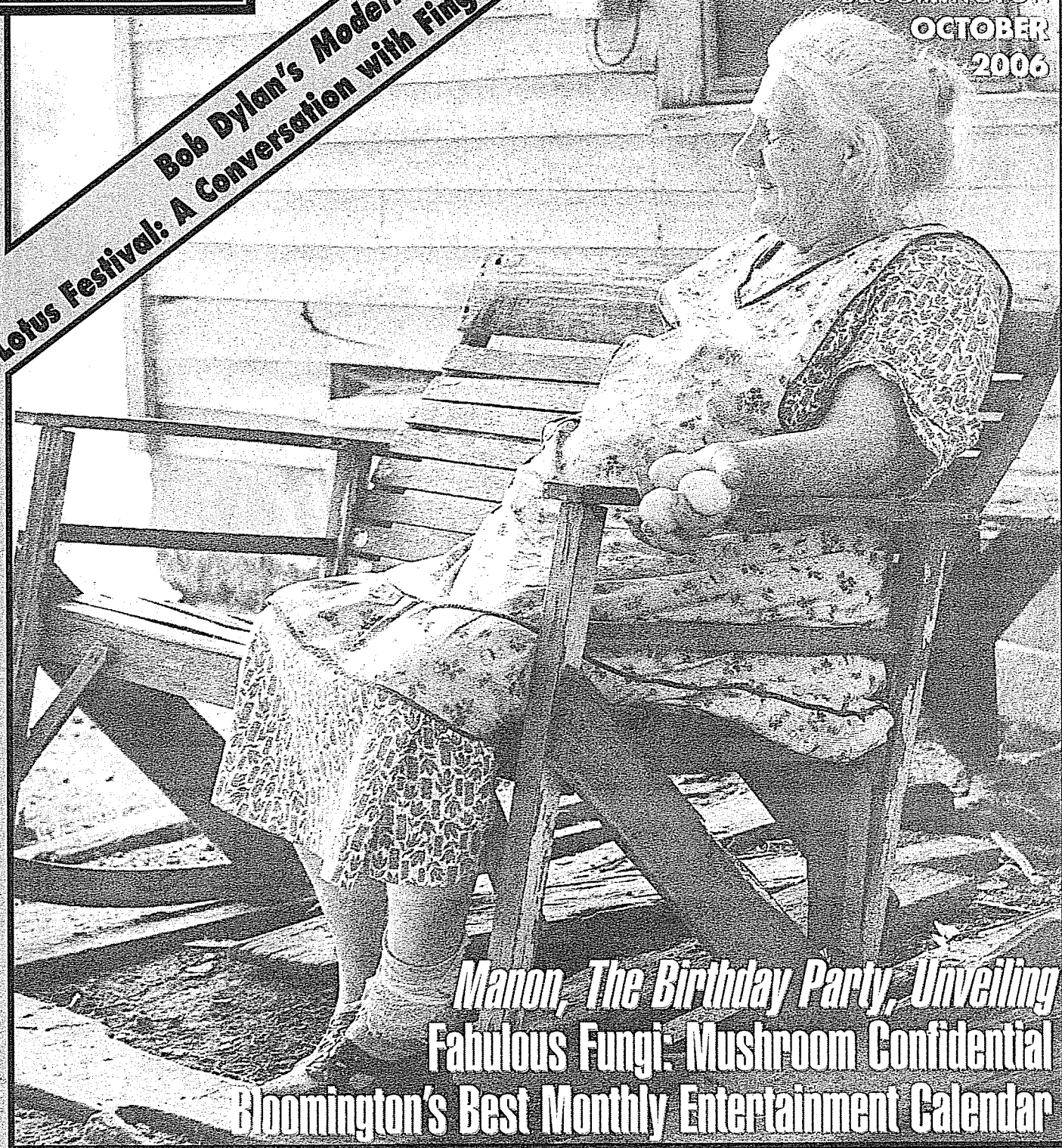


"Shhhh....Artists at work"

Lotus Festival: A Conversation with Fingal's Dáithí Sproule
Bob Dylan's Modern Times

The Ryder

BLOOMINGTON
OCTOBER
2006



*Manon, The Birthday Party, Unveiling
Fabulous Fungi: Mushroom Confidential*
Bloomington's Best Monthly Entertainment Calendar

ARTS ▲ ENTERTAINMENT ▲ POPULAR CULTURE

Keeping the Delicate Beauties

A Conversation with Fingal's Dáithí Sproule

By Seán Dwyer

The resurgence of traditional Irish music has taken two paths over the past fifty years: the predictable tinkering with the genre, and the current of structural purity that seeks to maintain the original flavor of centuries-old tunes.

