

Mp3 Jerry O'sullivan - O'sullivan Meets O'farrell



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"A sparkling summit linking two uilleann pipers separated by more than two centuries," this recording and accompanying 28 page CD booklet features music from the O'Farrell collections, as played by America's premier uilleann piper, Jerry O'Sullivan. 15 MP3 Songs WORLD: Celtic, FOLK: Traditional Folk Details: Jerry O'Sullivan by Earle Hitchner The danger with any archival retrieval in music is either too reverential or too roiling a treatment. Jerry O'Sullivan's uilleann piping smartly avoids those extremes here. It is respectful without being rigid, exciting without being eccentric. The title of this CD points to a meeting of minds, and that it is. Not much is known for certain about the 18th-century Irish piper and tune compiler O'Farrell, not even his first name. What is known for certain is the breadth and depth of his musical legacy, a collection of over 400 tunes that have been largely unrecorded. The majority of those tunes were Irish, with perhaps another quarter of them Scottish. Jerry O'Sullivan's mastery on uilleann pipes, warpipes (the first instrument he learned), and Scottish smallpipes makes him an ideal musical match for the O'Farrell canon. Though this is strictly a solo recording on D-pitched uilleann pipes, Jerry's comfort with the technical demands of non-Irish tunes and the finesse he brings to their performance stamp this album as both rare and refreshing. His uilleann piping on 'Sir Charles Douglas's Strathspey/Braes of Busbie' offers a sterling example of how literally in tune Jerry is with the challenge of playing Scottish strathspeys. Sometimes described as slow reels, strathspeys are dance tunes in quadruple time with a distinct, dotted rhythm. They are difficult to execute properly because of their elusive mid-tempo, which sometimes causes Irish players to speed up almost reflexively. (Think of the slightly faster highlands, adapted from strathspeys, that are played in Donegal.) Jerry's tempo never wavers, and his piquant accents on the regulators in the second strathspey expertly enhance its flavor. Like strathspeys, hornpipes can be the undoing of less than confident and competent players in Irish music. The steady 4/4

time required in a hornpipe can lapse into metronomic roteness if played too slowly or sedately. In 'O'Farrells Hornpipe/Mr. Walkers Hornpipe,' Jerry maintains tempo while using his extensive piping palette to draw out all the colors contained in the melodies. It is an achievement all the more laudable for its subtlety. There's a crisp, lively touch and joyful lift to the reels, slip and double jigs, and single set of polkas played by Jerry on the album. He invests the slow air 'Adieu Adieu Thou Faithless World' with just the right amount of sentiment, contemplative rather than brooding. His approach to the set piece/waltz pairing of 'Humours of Glen/The Youghall Waltz' has just the right amount of swing to it. And by overdubbing his chanter to create the air/march duet on 'Mill Mill O,' he gives this perennially popular Scottish tune a lithe, baroque texture that dissolves the hard casing of familiarity. O'Farrell's penchant for musical variety and piping virtuosity in the tunes he published two centuries ago has clearly found sympathetic expression in Jerry O'Sullivan's selections and skill here. This discriminating yet expansive taste in music can also be heard to stunning effect on Jerry's previous solo recording, *The Gift* (Shanachie, 1998). The melodies on that album range from Irish, Scottish, and Cape Breton to American old-time, gospel, and Bach. Two of them, 'An Firn' and 'Noel McCarthy's Jig,' were penned by Jerry himself. Widely recognized as America's most accomplished uilleann piper, Jerry O'Sullivan drew much of his musical inspiration from Ireland itself, whether through recordings made there or through direct personal contact with musicians who lived there. Born in Manhattan on June 19, 1959, to a Dublin father, Peter, and an Irish-American mother, Frances, Jerry spent many Sunday afternoons as a child listening to LPs of Irish traditional music with his maternal grandfather, Andrew Duffy, who came from Killasser, Co. Mayo. As an adolescent, Jerry frequently visited relatives during summers and extended holidays in Ireland, where his fascination with traditional music grew dramatically. Musical kin such as his cousin, Dublin button accordionist Tom Dermody, and musical friends such as Longford's Peter Carberry, the first uilleann piper Jerry ever heard, had a strong early impact on his playing. The uilleann piping of Leo Rowsome, Liam O'Flynn, Paddy Keenan, Matt Kiernan, Fergus Finnegan, Mick O'Brien, Peter McKenna, Gay McKeon, Samus Ennis, Willie Clancy, and Johnny Doran also fueled Jerry's enthusiasm for pursuing Ireland's most complex and exacting instrument. Spanning two full octaves, the uilleann pipes have a musical range wider than most, if not all, other bagpipes in the world. A metaphor sometimes invoked for the instrument is an octopus, and grappling with its appendages and stubborn nature can be unnerving for anyone lacking in complete commitment and training. Jerry O'Sullivan's own commitment and training

