



Tony DeMarco
New York Irish Fiddler



THE
SLIGO
INDIANS



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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SFW CD 40545

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**THE
SLIGO
INDIANS**

1. *Reels: Paddy on the Turnpike / The Scholar* (4:32)
2. *Reels: The Mullingar Races / The Boys on the Hilltop* (3:22)
3. *Reels: The Wheels of the World / The Steampacket / The Moving Bogs* (3:43)
4. *Hornpipes: The Poppy Leaf / Alexander's* (3:58)
5. *Slow Air: The Sally Gardens* (2:54)
6. *Jigs: The Sligo Indians* (Tony DeMarco) / *Paddy Clancy's / Larry Redican's* (Larry Redican / The Rambling Pitchfork) (4:17)
7. *Song: The Best Years of My Life* (Carr-Devlin-Lockhart-OConnor-Fean, new lyrics by Seamie O'Dowd / Crashed Music) (4:16)
8. *Jigs: The Monaghan Jig / Richard Brennan's* (2:57)
9. *Reels: The Reel of Mullinavat / Linda Ray's* (Tony DeMarco) (3:36)
10. *Slow Air: The Blackbird* (3:46)
11. *Reels: Philip O'Beirne's Delight / The Old Dudeen* (2:23)
12. *Polkas: Minnie Dempsey's* (Tony DeMarco) / *Galway Belle / Tripping to the Well* (3:18)
13. *Reels: Lad O'Beirne's / The Rover* (2:45)
14. *Reels: The Kerry Reel / Miss Monaghan* (2:27)
15. *Slow Air: Rosemary* (Andy McGann) (4:49)

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Tony DeMarco, New York Irish Fiddler

Don Meade

Tony DeMarco: Irish fiddler. If that sounds slightly off, you have only to listen to the music on this recording to be cured of any preconceptions about the importance of ethnic purity in traditional music. There may have been a time when Irish music in New York City was played exclusively by Irish immigrants and their offspring, while their Italian neighbors strummed mandolins and sang opera. But the Big Apple really is a melting pot, at least for some of its disparate immigrant elements. Before World War II it really wasn't very common for Italian and Irish Americans to marry each other. By the 1950s, however, this kind of ethnic mixing was fairly normal in Tony's native Brooklyn, where the Italians and Irish lived side by side and attended the same parish churches.

Tony was born on May 20, 1955, the second of three children raised in East Flatbush by Paul DeMarco and his wife, the former Patricia Dempsey. Paul, a grandson of Italian immigrants, was a teenage lightweight boxing star who turned down an offer to turn pro and work with lightweight champ Paddy "Billygoat" DeMarco in order to pursue a more conventional career on Wall Street. Tony's maternal grandfather Jimmy Dempsey was a New York City cop and a son of Irish immigrants; he married Philomena "Minnie" Fenimore, one of several Italian-American siblings who married into Brooklyn Irish families.

Musical ability runs on both sides of Tony's family. During the Prohibition years, Minnie Dempsey's Italian immigrant father ran a speakeasy in East New York, where he played the piano and mandolin. Tony's paternal uncle Louie DeMarco was a singer who performed

with 1950s doo-wop groups, including Dickie Dell and the Ding Dongs. Tony's cousin John Patitucci, from the Fenimore side of the family, is a leading professional bass player who has recorded with jazz stars Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, and Wayne Shorter. But Tony definitely found his way to Irish traditional music via a different path than the one trod by musicians raised in Irish immigrant households.

More typical young Irish traditional musicians in New York in the 1970s had at least one parent born in Ireland. They may well have attended step dancing classes with one of the many dance schools in the region, and most likely went to group music classes conducted in the Bronx, Brooklyn, New Jersey, or Long Island by Pete Kelly, Martin Mulvihill, and Maureen Glynn. They would have joined a branch of the international Irish traditional music organization Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and competed each year at the regional *fleadh cheoil* at Manhattan College in the Bronx. If they placed high enough, they would go on to the big show, *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*—the All-Ireland *Fleadh*—from which not a few returned home with the coveted title of "All-Ireland champion" on the fiddle, button accordion, tin whistle, or other instrument.

Tony had a different background altogether. As he puts it: "I never grew up with the competitive Comhaltas scene—I came through the hippie scene, the folkie scene." He tells the story of how he took up the fiddle and discovered Irish music in his own contribution to these notes, but it is worth repeating here that his first exposure to Irish traditional music was through a Folkways recording of the County Sligo fiddler Michael Gorman. Tony had many other musical influences before this, and would have many more afterward, but for him the appeal of the Sligo fiddle style would never fade.

The fiddle style once peculiar to south County Sligo was introduced to a wider world in the 1920s and '30s, a golden age of ethnic music recording in which 78-rpm discs made by Sligo emigrants in New York established a new standard of Irish musical virtuosity. The Sligo greats—most notably Michael Coleman, James Morrison, and Paddy Killoran—were all very distinctive players, but they all shared a Sligo musical accent defined by a common repertoire of challenging reels, jigs, and hornpipes (many originally brought to

Ireland from Scotland), a common fiddler's toolkit of bowed and fingered ornamentation, and a common devotion to dance music played with up-tempo rhythmic swing and abundant melodic improvisation.

The style and repertoire of the Sligo greats who recorded in New York profoundly changed the way traditional music was played back in Ireland, where records by Coleman, Morrison, and Killoran were eagerly purchased, intently listened to, and faithfully copied by musicians from all 32 counties. Sligo music became for many years a de facto Irish national standard, eclipsing other styles to such a degree that musicians and scholars were concerned that these styles would become extinct. They needn't have worried. Over the past several decades there has been a tremendous revival of interest in the music of Donegal, Clare, East Galway, and the Sliabh Luachra district in Ireland's southwest. The Sligo style is in no danger of disappearing, but neither is it threatening the vitality of other regional traditions.

After high school, Tony went to live for a while in Indiana, where he soaked up bluegrass and old-time American music at midwestern festivals and on road trips to West Virginia. His friend Miles Krassen at Indiana University in Bloomington had a big collection of old-time Sligo fiddle recordings, which he eagerly shared with Tony. In addition to playing him the classics from the 78-rpm era, Krassen introduced Tony to the music of Chicago fiddler Johnny McGreevy, whom he regarded as the purest Sligo stylist still playing, as well as to recordings of Sligo native and Philadelphia resident John Vesey. With Krassen, Tony collaborated on *A Trip to Sligo*, an instructional book that will soon be reissued, although probably not with the original photos of Tony in hippie-length hair and flowing mustache!

