



The Pure Drop

A WEEKLY
ROUND UP OF
TRADITIONAL
MUSIC

by
Tommy Fegan

Billy Jones: a Newry man's rambles

Billy Jones, originally from Talbot Street, Newry, has made a remarkable journey in many senses of the word. He first played music with the Hunter Moore Memorial Flute Band, Bessbrook, while he was still attending Windsor Hill Primary School. He later met and married Carmel Drain, one of the well known members of the Drain family from Belfast, all incredibly musical and steeped in the 'Tradition' (local session goers will know Martin, a versatile banjo player).

Billy and Carmel left Newry in 1972 to start-a-new in the south of England. Amongst the few possessions they took were his musical instruments and it wasn't long after their arrival in Dorset that Billy got involved in the thriving folk scene there. After the birth of twin boys, Aaron and Nathon, the couple moved steadily northwards, living first in Gloucestershire.

They sojourned in Bournemouth in the early 1970's, forming the successful High Reel Band. Then it was on to Liverpool for a stint as a member of the Merseyside Socialist Music Collective. Before moving to Scotland in 1987. Here they established the highly popular traditional music website www.tradmusic.com which was nominated in the 'Services to the Music Industry' category of the 2006 Scots Trad Music Awards.

Twin sons Nathon and Aaron carry on the tradition as excellent musicians. Aaron's partner, Claire Mann, is an accomplished fiddler, who featured recently in the BBC TV recording at the Bank Bar in Newry, with Nuala Kennedy.

Regulars at the Railway Bar session last week were delighted that Billy's incredible journey took him back briefly to his beloved Newry, and to the Railway Bar in particular. Bill and family (see picture) entertained listeners and musicians alike, and we look forward to this Newry man's continuing rambles.

Q. How many musicians does it take to change a light bulb?

A. 20. One to do it, and the other 19 to stand around and say "I can do that!"

Irish Ways

I've found you the perfect Christmas gift to buy for friends

overseas, or even locally. "Irish Ways- The Story of Ireland in Song, Music and Poetry" is a breathtaking production which tells the story of Ireland and its people through songs, poetry and music.

The beautifully produced box set contains four CDs, of five hours of song, poetry, session music and narration, plus a high gloss 46,000 word book including illustrations, maps, and an extensive chronology from 9,000 BC to the present day.

This mammoth five year project was conceived, produced and performed by Ron Kavana, and supported by a plethora of superb singers and musicians including Paddy Keenan, Shane McGowan and other Pogues, Terry Woods, Niamh Parsons, Gino Lupari, Desi Wilkinson and many, many more.

Kavana's unique approach is based on the thesis that victors write the history, and the defeated write the songs. Balladry provides a vehicle for expressing the soul of an event in a way a historian never can and it's this that makes this package so compelling.

Guided by Trojan purveyors of song, like Paddy Tunney and Franke Harte, Kavana has enlisted powerful, popular songs like Father Murphy to illuminate great events in history. He deploys this to great effect repeatedly throughout the narrative, giving a fresh perspective to individuals like Roddy McCorley, Robert Emmett and others.

Where he found gaps, he composed song and poetry to illustrate the history, from the arrival of the Fir Bolg up to the recent events of the Peace Process. Inevitably such a broad sweep in such a focused package runs the risk of generalisations and inaccuracies.

There's some really powerful session music, especially where he recreates the Wren Boys celebration. This superb production is available on Amazon for £23.98, which makes it incredible value for money. Get a copy shipped direct to someone for Christmas, and you'll be remembered forever.

Q. What do you call a groupie who hangs around and annoys musicians?

A. A bodhrán player

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