

Milltown Lass

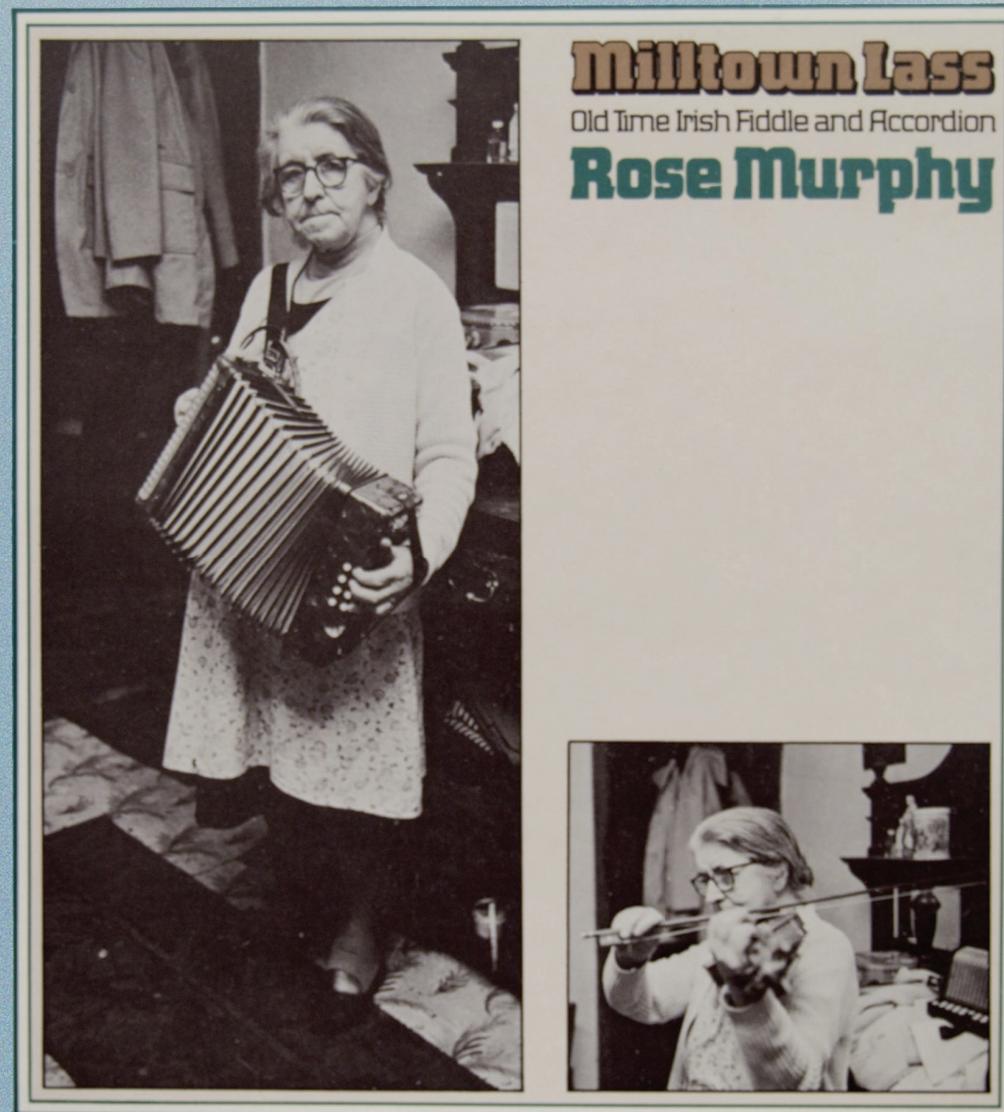
Rose Murphy

Old Time Irish Fiddle and Accordion

- 1* Reels: **Salamanca/The Milltown Lasses**
- 2+ Reel: **Trim the Velvet**
- 3* Jigs: **The Silver Tip/The Frog in the Well**
- 4+ Air: **The Lark in the Clear Air**
- 5* Polkas: **The First of May/The Last of June** (Jenny Lind)
- 6* Jigs: **Paddy in London/Over the Garden Wall**
- 7+ Hornpipe: **Road to Ballysodare**
- 8+ Reels: **The Teetotaller/The Bunch of Keys**
- 9* Reel: **The Whistler and His Dog**
- 10+ Reels: **The Flax in Bloom/The College Grove/The Maid on the Mountain**
- 11* Reels: **Ladybower's Reel/The Sister Reel**
- 12+ Reel: **Drowsy Maggie**
- 13+ Hornpipe: **The Harvest Home/The Londonderry**
- 14* Jigs: **The Frost is all Over/The Goose in the Bog**
- 15* Reel: **The Lonely Maid**
- 16+ Air: **The Coolin**
- 17+ Barn Dance: **Turkey in the Straw**
- 18+ Slip Jig: **Mother I'm up in the Roost** (What Are You Doing, You Divil You!)
- 19* Reels: **Miss Monahan's/Miss Gallagher's**
- 20* Reel: **Rakish Paddy**
- 21+ Hornpipe: **The Belfast** (or Sweep's) **Hornpipe**

