the highland bagpipes but following a visit to cousins in Dublin, he switched to the uilleann pipes. Back in New York, he got instruction and inspiration from piper Bill Ochs and developed his own robust but sophisticated style. In the 1980s he toured with Mick Moloney's Green Fields of America troupe and recorded two of his five solo CDs. Jerry is much in demand as a session player on recordings that include film scores and a disc by Dolly Parton.

Ivan Goff

Dublin-born uilleann piper Ivan Goff's musical mentors were piping greats Dan O'Dowd and Mick O'Brien. He has performed with Dervish, Danú, Lúnasa, Téada, Mick Moloney's Green Fields of America and other groups, most recently, Ghost Trio with Iarla Ó Lionáird and Cleek Schrey. Ivan is a veteran of *Riverdance*, *Peter and Wendy* and other theatrical and film productions, and has played with symphony orchestras, including a concerto for pipes performed with the Albany Symphony Orchestra. He recently completed a PhD in music at New York University and lives with his fiddle-playing wife Katie Linnane in Pearl River.

Cillian Vallely

An uilleann piper, Cillian's parents Brian and Eithne Vallely founded the Armagh Pipers Club, a leading force in the revival and transmission of traditional music in the north. He got his initial instruction on the pipes from his father and studied with the late Mark Donnelly. Cillian lived for a few years in Boston before moving to New York City in the 1990s. In 1999,

he joined the group Lúnasa and has toured and recorded seven albums with the group. He has also played with orchestras, on film scores, with *Riverdance*, and as a sideman on recordings by Natalie Merchant and Bruce Springsteen. Cillian has recorded duet CDs with his concertina-playing brother Niall and with Lúnasa flute player Kevin Crawford. He and his wife Katie and their three daughters live in Sunnyside, Queens. When not on tour, he can be heard on Sundays at the Dead Rabbit on Water Street.

FLUTE

Joanie Madden

Joanie was born in the Bronx, the second of seven children born to Irish immigrants Joe, from Portumna, County Galway and Helen Meade Madden from Miltown Malbay, County Clare. Joe was an outstanding button accordionist who led an Irish dance band for many years, so Joanie grew up to a soundtrack of traditional music. Her first teacher was east Galway flute player Jack Coen, who seems to have done a pretty good job. Joanie won teenage championships in Ireland and in 1984 took the senior All-Ireland championship on the tin whistle, a first for an American. The original Cherish the Ladies concerts the following year were a major turning point in her life – she turned the concept into a touring band that is still on the road over three decades later. As a soloist and bandleader, she has sold hundreds of thousands of albums. She has been featured on 180 recordings for other artists and played on the soundtracks of many films and TV productions. In her spare time, she runs the annual “Joanie Madden’s Musical Tour of Ireland” and “Joanie Madden’s Folk ‘n Irish Cruise.”

Kevin Crawford

Kevin, a flute player, grew up in Birmingham, England to parents from Miltown Malbay, County Clare. He learned his music in Birmingham’s Irish community before moving in 1989 to west Clare, where he recorded with the groups Grianan, Raise the Rafters and Moving Cloud before being called up in 1997 to replace Mike McGoldrick in the group Lúnasa. In addition to playing flute, whistles and bodhrán with the band, Kevin quickly took over the frontman role on stage. In addition to recordings with Lúnasa, Kevin has issued a solo CD, a recording of duets with various fiddlers, collaborations with bandmates Cillian Vallely and Colin Farrell, and a disc with New York fiddler Dylan Foley. He has also toured with Martin Hayes and John Doyle as “The Teetotallers.” Kevin now makes his home in Brooklyn.

