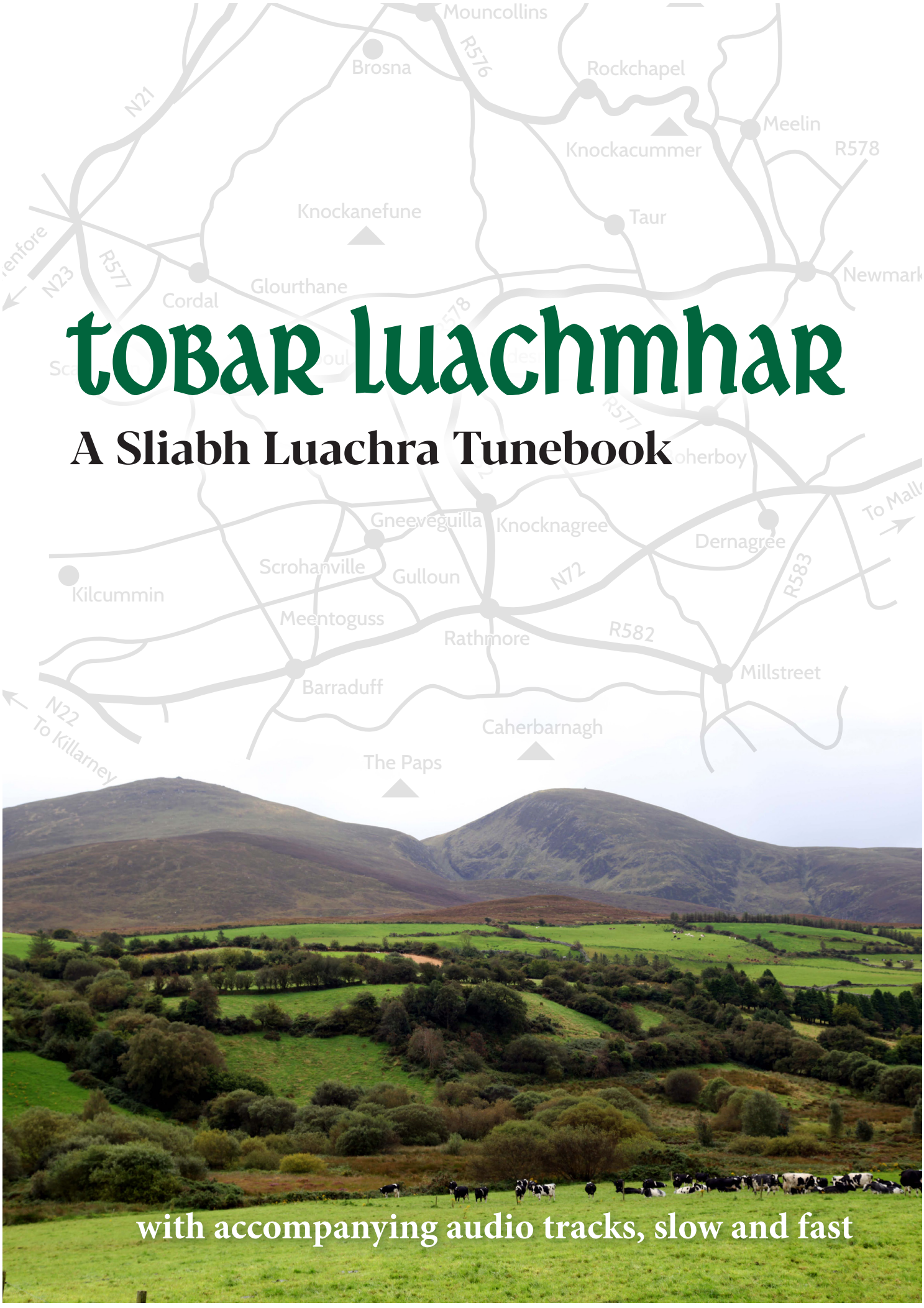
Tobar Luachmhar

A Sliabh Luachra Tunebook



with accompanying audio tracks, slow and fast

Foreword

A shared passion for the music of Sliabh Luachra – that deeply culturally rich area on the borders of counties Kerry, Cork and Limerick – has led us to this publication, a simply presented repertoire of tunes donated by three excellent musicians from the region.

Many great albums and recordings can be found featuring the seemingly endless well of tunes, but not too many tune books, so we feel it is time to put one together.

The idea to invite three contributing musicians was a no-brainer. Emma O'Leary, Mick Culloty and Timmy O'Connor are all great musicians with vast experience and different core repertoires, something which is representative of the rich diversity to be found within Sliabh Luachra music, and they have different perspectives on what they consider the core repertoire to be.

We asked Emma, Mick and Timmy to share their best tunes and the result is a lovely selection that all students of Sliabh Luachra music would do well to learn.

Paul De Grae has put in stellar work, helping with digital notation of tunes and editing of this publication. His attention to detail and commitment to a high-quality product are evident.

The notes of the tunes – along with some biographical information about our three contributors – are contained in this book, both in staff notation and in letter form.

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone camera to access the audio recordings of the tunes being played. It is always better to learn by ear where possible, and maybe use the notes as an additional support if you are missing a few bars.

Aidan Connolly, Pat Fleming & Paul De Grae, November 2024

an interesting undertaking:

'Project Denis' by Anton Zille

Denis 'The Weaver' Murphy
(1910-1974)

Anton Zille is a Russian fiddle player, editor and web developer currently living in Serbia. Anton's Sliabh Luachra music journey began almost two decades ago with him discovering the old recordings of Denis Murphy, Julia Clifford and Pádraig O'Keeffe. This love for the music saw Anton champion Cork, Kerry and Limerick tunes with his band Polca an Rí and led him to many wild and beautiful places during frequent trips to Ireland. It also helped him strike up friendships with some of his musical heroes such as Billy Clifford, John Walsh and Paddy Jones (R.I.P.). As of late, Anton has been studying the archival materials and making digital projects in hopes of raising more awareness about the hidden riches of the Sliabh Luachra fiddle style.

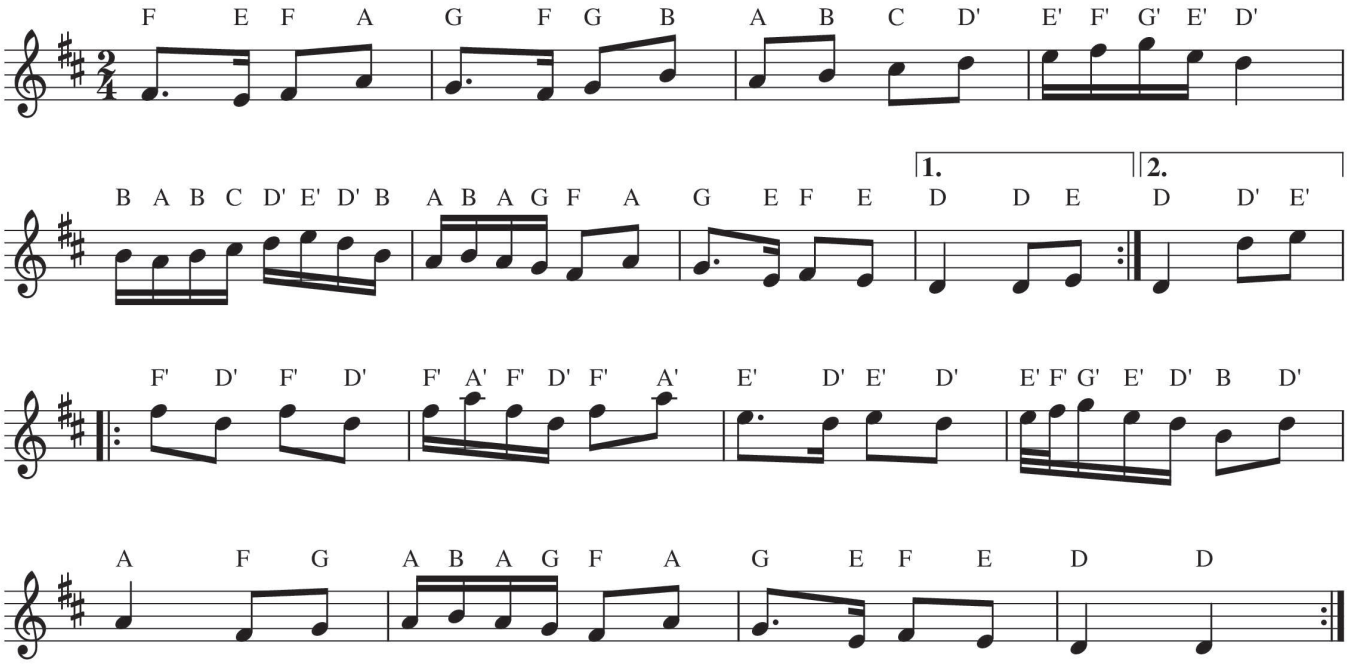
Anton Zille with the late great Paddy Jones.
Photo by Bob Singer

#ProjectDenis is Anton Zille's pilot project in memory of the Sliabh Luachra fiddle legend Denis Murphy (1910-1974). It is a web App that helps navigate Denis Murphy's incredibly varied repertoire by connecting the listeners, learners and researchers of this music to the source materials. It is built on a carefully updated database referencing hundreds of tracks found on commercial records, archival collections and publicly available copies of homemade tapes. The app includes search and interactive menus with details on tracks, tunes and source recordings as well as a thorough help guide.

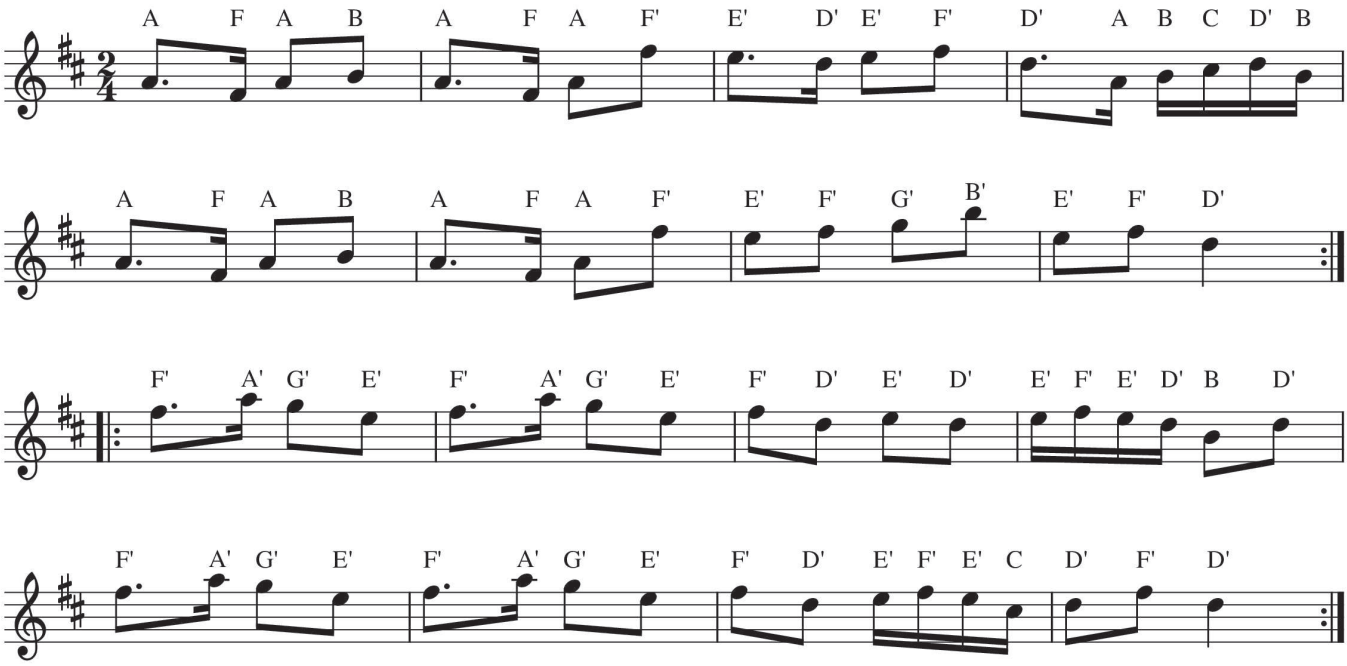
Follow the QR code to explore the app ▶

On the following pages you will find three selections of tunes from recordings of Denis Murphy that can be found in the Handed Down Sliabh Luachra Archive. Scan the QR code (left) to hear these tunes played slowly and fast.

The Five Servants (Polka)

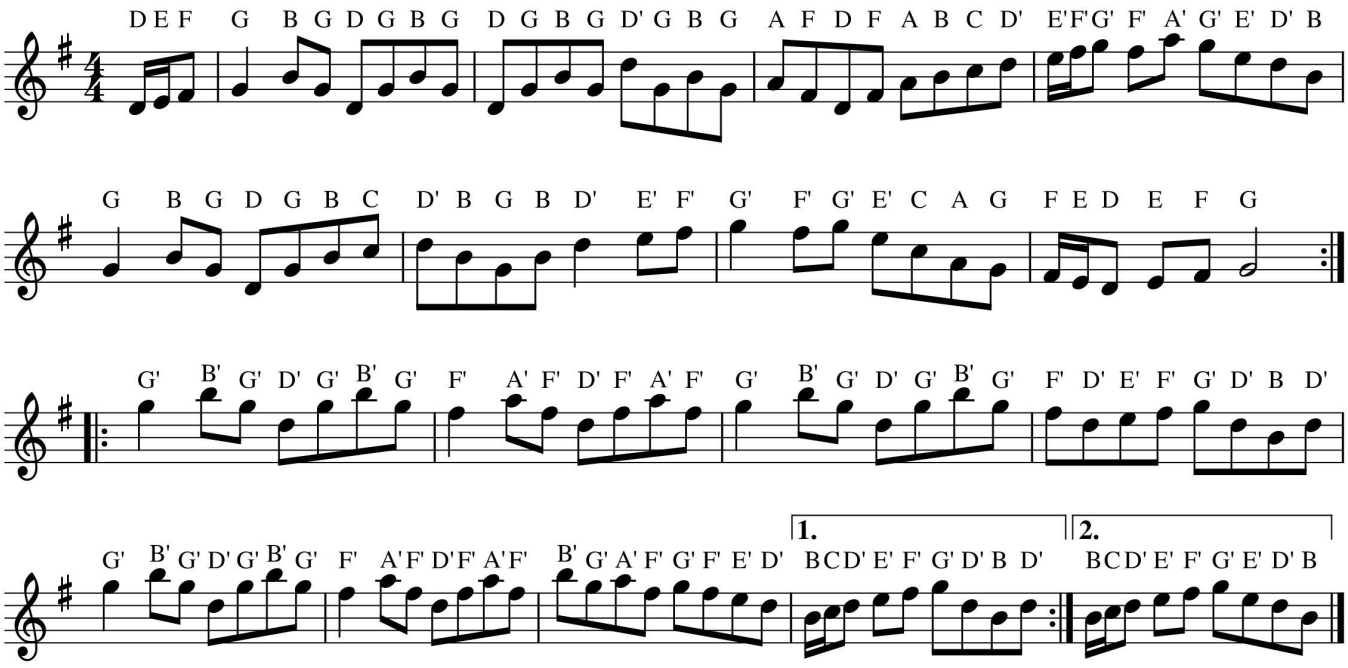


Julia Clifford's (Polka)

