

Seamus Egan's New Project

FROM THE HOB

Paul Keating



SEAMUS Egan has always been a trailblazer from his earliest days as a child prodigy in the traditional Irish music scene destined to accomplish great things.

Born in Hatboro, Pennsylvania on July 1, 1969 to Irish immigrants Mike and Ann Egan, he began his trans-Atlantic experience at the age of three when his parents moved the family back to Co. Mayo for several years and then returned to Lansdale, Pennsylvania where they would settle with their expanded family.

Along the way Egan would take to traditional Irish music like a duck to water, capturing All-Ireland medals on four different instruments by the age of 14 and building an instrumental versatility like no other American at that time (or ever to my knowledge).

His Philadelphia emergence in the Irish scene was burnished when Mick Moloney took him under his wing, accelerating his education by exposing him to senior Irish immigrant musicians like Ed Reavy and Eugene O'Donnell before including Egan in Moloney's flying squad of performing musicians, The Green Fields of America, in his mid-teens.

Seemingly, each year those who attended the annual Philadelphia Ceili Group Traditional Music Festival marveled at Egan's progression as a multi-instrumentalist and creative force that saw him produce his first album at the age of 16 called *Traditional Music of Ireland* in 1985.

He was just a few years behind young phenoms like Joanie Madden and Eileen Ivers who burst on the scene in the 1980s where the prospects for making a living playing traditional Irish music first became a concept, especially if you were young, talented and determined to combine your passion with a potential career path.

Egan sought greener and bigger pastures, moving to New York in the early 1990s just as the East Village

Irish cultural cauldron was bubbling, joining Chanting House, Susan McKeown's groundbreaking ensemble that also included Ivers and another recent Irish émigré, John Doyle.

The Irish festival network and New York City residence brought together the formidable but still evolving talents of Egan, Winifred Horan, Doyle and Karan Casey and a kindred spirit from Chicago, John Williams, to form a new cutting-edge band called Solas. Their meteoric rise coincided with the last great ride of CD sales fueled by their first three CDs as a quartet, and founders Egan and Horan kept the band going for 20 plus years through myriad ups and downs in the Irish music scene.

Along the way Egan continued to display his innovative and thoughtful approach to music and composition as he reflected on his own experiences and the world around him and found success beyond the concert stage, most notably in his musical contributions to the score of the Ed Burns film *The Brothers McMullen*. That led to a more successful collaboration with Sarah McLachlan's hit song "I Will Remember You" shedding further light on his versatile composition skills.

When Solas decided to take a break after 21 years on the road back in 2017 after producing 12 albums, it set in motion a new road and freedom for Egan to pursue and reexamine some of the musical influences and personal compositions that were set aside while on the fast-paced treadmill of a worldwide touring musician.

He left his long-time Philadelphia base and retreated to the peaceful but remote woods of Vermont to rekindle a personal emphasis on his music for his own sake and discovery anew, focusing more on the melodies than driving rhythms that were the hallmark of Solas for so many years.

That journey was explored in a new CD called *Early Bright* of all instrumental music composed by Egan and launched at the prestigious Celtic Connections Festival last Friday night in Glasgow, very familiar and hospitable territory for the now 50-year old artist. It was his first solo CD since the impressive *When Juniper Sleeps* debuted back in 1996 along with Solas on Shanachie Records.

These days he operates under a new title called the



Seamus Egan.

Seamus Egan Project to reflect where he wants to go with the music, and he has brought along Moira Smiley who served time in Solas as well plus highly respected plectrum artists Kyle Sanna and Owen Marshall. They head out on the road next week and through March and full details are available at www.seamuseganproject.com including a February 8 appearance at the Towne Crier Café in Beacon, New York at 8:30 p.m.

Ye Vagabonds On Tour

I AM a firm believer is that old axiom "that everything old is new again" when a younger generation catches a fancy to a bygone era and creates a new trend with just enough originality to make it their own.

That happens in music scenes as well, and in recent years in Irish circles there is a great revival movement underway that harkens back to the folk music boom of the 1950s-1970s when many considered that a revival itself because they drew upon music and sources from many decades earlier while introducing it to a broader audience through a more commercial recording and performance period.

I'm enjoying seeing a rich and varied younger generation tackle songs old and new that tell the many tales of our human experience or history through their reflective eyes and voices, and it is keeping the "living tradition" of Irish music robust. And two very determined brothers from Co. Carlow who call their act Ye Vagabonds have marched fervently up to the front of the pack.

They are Brian and Diarmuid Mac Gloinn who moved to Dublin in 2012 and immersed themselves in the various folk music communities around town that propagate traditional Irish music, blues and contemporary folk music. That would be very similar to the enthusiastic scene in Ireland's capital city back in the 1960s when the Clancys and Dubliners and many others were emerging into the very fertile 1970s.

The Mac Gloinns were influenced by many singers around town and in their own family, and even from faraway Donegal's isle of Arranmore where their mother hailed from.

Featuring delicate harmonies and spare instrumentation, they center the focus of their music on the expressive lyrics that appeal to more and more audiences who are looking for a more laid-back yet genuine approach to folk music. Last year was especially fruitful for the brothers who rang up great success after releasing their latest CD *The Hare's Lament*.

At the RTE Folk Awards last October, they scored a trifecta garnering awards as the Best Folk Group, Best Folk Album and Best Traditional Folk Track ("Bacach Shíol Andai"), one of four selections on the CD in the Irish language in which they are fluent practitioners.



Brian and Diarmuid Mac Gloinn.

They are embarking on a short U.S. tour thanks to support from Culture Ireland that will begin with a two-night stand at the Irish Arts Center (www.irishartscenter.org) in Manhattan on January 31 and February 1 with both shows at 8 p.m. On Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m. there is a matinee performance billed as Ye Vagabonds Family Concert in celebration of imbolc (spring) and Brigid's Day offering reasonable prices for all the family to enjoy their music. From there they head to Washington, D.C., Somerville and Milwaukee.

I first became aware of Ye Vagabonds when they shared an extensive tour in Ireland with The Murphy Beds (Eamon O'Leary and Jefferson Hamer) who shared a similar style of lush vocal renditions from the Irish and English folk traditions paired with simple but oh so exquisite instrumentation that transported you to another time and place.

There will be two gigs on the tour where they will reunite with the first being at the Jalopy (jalopytheatre.org) in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn on February 3 and the Parlour Room in Northampton, Massachusetts on the 4th. For more, visit www.yevagabonds.com.