

A photograph of a steel bridge structure, likely the Manhattan Bridge, with a complex lattice of dark metal beams. In the foreground, there are bare, dark tree branches, some with a few small, dried leaves. The background shows a city skyline under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Seán Cleland and The Kilgubbin Project

Live at Martyrs'

Track 1

The Great Northern Bands/Centenary March The Swiss Club

In 1977-1980, I frequently attended a monthly céili (as in dance) where I learned how to waltz, do my sevens and threes, and dance the "Siege of Ennis". This céili was loosely run by Noel Rice, Tom O'Malley & Pat McPartland and held at The Swiss Club, which was a hall (think VFW hall) located at the southwest corner of Deming and Laramie in Chicago. It was comprised of a big room which connected to a smallish bar and a kind of kitchen. The big room was the dancing room and it had a high stage along the eastern wall; anybody could hold events there. Those céilis were amazing events for me, both culturally and sonically, and I really looked forward to them each month. In advance of each one, Noel Rice would often write an impassioned newsletter.

Quite often during the tea break, us younger musicians would get up on the stage and perform our party pieces. As we grew older and better at playing, we'd end playing more and more of the evening. The Swiss Club monthly céili was a very important event for the Chicago Irish that were into traditional music and céili dancing. This is where I and other young, up-and-coming players like Cathleen Rice, Mary Mayer, Johnny Harling, and Marty Fahey, got to know each other and play with the many amazing older players who played at it each month like Noel Rice, Tom O'Malley, Pat McPartland, Jack Murray, Tommy Maguire, Seamus Cooley, and Des O'Grady to name but a few, and we were literally sitting at their feet taking it all in.



There's been a vibrant tradition of céili bands in Chicago since 1933 when the legendary dancing teacher Pat Roche, himself newly emigrated from County Clare, put together his "Harp and Shamrock Orchestra" to perform in the Irish Village at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair. He formed the Orchestra honoring the new "Irish standard" of 1933 which added a piano player & drummer to a traditional dance band of fiddles, flutes and accordions. The addition of drums and piano to traditional music was a necessary addition in Ireland because, due in part to the efforts of the clergy, the "wild" outside crossroads and pattern day dancing which was the norm there were being moved indoors into halls where the priests could watch and keep people "in line". The piano and drums were needed so the music could be heard indoors.

This glorious Orchestra played seven days a week during these two years of the World's Fair and included young musicians Eleanor Kane (16) piano, Joe Shannon (17) uilleann pipes and Johnny McGreevy (15) fiddle. I see similarities with my experiences at the monthly céilis at The Swiss Club in the 70s with the Orchestra in the 30s in that some of my Chicago heroes, Eleanor and Johnny and Joe, were at the beginning of their paths playing Irish music, playing for people dancing, and that they were sitting in with more experienced musicians from Ireland and absorbing all those lessons that you get through the process of 'Ó Ghlúin go Glúin', which means 'from knee to

Fast forward 40+ years to 1977, when all of us (me, Marty, Mary, Cathleen, Johnny) were roughly the same age as the Chicago teenagers in the Orchestra were in 1933 and learning those same important lessons.

These two marches are in honor of young Irish-American musicians sitting in with musicians from the old country and learning what's what!

Track 2

Turlough's Trip To Sligo

Trip to Sligo/Highway to Kilkenny/The Stack of Oats /O'Carolan's Concerto (Turlough O'Carolan)

In the late 70s/early 80s, I spent my Saturdays in the basement of the Pickwick Theater. I was often driven there by John O'Grady who was also driving his daughter Brigid to our music lessons with Liz Carroll and Noel Rice. John O'Grady had brothers that played accordion, including Des, who at this time was living in Chicago. John was a kind and generous man, full of interesting observations and lore about life and Irish music and his home place in County Mayo. John is the reason I love Velveeta Cheese! I remember these car rides and John's kindness fondly.

