

Folks

At a young 69 years of age, I finally became acquainted with the music of the Chieftains. A friend gave me an album for the good of my *heathen soul*.

Before I get on with the rest of this story, I need to acknowledge that even though growing up (I'm now 71) in the 50-60 folk music era ... I missed hearing the group, live or otherwise. However, at that time I was singing Elizabethan Ballads in Greenwich Village [NYC] Coffee houses and in Washington Square Park NYC, learning that I was not talented or disciplined enough to pretend to become a folk singer.

I became a chemist, now retired, and instead of performing I collected folk music (both books and albums) and volunteered to support venues that offered a stage to those more talented musicians than I.

Reach out and Get Permission

So I contacted the Chieftains' agents, via their website on 24 May 2006, with a request to reprint the article entitled *The Chieftains - A Musical History* in electronic form [PDF] for the members of the Three-Rivers Folklife Society.

Much to my delight, a few days ago, 26 April 2007, I received the permission I sought. So I'm reprinting the article as a PDF file with all links intact. Explore to your hearts content.

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Harry aka doc_Babad
1 May 2007

A Chieftains' Discography

I've seen the some of the Chieftains' albums advertised in the Rediscovered Music catalog

<http://www.mailordercentral.com/rediscovermusic/searchprods.asp>

and will continue to add them to my already large, alas mostly vinyl, but now CD folk music collection.

[Chieftains](#)

[Chieftains 2](#)

[Chieftains 3](#)

[Chieftains 4](#)

[Chieftains 5](#)

[Barry Lyndon](#)

[Bonaparte's Retreat](#)

[Chieftains Live](#)

[Chieftains 7](#)

[Chieftains 8](#)

[Chieftains 9: The Boil The Breakfast Early](#)

[Chieftains 10](#)

[The Year Of The French](#)

[The Grey Fox](#)

[The Chieftains in China](#)

[Ballad Of The Irish Horse](#)

[Celtic Wedding](#)

[The Chieftains In Ireland - With James Galway](#)

[Tailor of Gloucester](#)

[Irish Heartbeat - With Van Morrison](#)

[A Chieftains Celebration](#)

[James Galway and The Chieftains](#)

[Over the Sea to Skye](#)

[Bells Of Dublin](#)

[Reel Music: The Film Scores](#)

[Best Of The Chieftains](#)

[The Chieftains - An Irish Evening](#)

[Another Country](#)

[The Magic Of The Chieftains](#)

