

altan

PRESS/REVIEWS

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"Altan continues to be one of the Celtic world's great treasures, gifted with a front line that is a sheer powerhouse." **Los Angeles Times**

"More than any Irish group, this Donegal quintet is seen as keeper of the traditional flame." **The Boston Globe**

"Altan's tireless touring has won them a loyal following especially in America, and helped them make impressive inroads on world music charts." **Billboard**

"Thought by many to be the finest traditional Irish combo working today, Altan seamlessly blend dazzling instrumental prowess and the gorgeously delicate vocals of Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh" **Chicago Weekly**

"The material (on *Blackwater*) is largely traditional... the final piece, is simply the most captivating, resonant and beautiful music Altan have played, and makes useless for three and a half minutes the history of rock 'n' roll." **Mojo (UK)**

"Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh's beautiful airs had us begging for more. Every corner seemed to echo with her voice long after the music had stopped" **Evening Press (Dublin)**

"The hottest group in the Celtic realm these days." **The Boston Globe**

"Fresh from their well-deserved win in the Roots category at last week's Hot Press Awards, Altan put on a humdinger of a show at the Olympia on Saturday night." **The Evening Herald (Dublin)**

"*The Red Crow* is a triumphant restatement of the virtues of the traditional approach." **Q Magazine**

"Altan's tireless touring has won them a loyal following especially in America, and helped them make impressive inroads on world music charts." **Billboard (US)**

"The appeal of Altan centres on the fact that they see no differences or divisions in music. As such, they have managed to cross the all-important cultural barriers between folk and world and rock music." **The Sunday Tribune (Dublin)**

"Altan's special strength is the clarity and coordination of its textures." **The New York Times**

"...under no circumstances should they be missed in concert." **Irish Echo (New York)**

Traditude: Traditional Music With a Twist

Stephen D. Winick, Folklorist, Music Critic, Editor

Posted: 03/13/2015 12:03 pm EDT Updated: 03/13/2015 12:59 pm EDT

A couple of weeks ago, I returned from the Folk Alliance International conference with an earful of tunes and a bagful of CDs. At the conference I noted a particular orientation to traditional folk music that I've come to think of as "traditude." Traditude is having enough confidence in your traditions that you don't mind playing at the margins. You might collaborate with someone from another musical world, add unusual instruments to your band, or bend the rules of composition or arrangement. You don't just artificially combine, say, Irish fiddle tunes and Go-Go, but you don't rule out that combination if it says what you want to say.

OK, so traditude is hard to define, but I know it when I hear it.

<snip>

Finally, since St. Patrick's Day is at hand, I'll mention The Widening Gyre, the latest from renowned Irish band Altan. I've been listening to this group a long time; it's hard to believe, but over twenty-five years ago I recorded one of their gigs for WKCR at New York's Eagle Tavern. (Eerily, the band's singer and fiddler Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh looks exactly the same as she did then, but I've aged!) Since then, they became one of the first traditional music bands to record for a major label (Virgin), scored gold records, and toured all over the world. After a hiatus of a few years, they came back for 2012's *The Poison Glen*, and just followed that up with *The Widening Gyre*. Named for a line in Yeats's "The Second Coming," the album may have felt like a rough beast being born; it features the band's first lineup change since Frankie Kennedy passed away in 1994 and was replaced by Dermot Byrne. Now Byrne himself has been succeeded by Martin Tourish on keys and piano accordion. The band, which recorded *The Widening Gyre* in Nashville, invited along a slew of country and bluegrass guests to make this (more or less) a crossover country-Celtic album. Old-time fans will enjoy an unusual ballad combining elements of "The House Carpenter" with the framework of "Gypsy Davy," which features Tim O'Brien and Julee Galub Weems, as well as the tune set including "Buffalo Gals," featuring Darol Anger. Bluegrass aficionados will love the original tune "The Triple T," which includes Alison Brown, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, and other Nashville greats. Country fans will like "No Ash Will Burn," on which the great Bruce Molsky sings and fiddles alongside Ní Mhaonaigh. And if Irish music is your thing, there's Altan's usual stock-in-trade: hard-driving Donegal reels and jigs, gentle songs in Gaelic and English, and even a Yeats poem, set to music and sung by Ní Mhaonaigh and Mary Chapin Carpenter. Masterful playing and clean production are married to great attention to detail in the arrangements; on "Cúirt Robin Finley," for example, ebow guitar and cello are joined by eerie, subtle fiddle effects that add an extra dimension to Ní Mhaonaigh's clear, arresting vocal. Happily, the center holds, and mere anarchy is not loosed; au contraire, *The Widening Gyre* is a beautiful, coherent example of Irish music with strong American influences.

