

## REVIEW-ESSAYS

### ***The Clare Set: Free Reed Reissues Classic Clare Concertina Recordings Monumental but Hardly Definitive***

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***The Clare Set: The Definitive 6-CD Archive of the Concertina Traditions of County Clare***, various artists. Free Reed AnClar06 (2006)

For centuries, the near-insular county of Clare, on Ireland's western seaboard, has been an unlikely land's end for travelers and merchants, evangelists and colonial bureaucrats, antiquarians and historians. Anthropologists and music collectors too have added their peregrinations to the well-worn pathways of earlier travelers.<sup>1</sup> Like the proverbial goldfish in a transparent bowl, the natives of Clare have been screened and measured, described and defined by legions of scribes from all corners of the globe. From Harvardians Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball whose somewhat spurious account of a 'typical Irish rural community' was based on fieldwork conducted in Clare in the 1930s,<sup>2</sup> to English concertina enthusiasts Neil Wayne and John Tams, whose fieldwork produced this monumental collection of Clare music in the 1970s, *etic* enthusiasts of various persuasions have sought to render the all-illusive *definitive account* of this isolated barren place and its quaint, if oddly exotic, inhabitants.

Music collecting has enjoyed a long and eclectic history in Clare, since the forays of George Petrie and Eugene O'Curry in the pre-famine years of the nineteenth century to the now famous radio journeys of Séamus Ennis and Ciarán MacMathúna over a century afterwards. By the 1970s, however, Clare was rapidly exposed to new currents in popular and counter cultures, both of which would have a pivotal impact on its traditional music and on those concerned with its preservation. A decade after the implementation of the Lemass-Whitaker plan for Irish economic recovery in the late 1950s, the region had grown relatively prosperous as foreign corporations invested in the Shannon industrial corridor and Clare's youth no longer felt the need to emigrate in large numbers. The introduction of television to Ireland in 1961 had, by the end of the decade, reinforced the presence of Anglo-American popular culture throughout Clare, as well as in other parts of rural Ireland. Likewise, Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (later the European Union) in 1973, set the stage for seasonal incursions of new tourists from the university towns of Europe. Young Americans too found their way to Clare in the 1970s,

many seeking a respite from the corporate liberalism and sprawling suburban culture of Uncle Sam. For reasons still largely unexplored, Clare and, in particular, the straggling fishing village of Doolin on the edge of the Burren karst, became a musical mecca for a global community of students and hippies escaping the chains of modern industrial culture. 'Landing in with their bags and their rags'—in the prophetic words of Pakie Russell (Doolin's philosopher and concertina player)—on an aging community of farmers and fishermen (one of the largest concentrations of bachelors in the West of Ireland), these *arrivistes* transformed Doolin into an *entrepôt* of multicultural tourism during the 1970s. Dubbed by one laconic wag as 'the vas in Doolin crowd', demin-clad blondes from Sweden, German rucksackers, and sallow-skinned Francophones in yellow wind-breakers packed Doolin's three pubs to capacity every night to hear the natives play the music of another era. In the narrow street outside, tourist bikes, laden with bags and maps, jostled with tractors, cattle creels, and the Citroën *deux cheveaux* (the ubiquitous people's car of France) for miniscule parking spots. The hidden Ireland of rural Clare would never again be the same. In the resulting transformation, this transient community would change forever the cultural texture of Clare, designating Doolin as a world capital of Irish traditional music and elevating its hereditary keepers (especially the Russell brothers) to the role of ambassadors of a music that was once consigned to the periphery of Irish life.

It was into this milieu of socio-cultural change that Neil Wayne and John Tams arrived in January 1974. As counter-cultural hippies, folkies, and revivalists were witnessing and waking the old folk ways, new cultural vistas (Anglo-American and European) beckoned abruptly from afar. In Clare, 'the spiritual home of the concertina', according to Tams, the instrument was associated with an older cohort of male performers, relatively few in number, who represented the public face of a once-thriving tradition that went back to the Great Famine of the 1840s. Marginalized by mass-produced accordions (the instrument of choice for most young Irish musicians in the 1960s and 1970s), the concertina seemed as if it might go the way of the uilleann pipes in Clare, or indeed the harp on the eve of the Belfast harpers' gathering in 1792 (that attracted a mere ten performers, the last of their kind who were heirs to a thousand years of music). Disciples of the English folk revival, Wayne, a concertina historian, and Tams, a well-known folk singer (and future music director with BBC Radio 2), began their journey in Dublin, where they were treated to 'tea and cream buns' by the then upwardly-mobile overlord of the Chieftains, Paddy Moloney, in the luxurious offices of Claddagh Records. In the weeks that

