PORTRAIT: MARGARET BARRY

1) **My Lagan Love**
2) **The Factory Girl**
3) **"Me mother is dying..."** (interview)
4) **The Galway Shawl**
5) **Breakdown** (instrumental)
6) **Keening, diddling, and lullabyes** (interview)
7) **She Moved Through The Fair**
8) **"I sang through the fairs..."** (interview)
9) **The Blarney Stone**
10) **Let Mr. Maguire Sit Down**
11 **Mose Ritoora-li-ay**
12) **The Bard of Armagh**
13) **Ballyjamesduff**
14) **Eileen McMahon/Green Grow the Rushes O (reel)**
15) **Her Mantle So Green**
16) **Going to Mass Last Sunday**
17) **Lovin' Hannah** (sung by Jean Ritchie)
18) **Gra Machree**
19) **The Flower of Sweet Strabane**
20) **"When you're fond of music..."** (interview)
21) **She Moved Through The Fair** (long version)
22) **"And there's music coming into my head..."** (interview)
23) **Strayaway Child**
23) **Her Mantle So Green** (recorded live, with Michael Gorman, fiddle)

"What about that song? Why does that make you cry?"

She raised her head from her arms and dried her eyes with the back of her hand like a child. A kinder note than he had intended went into his voice.

"Why Gretta?" he asked.

"I am thinking about a person long ago who used to sing that song."
-- From "The Dead," by James Joyce, in Dubliners

I'll just tell you. When you're fond of music, and come from a musical family, and you look back on your own family, all your uncles, yourself -- every time I cry dreadful. Keep crying and crying away. Many a time... Even my husband asked me one night, "What are you crying for? You can't bring them back now." "Look man," I said, "You don't understand. You're not musical."

-- Margaret Barry to Alan Lomax, 1953

The depth of Margaret Barry's art and passion, which sprang from a deep well of memory and vivid world of dreams, is an enduring marvel of Irish music. As she makes clear above, being "musical" meant a lot more than being able to carry a tune, it opened a channel to other worlds, as it did for the James Joyce's middle-class Dubliners in his great story, "The Dead."

Margaret Barry is usually described as a "traditional" Irish folksinger, a bit of shorthand that is helpful for filing her recordings, but one that only hints at the broad base of influences, repertoire, and aesthetics that this singular performer could claim.

Like another banjo playing songster, Uncle Dave Macon, her songs came from many sources, spanning and often blurring the gap between 'traditional' and 'commercial' music. She knew pieces that fit the academic definition of what is traditional; as well as English language 'art song' settings of traditional Gaelic airs such as "She Moved Through the Fair" and "Oft in the Stilly Night" that had become a part of Irish vernacular music. She knew just as many songs, if not more, that she learned from gramophone recordings of the great Irish tenor John McCormack and his many imitators, as well as love songs and comic tunes recorded by Irish Americans like John McGettigan and James Mullan, "the Singing Insurance Man." All of these she made her own with a street and pub singing style that was loud and declamatory, yet filled with nuance and shading.

Though she preferred to sing unaccompanied (as here, on "Flower of Sweet Strabane"), her hard-edged banjo playing was as much a trademark as her plaintive but highly accomplished singing. The banjo is now familiar in Irish music, but it was a newcomer when Margaret took it up. Mike Flanagan, a Waterford-born musician and one-third of the very successful Irish-American recording group the Flanagan Brothers, was the first Irish musician to play banjo on records, and his sharp, percussive attack may have influenced Margaret's playing of jigs and reels. Her accompaniments and arpeggio fills

were decidedly personal, however, and enabled to her to infuse her balladry with an intensity and an evocative quality that remains distinctive.

She was born in Peter Street, Cork City, Ireland in 1917 into a family of travelers[1] who had been loosely rooted in that area for two generations. They were a musical family that included many street performers, including Margaret's father, whose family, Margaret recalled, used to host "local sing-songs in houses." He was also an occasional accompanist for silent films in the 1920s. Her maternal grandfather, Bob Thompson, was a well known uillean piper who took top prize at the Feis Ceoil in Dublin in 1897. A Spanish grandmother figured prominently in the recollections of her childhood that she gave to Lomax:

Grandmother came from Spain... Barcelona, that's where me mother told me. She was a singer, played a guitar, a most remarkable one. She had several kinds of instruments that I can't describe now -- but one -- the guitar with the two little shafts, one at each side... She sung in her own language. She could speak Gaelic too, as well as her own language, and Italian. Her ancestors was from Italy.[2]

But there was something else. As a semi-professional singer who often sang for strangers (as opposed to those traditional singers who sang only for family and friends), she was motivated to develop a powerful singing style and exceptional breath control) that was immediately prepossessing and could be heard above the din of a crowded street or public house. But as she told Lomax, her feelings for her music were deeply personal, and inseparable from her life

Margaret did her first public singing at the age of 13, during a period following the death of her mother when her father had taken up with another woman and she was feeling "badly neglected." Her father and eventual step-mother traveled the country with her in tow. In McCroon, County Cork, her father took a job in a circus, and Margaret took to wandering "up and down McCroon" singing "Two Eyes of Blue" a cappella, "up one street and down another street, and got money for it."