And, of course, with traditude.



Altan: The Widening Gyre (Compass)

By Lee Zimmerman | 16-March-2015

Borrowing its title from a poem by W.B. Yeats, *The Widening Gyre* finds this veteran Celtic combo journeying to Nashville and intertwining their Irish roots with ample doses of Appalachian mountain music and wholly American bluegrass. Guests Mary Chapin Carpenter, Alison Brown, Tim O'Brien, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Todd Phillips, Bryan Sutton, and Darol Anger help Altan expand their musical palette, while still retaining an emphasis on their usual array of traditional ballads, jigs and reels. Fiddles, banjos and mandolins abound, but when singer Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh takes the helm on the sublime “No Ash Will Burn”, “Lurgy Streams”, “Far Beyond Carrickfinn”, and the stoic standard “The House Carpenter (Gypsy Davy)”, even this year’s thermal winter couldn’t keep them from melting one’s heart in response. □□ Despite the disparate locale, the music does hold a certain seminal attraction for the band. Most music scholars will affirm the fact that Appalachian music and the folk tunes of Ireland do hold a certain kinship, both in the instrumentation and in the sublime sentiments that continually come to the fore.

It’s also an apt venture for a band that’s been around nearly 35 years together, a distinction that marks them as a band with the longest running lineup of founding members on the Irish music scene today. It’s also a credit to their perseverance that despite their hardy trajectory, they’re still keen to bend the boundaries and venture into new and as yet unconquered terrain. Learning and performing the music firsthand alongside their storied guests would certainly seem to help, but being that they were in Music City for only the second time, it’s especially fortuitous that they had Compass Records co-founder Garry West on hand to help steer the proceedings. One might imagine that he was the conduit between the Irish players and the American musicians, giving them common ground in the studio and a well of shared musical experiences from which they could freely draw.

Likewise, the more obvious musical touches made a marked impression as well, particularly the presence of Ms. Carpenter on the sublime “White Birds”, a Yeats poem about being a bird on the sea, and Scottish songstress Eddi Reader, who lends her vocals to the lush and lovely folk tale “Far Beyond Carrickfinn”.

Still, for all the apparent reverence and obvious historical leanings, *The Widening Gyre* is much more than a mere scholarly treatise. The energy and enthusiasm are palatable, and there’s a sense of celebration that echoes throughout. And yet it’s clear that Altan relishes its roots, and that they’re determined to do all they can to keep them visible at all times. For all the merging of forms and finesse, the group’s archival influences and untarnished authenticity continue to operate at full throttle. It’s a lesson in assimilation—mix and merge, but stay true to your own traditions.

Ultimately, *The Widening Gyre* is a defining moment for Altan. So while it remains to be seen if they’ll continue on this course, now anyway, Altan has made the kind of album that defines them as distinctive.

RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Lee Zimmerman is thrilled to be writing for PopMatters, one of the best in the biz. In addition, he also writes *Blurt*, *Relix*, *M Music and Musicians*, *New Times*, *Bluegrass Situation*, *Country Standard Time*, *Goldmine*, and maybe more that don't immediately come to mind. He's fond of editors (most of the time), publicists (esp. when they agree to send him music in physical form) and the brave souls that make the music and struggle to express their creativity and still make a living at it at the same time. Lee is obsessed with music - new, old, pop, rock, Americana, country, folk... all he desires is a great melody and an indelible refrain.