Tony returned to New York in 1975 because, as he says, "I realized I had the sources right in my home town." As he writes in his own notes, a chance meeting on a Brooklyn park bench introduced him to Paddy Reynolds, one of the finest Irish fiddlers in the U.S. Paddy was a native of County Longford who emigrated in 1948 to New York, where he fell under the spell of the great (and largely unrecorded) Sligo fiddler James "Lad" O'Beirne and developed his own highly polished version of the Sligo style. Paddy, who formed a legendary Sligo-style duet with New York fiddler Andy McGann, took an interest in Tony's development, gave him much

good advice, and helped integrate him into the lively Irish music scene in New York.

In addition to the sessions at the Bunnratty Pub in the Bronx, which Tony and Mick Moloney both describe below, Tony remembers the Irish Arts Center as one of the key traditional music venues of the 1970s. At the Center, located in the old Hell's Kitchen district on Manhattan's West Side, a new wave of young American musicians, many with no Irish family connections, gathered to share tunes and learn from visiting masters. It was there that Tony first met Kevin Burke, at a time when the London-born fiddle great had not yet become an international celebrity with the Bothy Band. Tony also fondly recalls sessions at the Monks Park bar, where on one occasion he pushed the tables together so that Maureen Glynn could dance on top of them to the fiddling of her husband Johnny Cronin, an outstanding County Kerry fiddler and one of the great "characters" in Irish music.

On trips to Ireland, Tony sought out and played with musicians still living in Sligo, most of whom had never made commercial recordings and whose earthy style preserved the sound of Sligo music as it was played before the heyday of Coleman, Morrison, and Killoran. Tony listened to and played with the late Andy Davey, Fred Finn, Johnny "Wat" Henry, and Joe



John and Margaret Dempsey
(Tony's great-grandparents from Ireland)

O'Dowd, as well as the still very much alive Peter Horan, who joins him for a duet track on this disc. He also took road trips to Boston to hear Kerry fiddle great Paddy Cronin, and to Philadelphia, where he met the great fiddling composer Ed Reavy.

Having spent a lengthy apprenticeship listening to such a wide variety of fiddlers, Tony feels that he has “a broader sense of what different players did with the Sligo style than someone who just followed their one teacher.” He learned a lot from Martin Wynne, a Sligo fiddler from the same parish as Michael Coleman who emigrated to New York in the late 1940s and was still actively playing in the 1970s. He was also impressed by recordings of Jackie Roche, a James Morrison protégé who cut a couple of LPs in New York in the 1950s. Tony liked the way that Roche would play a bowed triplet while sliding his fourth finger up to form a doubled unison note with the adjacent open string, and incorporated this into his armory of licks.

“There’s something unique about all the Sligo players—every one had their own tricks and variations. There really is a lot of variety in that style, and I got tricks from all those guys. Martin Wynne would always remember what different guys did—who had what version of a tune—that’s why his settings were so beautiful. I was building a vocabulary, a library of riffs that you might not hit all the time, but you’d hit them all eventually.”

Tony’s mature style reflects his deep immersion in Sligo music, but also his background in American old-time and bluegrass, as well as his interest in fiddling from other regions of Ireland. “My style is based on a good, broad sense of the music,” he says, adding that “I really made an effort to hear good players, not only in the Sligo tradition, but people like [Clare fiddler] Bobby Casey and Paddy Cronin, who was one of my favorites.”

Many Irish music lovers in New York first heard Tony in the mid-1970s, when he succeeded Kathleen Collins as the fiddler with The Flying Cloud, an eclectic group that performed a mix of English, Scottish, and Irish folk music every Wednesday at the Eagle Tavern on West 14th Street. The band, which included English-born singer Dan Milner, guitarist Caesar Pacifici, and multi-instrumentalist Brian Brooks, recorded an LP on the Adelphi label in 1978. At the Eagle, they were frequently joined by visiting singers and musicians, including sea chanteys

specialists The X Seamen’s Institute, and renowned English singers including Heather and Royston Wood, Dave Jones, and Charlie Hegarty. Among the band’s Irish guests were Galway flute great Jack Coen and a young Mary Black and her brothers.

Tony was also playing in those years in Irish bars with “show bands” led by Gerry Finlay and Sligoman Dermot Henry—gigs in which Tony largely played bass and backup fiddle behind the singers. At the same time, he struck up a friendship with Brian Conway, a young Bronx fiddle phenom who had studied with Martin Mulvihill and Martin Wynne and was already winning All-Ireland championships as a teenager. Brian brought Tony to Friday night sessions in the Conway home, gatherings frequently attended by Martin Wynne, button accordionist Dave Collins, and other top local Irish traditional musicians.

Tony’s duet playing with Brian was first recorded by Mick Moloney for the 1977 Rounder LP *Irish Traditional Instrumental Music, volume 1, East Coast of America*, and later on a full-length 1981 Green Linnet album, *The Apple in Winter*. With that disc, Tony and Brian made a notable new entry in the catalog of Sligo-style fiddle duets, one that ranks with those recorded by Paddy Reynolds and Andy McGann, Paddy Killoran and Paddy Sweeney, and James Morrison and Jackie Roche.

In the 1980s, Tony performed and recorded with Celtic Thunder, playing festivals and concerts with the Washington, D.C.-based group founded by brothers Jesse and Terry Winch, the latter an acclaimed songwriter and American Book Award winner for his poetry.

Even a very full schedule of bar sessions and festival gigs does not amount to a living in New York City, so in 1979 Tony began supplementing his musical income by following his father into the commodity trading business. He learned the ropes by clerking in the “open outcry” trading pits of the Coffee, Sugar and Cocoa Exchange on Pine Street in downtown Manhattan, an exchange that later joined the New York Board of Trade in new quarters at 4 World Trade Center.

Throughout his career in commodities futures, Tony made a living by trading on his own account rather than earning commissions on trades for clients. This is really a form of legal,



from left to right:
Vincent Harrison, Jack Coen, Paddy Reynolds
and Martin Wynne

high-stakes gambling that calls for nerves of steel and a very fine judgment of how much to stake on any given “position.” To an outsider, the commodity pits are a chaotic scene in which aggressive traders jostle and shout while waving hands and order pads. In 2001, Tony got a chance to show off both his trading techniques and his musical skills at the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., which that year featured New York City. In addition to playing Irish music on concert stages, Tony showed volunteers how to bid and make offers in a mock trading pit set up on the National Mall.