followed, their journey took them from the former second city of the empire across the heartland of the nation, westwards over the Shannon to the Banner County of Clare. Armed with Nagra and Sennheiser tape recorders and a van ready to tackle the byroads of rural Ireland, their mission was to record the keepers of Clare's concertina music and publish it on Wayne's nascent Free Reed label, which had joined forces with Topic Records, an older company with strong socialist credentials that had brought icons like Ewan MacColl, A.L. Lloyd, and Shirley Collins to public attention during the halcyon days of the British folk revival.<sup>3</sup> To help bring their task to fruition, Wayne and Tams recruited Kerry folklorist Muiris Ó Rócháin (Director of Scoil Shamhraidh Willie Clancy, the largest Irish traditional music academy in the world), who had just settled in Miltown Malbay a few years earlier; in addition, there were West Cork concertina player and music historian, Seán O'Dwyer, English folklorists A.L. Lloyd and Roly Brown, designer Tony Engle, and photographer Valerie Wilmer. In 2007, Dubliner Shay Fogarty and former Chieftain, Michael Turbidity contributed their editorial skills to the re-issued box set of this 1974 expedition.

## **The Recordings, Performers, and Collectors**

***The Russell Family of Doolin, Co Clare*** (Free Reed FCLAR 01, originally Topic LP 12TS 251). Recorded in 1974 and released the following year, when Doolin was a nascent mecca of Irish traditional music, this recording features the Russell brothers—Micho (1915-1994), Pakie (1920-1977), and Gussie (1917-2004)—playing whistle, flute, and concertina, as well as the wonderfully quaint traditional singing of Micho Russell. With an ethnographic essay and annotated tune notes by Muiris Ó Rocháin (who had just launched Scoil Shamraidh Willie Clancy in nearby Miltown Malbay the previous year), this recording is an abiding testament to unadorned traditional playing rendered in its own natural environment without recourse to studio contrivances or technical gimmickry. It is suitably adorned with period photographs of the Russells playing outside the door of Gussie O'Conner's pub in Doolin (before it was 'spruced up' for the hordes of *vas in Doolin* tourists), as well as stoic portraits (especially of Pakie) taken within the portals of this once all-male sanctuary. The new issue also features a copy of the real estate advert announcing the sale of the Russell homestead after the death of Gussie, the last brother, in 2004—a sad reminder of the music and music makers that are no more.

From a musical perspective, this disc contains a superb snapshot of vernacular dance music and song plucked directly from its guardians in full flight in the kitchen of their local hostelry. The ambiance of the performance has more in keeping with the natural milieu of a *teach cuairde* (old-world visiting house) than a modern pub intent on matching tunes played with pints of Guinness sold. Unfazed by microphones or foreign guests, the brothers seem totally relaxed as they play through various solo, duo, and trio combinations. While Micho's songs, sung in his own inimitable style, were light years removed from the lyrics sweeping to fame on commercial charts, his archaic narratives spoke of an older *gemeinschaft* of saints and monasteries, migrant fishermen in search of patronage, and farmers' sons intent on courtship. Likewise, the whistle playing of himself and Gussie, deceptive in its simplicity, was filled with enigmatic silences and unpredictable beauty. For concertina aficionados, this recording shines a rare spotlight on the musical genius of Pakie Russell, one of the most unlauded figures of Irish concertina music. His playing of *The Heather(y) Breeze* and *The Traveler* (signature pieces), *Russell's Hornpipe* and *Fisher's Hornpipe*, as well as *Tommy Glenny's Reel (Tear the Calico)* is laced with melodic taste and rhythmic sophistication. However, his unique treatment of the local *Connemara Stockings* (of biblical importance in the music of Kilfenora) and the global *The De'il Among the Tailors* (known under various French and English monickers all over North America) is nothing short of stunning. The pensive, curious, and roguish personality of Pakie (so well explored in the erudite essays of Irish poet Michael Coady, and quintessential reading for anyone interested in the Russells and their habitat) permeates these tunes and continues to inspire those with an ear for the deep spirituality that underlies this music. Reflecting on the folk philosophy that informed this old world, Coady cites the maxim: *Is deartháir don phaidir an port* - 'The tune is brother to the prayer'.<sup>4</sup> It is that same ageless maxim that lies at the heart of this historic recording.