The new trio *Fingal*, making its first Lotus appearance, follows the purely traditional line of Irish music. The individual musicians bring long and distinguished pedigrees to their ensemble. Accordion player James Keane, brother of Seán Keane of the Chieftains, has been at the forefront of the Irish revival since its beginning. Before joining *Fingal*, he had briefly worked with the trio's highly praised Fiddler Randal Bays, who in turn had previously recorded with the trio's guitarist Dáithí Sproule. Sproule played a strong role in the re-emergence of traditional Irish music when he was part of *Skara Brae*, with the late Mícheál Ó Domhnaill, who went on to form the legendary Bothy Band, and he has also been a member of *Altan* for years. In addition to his successful solo album *Heart Made of Glass*, he has contributed to numerous recording projects.

Dáithí Sproule is credited with making the guitar a significant factor in traditional Irish music. Especially by adopting the alternative DADGAD guitar tuning that has become a standard in Irish music, Sproule has helped Irish music sound fresh without compromising its roots.

We reached Sproule by telephone on the eve of Lotus 2006.

RYDER: You're both a musician and a writer of fiction. Could you tell us how these two creative impulses got their start in you.

Dáithí Sproule: I suppose they seem pretty separate. I've always loved music, and I've always loved reading. I've been reading books since I was a child, and I



Dáithí Sproule and his trio—*Fingal*—perform on October 6 & 7 at the Lotus World Music Festival.

always sang songs, so I think the things you enjoy, you want to try to do them yourself. I think a lot of creativity takes its impulse from imitation, really. You love this thing somebody has done, and it has a nice effect on you, and you have this impulse to try and do something to produce the same effect on somebody else. For many years I would only write stories sporadically. It kind of comes in waves, whereas the music, I'm always playing music.

Ryder: You have published a book of stories.

Your aim, as a singer when you sing traditional songs with a guitar or with other accompaniment, is to try and keep the delicate beauties that they had originally, and yet bring them into the modern world.

DS: Yeah, it's been almost twenty years ago now, and those were stories in the Irish language. Coincidentally, I just got an email a week or two ago from a publishing company in Ireland, and they're producing a collection of, well, what they,

what somebody regards as the best short stories in Irish of the last thirty-five years or so, and it's got one of my stories in it. So that was fun, because I haven't read these stories for fifteen years, you know. So that was nice.

Ryder: When you wrote in Irish rather than in English, was that because that's how you felt it, or because you wanted to give the Irish language something else for people to read?

DS: It just happened like that. I was writing in English, in fact, quite a lot of the time, and I just happened to start the story in Irish, I think because I was reading a few books in Irish, and when I sat down to write, I ended up writing it in Irish. In retrospect, I think it was a really good exercise, because I'm not a native Irish speaker; I can speak it fluently, but I'm not a native Irish speaker, and I think writing in a language that isn't your native tongue is actually a discipline. It's far more difficult to just ramble on. [Laughs]

Ryder: You started as a musician early on.

DS: Well, when I was growing up I always sang songs, and I came from a musical family; and I'm from the city of Derry in the North of Ireland, and it seemed as if everybody I knew sang, or danced, or whatever. And it wasn't necessarily traditional music that the people were interested in. But then, when I was a teenager, there was a big folk revival in Ireland, of traditional song, and also I was lucky

enough to spend my summers in the Gaelic-language-speaking areas of Donegal, the county adjacent to my own, and there I learnt a lot of old songs that I thought were really

beautiful. I started the guitar when I was seventeen, and I immediately started trying to arrange these songs for guitar, by myself and with friends, and that really got my career as a musician started off.

the resurgence of traditional Irish music taken two paths over the past fifty years: the predictable tinkering with the and the current of structural purity seeks to maintain the original flavor of tunes.

the new trio Fingal, making it Lotus appearance, follows the purely traditional line of music. The individualists bring long and distinguished pedigrees to their craft. Accordion player James Keane, brother of Seán Keane of the fiftains, has been at the front of the Irish revival since its beginning. Before joining the band, he had briefly worked with the trio's highly praised Fiddler, Seán Bays, who in turn had previously recorded with the guitarist Dáithí Sproule. He played a strong role in the emergence of traditional music when he was part of the Lotus World Music Festival.