Claddagh Records Limited, 1963
(1964?): CC02

Claddagh Records Limited, 1969: CC7

Claddagh Records Limited, 1973: CC10

Claddagh Records Limited, 1973: CC14

Claddagh Records Limited, 1975: CC16

Warner Brothers Records, 1975: BS 2903

Claddagh Records, 1977: CC20

Claddagh Records Limited, 1977: CC21

Claddagh Records Limited, 1977: CC24

Claddagh Records Limited, 1978: CC29

Claddagh Records Limited, 1979: CC30

Claddagh Records, 1981: CC33

Claddagh Records, 1982: CC36

DRG Records Inc., 1983: CDSL 9515

Claddagh Records 1987: CC42

Claddagh Records, 1987: CCF42

RCA Red Seal , 1987: 6358-2-RC

RCA Victor, 1987: 5798-2-RC

Rabbit Ears Productions, 1988: 74041-70213-4

Mercury, 1988 | 834 469-2

BMG / RCA Victor, 1989: 7858-2-RC

BMG / RCA Victor, 1990: 60424-2-RC

BMG / RCA Victor, 1991: 09026-60824-2

BMG / RCA Victor, 1991: 60412-2-RC

Columbia / Legacy, 1992: #48693

BMG / RCA Victor, 1992 | 09026-60916-2

BMG / RCA Victor, 1992: 09026-60939-2

Music Collection International, 1992:
MCCD 048

The Celtic Harp	BMG / RCA Victor, 1993: 09026-61490-5
The Long Black Veil	BMG / RCA Victor, 1995: 09026-62702-2
Film Cuts	BMG / RCA Victor, 1996: 09026-68438-2
Santiago	BMG / RCA Victor, 1996: 09026-68602-2
Fire in the Kitchen	Unisphere Records (BMG), 1998: 09026-63133-2
Long Journey Home	Unisphere Records (BMG), 1998: 09026-68963-2
Silent Night A Christmas In Rome	BMG / Catalyst / Wicklow, 1998: 09026-63250-2
Tears of Stone	BMG RCA Victor, 1999: 09026-68968-2
The Chieftains a collection of favorites	BMG Special Products, 1999: DRC22445
Chieftains Collection: The Very Best of the Claddagh Years	WEA / Atlantic, 1999: 83224
Chieftains Collection: Very Best of the Claddagh Years, Volume 2	WEA / Atlantic, 1999: 83395
From the Beginning...Chieftains 1 to 4	WEA / Atlantic, 2000: 83257
Water From The Well	BMG / RCA Victor, 2000: 09026-63637-2
The Wide World Over - 40th Anniversary Celebration	BMG RCA Victor, 2001: 09026-63917-2
Down the Old Plank Road - The Nashville Sessions	BMG / RCA Victor, 2002: 09026-63971-2
Further Down the Old Plank Road - The Nashville Sessions	BMG / RCA Victor, 2003: 82876-52897-2
Live From Dublin: A Tribute To Derek Bell	BMG / RCA Victor, 2005: 82876-67137-2
The Essential Chieftains	RCA Victor / Legacy, 2006: 82876-75398-2



The Chieftains

a musical history

"...let the music speak for itself"
Paddy Moloney



In 1962, [Paddy Moloney](#), an uilleann piper from Dublin, along with [Martin Fay](#), fiddle and bones, [Seán Potts](#), tin whistle, [Micheal Tubridy](#), flute, and a friend of Paddy's, bodhrán player, [David Fallon](#) met to record a one-time album for Garech a Brún's Claddagh label under the title of [The Chieftains](#), was released in 1963. The name *The Chieftains* comes from a suggestion from the Irish poet and a director of Claddagh records, John Montague, based on his poem *Death of a Chieftain*. The musicians involved in recording of this album were already familiar with each others talents from playing together in Seán Ó Riada's folk orchestra, [Ceoltóirí Cualann](#), and from various sessions in and around Dublin since the late 1950s. The album reflected a new approach to playing traditional Irish music through interpretation and arrangement. Whereas an album featuring just instruments playing music was considered a rarity in the 1960's, when the folk music movement concentrated on vocal acts such as Peter, Paul and Mary, The Dubliners, and The Clancy Brothers with Tommy Makem. During this time, instrumentation of a piece was a mere afterthought.

(Above picture shows the group prior to Derek Bell joining in 1972. It appears on Chieftains 3 and it is the first album cover to picture the members of The Chieftains.)



It would be five years before the group known as The Chieftains released their second album, [Chieftains 2](#). The release of *Chieftains 2* saw the first of several personnel changes the group would experience. [Peadar Mercier](#) replaced the elderly David Fallon on the bodhrán in 1966 and [Seán Keane](#) joined Martin Fay on fiddle in 1968. Both men were already familiar with Moloney and his group through their work with Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann. By the time *Chieftains 2* was released, it seemed that the destiny of the group had been laid out in the traditional sense but innovative in spirit. The Chieftains began receiving recognition for their interpretation of traditional music by the time their third album, [Chieftains 3](#) was released in 1971. Popularity of the group through their innovative style as people rediscovered traditional music in the 1960s. Their music become known by people such as Peter Sellers, Mick Jagger, and Marianne Faithfull, to name a few in the 1960s and early 70s. Matter of fact, Peter Sellers became such a large fan of the group, that



even wrote a brief comment in the liner notes for the *Chieftains 4* album. The Chieftains, by this time, were slowly making a name for themselves in the both the British and American markets. They played their first concert in the United States in New York City at the Irish Arts Theater in 1972 with a successful tours following in 1973 and 1974 all while they were still a semi-professional act.