The Pickwick basement was also the venue that Noel used to put on amazing Irish music concerts in which I had a front row seat both for the concert and for the pre- and post-show amazing craic. These shows included De Danann, Joe Burke and Andy McGann, Joe and Antonette McKenna and The Green Fields of America. The Green Fields of America concert in 1978 also featured, along with Mick's Green Fields (Seán McGlynn, Bill Ochs, Jackie and Charlie Coen, etc.), a split bill where Chicago musicians were interspersed throughout the performance. Marty Fahey's dad, Martin Fahey, along with Mick, were the emcees, and local legends like Liz Carroll and Jimmy Keane, Johnny McGreevy and Joe Shannon, Kevin Henry and his young protege Michael Flatley, Tom McMahon, Martin Byrne, Tom Masterson, Jimmy Coyle and three amazing Sean-nós singers from Connemara: Jimmy 'the Horse' Keane, Nora McDonagh, and Mary Cooley, all performed as well as our young musicians céili band which was called "Clan Na Gael". It was a hell of a show! And really long.

Although "Turlough's Trip to Sligo" includes many varied tunes I first heard in the Pickwick Theater basement, it begins with "Trip to Sligo", a jig that I first learned at the Mayfair Park Fieldhouse somewhere around 1972 which was my first exposure to Irish music. I played classical violin at that time for 2 years, and a school friend of mine from Ireland invited me to come with him there to check out some Irish music with his family.



The second tune, "Highway to Kilkenny" is a slip jig I learned from the fabulous record made by James Kelly, Paddy O'Brien and Dáithí Sproule in 1978 entitled "Is It Yourself".

We dramatically segue into a barn dance called "The Stack of Oats" learned from the great Philadelphian dance band Erin's Pride Orchestra, finishing off with the mighty O'Carolan's Concerto, a tune that I heard from many sources, with the lightning fast pace that Frankie Gavin and Máirtín O'Connor played it many years ago that really made an impact on me.

Track 3

Tribute to Matt & Séamus

Toormore/Gneeveguilla/Gleanntán Frolics

I have always been obsessed with the sounds and the swing of Sliabh Luachra music, and over the years I've listened intensely to many of its practitioners. My first exposure to this sonic region began with the inimitable Cuz Teahan,



who was born in County Kerry in 1905 and emigrated to Chicago on two separate occasions: first in 1928, but during the Great Depression he returned to Ireland, setting off again for Chicago in 1933. Cuz played concertina and one row melodeon, wrote poems and composed a bunch of cool tunes, was a complete character and who really had great time for Yanks like me. Cuz had been taught as a boy by the larger than life Sliabh Luachra traveling teacher, Padraig O'Keeffe, and when I met Cuz he was experiencing a kind of musical rebirth in that, in his late 60s after retiring from his job with the Illinois Central Railroad in 1970, he was doing all sorts of gigs with his special band of ladies: Mary McDonagh, Maida Sugrue, and Una McGlew.

Sliabh Luachra is a term used largely when describing the culture of east Kerry and west Limerick, and northwest Cork. Sliabh Luachra is more a state of mind than a place and its music is made to dance to. The region stretches from the Mullaghareirk Mountains in the north, where the River Blackwater rises, and follows the path of the river south to Rathmore. An upland boggy region, Sliabh Luachra literally translates to "the mountain of the rushes".

It's a region renowned for its high concentration of musicians, and the innate repertoire of Sliabh Luachra are polkas and slides which were basically tunes that were bent into shape to suit the dances, dances that were inherited from the royal courts of Britain and Europe. Those dances came from across the water with the soldiers and the landlords and others, and their corresponding polkas and slides evolved out of the quadrille dances of the time, so that Sliabh Luachra became a localized style of playing that was unique to this specific area.

My next explosion of listening to the slides and the polkas was the band De Danann when Jackie Daley was a member. I was already obsessed with De Danann, a blistering trad band fronted by master fiddler Frankie Gavin, and the addition of Jackie Daly was the proverbial icing on the cake. I devoured the recording that De Danann made with Jackie and that led to delving into three more classic recordings: Jackie's solo LP, the brilliant recording of Séamus Creagh and Jackie Daly, and the recording of Jackie Daly and Kevin Burke entitled "Eavesdropper". By this time I was sonically hooked and over the years I've sought out and devoured many of the greats of this music including Matt Cranitch, Mairéad Ní Mhaoldúgha, Maurice O'Keeffe, Padraig O'Keeffe, Denis Murphy & Julia Clifford, Séamus Creagh, Paudie Gleeson, Conal Ó Grada, Jimmy Doyle, Paddy Jones, Denis Doody, Séamus Begley, Kevin Burke, and Johnny O'Leary.

