


# The Rose in the Gap

The background of the cover is a painting of a rural landscape. It features rolling green hills in the foreground, a small white building with a dark roof in the middle ground, and a line of trees. In the far distance, there are blue mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall style is impressionistic.

DANCE MUSIC OF ORIEL  
*from the Donnellan Collection*

Gerry O'Connor

In the bottom left corner, there is faint, stylized musical notation, including what appears to be a treble clef and several notes, rendered in a light, sketchy style.

The Rose in the Gap  
Dance Music of Oriel from the Donnellan Collection



Lughnasa Music

# **The Rose in the Gap**

Gerry O'Connor

Dance Music of Oriel

from the Donnellan Collection

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TO THE MEMORY OF  
**ROSE O'CONNOR (NÉE O'BRIEN)**  
1920-2008

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I dedicate this publication to the memory of my mother,  
who gave me the love of music and the value of the written note.


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Audio recordings of all tunes available online at [www.gerryoconnor.net](http://www.gerryoconnor.net)

**Lughnasa Music** 

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

The South Ulster area has a significant local repertoire of instrumental music and song, most of which was not highlighted over the course of the post-1950s revival of Irish traditional music. This collection is a unique body of tunes from that region at the turn of the 20th century, recreational melodies with which the people of North Leinster would also have been familiar. The music was first seen in an article by Rev. Luke Donnellan entitled *Oriel Songs and Dances* which was published in 1909 in the *County Louth Archaeological Journal*. That included a number of hand-scribed pieces which were notated within the Oriel area, part of a larger collection attributed to Donnellan which is now held in the National Folklore Collection at University College, Dublin.

This edition of that body of work grew out of research by its editor, Gerry O'Connor, in the early 2000s. Here he has re-transcribed the Donnellan Collection in a contemporary playing format, with the original document's occasional inaccuracies and shortcuts sensitively amended, a process informed by his insider knowledge of the traditional music style of the area, and of the aesthetics of contemporary local traditional music performance. The manuscript is further complemented by the editor's playing of all the tunes, available online, airing them publicly for the first time since Luke Donnellan's original project was assembled over a century ago. And so the music is made available again, not only to performers in the Oriel area and its neighbouring counties, but also to musicians and scholars in all of Ireland and the international world of Irish traditional music.

## ABOUT THE EDITOR AND THE PROJECT

This is a demanding project; one which required the practiced ear and informed judgment of an expert musician, as well as empathy with the music of the region and a commitment to reviving its voice. Interpreting the tunes necessitated a high level of awareness of old music skills and aesthetics too, as well as performance experience of a wide range of repertoire. As one of Ireland's fiddle-stylists and being from the county in which much of this music was sourced, Dundalk musician Gerry O'Connor is uniquely suited to this task. He learned his music from childhood in the area, and since the 1980s, he has applied himself to interpretation of its melodies, 'the dance music of Oriel'. This cultural wealth he has performed in live concerts, passed on through fiddle teaching in Ireland and throughout the world, and presented on his recordings, solo and with his bands Lá Lugh and Skylark; all of that he has further enriched with music insights, local knowledge, ethnography and history.

Luke Donnellan was something of a polymath but was little-known as having an association with music collection except in specialist circles. So, in these pages Gerry brings us something new. He adds finesse to tune notations which previously were difficult to read, jumbled or just hearsay. And he gives them to us in the context of the life, times and scientific compulsions of their carer, Luke Donnellan. The music has been re-worked where graphic error or illegibility demanded, a sympathetic process which benefits from Gerry's intuition and skills. Vital too has been the inside knowledge which he gained through playing the Donnellan tunes for decades, as well as his appreciation of their parent culture, the music heritage of South Ulster. This is attested by his 2007 album *Journeyman*, which has 36 such pieces, a third of them from Donnellan. A further 18 South Ulster tunes and songs are on his 2011, *Oirialla* group recording, 10 of them from Donnellan.

It has been highly interesting for me to have been associated with the Donnellan Collection through supervision of Gerry's research at Dundalk. Two comparative projects come to mind: Nigel Boullier's tremendous, encyclopedic 2012 *Handed Down* assembly of Co. Down music, and Collette Moloney's 2003 *The Boss Murphy Musical Legacy* on music of North Cork. Like these, Gerry's edition opens a new window on the old scene of Traditional music in Ireland. The hard copy of a carefully interpreted and notated edition not only expands the Traditional music repertoire but makes possible fresh – and often startling – comparisons and conclusions as regards sources and influences before the time of telecommunications.