I left me father. I was by myself at 14. I lived in lodgings from place to place... and I had a fine life in a certain way. Of course, I got a little hardship here and there, and sometimes I might be singing out in the rain.

She sang at football matches, fairs, "sociables" in private houses and to cinema queues. She traveled by bicycle and horse drawn caravan. She became so well known and liked by Irish football teams that they frequently held a seat for her on their buses.

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[1] 1 Travelers or tinkers are descendants of semi-nomadic groups that have roamed the British Isles for centuries. They are well known as craftsmen, musicians, and singers. Although they are not of Romany or Gypsy stock, they have a similar culture built around a clan system.

[2] 2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes attributed to Margaret Barry are from taped interviews conducted by Alan Lomax in London between 1953 and 1958.

She sang love songs to predominantly male audiences in pubs and on team buses to great effect, employing both the male or female first person. But although she eventually did marry, she remained resolute that music was her one true love, and ambivalent about men, romance, and even how she presented herself to the world.

Well I wouldn't [use make-up] and I'll tell you the reason why. You see, everybody's to their own taste, you know. You see, there's women who interest themselves in making their faces up, and looking in the mirror, you know, and it might be nice and all that sort of thing, but I don't take any interest in myself... I take interest in singing and that's the most important part of my life... I like music and singing and singing and music, then I don't interest myself in make-up or anything like that... [although] I like to be right and right, dressed you know; have a nice dress on me and have my hair nice and made up and all that kind of thing -- and I like to have my teeth in too.

In 1951, Irish folklorist Sean O'Boyle discovered her while she was busking in Dublin, and alerted Alan Lomax in time for his Irish field trip of that year. The version of "She Moved Through the Fair" recorded at that time was included on the Columbia World Library Irish volume released in 1955 (reissued in 1998 as part of the Alan Lomax Collection as World Library of Folk & Primitive Music: Ireland. Rounder CD17__). Lomax and his assistant Robin Roberts caught up with Margaret in the town of Dundalk. Roberts recalled recently:

Alan and I were walking along the main street when we heard an extraordinary voice from around the corner, not beautiful, but strong and penetrating. She got through one or two rather banal songs without much response from the audience. Then came "The Bold Fenian Men." Splendid. "That's for the old ones," said one old gaffer, dropping a coin in her hand. She had black hair, thick as a horse's mane, black eyes, a long craggy face and body, and very few teeth. She seemed to sing the high notes while screwing her mouth around a good upper tooth, and the low ones with a similar lower tooth. Later, when she had gotten a full set of teeth and a much thicker torso, her mouth still tended to zig and zag. Alan asked her if she would come to the hotel and record for us, to which she promptly agreed as though this were an everyday occurrence. Her battered banjo was old, and when I asked her where she got the strings she muttered something about a bicycle brake. She said she was known as the Queen of the Tinkers –- Barry is a tinker name -- and that she had personally introduced "Irene Goodnight" into Ireland, having gotten it off Radio Luxembourg. Her talk was fast, funny, and full of malapropisms like "ulsterations" for illustrations. Alan was so taken with her, he later brought her to London to be a sort of housekeeper cum cook, which proved amusing, especially when she made three prized sirloin steaks into an Irish stew for a dinner party.[3][3]

Lomax presented her on BBC television in 1953, along with other traditional singers and musicians, including fiddler Michael Gorman, with whom she formed a lasting partnership. Many of the Lomax recordings of her were made at his London flat at that time. Soon after, she began appearing frequently with Gorman and his circle of musicians in the pubs around Camden Town in North London. She was recorded by Peter Kennedy

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[3] 3 From Robin Roberts introduction to "World Library -- Ireland" (Rounder CD 17__)

during this time, as well as Ewan MacColl. The MacColl sessions were eventually released on the Riverside label as "Songs of an Irish Tinker Lady," with other tracks appearing on the Folkways compilation "Irish Jigs, Reels, and Hornpipes." The English Topic label recorded her and Michael in 1957 for an album recently reissued in expanded form as "Her Mantle So Green," (Topic CD474).

