

Dear Listeners,

In April, We had a gathering of songsters in Lisdoonvarna. A gaggle of 471 lers gathered for a weekend of devotion to song, A Burren walk, 3 nights of singing till dawn, an exhibition of memorabilia, 3 gigs featuring Smalltown Talk, Declan Sinnott, Wally Page and myself. We also had a forum/discussion about this work that I do, these songs that I sing. It was mediated by Hilary Scanlan, recorded by Dickon Whitehead and transcribed by Olivia Mulooley. I edited the transcript. (And once or twice could not resist taking a few small editorial liberties). The audio may become available on the sister site (471 lers.org). This all took place in The Royal Spa Hotel, Lisdoonvarna on the afternoon of Saturday, 10th April.

Christy

Q & A

Royal Spa Hotel, Lisdoonvarna

Saturday 10th April, 2010 @ 2pm

Moderator: Ms. Hilary Scanlan

Hilary: Tá fáilte romhaibh go léir. I think the idea, Christy, was that we would talk about the work, the singing and the work, and not necessarily about the man who makes it. That is your understanding of it, yes?

Christy: Yes

Hilary: In that context, we invited listeners to send in some questions. I fielded those and sorted them out in some relevant order. We'll lash into a few of those questions and we'll go with the flow after that.

Christy: sounds good me, I'm hoping it will be a conversation, but I'd like to say this at the outset - ... what has developed over the last few years, since the onset of the website, has become something unique in my working life. I have been singing for many years now but this is the first time I have had an opportunity to engage with people who are interested in the work. Be it within my own family, our extended families, be it within bands or close work colleagues, I have not previously encountered listeners as involved with the songs as I am personally. There may well be occasional passing talk about the work but it goes much deeper with me personally. I have played in different bands and I play mostly with Declan Sinnott now. However he is not as interested in my songs as I am, nor would I expect him to be. He gives his all while we are playing. When we finish playing, rehearsing or recording our music he goes home and does his own thing. Meanwhile I will continue working, playing and renewing the songs every day. They remain in my head and are part of my everyday life. So it has been interesting and stimulating to meet a group of people who share more than a passing interest in the songs and the way I sing

them. It is something I have enjoyed these last five years. I have cherished and enjoyed the feedback and I have been looking forward to this conversation with you.

Hilary: The work. An chéad ceist. If you could cast your mind back to the making of 'Paddy on the Road' and tell us about that time, the feelings, the excitement around the recording of your first album and how that was for you?

Christy: Well, I was living in England from 66 to 72 - back then there were very few recording studios and those that existed belonged to record companies. It was very difficult for musicians on the folk and trad scene to gain access to the means of recording. Back in 1968/1969, many of us aspired to recording but I for one felt it might never happen. It was something many of us dreamt about. Back then there was great kudos in arriving at a folk club with one's own album to sell or to raffle. It was a quite a feather to have in the cap. Once a singer became a "recording artiste" the fee could be hiked hiked up a few quid. ..In early 1968 I did an audition for Transatlantic Records who were the progressive Folk label of the day. My friend Hamish Imlach got me that audition. The head Honcho, Nat Joseph, was not interested and rejected my demo (which, in retrospect, was very fortunate.) In 1969, I played a benefit gig for the Irish Civil Rights Movement in Shepherds Bush. Dominic Behan was on the bill and we struck up a friendship. (Which, unfortunately, proved to be a short one.) We had a few drinks got on very well and I stayed in his house for a while. When I was leaving Dominic said "I am going to record an album with you" and he was true to his word. He set up a meeting with Mercury Records .Dominic picked half the songs, I picked half the songs and He organised a backing band and we were booked into Sound Techniques Studio in Chelsea. At the time I went with the flow as I was totally out of my depth. Dominic called in Steve Benbow who was a jazz musician and arranger. He rounded up a team of players (Denny Wright, Ike Isaacs, Ray Warleigh, Jack Levine). He worked out arrangements and wrote the dots. I sang the songs and the guys played the dots. We recorded the first album in three hours and we mixed it in three hours and then we all went and got absolutely pissed. The photo was taken the next day in Hyde Park and I was nursing a horrific hangover. These are my current reflections upon 'Paddy on the Road', my debut album in 1969.

Hilary: A much coveted LP.

Christy: It can be strange listening to it now. It can give me the jitters or it can tickle me pink depending on the weather. It brings me back to a different time. I clearly remember getting the first copy into my hand. I recall posting an album home to my mother. I clearly remember the first time I heard the finished album. Noel Murphy the singer was a friend of mine who lived in Shepherds Bush. I called to his home and he spun the record on his hi-fi. It was a great buzz hearing my first album for the first time... Having packed up the "real" job, moved to England, slogged around the Folk Clubs for 3 years, this was my moment of fulfilment. I was euphoric, proud, excited and giddy so Noel and I went and had a few drinks. Then Mercury Records went and deleted my album almost immediately. There was one pressing of 500, Fair play to them. It has become quite a collector's item which is great for those of you who have a copy! One changed hands a few years back for £1,200. I have a copy myself and I believe there may be

about 30 copies in existence. Is Kieran Kelly here? Kieran, there are four different copies in that collage of photographs. Are they all yours? (*Referring to the programme prepared by Kieran Kelly for the weekend*).

Kieran Kelly: They all belong to different people; the names of those who have them are in the brochure.

Christy: Ok, because I thought perhaps you had four stashed away! (*laughter*)

Kieran Kelly: The names are in there of those who we know have them.

Christy: Fair Play KK

Lar Flynn: Did you think it was a one off Christy, that the album was a one off?

Christy: Oh yes, had I never made another album, I would have been quite happy.

Davoc Rynne: No you wouldn't! (*laughter*)

Hilary: Staying with the early work, you have described many times the effect that hearing John Reilly had upon you. Can you explain what it was that affected you so much; was it the lyrics, the delivery, or something else?

Christy: Well, there is a man in the room who was with me that night, Davoc Rynne is here. Can you remember the first time we heard John Reilly, Davoc?

Davoc Rynne: I have to admit, Christy, that he was sitting in a corner and I wasn't paying much attention to him, the songs were definitely too long for me. I can't remember what I was doing at the time, but I do remember him being a gentle soul. When you'd walk into Mrs. Grehan's bar John was always sitting there on the right hand side – forever there. After that, I don't know, except that his songs were definitely too long for me.

Christy: John Reilly was a very shy man as I recall. After he died we were shocked to discover that he was only 44 years old - we all presumed that he was in his 60s or 70s. He had lived a hard life and looked a lot older than he was. John was a gentle man who never understood the attention he received from "the fellas down from Dublin". We travelled to Boyle to hear the Grehan Sisters and when we heard John Reilly we were enchanted by his songs and singing. Thankfully, the late Tom Munnelly, recognised the importance of John's repertoire and managed to capture some wonderful recordings of John (Jacko) Reilly's singing. Sadly he was not able to record all of John's songs for the poor man caught pneumonia and died. Tom had one session with him and recorded about 25 songs. (Tom Munnelly devoted his life to collecting our Songs and Stories. His efforts and those of others like Frank Harte and Seamus Ennis saved our music and songs from extinction)

Davoc Rynne: Well in fairness Christy, Tom brought him to hospital.

