

The Lark In The Clear Air

Irish Traditional Music

Played On Small Instruments

- 1 **Gillan's Apples And The Prize Jig**
John Doonan *Whistle*, John Wright *Jew's Harp*
- 2 **The Shaskeen Reel**
John Wright *Jew's Harp*
- 3 **The Coolin (Air)**
Noel Pepper *Mouth Organ*
- 4 **Boys Of The Lough And The Trip To Durrow (Jigs)**
Noel Pepper *Mouth Organ*, Paddy Moran *Flute*
- 5 **Give Me Your Hand (Air)**
John Doonan *Piccolo*
- 6 **Banish Misfortune (Jig)**
John, Dave And Mike Wright *Jew's Harps*
- 7 **The Maid Behind The Bar (Reel)**
John, Dave And Mike Wright *Jew's Harps*, Paddy Neylan *Spoons*
- 8 **Dunphy's Hornpipe And The Derry Hornpipe**
John Doonan *Piccolo*
- 9 **St. Anne's Reel**
Noel Pepper *Mouth Organ* Paddy Moran *Flute*
- 10 **The Blackbird (Hornpipe)**
John Doonan *Piccolo*
- 11 **The Spalpeen's Lament (Air)**
John Doonan *Piccolo*
- 12 **Miss Mcleod And The Flowers Of Edinburgh (Reels)**
John Doonan *Piccolo*, John Wright *Jew's Harp*
- 13 **The Foxhunters' Jig**
John, Dave And Mike Wright *Jew's Harps*
- 14 **The Skylark And Tie The Bonnet (Reels)**
John Wright *Jew's Harp*
- 15 **Clancy's Fancy (Jig)**
John Wright *Jew's Harp*
- 16 **The Lark In The Clear Air (Air)**
Noel Pepper *Mouth Organ*
- 17 **Unnamed Jig**
Noel Pepper *Mouth Organ*, Paddy Moran *Flute*
- 18 **Cherish The Ladies And Father O'Flynn Jigs**
John Doonan *Piccolo*, Paddy Moran *Flute*, Paddy Neylan *Spoons*,
Noel Pepper *Mouth Organ*, John Wright *Jew's Harp*

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Produced by Tony Engle
Sleeve notes by A.L. Lloyd
Sleeve design by Ken Lees



ABOUT THE PLAYERS

JOHN DOONAN was born in Hebburn, Co. Durham, of Irish parents (his father came from Pettigo, near Lough Erne, on the Donnegal-Fermanagh border). Both father and grandfather were fiddlers, and as a boy John taught himself to play fiddle, mandolin, flute and piano. Flute was his preferred instrument. About 1946, John (a welding engineer by trade), started a ceili band of five fiddles (including his father), three concert flutes, and drums. In the absence of microphones, John felt the sound of his flute wasn't coming through, so he switched to the more penetrating piccolo, and has remained with it ever since. Most of his large repertory comes from family or other players. He says: 'Irish musicians take little from print'.

JOHN WRIGHT was born in Leicester. He became interested in folk music while at the College of Art in Wolverhampton, and started out as a singer. About 1965 he took up the jew's harp in earnest, fired by BBC archive recordings of such masters as Angus Lawrie of Oban (who later taught him a few tricks in person). Other players who have impressed him are Patrick Devane of Carraroe, Co. Galway and a Fermanagh man, Thomas McManus, now living in Wolverhampton. Currently, John is living in Paris and working on the large collection of jew's harps from all parts of the world, deposited in the Musée de l'Homme. His brother Michael is a student at Newcastle University. David is a trainee instructor at a psychiatric hospital.

NOEL PEPPER, who now lives in London, was born in Skibereen, Co. Cork, but brought up in the North, in Newry, Co. Down. He has been playing the mouth organ since he was seven years old. Some of his tunes come from his father-in-law, Thomas Walsh of Westport, Co. Mayo, an accordion player who made several records for Parlophone in the early 1930s.

PADDY MORAN comes from Boyle, Co. Roscommon. He has a great store of traditional tunes in his head, and is an accomplished player of fiddle and tin whistle as well as flute.

Of **PADDY NEYLAN** the spoons player, Tony Engle reports: "I met him in the Favourite (North London pub) and have seen him neither before nor since." Ah well, let this disc be his immortality.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

This record comprises song airs and dance tunes played on modest instruments such as would fit in your pocket. It's always a pleasure when, for instance in a pub - Irish country or English city - there's a thread of instrumental music weaving through the bar conversation, and perhaps a man comes in, goes towards the musicians, fumbles in the depths of his overcoat and brings out a whistle, a mouth-organ, a piccolo, and he's off with the rest of the musicians in some rippling render of a jig or a reel from his home country, a music that's at once utterly private and amiably communal.

