



Christmas in Ireland

with Noel McLoughlin & Ger O'Donnell



Popular Songs at Christmas Time in Ireland & the World Over

NOEL MCLOUGHLIN was born in Limerick, Ireland, and he began to play guitar at the age of fifteen. His singing was influenced by *The Johnstons* (Irish group, popular in the late 60s, specialising in 3 and 4 part harmonies). Instrumentally, groups such as *Planxty*, *Sweeney's Men*, *De Dannan* and also, of course, *The Dubliners* and *The Furey Brothers* influenced his style. He spent his early years in Ireland playing traditional folk music with various groups in countless sessions, festivals, concerts, etc. In the seventies he joined several Irish folk bands, among others *Cromlach* (later *Celtic Tradition*) with whom he recorded his first album in 1984. In groups he plays guitar, banjo, mandolin, bouzouki, tin whistle, bodhran as well as singing. After 1984 he concentrated on performing mainly as a soloist, playing guitar and singing Irish and Scottish folk songs, touring throughout Europe and the USA.



NOEL MCLOUGHLIN

Since 1989 he has recorded numerous albums of the most popular Irish and Scottish songs and ballads. After many tours and having appeared on television and radio in Ireland, England, Germany, Austria and USA as a soloist, he now prefers to tour with a small group, although occasionally he still does solo performances.

The incredible success of his recordings is due to Noel's impressive but soft voice – especially appreciated by the audiences in his live concerts. Noel McLoughlin has therefore come to be one of the most acclaimed singers of Irish and Scottish folk.

GER O'DONNELL, multi-instrumentalist, singer, teacher, composer, arranger and experimenter of acoustic music, was born in Limerick in the southwest of Ireland. His musical journey since the 1980s has led him to develop a unique instrumental style. This, coupled with his dynamic voice, has led him to carve an interesting path through the genres with which he engages.

His earliest musical experience was in the theatre at a very young age as a singer, and he featured in many productions. At age nine he then moved on to play the fife in one of Ireland's longest established fife and drum bands, following in his grandfather's footsteps. This led him to the classical flute where he studied extensively and performed in many ensembles and orchestras.



GER O'DONNELL

His love for strings started to blossom later, starting initially with the guitar and developing to an appreciation and proficiency on mandolin, bouzouki, mandola, mandocello, piano, banjo, double bass as well as more unusual instruments such as the hurdy-gurdy, Chinese ruan, guitarrón and waldzither, some of which feature on this album.

Ger went on to study music to Degree and Grad. Dip. level in Ireland, where his skillfulness with 'classical' theory has heavily influenced his later work. He has also been in a critically acclaimed touring rock band, a popular covers band as well as many groups in many other genres: Afro-Caribbean, Irish ballad, Irish rock, traditional Irish, bluegrass and country to name a few.

He has gone on to compose and arrange for TV, film, theatre, web and liturgical events, whilst developing as a session studio musician over the past few years. He has appeared on many albums over the last six or seven years, and most prolifically as an in-demand double bass player for the last three years or so.

This album is an exciting one for Ger as he has thoroughly enjoyed teaming up with Noel McLoughlin: 'we have two similar outlooks on an end result, with two different ways to get there'. Both musicians enjoy similar genres, but have contrasting styles, approaches and voices which have made it an enjoyable journey and now a delightful listening experience. It has been such a positive undertaking, work has already begun on the next album!

1. **THE HOLLY AND THE IVY**

Holly and Ivy have long been a church decoration at Christmas time, which seems to have come from the Roman belief that holly was the plant of Saturn and the pagan druid belief that it is linked to the winter solstice.

Noel McLoughlin – main vocals, backing vocals, guitar, mandolins

Ger O'Donnell – cello, backing vocals, double bass, percussion

2. **CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES**

This is an anti-war song depicting the famous truce in World War I in which a game of football took place on Christmas Day between opposing sides before returning to battle. The character of the song is fictional but the song was based on actual events.