began in earnest at age 16. Though advised and encouraged along the way, he is self-taught, which makes his swift, sure taming of the octopus all the more impressive. A stint on warpipes with the County Tyrone Pipe Band in Queens, New York, likewise shaped his broader interest in different traditions of piping. From the early to middle 1980s, an increase of session playing in New York City and of concerts and festivals Jerry did there and elsewhere sharpened his uilleann piping technique, deepened his repertoire, and extended his reputation. When the opportunity came to record *The Invasion*, his solo debut for Green Linnet in 1987, he was more than ready. For proof, listen on that album to his electrifying uilleann pipes solo on a reel that Johnny Doran, one of his idols, had recorded 40 years earlier: 'Colonel Fraser.' In 1992, Jerry, his wife, and their children moved from Yonkers, New York, to Kilnaboy, Co. Clare, where they lived for about a year and a half. Before they decided to return to New York in 1994, Jerry sometimes played in sessions with Clare fiddler Tony Linnane and flutist Garry Shannon, and near the end of his stay he also visited a Monday night session in Ennis anchored by Lúasa flute, whistle, and bodhrán player Kevin Crawford. A fine flute and whistle player himself, Jerry maintains a busy music schedule stateside. He has performed or toured with the Windbags (a quartet comprising Jerry, John Skelton, Patrick O'Gorman, and the late Tony Cuffe), the Green Fields of America, the Eileen Ivers Band, the Paul Winter Consort, the Boston Pops Orchestra (under the successive batons of John Williams and Keith Lockhart), the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, Bonnie Rideout's 'A Scottish Christmas' ensemble, and the Eagles singer Don Henley's band. Jerry was also a guest soloist for Patrick Cassidy's *Famine Remembrance* and *Siochin* ('Peace') when these orchestral pieces were performed in New York City and Washington, D.C., respectively. *We're Irish Still*, issued by the Boston branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in 1981, was Jerry O'Sullivan's first appearance on a recording. Since then, he has been featured on more than 90 other albums, including Paul Winter and Friends' Grammy-winning *Celtic Solstice* in 1999 and the Boston Pops Orchestra's Grammy-nominated *The Celtic Album* in 1998. Among the many other artists with whom he's collaborated on recordings are James Galway, Dolly Parton, Joanie Madden, Altan, Jennifer Kimball, Jonatha Brooke, Joe Derrane, Niamh Parsons, Rafe Stefanini, Nírn N Ríain, John Whelan, Pat Kilbride, Eileen Ivers, Mick Moloney, Akira Satake, and the late Johnny Cunningham. That impressive list of credits attests to the versatility and appeal of Jerry's music, which was also heard in TV commercials for Texaco, Dr Pepper, Mobil, AT&T, and Folgers as well as in the soundtracks to the Tom Cruise-starring film *Far and Away* and the

