

MY LIFE AND MUSIC

By Jimmy Doyle



A youthful Jimmy Doyle pictured with his late father in 1964.

I think my father and mother would have disowned me if I hadn't made an attempt to play some musical instrument as they both played - my mother the fiddle, and my father both the fiddle and the accordion. All the Doyles played music and it was passed on to us all. Johnny and Paddy both play the accordion and my sister Mary, while never playing an instrument, is a good singer and dancer.

My father was one of the Doyles, of Listry, and even though the old saying goes "East for land, and West for women," he came east for both. He married my mother, Julia Sheehan, from Maulykevane, or as it is more commonly known, "Jib." Why it got the name "Jib" I'm not sure. Some say it is because those people who went abroad and were never heard of again and were said to have died or been killed in Gibraltar which seemed to be the end of the earth. Others say that some Parish Priest in Rathmore regarded it as the farthest outpost of his parish and found it very difficult to travel there and referred to it as Gibraltar and, like the shortening of all words, it

became known as "Jib."

At any rate, it was there my father and mother settled to farm 130 acres of typical Sliabh Luachra land. I can tell you he didn't have to go far from the house to cut the turf! The three parishes of Glenflesk, Kilcummin and Rathmore meet at the bridge above the house.

I went to Raheen National School and the teachers were Mrs. Madge Cronin and Mr. Denis O'Connell. The school was about three miles away but we always went through the fields (unless the river was flooded), which knocked about a mile off it. My school years were typical of the late 'forties and 'fifties. We played football in the yard behind the school at lunch hour but there was no music except for a half an hour singing once a week.

I played a few under-fourteen football games with Glenflesk because Gneeveguilla had no club at the time. Talking of football, I remember in the early 'fifties seeing up to forty boys and men playing football where my house is now built. The games often lasted for three hours or so, and they didn't



A family portrait of Jimmy and Joan Doyle with their children James, Sean, Marguerite, Padraig, Owen and Julia Mary.

worry about togs or football boots. Sure I suppose that is why Kerry are the best at football - it was played everywhere by everybody!

I really enjoyed the long Winter nights because our house was a "rambling" house. I can tell you the discussions weren't about inflation or contraception as the people didn't even know the meaning of such words at the time. One newspaper did the whole townland and the man who went to the creamery brought that as well as the news that wasn't in the paper. Once the tea and the half-six news were over, we settled down in front of the big open fire and the neighbours would arrive. After the general conversation, we often played a few tunes. Johnny O'Leary lived next door. He and my father would be joined by Jimmy O'Brien, David Lynch and Eddie Galvin. I would join them - first for a few tunes and, as time passed, for longer sessions. I learned all my music by ear and all those people I

mentioned were a great help. My father insisted that I practise every night. In fact, much of the enjoyment in playing music is helping others and exchanging tunes.

At twelve years of age, I started playing with the Desmond Céilí Band. The other members at that time were Michael O'Callaghan, Johnny O'Leary, Denis Murphy and Mike Duggan. We played all over Kerry and parts of North Cork like Rockchapel, Kanturk, Freemount and other places. Johnny O'Leary was married in Gullane at the time I started playing with the Desmond. I would cycle over to his house after school with the accordion tied up on my back with a piece of hay twine - no such thing as accordion cases in those days! I would stay at Johnny's house that night and cycle to school again in the morning. I needn't tell you I often found it difficult to keep my eyes open in the school that day.

When I started playing, I saved up my



A happy musical trio. Jimmy Doyle photographed with Joe Burke (Galway) and Johnny O'Leary. The picture was taken at the wedding of another well known musician, Johnny Cronin (Reaboy), now in the U.S.A.

money. I was paid £1 a night for a dance from 9.00 p.m. to 12.00 p.m. and £1.50 for an extension which lasted until 1.00 a.m. This enabled me to put a down payment on my first Paolo Soprano in Caball's, Tralee. It cost £14 and I had to pay £1.25 a month. As well as the money from playing, I also earned a little cutting turf and selling it. I had more time for this because I gave up school when I was fourteen years of age.

In 1959, at the age of fifteen, things were very bad in the country so I decided to go to England. My brother Johnny was over there and he guaranteed me a job. I went on the boat from Dublin to Liverpool with Timmy Brosnan, of Gattabawn and when we arrived the first place we went to was the Antree Grand National. I don't even remember the name of the horse that won the race. I was mesmerized with all that was going on around me. I met my brother there and then we all travelled down to London.

I began work on the following day driving a digger for £12 a week, which was a great wage at the time. The first job was in Finsbury Park. I wasn't long over when I started playing in the Brick Knock Pub, Camden Town, on Saturday nights

and the Shakespeare, in Holloway Road, on Sunday morning. I played with two other lads - one from Mayo and one from Clare. Pub music sessions were all the go in England at the time while the only place I saw one in Ireland was in Clifford's (now the Failte Hotel) in Killarney - on Race Night. When the pubs closed, we usually went dancing to the Galtymore, or the Elephant and Castle.