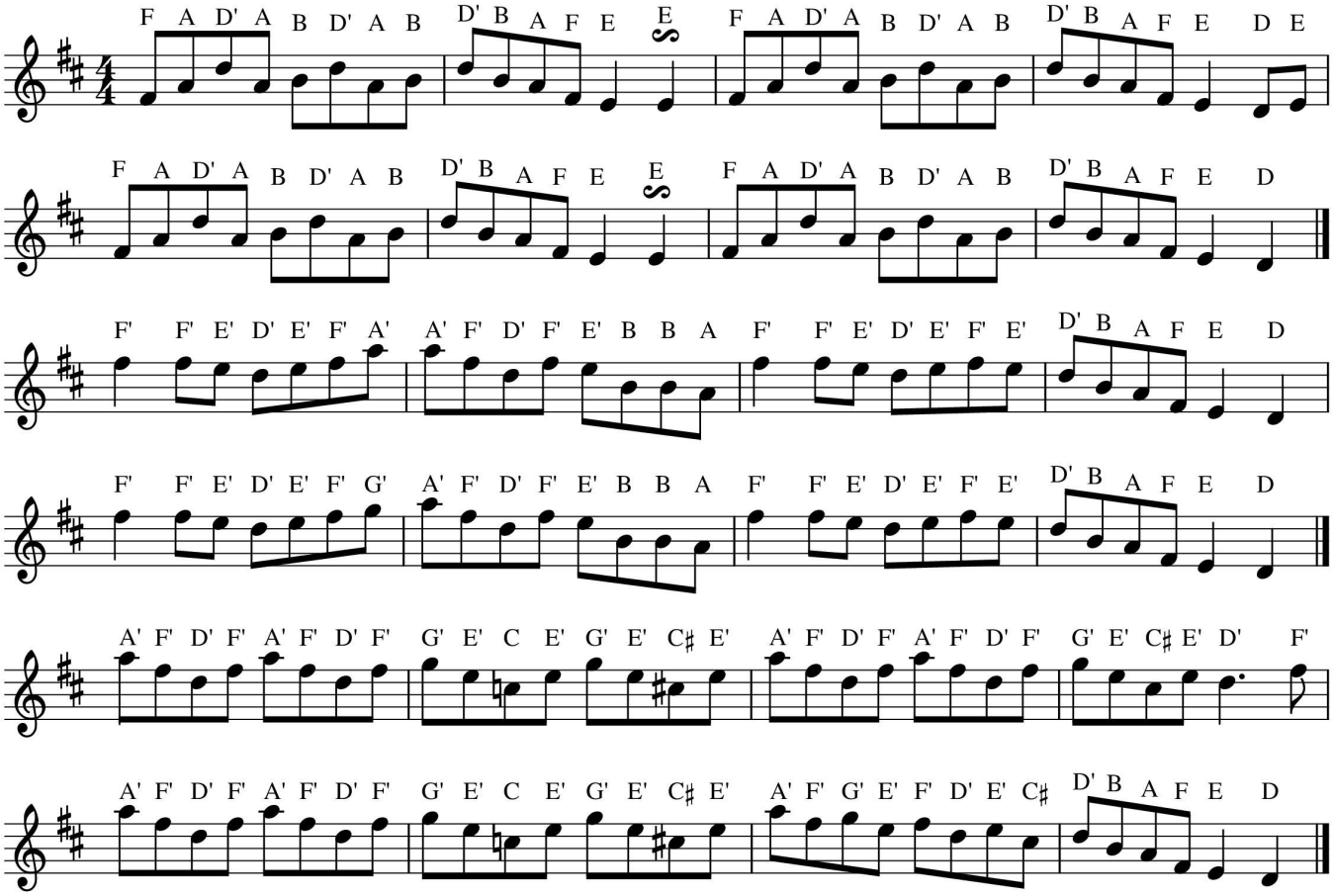


Scan the QR code to hear fantastic original and rare recordings of Denis Murphy, and to explore the wider Handed Down Sliabh Luachra Archive, curated by PJ Teahan.

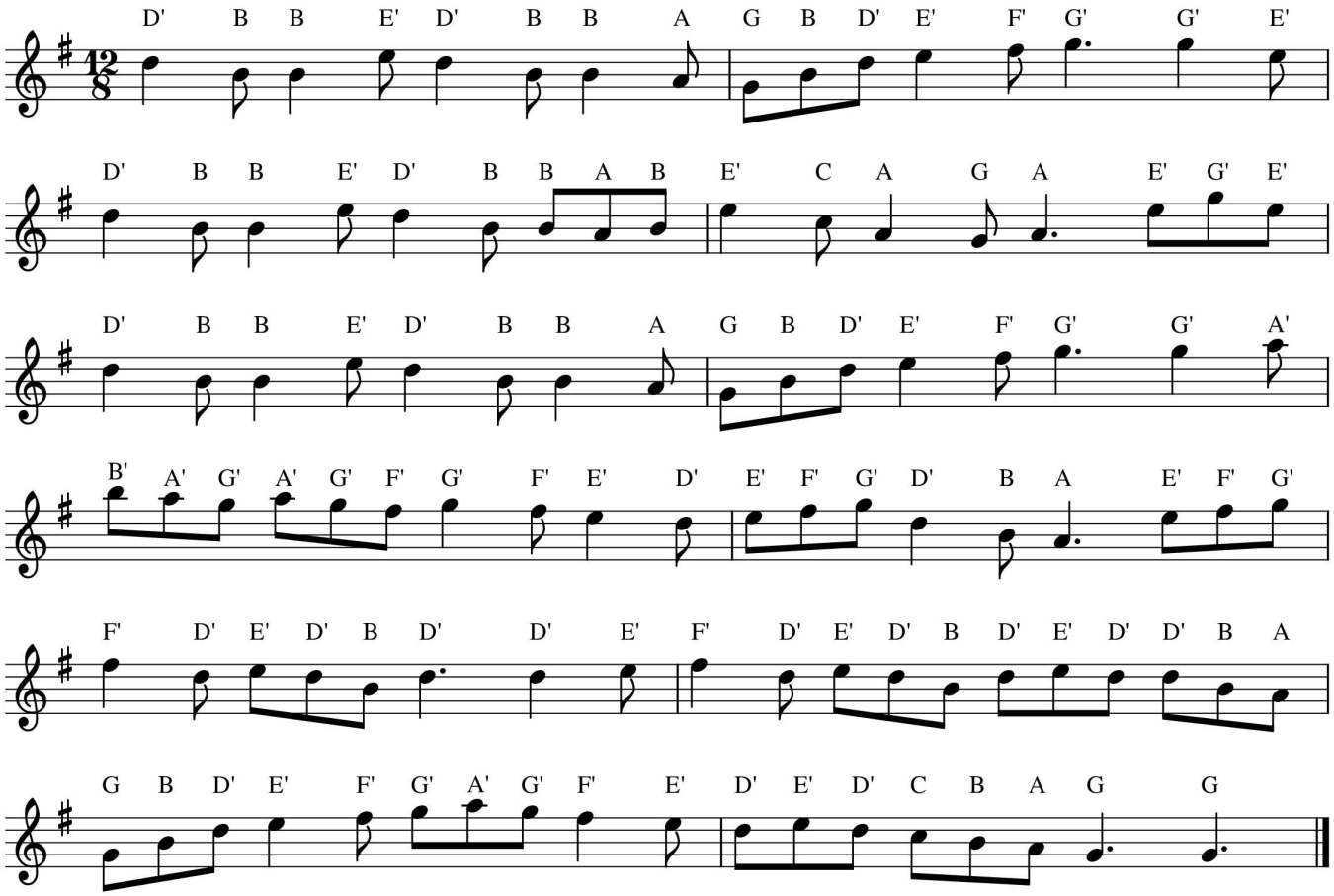
Sliabh Maol (Reel)



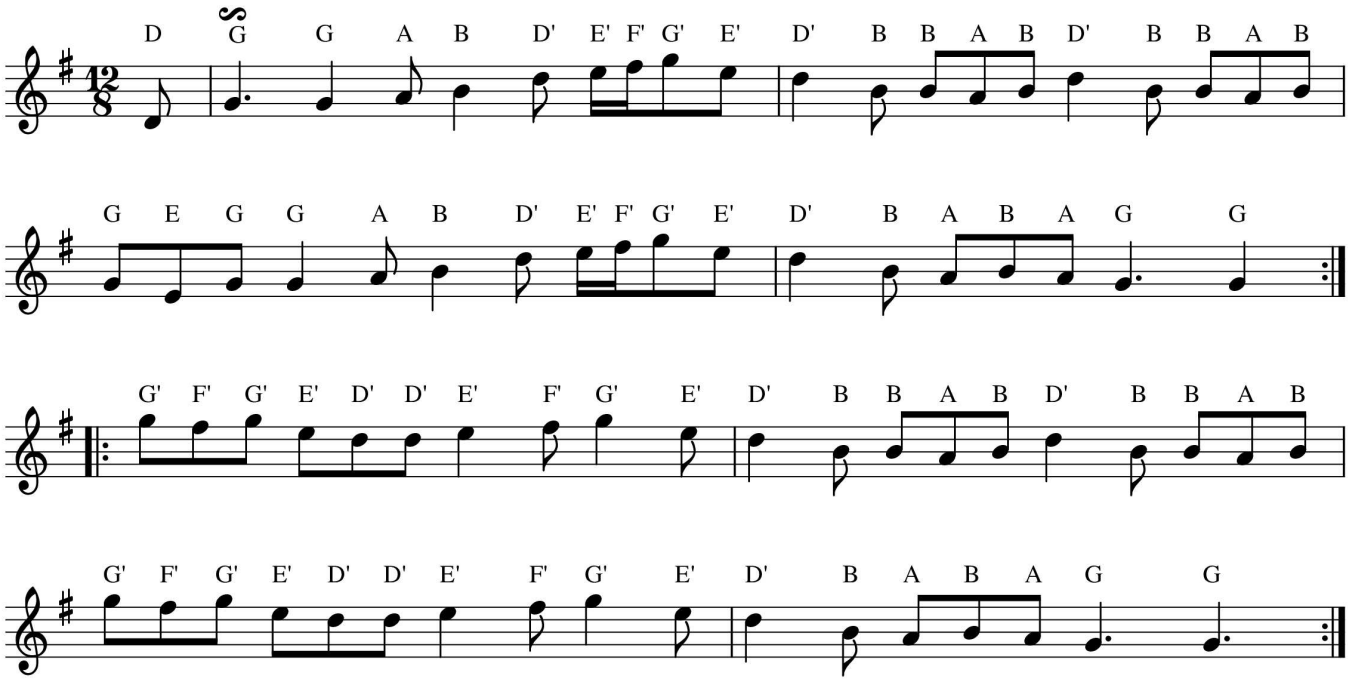
The Bog Carrot (Reel) [Third part added by Jackie Daly}



Art O'Keeffe's #1 (Slide)



Denis McMahon's (Slide)



Emma O'Leary

Photo taken by Eoin Stan O'Sullivan in May 2021 at Culturlann MacAmhlaoibh, in Newmarket, Co. Cork.

Emma grew up on a farm in Mount, north of Scartaglin Village, in the 1980's. She is the youngest of eleven children. Her father Michael was a farmer and her mother Rita worked at home and on the farm. Her father was born in Mount, and her mother was born in Mileen, Kilcummin. Rita had one sibling, Pat, who played the accordion with the 'Radiant Show Band' led by a neighbour from Mount, Scartaglin, Jack 'the Tailor' Brosnan. While Emma's parents didn't play music, her siblings Mike, Eileen, Colette, Carmel and Kathryn did, so she grew up in a home listening to them playing daily. Her earliest link with making music was when she started lilting when she was three years old! As a young child, the earliest recordings she remembers listening to at home were cassette tapes of accordion players Tom Fleming (Muingbháite, Castleisland), and her neighbour Johnny Reidy (Mullin). She later remembers tapes of Mary Bergin, Joe Burke and Frankie Gavin. *'My mother used to play these tapes for us in an effort to get us off to bed at night. I remember having to turn the tape to play side B and I'd eventually go off to sleep.'*

Emma's Dad died suddenly when she was three years old and her brother Michael took over the farm when he was eighteen. Her mother continued to work daily on the farm.

Emma attended Scartaglin National School. She remembers the highlight of the year for her as a child was the 'Scartaglin Féile Ceoil', held in the village on the August Bank Holiday weekend. Her earliest involvement in it was taking part in Maureen Cronin's group with her sisters Carmel and Kathryn. She was the youngest member of the group starting on the bodhrán. Emma competed at the 'Scartaglin Féile Ceoil' every year. In her own words:

> *"I had the opportunity to compete twice in many instruments as there were competitions 'confined' to the local area as well as 'open' competitions. There was a carnival on in the village green, Johnny Reidy played for open air set dancing at the Pádraig O'Keeffe monument and there were sessions in the three pubs, Fleming's, Lyon's and O'Connor's. I was privileged to grow up in such an area as I always had the opportunity to listen and play with the local Sliabh Luachra greats."*

Emma recalls *"being lucky to grow up in the Sliabh Luachra area which was always steeped in music and culture."* She remembers Paddy Cronin playing in Fleming's kitchen and local musicians like Dan Jeremiah O'Connor, Ned O'Connor, Pacheen O'Connell, Jerry McCarthy, Jer Collins, Willie O'Connell, Maurice O'Keeffe and Dan Herlihy.

Emma's earliest recollection of music classes was when she was three years old attending Friday night music classes with Nickie McAuliffe, along with her siblings Mike, Carmel and Kathryn in a prefab at the back of the old 'Tech' in Castleisland (now the Gaelscoil). It wasn't planned that she'd start so young but she was accustomed to going along with her siblings. She started on an F

tin-whistle - a smaller size than regular key of D, more suitable for smaller fingers. Her first county medal was at the County Fleadh in Ballyheigue for lilting when she was about three or four years old. She started the piano accordion aged five, attending Saturday classes with Celia Regan in the Ivy Leaf in Castleisland. She dabbled in several instruments with Nickie, at one stage going in with whistle, flute, banjo and fiddle. Emma started the fiddle with Nickie when she was about ten.

Emma remembers Paddy Cronin assisting her source her first good fiddle which was purchased from William Patterson's in Cork City. A few years later she bought her current fiddle from Paddy which he brought back from America. Emma's mother Rita was a childhood friend of Paddy Cronin's. Emma recalls how her mother remembered Paddy and his brother Johnny playing music sessions at her home in Mileen, Kilcummin. When Paddy and his wife Connie moved home to Killarney from America in the 90's, Emma and her mother would visit regularly and Emma remembers playing lots of music with Paddy.

Photo taken outside the farm home in Mount, Scartaglin.

Emma studied classical music on piano, flute and violin at the Kerry School of Music in Tralee and completed eight grades on violin. She also studied Music as an exam subject outside of school in Tralee for Junior and Leaving Cert. Emma became one of Nickie McAuliffe's longest standing pupils as she completed a BA Degree in Folk Theatre Studies at the Institute of Technology Tralee under Nicky's tutelage.

Emma loved going to the Fleadhanna Cheoil and she remembers her mother travelling the country with her. Her first time competing at the All-Ireland Fleadh was when she was nine years old.

'The Fleadh was on in Sligo and my mother and I got the bus. I competed in whistle, piano accordion and lilting. I got second that year on the whistle, Anne McAuliffe made a recording that day which is now on the Sliabh Luachra Handed Down Music Archive!'

Emma had many Fleadh successes after that and made lifelong friends through these events. In 1999, Emma won three senior gold medals in whistle, whistle slow airs and fiddle slow airs at the All-Ireland Fleadh in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. Emma has a particular passion for slow airs and remembers when preparing for the Fleadh listening to the air playing of recordings of Julia Clifford and Pádraig O'Keeffe and loving the sean nós singing of Séamus Begley.

