



BIOGRAPHY 2013

Music is one of Ireland's most celebrated exports, and Lúnasa, a band like no other, has been at the forefront of that musical migration. Since the release of their 1997 recording debut LÚNASA and the band's first tour of the U.S.—when word-of-mouth led to SRO shows and rave reviews (“This is the hottest Irish acoustic group on the planet” said *The New York Times*)—the all-star quintet has become one of the most popular bands on the international Celtic music scene.

Comprising Seán Smyth (fiddle and low whistles), Kevin Crawford (flute, low whistles and tin whistles), Cillian Vallely (uilleann pipes and low whistles), Trevor Hutchinson (double bass) and the group's newest member Ed Boyd (guitar), Lúnasa delivers music with a passion that informs every note and continues to define and redefine the genre. Their innovative arrangements and unique approach to the music create a singular sound that has propelled Irish acoustic music from familiar ground into surprising and exciting new territory.

“Lúnasa is a very different Irish band in many ways,” explains Cillian Vallely. “It's an all-instrumental band. We have a double bass. We play a very diverse selection of music, including our own compositions, melodies from other Celtic regions such as Brittany, Galicia, Asturias, and Scotland, and slower melodies, often involving three-part harmonies. The melodies are played on the traditional instruments of pipes, fiddle and flute, but the rhythmic and harmonic style—the bass and guitar style—give the band a very contemporary sound.”

It's a sound that moves beyond the long established boundaries of traditional music, and it has earned the group a following that encompasses music fans of all ages and tastes around the world. Lúnasa is also a collective that courts opportunities to grow and change, to try something different. With eight albums already in its discography, as well as solo CDs and recording and performing credits with many of Ireland's and the world's most well known talents, the quintet will introduce a rarity in the traditional music world with the release in April, 2013 of **LÚNASA WITH THE RTÉ CONCERT ORCHESTRA**.

LÚNASA WITH THE RTÉ CONCERT ORCHESTRA is a glittering collection of tunes sparked from a brilliant union of two of Ireland's brightest musical stars—a remarkable traditional Irish music band and Ireland's treasured national orchestra which has long prided itself on its dynamic programs and stylistic range. Their first joint effort was a sold-out performance at Dublin's National Concert Hall on June 19, 2012 that was later broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1 and followed by the recording of the album. The RTÉ Concert Orchestra, whose credits include seven Eurovision Song Contests and projects with talents as diverse as Luciano Pavarotti, Cleo Laine and Jon Lord of Deep Purple and Ireland's Sharon Shannon, Sinéad O'Connor, Imelda May and The Coronas, is conducted by David Brophy.

The collaboration with Lúnasa was born when RTÉ asked Niall Vallely, one of Ireland's most exciting new composers and brother of Lúnasa's piper Cillian Vallely, to create arrangements for a traditional band. With classical and traditional compositions to his credit, Vallely was the perfect fit for this adventurous undertaking, and he suggested Lúnasa for the project. Lúnasa has long been praised for its innovative use of harmony and rhythm, and Niall expanded these features to take advantage of the rhythmic and harmonic possibilities of the full orchestral sound. The result is truly a new sound in Irish music.

Among the album's nine tracks are "The Merry Sisters of Fate" and "Morning Nightcap," tunes long associated with the band, "Casu", "Leckan Mór," "Spoil The Dance" and "The Minor Bee." Also included are "A Breton Set" featuring "Tro Breizh," Pierre Bensusan's "The Last Pint" and the specially composed "An Buachaillín Bán."

"It's been an almost cathartic experience in many ways to revisit many of the melodies that Niall Vallely chose to arrange for ourselves and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. A number of the pieces had been banished to the wilderness, destined never to see the light of a Lúnasa day ever again. Getting the opportunity to dust them down and hear them in a totally new environment gave the tunes a whole new lease of life and reawakened our love and respect for them," says the band's Kevin Crawford. "What an amazing buzz it's been playing our music among the orchestral wall of sound. From the initial rehearsals to the performance at the National Concert Hall in Dublin and onto the recording of the album, it's been sheer joy from start to finish and an experience that I certainly never thought I'd encounter as a traditional Irish musician."