I returned home in 1961 to help on the family farm. Around this time, Jimmy O'Brien started music sessions in his bar in Killarney. This was the first time that pub sessions were organised on a regular basis. Every Sunday night, Dan Leary, Tim Riordan, David Lynch and I would play there. I played with Dan until his death in 1981. He was a great musician and it would be hard to meet the likes of him again - he was a gentleman and a true friend.

Our style of playing was complementary and the record we made together in Limerick for Seannachai records sold very well, both at home and in America. Later, we also played in many pubs on a regular basis - the Two Mile Inn, Fitzgeralds (now the Deenach), and the East Avenue. There wasn't a Fleadh Cheoil in the county that we didn't attend and we played at all

the Carnivals in Sliabh Luachra. Where ever we thought there would be music, we went there, because we loved to play ourselves and listen to others.

I remember the first Fleadh Ceoil I ever went to was in Ennis in Jimmy Brien's old Prefect. It was in 1956, Danny O'Neill and my brothers, Johnny and Paddy, were also there. We met with Denis Murphy and Johnny O'Leary. We had a good, long session into the late hours of the morning and when the time came to "hit the sack" the only ones who had a bed were Denis and Johnny. They said they'd take the young lad (myself) with them. The boys decided to sleep in the car as you can imagine, funds weren't so 'fluirseach'. Yet I would definitely say that they got more sleep than I did that night because I had to sleep between Denis and Johnny in a single bed.

It was at this Fleadh Ceoil that I saw a tape-recorder for the first time and I thought I would be made for life if I played into it. I eventually got my chance and was told the recording would be on the radio on the following Friday night. Never did a week seem so long. My mother and father sent word to all friends and relations. On that Friday, the cows were stowed and all the other jobs seen to in double quick time. We were all ready about two hours before programme time, tea and all over, and were all sitting around the radio. When I think back on it, I smile and say to myself that it was a wonder we didn't shave and put on our new clothes.

Speaking of tape-recorders and records - the first record I ever saw was by my neighbour, Mrs Catherine Sheehan, who is still alive at 93. It was a gramophone record of Paddy Cronin, of Reaboy, which she got from America. I listened to it very often and I learned a lot from it. The Cronins were very good musicians - Paddy, Johnny and Mick, R.I.P. Later, I got a tape-recorder of my own and I found it a great help in learning new tunes.

Our side of the county was great for Bidy Dances. A group of us would travel to the villages and towns in the locality and collect as much as we could on January 31st and February 1st. Depending on how much we collected, we would hold Bidy Dances. The proceeds of the collection would go towards the purchase of drink and people of the house provided the food free of charge. Noted houses for Bidy Dances were Eugene Moynihan's and Fred Moynihan's, in Kilcummin, Brido's, Mick Sheehans and our own house, all in Maulykevane.

At that time, house-weddings and station-dances were great too, but we never hear of them now.

Television, motor cars and modern houses with their fitted-kitchens and covered floors put an end to them. While progress is wonderful and modern houses are very nice and comfortable, I still feel sad for the big kitchen with the cement floor, where the table could be pushed to one side and a half set danced. Never again will we hear the shouts of "'Round the house and mind the dresser!!'"

Like all people who have an interest in music, I feel that R.T.E. television could do a little more. I think they produced fine programmes in the early days such as "Bring Down the Lamp." I don't see how it would cost very much to come down to this part of the country and record some programmes. If they spent one week here I am sure they would get six or seven programmes. The place is full of singers, musicians and dancers, and if I started naming them all I would fill pages.

Nowadays, I am very happy to see so many young people going to traditional music and dancing classes. This gives great hope for the future and events like Scor and Tops of the Parish have done a lot. In fact, they are the only events that resemble old times. They make me think of the Raheen plays that we put on every Lent. Briany Kelly was the man behind these plays and he did all the work. I remember the halls in Gneeveguilla and Barraduff full of people enjoying these plays. They provided great entertainment for the young and old during a season when there was no dancing. Indeed, Briany was a man before his time because he arranged a day out during the Summer to Ballybunion or to Rossbeigh for those who had taken part or helped out in any way with the play. I suppose I should have a very special regard for Briany because it was at one of these plays I met my wife Joan - she was stepdancing and I was playing music.

With six in the family, Pdraig (16), Owen (15), James (12), Sean (10), Julia Mary (7), and Marguerite (4), we have a busy house so I do not play anywhere on a regular basis, but I like to meet people like Connie O'Connell, Paudie Gleeson, Sean Tyrell and Frank Brosnan for a good session. I am very happy that all the family seem to have an interest and I hope it will last. I hope they will continue the tradition handed down to me by my father. Music has given us all many years of happiness and what can be better than a good session. I have never seen anyone playing music with a sad face, and in today's world especially it is nice to see people with a cheery look.