As a child, sessions were a big part of Emma's social life. Emma travelled to sessions with her mum, brother Mike and sister Carmel to Dan O'Connell's Knocknagree, Ballydesmond, Scully's of Newmarket, the three pubs in Scartaglin and the Shoemaker's Bar in Castleisland. Johnny O'Leary led the session at Dan O'Connell's, Friday and Sunday nights, and he always welcomed new musicians and people came from far and wide to play with and dance to Johnny's music. Dan Herlihy led the sessions in Ballydesmond and he played a lot with Denis O'Connor and Paddy

Cronin. Accordion player Timmy O'Connor led the session in Scully's in Newmarket and Emma remembers how he was always so encouraging and welcoming towards her as a child 'always giving me a chance to start off my own tunes.' The Shoemaker's Bar in Castleisland had a Tuesday night session led by John Brosnan and local musicians like Jer Collins, Willie O'Connell and Joe O'Sullivan. John was always hugely encouraging towards young musicians.

Jimmy Doyle led the Sunday afternoon session in the Arbutus in Killarney with Paudie Gleeson, John and Joe O'Sullivan and they were always welcoming to young musicians. As a teenager and young adult Emma played in sessions with Pádraig Buckley and Tim O'Shea in Killarney and Mick Culloty in Dingle and Ballyferriter. Emma was part of a band called 'Créde' in her college years with her friends Eilís Murphy from Abbeyfeale on flute, Jonathan Roche from Brosna on accordion and guitarists Leonard Casey, Sean Leahy and Gary O'Brien. Emma was part of the Comhaltas Tour of Ireland and travelled the world with 'Ceol Chiarraí' and 'Rhythm of the Dance'. For the past fifteen years Emma has frequented Browne's Bar in Castleisland for the sessions every Friday night and Kearney's Bar on Tuesday nights.

Photo taken for the Kerryman newspaper by the monument of Pádraig O'Keeffe to advertise the upcoming Féile Ceoil in Scartaglin, circa 1992.

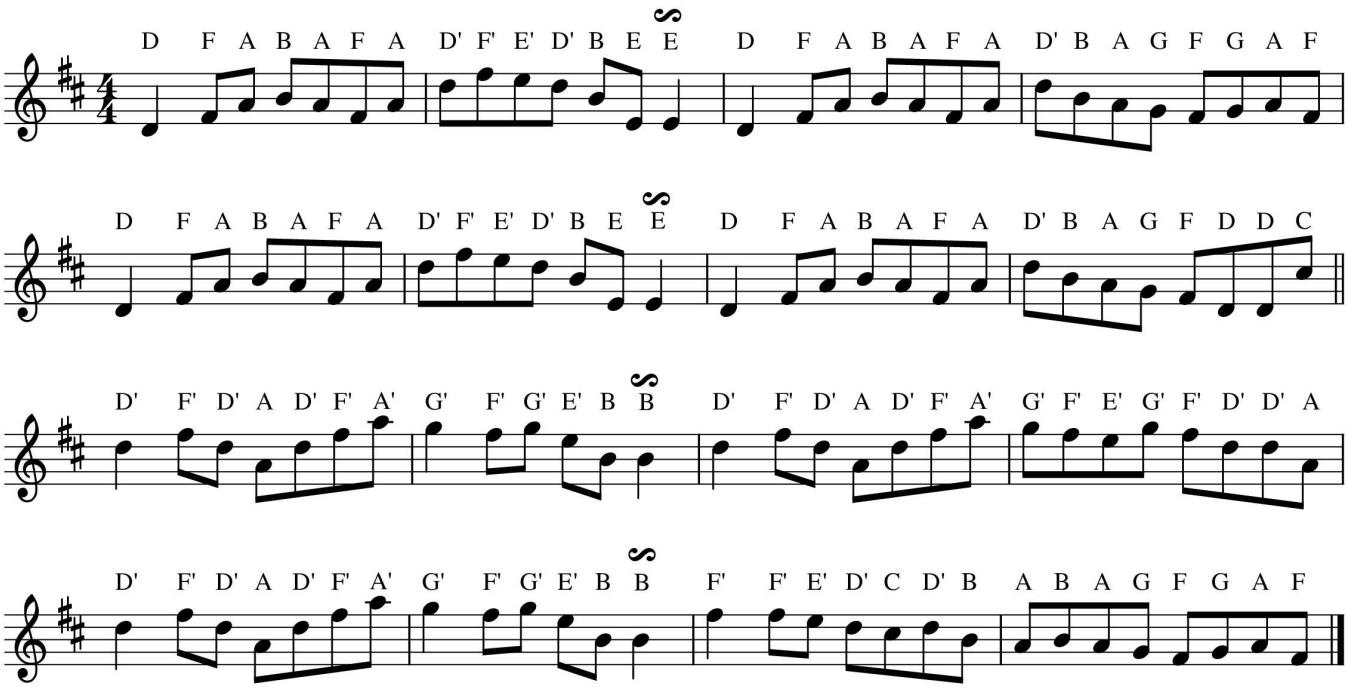
In May 2021 Eoin Stan O'Sullivan, Sliabh Luachra Musician in Residence, recorded Emma's LP - Mo Cheantair Féin - through his Sliabh Luachra record label. It is a recording of locally sourced repertoire. Speaking about the album, Emma commented:

> *"I chose the album title Mo Cheantar Féin (My Own Area), as all of the repertoire in this recording is associated with my local area where I grew up in Mount, Scartaglin. I was one of Nickie McAuliffe's longest standing pupils and was lucky enough to grow up in this area, one which is deeply enriched in music, culture, poetry and folklore. I return frequently to the Sliabh Luachra area for the Handed Down Series in Scartaglin, World Fiddle Day and the local festivals such as the Patrick O'Keeffe weekend as well as local sessions at Browne's Bar."*

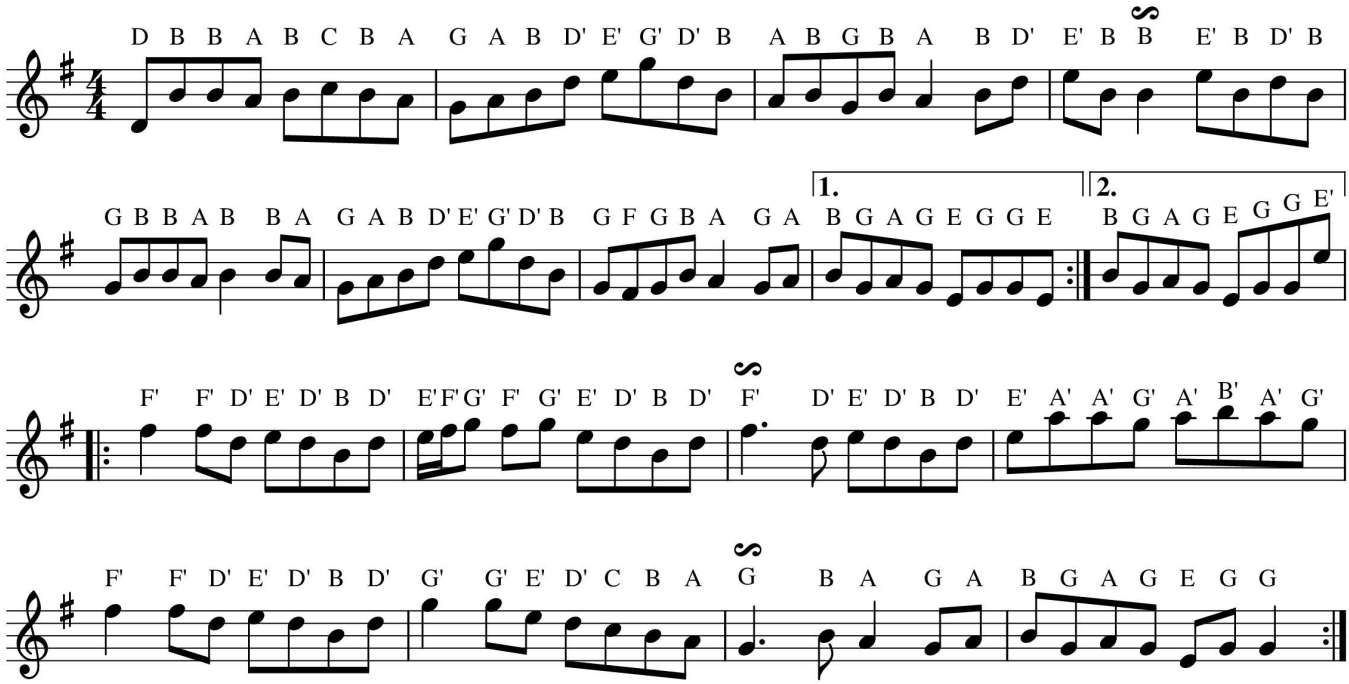
Emma resides in Limerick with her husband Emmett and two sons Eoghan and Cathal. Eoghan plays the fiddle and Cathal plays the concertina.

Use the QR code to access the tracks of Emma's tunes played slowly and fast.

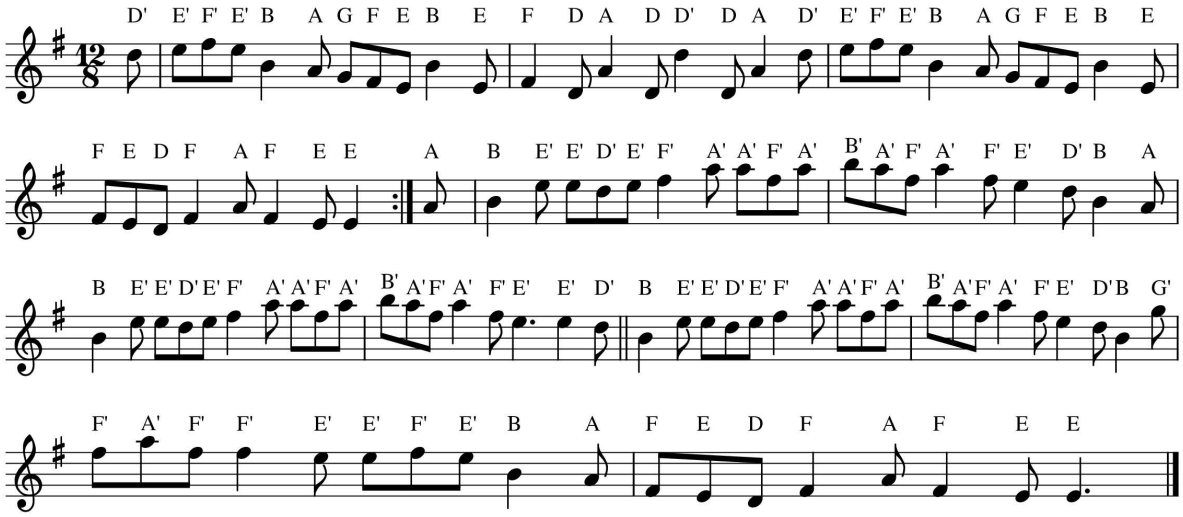
Quinn's (Reel)



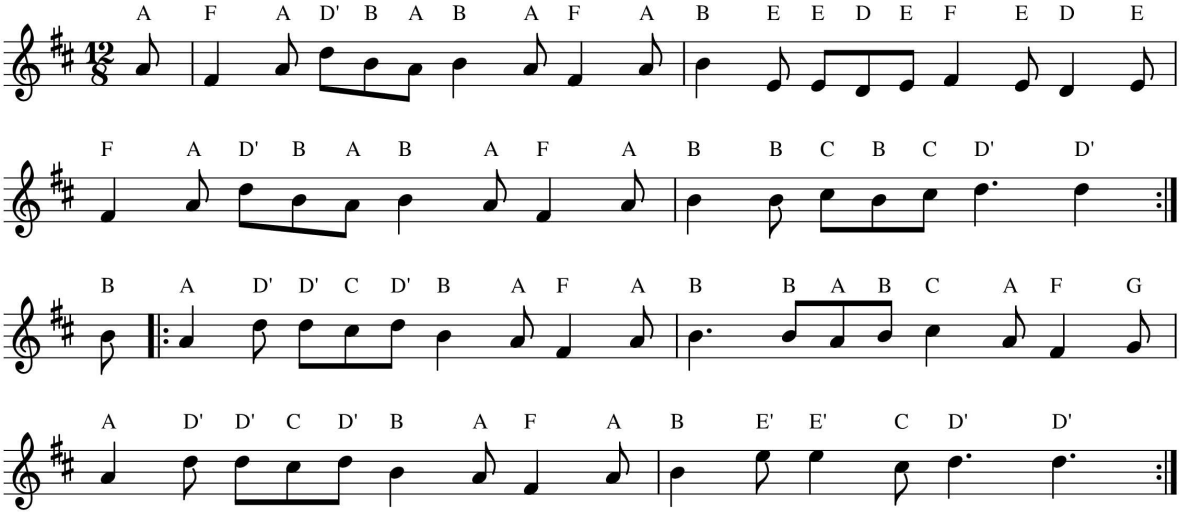
The Woman of the House (Reel)



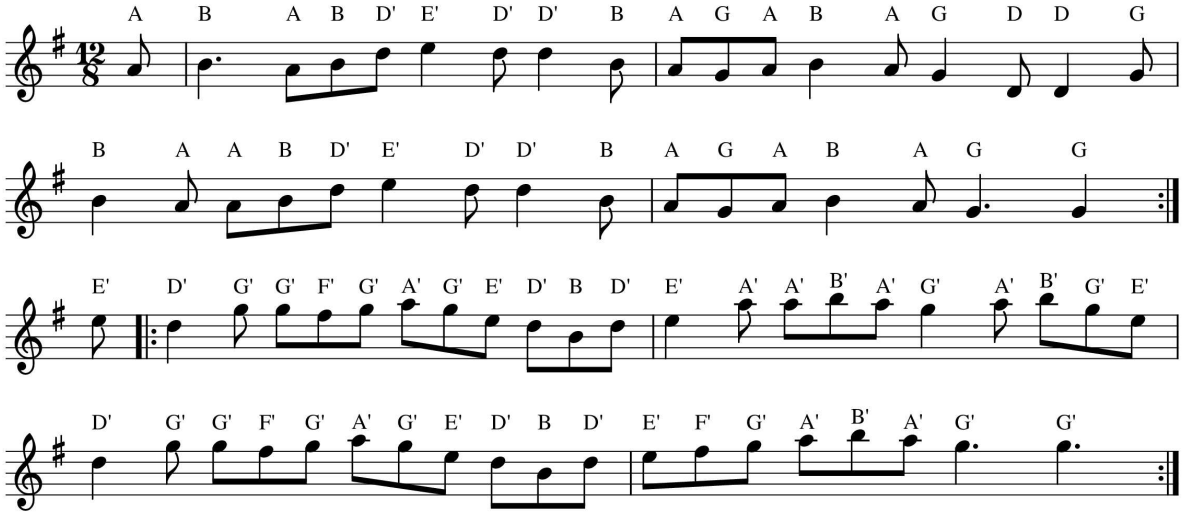
Cuz Teahan's (Slide)