Noel McLoughlin – main vocals, backing vocals, guitar, tin whistle

Ger O'Donnell – piano, double bass, tin whistle, harmonica, percussion, cello, piccolo

Niamh Phelan – fiddle

3. **I SAW THREE SHIPS**

Various conflicting theories exist as to the meaning of this song. Some say that it is a reference to relics of the Biblical Magi being taken to Cologne Cathedral in the 12th century. Others would say it is a reference to the wise men or the three virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

Noel McLoughlin – vocals, guitar, tin whistle

Ger O'Donnell – vocals, bouzouki, double bass, whistles, keyboard, xylophone, percussion

4. **O' LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**

This is a traditional carol from the 1860s, and it depicts beautifully the 2000 years old scene of The Nativity.

Noel McLoughlin – backing vocals, guitar

Ger O'Donnell – main vocals, guitar, bass, piano, cello

5. **OH CHRISTMAS TREE**

This is an English translation of the traditional German carol (Oh Tannenbaum). It has immortalised the practice of decorating a tree indoors to celebrate Christmas which started in the 18th Century.

Noel McLoughlin – vocals, guitar, mandolins, bouzoukis

Ger O'Donnell – acoustic bass, cello, percussion

Niamh Phelan – fiddle

6. **IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER**

This song began as poet Christina Rossetti's reply to an article in the magazine 'Scribner's Monthly' in 1872, and eventually became a Christmas carol in a setting by Gustav Holst. It describes Christ being quite contented at his humble stable surroundings despite being the Son of God.

Noel McLoughlin – main vocals, guitars, mandolin

Ger O'Donnell – backing vocals, double bass, piano, low whistle, percussion

7. **THE MAID WHO SOLD HER BARLEY**

This song was first published in 1699, and is a traditional winter song, and the barley seems to represent her hand in marriage. The lady in question seems to be in search of a husband on this wintry morning, and the man she initially meets appears to have less than honourable intentions.

Noel McLoughlin – vocals, guitar, mandolin, bouzouki, tin whistle

Ger O'Donnell – double bass, bodhran, bones

8. **THE SNOWS THEY MELT THE SOONEST**

This song describes the transition from autumn to winter, with a subtext possibly of strife in a relationship mirrored in the seasons.

Ger O'Donnell – vocals, guitar, dobro, bass, piano, keyboard

9. **THE COVENTRY CAROL**

The Coventry Carol depicts the Massacre of the Innocents from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Herod ordered the killing of all boys under two in the time of Jesus. This dates from the 16th Century.

Noel McLoughlin – vocals, guitar, bouzouki, percussion

Ger O'Donnell – keyboards

10. **GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN**

This is a traditional English carol conveying the wonder of the Christmas season, anticipating the birth of Jesus. Interestingly, the punctuation is often overlooked or mistaken. 'God rest ye Merry' is the greeting to the Gentlemen, as opposed to the gentlemen being merry. It was mentioned in Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'.

Noel McLoughlin – main vocal, guitar

Ger O'Donnell – backing vocal, guitar, bass, hurdy-gurdy, bodhran, percussion

Niamh Phelan – fiddle

11. **THE SOULCAKE**

A soulcake is a small round cake traditionally made for All Souls Day or Christmas. There was a practice of going door to door, and the household would provide a soulcake (or any good thing to make us merry). This is considered to be the origin of modern 'trick-or-treating'.

Noel McLoughlin – main vocals, backing vocals, guitar

Ger O'Donnell – recorder, hurdy-gurdy, double bass, backing vocals, percussion

12. **THE WEXFORD CAROL**

This is one of the oldest Christmas carols in the European tradition, and is thought to originate from the Enniscorthy part of Wexford in Ireland in the 12th Century. There was a tradition that only men should sing this song during the 12 days of Christmas. It describes The Nativity.

Noel McLoughlin – backing vocals, guitar

Ger O'Donnell – main vocals, backing vocal, baritone, guitar, double bass, piano

13. **AULD LANG SYNE**

Auld Lang Syne (of times gone by) is a song collected by the poet Robert Burns. It is a song recalling old friendships and has been traditionally sung at New Year's Eve celebrations at midnight around the world.

Noel McLoughlin – main vocals, backing vocals

Ger O'Donnell – whistles, hurdy-gurdy, double bass, 5-string banjo, percussion

*Licensed from **Noel McLoughlin** and **Ger O'Donnell**
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