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Gan Bua

From Chicago, in a very traditional way

Interview by Graziano Pettinari

One of the most important bands of the American Irish scene comes from the city of the wind and of motors. We present their first album, a visiting card of very high quality

Gan Bua comes from Chicago, a city very important for the development of America – and so not only Irish – music. But remaining to the latter, the first connection coming to our mind is the name of Francis O'Neill, a man who collected a huge number of tunes, a writer, a musician, but also a symbol of an emigration that was both a mandatory, difficult escape from the terrible economic situation of post-famine Ireland, but also the realisation of the American dream, since he became the chief of Chicago police, in the beginnings of last Century.

The debut album of this band coming from the windy city is of a very high level, as our readers can easily understand listening to the tracks from their CD on this month's sampler, the set of reels "The Exile of Erin/Reel/A Punch in the Dark" and the *song* "Missing You".

The first and the last of the reels set are from recent compositions by super-banjo-players such as Anthony Sullivan and Gerry O'Connor.

Following is the interview we had with Jackie Moran (percussion and voice); while the others of the band are Christy Bain (fiddle, viola), Tim Fleming (guitar, voice), Sheila Doorley (button accordion) and Isaac Alderson (flute, uilleann pipes), guest in two tracks of the CD.

Moran has a long history of recording sessions, with collaborations with some of the most important musicians of the Celtic scene.

Q: How did you decide to make this CD?

A: Like any band we wanted to take a snapshot of what we sounded like at that particular time. Also to get many gigs and name recognition you have to have some product to represent yourselves.

Q: You are from Chicago. How is actually the Irish music scene in your city?

A: Chicago is a great City with many diverse cultures. You can go out and see music from all over the world at almost any time. The Chicago Irish music scene here is great. I believe that we have the largest population of Irish musicians in America. Each week there are over 15 sessions happening on different days. That's not counting the many pub and club gigs that happen on a weekly basis.

Q: Francis O'Neill too was from Chicago. Apart from his historical importance for his musical collections, is his image still popular there?

A: His image is still of great importance to us here in Chicago. There is a Francis O'Neill Comhaltas branch. There is a Pub named in his honour- Chief O'Neill's. They play traditional Irish music there fairly regularly. The mayor of Chicago has even named a Francis O'Neill day.

Q: One of the main characteristics of Irish music in America is the fact that it has been always in relations with different music genres - think about the influence of jazz on some Irish musicians, such as James Morrison. Is the situation the same today? In other words, are there important influences, mixings, fusions with other kinds of music?

A: The world is getting to be a smaller place every day. The speed at which things are communicated now are astonishing. Everywhere in the world people are sharing different ideas from different cultures. It stands to reason that it should influence Irish music as well. In Irish music you have the purists. The people that feel that Irish Music should not progress beyond where it was in the late sixties. Then you have those that want to revive the music that was played in the 1920's. Then there are those that want to progress Irish music by bringing in different influences and new compositions. There is lots of room in Irish music to accommodate all of those people. It is good to look back and respect where the music came from but if you do not look forward you can't see the future. I think that is very important to expand you mind and musical knowledge. Sharing musical ideas from different genres is the best way to progress and have an understanding of different cultures.

Q: Often we talk about "Celtic" music. Do you think that this way we in fact loose the peculiarity of the essence of Irish music?

A: When you go into a big record store in America and you go to the Irish music section. Most of the time it is in it's own section. I always feel it strange that record companies separate Irish music and Celtic music from the 'World Music' section. The last time I looked we all share the same planet. I don't think that we will ever loose the essence of Irish music but it is important to inform people that there was more to the Celtic empire than just Ireland and Scotland. There are many people in the world that still consider themselves Celts. I believe that if the Irish musicians out there would educate people and let them know what Celtic music is there would be no confusion. Also since Irish is one of the most popular Celtic genres why not tell people about the great music that Celts are playing all over Europe.

Q: Dennis Cahill is among the producers - and the credit notes - of your album. Please, some words about him...

A: Dennis is a good, long time friend of mine and the rest of the band. I have played with Dennis in quite a few different bands. You could say that we were in the trenches together on a few gigs. He is a consummate professional and we were glad he could help us with the mixing. A feature in the scene when he is in town, Dennis is always helping out someone. I go over to his house once in a while and we sit around and play tunes and talk about the old days. He is always up for a good party and will be having his annual 'Hair of the Dog' party on January 1st.

Q: Any possibility to have Gan Bua in Italy?

A: We would love to play in Italy! Any contacts?