<http://www.popmatters.com/review/191195-altan-the-widening-gyre/>

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Country	Date Publication	Article	Writer	Link
USA	14-Feb-15 WGBH (MA) 'A Celtic Sojourn'	On air feature on the album with Boston show promotion		Live
USA	24-Feb-15 Irish Voice	Altan Return With Amazing CD	Paul Keating	In print
USA	25-Feb-15 Boston Globe	The Week Ahead	Staff	http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/music/2015/02/25/the-week-ahead-pop-rock/oNT1VYBtK1Xi6CFzhUAmM/story.html
USA	19-Mar-15 Travel & Leisure	Traditional Irish Folk Group Altan Talks Travel	Caroline Hallemann	http://www.travelandleisure.com/blogs/altan-irish-folk-band-interview
USA	13-Mar-15 Huffington Post	Traditide: Traditional Music With A Twist	Stephen Winick	http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-d-winick/traditide-traditional-music-with-a-twist_b_6861514.html
USA	1-Mar-15 WFUV Ceol na Ngael	Interview and performance		
USA	16-Mar-15 PopMatters	Review	Lee Zimmerman	www.popmatters.com/review/191195-altan-the-widening-gyre/ "The energy and enthusiasm are palatable, and there
USA	7-Mar-15 Sirius XM 'Celtic Crush'	Performance		
USA	7-Mar-15 WXPn: Folkadelphia	Video performance	Fred Kittel	Live
USA	9-Mar-15 DC Metro Theater Arts	Altan at the Barns at Wolf Trap	Jessica Vaughn	http://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2015/03/09/altan-at-the-barns-at-wolf-trap/
USA	4-Mar-15 Irish Voice	Altan Launches Wonderful New CD	Paul Keating	In print
USA	10-Mar-15 Chicago Sun-Times	Irish Folk Icons Altan Turn to Nashville for Their Latest Release	Mary Houlihan	http://entertainment.suntimes.com/entertainment-news/irish-folk-icons-altan-turn-nashville-latest-release/
USA	28-Feb-15 Irish Arts Magazine	Track-by-track podcast interview	Gwen Orel	http://blogspot.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=712b0d681e88ff770b53ddf9a&id=c9a301118e&e=493db60abc
USA	11-Mar-15 Wisconsin Public Radio	Preview of show		Live
USA	11-Mar-15 Wisconsin State Journal	Preview with photo		
USA	5-Mar-15 Ann Arbor News	5 Things To Do Around Ann Arbor This Week: See Buddy Guy, Hear Irish Music and More	Jenn McKee	http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2015/03/5_things_to_do_around_ann_arbo_101.html
USA	12-Mar-15 Capital Times Madison	The Day Ahead, March 12: Altan, 'The Drowsy Chaperone,' Red Cross Blood Drives	Staff	http://host.madison.com/news/local/the-day-ahead-march-altan-the-drowsy-chaperone-red-cross/article_45b591ca-e2b9-56c2-9421-c219693983a8.ht
USA	13-Mar-15 The Irish Community of Tucson	Altan, with Liz Carroll, at the Berger Center	Staff	http://tucsonirishcommunity.com/Events/altan-with-special-guest-at-the-berger-center
USA	9-Apr-15 FolkWorks	Album Review	Anya Sturm	http://folkworks.org/reviews/folkworks-cd-reviews/45648-altan-the-widening-gyre
Ireland	1/22/2015 Independent.ie	A Step Back in Time for Altan Singer Mairead	Kirsty Blake Knox	http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/a-step-back-in-time-for-altan-singer-mairead-30927839.html
Ireland	1/23/2015 Irish Times	What's on Sunday: Natalie Prass and A Donegal Photo Album		http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/what-s-on-sunday-natalie-prass-and-a-donegal-photo-album-1.2075791
Ireland	2/11/2015 Donegal news	Memory Lane: When Altan Teamed up With the Queen of Country	SEÁN P. FEENY	http://donegalnews.com/2015/02/memory-lane-when-altan-teamed-up-with-the-queen-of-country/
Ireland	2/11/2015 Donegal news	Altan's First Nashville Album Due For Release Next Month	SEÁN P. FEENY	http://donegalnews.com/2015/01/altans-first-nashville-album-due-for-release/
Ireland	5/2/2015 Irish Post	Altan Push the Boundaries	Joe Giltrap	In print
Ireland	2/10/2015 Irish Music Magazine	Cover story and feature	Grainne McCool	In print
Ireland	5-Feb-15 Irish Post	5 Star Album Review		Attached
UK	2/7/2015 The Irish World	Altan Release New Album	n/a	In print
UK	24-Feb Financial Times	3 Star Album Review		In print
UK	23-Feb-15 The Arts Desk	Album Review	Peter Quinn	http://www.theartsdesk.com/new-music/cd-altan-widening-gyre "one of the most touching things you'll hear this year
UK	19-Feb-15 BBC Radio 2	The Folk Show With Mark Radcliffe	Mark Radcliffe	http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b052gns2
UK	8-Mar-15 Sunday Times	Album Review	Lauren Murphy	http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/ireland/article1526846.ece
UK	1-Apr-15 Songlines	Quickfire Questions with Mairead	n/a	In print
UK	June issue Songlines	Album Review		Scheduled to run
Canada	March Staff	Penguin Eggs Picks for March	staff	http://www.ckuu.com/penguin-egg-picks-march/
France	Mar-15 Le Peuple Breton	Musiques de Celtie: Altan, The Widening Gyre	Philippe Cousin	In print
Germany	19-Mar-15 Weltmusik Magazin	Album Review		http://www.weltmusik-magazin.de/?p=5940 "This review is a good one."
Italy	Scheduled for April World Music Magazine	Album Review	Ciro De Rosa	Scheduled
	Scheduled for May World Music Magazine	Interview with Mairead	Ciro De Rosa	
	Expecting coverage			
	Folsom Telegraph	Interview		
	Folkadelphia	Archived video coverage		
	NÓS	Album Review		
	Acoustic Guitar	On-camera feature with Daithi		

IRISH AMERICA MAGAZINE

By [Tara Dougherty](#), Music Editor | April / May 2012

A look at recently released music of Irish and Irish-American interest.

