Bundle and Go

John Doherty

Master Fiddler of Donegal

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1. March & Reel: **Hudie Gallagher's March/ Untitled Reel**
2. Reel: **The Black Mare of Fanad**
3. Highland: **The March of the Meena Toiten Bull**
4. Jigs: **Kiss the Maid Behind the Bier/ The Bargain is Over**
5. Highland: **The 21 Highland**
6. Untitled March
7. Untitled Reel
8. Highland: **The Paps of Glencoe**
9. Reel: **The Hare in the Corn**
10. Untitled March
11. Jig: **The Knights of St. Patrick**
12. Reel: **The Dispute at the Crossroads**
13. Reels: **Roaring Mary/ Stormy Weather**
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22. Reel: **The Heathery Breeze**
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25. Untitled Highland
26. Reel: **The Black Haired Lass**
27. Air: **Paddy's Rambles Through the Park**

First published by Topic 1984
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Produced by Allen Feldman & Tony Engle
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The recent death of John Doherty, the travelling virtuoso fiddler of Donegal, has ushered in a final tragic period in the Irish musical tradition. Presaged by the death of Willie Clancy in 1974, the passing away of John Doherty is a crucial marker in an inevitable process by which Ireland will lose that remarkable sub-culture of older musicians who stood as the sole bridge between contemporary Ireland and the most fertile and expressive arts of the rural tradition. The next five to ten years will witness the gradual attrition of the rural master musician, that special breed of artist born around the turn of the century, who assimilated Irish music as a direct generational transmittance. For these musicians and singers, music was, essentially, Irish music. Locked into their regional particularity by geographic isolation, the localised aesthetics of the home community, whether it be East Clare or Southwest Donegal, defined the limits of their musical milieu. It is their relentless exploration of the music's power of expressiveness within the constraints of regional particularity that separates this and older generations of traditional musicians from those who have followed. In contrast, those younger musicians who have taken their music from these artists, directly or indirectly, will have experienced the media, recordings and cultural ideologies of a contemporary Europeanised Ireland.

Their music will have developed in contrast and even in opposition to foreign cultural forms, but never in isolation from them.

The younger musicians will have forced the music's survival into a different societal context. Their action over the years may well come to be valued as a cultural counterpoint to an increasingly Europeanised Ireland. But John Doherty presented his listeners with another type of otherness. When he lifted the bow to play, his concerns were not with the historical continuance of the music (his feelings about this were laden with bemused irony) - John played in order to effect a meta-historical return to the ground source of the Irish musical tradition.

Those of us who were privileged to hear him in person felt this temporal pull in his music, and returned time after time to relive this tension. His music struck people who did not understand this as remote, austere, even unemotional. They failed to see that his emotional experience was not ours. When John Doherty fiddled, he entered into a secret communion with his instrument, his music and the past. He played with the aesthetic concerns and the emotional perspective of 18th-century Ireland. In doing so he stood outside our lives and our world, enlarging our experience as few musicians have ever done. Perhaps no other traditional musician played his music with such historicised intimacy. His was no attempt at recreation or nostalgia. Doherty was a captive of his art and through the medium of his music, with its depth of personal association, he was simply - there.

As Paddy Tunney pointed out in his recent book, John Doherty was one of our last living links to the tradition of the bards, harpers and oldtime *seanachie*. In recent years this type of statement has become a cliche. But consider that John Doherty was at the centre of that Gaelic tradition where the patterned and aesthetic organisation of sound becomes a form of historical record keeping. Like the aged *sloinnteori* of Tory Island, who would chant the names of their antecedents back seven generations as a mnemonic technique, John Doherty gave his listeners genealogies in sound, where each reel, each lament became an avenue of access to a world which was not our own. John's approach to his music was predetermined by his own links to this past. He could trace his descent through four generations of travelling musicians to his great-grandparents Hugh Doherty and Nannie Rua Mac Sweeney, who was the aunt of

the renowned Donegal piper Turlough Mac Sweeney. More famous in this century for their fiddling, the Dohertys and their kin preserved the art of the *piob mor* when it had died out for centuries in the rest of Ireland. The mouth-blown highland pipes was probably their original instrument, the source of much of their archaic repertoire, and a strong influence on their fiddling. John Doherty has kept this oldest instrumental tradition alive through the sound of his fiddling. The ghost of the chanter lived in his powerful bowing. In his music the pipes were an ever-present musical referent renewing his connection to the familial tradition.