Tony has never been much of an early riser, which worked to his advantage when he found himself still in his Battery Park City apartment across the street from the World Trade Center when planes struck the towers on the morning of September 11, 2001. Grabbing his fiddle, he got to his car and made it over the Brooklyn Bridge just before it was sealed off. The loss of the Trade Center was a huge blow to the commodities traders, who for a couple of years had to share cramped quarters at a temporary site in Queens. But the “open outcry” trading system was actually threatened more by the rise of electronic trading than by terrorist attacks. In early 2007, the New York Board of Trade became a wholly owned subsidiary of IntercontinentalExchange (ICE). Tony retains a seat on the new exchange but is no longer actively trading. “The whole floor trading system is on its way out,” he says, and the new world of cool and quiet internet trading is not for him.

Tony remains one of the busiest Irish traditional musicians in New York. He’s still in great demand as a backup fiddler for singers, and his own Thursday night gig at Paddy Reilly’s Music Bar on 2nd Avenue is the longest continually running Irish music session in the city. Tony also leads an unamplified Sunday night session at the 11th Street Bar in the East Village, where top-flight Irish musicians and celebrities such as mandolin hero Chris Thile and songwriter Steve Earle drop by to listen and sit in.

By the end of the 20th century, a Tony DeMarco solo recording was long overdue, but Tony was in no hurry to crank one out. Instead, he took his time, assembling an all-star cast of musical collaborators and recording in several different studios in Ireland and the U.S. The results, as you will hear on this disc, were surely worth waiting for.



above: Tony and Brian Brooks in the late 1970s

Tony and the New York City Irish Session Scene

Mick Moloney

It's hard to imagine an Irish traditional music scene in New York City without Tony DeMarco. He seems to turn up either as a participant or a supporter at just about every Irish music gathering in the city, and his genial, outgoing, good-humored personality is always sure to enliven the occasion. He also commands enormous respect among older and younger musicians alike.

To describe Tony's musical skills as eclectic would be an understatement. He plays a huge repertoire of Irish traditional music in a variety of styles, and over the past 30 years he has also performed in show bands, rock bands, and in bluegrass and American old-time music groups. When I first met Tony in September 1976, he was playing Irish traditional music in a strictly Sligo style. I traveled from Philadelphia to his home in Queens to record him and his friend Brian Conway for an anthology of field recordings of Irish instrumental music in America (*Irish Traditional Instrumental Music, volume 1, East Coast of America*: Rounder Records LP 6005, 1977). Tony was only 21 years old then, and I was amazed to hear someone so young—and an American musician with a non-Irish name—playing in such a mature style and at such a high level. At this time almost all those playing Irish music of this caliber in the United States were either immigrants or the sons and daughters of immigrants. That day he and Brian recorded a magnificent performance of “The Widow’s Daughter” and “The Flogging Reel,” which remains to this day a wonderful example of traditional Irish duet playing at its finest.

Since then, Tony has greatly expanded his stylistic repertoire beyond the Sligo style, although he can return to it at will. On the occasions when he is joined by Brian Conway and his protégé Patrick Mangan at the 11th Street Bar, it is a pleasure for everyone in the session to stop playing and enjoy the virtuosity of the three foremost Sligo-style musicians in America. Their instruments sound as one as the trio plays the

repertoire of the old Sligo masters seemingly effortlessly, with precisely matching articulation, phrasing, and ornamentation.

Tony is a brilliant technician, and he can do just about anything he wants to within the parameters of Irish traditional music. Sometimes his creativity leads him into extraordinary excursions of embellishment and variation and musical flights of fancy. I've often sat down with him in sessions and found myself with banjo on lap listening intently to what I imagined was an unfamiliar tune until I realized that it was one as well known as “The Silver Spear” or “The Heathery Breeze.”

Tony plays in a variety of contexts including concerts, festivals, and clubs, but in the New York scene he is known as the ultimate session musician. He has led sessions over the years in many bars including Swift's on East 4th Street, Paddy Reilly's on 2nd Avenue, The Scratcher on East 5th Street, and for the past ten years the 11th Street Bar between Avenues A and B. Everyone in the Irish music scene in New York knows Tony, and he is well liked by all. He has a big heart, a garrulous personality, an infectious grin, and a great, gritty sense of humor that is endearing.

Leading a regular paid session gig is a tough number. You have to be well organized and reliable as well as adaptable. You have to be able to deal with musicians of different ability levels with varying repertoires. When various breaches of protocol are committed, it is also crucial that you can deal with them. In many ways the norms of the session are governed by the pastoral conventions of neighborliness and good manners associated with Irish rural life in times long past. Bad or beginner musicians at sessions should not ruin the event for the more experienced musicians present. Good musicians will avoid a session where novices take over the show. Yet beginners are welcomed as long as they behave appropriately. In fact, many accomplished musicians have learned their trade sitting respectfully on the sidelines of sessions. Violations of manners are generally dealt with diplomatically and gently without direct confrontation. A session leader needs enormous patience, and it helps if you don't mind hanging out with a lot of diverse types of characters and personalities. The pub can be crowded with drinking customers, and if they are noisy and inattentive, then you have to be



from left to right:
Andy McGann, Johnny Cronin, Paddy Reynolds

able to create a certain kind of energy that might be very different from the occasions when the place is half empty. Tony possesses all these qualities in spades.

The group session is now the engine room for Irish traditional music all over the world, a kind of home base for everyone with a passion for the music. It's a thoroughly modern context, fashionable with old and young. Sometimes a session will happen suddenly on an impulse when musicians meet one another and decide to "have a tune." Other sessions are organized affairs that happen regularly at the same place and at the same time. Typically the session will be held in an open space, often in a major population center, with open access to potential participants and the general public. The atmosphere is generally informal with lines between the players, enthusiasts, and casual visitors often almost indistinguishable.

The very name "session" (or *seisiún* as it has been fancifully dubbed in the Gaelic translation) is borrowed from jazz, though indeed jazz and Irish traditional music sessions share little in common apart from the notion of musicians making music together. In the Irish session the music making is communal, participants playing the same tunes together without excessive solo taking and displays of virtuosity or technical skills. There are other places for this kind of personal expression.