**Clare Concertinas—Bernard O'Sullivan & Tommy McMahon** (FCLAR02, originally Topic/Free LP 12TFRS 502). Recorded in 1974 in the Cree-Cooraclare district of south west Clare (one of the heartlands of the Clare concertina and birthplace of Mrs. Elizabeth Crotty, Ireland's 'First Lady of Concertina'), Bernard O'Sullivan and his neighbour Tommy McMahon (accompanied by Bernard's daughter Bernadette playing guitar on some tracks) perform a bevy of traditional dance tunes from reels, jigs and hornpipes to polkas, Napoleonic marches, and set dances, the latter being a relatively neglected genre in Irish traditional music. A former student of Mick 'Stack' Ryan (who

ran an informal concertina school in nearby Leitrim) and an experienced veteran of the house dance scene, Bernard O'Sullivan had a wealth of local dance music. McMahon, then a twenty-four-year-old All Ireland Champion (1971, 1972, and 1973), was somewhat more exposed to musical influences beyond his immediate habitat, not least of which were those garnered by contacts made at *fleadhanna* and on concert stages outside of Clare.

As a duo, the older master and his young protégé played with tremendous empathy and panache. Their treatment of the polkas *The Babes in the Wood*, *The Cooraclare Polka*, and *Clare's Dragoons* (originally a march) is a classic case in point, and speaks to a bygone era of Plain Set dancing (to polkas) in south west Clare. Likewise, their treatment of the set dance *Rodney's Glory*, composed by the eighteenth-century Kerry poet Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-1784), is exemplary. Notwithstanding McMahon's interest in external dialects of dance music, his sense of deference towards local sources is evident throughout this disc, particularly in the jig set *Martin Talty's*, *Thomas Friel's*, and *Joe Cuneen's* (affirming local tradition bearers from the Miltown Malbay-Quilty area of midwest Clare), *The Danganella Hornpipe* (named after his own townland), and *Ollie Conway's Selection*, which recalls one of Ireland's legendary set dancers who grew up in nearby Kilmihil before moving to Mullagh where his pub is one of west Clare's best-known landmarks for musicians and dancers. Like the other discs in the collection, this ethnographic recording is a timely testament to an era and a soundscape that has changed radically in the past three decades. Its ultimate demise may well have been foretold in the prophetic words of the Basket storytellers: *Ní bheidh a leithéidí ann arís*—'Their kind will never be here again'.

***Irish Traditional Concertina Music—The Flowing Tide: Chris Droney*** (Free Reed FCLAR 03, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12TFRS 503). A veteran of *fleadh cheoil* competitions, concert tours and céilí bands for over half a century, Chris Droney from Bellharbour (a picturesque hamlet overlooking Galway Bay on the brow of the Burren in north Clare) is the most recorded of Ireland's senior concertina players. This disc was recorded by Tams and Wayne in January 1974 when Chris Droney was in his prime. It includes twenty-one tracks of reels, jigs, hornpipes, polkas, marches, waltzes, and a slow air: *Ar Éirinn, Ní Neosfainn Cé Hí* (regrettably listed as 'untitled' in the credits). As with all of the new issues, this CD package contains reflective travelogues by Wayne and Tams, an essay on the history of the concertina in Clare (in which Clare plays an ancillary role to the history

of the instrument in England, Wayne's real area of specialization), a blurb on Éigse Mrs. Crotty, and a marketing promo for the remainder of *The Clare Set* (as well as a supplementary extract from the Free Reed catalogue in this booklet). Despite this welter of literature, the package contains no tune notes whatsoever. The only annotations the listener is given on the music of Droney—a key figure in Irish concertina music—is a superficial five-paragraph biography. That said, the contrasting (historical and contemporary) photographs are a fitting tribute to his enduring place in the chronology of Irish concertina music.