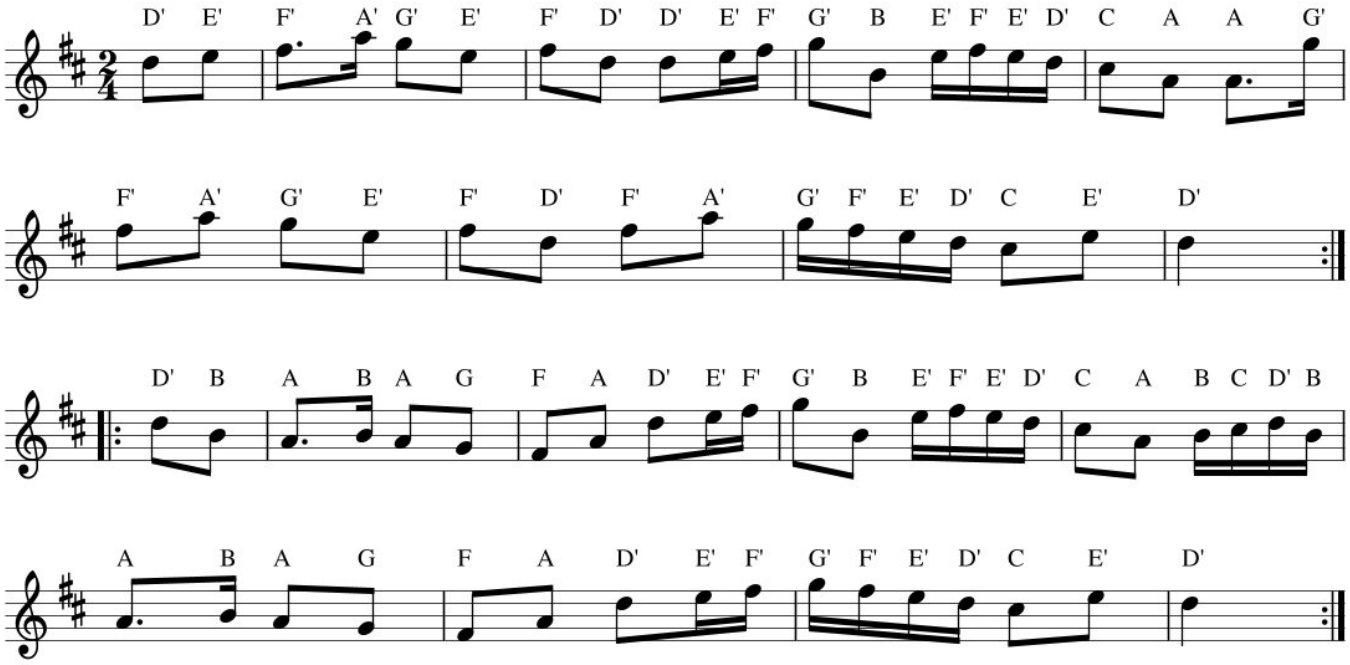
The Mullin Slide



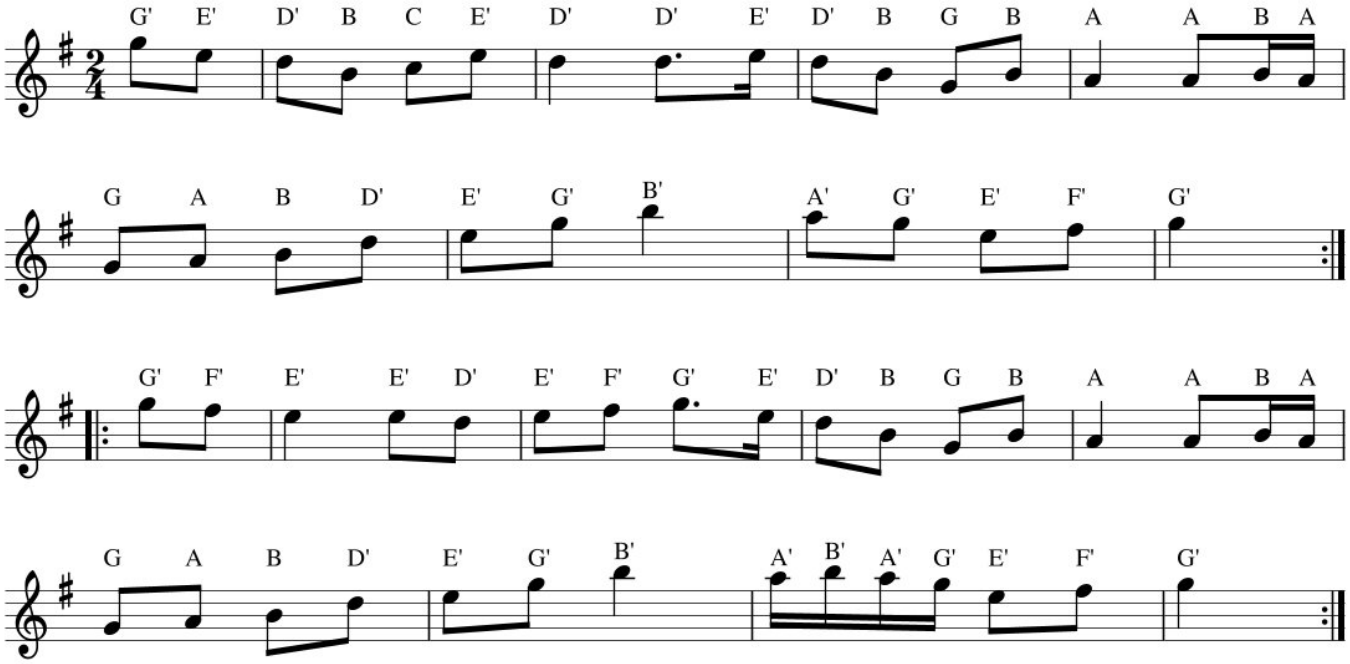
If I Had a Wife (Slide)



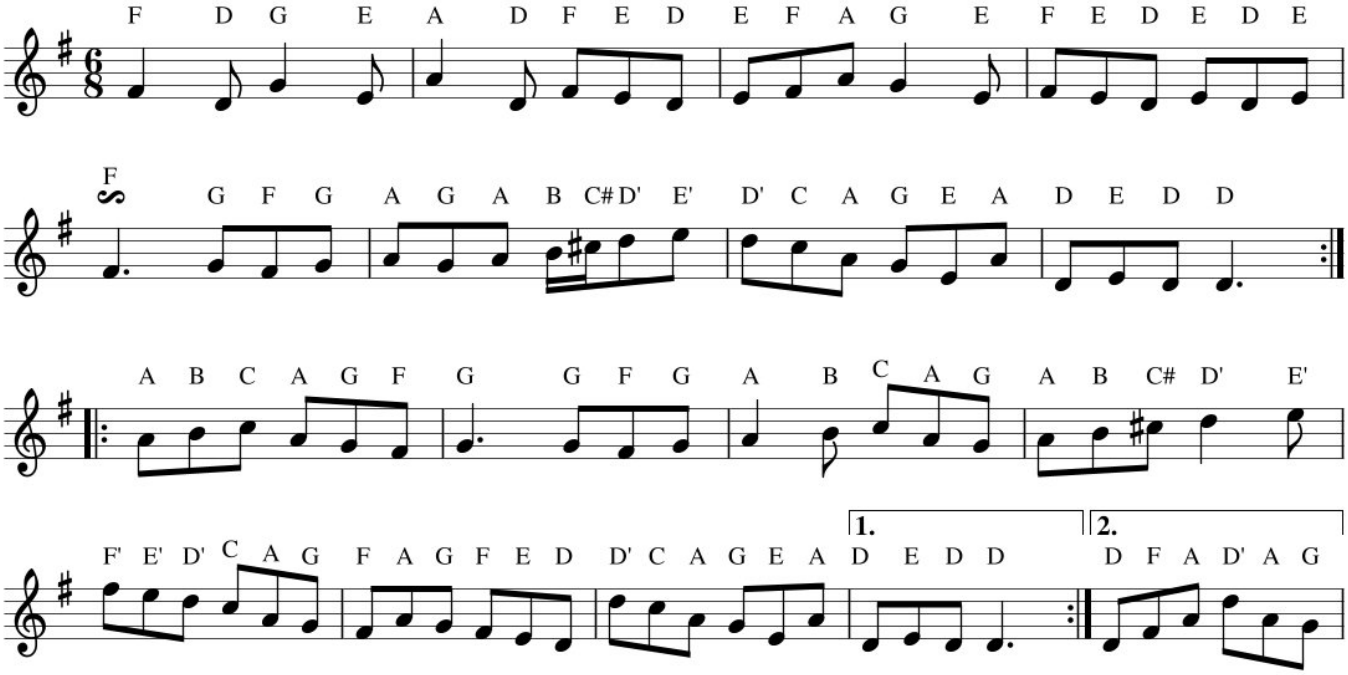
Eily Buckley's Fancy (Polka)



Dan Jeremiah's (Polka)

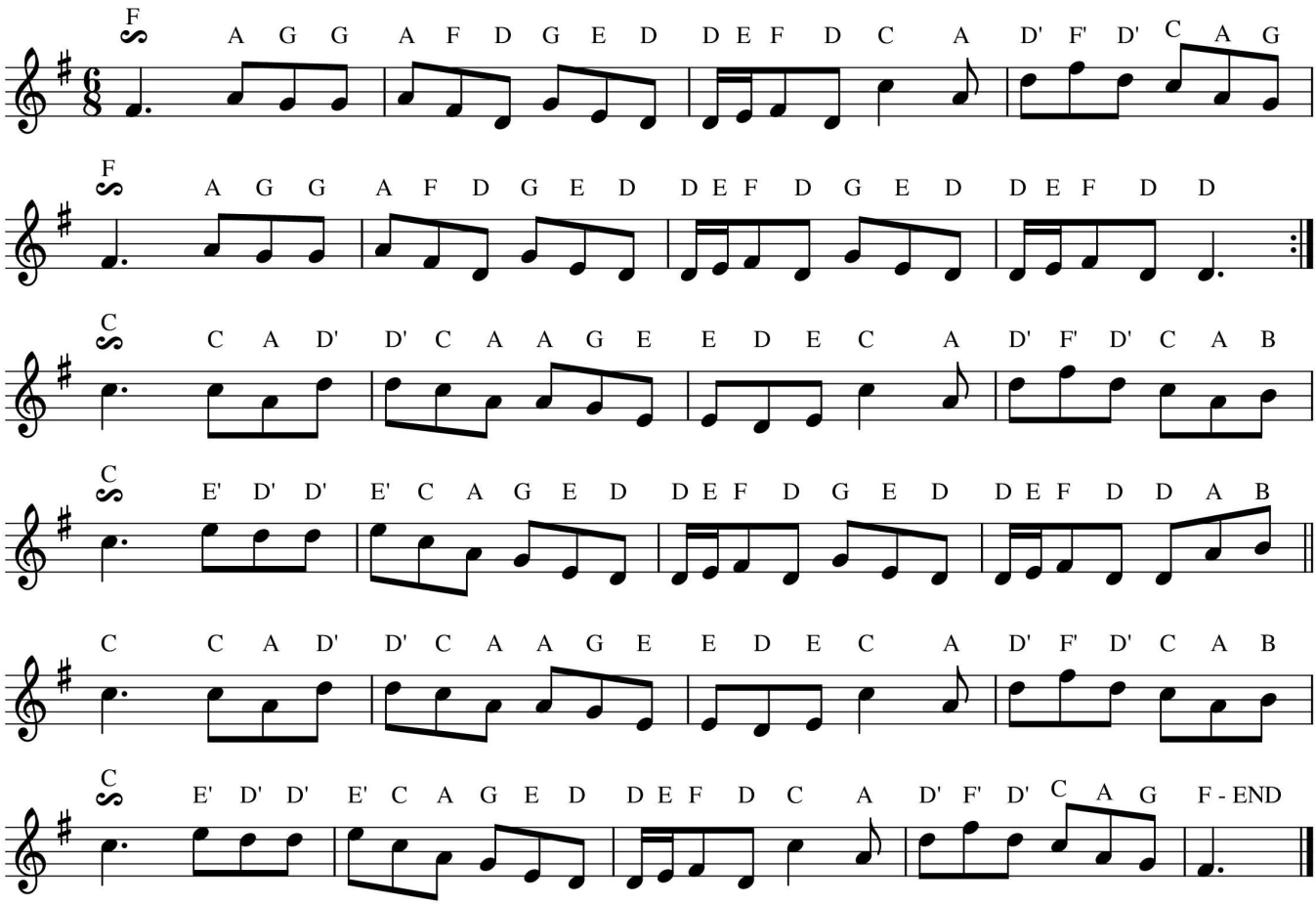


The Girl of the Big House (Jig)



Peig sa Súsa (Jig)

Pádraig O'Keeffe



mick culloty

Mick at World Fiddle Day, Fleming's Bar Scartaglin, 2019. (photo Liz Galwey)

Mick Culloty was born in 1965 in Killeentierna, Currow, Co. Kerry, into a house with a fierce interest in traditional music. There was musical heritage on his mother's side via the Quinn family, and Mick was exposed to lots of music through listening to traditional music programmes such as Céilí House. Mick's brothers, Jim and Jack, have also displayed a strong support and interest for the local music.

Mick moved to Scartaglin to help his uncle on the farm and from there he was able to travel frequently to Dan Connell's Pub in Knocknagree, the Mecca of Sliabh Luachra music. Mick would have known the majority of the musicians in the locality, so although he started playing relatively late (around the age of 17), he had a head start in that he already knew the characters and had heard plenty of music before playing himself.

Mick with the late Johnny Connolly at the Inisbofin Set Dancing Weekend, 2015.

At Dan Connell's, Mick showed a great interest in the music – tapping his fingers on the table - and was particularly attracted by the C#D style of box playing exhibited by Johnny O'Leary. At the time, Mick and Jack had an accordion between them at home and Johnny encouraged the 17-year-old Mick to bring it along so he could teach him the basics of how to play and also to give him a couple of tunes. Mick became friends with Johnny and he cites him as one of his main influences.

Mick was influenced by many others, including John Brosnan, from whom he got his own accordion. Mick insisted that the accordion be a quiet one that would fit in with the fiddle players which were a majority at sessions in the area.

For the most part, Mick learned his music organically, from interacting with and listening to musicians at sessions. Mick attended the Cibeal Festival (1981-91) in Kenmare in his teens which provided inspiration, and he was an avid session-goer from the mid-1980s onwards, recording tunes he liked, learning up to four new tunes a week at one point. Apart from Dan Connell's, Mick regularly went to his local Scartaglin for music at Tom Fleming's, Lyons's and O'Connor's.

As has been mentioned, Mick learned most of his repertoire from fiddle players. People like Dan Jeremiah O'Connor and Ned O'Connor gave Mick lots of tunes, as did Denis 'The Hat' McMahon, who took Mick to his first All-Ireland Fleadh in Kilkenny. Other influential fiddle players

Session at 'Bailey's Corner' in Tralee, c.1990.
Left to right: Mick Culloty, Paul De Grae, Dee Sullivan, Kevin Ryan, Mary Crowley, Dan Jeramiah O'Connor, Ned O'Connor.

included Paudie Gleeson, Sonny Riordan, Connie O'Connell, Matt Cranitch, John Coakley, Maurice O'Keeffe and John Walsh.

Mick learned plenty from accordion players as well of course. People like Jimmy Doyle, Dónal Murphy, Jackie Daly, Paudie O'Connor and Aidan Coffey have impacted his style and repertoire. Throughout his formative years he would also go to Scully's in Newmarket on a regular basis to play with Timmy O'Connor, who was also very generous with his music.

Mick started working as a professional musician in the mid-1980s, and played regularly with people like Con Moynihan, Denis O'Connor, Stephen Scales and others in Murphy's Pub in Killarney. He played for bus tours and travelled far and wide for gigs and got to know a wealth of musicians through his work.

In Bailey's Corner in Tralee Mick played regularly with Paul de Grae, Kate Mulcahy, Dee Sullivan Kevin Ryan, and Seán Abeyta, who he cites as his 'archiver-in-chief'!