Dáithí Sproule and his trio—Fingal—perform on October 6 & 7 at the Lotus World Music Festival.

on to form the legendary Botby and he has also been a member of for years. In addition to his success to album *Heart Made of Glass*, he contributed to numerous recordings.

with Sproule is credited with making a significant actor in traditional Irish music. Originally by adopting an alternative GAD guitar that has become a standard in music, Sproule has helped Irish music and fresh without compromising its

RYDER: You're both a musician and a writer of fiction. Could you tell us how these two creative impulses got their start in you.

Dáithí Sproule: I suppose they seem pretty separate. I've always loved music, and I've always loved reading. I've been reading books since I was a child, and I

always sang songs, so I think the things you enjoy, you want to try to do them yourself. I think a lot of creativity takes its impulse from imitation, really. You love this thing somebody has done, and it has a nice effect on you, and you have this impulse to try and do something to produce the same effect on somebody else. For many years I would only write stories sporadically. It kind of comes in waves, whereas the music, I'm always playing music.

Ryder: You have published a book of stories.

Your aim, as a singer when you sing traditional songs with a guitar or with other accompaniment, is to try and keep the delicate beauties that they had originally, and yet bring them into the modern world.

DS: Yeah, it's been almost twenty years ago now, and those were stories in the Irish language. Coincidentally, I just got

what somebody regards as the best short stories in Irish of the last thirty-five years or so, and it's got one of my stories in it. So that was fun, because I haven't read these stories for fifteen years, you know. So that was nice.

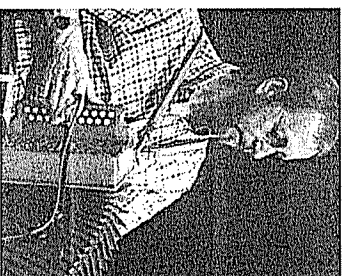
Ryder: When you wrote in Irish rather than in English, was that because that's how you felt it, or because you wanted to give the Irish language something else for people to read?

DS: It just happened like that. I was writing in English, in fact, quite a lot of the time, and I just happened to start that story in Irish, I think because I was reading a few books in Irish, and when I sat down to write, I ended up writing it in Irish. In retrospect, I think it was a really good exercise, because I'm not a native Irish speaker; I can speak it fluently, but I'm not a native Irish speaker, and I think writing in a language that isn't your native tongue is actually a discipline. It's far more difficult to just ramble on. [Laughs]

Ryder: You started as a musician early on.

DS: Well, when I was growing up I always sang songs, and I came from a musical family; and I'm from the city of Derry, in the North of Ireland, and it seemed as if everybody I knew sang, or danced, or whatever. And it wasn't necessarily traditional music that the people were interested in. But then, when I was a teenager, there was a big folk revival in Ireland, of traditional song, and also I was lucky

enough to spend my summers in the Gaelic-language-speaking areas of Donegal, the county adjacent to my own, and there I learnt a lot of old songs that I thought were really beautiful. I started the guitar when I was seventeen, and I immediately started trying to arrange these songs for guitar, by myself and with friends, and that was the



Fingal's James Keane has been at the forefront of the Irish revival since its beginning.

thing, or any of that stuff. When you heard the stuff they were doing in 1962, it was great, then you were following with them, and year by year they were astonishing you, you know? And I think that's a great inspiration, and it was an inspiration for me, definitely, in arranging songs, because one of the

ally—for people of my age, and my generation—it was just incredibly exciting. And the thing was, the music was just astonishing, and it hadn't really anything to do with being trendy, or the "in" thing, or the "cool" thing, or any of that stuff. When you heard the stuff they were doing in 1962, it was great, then you were following with them, and year by year they were astonishing you, you know? And I think that's a great inspiration, and it was an inspiration for me, definitely, in arranging songs, because one of the

Ryder: So, really, your understanding of what the Beatles were doing contributed a lot to your own compositions and to your guitar playing.