* indicates fiddle

+ indicates melodeon



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Old Time Irish Fiddle and Accordion

Rose Murphy

First published by Topic 1977

Recorded and produced by John Leonard and David Baker in Maltby, nr. Rotherham, 1976

Notes by Paddy Ryan

Photography by David Baker

Towards the end of the last century and the start of the present one, when there was no such thing as radio, television or the cinema, and dance halls still had to be invented, the people of rural Ireland whiled away their leisure hours by providing their own entertainment in their own homes. This consisted mainly of traditional dancing, music, singing and storytelling. There was hardly a house that didn't have one or two fiddles hanging on the chimney breast, or a melodeon or concertina sitting on top of the kitchen dresser, out of reach of small children. You might also find a concert flute tucked away behind the plates, on the top shelf of the dresser.

Every parish had its quota of musicians and singers, and in many cases a few good step dancers. The favourite form of entertainment was house dances, which were as numerous at that time as bingo sessions are today. When the day's work was done, the neighbours would gather at a certain house in the district, known in the West of Ireland as the 'Rambling House'. Here they would chat and tell stories, until eventually someone would suggest having a 'blast' of music. As soon as the musicians started playing, the rest of the company would push back the chairs and stools and take the floor for a 'set'. These 'sets', as they were called, were danced by groups of eight people usually, and they varied from area to area, or from county to county, hence the Kerry set, the Clare set, the Galway set, the Donegal set, etc.

It was in this environment that Rose Anne Conlon (later, Murphy) first saw the light of day. Rose was born in Bellmount, a tiny village near Milltown, Co. Galway, on July 7th, 1900. As she grew up she became deeply immersed in the rural customs and traditions of the area and, at an early age, she started learning to play the fiddle and melodeon. She was the youngest member of a very talented family, and as we say in the West: 'It wasn't off the grass she licked it!' Her parents, both of whom came from Co. Mayo, were versatile musicians. Her father, John James, played the fiddle, flute, melodeon and warpipes, and her mother, Maria (nee Dwyer), played the melodeon and was also a great step dancer. Her brother Tommy played the flute, tin whistle and warpipes, and another brother, John, was the singer of the family. She had a sister, Delia, who played the fiddle and melodeon. The most famous member of the Conlon family was her brother P. J. or 'Peteeen' as he was called at home. 'Peteeen' emigrated to America as a young lad, and there he achieved fame as a fine exponent of the melodeon. In the days when the recording industry was in its infancy, P. J. Conlon was one of the best known recording artistes of the period, ranking high amongst such notables as Michael Coleman, James and Tom Morrison, and John McKenna.

Rose's music has that great spirit and vitality which is characteristic of the style of playing in the West of Ireland half a century ago, and is still to be found in many parts today. Anyone who has been lucky enough to hear P. J. Conlon's records (and they are collectors' items now) will immediately recognise the similarity between his music and that of Rose Murphy. Her sense of rhythm and timing is impeccable and her phrasing is excellent. She uses her ornamentation tastefully and sparingly, while at the same time giving a good, lively lift to the rhythm, which makes her music ideal for dancing. Her co-ordination, especially on the fiddle, is marvellous, particularly in the nice, clean, precise bow work (notice those lovely staccato triplets) which would do credit to a young musician in the prime of life. Rose's music is all the more remarkable when we consider the fact that she has suffered from arthritis for nearly ten years, and when the music on this album was recorded, she was all of seventy-six years young!

Not content with playing tunes she learned from other musicians, Rose became quite a prolific composer. The album contains two of her compositions, **Ladybower's Reel** and **The Lonely Maid**, tracks 11 and 15. As well as being a musician and composer, she was also a very talented step dancer. She won a Feis Championship for solo dancing at the tender age of seven and went on to win many more in later years. In her early twenties, she travelled most of Connaught, teaching melodeon, fiddle, and step dancing.

Later came the journey to England where she lived a while in Wigan before joining her brothers in South Yorkshire. All through the hard times of the Hungry Thirties, Rose played and danced in many of the small mining villages of South Yorkshire, and the parish clubs around Rotherham. She started a dancing class in Maltby, and she is very proud of the fact that the first six girls she taught are all grandmothers now.

Rose is the only member of her generation of the Conlon family still alive. As she says herself, "I'm the last of the Mohicans". A lady of small dimensions, but a terrific personality with a wonderful sense of dignity which she expresses very well in her music, she now lives in Maltby, near Rotherham with her husband Paddy Murphy, a retired miner. Because of her health, she isn't able to get around as she used to. She is always delighted when visitors - of which she has many - call to hear her play, and talk about her music. She has an impish sense of humour which comes through when she is reliving her musical memories.

A visit to Rose Murphy is a revelation. She will captivate you with her fiddle and melodeon and take you along with her into her own fairytale world of music and dancing and her young days in the West of Ireland, away from the trials and stresses of this mad materialistic world of today. I hope this album will help to take you in spirit to share her world for a while.

Paddy Ryan

The producers wish to acknowledge their debt to Michael Furey of Maltby, who re-introduced Rose to the music after her long retirement through illness.



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