Christy: Did he?

Davoc Rynne: He did. If a man is dying of pneumonia you can't very well get songs from him, but he actually brought him to hospital, he was only 44. I read that in the Christy Moore book this morning! (*laughter*)

Christy: That was John the man, but now to the songs themselves, I suppose initially, the Grehan Sisters used to sing a few of John's songs, 'Tippin' it Up to Nancy' and 'Leaning on the Half Door'. I would have heard John sing "The Raggle Taggle Gypsy", "The Well Below the Valley" "What put the Blood" and "Lord Baker" that I can remember. Later on I got to hear some of the recordings. I was very taken by his singing from the first time I heard him, but not in a way that I can explain. Subsequently, hearing the recordings, he inspired me in a way that has stayed with me to this day. When I sing a John Reilly song, I still get a feeling that I cannot explain- there was mystery and timelessness in his singing, there was darkness too. Even the language he used was unique - a lot of the songs are variations of very old English ballads. In the process of being passed down orally through the generations - different colloquialisms emerged, different sequences of words and sometimes even the very stories went askew from the original, which is wonderful. A lovely innocent man who sang great, great songs and his spirit still burns today, thankfully.

Sean O'Grady: Through you, Christy.

Christy: No, No, but thank you for saying that. It has been carried on through everybody here, through all those who sing these songs and through all those who listen and appreciate them, but thank you.

Hilary: A long question, Christy, about whether you would care to share your interpretation of 'What Put the Blood' in terms of the story of what happened between the two brothers and whether you have any insight into that you would like to share?

Christy: Not really. Again, it is a version of a very old ballad, one of the original ballads. Anyone here familiar with the Child ballads? With the original version in The Child Collection? Perhaps someone here can enlighten us. No? I can't really expand on it, I just sing the song and my own interpretation emerges. I wouldn't like to interfere with anybody else's interpretation of that particular song. To listen is to understand.

Hilary: Moving on to a question about Lisdoonvarna and the song. Somebody is curious about these long songs with long lyrics and stories. How do you learn such songs, do you sing them at home or in the bathroom or in the kitchen until you get them right. How does that work for you?

Christy: Well, that particular song goes back to when Paddy Doherty asked me to play at the first Lisdoonvarna Festival, when was it Paddy?

Paddy Doherty: 1978

Christy: In 1978 Paddy and Jim Shannon came up to Dublin and we met in the Meeting Place Pub in Dorset Street which was my HQ at the time. They talked about a festival they wanted to run and invited me to play. I had never heard of these guys before but there was a great gimp off them and they had a wonderful raw enthusiasm for their project. I signed up immediately and we

drank a few large bottles to cement the deal... They gave me top billing with The Chieftains. I was well chuffed... No, in actual fact, it was the following year that I wrote the song. The year I went on before Rory Gallagher.

Paddy Doherty: ...that was in 1983

Christy: Well it was the year that Rory Gallagher played that I started writing 'Lisdoonvarna' ...I think.

Davoc Rynne: No, you definitely sang it in The Peoples Hostel in the late 70s (Spanish Point Co Clare) You were sitting at the table singing the line about scratching your back on the barbed wire in Long Kesh and I said, "Oh my God, what weird words Christy, are you sure this is what you are doing?"

Christy: Was the People's Hostel going in '78/'79?

Anne Rynne: it was in our kitchen.

Christy: I feel like I'm on acid here

Hilary: How about writing it, how do you learn the lyrics?

Christy: Well obviously, I have to write them to learn them. It is different with every song. Learning lyrics can be a weird thing. Some songs are incredibly difficult to learn – for example Hank Wedell's 'Listen', I still can't remember the words of it, I have to use a guide lyric sheet despite the fact that are only twelve lines in it. Take a very long song like "Spanish Lady". I used to sing it back in 1967. I have hardly sung it since yet, last night, it just tumbled out with instant recall. There lurking in my subconscious waiting to be sung. "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" is another great song which I find difficult to narrate without guidelines. Yet I sang "Lord Baker" last night and it flowed like a river, from memory to vocal and on out into the night. I sing it maybe once a year, and it always runs out smoothly... again there are specific pictures that run in my head each time I sing it. There is no simple answer to this question... except to say that I can instantly recall 12 minutes of "Me and The Rose" and struggle with 2 minutes of "Listen".

Hilary: Ok, well we can come back to it; there is another question later about lyrics.

Christy: Ok, does anybody else have anything on that?

Davoc Rynne: I read the lyrics of "Lord Baker" today for the first time; I must have been doing a 'Lord Baker' study this morning. I found it just didn't make sense at all to me. I tried to read it a second time and a few of the verses got stuck in places.

Christy: Well, which version were you reading?

Davoc Rynne: the version in the Christy Moore book.

Christy: And you couldn't follow the narrative?

Davoc Rynne: Well, it got confusing when she started knocking on the door, it wasn't making sense, the North Humber thing and ... the sequence was wrong or something.

Christy When I sang Lord Baker last night I was in Northumberland, other nights I can be North of Humber in Hull. I mentioned earlier on that I used to continuously rewrite some of John's songs as I tried to learn and sing them. When it came to Lord Baker I spent a long time (over a number of years) trying to copy precisely the melody and lyric of John's version. John, as you know, had a unique way of singing. He had a number of basic tunes and in the course of singing a song the melody could alter and move. Sometimes while singing a song, John would stop for a sup of Porter and when he re-commenced the song it could be to a different tune. This never mattered to me for I was enchanted by his singing. Sometimes it seemed that he had learned some of the verses phonetically, that perhaps he may not have known what certain lines were about. That mattered neither for I loved the very abstraction of it. So as I adhered closely to John's original version of Lord Baker, some of the verses are odd. When "Turkeys Daughter" arrived at the castle and is conversing with the Young Foot Soldier (whom John would sometimes call "the brave young porter")....

Davoc Rynne: That's the confusing part, yes.

Christy: Yes, it does get a bit confusing there. But you know, life can be very confusing sometimes! *(laughter)*

Sean O'Grady: 'Little Musgrave' is a long song, but, if you know the story, there is logic to every verse. It is easy, once you get the start, to follow on with the story. Whereas 'Listen' is a short song, but because it is random things pulled out of everywhere, there is no logic and it is harder to remember what comes after each verse.

Christy: Yes

Sean O'Grady: 'Musgrave' isn't that hard to learn if you're determined to learn it.

Christy: If it was that easy Sean we'd all be doing it....

Sean O'Grady: You can follow the song naturally.

Christy: Up to Carlow

Dickon Whitehead: Also, Christy, you said for "Little Musgrave" you have a film that runs in your head so you are remembering that, you are not just remembering words.

Christy: Yes, very much so. "Musgrave" makes an engrossing film... On good nights Daniel Day Lewis plays Musgrave. If the gig is a bit stiff I might cast Pierce Brosnan, this old chat is going very well.

