



‘ IMEALL ’
MAIRÉAD NÍ MHAONAIGH

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Imeall is the name of the first solo project from singer and fiddle player Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh. Imeall is Gaelic for 'edge', 'rim' and 'threshold'.

This is a recording project that started when Mairéad returned to live in Donegal about five years ago. In a way she was returning to the source of the music and song which she grew up with.

County Donegal is regarded of having a very distinctive style of fiddle music and is known in traditional music circles for its unusual tunes and individuality of players. North –West Donegal is the largest Gaeltacht area in Ireland and pocesses a rich source of traditional song and folklore.

It is this area, in the parish of Gaoth Dobhair that Mairéad grew up, speaking Gaelic and learning music and songs from her relatives and neighbours.

Her father, Francie Mooney, was her biggest influence as he played traditional fiddle and had a lot of the songs that Mairéad sings and performs with her band Altan, in venues, all over the Globe today. She also had a great interest in every type of music while growing up and often borrowed from her brother, Gearóid's eclectic music collection and listened to everyone from David Bowie to Carlos Santana to BB King!

The Mooney household always had people visiting between musicians, writers, scholars and Gaelic language enthusiasts. In retrospect Mairéad sees this as a huge learning process and had a huge influence on her career.

Her father was also very involved in writing dramas, musicals and songs for the local community.....so creativity was part and parcel of growing up. Local mythological figures like Balor, Lugh, Diarmuid agus Gráinne were alive and talked about in the household and discussed as seriously as contemporary news stories.

Mairéad remembers going to neighbours houses to ceili and exchange tunes and songs when she was very young. One of these houses was that of another fiddle player, Joe Jack Curran, who lived in Maheragallon in the heart of the parish. Joe was married to Neilly Dinny Ní Ghallchoir, who was a neighbour of Francie's from Cois Claidigh and was also from a very musical family. These nights of music song and stories is where Mairéad started to take an interest in the local culture. She would dance the night away with Joe's children, while the fathers played and exchanged tunes and stories and listen to a few songs.

In the late 70's and early 80's traditional music began to get more popular with young people through the popularity of the Chieftains, Planxty, the Bothy band, Clannad , Skara Brae etc. The growing awareness of traditional music initiated festivals like Lisdoonvarna, Ballysodare, The

Ballyshannon Folk Festival.....which gave Irish bands a stage to launch their careers and make a living from the music.

Sessions were being played in pubs all over the country and foreign people travelled to find the music and seek out the best tunes. It became an industry, Ireland was attracting German, French, Spanish and American music lovers to it's shores and all of a sudden, traditional music was becoming very popular and trendy.

Hiúdaí Beag's pub in Bunbeg is where the sessions were in Gaoth Dobhair. Hiúdaí, himself was a great singer and was very interested in the music. He asked Francie to start a session in the bar there and has continued until this day and has played host to many of the big names playing traditional Irish music. It is also one of the top 10 places to go and listen to the music , according to the Rough Guide to Irish Music!

When Mairéad was 14 years old, she met her future husband in Hiúdaí Beag's pub while playing a session there with her father. Frankie Kennedy happened to be visiting Gaoth Dobhair from Belfast that summer with his school friends before going to Queen's University in Belfast to study political history. Although he didn't play any instrument at that stage, he was very intrested in the music and when he returned to Belfast began to learn the tinwhistle and joining in the sessions in the city.

Belfast had a lot of fine musicians playing music at the time; Dermot Diamond, Andy Dickson, Gerry McCartney, Tara Bingham, Leslie Bingham, Ciaran Carson, Deirdre Shannon to name but a few. These musicians had a fine store of tunes and shared them with everyone. They were also regular visitors to the Gaeltacht and were welcomed by Hiúdaí Beag to his bar in Bunbeg and were looked after for playing their music.

Mairéad and Frankie married in 1981.

They were both teaching in Malahide in County Dublin and playing music at weekends and during the holidays for fun. Roibeard MacGobhrain of Gael Linn records approached them to make an album for the company in

1981. They made 'Ceol Aduaidh' that year, which was enthusiastically welcomed by critics and opened up a new world of opportunity for them to play music professionally.

Mairéad has played with Altan, the band that she and Frankie started, over 21 years. Frankie sadly passed away in 1994 from cancer which was a huge and unbearable loss on Mairéad.

The band continued, as was Frankie's wish and gained world wide popularity. They signed to Virgin records in London, in 1995.....one of the first traditional bands to sign to a major record label. Through Altan, Mairéad has travelled the world and performed on most continents and has brought her music and song in her native language to every corner of the globe.

It is only now that she has had time to reflect and reassess her own music and record it in this new project; Imeall. Being back at home in County Donegal has opened her own creativity and has inspired her to compose more music and song which you can hear on Imeall.

She has three songs which are newly composed....one for her daughter Nia called Mó Níon Ó; A Óganaigh Óig, is her giving back to the tradition a love song from a woman's perspective; and Imeall, which sums up the place where she feels she has arrived now personally and musically.

There are several tunes composed for family and friends.

An Fidleoir is a lament for her father who passed away two years ago.

Port Chiti Rua is a jig in honour of her mother, who is a great dancer.

Girseachai an Phointe, is a tune to celebrate the joy of looking at her daughter and her little friends dancing in response to her music one day.

The Red Crow is an older tune that Mairéad composed for her fellow Altan members in thanks for their friendship many years ago.

The rest of the pieces are traditional songs and dance tunes which she collected over the years from family and friends.

The recording process was extremely relaxing and enjoyable for Mairéad. Manus Lunny, bouzouki and guitar player with Capercaille, happens to be a long time friend and neighbour of Mairéad in the Rosses. He happens to have a studio which she was able to avail of when she would leave Nia her daughter to school.

And so the project was done in small slots of time over a period of a year. Manus became a catalyst and let Mairéad put the initial ideas down without any comment. He would then put backing down and they would both experiment with different ideas until they would come up with the final track.

Mairéad let Manus do whatever he felt and trusted his innate musical sensibility to create the different textures which he achieved.

They were both very aware that the sound was going to be different to that of Altan, which Mairéad's music has been associated with until now, with musical contributions from a number of friends including Ann Björg Lien (Hardanger Fiddle), Tríona Ní Dhomhnaill (Piano), Jim Higgins (Percussion & Bodhrán), Dónal Lunny (Bodhrán), Michael Mc Goldrick (Uilleann Pipes & Flute), Graham Henderson (Keyboards), and Tim Edey (Guitar),

All in all, this is the edge, the imeall, the personal stamp that Mairéad wanted to achieve on this recording.

It shows the personal state of Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh's music, back living in the wilds of Donegal on the edge of the Atlantic.

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*Press images can be found on Mairéad's website at:
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