A SON OF LEITRIM

Bryan Dolan

"Siege of Ennis" the big 6ft Englishman shouted to the packed church hall.

It was a Sunday night in late September 1954, in StAlban's, Hertfordshire, England . I had landed just the day before and was taken to the 'hop' by my relatives. It was obvious that the big man who had been playing the piano up until then, couldn't play traditional Irish Céilí music on the box so I went up to the bandstand and said "Can you vamp on the piano if I play your accordion". As a result of that, he gave me a job in his dance band and that was the beginning of over fifty years in the entertainment business in England and Ireland.

Of course I had played with the 'Shannon Melody Makers' in Carrick, who were led by the late Joey Oates and I played background music for the Breffni Player's 'Nano', at country house dances and at some American wakes which lasted a night and a day! And all before I was 15 years old.

In 1938 a man called Phil Gaffney, from the Ballinamore area, was a guest in our house. I was three years of age and was asked to sing for him. Phil was a County Councillor or some such official and had done his bit for the cause.

I sang three songs, one of which was 'I'll forgive but I'll never forget' – Phil gave me three shillings, which in 1938 was a lot of money. Years later, I found out that Frank Quinn and Nan Fitzpatrick (later to become Nan Gaffney) had made the record in New York in 1930's and I did wonder if Phil Gaffney was related to Nan. I also wondered if that was my first professional engagement.

Bryan Dolan, on accordion with Larry Adler, Patricia Blake & Gerry Molumby.

In 1942, at a Christmas concert in the Old Brothers School in Summerhill, I sang two Gene Autry songs and won five shillings. The next day Brother Patrick, my teacher (he stood 6 feet 4inches tall) stood me on his desk and had me sing to the entire class. When I finished he whispered "do you know Lily Marlene", I sang it and I thought he was a little in love with her too!

I have played in many, if not all, the Irish dance halls in the London area, the 'Round Tower' in Holloway as the resident accordionist and then in 'Conway's New Emerald' in Hammersmith. I also played the 'Garryowen' and of course 'The Innisfree' in Ealing Broadway where I topped the bill. Later, when the 'Cordovox' was invented I got on the Concert Season Circuit and played with such luminaries as Jack Cruise, Cecil Sheridan, Joe Lynch, Lenny Peters, Marvin Rainwater from Michigan, Kris Kristofferson to name just a few, and then, on the Traditional Irish circuit, the great Seán McGuire, fiddle virtuoso on several occasions, Bobby Casey and Vincent Griffin, both from Clare, Seamus Tansey from Sligo, Seamus Horan, Joe 'Lackey' Gallagher from Leitrim and Vincent Harrison, the list is endless, and finally provided the musical backing for the 'Brown Bomber', the great Joe Louis, heavyweight champion of the world several times, and for Larry Adler the greatest Harmonica player of all time.

Lest I forget, Rinty Monaghan, Flyweight champion of the world, it was Rinty that put me in touch with Pat Sherlock from Cork, head of Mills Music and later Leeds Music from Tin Pan Alley, London. Pat produced my first LP 'For Fame and Fortune'. A track from that LP 'Southern Dixie Flyer' was top of the DJ play list for most of Summer 1987. This led to 4 more albums and later CD's.

Then ill health struck, first Angina and then open heart surgery in Harefield Hospital, but I made a fairly good recovery and after about six months rest I returned to playing but with a reduced repertoire.

The little boy who sang 'Deirin De' coached by Brother Sylvester in Carrick in 1946/47, winning three Junior Solo Singing medals on the trot in Sligo Feis Ceoil and Feis Cluanin Ui Ruairc , finally got his Gold Disc this year, 2005.

I am still playing mostly Céilí and Country and Western with the odd classical number, Strauss and Verdi waltzes and still enjoying it.

My best regards to everyone in Leitrim. As I was born in North Leitrim, raised in Central Leitrim and lived in South Leitrim, a woman once asked of me "what part of Leitrim are you from"? I replied "All of it!"

At this point I would like to thank Michael Ward-Bergman of Long Island, New York for all his help in the production of my CD's.

Bryan Dolan with Joe Louis in 1968

NATURE IN LEITRIM

Nora B Connolly

My beautiful Leitrim, precious crown of earth's bounty
A jewel to behold, this landmark and county
Salubriously placed without hint of duress
And fulfilling a purpose on this planet of stress

God moulded the mountains in hues of grey, brown and green
To forever stand sentinel while enchanting the scene
His great rivers wander, elusive streams wend their way
All gently meandering the entire course as they stray

Leitrim's lacustral dark waters stay eerie all day
Where a misty lough hides a monster, the fabled Dobharcu, folk say
Its verdant rich pastures fascinate one and all
They are bespreaded with flowers, white and gold, large and small

The growing grass whispers to children by day
And provides a soft carpet as they ramble and play
Heathered bogland yields peat, sweet smelling meadows the hay
Two precious commodities that must last out the May

Ripe fruit by the hedgerows is a fine sight to behold
Jam making time calls the young to be told
The crop from the orchards is appetising to see
And the farmyards look splendid with them full as can be

These things that have grown with the sun from above
Have rewarded the farmers for their labours of love
Woodland trees stretch their arms as church bells call to pray
And are heard lowly chiming as homeward bound one makes way

This special place in dear Ireland away down in the West
Is where nature thrives safely and can be seen at its best
Resting place of my forebears, cherished soil of this earth
Leitrim's songs lore and legends bring joy laughter and mirth

Scór na nÓg Winners

Seán Maxwell, President Leitrim County Board & Gerry McGovern, Chairman, with the Ward sisters, Yvonne, Lisa, Niamh & Orla from Aughnasheelin, who won the Instrumental Music section at the Leitrim Scór na nÓg finals in 2005. Yvonne is not only a good musician but she also picked up 11 A's in her Junior Certificate examination in Ballinamore Post Primary school in 2005.