documentaries Out of Ireland, The Long Journey Home, Africans in America, and From Shore to Shore. Jerry additionally narrated From Shore to Shore and appeared on camera in it, and all four documentaries were broadcast on U.S. public-television stations. Today Jerry O'Sullivan's long-standing excellence on the uilleann pipes is celebrated globally. His style is the outcome of many influences, but what makes his uilleann piping unique is how effectively he integrates those influences with his own personality, taste, invention, and sense of wonder. Grateful for the guidance and support he's received in the past, Jerry is also dedicated to passing on the instrument's beauty and intricacies through teaching. His third solo album, O'Sullivan Meets O'Farrell, is a sparkling summit linking two uilleann pipers separated by more than two centuries. O'Farrell would have been proud of how well these 27 tunes, many lying untouched and unappreciated for far too long, are performed by O'Sullivan for entirely new listeners. Bring on volume two. Earle Hitchner is the 'Ceol' columnist for the Irish Echo newspaper and a contributing music writer to The Wall Street Journal. ----- O'Sullivan Meets O'Farrell by Jerry

O'Sullivan I first became acquainted with the music of Mr. O'Farrell through the unfailing generosity of New York uilleann piper Richard O'Shea. Richard kindly provided me with photocopies of all the O'Farrell collections: the four Pocket Companions and the National Irish Music tutor with its accompanying tunes. The idea behind this recording came from a long-held desire to make a solo uilleann piping CD, the most challenging task musically for any uilleann piper. My instant attraction to the music of the O'Farrell collections made it clear to me that this was the music that I would feature on the recording. What struck me initially about this music was that it was both very familiar and logical stylistically, yet somehow different from the majority of today's popular Irish and Scottish traditional dance music. In particular, the melodies themselves very frequently took unexpected twists and turns compared to many of the tunes that are currently in the tradition. Also, it struck me that there was an older, simpler approach to multi-part tune composition. Specifically, most traditional Irish and Scottish dance tunes have a two-part form. In the O'Farrell collections, there are many tunes with more than two parts and it becomes obvious that the further parts are well-written variations that complement the original two themes. Another obvious point is that the material from Mr. O'Farrell is very clearly uilleann pipe music, though some of it is virtuosic by today's standards. I was also attracted to the diversity of the repertoire in these collections; Mr. O'Farrell in many ways collected and performed the 'hit tunes' of his day. The majority of the pieces are Irish but there are many Scottish tunes, some English ones and a good number of strongly baroque-flavored

melodies. Some of these baroque-flavored pieces are the most challenging pieces in the entire collection due to their expanded melodic range and extensive use of chromatic notes. Another baroque influence is the inclusion of several duets for the uilleann pipes. This was a standard practice in classical baroque music; it afforded an ideal opportunity for a teacher and student to practice and to perform together. It was a common feature in other 18th century classical music tutors and collections. Mr. O'Farrell's work parallels other 18th century manuscripts in both the Irish, Scottish, and English traditions in that one finds a body of traditional folk music interspersed with 'folk-baroque' fusions. O'Carolan's compositions and English Country Dance Music from Playford's Dancing Master are two examples of folk music forms strongly influenced by the Western Art Music style of the day. The same phenomena took place in the French court of Versailles in the late 17th and early 18th century; there was a conscious blending of the pastoral with the courtly in music and other art forms. For this recording, I focused on pieces from the O'Farrell collection that were clearly more from the folk tradition (rather than from the 'folk-baroque' genre) as these tunes are more effective as solo uilleann pipe pieces. Baroque-influenced melodies normally need the harmonic underpinnings of harpsichord and cello to make them breathe properly (a future volume in this series will focus on the more baroque-influenced O'Farrell repertoire). My only criteria for selecting tunes for this recording was that they be representative of the variety of the collection itself in addition to being personally appealing to me melodically. It was then a case of arranging medleys that made good musical sense. In terms of the uilleann piping approach to these O'Farrell tunes, I treated most of them as pieces of dance music. Since Mr. O'Farrell writes of only tenor regulator usage in his tutor, I used a more sparing regulator style in terms of using primarily single regulator notes against the melody and drone rather than using two-note regulator chords that are standard practice today. It is my sincere hope that this recording will encourage others to explore the O'Farrell collection more fully and hopefully bring back into the living tradition more of these musical gems, many of which have lain dormant for close to 200 years.

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