Given its present-day international ubiquity, many people are surprised to learn that the pub session is a relatively recent development in traditional Irish music. By all accounts, the idea of scheduled Irish music sessions in bars arose less than 60 years ago, and in the Irish diaspora rather than in the homeland. Some Irish music scholars maintain that the pub session began in London in the early 1950s as a regular meeting place for expatriate Irish musicians. In New York it seems to have begun a little earlier than that. The mighty flute player Jack Coen, who arrived in New York from East Galway in 1949, tells me that he would get together with musicians such as Sligo flute player Mike Flynn on Friday nights in the early 1950s in The New Manhattan Pub, which was owned by a Connemara man.

"Every instrument you could think of was hanging right behind the bar," says Jack. "If you were a musician you were just handed one and then you were ready to play." Jack thought

that music making in that bar might have begun in the late 1940s before he arrived. There was also a Sunday session in the early 1950s at Healy's Pub in the Bronx, where Jack would play with fiddlers Paddy Reynolds and Andy McGann. The musicians were not paid, they just turned up and played whenever they felt like it. Many of the Irish pubs in New York at that time had a small back room with a piano, and musicians were always welcome to use it. But more often than not, the really good players like Andy McGann, Paddy Reynolds, Vincent Harrison, and Larry Redican, all big influences on Tony, would prefer to play in homes where there would be no interference in the music making, such as Martin Wynne's house in the Bronx. In fact the only time one would be likely to hear these great fiddlers and others such as Paddy Killoran and Paddy Sweeney in public would be once a year at the United Counties Feis in Corless Hall on Willis Avenue in the Bronx. In short, quite unlike today, Irish traditional music was then very much a subcultural activity, practically unknown and invisible to the vast majority of Irish Americans.

The Bunratty Pub on Kingsbridge Avenue in the Bronx was the first New York bar which paid traditional Irish musicians to perform in public on a regular basis. It started to do so in the mid-1970s, and the sessions continued until the pub closed down for good in 1981. The music took place on a small stage at the back of the bar, and the evening's entertainment would include a combination of songs and music usually performed through a standard sound system against a loud and sometimes deafening cacophony of animated chat from the bar customers. Fiddlers Andy McGann, Paddy Reynolds, and the late Johnny Cronin were among the regularly featured performers. I visited it myself around that time on a few occasions and played briefly there on weekends with Paddy Reynolds. Tony would show up there from time to time as well. It was a rough gig, but there were always high moments, especially when all the musicians in the pub gathered together late into the night for a few tunes.

As traditional Irish music became more popular in New York City over the years since the demise of the Bunratty, sessions were organized at many other bars including Kate Kearney's on East 71st, O'Neill's on 3rd Avenue, Paddy Reilly's on 2nd Avenue, Swift's on E 4th Street, The Scratcher on East 5th Street, and Mona's on Avenue B. There were scores of others that lasted only a couple of months. Often a session begins when a musician walks into a bar,

sees that business is not good on that night, and suggests a session. But without backing from the staff or the owner it is unlikely to continue for very long.

Tony seems to have the ability to steer some magical course in dealing with bar owners, managerial staff, and customers, somehow navigating a measure of compromise between all parties that keeps the sessions going. And that's great for all of us who love Irish traditional music. For his musicianship and his leadership, we are very lucky to have him in town.

A Few Words from Kevin Burke

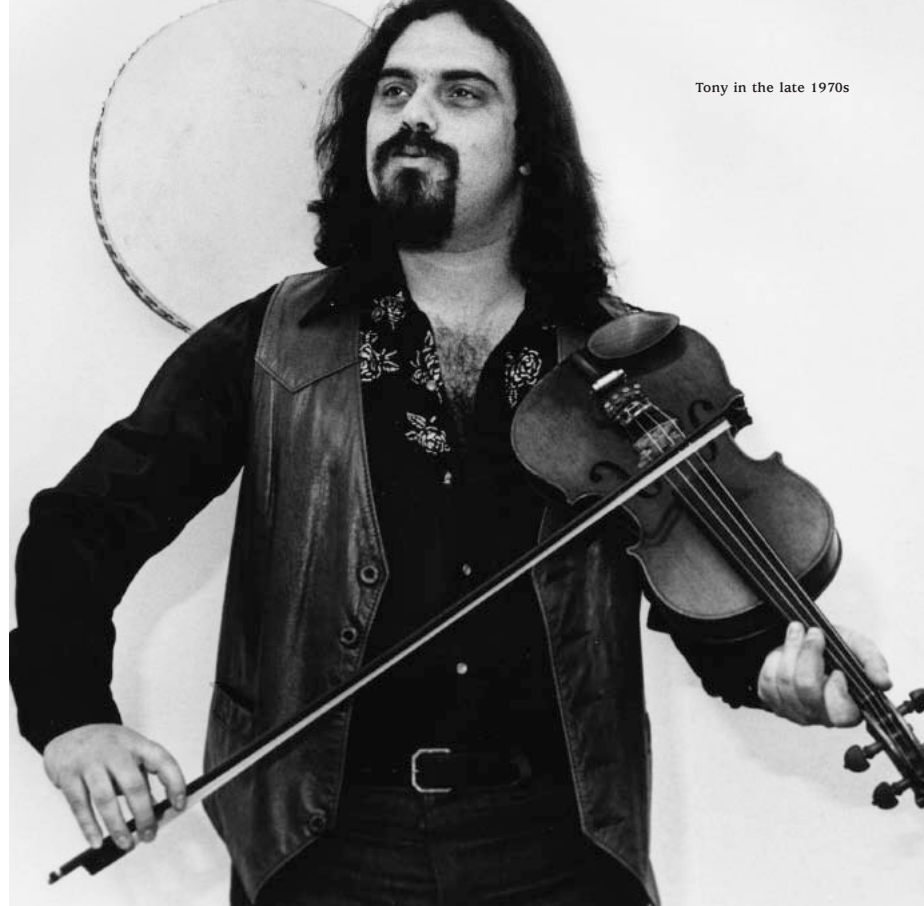
I first met Tony in the early 1970s in New York City. We were both "city kids," we both played the fiddle, and we both loved Sligo music. We talked a lot about music and musicians, especially "the old Sligo guys," several of whom were living in New York and London, our respective home cities.

