

## MUSIC

# The phenomena that is The Chieftains celebrates 50 years in orbit



From left: Jon Pilatzke, Cara Butler, Kevin Coneff, Paddy Moloney, Matt Molloy, Triona Marshall, and Nathan Pilatzke. In total, there will be 10 people onstage and one in outer space.

By [Enrique Lopetegui](#)

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With six Grammys, 22 nominations, and 51 albums in 50 years, the Chieftains — playing the Lila Cockrell Theatre on Wednesday, February 29 — are one of Ireland's most beloved musical institutions. "We have won over so many people who have never seen us or ever heard of us," said Paddy Moloney, who founded the Chieftains in Dublin in 1962. "We present our shows in a very humorous way. There's fun and an incredible variety all the way through it."

"Incredible variety" is an understatement. Besides recording and performing some of the best classical and original Irish and Scottish folk music of the last half a century, there's virtually no style foreign to the Chieftains. The band has played and recorded collaborations with some of the most important names in rock, country, gospel, Galician folk, Scottish music, and the list goes on and on. The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Mark Knopfler, Luciano Pavarotti, Sting, and Van Morrison are only a few of the fans and collaborators they've worked with in the past., but 2010's *San Patricio* was their first foray into Mexican folk. The album produced by Ry Cooder is dedicated to the Patricios (heros abroad, traitors here), Irish soldiers who deserted the American army during the Mexican-American war of 1846-48 to fight for Mexico. The album is a gem, with guest appearances by Lila Downs, Linda Ronstadt, and Los Cenzontles, among others. "There are no barriers," Moloney told the *Current*. "This is the great thing about music. It's this wonderful thing that brings people together and you don't even have to know the language."

There's one thing the Chieftains won't touch, though — hip hop.

"Don't be overcome by the heavy media who are pushing all this dreadful stuff," Moloney said of the genre he describes as "awful music" and "rap crap." "Over the last few years I honestly felt good music was gone, that everything was lost."

Then, something wonderful happened — he fell in love with American indie folk, giving birth to *Voice of Ages*, a T Bone Burnett production that celebrates the band's 50th anniversary with appearances by the Decemberists, the Civil Wars, Low Anthem, and even country supergroup Pistol Annies (Miranda Lambert, Ashley Monroe, and Angaleena Presley). "I was so impressed when I heard their material that I was inspired to send songs to these young bands," said Moloney. "It was a great honor for us that they accepted our invitation."

The album, which was released February 21, includes "The Chieftains Reunion," an 11:23 track that features retired octogenarian band members like Sean Potts and Michael Tubridy. The epic song is the equivalent to the typical ending for any Chieftains concert, with every member taking a solo, and it is followed by another highlight: "The Chieftains in Orbit," which features Irish American astronaut Cady Coleman greeting us and playing the melody of "Fanny Power" while in orbit aboard the International Space Station. Coleman knew the Chieftains through Moloney's son, a rocket scientist at NASA.

"So last March, I get a phone call at a New York restaurant," said Moloney. "I'm Cady Coleman and I'm talking to you from the International Space Station.' I said, 'Come on, Cady, you're having me on,' and she said, 'No, I'm directly over you at the moment.' The waiter thought I had too many glasses of wine at this stage because I do love red wine."

She had been given a flute by Chieftain Matt Malloy and a tin whistle by Moloney, and the video of her playing in space will be seen on a big screen at the show, "just to show that I'm not making it up."

In total, the Chieftains San Antonio show, a retrospective of the group's career, will have 10 people onstage: Moloney (uilleann pipes), Molloy (flute), Kevin Koneff (bodhran, vocals), Jon Pilatzke (fiddler, stepdancer), Nathan Pilatzke (stepdancer), Cara Butler (stepdancer), and Triona Marshall (harp). Special guests are to include Scottish singer Alyth McCormack, singer/guitarist Jeff White, and country/bluegrass fiddler Deanie Richardson, both from Nashville.

Moloney hopes to be joined by a special local guest onstage.

"I'm just wondering if my good friend Flaco Jiménez [is available]," Moloney said. "Ten years ago he was our guest in San Antonio and we played together in Ireland as well. I'd love to have him as a guest again."

Flaco or no Flaco, Moloney will enjoy his visit to San Antonio — especially since the city hasn't dyed the river for St. Patrick's Day yet. "We love San Antonio," Moloney said. "But I was a bit disgusted when I saw your lovely river dyed green because it was near St. Patrick's Day." According to the River Walk webpage, on March 16 floats will release "110 pounds of environmentally friendly green dye into the San Antonio River," but Moloney doesn't buy it. "It looks like it's polluted ... I wouldn't like to bottle it and drink it! I love my walks when I'm there, and I prefer to stay there than Austin or Houston. So please, don't dye the river."•

### **The Chieftains 50th Anniversary Tour Concert**

\$23-\$78

7:30 pm Wed, Feb 29

Lila Cockrell Theatre