

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Chieftains

John Glatt

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About the Author

Born in England, John Glatt has over twenty years experience as a music and show business journalist. He has previously written biographies of Bill Graham and River Phoenix. A regular contributor to magazines and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic, he now lives in the USA.

Also by John Glatt

*Rage & Roll; Bill Graham and the Selling of Rock
Lost in Hollywood; the Fast Times and Short Life of River
Phoenix*

The Chieftains

The Authorized Biography

by

John Glatt



CENTURY · LONDON

For Charles Comer - 'Showbiz is my Life'

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'These guys are the real deal - They're Seriously
Fiery'

Dr John, May 1995

Prologue

At 2:45 p.m. on Wednesday May 17th, 1995 a large coach drew up outside the Intercontinental Hotel in Hamilton Place just off London's Hyde Park. No one waiting in the hotel's smartly furnished lobby would have given a second glance to the six casually dressed, apparently bored, middle-aged men, aimlessly standing around by the front doors. Suddenly a much younger man burst through the doors announcing the arrival of the coach, and the members of the world-renowned traditional Irish musical group The Chieftains slowly shambled out of the hotel to make global television history.

The London Television Centre was a 20-minute drive across the River Thames on the South Bank. For the first time ever, America's top-rated *The Late Show With David Letterman* had moved across the Atlantic to do a week of shows in a bid to boost ratings during the all-important sweeps week. Not even Letterman's predecessor Johnny Carson had pulled off a live show from London and the CBS show's producers had booked a stellar guest list for this Wednesday.

The night would have a definite Irish theme. The legendary actor Peter O'Toole would make a grand entrance on a camel, followed by a one-off performance by The Chieftains with special guests Van Morrison and Sinéad O'Connor.

The organization and planning to get these giants of Irish music together on the same stage had been weeks in the making. The Letterman talent bookers had been trying

to get Van Morrison to make a guest appearance for years but to no avail. The enigmatic superstar had finally agreed after hearing that his long-time friends and collaborators The Chieftains were to appear for an unprecedented second time in less than three months.

The plan was to perform Morrison's beautifully lyrical ballad *Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?*, a single from The Chieftains' new hit album *The Long Black Veil*. Sinéad O'Connor, who also appeared on the album, had been added at her own request so she could fulfil a lifelong ambition to sing with Morrison, her childhood hero.

During the short ride to the studio, The Chieftains' leader Paddy Moloney told the rest of the band how a nervous O'Connor had called him at 10:30 that morning about performing a song she'd never sung, in front of a satellite TV audience of millions around the world. Moloney had comforted her like the musical uncle he is to her, and arranged to send over the song's score which he later went through with her over the phone.

Waking up that Wednesday morning Moloney had felt dog tired after completing ten dates of an English tour in as many days. After the final show at Birmingham Town Hall the previous night, Moloney and the rest of the band had impetuously decided to drive the 100 miles down to London in the coach. Celebrating the end of the gruelling tour they drank beers and ate too much of the food prepared by their New Zealand chef Helen. On arrival in London some members of the band went out to a party while Moloney retired to the comfort of his suite at the Tara Hotel in Kensington.

The main tour had finished, but straight after appearing on the *Late Show* The Chieftains would board a flight to Los Angeles. For the next three days they would be fêted by Hollywood. They would play concerts at the premiere of Mel Gibson's new movie *Braveheart*, the two-million-dollar

wedding of the Eagles' Don Henley, and film a concert for an upcoming *House of Blues* TV show.

Thirty-two years after forming The Chieftains, Paddy Moloney's international standing had never been higher. The mastermind of The Chieftains had seen his vision of popularizing Irish traditional music come to fruition and that night's Letterman show would rubber-stamp his group's global recognition. The surprisingly small man with a ready smile possessed a calm and tranquillity that betrayed little of the frenetic pace he maintained and the huge pressures he shouldered.

