

THE CHIEFTAINS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
1964-2012	Folk (Celtic)	<u>The Musical Priest / The Queen of May (1964)</u>

Only Solitaire

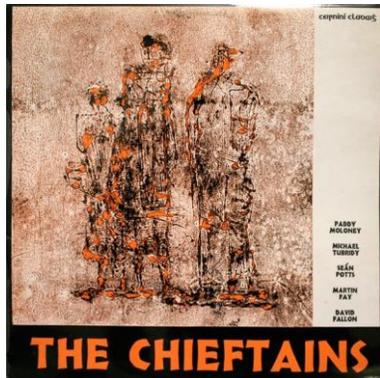
Artist: *The Chieftains*

Years: *1964*

George Starostin's Reviews

Page contents:

- [The Chieftains](#) (1964)



THE CHIEFTAINS

Album released:
1964

V A L U E
2 5 2 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) 'Sé Fáth Mo Bhuartha (Slow Air) / The Lark On The Strand (Jig) / An Fhallaingín Mhuimhneach (Air) / Trim The Velvet (Reel); 2) An Comhra Donn, Murphy's Hornpipe (Hornpipes); 3) Caílín Na Gruaige Doinne (Slow Air); 4) Comb Your Hair And Curl It / The Boys Of Ballisodare (Slip And Hop Jig); 5) The Musical Priest / The Queen Of May (Reels); 6) The Walls Of Liscarroll (Jig); 7) A Dhruimfhionn Donn Dílis (Slow Air); 8) The Connemara Stocking / The Limestone Rock / Dan Breen's (Reels); 9) Casdh An tSúgáin; 10) The Boy In The Gap (Uilleann Pipes Solo / Reel); 11) Saint Mary's, Church Street (Polkas) / Garrett Barry, The Battering Ram (Jigs) / Kitty Goes A-Milking, Rakish Paddy (Reels).

REVIEW

Although the Chieftains were certainly not the first band to perform and record samples of Irish folk music — the Clancy Brothers preceded them by a good decade or so — it could, arguably, be stated that they were the first band (or, at least, the first reasonably well-known band) to promote it in a starkly uncompromising fashion. And it is certainly easier to trace the roots of all sorts of Celtic-influenced folk-rock and prog-rock, from Fairport Convention to Alan Stivell to Gryphon etc., to the quintessentially musical sound of the Chieftains than to the pub-style shanties of the Clancies (which were great in their own way, but are likely to have had more significant influence on singer-songwriters — and maybe the Pogues as well).

Curiously, unlike the other famous Irish folk outfit who also had their debut record the same year — the Dubliners — and who would then go on a prominent recording spree, the Chieftains only managed to put out one LP in the years between 1963 and 1969. One reason for that might have been the «semi-professional» status of the band throughout the decade, meaning that it was probably difficult to combine day jobs with studio time. Another reason, however, was that there clearly could not have been much commercial demand for the Chieftains' music, certainly not in 1964, when the popularity of Irish



folk more or less followed along the same lines as popularity of folk music in general — which was, on the whole, expected to be small-scale and vocal. The Clancy Brothers were en vogue because they could be digested by the same brain cells that were responsible for the Seekers, or for Peter, Paul & Mary. Mary O'Hara enjoyed success because she could follow up Joan Baez and Shirley Collins with her sweet and tender balladry.

Then along came the Chieftains and began playing traditional jigs, reels, and airs — without singing a single note! — not to mention daring to print most of the titles to these songs in Irish, which, as we all know, no sane person can even pronounce, due to the crazyass antiquated Irish orthography. They'd also released the record on the little-known Claddagh label, set up by Garech á Brun in 1959 to accommodate artists specializing in authentic Irish music and, as of 1964, seemingly having accommodated nobody except for Leo Rowsome, a classic master of the uilleann pipes (ever tried listening to a solo album of uilleann pipes in one setting? then mister you're a better masochist than I). Little wonder that few in the musical world outside of Dublin at the time paid much attention to Paddy Moloney, the presiding Chieftain, and his merry mates Michael Tubridy, Sean Potts, David Fallon, and Martin Fay.