(Christy to Cathal Holland) "How are you, Cathal? Is your choir still going?"

Cathal Holland: Still going. I'm not as involved with them but they're still there.

Christy: A lot of you will know Cathal and his daughter Aine. I first met them when I was invited to sing at a commemoration for the bereaved families of children lost to drugs. This gathering is held every year and Cathal conducts the choir. After singing with them in Sean McDermott St. Church, Dublin, we did a concert out in Ballymun. It was a memorable occasion. The Ballymun Women's choir were singing behind me. I was less than pleased because I had to perform looking out at the audience! (*laughter*)

Cathal Holland: The first night we had the gig, it went great and then the second night, we were finishing up and before we went to do the gig, we were all saying "How are we going to let Christy and Declan know 'thanks very much' for coming out to sing with us in Ballymun?". We were all racking our brains until someone suggested we finish with Shane McGowan's "Fairytale of New York. Do you remember that Mick? (*To Mick Devine*)

Michael Devine: I do, yes.

Cathal Holland: One of the boys wrote a few lines "we love you Christy, thanks for coming, we love you Declan etc." We came out the second night and we were playing away and the bold Christy turns around and thanks everybody and not a sound of the 'Fairytale' and there were about 18 in the choir who had been practising this all afternoon. When we were in the dressing room, Mick Devine had heard us practising and he asked "what are ye doing" and I said "we are going to surprise Christy" and asked "What do you think?" He said "Yes, do that!" and I said "Right, we'll do that". So anyway, they finished the songs and Christy was thanking everyone and Mick walked to the back of the stage asking "Are you going to do that?" I said "Ok" and I said to Christy, "Christy, will you do the Fairytale?" And he said "Sure I'm after finishing up". I said "Just tell them I'm after asking you to do it". So he turns around to the man and says "Cathal Holland loves this song and we are going to finish with the Fairytale" so you and Declan played it away and finished it off and we sailed in. You turned and looked at Declan and Declan had copped us and he was breaking his heart laughing and you started breaking your heart laughing and we played it again without even knowing it and we brought the house down. (I have tried to unsuccessfully to edit the above, make of it what you will, it was a great night...CM)

Christy: Well, I've always enjoyed singing with you both, Cathal and Áine Holland; you are a great pair of chanters!

Hilary: A listener from Donegal has asked if you knew somebody like Matty when you were young, it is a brilliant song and you make it so real, that we really believe there was Matty.

Christy: "Matty" was written by Johnny Mulhearn. I don't know precisely what Johnny was writing about nor have I asked him. "Matty" paints vivid recurring pictures in my head as I sing it. Pictures of home back in the 50's. The way our society was (and still can be) where people were ostracised for being different, shunned for being eccentric, ridiculed for being artistic. I sing "Matty" as a song about a man who suffered loneliness. Before hearing this song I knew nothing of "the dark familiar". In earlier times many people believed in the concept of the alter image. Believed that one could meet one's own alter image in the form of another creature, often in the form of a cat. In my mind I have an image of Matty being lonely in the world, talking mainly to himself. One night, meeting himself coming the other way, he tried to embrace his own image.

This was a fatal act and the poor man died of his loneliness. Some nights when I finish the song, I address a word to Matty, and to all those people who have had that dreadful lonely experience in their lives. I have known lonely people and I have experienced loneliness. At a younger age, I may not have understood as well as I do now. Any other remarks or questions on “Matty”

Hilary: There are a few specific questions about writing songs. Do you have a process for writing songs or is it just when they come to you? Leonard Cohen described it as being very hard work and will write endless revisions before settling on a version. Part of that is how do you know when a song is ready or finished or are they ever?

Christy: I don't consider myself to be a songwriter. I am a singer who occasionally writes songs. It may sound clichéd but the song tells me when it's finished. Sometimes, it has happened that I have written and rewritten endlessly and eventually ended up back with the original version. Some songs were easy to write. Songs like 'Lisdoonvarna' 'Me and the Rose ' and 'DTs' simply flowed out. Other songs proved more difficult. Traumatic might be too strong a word but betimes I have been troubled by the process of writing certain songs. Recently my wife and I went to hear John Spillane, something we both love to do. It was shortly after the terrible events in Haiti. As John sang “everyone needs a rock to cling to” I thought that we could do a gig and write a song to support the people of Haiti. It was difficult as John was in Cork and I was in Dublin. John left for America happy that the song was complete. I got very hung up on certain phrases and kept changing it around. He was very generous in his response, but I think he may have been a bit frustrated by my obsessive re-writing. (I'm still looking for words of completion). I am rambling on a bit here now because this all took place recently.

Juergen: Christy, sometimes you write topical songs, like 'Veronica', but you sing it very rarely. I like this song because it also has importance for the public that songs about these things are done and presented. I like that very much.

Christy: Thank you. I can't explain why some songs fall off the list. 'Veronica' was not performed for a number of years. Recently it has re-emerged back into the repertoire. It is sounding good again and many people want to hear it. The cruel murder of Veronica Guerin still shocks and saddens. As new songs appear other songs must give way. It's the way of it. Are you coming tomorrow night? I will play “Veronica” for you tomorrow night, definitely! Thank you.

Hilary: You will be encouraging loads of requests here!

Christy: Fine!

Hilary: Send them up!

Christy: I will note them down so I can make good my promise.

Anne Rynne: Christy, a follow-on question in that vein about protest songs and their relevance in today's Ireland. Issues are bringing people together. We all know the way the country is at the moment and people have no hope, they are really despairing. I wonder what is your opinion on protest songs bringing people together, or should they bring people together?

Christy: I don't know if I have a view anymore of what should be or could be or would be. I think I know what you mean Sis but when I hear the endless negativity used to describe our country I sometimes have to switch off. If I spent my day listening to it I probably wouldn't be here, I would lose the will to live. I don't know, Anne, I can't give you a general answer to that. I do sing and I do write songs of issue. These are simply my view of things. I don't feel any responsibility or feel that I have to address issues. It is simply what I do. Certain things engage me. I can sing passionately about Veronica and I can sing passionately about Matty but not about the candy store on the corner. The only thing I know for certain is that songs have changed my attitude and perception; songs have effected change in my world.

Audient: Like Strangeways?

Christy: Yes, the same thing would apply to Strangeways. Some songs will always be topical.

Sean O'Grady: They are educational as well. A lot of people wouldn't know about some of the things that you sing about, it is only when they hear you singing about them, that they start to learn about things. They are important for that reason, Christy.

Christy: One of the things about the Haiti song is the reference in the last verse to the message of love from the Choctaw Nation. My daughter pointed out to me that perhaps I needed to be a bit more specific, not everyone would understand the reference.

Sean O'Grady: I would like you to write a song about that if you could.

Christy: I will happily help you to write it!

Sean O'Grady: Christy, I'd be sitting up there where you are now if I could do that!

Christy: The reference to the Choctaw People was too obscure. So last night I sang "in 1845, when Skibbereen was mourning". That straight away brings it back into that time. To that magnificent gesture from the Choctaw who sent 80 dollars to Ireland in 1845 for famine relief. I think it was 80 dollars.