A self-confessed workaholic, there were never enough hours in the day for Moloney. Since the release of *The Long Black Veil*, a musical homage to The Chieftains from rock icons like The Rolling Stones, Sting and Mark Knopfler, Moloney had been in constant demand. In just four months *The Long Black Veil* had gone gold in countries all over the world, making it the band's most successful album to date and lifting them out of cult status into the pop mainstream.

The master of the Irish uilleann (or elbow) pipes now moved effortlessly from playing traditional Celtic music to composing full-orchestral symphonies and film scores to travelling around the world in search of other musical styles and masters to play with. Future projects included a concert with Luciano Pavarotti and scoring a song for the new Disney compilation album *Winnie The Pooh*.

When they arrived at the television studios The Chieftains were hustled into the green room where they were greeted by Van Morrison. Always unpredictable, Morrison seemed unusually cheerful when he greeted Moloney. 'He was in a very funny mood,' said Moloney a few days later. 'But that's Van. You can never predict what will happen, but that's what makes the man tick.'

The 4:00 p.m. soundcheck went off without a hitch. The computer-generated stage plot, drafted by Chieftains' road manager and general chaperone Dan Cleland, was agreed

by all camps and Morrison's duet with O'Connor worked wonderfully in rehearsal.

Back in the green room Peter O'Toole arrived and started reminiscing with Moloney about their old days in Dublin. Then the strikingly tall but now frail-looking, white-haired actor told Moloney how he knew the bagpipes and asked to try out his set.

'I was afraid,' said Moloney. 'The reeds are very temperamental and easily destroyed. I think he was hoping he might be able to play it on the Letterman show.'

Instead Moloney rigged up a makeshift set of pipe reeds and O'Toole silenced the green room as he triumphantly piped a tune to a round of applause.

'I wound up in Paddy's dressing room with all the boys and that delightful singer Sinéad,' says Peter O'Toole who is a big fan of The Chieftains' music. 'I had a go on the pipes and of course I was assured by his companions that I was raising a couple of snakes but that was as far as I got.'

The green room had a party atmosphere. At intermittent periods talk show host David Letterman, who was getting pumped up for the show with loud rock music, came running out of his dressing room to welcome guests. Van Morrison was clearly enjoying himself, drinking and cracking jokes with the various Chieftains scattered around the room.

'At one point Van just turned to me and said, "How old are you?,"' remembered Danny Cleland, who was born the year Moloney founded The Chieftains. 'I said, "I'm 32." Van goes, "Jeez, I'd thought you'd be at least 50 by now working for The Chieftains." Paddy just burst out laughing. Van was poking fun at everyone.'

Ninety minutes later the show was well underway. As The Chieftains took their positions on stage for their live performance, during the final break in the show, Van Morrison was poised offstage to walk on with Sinéad O'Connor. Wearing a huge wide-brimmed hat, dark glasses

and a black full-length coat, Morrison had artfully asked Letterman to display his upcoming album *Days Like This* instead of *The Long Black Veil*.

‘Typical Van,’ said Moloney later. ‘He got someone to put up his new album and we never got mentioned at all.’

When Letterman introduced the superstar ensemble as ‘some of Ireland’s greatest musicians’ millions of viewers all over the world saw Moloney play the serene introduction to *Have I Told You Lately* on his tin whistle, as Morrison escorted Sinéad O’Connor to the stage.

The first sign that something was not quite right was when Morrison delivered the first line of the song and started laughing, totally throwing his partner.

‘Sinéad was quite frightened when she saw him in such form,’ said Moloney. ‘He was stumbling around a bit.’

Ignoring what they’d rehearsed, Morrison began singing Sinéad’s harmony parts and burst into his trademark scattling during The Chieftains’ musical interlude as he began trying to conduct them with extravagant waves of his hands. By this time Sinéad was giggling and Moloney, fiddler Seán Keane and flautist Matt Molloy could barely keep straight faces.

In a grand finale Van Morrison lunged towards Sinéad’s microphone, missed and almost fell over, prompting the alarmed singer to cry ‘Oops!’ Throughout it all The Chieftains never missed a beat as they played straight men to Morrison’s antics. As the performance finished, a delighted Letterman walked out exclaiming, ‘Thank you gentlemen. Lovely. It was beautiful.’ Letterman would later call it the best musical performance that he had ever seen on the show.

