

Compositions of Tommy Whelan

Traditional Irish Music Dance Tunes



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Tommy Whelan (1879 – 1951)

Biography

Tommy Whelan was a noted concert flute player in the traditional Irish music idiom in the first half of the twentieth century. He lived for most of his life in the parish of Ballinakill in the east of County Galway just southeast of the town of Loughrea. In 1924 he was a founder member of the Ballinakill Traditional Players (later known as the Ballinakill Céilí Band) along with friend, neighbour and flute player Stephen Moloney, fiddle players Tommy Whyte and Jerry Moloney and pianist Anna Rafferty. This band recorded many highly regarded and successful 78's in the 1920's and 1930's and made radio broadcasts.

Tommy was born in Philadelphia, U.S.A, in 1879 to Irish immigrants Thomas Whelan (Senior) and his wife whose maiden name was Callanan. She was from Kylebrack, Ballinakill, Loughrea, County Galway. Thomas Whelan Senior did not play music. Tommy inherited the music from the Callanan side. Tommy's grandfather, known as Moon Callanan, was a highly regarded flute player in the area. Thomas Whelan Senior saved up enough money in the United States to come back to Ireland and buy a farm in the townland of Kylebrack West, known locally as Brackish. Tommy and his sister moved to Ireland with their parents at quite a young age, probably in the 1880's. Tommy would eventually take over the farm in Brackish.

In 1910 Tommy married Margaret Shiel from Drumkeary, a nearby townland. Stephen Moloney was the best man at this wedding. According to Eddie Moloney, (1919 – 1980), flute player and son of Stephen Moloney, Margaret was a concertina player. This is verified by Seán O'Donnell, Tommy Whelan's grandson. Tommy and Margaret had eight children, one boy and seven girls. They were all able to perform in some way connected to the music, either play or dance. The only son, John Thomas, known as Jetty (J.T.) played flute. One of the older daughters, Kathleen, played fiddle as did the youngest daughter, Eva, mother of Seán O'Donnell, who was to become a member of the Ballinakill Céilí Band in the 1950's.

Hugh O'Donnell, now in his late 80's and residing in Swords, County Dublin, grandson of Tommy Whelan and brother of Seán O'Donnell, was very fond of Tommy and has great memories of him. He said he was a very gentle soul and had a great way of relating to young people. He said Tommy would often wake up in the morning with a tune in his head. He would go for the flute first thing before doing anything else to get the tune out until his wife would remind him that the cows had to be milked!

It is not surprising that many young men of the generation after Tommy in the area took up the flute and became very good at it under his influence. Apart from Tommy's son, Jetty, two flute players in particular stand out as being highly influenced by Tommy's tunes and playing and they would be the closest in style of flute playing to Tommy's, namely Eddie Moloney (son of Stephen) and Jack Coughlan. Solo recordings of Eddie exist on the double CD collection of archival recordings "Eddie Moloney, Master Musician". Several of Tommy Whelan's compositions can be heard on that album. Eddie lived in Ballinakill and Galway City all his life. Jack Coughlan emigrated to London, where there must be some recordings of him in personal collections. Even Stephen Moloney, Tommy's friend, who was six years younger than Tommy, in a 1956 interview with broadcaster and folklore/music collector Ciarán McMathúna for Radio Éireann, credits Tommy as being his flute instructor. Incidentally, in this interview, Stephen Moloney mentions that he collaborated with Tommy Whelan in some of his compositions and in settings of other tunes.

Eddie Moloney stated that Tommy Whelan had lived in Chicago, where he came across some great music and musicians. Of note was one fiddle player (unnamed), who had a most unusual style of bowing. Tommy described his use of the bow like that of casting a fishing rod. One day after Tommy had heard him perform, he saw him labouring in a pipeline trench in the city and was saddened to observe such a good musician labouring so hard. It can be assumed that Tommy returned to the United States in his twenties to work, i.e. between 1901 and 1911 before returning to Ireland again to settle down and get married. He is shown to be present in Brackish East in both the censuses of 1901 and 1911. Tommy passed away in 1951 at the age of 72. Thanks to Seán O'Donnell, for the information on Tommy's personal life. Seán resides in Kylebrack, Ballinakill. He is Tommy's grandson and son of Margaret Whelan.

