

"Oyster Light" is what we call a certain kind of light here in the Pacific Northwest of America, when the sun partly breaks through the clouds in winter, over the waters of Puget Sound.

1 Castle Kelly/The Bunch of Green Rushes - Two traditional Irish reels

2 The Lark in the Clear Air - This beautiful melody was the opening theme of one of Ireland's most beloved and long-running radio programs, Mo Cheol Thú, presented by Ciarán Mac Mathúna, who passed away just one year ago, in 2009. Many Irish homes tuned in every Sunday morning to hear Ciarán's 'unashamedly nostalgic and wistful' mix of poetry, instrumental music and song. In Oregon in the 1970's, a lot of us were discovering Irish traditional music for the first time, and tapes of Mo Cheol Thú brought back from Ireland were hungrily copied and passed around. My friends and I used to hang out on Sunday mornings, drinking coffee and listening to these tapes, imagining the world they represented.

3 The Cuil Aodha Jig/The Lark on the Strand - Two traditional jigs that I especially like on the guitar.

4 Whately Snow - A tune I composed in 2001 for my wife, Susan Waters, named for the village where we lived in western Massachusetts at the time.

5 Bach Cello Prelude - I've spent the last thirty or so years immersed in Irish fiddling, but before that I was immersed in various other things, including the classical guitar. This was always a favorite piece, one that I started playing again at home a few years ago as part of my nightly "Owen's bedtime" series. I couldn't begin to say how much the music of J.S. Bach means to me. I don't think he would have minded the countermelody I added here on the viola, improvised in the studio. This is the only piece on this album played in "standard" tuning.

6 The Trip to Durrow - Another favorite traditional Irish reel, with some non-trad viola parts overlaid.

7 Coinleach Ghlas an Fhomhair - This is Micheál O'Domhnaill's arrangement of a traditional song which he recorded with the group Clannad, and with fiddler Kevin Burke. I have a vivid memory of Micheál singing this song in my living room, just at dawn, for a handful of us who'd been up all night playing tunes. The title is in Irish and translates roughly to "The Green Stubble Field of Autumn"... dedicated to the memory of Micheál.

8 An Crubach/Sí Beg, Sí Mor - The first piece is another of Micheál's songs that I first heard him sing at a session in Portland. The second one is the best-known composition of Turlough O'Carolan, the famed harper, who lived and made music from 1670 to 1738.

9 Miss Hamilton - Another piece from the harp repertoire, the only surviving composition of O'Carolan's contemporary Cornelius Lyons, harper to the Earl of Antrim.

10 My Lady Hunsdon's Puffe - Another relic of my classical guitar days, composed by Elizabethan lutenist John Dowland, who may have been born in Ireland. This was always a favorite, and I was delighted when two brilliant Irish musicians, Steven Cooney and Seamus Begley, recorded an amazingly creative arrangement of it on their album "Meital". This is usually played on guitar in dropped D tuning, but I play it here in DADGAD.

11 Paddy's Rambles Through the Park - This is an air which, as far as I can tell, came from the playing of the great Donegal fiddler Johnny Doherty. I first heard him playing it on a recording many years ago, but I first really "heard" this amazing piece of music when James Keane played it for me. James is my bandmate in the traditional trio "Fingal", along with guitarist and singer Daithí Sproule. The story of the tune (from Doherty) is of a man drawn into a "pairc", or farm field, late one night, trying to find an elusive ghostly singer.

12 The Sheep Under the Snow - This is the title in English of a lovely Manx air that I learned many years ago from the playing of a brilliant harper named Charles Guard.

13 The Banks of the Quay/An Chuilleán - The second tune is the famous slow air usually called "The Coolin", played as a march, as recorded by Donegal fiddler Johnny Doherty.

14 Baptist Johnson/The Emigrant's Jig - Another O'Carolan composition. Baptist Johnson was the name of one of O'Carolan's patrons, the high sheriff of Co. Monaghan. The second tune is a slip jig (in 9/8), which came to me from the very musical Kelly family of Capel Street in Dublin, via my good friend and co-fiddler James Kelly.

15 Oyster Light - My own little composition, probably not complete, but here it is for now.