



Behind the scenes

Without the dedication of the committee of Feis Dhoire Cholmcille, its volunteers and its legendary accompanists, it would have been impossible for the institution to survive and thrive in the manner in which it has for a century. The resilience and determination of all those who have served in this capacity since 1922 is both remembered and revered.

Archbishop Eamon Martin: ‘The feis was a window of hope, light and community’

When asked as a young priest in the early 1990s to take over the administration of Feis Dhoire Cholmcille, the then Fr Eamon Martin was inspired to introduce fledgling computer technology to aid the vast amount of manual work involved in organising thousands of competitors.

The use of emerging software like Microsoft’s Excel and Access programmes meant that, for example, the long slog of writing out entry tickets by hand was banished forever. With entries in that period tipping the 7,000 mark, it was a gift that the committee couldn’t and didn’t reject. One knock-on effect of this was that, after a couple of years, the competitions began to run on time – well, *almost* on time. Those who know will recall that the clock at Derry Feis very rarely, if ever, bore any true relation to Greenwich Mean Time.

Technological advancement for the feis was, however, a development that wasn’t rapturously received in all quarters.

Archbishop Martin said: “I think it was 1992 or 1993. We were coming down the steps of the Guildhall, and the competitions were over at ten minutes to twelve. As we went down the stairs, there was this lady, a wee Derry woman, and she turned to her friend and said ‘it’s a disgrace - a disgrace! The Derry Feis over before twelve o’clock!’ Ursula Clifford turned around and said, ‘we’ve to be in here tomorrow morning again at quarter to eight, don’t be saying that!’

“It was so funny, but it just shows you that, while we thought we were making advances, other people thought we were losing something. So perhaps that’s the story of the feis – the ability to move on.”

Archbishop Martin’s long association with the feis was always a hands-on one. He categorises his involvement in three distinct phases that gave him an insight into the cultural institution from all angles. It also allowed him a genuine appreciation of what the feis has meant in the last 100 years.

His first connection with the feis was as a competitor during his primary school days at St Patrick’s in Pennyburn.

He said: “I was first introduced to the feis by my teachers, and two in particular come to mind. One was Mr Freddie Campbell and the other was Mrs Ann Joyce. It was very much to do with singing at that stage. I was a boy soprano and I loved to sing. Freddie Campbell was the music teacher, and we considered him ‘old Mr Campbell’. He probably wasn’t that old, but to us he was. And he had a love for music and singing. I was in his class, and I was also in Mrs Joyce’s class and, between herself and Freddie, they looked after the music.

“Even before I sang in the feis I have a very vague memory of saying a poem in it. I actually remember the poem was called *The Donkey*. It was a wee reflection on a baby donkey that couldn’t stand up, and it was very awkward and very clumsy.

“I’ll never forget that my first time on the stage was a very embarrassing moment, because it was in the Minor Hall in the Guildhall and they had a wee platform up, and as I went up, full of nerves, I tripped on the lip of the platform and fell across it. Then I got up, and there were so many competitors, you were probably only allowed to say one verse of a five-verse poem, but in my awkwardness and clumsiness I said my four lines that started ‘I saw a donkey, one day old’.

“I remember getting a certificate, but I think it may have been out of sympathy that the adjudicator gave it to me. So, my first experience in the feis wasn’t a very happy one because I think I might have cried,” Archbishop Martin laughed.

Those formative years also brought the future cleric into contact for the first time with a form of singing that would have a bearing on his later life – the Gregorian chant and sacred music in general.

“Even the term 'Gregorian chant' for a wee fella was very unfamiliar. It was very beautiful and, between Freddie and Mrs Joyce organising it, we won a prize. I suppose then was when I got the bug of the feis and wanting to be in it.

“In my post-primary schooldays at St Columb’s College, I became involved in a number of aspects of the feis. I continued singing. I was a good singer, but I was never a gold or silver medal winner. There was a young man called Damien Nixon, who was in my class at Pennyburn, and there was another young boy called Austin O’Donnell who tragically died in a car accident in his teenage years. There’s actually now an Austin O’Donnell Cup in the feis because Austin won rings round him. Against that competition, I would never have won the top medals. But I always featured there as a singer. I think I might have won the sacred solo at one stage - I’m not sure - but it introduced me to sacred music. So, it’s funny, then, the things in your life that become important to you.

“I also remember the Irish competitions. I loved Irish. I remember one of my teachers teaching us a poem called *Anseo i lár an Ghleanna*. It’s a poem about a priest saying Mass during the penal times down in the glens and being attacked by Redcoats. Our teacher explained it to us, and what happened was an old man took his place to save the life of a priest. The old man was put to death and the priest managed to escape.

“Later on, in the feis, I would have been involved in the Irish debating competitions and Irish speech making, conversation and reading. Mr Garvan in the college, he taught me that. Interestingly enough, I remember learning a poem for the senior Irish poem called *Finit* by Máire MacEntee, one of the great Irish writers, who died in 2021. They were doing tributes to her on the radio and somebody read *Finit*, and I remembered saying it in the feis years ago.

“But mostly in those early years I was involved in singing, with the choirs in the college, then came the bands and the orchestra because I had taken up the trombone. I got involved in a lot of the ensembles and, through that, I got to know all the different disciplines of the feis. I used to love going up even when we weren’t competing and watching and listening to the music. Even as a young teenager, going to the feis was a big social outlet. Even though I wasn’t into the dancing, I liked watching it. I loved the music at the dancing from players like Paddy McCafferty and George Kilkie.

“Then, in the evening time, I heard the likes of Cissie Parlour, Carita Kerr and Pat MacCafferty, of course. There was also a man called James Gallagher who was a fabulous singer. So here was a young teenager being exposed to a whole range of music, between Irish language, English language, classical music and bands. We were also involved in the history competitions. There is no doubt about it that these were troubled times in Derry in the '70s, but the feis was that little window of light – a window of hope and community. You picked that up even as a young fella, that there was a community atmosphere that was continuing on despite everything.

“I also got to know a whole range of people who were involved in the musical life of this city by meeting people like James MacCafferty and Giles Doherty. A lot of these people were the big names in the feis. I also got to know Sibéal Sharkey and her daughters Ursula and Bridgin and their whole family.”

Clerical links to the feis have been there since its inception through the work of Fr John McGettigan. And, as the future Primate of All Ireland made his way to Maynooth to embark on his studies for life in the priesthood, another priest had come to the forefront of the organisational side of the feis. This led to the archbishop’s second phase of involvement, as the then feis secretary, Fr Kevin Mullan, pencilled him in each year to act as a stage steward in the Gaelic music and language competitions along with various other duties.

“I began to see the feis from a different side – from the inside. It was then that I became aware of the amazing contribution of families to the feis – almost like Derry dynasties. I have mentioned the

likes of the McCafferty's, the Sharkey's and the Burkes - all of the families who had contributed. I also became more aware of the story of the feis. This was in the '80s, so the feis was already halfway to the centenary. It was coming of age; it was into its older years. A lot of these people's families went way back in the feis. You began to hear stories of their involvement through Paddy Carlin and Sheila and hear what the Carlins had done; you became aware of Samuel Burke and the big choirs he had taught.

