



PADDY TUNNEY

The Mountain Streams

Where the Moorcocks Crow

- 1 The Mountain Streams where the Moorcocks Crow
- 2 The Wee Weaver
- 3 The Boys of Mullaghbawn
- 4 The Old Petticoat
- 5 Coinleach Glas An Fhomhair
- 6 Donall Og
- 7 The Reaping of the Rushes Green
- 8 One Morning in June
- 9 Lady Margaret
- 10 Inis Dhun Ramha
- 11 The Old Oak Tree
- 12 Drinking Good Whiskey
- 13 Sweet Omagh Town
- 14 The Green Fields of Canada

First published by Topic 1975

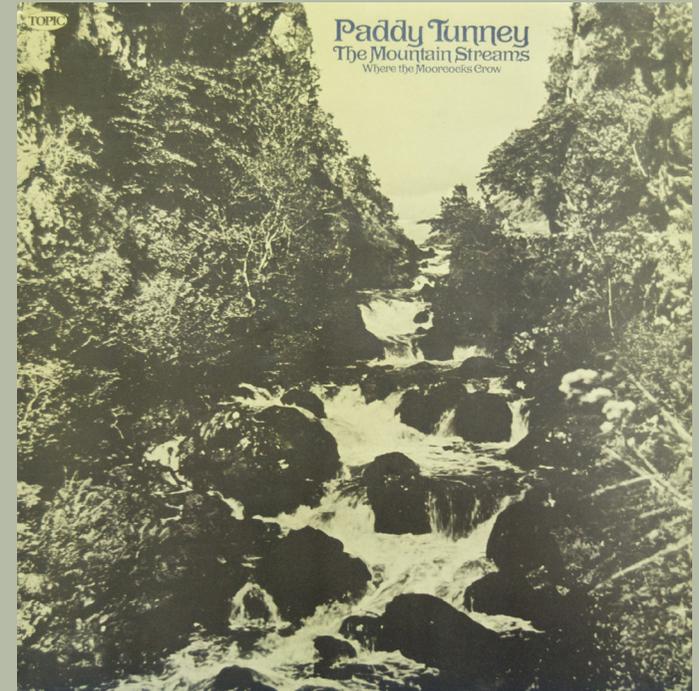
Production and sleeve design by Tony Engle

Recorded by Tony Engle & Tony Russell in London February 1975

Sleeve notes by Cathal O'Baoill

Front sleeve photograph by Popperfoto

Back sleeve photograph by Tony Russell



I first came into contact with the Tunneys when I was about eleven years old. At that time my father, Sean O'Baoill, was travelling the country with Peter Kennedy collecting songs for the BBC archive of folk music. Paddy Tunney's mother, Brigid, was one of the people whose recorded voice was played over to us when the two collectors could get home to Armagh. It was not long before we began to hear records of Paddy himself and since those days there is no doubt that he has established himself as a singer in a class of his own. One of Paddy's peculiarities is that he chooses a high proportion of songs that are hexatonic or pentatonic. In the present instance, these 'gapped' scales, along with the decorated styles of his singing, produce a homogeneity of character which alone would make this a record for the connoisseur of traditional singing.

The Mountain Streams where the Moorcocks Crow

This is one of the songs I heard as a boy from Paddy's mother. It is recorded by her on BBC No. 20022. Paddy has already recorded it for Topic (12T157) and Caedmon (TCI 142). You will find a version of this song in *Peter Kennedy's Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (No.136), though I must say I prefer this version to the Denis Cassley version recorded there. Whether or not it is ever proved that the song was originally composed in Ayrshire there is no doubt in my mind as to the Irishness of Paddy's version and performance.

The Wee Weaver

This is one of many tunes written in Ireland by home weavers. Previous to the home weavers, the main song writers of the people were the hedge-schoolmasters. The song is a simple tale of requited love, and it is this very quality of love story which links it to the pastourelle of the Provençal troubadours who usually 'rode out', where Willie and Mary could only 'roam'. The scene is set close to Lough Erne but could as well have been set in any part of Ireland where the weaver might have worked. The tune is pentatonic and in the lah mode. It was recorded by Brigid Tunney on BBC No.18527.

The Boys of Mullaghbawn

Another pentatonic in the lah mode, this song can be found in *PW Joyce's Old Irish Folk Music and Song* (No. 397). In that version you will find a subtonic (leading note) included which appears to make the tune hexatonic but neither Paddy nor anyone else I have heard ever sings it that way. The song tells of the transportation of a number of young men from South Armagh, whose crime is not mentioned though possibly they were connected with the rebellion of 1798. As Joyce says, the song is very characteristic of the 'Irish unlettered muse', whose key is to be found in the Gaelic tradition of 17th and 18th century Gaelic poets as 'Tri duilleog agus stoc' or 'three leaves and a stem'. Rhymes were internal and mainly acconantal and the poetry stressed:

On a MONday MORning EARly (Leaf one)
as my WANd'ring STEPS did LEAD me (Leaf three)
down BY a FARmer's STAtion (Leaf three)
of MEAdow AND green LAWN (Stem)

The endings of all the 'leaves' are feminine and of the 'stems', masculine.

