

McDaniel, Maisie

by Linde Lunney

McDaniel, Maisie (1939–2008), singer, was born Mary Anne McDaniel on 28 October 1939 in Kensington, London, England, one of four daughters and two sons of Sligo man Paddy McDaniel and his wife Lizzie (née Wynne). The family soon returned to Sligo, and Maisie grew up in Garavogue Villas in the town. Shortly after leaving the Sisters of Mercy convent school, she embarked on a career as a singer. She and her sisters had been successful in the late 1950s in local feiseanna and in An Tostal in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim. Her father booked her to sing in Irish clubs in England, and after that first tour, George O'Reilly, already well known as a show business impresario, became the youngster's manager. He teamed her with a backing group, the Fendermen, and suggested she adopt a country-and-western style, wearing a cowgirl costume of fringed jacket, short swing skirt (also sometimes fringed) and calf-length white boots. The group was instantly successful and was booked five nights a week into dancehalls, town halls, local festivals, pubs, hotels and temperance halls all over Ireland.

Maisie was one of the first women artists to bring out single records, recording pop ballads on the Fontana label, and later, on O'Reilly's advice, covering songs made famous by American crooners and country singers, as well as local material. Her first single in 1961 on the Beltona label was 'Forty shades of green', with 'Lovely Armoyn' on the B-side; another 1961 disc included 'Christmastide in Ireland' and 'The old pigsty'. Her recordings sold well: 'Roomful of roses', 'This song is just for you', 'Blackboard of my heart' and others were frequent requests for years on radio shows. McDaniel appeared regularly on Radio Éireann programmes, especially with Maureen Potter (qv). Up to 1964 she had regular engagements on RTÉ television, on the weekly variety show *Curtain up* and on the *Showband show*, and even presented her own programme, *Jamboree*, making her the first Irish female country singer to have her own television show. There were also popular appearances on Ulster Television, and on a Welsh television special for Christmas 1963. She was a guest of honour when country legend Jim Reeves played in Sligo in June 1963, was voted number one female singer in Ireland by readers of the show business magazine *Spotlight*, and was one of the first people in 1960s Ireland to experience the pressures of popular celebrity.

In late 1964, with showbands at the peak of their popularity, her manager decided she should become the celebrity vocalist with an up-and-coming band, the Nevada Showband, and concentrate on the dancehall circuit. After only a few weeks of successful appearances, Maisie was seriously injured in a car crash on 21 January 1965 near Kells, Co. Meath, en route to a performance, and spent weeks in hospital. She had to endure a number of major operations over the next few years to reconstruct a shattered hipbone. Eileen Kelly, known professionally as Kelley,

took Maisie's place with the Nevada, and Maisie missed out on the Irish heat of the Eurovision Song Contest in 1965, and on a tour in Germany and France which was at the planning stage.

She was only just able to walk again on 22 May 1965, when she married Fintan Stanley, from Clogherhead, Co. Louth, in Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo. The couple moved to England, and Stanley, an accordion player, appeared in clubs and cabaret. Eventually Maisie was well enough to join him in cabaret and, in 1969, George O'Reilly convinced them to come back to Ireland. Maisie was successful in appearances on a new RTÉ programme, *Hootenanny*, and with her husband formed the Ramblers, later the Nashville Ramblers. However, success was again short-lived; after suffering one of several miscarriages, Maisie left the band and returned to Sligo to convalesce. The couple bought land, as well as Drumcliffe Rectory, a house associated with the poet W. B. Yeats (qv). They played in local concerts and clubs, and Maisie had a daughter in 1973. The marriage was in difficulties, however, and in 1976 Fintan Stanley moved to Massachusetts, USA, where he later obtained a divorce.

Maisie's career and personal life were alike in disarray. She developed a drink problem, and was hospitalised for three weeks after collapsing. She attended AA meetings and after a few months was well enough to get a job in a Sligo factory. After two years, she was unable to work because her damaged hip caused problems, and was also involved in another car accident. In 1970 the Land Commission compulsorily purchased fifteen acres of land that she and Stanley owned at Rathcormac, Co. Sligo, and Drumcliffe was sold in 1977. Maisie was refused a marriage annulment; unable to marry again in church, she lived with a new partner, Frank Duskey, and, to her great distress, a priest refused to allow her access to confession. She and Duskey later had other difficulties, involving breaches of planning controls; they lived in a mobile home in a field Maisie owned near Rathcormac, and Duskey was fined for starting a welding business on the site.

After years in retirement, Maisie McDaniel made an anthology record of her former hits in 1985, but there was to be no successful comeback. When she died suddenly at home in Yeats Drive, Cranmore, Sligo town, on 28 June 2008, she had been almost forgotten by the music business, though many fans remembered her music and the big nights in marquees and dancehalls. She was survived by her daughter and her estranged husband, and by Tommy McGowan, who had been her partner for over twenty years. Her daughter Lisa Stanley is a singer who recorded versions of her mother's hit songs in 2009, and has appeared in tribute shows.

Anglo-Celt, 7 Nov. 1960; 26 Sept. 1969; *Ir. Independent*, *passim*, esp.: 24 July 1964; 26 Jan., 18 May 1965; *Irish Farmers' Journal*, 13 Jan. 1970; *Sunday Independent*,

19 Sept. 1976; *Ir. Press*, 13 Sept. 1980; 1 May 1984; Vincent Power, *Send 'em home sweating: the showbands' story* (1990), 341; Jimmy Higgins, *'Are ye the band?': a memoir of the showband era* (2007), 63, and plate after p 60; *Ir. Times*, *passim*, esp. 5 July 2008; www.irish-showbands.com; index to English births on www.findmypast.co.uk (internet material accessed Mar. 2014)

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