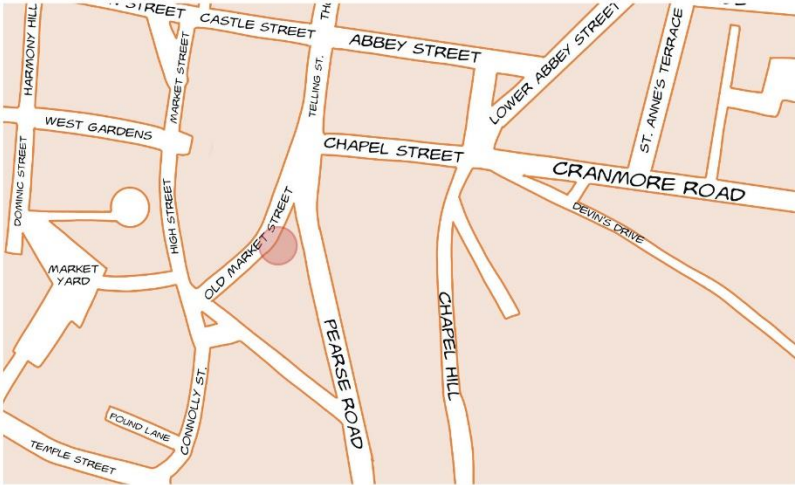


A charming mural adorns the wall opposite McLynns pub on Old Market Street. Musicians look down from the wall and an audience is held enraptured, but does this work of art hide a dark secret?



THE CASE OF THE MOANING MURAL

by Wyrd Caldron

The following newspaper clippings illustrate an extraordinary sequence of events concerning the mural on Old Market Street which unfolded in the late Summer and Fall of 2015.

Fig. 1: extract from the *Sligo Post*, dated 2nd August 2015:

Traditional Musicians Gather from Afar to Celebrate “Musical Mural”

Traditional musicians flocked to the streets of Sligo this week, following reports that a recently completed mural, featuring famed fiddle player Joe O’Dowd, had been heard “tuning up” at midnight for several nights.

According to Old Market Street residents, the mural has been making noises since it was completed in 2014. Eoin McKeown explains “At first, I thought it was a metal gate blowing



about in the wind, but a neighbour who’s into playing music pointed out that the noise always ended on a perfect C note. We pieced it together from there.” What began as a local rumour subsequently reached national attention, but McKeown is modest about his role in the story, “I think it’s wonderful for the Trad community and the town, however it came to happen. People are lining up to visit!”

Scenes in the street itself resemble the Fleadh which recently took place in Sligo town for the second year in a row- musicians sit on pavements, instrument in hand joining in tunes and smiling. “There’s a lovely feeling in the street and we don’t need to be going out to shows anymore, cause there’s always music being played right by our door” McKeown added, laughing.

Fig. 2: extract from the *Sligo Post*, dated 14th August 2015:

DISTRICT COURT ROUND

From our reporter at Sligo Courthouse

Eoin McKeown (37) of Old Market Street, Sligo has been convicted and sentenced at Sligo District Court. Apprehended after assaulting a musician near his home, McKeown had also attempted to deface anearby mural with a hammer.

McKeown plead guilty to charges of assault and vandalism, but appealed for leniency, saying “the reels, they just wouldn’t stop, your honour.”



Fig. 3: extract from the *NorthWest Mail*, dated 30th August 2015

WONDER WALL!

Tourists flock to Sligo's Musical Mural

Sligo town, the end of the Summer season and camera totting American tourists crowd a small street, hoping to witness a miracle. Over the past weeks, a gaggle of trad musicians have made pilgrimage to this unlikely spot, filling the streets with music and setting up camp. The mural, said to have been heard "tuning up" at first, is now claimed to take turns playing music with the visiting musicians! "After this lovely fellow with the Irish bagpipes had done his jig, I heard it- as if it was coming from inside the stone wall- an Irish fiddle! I swear to God!" an American tourist told us excitedly.