Back in the green room a happy Van Morrison rushed over to Moloney and hugged him, saying it was time to make a follow-up album to their hugely successful 1987 collaboration *Irish Heartbeat*.

'We've had some incredible moments over the last seven or eight years,' said a weary Moloney. 'But the last album took two years off my life and I don't know if I could do another one.'

Later, the boyish-looking Chieftain harpist and group comedian, Derek Bell, affectionately known as 'Ding Dong', put the whole thing into his own unique perspective, by saying, 'Well, we played the piece extremely well and nobody disgraced themselves which was a big relief. One realizes that we were on an extremely prestigious thing that millions of people all over the world were watching, probably to their own detriment. I find it quite frightening that we have taken off into such mega-stars.'

PART 1

Planting the Seeds

IN 1792 THE Belfast Harpers Society invited folklore collector Edward Bunting to organize a festival of Irish Music. Fearing that the traditional harp music they loved was dying, the Society turned to Bunting in desperation hoping he could turn the tide. A natural promoter, Bunting decided to stage a play-off between ten of Ireland's best harpers as the festival climax.

The festival was a great success, drawing hundreds of musicians from all over Ireland. Dublin people flocked to an array of concerts and performances and there were also musical workshops where aspiring young harpers could get tips from the masters.

When the competition judges finally announced the result of the harp competition the three grand winners were awarded £10 a year each for life. More importantly though for posterity, Bunting and his staff met with each harper in turn to write down all their music in a collection and preserve it for future generations of Irish musicians.

Two hundred years later Bunting's musical descendant Paddy Moloney would feel compelled to repay the debt by commemorating the bi-centenary of the Festival with a gala concert pairing The Chieftains with the modern Belfast Harp Orchestra.

'It's in memory of Edward Bunting,' explained Moloney at the time. 'He was a great collector of Irish music and

he'd known all those rogues of harpers as I like to call them.'

Throughout The Chieftains' 33-year career championing traditional music, Moloney had often visited the rich treasure trove of the Bunting collection for material. Now in a delicious irony The Chieftains would record the very same songs preserved by Edward Bunting in a tribute called *The Celtic Harp* to world acclaim. The Bunting album would bridge two centuries to finally fulfil the Belfast Harpers Society's prayers by taking Irish music soaring to new heights by winning a Grammy award in Hollywood.

But Irish traditional music is ephemeral and without boundaries. Faithfully passed down orally from generation to generation, the music has provided a stirring backdrop for the history of Ireland. It has given the Irish hope and inspiration through eight centuries of colonization, the 1845 holocaust of famine and continuous poverty and hardship.

During the great wave of emigration that followed the Irish famine of the 1840s, when millions abandoned their homeland, Irish sons and daughters faithfully took their music with them and transplanted it across the world where it took roots and grew. Ironically this was at a time when many Irish people turned their backs on their music and culture. It would be another two decades before musical pioneers like The Clancy Brothers, The Chieftains and The Dubliners would popularize traditional music again in Ireland and take it around the world.

* * *

Paddy Moloney was born on August 1st, 1938 in the north Dublin suburb of Donnycarney. His father John, a sergeant in the Irish Army, was a decent bagpiper and his mother Catherine played accordion and sang.

Tragedy hit the Moloneys a year before Paddy's birth when his eight-year-old brother John was knocked over by a motorbike and sidecar, which went out of control killing him and another boy as they were out walking. It was the first motorbike accident in Ireland and made all the Dublin papers. As a child Paddy found himself constantly in the shadow of his late brother, who was always spoken about in the house as if he was still alive, as he grew up with his two elder sisters, Mary and Esther. A younger sister, Sheila, was born in 1941 as John Moloney was preparing himself to serve in the Second World War.

Right from the cradle Paddy, always known as Pat by the family, found himself surrounded by Irish music. His aunt Elizabeth and her children and their friends would regularly come to the Moloney home for musical evenings. Everyone played an instrument or did a special party piece as entertainment and Paddy was often rocked to sleep by the fire to the radio programmes *The Ballad Makers*, *Saturday Night* and *Round the Fire*.

