

1. The Old Piano

One of the first of the songs written for this album. I wrote it sometime in 2016. I wanted to write songs with an Irish traditional heritage but to also include the surroundings I live in now and which have been a part of my life since I came to the United States in 1982. This song incorporates that idea with the Irish immigrant woman who found herself in western Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl. She and her husband become part of the Dust Bowl migration to California. Before leaving she insists they bring along her piano so she can still have her music of the past and the music of her present day surroundings. Years later a grandson wants save the piano from the auction block and restore it so he can hear what his grandmother heard when she played it all those years ago, and to, in effect, get closer to her.

2. A Lovely Day

I wrote this after seeing on Facebook that a second cousin, Hugh, was having a birthday. I messaged him and said I hoped he would have a lovely birthday. He said it would be lovely because he would be with Mary, his wife, for the most part of the day. They have been married for over 35 years or more. I thought about what he said and came up with the song that evening.

3. Just Try It

My youngest daughter, Leslie, got married last year. A friend of mine said “you should write a song for her wedding!” I thought it would be too difficult. There's just so much I would want to say. But after a few weeks I thought about how she used to always say “just try it” when she was growing up. If she had a broken doll, she would ask me to fix it and although it may be beyond fixing and I would say so, she would say “just try it” and more often than not she would be happy with the outcome. So, I wrote this for Leslie on her wedding day. My eldest daughter, Evelyn, got married a few months later and I had to come up with another song!

4. My Home in Roscommon

I wrote this sometime last year but it originally had the melody of “The State It Has me In” and I just wasn't happy with it. I liked the sentiment of the lyrics. They were true to me but the melody wasn't getting that across. It was too fast and the words flew by and made them sound trite. So, I messed around with a new melody. I slowed the tempo and am really happy with it now as it speaks to my love of the area where I grew up. The words are more heartfelt and true as a result.

5. Mother Jones

I had been vaguely aware of Mother Jones and that she had grown up, Mary Harris, in Cork City, Ireland. Then I read the book by Elliot Gorn – Mother Jones - last year and wrote this song. My first attempt was nine minutes long. I tried to get every significant thing into the song – she survived the famine, emigrated to Canada with her mother, brothers, and sister. Later she married and had a family in Tennessee – a husband and 3 or 4 children who died from yellow fever. After that she moved to Chicago and had a dress shop or worked for a dress shop. The shop got burned down in the Great Chicago Fire. I left all that out in the version on the CD which is now down to four minutes or so. Mother Jones got involved with the labor movement and that is what she is known for.

6. The State It Has Me In

I had sent Colin Farrell the first version of “My Home in Roscommon” – the fast version. Months passed and in that time I had re-written “Roscommon” but Colin had, unbeknownst to me, worked up the original melody with whistle and fiddle and had Alan Murray put down bouzouki and guitar. Another several months passed and I was with Colin at Swanannoa in North Carolina. He played some of the tracks and I realized our lines had gotten crossed. Colin was still working on the original “Home

in Roscommon” and I had been working on the new slower version. I told Colin we'll keep the tune he had, pretty much mixed and recorded with Alan, and I would write some other lyrics to go along with the tune. I came up with this – a story about an elderly man who would be just as happy had he never saw a computer in his life. The song is followed by “The Manchester Reel” a lively original tune by Colin.

7. Father of the Bride

I wrote this song for my eldest daughter, Evelyn's, wedding. I settled on the story of a father trying to come up with a speech. I had played music at a few weddings and I came to know how hard it is for father's to come up with the father of the bride speech and many of them are nervous wrecks before they get it is over! I remember thinking about when we sleep our brains are working and we work out problems that we encounter during our waking hours. That's where I started, or at least had as something I wanted to include in the song. This father tries to write something but eventually goes to bed, and in sleep, William Butler Yeats comes to him. They work together on the speech throughout the night. In the morning the father wakes up and it's as if a path has been cleared. He knows where to begin, how to begin, and how to end. His mind is clear and although we never know what the speech is the father is happy and his mind is at ease.

8. The Champion

We were visiting my mom in Ireland and my eldest daughter who was about 6 years old at the time said that the night before, after my wife and I had gone to town, my mom had been telling her stories about me when I was growing up. So, that gave me the idea for this song. It's not based in fact but I suppose a few scenes do come from my childhood like playing soccer out in the field; going to the shop almost daily for something or other, or going to the well; and also returning home with my wife and daughter when she was about two years old the first time we went back for a visit.

9. The Beautiful Game

I wrote this song the day after the Women's World Cup ended this past summer. The tournament was great and it inspired me to write the song.

10. The Highwayman

I wrote this song after hearing the Colin Farrell Band play “When First Unto This Country” on YouTube. I wasn't quite sure why I had put in that the highwayman would steal the “jacket blue”. Later I started to think that the jacket blue represented the American revolutionaries. The highwayman represented the British Crown who was taking all he could from the colonists. It's funny because these details have become true to me now which makes the song more meaningful to me. The song didn't start out that in mind.

11. I'll Take Care Of You

I thought “I'll take care of you” is a nice phrase and it might make a nice song title. So, I began to write and I can't remember how I settled on the story. I don't remember how I decided to start it in winter time either but once I did one scene led to another and the song kind of finished itself. My mom has swallows that return every year in springtime from their travels so I was thinking of them. Also, thinking of the cold, hard rains that come, and how miserable and difficult it would be for a little bird to survive in such a situation.

12. Delia and Saint Christopher

A song about a young girl who left home in Ireland for the US or England, who knows where, and found hard times. But, thankfully, she decides to go back home by the end of the song with the encouragement of Saint Christopher, the Patron Saint of Travellers.

13. The Christmas Comet

When I was growing up Christmas Eve was a magical time. Men, women, and children went to town. The women did the shopping for the Christmas dinner, after they situated the men and children in the pub. Christmas lights and music lit the dark early evening and a mist was on the air. It was absolutely magical. As children we listened to the men tell stories. The stories got progressively funnier as the conversation and drink flowed. And I do remember it was in that order. Conversation was paramount, the drinks were sociable, and there was such merriment, cheer, and excitement everywhere. Immigrants returned for the holidays, songs were sung, poems recited. I remember there were certain characters who were “as if onstage” at all times. And when they arose to recite a monologue or poem about a famous football team or historical event it was like having a front row seat to the theater. What I tried to capture in “The Christmas Comet” was the love and appreciation for those town characters who bring something special to a community by doing something magical. Something that is outside the realm of the ordinary. So, this is a fictional story but very much based in reality of my memory.

14. I Have To Be Someplace

This is a song about a person who is diligently aware of his/her responsibility to an assigned task. People are counting on the person. That's what this song is about. That no matter how small or insignificant we think a job may be others are counting on us and we have a responsibility to come through. The wave is a metaphor for a person engaged in a remarkably hard and repetitive task – carrying messages back and forth across a vast expanse. The wave is also a character. He's just a little odd with his attention to task, and he probably is an unusual character but that's no excuse for “the wind” and “the rain's” mockery. However, I don't think the “wave” notices them. He is too dedicated to his responsibilities.