The Old Petticoat

This tune approaches the more conventional scales of the western hemisphere, but as you might expect with Paddy, does not quite arrive, ending as it does on re. One of Paddy's many attainments is that of All Ireland Championship in liling. It is therefore not surprising that we should get an example of *port a'beil*, or mouth music. This is not a 'song' in the strict sense, but a mixture of nonsense-syllables with apparently sensible words. In such pieces there is only a tenuous link between one verse and the next. The fact is that the lilter is expected to put in whatever words or verses he may think appropriate to his audience. This song isn't quite the thing for the convent parlour, any more than the little Scottish port a'beil *Tail toddle* would be.

Coinleach Ghlas An Fhomhair

Re mode hexatonic. In common with many who love Irish traditional music, Paddy looks to Gaelic songs as the source of the best aspects in Irish singing. *Coinleach Ghlas An Fhomhair* is the story of a young man who first meets his love in the green autumn stubble, speaks of his determination to marry her and of her beauties. The English adaptation of the song is quite faithful to the original Gaelic, which can be found in *Cnussacht de Cheoltai Uladh* by Sean O'Baoighill or in *Ceolta Gael* by Manus and Sean Og O'Baoill.

Donall Og

There are only two songs on the early part of the collection which are diatonic in the doh or conventional major mode, and it is odd that this one should probably be the oldest of them all. This song is sufficiently remarkable to have caused Seosamh O' Duibhginn to write a whole book about it. Paddy's version of the tune is akin to that given in Alfred Moffat's *Minstrelsy of Ireland* (310). As O'Duibhginn says, the song is extremely old, perhaps referring to the Donall Og who became Prince in Donegal in 1258. Certainly the strength of the tune, the beauty of the imagery and the poetic character of the language lead one to think that the song was written by a professional bard.

The Reaping of the Rushes Green

Re mode. The source of innumerable pieces of roughly the same title is a song called *An Binsin Luaichre* or *The Bench of Rushes*. A 'binse' is a stone seat or bench once very common outside Irish doors. These benches, thanks to the climate, were either too hot, too wet or too cold to sit on, so that a cushion of sorts had to be put on them. A handful or two of rushes served as an insulator. The story tells of a young girl who was cutting such a bunch of rushes when the hero arrived. Paddy's English adaptation of the song faithfully follows the Gaelic original. Out of the title came a great number of similar titles such as *The Bunch of Rushes*, *The Bonny Bunch of Roses* and the *Banks of the Roses*. As you can see the titles are related, but though the tune is sometimes retained the words go very far afield, even in one case to the length of taking the Bunch of Roses as an image of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland which Bonaparte wanted to capture.

One Morning in June

Paddy here uses the tune of 'The Bould Thady Quill for a song which can be found in different forms in *Ceolta Gael* by Sean Og and Manus O'Baoill. In the version in *Ceolra Gael* the song is macaronic with Gaelic and English mixed freely as follows:

One morning in June agus me
ag dul ag spaisteoreacht
Casadh liom cailin is ba ro-dheas a gnaoi
She was so handsome do thuit me i ngra leithe
is d'fhag si an arraing tri cheart ar mo chroi, etc.

This type of song hails from the period when Irish was being gradually replaced by English as the spoken language of most Irish people.

Lady Margaret

This is a hexatonic lah mode version of the well known English ballad *Lady Margaret and Sweet William*. This ballad is by no means alone in its popularity among Irish singers as a song of foreign origin. The magic of such songs as this, *Lord Randall*, *Edward*, *The Cruel Mother* and so on, was strong enough not only to go with the English to America and Australia but to break into the popular repertoire of the native Irish. Strangely enough, the song repertoire of Ireland is not very well supplied with ghost stories, for all the popularity of 'She moved through the fair', and it may be the ghosts in the *Cruel Ship's Carpenter* and this ballad that made them particularly attractive.

Inis Dhun Ramha

Here is a song of characteristically Irish type. Whereas the tune is generally a simple doh mode, the introduction of the flattened seventh at the end of the first lines gives the impression that it is going to be a soh mode tune. This change of modality, however temporary, is very common in Irish music and constitutes in modal music the same type of harmonic interest as modulation does in tonally-based music. The first verse is a wish that the lover could elope with his beloved to the mythical town of Inis Dhun Ramha. I say mythical, because it is impossible to view ships from any point in the Finn Valley, which runs from the eastern side of the Donegal Mountains to the southern end of the Valley of the Foyle. Still, I suppose when a man is in love his geography is entitled to lapses. The rest of the song is a declaration of dedicated enthusiasm for the loved one and an incidental disregard for the social proprieties.