(The above picture is a promotional picture of the Chieftains in 1975.)



When [Chieftains 4](#) was released in 1973, Moloney added a new instrument to the sound of the Chieftains. He desired to incorporate the sound of the harp as a concept of how Irish music could be interpreted. [Derek Bell](#), a classically trained harpist from Belfast, joined the group as a full-time Chieftain in 1973. Prior to his joining the group, he would occasionally perform with the group in some arrangements as a guest either in a concert or television performance. **Chieftains 4** marked the first appearance of Bell as a full-time Chieftain. However, he did keep his job with the BBC Orchestra in Belfast and performed with them whenever he could get time off from the BBC. This continued until the group went professional in 1975. The addition of Derek Bell essentially solidified the ensemble sound Moloney was striving for. This album also featured an original composition by Seán Ó Riada and arranged by

Paddy Moloney, the hauntingly beautiful *Mná na hÉireann (Women of Ireland)*. The piece became so popular that it actually received airplay on many pop stations in the British Isles. It was also featured as a love theme in the Academy award winning film by director Stanley Kubrick, **Barry Lyndon**, with Ryan O'Neal and Marisa Berenson in 1975. The movie received five Academy Awards and it is in the scoring category that The Chieftains were recognized for their work on the Irish traditional pieces on the [Barry Lyndon](#) soundtrack.

(The above photo shows the group with Derek Bell after he joined the group full time and is one of the last ones with bodhrán player, Peadar Mercier.)



Their success with **Barry Lyndon** and growing acclaim allowed them to be named **Melody Maker's Group of the Year** for 1975 beating out artists such as the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. With growing popularity worldwide, The Chieftains decided to become a full-time professional group. Their first concert as a full-time act was a sold out show in 1975 at Royal Albert Hall in London. Up until this time, the members of the group struggled to maintain their day jobs and play music as their second profession. Shortly after going professional, Peadar Mercier decided to leave the group and was replaced by [Kevin Conneff](#). Conneff joined the group in 1976 and brought a new aspect to the Chieftains sound and he first appears on the album, [Bonaparte's Retreat](#). Besides his talents on the bodhrán, he is also a talented vocalist. He has contributed to the sound of group in the the old seán-nos style of singing in both English and Irish, along with lilting. *Bonaparte's Retreat* also featured another changing aspect of the group's sound with the addition of vocals and dance on selected tracks.



(The above photo is of the Chieftains prior to Kevin Conneff joining in 1975.)



The Chieftains work in scoring films did not stop with **Barry Lyndon**, in 1977, in fact they contributed music to the French-Irish film, **[The Purple Taxi \(Un Taxi Mauve\)](#)** directed by Yves Boisset. Their work has also appeared in a number soundtracks for documentaries in the late 1970s and early 1980s including ***Ireland Moving***. The group's future success became even more evident when they received their first Grammy nomination in 1978 for **[Chieftains 7](#)** in the Ethnic Recording category, their first release on CBS (Columbia) Records in 1977. ***Chieftains 7*** brought about another evolution for the group as each musician was given the chance to arrange a piece of music

for the album. The release of **[Chieftains 8](#)**, signified the passing of one era for the group. It was the last album to feature Seán Potts on whistle and Michael Tubridy on flute and concertina as they stepped down to pursue other interests. The release of ***Chieftains 8*** also reflects the dawning of a new era for the group to explore. It gave the Chieftains a chance to explore a new road and perhaps see new challenges. Moloney tapped an old friend and duet partner, **[Matt Molloy](#)** to join the group in 1979 to replace Tubridy. Molloy, a former member of the Bothy Band and Planxty, joined The Chieftains in 1979 on flute. It is clear to see on their Grammy nominated album, **[Chieftains 9: Boil The Breakfast Early](#)**, the impact that he was going to have on the group. One of the biggest highlights in the career of The Chieftains came shortly after Molloy joined the group. In 1979, at Phoenix Park in Dublin, they played before a crowd of 1.35 million people during the visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland where they were the opening act.

