



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (MH) Maggie Holtzberg. ()

Accession Numbers:

MH-04-09-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -D

Audio recordings

- - -CS

Photographic documentation

MH-04-09-M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: _____

Contact Date: _____

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Individual/Group/Event: Seamus Connolly

Address: Irish Studies Program 300 Hammond House, Boston College

City: Chestnut Hill Zip: _____ County: Middlesex

Phone: Daytime: [REDACTED] Evenin: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED] Website: _____

Contact person: _____

Title: Sullivan Artist in Residence in Irish Music

Location of Interview: not a formal interview, but we have been around Seamus in numerous settings - at Gaelic Roots, at concerts, in seisuns, etc.

Street Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Special Needs (including translation): _____

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): _____

Traditions noted for follow-up: _____

Other Possible Contacts: _____

Summary Description: .Séamus Connolly is one of the world's most respected master Irish musicians. A native of Killaloe, County Clare, Ireland, he now resides in Groton, Massachusetts. Séamus won the Irish National Fiddle Championship 10 times, a feat unequalled by any other musician. He was also the winner of the internationally acclaimed "Fiddler of Dooney" Competition. Séamus grew up in a home filled with music, both his parents and two brothers were musicians. His brother Martin Connolly, a button accordionist, also won the National Championship a number of times. Besides being an outstanding musician, Martin is also an accordion teacher and designer/maker of the Kincora Button Accordion.

Séamus was only 12 years old when he began playing the fiddle. His father encouraged him to listen to the recordings of the famed County Sligo fiddler Michael Coleman. Colman was later to become one of Séamus' musical heroes. Séamus would slow down the Maestro's 78 rpm recordings and re-tune his own fiddle to match the sounds and tones of the record. He could then hear every note clearly and was almost able to visualize the movements of the master's fingers and bow.

Before long, Séamus went on to national prominence. He was a regular performer on Irish radio and television. He joined the famous Kilfenora Céilí Band, an ensemble noted for its rhythms, musicality and rare tunes indigenous to North County Clare. He traveled with the band throughout Ireland and Britain, playing for dances, concerts, radio and television programs.

Séamus came to the United States in 1972 as a member of the first Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann (CCE) tour, an ensemble of 26 musicians, singers and dancers. In 1976 he immigrated to America and settled in the Boston area. At the request of Larry Reynolds, President of the local branch of CCE, Séamus agreed to teach and pass on to American-born students the various regional styles of Irish fiddling. Some of his better students qualified to compete in the Irish National Music Championships, one of them, Brendan Bulger, won first place in the under eighteen fiddle category, a competition Séamus had won twenty five years earlier.

Séamus has had the honor of representing Ireland on three "Masters of the Folk Violin" tours organized by the National Council for the Traditional Arts. He has performed at most major festivals in the United States, including the National Folk Festival, Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, Wolf Trap Irish Folk Festival and American Roots Fourth of July Celebration at the Washington Monument. He also performed on the "Folk Masters" radio series, which was broadcast nationwide on National Public Radio. As a performer, teacher and lecturer, he has traveled to places as far afield as Australia, Spain,

France, England, Canada, Alaska, and Ireland. In 1990 Seamus won a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship Award, one of three recipients from over 2,500 applicants. Refugee Arts (Country Roads) and the National Endowment for the Arts recognized Séamus' mastery by awarding him three consecutive Master/Apprenticeship Grants.

Séamus has also appeared on the nationally televised "Today Show" and was profiled by Boston's WCVB-TV5 "Chronicle Program." He initiated, produced and co-hosted with Larry Reynolds Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann's ongoing weekly radio program of traditional Irish music on WNTN-1550 AM Boston. The program is the only one of its kind in North America. He also co-hosted the Irish segments of Boston's WGBH National Public Radio series "Ethnicity."

Séamus has numerous recordings to his credit. Released on Green Linnet Records are his two solo CDs: Notes from my Mind and Here and There. Also released on Green Linnet Records is Banks of the Shannon, (a recording with the legendary accordionist Paddy O'Brien and pianist/composer Charlie Lennon) and Warming Up (a recording with accordionist/composer Martin Mulhaire, flutist Jack Coen and pianist Felix Dolan). Séamus is now collaborating with Laurel Martin, a colleague and fiddle teacher in the Boston College Irish Studies Program, to produce a book of Irish tunes with accompanying CDs. The music will be printed and recorded in both simple and more highly ornamented versions.

Seamus is Director of The Boston College Irish Studies Music, Song and Dance Program. He is an Adjunct Professor in the Music Department and is Director of the Gaelic Roots Summer School and Festival. In Spring of 2004, Connolly was named the Sullivan Artist in Residence in Irish Music at Boston College.

Connolly received a MCC Artist Grant in FY04.