Sean O'Grady: I thought it was 150.

Christy: Well, whatever it was. I like to reference certain things. There was an interesting dilemma in writing that song. In the first verse John wrote of the 'Mestizo'. I rang Maryline in Chile and asked her about Mestizo in the Haitian context, it emerged that Haiti is the only country where Mestizo has a different meaning. In Haiti 'Mestizo' refers to the elite, whereas in most other countries 'Mestizo' refers to native people. Eventually I decided to leave it in because it sounds better. It may be out of precise colloquial context but it sounds better. Sacrifices must be made in the pursuit of song!

Marty Mc: Just about the songs being educational and the state the country is in now. It was a few years ago, I think it was your first gig back in Ballybofey, we had the young fella and you sang 'Missing You'. He was asking questions about what the song was about. Unfortunately, it is obvious to everybody again now, but it was educational to him at that stage.

Christy: Yes, songs can move in and out of relevance and reality. 'Missing You' is a great song to sing. For many years, younger listeners had no knowledge of exile or unemployment. It is back with us now, for how long, we don't know. It was written during one of Jimmy McCarthy's purple patches. I still remember him singing it to me in a dressing room in RTE back in the mid 80s...

Ruth: May I ask a question about song writing? What is the reason for you to write a song? Is it a topic of interest to you? Is it a melody that comes from your head? It is lyrics or all together?

Christy: It varies a lot. But I have never had a melody first nor have I ever actually tried to write words to fit music. The words are always my starting point. I work on my lyric and then seek the music. If I fail to get a melody I call upon Wally Page and send him the lyrics. Wally writes beautiful tunes. Betimes I have managed to write the words, pick up the guitar, play my nine chords and a melody has emerged. Many of my own melodies have sounded quite similar. I cannot always hear it myself but colleagues have pointed it out... Songs like "Pity the poor Immigrant", "The Homes of Donegal", "Tramps and Hawkers", "90 miles to Dublin" all share the same basic melody...It is the way of folksongs.

Ruth: A famous German songwriter said in an interview that he has a melody in his head. And then he arranges the melody and then the words come in. I can't imagine doing it this way.

Christy: Well, I was amazed to learn of Ewan McColl's writing process. I had always assumed that Peggy Seeger wrote the music for Ewan's songs, but one of his sons told me that Ewan would write the tune first on a small Casio player. (*Christy hums the first line from 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face'*)... and then, the words!

Ruth: I can't imagine it.

Christy: I can't imagine it either! Apparently Ewan had a cubby hole under the stairs where he would sit at a small desk with his Casio! It's a wonderful image isn't it? (*Holds water glass aloft*)
.a toast to Ewan McColl!

(Applause from the floor)

Hilary: You and Declan go back a long way, but something extra special has come about in your work together in the last decade or so. A question from Vancouver- do you agree, and if so, what do you attribute this to?

Christy: I started playing with Declan in Moving Hearts. I'd known him before then for his work with Jimmy McCarthy. He played with my brother Barry (Luka Bloom) for a while in Dublin and he was around town playing with different bands and ensembles. He was the third player into Moving Hearts after Donal Lunny and I and he had a very strong influence upon that band. During our time together in Moving Hearts we never connected that much as happens in most bands. After Moving Hearts I began doing solo work again and I invited Mary Black to play a concert with me. She was seeking an accompanist, I suggested Declan to her and they played together. Subsequent to that, they worked together for thirteen years. Later Declan and I re-connected for the 'Ride On' album. Declan, Donal Lunny and I went to Killarney where we spent

some time recording. Whoever asked the question is right. In the last ten years we have gotten to know each other a lot better. He is a wonderful ally for me as a performer. When we are playing or rehearsing together, he is utterly committed to the work. When we part he leaves it with me and focuses entirely upon his own activities. I could say this if he was in the room... mine is not specifically his kind of music - he loves playing, but when he goes home, he gets into a different groove altogether. When we are out on the road he is always prepared and willing to rehearse. A willingness to rehearse has not always been forthcoming from previous colleagues. Occasionally Declan may struggle a little with certain songs. Songs that I love to sing, songs you may love to hear. In certain songs there may not enough scope for Declan to express himself but he will hang in there and give his very best. Am I lost in the answer or am I making sense here? Have I covered it? Any other questions with regard to Declan's playing?

Brian Kuin: Does Declan bring in songs too?

Christy: For me to sing?

Brian Kuin: Yes

Christy: Yes, he does. – After the Deluge, Cry Like a Man, Black Dog, Hattie Carroll...

Hilary: And 'Motherland', he likes 'Motherland', doesn't he?

Christy: Yes. I tell a story about 'Motherland' that we were playing here one night in this very room and how Natalie Merchant was here at the gig. (*To Paddy Doherty*) – Paddy is that true?

Paddy Doherty: Yes, that's true.

Christy: But was she here or did I imagine it?! (This might be an opportune time for me to own up. Never take my song intros too seriously. Suspend belief... Occasionally I can get carried away with intros)

Paddy Doherty: No, she was here.

Christy: You're after saying that to make me feel better!! (*laughter*) She was with Susan McKeon, or did I also imagine that?

Paddy Doherty: Yes she was here

Christy: I knew Susan McKeon was here. Natalie Merchant played in Dublin a month ago and I missed it.

Hilary: She is coming back.

Christy: Is she? When?

Hilary: I forget. You will have to Google it!

Christy: Where is she playing?

Hilary: Dublin. I think it is during the summer.

Christy: Oh well, I'll have to... she has brought a new album out as well – she has taken twenty four poems and set them to music so I'm looking forward to hearing that.

Hilary: Some of us saw her in Glasgow, at Celtic Connections.

Christy: And?

Hilary: She was superb.

Christy: Did she have a band?

Hilary: I'll get back to you on that! I had my eyes closed as usual!

Christy: And your ears?

Hilary: Go the whole hog, why don't you?! My career will be short-lived here! Is there any hard question I could ask him? I think it is going ok, is it? (*applause*) Here's a hard one now, are you ready? Straighten yourself! You once mused that, when you couldn't write down or speak lyrics consciously, the moment you began to sing them, they would come to you clearly, as if a subconscious stream was opened?

Christy: I mused that?!

Hilary: Well, Doug in Vancouver says you do anyway, I don't know! The question-would you speak to that mystery, that process by which song memory is created and tapped into?

Christy: There's a question in there?! (*laughter*)

Hilary: Will I repeat it?

Christy: Yes. Go on. If everyone could listen to the question and perhaps rephrase it in an understandable way. We'll all listen ok?

Hilary: The shortened version is - would you speak to the mystery about the process of song memory and how it is created and tapped into?

Christy: Jaysus. Anybody rephrase that question?

Aine Holland: Just engagement in song, I wouldn't say you speak to it, do you?

Christy: I don't understand the question! But I'm curious! How do you remember the words?

Hilary: From memory yes.

Kevin Cowan: Well, I think you may have touched on it already, you said when you can sing a song from 40 years ago, and it's there. Maybe there is no easy answer to that question. Some songs are just locked in your head.