(The above photo reflects the group prior to the departure of Seán Potts and Michael Tubridy.)



As the 1980's dawned, the Chieftains sound established and group was on its way to its destiny. A score was created by Paddy Moloney and performed by The Chieftains and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra for the Radio Telefis Éireann and French television production of the Thomas Flanagan's novel, ***The Year of the French*** in 1982. This miniseries also marked the group's "acting" debut where they played musicians. An album featuring the expanded film score of **[Year of the French](#)** was released shortly afterwards. The group's other key highlight was their visit to China in 1983. Upon invitation from the Chinese Exchange Minister, The Chieftains were one of the first groups from the west to visit China. Their journey in China has been chronicled in an album and video, **[The Chieftains in China](#)**. The video has been broadcasted worldwide. It features the group in various venues in China and performing alone and with Chinese musicians. They are the first group to play on the Great Wall and event is documented on the documentary. The Chieftains continued their work on filmscores and received a Genie Award, a Canadian Oscar, for their work on **[The Grey Fox](#)** starring Richard Farnsworth. The union of the music with the image on the screen gave the film and incredible feel and texture. Paddy Moloney also composed the music for **[Tristan and Isolde \(Lovespell\)](#)** by creating a score that used traditional instruments with performance by the Chieftains. It is probably one of the first attempts to incorporate uilleann pipes in an orchestral setting. Despite the film never being released, the music from this film is still performed in the Chieftains repertoire of music. Several pieces of music has been recorded and



appears on three albums, [James Galway and the Chieftains In Ireland](#), [Reel Music](#), and [Film Cuts](#). The Chieftains contributed to the soundtrack for the National Geographic Special, [Ballad of the Irish Horse](#), in 1986. Many of the tracks were composed and arranged for the album by Paddy Moloney.

(The above photo shows The Chieftains busking on the Great Wall in China.)



The Chieftains have toured the world and played in many different venues and with a number of symphonies and orchestras throughout their history and in a variety of settings. They have also worked with dance theatre, particularly with the play, ***Playboy of the Western World***, which incorporates the music of Ireland. For Moloney and Fay, it was a visit to their past as members of Ceoltóiri Cualann when they performed the score created by Seán Ó Riada for the film version in 1962. Their performance with the ballet was performed throughout the British Isles, France, and for two weeks off-Broadway in New York City. The group has made innumerable television and radio appearances worldwide as their following has increased. Their appearances have not been limited to sound bites on screen but personal appearances on a variety of television programs around the world. The Chieftains were even musical guests on the American late-night television program, ***Saturday Night Live*** in 1979 with Margot Kidder as guest host. Their appearance on *Saturday Night Live* marks one of the earliest American television appearances of the Chieftains lineup just prior to the departure of Tubridy and Potts. A momentous event for The Chieftains came in 1983 they became the first group to play in the United States Capitol building rotunda, upon invitation from the former United States Speaker of the House, Thomas "Tip" O'Neill and United States Senator from Massachusetts, Edward Kennedy. Another breakthrough appearance was on the American network, NBC's early morning news and entertainment program, *The Today Show* in 1986. It gave many Americans an opportunity to see the Chieftains perform as they readied for what ever the day presented.

(Above is a photo of The Chieftains shortly after Matt Molloy joining in the early 1980s.)