"Another person that I had known at school but didn't realise his significance was the composer, Redmond Friel. When we were at the college, we had played a number of his arrangements but didn't realise how significant a composer he was. I can remember St Columb's College Orchestra playing arrangements he had written for the *RTE* Symphony Orchestra. They were arrangements of Irish melodies – it was a crossover between classical and traditional music. Redmond died when I was nearly left the college, about 1979, but his arrangements were still there. We played some of his beautiful arrangements of Irish music," he said.

At the roots of the foundations of Feis Dhoire Cholmcille was a desire to maintain a distinct Gaelic cultural dimension to its ethos and its competitions. This was a factor that Archbishop Martin realised, early on, was an important one.

"I was always conscious that the feis was trying to encourage Irish language and culture and I suppose the roots of the feis in the 1920s were in the Gaelic League and trying to keep Irish language and culture alive. I always felt that my teachers were encouraging you to be interested in the Irish language and Irish music. Even though I didn't play traditional music, some of my good friends at school did play and they were stars. I think of people like Peter Tracey and Frank Gallagher, then Dermot McLaughlin and his family, Proinseas McCloskey – these boys were stars at traditional music, and I used to go up and listen to them when they were playing at the feis.

"Also, with the motto of the feis – 'Do chum glóire Dé agus Onóra na hÉireann' – 'For the Glory of God and the Honour of Ireland' – there was always that Catholic and nationalist sentiment associated with Feis Dhoire Cholmcille and they didn't apologise for it.

"What I realised then was that, even though we were in a very diverse situation in Ireland, there was nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to your language, your dancing, your music, your poetry, your art. That these are things you ought to be proud of - that they are part of our heritage. And there is a possibility that by the '70s and '80s that the feis had become a bit more of a music and drama festival as distinct from a feis. I think that's something that we have always had to watch – how to retain its identity and what it's really about.

"It was difficult to get people who weren't Catholics to participate. And that is probably one of my regrets. The Londonderry Feis had really left behind any of its Gaelic roots. Originally, it pre-dated Feis Dhoire Cholmcille by ten or twenty years. It began as an attempt to create a lot of Irish language and culture, but you're talking about 1921-22 and a parting of the ways. But we in Feis Dhoire Cholmcille never really successfully crossed the divide, apart from a small number of people in the very high-level singing.

"That is one of the saddest things, actually, now when I look back is to see how the Irish language became a badge of one community or the other. If you look back further, some of the great exponents of the Irish language came from the Presbyterian tradition. St Columb's College and Foyle and Londonderry College did participate in the history competition, and we took part in the classical section at Londonderry Feis, so some attempts were made to bridge the divide, but it wasn't successful."

The third and final stage of Archbishop Martin's involvement with the feis was his tenure as secretary, which spanned almost the entire 1990s.

Speaking of his time at the forefront he said: "One of the things that I discovered when I became secretary of the feis was that competition was actually secondary and it was also friendly. It was a friendly rivalry. So, for example, when you saw it from the other end, you saw people like Carita Kerr, Maureen Hegarty and Una O'Somachain who were all competing against each other - but they were all singing in choirs together too. That bit of rivalry was actually part of the fun of the feis.

"When we were competing as pupils there was always a great rivalry between Thornhill and the college to win the Bishop's Shield. So, you were rooting for your own school and singing in the choir to win, but actually it was all part of the craic. Competition enables you to strive to be better and to be the best without being boastful.

"Also, in the '90s, I became conscious that there were a number of outstanding Derry musicians. But they weren't actually getting a chance. We managed, through the Honourable The Irish Society, to get a bursary to send an outstanding young musician to the Guildhall School of Music in London.

"This was something that I felt might give some young Derry people a leg up into the professional music scene. You had some musicians who had come through the feis in the past, like Paul Cassidy, but what we were able to do was encourage. So, you had the McGinley family - Rachel, Tanya and Ruth and their mum Ray - beginning to emerge. Ruth was clearly an outstanding young musician. You had Lawrence Quigg, Doreen Curran, Dervla Ramsey and Rachel Fisher - young singers and musicians who were every bit as good as anyone on these islands, but who hadn't got the opportunity to move into the third level. So, through the feis and a number of scholarships, we were creating competitions that would enable these young people to get pushed to the top. The rest is history because they've done extremely well.

"I do think, as a city, we should be very proud of the achievements of the feis and the tremendous voluntary contribution that it represents."



St Columb's College band, winners of the brass ensemble under 16 in 1979. From left, Paul McKeever, John Duffy, Charlie Doherty, Eamon Martin and John Doherty.

1980: Eamonn Martin, winner of the brass solo over 16 and who also received a bursary.



Archbishop Eamon Martin had a long association with Derry Feis as a competitor, volunteer worker and as Feis Secretary.

Ursula Clifford: 'My father was a saint - but I don't think he ever had a choice'

One outstanding childhood memory that Ursula Clifford (née Sharkey) has of Feis Dhoire Cholmcille is sitting on the knee of none other than feis founder, Mrs Edward Henry O'Doherty, and being comforted after the results of a competition in which she didn't receive a prize.

It's a memory not only indicative of her lifetime involvement with the feis - both as a competitor and administrator - but also one that reveals that her family's involvement goes back even further than her own.

"My grandfather Samuel Burke was a competitor, and my aunt Kathleen was the first in the family to be on the committee - she was registrar. When she died, my mother, Sibéal Sharkey (née Burke), took over, and when she passed away, I took over as registrar, and I am at it since. That was in 1986," Ursula said.

Not only was her family steeped in the tradition of Derry Feis, but their home was also the de facto headquarters of the entire institution.

"Our sitting room in Grafton Avenue was the feis office. Everything was handwritten and hand delivered. The rest of the family will still tell you that if you could ride a bicycle, you were sent off to deliver entry tickets to teachers. Then my mother would have had a team in doing the writing for weeks before the feis. My father was then left to make anything anybody got to eat because there wasn't time. All the administration came out of there. There was no technology; there wasn't even a typewriter. Plus, we had a landline, which was kind of rare in those days, too. No money ever passed hands except for the competitors coming in to pay their entry fees. Other than that, nobody got paid for their work and it's the same to this day.

"Basically, the house was taken over from around August or September until after the feis each year. But we were used to it. My father was a saint - but I don't think he ever had a choice. And he never put his foot in the feis. Then, at Easter week, any new babies there were in the family, he had to look after them. Don't forget my mother had ten pregnancies. My father was an expert at making stews with Doherty's mince, turnips, and bacon. He could do the washing and all that sort of thing, too. He was the backup man for the entire operation.

"Fr Kevin Mullan was perpetually there, too. When he appeared - and the attitude towards priests was different in those days and Fr Megahey was treated the same - my mother would say 'Jim, a cup of tea,' and so he had to provide the teas too. Above all that, what my mother thought of the feis was that it was encouraging young people to keep in touch with the culture: with the dancing and singing and everything else. For that era, she was very much open to change. For example, my sister Patricia taught PE at Thornhill, but she brought in European folk dancing to the feis. My mother also brought in ballet. She went to Miss Watson, who was the ballet teacher in Derry, and organised that.