Scartaglin has always been a hub of music and Mick continues to play there often with PJ Teahan, Emma O'Leary and many of the musicians mentioned above. Mick, his brother Jack, and PJ have been part of a very strong and committed team running the very successful 'Handed Down' series for the past decade, in the fabulous Heritage Centre in Scartaglin.

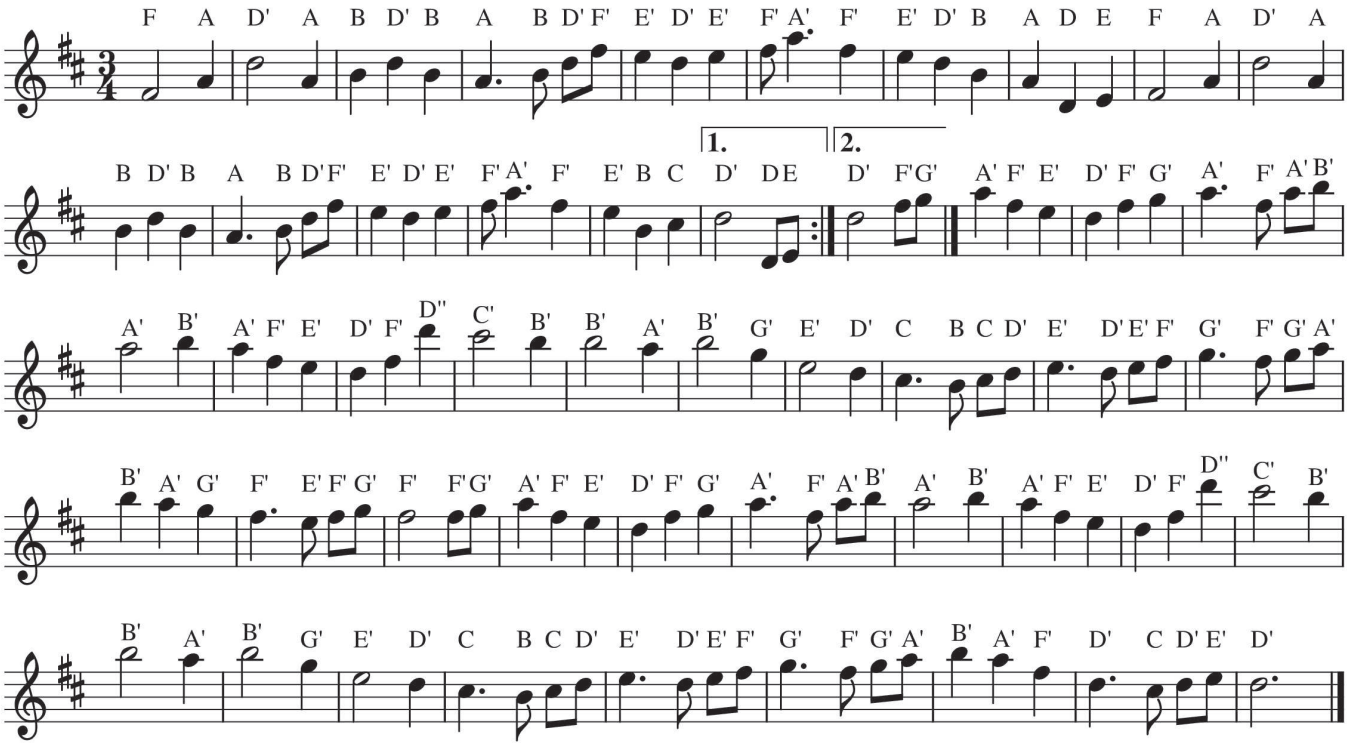
When raising money in the late 90's with Tom Fleming, Paudie O'Connor and many others to do up the hall in Scartaglin and create the Heritage Centre, he played as part of the 'Top Coat Céilí Band'. It was christened the 'Top Coat' as you would need a heavy jacket while playing as the hall was so cold prior to the renovation!

Scartaglin Culture and Heritage Centre

Mick considers it of the utmost importance to preserve and pass on traditional music to future generations, and has been heavily involved in community work to this end.

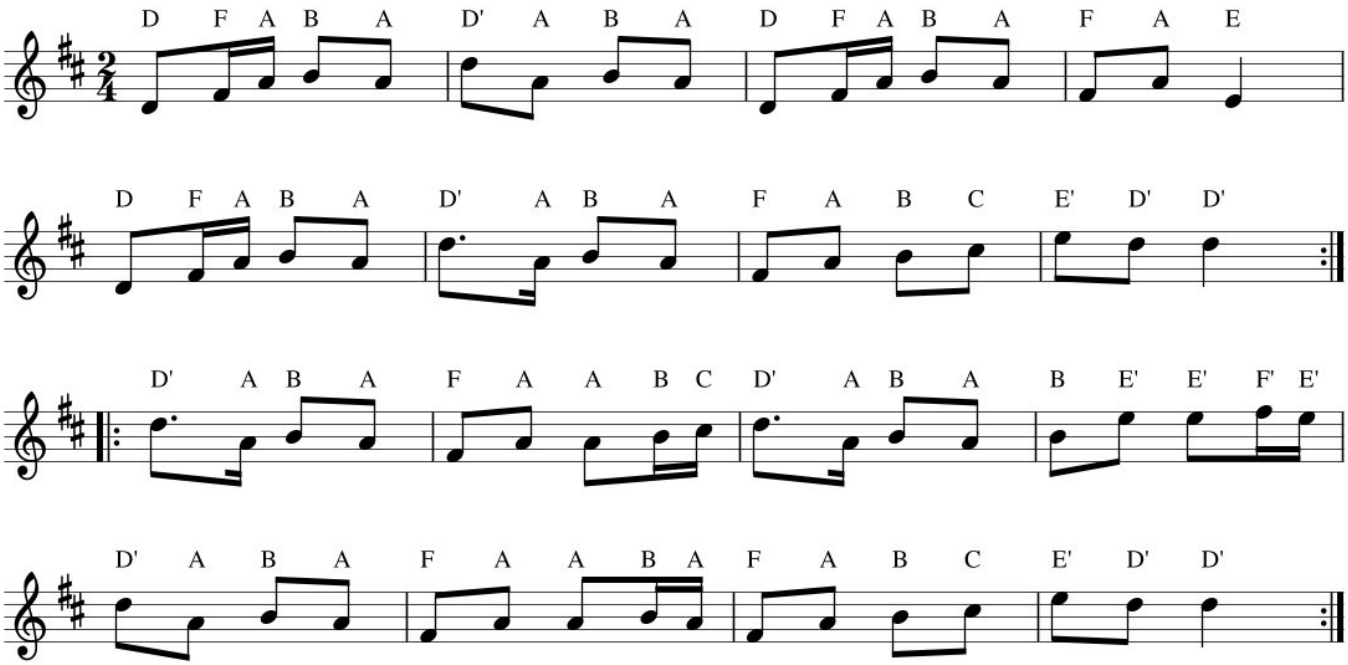
Scan the QR code to hear Mick's tunes played fast and slow

Tom Billy's (Waltz)

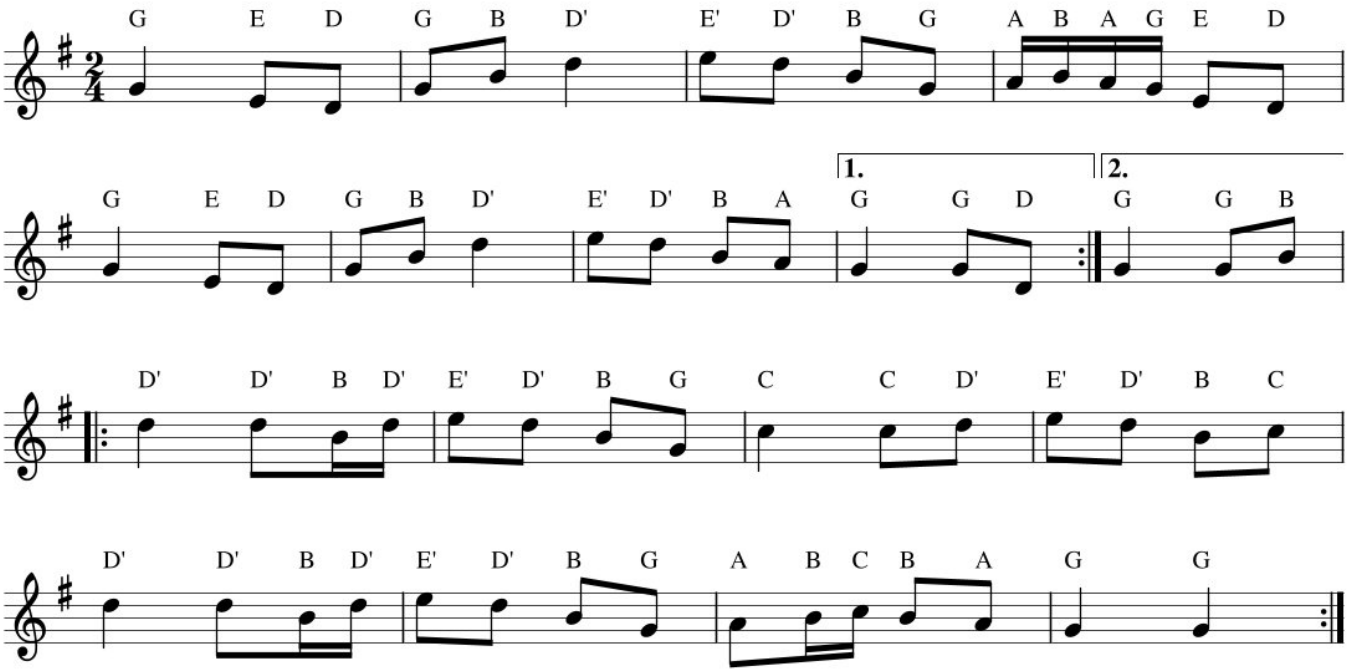


Mick Culloty's (Polka)

Mick Culloty

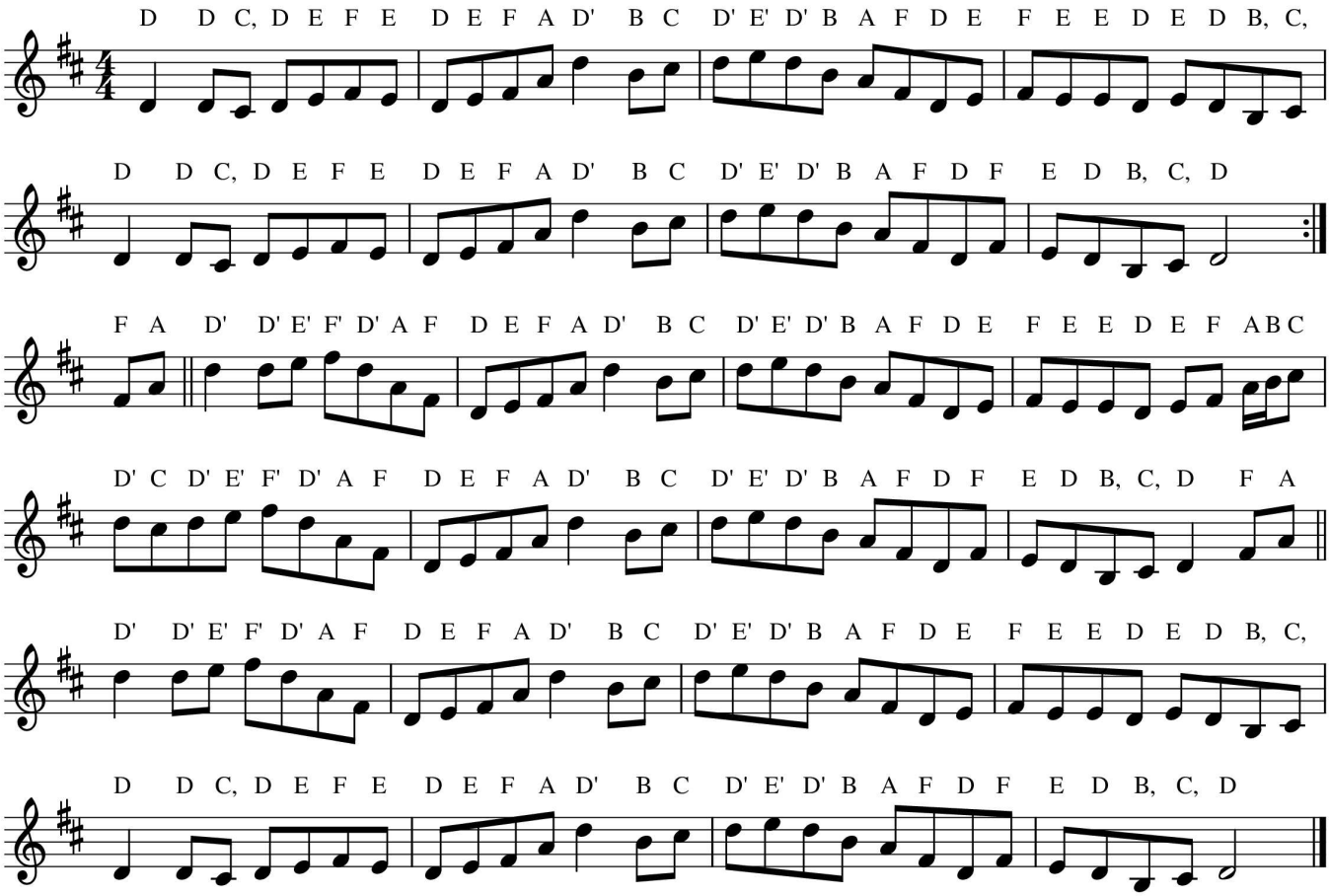


The Knocknagoshel (Polka)

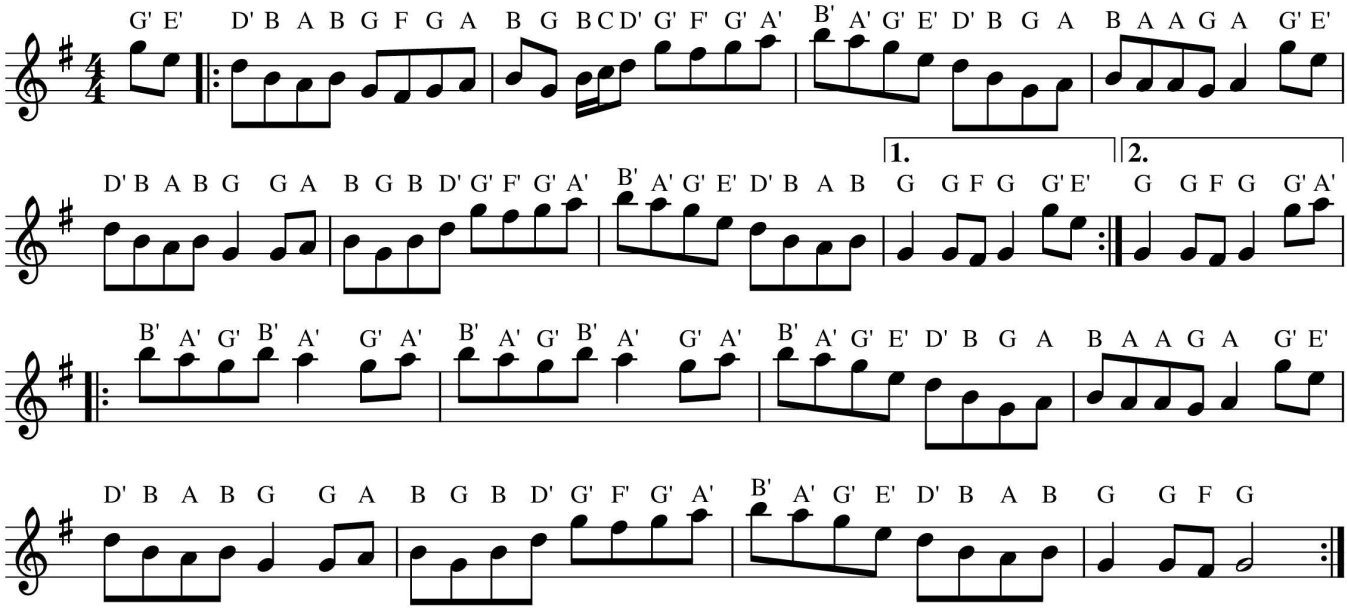


Tom Dahill's Fiddle (Hornpipe)