During the 1980's, the Chieftains added a new component to their live performances with the presence of Irish step dancers. They were among the earliest groups to have dancers featured during their performances. Some of the dancers who have performed with the Chieftains include Micheal Flatley and Jean Butler in their pre-Riverdance days, Monica Ayres, Sheila Ryan, Donnie Golden and Cara Butler. Incidentally, the introduction of the dancers reawakened interest in Irish step dancing. Their addition to the live performances proved to popular with the audience and it has since remained an intregal part of any Chieftains concert. In 1986, they recorded a collaboration with with Van Morrison called [Irish Heartbeat](#) and it married Irish music with influences of pop and rock music. The work they did with Morrison was recognized when they received a Grammy nomination in Ethnic Recording category in 1987 and for [Celtic Wedding](#) in 1988. The Chieftains also received a Grammy nomination in 1989 for best children's recording for [The Tailor of Gloucester](#) with Academy Award winning actress, Meryl Streep. In ***Celtic Wedding***, they explored the music of Brittany through the customs of a wedding ceremony in Brittany. The Chieftains celebrated their 25th Anniversary in 1988 with a special commemoration program and received for their



contributions to Irish culture and a retrospective on their career to date on the famed Irish television program, ***The Late, Late Show***. In 1989, the Irish government commended the title of Ireland's *Musical Ambassador* upon The Chieftains for their contributions to Irish culture. One of the highest honors to be ever given to a group. Aside from performing and touring, the group has continued their work on film and television. The Chieftains work in film in the 1990s has appeared on [Three Wishes for Jamie](#), [Treasure Island](#), [Far and Away](#), [Circle of Friends](#) and [Rob Roy](#). Matter of fact, the song, *North Americay*, as performed by Kevin Conneff inspired Ron Howard to make the movie, ***Far and Away*** starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman in 1992.

(Above photo shows The Chieftains at 25.)



The 1990s have seen a number of honors come to the Chieftains for their work. In 1991, They received Grammy nominations in five categories for their work and were awarded two Grammys. They received a Grammy for [An Irish Evening: Live at the Grand Opera House](#) with Nanci Griffith and Roger Daltrey in the category of Best Contemporary Traditional album and a Grammy for [Another Country](#) in the Best Contemporary Folk Album category in 1992. This album explored the relationship between Irish traditional music and American country music. **Another Country** also received nominations in the categories of Best Pop Instrumental for Tahitian Skies; Best Pop Vocal Collaboration for Killybegs; and Best Country Vocal Collaboration for Cotton-Eyed Joe. The release of [Celtic Harp](#):

tribute to the Edward Bunting collection with the Belfast Harp Orchestra won a Grammy in the Best Traditional album category in 1993. The Chieftains' Christmas album, [The Bells of Dublin](#) released in 1991, became the group's first gold album and it has remained a popular one since its release. *The Bells of Dublin* was one of the first albums to feature the Chieftains performing with other artists such as Jackson Browne and Marianne Faithfull. *Bells of Dublin* is only one of two albums that have received a gold record to date. They have also recorded two critically acclaimed albums with the renown Irish flautist, James Galway. However, The Chieftains best selling album of all time, [The Long Black Veil](#) was certified gold within a short time after release and captured a Grammy for its collaboration with Van Morrison on the track *Have I Told You Lately That I Love You* for Best Pop Vocal Collaboration beating musical artists like Mariah Carey and Micheal Jackson. The Chieftains also in March 1995 were made honorary Chiefs of the Oklahoma Choctaw Nation after Paddy Moloney heard that the nation reached out over 150 years ago to help the Irish during the Great Hunger and thanked them. It is the first time such an honor had been bestowed upon a non-Native American.

(The above photo shows The Chieftains in a musically playful mood!!)



The acting bug once again visited the Chieftains as they made an appearance on the American soap opera, ***One Life to Live***, in 1996 where they played a medley from ***The Long Black Veil*** and an instrumental, *Song Without End*, which was a love theme for two principal characters on the show. The Chieftains have always strived to explore musical ideas and their journeys have taken them and Irish Music to many parts of the world. In 1996, this journey lead them to led them to Galicia and this resulted in [Santiago](#). It is an exploration of