Christmas was a magical time in the Moloney household and Paddy's very first memory at the age of three is of his mother packing the brown case, which she still has, to spend the holidays at his grandparents' little farm, high up in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Ballyfin, Co. Laois.

Paddy remembers, 'I saw my mother put some jelly into the case and when she wasn't looking I dug in and picked open the cardboard box and ate some. I put it back and thought that was the end of it.'

When they arrived at the farm, his grandmother Julia Conroy helped his mother unpack while a guilty Paddy sheepishly looked on.

Recalls Paddy: 'My grandmother suddenly screamed, "My God, Kate, a mouse has got into your case."

'I didn't say anything. I was terrified that they'd catch me. They kept saying, "Oh, it was a mouse all right." They knew darn well who had done it.'

Twice a year, during Easter and the three-month summer holidays, Paddy and his sisters would stay with Granny Conroy and her husband Stephen, who was a concert flautist. Once the children arrived in the country off came their shoes and socks and they would go barefoot everywhere.

The only time they were expected to dress up was for Mass on Sunday and holy days, which were serious formal family occasions. Out came their best clothes, everyone would be scrubbed clean and the smell of boot polish would permeate the farm house as Paddy and his sisters shone their shoes to perfection.

Then the Conroy's old horse Paddy would be brought out to the front of the cottage and harnessed to a large trap. There would be stifled giggles as the children watched their huge Granny struggling to get into the trap which sunk down measurably under her weight. Eventually when everyone was safely packed into the trap, they rode the five miles downhill to the village church and tethered the horse to a big metal ring on a long wall alongside the other horses.

During the summer holidays so many members of the family would stay at the Conroys that three children would often have to cram into the old settle bed with straw mattress. But after a day running around outside, they all slept like logs.

The first time Paddy ever heard the sound of the pipes was from his uncle Stephen, an excellent bagpiper who had won an all-Ireland competition in his youth. He would arrive early and march up and down the kitchen playing beautifully crafted solo pieces which rang out through the cottage. Sometimes, late at night, Uncle Stephen would go out to a small wood behind the cottage and play soothing lullabies to the infant Paddy and send him into a deep sleep.

At weekends the Conroys would host hooleys or parties in which all the children took part. These were informal and friends and neighbours would turn up with flutes, melodeons, the odd fiddle and spoons. They always started at 8:00 in the evening and the music and dancing often went on until 8:00 in the morning with two tea sittings in the middle of the night. If the hooley happened to finish on Sunday morning everyone would rush off and go straight to Mass.

‘We’d dance all night,’ Paddy recalls. ‘And it was wild dancing. Unbelievable. Finally, at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning there was always old-time waltzes to finish off the dances.’

But on special occasions there would be well organized house dances that everyone heard about in advance by word of mouth. On the appointed night Paddy’s seven aunts and uncles and untold numbers of cousins and friends would pile into the cottage for a night of traditional music and dancing. Often so many turned up that the party spilled out into the farmyard.

Although just 60 miles from Dublin, daily life in the Slieve Bloom Mountains was unaffected by the outside world and had remained unchanged for centuries. One of the most popular pastimes was affectionately referred to as ‘rambling.’ At any time of the day or night a neighbour might arrive at the front door breathlessly exclaiming, ‘God save all here,’ and just walk in, sit down and join in the stories of what was going on, particularly in the area. Under the unwritten rules of Irish hospitality everyone was always welcome.

Grandfather Conroy often took Paddy off rambling to friends’ houses where he played tunes on the flute which the young boy picked up by ear and would put to good use years later. Those days spent with his grandfather were some of the happiest he would ever know and he experienced an inner peace he would never forget.

‘These were the best days of my life,’ admits Moloney today. ‘So simple. Nature. Little places to play. Going down to the little river to wash. Little things like that were so important.’