Frankly, with so much Celtic music in so many «authentic» and «tampered» varieties on the market these days, it is hard for me to say if the value of **The Chieftains** somehow remains relevant or if the record only plays out as a museum piece. It is, as far as I know, one of the first, if not *the* very first, (semi-)professionally played and properly recorded 40-minute sample of the various styles of instrumental Irish music — full-on revivalism, with no attempts to somehow sweeten or modernize the sound for the general public of the 1960s. It dispels the then-prevailing perception of Irish music as friendly drunk bar songs; however, it does not dispel the perception of Irish music as pre-eminently dance-oriented music, with most of the tunes clearly marked as a «jig» or a «reel», with a couple «polkas» thrown in for good measure. (At least, since it's all so clearly delineated in the liner notes, the album is an excellent starter for helping the uninitiated finally understand the difference between the *cha-choom cha-choom cha-choom cha-choom JIG* and the *cha-cha-choom-choom-choom cha-cha-choom-choom-choom REEL*).

The several «slow airs» spread through the record might be its most important parts: they are played by Paddy himself on the proverbial uilleann pipes (more rarely, and sometimes in a duet with Sean Potts, on tin whistles — "the humblest but not the least sweet of our traditional instruments", as the liner notes describe). This is a bit of a challenge for those with sensitive ears; if you can actually feel the tenderness and courteousness in the notes of 'Caílin Na Gruaige Doinne' ('The Brown-Haired Girl'), I envy you — and double so for 'An Dhruimfhionn Donn Dílis', on which the pipes reach out for even

higher notes in solemn anthemic fashion. I can't bloody well listen to this, but I can certainly tip my hat to the bravery of the good Irish lads who dared to record it.

As for the dance tunes, one bit of «compromise» — unless this is also a reflection of some local dance tradition — is that many of these are reduced to relatively short bits and spliced together in lengthy medleys, sometimes with but a slight change of melody, other times with a major change of pace (there are medleys integrating jigs and reels, reels and polkas, or even inserting a slow air in between). Do not, therefore, be afraid of 7- or 8-minute long tracks, because all of them will be shifting gears every 2 minutes or so — which is, of course, especially important since this kind of music surmises no soloing or improvisation, just strict rhythmic melodies for dancing partners to follow.

Needless to say, individual highlights are all but impossible to pick, though my own ear found itself a bit more attached to the medley of 'The Musical Priest / The Queen Of May', free of percussion and sounding like a cute pixie dance for the first minute, when it's just a tin whistle and what seems to be a lightly plucked fiddle, unless I am mistaken. It is fun to follow the build-up, with the whistle initiating the proceedings and the fiddle later catching up with the little guy — then, after the first part of the medley is over, the cycle being repeated for 'The Queen Of May' (which, like the good old-fashioned reel it is, honestly sounds almost identical to its predecessor). But that's just me anyway; *you* might find yourself more closely drawn to the fuller-sounding tunes, or even, God help us, the uilleann pipe solos.

It is also worth reading the liner notes by Seán Mac Réamoinn — short and, thankfully, more on the informative than the dithyrambic side, at least after the first couple of paragraphs: for instance, they let us know that one of the components of the opening medley ('An Fhallaingín Mhuimhneach') was allegedly brought to Ireland from Spain by an Armada survivor in the late 16th century — a statement I find hard to believe, failing to hear any Spanish influence in the tune, but then again, who knows what tricky paths of evolution it could have taken over the next three hundred years — especially in the light of the Chieftains' own evolution, which would, over the next *ten* years, take them to some completely different places. Yet this is where it all began, and unless you are allergic to all Celtic folk music with pre-1970s arrangement and production values (for which I won't judge you), it is well worth checking out.