She remained close to Lomax, staying at his London flat when her travels brought her there, and participating in his radio broadcasts, including the "Dublin to Donegal" program in Lomax's "A Ballad-Hunter Looks at Britain" BBC radio series in December 1957. She eventually gained a considerable reputation, touring both England and America. She stayed with Lomax one last time in New York in the 1980's, while on tour, regaling the household once with boiled cabbage and haunting songs. She died in County Down, Northern Ireland, in November, 1989. In 1953, though, she had already composed her own epitaph:

The thing is, I never was really in love. Only with one thing -- that was singing and music... I'm sure you've traveled a lot of the country -- yet you never met anyone like me, that could say I never loved a man -- only the one thing that I'm in love and that's music.

SONG NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all songs feature Margaret Barry, vocal and banjo, and were recorded by Alan Lomax in London, in 1953.

MY LAGAN LOVE (Joseph Campbell)

An art song popularized by John McCormack, who recorded it for Victor in 1910. Margaret's words closely follow those in his version.

Where Lagan stream sings lullaby
There blows a lily fair,
The twilight gleam in her eye
The night is on her hair.
And like a love-sick lemon
She has my heart in thrall.
No life I own, nor liberty
For love is Lord of all.

And often when the beetles' horns
Have lulled the eve to sleep,
I steel into her (unintelligible)
And there, adoring, peep.
Whereon the cricket sings its song,
She stirs the bogwood fire,
And there she sings sad sweet undertones,
The song of her heart's desire.

THE FACTORY GIRL
Recorded by Peter Kennedy, Dundalk, County Louth, Ireland, 1953

A fine ballad on a classic theme set against the backdrop of the industrial revolution, and found in both England and Ireland. Sarah Makem (mother of Tommy Makem) of Keady, County Armagh, Northern Ireland recorded a much longer version for Peter Kennedy in 1952. As Margaret explains below, she felt the song originated closer to her home.

Spoken: The words are generated from Cork, you see. And I used to hear it from next door neighbors. 'Cos, you know, it was popular in them times. Of course that's when I was about sixteen. And the words, the people next door, next door neighbors used to always sing it around all our neighborhood. And that's why I knew the air of it very well. But it's only lately-like I got the words, you see. Well I was around there in Cork, say about maybe 15 years ago, and I got the words, you see, given to me them. But I always knew the air and I always heard it sung from neighbors around the place, you see.

(She hums the air, with banjo accompaniment)

Well it's a factory, it's linen, um, linen mostly. All the women works in the factory -- there's quite a few of them down there. Two, particularly along Gratton Street, and maybe Peter Street. There's also in [unintelligible] as well. That's above Blackpool in Cork. And there's two or three more factories but it's all linen, like. And it's mostly women making all sorts of linen you see. And it does apply to the factory, that's what it means, factory work. It's all linen, like. No other work, only linen.

As I went out walking on a fine summer's morning
The birds on the bushes would whistle and sing
The lads and the lasses in couples were sporting
Going back to the factory their work to begin

He spied one amongst them she was fairer than Annie
Her cheeks like red roses that blooms in the spring
Her hair like the lily that grows in yon valley
She was only a hard-working factory girl

He stepped up beside her more closely to view her
She says: My young man don't steer me so
I have gold in my pocket and silver as well
No more will I answer that factory call

"ME MOTHER IS DYING..." (interview)

The extraordinary comments and recollections below may shed some light on the intensity that Margaret brought to her singing, particularly love songs. Her vivid memories of her mother are mirrored in the florid descriptions of young beauty one encounters in songs like "The Galway Shawl," which follows this interview.

Alan Lomax: Margaret, tell me about when you were born, your brothers and your sisters, your father and mother, start from the beginning, because I never did hear it.

Margaret Barry: You didn't. Well, you're going to hear it now. Well I was born on June 1st, 1917 in the city of Cork, Peter Street. My mother and father was married seventeen years and there was five in the family of us. Well, me mother was seventeen years married to my father. I remember her up to 12 years old. Any farther than that, I just saw her dying you know.

AL: What was she like?

MB: She died, She was dying, you know.

AL: What was she like?