Chris Droney's music is distinguished by an unornamented 'single-note' style, a driving rhythm, and an upbeat pulse (referred to as 'lift' in Clare) that is tailor made for the set dancers of north Clare; and to this day, he is highly sought-after as a dance player. In this recording, his music (much of it inherited from his father Jim Droney, one of last Gaelic speakers in north Clare) finds its historic wellspring in pieces like *The Three Little Drummers* and *The Eagle's Nest*, *The Union Reel*, *The Three Part Jig (The Bride's Favorite)*, and *Tim Maloney's Reel*. Droney's own gift for composition makes a cameo appearance in *The Bellharbour Reel*, popular in Irish music communities on both sides of the Atlantic. His signature hornpipe, *The Flowing Tide*, is also included. Published as *The Seventh Regiment* reel in *Ryan's Mammoth Collection*, this tune is attributed to the nineteenth-century fiddler Conn Higgins.<sup>5</sup> Its transition to hornpipe status remains a mystery.

While the inclusion of additional tracks in the new CD version is laudable in principle, it is frustrating that tunes often reappear under different titles in the bonus tracks (as in the case of track 10's *The Three Part Jig* and *The Moate Hunt*, which re-emerge as *Katie's Fancy* and *Willie Coleman's Jig* - both valid alternative titles - in the bonus tracks). Surely, between the additional editors and multiple checking mechanisms, a vote could have been taken in the name of consistency. Omissions also occur in the additional tracks. Track 20, for example, which is listed as *Connemara Stockings*, actually opens with *John Brennan's Reel* (which has at least fifteen other titles to choose from) before Droney changes into *The Connemara Stockings*, a local favourite.

Some effort could have been made to safeguard the integrity of Irish language names and titles, not just on this disc but throughout the series. While this has not always been a strong suit among British 'visitors' to Ireland, it is grating to see an absurd meaningless title such as *Sliam na Gapall* in place of the correct version: *Sliabh na gCapaill*

(‘Mountain of the Horses’) on the Droney disc. Flippant inaccuracies are speckled throughout the other booklets too; not least of which is the near universal absence of length accents (*síntí fada*) over long vowels in Irish-language names, as in Séamus Ennis, Seán O’Dwyer, Mícheál (*not: Michael*) MacAogáin, Muiris Ó Rócháin (*not: Muiris O Rochain*) and Bunnán (*not: Bunnan*). This lack of care also extends to photo captions, as in *Sceoil Eigse* for *Scoil Éigse* (correct version) and *Eigse Teachers* for *Éigse Teachers* (correct version with the proper accent). Failure to use accents in Irish can completely change the meaning of a word. Similarly, the plural of *céilí* (a traditional dance) is not *ceilidhs* but rather *céilithe*. Now that the Irish language (after centuries of colonial oppression and at times native indifference) is an official language of the European Union, surely it is time to afford it the full dignity of orthographic accuracy—as with any other national language of equal political and cultural status.

***John Kelly: Irish Traditional Concertina and Fiddle Music*** (Free Reed FCLAR 04, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12FRS 503). Recorded in January 1974 by Neil Wayne and John Tams and in March and April 1975 by Tony Engle and Patrick Hayes, this seminal disc was released originally in 1975. It features the concertina and fiddle music of John Kelly from Rehy West on the Iorris peninsula in south west Clare (he had lived in Dublin since the 1940s). A veritable encyclopedia of traditional dance music, tune lore, and folklife, John Kelly was a key member of Seán Ó Riada’s Ceoltóirí Chualann (forerunner of the Chieftains), an ensemble that had refashioned Irish traditional music by presenting it formally on the concert hall stage. Kelly was also a veteran of both the celebrated Castle Céilí Band (that swept to national prominence at the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in Thurles in 1965) and Ceoltóirí Laighean (another outgrowth of Ceoltóirí Chualann founded by musician and filmmaker Éamon de Buítléar after Ó Riada’s death in 1972).

