3.08 Publicity: The O'Mealy Flyer & Memo Ronan Browne

In many areas, the modern world tends to look back in time with a feeling of superiority but not always! We have here a lesson in humility for any young buck who thinks themselves ahead of a lad from a quiet townland in County Westmeath around 1900. Here are two examples of Richard Lewis O'Mealy's publicity material which show him to be in total control of his public image. We can also see that he has come to expect positive reaction from reviewers.

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The first is a 1905 flyer for a concert in the Lecture Hall of the Presbyterian Church, Strabane, incorporating press quotes and a full length sketch of Richard with his pipes; the second is the "O'Mealy Memo" which has a photograph of Richard at the top left of the front page with the rest of the page blank for writing. It includes 2 pages of press quotes with dates ranging from March 1901 to February 1904.

Between them, we are shown a confident young entertainer who appears to be playing quite a number of engagements to appreciative audiences; these performances mixed music with lecturing about the instrument and music in general and this must have made for a very interesting evening's entertainment.

R. L. O'MEALY



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Press Notices.

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CONCERT ON NEW YEAR'S ANONT. Popularly knows in the City by his past

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instrument one hundred years ago!

R. L. O'Mealy is no wallflower waiting quietly to be noticed - he is using technology to his advantage; by advertising more than just his concert, he is also showing people that he has critical acclaim and ensuring that his self-created "celtic-revival" image is recognisable to all. Everything is well thought out, and in common with other aspects of his life, it is forthright and self-assured - any professional entertainer of today working on their publicity would be more than satisfied with these examples of product advertising. Indeed, while discovery of such material might be expected in an investigation of a modern performer, it is highly unusual in somebody playing an obscure minority musical

R. L. often played to audiences unaccustomed to Irish music. Having had experience of same, I find these audiences to be open-minded and more receptive than typical Irish music audiences who tend to have pre-conceived ideas about who you are and what you do. While O'Mealy's general audience were celebrating him, we get a glimpse of how he was perceived by his peers in Éamonn Ceannt's piece for *An Piobaire* III (1901-2) where he says that O'Mealy "...spoiled his performance by the ridiculous costume he wore". Ceannt says nothing whatsoever about O'Mealy's playing but goes to great length to describe his clothes and even the colours of those clothes!¹

Both the memo and the flyer date from roughly the same time, around 1904-05. Richard was 30 years old at this time and quite obviously at the height of his career as a performer. He may have published more publicity material in later years but if he did, none of it has surfaced. His career would have continued on until the beginning of the great war during which it must have declined.

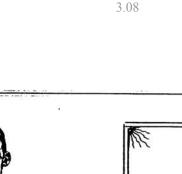
After the war, his wife Nelly was very ill and died in 1920. We are told by his family and friends that he didn't perform publicly for a number of years after her death. While we know he broadcast quite regularly, other than reports of him playing at the Tristernagh *Feis*, we have no accounts of concerts in later years. In fact, he mentions in his letters to the Delaps² that concerts are hard come by and if it were not for the odd "engagement" from the BBC, he would "not be able to stay here at all". I presume he meant that he wouldn't be able to afford to live in his present house and would have to move back down the housing ladder. All of this paints a very different picture to the highly successful and hopeful career depicted below.

[Note: The memo press quotes are included as verbatim text below the scans. The flyer and memo can also be downloaded from the associated files section with this article.]

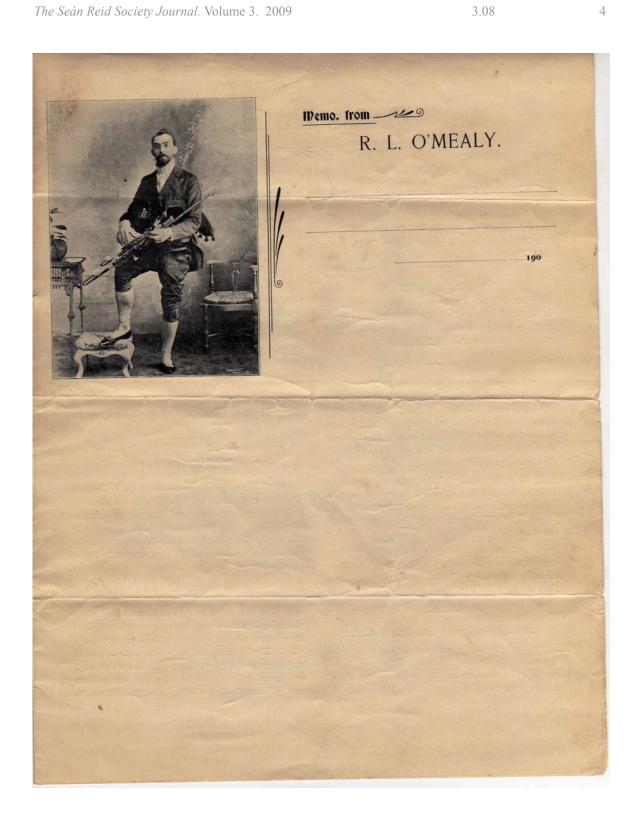
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¹ Interestingly, Éamonn Ceannt attended the 1908 Jubilee Celebrations in Rome, in honour of Pope Pius X. As the Irish athletes marched into the arena, they were piped in by Ceannt dressed in an 11th century Irish costume with kilts. This was only six years after he had ridiculed O'Mealy for the very same thing!

² See 3.13.1 "A method for Miles" for more on these letters.







Press Notices.

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" Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the famous Irish Piper. _____ the expression perfect. _____

. . . His playing was warmly applauded, and he had to bow to an *aris* that would brook no denial . . at last retired amidst a great outburst of applause. . . . Mr. O'Mealy achieved a distinct success."—*The Belfast Irish News*.

PAN CELTIC CONGRESS.

" Mr. O'Mealy contributed some exquisite melodies on the Irish Pipes. The native instrument, under his masterly manipulation, seemed to bubble over with rollicking tunefulness."—*The Irish Times*, *Dublin*.

"This gentleman's playing of the Irish bagpipes is one of those unique artistic achievements along traditional lines that musicians of culture will thoroughly appreciate. Mr. O'Mealy's pipes stand in the same relationship to the ordinary instrument of the itinerant piper that a Rudal-Carte clarionet of to-day does with the clarionet of Handel's time.

I think that future Irish composers will find an unfailing source of inspiration, and more hints towards a legitimate technique, with due appreciation of idiom and nuance, spirit and tempo, in Mr. O'Mealy's playing than elsewhere.

. . . There is the right ring about this playing; it goes straight to the heart; the whole art of the thing is healthy and sound."—*Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 20th November, 1902.

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BRITISH ASSOCIATION IN BELFAST. Lord Shaftesbury's Garden Party.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the well-known Irish Piper, was also present, clad in his picturesque costume, and the visitors from England and Scotland were especially interested in this clever musician, and in the instrument which he knows how to use with such effect."—*The Belfast News-Letter*, 13th Sept., 1902.

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"Mr. O'Mealy was a delightful change. He has great powers of execution, and is very expressive. In the old Irish airs he played with all the feeling that could be imparted to them, and in the old planxties, reels, and jigs, he rattled them off in a pleasing style. Mr. O'Mealy is a refined performer . . . no doubt that at the Cork Exhibition the Irish Pipes will be recognised as the sweetest of all instruments."—Belfast Evening Telegraph, 11th April, 1902.

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. . . The music was soft and sweet . . . perfect harmony produced by a master hand, with such subtlety, such grace and power of inflection, that the audience were spellbound."—*Coleraine Constitution*, 9th March, 1901.

PRESS NOTICES.-Continued.

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