Seán Moloney
Galway, 22nd May, 2024



Tommy Whelan



Ballinakill Traditional Players, 1931. L to R: Stephen Moloney, Jerry Moloney, Tommy Whyte, Tommy Whelan. Seated: Anna Rafferty



Tommy Whelan's Home (in June 2024)



Road Signage at Kylebrack facing bye-road to the Whelan homestead c. 500m away

About the Author

Seán Moloney, born 1957, in Galway City to Eddie Moloney and Margaret Moloney (Nee Quinn) was brought up in the Salthill area of the city. Eddie was from Kylebrack, Ballinakill, County Galway and Margaret was from nearby Rossmore, Woodford, County Galway, both areas steeped in traditional Irish music. From the ages of three to sixteen, Seán spent the summer months on his grandfather's farm in Rossmore, where he was exposed to traditional Irish music through his uncle Kieran Quinn, who was an accordion player and from hearing many musicians, particularly flute players, from the Woodford area.

He was educated firstly at Scoil Fhursa Primary School, an Irish speaking school, then St. Patrick's Patrician Brother's Primary School and on to St Joseph's Patrician Brother's Secondary School (known locally as the "Bish"), all in Galway City. He then went on to University College Galway, where he qualified with a Bachelor of Engineering in Civil Engineering in 1978. In 1992, he obtained a Master of Science degree in Environmental Protection through Sligo Regional Technical College, now a part of the Atlantic Technological University. While in St. Patrick's Primary School, he joined the school brass band, known as the Patrician Boys Brass Band. There he would learn to read music under the guidance of jazz musician and trumpeter, Johnny Cox.

His career involved working for Engineering Consultants and various Local Authorities in Ireland and he finally ended up lecturing in Civil Engineering and Environmental Management at the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in Galway city, now part of the Atlantic Technological University. His career took himself and his young family to spend time and live in several counties in Ireland, including Galway, Roscommon, Leitrim, Kerry, Mayo, Sligo and Louth, all places steeped in traditional music where they intermingled with many musicians and were exposed to different styles of music.

Seán is a traditional Irish music performer, composer, and musical director and retired college lecturer. He is a fourth generation of Moloney flute players from the Ballinakill, East Galway, tradition - which is declining and of great interest to him in revitalising and disseminating. He has performed, with his family and with others on national radio and TV and in many festivals in Ireland and abroad. He has recorded four commercial CDs in the East Galway tradition. In 2010 he composed and directed the music for Tarry Flynn, a stage production in Town Hall, Galway. In 2015 he released an album of archival recording of his father, Eddie. Having done extensive research for that particular album in addition to the desire to preserve some of the Ballinakill music heritage is what prompted him to undertake producing this collection.

In the context of the source of this collection, a very important period was between 1974 and 1980, when he listened to and played a great deal with his father, Eddie. He managed to record Eddie at home playing various tunes, but in particular Tommy Whelan's compositions. In 1996 he recorded a fiddle/flue duet CD, with his uncle Kevin Moloney on fiddle and Seán on flute on which two of the Tommy Whelan tunes can be heard in addition to demonstrating the Ballinakill style of music. Kevin Moloney recorded 78's with the Ballinakill Traditional Players in 1937 alongside Tommy Whelan and the other members of the original group.

Seán lives with his wife, Irene, also a traditional Irish musician, in Galway City. They have four children, who also continue the music tradition and five grandchildren. May, 2024.



Seán Moloney, transcriber and author of this book



Seán Moloney with Tommy Whelan's grandson, Séamus O'Donnell, June 2024



Eddie and Seán Moloney in the Cottage Bar in 1977. Note: Eddie also played fiddle as well as flute. Photo: courtesy of Joe Geoghegan.



