



# Buy This Man a Drink

If you're not already a fan of Irish music, Earle Hitchner will make you one. **BY ALLAN HOFFMAN**

BACK IN 1979, A FRIEND OF EARLE Hitchner's convinced him to head into New York for the St. Patrick's Day parade. It was a frigid day, and after the parade, the friend ("a professional Irishman," as he describes him) took Hitchner downtown to see the band The Irish Tradition at the iconic Greenwich Village club Folk City. Hitchner, an adjunct who teaches the graduate journalism course "Old Modes, New Media: Journalism at a Crossroads," was wowed. "It was a transforming experience," he recalls. "I saw that performance, and I was transfixed."

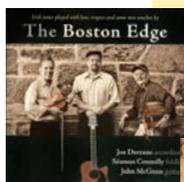
Hitchner wrote a letter to the owner of Green Linnet, the group's record label, and soon he was writing liner notes for the label's albums. And that was just the beginning. Within the next several years, he was hosting an Irish radio show and writing a column on Irish music for *The Irish Voice* and later *The Irish Echo*, where his column still appears.

Hitchner also writes about music for *The Wall Street Journal* and has been called "arguably the pre-eminent Celtic critic in this country" by *The Boston Globe*. "It went from an avocation to a vocation," says Hitchner, who in addition to contributing essays to *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (NYU Press, 1999), also has an entry about himself in the volume.

One considerable achievement came in the mid-1990s, when he

contacted Joe Derrane, a button accordion player who hadn't been heard from in decades, and convinced him to return to the scene; Derrane later played at the White House for the Clintons and the prime minister of Ireland. To this day, fans of Irish music buy drinks for Hitchner and say, "Thank you for bringing Joe Derrane back into music again."

And you may thank him, too, after listening to his pick of not-to-be-missed recordings. "The more you listen, the more you discover," Hitchner says of the music. "It's a very friendly, communal music, and it's always been that."



## A Crash Course in Irish Music

BY EARLE HITCHNER

### The Best of the Bothy Band

(Mulligan Records/Compass Records Group) From 1975 to 1979, no other Irish traditional group had more talent, impact and influence. This compilation proved why.

**The Boston Edge** (Mapleshade Records) Irish America's greatest button accordionist, Joe Derrane, joined 10-time all-Ireland fiddle champion Seamus Connolly and guitar-mandolin wizard John McGann for spellbinding instrumental music.

### The Essential Chieftains

(RCA Victor) The Chieftains are the most popular Irish traditional band in the world, and this release focused on their acoustic roots (Disc 1) and rock-pop collaborations with Van Morrison, Sting, Linda Ronstadt and others (Disc 2).

### Clannad in Concert

(Shanachie Entertainment) This album was culled from the 1978 Swiss tour by the Donegal quintet and includes stunning renditions of the songs "Down by the Salley Gardens" and "Nil Se'n La" ("It's Not Yet Day") by lead vocalist Maire Ni Bhraonain (Moya Brennan).

### Reunion: A Decade of Solas

(Compass Records) On this CD-and-DVD release, current and former members of the band Solas, plus several invited guests, displayed their full vocal and instrumental firepower at a 10th anniversary concert in Philadelphia.

Listen to Earle Hitchner's picks on an iTunes playlist at [drewmagazine.com](http://drewmagazine.com).