

Chieftans: revival of the Irish

interview by Andrew Spence

One often wonders how Irish folk music has become so popular throughout the world. In order to gain some insight into this question, *The Gateway* spoke with Paddy Maloney, band leader of *The Chieftains*. The band has gained recognition world wide in their successful promotion of traditional Irish music.

The group got together in the late fifties as part of a general revival of traditional Irish folk music. Asked if they started by getting together in the pub for a few tunes, Paddy Maloney replied, "There was none of that then, mostly we played in our own homes or at clubs where there was no alcohol—often just in the neighbour's house."

The original band members are all from the Dublin area, with the addition in 1975 of flute player Matt Malloy. Not a native Dubliner, Malloy hails from County Roscommon. Following Malloy came Derek Bell, "The Belfast Cowboy," whose major instrument is the harp; thus completing the full range of traditional instruments.

Paddy Maloney feels *The Chieftains* have been influential in promoting the ascent of traditional Irish music to world prominence, and this has complemented the Irish people's desire to retain their cultural values, and native language.

Their reception in Eire in the early days of 1963 was mixed, recalls Paddy. Most people were appreciative, "although the purists didn't like it—but they came around about five years later."

Recognition outside of Eire came with their U.K. debut at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1975. Paddy remembers that "I wanted to do a small place, about a three hundred seater, but our promoter booked a six thou-



The Chieftans: "exciting arrangement of jigs and reels that are centuries old."

sand seater!" However, Paddy had no cause for concern, as the hall was sold out in three weeks.

The weekly music paper *Melody Maker* (published in London) made *The Chieftains* 'band of the year' in 1975, further raising their profile. A North American tour followed.

Knowledge of traditional Irish music had been growing in North America prior to *The Chieftains*' first tour. The band had five albums out in the States and Canada, and Paddy feels that their first tour was successful because "people were curious about our music." Paddy also thought that *The Chieftains* score to the film *Barry Lyndon* had gained them further recognition.

Asked if their success in North America was easily won, Paddy replied: "It was a hard

slog all right, but it was a well organized tour" that left the band with a dedicated following.

Paddy credits the band's success to their "exciting arrangements of jigs and reels that are centuries old." He said they only take material that is the cream of the crop and make new melodies from old ones. Paddy explained that many of the arrangements take place on the road, and Paddy fills the "flying hours" putting air sickness bags to good use."

In 1978 *The Chieftains* were invited to tour China. After accepting the invitation on condition that they be accompanied by a full Chinese orchestra and a film crew, *The Chieftains* produced a film titled *The Chieftains in China*, which is to be released on February 18, 1985.

Paddy sees many similarities between Chinese and Irish folk music—especially in the songs. The song *Sean-Nox*, an old Irish style, contains many of the rustic motifs of Chinese folk songs. The Chieftains will be featuring one Chinese song in their line-up, entitled "Full of Joy."

Accompanying them is Chen Hsi-Chuan. Chen has played with the Chinese Ensemble in New York, and will be playing along with the Irish tunes, as well as "Full of Joy."

Paddy believes that as of yet the Chinese tour has not had a marked influence upon their music, but he remarked that it is helping him come up "with some real stuff" and is steering him in a new direction.

The band is always in demand, with Paddy mentioning that they will "be going well into '87," having received invitations from Egypt, Argentina and Russia—as well as an invitation to return to China.

The Chieftains are also accompanied by Irish Step Dancer Michael Flatley. This is a traditional form of Irish dance—but Michael is far from traditional as he has abandoned the customary stockings and kilt. Michael is a natural compliment to *The Chieftains*, as he brings the same improvisational qualities to dance as *The Chieftains* bring to their music.

Paddy has no doubt that the band has retained its original direction in continuing to play the traditional forms of their native music. Although the band has diversified into scoring films, Paddy feels that the band will be returning to less commercial ventures.

After 22 years of experience, *The Chieftains* will be bringing a world class act to Edmonton, that is appreciated by audiences around the world. If you've got a free evening go and check them out, for it should be a good show.

Three records: A hit, a nice try, and some excess vinyl

reviews by Jens Andersen

Centerfield
John Fogerty
Warner Bros.

There I was, driving along and despising nearly every song spewing out of the car speakers. Chrissie Hynde with that effete, cooled-out, roboto voice of hers (show me the meaning indeed!) Bryan Adams and his slick, all-froth, no-beer schlock music (ah, the perfect, boring Canadian!) Bruce Cockburn battling hatred with his tear-stained rocket launcher (Onward Christian Hamburger Helpers!)...