Seán with Uncle Kevin Moloney, All-Ireland Fleadh, Ballina, 1997

About This Collection

There are 19 compositions of Tommy Whelan's in this collection and one unique setting from Tommy Whelan of the reel, *The Sailor on the Rock*. All, but one of the tunes were passed directly to me via my father, Eddie Moloney (flute player), during the 1970's. The jig, *The Humours of Ross*, I learned from my fiddle player uncle Kevin Moloney in the 1990's, who stated it was Tommy Whelan's. Eddie and Kevin learned these tunes directly from Tommy Whelan, who frequented the Moloney household in Ross, Kylebrack, Ballinakill, County Galway for music sessions. Tommy was a great friend and musical companion of Stephen Moloney, father of Eddie and Kevin. Stephen Moloney collaborated with Tommy Whelan on some of his compositions and on settings of other tunes in the general traditional Irish music domain.

Eagerly learning tunes during the 1970's, I would use my cassette tape recorder to capture them from Eddie at home, often after the stimulation of having had a music session in our local pub, *The Cottage Bar*, in Lower Salthill, Galway, the street on which we lived. I would ask him the source of the tunes and he confirmed that the ones in this collection were Whelan's compositions.

Most of these home recordings of Eddie still exist except for two of the tunes, which I am unable to locate to date. However, luckily, I wrote all of them down in tonic sol-fa format in small memo notebooks, which I still have to this day and with the heading "Tommy Whelan's Composition".

While researching public and private music recording archives as well as my own of Eddie Moloney during 2014 and 2015 to produce the double CD album of "Eddie Moloney: Master Musician", released in 2015, it was only then that I really realised how many Tommy Whelan tunes existed. There possibly could have been more, but unfortunately neither Tommy Whelan, Stephen Moloney nor the fiddle players in *The Ballinakill Traditional Players of the 1920's* could read or write music and tape recorders didn't exist. Luckily, the next generation picked up at least some of his compositions aurally. While Eddie could read music to some extent, he never penned any of these tunes, so we rely on his playing and recording of them. I transcribed the tunes into staff notation with the use of the free downloadable software *MCmusiceditor*, created by Reinier Maliepaard. I learned how to read staff notated music from Johnny Cox, trumpeter and jazz musician from Galway, who was the music tutor to St. Patrick's School Brass Band, in which I played the euphonium in the late 1960's.

Getting back to the *Eddie Moloney: Master Musician* album, about half of the known Tommy Whelan compositions are on it. The remainder could not be included on that album because of poor recorded sound, i.e. home recordings with tape recorder hum and background talk and noise. However, audio of all twenty tunes in this book are included in a CD inserted inside the back cover, even if some are of poor sound quality. This is to cater for those who cannot read music. Seventeen of the tunes are played by Eddie Moloney (one as a duet with fiddle player Tommy Coen), two by myself and one a duet by my Uncle Kevin Moloney and myself, extracted from the 1997 duet album *Bridging the Gap*. If anyone wishes to broadcast Tommy Whelan's tunes publicly on radio or other media, I urge them to extract them from the *Eddie Moloney: Master Musician* album and not from the CD included in this book.

For the sake of having a reference, the tunes are numbered Tommy Whelan's Reels 1 to 14 and Jigs 1 to 5. This does not imply that they were composed by Whelan in that order. It arose because the numbering system was initiated when compiling the Eddie Moloney: Master Musician album, No. 1 being the first one to appear on the album, etc. In cases where names of the tunes already existed, the titles also include these existing names, for example Ambrose Moloney's Favourite Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 4). Ambrose was another son of Stephen Moloney, so it's no surprise how the tune adopted that title.