MB: Oh, a very lovely woman. Beautiful. You know, I don't think there's such a lovelier women that ever can be got in Cork. Lovely black hair, you know. It isn't the way she used to wear it, was different from the modern type now, she used to wear it in a plait right around her head like that, in a plait and she used to get it up in a big bun at the back, what they call a bun, that you roll your hair up three or four times up in a hump at the back and stick a hairpin in it. She was five feet eleven. That's an extraordinary height for a woman. Five feet eleven, and she was 16 1/2 stone in weight [about 230 pounds]. That's not my own side of the story. That's my father, he was always telling me, like. Because, I'll tell you, when she got sick you know, and she had double pneumonia several times. I wanted to tell you the truth, to be truthful. My mother died in bad health, you know. She really did die in bad health. She got double pneumonia three times and she went away to hospital. I couldn't tell you the disease that she had for they never told me. Well then, when she dies, she called me to bed where she was dying, and all the friends was right around. And you see, I hadn't a bit of sense. She called me over and she said, "Margaret, my Margaret." And from that I walked away. But I was going down the stairs and I said, "Me mother is dying. Me mother is dying." I was taking more fun out of it than serious. No understanding of it. I was running down the stairs: "Me mother is dying, me mother is dying." 'Course, I said "Me mammy," like, "Me mammy." "Me mammy is dying, me mammy is dying." She said, "Who said that?" She called me over and then she put her hand like that, she says, "Margaret, my Margaret." When they were putting her in the coffin, in the coffin, you know, one of the old women lifted me up and made me kiss her. Do you see, the thing is I hadn't no sense, see. Like I had no sense, and I didn't mind very much. I kissed her as was dying. That's all I remember. Is she coming back to my heart? I cried every day. I cried for days and days. When she was drew up, that finished me. I always had her there, in my heart. When she was drew up, if anyone might bring up her name, that would finish me.

THE GALWAY SHAWL (ORANMORE)

A classic ballad scenario much favored by the broadside writers and art song popularizers: the chance encounter in springtime with a poor but immeasurably beautiful "colleen" (from the Irish word "cailin," which simply means "girl"), who sings with the

voice of Ireland's national bird. The description of her unadorned beauty makes her sound like Margaret herself. Irish pop singer Dermot O'Brien enjoyed success with his own version in the 1970's. The town of Oranmore lies on Galway Bay, about 10 miles due east of Galway City.

Oranmore in the County Galway
One summer's morning in the month of May,
He espied a colleen, she was tall and handsome,
And she nearly stole his poor heart away.

She wore no jewels, no costly diamonds,
No paint of powder, no none at all,
She wore a bonnet with red roses on it,
And o'er her shoulders hung the Galway shawl.

He played "The Blackbird," "The Stack of Barley,"
And "Rodney's Glory" and "The Foggy Dew,"
She sang each note like an Irish linnet,
Till down her cheeks came the tears like dew.

She set out early the next morning,
To hit the road for Donegal,
She kissed and hugged him, and then she left him,
And she's stole his heart in her Galway shawl.

BREAKDOWN (banjo instrumental)

A showcase for Margaret's percussive banjo playing which she learned from her mother.

KEENING, DIDDLING AND LULLABIES (interview)

Here Margaret discusses several types of singing. The first is 'keening,' a common practice throughout Europe of funeral laments, but now extinct in Ireland. 'Diddling' or 'mouth music' is the practice of scat-singing fiddle tunes. As she notes, the wordless lullaby she sings is very similar to a keen.

AL: Did you ever hear anybody keening?

MB: Well, what we call keening is a lament. It means, like, all the time lamenting for somebody, sorrowful. It means very sorrowful.

AL: Did you ever hear anybody do this?

MB: Well I did. They sounded {she sings] that sort of way [sings some more]. I heard that once and I asked, in fact, when it got around when I was in the house, and all these people were at this lament and they described it to. That was at Wexford, way up, from Munster. And it is that kind of a country for that -- and for diddling, you know, like

diddling, or "doodling" as they call it up there, you know [she sings]. All that you see. Then there's parts of Wexford in Enniscorthy and around them places round and all round and getting like to Wicklow, then getting into one country from another. That's what they call the lamentations, they call it. Actually I did ask and that's what I did hear.

AL: Did you ever hear anybody singing a lullaby to a baby?

MB: I did.

AL: Did you ever sing a lullaby to your child -- not a song?

MB: No song... yes I did. That would be like a lament, too. Not just singing any words, but [she sings]. Many a time I sung that to my own youngster. But I didn't make any songs out of it.

SHE MOVED THROUGH THE FAIR (OUR WEDDING DAY) (Herbert Hughes)

Although John McCormack, Sidney MacEwan and other popular tenors of the early 20th century made this song famous, it has become inextricably associated with Margaret Barry, who made it her signature song. The lyrics and the air are exceptionally beautiful, but the song's story of a departed lover beckoning from beyond the grave seem to crystallize her feelings about music and the dead. Irish folklorist Herbert Hughes set these three verses to a fiddle tune he collected in Donegal, and published it in his "Irish Country Songs." Margaret knew a fourth which she sings in the version recorded by Peter Kennedy, below.

My young love said to me
  My mother won't mind
And my father won't slight your
  for your lack of kind
As she stepped away from me
  and this she did say
It will not be long love till our wedding day

As she stepped away from me
  and she moves through the fair
And fondly I watched her move here
  and move there
And then she turned homeward
  with one star awake
Like the swan in the evening moves over the lake

Last night she came to me
  my dead love came in
So softly she came the her fee made no din
As she laid her hand on me and this she did say.
It will not be long love till our wedding day.