Christy: Well I think there are different things about it and I have to say I suspect part of it may be the ageing process, that as you get older, the head can go a bit askew. There was a time there last year when I was starting to falter maybe four or five times in a gig, to draw a blank and it's terrible, it's horrible when it happens. Sometimes you get this sense that it's looming, you're going through a song and you're grooving away, but you feel this black spot coming down the line and you get there and you can't remember and it's horrible. Maybe it has moved on again because last night there were 36 songs in all and I think it went smoothly apart from a faltering moment during "Continental Céili"

Audient: Well, somebody asked for the Boys of Mullaghbawn early in the show last night, and you couldn't remember it, but then by the end of the gig, you were able to sing three verses.

Christy: Through the gig, for some reason, The Boys of Mullaghbawn kept coming back to me and I think it became a bit of a challenge. Just as I was finishing, I thought to take a stab at it and out it came in perfect recall. I could have done the full song, but I decided to just do the three verses - I think there are five. It's a Powerful song.

Martin McFadden: I don't know about anyone else Christy, but I thought you were faultless last night. *(Applause)*

Christy: Well so was the audience, it was a great night. It was a great gathering and it was lovely. Anne? You were on something there?

Anne Rynne: It was the same question about Mullaghbawn.

Christy: Frank Harte used to sing that song. He also invited me a few times to singing sessions in Mullaghbawn that take place every year. Frank invited me a couple of times to go with him but I never made it. It is something I really regret. That's the way life goes.

Hilary: An easier question now. The mix of songs in a gig is fascinating. People like the change of mood from serious songs to fun and back again. Do you still ponder over the lyrics of songs such as 'Bright Blue Rose' or 'Magdalene Laundries', or do you come to your own definition of the meaning which won't change anymore?

Christy: I'd say the latter. Those two particular songs – Joni Mitchell's "Magdalene Laundry" is a complete and perfect song with a beautiful melody - it is heartbreaking. It can make me feel angry and broken hearted. There is no light in it and yet it is a thing of beauty. 'Bright Blue Rose' - I haven't got a clue what McCarthy was writing about nor do I need to know. It is sufficient that I love singing it. I know it means different things to different people. I have my own interpretation but I doubt if that matches what Jimmy McCarthy wrote about. Basically, it's a song that creates space for each listener's interpretation. That is the mark of a great song – a song everyone can inhabit for its duration. A wonderful piece of writing from a great songwriter – Jimmy McCarthy.

Hilary: Very specific question again, about 'Yellow Triangle'. The combination of the poem and the signs that the victims of persecution had to wear are woven so brilliantly into the song. How did you find out the meaning of those different coloured triangles?

Christy: My sister-in-law, Sheila Isaacson, researched it for me. My wife, Valerie Isaacson, had some knowledge of the significance of the different colours. Sheila then did some research and came back with what the different colours represented. That's how that came about. Do you know the story about the song? I met Phyllis McGee at the launch of Charlie Donnelly's book "Even the olives are bleeding" Some time later Phyllis sent me a card that contained some writings of Pastor Niemöller. I put it on the wall above my desk where I would see it every day. The song evolved from there.

Jim McCrann: If I could just say on that song, it is one of the few songs where at the end I've seen you sing it with real anger. Does that still annoy you when you are singing it at the end? The anger that I've seen in some of the performances you've given at the end of it...

Christy: Yes, it is not feigned. It is an interesting observation. Even as I say to you, "it's not feigned" there is a little voice in my head saying "Hang on a second there!" Perhaps it is feigned betimes... When I sing "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" I sometimes get an anger rush. This is not part of the question, but one thing I did realise 10 or 15 years ago, that this singing I do involves quite a bit of acting. I go out on stage and I do what I do. But I don't sing like that when I'm at home nor am I behaving that way now – I don't think I am anyway... maybe I am though!! (*laughs*) Well, sometimes you have to act, because sometimes you go out on stage and you might not be feeling that good. Sometimes, you've got a room with hundreds or thousands of people who are full of expectation. Inside in the dressing room and you might feeling really bad about something. The head might be down on the ground... I read of an American comedian who spoke about the need to "leave your stuff in the dressing room". Go out and do your gig remembering that a lot of people have made sacrifices to come and listen. A lot of people have had to save their money to get here. A lot of people out in that room mightn't be feeling too good, some may be very ill have gone to great lengths to attend. So go out and give it your best shot, go out and do the very best you can and leave your own personal shit in the dressing room. That was a good piece of advice. I've tried to incorporate that into my preparation- whatever shit is going on, try and leave it in the dressing room, it will still be there two hours later when the gig is over. How did we get on to that?

Sean O'Grady: About getting angry, but surely if you're singing the song with feeling, you would get angry anyway, you're supposed to sing a song and put feeling into it.

Christy: Here is another thing I've learned. Singing angrily makes it easy for people to switch off. I went through a whole period of my life performing where I was angry all the time. People will say "I don't need this" and never come back... Whatever needs to be said is better said gently. If one can sing about something ugly but sing about it in a beautiful way it's more difficult for a listener to switch off. I sometimes feel discomfort in the room when I sing 'Magdalene Laundry' or 'Strangeways' or 'The Time Has Come'. Certain songs are awful, but it's harder to switch off when song is sweet and gentle upon the air.

Kieran Kelly: Christy, I can see that with 'Veronica'. I remember when you sang 'Veronica' first there was anger in the song. Particularly in the way you played the guitar there was anger. Then later on you began to sing it more gently which brought the song forward a lot

Christy: Well, there's something interesting in that, when I first wrote the song I thought I had written a melody. Then when I went to record "Veronica" both Donal Lunny and Declan pointed out that the melody was almost identical to a Jimmy McCarthy song. To this day I cannot hear the similarity! Declan and Donal then wrote a new melody which is quite beautiful. I should add that they did incorporate elements of my original tune! So there!

Hilary: What songs would you dearly love to sing, either on stage, or record, that you just can't get right?

Christy: Well with regards to stage, I know Lar was asking for 'Easter Snow' and Olivia as well. I've never been able to do it on stage and I don't know if I've ever done it, have you ever heard me do it?

Lar Flynn: I can't say I have, no.

Christy: I don't think I have ever done 'Easter Snow' live. I do get requests for it. And the same applies to "Folk Tale." I also get many requests for 'Folk Tale' and I've tried to get both songs together at home in the work room. I have great memory of the morning we recorded 'Folktale' in Nigel Rolfe's garden in Passage. It was a lovely early dawn and we were out with the tape recorder. I wanted to sing the song amid the dawn chorus. Just as I started to sing a milk lorry came trundling up the hill but I kept singing and Nigel kept recording. The milk lorry passed. I love that recording. Nigel Rolfe, myself, The Dawn Chorus and the milk lorry. A lovely piece. A Passage Dawn rendering of Paula Meehan's beautiful Folk Tale. Maybe one day I'll get to do them both, but at the moment, I cannot do justice to either song. Sorry about that Olivia!

