

Ballinakill Ceili Band Commemoration

On June 3rd, a memorial ceremony commemorating the "Old" Ballinakill Band, will be unveiled by Senator Labhras O Murchu, Ard Stiurthoir Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann. The occasion marks the 80th year since the formation of the Ballinakill Band and is a tribute to those who kept alive the traditional music, dance, and song of East Galway, before the era of radio, or television.

Musicians, singers and dancers from Clare, Tipperary, Offaly and Galway will be converging on Ballinakill on the evening of June 3rd. Preparations are afoot to cater for the large crowds of music lovers when Ballinakill becomes the Mecca of Irish Culture.

It was in 1927 that the "*Old Ballinakill*" was formed. At the time *Miss. Anna Rafferty* lived in Carraroe house, and it was here that the late *Fr. Larkin P.P.* put into practice his boyhood ambitions when he brought a group of musicians together and formed *The Ballinakill Ceile Band*, or *The Ballinakill Traditional Players* as they were originally called.

From this humble beginning, they went on to achieve success not only in Ireland but also in England where the fame of their music had gone before them in the numerous records they made.

The founding members were - *Miss. Anna Rafferty*, *Stephen Maloney*, *Tommy Whelan* (flutes), *Tommy Whyte*, *Jerry Maloney* (fiddles).

Throughout the Winter of 1927-28, the band practiced and perfected itself, played at local functions, and in a short time the name "*Ballinakill*" became synonymous with Ceili music.

Their first engagement brought them to Feis Ath Luain, sponsored by Custume Barracks. Then in 1929 Seamus Clandillon, first director of 2RN, as Raidio Eireann was then known, engaged the band to make a live broadcast on November 1st 1929. Their selection was broken down into two sections, timed for 7.30 and 10.30. A session followed with members of *The Tir na nOg Trio*, *Leo Rowsome*, *Neilus Cronan* and *Seamus O'Mahony*.

In July 1930, Parlophone of London recorded "*The Pipe on the Hob*," "*The Old Bush Reel*," the "*Queen of the Rushes*," and "*The Copperplate Reel*." and sales from these records surpassed all expectations. On 17th November 1931, the whole band was invited by Parlophone to London to make six double-sided records. Between 1931-'34. they continued to fulfill local engagements, ceilithe, feisanna, and Concerts in Ballinasloe, Clifden, Spiddal College, Athlone, Mount Shannon, Labane, Killanaena and Limerick.

In January 1934 after a broadcast in Raidio Eireann, the members were guests of honour of the *Lord Mayor of Dublin*, *Alfie Byrne*. Incidentally, the *Lady Mayoress*, *Mrs. Byrne*, a cousin of the Heagney family of Carrowcrin, had spent some seasons there as a child, and was a classmate of *Fr. Larkin* at Duniry National School. In 1938 a second trip to London took place, this time with two new members, *Aggie Whyte* and *Kevin Maloney*.

On St. Patrick's night they played in the Olympia Theatre, Earl's Court, and on their return to Dublin they recorded further tunes including "*Eileen Curran*" and "*Sandymount reels*."

Another highlight of the Band's career was their role as Guests of Honour at the coming-of-age of Lord Killanin at his residence outside Spiddal a few weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War.

By 1941-'42, the Ballinakill Ceili Band had reached International fame, and the sales from their records amounted to tens of thousands. For fourteen years they had worked together, building up a reputation which the passing years could not tarnish. By 1942, when travelling became difficult, the "*Old*" *Ballinakill Band* had reached its well earned rest. When these original members retired from the music scene, they passed their music to their sons and daughters, and it was this new combination of *Aggie and Bridie Whyte, Eddie Moloney, Jack Dervin, Jack Coughlan, Martin Grace, Tom Rourke, Jim Hogan and John Moloney* that was chosen by folklorist *Alan Lomax*, in collaboration with *Seamus Ennis*, to perform the background music for the Ballad-Opera "*Story of Troy*," written for production B.B.C.

Again the Band personnel underwent a change and by the mid 60's it consisted of *Ambrose Moloney, Eva Whelan, M.B. Tierney, Liam O'Connor, Ned Mc Donnell and Brendan Hogan*. Emulating the tradition of their elders, they too, were proud standard bearers of the Ballinakill Music on both sides of the Celtic Sea.

Two generations on and traditional music is as vibrant in Ballinakill to-day as it was in the 30's and 40's. Following on in the music tradition, a 3rd band of *The Ballinakill* carried off the All-Ireland at Fleadh Cheoil na nEireann in Listowel. The members of this band were - *Maureen Fahy, Patsy Broderick, Bernie Shiel, Kathleen O Halloran, Gerard Fahy, Padraic Spain, Joe O Halloran, Joe Larkin, Aidan Donnelly*. To-day their children too, are carrying on the grand tradition of their ancestors.