In the years since those early concerts and CDs catapulted the band to the forefront of traditional Irish music, the members of Lúnasa have gathered a long list of credits and honors in addition to the legion of fans that spans the globe, fitting achievements for a band that takes its name from the old Celtic harvest festival in honor of the god Lugh, patron of the arts. In 2004, seven years and three albums (OTHERWORLD, 1999; MERRY SISTERS OF FATE, 2001; REDWOOD, 2003) after their acclaimed debut, the group recorded live within the supposedly-haunted walls of Ireland's Kinnitty Castle. THE KINNITTY SESSIONS was voted Best Traditional Album of 2005 by readers of *Irish Music Magazine* and was nominated for Folk Album of the Year in the BBC Radio 2 Awards. Released in 2006, the SÉ album was followed by the 2008 compilation THE STORY SO FAR... The well-received LÁ NUA, released in 2010, was recorded in the ancient pagan settlement of Bavan, Co. Louth. That year Lúnasa was named *Performers of the Decade* at Live Ireland's LIVIES awards and were invited to perform at The White House. It was also the year they collaborated with Natalie Merchant on her LEAVE YOUR SLEEP album and won kudos from *Folk & Roots* and *The Independent* for their closing performance at the world-renowned Cambridge Folk Festival. In 2012, the band's itinerary included the UK (18 shows in 19 days), North America (three tours) and the sold-out performance at Dublin's National Concert Hall with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. Along the way, the group has toured and performed with Billy Bragg, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Roseanne Cash, played the Hollywood Bowl and headlined Glasgow's international jamboree, Celtic Connections.

Through the years, the bandmates have earned credits on other projects as well. Before Lúnasa, Kevin Crawford was a member of the Claire-based band Moving Cloud and recorded with Grianán, Raise The Rafter, Joe Derrane and Sean Tyrrell. A virtuoso flute player, he has recorded two solo albums. Stand-up bass master Trevor Hutchinson played with The Waterboys from 1986 to 1991, recording with them as well as with the Sharon Shannon Band, Altan's Dermot Byrne, Eric Bibb, Máire Breatnach and Eileen Ivers of *Riverdance* renown. Cillian Vallely has extensively toured the U.S.

(where he now lives), performing with the New York-based Whirligig, Paddy O'Brien's Chulrua and with Claire fiddler Seamus Connolly. He was featured as uilleann pipes soloist in the Broadway production of *Riverdance* and toured with Tim O'Brien. With his brother Niall, he recorded the album CALLAN BRIDGE. Seán Smyth, a native of Straide, Co. Mayo, is an All-Ireland champion on both fiddle and whistle and is also a practicing medical doctor. THE BLUE FIDDLE, his 1993 solo debut, was named one of the year's 10 Best Albums by *The Irish Echo*, and he appears on numerous other recordings. Ed Boyd, who permanently joined the group last year, is a founding member of the BBC Folk Award-winning group Flook and the guitarist of choice for artists such as Cara Dillon and Kate Rusby.

With the release of **LÚNASA WITH THE RTÉ CONCERT ORCHESTRA**, the band will continue to explore new directions in the world of Irish traditional music. "Thankfully, the huge melting pot of music that exists within the Irish tradition allows us to seek out exciting and unexplored melodies that work for a band like ourselves," says Kevin Crawford. "This combined with the newer self composed pieces and strong belief in what we do help to keep both the band and the tradition very much alive and kicking." Referencing the new CD in particular, Seán Smyth adds: "As for the future, there are many, many musical journeys left open to us. For now, we're going to savor the orchestral theme and look forward to recreating these wonderful arrangements in theatres and with audiences around the world."

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