

3.22 The Long Note: R. L. O'Mealy

Ronan Browne

We are extremely fortunate to have in our possession a copy of this documentary made in the mid 1980s, for the RTÉ series, *The Long Note*.¹ The presenter was Robbie Hannan and the producer, Harry Bradshaw. The transmission date was the 18th of November 1985.

Throughout 1985, Robbie and Harry travelled around Westmeath and Belfast recording interviews with surviving people who knew R. L. All of the people in the programme are now dead with the exception of Wilbert Garvin who, although he didn't know R. L. personally, has had a life-long interest in him and is interviewed in the programme about Mealy artefacts of which he was in possession.

The people interviewed included pipers Jim Dolan, Jim McIntosh, Willie Reynolds and Wilbert Garvin, R. L.'s nephew Victor Mealy, his friend Mick Kilmurray and accordion player Frank Gavigan.

The programme follows the format of a timeline following O'Mealy throughout his life with reference to his ancestors and environment and is interspersed with the ten short tracks of music recorded by the BBC in 1943.

To listen to the programme see the associated files folder along with this article or follow this link: http://seanreidsociety.org/SRSJ3/3.22/Long_Note_O%27Mealy_1985.mp3

Note:

Copyright in the physical recording rests with *Raidió Telefís Éireann* and copyright in the music rests with the estate of R. L. O'Mealy. At the time of writing, they are not in the public domain and permission must be sought from the copyright holders if a third party wishes to use them. Thanks are due to the estate of O'Mealy and RTÉ for allowing us to use the recording.

Acknowledgments:

Peter Browne
Helen Gubbins
Robbie Hannan
Harry Bradshaw

Appendix:

The Long Note

The Long Note was an influential RTÉ radio programme which ran from 1974 to 1992. It was one of the leading shows about traditional music on RTÉ radio for 17 years. Tony

¹ The programme couldn't be located in the RTÉ library and to this day it is missing. Luckily Jonathan and Clement Farrar had a copy taped from the radio by their grandfather Sam Farrar which they later digitised. It is from this digital copy of the original tape cassette via Leslie Drew in Canada that we now have the audio, which very nearly went the way of so many other gems.

MacMahon conceived the idea and devised the initial format but it was Harry Bradshaw who produced it for most of that long period. The early producers were Tony MacMahon, Michael O'Donnell, Gene Martin, Tony MacMahon again, before Harry Bradshaw took over in September 1978 until the programme ceased in 1992.

The original programme length was a half hour (27mins, 30secs) and this was expanded to three quarters of an hour (42mins, 30secs) in 1977, an indication of the programme's success and popularity.

The presenters were generally musicians, singers or people from within the traditional music community as opposed to staff presenters from RTÉ; while this certainly lent an air of credibility to the programme, it was often the subject of conversation amongst the musician listenership who often imagined – with dread – being to be in that position themselves, having to review the work of their peers!

Presenters of *The Long Note*:

1. Mícheál Ó Domhnaill (Mid 74)
2. Bill Meek (Mid 75-Dec 76)
3. Peter Browne (Dec 76-78)
4. Paddy Glackin (Sept 78-80)
5. Tríona Ní Dhomhnaill (1980-82)
6. Éamonn Fitzgerald (82)
7. Robbie Hannan (May 7 1984-Dec 85)
8. Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh (87-88)
9. Jackie Small (88)
10. Máire Ó Keefe (1990-92)