By the time Wayne and Tams arrived in Dublin, Kelly was an archdeacon in the city’s traditional pub sessions, holding court in Slattery’s and later in the Four Seasons, across the street from his home and shop (the Horse Shoe) in Capel Street. These legendary sessions were learning academies for scores of musicians from all over Ireland who came to learn from Kelly and his cohorts Joe Ryan and Desi O’Connor. The apex of the CD series in terms of archaic tune settings, this recording showcases Kelly at the height of his career. Drawing on an older and often peripheral repertoire from players like Charlie Simmonds, Tim Griffin, Frank Keane, and Patsy Geary from Iorris,

Kelly as a hereditary keeper of an older dialect of Clare concertina music was indeed the last of his kind. Today's genericization of styles among younger players has afforded little affirmation or longevity to this rare dialect of concertina music. Interspersed with fiddle tunes (local and external), the concertina pieces that really shine in terms of stylistic rarity are the reels *The Spike Island Lassies*, *The Heathery Breeze* (very reminiscent of west Clare), Charlie Simmonds' version of *Eddie Dunn's Reel* (a setting of *The Bag of Potatoes*), and Neil Gow's *Flogging Reel*. The inclusion of quaint slides and jigs from an older pre-reel era in south west Clare is also a marked feature of this recording. Slides that linked the music of the Iorrus peninsula with Sliabh Luachra (through the work of travelling teachers like George Whelan, who crossed the Shannon from Kerry into west Clare in the late nineteenth century) are an all-too-rare commodity in the music of Clare today. The glimpses we get here in *The Scatterry Island Slide* and *John Kelly's Slide* speak to a time when slides and polkas populated the soundscape of Clare before retreating across the Shannon to their celebrated Sliabh Luachra heartland in west Limerick, north Kerry, and north west Cork. While the additional tracks on the re-issued recording will invariably appeal to fiddlers (although track 27 is a two-part version of *Jenny's Welcome to Charlie*, followed by a brief interlude of *The Collier's Reel*, not *Lucy Campbell* as listed), John Kelly's voice introducing the (repeat of the) hornpipe *An Comhra Donn* (not the jig set cited) on track 28 is a tease for listeners who never knew or heard him. A track (or two) devoted to an ethnographic interview with Kelly—a pithy and colorful character, who was very articulate, even down to his legendary malapropisms—would have helped introduce his personality, as well as his music, to a broader, newer, and younger audience. This recording above all the others in the compendium is the *pièce de resistance*, a priceless jewel in a sea of gems.

**Tommy McMahon & Bernard O'Sullivan—Irish Traditional Concertina Music of Co. Clare** (FCLAR05, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12TFRS 505). Issued a year after its 1975 precursor, this disc contains another installment of the field recordings made in Bernard O'Sullivan's house in Sheane in January 1974. Showcasing their duet that lasted over thirty years until O'Sullivan's death in August 2006, Tommy McMahon and his mentor Bernard O'Sullivan play more reels, jigs, hornpipes, set dances, and polkas from a variety of indigenous and external sources. While some pundits feel that these performers were over-represented in the collection (in comparison to such players as Mary King, Mary Lynch, Bridget Dineen, Micho Doyle, and Pappy Looney, all of whom were within easy reach of Wayne and Tams, as

well as countless others all over Clare who failed to register on the grid), the performance quality of the duet playing on this second disc is just as commendable as it is on the first. Worthy of note are the polkas *I Have a Bonnet Trimmed with Blue* and *The Rakes of Mallow* (given very different treatment here from the hackneyed routine of dancing school initiation drills usually associated with it) and the jigs *The Blooming Meadows*, *The Mullagh Jig*, and *The Ballinakill Jig*. Although McMahon's 'external' influences (especially ornamentation patterns and tune settings from accordion players, who were a dominant force in Irish music in the 1970s) can be a bit jarring at times, his peregrinations beyond the fold are counter balanced by O'Sullivan, whose solo pieces from the repertoire of Stack Ryan more than compensate for the 'modernist' proclivities of his cohort.