My parents were Sligo people so, as a youngster, I became very familiar with many of the places and people whose names are heard in so many tune titles—names such as Ballisodare, Lissadell, Roger Sherlock, Willie Coleman. This gave Tony and me a lot to talk about. And when we stopped talking, the fiddles took over. Sometimes those nights just weren't long enough! Ever since our first meeting I've always enjoyed Tony and his music, so it was a great pleasure and an honor to be asked to play with him as one of the several duets featured on this recording (and yet again, the night was too short!).

Someone (I don't remember who) was once asked, "Is there anything better than a fiddle player?" And the answer given was "two fiddle players!" I'm sure Tony will agree!

Congratulations on making such a great record, Tony. It was a pleasure to be part of it!

Tony in the late 1970s



Personal Notes from Tony DeMarco

This CD represents the music and musicians that I've played with in New York and Ireland for better than 30 years.

I first picked up the fiddle in 1973, my senior year, to fulfill a graduation requirement at Tilden High School, Brooklyn, New York. I'd been playing electric guitar in grade-school garage bands since I was nine years old. Needing an extra credit to graduate, I had a choice of English, history, or music. I chose the music class and was assigned to the string section. My friend Phil Lenowsky, a guitar player, told me how the rock bands like Jefferson Airplane, Hot Tuna, and the Grateful Dead were using electric fiddlers. Papa John Creach, Vassar Clements, Sugar Cane Harris, Jerry Goodman, and Jean-Luc Ponty were my first influences on playing the fiddle. Phil wanted to learn some country and bluegrass music, so we found a school that taught it in the Village, Jack Baker's fretted instrument school, and I went along with the fiddle.

Starting there with fiddle lessons from Alan Kaufman, I learned "old-timey" Appalachian tunes and hung out with the Wretched Refuse String Band. They did square dances at Brooklyn College and Cooper Union, and that was my first introduction to folk music. I then started jamming with neighborhood musicians, playing rock and folk music.

In 1973 I graduated high school and had a few months of fiddle lessons under my belt. Great fiddlers came through town, the likes of Bill Monroe, Jim and Jesse, and the Newgrass Revival. They brought Kenny Baker, Tex Logan, Byron Berline, Kenny Kosek, and Vassar Clements. Kenny Kosek was very influential to me when I started as he lived in New York City. The Breakfast Special were tearing up the bluegrass scene with Andy Statman, Kenny Kosek, Tony Trischka, Stacy Phillips, and Roger Mason. I loved all styles of fiddle music, and New York City was just the place to be for its ethnic musical diversity. Latin, jazz, blues, rock-fusion, and avant-garde sparked my interest. John McLaughlin with the Mahavishnu Orchestra (then

Shakti) was musical bliss to me! Jerry Goodman (rock) and L. Shankar (Indian) were his fiddlers/violinists.

During a lesson with Alan, he played a recording of Michael Gorman and Margaret Barry. The tune was "The Bunch of Keys" (aka "Paddy on the Turnpike"), and it hit home for me. It was then I decided to play that style of fiddle music. Gorman was from Sligo but lived in England for many years and influenced players there like Kevin Burke. I met Kevin Burke through Brian Heron at the Irish Arts Center, which is in Hell's Kitchen, New York City. To this day, Kevin is one of my favorite Irish fiddlers, and he has influenced my playing greatly. Much like Kevin coming to America to check out the Sligo music in New York, I went to Ireland to see what the Sligo fiddlers were like there. To my delight I found, to mention a few, Fred Finn and Peter Horan, Andy Davey, Joe O'Dowd, and flute player Séamus Tansey.

After high school, I moved to northern Indiana to play music and check out the festival scene around there, Ohio, and West Virginia. While in West Virginia, I had the pleasure to meet the Hammons family through Dwight Diller. Burl Hammons had a style that linked the past to the present with the old-country inflections. At a fiddle contest in Indiana, I met Tom Sparks who lives in Bloomington, Indiana, which has a great traditional music scene. Tom built the fiddle I'm playing on this recording. In Bloomington, I met Miles Krassen and Larry McCullough, who were deeply involved in collecting and playing Irish music. Miles and I put out a fiddle tutorial, *A Trip to Sligo*, which gives some insight to the Sligo style of fiddling in New York and which I will soon be reissuing through my own Soundpost Productions.

Miles introduced me to the Chicago Irish music scene. We would take trips to Chicago and stay with flute player Seamus Cooley (brother of the famous accordionist Joe Cooley) and his wife Mary, a *sean nós* singer. Johnny McGreevy was such a great fiddle player who had a unique style, different from the New York sound. Liz Carroll was about 15 years young and the new kid to watch on the trad scene. I met Kerry fiddle great Paddy Cronin, Johnny's brother, there as well. Paddy has a beautiful style, very soulful.

After playing the fiddle for only a couple of years, I met Paddy Reynolds while practicing on a park bench in Farragut Park in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. He was walking his dog down the park lane and invited me to his house to hear his sweet and traditional fiddle music. We then went up to the Bronx to Tommy O'Reilly's Bunratty Pub, where Paddy, Andy McGann, and Johnny Cronin played every weekend. That music inspires my playing to this day.

I also met Martin Wynne, Vincent Harrison, and Brian Conway in the Bronx. Martin Wynne used to be over at Brian's house on a Friday night. Brian's mom would make soda bread and tea and we'd play for hours! Martin was such a gem. He taught us brilliant versions of tunes and had a great memory of how the players from his homeland would play different bits of the tune. His gentle nature and easy style of playing the fiddle made it a pleasure to learn tunes and be in his company.

Back to Johnny Cronin for a moment. His fiddling was very influential on the New York scene due to his compassion for the younger players and the great sense of humor and joy he had in his music. His wife Maureen Glynn taught hundreds of kids in the New York City area, and through her Johnny's fiddling made an impact on such great players as Martin and Marie Reilly, Matt Mancuso, Annmarie Acosta, and Bernie Fee, just to name a few. Maureen lovingly gave so much passion for and understanding of the music to her kids. You can see the prevalence of this on the Irish music world in America and Ireland today.

Some other great players in New York City I met when I first started Irish fiddling are Danny and Kathleen Collins and Martin and Brendan Mullvihill. Martin, like Maureen, taught many kids who turned into top Irish musicians. Two standouts from Martin's school are Joanie Madden and Eileen Ivers, both brilliant players from the Bronx.

There were some great fiddlers from Philadelphia that I had the pleasure of meeting, including John Vesey, Ed Reavy, and Eugene O'Donnell. Johnny Vesey had a powerful Sligo style, Ed Reavy wrote the most beautiful tunes, and Eugene played the hornpipes and set pieces with impeccable timing and skill. All these players were treasures for the music they loved to play.