The Kilkenny Castle was a pub located on the northwest side of Chicago owned by Eamon, Peter and Margaret Brady who were siblings and folk singers, and had a band they called 'The Brogue,' with their lifelong friend Jimmy Moore. They were originally from County Kilkenny and had relocated to Chicago after a few years of trying to make it in Nashville, Tennessee. On Saturday nights for many years, the Brady family would provide the entertainment in their pub, and during the mid-1980s myself and Noel, Kevin and Cathleen Rice would show up with our instruments and play a set when they took a break; as we got used to playing these breaks our set began to include polkas and slides which we were learning from Cuz and Jackie Daly and the Chieftains.

I've been gobsmacked by the sounds of Sliabh Luachra since I first experienced them, and this track is in tribute. This set of tunes comes from a gorgeous clip of Matt Cranitch and Séamus Creagh playing these slides that I often play in sessions and are taught as part of the repertoire of the Irish Music School of Chicago.

Track 4 Western Ave.

Frank Thornton's Fling (Terence 'Cuz' Teahan) / Road To Glountane (Terence 'Cuz' Teahan) / McFadden's Handsome Daughter / The Boys of Ballisodare

This set represents the feeling of what playing traditional Irish music in Chicago is like to me. It's hard driving on the front edge of the beat, and it has a bit of grit and space in it. It's everything that "The Kilgubbin Project" is meant to musically embody. Each tune in it contains the energy, the drive, and a tad of quirkiness that I have always been drawn to as a player of Irish music in Chicago.

This track surges from flings to reels and it contains the tenacity and verve that I have always felt and been inspired by. When we recorded this, we were trying to channel the playing of Eleanor Neary and Johnny McGreevy, of Kevin Henry and Albert Neary, of Martin Byrne and Tom Masterson, of Liz Carroll and Jimmy Keane, of Edward Cronin and John McFadden, of Cuz Teahan, Una McGlew, Maida Sugrue and Mary McDonagh, and of Frank and Jimmy Thornton.

The track is named after the greatest street in the world, Western Avenue which is located in the City of Chicago. Western Ave. is a 26 mile long straight street that runs the length of the city, from Chicago's Northern border to its Southern edge. It's a street filled with adventure and infinite possibilities. Everything in Chicago is easily accessible from Western. I have spent a lot of time traversing Chicago on this road in my life, including in my early years when my mom would drive me to and from places on it because she was afraid of driving on the expressways.



I went to high school at Lane Tech on the corner of Addison and Western, and in the Lane auditorium in the fall of 1972, long before I went to high school there, I had my first taste of high level Irish music. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann presented their touring concert on an autumn evening which totally rocked my 11-year old world. The concert was amazing. The musicians were legendary and the step dancing was top class with Celine Hession and Donncha Ó Muimhneacháin. Most importantly to me, there were three fiddle players on stage that evening: Paddy Ryan, Antóin Mac Gabhann and Paddy Glackin (who couldn't have been more than 23 years of age). For his solo, Paddy stood at the microphone and played "The Duke of Leinster" into "The Morning Dew". Whew, I can still remember everything about that performance some 50+ years later. I recorded that show, on my new tape recorder that my Dad had bought me, and listened to that tape for the next 20 years until I wore it out.

Track 5 The Kevin Reels Sporting Pat/ Galway Rambler/Flowers of the Red Hill

I have spent the majority of my musical Irish life playing with flute players. My two biggest mentors were both flute players: first Noel Rice (County Offaly), and then the force of nature that was Kevin Henry (County Sligo/Mayo). Since 2020, I have taught with Grey Larsen who is one of the foremost performers and teachers of Irish flute and tin whistle in the U.S. Other influential Chicago flute players that have had some influence on my music were Pat McPartland, Frank Thornton, Séamus Cooley and Albert Neary. Since 2017, I have had the pleasure of both playing and teaching with the bold and talented flute player James Reilly who suggested these rollicking reels for the album.

The first reel, "Sporting Pat", James learned from his dad, Tom Reilly from County Longford. The following two reels, "The Galway Rambler" and "The Flowers of Red Hill", James and I learned from Kevin Henry. Kevin's playing of these two reels showcases the hearty, huffy puffy flute playing that's the bedrock of North Connacht Irish music. You can't help but be drawn in by the sounds emanating from this musical wooden stick, and then boom, you're bashed over the head by the fantastic artistry and rhythms pulsating from it in the most delightful way.