"I can't remember a time without my family being involved in the feis. Once you could do 'lady assistant' (adjudicators' administrative helper) or door steward or any job that needed to be filled. I remember our youngest, Dermot, was doing door steward and they didn't give him one of the pieces of wood that slotted between the handles on the doors in the Guildhall to keep them shut during competitions. So, he put his arm between the handles, and a man nearly broke his arm pushing at the door trying to get in. You were always given a job whether you liked it or whether you didn't," Ursula said.

Long before Sibéal Sharkey made her mark as a legendary and leading figure within the backroom staff of Derry Feis, she too had her day on stage as a performer. And that involved stints with the Derry choirs that battled for choral supremacy at the feis many decades ago. Although Sibéal, by

birth, came from the vaunted musical Burke family, she didn't find a musical outlet there but in a rival choir. And she found her future husband in that rival choir, too.

Ursula continued: "My mother met my father in McCabe's choir, not Sammy Burke's choir. Burke's choir looked down on them and called them 'McCabe's yahoos'. But one year the McCabe's yahoos beat them – the big swanky choirs from the Waterside. She also did trios and things like that, too. Then she was in the Colmcille Ladies' Choir. My father loved music and loved opera, but as I said he never went to the feis. But then, maybe, he couldn't go because he had to do everything else. Then, of course, when Feargal came along she went around every feis in Northern Ireland. He appeared on Teatime with Tommy and so on so that was her life."

While Feis Dhoire Chomcille fell victim to perhaps the most savage years of the Troubles for three years between 1972 and 1975, it didn't actually disappear at all.

"Thinking about my mother and thinking about Fr Kevin Mullan, you would wonder what really would have happened to the feis in those few years if they had not kept it alive by holding the Bogside Festival. That was basically to keep people interested even though it wasn't officially named Feis Dhoire Cholmcille. Fr Mullan remains as dedicated to Derry Feis now as when he was secretary."

Ursula herself also competed as a singer and a piano player, and it was her first outing as an instrumentalist that led to her childhood encounter with Mrs Edward Henry O'Doherty.

"I was a singer and then I was in the contralto solo when I moved past the children's sections. I did piano too with Miss Cox. The first time I competed I didn't win anything, and Mrs O'Doherty took me onto her knee to pet me. I didn't understand. I thought I was bad, but I remember Mrs O'Doherty telling me there was always next time. But I was never great at the piano. But then I was in the church choir in the Long Tower," she said.

Another mainstay of the feis and countless other events was, of course, the Colmcille Ladies' Choir. The brainchild of the late Bishop of Derry, Dr Edward Daly, the choir has been rapturously received in many countries and continues to perform to this day.

"At the height of the Troubles, nothing was happening in the middle of the town and Fr Daly, as he was then, put an advertisement in the paper for drama and singing and pantomimes, and so on. I went to a meeting and ended up in the pantomime that year. Paddy Carlin was allocated to organise a mixed voice choir, but the men rarely turned up so it was changed into a ladies' choir. So, when I was finished with the pantomime, I joined the Colmcille Ladies' Choir. That was 50-odd years ago and I am in it since; I am currently the chairperson.

"It was very important to establish the choir at that time. Some of the women in the choir had a lot of children and they had no outlet. A typical example is that I was at a wake recently of the husband of a woman in the choir. The woman said to me that she had a wonderful life because of the choir. I saw America and Italy. We had a private audience with Pope John Paul II. We all got to speak to him and as we were introduced, Bishop Daly was telling him something about everyone. When it came to this woman the Pope learned that she had eight children and Pope John Paul said to her 'do you live on a farm?'" Ursula laughed.

After its formation, the choir hit the ground running in terms of public appearances. The first outing was the Portstewart Festival followed by a trip to the Oireachtas in Dublin. The next planned trip was to Wales and an appearance at the annual Eisteddfod. In the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, Fr Daly left Derry for a period and took up a post as head of religious affairs at RTÉ. This enabled him to organise an appearance on Gay Byrne's *Late Late Show* for the choir. He later intimated to the women that he knew when they were in Dublin he was to be installed as Bishop of Derry, but he

couldn't tell them at that point. Nevertheless, upon his return to the city, he let it be known that he wished to travel with them to Wales.

Ursula takes up the story: "He was only bishop six months, and he rang me up and said that he was going to the Eisteddfod. I asked how he was getting there and he said he was travelling on the bus with us. The bus stopped outside St Columb's Hall to pick us all up. Donal MacCafferty said to him 'now you're on this bus let's get this straight: do we call you My Lord, Bishop, Eddie or what is it?' And he said, 'Bishop will do'."

Over a lifetime's involvement with Feis Dhoire Cholmcille, Ursula summed up its overall value to Derry like this: "I don't worry about the future of the feis at all. It's in good hands. The evidence of the success of the feis is in the number of people who have come through its doors and who have gone on to make a living in the arts. It's also responsible for giving a lot of the kids in Derry the confidence to be able to get up on stage and perform."



1964: Feis committee members. Seated from left to right are Cissie MacCafferty, Mrs EH O'Doherty (vice president), Kathleen Walshaw (registrar) and Eithne Quigley. At back from left to right are Margaret Walshaw, Fr O'Doherty (president), Sibeal Sharkey, Rev Willie McGaughey (secretary), Ursula Clifford and Anne Coyle. **(Picture courtesy of Derry Journal)**



Ursula Clifford competed in both piano and solo singing as a young competitor and still performs as a member of the Colmcille Ladies Choir. **(Picture courtesy of Derry Journal)**

The Colmcille Ladies Choir was established after an appeal for performers by the late Bishop of Derry Edward Daly at the height of the Troubles in the 1970s.



Pat MacCafferty: 'The feis was part of my life – it was a duty I was glad to have'

The first time feis music secretary Pat MacCafferty sang at Feis Dhoire Cholmcille, he was ten years old. In the nicest possible way, his initial appearance wasn't necessarily his choice but was at the gentle bidding of his late father, James MacCafferty.

Pat said: "I was at Rosemount Boys School at the time, and I sang an Irish song, and I was useless. Honest to God. You see at that age I was a very nervous child, although I know that people would say that they couldn't believe I would be nervous about anything when they know me now and the way I am.

"When I went on the stage, I just shook. You see, the expectation was running through the place. You could almost hear the audience say, 'there's James MacCafferty's son, he'll be good'. I never even got a recall.

"I think I did another two years at the feis and after that, at the age of 12, I said goodbye. I was useless on stage, but as I moved on and matured a bit, I went back in 1962 for my first solo – the bass solo. I won. I was the only one in for it. That year, I won the bass solo in Letterkenny, Moville, and Carndonagh too. I was the only one it for it at those places as well," he laughed.