I hope this illuminates the New York City Irish music scene, which has so many contenders and characters, during my time with it for over 30 years. The music is very family oriented, which I think complements my Italian side. Most of my last two generations of family were Irish-Italian marriages, which adds up to great music, food, and drink.

My original tunes on this recording are the jig "The Sligo Indians," the polka "Minnie Dempsey's," and the reel "Linda Ray's." There are so many to thank along the way and I know I've forgotten a few, but this music will say "thank you," and "bye for now."

Track Notes

Don Meade and Tony DeMarco

1. Reels: **Paddy on the Turnpike / The Scholar**

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Fionn Ó Lochlainn, guitars

The first tune has long been popular, under various titles and in many different settings, among fiddlers in Ireland and North America. Sligo fiddle greats Michael Coleman, James Morrison, and Paddy Killoran all recorded versions in New York during the 78-rpm era. Tony's source was the 1965 Folkways LP *Irish Music in London Pubs*, an influential recording that included contributions from, among others, uilleann piper Séamus Ennis, fiddler Michael Gorman, and singers Margaret Barry and Joe Heaney. The second reel, which can also be played as a hornpipe, first appeared in print in Levey's *The Dance Music of Ireland, Vol. 1*, a collection published in London in 1858. Famed tune collector (and Chicago police chief) Francis O'Neill published a setting in 1922 from John Kelly and Joseph Tamony, two emigrant Roscommon fiddlers in San Francisco.

Tony: I learned the first tune, which is also called "The Bunch of Keys," from an old

Folkways recording of Sligo fiddler Michael Gorman. Fiddle player Tommy Potts, who was greatly inspired by the music of County Clare, was another influence on my playing of this tune. I learned the second reel from Paddy Reynolds.

2: Reels: The Mullingar Races / The Boys on the Hilltop

Tony DeMarco and Kevin Burke, fiddles

This fiddle duet pays homage to Sligo fiddle greats Paddy Killoran and Paddy Sweeney, who recorded these two reels together in New York in the 1930s. Tony is joined on this track by fiddle great Kevin Burke, a London native whose parents were from County Sligo and who made his first recording, *Sweeney's Dream*, for Folkways in 1972. A long-time resident of Portland, Oregon, Kevin was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship in 2002 for his contributions to Irish music in America.

Tony: Kevin Burke was the first fiddle player from Ireland I ever met. I met him in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, through the Irish Arts Center when it started around 1973. This track is an example of unison fiddling, which is highly regarded among traditional players, including Paddy Killoran and Paddy Sweeney, Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds, and Martin Wynne and Lad O'Beirne.

3: Reels: The Wheels of the World / The Steampacket / The Moving Bogs

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Jerry O'Sullivan, uilleann pipes

Sligo fiddler James Morrison, known as "The Professor" to his many New York students and musical admirers, recorded all three of these tunes on 78-rpm discs. "The Wheels of the World" is a popular title that has also been attached to other tunes and songs. "The Steampacket," a reference to the trans-Atlantic passenger ships of the 19th century, was memorably recorded by uilleann piper Patsy Touhey, an Irish-American vaudeville star of the early 20th century. The name "The Moving Bogs" refers to the wandering tendency of water-saturated peatlands in Ireland, which on occasion overrun roads, farmland, and homes.



Tony: These tunes feature Jerry O’Sullivan, one of the finest pipers from America. On my first trip to Sligo in 1976, we sat next to each other on the plane to Ireland. I had never met Jerry before, but since then we’ve been great musical partners and have been playing together around New York for the past 30-plus years. “The Wheels of the World” was influenced by James Morrison’s recording, “The Steampacket” by Chicago fiddler Johnny McGreevy. “The Moving Bogs” I first heard on the pipes.

4: Hornpipes: The Poppy Leaf / Alexander’s

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Charlie Lennon, piano

While long popular in Ireland, the hornpipe originated in England as a solo dance done in hard shoes or clogs. “The Poppy Leaf,” which Tony first recorded with Brian Conway on their 1979 duet album *The Apple in Winter*, is a type of hornpipe especially favored by 19th-century variety theater dancers. It was first published in *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection*, an 1882 Boston tunebook that remained in print for many years under the name *1000 Fiddle Tunes* and had a great influence among musically literate fiddlers in Ireland, Canada, and the U.S. “Alexander’s” is a more purely Irish tune first published in Francis O’Neill’s 1903 *Music of Ireland* collection.

Tony: The first hornpipe was a favorite of Paddy Reynolds, who was a big part of the New York scene during the 1950s and ’60s. “Alexander’s” I also learned from Paddy, as well as from a recording by Liam O’Flynn on the pipes. This track features Charlie Lennon on piano. He has always been one of my favorite piano players, and it is an honor to have him on the album. I had never heard piano played this way until I got a record by Joe “Accordion” Burke with Charlie as the backup. I was delighted with his approach, which was different from anything I had heard before.

5: Slow Air: The Sally Gardens

Tony DeMarco, fiddle, baritone fiddle; Natalie Haas, cello

Tony here applies his improvisational talents to the traditional air to which William Butler Yeats set “Down by the Sally Gardens,” his version of an older Irish folk song. It was once

common for Irish farmers to keep a “sally garden” (from the Irish *saileach* for willow) as a source for the willow wands used in basketry and furniture making. The sally garden was also a popular trysting site for courting lovers, at least in song!

Tony: I first heard this when playing in John J. McGurk’s in St Louis, where accordionist Joe Burke played it on the flute. I use a baritone fiddle made by Rich Barbera, who makes my electric fiddles. This is one of my favorite old airs for fiddle music, and Natalie accompanies this beautifully.

6: Jigs: The Sligo Indians / Paddy Clancy’s / Larry Redican’s / The Rambling Pitchfork

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Fionn Ó Lochlainn, guitars; Junior Davey, *bodhrán*

The fiddler Paddy Clancy recorded a few 78-rpm discs in the early 20th century but is known today mostly through the title of the jig named for him by Michael Coleman. Larry Redican was born in Dublin but lived most of his life in New York, where he formed a long musical partnership with his fellow fiddlers Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds.