Eileen Clune Goodman

Eileen grew up in the Bronx before moving to Westwood, New Jersey. Her parents, immigrants from west Clare, were active members of the Doonbeg Social Club. Eileen attended the club dances and was soon sitting in with the older players. She studied the piano accordion with Martin Mulvihill, taught herself the whistle and went for further instruction to Maureen Glynn. She put the music aside for a few years as she went to university and then started a family and a career with the Federal Reserve Bank (she manages the gold vault!) but came back in the mid- 1990s, when she picked up the timber flute and got lessons from Sligo man, Pat Casey. Soon she was teaching herself, as well as playing for dancing with the Green Gates Céilí Band, a group that included Pat Casey, Eileen’s button accordionist cousin, John Kennedy and fiddler, Rose Flanagan.

Margie Mulvihill

A flute player, Margie's parents came from north Kerry, and she made many trips to Ireland in her younger years. Her grand-uncle Jerry Mulvihill was a popular step dancer of the old Munster school. Fiddler and music teacher Martin Mulvihill was a cousin. She studied music with him, playing piano accordion and tin whistle, and was part of his All-Ireland champion Glinside Céilí Band. With Kerry singer, Mary Courtney and fiddler, Carmel Johnston, she formed the trio Morning Star, which stayed together with various musicians for twenty years. After the band broke up, Margie took up the wooden flute and studied with Mike Rafferty. Margie is a music teacher with the Pearl River School. Her daughters Erin, Blaithín and Neidín Loughran, and her son John Paul Reynolds, are all outstanding musicians.

TENOR BANJO

Frankie McCormick

Frankie hails from Blackwatertown on the border of Counties Armagh and Tyrone, where his father was a leader of the local Comhaltas branch. He is left-handed and has a unique upside-down method of playing the tenor banjo that developed when he had to learn on an instrument strung for righties. Frankie made the move to America in 1986 and lived the hectic life of a carpenter by day and a bar band musician by night for many years. He now lives on Long Island and serves as the chair of the North American provincial board of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Mick Moloney

Mick Moloney's accomplishments in Irish music are many and various. He is, of course, a marvelous singer and a virtuoso player of all manner of fretted instruments. But in his long career he has also been the producer of recordings and documentary films, the author of books, the leader of the Green Fields of America troupe, and a winner of a National Heritage Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Mick has taught ethnomusicology, folklore, music and Irish Studies at Villanova, Georgetown, the University of Pennsylvania and, most recently, New York University.

John Morrow

John comes from a musical family in Carrigallen, County Leitrim. His brother, Tom plays fiddle with the well-known group Dervish while John himself is an All-Ireland champion on tenor banjo and mandolin. He arrived in New York well-traveled, having spent time in Australia and Canada. An experienced teacher, he has been on the staff of music teaching weeks in West Virginia and Texas. In New York, he plays frequently with Katie Linnane, Joanie Madden and other top local musicians.

PIANO

Brendan Dolan

Brendan's father Felix, a Bronx native, was one of the most renowned piano accompanists in Irish music, a member of the legendary New York Céilí Band who recorded with Andy McGann, Joe Burke and other greats. Brendan has followed those footsteps well and is the first-call keyboard man in New York Irish music, including for the all-star Pride of New York ensemble. Like his dad, he also plays the flute. A teacher by profession, Brendan has

lectured and done archival work at New York University, composed film scores and commercial sound designs.

PIANO ACCORDION

Annmarie Acosta Williams

Annmarie, from Queens, studied Irish dance with Jerry Mulvihill and Donny Golden and music with Maureen Glynn. From Maureen, she learned a sophisticated style of piano accompaniment to Irish dance music, a style that won her an All-Ireland accompaniment championship. But Annmarie is best known for her prodigious skill on the piano accordion, as well as for her dedication to teaching traditional music for over twenty years. She has a Masters degree in traditional music from the University of Limerick and has taught a course at Fordham University on Irish traditional music and dance.

Chris McLoughlin

Not many folks can make a living playing the piano accordion, but then not many piano accordionists can play like Chris McLoughlin. His mother, Patsy Early McLoughlin has been one of the leading step dancing teachers in the USA for many years while his father, Chris is a talented singer from Belfast. Chris specializes in music for the *feis* and is at the top of his field, constantly flying to play for dancers all over the USA as well as in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.