"I SANG THROUGH THE FAIRS..." (interview)

MB: I sang through the fairs and the markets, and had very enjoyable times, more times [than] I hadn't. There was times when it was wet and rainy, knocked around a little bit, but I enjoyed every minute of it as well as the getting knocked around. Because me heart was delighted when I went through the fairs and kept singing all the time. And then it's not alone I used to do that. As soon as I finished up at a fair or market I'd actually go to some house. I'd always get hired, they knew me that well around Castleblayney, in Monaghan, across and in Armagh and all these places and they used to always come along for me and say "Would you like to go up to the house some night and play a few tunes and sing a few songs?" And there I was. I used to go to the houses at eight in the evening, and from eight till maybe seven in the morning, I'd be playing all the time and singing and I'd get a rest about twelve o'clock. Just a little rest in-between and I'd get and a little bit of supper and I'd start off playing half-sets and if there was room in the place around, take away the furniture and tables and the whole lot and just start off playing and dancing till seven o'clock in the morning.

AL: They'd be doing step-dancing?

MB: Oh yes, then while I'd be, say getting a little refreshment at about midnight, twelve, well, they'd all have a recitation. Some of them would be able to sing and more of them couldn't sing, they'd have to say something, because that's the sort of a place it is around there. Everybody has to do a turn while I was getting this little bit of a feast at twelve or whatever time it would be. And I'd have to start off playing again for them then, as usual, keep on playing.

AL: This would be at a wedding or a wake?

MB: No, no. It's not a wake, no. It's actually what you call a sociable. In houses, they carry on that, They bring you there and you play, like, for them and get you a collection, you see, amongst the people, Because they love that sort of life, the dance you see. It's what they a "house-ceilidh." A "house-ceilidh." What they call it in the country around there is a "house-ceilidh" and of course, it's only natural enough, it's never without drink.

THE BLARNEY STONE
recorded by Peter Kennedy, Dundalk, County Louth, 1952.

The Blarney Stone of legend is located in County Cork. It is named for ____ Blarney, an Irish politician renowned for his sly way with words. "All of this is Blarney" Queen Victoria is said to have remarked over one of his letters "He never says what he means." "Blarney" thus came to mean nonsense or double-talk, and one might gain this gift-of-gab by kissing the stone that resides at Blarney Castle in Cork.

The two characters in this song both demonstrate an ample gift for "blarney" as they flirt with each other. Songs like this that feature many Irish place names are a staple of the street and pub singer's repertoire, who can always count on a positive response around the room as natives cheer a mention of their home. One such song, "Ireland's 32" does little else besides name every county in Ireland. Margaret sang this song on Lomax's "Dublin to Donegal" broadcast in 1957, although that version does not seem to have survived. On that program Lomax introduced the song (recorded live at the Bedford Arms, Camden Town, London) in this way:

AL: And finally, Margaret herself, whacking away at her banjo, a sidewise grin of pure delight on her face... And then she rises and sings a song for the burly men who pack the pub -- a song for these Irishmen who have come from every country in Erin to help keep the great city of London ticking smoothly.

'Twas on the rode to Bandon,
One morning in July
Sure I met a lovely colleen
And she smiled as she passed by

She says I am a stranger
And I am lonely all alone
Would you kindly tell me where
I'd find that little Blarney Stone?

There's a Blarney Stone in Kerry,
There's a Blarney Stone in Clare,
There's a Blarney Stone in Wicklow
And there's plenty in Kildare
There's a Blarney Stone in Sligo
And another in Mayo
Sure the devil a town in Ireland
But you'll find a Blarney Stone

Sure I know he comes from Galway
I can tell it from his brogue
Sure there never was a Galway man
That was a normal rogue

And since you are a stranger
Where the river Shannon flows
And the only Blarney Stone I know
Is underneath me nose!

Sure her Irish smile was broadened
And she winked a roguish eye,
O she set me heart a-thumping
Till I thought I'd surely die
So he rolled me in his arms and
I never bade him o'er
Sure he kissed the blooming roses and
Abandoned Blarney Stone

There's a Blarney Stone in Kerry,
There's a Blarney Stone in Clare,
There's a Blarney Stone in Wicklow
And there's plenty in Kildare
There's a Blarney Stone in Sligo
And another in Tyrone
Sure the devil a town in Ireland
That you'll find a Blarney Stone

LET MR. MAGUIRE SIT DOWN
Recorded by Peter Kennedy

A comic song that Margaret may have learned from James Mullan's 1932 recording (which can be heard on Rounder CD 1087, From Galway to Dublin: Early Recordings of Irish Traditional Music). The chorus shows a few changes, but otherwise the words are almost identical.