Fintan Vallely  
July 2018

## INTRODUCTION

In 1976, in Mark's Bar, Dundalk, a friend, Johnny Gallagher gave me a photocopy of a 1909 *County Louth Archaeological Journal* (CLAJ) article submitted by Rev. Luke Donnellan entitled *Oriel Songs & Dances* which included a collection of 106 tunes collected within the Oriel region in the early part of the 20th century. Finding evidence of the rich cultural heritage available on my doorstep was a huge affirmation of my musical upbringing which had been all a child could ask for: music passed down from my mother, an inspiring primary school teacher, Gerry Byrne who taught local songs and mythology as part of his curriculum, expert musicians living locally who were generous with their time and experiences and a landscape which encompassed sea, mountains, neolithic monuments, historical battlefields and a mythology dating to the earliest human memories.

I used this manuscript religiously during the early years of my career, keen to re-affirm the musical wealth of the region, alongside the burgeoning cultural exposure of many other areas throughout the country. During my years with Skylark (Garry O'Briain, Mairtín O'Connor, Len Graham) and Lá Lugh (Eithne Ní Uallacháin), we recorded many melodies from the CLAJ collection, most notably *The Rose in the Gap*, which I liked to dedicate to my mother, Rose.

In 2006, I was offered the opportunity to enter into a Master of Arts (MA) research programme on the subject of the CLAJ article. With the time and funding available to me, I began to delve deeper into the background of the collection and of the author of the article. I discovered that the original manuscript had been donated to the National Folklore Collection which is currently owned and managed by University College, Dublin. When I visited UCD, I discovered that the CLAJ published melodies were part of a much larger collection of 285 melodies. My research instantly expanded to encompass the larger collection. This publication includes selected aspects of my academic research and additional information can be found in my MA dissertation in the Department of Creative Arts, Media and Music, Dundalk Institute of Technology.

The manuscript itself is entirely written by hand including the drawing of the staves and appears to be been carefully maintained over a period of time by the re-tracing of the melodies and the text. Space within the manuscript was used sparingly with tunes often written in abbreviated form. Preparing the manuscript for publication involved the reconstruction of many of the tunes and, in some cases, making informed decisions based on my experience of typical motifs and structures of traditional music.

The majority of melodies within the collection are reels, together with a small number of hornpipes, marches, quicksteps and song airs. An index for each of the reel and hornpipe section is included which provided a useful cross reference to the manuscript. The absence of some pages originally contained within the manuscript was obvious where titles within the index listings could not be found in the transcriptions. Notably, there are no jigs included in the manuscript which is unusual when compared



Gerry O'Connor  
Editor

to other local collections. It is possible that an original jig section was included before the reel section but was also lost. A small number of melodies are illegible due to the fading of the original ink transcriptions. I have kept to the original numbering format which in the Reels section, begins at No. 10.

As well as reconstructing the tunes, I 'corrected' notation errors in the original transcription which were apparent to me when playing the music; these were typically key signature errors. I also adjusted the tune titles for spelling and punctuation. All changes are noted in the Analytical Notes section at the end of this publication. One aspect of the transcriptions which I chose to reproduce as the original was the inclusion (or exclusion) of repeat signs. Most of the melodies are presented as single form, even though today many of them are commonly played as double form.

By the time my research had been completed, due to the appearance and character of the manuscript, and the anomalies between it and the subsequent CLAJ article, I became convinced that Rev. Luke Donnellan was not the original author of this manuscript, and that the collection itself had been the work of an unknown, able, traditional musician, probably a fiddle player, transcribed over the musician's lifetime. Perhaps the collection was presented to Rev. Luke Donnellan by a surviving family member to see it published by someone who had the education, interest and means to see it to fruition. However, in honour of a man who strived to expand the boundaries of knowledge in many fields, and because his name remains on a large collection of folklore recordings and manuscripts, I present the Donnellan Collection, edited and revised to be available to all interested musicians. Enjoy!

*Gerry O'Connor*  
*July 2018*

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## THE ROSE IN THE GAP

### DANCE MUSIC OF ORIEL FROM THE DONNELLAN COLLECTION

*"It is no exaggeration to say that hundreds of manuscripts were written in the district of South Ulster, Louth and Meath... the scribes can be enumerated in dozens and they were almost all poor men, but passionately devoted to the language and literature of their motherland."*

*Enrí Ó Muirghéasa, 1915*

The South East Ulster area of Ireland, the Oriel region, has a significant local repertoire of instrumental music and song, and this body of tunes was played in this region at the turn of the 20th century. Fiddle-player Gerry O'Connor from Dundalk has edited and transcribed the dance music of the Donnellan Collection in a contemporary playing format and has included audio files of all the tunes, available online, airing them publicly for the first time in over a century.

*"The music has been reworked where graphic error or illegibility demanded, a sympathetic process which benefits from Gerry's intuition and skills. Vital too has been the inside knowledge which he gained through playing the Donnellan tunes for decades, as well as his appreciation for their parent culture, the music of South Ulster. Gerry's edition opens a new window on the old scene of Traditional music in Ireland."*

*Fintan Vallely*

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