The town is divided over how seriously to

Fig. 4: extract from *An Pionta Nois* A trad music periodical, dated 4th October 2015



by Pádraig Ó hÉalaighthe

The sky is a leaden grey with the threat of rain entering Sligo town and an odd stillness hangs in the air as I approach Old Market Street. The few locals I meet on the way want nothing to do with me when I tell them I'm here to cover the miraculous Joe O'Dowd Mural.

At the scene I don't find the revelry I'd expected- yes, some of the country's finest musicians are gathered here, but I find them oddly subdued. They sit in silence, with their instruments lain to one side as they hunker about the famous mural.

And here it is- a fine rendering of Joe O'Dowd, capturing the joyful atmosphere of his sessions. He was said to have kickstarted the whole scene in Sligo, back in the day.

When I begin asking around- has the mural been heard playing today and whether I can interview anyone- I'm shushed immediately. "We are waiting for his request" grumbles famed bodhrán player Siofradh MacSeoin, gesturing to the mural and then raising her hand to indicate silence. I listen with them for a time and then, I see it- a wave goes through the assembled players and they strike up a tune I've never heard before. It is measured and without ornamentation, but something in the playing eludes me, the time signature seems hard to pin down, and the technique employed on the fiddles, especially, is quite unfamiliar to me. The feeling the piece imparts is of a sad beauty that nearly goes so far as to be quite draining. I heard no voice make the request.

Later, I corner a resident of the street. "At first, everyone was delighted- all these fiddlers getting

to play with their hero, the town full of tourists and McLynns always rammed," begins Barry Townes, "but then I started hearing rumours... the players that gathered weren't just hearing music anymore, they were talking with the mural, and referring to it as if it commanded them. The music kept getting sadder and slower."

Local musician Bernie Loughrey mentions to me that he won't have anything to do with the mural- "something strange is taking them over on that street. First it was just a celebration, someone claiming to hear a sound and a lot of us taking the excuse for a bit of fun, regardless of the rumours. We played all hours, fast and loose, in and out of McLynns across the road. Great craic." Here, he grimaces, "But it kept going. The residents were driven mad by the music after a couple of days, and you could see it wear on the musicians too. The life went out of their playing. Sure, I even heard people say you could hear him moaning up there in the mural if you played too fast or in a popular style."

But is it real? Is the mural really playing and speaking? "Playing maybe," begins Bernie, "but never speaking to me. I heard the tuning alright, I could even believe the music, though I never heard it myself. But I've been there when he's meant to be speaking..." he pauses again and looks down at his knees, "Everyone else's eyes glazed over. There was complete silence. Then they all snapped back to life, striking into a tune such as I'd never heard before, and all at once, as if by telepathy. I nearly ran a mile! They're hearing something alright, but I for one, don't want to be a part of that audience."

Fig. 5: extract from the *NorthWest Mail*, dated 20th October 2015

DIDDLEY-EYE-POCALYPSE! Local Man's Disappearance linked to the Musical Mural of Sligo Town

The disappearance of Sligo man Eoin McKeown, resident of Old Market Street, and vocal critic of the "musical mural" has shaken the town of Sligo. Eoin's claims that "an unholy alliance of fiddle players and American tourists" were working to "swallow up the town with their madness" were met with derision, but his demands for a ban on the all-night music sessions now common at the mural were popular among Sligo residents.

Concerns for Eoin's mental state grew among McKeown's family and friends when a scrawled note he appears to have left behind was made public: "I know what it wants now, and I must stop it, before the fools doom themselves and us all."

His sudden disappearance is under investigation, but Gardai were quick to dismiss rumours of his kidnap, and pointed out that claims of "possessed uilleann pipers" and rumours of "the ashes of haunted fiddles being mixed into the paint of the mural" were "obvious nonsense designed to enflame tensions between the community and these musicians."

"It seems obvious to me that some foul play was involved



Fig. 6: extract from the *Sligo Post*, dated 2nd November 2015

Yesterday, the town awoke to a mysterious sight- the trad musicians who had once been such a fixture on Old Market Street had all cleared out, presumably in the early hours of the morning.

Local Resident Barry Townes remarked "No one saw them leave- and there were so many of them, always making such racket... Strangest thing is, when I went to look at the mural, well, the audience in it- I could swear there didn't used to be so many people in there, and they looked sort of... familiar."