Doubtless John Doonan is right when he says: 'Irish musicians take little from print.' All the same, printed tune books have exercised fair control over the surviving repertory of Irish dance tunes. The large compilations of Petrie and Joyce went mostly on to the shelves of scholars, but popular collections such as O'Neill's *Music of Ireland* (1,850 melodies), and particularly his *Dance Music of Ireland* ('1001 Gems') published some four years later in 1907, had enormous influence on the repertory of Irish fiddlers, pipers, flute-players and others on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, the *Dance Music of Ireland* has been called 'the bible of traditional players', and it's no surprise that most of the pieces on this record are to be found in more or less identical form in the O'Neill compilations. O'Neill was born in West Cork in 1849. At sixteen, he ran away to sea, and landed up in the United States where he eventually joined the Chicago police force. By the time he retired, he had reached the rank of General Superintendent. He was a flute-player himself, with hundreds of tunes in his head, but no ability to write them down. He used his official position to sound out other Irishmen - policemen, stage artists, criminals even - for melodies to add to his store. A police colleague, Sergeant James O'Neill (no relation) from Belfast noted down the tunes for him in reasonable - though not always satisfactory - outline. Also, generous musicians lent Chief O'Neill their tune-books and manuscript collections.

One such collection came from a retired Chicago business man, John Gillan, originally of Co. Longford. From his manuscript we have *Gillan's Apples* (he called it *Apples in Winter*, but as there's another jig of that name, O'Neill re-christened Gillan's tune). One of the police chief's best informants was the former Co. Mayo fiddler John McFadden, whose version of the Connacht reel, the *Shaskeen*, is given here. O'Neill reckoned it one of the finest traditional tunes, little known and quite unpublished till he printed it (erroneously as a hornpipe) in *Music of Ireland*. incidentally, a photograph of McFadden and his bosom friend, the piper and police sergeant James Early, appears in the *Dance Music of Ireland* but the men's names are reversed.

John Doonan reports that *The Coolin* (or *Cuilin*) is a composition of Maurice O'Dugan who flourished in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and that the title refers to the hair-style of a blond girl. O'Neill gives the piece in an elaborate set of six variations, slow, moderate, and lively. The basic tune was used by Thomas Moore in his *Irish Melodies*, but as usual in a more insipid version than country players have. Noel Pepper learnt his set of it from an old Waterford fiddler, Charlie Sweeney, while *The Boys of the Lough* came to him from Paddy Moran. O'Neill had this tune from Bernard Delaney, an excellent piper, who was a postman when the bold captain first heard him in a Van Buren Street saloon, but O'Neill soon recruited him into the police force where he could associate closer with other good players.

Give Me Your Hand (No. 406 in *Music of Ireland*) is said to be a composition of Rory Dall O’Cathain, a blind harper whose period is roughly contemporaneous with Shakespeare’s. *Dunphy’s Hornpipe* is another O’Neill tune, a formerly unnamed piece re-christened after the Chicago fiddler who dictated it to Sgt. James O’Neill. *Banish Misfortune* (also called *The Little Bag of Meal* or *Nancy Hines*) was taken by O’Neill from the Tipperary fiddler Edward Cronin, of whom the police chief remarks: ‘In every variety of dance music he was a liberal and prolific contributor, and not only that, but a capable reader and writer of music also.’

John Doonan rates *The Blackbird* along with *Eileen Aroon* as among the oldest Irish melodies still current. Certainly in its song-air form *The Blackbird* has been known since Jacobite times, and its ‘political’ words were already printed on a broadside before 1720. In its hornpipe form, the tune is probably a bit more recent. The set given in *The Dance Music of Ireland* is from the family tradition of Sgt. James O’Neill.

It didn’t require any diligent collector to uncover and perpetuate *Miss McLeod’s Reel* (also called *Seanduine Dhota -The Burnt Old Man*), for as Francis O’Neill himself remarks, the tune is ‘universally hummed, lilted, whistled and played throughout Ireland, and in some parts of the country no other reel is heard’. Surprisingly enough, *The Flowers of Edinburgh* doesn’t appear - under that title anyway - in any O’Neill collection, though there’s a set of it, unusually good, in Petrie’s *Complete Collection of Irish Music*, noted from a Mary O’Donoghoe of Arranmore in 1857.

The Foxhunters’ Jig is the finale of a remarkable piece of programme music describing the course of a fox chase, with instrumental imitation of huntsmen’s horns, baying of hounds, death cry of fox, and the triumphal dance (the jig). O’Neill had it from the remarkable stage comedian and piper Patsy Tuohy whose gorgeous ripple-style of playing is embalmed on some early commercial gramophone records (Tuohy, in turn, took his version from one of the great Kerry pipers, one Stephenson).

Tie the Bonnet comes from O’Neill’s home country of West Cork (In fact from the next parish to Caheragh where he was born) though he’d never heard the tune till Abram Beamish played it to him in Chicago. John Wright learnt it from the (alas) late Willie Clancy, the fine Co. Clare piper. *Cherish the Ladies* is another tune that came to light from John Gillan’s manuscript, but Father O’Flynn was well known from print long before O’Neill’s time. A better title for this jig is *The Top of Cork Road*. A.P. Graves (father of Robert, the poet) found the tune in Joyce’s *Ancient Irish Music* (1873), set words to it, and called it *Father O’Flynn*. But as *Yorkshire Lassies* the jig had already appeared in several English collections in the 1770s and ’80s. As for the title piece, it was originally the air of a Gaelic song, translated into English by Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-1886), and popularized by the tenor John McCormack along with *My Lagan Love* and other pieces whose tunes are far more handsome than the words they’re saddled with.

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