Terry 'Cuz' Teahan

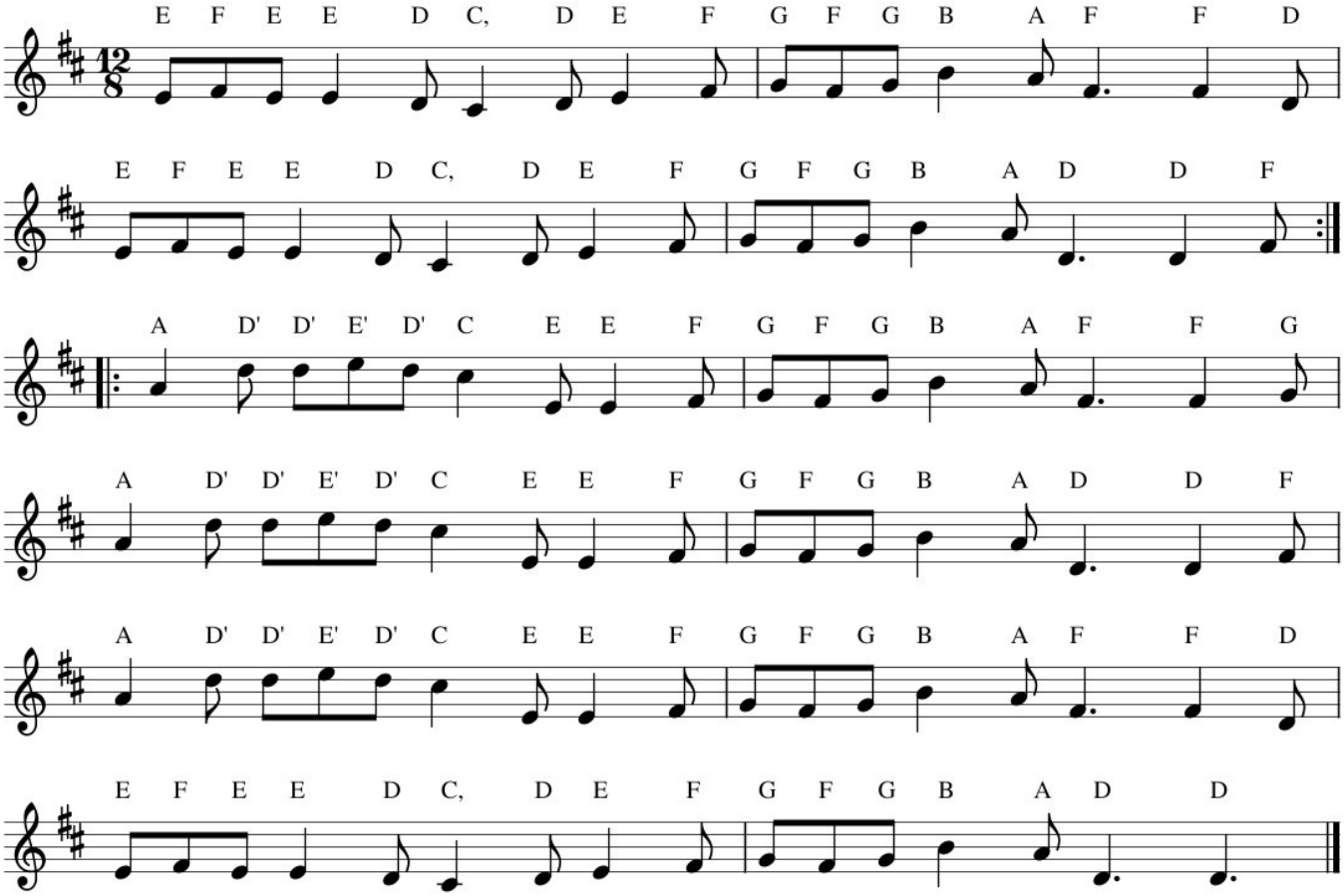


O'Mahoney's (Hornpipe)

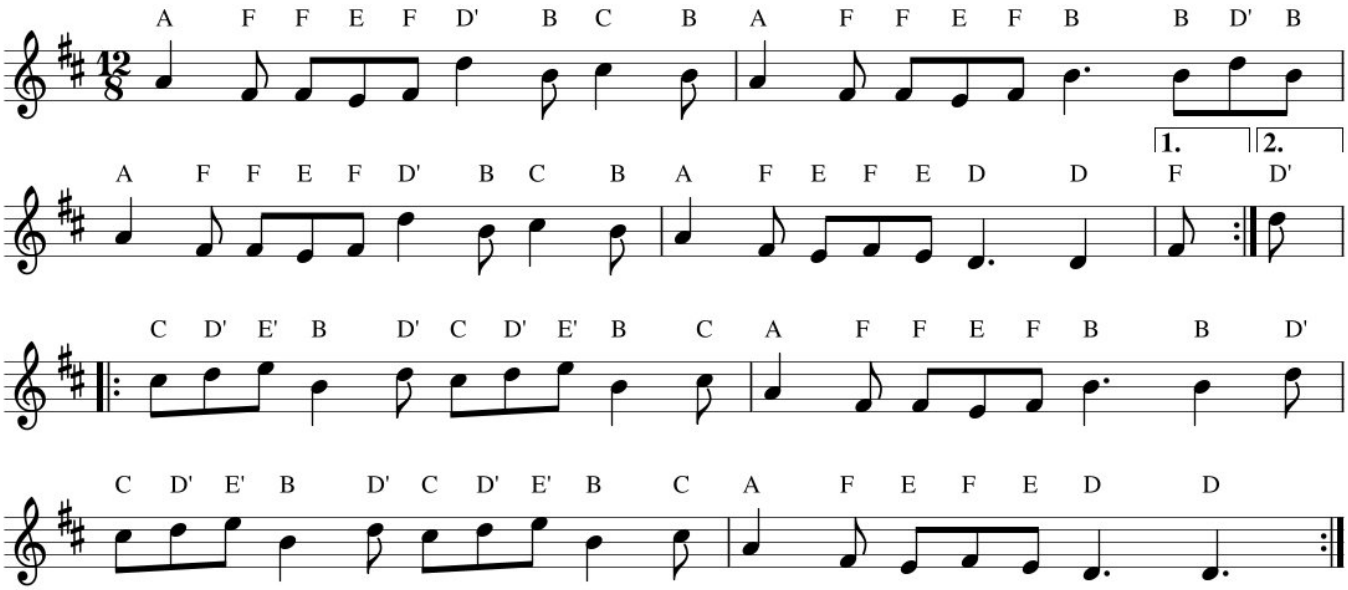


Dan & Ned's #1 (Slide)

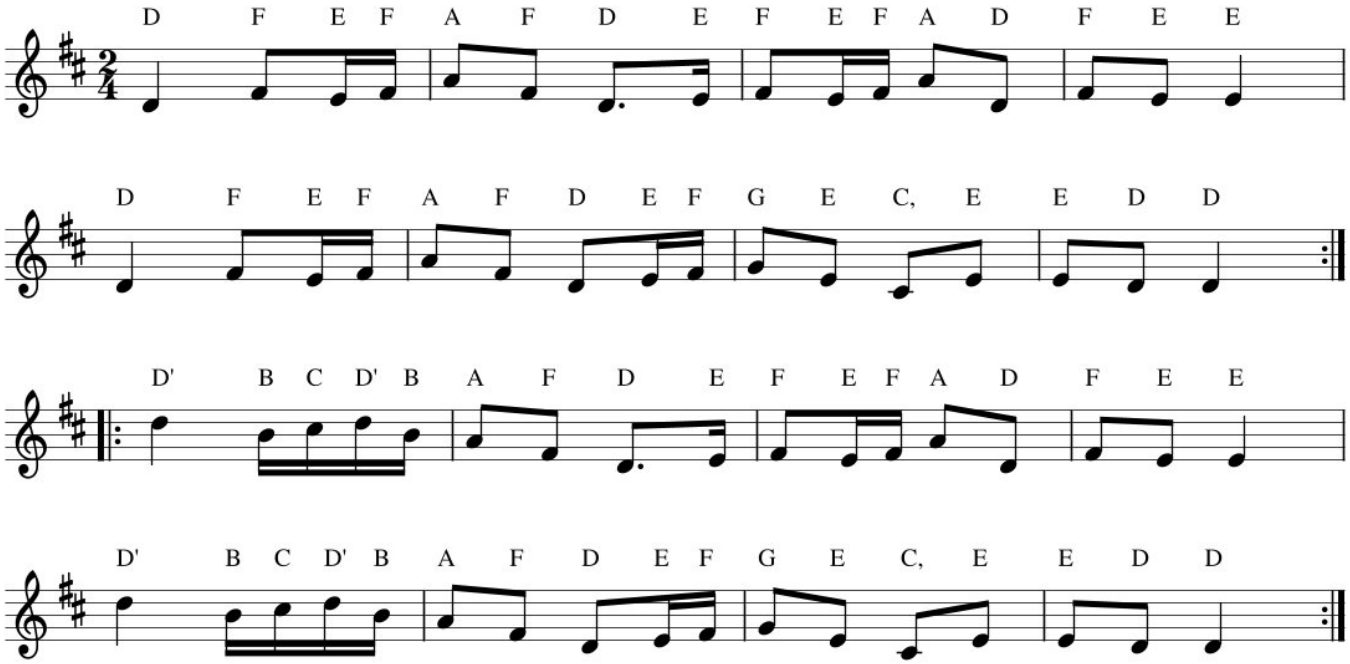
AKA 'The Clog'



Dan & Ned's #2 (Slide)

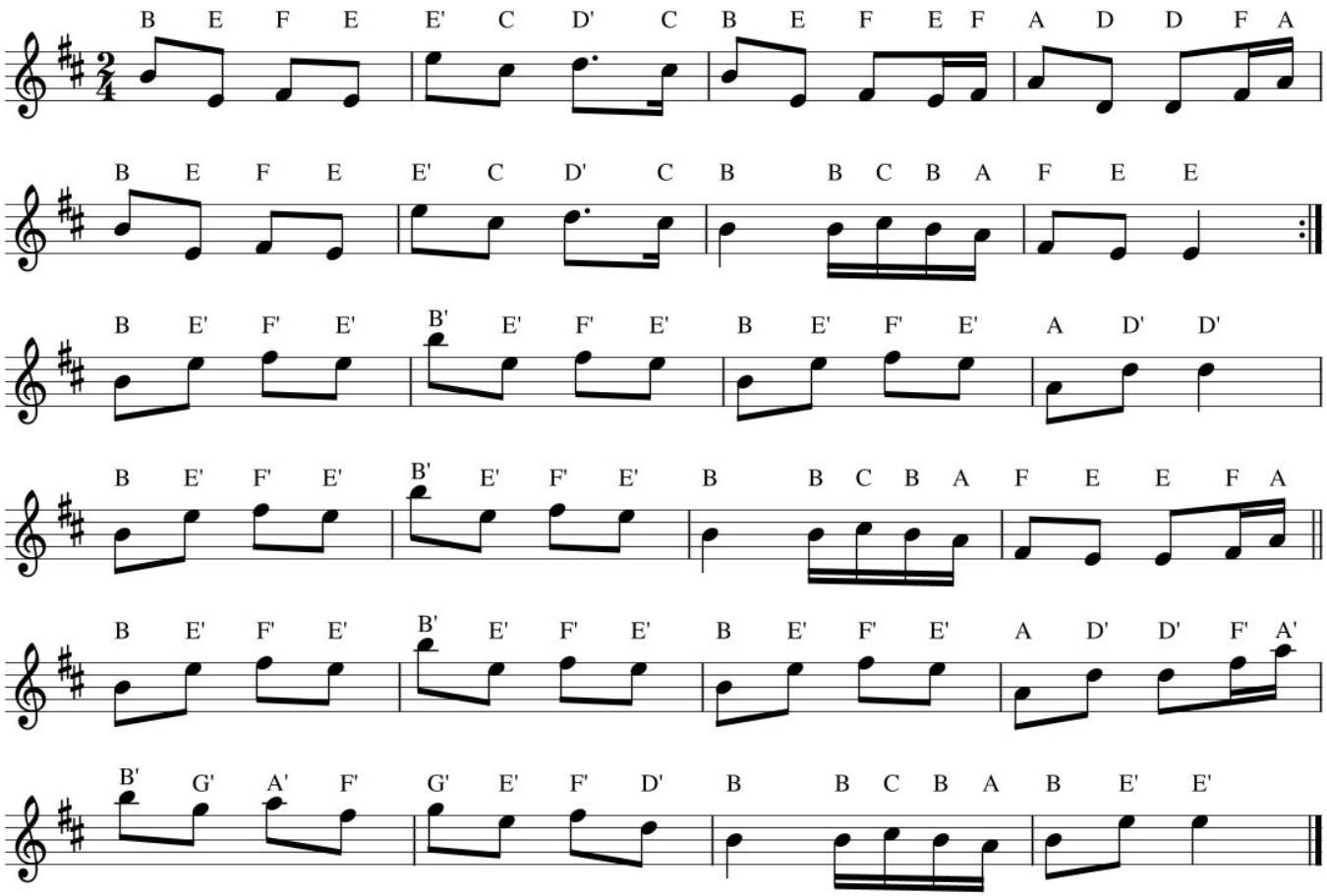


Spillane's (Polka)



Paddy Cronin's (Polka)

Paddy Cronin



timmy o'connor

Timmy O'Connor was born in 1935, and has been a stalwart figure of Sliabh Luachra music for over 70 years. He has for decades been at the forefront of a vibrant music scene in Newmarket, and he was a founding member of the group, 'The Monks of the Screw', which released the album Bráthar na n-Ól in 1995.

In 2013 Timmy released a solo album, As It Was in Toureendarby, which contains gems of the local repertoire along with some of Timmy's own compositions.

Timmy was interviewed in February 2024 by Pat Fleming.

Where are you from in Sliabh Luachra?
A place called Toureendarby near Newmarket, Co. Cork. It's well-established and well-known that it is in Sliabh Luachra!

How did you learn your music?
I learned by ear listening first of all to all the local musicians that were around here – there were three or four of them – Johnny Mickey Barry was one, Phil Barry was another. He was my godfather, and he was a nice player. There was another musician who used to come, who lived in Toureendarby for a long time, but he moved back to Knocknaknock. He was the star player who used to play for the dancers, and his name was Paul Lenihan, an accordion player and he played the fiddle as well. He had a big influence on me.

Who are the musicians that influenced you the most?
At that time, when I was learning, Paul Lenihan was one of the main people. As time went on, there was another man from Ballydesmond who was living in Newmarket, Davey Piggott, and I had very high regard for him. He was a great player.

Did you ever play for dancers?
I played for a lot of dancers, and it's a hard job to play for 'em!

Do you find it different to play for dancers than on your own or in a session?
Oh it is a way easier to play in a session. The dancers want it precisely at the right speed, and I can tell you a good one. I was playing in Rockchapel one day, and there were a lot of dancers there. And there was one little girl there, and she never said nothing, and she bate 'em all!"