While the additional tracks are interesting and their inclusion laudable, there is some repetition and confusion with respect to titles that could have been avoided with more discerning editing. These shortcomings aside, the disc continues the exemplary standard of sound recording evidenced in the previous discs. Photographs of the performers (working farmers taken from their midday chores by the visiting collectors) are also included, plus an exquisite period photograph of Stack Ryan posing for the camera in his Sunday best. Similarly, the photo collage in the first CD by O'Sullivan and McMahon contains an interesting contrast between historical black and white prints taken in 1974 and color prints taken when Shay Fogarty went back to visit O'Sullivan and his family thirty-two years after the field trip of Tams and Wayne. One of these modern prints shows Bernard and his grandson both playing concertinas—a portent for some musical continuity in the land of the affluent Celtic Tiger.

***Irish Traditional Concertina Styles—Twelve great players from the 1970s*** (FCLAR06, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12TFRS 506). This CD represents a veritable 'Who's Who' of the Irish concertina in the 1970s. There are twenty-two tracks from twelve players recorded in 1974 and released on LP in 1975, as well as eight additional tracks from Chris Droney, the Russell family, Tommy McMahon, and Bernard O'Sullivan. Clare players dominate this compendium: among them are Paddy Murphy, Sonny Murray, Gerald Haugh, Solus Lillis, Tom Carey, Chris Droney, Pakie Russell, Tommy McMahon, and Bernard O'Sullivan. Two younger Dublin players, Seán O'Dwyer and Mícheál MacAogáin, (both transplants from west Cork and Sligo), as well as Seán O'Dwyer's mother, Ella Mae O'Dwyer (a native of west

Limerick who married and raised a family in Ardgroom on the Beara peninsula in west Cork), fill the ranks of the non-Clare cohort.

This CD is a musical *tour de force* that spans the spectrum from the most sophisticated modern masters of the day (Paddy Murphy) to quaint older stylists (Chris Droney and Ella Mae O'Dwyer). Occupying the ground between these two poles were players like Sonny Murray, Tom Carey, and Gerald Haugh. There was also a 'middle generation' between the senior figures whose styles were brought to fruition on cheaper German concertinas and the younger players of today who can afford expensive Anglo-German instruments (made by Jeffries and Wheatstone) that lent themselves to complex fingering techniques and more challenging repertoires. Although paltry in comparison to the man's standing at the apex of modern Irish concertina music, the two tracks recorded by Paddy Murphy of Kilmaley—*Kit O'Mahoney's Jig* and *The Mason Apron*—represent only a modicum in a colossal store of highly-sophisticated concertina music. The disappointing lack of ethnobiographical detail in the liner notes (along with several historical inaccuracies) does nothing to elevate Murphy to his rightful place in the pantheon of Irish concertina music. Thankfully, the gaping lacuna in this compendium was finally redressed in 2007 with the release of an extensive historic recording of Paddy Murphy's music by the San Francisco-based Celtic Crossings label, which was launched to popular acclaim by Cathal Goan, Director General of RTE (Irish National Television) in Clare in December 2007. (Full details can be downloaded from: [www.celticcrossings.com](http://www.celticcrossings.com) and [www.paddymurphy.eu](http://www.paddymurphy.eu).)

Sonny Murray, another celebrated west Clare player from Knockalough near Kilmihil, is also featured on this final disc. An exemplary player with a considerable repertoire of tunes (on whistle and concertina), Murray's style is rich in melodic detail and polished in its use of 'long note' phrasing, double-octave variations, and rhythmic cadences. Ironically, all of his contributions are misrepresented by the editors, not least in their lack of attention to detail in titles and inclusiveness. In the opening track, he is listed as playing *The King of the Clans* reel, whereas, in fact, he plays *Christmas Eve* (also known as *Tommy Coen's Reel*). *The King of the Clans* appears (unlisted) in track 10, after a tune incorrectly titled *The Morning Dew*. The correct title of the latter is *The Daisy Field*, composed by Aughrim Slopes fiddler Paddy Kelly. In track 9, Murray is listed as playing *Chancy Cheory* and *West Along the Road*, whereas the standard vernacular titles for these tunes in Clare are *Seán sa Cheo* (attributed to Donegal fiddler Neilie Boyle) and *Come West Along the Road*. Incidentally, *The*

*London Lassies*, which he plays to close the suite, is totally missing from the track index. In the thirty-two-year window since the initial launch of the series in 1975 and its update to CD status in 2007, it is quite inexcusable that it never occurred to the editors to check tune titles or proof the audio files for accurate disclosure of their contents.

