

Ceol na Sféir: Music of the Spheres

The wind was not a stranger to the island village. It was often caught rustling trees, thieving socks and creating great ship sails with the linen shirts atop the struggling washing lines. Large gusts bellowed down the small pebbled streets of the village, rattling windows and ringing shop bells, as if it were a rebellious child who had run off from its mother.

This night, the malevolent wind whipped against the island's hills with a harsh intensity. Roaring and insistent, trees thrashed and boats rocked and groaned in their ports. The island's very foundations shook with the intensity of the relentless wind. Black waves, invisible against the midnight rocks, unleashed their violence, creating dismay and an untameable chaos. Not even the bravest of fishermen in the village would dare to brave the waters tonight, instead choosing to bunker down with their families, hoping to wait out the violent winds that whipped at their backs, and wrenched on their sleeves.

Many cursed the wind and the waves, which had halted the afternoon. The town's shops, stripped of their natural colour from the years of salty winds, stood idle and veiled, awaiting the sun and warmth of a new day. Despite the winds, and the waves, a kernel of light began to grow, emanating from the small dry-stone hut upon the very top of the island, where a soft melody began.

The violin sat pliantly under old Cillian's chin, all too willing to deliver his notes and tunes. He was a quiet man, Old Cillian. He wasn't too fond of talking. He was content, perhaps even happy, living far removed from his village overlooking the ocean that had once been his highway to the world. Old Cillian had always believed the land was a living, breathing power beneath his feet. He could see this power in the green pastures, and even in the occasional sheep that kept him company.

On this particular night he found himself glancing outside his dark window pane to watch the waves hit the rocks and the wind whip against the hills, eager to accompany the music they created together. His melody, a story of tales old and long forgotten, pulsed through the small hut. So full of emotion, yet so peaceful and calm, he played on and on until even the wind and the raging waves had halted to listen to him play.

His eyes fluttered shut at the stories he brought to life. Joy, sorrow, regret, and excitement, danced across his wrinkled face, interweaving and interchanging as he waltzed around the hut's largest room, cradling his violin like a long forgotten child. He often found himself imagining what it would be like to hold his children again, who were long since grown and old enough to leave the Island

that had, at least in their minds, held their dreams and goals hostage. Only the occasional telegraph was now received: promotions at work, the weather, and if he was lucky, the occasional scatter of children's drawings, quickly composed to appease a parental request for 'the crazy man on the hill'.

The longer he played in that little hut, the more he found himself getting lost within his music, lost within his thoughts, willingly handing himself over to his raw and natural roots, guiding him in his composition. And when, on occasion, he would pause to listen again to the waves and to the wind out his window, he would take a second to gaze up at the millions of stars, littered across the sky. Diamonds upon a black canvas. Old Cillian had always believed that stars were beacons of hope for lost souls, pulling them along in the hardest of times. They watched with ancient wisdom, as he grinned up in delight, eager to hear him play again.

Old Cillian often remembered the stories his grandmother had told him about the wee folk of the Sidhe mountains, Fae rings, and of the selkies that swam in the waters around the small town. Folk who were in tune with nature. The custodians of the natural world.

"Cillian you must make sure the Fae folk are happy," she would say in her soft, lilting brogue. And so each day small trays of milk, chunks of bread, or even small shiny items were left out, just as his grandmother had taught him, to appease those who were once known as gods.

On occasion new shoe buckles or fresh lilies would be left on Cillian's doorstep. Gifts, he was certain, came from the little folk in appreciation of his song. Old Cillian would often pretend he didn't notice their small noses pressed against his dark window pane, humming faintly along with his soft tune. They sat, hidden by the cover of darkness, watching avidly as his fingers danced seamlessly along the violin, evoking memories of when they were worshipped as lords and gods.

His wife had not been from the village. Some village women had suggested she may have been one of the selkie women who had left her watery domain for the love of Old Cillian. But when she passed away, every person in that small village mourned for her. His lighthouse, his beacon, his star, had disappeared. No longer would her gentle words and her loving caress guide him in the hardest of times. He was now just another lost soul guided by the stars.

He had disappeared for weeks upon weeks after her departure. Some speculated that he had run into the ocean and drowned, desperately seeking his lost love, or was stolen by large gangly creatures, others said he ran away chasing faeries that didn't exist. But when he did finally return, a new light shone in his eyes and an old violin was grasped firmly in his hands.

And then the music came. At first the melody, so filled with heartache and sorrow, pulsed through the huts, bringing sadness and a dark cloud that followed every person in the village. Some said that even the waves weren't as powerful as they had been, and the sky was instead a somber shade of blue. But after a long while, his music had become filled with wonder and carried a sweet tune, bringing joy wherever it was heard.

The people of the village tried, and tried again, in their hearty pubs, and hearth lit homes, to recreate the notes carried on the ocean breeze, dancing through the village. Despite their best efforts, they could never weave the notes together to create a melody as sweet as his. They would stay up at night huddled around warm fireplaces, humming and swaying along to the notes that filtered through their windows, laughing as their children pranced around the room, expressions filled with joy and childish delight. The old wives revisited tales of the Tuatha de Danann and the Fae magic, smiling along as his magical tune uplifted souls of everyone in the village. Unsure of how to thank the strange hermit for his gifts, the children of the town would leave flowers or small items they had pilfered from the beaches, hoping that he would always play.

But Old Cillian didn't play for the wind to stop, or the stars to smile, or for an unseen audience, or even for the townfolk's enjoyment. No, he didn't play for these, no one knew why he played. He was once just a simple fisherman who went about his life, caring for his wife and children. As soon as the clock struck six in the afternoon, he was partial, as all families in the village were, in heading to the town's pub to hear the musicians pluck away at their guitars and sing atop bar stools. He often reminisced of Sunday mornings when his wife would drag him and the children out of the house for long walks along the shore. Old Cillian was never a fan of the tedious walks that often caused his legs to ache, although he was willing to endure it for her sake. But more so for the promise of her famous scones with blackberry jam and fresh cream.

And now, with a broad smile stretching across his wrinkled face, he danced around his little hut on his small island, in harmony with the crashing waves and the relentless wind, playing on and on until the small *pitter patter* of feet could be heard disappearing into the darkness outside.