"That was the start of it – that was me launched, as they say. And from then on, I sang for the guts of 25 years at the feis as a soloist. That's unheard of now because people don't do that anymore. But in the years that I sang, it was with what I call the greats. Cissie Parlour, my sister Una, Maureen Hegarty (nee McGuinness), Gloria Doherty, Carita Kerr, Charlie Meehan, Jimmy Gallagher, Bertie Barrett, Patrick Carlin, Patricia Henderson, Myra Wilson...I could go on. It was marvellous. And every single one of them could have won a cup. There were many other great singers who came in and out of the feis at various stages of that era. But those are the people that I remember fondly, maybe because I was in choirs with some of them, and some of them were in the Gaelic Singers and I got to know them that way," Pat added.

In an era that saw all competitors having to sing an Irish and an Anglo-Irish song, Pat MacCafferty believes that fact only served to sharpen the competitive aspect of the feis as well as heighten standards across the board.

He said: "It was very strict in those days; you couldn't sing any song. They had to be by an Irish composer. You see, when you got your first third or second place, you were over the moon. It took me several years to get into the also-rans. And then you started to gather your confidence. I won the Danny Casey Cup, and my grandfather had a cup in his honour – the Pat MacCafferty Cup for interpretation. And I won it one year and of course everyone said, 'the only reason he won it was because he's named after him,'" he laughed.

"That's me being facetious; I was over the moon winning my grandfather's cup. My father too, in his own quiet way, was delighted. My sister was a much more polished singer, and she was in the Gaelic Singers. So, she was singing confidently from an early age, and she would have won way before I did. My brother Seamus didn't really sing a lot at the feis and nor did *Bláthnaid*. *Máire* sang well in the early days in the girls' solo competitions. It was really just Una and me, the oldest and the second oldest, and it was wonderful. You were up there every night, and it was just great.

"You worked and worked, and you learned songs. Then the rules started to open up a bit. It just used to be Irish opera that you could perform, then they brought in 'big opera', and you had to learn songs in Italian. Then they brought in lieder songs (German songs that set poetry to music) for a while and classical songs.

"I was very lucky that I won a bursary which was handed out each year to singers that accumulated points across various competitions. The bursary was to go to Feis Ceoil in Dublin. So, I went and sang up there as well.

"Cissie Parlour and I went up one year and sang in the operatic competition. I went on in a lounge suit and Cissie went on in a dress. This boy came out dressed as a clown – as a complete operatic character. So, I thought we looked very silly because everybody was in character. We looked at the competitions and thought about what we could do. There was an Irish opera competition for male and female, and Cissie and I got a medal in that. Then there was a thing called the Bohemian Prize which was male-only, and I won that one year, and winning that qualified you for the John McCormack Medal competition. And I won it. I have a John McCormack medal in the house. Boy, was I a proud man, going up to Feis Ceoil – that is the standard of Ireland because competitors are from all over Ireland.

"That's what we got from the bursary from Derry Feis. I remember the first time we went up; I took dad up with me to play in the Denis O'Sullivan Medal competition. It was very tiring because what happened was, we went up and down in the one day, and you were getting home in the early hours. So, I didn't ask him again. From then on, I asked a girl called Trudy Carberry from Dublin to accompany me, and that's who I won the medal with. Feis Ceoil was very strict and very hard, and it was a very tough competition. I remember a friend of mine saying to me 'how did you get the John McCormack Medal and him a tenor', he laughed.

However, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. And Pat's love of just taking part at Derry Feis came to an end when an abrupt reminder of the passage of time passed literally in front of his eyes one Easter week at the Guildhall. He recalled with humour that it was time to bow out gracefully.

"I sang one year against three girls from Thornhill who were in their uniforms. My wife pointed out that there I was - a veteran of veterans. And I thought 'Pat, it's time to say goodbye!' But I just loved singing and, you know, we were lucky in those days because Bishop Daly had started the Sunday night concerts in St Columb's Hall. The MacCafferty Singers and the choirs were in them and then there were the pantomimes. We got bit parts and then built up to bigger parts. And that was your life, and, at that time, we never got a penny – not a penny. Ok, Frank Carson did, and rightly so because he was the man that was drawing the crowds. He made the pantomimes what they were. But that was like your graduation after the feis."

Time waits for no one, but sometimes it creates circumstances of joy from the sadness it can also bring. In the 1990s, time and circumstance combined to lead Pat McCafferty back to his roots at Derry Feis.

Pat continued: "What happened then was that God rest my father passed away in October 1995. You see, my father was never on the feis committee. That was because firstly he was the accompanist and secondly because he had a school of music. To avoid anyone saying there was a conflict of interest, he was never asked. So, when he passed away, Giles Doherty came along and said, 'we'd like you to come onboard'. Annie Morgan was music secretary and then I took that role over after a few years.

"In doing that, I felt that it was part of my life. It was a duty. It wasn't erroneous duty. It was a duty I was glad to have because my grandfather, my father and now I was coming into something that had been part of my life for so long. The feis, the preparation of it, was part of my life. The friendship, the fun and the enjoyment were all part of it. Ok, there was rivalry there. All the people I have mentioned – we were all out to win when we went on stage, but it wasn't a matter of winning at all costs. There were years that you impressed the adjudicators and years that you didn't. That was just

a fact of life. It was a matter of taking your oil. But anyway, that's what took me on – a sense of duty and responsibility that my family had been so involved with the feis over the years. So, I wanted to do my bit as well."

Pleasurable duty aside, the life of a senior voluntary position in a major event such as Feis Dhoire Cholmcille can be a stressful one. But, as ever with Pat MacCafferty, such instances are always viewed with much laughter in hindsight.

He added: "There have been ups and downs with it. There was one occasion when I wrote a resignation note.

"I remember it well. What happened was, there was an orchestra competition on in the main hall at the Millennium Forum and there was an instrumental competition on in the studio. I had scheduled this you see, it was part of my responsibility, but the two competitions clashed, and the orchestra leader said he couldn't go on because his lead violinist was competing upstairs. And of course, all hell let loose as you would expect.

"Anyway, it ended up I was in the midst of all this getting blitzed. We had to stop what was going on in the studio, brought them downstairs to do the orchestra competition, then bring them back up again and finish the competition upstairs. It was terrible. People were eating the face off me. I took it very badly and I never slept that night I was so annoyed. The following day, I came into the feis and went upstairs to the office and asked them for paper and a pen and wrote my resignation and handed it to Giles Doherty.

"I said 'I'm going Giles, this is my last feis, I can take no more of this'. Giles said 'well, think about it'. I said, 'I'm not thinking about it, that's it'. Needless to say, by the end of the week, the resignation was withdrawn. Giles said, 'are you over it now, Pat?'," laughed Pat.

After many years of dedicated service and watching each generation of competitors grow and develop, does he think being behind the scenes is as good as being on stage?

With typical honesty, Pat answered: "No. Being a competitor was wonderful – it was great. People don't realise the fun that we had; the rivalry and the friendships that have lasted a lifetime. A lot of them have now passed away, but we loved each other's company. It's a totally different thing to working behind the scenes.

"Look at the fun we had at the veterans' singing competition during the centenary feis. For me, it was the best competition of the week by a mile. Everybody sang at the top of their form. I know I was robbed, but that's neither here nor there," Pat chuckled.