DS: Oh, yeah, definitely. And there were other people that you would hear, you know; that was the era when Dylan was starting out—he had a big traditional element in his music—and

Ryder: We have Irish music in Blaine those in town with it, how the structure of it is. **DS:** Well, you could two elements in Irish instrumental music, that is dance tunes so on. It's mostly and there are various flutes, fiddle, accordion, and the pipe Irish pipes. Those

In the last ten years or so, I've moved from listening to Glenn Gould pianist, and Bill Evans, the

AFFORDABLE MASSAGE
and Spa Treatments

1 HR. DEEP TISSUE MASSAGE...\$40; 1 1/2 HR...\$55
HAND & FOOT REFLEXOLOGY.....\$40
EXFOLIATING SALT GLOW.....\$40
MUD WRAP.....\$50
HONEY FACIAL.....\$40
Spa Treatments Include Head, Hand, & Foot Massage

Judy McGuire
Licensed Massage Therapist

1016 W. Country Club Dr. cell: (520)-239-6958
Appointments any day from 7am-8pm

Upland
Brewing Company

Great Food ♦ Gr
Superb Be

350 West 11th S
336-BEER www.upland

Color Copies

49¢
or less

WHITTE RABBIT

Don & B
Lawn Service

(812) 336-9

DÁITHÍ SPROUL

of Irish music and no doubt had a lot to do with the origins of old-time music and some of the tunes.

And then there's the singing, the songs, and they are originally, as I said, unaccompanied songs. They were solo pieces, very intimate and sort of introverted almost. The business of arranging them for the modern world is a more delicate process than the dance tunes. The dance tunes are kind of sturdy little characters. [Laughs.] They can stand up for themselves. Songs are, most of them are love songs, and a lot of them are very delicate pieces.

Your aim, as a singer when you sing it with a guitar or with other accompaniment, is to try and keep the delicate beauties that they had originally, and yet bring them into the modern world. The combination of a trio, which is what we'll be doing, is great, because it means you have a kind of group sound, and yet each individual's personality is to be heard. A duo or a trio is really my ideal thing, even though I do play in bands. For the question of just hearing the personality of the music, you can't really hear it in a better way.

Ryder: When you mentioned the traditional instruments, you didn't mention the guitar, and I've even seen people say that having a guitar is almost heresy. What do you say to that?

DS: Well, you know, things change, and things develop, and there's no doubt that where the music came from, and where the center of the music still is, is in the melody lines. It's a kind of linear music. Again, I'm talking about the singing or the tune-playing. It's a linear music; the main thing is the note of the tune. And that's the way it has always existed. Now, on the other hand, you can't say that the guitar isn't *in* traditional music, because it has been there since the '60s, in Irish music. And the bouzouki has been there in the '60s, so it's *there*, for sure, so you have to say that in that sense it's part of the music. But if somebody says,

"Well, that isn't really part of the music," I wouldn't really blame them, because I still enjoy listening to tunes without chords myself. I can listen to them either way. I think there's a certain beauty with the chordal accompaniment, and I think there's a definite, obviously, a great beauty without it as well.

Ryder: What music do you listen to these days?

DS: I've listened to all sorts of stuff over the years, just like anybody else. I love blues. I used to listen a lot to—you know, I used to play electric guitar as well, and I loved Roy Buchanan, a great electric guitarist, and Eric Clapton of course, and Jeff Beck. In the last ten years or so, I've got most pleasure from listening to Glenn Gould, the classical pianist, and Bill Evans, the jazz pianist. I've listened to more hours of them than anything else.

Ryder: Have you thought about branching out in your composition?

DS: In the way of compositions, I've made up some melodies for songs, but most of

my compositions would be guitar instrumental pieces. Some of those I've recorded, and some other people have recorded. I don't think they're any particular style, and some may find them a wee bit Irish, but they may not, you know. They're just melodies. They just come out as they come out, without any plan on my part.

Ryder: But they sound carefully composed.

DS: Thanks. One of my plans that I always have is to do a CD just of the guitar instrumentals. I kind of come back to it periodically. I think I'm going to be working on it in the next six months. I hope so, anyhow.

