

Romantic Interlude

Harry Keegan

IN MY YOUTH in the fifties in Leitrim, Sunday night was for dancing. We were mad for dancing. So, you'd milk the cows early, feed the calves and have the tea. Then, you'd put on the good suit; polish the shoes, Brylcreem the hair and set off on the bike, trouser clips in place, with a few of the locals.

We had a choice of three halls within cycling distance, Dromahair, Ballinagar or Creevelea, but our destinations was decided by the location of the dance on that particular night. Fairly often it would be to Creevelea. They put on dances nearly every Sunday night and it was a relatively new hall. The bands that played were popular, such as The Derrylin Starlight, The Mighty Avons and Larry Cunningham or the Melody Aces. We'd leave the bikes along the side of the hall or maybe give them to a man who charged three pence a bike to take care of them.

Paying our admission at the door, usually a half-a-crown and we strolled in and sat down on the long forms by the wall for a while, after leaving your coat in the cloakroom. The ticket was placed

carefully in the inside pocket, as it'd be needed later. Things would liven up gradually. As the crowd got bigger the band would strike up a waltz, foxtrot or quickstep. You might have your eye on someone and muster up enough courage and ask her "would she like to dance" hoping she wouldn't refuse. If things went fairly well, you'd ask her to keep a dance for you later.

About half way through the night a ladies choice was called and that was a bit tricky, since you were at the mercy of the girls. You stood your ground and hoped for the best and if you were asked out, great, if not, you want and sat down with the others and pretended you didn't care. If the lady who you were paying attention to asked you for the lady's choice, great, things were looking up and after an few more dances you'd ask to take her home and, dependent on her response, ask her in for a mineral and a packet of biscuits first. Then arrangements were made to get the coats and meet at the door. If she had her own bike you'd cycle with her to her home or a least to a fairly safe distance, if not, you'd take

her on the cross bar, have a bit a of 'houl't' and court and you might make a date to see her during the week.

Off home then in the moonlight, touch of frost in the air, happy with life, whistling and singing assisted by corncrakes or barking dogs. Life was good. "Ah! What romance?" The Breffni Ballroom in Dromahair was also popular in those days. Freddie Dykes Band (specially augmented) from Sligo played there quite a lot. It was years later when I got to know what (specially augmented) meant.

I do remember Dinjo performing there; he led the dancers in some Irish dances in his own unique style. A singer, Willie Grady, who was with him, sang 'I am a Little Beggerman, and begging I have being'. Jimmy Shand, a famous Scottish traditional musician on the accordion, performed there with his band. Ballinagar Parochial Hall was a quieter place and would not have dances that often, I do remember the famous Josie McDermott from Ballyfarnon playing and singing there with the Lough Key Dance band.

REMINISCENCE

As the years moved on we broadened our horizon and if someone had a car, maybe home from England or America, we would go to the Silver Slipper in Strandhill, to see the 'Showbands' that were starting to come on the scene such as Chick Smith and his band at The Astoria in Bundoran, or at The Ballroom of Romance in Glenfarne, which was very popular then. It was built and run by John McGivern who had a style of his own. He was tall and handsome and with a good sense of showmanship. During the course of the night he'd take to the stage and

announce the 'Romantic Interlude'. While on stage he introduced himself as Johnny Macarony. The dancers were invited to face each other, introduce themselves and shake hands. He'd lead the dancing then, singing

*'Have you ever been Lonely
Have you ever been Blue
Have you ever loved someone
just as I Love You'.*

It was a nice touch and went down well and I'd imagine plenty of friendships developed from it, maybe some for life, who knows?

Bridie Gallagher performed there singing the 'Boys from the County Armagh' amongst others. Besotted I was, I fell for her there and then, not only for her unusual style of singing, but her lovely blue dress, red shoes and glittering hair.

The dance halls are now all closed. Some turned into community halls, some warehouses and some knocked down. The bands likewise all gone by the wayside. Discos and disco lights have taken over. Times change, but we have our memories.



THE DORIAN MODE

Teachers and students attending ETB Adult Education classes in Aughavas Community Centre (Gaeilge agus Cheol). Email mwdrumgunny@gmail.com

*Back Row: Francis McLaughlin, Seamus McWeeney, Anne McIntyre, Tim Hester,
Róisín McGuire, Micheál Doonan & Rian McWeeney.*

Front: Declan McNamara, Delores McIntyre, Michael McNamara, Mossí Whelan & Robert O'Reilly