

TSDL369

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**THE LAMBS ON THE  
GREEN HILLS  
SONGS FROM COUNTY  
CLARE**

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**Nora Cleary  
Siney Crotty  
Ollie Conway  
Mick Flynn**

**The Lambs on the Green Hills  
Songs from County Clare**



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|----|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1  | The Bold Trooper                    | Nora Cleary  |
| 2  | The Grey Mare                       | Ollie Conway |
| 3  | Farewell to<br>Lissycasey           | Siney Crotty |
| 4  | An Cailín Deas                      | Siney Crotty |
| 5  | The Lambs on<br>the Green Hills     | Mick Flynn   |
| 6  | Lovely Mary to<br>the Sea Do Not Go | Siney Crotty |
| 7  | Pat O'Donnell                       | Mick Flynn   |
| 8  | Stór Mo Chroi                       | Mick Flynn   |
| 9  | Bessie of<br>Ballantown Brae        | Nora Cleary  |
| 10 | Farewell to<br>Milltown             | Nora Cleary  |

County Clare has long been known as one of the richest areas for music and song throughout Ireland. Petrie, writing in his 'Ancient Music of Ireland', published in 1855, was enthusiastic about the tunes he heard. His remarks spring from his travels through Clare during the early 1820s and throw into relief musical traditions that clearly go back deeply into the eighteenth century at least. Even if it's felt that Petrie's enthusiasm may have run away with him we can't doubt the more recent, towering figures of Garrett Barry, George Whelan (Kerry born), or Willie Clancy, and the Bobby Caseys, Miko Russells and John Kellys of today; all of whom testify to the strength of the musical heritage of the people of the Dal Cais.

Singing, of course, has been less prominent if we're to take particular personalities as any kind of yardstick, yet the oldest music is that of the song air and there's plenty of internal evidence in the songs of Clare to show how deep and treasured song traditions have been – as we shall hear on this record.

On the other hand, it's certainly true that as we learn more about other areas, such as Kerry or Donegal, then our perspective on the pre-eminence of Clare alters somewhat, though it doesn't take anything away from the crowded and eloquent storehouse of song from which this record draws its examples.

## TSDL369

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Indeed, even in a collection so obviously limited as this, it wasn't difficult to present a variety of styles and songs. This very diversity was, in fact, one of the moving factors in bringing the record out.

For example, **Siney Crotty**, a native of Ross, near Kilbaha, has a lot of the style of decorated singing that is popularly and quite rightly often associated with singing in Irish. His songs are rare, sometimes unique, and it becomes clear that he has been the source and fountainhead of a number of them and has, in one respect or another, fashioned or altered others. We hope to feature Siney's version of *Lord Gregory* at a later date, a song which shows the process of tradition in action just as *Farewell to Lissycasey* and *Lovely Mary...* do here. **Nora Cleary**, like Siney, has added phrases of her own to her songs, many of which were got from her father, Daniel, in the family cottage out at The Hand between Milltown Malbay and Connolly. Her delivery is fairly straight forward, faintly crooning, a style widespread in Ireland. **Ollie Conway**, publican and famous step-dancer from Mullagh, is a declamatory singer, gaining effect from his involvement in the songs just as much as Nora tends to let her singing drop quietly into place. **Mick Flynn** had some of his songs from his family and picked up others both from his

contemporaries and from records. He sings with a deliberate intensity, usually in the kitchen of Friel's pub, where he was photographed for this record.

The important thing to note is how the Child ballad rubs shoulders with the genuinely local product and how songs with strong English counterparts take their places with children of the *sean nos* traditions. Thus the many crosscurrents – oral, printed, native, accidental – combine to make clear what is meant by the term 'richness' when it comes to singing in West Clare and, of course, the whole country and the whole of Ireland.

Yet the four singers on this record are, sadly, members of a declining companionhood. Young musicians seem to attain a fair degree of mastery of their instruments quite quickly and clubs and music lounges, not necessarily genuine in their apparent sympathy for traditional songs and music, offer an attractive commercial stimulus. The slower, more intimate apprenticeship of singing (and this perhaps takes us back to the opening remarks in the notes) has little to offer in this respect and, apparently, holds no attraction for young people. So that, whilst undoubtedly singing is the oldest, most personal and noble of all musical arts, there are just no young singers appearing in Clare, and, for that matter, very

## TSDL369

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few in Ireland generally, though the northern counties seem to be in a slightly happier position. It's an appalling fact, and it should be stressed, that we are recording the decline and possibly even the demise of traditional singing in some areas.

Finally, the generosity of West Clare people is legendary. Some of these recordings were made in the middle of the hay harvest, some at the end of a long day, and in each case the singers gave time and attention without hesitation: typical enough but it should be noted. In the same way we should pay tribute to the likes of Thomas and Maisie Friel, true patrons of music and friends to countless thousands, who allowed the recordings of Mick Flynn to be made in their kitchen. Esther and Greg O'Hanlon, too, kindly gave over their house in Dublin for recording Siney. This record is in the nature of a small 'thank you'.