Altan • The Poison Glen

In their newest album, *The Poison Glen*, Altan reverts to the sound that their fans initially fell in love with. Transforming from a virtually unknown duo in the mid-eighties to the six-piece band they are now, Altan is a band that has never really stopped growing or developing. It is clear from the jump with this effort that the intention was to take Altan back to the stage, to recreate their intoxicating live sound. Their more recent work has stood atop very large production, which at times would only water down the atmosphere that has made Altan unquestionably the next legendary name in Celtic music.



As a whole, *The Poison Glen* is a more somber album than Altan is known for, the tracks unfolding slowly with Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh's crystal clear vocals very much at the helm. Her harmonies on "Caitlin Triall" harken back to a sound that listeners yearn for in Celtic music. Her vocal tracks, stripped bare of effects, seem to echo across centuries. Altan's more playful side emerges in "Tommy Pott's Slip Jig." *The Poison Glen* is a diverse album; it is complete, polished and raises the bar for future Altan albums.

The Washington Post

Album review: Altan's '25th Anniversary Celebration'

ALTAN WITH THE R.T.E. CONCERT ORCHESTRA
"25th Anniversary Celebration"

Kindred spirits: The Chieftains, Bothy Band, Eileen Ivers, Solas



Pairing a folk string band with a classical orchestra is often a bad idea: The cohesiveness of the large ensemble can clash with the assertiveness of the small. But when the R.T.E Concert Orchestra, Ireland's public-radio house orchestra, backs that country's great folk band Altan on "25th Anniversary Celebration," they blend unexpectedly well. That's because precision harmonies are essential to Altan's music, and the orchestra expands that signature sound without distorting it.

The group, which has worked with a classical string quartet, asked Irish composer Fiachra Trench to flesh out his chamber-music arrangements for a full orchestra. He does so quite tastefully, always allowing the folk quintet to own the foreground at the beginning of each song and bringing up the strings and woodwinds later to broaden the band's musical ideas. The nine songs and six instrumental tracks -- two-thirds traditional and all previously recorded -- provide a sumptuous tour of the band's quarter-century history.

It helps that Altan's leader, Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh, is the Alison Krauss of Ireland -- a talented fiddler and once-in-a-generation singer. When Ni Mhaonaigh warbles the slow air "I Wish My Love Was a Red Red Rose," her soprano mirrors the lushness of the orchestra behind her and the yearning desire of the song's lover.

-- **Geoffrey Himes**

Los Angeles Times

POP MUSIC REVIEW: Altan Excels in Fiery Donegal Tradition

March 11, 1996 | DON HECKMAN | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

It took half the program for the Irish traditional group Altan to get its act together at the Wadsworth Theater on Saturday. But it was worth the wait.

Altan, whose recent albums have consistently risen to the tops of various world music charts, played an opening set dominated by the sprightly reels and jigs of the Donegal tradition, which is the basis of its musical style. And violinist-singer Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh offered a few melancholy ballads in her warm and haunting voice.

But the set--for all its musical excellence--never quite came to life.

The second half of the performance was an entirely different matter. Its revived energies were triggered in the first tune by violinist Ciaran Tourish, who ripped off a solo so overflowing with spunk and vigor that the capacity audience was soon clapping along spontaneously.

Altan was immediately invigorated. More reels and jigs followed, now buoyed by the enthusiastic rhythms of guitarist Daithi Sproule and bouzouki player Ciaran Curran and the fiery drive of the two-violin front line.

Accordianist Dermot Byrne added harmonic colorations, occasionally contributing wistful solos of his own. And Ni Mhaonaigh sang more ballads about such subjects as the first day of spring, St. Brigid, and the unfortunate passions of lovesick swains. "All my songs are sad," she noted, adding with a touch of Donegal whimsy, "The men are left brokenhearted and the women go off to play bingo."

As the program rolled to a close, Altan's connection with the audience finally became solidly linked when the aisles were filled with dancing listeners--indisputable evidence of Irish music's remarkable ability to transcend barriers of language and culture.