

ALTAN

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30th Anniversary Tour! No Irish traditional band in the last dozen years has had a wider impact on audiences and music lovers throughout the world than Altan. With their exquisitely produced award-winning recordings, ranging dynamically from the most sensitive and touching old Irish songs all the way to hard hitting reels and jigs, and with their heartwarming live performances, Altan have moved audiences from Donegal to Tokyo to Seattle. Altan's international status and success found a very practical recognition when they were signed to Virgin Records in 1996, the first Irish band of their kind to be signed by a major label. The band gained gold and platinum albums in Ireland and toured larger venues throughout the world. In spite of a hectic touring and recording schedule, Altan continue fresh in their vision of bringing the beauty and joy of traditional music to audiences everywhere, and have always promised themselves to continue as long as it's fun – fortunately, it still is.

Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh – Lead Vocals, Fiddle
Ciarán Curran – Bouzouki
Ciaran Tourish – Fiddle, Tin Whistle, Backing Vocals
Dáithí Sproule – Guitar, Vocals
Martin Tourish – Accordion

Martin Nolan – Manager
David Nokken – Tour Manager, Front of House Engineer

Booking Agency/Tour Direction – SRO Artists, Inc.

*(Set list to be announced from stage and include a mix of music from the new album, *The Widening Gyre*, as well as songs spanning the Altan's career. There will be a short intermission.)*

Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh is a native of the Donegal Gaeltacht of Gaoth Dobhair. Her first language is Gaelic and she has learned many of her songs from family and neighbors as well as sourcing older material from archive facilities. She is renowned as one of the leading exponents of Donegal fiddle music and likes to promote the music which she has inherited from her late father Francie, whenever possible. Mairéad founded Altan along with her late husband, Frankie Kennedy; from humble beginnings they brought their music to the world arena without compromising the deep musical tradition they loved. Mairéad has recorded with other musicians such as Enya, the Chieftains, Dolly Parton, The String Sisters, T With the Maggies, and many more.

Ciarán Curran is a native of Kinawley, Co. Fermanagh, an area rich in music, song and folklore and brings his strong family musical tradition to bear on an instrument relatively new to Irish traditional music – the bouzouki. Ciarán has worked with Co. Antrim singer, Len Graham, Enniskillen singer, Gabriel McArdle, Derrygonnelly fiddler, Seamus Quinn and Belfast flute player, Gary Hastings. He has developed a unique, personal and subtle style on the bouzouki using counter harmonies and melodies that let the music breathe and show its most melodic strengths without conflicting with the essence of the melody.

Ciaran Tourish hails from Buncrana in East Co. Donegal. Although Ciaran started playing the tin whistle at an early age, he soon took up the fiddle under the guidance of local legendary fiddler and teacher, Dinny McLaughlin. In addition to his mastery of the dance music tradition, Ciaran's quick ear, love of harmony and counterpoint have led to his talent being in demand as a valued collaborator on non-Altan and even non-Irish music projects with a wide range of musicians and singers including Paul Brady, Matt Molloy, Mary Black, Maura O'Connell, Máirtín O'Connor, Dolores Keane, Dé Danann and American musicians, Jerry Douglas and Tim O'Brien.

Dáithí Sproule of Derry, whose first group was legendary Skara Brae, has lived for many years in Minnesota. Dáithí was one of the first guitarists to develop DADGAD guitar tuning for Irish music. As well as playing and singing with Altan, he has performed and recorded with two highly influential traditional music trios; Bowhand (with James Kelly and Paddy O'Brien) and Trian (with Liz Carroll and Billy McComiskey) and has played on recordings of Tommy Peoples, Seamus and Manus McGuire, Peter Ostroushko, and many others. In addition to performing and recording Dáithí is a teacher and lecturer in subjects ranging from guitar styles and traditional songs to Irish language and myth.

