

Ní Scolaí, Máire

by Paul Rouse

Ní Scolaí, Máire (1909–85), traditional singer, was born in Dublin on 24 May 1909 to Michael Scully, commercial traveller, of 60 Ignatius Road, and Mary Scully (née Kavanagh). She lived in Dublin for much of her childhood and was educated at Central Model Schools, which held pilot Irish-language courses. She improved her Irish at Ring College, Co. Waterford, which fostered her love for traditional Irish culture. In her late teenage years she moved with her sister Mona to Galway and set herself up as a teacher of Irish singing and dancing. She played several leading roles in the Irish-language theatre, *An Taibhdhearc*, and appeared as Gráinne with Micheál MacLiammóir (qv) in his 1928 production of 'Diarmaid agus Gráinne'.

She became widely known for her interpretation of traditional Irish songs and sang on numerous occasions on 2RN (Radio Éireann), as well as on the BBC, Radio Vaticano, and Radio Française, and in America. A mezzo-soprano who formally studied vocal and instrumental music and was a licentiate of the Trinity College of Music, London, she was considered one of the few people who could successfully combine sean-nós singing with her training in classical music. She won awards at numerous feiseanna (at which she later became a judge) including Feis Chonnacht and Feis Shligigh, and at the Aonach Tailteann. She also performed with distinction at the Welsh eisteddfod, the Scottish mod, the Manx Tynwald, and the Breton Bretagne celebrations. She gave concerts at London's Covent Garden and Queen's Hall. An avid collector of songs across the Gaeltacht areas and in Co. Clare, she saved much material that might otherwise have been lost. She performed many songs which she acquired from traditional singers such as Cáit Uí Chonláin in Spiddal and Labhras 'Binn' Ó Cadhla (1889–1961).

She released a number of HMV recordings including *Seacht ndolas na Maighduine Mhuire*, *Caoineadh na dtrí Muire*, and *Eibhlín a Rún*. Her work is best captured on an eponymously titled 1971 Gael-Linn recording which carries her EMI/HMV recordings on one side and songs from the 2RN and RTÉ archive on the other. This includes love songs such as 'An droighneán donn', the lament for lost love 'Sail óg rua', and the plaintive 'Sé fáth mo bhuartha'. She married (9 September 1931) Liam Ó Buachalla (qv), whom she had met in *An Taibhdhearc*, at University Church, St Stephen's Green, Dublin; they had no children. She died 28 June 1985 and was buried in Galway.

GRO; *Ir. Times*, 26 July 1969; *Studia Hib.*, xvi (1976), 21; *Hosanna*, i, no. 4 (Sept. 1976); Boylan; *Anois*, 7 July 1985; Pádraig Ó Siadhail, *Stair dhrámaíocht na Gaeilge*

1900–1970 (1993); *Beatháisnéis*, iv, 82; Ó Céirín; Tadhg Foley (ed.), *From Queen's College to National University* (1999), 323–4

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