Anyway, there I was praying for some Cyndi Lauper, Bruce Springsteen, or even just the Cars or Don Henley, when I hear a murky and oddly familiar guitar line. What's this — an oldie?? Then that raw, funky, unmistakable voice which sounds like the very heart of America:

He take the thunder
from the mountain
He take the lightning
from the sky
He bring the strong man
to his begging knee
He make the young girl's
mama cry

It wasn't some obscure Creedence track as I originally thought, but John Fogerty himself. Back with a vengeance after a gaping nine-year absence, his voice cutting like a whipsaw through the shit and corruption on the airwaves.

If you have listened to "The Old Man

Down the Road" on the radio you know what I mean. Real voodoo boogaloo. And the rest of the album is just as good (In case you haven't heard, *Rolling Stone* gave it a four-star rave).

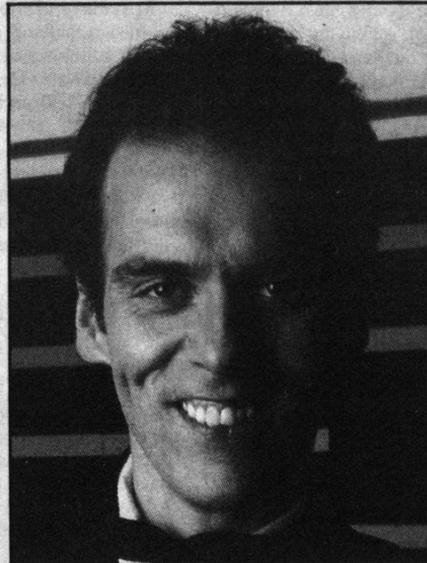
The albums cuts are varied, but most possess that distinctive Creedence feel that Fogerty owns the patent rights to. There is a first-class rockabilly ("Big Train from Memphis"). There is A-1 heavy metal ("Mr. Creed") featuring a propulsive rhythm that most songs in this genre lack. And a nostalgic ballad ("I Saw It On TV"), achingly lovely like Lauper's "All Through the Night". And finally "Zanz Kant Danz", whose reggae is unCreedence-ish as the synthesizer that graces it.

Two of the songs, "Searchlight" and the title track, seem a bit forced but are fine otherwise. Aside from this, *Centerfield* simply brims over with youthful exuberance. Coming after the messy Creedence break-up, two excellent but commercially disastrous solo albums, and his nine-year dry spell (Fogerty must be pushing 40 by now) one might have expected tired or cranky cynicism. The high spirits come as a nice surprise.

Even "Zanz Kant Danz," apparently an attack on some former business manager, is quite good-natured. The *Rolling Stone* reviewer decried its "extreme vitriol" but he is either imagining things or thinking of "Mr. Creed," which is angry but not bitter.

All in all, a beautiful album. Welcome back, John.

Warming Up to the Ice Age
John Hiatt
Geffen Records



John Hiatt: a few sparks, but his record fails to ignite.

God I hate reviewing records like this. They aren't bad enough to hatchet, but they aren't good enough to really recommend.

Often there is one very good track on the album. On this one, for instance, there is "She Said the Same Things to Me," a slower rocker with some superlative call-and-response vocals between Hiatt and one Frieda Woody.

And there may be a few other innocuously good tracks, like Hiatt's "The Usual" and "I'm

a Real Man" with its tongue-in-cheek macho boasting.

In addition there may be other minor bright points. Like Hiatt's voice—sort of like Elvis Costello with a rebuilt larynx. And his dry sense of humour, which keeps the lyrics interesting.

But the music, whether reggae, new wave or heavy metal, has a certain flat sameness that drags the album down. Why waste money on him when for the same outlay you can get a pure delight like *Centerfield*, *She's so Unusual*, or *Switched-On Bach*?

Hello Again (12" single)
The Cars
Elektra

Yeah, yeah, this is a pretty fair song, even if they did steal the theme and a couple of lines from "Like a Rolling Stone."

It is getting good airplay, thankfully. What I want to talk about, though, is these damn 12" singles. I mean, what's wrong with a "45"? The sound quality is just as good, it requires only one-quarter of the carcinogenic vinyl chloride to manufacture, it costs less, and instead of two crappy "remixes" on the B-side, you can have one good second song. Maybe even another hit, like the Beatles used to do.

So how about it, all you record execs out there in your \$2,000 sharkskin suits—why don't you revive the "45"? And take these 12" singles and do the old rectal insertion routine. Like sideways.

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