Paddy and his grandfather regularly visited an eccentric old flute player called Fint Lanham to share tunes. It was well known that Lanham kept his flute in the river weighted down by a large stone, believing it would improve the sound. When Lanham’s flute went missing he became convinced that Paddy had stolen it and soon the local Garda sergeant was cycling up the steep hill to the farm on a scorching hot summer’s day to investigate. The young boy was terrified that he might go to prison but the highly amused policeman was never in any doubt that this was another of the old man’s fantasies. The flute was found behind the Sacred Heart picture hanging on the wall. That was the last time they ever rambled to Lanham’s house.

Growing up, Paddy had an inexhaustible curiosity to find out as much as he could about the world. He was lucky to have a willing and exceptional early teacher in his grandmother. Julia Conroy was self-educated and highly respected in the community and known as a great reader. She had a huge collection of books on all subjects and delighted in reading out loud to Paddy and the other neighbouring children.

Although she lived in a remote area high up on a mountain, Julia Conroy had her own distinct worldly philosophy about life. Her views and ideas were an enormous influence on her grandchildren. Indeed, one of the first songs Paddy ever remembers hearing was his grandmother singing her favorite song, *Little Maid from Malabar*, as she sat on top of an old wooden churn during one of the house parties. Half a century later The Chieftains would record it with Ry Cooder on *The Long Black Veil* album after renaming it *The Coast of Malabar* as

Paddy feared 'Little Maid' would have a different meaning outside Ireland.

At the age of eight Paddy went to his first wake after the death of a neighbour while he was staying in Co. Laois. 'There was the body laid out on the bed and I was sitting down saying a prayer. Then one of the older mourners kicked me up the arse with his boot and I went flying onto the corpse. That was the sort of irreverent humour they had. I had nightmares for ages. But it was also a wonderful lesson to learn about life and death at such an early age.'

For two weeks every summer Paddy's father John Moloney would turn up in Ballyfin to visit his family during his annual vacation from the army. As money was so tight he used to get up at 5:00 a.m. and cycle the 60 miles to the Slieve Bloom Mountains arriving at 8:00 that night. He was a good father and provider and would often send little parcels containing presents for his children who would always be waiting hopefully at the top of the lane for the postman.

Paddy spent most of his childhood in Donnycarney where the main sources of music were the wireless and an old wind-up HMV gramophone which he still has. As an infant he was allowed to wind up the gramophone when friends and family came around for dances. The Moloney's had a collection of old 78's ranging from piping soloists to John McCormack and pop records of the 1940s as well as old songs like *I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover*.

In those days, although there was little Irish music on the radio, RTE did broadcast an Irish Ballad programme every Saturday night and a half-hour-long live Ceili Band Session on Sunday nights. Although they were on at 9:30 p.m., and Paddy was tucked up in bed upstairs, he and his sister Sheila had no trouble hearing the music through the floor as the radio was always turned up to full volume.

By now Paddy was smitten by traditional music and knew he wanted to be a musician one day. Possessing a rich

imagination he often daydreamed about the origins of the music, where it came from and how it found its way to other countries.

‘There’s an old Irish poem that makes me feel how far back our traditional music goes,’ says Moloney. ‘*Thánaig Long o Valparaiso* (“A ship came from Valparaiso and they raised the sails in the bay.”) I used to conjure up all these great ideas about where the ship came from and the music it brought such as the ballad *The Coast of Malabar*, and what its connection was with Ireland. It was magical for me.’

Paddy’s first musical landmark came when he finally convinced his mother to let him try her single-row melodeon, which was always kept well out of reach on the top of a high dresser in the kitchen. Finally Catherine Moloney gave in to his pleas and her four-year-old son played his first real musical instrument. Just recalling the experience today sends Paddy into ecstatic reminiscences. ‘The tune I tried to play was a simple version of *Roll Out the Barrel*. You see, the first four bars could be played on one note, by pulling it in and out. Oh God, the smell of that melodeon was great.’

