

**"M**usic heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all, but you are the music / While the music lasts." Those lines from T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" floated back to me during the requiem Mass for Joe Madden. What he meant to so many people came into sharp focus starting at 11 a.m. on Tues., Nov. 18, inside St. Patrick's Church in Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

Musicians paid tribute to him in the best way they know how: by performing. Among them were Mike and Mary Rafferty, Mattie and Deirdre Connolly, Felix and Brendan Dolan, Martin Mulhaire, Liz Carroll, Jimmy Keane, Billy and Sean McComiskey, Brian and Rose Conway, John Whelan, Jerry O'Sullivan, Donna Long, Aoife Clancy, John Nolan, Laura Byrne, Mirella Murray, Roisin Dillon, Mary Coogan, Marie Reilly, Pat Keogh, Gabe Donohue, and Mick Moloney.

Other performers whom I saw watching from the pews included Robbie O'Connell and Willie and Siobhan Kelly, while stepdancer Donny Golden stayed beside Joanie Madden, Joe's daughter and leader of Cherish the Ladies.

It was an extraordinary display of music steeped in admiration and affection for Joe Madden, the 70-year-old button accordionist from Portumna, East Galway, who lived in New York from 1959, the year of his immigration, until his death on Nov. 14, from complications of an accidental fall at his Yorktown Heights home.

A fellow Galwayman, Monsignor Charlie Coen was the lead celebrant of the Mass, and his sermon struck just the right balance of mourning for the loss and expressing gratitude for the life of Joe Madden, a skilled tradesman and builder who was a member of Carpenters Union Local 608. Quoting St. Paul, Coen said that all creation is groaning to be redeemed, and he cited Joe Madden as someone who succeeded. "His life was spent on ladders, scaffolds, and roofs," Coen said. "He could redeem stones, lumber, nails, and plaster into a beautiful house. And Joe's accordion music could compel people to swirl around the floor. He redeemed sound."

Humor bubbled up in a Coen anecdote



Joe Madden in concert at the Catskills Irish Arts Week, July 16, 2008.

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## A beloved figure in Irish music: Joe Madden

*He prized family, friends, and tunes*

about selling a car to Joe Madden for \$50. "I think it blew up," he said.

Joseph Madden, Joe's son, gave the eulogy. Fighting back tears, he described the new master kitchen his father had completed on the same day he fell, a kitchen with top-grade appliances to make life easier mainly for Helen (nee Meade), his Miltown Malbay-born wife of 45 years.

An amusing anecdote also surfaced in Joseph's remarks. On St. Patrick's Day, 2004, Cherish the Ladies performed at the White House and brought along family members, Joe Madden included. "He couldn't stand Bush,"

Joseph recalled, pointing to his dad's proud union membership as a main reason. But after the performance and visit, Joseph quoted his father saying this: "You know, that Georgie Bush is not a bad fellow."

Joseph also quoted a Furey Brothers' song, "The Old Man," and read a poem written by his sister Joanie for their father.

With soft keyboard backing, she played a soaring tin whistle solo that finished with tears overwhelming her. The music before, during, and after the Mass would have thrilled Joe Madden, as Joanie herself said out loud at one point. It featured such liturgical hymns as "Shepherd Me, O God," "Going Home," and "How Great Thou Art"; the 18th-century hymn "Amazing Grace," sung by Deirdre Connolly; the Irish melody "Come Give Me Your Hand"; and the ballad "John O'Dreams," sung by Mick Moloney.

"Go Rest High on That Mountain," a contemporary, gospel-flavored hymn rooted in country music, was stirringly sung by Deirdre Connolly. The song was composed by Vince Gill in memory of his older brother Bob, who died in 1993. This is the refrain: "Go rest high on that mountain / Son, your work on earth is done / Go to heaven a-shoutin' / Love for the Father and Son." It seemed especially fitting for Joe Madden, a man larger than life in the memory of many, a man who worked hard and well with his hands.

An All-Ireland champion on button

accordion, Joe played for a time with the Echo Ceili Band in Ireland. In the New York metropolitan area he led his own dance band for many years, working by day as a carpenter and sometimes by weeknight and usually on weekends as a musician. In 1992, he was inducted into Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann's Mid-Atlantic Region Hall of Fame, which his daughter Joanie also entered in 2007, and he was inducted into the Galway Association's Hall of Fame for his lifelong contributions to Irish music.

Before Joe Madden passed away, he and his daughter Joanie had the chance to record a number of tracks together in Ireland, and it's hoped that the music the two made with Charlie Lennon accompanying on piano will be issued on a CD in the near future.

Until the release of that recording, you can listen to Joe Madden's distinctive button accordion playing on such albums as "Fathers and Daughters" in 1986, Joanie Madden's "A Whistle on the Wind" in 1994, Cherish the Ladies' "At Home" in 1999 and "The Girls Won't Leave the Boys Alone" in 2001, and Mike Rafferty's "Speed 78" in 2004. That last CD features a 90-second track called "Story About Joe Madden," told by Mike, one of his closest friends.

I also strongly recommend visiting Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann's website to see and hear "Comhaltas Live #243." It's a video of Joe Madden on the accordion and Joanie Madden on the flute, backed by Felix Dolan on keyboards, playing three reels during a break at the 2004 CCE North American Convention in Parsippany, N.J.

Last spring at the CCE North American Convention in the same N.J. town, I had a lengthy conversation with Joe during Saturday night's ceili in the main ballroom. He asked about my health, my work, my last trip to Ireland, and several other topics, and the entire time we spoke, I was aware he was not mentally multi-tasking. He was giving me his undivided attention and full focus. It was a gesture born not of habit or graciousness but of real caring, something Joe Madden always had in abundance. After a while, we stopped chatting and turned our attention back to the crowded bandstand he had left for a brief rest. "God, that's mighty music," he said.

As St. Patrick's Church emptied after his funeral Mass on Nov. 18, I stayed behind to hear the musicians continue to play. I thought of those no longer with us, including Andy McGann, Paddy Reynolds, Martin Wynne, Tom Doherty, Martin Mulvihill, Johnny Cronin, Maureen Glynn, and now Joe Madden. What a privilege to have heard their music firsthand.

And what a privilege to hear the musicians in St. Patrick's Church keep the sound of their departed comrades Joe alive. I watched the musicians' intent faces, felt the swing and power in their playing, and became strangely wistful for the Irish traditional music I had not lost. It was right in front of me, and I realized the breath and fingers of these musicians spoke far more eloquently about Joe than the imperfect words I muster here.

From behind me, I overheard someone say, "What a sendoff." Those words are perfect.

What mighty music, friendship, and memories Joe Madden gave us.



Joe Madden (in green tie, fifth from right) was among the performers at the North American Convention of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann last spring in N.J.