

OUR LIFE AND MUSIC – NICHOLAS AND ANNE MCAULIFFE

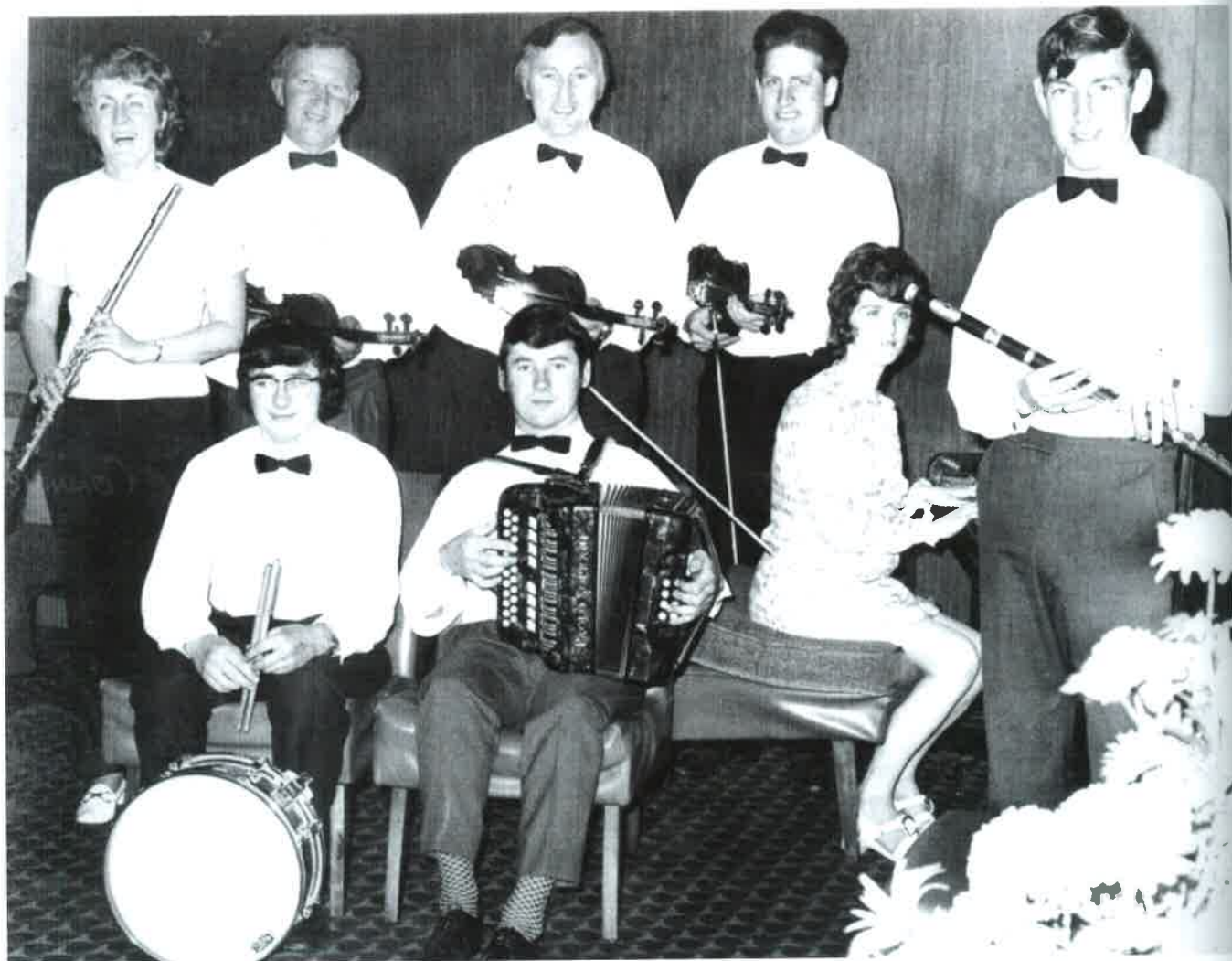
Nicholas (Nickie) McAuliffe was born in Lyre, Cordal, Castleisland, on 11th March 1945. He attended Loughfouder National School, and later the Technical School in Castleisland. He learned his first music from his parents, Kathleen and Florence, who both played melodeon. Therefore, his first instrument was melodeon and later tin whistle.

He later took up the fiddle, which he had seen played by his neighbour and friend, John Ben Lane. He listened avidly to a series of radio programmes, which were broadcast every week, namely “A job of Journeywork”, presented by Ciarán MacMathúna. Nickie also purchased the 78 rpm records which were in vogue at the time, mostly recorded in America, and featured fiddle players such as Michael Coleman, James Morrison, Paddy Killoran and Paddy Cronin.

In 1964, he started to travel around to Fleadhanna Cheoil with his friends Denis McMahan from Castleisland, Jack Regan, Knocknagoshel, and other musicians. He joined the Desmond Céilí Band, which

was led by Michael O’Callaghan (R.I.P.), Castleisland, and travelled all over Kerry and beyond playing for céilithe. His first performance with the band also happened to be his first visit to Gneeveguilla to play in Paddy Moynihan’s Hall, on St. Patrick’s Night, 1964. Some weeks later they also played in O’Connor’s Hall, better known as “Thady Willie’s Hall”, Gneeveguilla

In 1967, he joined the Brosna Céilí Band, which was led by Donal O’Connor, Brosna. By now he was playing concert flute. The Brosna Céilí Band actually won the All-Ireland Céilí Band competition at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Listowel in 1972. Nickie won the Senior All-Ireland tin whistle competition in 1971.



The McAuliffes in the Brosna Ceili Band, 1972 All-Ireland champions.