Pat MacCafferty pictured in 1962 after winning the Bass Solo competition at Feis Dhoire Cholmcille.
(Picture courtesy of the Derry Journal).



Pat pictured with Nadine Fiorentini, a former notable feis competitor, who returned to adjudicate at the feis in 2022.

Daithí McBrearty, a pupil of Donegal Music Education who on his first ever visit to Feis Dhoire Cholmcille in 2022 won third place in the Musical Theatre Competition (12-16) pictured here with Feis Music Secretary Pat MacCafferty.





Pictured from left to right, are feis committee member Martin McNamee, Bronagh Gallagher, Margaret Keys and Pat MacCafferty at the Feis Dhoire Cholmcille – Centenary Gala Concert which took place at the Millennium Forum on Sunday, 24 April 2022.



Pat MacCafferty, his wife Jean and Archbishop Eamon Martin pictured outside the former MacCafferty home on Francis Street when on Saturday, 23 April 2022, the Ulster History Circle unveiled a blue plaque in honour of James MacCafferty. **(Picture courtesy of the Derry Journal).**

James MacCafferty: the world-class musician who 'lived and loved' Derry Feis

James MacCafferty's contribution to the incredible musical lineage of Derry and Feis Dhoire Cholmcille is what the River Foyle is to the city itself – both will continue to flow ceaselessly as long as the world exists, or as long as a child from here places a finger on a piano keyboard or sings a note for the very first time. He was a man who used his talents to develop the talent of others, and whose influence was and remains immense.

Born in 1915, James arrived into a family already immersed in music. His mother and father, Pat and Cis MacCafferty, were in great demand for their singing abilities. Pat MacCafferty was a bass who sang in many of the choral groups of the time – male and mixed voice – while Cis was a contralto who commanded lead roles in Mrs Edward Henry O'Doherty's productions. The O'Doherty's and MacCafferty's were also neighbours and friends in Francis Street.

The husband-and-wife duo performed with the Derry Philharmonic Society and in the famed O'Brien's annual operas. Also, Cis played piano and Pat the euphonium. So, when the feis began in 1922 it was only natural that they competed, and they continued to do so for the next ten years or so.

James' late brother Don MacCafferty once said of his parents: "In fact, I remember seeing them, I must have been two or three, coming in with their costumes on from singing in the Opera House – *Faust* or something. I remember seeing them in these strange rigs. My mother was dressed as a nun; my father was dressed as a crusader or something. He had one of those big crosses on his chest."

Don, born a year after James in 1916, also showed musical ability. Neither brother, however, received any formal training until they were around ten years old. James was sent to learn piano and Don the cello. Both boys competed at Derry Feis as singers and instrumentalists and remained inseparable throughout their lives and careers.

The value of James' and Don's relationship was captured by Don's wife Jeannie, who said: "They couldn't have been any closer if they had been twins, and they were always wonderful friends. They were friends first and brothers afterwards. They were really very, very close."

James MacCafferty began his musical education under Miss Maude Butler and gained his early grades from the Trinity College of Music in London, aged 14, in 1929. But soon, it was obvious that his talent required someone capable of providing more advanced learning, and it was to JT Frankland, the organist at St Columb's Cathedral, that the MacCafferty's turned to enhance James' education. The cellist Laurence McCann assisted him with his theory work, so by his mid-teens, James was already an accomplished musician. When, at the age of 15, he was asked to be the accompanist at a concert in Bridge Street which featured the best of local talent, including Jack Collins, John McCabe, Josie Hasson and Wee Willie Doherty, the receipt of five shillings for the evening's work was an initial influence on James' decision to become a professional musician.

Added to this, Mrs O'Doherty offered James the chance to assist her, and so at the feis he was given the opportunity to play for all the best singers of the era. Amongst those he played for in this golden age were Afric McGinley, Dawson Noble, Bridie McGuinness, Willie John McDaid, Kathleen Lecky and Eddie Mount.

James set about teaching himself how to vamp, improvise and transpose and blessed with a great memory, he soon acquired a repertoire of material that he could instantly recall without the need to look at sheet music.

As an aspiring professional he also learned that travel, often lengthy and gruelling, was an essential part of the job. Musicians went to where the work was; it was as simple as that. When he wasn't

formally employed, James did not remain idle but would practise at home. He would select a dozen or so pieces of his parents' music and try to sight read them, keeping a record of his efforts by awarding himself marks out of ten for each attempt.

History also records what was perhaps the defining moment in James' decision to make music his full-time occupation and that would also change the life of his brother Don. A message arrived at the MacCafferty's Francis Street home from the manager of Cavendish's furniture store in Bishop Street inviting James to interview for a job. James wasn't in, but Don decided he'd go along instead and so began a lifetime career. James became a full-time professional musician, and Don fitted his music career around his work.

In his early days as a professional musician, James tackled many and varied projects that included ventures such as the James MacCafferty Quintette, the Ten Columbians and the Carlton Swingtette. His other associations included working with Josef Locke, the famed St Columb's Hall and Creggan pantomimes, the Merville Operettas, the MacCafferty Singers, the Feis Ceoil Singers, and magnificent collaborations with the traditional fiddler Eugene O'Donnell. On top of that, he also held a post as music teacher at St Mary's in Creggan.

Such was the life of the professional musical director and accompanist that there was no abundance of time to spend on single projects. It was a life of the metaphorical juggler keeping many plates in the air at one time. It was an ability to stride across musical genres effortlessly and successfully without any hint of musical snobbery. It was, in many ways, a lifelong endurance test that was made enjoyable by a pure, undiluted love of music and the people he encountered on his journey within it. It was a test that James passed with consummate ease.

Despite the hectic schedule, James found time to get married on July 23, 1941. The couple had six children: Pat, Una, Seamus, *Bláthnaid*, *Máire* and the late *Róisín*.

However, during Easter week, there was only one place James MacCafferty could be found.

James' son Pat, music secretary at Feis Dhoire Cholmcille, said: "My father was a singer as well as a piano player; more so a singer than Don. He would have taken part in the Anna McAuley Cup, played the piano and sang in a lot of competitions before he became a feis accompanist.

"In 1946, he and Tony Black started the accompaniment, which at that stage was for Irish dancing. As well as that my father was also in the choirs with McCabe, and in the later 1940s he had his own choirs – a male and a mixed choir. These great choir competitions were the lifeblood of the feis in the 40s. There was huge rivalry. My father said people who knew each other wouldn't have spoken to one another when they arrived in the Guildhall; it was a case of 'persona non grata'.

"Then, in the 1950s, Mrs O'Doherty, who was the official accompanist, was getting a bit older and asked my father to take over in 1955. And from then until he passed away in 1995, he was synonymous with the feis. Many people have told me they felt that, after my father died, the feis was never the same. He had a school of music, the Gaelic Singers, he had choirs and was in concerts, and if you look at it, an awful lot of the people he was coaching took part in the feis and it was part of their lives – it was their love. Let's be honest, in those days that's all there was. There were no talent competitions, and certainly, there were very, very few people in Derry who went off to music college and became like a lot have now, full-time singers and musicians. Feis Dhoire Cholmcille was the only platform.