Kevin Henry, to whom this track is dedicated was a lovely man and a true inspiration for me. He was a pillar of Irish music in Chicago for over 50 years; he really loved Ireland and Irish culture, his family, and Chief Francis O'Neill. He was one of the greatest of characters in a city filled with great characters, and he had all the time in world for a young Irish-American like me who wanted to soak up Irish music and all that went with it from an actual legend. He supported me in so many ways throughout my life and I am forever grateful.

I'm continuously blown away by and inspired by James Reilly, and that thing that he does with his flute really spurred on the feast of flutery in this track as represented by these three flute tunes that we learned from our mutual musical flute heroes: Tom Reilly, Noel Rice and Kevin Henry.



Track 6 For Noel

**Tralibane Bridge /Johnny's Wedding Reel/Trip To Nenagh
(comp. Seán Ryan)**

From 1977 until 1987, I took pretty intense Irish music lessons with Noel Rice, in the later years at his lovely, warm home on Happy Hollow in Glenview. Although he played the flute and whistle, he was chock full of knowledge and opinions about fiddling. Noel's brother Fred, and father Jack, were both fiddle players. In 1956, Noel immigrated initially to New York City. Family friend and piper/flute player Andy Conroy, was living there and introduced Noel to the middle of the Irish Music Renaissance that was active in New York at the time which was very fiddle-centric. Noel was soon playing with Andy McGann, Paddy Killoran, Larry Redican, Hughie Gillespie, Lad O'Beirne. His time in NYC made a huge impact on Noel.

In 2012, I was in Music Mad, a musical drama celebrating the life and times of Chief Francis O'Neill, written by Adam Whiteman. I had obviously been very aware of Chief Francis O'Neill before then. For years, Noel and I spent hours sight reading through "1001" - in fact my copy still has some of Noel's penciled-in notes. In my youthfulness, I figured that the Francis O'Neill actual story was of little practical interest to my art; however, my experiences in Music Mad blew up that notion!

O'Neill wrote quite a lot, and hearing his actual words was fascinating and revelatory. From O'Neill's writing later in his life, after being asked what out of the thousands of tunes notated in his many collections was his favorite, said that the tune that he just could not get out of his mind was the air, "Tralibane Bridge". He said, "When affliction beyond the power of pen to describe cast its withering blight on our home, this weird and fascinating air obsessed my waking hours for days unnumbered."

"To me no other strains in the whole range of wailing dirges so deeply touches the heart or so feelingly voices the language of sadness and despair. Tralibane Bridge, ivy clad and ancient, spans a rocky, brawling river named on the maps Owennashingaun, in West Cork. Three townlands meet at this bridge, a significant circumstance to at least one disciple of the "black art," who one May morning at sunrise stood knee deep in the rushing current and performed certain mystic ceremonies. One consisted in dividing the waters with a scissors along the imaginary lines of the townland boundaries under the centre of the main arch. Whatever songs may have been sung to this touching air are lost as far as the writer has been able to ascertain."



In our Irish music lessons, Noel taught me how learn by ear and how to phrase. We talked about ornamentation and which were the correct notes in tunes. He showed me how to dig into melody. It was hanging with Noel, that I was first exposed to the idea that there is no one way to play Irish tunes. We spent countless hours scouring and sight reading through various collections of Irish music including O'Neill's "1001", the first two Breandán Breathnach books, and "The Bulmer's Collection". In "The Bulmer's Collection", notated from Irish immigrant musicians in England during the early 1970s, we discovered a reel called "An Moinfheir", to which Noel immediately began playing as an evocative slow piece. This idea that a reel could be played out of time as a slow dreamy piece was a life-changing concept for me. "An Moinfheir" is of course also called "Trip to Nenagh", popularized by Finbarr Dwyer in London and was composed by Seán Ryan, the Tipperary fiddle player. With Noel, we performed it as a slow piece but it also works as a ripping reel so for this recording we sped it up for this track.

This track is dedicated to my first teacher, Noel. "Tralibane Bridge" (from "1001") is followed by two reels, "Johnny's Wedding" (also from "1001") and Seán Ryan's "Trip To Nenagh".

Track 7

The Grand Gubbin

Tommy Cawley's/Give Us a Drink of Water/My Mind Will Never Be Easy/Kilnamona/Graf Spey/Salamanca/Chicago Reel/Anderson's

In 1983, I joined with Noel to help him teach Irish music, again on Saturdays, but by this time not in the Pickwick Theater basement anymore. We taught at a park district field house on the northwest side, and every Saturday at lunchtime, we would head over to a Greek diner a block away called 'Wonderful Food' on Northwest Highway where I'd have liver and onions and a baked potato.

