



DAN  
SULLIVAN'S  
*Shamrock*  
BAND



# DAN SULLIVAN'S SHAMROCK BAND

## Classic Recordings of IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC in America

- 1 Reels: Irish Dance Set - Figure No 2
- 2 Hornpipe: Dan Sullivan's Favorite
- 3 Song: Tickling Mary Jane
- 4 Jig: The Rabbit Catcher
- 5 Hornpipe: Londonderry Hornpipe
- 6 Reels: Miller's Reel / Duffy the Dancer
- 7 Hornpipe: Bantry Bay
- 8 Reel: Billy Hanafin's Reel (The Little Bird on the Tree)
- 9 Fling: Green Grow the Rashes-O
- 10 Waltz: The Versouviana Dance
- 11 Reel: Boil the Kettle Early
- 12 Hornpipe: Groves Hornpipe
- 13 Song: Johnny Will You Marry Me?
- 14 Reel: Lord Gordon's Reel
- 15 Jig: Lanigan's Ball
- 16 Reels: Blackberry Blossom / Bonnie Kate
- 17 Song: I'm Leaving Tipperary
- 18 Hornpipes: Silver Slipper / Jerry Daly's

Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
Michael Hanafin *fiddle*  
Murty Rabbett & His Gaelic Band  
Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
Neil Nolan *banjo*  
The Hanafins *fiddle & accordion*  
Michael Hanafin *fiddle*  
Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
Murty Rabbett & His Gaelic Band  
Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
Michael Hanafin & Daniel Moroney *fiddle & whistle*  
Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
Michael Hanafin *fiddle*  
Sullivan's Shamrock Band  
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Sleeve design by Tony Russell

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**THE FIRST TIME I HEARD DAN SULLIVAN'S** Shamrock Band was during a visit to a cousin of mine, May Mullins, in Dedham, Mass. I discovered that she had a great store of old Irish 78s in her attic and in the process of playing them I became acquainted with the exciting sound of this great band of musicians, who were so different from all the modern ceili bands I was accustomed to hearing. I started to make enquiries around Boston about the band, but was unable for a long time to come up with anything beyond the most rudimentary information about its history and personnel. It wasn't until I enlisted the assistance of Leo Sullivan (no relation to Dan, incidentally), an enthusiast of old-time Irish and Cape Breton music who lives in Boston, that I was able to make any kind of breakthrough. Eventually we gained enough information to piece together the general outline of the history of the band.

Special thanks are due to Owen and Gene Frain, Pat Martin, May Mullins, Niall Nolan and, particularly, Billy Hanafin.  
**Mick Moloney** Philadelphia, February 1979.

In his book *Irish Minstrels and Musicians* Francis O'Neill wrote: 'Everybody in Boston and the adjoining towns, and not a few from other parts of this broad land, knew or heard of "Dan" Sullivan, the great Irish fiddler, who departed this life at the end of June, 1912. Though an octogenarian, he was game to the last. A few days before his death he asked his son and namesake to accompany him on the piano while he played a few of his favourite tunes. Realising that the end was near, he calmly announced that he would be dead soon ....'

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Dan Sullivan's death left a great void in Irish traditional music circles in Boston, but his son Dan was to see to it that the family name was prominently associated with the music his father loved so well for many years thereafter. He had learned the piano while in his teens and after leaving school went to work as a salesman with the Steinway Piano Corporation. In the mid-1920s he founded a band which he entitled Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band. Nobody seems sure exactly how the band first got together, but Dan Sullivan seems, by all accounts, to have been a resourceful character, as he managed to get the band recorded only a few months after its formation. They all drove down to New York in a bus hired for the occasion and recorded enough music for several records.

The band performed regularly around Boston, at least in its early years. It played for dances at the Deacon Hall in the south end of Boston and had its own weekly radio show on WNAC for a couple of years in the early '30s.

The band also recorded for at least three record companies. The earliest sides were made around 1926, when the lineup was Dan Sullivan *piano*, Michael C Hanafin *fiddle*, Daniel J Murphy *pipes/flute*, Thomas Ryan *fiddle* and Daniel P Moroney *pipes/flute*. **Michael Hanafin** was the most celebrated musician in the group. He was born in Collinaferry, near Miltown, Co Kerry, on August 6, 1880, and learned to play in an extremely musical household. O'Neill wrote that 'the Hanafin farmstead was the goal to which all travelling pipers, fiddlers and dancing masters bent their way.' Michael emigrated to America around 1898 and joined his older brother Billy in Boston. Billy had emigrated in 1889 when but 14 years old and was even at that time an accomplished fiddle and flute player. He was also a dancer of repute and won the gold medal at the Boston Feis in 1906. Eventually, Billy turned to the pipes. He learned a lot from Patsy Touhey and the two struck up a firm friendship, which was to last until Touhey's death in 1923. Billy himself died in 1924. Michael, however, carried the music on and became the mainstay of the Shamrock Band. He also made at least 10 solo records, which attest to the fact that he was one of the finest fiddlers of his time. It is sad that his great talents have not been given adequate recognition as have those of the great Sligo fiddlers of the past. He died in Boston in 1970, carrying an untold amount of great music to the grave with him.

**Thomas Ryan** came from Tipperary Town and learned the fiddle from Dan Sullivan Sr. **Daniel Murphy** was a piper from Co Kerry and **Daniel Moroney**, who came from Caherciveen, Co Kerry, and was a good friend of Thomas Ryan and the Hanafins, also played the pipes as well as the flute.

On later recordings for the same company, Thomas Ryan and Danny Murphy were replaced by **Owen Frain**, a flute-player from Roosky, Co Sligo, **Martin Mullins**, a fiddler from Co Galway, and **Dominic Doyle**, who played the pipes. Owen Frain still lives in the Boston area. His son Gene plays pipes and piano and possesses a fine stock of rare old recordings, including many of the Shamrock Band.

The band's lineup varied in the recordings made for other companies. Michael Hanafin and, of course, Dan Sullivan are present on all the recordings, but at various times some musicians disappeared and were replaced by others, often on different instruments. **Thomas Senior**, a native of Clifden, Co Galway, and one of the great bastions of Irish music in Boston until his death in 1974, played accordion on some of the mid-'30s recordings, and **Neil (correctly Niall) Nolan**, a native of Maine, who still lives in the Dorchester section of Boston, played tenor banjo on these and some earlier recordings.

On occasions a vocalist would record with the band, either **Larry Griffin** from New York or **Murty** (originally **Mortimore**) **Rabbett**, a native of Oranmore, Co. Galway, who lived in Lynn, Mass. and also lilted and played the flute and tin whistle.

All the band's recordings, particularly the early ones, possess a rare freshness and vitality. Much of the charm in their music can also be detected in the recordings of the old Ballinakill Ceili Band. The sound of both bands was dominated by fiddle and either pipes or flute backed by excellent piano-playing. Dan Sullivan's outstanding and authoritative playing makes such a pleasant change from the pedestrian and usually inaccurate accompaniment which marred so many recordings of great Irish musicians between the '20s and the '50s. Sullivan's musicianship and the fine, solid traditional playing of the rest of the band combined to produce a driving, exciting sound which has not been bettered to this day by any ceili band in America.

**Mick Moloney & Leo Sullivan**, February 1979



*Wm. F. Hanafin*

*Michael Hanafin*

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