

# Featured review in September 2017 issue

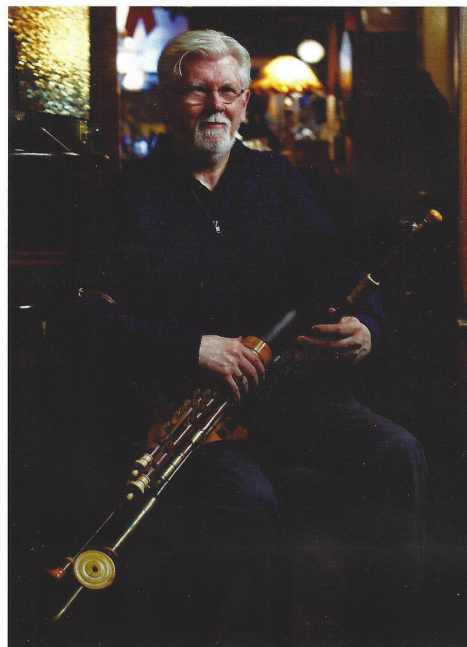
## IRISH MUSIC MAGAZINE



For events by Professor Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin  
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# FLOWING TIDES WITH GEARÓID Ó HALLMHURÁIN

William H.A. Williams has a conversation with Clare native Professor Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin.



throughout the world, especially since the expansion of Old World communities in the seventeenth century.

“Let me give you an example from my own musical travels. Twenty years ago, I toured in Alaska. When I arrived in Fairbanks, I was greeted by our host who announced: ‘You’re going to be performing with some interesting guests tonight.’ So I said, ‘That’s wonderful, who are they?’ ‘Athabaskan Indians,’ said he. That sounded interesting, so I asked, ‘Are they going to play before me, or afterwards?’ ‘Oh no,’ he said. ‘They’re going to play with you.’

“I was intrigued and when I showed up at the concert hall I found two Athabaskans waiting, and before you know it, we had four wonderful sets ready to present. The ancestors of these Athabaskans had learned Scottish music from the Hudson Bay clerks who explored the Canadian North in the nineteenth century. They also learned Irish tunes from Irish musicians who went to dig for gold in the Klondike in the late 1890s. This is the kind of musical story that is rarely told in Ireland. It goes back to my point that the only constants in Irish music history, or any music history, for that matter, are place and movement, not tradition and innovation. I don’t have to remind you that similar Irish musical journeys are taking place today in Brazil and Argentina, China and Japan, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. Understanding these journeys requires a heightened sense of trans-cultural literacy, which, regrettably, we don’t always have in Ireland.”

**William** “Is there any aspect of Irish music that you fear may be lost in the future?”

**Gearóid** “The Irish language. It is one of the most fragile attributes of the soundscape. Irish informs so much of our *sean nós* tradition and our singing tradition in general. It contextualizes our slow airs and reinforces the cultural origins of so much of our soundscape. Yet, it remains one of the most difficult areas to access and preserve. Fortunately, a young generation in the Gaeltacht areas of the West of Ireland has been vigilant in preserving and modernizing its language, while Dublin-based politicians offer mere lip service to it, or choose to ignore it entirely. This will ultimately impact the language in the long-run and undermine its importance as a musical conduit.”

**William** “What features of Irish music do you think will sustain it into the future?”

**Gearóid** “I think that one of the key attributes of the music is its ability to reach out and invite people in, not only in terms of entertaining them,

“The only constants in Irish music history,...are place and movement, not tradition and innovation”

of Ireland, have an implicit sense of beholding to the past. This has fuelled a creative paradox in that young musicians often rebel against orthodox notions of tradition and preservation, whereas, the old guard is fervently committed to retaining an “unbroken” past. As a result of this myopic, and indeed simplistic, binary, we’ve become obsessed with conflicting ideas of tradition and innovation. However, music functions in a much larger space and to understand that space we need go beyond entrenched ideas of tradition and innovation.

“Ultimately, the only real constants in Irish traditional music are *place* and *movement*. Music is constantly putting down roots in specific places, but it is also constantly moving across time and space. Because of narrow pre-occupations with tradition and innovation, we often fail to follow the intriguing trans-cultural journeys made by Irish music

but also in allowing them to become musicians, singers, and dancers through classes, schools and interaction with great teachers who truly love their music. The global journey of Irish traditional music has generated a new trans-cultural sociology of music, which is seldom understood, or appreciated in Ireland. New learners create their own new sessions, they make new friends, and they go to summer schools and enjoy being part of the social and media networks that sustain the music, especially, outside of Ireland. Like it or not, most Irish traditional soundscapes that flourish outside of Ireland are maintained by non-Irish performers, not by simplistically-described Irish Diasporic musicians. Frequently, Irish musicians who safeguard the music in *exile*, so to speak, have no ethnic connection to Ireland, a phenomenon that has little in common with jaded Irish notions of tradition and innovation.”