Teaching remained a part-time way for me to make some extra money until 2003 when I decided to engage in teaching Irish music in a bigger and more comprehensive way, and I formed the Irish Music School of Chicago.



Part of this engagement has included having my younger students participate in yearly Irish music competitions called Fleadh Cheoil. Within the Fleadh Cheoil are band competitions, and my music school has really focused on the Grupai Cheoil competition which is a mixed-instrument ensemble competition (up to 20 musicians) and which highlights the performance of tunes that aren't just jigs and reels; it promotes other tunes like polkas and slides, slow airs and O'Carolan pieces. Myself, and quite often my great friend, collaborator and superb musician, Jesse Langen, curated and produced many of these ensembles, and he and I learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. I found that I really enjoyed presenting Irish tunes that this innovative way and working with Jesse.

"The Grand Gubbin" set was assembled a bit like a long Grupai Cheoil piece with a variety of different tunes in different rhythms setting a path for me to tell a complete Irish music story while I was workshoping various versions of "The Kilgubbin Project" at the Irish American Heritage Center. As I tried out playing with different folks, it was a great set to try out various players in that the tunes were not unusual, and if musicians didn't know them, they could just not play and the overall set would still work well.

This recording, and in fact "The Kilgubbin Project" itself might not have come into existence without the Irish American Heritage Center. For a year, before the COVID lockdown shut the whole world down, earlier versions of the Kilgubbins played every Thursday in the 5th Province. We worked out a lot of material during those gigs (thank you Meg Buchanan).

"The Grand Gubbin" begins with Tommy Cawley's jig, a lovely, old-fashioned tune learned from the playing of Johnny McGreevy. Paddy Glackin's lovely playing on the LP "Hidden Ground" is the inspiration for the two slip jigs, "Give Us a Drink of Water" and "My Mind Will Never Be Easy". We drift into the "Kilnamona" barndance, which I learned many years ago from the playing of Martin Hayes. The second half of the set begins with the solo fiddle playing the "Graf Spey" flowing into the "Salamanca" (learned from Tommy Peoples) then charging into the "Chicago Reel" (lovingly pronounced "Chicargo" by those in the know) and finally seguing into "Anderson's" (learned from Noel Hill and Tony Linnane's inspired 1977 LP).

Dedication Kathy Medic also, Charlie

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Mixing of Album: Jesse Langen, Vijay Tellis-Nayak

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The Kilgubbin Project Album Musicians: Jesse Langen, James Reilly, Brendan Bulger, James Conway, Steve Morrow

Other Kilgubbin Members: Jackie Moran, Joe Kilroy, Ray Quinn, Jeff Lindblade, Niall O'Leary, Tim Britton, Liz Hanley

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Sé mo loch: Noel Rice, Kevin Henry, Albert Neary, Níoclás Tóibín, Seán 'ac Dhonncha, Liz Carroll, Johnny McGreevy, Oisín Mac Diarmada, Fred Rice, John Doherty, Tommy Patts, Andy McGann, Tommy Masterson, Matt Cranitch, Paddy Moloney, Seosamh Ó hÉanaí, Caitlín Maude, Willie Clancy, Séamus Ennis, John Séamus Cooley, Martin Hayes, Mary McDonagh, Jimmy & Eleanor Neary, Joe Shannon, Jimmy Keane, Joe O'Shea, James Kelly, Paul Brady, Joe Cooley, Tony MacMahon, Séamus Mac Mathuna, Paddy O'Brien, Dáithí Sproule, Matt Cranitch, Pat McPartland, Jack Murray, Cuz Teahan, Una McGlew, John Cahill, Liz Carroll, Tommy Makem, Tommy Peoples, Paddy Glackin, Frankie Gavin, Alec Finn, Joe Burke, Máirtín O'Connor, Seán Keane, Paddy Canny, PJ Hayes, John Bonham, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Elvis Costello, John Coltrane, Michael Cleveland, Andy Summers, Séamus Begley, Breannán Begley, David Bloom, Dennis Cahill, Mick Moloney, Jimmy Moore, David Bowie, Mary Bergin

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