Ryder: With Skara Brae, you helped bring Irish traditional music back into the public consciousness. Were you try-

ing to create traditional recordings for the sake of preservation, or did you hope to market it as a big next wave?

DS: We didn't have those plans at all. We were just trying to play beautiful music. The idea of preservation or anything would never have occurred to us. We just had these songs, we thought they were beautiful, and we were trying to arrange them in a nice way.

Ryder: You grew up in Derry and you were there for the Troubles. What did that do to you musically?

DS: Well, I don't think there was any connection to music for me. I know some people would sing songs that had a political content or a topical content, but I never have. Actually, the year I left Derry was the year the Troubles started. It was 1968. I was off to university in Dublin, but I was at the Civil Rights march in Derry that really started the Troubles, because it was a peaceful civil rights march, and we were, the crowd was attacked by the police, and friends of mine were beaten up by the police, and so on. Of course I was back at Derry often through those years and saw plenty of violence, riots and so on. But I don't think it had anything obvious to do with music for me, except

Maybe your readers wouldn't know that traditional songs have no chords in them, no accompaniment.

for the songs that talked about the sadness of people going off and getting killed in wars, you know. But that was the only time.

Say, nowadays, if I'm singing a song like "The Bonny Light Horseman," which is one I love, it's a very simple story of the Napoleonic Wars, and the girl's boyfriend or husband goes off and is killed, you know, and it's this beautiful song, and it doesn't have to preach. But what it's saying is just how incredibly sad it is that these things happen. And I would be a totally nonviolent person. And even nowadays when I'm singing that song, I'm not saying anything about politics, but I'm obviously thinking about all the people who are needlessly getting killed in these wars all around the world. I've never understood how anybody could

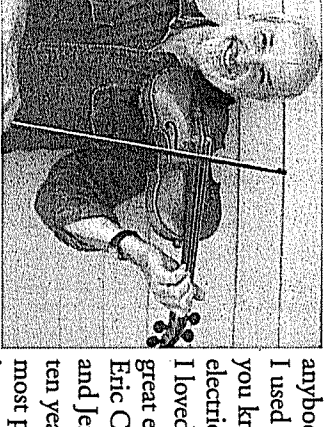


Fingal's Randall Bays

are originally, as I said, unaccompanied songs. They were solo pieces, intimate and sort of introverted—the business of arranging them for the world is a more delicate than the dance tunes. The dance kind of sturdy little characters.

They can stand up for themselves, most are love songs, but of them are delicate pieces.

aim, as a when you sing it guitar or with accompaniment, and keep the beauties that I originally, bring them modern world. The combination, which is what we'll be doing, because it means you have a kind of sound, and yet each individual's lity is to be heard. A duo or a trio my ideal things, even though I do bands. For the question of just the personality of the music, you lly hear it in a better way.



Fingal's Randall Bays

Ryder: What music do you listen to these days?
DS: I've listened to all sorts of stuff over the years, just like anybody else. I love blues. I used to listen a lot to— you know, I used to play electric guitar as well, and I loved Roy Buchanan, a great electric guitarist, and Eric Clapton of course, and Jeff Beck. In the last ten years or so, I've got most pleasure from listening to Glenn Gould, the classical pianist, and Bill Evans, the jazz pianist. I've listened to more hours of them than anything else.

Ryder: Have you thought about branching out in your composition?

DS: In the way of compositions, I've made up some melodies for songs, but most of

my **Maybe your readers wouldn't know that traditional songs have no chords in them, no accompaniment.**

compositions would be guitar instrumental pieces.

Some of those I've recorded, and some other people have recorded. I don't think they're any particular style, and some may find them a wee bit Irish, but they may not, you know. They're just melodies. They just come out as they come out, without any plan on my part.

Ryder: But they sound carefully composed.

DS: Thanks. One of my plans that I always have is to do a CD just of the guitar instrumentals. I kind of come back to it periodically. I think I'm going to be working on it in the next six months. I hope so, anyhow.

Ryder: With Skara Brae, you helped

We were just trying to play beautiful music. The idea of preservation or anything would never have occurred to us. We just had these songs, we thought they were beautiful, and we were trying to arrange them in a nice way.

Ryder: You grew up in Derry and you were there for the Troubles. What did that do to you musically?

