

The Men of the Island

The O'Halloran Brothers

Des O'Halloran, *fiddle/vocal*

Vince O'Halloran, *button accordion*

with Reg Hall, *piano*

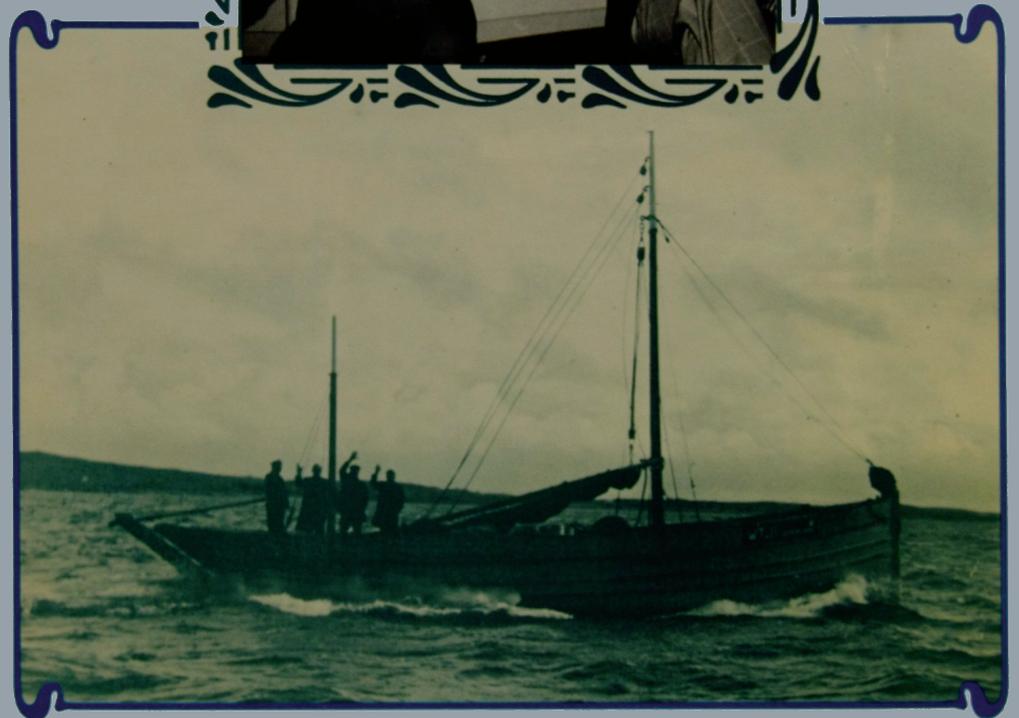
- 1 Reels: **The Music in the Glen/The Green Fields of America** - *trio*
- 2 Jigs: **The Lark in the Morning/The Connaughtman's Rambles** - *trio*
- 3 Song: **The Lowlands of Holland** - *Des*
- 4 Barn Dances: **Stack of Barley/Johnny, Will You Marry Me?** - *acc/fi*
- 5 Jigs: **Pat Burke's/Fraher's** - *acc/pi*
- 6 Song: **Sweet Inniscarra** - *Des*
- 7 Waltz and Jigs: **Martin Byrne's Waltz/A Hundred Pipers/Dingle Regatta** - *trio*
- 8 Song: **Granuaile** - *Des*
- 9 Reels: **The Sailor on the Rock/The Maid I Ne'er Forgot** - *trio*
- 10 Reel: **The Limerick Lassies** - *fi/pi*
- 11 Jigs: **The Lake Shore/The Exile's Return** - *trio*
- 12 Reels: **The Eel in the Sink/Larry Redigan's** - *trio*
- 13 Song: **Moorlough Mary** - *Des*
- 14 Reels: **The Bucks of Oranmore/The Wind That Shakes the Barley** - *trio*

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Sleeve design by Tony Engle

Song notes by A L Lloyd



SONG NOTES

The Lowlands of Holland

It seems to be a Scottish song originally, and was published in James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803), but it has been very widely adopted in Ireland (and in England too, for the matter of that). In the Scottish version, the lost lover was a shipowner who had bad luck with a couple of vessels. Later sets agree with Des O'Halloran's, that the young man was untimely dragged from his marriage-bed (pressed, or merely called up?) and lost in a surprising landscape of Holland, 'where the sugarcane is plentiful and the fruit grows on each tree'. The early Scottish versions clarify the mystery; the place referred to was really *New Holland*, now called Surinam.