Petra: Christy, have you ever thought about singing more songs in the Irish language? I love that passage in 'The Two Conneelys'.

Christy: I am a little bit embarrassed by my lack of Irish. There are many people singing songs beautifully in Irish now.

Petra: John Spillane.

Christy: Like John Spillane. When I was in my teens, my Irish was good. Now, I'd describe what's left as Bord na Móna Irish! When I was drinking, my Irish was a lot better! On the beer, at two in the morning, I could be fluent in Irish... and Japanese! (*laughter*) Every year for the last 20 years, I've vowed to regain my "grá for the teanga"

Petra: It sounds really beautiful, in 'The Two Conneelys', I am always waiting for this passage to come.

Christy: Well, maybe you have spurred me on here; maybe it's time to.....

Hilary: tús ag caint!

Christy: Ceart go leor. Ar aghaidh linn!

Hilary: Changing tack- as a film fan, is there any one particular song that you have recorded or written that you would like to have seen used as a soundtrack?

Christy: I have given up on that. I did submit songs and music and ideas to film makers on a number of occasions.

Hilary: When you were invited to submit for a soundtrack, was it?

Christy: Yes. But it's not the end of the world. Can you ask me the question again? Because resentment has come up into my head and distracted me.

Hilary: As a film fan, is there any particular song that you have recorded or written that you would like to see used as a soundtrack? The guy that asked the question is just over there, so maybe he would like to rephrase it.

Christy: Who asked the question?

Hilary: Decky.

Christy: Well, one that comes to mind is 'In the Name of the Father' the song I wrote for Giuseppe Conlon, I thought it would have worked well. 'Veronica' too could have been used. There were times when I wondered did anyone even bother to listen. "The Time has Come" might have worked perfectly at the end of "Some Mother's Son".

Decky Harbinson: Those were the sort of songs I was thinking about. I was saying to Hilary, you're sitting in the cinema and thinking about the music coming on.

Christy: A couple of times I've heard little snippets of things in films and thought "Wow!" I went to see an English film there a couple of years ago and there was a bit of my version of 'Don't Forget Your Shovel' in it... it was such a buzz! Music in films is so important. There are people who have that gift of creating soundscape. I don't have it. However in certain instances I felt my songs might have worked... I was invited to audition for a few good parts in films but I declined. When I eventually saw the films in question I was glad for the actors who got the parts were superb. I have been given one gift and I will stick to it, I'm content to be a one trick pony... mind you, there was one film part I turned down that I might have done a wee bit better but my lips are sealed...

Hilary: A few particular questions about your voice. One question is how you prepare for singing and how do you look after your voice, do you do voice exercises?

Christy: With regard to preparation, I sing before I go out on stage to warm up. For a while I went to a voice coach. I learned exercises and did them for a few years. I do sing a lot at home. I sing every day. When I'm on the road, I can do two gigs on the trot - if I gig three days in a row, my voice begins to get thin and hoarse. If I do two gigs and have a day off, I'm ok for two more. In the old days, I could do 20, 30, 40 nights on the trot and it didn't seem to make any difference. But then in those days, I was doing two 20 minute sets and taking lots of lubrication! These days the sets run to two hours. I sing more physically now and I use my voice a lot more extensively.

I've learned a lot about this voice these past 10 to 15 years. I certainly appreciate still having it and I dread the day it will go.

Hilary: As do we.

Christy: It's a great gift that I've been given. I understand that now. I have gratitude for it. I take care of it on a daily basis trying to nurture it and not abuse it. When it goes I plan to take up gardening

Hilary: Scaly, you asked that question.

Sean O'Grady: Yes, Christy I was wondering if you take honey or different things before you start singing or how you look after it.

Christy: No. I think the biggest thing in my singing life was getting some singing lessons from our neighbour, Mrs. Marie Sullivan (nee Slowey). Marie was a close friend of my mother's and both of them sang in the choir. As a boy soprano and she took me under her wing and she taught me many things about singing.

Anne Rynne: and breathing

Christy: The breathing was part of it, yes, but equally the projection of the voice is important, not to sing down in your throat. If you sing in your throat, there will be damage to the voice. All small things but once you take them in they are there for life... She told me that I should imagine that my voice is coming from here (*points to his forehead*). I do it automatically now.

Sean O'Grady: Would you put a lot of emphasis now, on how successful you are, on those lessons?

Christy: Oh definitely. Well, Mother sang at home. She had us all singing at an early age. I sang Kevin Barry last night. Our mother had me singing Kevin Barry when I was 6 or 7, as a small boy soprano. In national school I was in the choir. In secondary school, I was in the choir and in school musicals. All the time I was picking up technique. I sang in the choir at secondary school and I still remember the power of that - the four-part harmonies. I just loved all that. So all along the way, I've learned these things that I don't think about now or notice now...but they are always there.

Anne Rynne: Just on that, a memory has popped into my head, the first time I saw you on stage was in Newbridge College in 'The Mikado' singing Tit Willow.

Christy: That's right. I loved that time. A light went on for me during that time. I went to secondary school in Newbridge College. Fr. Henry Flanagan taught there. He was a most enlightened and very artistic man. A wonderful sculptor, he also painted as well as directing the choir... He was Dean of Discipline (Biffer) in the school. Many years afterwards when I used to visit him he told me that he took on that job to do it fairly. He recognised that certain teachers didn't have the ability to issue discipline dispassionately. He was a great teacher. He taught me many different things, particularly about singing.

Davoc Rynne: Can I ask a question about singing again, the gift of singing, as against learning singing. How much, percentage wise, would you say that this is a gift that must be stored in you or how much do you think you have actually learned as you were going along?

Christy: I hear great singers who have relatively small voices and I hear people with wonderful voices whom I would not consider to be great singers. When I hear singers using songs to show off their instruments I seldom engage. I prefer the singers who are passionate about the song. You don't need to possess a great voice to be a good singer. I see them as separate things. Both our parents sang passionately, they were both good singers, that's where it came from initially

Davoc Rynne: And that was an era where everybody sung. Certainly, my father sung- my mother- not really, but everybody sung.

Christy: We used to have concerts at home when we were all young kids. We would all sing and they were lovely occasions. Before the ballad days the songs were a bit more formal, more Thomas Moore then Zozimus. The Clancy's and The Dubliners soon changed all that. Did you bring the whistle in with you, Dav?

Davoc Rynne: This is your gig Christy, not mine!

Christy: Would you give us a tune? Go on Davoc give us a tune!

Cathal Holland: It's your gig now! (*Christy and audience cajole Davoc to play*).

Christy: I first met Davoc in the early 60s when the Newbridge Folkies started going out to the village of Prosperous which was all of 10 miles as Mick Curran's van flew. (Davoc is a native of Downings, Prosperous, Co. Kildare and the album Prosperous was recorded in his house. That photograph on the front sleeve of the album "Prosperous" is Rynne's hall door.) It was a great time, we started going to the Fleadhs and we discovered a lot together. We brought down many's the lamp.

(*Davoc Rynne plays a tune on the tin whistle*).

