

Saint Abbey's Day

We first discovered this song in our last week at the Ionad Cúlurtha. We learned it from a recording online of Diarmuid MacSuibhne. Ours is an abridged version of the full song, which goes on to talk about Gobnait's Bowl, the Rag Tree by Gobnait's Well, and Gobnait's Day on the 11th of February

*There's a neat rising valley far over the hills
Baile Mhúirne embracing the village and mills
Where the people for ages come thronging to pray
For cures on Whitsunday and Saint Abbey's Day.*

*Not the vale of Avoca so painted by Moore
Glendalough or Glengarrif or old Glenmalour
Not the falls of Niagara nor bright Avondale
Are as charming to view as this beautiful vale*

*It is sweet to come here when midsummer is nigh
Twixt two stately mountains approaching the sky
Where the strong mountain Ash and the Oak trees high grow
O'er a neat rising town that's embosomed below.*

*In years long ago as our history paints
When Ireland was titled the island of saints
It was here that saint Abbey erected her shrine
Where you're cured by the power of our maker divine*

*So devoutly come here and implore on your knees
Of the glorious saint who made soldiers of bees
To grant your request and lay down each complaint
With devotion and faith at the shrine of the saint*

Gobnait's Well / Gobnait's March

*Tie a ribbon round and round,
And hold it to your heart
Where the sad ones leave their sorrows
Those who pass but never part*

In August, we spent a few beautiful days bathed in the last remnants of summer exploring Baile Mhúirne. On the last day of our trip, we stopped by UCC to visit the Honan Chapel, and found ourselves gazing up at Harry Clarke's stained glass window of Gobnait. We were struck by her ethereal, placid face; the quiet strength that radiated from her; and the scenes surrounding her - bees set like soldiers upon raiders, Gobnait's crozier as a weapon and a bulwark, the triple goddess defending the town of Baile Mhúirne... And the mill and the abbey sitting safely in her hand.

Gobnait's Well is a non-sacred prayer to Gobnait, an address, asking if she knows what became of her beloved town - if she knows that a cold, masculine, river runs through it, claiming a life every seven years. We ask her where the lines become blurred between who she was as a woman, and the goddess her followers know and love.

Alec's accompaniment is a sonic response to the images in the text, and is offered as a soothing counterpart to his piece, *An Súlán*, which will be featured later in this programme. We then transition to *Gobnait's March* which is a short instrumental inspired by her fiery power and her fight to protect Baile Mhúirne against all harm.

*O painted sister, veiled in blue
A chailleach, a hiníon buí
What do you know of the town you loved beside your lovely Lee*

*Gan meas aige don mhil nó don bheach
There winds the cursed Súlán
Enticing souls you sought to save his bed to rest upon*

*Duine de na triúir deirfiúiracha
Banríon áitiúil
Your placid face belies a wrath for he that scorns your rule*

*A Ghobnait, goddess ó dhúthaigh Mhúscraí
You were of woman too
Cá tharraing muid na línte seo luachmhara eatarthu*

*Agus there sits Baile Mhúirne
Safe in your graceful hand
A hive in every home agus beach i chuile cheann*

Sólás Ón nDólás

1981, "if you can find her, you can keep her"

During our time at the Ionad Cultúrtha, we were inspired by a story of an unmarried woman who became pregnant, and had her baby taken away by nuns from a Mother and Baby Home. She went back to the nuns, six weeks after giving birth, and demanded they allow her to take her baby home. They brought her to a room lined with unmarked cots, a room full of newborns, and told her that if she could find her child among them, she could have her.

This occurred in the early 1980s, a time when Ireland didn't adequately love or protect unmarried mothers or their babies.

"Sólás Ón nDólás" began as a lullaby, and evolved into a declaration of feminine strength. In the song, a mother sings to her daughter, and tells her that she will love and protect her. The song is an homage to a mother's love, and to these women's strength.

This song is dedicated to those impacted by the mother and baby homes.

*I played no part in choosing you, stóirín
When the time came I knew you by name
I knew your cry in a room filled with crying
I knew your face and I claimed you as mine*

*I took you home to a quiet reception
No coos and cries from my sisters or kin
Lovingly hand-crocheted stockings and geansaí
Were kept for those others not born of sin*

*Mamó won't swaddle my babe when I'm weary
Daideo won't carve you a bábbóg a chroí
Your tiny gold curls mussed only by mama
Rosy cheeks kissed and your tears dried by me*

*'Sí Gobnait do mhaimeó, the Hawthorn your brother
San oíche tabhair cluas do hamhrán na mBeach
We will find solace in the vale of Muskerry
Faoi scáth na sléibhte ní bheimid uaigneach*

*'Sí Gobnait do mhaimeó, is cara duit an sceach gheal
San oíche tabhair cluas do hamhrán na mBeach
Gheobhaimid sólás i ngleann an Mhúscraí
Faoi scáth na sléibhte ní bheimid uaigneach*

Tomhas Ghobnatan / Gobnait's Measure

When we first came to Baile Mhúirne, we learned about Gobnait's Day on the 11th of February, and about the throngs who come to the town every year to pay tribute to the saint and goddess. People come to do a pilgrimage bringing them by foot up to Gobnait's well, to her "Rag Tree" where ribbons and tokens and votive offerings are left, to the church, to the shrine and to her grave.