Front (from left): Pat Mulcahy, Michael Mulcahy, Celia Regan, Nickie McAuliffe.

Back row: Ann Sheehy McAuliffe, Patrick O’Connor, RIP, Donal O’Connor, Denis McMahan.

Nickie was also a member of Siamsa Tíre Folk Theatre for many years.

In 1975, he married a fellow-musician Anne Sheehy, from Lixnaw, who was also a member of all the above groups. Together, they travelled extensively abroad, to places like U.S.A., Britain, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Australia.

In 1970, Nickie began teaching music for Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in co-operation with Co. Kerry V.E.C. His first class was held on Monday 15th March, 1970, in (you've guessed it!) Thady Willie's Hall, in Gneeveguilla! One of the pupils enrolled in that class was Ellen O'Leary, daughter of Johnny (R.I.P.). Over 40 years later, he still teaches at many venues around Kerry. Many of his pupils have achieved high honours in music and some are now music teachers also. He lectured on the history of Irish music to students who are taking the degree course in Folk Studies under the IT Tralee in co-operation with Siamsa Tíre. He and Anne, are regular teachers at the Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, and Scoil Éigse. They have both taught at the Gaelic Roots Festival, in Boston College. They also toured Australia and the U.S.A. as members of "Na Ridirí", under the direction of Diarmuid Ó Catháin.

Nickie has written many articles on traditional music and is a regular contributor to the souvenir programme for Fleadh Cheoil Chiarraí and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. He is much in demand as a source for names of tunes and background information, having studied the music in depth in all its aspects. He has a particular gift of retaining what he hears and reads, and is known for his phenomenal memory!

Besides traditional Irish music, Nickie is also interested in Gaelic Football and Hurling. His reading



Nickie McAuliffe, with well-known fiddler Paddy Cronin, of Reaboy, Boston and Killarney.

covers a wide spectrum from philosophy to history. He is also a keen photographer.

Starting back teaching for his 43rd year on 1st October, 2012, once again Gneeveguilla is his first port of call! Hopes for the future are bright, as can be seen from the many talented children who are at present learning the music in the area, he says. Sliabh Luachra is rich in Gaelic culture and, therefore, more fortunate than other areas. The birthplace of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin and Aodhagán Ó Rathaille will not easily lose its tradition, he adds.

Anne Sheehy (McAuliffe)

Anne Sheehy was born in Glenoe, in the parish of Lixnaw, Co. Kerry, on 23rd February, 1946. She attended Clandouglas National School and later the Technical School in Listowel. She learned her first music on tin whistle from her father, Jack Sheehy, who played the fiddle and the whistle.

She later took up the button accordion which she had seen played by neighbours who visited the house for regular music sessions with her father, viz. Jerry Mulvihill and Páidín Kelliher. When very young, a teacher in Clandouglas school – Miss Nolan from Lyreacrompane – took Anne to play in a parish concert in Lixnaw Hall. This was her first public appearance! Some time later, another person who was involved in the same concert approached her parents suggesting she should compete in a Fleadh Cheoil which was being organised in Ballyheigue. This person was none other than Diarmuid Ó Catháin – or Jer Keane as he was known locally – and the event was the first Kerry Fleadh Cheoil, in 1960. (She won the under 14 accordion competition on that occasion, and this was the start of a long career of competing in Fleadhanna all over Munster on various instruments, as well as in duets with her sister, Bridie, and trios with various other members of the Lixnaw Comhaltas branch as the need arose! She was a member of the Kingdom Céilí Band which played extensively around North Kerry and also the Lixnaw Scoraíocht Group.

Her first All-Ireland Fleadh was in 1964, in Clones, Co. Monaghan, where she won the under 18 accordion competition. She has missed very few All-Irelands since then. In 1967, she won the Senior tin whistle at the Fleadh in Enniscorthy and in the same year she won the senior accordion competition at the Oireachtas, in Dublin.

In 1968, Anne joined Siamsa Tíre which was being set up at the time by Fr. Pat Ahern, originally from Moyvane, who was then a curate in St. John's Parish, in Tralee. She enjoyed many years of performing with this group, both for summer seasons in Tralee and many trips abroad.

In 1968, also, she became a member of the Desmond Céilí Band which was led by Michael O'Callaghan (R.I.P.) from Castleisland. By now she was playing concert flute as well as accordion. She was also a member of the Brosna Céilí Band which was led by Donal O'Connor, Brosna. Both bands played extensively in Kerry and beyond and took part in competitions with considerable success. The Brosna Céilí Band won the senior competition at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Listowel, in 1972.

In 1975, Anne married fellow-musician Nickie McAuliffe from Knockachur, Knocknagoshel, who was also a member of all the above groups. On marriage, she resigned from her job as a shorthand typist with Kerry County Council and started teaching

music, which she still does.

Growing up, her most admired musicians were Willie Clancy on whistle and pipes, Paddy Canny on fiddle, Joe Burke on accordion and Paddy Carthy on concert flute.

P.S.: This year, the McAuliffes were, with the Rockchapel-based group, Ceoltóirí Shliabh Luachra, warmly received in Áras an Uachtaráin by President Michael D. Higgins and his wife, Sabina. The group's highly-acclaimed show, 'A musical trail through the history of Ireland', was researched and written by Nickie McAuliffe. On the same day, the group were welcomed to Leinster House by Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Minister Jimmy Deenihan.



The McAuliffes with the late Garry MacMahon at Aras an Uachtaráin in 2003.

Ann Sheehy McAuliffe, with Ellen O'Leary, one of the first students from the 1970 music class, and Michelle O'Sullivan Trainor, at Boston College in 2000.