This evocation of an extinct musical tradition transformed his fiddling into a cultural and historical symbolism. It was the articulation of the most archaic tendencies in his art and personality. As a travelling musician among the isolated and sedentary communities of rural Donegal, John's life and music were pervaded with the aura of the shaman, with the archetypal imagery of the Trickster/Artist, that pivotal figure in traditional society. Everything about him seemed to signify something else. He contained apparently contradictory oppositions or counterpoints that lent a metaphorical quality to his life and art. His dual-imagery was a formative component of his life-style. He would play the fiddle and we would hear the pipes. He could casually relate an earthy anecdote and transform it subtly into myth. He was capable of the most complex technical intricacies on the fiddle, but held these in reserve and played with a deceptive simplicity and directness. He presented himself as a composed man, content with his lot, but those who knew him experienced his inbred restlessness, his urge to wander, his need to be always somewhere else. He was an isolated man, a figure in exile, yet no other individual was made more welcome in the houses of rural Donegal. He was one of the greatest master musicians of Ireland, yet for most of his life he never owned a fiddle.

Despite his warmth and cordiality, John died an enigma. Even his death contains implications we will never fully comprehend. He was a collector of traditions in his own right, and his fund of music and stories was never exhausted. An invaluable legacy of native Irish culture died with him. He would often remark that there were 'more things hidden in the fiddle than men could ever know'. So it was with him.

Perhaps he was lost to us from the beginning. We had come to him from our places and he in turn was claimed by a culture and a temporality that we could not know. The morphology of men like John Doherty, Willy Clancy and Seamus Ennis is unclear. In the process of communicating a fading tradition, they become emblematic of the totality of that tradition. The expressive power of centuries of music recapitulates itself through their personalities and art. Despite their own fatalism concerning the future, they may well be the individual expression of that final surge of survival awareness, by which one culture, one society leaves tracks - for another to follow.

THE MUSIC
The recordings featured in this album were made in the field during the summer of 1977. The fiddle John plays was graciously lent to him by Danny O'Donnell, a highly accomplished fiddler in his own right. An attempt has been made in the selection of performances to emphasise the more archaic aspects of Doherty's repertoire: those tunes and playing styles that have their roots in the *piob mor* tradition that was indigenous to his family. At the time of recording John Doherty was about 83 years old.

1. *March & Reel:* **Hudie Gallagher's March/ Untitled Reel**
John learned the opening 6/8 march from the playing of his cousin Hudie Gallagher, a travelling highland pipe player who exerted a strong influence on the repertoire of many fiddlers in Southwest Donegal. The reel, which John remembers his father Michael Doherty playing on the pipes, is a variant of the *West Wind* (CRE 72).

2. *Reel:* **The Black Mare of Fanad**
This reel has come down to John through his family and was associated with a 'Fiddler' Doyle of Fanad who made it up as a commemoration of his successful escape from a supernatural creature at a crossroads. The bottom D triplets of the bow are supposed to recreate the rhythms of the beating of the Black Mare's hoofs in her flight from the haunt. It is a variant of the *Nine Points of Roguery* but differs from it in the transition to the C chord in the first part and the more elaborate runs in the second. The former version can be found in CRE II, 264.

3. *Highland:* **The March of the Meena Toiten Bull**

4. *Jigs:* **Kiss the Maid Behind the Bier/**
The Bargain is Over
These are two wedding jigs which, John informed us, were popular in the Rosses. They possibly served the same function as wedding marches did in the Shetlands. The first is a variant of *My Love and I in the Morning* (CRE 57) and the second was also known as *Who Will Be King but Charlie. A* 2/4 version of this same air is played in Kentucky as *Charlie 's Neat* and is known as a courtship tune (O'Neill's DMI 398).

5. *Highland:* **The 21 Highland**
So called because it was composed by a Donegal fiddler in the year 1921.

6. **Untitled March**
A pipe tune learnt from his father. It appears in Joyce as *Beer and Ale and Brandy* and in O'Farrell's Pocket Companion II, 43 as *An rogaire dubh*.