"The feis provided a springboard so now people can go and pursue full-time careers in performing. Some have said that when they arrived at music colleges in England and had to perform, they were able to walk on stage and sing because they'd spent ten years of their lives singing at Derry Feis and

gained the confidence and self-assurance to go up and perform in front of their peers. Their contemporaries at college, some with wonderful voices, couldn't go up and perform because they didn't have that experience. Others who have gone into business have said they were able to stand up and make a presentation because of that experience because, for every star the feis has produced, there are hundreds more who got up and sang but moved on into other things. The feis gave them that bit of poise.

"So that was my father's life and, quite honestly as a family, we never knew what Easter was about except for the feis. We never went away and there was no argument about it. My father was down playing, and in later life, as we all grew up, the expectation was you performed and that was it. My father lived and loved the feis. Anyone that ever encountered him will tell you that. He personified the feis," Pat said.

Despite the gravity of the competitions, James was renowned for his empathy towards performers; even when, strictly speaking, the rules of competition didn't really allow for it.

"I can recall people going up to sing and struggling and he'd ask them what was wrong, and they'd answer, 'I don't know', then he'd say 'right, I'll take it down half a tone'. I remember Giles Doherty cursing my father up and down because when my father passed away, Giles would have helped as accompanist, and people were coming up and saying to Giles 'would you take it up half a tone?' and Giles looking at them and saying 'no'," Pat laughed.

The MacCaffertys' association with the feis can be traced to its first year in 1922 when Pat's grandparents competed. His grandfather and namesake also served on the original committee.

Such an association obviously produces a wealth of memories, and Pat said: "My first vivid memory of the feis as a young boy was going up to St Columb's Hall and sitting beside my father and Tony Black, who was a fiddler, and I was in tears. There was nobody coming up with a metronome and saying 'right, that's my speed'. They played away and nobody ever said a word that they weren't playing it correctly.

"In fact, Tony, my father and Brendan de Glinn were the three who went to the Nazareth House in the late '40s and coached the children. Tony took the orchestra; my father looked after the singing and choir and Brendan did the dancing. Ultimately, this became the Gaelic Singers, from their work at the Nazareth House. My father's choir went into the feis, and one of the adjudicators in 1955 was a man called Dr Waldemar Rosen. Later that year an impresario from New York called Albert Morini contacted Dr Rosen and asked him to recommend someone in Ireland who could form a children's choir to tour America. Dr Rosen told him it should be James MacCafferty in Derry. That's extraordinary. Of all the people Rosen encountered in Dublin, James MacCafferty was the name he gave.

"When they appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, a new singer called Elvis Presley was also on the bill, and a couple of shows later, Fidel Castro appeared."

James kept a diary of this trip to the USA and one entry records: "October 28, had rehearsal with Ed Sullivan. Police had to keep back teenagers from Presley. Show at 8 o'clock. Mounted police keeping back howling mob."

Speaking years later about that particularly memorable trip, James said: "We were asked to a television show with Ed Sullivan, which at that time was a big television show in America. We were on the first night that Elvis Presley made his debut on television. It was estimated that there were 88 million people who watched it – obviously, it wasn't to watch us. In the second half when he came out, he put on a green coat, kind of in our honour. I have to say I liked him. We managed to fill

Carnegie Hall, Boston Symphony Hall and the Chicago Opera House. We even appeared in Disneyland.”

Such was the popularity of the Gaelic Singers; record companies were keen to get in on the act.

The next day, October 29, 1955, James’ diary entry reads: “Recording with Decca, 10am - 5.30pm. Signed Decca contract. Signed Morini contract.”

The Derry contingent’s brush with the greats of American entertainment, however, was not at an end.

James later recalled: “We had the choice of going to Hollywood or meeting Bing Crosby. We said we’d go to see Bing Crosby. He was with Rosemary Clooney cutting a few oldies. He came out and he had an hour with us. The orchestra waiting inside must have been costing him a fortune. He was a lovely fella.”

When the 25th anniversary of the Gaelic Singers took place in 1980, a concert marking the event was held in the Guildhall. As he addressed the packed main hall, James MacCafferty gave a glimpse of his renowned understated humour and modesty by saying: “When Don O’Doherty sometimes would be introducing me at the end of a concert, he would tell the audience that I would be the first man that made a million out of music. Well, that is not correct, but it’s something I am very proud of. But something that I am very proud of, is if I didn’t make a million out of music, I made thousands of friends out of music.”

Pat MacCafferty continued: “My father’s love of the feis never diminished, even as he grew old. I was amazed at that. If you look at it, my father was just 80 when he passed away. The previous year, he had played. He wasn’t a well man because he had cancer, unfortunately, and you could see him suffering. You could see him getting weaker and weaker. He played at the feis, but he certainly wasn’t doing the same amount he had before. My father used to start at 9.30 am on the Monday and finish at 2am on the Friday night and he never left the place.

“My father talked lovingly about two eras of the feis – the 1940s, when there were great big competitions, and the 1960s. If you look at it, the records show that in the 40s, the Fr McDaid Cup was pulling in 25 people. In the ’60s it was the same, and on some occasions the number went to over 30. In those days it was compulsory that you sang a song in Gaelic and an Anglo-Irish song. He just talked so lovingly about those days. The Fr McDaid Cup might not have even started until midnight and went on until 2 or 2.30 am, and you had to go up and sing at your best. After three nights of marathons, some of the adjudicators were ready to go home.”

The late Bishop of Derry, Dr Edward Daly, arrived in Derry in 1962 as a young priest attached to St Eugene’s Cathedral. When he was tasked to run a series of variety concerts at St Columb’s Hall, it was James MacCafferty that he went to for guidance and support.

Speaking of James’ talents, he said: “He was a genius at core arrangements. He was also terrific in a choir and a great motivator. He could, by a mixture of humour and insult, produce wonderful results from a choir, and of course his skills as an accompanist were incredible. I mean, that was the one thing that the artists that came to the hall, without exception, said afterwards; ‘you have a wonderful accompanist there’. As well as that he was enormous craic to be with.

“He was essentially a Derry man. He was happy in Derry, and he could have made a fortune if he’d wanted to. James had great pleasure when he had his pipe, his piano, and his pupils. He was a happy, happy man.”

A video recording of an occasion in the Guildhall some years before his passing shows James MacCafferty reciting a poem called 'Do It Now' by the American poet Berton Braley that perhaps helps sum up his outlook in life.

It states: "If with pleasure you are viewing, any work a man is doing, if you like him, if you love him, tell him now. Don't withhold your approbations, 'til the parson makes oration, and he lies with snowy lilies on his brow.

"For no matter how you shout it, he won't really care about it, he won't see how many teardrops you have shed. If you think the credit's due to him, now's the time to give it to him, for he cannot read the tributes on his tombstone when he's dead."

The poem is perhaps a fitting epitaph for a man who was willing to help and praise the efforts of others, but humbly reluctant to accept it when, as often it did, it came his way.

On Saturday, April 23, 2022, some 27 years after his death, and appropriately one day after the conclusion of the centenary Feis Dhoire Cholmcille, the Ulster History Circle placed a blue plaque at the former home of the late maestro on Francis Street.