Galician music and its relationship to Irish traditional and it received a Grammy in 1997 for best World Music album. The story of the Chieftains was put into print in an authorized biography by John Glatt in 1997 with an audiobook version released in 1999. The Chieftains have continued to work with a number of different artists, including Joan Osborne, Bonnie Raitt, The Corrs, Diana Krall and many others throughout the 1990s. They also received a Grammy in 1999 in the Best Traditional Folk Category for their work on music for the documentary, [The Long Journey Home: The Irish in America](#). The album featured collaborations and several new compositions as it documents the Irish diaspora and its bittersweet legacy with special attention paid to An Gorta Mor (*The Great Hunger*) and the resulting mass exodus due to the famine up through their acceptance in American society. Their work on this soundtrack gave the Chieftains their first Emmy award.

(The above photo shows The Chieftains in 1996.)



After a number of collaboration albums, the Chieftains returned to a strongly traditional album, [Water From The Well](#). The album garnered another grammy nomination for them in 2000. The audio recording of their biography by Nanci Griffith received a Grammy nomination in 2000 in the best spoken word recording category. Paddy Moloney and The Chieftains were awarded with one of the most prestigious traditional music awards in Ireland. On December 17, 2000 in Dublin, The Chieftains were honoured with a lifetime achievement award from The Irish Music Magazine. An honor that recognized their work to Irish music and Irish culture. The release of a compilation album, [The Wide World Over](#), released in 2001 is a cross section of their 40-year career in making music. The ranks of the Chieftains changed in 2001, when Martin Fay decided to semi-retire from the group and limit his

appearances to gigs in Ireland. The horrific terrorist attacks also affected the Chieftains as it saw them performing at a memorial service in New York for a friend who was killed at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Paddy Moloney was given permission to visit Ground Zero in March 2002, where he played a piece on his whistle for the rescue workers at the site. The group in recent years have been honored for their contributions to Irish music with the bestowing of a lifetime achievement award at the [BBC2 Folk Awards](#) in 2002, which was broadcast in the British Isles and on the Internet. Their performance in awards program also featured a set with two of the founding members of the Chieftains, Seán Potts and Michael Tubridy.

(The above photo shows The Chieftains lineup in 1998)



In their fortieth year as the Chieftains, they revisited Nashville in further exploration of American bluegrass music and its relation to Irish traditional music. The recording sessions with artists such as Alison Krauss, Del McCoury and many others resulted in the release of [Down the Old Plank Road - The Nashville Sessions](#). The sessions proved to be so productive that a companion disc will be released in 2003. The album did receive two Grammy nominations, one in the Best Contemporary Folk Album and the second nomination for a collaboration with Earl Scruggs in the Best Country Instrumental Collaboration category. In August 2003, the group was nominated for their work on Down the Old Plank Road for an award for best recorded event of the year by the International Bluegrass Musicians



Association (IBMA). A historic concert was held at Ryman Auditorium in Nashville and recorded for release as a DVD. Sadly, this was the last concert that featured the group's harpist, Derek Bell. The Chieftains faced their greatest heartbreak on October 17, 2002 when longtime band mate and dear friend, Derek Bell, died suddenly in Phoenix, AZ after being given the all clear after medical checks to return to Ireland. The Chieftains recieved tribute from Ireland's president, Mary McAleese, in December 2002 for their contributions to Irish music and culture. This year also saw the Chieftains return to film work with two tracks featured on the Martin Scorsese film, [Gangs of New York](#) starring Leonardo diCaprio, Daniel Day Lewis, and Cameron Diaz. In 2003, The Chieftains ventured back on the road to promote **Down the Old Plank**, the first time without Derek Bell. The Chieftains recently held two concerts in Ireland to raise funds to sponsor a scholarship at the University of Limerick in memory of Derek Bell to assist young musicians.

(The above photo was taken in 2002 shortly after the departure of Martin Fay. The bottom photo was taken after the death of Derek Bell)

The Chieftains have always valued performing live and the claddagh is emblematic to the dedication and the love they have for traditional music, but to understand the history of The Chieftains is to *let the music speak for itself...*



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