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## Celtic Music Selections for St. Patrick's Day 2014

By TJ Nelson – March 12, 2014

It's that time of year again where the warm, rich tang of a pint of Guinness, the sharp lushness of Irish whiskey and the bright, beautiful sounds of Clannad fill the air. St. Patrick's Day is soon upon us and so it is only good and right that World Music Central offers up some musical suggestions to get you in the mood for a reel around the dance floor or lull you with the green dreams of spring.

First up is Loreena McKennitt's 2-CD deluxe edition of *The Journey So Far—The Best of Loreena McKennitt*. The first CD is packed with goodies like "The Mystic's Dream," "Bonny Portmore," "The Mummers' Dance," "Stolen Child," "The Lady of Shalott," "Huron Beltane Fire Dance" and "The Old Ways." The second CD is a collection of highlight songs taken from Ms. McKennitt's 2012 Mainz, Germany live "A Midsummer Night's Tour." This boasts live performances of "The Star of the County Down," "The Dark Night of the Soul," "Beneath a Phrygian Sky" and "Caravanserai." Ms. McKennitt's lovely voice will have you weeping into your beer in no time.

Padraig Rynne – *Notify*

If you are looking for something a little dramatic, you might want to check out Brian Keane's *Copper*, the soundtrack to the BBC series *Copper*. Power packed with Cherish the Ladies Joanie Madden and Eileen Ivers and banjo master Eric Weissberg, Mr. Keane offers up a whole host of short atmospheric tracks and some full length tracks from the television series like "Copper Title," "Lost and Longing/Ammie's Theme" and "Kevin and Elizabeth." Even if you never caught the series there's some lovely pieces on this CD.

I'm going to give a cautionary note to Padraig Rynne's *Notify* in that it's not in any way traditional. While its opening "May's Smile" is sweetly soulful, this recording has a decidedly fusion kind of bent. Mr. Rynne's concertina work is indeed good, but I would be hard pressed to offer it up for a standard St. Patrick's Day party, unless you're planning something a little more offbeat.

If it's the multimedia experience you're looking for Childsplay has out on DVD their *Live from the Zeiterion Theatre*. While not strictly adhering to Celtic music, Childsplay offers up some stunning first class fiddlers and flute and whistle players. Some standouts include "Lianne Maclean's Revenge/The Catchy Bug" and "Child Suite: Christopher's Theme/ Nigel's Dream/Arthur's Shooting Star/Hunter's Moon."

Moya Brennan and Cormac de Barra – Affinity: Voices and Harps

The Paul McKenna Band's recording Elements has got the goods with tracks like "Lonely Man," "Flying Through Flanders," "Take Your Time" and a reworked American tune "No Ash Will Burn." This recording offers up a contemporary listen into Celtic music filled with guitar, flute, whistle, bodhran, Uilleann pipes, mandolin and cittern. The recording on this is deliciously spare so listeners get an up-close ear full.

Moya Brennan and Cormac de Barra offer up Affinity: Voices and Harps with some standout tracks like "The Lass of Aughrim," "Cruiscin Lan," "Seoithin Seo," "Stoirin Rua" and "Suas Sios." This CD was a bit frothy for me, but lushness comes shining through.

Perhaps one of my favorites is Runa's Somewhere Along the Road. Vocalist and bodhran player Shannon Lambert-Ryan, percussionist Cheryl Prashker, guitarist, bassist, vocalist and bodhran player Fionan de Barra, fiddler Tomoko Omura, mandolin player, vocalist and bodhran player David Curley and flutist and Uilleann piper Issac Anderson kick out some serious Celtic tunes on this recording like "The Dreadful End of Marianna for Sorcery," "A Stor, A Sor, A Grah," "Seinn O Ho Ro," "Mae Colven" and "Allison Cross." Actually, there isn't a stinker in the bunch and I would consider this a must for your St. Patrick's Day festivities.

Runa – Somewhere Along the Road

For popular fare there's Celtic Garden: A Celtic Tribute to the Music of Sarah Brightman, Enya, Celtic Woman, Secret Garden and More and Celtic Thunder's Paul Byrom on his Thinking of Home.

Abundance by Alasdair Fraser and Natalie Haas dazzles with guests Donald Shaw, James MacIntosh, Corey DiMarios, Dominick Leslie, Brittany Haas, Hanneke Cassel, Stefan Amidon, Kai Welch and Oscar Utterstrom.

The import The Gloaming by The Gloaming has some stunning reviews.

Dean Rathje's Factory Girl is a collection of traditional songs, ballads and instrumentals that might appeal.

One of my favorite labels ARC Music has come out with The Ultimate Guide to Irish Folk with various artists and the Rough Guide folks have put out the 2-CD set The Rough Guide To Celtic Music (2nd Ed) that includes great cuts such as Capercaillie's "S'Och A' Dhomhnaill Oig Ghaolaich (Waulking Song)," Liz Carroll and John Doyle's "Rushin' Dressing/The Quitter/Remove The Rug" and Altan's "Caitlin Triall," and includes the bonus album Rooz by Dalla.

There's also Green Energy by The Irish Experience, The Gaelic Mystery by Aethera and Ambient Holidays Volume 4 – St. Patrick's Day Ambient by Ken Elkinson should you really, really need smooth and plushy.

Ireland's Tara Music has recorded some of the most exciting Irish traditional and contemporary folk music acts, including Clannad, Planxty, Shaun Davey, Stockton's Wing, Christy Moore, Moving Hearts and many more. Masters Of Their Craft is a compilation featuring eighteen tracks from some of the leading artists and groups in the world of Irish music.

In case you missed some earlier releases you might want to check out some of these goodies:

Clannad – Nádúr

Whiskey in the Jar: Essential Irish Drinking Songs & Sing Alongs – You can hardly go wrong with The Clancy Brothers, Tommy Makem, The Dubliners, Frank Patterson and the Dropkick Murphys.

Upon A Shamrock Shore: Songs of Ireland and the Irish by Irish Rovers – This has tracks like “King of the Faeries,” “Up Among the Heather,” “Pennywhistle Peddler” and “The Rovers Street Song Medley.”

Nadur by Clannad – As if you could go wrong with Clannad.

Water From the Well by The Chieftains – Again, there’s no wrong turn on this one.

Traditional Music Of Ireland – A Shanachie release featuring fiddler James Kelly, accordionist Paddy O’Brien and guitarist and vocalist Daithi Sproule this one’s got some legs.

There’s also Acoustically Irish by Neil Byrne and Ryan Kelly, Putumayo’s 2007 release of Celtic Dreamland, From Galway To Dublin, Irish Love Songs: A Traditional Instrumental Recording Celebrating the Romance of the Emerald Isle by Craig Duncan, Celtic Songs for Children by Golden Bough and When New York Was Irish: Songs & Tunes by Terence Winch.

So, sona ú. lá patrick ar (Happy St. Patrick’s Day) to our music fans.

I’d like to leave you with two apt quotes:

“Maybe it’s bred in the bone, but the sound of pipes is a little bit of heaven to some of us.”

– Nancy O’Keefe.

“Never get one of those cheap tin whistles. It leads to much harder drugs like pipes and flutes.”

– Unknown.