### The Songs

#### The Bold Trooper

This song, and its associates, is well-enough known (see, for instance, *Marrowbones*, ed. F. Purslow, 1965, p.6; *Songs and Ballads Sung in Ulster*, ed. R. Morton, 1970 p.80). Yet this seems to be the only version found in Clare. Nora got it from Big John Boland of Tullaghboy, a mile or so distant from her home, and it's one of the songs she passed on to Willie Clancy. As you can hear, Nora enjoyed singing this song.

#### The Grey Mare

Again, this song is familiar enough in England. Baring-Gould and Kidson both have versions as has Purslow in *Marrowbones*, p.40. Ollie got his version from Josie Baker of Cahermurphy near Kilmihil. He heard it too in the Breen household at Kilmihil where he was a frequent visitor. As a child he'd set off on the dairy with ass and cart only to fetch up inevitably in Katie Breen's kitchen where he would pass away the time listening or, sometimes, playing flute with the late Paddy Breen. Inevitably, too, Ollie would get into trouble at home for this.

## TSDL369

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### **Farewell to Lissycasey**

Tom Munnely thinks this song was originally from Mayo but Siney acknowledges Paddy Breen as his immediate source. Time, locality, Paddy – who, sadly, was killed in a car accident in London in 1973 – and Mick McGuane, a whistle-player from the Kilmihil area, have all been instrumental in altering the form of the song, and Siney contributed his share.

### **An Cailin Deas**

Siney got this from Matt Carmody, a musician and lilter from the Moneen/Kilbaha district and later passed it on to Seamus Ennis when the latter was collecting songs. No other version exists as far as is known; but there is a sister song, An Cailin Rua, which Siney also sings.

### **The Lambs on the Green Hills**

Mick says he learned this from a record, probably the one The Johnstons put out in 1968 (Transatlantic TRA 169). They, in turn, got it from Colm O'Lochlainn's collection, *Irish Street Ballads*, (1939) p.170, and it seems that the song, which O'Lochlainn got from a Mrs Redding of Dublin, received quite a boost through its publication.

### **Lovely Mary to the Sea Do Not Go**

The variants are numerous. Siney got his

words entirely fortuitously, finding a written set in an old school book which he found at Leitrim (Cree) in 1944.

### **Pat O'Donnell**

The Phoenix Park murders of 1882 when the then Viceroy of Ireland, Cavendish, and his Under-Secretary, Thomas Henry Burke, were stabbed to death, inspired some thirty songs, according to D. G. Zimmerman (in *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, 1967) of which **Pat O'Donnell** was one of the most popular.

### **Stór Mo Chroi**

This song, long a favourite amongst singers and at one time almost obligatory at fleadh competitions was written by Brian O'Higgins (na Bán Bán). Mick uses the same tune as Willie Clancy, a Clare variant of *Bruach na Carraige Baine* (The Brink of the White Rock). Sean Mac Donnchadha sings a version on *Grand Airs of Connemara* (Topic 12T177).

### **Bessie of Ballantown Brae**

Nora reckons this is a very old song, passed on to her by her father and to him by his father. In one guise or another it is indeed old, being a variant of Fair Margaret and Sweet William (Child No. 74). Brereton, the Dublin printer, also published a broadside version and Sam Henry noted it (No. 73).

## TSDL369

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### Farewell to Milltown

This was the work of Tom Hayes who also wrote *Nora Daly* and who was born in the house that is now Queally's pub in Milltown. Both song and tune are common enough in Clare though Nora seems to have added the odd phrase of her own to both.

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06

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Recorded and produced by Roly Brown

Editing and mastering by Tony Engle

Photograph of Siney Crotty by Roly Brown

All other photographs: Hugh MacConville – the cover photograph is of the reputed site of the grave of Diarmuid and Grania, just above Nora Cleary's cottage.

Sleeve design by Tony Engle

Notes by Roly Brown and thanks to Tom Munnely for assistance with these.

# TSDL369

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07



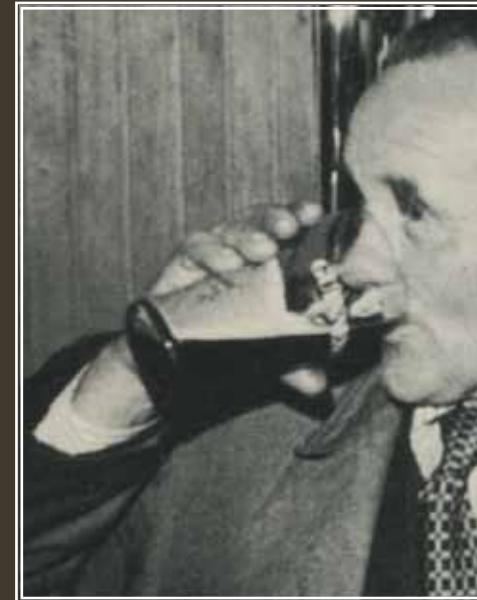
OLLIE CONWAY



NORA CLEARY



MICK FLYNN



SINEY CROTTY

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