Catherine immediately recognized her son had a rare musical gift and from then on did everything she could to develop it. That Christmas Eve she took Paddy to see Santa Claus and then bought him a white tin whistle with a shiny red top for one shilling and nine pence in Bolgers in North Earl Street, Dublin. As soon as they got on the bus to go home, he started to teach himself the scale. As they got off, another passenger, unknown to Paddy, said ‘Keep at it, son, and you’ll soon get the high D.’ The passenger was Leo Rowsome, who was later to become Paddy’s pipes teacher.

‘It was the greatest treasure I ever had,’ says Moloney today.

Now that he had power of expressing the music he heard in his head through an instrument, Paddy Moloney

would be unstoppable.

* * *

As he became more accomplished on the tin whistle, Paddy began to realize the potential power of his music and how to use it to his best advantage. Having just started at the St Mary's School in the nearby district of Marino, Paddy, who was far smaller than his classmates, found he could easily counter any potential bullying, and ensure popularity at the same time, simply by playing his whistle, giving recitals and acting out songs.

'I was like the pied piper,' he says. 'I used to get all the gang out in the avenue after school. I'd play the whistle and have everyone marching after me in a procession.'

Paddy's school teacher, Brother Seamus McCaffrey, had a love of traditional music and took the promising student under his wing, teaching him the tonic solfa notation system, which he still relies on. Employing the Mary Poppins' method 'Do Re Me Fa So La Ti Do' Paddy could now instantly pick up tunes and write them down even while they were being played.

Musically he was always at or near the top of the class. With his classmates he spent an hour a day on their tonic solfa. When the feared school inspector made his annual visit it would always be young Moloney who was called out to the front of the class to demonstrate tonic solfa to perfection.

Brother McCaffrey, who has since left the brotherhood and got married, encouraged Paddy to join the school band run by Brother Forrestal. And it was when he heard fellow pupil Leon Rowsome playing uilleann pipes Paddy had an epiphany. He knew at once this was the instrument he was born to play.

The uilleann pipes were developed in the 18th century as a more sophisticated indoor version of the old Irish war

pipes, once banned by Queen Elizabeth I who saw them as a threat. Worked by a bag filled by a bellows and not a blow pipe, there is a chanter or melody pipe which is fully chromatic and gives a range of two octaves. Regulators and drones can be added to accompany the melody.

Leon's father Leo Rowsome was then known in Ireland as 'The King of the Pipers' and, as well as making uilleann pipes, he led his own quartet of pipers who had a regular half-hour programme on RTE. Once a week after dinner the whole Moloney family would dutifully gather around the radio in the parlour to listen to the Leo Rowsome Pipes Quartet.

By this time Paddy was itching to get his own pipes and persuaded his mother to take him to see Leo Rowsome, who also lived in Donnycarney, for advice. Rowsome was encouraging but said a practice set cost £5 which was a whole week's Army pay for John Moloney who was constantly struggling to make ends meet.

'I tried everything to get round my father,' recalls Paddy. 'He kept saying "Pat, we just don't have the money." But my mother and father scraped and scrounged and somehow got the money together.'

Catherine Moloney arranged to pay Leo Rowsome for the practice pipes in two installments and enrolled her son for the maestro's Friday evening classes at the School of Music in Chatham Street.

Every Friday evening Catherine took her son to the school where he'd take down a new tune for 15 minutes and then play Rowsome the one he'd learned the week before. The pressure was enormous as Rowsome could only devote half an hour to each student. Many lacked the required dedication and dropped out.

After the lesson Paddy and his mother would either have tea in Bewleys or dash over to the Gaiety Theatre near the school to try to catch their favourite comedians, such as Jimmy O'Dea or Maureen Potter in a variety show. Although

money was scarce Catherine would find a shilling each for them to go up in the gods, while Paddy ran on ahead up flights of stairs to get their seats. It was while watching the comedians and other vaudeville acts at the Gaiety that Paddy developed a taste for the theatre and a love of performing. His father constantly took his children to pantos and plays at the Abbey Theatre. Years later, he did the same for his grandchildren.