Christy: Thanks Dav. That brings me back to the Fleadh. We'd leave on Friday night and not come home till Monday. Through Tuesday or Wednesday of the following week the music would still be resounding in our ears. It was always the whistle tunes that reverberated and it would be time to go to the next Fleadh by the time the reverberating calmed down! We needed so little to go to a Fleadh back then. 2 or 3 quid and a sleeping bag and it didn't matter where we lay-under a bush or in a hayshed. Back at the Boyle Fleadh we dossed in old Railway carriages.

Davoc Rynne: The whip rounds for petrol were serious affairs.

Christy: money for petrol or money for porter!

Kieran Kelly: Christy, Gerry Brady is here in the audience and Gerry he has told us many a story of your time in England.

Christy: I'm really glad you mentioned that now, because I'd like to talk a bit about him.

Kieran Kelly: Yes, I just wanted to ask you to tell your side of the story! I'm always hearing Gerry's! I have to say, for those of you who don't know Gerry Brady, he is a gem in our lives, he is a fantastic man and I think Christy will agree with that. He is a great storyteller and he tells the stories so well of the time in England.

Christy: Well, when I arrived into Manchester in 1966, I was trying to get the start, trying to get my foot in the door. Mike Harding gave me my first gig out in Crumpsall village where he ran a great folk club with his wife Patricia. I heard about this band in Manchester called 'The Beggarmen'. They had a club on Thursday nights in The Crown and Anchor at the back of Piccadilly. I went there and met up with Gerry Brady and Eamon Clinch who fronted the band. I have to say that it was the best folk club I ever played. Most Gerry Brady stories are for another time... Perhaps after dark... *(To Gerry)* Will you sing a song?

Gerry Brady: Will I do The Little Beggarman?

(Gerry Brady sings The Little Beggarman while playing the bones)

Christy: Thank you very much Gerry. Listening to your album recently after 40 years I was reminded just how good ye were. You recorded that album in just one take? Might ye get together again?

Gerry Brady: Nobody knows. If we can find someone who might want to record us! Just for nostalgic reasons more than anything else. (What about Dave and Helen Howard, late of Manchester, who run a studio near Thomastown, Co.Kilkenny...)

Christy: I'd love to hear ye together again, count me in! The Crown and Anchor is still there, I walked past it a couple of years ago.

Gerry Brady: I saw that myself, it brought back some great memories of old. We had some great people drop in, Luke Kelly sang for us there.

Christy: I heard Tom Paxton, Ewan McColl, Alex Campbell and The Watersons in your club but, no matter what act ye booked, the people came to hear The Beggarmen...

Hilary: I'm conscious that Adam gave me one question and I would certainly like to acknowledge Adam's contribution to the whole affair. He is curious as to how you came up with the title for the album 'Graffiti Tongue'.

Christy: I am going to do a serious bit of name dropping here - it was Bono. I did a bit of work with Bono that year on 'North and South', which was a really interesting time. He was good to work with. He suggested that title. He christened that album 'Graffiti Tongue'. How are you Adam?

Adam: Fine.

Christy: I love seeing you at gigs; I get a great lift when I see Adam in the front row!

Hilary: That and 'Traveller' are his two favourite albums, I think.

Christy: 'Traveller'? Very few people ever mention the Traveller album. A lot of the regular listeners tend to skip that one! I enjoyed making that album a lot. I'd like to go back there again and learn a little bit more about that process.

Tommy Clarke: I was listening to that album on the way down. Having been in Somalia myself, I was wondering how that song came about- 'The Siren's Voice'? No one else has said anything about that country at that particular time, apart the Yanks with 'Black Hawk Down'. That situation, you know, it wasn't heard of, except for the famine, a couple of years previously.

Christy: Hi Tommy, I can't remember where the voice of Somalia came into the song. The song was somewhat like 'Listen'. It was a series of images. It's almost as if the narrative happened upon Somalia. You put all these images together and the narrative came out of it. I had images of black priests coming to Ireland 'to save the white babies', of people coming here to seek sanctuary and some finding further oppression. My memories of writing "Siren's Voice" are vague. I was starting to work again having come through a time when I thought my singing days were done...

Tommy Clarke: Because some of the song comes across to me like 'Listen'. The words "no niggers, no knackers, no wogs, no refugees". People didn't want immigrants in the country, but they have contributed a lot to the country. It has turned full circle now. Most of the young priests around Dublin now are black. "The penny for the black babies", they are coming back now to give back what we gave them.

Primula: You were talking about singing and how much you enjoy the duet with Declan. A lot of other singers have done duets albums. Is there anybody else you would like to do duets with?

Christy: I'm not great in the "duetting department".

Primula: Not even vocal harmonies?

Christy: I'm not a very good harmoniser. When I worked with Donal Lunny, he would write out specific lines and I would learn them off by heart. When Declan hears a song he can accompany and harmonise it straight away. Anne, my sister over there, has the gift with harmonies. Cathal and Aine Holland can harmonise like songbirds (*To Aine Holland – Were you singing harmonies last night?*)

Aine Holland: Probably yes.

Christy: They were lovely.

Aine Holland: When I was young, I had to teach myself how to get into a harmony line.

Christy: Were both of ye harmonising last night? It was lovely.

Cathal Holland: It was nice, yeah.

Christy: When good harmonies happen it is special thing. I recall Elvis Costello came into the studio when I was recording 'Missing You' and he laid down a great harmony line. It is something I can only do with great difficulty. I sang Donal-Lunny-written harmony lines in Planxty and

enjoyed that immensely. I have played bowrwn on many albums, I find that easy to do, get into the groove and stick around till the red light goes off.

Hilary: Can I ask you another question? What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you on stage?

Christy: When I was fourteen I smashed all my front teeth in a handball alley. From that time until I was forty I had five false teeth. But back in the Royal Albert Hall, with Planxty in 1973, I was singing 'Follow Me Up To Carlow'. I over did the "F" in Follow and the false teeth took off and landed down in Ted Heath's lap. (*Gestures*). We were playing support to Steeleye Span in a 'Fanfare for Europe' concert. Afterwards, Ted Heath, the British Prime Minister of the day, came to the Planxty dressing room, thinking he was going into the Steeleye Span dressing room. We were in rag order and a bit dishevelled. Donal had just lit up a mighty spliff! Ted and entourage exited sharply and we made our way back to The Irish Club at Eaton Square where we quaffed through the night with Lord Longford and Christine Keeler. God be with the days! (*laughs*)

At this point I should like to say, and he'll hate me for saying it, I am very fortunate to work with Paddy Doherty. I first met Paddy, as referenced earlier, when he came to Dublin with Jim Shannon and invited me to the first Lisdoonvarna Festival. Later in the 80s and into the 90s, Paddy promoted a lot of my gigs in America. Since then, himself and his wife Chris returned to Ireland and for the last ten years Paddy and I been working together. To me, the work I do now is made possible by the attention that Paddy gives to detail. Michael Devine has been my travelling companion and tour manager for almost 20 years. I first met Davy Meade at a Bloody Sunday commemoration concert in Derry. Davy was doing the sound and he really impressed me - the way he worked the sound and the feedback he gave me. Davy is the best live sound engineer I've worked with. I can sing very quietly to 5,000 people confident that Davy will send the sound right around the room. No matter how softly I play it, Davy will deliver it. His brother, Johnny Meade, looks after the instruments and the staging. He never misses a glitch during in the course of a gig. Dickon Whitehead provides our monitor sound, records all the gigs and is our resident snapper. Geoff Ryan provides our lighting. To me, good lighting is lighting that is barely noticed - that enhances rather than distracts. I feel very fortunate to have such good team of work colleagues around me. This gathering, that we are enjoying, was put together by The Doherty Family. I wish to thank them for their hospitality

(*Applause*)

Martin MacFadden: Christy, can I ask you a question if I may? It is actually a two part question. Bear in mind that you still have many years of performing left and you have a huge range of material, but what would be the song that you would most like to be remembered for, from your own point of view but also from your fans' point of view? What song do you think the fans would relate to Christy and what song would Christy like to be remembered for?

