

THE ROSE IN THE GAP: DANCE MUSIC OF ORIEL FROM THE DONNELLAN COLLECTION by Gerry O'Connor. Pp 176, Ballymakellett (Ravensdale), 2018. ISBN 978-0-9511569-8-8 (h/b), 978-0-9511569-7-1 (s/b). €40.00 hardback, €30.00 softback.

Gerry O'Connor in this beautifully produced book, has re-transcribed the entire Donnellan Collection in a contemporary playing format. The book is dedicated to the memory of Rose O'Connor (née O'Brien), his mother, and the title comes from one of the reels in the collection. Rose's aunt, Annie O'Brien of Moynalty, Co Meath was a collector of music.

The author's attention to the Donnellan Collection came first through part of it published in this *Journal* (1909) in an article entitled 'Oriel Songs and Dances' by Fr Luke Donnellan of the Armagh Archdiocese. That article included 106 hand-written pieces which were notated within the Oriel area. These tunes were part of a larger collection attributed to Donnellan, now held in the National Folklore Collection at University College, Dublin. The book includes mention of 235 reels, 22 hornpipes, 22 marches & quick steps and 10 song tunes or airs totalling 289 melodies. Three of these are solely attributed to the 1909 article. Transcriptions from the first nine tunes listed in the index on the Donnellan manuscript are absent from the surviving document and are considered lost. Apart from these and four further tunes that were either missing or illegible in the original manuscript at UCD, all the tunes in the collection have been re-worked and re-transcribed. Audio recordings of all the tunes are available online at: [www.gerryoconnor.net](http://www.gerryoconnor.net)

Two introductory pages have been penned by Dr Fintan Vallely who supervised the author's MA thesis at Dundalk Institute of Technology. He states that O'Connor adds finesse to tune notations which previously were difficult to read, jumbled or just hearsay. And he gives them to us in the context of the life, times and scientific compulsions of their carer, Luke Donnellan. The book contains a biography of Luke Donnellan (1878-1952). It details his early life, education and career, and interest in science. Parallel to these interests, was that in Irish traditional and classical music. While based in South Armagh he collected and recorded Irish traditional music and songs detailed in the biography. Donnellan published a number of articles in five issues of this *Journal*, two of them along with Fr Séamus Ó Cuinn.

A cultural and historical background to the Oriel region is provided. Local mid-seventeenth century lyricists are noted in particular Peadar Ó Doirnín (1704-68), Pádraig MacGiolla Fhiondáin (c. 1666-1733) and Art MacCubhthaigh (c. 1715-73). The author outlines how Edward Bunting partly documented the instrumental music tradition of the Ulster area during the Belfast harp Festival of 1792. This was followed by the McGahon Collection in South Ulster in 1817 and the Philip Goodman repertoire (published in 1922). A footnote states that copies of the McGahon Collection, the Philip Goodman Collection and Donnellan's Oriel songs and dance melodies are included in Pádraigín Ní Ullacháin's *A Hidden Ulster: People, Songs and Traditions of Oriel* (2003). The reviewer of that book in this *Journal* (2003) stated that it was an extraordinary work, and worthy successor to the works of Énrí Ó Muiríosa (Henry Morris) and Lorcán Ó Muirí (Fr Larry Murray). O'Connor cites both as members of this Society and their contributions to this journal. The extensive bibliography in *The Rose in the Gap* includes Morris's 1922 article on Philip Goodman's (the Farney Piper) tunes. Over ninety of Goodman's tunes are included in the Donnellan collection and those tunes are identified in the analytical notes provided at the back of the book.

The book is very easy to navigate, the tunes are classified as reels, hornpipes, marches & quicksteps and song tunes or airs. At the back is a tune index in alphabetic order. For those who wish to play the tunes, the analytical notes towards the back of the book provide concise and further detail. While some melodies are part of the greater canon of Irish traditional music, this collection features a number of unfamiliar delights. While there is an absence of jigs, which O'Connor acknowledges may be lost, and an abundance of reels, musicians can find diversity in the way they approach the melodies, as O'Connor himself has done in his fiddle playing. For those who read music, O'Connor in the analytical notes, provides a summary of conventions used. Some historical details are also included and the tune names themselves provide signposts for those interested in the history and geography of the region.

Various signatures appear throughout the Donnellan Collection. It is believed these refer to the original sources of the melodies. The 'Carpenter's March' carried the note 'A composition by James Murtagh'. Unfortunately this tune was illegible on the manuscript. In the analysis of the Donnellan manuscript the point was noted that some dedicated scribe over-wrote the original tunes where fading was taking place. Had this not been carried, more tunes would have been lost in a similar manner to the 'Carpenter's March'. In conclusions drawn from the analysis of tunes, the author after careful consideration opines that Donnellan merely transcribed the 106 CLAJ melodies directly from his manuscript collection with little consideration to their musical content or accuracy of the same. He also

surmised that the original manuscript could have been given to him (Donnellan), perhaps by a member of the family of a local musician who were aware of Donnellan's interest and passion for the musical culture of the area and his belief in the importance of preserving and passing it on through publication to future generations. Since Donnellan's note books do confirm such passions, his great haste to publish the CLAJ article may have resulted in an forgivable oversight of what may be considered relatively small details in the bigger plan.

Although Irish traditional music is often considered an aural tradition, musicians and scholars are indebted to the collectors of Irish traditional music who often notated elements of the repertoire that were otherwise lost. These collections provide opportunities for the music to be rediscovered and, when edited and published in a manner such as *The Rose in the Gap*, they become more accessible to a greater range of musicians. For teachers, particularly in the Oriel region, there is an opportunity to provide students with a meaningful and historically informed connection to the musical heritage of their predecessors while simultaneously recognising O'Connor as one of the preeminent contemporary Irish traditional musicians in the region. In an age where interest in local nuances competes with processes of globalisation, publications such as this firmly locate musical traditions and highlight hidden musical worlds.

Fittingly the book was launched at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2018 in Drogheda, the first occasion on which the Fleadh was held in Co. Louth and at a time when interest in the musical heritage of the region is growing. As those interested in Irish traditional music continue to broaden their knowledge of the traditions beyond the narrow confines of the west of Ireland, this collection is a valuable resource that will enrich the music making of Oriel and further afield into the future.

Daithí Kearney and Séamus Bellew - both DkIT, Dundalk.