As part of this day, a small medieval statue of Gobnait is brought out and put on display at the altar of the church in Ballyvourney - visitors come with lengths of ribbon, and measure it along the length of the statue, around her feet, and around her neck, before wrapping it around an ailing limb, tying it to the rear-view mirror of their car, or hanging it at the rag tree as an offering with a wish or a prayer to Gobnait. This length of ribbon is called Gobnait's Measure - Tomhas Ghobnatan.

When I think of "Gobnait's Measure" however, it calls to mind our measure of a person - their virtues, the values they live by. Gobnait seems to me a benevolent, forgiving presence and one that is loving and beloved rather than feared. With that as a starting point, I wrote Tomhas Ghobnatan as a song of adoration, fusing contemporary pop and gospel styles.

"Gobnait" is most often translated as Deborah or Abigail. Deborah is the Hebrew word for "bee" and Gobnait is the patron saint of bees. Abigail is the Hebrew word for "cause of joy" or "father's joy"; ironically enough it's suggested that Gobnait was cast out of her home by her father, just before an angel appeared to her and told her to find a place with nine white deer, that it would be the place of her death and resurrection. That place was Baile Mhúirne.

*Her measure is forgiving, she won't judge me on the past
She will take me as I'm given, and the choices I made last
When I go to her in trouble, she'll take me in her arms no questions asked
My Abigail
My Deborah
My cause of joy and light*

*Her measure is a healing, she is shelter from the rain
She is water for the grass that grows / A balm to soothe the pain
And when I return from far away, she takes me in her loving arms again*

*She tells me tie a ribbon round and hold it to my heart
She'll ease me of my sorrow and we'll promise not to part
And I'll make another pilgrimage tomorrow to her side
Before throwing sail back to the sea of night
My Abigail
My Deborah
My cause of joy and light*

An Súlán / Crónán Na mBeach / Crónán Na mBeach Jig

An Súlán is a sonic representation of the river Sullane. Throughout this soundscape different aspects of the river, both physical and metaphysical are explored. It begins with drops of water being heard delicately clapping against the rocks in Cúil Aodha before the powerful drones of the river are realised as it flows toward Ballyvourney. As it drives forward, a delicate wind begins to blow while the river passes beneath the strong stone bridge where the beguiling, yet ominous, curse comes into view.

*Mise an Súlán
Fuar, fada, fireann
Anois an t-am
Cá bhfuil an duine?*

Eerily, the lost souls residing in the Súlán's rolling waters begin to call out. It is rumoured that every seven years this cursed river claims a life. The seven beats at the end of this piece represent a warning that the river is ready for its next victim.

An Súlán transitions to *Crónán Na mBeach*, a macaronic song in which a young woman has awoken from a bad dream - in the dream, the Sullane River is calling to her. It tells her that it is the seventh year, now is the time, she is the person, and she must go to the river and give herself to it. It tells her she is carrying guilt and shame, and she must sacrifice herself. Gobnait sends the bees to sing to the young girl, to soothe her worry, and to lull her back to the safety of her own bed.

This suite ends with the *Crónán Na mBeach jig*, a piece reimagining the melody of *Crónán na mBeach* as a lively up-tempo traditional instrumental, arranged by Hannah Nic Gearailt.

*An mhaidin chinniúnach a dhúisigh sí
From a dark night of troubling dreams
The sky was the warm hue of honey
Forging gold in the well and the stream*

*D'fhág sí a clann ina luí ann
And the walk was the longest it's been
When she answered the call of the river
Glaon nach raibh beartaithe di*

*Ach a chailín, bí socair
A chailín, bí sámhir
Tá coirceog i ngach teach
Ag cró, ag fanacht*

*A chailín, bí socair
A chailín, bí sámhir
Tá coirceog i ngach teach
'Is i ngach ceann, beach*

*Ansiúd ar bhruach an tSúláin
In her ear, the song of the bees
Was a lullaby, lulling her safely abhaile
Ní duitse an rud seo, a chroí*

*Gan chiontacht, gan pheaca atá tú
In this world there are shadows galore
Ach beloved iníon of Múscraí
Ní ortsa an milleán a stór*

*A chailín, bí socair
A chailín, bí sámhir
Tá coirceog i ngach teach
Ag cró, ag fanacht*

*A chailín, bí socair
A chailín, bí sámhir
Tá coirceog i ngach teach
'Is i ngach ceann, beach*

Credits

Saint Abbey's Day

Arrangement: Emma Langford & Alec Brown

Gobnait's Well

Lyrics: Emma Langford

Composition: Alec Brown

Gobnait's March

Melody: Emma Langford

Piano Arrangement: Hannah Nic Gearailt

Sólás Ón nDólás

Lyrics, Melody & Guitar: Emma Langford

Piano: Hannah Nic Gearailt

Cello: Alec Brown

Tomhas Ghobnatan

Lyrics & Melody: Emma Langford

Piano: Hannah Nic Gearailt

Flute: Alec Brown

An Súlán

Composition: Alec Brown

Crónán Na mBeach

Lyrics & Melody: Emma Langford

Piano: Hannah Nic Gearailt

Crónán Na mBeach Jig

Arrangement: Hannah Nic Gearailt

Port Chúil Aodha / Cúl Aodha Jig

Arrangement: Hannah Nic Gearailt

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Special thanks to the people of Baile Mhúirne for welcoming us, it has been our privilege to be here, and to learn about and interpret your stories.