What is your favourite type of tune and why?
There is lovely music in polkas and slides, grand music in them. The reels are grand but around here they aren't played that much. I attempt to play them but they wouldn't be played much. The polkas and slides are what the people wanted to hear, for the dancing.

Did you ever try another instrument?
I might have tried the fiddle, but no, I made no hand of it.

What advice would you give to somebody who wants to learn Sliabh Luachra music?
Oh, to listen to it, and to learn by ear, d'you know, because, you'll get the bounce out of it, you'll get the meaning of it. Listen to good players, like, that can play it.

Is it difficult to compose a tune?
It was no bother once it would come into your head. You'd be fiddling around with notes and the next thing is you have a tune, you know? The first one I made was a polka called 'The Cascade'. A lot of people are playing it now. There are youngsters coming up asking me about it.

Who do you play with most often?
They're kind of scattered now, but I used to play most often with Paudie Scully, Raymond O'Sullivan, John Walsh, Davey Piggott, John Drew, Dan Curtin and others. They were the ones I played with for a long time inside in Scully's. I played with the Duhallow Ceilí Band, and a lot of other bands. There was a fella used to come up from Banteer, he was Tommy Doocey. He used to have these bands, but it was the one band really and he used to have a different name on it each time! I used play with him and Gerry O'Connor had a band too. I played with Patrick O'Connor for a long time too.

L-R: Con Moynihan, Colm Fleming, Aidan Connolly, Timmy O'Connor, Seán Fleming. Photo by Maureen Fleming, October 2024

What is the best session you ever had?
The session that I enjoyed the most was one night that I was taken back to Tureencahill back to the Stations. I taught it was the best craic and the nicest people; the best night I ever had I thought, after the Stations.

Do you listen to, and play music from, other places apart from Sliabh Luachra?
I do, I do listen away to them. I was attempting to play it and then I heard Kieran Kelly on the radio, and everyone knows of course that he was a great player. He was playing the 'Yellow Tinker' and 'The Sally Gardens' and 'The Lark on the Strand' was another great one. I tried to play it myself then.

And then we were listening to Ciarán MacMathúna, and he had Joe Burke and Paddy O'Brien and all them on. Then I went to the Fleadh Cheoil and they were all doing that kind of music there. Listening to Ciarán MacMathúna's programmes was the first time I heard that different style of music, back in the 50s I suppose, 'The Job of Journeywork'. He had the two programmes, one on the Sunday and the other on the Tuesday, and he'd have the same tunes partly on both, so you'd have a good chance to hear them often.

What age were you then?
I was 16 or 17, I was a teenager when I started.

If you heard a tune you liked on the radio, how did you retain it?
There were no tape recorders or nothing, so we had to play from memory, which was a bad job because, you'd think you'd have it, and you wouldn't. You would be short a bit like. The tape recorder was a great thing, but I didn't have it when I wanted it.

And back to when you started off, did you hear it on the radio and then you started playing?
No, I was playing the local music before that. I always liked music alright, even though I didn't know a jig from a reel. There were these house dances that were held, and at the Patterns as well there was music.

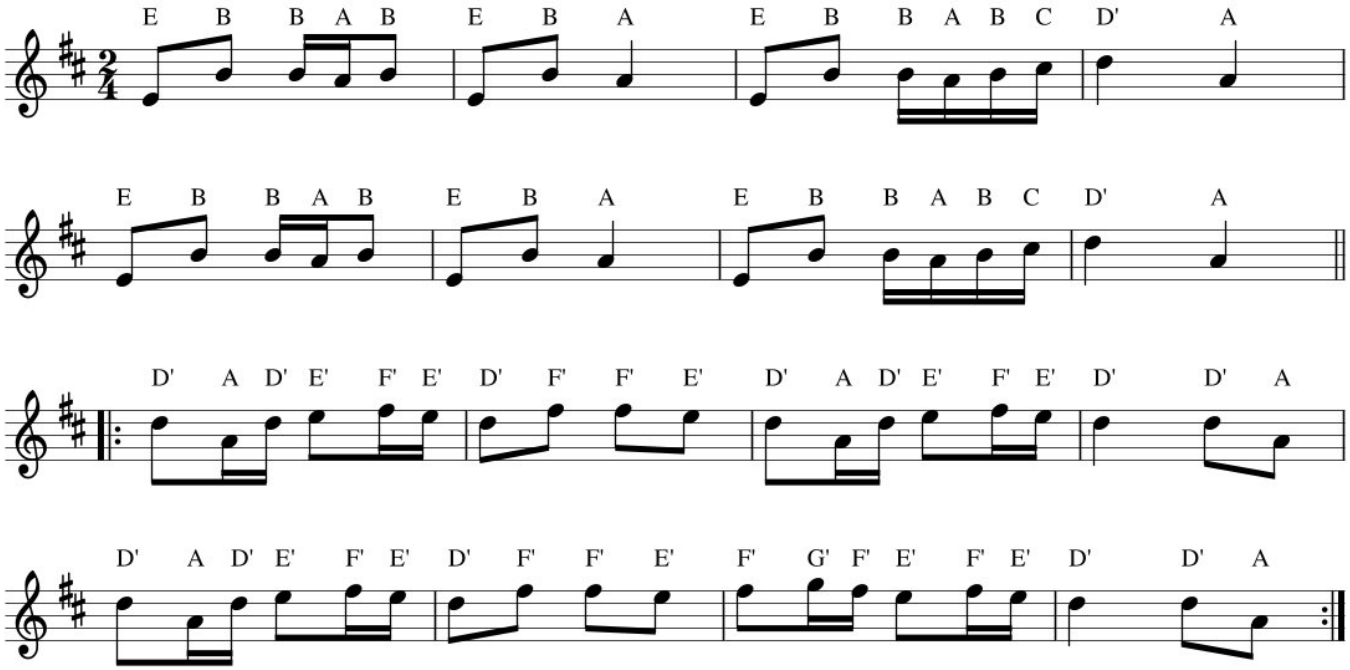
Timmy with Con Moynihan and Seán & Colm Fleming

I got going on a melodeon belonging to a fella who left it after him one night after a dance. I was able to bring a couple of notes of a tune out of it. After that then a melodeon was got; there was a melodeon came to Tim Ryan's shop in Newmarket, and I was mad for that but that one went anyway. The next one that came in anyway we got it. My sister Joan, the Lord have mercy on her, she got it.

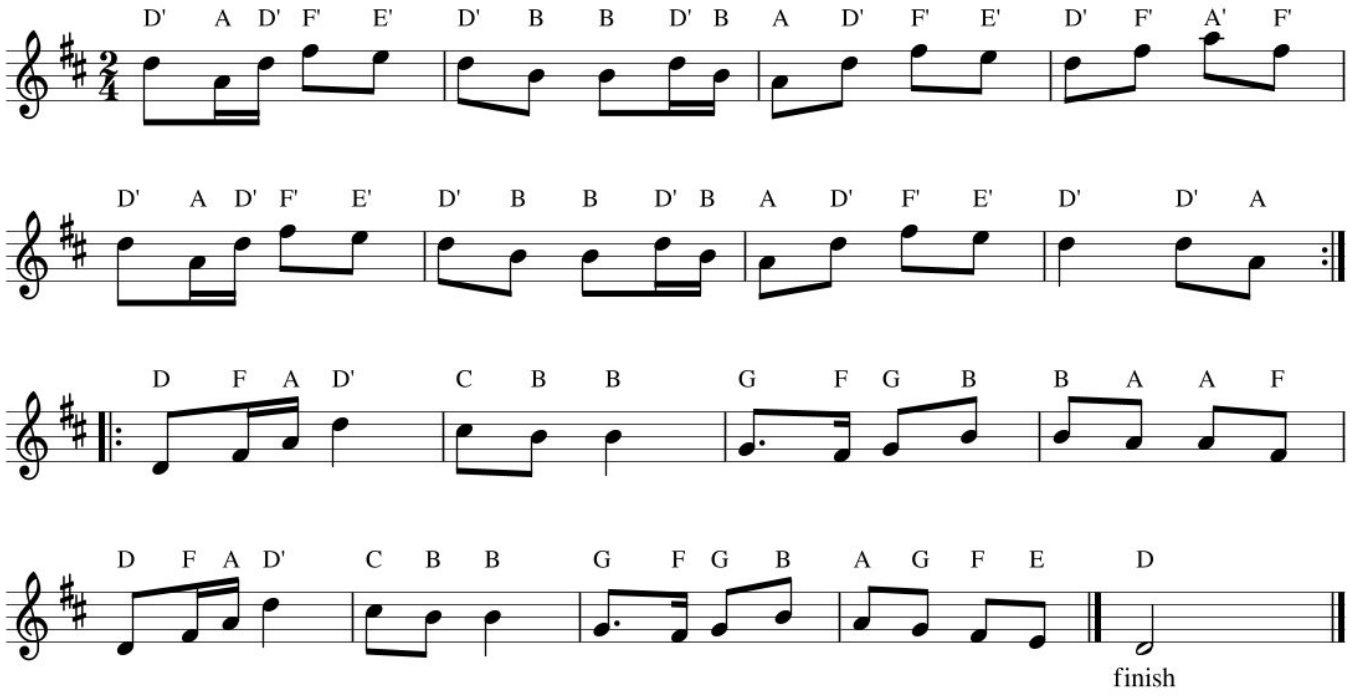
There was no stopping me then, 'twas going night and day nearly! I had two brothers and they used to work with farmers, and I used to be at home with my father. He had only one hand, his fingers were blown off, but I used to be with him and they'd be working with farmers. They'd be home at Christmas then for the holidays, and they'd be at the music all night and I'd be at it all day.

Scan the QR code to hear Timmy's selections played slow and fast.

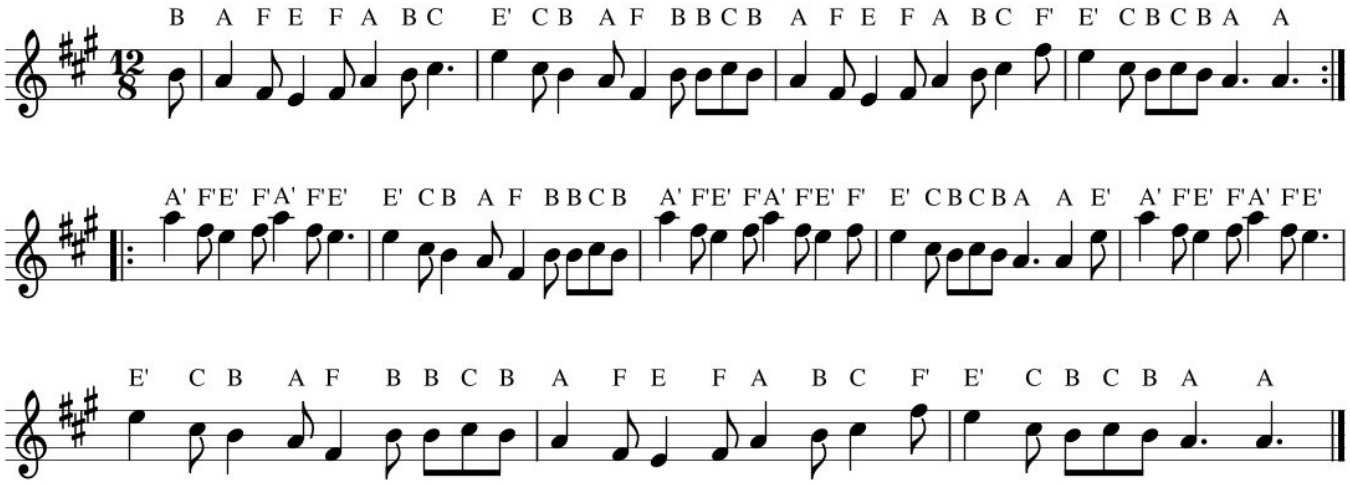
The Four Shoves (Polka)



Jerry Dan Mac's (Polka)

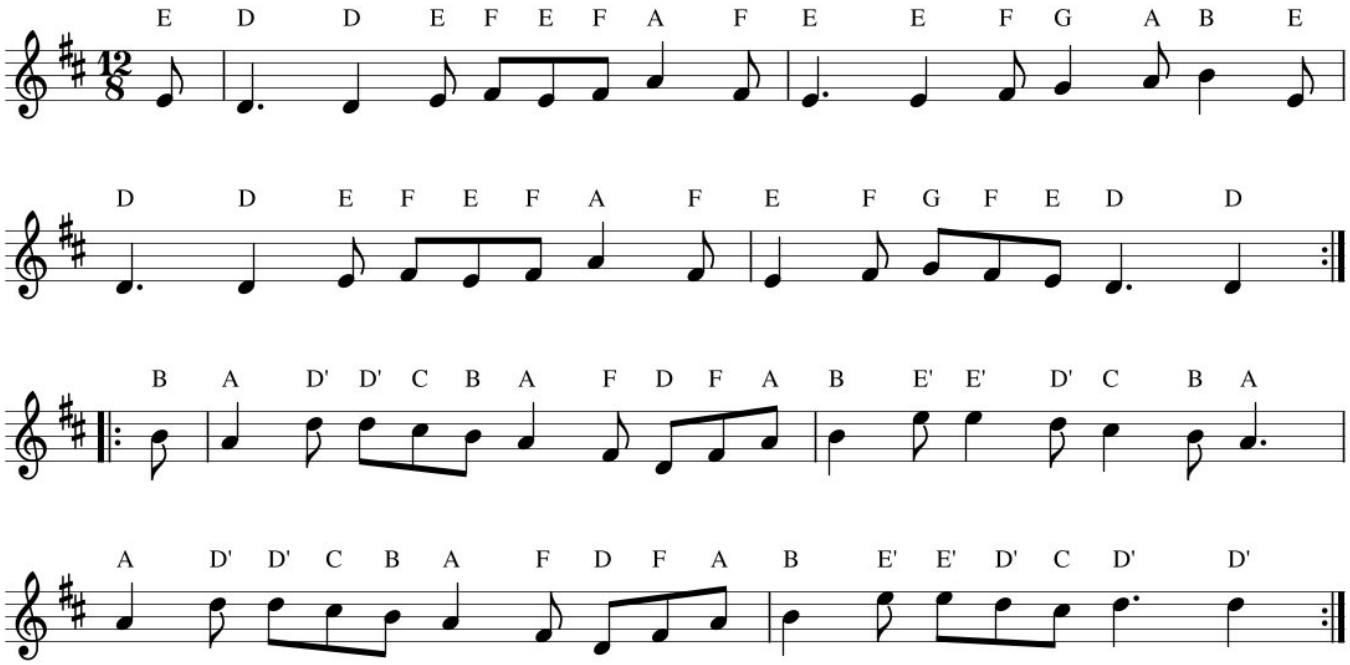


Timmy O'Connor's (Slide)