Tony: On my second trip to Ireland in 1978, the father-in-law of button accordionist P.J. HERNON saw me playing with guitar player Caesar Pacifici at a session in Gurteen, County Sligo. We both had long black hair at the time, and there may have been a few feathers involved. Anyway, he went back to the house to tell P.J. that “there are two American Indians in Ted McGowan’s, playing Irish music like you never heard before!” I wrote this tune with the version of “Garret Barry’s Jig” played by Clare fiddler Paddy Canny in mind, but I named it “The Sligo Indians” so I can tell that story of how I met P.J.! I know “Paddy Clancy’s” from the playing of Michael Coleman. The third tune is by Larry Redican, the great fiddle and banjo player who played with the New York Ceili Band. Larry composed some of the best tunes in Irish music ever! The last jig was a favorite of Paddy Reynolds and is a standard session tune around New York.

7: Song: The Best Years of My Life

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Seamie O’Dowd, vocals and guitar

This arrangement incorporates the reel “Dowd’s No. 9,” a tune recorded in New York in the 1930s by fiddler Hughie Gillespie. Gillespie was a friend and student of Michael

Coleman, who named the tune for John O'Dowd, an older Sligo fiddle master who was also a great-uncle of Seamie O'Dowd.

Tony: This is a song originally written and recorded by Horslips, one of the first Celtic rock bands out of Ireland in the 1970s. The Horslips version is in the rock-opera style and originally about Galway. On my first trip to Ireland I was fortunate to meet and learn tunes from Joe O'Dowd, Seamie's father. Seamie was about 80 years young and playing the fiddle. Their family has had a great influence on the traditional music of Ireland. Tunes like "Dowd's No. 9" and "Dowd's Favorite" have been staples in the Irish music world for generations. Seamie is keeping that light glowing with his music and song.

8: Jigs: The Monaghan Jig / Richard Brennan's

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Séamus Tansey, flute

Sligo fiddle great Michael Coleman recorded "The Monaghan Jig" in 1921, and may have composed the challenging fourth part. Coleman also recorded the second tune, a fiddler's setting of an old piping jig known as "Paddy O'Carroll," naming it for a fiddler from his home village of Killavil, County Sligo.

Tony: I first met the legendary flute player Séamus Tansey in 1976 in Gurteen, County Sligo. At that time, he was a postal carrier, and I'd see him while I was painting the Teach Murray pub. We became friends, and I'd visit his house and talk about the music of Sligo. I went with him to the many pub gigs he did in the area and enjoyed his playing and singing. He brought the All-Ireland flute championship back to Gurteen in 1965 and is one of the most amazing and influential Sligo flute players ever.

9: Reels: The Reel of Mullinavat / Linda Ray's

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Charlie Lennon, piano

"The Reel of Mullinavat," named for a town in County Kilkenny, was adopted into the standard Sligo repertoire after it was recorded by Michael Coleman.

Tony: The first tune I originally learned from Paddy Reynolds when we first met. I'd go over to his house on Avenue D in Brooklyn, and he would put a bunch of tunes on a tape

for me to learn, nice and easy. He had such great phrasing and timing along with beautiful settings of the tunes. "Linda Ray's" is an original composition of mine, named for Linda Hickman, flute player with Celtic Thunder, a group I've performed with since the early 1980s. Terry and Jesse Winch, Linda and Steve Hickman, and Nita Connolly have done much for the Irish music scene in the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. area since the 1970s.

10: Slow Air: The Blackbird

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Ivan Goff, uilleann pipes

"The Blackbird" is an early 18th-century English-language Irish song in praise of James III, the "Old Pretender" to the English throne whose cause was supported by Irish Catholics. The melody was later used for other songs, including Edward Harrigan's 1874 comic Irish-American song "Since the Soup-House Moved Away." "The Blackbird" was also adapted by the dancing masters of Munster for the most famous of Irish solo "set dances." The dance version was recorded by Michael Coleman, while Andy McGann played it both as an air and a set dance on the classic 1965 LP *A Tribute to Michael Coleman*.

Tony: This is one of my favorite airs. I heard this tune played by Andy McGann and also from the playing of Tommy Potts. Ivan Goff, a great piper and flute player whom I perform with often in New York, accompanies me on the uilleann pipes, playing the drones and the regulators.

11: Reels: Philip O'Beirne's Delight / The Old Dudeen

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Eddie Bobé, congas, *clave*, and *shekere*; John Doyle, guitar

The first tune is another gem popularized by Michael Coleman, who named it for one of his fiddle teachers in Sligo. Philip's son James "Lad" O'Beirne later emigrated to New York, where he was at the center of a thriving Irish music scene in the South Bronx in the 1940s and a mentor to younger fiddlers who included Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds. "The Old Dudeen," named for the little clay pipes long popular among Irishmen, was popularized by Sligo fiddler Paddy Killoran.

Tony: These tracks fuse Irish fiddle tunes with contemporary guitar accompaniment and

Afro-Cuban, Latin, and Indian rhythms. You'll be hearing more about this project in the future. John and Eddie are masters of their craft and give these tunes their magic touch.

12: Polkas: Minnie Dempsey's / Galway Belle / Tripping to the Well

Tony DeMarco, fiddles, baritone fiddle; Tom English, *bodhrán*

The polka, an international dance sensation in the 19th century, came to Ireland along with the quadrille dances imported from the continent. Today's Irish music lovers are familiar with the fast-paced polkas favored by set dancers in the Sliabh Luachra region of Ireland's southwest. A different style of polka at a slower tempo was required for some of the ceili dances popularized by the Gaelic League, and polkas of this type were also recorded by the Sligo fiddle greats. Paddy Reynolds, Tony's source for the second and third polkas on this track, had a large store of such tunes, which he played at Gaelic League ceilis in the 1950s and '60s. "Tripping to the Well" was popularized by a 1937 flute duet recorded in New York by John McKenna and Eddie Meehan. It is frequently paired with "Galway Belle" and was printed alongside that tune in *Irish Folk Dance Music*, a 1952 Boston collection edited by Cork button accordionist Jerry O'Brien.

Tony: "Minnie Dempsey's" was composed for my grandmother on my mother's side, Philomena Fenimore, nicknamed Minnie. She married Jimmy Dempsey, whose parents came from Ireland. He was an Irish-American cop in New York City. Minnie was an amazing woman who left us so many fond memories, so I had to name a tune for her! Tom and I have played many sessions together, and I'm very pleased to have him on these tunes.