The more commonly known Whelan tunes can be heard on many commercial recordings, too many to attempt to compile a complete discography in this book. For example, the first track on Frankie Gavin's flute album of 1983, *Croch Suas É* (or Up and Away), is called Eddie Moloney's set. The three tunes on this track are Devanney's Goat (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 11), Vincent Broderick's Favourite (Tommy Whelan's Reel no. 8) and Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 6. The 1975 album, *Traditional Irish Music* by County Galway flute player Paddy Carty with banjoist, Mick O'Connor, contains two of Whelan's compositions. Track No. 4 has Whelan's Jig (also referred to as Tommy Whelan's Jig No. 3 in this collection) and track No. 6 has *The Humours of Loughrea Reel*, referred to as the *Pride of Loughrea* or Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 2 in this collection.

The tune, *The Earl's Chair* (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 14) has been recorded on well over 100 albums. The version on almost all of these is different and more commonly played than the setting obtained from Eddie Moloney in this collection. However, the 1975 vinyl album by the group *The Shaskeen* has Eddie Moloney's setting of the tune. It can be heard on track No. 1 on Side 2. Eddie Moloney plays the concert flute on this album to which he contributed this version of the tune. Flute player, Gabe O'Sullivan, from County Galway, who resided most of his life in London also played the same setting as in this collection in the recordings of Terry Yarnell, which is available in the British Libraries. Normally, this can be heard by accessing <http://sounds.bl.uk>. However, at the time of writing this is not accessible due to a cyber-attack on the British Libraries website. Gabe was very interested in the music of Tommy Whelan and Stephen Moloney and he made many visits to Ballinakill to learn from them. He was also a good friend of Eddie Moloney and they played together from time to time.

It is intended that there will be a very limited number of hard copies of this collection available on a once off basis, intended for enthusiastic collectors at a cost to cover production and postage. Some copies will be gifted to relevant archives and libraries. It will be available for download on the internet for free after the launch of the hard copy book, thanks to funding from The Arts Council of Ireland.

Seán Moloney
Galway
May 24th, 2024

Compositions of Tommy Whelan



Ballinakill Traditional Players in 1936. Standing L to R: Stephen Moloney, Tommy Whyte, Kevin Moloney, Jerry Moloney, Tommy Whelan. Seated L to R: Anna Rafferty, Fr. Tom Whelan, Aggie Whyte.



Stephen Moloney (left) and Tommy Whelan (right)



Photo of Eddie Moloney as a boy with his father Stephen, early 1930's

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 1

Tommy Whelan

A coda

Notation: Seán Moloney

Pride of Loughrea or Whelan's Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 2)

Tommy Whelan

start

Notation: Sean Moloney

Eddie Moloney's Favourite Reel (Tommy Whelan's No. 3 Reel)

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for 'Eddie Moloney's Favourite Reel' is presented in four staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first two staves feature a complex, rhythmic melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The third and fourth staves continue the melody with a more regular eighth-note pattern.

Notation: Sean Moloney

Ambrose Moloney's Favourite Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 4)

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for 'Ambrose Moloney's Favourite Reel' is presented in four staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first two staves feature a complex, rhythmic melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The third and fourth staves continue the melody with a more regular eighth-note pattern.

Notation: Sean Moloney

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 5

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 5 consists of five staves. The first four staves contain the main melody, which begins with a half rest followed by a quarter note G4, then a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The fifth staff is labeled 'a coda' and contains a short concluding phrase: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter rest.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 6

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 6 consists of four staves. The first three staves contain the main melody, which starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The fourth staff is labeled 'A coda' and contains a short concluding phrase: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter rest.

