

FOREWORD

While harps and pipes have dominated the pantheon of Irish folk instruments, flutes and whistles appear to have enjoyed an equally long and enduring presence in Irish music history. From the ubiquitous *cuisleannaigh* of Early Christian Ireland to Land League and Orange Lodge fifers in more recent times, these wind instruments have played a conspicuous role in the shifting currents of Irish folk life. As a child growing up in County Clare, my first foray into the world of tin whistle music was with the plebeian Clarke's whistle. The first one I ever saw was played by Joe Cuneen sitting on the sea wall in Quilty with his back to the Atlantic. With its blackened conical anatomy and soggy wooden mouthpiece, it was as omnipresent as tea and pipe smoke in most country houses. More costly and challenging, the "timber flute" - as the simple-system flute was called by our elders - lay at the other end of the music map from the humble Clarke's. Ironically, its popularity in Ireland owes much to the inventive labors of Theobald Boehm whose key-system flute first appeared in 1847. According to popular thought, the simple-system instruments that Boehm's flute eclipsed found their way into the ranks of folk musicians throughout Western Europe. Like Victorian era concertinas that followed a similar "downward" dissemination from the drawing rooms of "high society," these simple flutes made by German and English artisans had found avid patrons among Irish musicians on both sides of the North Atlantic by the end of the 19th century.

As with Irish fiddle music, it is widely accepted that some of the most significant developments in the history of Irish flute playing took place in the United States. With the advent of recording technology in the 1890s and the popular espousal of Victrolas and 78 rpm discs in the 1920s, Irish flute players followed in the tracks of luminaries like Patsy Touhey and Michael Coleman. By the 1930s, Leitrim flute master, John McKenna, had set unprecedented standards for Irish flute playing in the US while, in Ireland, the milestone recordings of the Ballinakill Traditional Players focused public attention on the unique flute playing of Tommy Whelan and Stephen Moloney. In recent decades, North America has again emerged as a creative cornucopia of Irish flute playing. Home to masters like Jack Coen, Mike McHale, Joe Murtagh, Mike Rafferty and others, the extended community of Irish music makers has now reached out and embraced a myriad of non-Irish performers who have added prodigiously to the artistic diversity of Irish flute music. Grey Larsen is a rare beacon in this new cohort of Irish flute players in North America.

Having worked and performed with Grey at various summer schools and festivals since 1995, I have been aware of his opus as it went through various stages on the road to maturity. Now that it has reached fruition, it is my pleasure to recommend it to readers, musicians, historians and, above all, to flute enthusiasts. Thoroughly researched and comprehensive in scope, exploring the history of the instruments, as well as proffering a compelling analysis of ornamentation techniques, it is astutely aware of the pedagogical needs of the first-time learner and mature student alike. In its in-depth treatment of great performances in the period 1925-2001, it is marked by an abiding sense of humanism. This is as much an affirmation of Grey Larsen's reverence for the traditional storehouse as it is a testament of his deference for the tradition bearers themselves.

The Essential Guide to Irish Flute and Tin Whistle establishes an important benchmark for future generations of Irish music students, historians and music teachers. Above all, it fills a conspicuous void in the literature of Irish flute and tin whistle playing in America.

Mo Cheol Thú, Grey!

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