Following an event at nearby Christ Church, where a selection of music and songs was played in tribute to James, some performed by members of his own family, the assembled crowd gathered in the shadow of St Eugene's Cathedral to watch the unveiling by mayor of the city and district councillor, Graham Warke. Archbishop Eamon Martin, former feis secretary, also attended the event along with James' children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. The monument sits two doors away from the same honour accorded to his former neighbour, Mrs Edward Henry (Rose) O'Doherty.

James' plaque simply reads: "James MacCafferty – (1915-1995) – Musician, Teacher, Feis Doire Accompanist – lived here."

James' father Pat MacCafferty dressed as a crusader in for one of his many appearances in local operatic productions. Pat was also on the original committee of Feis Dhoire Cholmcille in 1922.



James' mother Cis whose contralto voice was much sought after for appearances in Derry.



James pictured on the right with his beloved brother Don.

James MacCafferty 1915 – 1995



The Ten Colombians – from left to right: Mick McWilliams, Leo O'Donnell, Phil Hegarty, Tony Black, Michael Cutliffe, John McCabe, and Don MacCafferty. James MacCafferty is seated at the piano.



The Carlton Swingtette pictured at Portrush in 1948 where they had a lengthy residency. Included are Willie Lindsey, Tony Black, Barney Coyle, James and Mick McWilliams and James MacCafferty.



A local version of This is Your Life that was sprung on James MacCafferty in the early 1960s and compered by the late Don O'Doherty. Included is James' wife Eileen.



The Little Gaelic Singers pictured with Bing Crosby on a tour of the USA. James MacCafferty and Brendan de Glinn are seen here on the front row.

Giles Doherty: 'A world without music would be a dire place'

In his many decades of service to Derry Feis, Giles Doherty was both chair and deputy chair of the committee, a stage steward, a choirmaster and, of course, a renowned accompanist. The retired headteacher, who spent his working life between Rosemount Boys', Carnhill and Slievemore primary schools, was first connected to the feis in his childhood years as a competitor.

Giles said: "I was at the Christian Brothers school, known as the Brow of the Hill. They took the feis very seriously. It used to be a military operation; they all but abandoned teaching after Christmas because the feis syllabus came out then and they got stuck in. The late Bishop, Dr Farren, awarded a shield to the school that got the most points, and the Christian Brothers won it ad nauseam until the school folded. In those days if you were in fourth, fifth or sixth class and you were musical, you were in the choir. So I sang in the unison choir, the Gregorian chant choir and the three-part choir, and the three men who did that for years were Paddy Carlin, who eventually conducted the Colmcille Ladies Choir, a man called Tommy Carr, who produced brilliant action songs (I was in an action song one year and I was a pirate, and I was well cast) and Brother McFarland, who was a fanatic about Gregorian chant. I also sang in the boys' solo. Those were my first experiences at the feis. If you like, it was an education about the feis.

"Then, when I became a teacher and because I had taken a special year in music, I started to conduct choirs. My first school was Rosemount, and because I had a grounding in the feis and Fr Willie McGaughey was the secretary, he appointed the stage stewards and once he got your name, that was it. If you were a new teacher, you got this mysterious letter telling you to appear as a steward at such and such a session. I got the letter and that's how I got involved. When I moved down to Carnhill from Rosemount I conducted the choirs there, and when I went to Slievemore as principal we had a brilliant choir mistress who I was delighted came to our school, and that was Brigid Langan.

"At Rosemount, we never had a problem getting the boys to sing. There were only too happy to be in the choir and loved performing. It was a serious business. The boys stayed after school to rehearse, and they would come into school at the weekend for extra rehearsals and then we would all troop down together to the feis to perform."

"I worked for the feis for so long that eventually I was appointed to the committee. The chair when I was a young man was John Maultsaid. When he retired, Annie Morgan became chairperson, and after she retired, I was appointed, but I had been on the committee quite a few years at that point. I had twenty years as chairperson. It was a labour of love and I liked being involved. When I was at teacher training college for four terms, I was president of the student body, so I had been involved with committees before."

With a full gamut of experience in terms of the feis behind him, Giles has been in the perfect position for many years to assess the impact the feis has had on Derry.

"I think the impact of the feis has been massive. The whole thing has been good for the city and that's why, when I became involved, I stuck with it. I remember lodging money from the feis at the Bank of Ireland in Sackville Street and the girl behind the counter told me about her days as a competitor. But that's what it was like; you met so many people who had been involved by singing a song, or saying a poem, or dancing or being in choirs."

As an accompanist at the feis, Giles Doherty followed in the footsteps of the late James MacCafferty, and this wasn't an easy path to take.

"There has always been a Moore's Melody competition at the feis, and when James died that was the competition given over to his memory. The James MacCafferty Medal is now awarded to the

winner because he loved the Moore's melodies. He used to take four or five books of Moore's melodies out at the beginning of the competition, but he never used one of them. James was a genius - he was just a living extension of the piano. He could improvise right, left and centre.

"Also, when he took over the pantomimes and asked me to play the piano, I was very pleased that he considered me good enough to do it for him. James could do things I couldn't do. I was sitting in the lower balcony in the Guildhall one night during the Moore's Melodies and there was an English adjudicator called Geoffrey Spratt who taught at Cork university and who was a hell of a musician. I noticed a couple of times when James was playing that he was listening to the improvisations rather than listening to the singing. I was saying to myself 'he'd need to get back to the singer'.

"There was one day I remember clearly playing 'Down by the Sally Gardens' 75 times in St Columb's Hall. By the end, I think there were a few rogue notes here and there.

"I loved working for the feis and did my best to help it keep going. Our children didn't get anywhere at Easter, but as soon as they were old enough to compete, they had to go to the feis anyway. My daughters Deirdre and Fionnuala were at Thornhill, so they were always in the orchestra, and they were in their university orchestra and the western counties orchestra as well when that was going.

"There is always a buzz about the city in Feis week, and I have been told by visiting adjudicators that there is no buzz anywhere else like that felt in Derry, and I think that's true."

"I have to say that a world without music would be a dire place."

Giles has been associated with Feis Dhoire Cholmcille for almost his entire life.



Giles Doherty pictured with one of his prize-winning choirs from his time as a teacher at Rosemount Boys School.

The beating heart: the long and legendary line of feis accompanists

The business of accompanying singers, instrumentalists and dancers at Feis Dhoire Cholmcille is a serious one.

It is the job of accompanists to intimately know the music that each singer or player will perform to and be aware of the accepted and proper timings for jigs, reels, hornpipes, slip jigs, team dances and, most especially, set dances.

Often, it befalls the accompanist to provide a nod and smile of encouragement to the trembling six-year-old stepping up on stage for the first time, or a calming word to the senior singer in a blue riband competition, or to speak assuredly to the dancer entering the final round of a championship.

Feis accompanists are not just expert musicians. They are also acutely aware that a year's work hinges not just on the efforts of the performer, but on the accompanist's ability to support them musically - and to an extent psychologically - because on this can depend the future confidence of each and every competitor.