Máirtín Tourish is an accordionist, composer, producer and musicologist from Co. Donegal and now based in Dublin. In 2008, Martin was commissioned by TG4 to compose, produce and perform the music for their brand television advertisement 'The More You Look, The More You See' which won many national and international awards and earned the piece of music national recognition. A song he composed entitled 'An Gealóg' appears on Altan's latest album *The Poison Glen* whilst a virtuosic piece entitled 'The Seventh Degree' is being performed by Triona Marshal on harp during The Chieftain's 50th anniversary tour.

About ATLAN's new release, *The Widening Gyre* (Compass Records. Street Date: February 17, 2014)

"The music on this album examines the lifecycle of Altan by exploring the influence of Appalachian music on Irish music," says lead vocalist, fiddler, and founding member Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh of Altan's new studio album *The Widening Gyre*.

After nearly 35 years together—the longest running lineup of founding members in Irish music—the members of Altan were ready to flex their musical boundaries when they started talking to Compass co-founder Garry West about the direction for their latest project. With Garry in the producer's chair and many good friends in the studio, Altan fused the traditional Irish music that they are known for, namely Donegal fiddling and Gaelic singing traditions, with American roots music, particularly that of the Appalachian bluegrass fiddle.

"Garry steered the band in the studio to open up musically while somehow managing to help us keep the integrity of Altan intact," said Mairéad of Garry West's production. Recording in Nashville for only the second time and the first time for a full album, the band was able to gather many of the roots musicians they've met over their thirty years together, including Tim O'Brien, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Bryan Sutton, and Compass co-founder Alison Brown. "We've made lifelong friends through music. The circle has expanded over the years, and our new album celebrates those relationships. The band was totally overwhelmed by our friends' endless variety of contributions."

The list of guests on *The Widening Gyre* is as diverse as it is impressive. Mary Chapin Carpenter, a friend of the band since the '90s, lent her vocals to the song "White Birds" to create a lush, meditative reimagining of the W.B. Yeats poem about being a bird on the sea, an appropriate metaphor for a band who has musically and physically crossed the Atlantic in the making of the album.

Eddie Reader, "an amazing singer and very generous person," says Mairéad, offers her angelic backing vocals to "Far Beyond Carrickfinn." Altan has played concerts with Reader before and they were delighted to finally have the Glasgow native join them in the studio.

Altan borrowed the mournful waltz "No Ash Will Burn" from the legendary Nashville songwriter Walt Aldridge. Mairéad's crystalline vocals unlock the Celtic undertones of the song while standing in stark contrast to the plaintive baritone of Bruce Molsky, a long time friend of the band and well-known old-time fiddler and singer.

The bluegrass presence shows itself most clearly on "Buffalo Gals" and "Thomasino (Thomas Tourish's Tune)," a lively fiddle song written by Altan's own Ciaran Tourish. Ciaran is joined by bluegrass greats Alison Brown, Sam Bush, Stuart Duncan, Jerry Douglas, Todd Phillips, Bryan Sutton, and Darol Anger.

Mairéad gushes about Anger: "His unique approach gives a different color to the music which opens up amazing possibilities with Irish traditional music. He is a true artist with that fiddle!" She also declares Duncan to be, "a fiddler's fiddler! He can create so many different sounds and variations on that instrument. The band was mesmerized listening to his playing."

O'Brien duets on "The House Carpenter (Gypsy Davy)," a track which spotlights the shared musical roots of Irish and Appalachian music with references to both of these historical songs. O'Brien is best known for his work with Hot Rize, but like many dedicated bluegrass musicians, has shown a deep interest in Celtic music.

The Widening Gyre straddles time as it manages to remind listeners of the ancient bond between Irish and Appalachian music while at the same time breaking new ground through collaborations between masters of American roots music and Celtic music.

"The title *The Widening Gyre* appeals to us and depicts the spiral of life, widening and embracing the new. It has an innate energy. We think that idea is reflected in the album's music," says Mairéad.

The Widening Gyre is a compelling development in Altan's story proving that they are still growing as artists, even after so many years together.

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