The first summer Paddy proudly took his new practice pipes to his grandparents he caused a stir as uilleann pipes were rare in that area. His Uncle Stephen was delighted that his nephew was following in his piping footsteps and brought the boy along to meet the fellow members of the Ballyfin Pipe Band to which he belonged. Paddy would spend summer evenings rehearsing with them in a small band hall and became their official mascot.

When they marched up and down the main streets of neighbouring towns, such as Roscrea and Birr, Paddy was their secret fund-raising weapon. He would sit on the huge bass drum in the middle of the square playing his pipes and drawing a huge crowd that threw coins in a hat besides him. His first ever public performances were triumphs and raised record donations.

* * *

In 1947 Leo Rowsome felt Paddy was ready to make his official public debut with 20 other pipers at an open air concert at Phoenix Park – just a few yards away from where The Chieftains would play for Pope John Paul II almost 40 years later in front of an audience of 1.3 million people. A picture taken of the concert shows Rowsome conducting the diminutive Paddy, who's wearing short trousers with his legs dangling two or three inches off the ground.

'I was so proud,' says Paddy. 'This was my first concert and it was such a great feeling. It was so important.'

By now Paddy had become the leading light in the St Mary's School band and was often allowed to conduct. And after a year of piping lessons, Rowsome entered his most promising pupil in a major piping competition in Dublin called the Feis Atha Cliath. Just ten years old, Paddy was entered for the under-14's piping section and was by far the youngest of 20 competitors. He came in fourth and was devastated.

'It was very competitive and the nerves were terrible,' Paddy recalls today. 'It was very important to get up there and compete. I could never accept failure.'

Feeling disgusted with himself Paddy redoubled his efforts, putting in even more hours of practising every day. He easily won the competition the next year. Paddy received a standing ovation from the crowd and a delighted Rowsome lifted the little boy onto his shoulders for a triumphant lap of honour around the hall.

Closely watching Paddy's winning performance was another ambitious young Dublin musician and future Chieftain named Seán Potts. A couple of years older, Seán had already heard Paddy's piping and had been highly impressed. As Paddy, the last to perform, mounted the stage, Seán told a friend, 'Here's this little bastard who's going to win. He's fantastic.' After the performance, Seán's friend commented, 'He's been on this Earth before'.

By this time Paddy had become the Dublin College of Music's star pupil, always representing the Piping School in the annual college concert. The piece he always played was *Carolan's Concerto*, which would later become a highlight of The Chieftains' repertoire and help a new generation discover the long forgotten works of the blind 17th century harp player. He had also started writing his own music. At the age of 12, his first proper composition was *The Ivy Waltz*.

After two years of weekly lessons at the School Of Music, Paddy was ready to move on to bigger things. Every

Monday night Paddy would visit his neighbour the piper Peadar Flynn at 25 Oak Road, Donnycarney for his regular weekly sessions, which would attract some of Ireland's greatest pipers. Flynn, who had lost a finger during the Irish War of Independence in which he'd served as an officer in the volunteers, had turned his home into a haven for pipers.

At the age of 11 Paddy was introduced to these extraordinary sessions which served as a master class for him. Piping legends such as Séamus Ennis, Willie Clancy, Dan Dowd and Tommy Reck often attended and although still in short trousers Paddy Moloney never shied away from playing in the masters' company and duly impressed them with his style and technique.

'I became the living hope for the pipers. The saviour of the pipes to be,' states Paddy. 'I was one of only a handful of pipers showing any promise. They'd always try to help me out saying, "Try it this way" or "Try these pipes. See what you think of this one." I loved it and those evenings of music changed my life.'

It was at Peadar Flynn's that Paddy picked up much of his music and helped to lay the groundwork for his later career. He learned hundreds of traditional tunes from the greats and, with his photographic memory, once he heard a tune, it would never be forgotten.

Although even then Paddy Moloney stood out among the other young pipers as having the potential for greatness, where was there to go? As the 1950s dawned few people in Dublin had any use for traditional music and commonsense told him he didn't have a chance in hell of ever making a living playing his country's music.

'Playing music was always a hobby to me,' says Paddy. 'Every Friday when my mother brought me to the school of music she always used to say, "Learn music but never forget you have to get a decent job." '