The inclusion of Ella Mae O'Dwyer—the only female concertina player in the series—was a welcome return to the older milieu of the German concertina, which enjoyed widespread currency in rural communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She is featured on seven tracks that include jigs, reels, a march, a barn dance, and a number of polkas that are spuriously described by the editors as 'set tunes' and 'set dances' for reasons known only to themselves. Her playing of the jigs *Jenny's Beaver Hat*, popularly known as *Jerry's Beaver Hat*, and *The Humours of Glendart*, also known as *East of Glendart* (neither of which feature in the tune names), is exquisite. Again, the editorial guardians fail to identify the barn dance in track 8 as *The Stack of Barley*, which is known to virtually every school child in Ireland who ever held a traditional instrument. Similarly, the barn dance referred to as the *Ardgroom Set* (which may or may not be a contrived title) is known in Sliabh Luachra (the childhood home of Mrs. O'Dwyer) as *Johnny Leary's Polka*, *Tournmore*, or *Wallace's Cross*. A modicum of editorial cross-checking could have unearthed this information that would have added exponentially to the 'scholarly' credibility of the project.

This compendium also features the duo playing of Tom Carey and Solus Lillis, who contributed three selections to the disc: *The Clare Jig (Stack Ryan's)*, *Apples in Winter*, and a track simply cited as *Reels*. Here again, ethnomusicological accuracy is marred by a lack of editorial vigilance, as tunes and titles fail to register with the collectors. Track 6, generically titled *Reels* contains *The Heathery Breeze* (which appears twice previously in the collection—played by John Kelly and the Russell Family—and should have been familiar to the editors at this point) and *The New Copperplate*, another popular standard. Likewise, *Apples in Winter* is followed by *The Boys of the Town* and *The Carraroe Jig*, neither of which is identified by our editors.

The 'Spot-the-Mis(un)named-Tune' safari continues throughout the remainder of the compendium. Track 25 cites Chris Droney playing *The Dublin Reel*, whereas he actually plays *Jim McCormick's Reel* (a four-part tune named after a celebrated flute player with the Kilfenora Céilí Band). While part of the tune is a transposed cognate of *The Dublin*

*Reel* (from D major to G major), the overall melody is quite distinct and recognized by most of the informed Irish traditional music community as being a different tune from the three-part *Dublin Reel*. In track 27, the Russell brothers are listed as playing *The Skylark*, whereas, in fact, they play *The Scholar*, a reel made famous by Miltown Malbay piper Willie Clancy. Few informed editors would confuse both pieces. In track 18, Solus Lillis is cited as playing an *Air from Thomas Moor* (which should read *Thomas Moore*, one of the most illustrious musical figures of the Regency period). Despite Solus's interpretative license, the piece bears an uncanny resemblance to the Gaelic air *Caoine Cill Cháis* (especially in the second part). This eighteenth-century song mourns the destruction of Ireland's native forests, such as those around Cill Cháis in south Tipperary, during the Elizabethan conquest in the sixteenth century. Sadly, these forests were never replenished by their exploiters.

### **Lacunae and Selectivity in the Fieldwork**

Editorial quibbling aside, the definitive pretensions of *The Clare Set* are also laid bare by other key inconsistencies. At a time when women were becoming increasingly visible in Irish traditional music (and when the Women's Movement was particularly active in Irish social, political, and intellectual life), it is quite astonishing that the collectors could not have seen their way to include any more than one female performer, Ella Mae O'Dwyer (two, if one counts guitarist Bernadette O'Sullivan), in this project. As mentioned already, Clare was awash with female performers in the 1970s, such as Mary King, Mary Lynch, Bridget Dineen, Molly Carthy, Nora Neylon, and Susan Whelan, all of whom were within easy access (a ten-mile radius) of Wayne and Tams at the time of their fieldwork. While social mores may have prevented some of these ladies from performing in public, an effort to record some of them in their own homes (as was the case of their male cohorts who qualified for inclusion) may have presented a more balanced gender profile. When, a decade afterwards, I conducted my own ethnomusicological fieldwork in Clare, I interviewed fifteen elderly female performers, four of whom lived to be over one-hundred years: Susan Whelan from Moy, Bridget Dinan from Clooney, Margaret Dooley from Knockjames and Molly Carthy from Lisroe, who was still playing a week before she died at the age of 104 in December 2000. Sadly, not one of these performers was ever sought out by broadcasters, collectors, or archivists before I interviewed them in the years 1985-1988. Similarly, in choosing to ignore young performers, the collection created the (unintended) impression of a last-ditch rescue operation. In the 1970s, young Clare players like Noel Hill, Ann Droney, Nuala Hill,