7. **Untitled Reel**
John identified this as a Laggan reel (from Tyrone) and it may be a distant variant of *Colonel McBain* (CRE 182).

8. *Highland:* **The Paps of Glencoe**

9. *Reel:* **The Hare in the Corn**
This was a popular reel throughout South-west Donegal but was not played often outside this region. It is similar to the better known *The Maid in the Cherry Tree* (CRE 103).

10. **Untitled March**

11. *Jig:* **The Knights of St. Patrick**
An unusual version of the *Gold Ring*.

12. *Reel:* **The Dispute at the Crossroads**
This reel is actually *Doctor Gilbert* but was retitled by John's uncle Mickey McConnell in order to mark a small altercation he had with the police. They had ascertained from McConnell's playing of the reel while he was walking home from a dance that he was in no fit condition to be out and about alone late at night.

13. R*eels:* **Roaring Mary/ Stormy Weather**
The first reel can be found in CRE 161. The second is a more elaborate version of *Miss Monaghan's* which appears in O'Neill's DMI 575 as well as in Goodman's collection III, 159, and as the *Connacht Lasses in Cole's 1,000 Fiddle Tunes*.

14. *Reel:* **Miss Patterson's Slippers**
John has actually grouped two reels here under the same name. The first appears in O'Neill's *Music of Ireland* 1407, the second is identical to the *Roscommon Reel* (CRE 202). Notice John's use of highly spiccato bowing towards the end of this piece, a device characteristic of American fiddling but uncommon in Ireland.

15. *HighIand:* **The Cat that Kittled in James' Wig**

16. *March:* **Welcome Home Royal Charlie**

17. *Jig:* **Darby Gallagher**
An unusual jig that has a number of variants *The Humours of Glendart, East of Glendart, Shins Around the Fire* and *Tim the Piper,* which can be found in O'Neill's Music of Ireland.

18. **Untitled Mazurka**
Learned from the playing of a travelling Antrim fiddler, Francie Welch or Walsh, this evocative tune is unique in the Irish tradition for its transition from 3/4 mazurka signature to slip jig tempo.

19. **Untitled Reel**
This appears as *Carey's Dream* in CRE 128 and as the *Cameronian* in O'Neill's DMI 731.

20. *Highland:* **The Teelin Highland**
Composed by John Cassidy of Teelin to commemorate the dancing of Tom Taylor of Teelin.

21. **Untitled March**

22. *Reel:* **The Heathery Breeze**
(CRE Il, 149)

23. **Untitled Highland**

24. *Reel:* **The Monaghan Switch**
This seems to be an unusual variant of the better known reel of the same name. It tends to follow the melodic structure of the latter in a different mode. It appears as *Our Boys* in *Cole's 1,000 Fiddle Tunes*.

25. **Untitled Highland**

26. *Reel:* **The Black Haired Lass**
John refers to this as a Laggan reel and, though it is well known in Fermanagh and Tyrone, I have never heard it played with such authentic lyricism. The direct simplicityof his approach in playing this tune says a lot about John's fiddling aesthetics and his control over the instrument. (CRE 114).

27. *Air:* **Paddy's Rambles Through the Park**
'Paddy' picked up this haunting air from the singing of a 'banshee' whom 'Paddy' followed from cairn to cairn all night to get the piece in good order. This may possibly be the oldest tune in Doherty's repertoire and has come down to him from the lilting of his great-grandmother Nannie Rua Mac Sweeney. It is a worthy lament for John himself. I hope he is finding good crack in Fiddlers Green.

Acknowledgements
The music on this record was taken from recordings made in the field by Allen Feldman and Eamonn Doherty under a grant from the Northern Ireland Arts Council, Belfast. The collectors would like to thank the Northern Ireland Arts Council for their generous support without which these recordings would not have been possible. The collectors would also like to acknowledge the very special role played by Mrs Natalie Joynt in establishing contact with the musicians and for her preliminary field work which was essential for the making of this record. The collectors owe a debt of gratitude to Breandlaln Breathnach for his invaluable research and annotations concerning the tunes' origins.

Allen Feldman,
New York 1980



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TOPIC TSDL398
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