

In lieu of any further attempt to describe Brian Wilson's unique work, I simply urge anyone intrigued by what I've written here to go listen to it. There are few album-length musical experiences that provide as much, or as consistent, sonic variety and delight as *Smile*. To conclude by quoting one of Van Dyke Parks's memorable puns, *Smile* is, in every sense of the word(s), "one, one, wonderful."

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*McNally's Row of Flats: Irish American Songs of Old New York by Harrigan and Braham.* By Mick Moloney. McNally's Row of Flats. Are you There Moriarity. The Regular Army-O. Patrick's Day Parade. Danny by my Side. Get Up Jack John Sit Down. Dad's Dinner Pail. Never Take the Horseshoe From the Door. I Never Drink Behind the Bar. The Babies on Our Block. The Mulligan Guard. Old Boss Barry. Such an Education Has My Mary Ann. Maggie Murphy's Home. Compass 4426, 2006.

In his latest CD, Mick Moloney, a Limerick-born folklorist, record producer, and performer, has issued one of the most important collections of historic American popular music since the rediscovery of Scott Joplin over thirty years ago. Reaching back over a century to New York City's early musical theater, Moloney and his fellow musicians have resurrected fourteen of the best songs of Edward Harrigan and David Braham. Moloney clearly has affection and respect for this material.

Edward (Ned) Harrigan (1845–1911) was born on "Cork Row" in the Corlear's Hook section of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The Harrigans, like many of their neighbors, traced their roots back to Ireland. Along with other creative members of his generation, including Samuel Clemens and the James Boys (William and Henry), he managed to avoid the Civil War and settled in San Francisco in 1866. Having picked up a love of music and singing from his mother, Harrigan began performing at the Bella Union, one of the city's early vaudeville houses. He eventually worked his way east to Chicago, where in 1871 he teamed up with Tony Hart (a.k.a. Anthony J. Cannon, 1855–1901). Moving on to New York City, Harrigan and Hart quickly established themselves as the city's most successful entertainment team.

Whereas the art of Tony Hart lay in performing (he was particularly successful in so-called wench roles), Harrigan had a gift for writing. "The Mulligan Guard" (1873), one of his vaudeville sketches about an Irish immigrant family in the Five Points section of Lower Manhattan, became very popular. By 1879, the sketch had evolved into a full-fledged musical play, the first of the "Mulligan Guard" series, which stretched into the 1880s. Most of Harrigan's thirty-six plays (and many of his eighty vaudeville sketches) featured original songs, making Harrigan and composer David Braham pioneers of the American musical. As a lyricist, Harrigan was fortunate to find a talented musician in Braham (1838–1905), who became the

musical director of Harrigan's company, as well as his father-in-law. Born in London, Braham had an excellent sense of the new musical theater emerging out of the music hall, minstrelsy, and vaudeville. He was much better than many of his Tin Pan Alley successors in balancing the melodic quality of a song's verse with that of its chorus.

Most of Harrigan and Braham's two hundred songs were published, and because the company toured the great urban centers on both coasts each summer, the songs became very popular between the 1870s and 1890s. By the end of the century, however, Harrigan's star had faded. For a time the songs slightly outlived his shows, thanks in part to stalwart fans such as New York's Governor Al Smith, once the "Commodore" of New York City's Harrigan Club. But only a few Harrigan-Braham pieces were recorded, and by World War II the songs were buried in the memories of those, especially Irish Americans, who had grown up around the turn of the century.

One reason for Harrigan's eclipse is clearly displayed in Moloney's collection. Those who imagine the strains of "Mother Machree" or "Danny Boy" when they think of Irish American music are in for a surprise when they hear the title song of this album. Most of Harrigan's songs and musicals presented the urban Irish as they struggled with other immigrants to create a place for themselves in America's industrial cities. "McNally's Row of Flats" is about an Irish slumlord whose "peculiar institution, where brogues without dilution, are rattled off together," by the Irish, Germans, Jews, blacks, and Chinese who cram themselves into his tenement. The song represents the in-your-face multiculturalism of the 1880s rather than the tinsel "faux Irishness" of the early twentieth century.

Harrigan was an entertainer, not a reformer, however, and his songs are jaunty, even when they cut close to the bone. "Bottle Alley," in which he located McNally's Flats, was just a block or so north of Five Points and was well known to the readers of *Harper's Weekly* as perhaps the worst slum in a district infamous for its slums. Neither this fact, nor the other references to real-life New York that he worked into his shows, was lost on Harrigan's patrons. As part of a constant effort to give his farces a realistic look, Harrigan had his cast literally buy the clothes off of the backs of the immigrants landing at Castle Garden. His set designer, David Witham, was admired for his realistic urban backdrops. Moloney has quite appropriately used a drawing of one of Witham's sets on his album's cover.

Among the other musical glimpses of New York's Irish America included in the album are "Babies on Our Block" (1879), a song about the Irish families who swarmed around the Battery in the summer. It celebrates the men who were "easy with the shovel and so handy with the pen," a reminder of who was running as well as building the city. "Danny By My Side" (1891), probably the best musical tribute ever written for the Brooklyn Bridge, celebrates the city's working class, who used it for their summer promenades. The charming "Maggie Murphy's Home" (1890) provides a glimpse of an Irish party without the drinking and fighting featured in so many popular songs of the period. The success of the last two songs, incidentally, contributed greatly to the popularity of the "waltz song" that all but dominated the 1890s.

Other songs Moloney has selected feature Harrigan's gentle satiric take on such well-known urban Irish American types as the politician ("Old Boss Barry," 1888),

the bartender (“I Never Drink Behind the Bar” (1883), and, of course, the Irish cop (“Are You There, Moriarity?”, 1876). Also celebrated is the New York Irish propensity for marching: “St. Patrick’s Day Parade” (1874), “The Regular Army-O” (1874), and “The Mulligan Guards” (1873), Harrigan and Braham’s first hit song.

Although Braham’s orchestral scores were lost in a fire, the songs survived in sheet music, many of them collected in Jon W. Finson’s edition published in the Music in the United States of America (MUSA) series.<sup>1</sup> Moloney has used Braham’s piano setting to introduce several of the songs, providing a good sense of the period. Likewise, the brilliant idea of occasionally filling out Braham’s piano scores with a small brass ensemble suggests the sounds of a Gilded Age pit orchestra. Moloney’s decision to use the sound of the contemporary Irish folk band to accompany other songs does take a bit away from the feeling of the period, but nevertheless, in one way or another, all of his settings work. An experienced performer, Moloney presents these songs with the same relaxed but attentive style he has brought to his recordings of Irish folk songs. It is clear that he does not want to treat these songs as museum pieces but prefers to reintroduce them into America’s musical awareness, and to this end he has made a fine effort. The notes and photographs in the CD’s accompanying booklet provide a good historical introduction to Harrigan, Braham, and their songs.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon W. Finson, *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs* (Madison, Wisc.: A-R Editions, 1997).