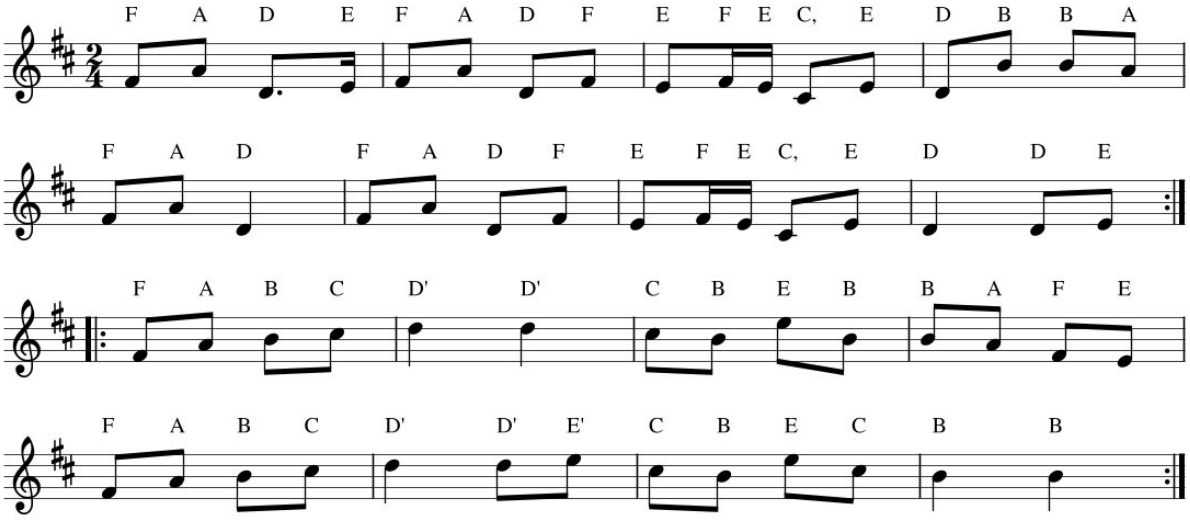


Toureen Bridge (Slide)

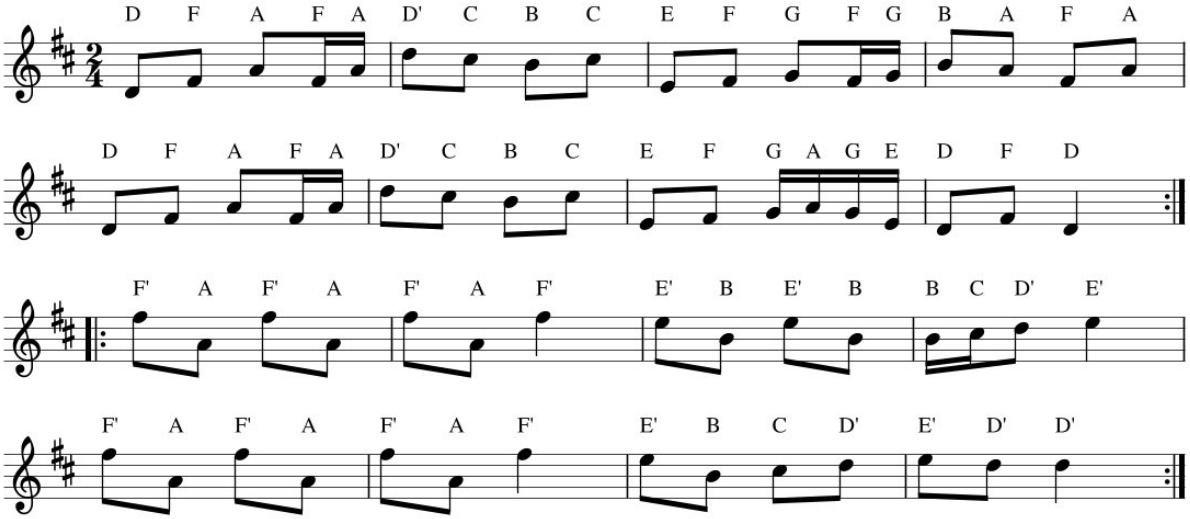
Timmy O'Connor



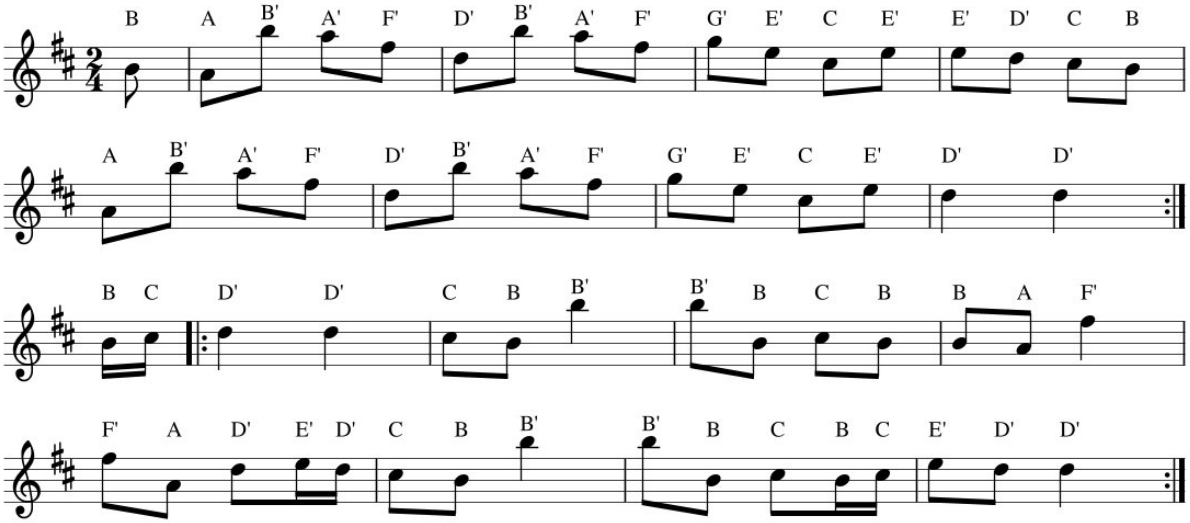
Jer Dan Mac's #1 (Polka)



Jer Dan Mac's #2 (Polka)

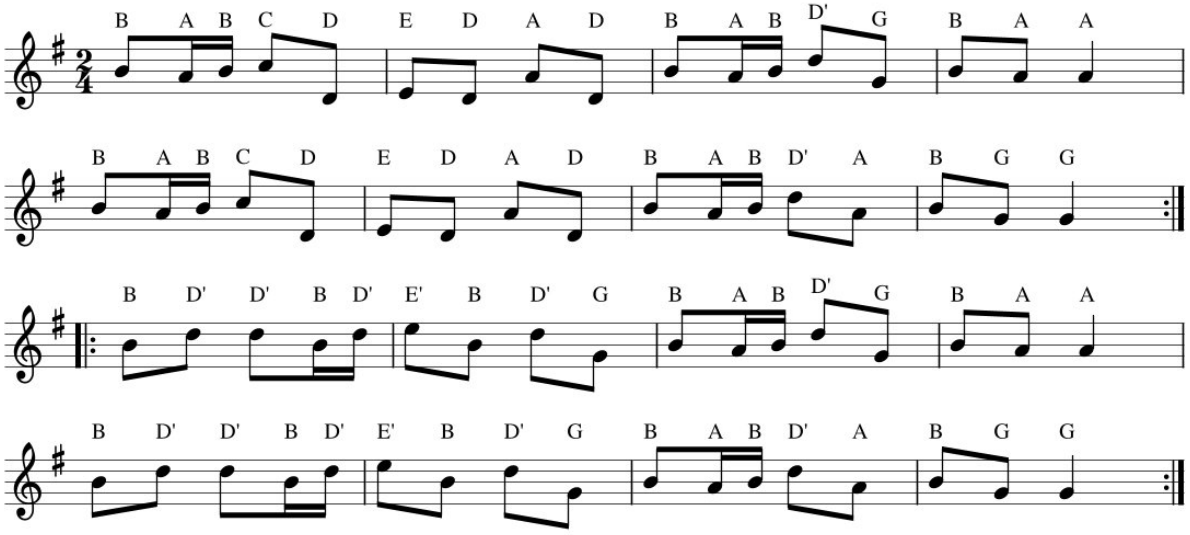


Kit O'Mahoney's (Polka)

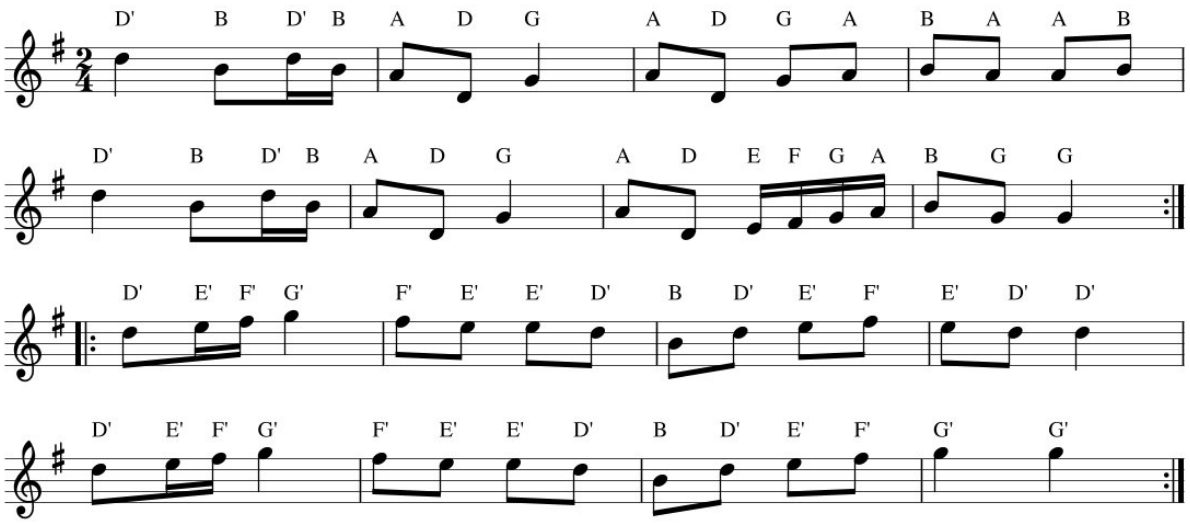


The Cascade (Polka)

Timmy O'Connor

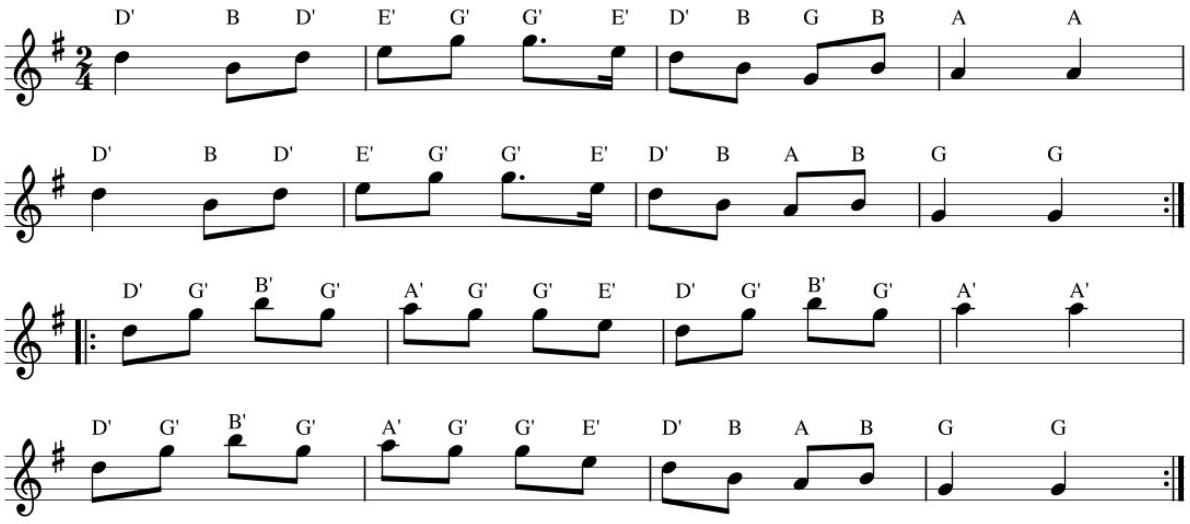


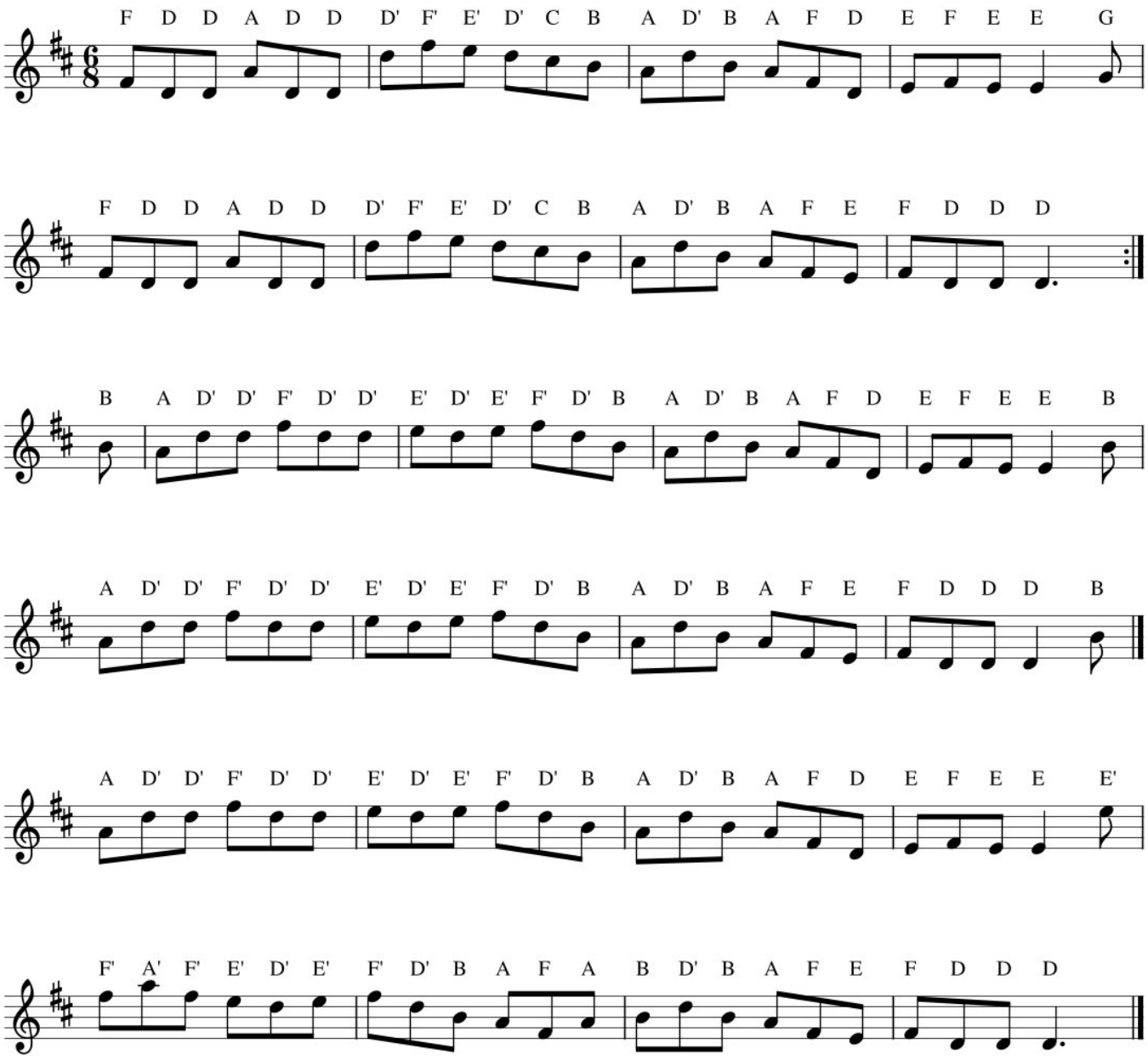
Billy Mahoney's (Polka)



The One I Know (Polka)

Timmy O'Connor



Springtime in Toureen (Jig)

Timmy O'Connor