Oh, me name is Phil Maguire and I'll quickly tell to you
Of a pretty girl I admire named Katie Donohoe
She's fair and fat and forty, and believe me when I will say
Every time that I go courtin' her you can hear her mother say:

Chorus:

Johnny, get up from the fire,
  get up and give the man a seat
Don't you see it's Mr. Maguire
  and he's courtin' your sister Kate?
Well, you know very well he owns a farm
  a little way out of town
Will you get up and you devil be taking the air
  let Mr. Maguire sit down."

Well the first time that I met her, 'twas
  the pattern[4*] of Tralee
And I asked her very kindly if she'd
  dance a step with me

She wanted to know if I'd see her home
  and with her have some tea
Well, I no sooner got inside the door
When heard her mother say:

Chorus:

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Harry Duffy, a singer from Derry, sang a verse which told of the unhappy result of this courtship:

Now that we are married,
 things are not so fine
All because I spent the legacy
  that me father he left behiid
She hasn't got the decency
  to bid me time of day
When ever I go into the door,
  sure I can hear her sayin':

Johnny come up to the fire, come up
you're sitting in the draft
It's only old Maguire and och,
  you know he drives me daft!
You know very well he has nothing
  for he's always on the tear
so just sit where you are
 no never you dare
To give old Maguire the chair!

MOSES RITOORA-LI-AY
Recorded by Peter Kennedy

Margaret often saved this song for those moments when a local policemen (or "peeler") came down the street to try and move her along. The unlikely Jewish hero is causing no harm to anybody, and won Margaret's approval by causing the downfall of the ambitious "bobby."

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[4] * A "pattern" (from the Irish "patrun") is a festival connected with a patron saint's day.

O the bobby have gone like a hen on a cleave
A vision came on with a bee on his sleeve
"Promotion," he whispered. "I'll try for today,
So come with me Moses Ritoora-li-ay"

O the bobby marched on he was lord of the town
He suddenly stopped with a snort and a frown
"Promotion," he whispered. "I'll try for today,
So come with Moses Ritoora-li-ay"

"Come tell my your name," says the limb of the law
To the little fat man sittin' there on the straw
"What's that sir? My name sir?
It's there on the dray
And it's Moses Ritooral-li-oora-li-ay"

O the trial came on and it lasted a week
One judge says 'twas German
another 'twas Greek
Though be Ireland says Chedra be on the Crimay
And they'll seize on this Moses Ritooral-li-ay

O he turned on the prisoner as stiff as a crutch
"Are you Irish or English or German or Dutch?"
"I'm a Jew, sir, I'm a Jew, sir,
that came over to stay
And my name it is Moses Ritoora-li-ay"

There's a sorrowful scavenger sweeps on the street
He once was a peeler and the pride of his beat
He moans all the night & he groans all the day
Singing: "Moses Ritooral-li-ay!"

THE BARD OF ARMAGH (Herbert Hughes)

Herbert Hughes set these lyrics to one of the airs he collected in Ireland in the early 20th century. The words are a sentimental tribute to the bards that once served in the courts of Irish nobility. These men were left to wander the countryside with their music after the destruction of the Irish aristocracy in the 17th century. Among other changes in Hughes texts, Margaret omits a verse in which the harper identifies himself as a native of the countryside. Padraic Colum felt that even a dispossessed bard would still identify himself and his art with the aristocracy rather than the rural peasantry. Margaret had her own interpretation of the ballad, and told Lomax that the Bard of Armagh was in fact a disguised Catholic Bishop, forced to masquerade as a harper by the British Penal Laws, which banned Roman high clergy from the entire country.

O here's to the list of a poor Irish harper,

Scorn not the strains of his old withered hands,
But remember his fingers could once move so sharply,
To raise the very strains of his dear native land.

At a pattern or fair he could twist his shillelagh,
Or trip through the jig with his brogues bound with straw,
And all the pretty colleens around him assembled,
Loved the bold Philip Brady, the Bard of Armagh.

And when Sergeant Death his cold hands will embrace me,
To lull me to sleep with sweet Erin Go Bragh,
By the side of his Cathleen, his young wife who pleased him,
They forget Philip Brady, the Bard of Armagh.

HER MANTLE SO GREEN

This is a variation on the "broken token" theme familiar in English balladry. This could actually be called an "UN-broken token" ballad, because in this song, the ring is not broken, but is presented as a memento of the young woman's lost love. The text is very similar to another Napoleonic ballad, "The Plains of Waterloo," except that there the young man reveals himself to be the young woman's long lost love, alive and well, presenting his half of the ring as proof, the more typical conclusion of a "broken token" story.

