

Ar Lorg na Laochra – On the Shoulders of Giants

Tiarnan Ó Duinnchinn & Laoise Kelly

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10. Reels: New-Mown Meadows, Black Mare of Fanad, Fred Finn’s
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01 March & double jig: O’Sullivan’s March, The Humours of Killarney

‘O’Sullivan’s March’ was first published in London in the 1650s as ‘An Irish Rant’, and it has spread widely since, being known in Ireland, Scotland and North America as a dance tune and in England and Ireland as the air of the song ‘There was an Old Woman Tossed up in a Basket’. We heard the second tune from Leitrim piper Brian McNamara. Its older title is ‘An Síoda atá id’ Bhallait, a Bhuachail?’ (is there silk in your satchel, boy?) from a traditional song about an encounter between a girl and a travelling scholar. Like many of our tunes, it probably originated in the 19th century and is of unknown authorship. This version seems to have come into circulation from the playing of the Sliabh Luachra fiddle player Denis Murphy (1910–74).

02 Song air & reel: Fáinne Geal an Lae, The Lady’s Cup of Tea

Both versions of these melodies are from *Tunes of the Munster Pipers* (nos 1 & 107), published by the Irish Traditional Music Archive from the music manuscripts noted from pre-Famine oral tradition by the Rev. James Goodman (1828–96) of west Kerry and Cork. They are both now widely played after being unheard for over a century. ‘Fáinne Geal an Lae’ (the bright dawning of the day) is the air of an old love song set in Killarney, Co Kerry.

03. Polkas: Ó Neillí, Neillí, A Finnish polka, The New Roundabout, Goodman’s Polka

We adapted the first from the air of a comic song from Kerry about the cold weather. The Finnish polka we heard from the piper and flute player Iain McDonald from Moidart, Scotland. ‘The New Roundabout’ was composed by Cork accordion player Dave Hennessy in the late 1980s when road roundabouts were beginning to proliferate in Ireland. We have given its title to the final tune, which comes from *Tunes of the Munster Pipers* (no 549) where it is simply entitled ‘Polka’.

04 Song air & double jig: Bó na Leathadhairce, Strop the Razor

‘Bó na Leathadhairce’ (the cow with one horn) is the air of a song from Uíbh Ráthach in Co Kerry which has been in print since the early 20th century. It is ostensibly about a man’s sheep but is generally taken as being a coded reference to a poteen still. ‘Strop the Razor’, also commonly known as ‘Petticoat Loose’, has been popular with uilleann pipers since the 19th century.

05. Highland & reels: A Teelin highland, Drowsy Maggie, The Ballinamore Reel

Highlands are Co Donegal adaptations of the Scottish strathspey rhythm. This one is associated with Teelin in the south-west of the county where it is attributed to a John Cassidy who died in 1924. ‘Drowsy Maggie’ has been popular since the 18th century in many versions; this version is a northern one which may have come from the Donegal travelling fiddle player John Doherty (1900–80). We heard ‘The Ballinamore Reel’ played by Donegal accordion player Dermot Byrne. It was played by the Clare fiddle player John Kelly (1912–89) as ‘The Baltimore Reel’ and is also known as ‘The Balmoral Reel’

06. Barn dances: Maggie’s Lilt, She Said She Couldn’t Dance, McConnell’s

A selection we picked up in Donegal of tunes for the two-hand dances popular there. The first came originally from the playing of Gaoth Dobhair, Co Donegal, fiddle player Proinsias Ó Maonaigh (1922–2006) who learned it from his mother Roise Bheag Roise Móire. The second is often played in highland rhythm. It may originally have been called ‘Ringle Dingle Daddy’ but it has its present name from the song ‘In the Town of Ballybay’, written to it about 1977 by Co Armagh singer Tommy Makem (1932–2007). The third may possibly have got its name from the travelling Donegal fiddle players Alec and Mickey McConnell, uncles of John Doherty who died in the 1930s.

07. Harp air: Catherine Ogie

A 17th-century air of Scottish origin which has long been played in Ireland and in many versions. This version is from *Tunes of the Munster Pipers* (no 1036). The tune is sometimes misattributed to the 18th-century harper-composer Turlough Carolan who doubtless played it.

08. Strathspey & reel: Cawdor Fair, The Spirits of Wine

‘Cawdor Fair’ is a strathspey from Cape Breton. John Doherty is the source for all the current renditions of the reel. His version can be heard on the 1996 Claddagh CD *The Floating Bow*.

09. Slip jig & double jigs: Paddy Hiúdaí Byrne’s, Darby Gallagher’s, Con Cassidy’s

Paddy Hiúdaí Byrne of Glencolmcille, Co Donegal, gave the first two tunes to his neighbour James Byrne (1946–2008) who popularised it through his 1990 Claddagh CD *The Road to Glenlough*. The third tune comes from the playing of the Teelin fiddle player Con Cassidy (1909–1994), heard on the 2007 *Cairdeas na bhFidléirí* CD of his music.

10. Reels: The New-Mown Meadows, The Black Mare of Fanad, Fred Finn’s

The first reel is a 19th-century tune nowadays very popular among *sean-nós* dancers; we associate it with the Conamara accordion player Johnny Connolly. John Doherty was the source for ‘The Black Mare of Fanad’ which he accompanied with a related ghost story. Fred Finn (1919–86), a fiddle player from Killavil, Co Sligo, became nationally known at *fleadhanna ceoil* in the mid-century.

11. Slip jigs: Comb your Hair and Curl it, The Dusty Miller, The Rocky Road to Dublin

Slip jigs are jigs in 9/8 time that were once popular among exhibition stepdancers but are now only infrequently played by musicians. Most were composed in the 19th century, but the second one here was in circulation in the 18th.

12. Song air: Méilte Cheann Dubhrann

This melody was collected in 1903 by the Belfast musician Herbert Hughes from a Cáit Ní Dhubhthaigh, a Donegal singer who had learned it from a ballad singer at a fair in Churchhill. It is often called 'The Blue Hills of Antrim' from a praise song written to it at the time by the Belfast poet Joseph Campbell. The 'Méilte Cheann Dubhrann' title is from a later song of emigration written to the air by the Rann na Feirste, Co Donegal, writer Séamus Ó Grianna.

13. Barn dances: Kitty Seán Cunningham's, Jamesie Gannon's, If There Weren't Any Women in the World

The first barn dance we got from the lilting of Kitty Seán Cunningham of Teelin, who is a source of tunes for many musicians. It was known to other Donegal musicians and may have come from ballroom sheet music. The other two are popular tunes we picked up at sessions. They doubtless came into circulation from 78s recorded in New York in the 1920s and 1930s by the Sligo fiddle players Michael Coleman, James Morrison and Paddy Killoran.

With thanks for information to Nicholas Carolan, Jackie Small and Rónán Galvin of the Irish Traditional Music Archive, and also to Ríónach uí Ógáin, Matt Cranitch, Dave Hennessy and Seán Donnelly.