"CEOL RINCE na hEIREANN"

This is a series of five volumes of dance tunes compiled by tune collector Breandan Breathnach (1912 - 1985) over a period of many years.

From Wikipedia:

"Breathnach grew up in the Liberties of Dublin, where his father was a silk weaver. His uncle Joe was a player of the uilleann pipes and a member of the Piper's Club. He started learning the pipes from John Potts of Wexford and William Andrews, then with the renowned piper Leo Rowsome.

Breathnach started work as a civil servant with the Department of Agriculture, but in 1965 switched to the Department of Education where he was responsible for collecting music from around Ireland.

In the 1950s he decided to publish some of his music collection. Tunes were contributed by pipers such as his uncle Joe, John Potts, Tommy Reck, Matt Kiernan and Willie Clancy, fiddlers such as John Kelly,Donncha Ó Cróinín, Tommy Potts and Tom Mulligan, flutists and whistlers such as John Egan, John Brennan and Michael Tubridy, and box-player Sonny Brogan. The collection was called Ceol Rince na hÉireann ("Dance Music of Ireland").

The first volume of his collection was published in 1963. A second volume appeared, to great acclaim, in 1976. This included music from, amongst others, James McEnery (Limerick), John Doherty (Donegal), Micho Russell (Clare) and Denis Murphy (Kerry). Additional volumes based on his work were published in 1985, 1996 and 1999.

By the time of his death he had collected over 7,000 tunes. His efforts were responsible for saving numerous tunes and he is generally recognised as a major figure in the preservation and continuation of traditional Irish music."

After Breathnach's death, the work of completing the series was undertaken by musician and researcher Jackie Small, who was responsible for the publication of CRE Volumes 4 (1996) and 5 (1999).

There are over 1200 tunes in these volumes, the great majority of which had not been published elsewhere prior to their appearance in CRE.

One of the problems encountered in the later volumes was the prevalence of "gan ainm" ("no name") items. These present a challenge to any archivist, since cataloguing anything nameless is obviously impossible. To get around this difficulty, I have taken the liberty of supplying names of my own creation to these hitherto-anonymous tunes. In the present files my titles are marked by an asterisk. In some cases I was able to supply a name based on Breathnach's notes for the tune, but in most cases I was left to my own devices.

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As a disclaimer I should mention that I am not the first collector to engage in such activities - as a matter of fact, in a few cases Breathnach's own tune notes contain a statement like "mé fein a bháist é" ("it was I who christened it"). Chief O'Neill took the same liberties, and I would imagine that the practice goes back to the Neale brothers (1726) and has persisted more or less quietly since then.

If anyone consulting these files takes exception to the name I have supplied, I invite them to bring this to my attention. If I consider their claim to be substantiated, I will gladly replace my name with the "correct" one.

One additional situation with regards to CRE should be mentioned here: the extensive (and in the later volumes, exclusive) use of Gaelic for the tune names and commentary.

It's a little difficult for me to understand the reasoning for this. While I consider myself - an American of Irish heritage - a supporter of the language and any effort to keep it a living tongue, I have to think that in some instances the gaelgóirí (? sp) get carried away and forget that only a very few fortunate people have any familiarity with the language. This is true not only for the world at large but unfortunately for the population of Ireland.

The point is not that Irish should not be used as often as is practical, but that some recognition of a potential audience should be kept in mind. By 1976 - the publication date of CRE II - there was huge increase of interest in traditional music exemplified by the worldwide popularity of groups like the Chieftains, Planxty, the Bothy Band, and De Danann, and rediscovery of some of the early recordings of musicians like Michael Coleman and Paddy Killoran, Irish-born but living in America.

Collections of tunes like CRE and the O'Neill volumes were crucial to the younger musicians (as I was then, God be with the days) trying to get a handle on this wonderful new art form. If you couldn't manage to read music, you knew someone who could, or - most commonly - you learned by ear, as generations of Irish musicians had done before you.

But if you wanted to know more about the tunes that you might have picked up from CRE, you were out of luck unless you were fluent in Irish - not by any means an easy language to "pick up" for those coming to it later in life.

I have since come to the conclusion that the use of Irish in these volumes may have been suggested (dictated?) by individuals or groups in the Irish government who saw the flowering of interest in traditional music as an opporunity to press forward with their efforts to keep Irish alive. What better way to accomplish this, they probably thought, than requiring that any government-funded publications be required to use Irish as the primary means of communication? Or, more bluntly, if you're using our money, you'll use our language too. We don't really care if no one outside the country has no idea what you're talking about. And Breathnach, who as a career civil servant would have had at least some familiarity with Irish, would doubtless have been more sensitive than most to these "suggestions".

(I'm guessing that as a native of the Liberties of Dublin - not known then or now for producing huge numbers of "native speakers" - Breathnach had to work diligently to accumulate his language skills!)

This attitude persists today in the pages of <u>Treoir</u>, the official publication of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, each edition of which has at least three articles in Irish. I'm not sure how many of the "gan teanga, gan tir" ("no language, no country") stalwarts are still left in CCE, but evidently there are enough to ensure that the language still has a presence in <u>Treoir</u>'s pages.

In the CRE volumes, a comical aspect of all this can be seen in the mostly woeful "back-translation" of tune names, the vast majority of which started life in English but got bureaucratized into Irish (I like to hope that Breathnach himself didn't get involved with this butchery). Two examples come to mind - the tune called "Miss Cox" by 99.87% of the world has been Irished as "Inion an Coileach" ("the rooster's daughter"), while "Lord Mounteagle's" is "Tiarna Iolair an Sliabh" or some such ("Lord Eagle of the Mountain").

 I won't go near the job the bureaucrats did on "When Sick Is It Tea You Want?" or "The Lad That Can Do It". It's pretty embarrassing, all the more so for being unnecessary.

A musician named Paul de Grae did yeoman service in translating Breathnach's notes for volumes 2 through 5. With his permission I have included them here (the link is on the tune list or "table" for each volume). It's a shame that Paul had to go through all this, but he did us all a favor!

Some final comments on the editing:
- I have removed most of the ornamentation present in the originals, since my main interest is in preserving the essence of the tune and not so much the way it might have been performed by this or that musician.
- I have transposed tune keys in cases where I thought that so doing would make the tune easier to learn. In such cases, the ABC file indicates the "source key".
- Where I thought a "single" tune (two parts of 8 measures, no repeats) would be improved by converting it to a "double", I have done so. Again, the ABC entry indicates when this has happened.
- tunes that end abruptly in the original have been provided with a coda to smooth out the sound file. again, a liberty taken to improve the learning experience.
- I have used standard speeds throughout the Traditional Tune Library (e.g. 1/4=180 for reels, 1/4=160 for jigs, etc.) If you find my speed not helpful to your learning efforts, you can always enter a higher or lower number in the ABC tune file's Q: field. Whatever change you make will take effect when you play the tune back in your ABC translator (naturally the MP3 won't be affected). Also note that Michael Eskin's fine ABC Transcription Tools will make speed adjustments easy via its Tune Trainer function.

If you're interested in learning more about ABC, <u>click here</u>.