
TA GACH RUD TO HIONTACH

OR, 'EVERYTHING IS GREAT,' SAYS PADDY MOLONEY

By DOUG HEROLD

Freeman staff

PADDY Moloney goes at life like a reel — excited, relentless, repetitive, digressing. Call it a personality type. Or call it Celtic blood straining against 20th-century veins, fierce to conquer the world or remake it in song.

Maloney has done a bit of both.

Last week, this chief of the Chieftains stopped for a respite at his home in Dublin — 24 hours sandwiched between a television shoot in London and a grueling week that includes a show in Helsinki and the kickoff of a 22-stop American tour. The U.S. itinerary, which peaks at Carnegie Hall on St. Patrick's Day, brings the Chieftains down the Hudson Valley for an 8 p.m. concert tonight at Poughkeepsie's Bardavon Opera House.

Despite the opportunity to collapse, Moloney was weeks ahead of his schedule — rattling off dates, working projects, directions. A two-track session for Van Morrison's upcoming album has just spawned a single and a video. "Over the Sea to Skye," a second collaboration with flutist James Galway, is ranked ninth on European album charts. In May, the Chieftains spend 10 days with the Cincinnati Ballet Company, performing a score by Moloney. After that, it's east to join the Boston Pops and pick up a Gold Award from the Eire Society of Boston (past recipients: J.F.K., Maureen O'Hara). In June, The Chieftains tour Japan.

How does a traditional Irish band manage to frequent major sites (Royal Albert Hall, the U.S. Capitol Building, Dublin's Slane Castle), before major audiences (the Pope, for instance, with 1.3 million friends) through the better part of three decades?

There is Moloney's near-frenetic character.

"I can't believe it's been 29 years," he says, barely slowing from his grocery list of engagements. "After all this time, we're enjoying ourselves more than ever."

If the attitude sounds unusual against the shatter-prone backdrop of the recording industry, it is no less an anomaly than the Chieftains' approach.

In the past decade, Moloney has performed, recorded or collaborated with a miscellany of contemporary artists — Art Garfunkel, Dan Fogelberg, former Eagles drummer Don Henley, Gary Moore, Ultravox, Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler and others. Last summer, at the request of Pink Floyd veteran Roger Waters, the Chieftains played in a Berlin production of the “The Wall” that also featured Sinéad O’Connor and a host of rockers.

Yet the Chieftains remain a gospel, almost missionary, endeavor, unwilling to sacrifice the authenticity of Celtic music for more migratory preferences. Theirs is the music of Gallaecia — Ireland, Scotland, Brittany and other lands once influenced or populated by Celts, Picts and their kin.

"The bands that seek us out usually have a very good idea of what we're about," Moloney says. "I think maybe one or two times over the past 15 years I've listened to a tape and said, 'That's not for us.'"

The Chieftains' grounding in ancient music, typified by Moloney's work with whistles and Uilleann pipes, certainly appeals to a segment of contemporary artists, but it has been equally embraced in high-art circles. The Chieftains have performed with the National Symphony, and the symphonies of Milwaukee, Toronto and Utah, to name a few. They've also weaved dance into the repertoire, beginning in 1986 with a suite choreographed by Patricia Coleman and performed at Royce Hall in Los Angeles and Washington's Kennedy Center.

Film, too, has been good to this six-member band. In 1976, the Chieftan-laden score to "Barry Lyndon" won an Academy Award and launched a string of Moloney projects on big and little screens, including "Tristan and Isolde," with Richard Burton, and "The Year of the French."

The Chieftains' largely instrumental music spans cultures as well as media. In 1983, the band appeared in Beijing, Shanghai and the Heavenly City of Suzhou, performing with a Chinese folk orchestra and becoming the first group ever to play at the Great Wall. The music, Moloney says, "speaks for itself. It is very much an international language."

The music also invokes the image of an Ireland fused by a single past, in contrast to the flood of alternative work illustrating the strife in the North.

"The groups that are into that in a strong way are singing songs of the past 50 or 60 years ... Rousing chorus songs are fine, but musically, I'm not interested in them at all.

"We play as much in the North as in the South," Moloney says. "And we have fans in both communities in the North. It's always been one of my policies to stay out of religion and politics. The music and enjoyment is too important."

Given the bridging of cultures and eras, it's hardly surprising the Republic named the Chieftains official Musical Ambassadors for Ireland in 1989. But while their publicists claim it's the highest honor ever bestowed by a government on a musical group, Moloney hints that it may be more pomp than circumstance: "They gave us some leather bags that say Ambassador' on them."

Still, he's not complaining, nor are the Chieftains. Recently Moloney commented, "We have a saying in Ireland, 'Ta gach rud to hiontach,' which loosely translated means 'everything is great'—and that's how we feel."

The Chieftains' performance tonight at Poughkeepsie's Bardavan Opera House, 35 Market St., will feature dancing by 19-year-old Jean Butler of New Jersey, winner of the 1989 Step Dancing Championship. Tickets are \$22.

COVER STORY Daily Freeman

'Ta gach rud to hiontach'

Or, 'Everything is great,' says Paddy Moloney

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PADDY Moloney goes at life like a real — excited, relaxed, repetitive, depressing. Call it a personality type. Or call it Celtic blood straining against 20th-century vices. Here to conquer the world or remake it in song.

Moloney has done a bit of both. Last week, this chief of the Chieftains stopped for a respite at his home in Dublin — 24 hours sandwiched between a television shoot in London and a grueling week that includes a show in Helsinki and the kickoff of a 22-stop American tour. The 52-year-old Moloney, which peaks at Carnegie Hall on St. Patrick's Day, brings the Chieftains down the Hudson Valley for an 8 p.m. concert tonight at Poughkeepsie's Bardavan Opera House.

Despite the opportunity to collapse, Moloney was weeks ahead of his schedule — sitting off dates, working papers, directions. A two-track session for Van Morrison's upcoming album has just covered a single and a video "Give the Sun a Shake," a second collaboration with Dublin's James Galway, is talked about in European album charts. In May, the Chieftains spent 10 days with the Cincinnati Ballet Company, performing a score by Moloney. After that, it's east to join the Boston Pops and pick up a Gold Award from the Irish Society of Boston (past recipients: J.P.K. Maureen O'Hara). In June, the Chieftains tour Japan.

How does a traditional Irish band manage to recruit major acts to Royal Albert Hall, the U.S. Capitol Building, Dublin's Slane Castle, and major universities in Paris, for instance, with 1.3 million records through the better part of three decades?

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Yet the Chieftains remain a gospel, almost missionary, endeavor, unwilling to succumb to the seductiveness of Celtic music for more migratory preferences. There is the music of Ireland — Ireland, Scotland, Ulster and other lands once influenced or populated by Celtic, Pictic and their kin.

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