

Chieftains' collaborative effort

By Jim Beal Jr.
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The Chieftains are Sean Keane, from left, Paddy Moloney, Kevin Conneff and Matt Molloy.
Photo: Courtesy Barry McCall / SA

THE CHIEFTAINS

7:30 p.m. Wednesday
Lila Cockrell Theatre, 200 E. Market St.
\$29.10-\$88.40 through Ticketmaster.

Paddy Moloney, piper, tin-whistle player and leader of the legendary Irish band the Chieftains, will always have a fondness for the Alamo City.

"The first time I went to San Antonio, they were dyeing the river green. I thought it was in my honor, but it was for St. Patrick's Day. It was good timing," Moloney said, laughing.

Moloney, 73, likes to laugh, and he likes to talk. He's good at both; his good nature and high spirit are likely contributors to the Chieftains' longevity. This year, the band is celebrating its 50th anniversary, actually the 50th anniversary of its first recording. The anniversary tour will stop at [Lila Cockrell Theatre](#) today.

A new CD, *Voice of Ages*, produced by Moloney and [T Bone Burnett](#), features the band working with a herd of indie rockers, Americana artists and Irish and Scottish folk singers, including the Decemberists, Bon Iver, Carolina Chocolate Drops, Punch Brothers, the Low Anthem, the Civil Wars and Pistol Annies, plus NASA astronaut [Cady Coleman](#), who recorded her flute and tin-whistle parts while in space.

The Chieftains have worked with rock, country, Latin and Celtic stars, composed songs for movie soundtracks and racked up a shelf full of Grammys. It wasn't easy for the band to come up with a novel way to celebrate the big 5-0.

"I was looking for an angle, as always," Moloney said. "We'd already done the Best Of and The Essential Chieftains. I got to talking to our good friend T Bone Burnett and asked if he'd be interested in producing the album. He said, 'Where do I sign?' He was working with a lot of the bands on the CD at the time. I'd never heard of some of these young bands, but they all did a great job. I picked out the songs, and I gave everybody choices. The result is this great Irish feeling."

When it comes to collaborating, the Chieftains are among the best.

The touring troupe includes the band - Moloney, Matt Molloy (flute), Sean Keane (fiddle) and Kevin Coneff (bodhran, vocals) - working with fiddler/stepdancer Jon Pilatzke, his brother, stepdancer Nathan Pilatzke, stepdancer Cara Butler and harpist Triona Marshall plus featured guests Jeff White (guitar, vocals) and Deanie Richardson (fiddle).

Moloney also is known for featuring local Celtic musicians and coming up with surprise guests.

"I've been careful to not take the music into a place that would embarrass the band," Moloney said. "The collaborations we've done and the guests we've worked with have all made sense."

"That theory goes back to the first album. There was not much market for traditional music. But people were listening to roots music, so we did arrangements to bring out the color of the music, harmonies, counter-melodies. I got a little slapping from the purists."

"From the word go, from the late '50s, apart from the musicianship, what's kept us together is the personality and the blend."

Much of the beauty, and the attraction, of the Chieftains lies in the band's ability to spotlight musical links rather than differences. With the albums *Down the Old Plank Road* and *Further Down the Old Plank Road*, the band found much common ground with country and bluegrass players.

When the Chieftains teamed with Ry Cooder for the *San Patricio* CD, the result was Irish-meets-Mexican. The group also has delved into music from Spain, France and beyond.

"We've made connections with so many musicians who I didn't know were fans," Moloney said. "When we made the country albums, it was like going to another part of Ireland. The *San Patricio* album was such rich history. The songs on *Voice of Ages* go way back. The song the Pistol Annies did, *Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies*, I believe the Carter Family did it, but the melody is right from Ireland and Scotland."

"When I heard Rhiannon (Rhiannon Giddens, from the African-American string band *Carolina Chocolate Drops*) sing, I thought she was Irish. When I saw her dance, her dance steps would go perfectly with those of our stepdancers."

When the Chieftains and their crew hit the stage, there's nonstop singing, dancing and music.

"The whole idea of making studio albums is to give you a taste of the live band," Moloney said. "When you play live there's excitement, there are nerves, there's that edge you don't get in the studio. Live is how we started, and there's nothing that compares to working onstage, to doing a live show."

Read more: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/life/article/Chieftains-collaborative-effort-3367334.php#ixzz1oM3DL9Cn>