And when you are following in the footsteps of previous legendary feis accompanists such as James MacCafferty, Don O'Doherty, Paddy McCafferty and George Kilkie, concentration levels as well as knowledge have to be at a premium for the entire run of every feis.

Trevor Burnside is amongst the most respected and admired musicians ever to hail from Derry. He is musical director of the Doire Calgach Singers, church choirmaster and has a musical gift that allows him to express his talent equally well on a church organ, a concert piano, an electronic keyboard or a piano accordion. He has been at the heart of countless theatrical productions in Derry and far beyond for many decades.

He said: "I started playing at the feis when it was still in the Guildhall. In the mid-90s I started playing for the Irish dancers with George Kilkie, Paddy McCafferty and Don O'Doherty. After a bad car accident, George wasn't able to play for a couple of years, so I came in at that stage to fill in for him. I had been musical director for the Irish show in the Craft Village around then, so Don O'Doherty asked me to fill in for George. there was no big persuasion needed; it was a pleasure to sit beside players like Paddy and Don. It was good fun.

"Then George recovered again, and he and I started playing for the dancers. In those days I think we started on Tuesdays right through until the senior championships on the Friday night."

Whilst the late George Kilkie ranks amongst Trevor's most fondly remembered friends, there was an even closer bond between himself and the late Paddy McCafferty, who played fiddle at the feis for many, many years.

Trevor said: "Paddy McCafferty was an absolute gentleman of music. He shared his talent with everybody flawlessly – with kids at schools and older people. He loved getting out to play. We would have called up at his wee house and picked up to go and play in somewhere like Portrush, and he loved getting away for the night to play, especially when he was in the right company.

"I knew some traditional music, but I wanted to expand my knowledge so I said to Paddy one night that, as he was teaching children, he must have music written out for them. He said: 'I have jigs and hornpipes and reels.' I said: 'It would be great if you could give me a photocopy of what you have.' 'No problem,' he said.

"We were doing shows every week together in the summer, but nothing ever materialised. That went on for about two months, and I didn't like to say anything to him. But I came back to the house

one day and opened the front door and there was this brown paper bag lying in the porch. I didn't know what it was, so I opened the bag and inside was a book handwritten in beautiful italic writing. It said, 'a selection of jigs, reels and hornpipes for Trevor Burnside'. It was all finished off with coloured card on the front and inside, with all the tunes handwritten. Next day we were doing a lunchtime concert and I said 'Paddy, how can I ever thank you for that?' I have it here and I treasure it. Paddy said 'ah, I just wrote them out for you, they are my favourites'. It would have been an insult to offer Paddy money for doing that.

"I think it was the next Saturday morning I had a tune in my head. I played it a couple of times and hooked an electronic keyboard up to a computer and recorded it so I could remember the melody. I fine-tuned it a wee bit, then I printed it out. It was a slow air, and I went to the printing company in Bishop Street and got it put in a binder and put a wee foreword on it thanking Paddy for giving me the music. So that tune is 'Paddy McCafferty's Slow Air', and I gave it to him the next time I saw him and told him to take it away and have a look at it, have a practise at it and we'd start to put it into shows. He was delighted with it.

"That actually brings us to the centenary of the feis, because on the CD – *Derry Feis 100* – I was asked to play some instrumental stuff and one of them is *Paddy McCafferty's Air*.

"A couple of months after I received that first book I came home and there was another brown paper bag. This one was 'a selection of slow airs for Trevor Burnside', again all handwritten, and after another few weeks there was a selection of slow waltzes. That just typified Paddy. He was such a gentleman, and I mean that in the real sense of the word; he was a 'gentle man'. He loved music and playing with other people. He sat smiling all the time he was playing. He also had a smile on his face and his eyes closed if he was listening to someone playing or singing.

"Then, when he was in a nursing home on the Limavady Road, George and myself and some others went out there and Paddy would have brought out the fiddle and played with us. He was a great friend and a great mentor.

"George Kilkie was the same. He taught me a hell of a lot about traditional music. He was such a good dancer himself - he was top-notch in his day. He was a terrible man for cracking jokes. We'd be sitting playing and he'd be telling jokes."

Feis music secretary Pat MacCafferty was the man responsible for booking musicians and would normally seek their availability at the beginning of the year.

"I think George died in the February and I rang Pat back and said, 'I always said whatever time George wouldn't be there, I wouldn't be playing for the Irish dancing'. I said I wouldn't do it without George. I didn't feel that I wanted to continue on without him there. Pat said, 'that's grand, you'll be playing for singing and instrumental competitions, then'.

"I have been so lucky to have had the pleasure, enjoyment and camaraderie of playing with all those people.

"Times have changed so much. People didn't go away at Easter week then. They didn't have the money to go away, so during Easter week, the feis was a week's entertainment. There were big audiences and big entry numbers. There's still a good number of young children singing, but there's not that quality of older singers. The cultural contribution of the feis is phenomenal. It's something that maybe doesn't get the recognition that it should get. It's the starting point for children who, at four years of age, are getting up for the first time in front of an audience. Some of them go to bits, but some of them just come to life. That's their first taste of it and they have to get started early to develop their interest. By the time they reach seven years old, the difference is unbelievable. They

come and sing songs that make my jaw drop when I hear them. It's a great thing to be able to do that."

Charlotte Logue has been associated with Derry Feis for many years, both as a former competitor and now an accompanist.

She said: "I competed in the feis years ago, from about the age of 13 until I was about 17. My music teacher, Mrs Taylor in Rosemount, entered us for all the competitions, like Portstewart, Coleraine and Moville. She was a fabulous teacher. She taught a lot of us who ended up teaching music.

"I loved doing the feises; it was a day off school and getting dressed up. Then, of course, all the people we knew were there. You knew everyone because the same people entered all the time. I loved the atmosphere. There was a competitive element, but it was friendly. It was a case of supporting whoever won. It was done in a fun way and always in a friendly way.

"I got involved in Derry Feis when Pat MacCafferty phoned and asked me, and I have been doing it every year since. It can be a long week. It used to be longer when we used to do five days, and we didn't finish until midnight or later. It's down to four days now, and you wouldn't be working all of those days.

"I love playing at the feis and look forward to it. There are a lot of the same competitors every year and you get to know them and see how they progress. It's still fun. There may have been a time when it was a lot more competitive, but people are nice to each other even if they don't go to the same teacher. The teachers are very supportive of each other, as are the pupils.

"As a child, I used to love the Guildhall. The atmosphere was amazing even if you were just there to watch. I did a few prize-winners concerts' in the Guildhall, and I used to love that. I remember sitting at the back of the Guildhall and watching the dancers who were sitting at the back of the stage tapping their fingers to the music as they were waiting on their turns.

"I think the feis is really important because it shows the talent in Derry. Looking back, I can still see all the people that are still involved in music and who teach music who came through the feis. If they hadn't had Derry Feis, they wouldn't have been able to do everything that they have."

Trevor Burnside pictured with the late George Kilkie.



The late Don O'Doherty was a feis accompanist for many years.

The late Paddy McCafferty played for many years as accompanist to the Irish dancers at Feis Dhoire Cholmcille.