13: Reels: Lad O'Beirne's / The Rover

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Charlie Lennon, piano

"Lad" O'Beirne was a musically literate and creative fiddler who enjoyed crafting improved settings of obscure tunes he discovered in old printed collections. It is likely that O'Beirne found the first of these reels in *Old Irish Folk Music*, a 1909 collection edited by P.W. Joyce, whose source for the nameless tune "No. 295" was Patrick O'Leary of Graignamanagh, County Kilkenny. "The Rover" was printed in *Kerr's Fourth*

Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin, a tunebook first published in Glasgow sometime around 1900.

Tony: These are two lovely reels that Paddy Reynolds learned from the playing of James "Lad" O'Beirne, the great Sligo fiddle player who lived most of his life in New York and was also one of my biggest influences.

14: Reels: The Kerry Reel / Miss Monaghan

Tony DeMarco, fiddle; Peter Horan, flute

The first reel was recorded in Boston in 1926 by the Kerry-born fiddler Michael Hanafin, a star with piano player Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band. Hanafin's title, "The Green Banks of Rossbeigh" (after a beauty spot on the west Kerry coast), was later shortened to "The Kerry Reel" on a disc recorded by Michael Coleman. Coleman is also the source of this floridly ornate Sligo setting of "Miss Monaghan," a tune derived from the Scottish "Braes of Auchtertyre."

Tony: These two reels feature the great Peter Horan on flute. How do you say something about someone who's 84 going on 18? He's one of the most lively and influential elder statesmen of Irish music, and I'm grateful to have him on this recording. Peter was known for many years for his duets with the late Fred Finn. Both musicians were a very influential force in the music scene around Sligo.

15: Slow Air: Rosemary

Tony DeMarco, fiddle, baritone fiddle; John Patitucci, bass; Natalie Haas, cello

Tony: This is a beautiful air composed by Andy McGann for Rosemary Gillespie, daughter of Hughie Gillespie, the famous fiddler from Donegal who recorded in New York in the 1930s. The music of Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds has influenced my playing tremendously and has been the bible of New York Irish fiddle music to me and many others. I'm proud to have my cousin John Patitucci perform with me on the double bass (bull fiddle). John plays a bass that my uncle John Fenimore found for him.

Credits

Produced by Tony DeMarco, Soundpost Productions

Special Guests: Eddie Bobé, Kevin Burke, Junior Davey, John Doyle, Tom English, Ivan Goff, Natalie Haas, Peter Horan, Charlie Lennon, Seamie O'Dowd, Fionn Ó Lochlainn, Jerry O'Sullivan, John Patitucci (courtesy of Concord Records), Séamus Tansey

Tracks 6, 8, and 14 recorded by Liam Cunningham, The Lakes Studio, Co. Roscommon, Ireland

Tracks 4, 7, 9, and 11 recorded by Charlie Lennon, Cuan Studio, Spiddal, Co. Galway, Ireland

Tracks 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15 recorded by Fionn Ó Lochlainn, Sonic Arts Studio, Brooklyn, NY

Tracks 3, 4, 9, and 13 recorded by Oliver Straus, Mission Sound, Brooklyn, NY

Mixed by Tony DeMarco and Fionn Ó Lochlainn at Sonic Arts Studio, Brooklyn, NY

Mastered by Bob Katz, Digital Domain, www.digido.com

Tony's fiddles: The main fiddle on all tracks was made by Tom Sparks, director of String Instrument Technology at Indiana University in Bloomington. Rich Barbera, Barbera Transducer Systems, makes Tony's electric fiddles.

Annotated by Don Meade, Tony DeMarco, Mick Moloney, and Kevin Burke

Executive producers: Daniel Sheehy and D. A. Sonneborn

Production managed by Mary Monseur

Editorial assistance by Carla Borden

Art Direction and design by Marlow Palleja (www.marlowpallejadesign.com)

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Special thanks to: My folks for putting up with a screeching fiddle for seven hours a day on the weekends. Ed Haber, Brian McDonagh of Dervish, Ted McGowan and family at The Roisin Dubh, Gurteen, Co. Sligo; the Murray family of Teach Murray, Gurteen; Seamus McIntyre, Steve Duggan, Kenny Connors, Earle Hitchner, Paul Keating, Ram Benz, and Anna Colliton.

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Smithsonian Folkways Recordings



Tony DeMarco THE SLIGO INDIANS

SFW CD 40545

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Tony DeMarco

New York Irish Fiddler

THE SLIGO INDIANS

1. *Reels: Paddy on the Turnpike / The Scholar (4:32)*
2. *Reels: The Mullingar Races / The Boys on the Hilltop (3:22)*
3. *Reels: The Wheels of the World / The Steampacket / The Moving Bogs (5:43)*
4. *Hornpipes: The Poppy Leaf / Alexander's (3:58)*
5. *Slow Air: The Sally Gardens (2:54)*
6. *Jigs: The Sligo Indians / Paddy Clancy's / Larry Redican's / The Rambling Pitchfork (4:17)*
7. *Song: The Best Years of My Life (4:16)*
8. *Jigs: The Monaghan Jig / Richard Brennan's (2:57)*
9. *Reels: The Reel of Mullinavat / Linda Ray's (3:36)*
10. *Slow Air: The Blackbird (3:46)*
11. *Reels: Philip O'Beirne's Delight / The Old Dudeen (2:23)*
12. *Polkas: Minnie Dempsey's / Galway Belle / Tripping to the Well (3:18)*
13. *Reels: Lad O'Beirne's / The Rover (2:45)*
14. *Reels: The Kerry Reel / Miss Monaghan (2:27)*
15. *Slow Air: Rosemary (4:49)*

The Sligo Indians is a long-awaited solo debut for one of America's finest folk fiddlers. A Brooklyn native of mixed Irish and Italian descent, New Yorker Tony DeMarco is a master of the intricate ornamentation, swinging rhythm, and adventurous melodic improvisation that mark the famed County Sligo fiddle style. Mentored by the late Sligo master fiddler Paddy Reynolds, Tony has for decades been a pillar of the Irish session scene in New York City. 54 minutes, 36-page booklet with extensive notes.

With special guests: Eddie Bobé, Kevin Burke, JR Davey, Tom English, Ivan Goff, Natalie Haas, Peter Horan, Charlie Lennon, Seamie O'Dowd, Fionn O'Lochainn, Jerry O'Sullivan, John Patitucci and Seamus Tansey

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Tony DeMarco THE SLIGO INDIANS

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