As I walked out one evening in June,
To view the fine parks and the meadows in bloom,
I spied a young damsel, she appeared like a queen,
In her costly fine robes and her mantle so green.
I stood in amaze, I was caught by surprise,
I thought her an angel that fell from the skies,
Her eyes like the diamond, her cheeks like the rose,
She's one of the fairest that nature composed.

Says I "Pretty fair maid would you come with me?
We'll join in wedlock and married we'll be.
I'll dress you in rich attire, the fair like a queen,
In her costly fine robes and her mantle so green."
She said "My young man, you must be excused,
For I'll wed no man and you must be refused.
The green fields I'll wander, the sun all in bloom,
For the lad I love best lies in famed Waterloo.

Since you will not marry, tell me your lover's name,
I have been in battle, I might know the same."
"Draw near to my garment and there you will see
His letter embroidered in my mantle so green."
In the ribbon of her mantle 'tis there I behold

his name and his surname in letters of gold,
Young William O'Reilly appeared in my view -
He was my chief comrade in famed Waterloo.
And as he was a-dying, I heard his last cry,
"For you lovely Nancy, I'm willing to die.
And that is the truth, and the truth I declare,
Here is a token, a gold ring I wear."

GOING TO MASS LAST SUNDAY

This was recorded at a song-swap that Lomax hosted in his London flat. The other participants were Jeannie Robertson of Scotland, Isla Cameron of England and Jean Ritchie, the great Appalachian folk singer from Viper, Kentucky. Margaret sang this fragment of a longer ballad, which Jean Ritchie immediately recognized as an ancestor of "Lovin' Hannah."

And I going to mass last Sunday
When me true-lover passed me by
And I knew her mind was altered
By the rolling of her eye
Fare-thee-well, my love, fare-thee-well, my dear
Fare-thee-well Ballyhelly's banks,
And I going to mass last Sunday, when me true lover passed me by.

AL: What did you say that was, Jean?

Jean Ritchie: That's like "Lovin' Hannah," the words of it.

AL: The tune's not the same?

JR: No.

AL: Start it off.

JR; Instead of "mass" we say "church" because, I guess, we're Protestant.

LOVIN' HANNAH (sung by Jean Ritchie)

I roved to church last Sunday
My true love passed me by,
I knew her mind was changing
From the rolling of her eye.
From the rolling of her eye
From the rolling of her eye
I knew her mind was a-changing
From the rolling of her eye

GRA MACHREE

Patriotic songs are a staple of the Irish pub singers repertoire to this day, but Margaret may have favored this one because it's dream motif and the lament for lost heroes were similar to her songs of lost but undying love. "Gra Machree" (or "Gra Mo Chroi") translates roughly from the Irish as "my heart's beloved" or "my darling." The names of many Irish patriots are invoked, as is the memory of the brave but disastrous Irish uprising of 1798, when Protestants (like Wolfe Tone, mentioned below) joined forces with Catholics to fight the Crown. The text is very similar to other patriotic songs, like "The Young Man's Dream" and "McKenna's Dream."

Last night I had a happy dream, though restless where I be,
I though again brave Irishman would set old Ireland free.
And all excited I became when I heard the cannons roar,
O Gra Machree, I long to see old Ireland free once more.

In truth we have brave Irishmen, as everyone must own,
The hero O'Connel true, Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone,
And also Robert Emmett, until death he'd never give o'er,
O Gra Machree, I'd long to see old Ireland free once more.

Now we can't forget the former years that lives in memory still
Or the boys of '98 who fought on Vinegar Hill,
With Father Murphy by their side, and his green flag waving o'er,
O Gra Machree, I long to see old Ireland free once more.

Allen, Larkin and O'Brien dead, their country to set free,
And some day a brave Irishmen will make them set it free.
Both day and night they'll always fight until death he'll never give o'er,
O Gra Machree, I long to see old Ireland free once more.

THE FLOWER OF SWEET STRABANE
Recorded by Peter Kennedy

The town of Strabane is in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland; near the border of County Donegal in the Irish Republic. This song has been circulating among Irish singers since the 1840's, and was first published in a Derry newspaper in 1909.

Margaret loved to sing unaccompanied in the traditional Irish style, but sadly, few recordings were ever made of her singing without her banjo.

If I was king of Erin's Isle
Had all things at my will
I would roam through every inch
And seek for comfort still
The comfort I would seek
As you may understand

Would be to gain you lovely Martha,
The flower of sweet Strabane

Her cheeks they are a rosy red
Her eyes a lovely brown
And oe'r her lily white shoulders
Her golden hair it hangs down
She is one of the fairest creatures
And fairest of her clan
She is my pride, my lovely Martha
The flower of Sweet Strabane

If I had you lovely Martha,
Way down in Innishowen
Or in some lonesome valley
Or the wild woods of Tyrone
I would end my whole endeavor
And I'd try to work a plan
For to gain you lovely myrtle
The flower of sweet Strabane

"WHEN YOU"RE FOND OF MUSIC..." (interview)

Here Margaret describes how her feelings for music and lost loved ones are inseparable.