DS: Well, I don't think there was any connection to music for me. I know some people would sing songs that had a political content or a topical content, but I never have. Actually, the year I left Derry was the year the Troubles started. It was 1968. I was off to university in Dublin, but I was at the Civil Rights march in Derry that really started the Troubles, because it was a peaceful civil rights march, and we were, the crowd was attacked by the police, and friends of mine were beaten up by the police, and so on. Of course I was back at Derry often through those years and saw plenty of violence, riots and so on. But I don't think it had anything obvious to do with music for me, except

for the songs that talked about the sadness of people going off and getting killed in wars, you know. But that was the only time.

Say, nowadays, if I'm singing a song like "The Bonny Light Horseman," which is one I love, it's a very simple story of the Napoleonic Wars, and the girl's boyfriend or husband goes off and is killed, you know, and it's this beautiful song, and it doesn't have to preach. But what it's saying is just how incredibly sad it is that these things happen. And I would be a totally nonviolent person. And even nowadays when I'm singing that song, I'm not saying anything about politics, but I'm obviously thinking about all the people who are needlessly getting

dated to do that during the '70s?

DS: No, I don't think that was ever a problem. It never even occurred to me. That was one thing to be thankful for.

Ryder: But you probably weren't singing in Protestant pubs, either.

DS: Probably not. [Laughs.] The only way it came up was, and it only happened once or twice, was that among the songs that we used to sing were Orange songs, you know, that were sung by Catholics in Ireland with tongue in cheek, or whatever.

I was lucky enough to spend my summers in the Gaelic-language-speaking areas of Donegal, and there I learnt a lot of old songs that I thought were really beautiful.

And I remember one time singing this beautiful and ridiculous Orange song in Dublin, I was threatened. [Laughs.] I didn't sing it in Dublin any more. But it's a lovely song. You see, the first thing that

Ryder: Now, your current group. You and fiddler Randall Bays have worked together, and you've recorded together. Now you're adding an accordion, with James Keane.

DS: James is an old friend of mine and I played with him many years ago, in St. Louis, and I got to know him a wee bit then. And last year he and Randall started playing together and I'd occasionally join in. So, myself and Randall have a particular thing we do, but then when you add that third element, it becomes something

Ryder: You use an accordion setup be Carroll and Bill I thinking of revival did with them?

DS: I don't think to be in my fate the accordion players with James Kelly we recorded two And then the Titi Liz Carroll, and I think every combination to end up having
Ryder: You are

Bloomington Transit

Live in the apartments?
Short on money?
Sick of the heat?



Bloomington Transit has your answers!!!

336-RIDE
Bloomington Transit
www.bloomingtontransit.com

We get you to campus.
FREE to IU students.
Frequent schedule.

**It's not just about numbers.
It's about people.**

Encouraging a vibrant
Maintaining vital social
Fostering responsible de
Preserving Monroe County
www.keislorfoundi

Paid for by the Committee to Elect Vic Keislor, Ltd.

BELLA CUCINA

A new taste experience

- Distinctive and sumptuous sandwiches
- Special soups and salads

Seal for the people eating

KARASTAN SALE IN

HANDMADE PERSIAN

— Low Low Price

The Decorati

118 West Sixth

Mon-Fri 10:30am-5:30pm

DÁITHÍ SPROUL CONTINUED FROM PAGE

traditional. Are you insisting among yourselves on not modernizing the sound?

DS: It's all a matter of your own taste, what you think sounds nice. It's one of those things you can't spell out, or put in objective terms what your taste is, or what your aesthetic is. So there are just certain things I would never do. They wouldn't feel right to me. That dictates everything.

Sometimes what can happen, and what I've heard happening with

other bands, take for example the idea of introducing rock elements into traditional music. That is fine, as long as it adds up in good music. Sometimes I hear these experiments and it ends up being bad Irish music *and* bad rock music. So, you can get combinations of different styles, but it's very difficult, really. There are very few people who have mastered two styles of music. And then to stick them together in a way that is pleasing or tasteful, it's very rare.

The one thing I would say for definite is that some people are afraid they're going to spoil the music. I'm not afraid of that because I think traditional Irish music is so strong that if I form a band, if my next band is a combination of reggae and punk and traditional Irish music, traditional Irish music is going to survive. It's not going to die because of this little project of mine.