The Old Oak Tree

This gruesome tale of murder and horror is rescued only by the fact that it is sung to a version of a well known hexatonic re mode tune called *Spancel Hill*. The song is much liked in Fermanagh and Tyrone, but I cannot bring myself to like it at all.

Drinking Strong Whiskey

Paddy Tunney is a non-drinking man, but he sings this very drunk song with the enthusiasm of one much under the influence. I have not the foggiest idea what the song is supposed to be about except that it is an ill-remembered version of a conversation between a drunk and the devil. There are signs in it that it was a hedge-schoolmaster's song (for instance, the reference to Cerberus, the gate-keeper of hell) but probably it was more popular with drinkers than with those whose main interest was the story line.

Sweet Omagh Town

Omagh is a large town in the west of County Tyrone and is strikingly beautiful to its inhabitants, as this song suggests. Local pride is always a major factor in the popularity of songs but it is rarely expressed so beautifully as in this song. The metre derives from a Gaelic metre called 'Ocht fhoclach beag' and depends heavily on internal rhymes. Consider this pair of lines:

From sweet Dungannon to Ballyshannon, from
Cullyhanna to old Arboe
I have roamed and rambled, caroused and gambled
where songs did thunder and whiskey flow.

Not only do you have rhymes at the line ends but the assonances within the lines make music of the lines even if there were no tune with the words. The tune Paddy uses with this song is the one PW Joyce gives for *Castlehyde* which has a similar profusion of rhymes and assonances.

The Green Fields of Canada

Though it is very pleasant to hear a song of emigration taking such a down-to-earth attitude to leaving home, I am in some doubt as to the origin of this song. Taking into account the propensity of folk poets for mentioning the place in which they wrote their songs it is strange that the poet here mentions only 'the groves of Shillelagh and Shamrock.' The combination of these two in reference to Ireland generally indicates American rather than native Irish origin. The willingness of the singer to welcome all-comers to his 'home in the green fields of America' also points in that direction. Again the singing and the tunes are Irish and if a song can be taken from Ireland to America there is no reason why the traffic cannot be two-way.

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The Grove,
Lisnennan,
Letterkenny,
Co. Donegal.
26th September, 1974.

Mr. A. Engle,
Director,
Topic Records Limited,
27, Nassington Road,
LONDON. NW3/2TX.

Dear Tony Engle,

I hope your are well and that Topic is still issuing good folk and traditional records. It appears that there is a slight run coming on my records or songs it might be more correct to say.

Anyhow, I am London bound next February from the 15th to the 21st God willing for some folk concerts around the clubs.

I should very much like to make another record and there is a growing demand here for me to sing some of the songs in Gaelic. I have for so far resisted overtures from Gael Linn in this respect as I feel that my loyalty is to my old company.

Perhaps you could arrange something on these lines.

The songs I would like to put on this L.P. are -

- ✓1. The Mountain Streams Where The Moorcocks Crow.
- ✓2. Sweet Omagh Town.
- ✓3. The Wee Weaver.
- ✓4. The Blackbird (Jacobite Ballad)
5. The Heart-Broke Heyro (Translation from the Irish by myself)
6. Sweet Erin The Green.
- ✓7. Oul' Arboe.
- ✓8. The Reaping Of The Rushes Green.
9. The Old Oak Tree. (Murder Ballad)
- ✓10. Connlach Ghlas An Fhomhair (The Green Harvest Stubble)
- ✓11. An Buinnean Buidhe (The Yellow Bittern)
- ✓12. Ta Me 'Mo Shuidhe (I Am Awake)
13. Uir- Chill a' Chreagain.
14. Bean An Fhir Ruaidh (The Red-Haired Man's Wife

Ovrt/

2.

15. Roll Away Raggie Taggle (A Tinker Song of My Own Composition)
- ✓16. The Twisting Of The Rope (Translation of Casadh an tSugain made by myself)
17. Mo Bhron Ar An Fharraidge (My Sorrow On The Sea)

We should have a pick and choice in these. Regarding the Mountain Streams I did sing it on The Man of Songs - Folk Lrgacy Vermont U. S. A. in 1961-2 but it is not out of contract and I have never given this wonderful song it's rightful rendering on any L. P. or any other P.

I should love to crown the glory of Topic with this song, sung in full throat with all the runs, rolls stops and grace-notes.

Hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours as always in Song,

Paddy Tunney.
PADDY TUNNEY.