AL: How does music make you feel? Close your eyes and think.

MB: Well, I'll just tell you. When you're fond of music, and you come from a musical family, and you look back on your own family like, that's me mother's side. All her uncles, herself. Every time, I always, I cry you know, dreadful. Keep crying and crying away, you know. Many a time I'd think of her. And do you know when her name was drew up not so very long ago. A party come around to me and started taking her name down and my father's name down, in the book you know -- Mary Thompson, Timothy Cleary. Then that started me off. I cried and I cried and kept crying. I never stopped, you know, all the time crying. Even my husband asked me one night, "What on earth are you crying for? You can't bring them back now." "Look, man," I said, "You can't, You don't understand. You're not musical." I says, "You might be fond of music, you know, but you're not musical."

SHE MOVED THROUGH THE FAIR (OUR WEDDING DAY) Recorded by Peter Kennedy

A longer, four verse version of Margaret's signature song. The additional verse here is the third.

My young love said to me
  My mother won't mind

And my father won't slight your
  for your lack of kind
As she stepped away from me
  and this she did say
It will not be long love till our wedding day

As she stepped away from me
  and she moves through the fair
And fondly I watched her move here
  and move there
And then she turned homeward
  with one star awake
Like the swan in the evening moves over the lake

O the people they're saying
  that no two were wedded
But one of the sorrows that never was said
And she smiled as she passed
  with her goods and her gear
And that was the last that I saw of my dear

Last night she came to me
  my dead love came in
So softly she came the her fee made no din
As she laid her hand on me and this she did say.
It will not be long love till our wedding day.

"AND THERE'S MUSIC COMING INTO MY HEAD..." (interview)

Margaret's jig "The Strayaway Child" is now well known among Irish musicians. Here she describes how it came to her in a dream. In it's final form, it was too complex to tackle on the banjo, and it was left to her collaborator Michael Gorman to popularize it.

MB: Now and again, I do dream, of music all the time. And there's music coming into my head, when I'm dreaming, that I've never heard in reality. It's just one of those things that even -- I composed a jig of me own. It was true, a bit of dreaming that I got the parts of that dream. I only remembered a couple of parts of that. Only a couple of parts of it like, and actually I built from that. Michael Gorman, he was the man that actually put the parts together for me. You see, I put the parts meself, but actually, he put them as sort of one to another, you see. Gave them the time of the jig, so he kept on playing it. Until he played it over and over and over till he got it. There was only four parts in it then, then the fifth came along and the sixth. And naturally I was going to put the seventh part into it, but there it was I haven't that sort of energy now of putting a seventh part into it although that I'd have something, a little part in mind to put to it. It is a six part jig and it's a wonderful jig. I haven't played it. Michael Gorman has played it at Cecil Sharp House

AL: You can't.

MB: No I can't play it, but I have it me mind all the time

AL: Sing it, sing the tune that you heard in your dream. Do you remember that part? Can you just diddle the little part that you got in the dream?

MB: Yes. (she sings)

HER MANTLE SO GREEN
Recorded by Alan Lomax, London, UK; 1957. (dubbed from disc)

A live recording made for Lomax's December 13, 1957 broadcast "A Ballad Hunter Looks at Britain: Dublin to Donegal." This was the seventh of an eight part series Lomax made for the BBC surveying folk music in the British Isles. The recording was made at the Bedford Arms in Camden Town, London. She is joined by her regular partner there, Michael Gorman, on fiddle.

(Lyrics same as above)

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Every effort has been made to make these historic recordings sound as good as when Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy made them in the field. All transfers were made, wherever possible, from the original source materials, using the Prism 20 Bit A to D converters and the Prism 20 Bit Noise Shaping System.

MARGARET BARRY

The keening voice and rattling banjo of Irish streetsinger Margaret Barry were mainstays of the traditional music scene in England and Ireland from the1950s until her death. In intimate performances and interviews (as well as in a pub and a song swap with the great Jean Ritchie) the great singer of Ireland's nomadic traveling people reveals the depth of her art and passion, which sprang from a deep well of memory and vivid world of dreams.

THE PORTRAIT SERIES

Throughout his career Alan Lomax worked extensively with some of the greatest artists in folk music, many of which he was the first to record. The Portrait Series focuses in depth on those brilliant artists and heroes of traditional music.

THE ALAN LOMAX COLLECTION

The Alan Lomax Collection gathers together the American, European Caribbean field recordings, world music compilations, and ballad operas of writer, folklorist and ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax.

Remastered to 20 bit digital from the original field recordings.