Ryder: When you work with Altan, they're in Ireland, and you're in St. Paul. Now, James Keane's in New York, and Randal is in Washington State. How do you deal with the logistics of being so far apart so much of the time?

DS: You know, that's when things really come together, when you get up on the stage. So you have to make some preparations, and if you're not in the same city, usually what you do is exchange recordings or something. I maybe put a few songs on a CD and send them off, and they'll send a CD of tunes to me; or maybe they'll pick some tunes off their own recordings, like James may say, "Well, we'll do this selection or that selection." And Randal and myself might learn it off his record. And then you get together and you consult, and you run through stuff, but it will come together when you start performing it. And that's the way it works.

Seán Dwyer teaches Spanish at St. John's Preparatory School in Collegeville, Minnesota. An erstwhile twenty-year Bloomington resident, he holds a handful of degrees from IU, during the pursuit of which he spent much of his time writing and performing music and poetry. He is now writing the authorized biography of legendary songwriter Jeff Barry. ■

2006 Lotus Festival Showcases

Friday, October 6	Saturday, October 7
BLUEBIRD NIGHTCLUB (21 & older only) 7:30-8:45, Curumin 9-10:15, Uncle Earl 10:30-Midnight, Bonsoir Catin BUSKIRK-CHUMLEY THEATER 7:15-8:45, Catherine Russell 9-10:15, Mamadou Diabate Ensemble 10:30-11:45, Debshish Bhattacharya FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH 7:00-8:30, Carpathian Folk Quartet 9:15-10:15, Yungchen Lhamo 10:30-11:45, Safaafir FOURTH STREET STAGE 7:30-8:45, Inca Son 9-10:15, Rob Curto's Forro for All 10:30-Midnight, Kal FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 7-7:45, Fingal 8-9:15, Swäp 9:30-10:15, VIDA Reunion 10:30-11:15, Fingal MONROE BANK TENT 7:30-8:45, Rodrigo y Gabriela 9-10:15, Les Yeux Noirs 10:45-Midnight, Yerba Buena UNION BOARD TENT 7:15-8:15, IU Hip-Hop Congress 8:30-11, Free-World Djs Ali O'Ne, Tamir Muskat, Curumin	BLUEBIRD NIGHTCLUB (21 & older only) 7:15-8:45, Rob Curto's Forro for All 9-10:30, Kal 11-11:45, Fiamma Fumana BUSKIRK-CHUMLEY THEATER 7:30-8:45, Swäp 9-10:15, Issa (formerly Jane Siberry) 10:30-11:45, ContraCantos & Arabiando FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH 7:00-8:30, Debshish Bhattacharya 9:15-10:15, Mamadou Diabate Ensemble 10:30-11:30, Yungchen Lhamo FOURTH STREET STAGE 7:30-8:45, Ollabelle 9-10:15, Uncle Earl 10:30-Midnight, Bonsoir Catin FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 7-7:45, VIDA Reunion 8-8:45, Inca Son 9:00-10:15, Huun-Huur-Tu 10:30-11:45, Fingal MONROE BANK TENT 7:00-8:15, Rodrigo y Gabriela 8:30-10, Nomo 10:30-Midnight, Balkan Beat Box UNION BOARD TENT 7:15-8:45, Golam 9-9:45, Fiamma Fumana 10-11:30, Curumin

Lotus Non-Showcase Events

THURSDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Väsen: 7:30pm Buskirk Chumley Indiana Theater	Lotus in the Park: 12-5:15 pm 3rd Street Park	World Spirit Concert: 2-5pm Buskirk Chumley Indiana Theater

Schedule subject to change. Check www.lotusfest.org.

ESTEEMED

Carpet Care



SUPERIOR CARPET AND UPHOLSTERY STEAM CLEANING

We also do General Move-out Cleaning

• Affordable prices • Prompt professional services • Free estimates

336-0807

Art says hello!

Say hello with free electronic postcards featuring drawings, sculptures, paintings, and photography by these Bloomington artists:

Allen Gurevitz	Moe's Ache Studio
Bonnie Gordon-Lucas	Ned Shaw
Gerry Girman	Rich Reardin
Johnnie Belinda	Sara Hatch
Juliet Frey	Veda Stanfield

BloomingtonOnline.NET