Jacqui McCarthy, and a very young Mary McNamara were all beginning to come to national prominence at *fleadhanna* and Slógadh competitions. A nod in their direction by Wayne and Tams may have helped to reinforce their confidence and affirm their place within the growing repository of Irish concertina music. Emigrant Clare players are also conspicuously absent from the grid, among them, Tommy McCarthy from Sheane, who lived in London and who, according to Wayne, had 'transformed the pub sessions scene in the capital' (see *From here to Clare—winter 1974. Some notes by Neil Wayne*). Having supplied the names and addresses of his musical neighbours in west Clare to Neil Wayne, McCarthy was probably the initial catalyst that led to this mammoth collection. His inclusion in the final product would have been a grateful gesture for the generosity that inspired the journey.

Topographical myopia is also a disconcerting issue. Although they aspired to present a *definitive* archive of Clare concertina music (and even claimed non-Clare musicians like Johnny Doran, a Wicklow man, and Michelle O'Sullivan, a Kerry woman, for the Banner County), the collectors devoted most of their time and energy to south west and north west Clare. The part of Clare that lies east of the Fergus river valley (almost half of the landmass) found no place at all in the collection. In ignoring east Clare, Wayne and Tams missed a formidable treasury of concertina music, for it was a time when east Clare masters like 'Young' John Naughton, Bridget Dinan, Mickey Donoghue, Margaret Dooley (who was recorded by the BBC on her hundredth birthday), John Gorman, and Paddy Shaughnessy were all still in their prime. While their music found its way into my own field collections (housed in Queen's University, Belfast), it also found a global voice in the fiddling of Martin Hayes and the concertina playing of Mary McNamara. Had these masters featured to any extent in this monumental collection, *The Clare Set* could at least justify some claim to being a *definitive* portrait of Clare music. Alas, such claims remain untenable.

#### NOTES

1. See Brian Ó Dalaigh, ed., *The Stranger's Gaze: Travels in County Clare 1534-1950* (Ennis: Clasp Press, 1998); Kieran Sheedy, ed., *The Clare Anthology* (Ennis: Clasp Press, 1999).
2. See Conrad Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), and Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940).
3. One of the most celebrated albums of Irish traditional music, *Street Songs and Fiddle Tunes of Ireland*, which featured the Cork street singer Margaret Barry

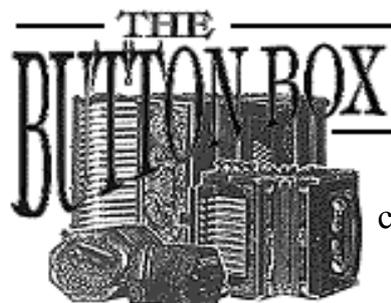
and Sligo fiddler Michael Gorman (both of whom were based in London), was issued by Topic in 1958. For a history of Topic Records, see Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival 1944-2002* (Aldershot [UK] and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

4. Michael Coady, *The Well of Spring Water: A Memoir of Packie and Micho Russell of Doolin, Co. Clare*, (Carrick-on-Suir: Private Publication, 1996), 40.

5. William B. Ryan, *Ryan's Mammoth Collection: 1050 Reel and Jigs, Horn-pipes, Clogs, Walk-arounds, Essences, Strathspeys, Highland Flings and Contra Dances, with Flings and How to Play Them* (Boston: Elias Howe, 1883; reissued by Patrick Sky, St. Louis: Mel Bay Publications, 1995), 75.

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