Sweet Inniscarra

An exile song. Again there's a geographical surprise in the song, which refers to 'Columbia's wild forests and Indiana's spicy bowers' instead of India's. The traveller, homesick, wanders afar, and when he returns to his native village he finds it desolate, with 'long grasses grown on the step of the door'. Perhaps it refers to the famine time of the mid-nineteenth century, when so many deserted villages fell into ruins. Where is Inniscarra? Does the song concern Enniskerry, in Co. Wicklow? The tune is a member of that vast melody-family of which *Youghal Harbour* is a fair representative, and the prison song of *The Old Triangle* is a disreputable and down-at-heel second cousin.

Granuaile

Irish songmakers have for centuries loved the allegory of Ireland as a handsome woman, met in a dream landscape. Songs on this theme are generally given the name of *aisling* (= vision). The parent of the present song was a broadside of the first half of the nineteenth century, called *Granuaile's Lament to Brave O'Connell*, celebrating the champion fighter for Emancipation who in 1829 was elected to Parliament, to the fury of the Orangemen who threatened to 'kick the Crown into the Boyne' if there was any weakening of the resistance to Catholic claims. Sounds familiar. Des O'Halloran's version follows closely a later broadside, published by Warren of Dublin. 'Granuaile', by the way, a common poetic name for Ireland, was in fact a Co. Mayo chieftain of the sixteenth century, a rebellious heroine called Grainne Ni Mhaille (Grace O'Malley).

Moorlough Mary

The lady belonged to Moorlough, near Strabane, Co. Derry, and the words of the song were written by a local poet named Devine, though perhaps not quite as Des O'Halloran sings them here. The broadside versions, all rather literary, do not always correspond, but the song, very widespread and sung to two or three different tunes (mostly variants of *Youghal Harbour*, as here) is usually heard in the form presented on this record. Paddy Tunney has a closely-related version, but sung to a much jauntier rhythm.

Inishbofin Island is seven miles off the coast of County Connemara in the West of Ireland. Five miles by three, the island has a dwindling population currently around two hundred and eighty, although at one time it numbered six times that figure. During a particularly bad winter three weeks can elapse before the weather softens to allow the passage of the boat from the mainland.

The islanders' main occupations are farming and fishing and there is not a great deal of traditional music to be found now - less than there was a few years ago when two O'Halloran brothers - Des and Vince - left to come to England. Des left in 1959 and Vince, his junior by two years, joined him in London. Des is still in London - a supervisor in the building trade - but Vince has moved to Swindon where

he is a carpenter.

Most of the music on Inishbofin was in the hands of the O'Halloran family and Vince picked up the accordion from another brother, Christy. He started at the age of eight and has gone on to win the All-England Championships in 1973 and '74. There was another musician on the island besides the O'Hallorans - an old fiddle player who taught Des a few tunes. From this he developed and, like Vince, has picked up many tunes over the years. They have developed an exciting, distinctive style of playing together, the fiddle fitting right in with the accordion.

Des is perhaps best known for his singing and has developed his style largely from two fine singers - Paddy Tunney of County Fermanagh and Paddy Breen of County Clare. He took the All-England singing prizes in 1974 and '75 and has come third in the All-Ireland.

Since coming to England, Des and Vince O'Halloran have played a lot in London pubs, including 'The Constitution' in Camden Town and 'The Brewery Tap' in the Holloway Road. At the time of this recording they play regularly every Sunday night at the Irish Club in Wimbledon.

Reg Hall, who plays piano on this record, is well known for his various musical activities and is the regular piano player at 'The Favourite' just off the Holloway Road, a centre for traditional music in London.

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