

Traditional Music / By Daniel Neely

First rate, beginning to end

Paddy O'Brien (from Offaly) is one of the great Irish musicians living in the United States. A noted composer (he was named "Irish Traditional Composer of the Year" by TG4's "Gradam Ceoil" program in 2012) who has played with some important groups (including the Castle Ceili Band, Bowhand, O'Rourke's Feast and Chulrua), O'Brien is someone who always seems up to something interesting and it so happens he's just out with a couple of terrific examples: a new CD called "Bright and Early" and a third volume of his "Paddy O'Brien Tune Collection." Both are highly recommended.

On "Bright and Early," O'Brien has teamed with guitarist Dáithí Sproule and fiddler Nathan Gourley and come up with an absolutely lovely album. A brilliant guitarist and member of the great group Altan, Sproule (www.daithisproule.com), has also been a member of Skara Brae (with Mícheál Ó Domhnaill and his sisters, Tríona and Maighread), performed or toured with just about every great musician out there, and is a noted composer. (His song "The Death of Queen Jane" was featured in the film "Inside Llewyn Davis.") His is a very familiar name to fans of traditional music and here, he proves his reputation as an intelligent and sensitive backer.

Currently based in Boston but originally from Wisconsin, Gourley's name is definitely on the rise. He is a top class fiddle player who has been a member of Chulrua, the Doon

Ceili Band, the Two Tap Trio, and the Máirtín de Cógáin Project. Regular readers will remember how enthusiastic I was about "Life is all Checkered," his recent album with fiddler Laura Fedderson (www.nathanandlauramusic.com). Here, Gourley's strong fiddle playing complements O'Brien box work admirably.

Indeed, the music on this album is first rate throughout, from beginning to end. I'm partial to the reel sets "Sheehan's / ..." and "Aggie White's / ...," both of which are wonderfully strong tracks. The hornpipe sets "Jim Erwin's / ..." and "The Midnight / ..." are as well - in all cases, the tempos and swing are just right, and full of warmth and grace.

In addition, the tune selection is spectacular. Listen, for instance, to the group's expanded setting of the familiar jig "The Rambling Pitchfork." (It's coupled here with "The Ballykeale.") Taken from Tommy Potts, this setting not only adds nuanced minor key touches to an otherwise familiar tune, it includes an extra section that adds to the setting's character. It's just wonderful stuff. The same can be said about the clan march and a polka, "The March Of The Jacobites / Bright And Early." It's an unusual selection and pairing that adds a fascinating wrinkle to an entirely compelling album.

The recently released third volume of "The Paddy O'Brien Tune Collection" sets a similarly high musical standard, but is excellent for different

reasons. Published in 2014, volume three offers musicians 150 reels, 44 slides, 16 hop jigs, 29 slip jigs, 13 slow airs, 80 double jigs, 30 set dances, 50 single jigs, 43 harp tunes and 45 marches. It is a massive and valuable resource and recommended to any musician interested in developing his or her repertoire.

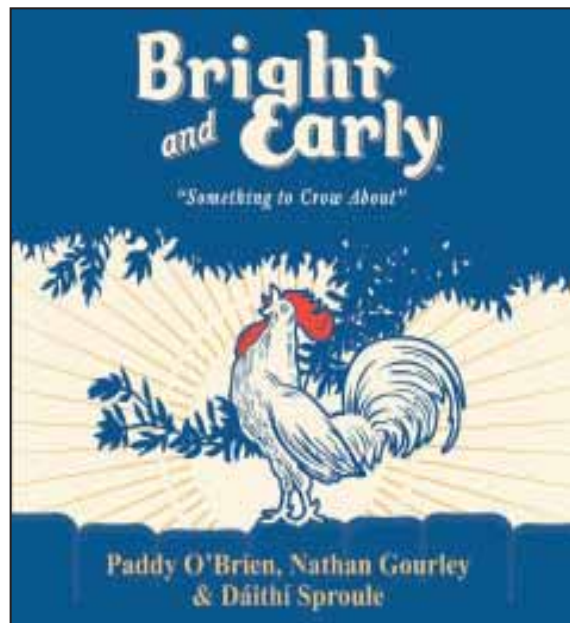
This new volume brings the total number of tunes across the Collection's three volumes to 1,500 and it includes great versions of many common and not-so-common tunes. (Be advised, though: the collection contains no written music at all and is intended for those who learn by ear.) The full physical package for each volume includes a spiral bound booklet that groups the tunes contained therein by dance rhythm. A short commentary is given for each tune, which offers musicians a sense of history and provenance. The collections are also available electronically, as PDFs and MP3s, the former through O'Brien's website (see below) and the latter on a track-by-track basis through CD Baby.

The Collection reveals O'Brien as an excellent teacher. On the recordings, he plays each tune multiple times at a moderate (but not particularly slow) pace, which allows

learners, through multiple listenings, not only to get to know the tune and its intricacies, but also it's particular lilt, which is crucial for anyone really wanting to know the music at the highest level. It's an effective approach that follows a very "traditional" style.

Both "The Paddy O'Brien Tune Collection" and "Bright and Early" are absolutely

worth having, the former not only for motivated learners, but for libraries and institutions that support Irish music; the latter for fans of Irish music who want a delightful album to listen to and enjoy. Thumbs up all around! For more information about how to acquire both "Bright and Early" and the "Tune Collection," visit paddyobrien.net.



The Irish Echo Quiz

1. William Casey, an Irish-American from Queens, headed what organization from 1981-1987?
2. MLA, a political acronym in Northern Ireland (where there are 108) and several other places worldwide, stands for what?
3. The short-story writer Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) was a native of Canada, Australia or New Zealand?
4. Inside right and inside left were positional terms once used in Gaelic football, rugby or soccer?
5. Who was accused of the 1892 murder in Fall River, Mass., of her father and stepmother and acquitted the following year?
6. The offspring of one birth of animals from the same mother is referred to as what?
7. Buddy Holly was born in which city in Texas?
8. Heather Humphreys, minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, is a member of which Irish political party?
9. Donald Keough, who died on Feb. 24, 2015, was chief operating officer of which leading U.S. corporation for the 12 years through 1993?
10. Name the singing star and actress whose first adult role was in the 1940 film "Little Nellie Kelly" and whose daughter also went on to become a major star.

Answers are on Page 18.

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