Christy: Well, the first half of that question, I can't really answer.

Martin MacFadden: Would it be the same song or would it be a different song?

Christy: what you are asking me now would never cross my mind. However I do have this concept - take most of the great songs that we cherish, we haven't got a clue who wrote them. All the songs John Reilly sung, we don't even know in what century they were written. When a song long outlives the memory of its writer means- that song must be very special. "Green grows the Lily O, right among the bushes O"

Martin MacFadden: I couldn't pick one either, there are so many.

Christy: Fair enough!

Sean O'Grady: Christy, of all the songs you wrote yourself, is there one you like the best? You know I love 'Viva La Quinte Brigada', I think it's a great song. Where would you put that with all the other songs you have written? Is there one you think you have done that is better than all the others?

Christy: I like "Strangeways", "Lovely Young One", and "Middle of The Island". Whichever one is going down well at the time I'm singing is my favourite! This sounds ridiculous, but when I was growing up and starting off into singing, there was no such thing as songwriters. Can anybody here name one songwriter in Ireland in the early 60s?

Cathal Holland: Dominic Behan.

Christy: One. I suppose Brendan may have written a couple of songs as well.

Cathal Holland: Brendan wrote a good few alright!

Christy: But the way it is now, there are thousands of songwriters. I suppose Woody, Dylan and McColl started a lot of that off and it's wonderful that they did. So I'm still not hung up on the songwriter thing. There are people who look down their noses at singers who cover the songs of other writers. But there are many wonderful song-writers who do not sing. These writers need singers to carry their songs to the world. Songs need singers. It's akin to knocking Marlon for not writing his own movies and plays. Elvis Presley and Luke Kelly were known to sing the odd cover.

Davoc Rynne: I've a question, Christy. Nancy Moore, God be good to her, was a great critic of yours. You have a room full of worshippers here, where are the critics?

Christy: I welcome the critic. All I ask is that they come to the gig or listen to the album before they write the review... It can be dangerous when all the world smells of fresh paint. I am aware of the pitfalls of persistent praise. It can be boring too. This forum and every gig is open to critics. Let them raise their voices.

Davoc Rynne: Could you not test this audience and say "what song would you not like me to sing again?"

Christy: Ok yes! I'm sure if Declan Sinnott was here, he could name a few, because I know that there are songs and he is thinking "here we go again!" But he always delivers the vamp! Are there any songs that you never want to hear again? I'm curious!

Brian Kuin: The Honda 50 song.

Christy: You don't like the Honda 50 song? But do you dislike it?

Brian Kuin: Not really dislike it, but if you hear it once or twice...

Christy: I think a lot of people have that feeling about it. Interestingly enough, I've stopped doing it. I did it maybe five or six times and loved it! But I love it for reasons that it would be difficult for a Lowlander to understand. I love it because it describes the very place I come from; I love those images, across the bog on the Honda 50... I can understand you not liking the song but I love the crack of it all. Getting away from the squad car on my Honda 50, Sergeant Kelly losing his marbles on The Curragh Plains... I'll definitely be doing that tomorrow night now! (*laughter*) No, but seriously, we need our critics just like every now and then we might need a good dose of salts or a blast of colonic irrigation.

Cathal Holland: Last night you were asking for songs and I was asked for 'The Diamantina Drover'. You said you'd fallen away from the song, I've only just learned it recently. The chords are complex, but it's a beautiful song.

Christy: It is beautiful.

Cathal Holland: You sing it wonderfully. It's taking me a long time to work it out though.

Christy: But, unlike the other ones we mentioned earlier on – 'Folk Tale' and 'Easter Snow' - I would have a yen in me to sing both those again. 'Diamantina Drover' is a beautiful song but the will to sing it is gone from me..... I look forward to hearing you sing it! Maybe we can sing it together sometime Cal...maybe at the next gathering

Gerry Brady: Christy, do you ever do that great song, Billy Gray?

Christy: Occasionally. Myself and Declan have done it maybe three or four times in the last few months.

Gerry Brady: Beautiful song.

Christy: Yes, it is a good song. I learned it from the Cork singer Noel Shine back in 1977.

Petra: Christy, I would like to make some general remarks, if you don't mind. I would just like to say that all of us really appreciate that you took your time and made it possible that we join this event the whole weekend. I would like to thank you and Hilary for organising everything and Mick and Paddy and the people in the background for making this such a very special thing for all of us. I think we will all agree that we have been looking forward to it for a long time and it has been just great.

Christy: Thank you so much. (*Applause*)

Petra: I would like to say that I felt very honoured when you dedicated 'Bright Blue Rose' to me last night and I really enjoyed it. But many people came from afar here and one even from New

York, that is John, so I thought it was a bit undeserved for me, although I enjoyed it! Thank you very much for that!

Christy: I will have to sing a song for John tomorrow. John? Tomorrow night, John. What's your call?

John Gilligan: Sonny

Christy: Sonny's Dream it is John. Thank you for joining us.

Sean O'Grady: Would you consider making this an annual event? *(laughter)*

Christy: No, I haven't considered it until this moment. We'll see what happens! One year hence might be too soon. It has taken 65 years for the first one!! *(laughter)* We'll see! Paddy, did you hear that? And we'll have to make sure that Mick Devine is available!

Dickon Whitehead: and you guys will have to think up 50 brand new questions!

Hilary: One final question. What are you most thankful for?

Christy: For the realisation that everything is given. I took so much for granted in my early life, both as a person and as a singer. Then it was all taken from me, and when it was taken from me, I learned to value and cherish the gifts of life. Sometimes, when Declan and I leave the stage, we reflect upon how blessed we are to be doing this work that we love to do, for people who want listen, the success we enjoy, the people we meet, the people with whom we work, all these gifts are given. A lot of people comment on the different age groups that are coming to the gigs. I will be 65 next month and I look out some nights and I see 17 and 18 year old kids, 50 year old kids and 70 year old kids singing the songs! For a singer, it doesn't get any better than that! So that's where my gratitude lies, it lies in this life that I have been given. Thank you.

(Applause)

The End