Notation: Sean Moloney

Jack Coughlan's Favourite (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 7)

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for Jack Coughlan's Favourite (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 7). The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of five staves of music. The first four staves contain the main melody, and the fifth staff is labeled "Last time" and features a more complex, rhythmic variation of the melody.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Vincent Broderick's Favourite Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 8)

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for Vincent Broderick's Favourite Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 8). The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of six staves of music. The first five staves contain the main melody, and the sixth staff is labeled "Last time" and features a more complex, rhythmic variation of the melody.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 10

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 10 is presented in four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. The third and fourth staves provide a more melodic line, primarily using quarter and eighth notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Notation: Seán Moloney

For the Sake of Old Decency Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 9)

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for For the Sake of Old Decency Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 9) is presented in four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet-like patterns. The second staff continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. The third and fourth staves provide a more melodic line, primarily using quarter and eighth notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the text "A coda" above the final note.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Devanney's Goat Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 11)

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for Devanney's Goat Reel, featuring eight staves of treble clef music in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A 'Last time' section is indicated above the final staff.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Sliabh an Óir Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 12)

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for Sliabh an Óir Reel, featuring four staves of treble clef music in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The piece concludes with a diamond-shaped symbol and the word 'end' above the final staff.

Notation: Sean Moloney

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 13

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 13, consisting of four staves of music in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and a final 'A coda' section.

Notation: Seán Moloney

The Earl's Chair Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 14)

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for The Earl's Chair Reel (Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 14), consisting of six staves of music in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes a first ending bracket and a final 'A coda' section.

Notation: Seán Moloney

The Sailor on the Rock Reel (Tommy Whelan's Setting)

Tommy Whelan's Setting

Musical notation for 'The Sailor on the Rock Reel' in G major, 4/4 time. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves contain the main melody. The third and fourth staves contain a more complex accompaniment with many beamed notes. The piece concludes with a 'coda' section on the fourth staff, marked with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Eddie Moloney's Favourite Jig No. 1 (Tommy Whelan's Jig No. 1)

Tommy Whelan

Musical notation for 'Eddie Moloney's Favourite Jig No. 1' in G major, 4/4 time. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves contain the main melody. The third and fourth staves contain a more complex accompaniment with many beamed notes. The piece concludes with a 'Last time' section on the fourth staff, marked with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note.

Noatation: Seán Moloney

Eddie Moloney's Favourite Jig No. 2 (Tommy Whelans Jig No. 2)

Tommy Whelan

Notation: Seán Moloney

Whelan's Jig (Tommy Whelan's Jig No. 3)

Tommy Whelan

Notation: Sean Moloney

The Humours of Ross Jig (Tommy Whelan's Jig no. 4)

Tommy Whelan

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature. It consists of six staves. The first two staves contain the main melody, featuring a first ending and a second ending. The next three staves show a more rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. The final staff concludes with a 'Last time' section.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Mol Kelly's Old Sow (Tommy Whelan's Jig No. 5)

Tommy Whelan

The image displays the musical notation for 'Mol Kelly's Old Sow (Tommy Whelan's Jig No. 5)'. It consists of six staves of music in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and repeat signs. A first ending bracket labeled '1' and a second ending bracket labeled '2' are present in the second staff. The final staff concludes with the instruction 'Last time' above the final measure.

Notation: Seán Moloney

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Musicians on the accompanying CD:

Eddie Moloney (flute and flageolet), Kevin Moloney (violin), Tommy Coen (violin), Seán Moloney (flute), Benny O'Connor (snare drum), Johnny Dooley (guitar), Pat Eade (bouzouki) and Irene Moloney (bodhrán).

Thanks to Tommy Cussen for providing the tracks on which Benny O'Connor and Johnny Dooley appear.

Thanks to Mick O'Connor (Dublin) for providing some of the flute tracks of Eddie.

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 5

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 5 consists of five staves. The first four staves contain the main melody, which is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, creating a rhythmic and melodic pattern. The fifth staff is a coda, marked 'a coda', and consists of a few notes followed by a double bar line.

Notation: Seán Moloney

Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 6

Tommy Whelan

The musical notation for Tommy Whelan's Reel No. 6 consists of four staves. The first three staves contain the main melody, which is written in a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, creating a rhythmic and melodic pattern. The fourth staff is a coda, marked 'A coda', and consists of a few notes followed by a double bar line.

Notation: Sean Moloney