

PROGRAM NOTES: ALTAN ~ MARCH 2023 Tour (revised 29-August-2022)

ALTAN

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Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh – Lead Vocals, Fiddle

Ciarán Curran – Bouzouki

Dáithí Sproule – Guitar, Vocals

Martin Tourish – Accordion

Clare Friel – Special Guest Fiddle, Vocals

Altan are delighted to welcome Clare on this tour of the US in October /November 2022 to show the continuation of the rich tradition that Co Donegal keeps producing.

Joyce In – Sound Engineer

Booking Agency/Tour Direction – SRO Artists, Inc.

(The program for this US Tour will feature all time favorite and requested pieces, ranging from haunting songs to lively spirited Donegal dance tunes. Set order may vary and will be announced from stage. There will be a short intermission.)

1. **Seán sa Cheo**

These are three reels from our 2018 album “The Gap of Dreams”. The first reel is an unusual version of a traditional reel, followed by two spirited reels composed by Martin Tourish. The names of the pieces are ‘Tuar’ meaning prediction and ‘Oíche Fheidhmiúil’ meaning a wonderful, memorable night!

2. **Andy de Jarvis**

These are three jigs from the vibrant Cape Breton tradition of Eastern Canada, which we got from the great Jerry Holland who passed away a few years ago

3. **Month of January**

A beautiful sad song from the singing of the great Paddy Tunney, who was a frequent visitor to the Gaeltacht area of Gaith Dobhair.

4. **Piper in the Cave**

An unusual march which we learned from the playing of the brothers, Micky and Francie Byrne of Kilcar, Co Donegal also known as ‘The Dears’ as the family were known for their red coloured hair!

5. **Templehouse Highland selection**

A selection of typical Donegal highlands and reels which shows the strong connection with the Scotland, our Celtic neighbours.

6. **Dáithí Sproule**

We usually get Derry born Dáithí Sproule to delight us nightly with various songs which he has collected over the years.

7. **Dónal agus Mórág/The New Rigged Ship**

This is a popular song which Mairéad got from a neighbour about a wedding feast on Ratlin island, off the Co Antrim coast. The neighbour could only remember two verses and Mairéad asked her father Francie to write a few additional verses in the same spirit of the original song. The reel that follows is an old reel from The Shetland Islands which was given to Mairéad by the great Tom Anderson telling her that it was from Co Donegal originally and came to the Shetland Islands through the fishermen.

8. Gap of Dreams

Three newly composed jigs. The first jig Mairéad composed after hearing Dáithí mentioning the idea in a song by the title The Ballad of Douglas Bridge. The second jig was composed by Mairéad's daughter Nia when she was 12 years old and we simply call it Nia's Jig. The third jig composed by a young musician and accomplished musician, Sam Kelly, is our Irish guitarist's son. He titled it 'The Beekeeper'.

9. Bacach Shíl Andaí

A children's song from the Irish uprising against the English in 1798. The French came to Kilalla to help, but the Irish being ill prepared were defeated and sent many on the run. Like a lot of children's rhymes this has a serious dark story!

10. Dark Haired Lass/Biddy from Muckross

A selection of three reels from the Donegal fiddle tradition. Biddy from Muckross was a great source of tunes for local musicians and it was said that she learned her music from the fairies.

11. The Road Home

A beautiful slow tune composed by Martin depicting his emotions on a journey north along the Atlantic coast to Co Donegal on his road home from the wonderful Willie Clancy Summer School which takes place annually in Milltown Malbay, Co Clare in memory of the great piper of that name who once lived there.

12. Tullaghan Lasses

This first reel was a favourite of one of Donegal's greatest fiddler, John Seimi Doherty. The reels that follow are also from the Donegal fiddling tradition repertoire.

13. Gleanntáin Ghlas Ghaoth Dobhair

Translated as 'The Green Fields of Gaoth Dobhair' which Francie Mooney, Mairead's father composed in praise of their home area in North West Donegal.

14. Fermanagh /DonegalHighlands/Reels

These two highlands are firm favourites of the band and their audience as they depict the essence of the music of County Donegal.

Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh (the 2017 recipient of the TG4 Gradam Ceoil/Traditional Musician of the Year, one of Ireland's highest musical honors) 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. She is a founding member of Cairdeas na bhFidléirí, which was set up 25 years ago to preserve and facilitate the development of the Donegal fiddling tradition for future generations. Mairéad's musical inspiration initially came from her family and neighbors, her father being a great fiddle teacher with a wealth of unusual local tunes, many learned from his mother, Róise. She also received tuition and inspiration from Buncrana fiddle player, Dinny McLaughlin, who was a frequent visitor to her home when she was growing up. 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. Along with her work with Altan, Mairéad is always in demand for solo work or presenting traditional music programs on radio or television; past projects include the classic radio show The Long Note and the television series The Pure Drop and The Full Set on RTÉ1. Mairéad has recorded with other musicians such as Enya, the Chieftains, Dolly Parton, The String Sisters, T With the Maggies, and many more. Mairéad's first solo project, Imeach, was released in 2009. <http://www.mairead.ie/>

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's late uncle, Ned Curran, was a great fiddle player and has given the band many tunes from his unusual repertoire. Ciarán was introduced to a lot of traditional music and musicians by his friend Cathal McConnell (Boys of the Lough) from whom he learned many tunes. Ciarán has also played with Co. Leitrim fiddler, Ben Lennon, to whom he attributes his strong backing rhythm and bounce. Ciarán has worked with Co. Antrim singer, Len Graham, Enniskillen singer, Gabriel McArdle, Derrygonnelly fiddler, Seamus Quinn and Belfast flute player, Gary Hastings. With

Ben Lennon, Seamus Quinn and Gabriel McArdle, he recorded the classic “Dog Big Dog Little” album, named after two mountains on the borders of County Fermanagh and Co Leitrim. Ciarán has also produced the critically acclaimed Slán le Loch Éirne, a duet album from Gary Hastings and Seamus Quinn. Ciarán Curran 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.

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 recent years he has been playing with another great trio, Fingal, with Randal Bays and James Keane, and performing locally in Minnesota with friends such as Laura MacKenzie and Jode and Kate Dowling. Dáithí's original compositions have been recorded by Skara Brae, the Bothy Band, Altan, Trian, Liz Carroll, Aoife Clancy and others. In 1995 he released his first solo album “A Heart Made of Glass” with songs in English and Irish. In 2008 he released an instrumental guitar album “The Crow in the Sun”, featuring 13 original compositions. 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. <http://www.daithisroule.com/>

Martin Tourish is an accordionist, composer, producer and musicologist from Co. Donegal and now based in Dublin. His ancestors were collectors of dance music whose manuscripts date from 1896. Martin's debut album Clan Ranald with bouzouki player Luke Ward was released in 2005 and listed by music critic Earle Hitchner of the Irish Echo and Wall Street Journal, as being in the top 20 albums of 2005. From the success of the Clan Ranald album, Martin is listed in The Rough Guide to Ireland as a piano accordionist of note while a track from the album appears in The Rough Guide to Irish Folk Vol. 2. In 2008, he became the first piano accordionist to win TG4's prestigious ‘Young Musician of the Year’ award which a subsequent article in The Irish Times regarded as “the Irish Music equivalent of an Oscar”. 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. In 2010 he composed the theme tune to a national marathon festival Rith2010 to promote the Irish language and in 2011 composed the trad style variation on a theme for the nationwide Love Live Music festival. 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.

Clare Friel, TG4 Gradam Ceoil Ceoltóir Óg/Young Musician of the Year 2018, was born and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland, with very close family ties to Donegal. She is a highly regarded fiddle player and singer and plays as a part of The Friel Sisters. Clare is quickly making a name for herself and has played and toured with such acts as Altan, The Chieftains, Moya Brennan, Lúnasa, Sharon Shannon, Carlos Nuñez, Cherish the Ladies and the Máirtín O'Connor Trio. “Clare's fiddle is a joy: unhurried, throaty and conversational in style” (The Irish Times). “She plays with a ferocious intensity” (Irish Echo, New York). “As good as you will get in Irish traditional music anywhere in the world” (WGBH, Boston). “This talented young woman has emerged as one of the most exciting young traditional musicians on the scene today” (TG4 Gradam Ceoil honored Young Musician of the Year in 2018).