

“I have a lot to be thankful about,” John Whelan said in a February interview. The seven-time all-Ireland button-accordion champion and award-winning, chart-topping recording artist is thankful for the music and the success, of course. But he’s also thankful for the friends he’s made along the way. Irish musicians and music fans the world over know Whelan as a brilliant player and a loveable wildman, who not only gets audiences to dance in the aisles but dances right there with them. Whelan is so much a part of the East Coast Irish circuit that it’s hard to imagine Irish music in the U.S. without him.

Whelan’s early life was spent neither in the U.S. nor in Ireland, but in England. He grew up 37 miles from London, in the Luton suburb of

Dunstable. But he had three years in the capital first. “I was born in London,” he explained. “My father told me they had a one-room flat when they first got married. My sister was the oldest, so she got the crib. And I was the youngest, so I got the drawer. So the first three years of my life, I slept in a drawer! And my dad says when I got too big for the drawer they had to move. So they moved to Dunstable.”

More seriously, he explained the family’s move in terms of the politics of the time. “About 1962, they had what you call the London overspill. They started developing all these towns past the greenbelt of London. You had 15 miles or so of greenbelt, and then they started developing these towns because London was getting too populated. So my dad got the house where I grew up. It was a council

house, but when Margaret Thatcher came into power, she turned housing over to the people who lived in it. You got a rebate on the house depending on how long you’d lived in it and paid rent. So my dad bought the house.” In 1980, the same year that Denis Whelan bought his home, John left for the United States. But his time in Dunstable had been well spent; he was already a seasoned accordion player with an album of traditional Irish music on a respected label.

Whelan’s start in Irish music came from hearing his family play at home. His father played “a couple of waltzes” on the box, but his grandfather and great-grandfather, who came from County Wexford, both were more serious players. When the young Whelan realized at the age of 11 that he wanted to learn, there was no question who his teacher would be: Clare fiddler Brendan Mulkere. “Brendan was really the pre-eminent teacher around at that time, him and Tommy McGuire in London,” Whelan remembered. “But Brendan was the one who traveled outside of London. He came to Luton.” Every other week for several years, Whelan met with Mulkere in the Harp Club in Luton. “He had 30 or 40 students, and he maintained that for a long time,” Whelan remembered. “Brendan started a lot of good people. John Carty, Christine Considine, and many others.”

The young Whelan took to the box easily, and within three years of beginning to play, was asked by Belfast’s Outlet records to record an album. The resulting LP was titled *The Pride of Wexford*. “I look back on it, and I figure it wasn’t too bad. There’s some errors on there, but I did the whole thing in one day, from 10 o’clock till five. It’s pretty good for a 14-year-old kid in seven hours.

“I remember getting the first shipment after the album was done,” he continued. “It was really exciting for me. We got this big, heavy box, like 300 LPs or something. We opened the LP, and the cover was there, and I hated the photograph. Then I took the LP out [of the sleeve], and it was *The Greatest Hits of Nashville*. The whole box was like that! So we had to send it back, and I was really bummed out.” Outlet did straighten the mess out, though, and *The Pride of Wexford* became a steady seller for the small label. Although the album has never been put on CD, Whelan says he’d like to see it reissued, if only for old time’s sake. The album holds many memories for him. His accompanist, for example, was pianist Kevin Taylor, a family friend who has since passed away. Whelan also remembers the fine Limerick flute player Paddy Taylor, Kevin’s father, whom he calls “a great man.” He was, according to Whelan, “the first adult musician to ask me to sit down and have a tune with him.”

Whelan continued to practice and play, and to compete in various championships. While he



Young John Whelan, 1970 (age 11) with his first accordion at the Harp Club, London

did very well as a musician, he was not as good at keeping his personal life in order. He attributes his confusion to early success and the mixed messages it sent. "When you do your first album when you're 14, you're all of a sudden this child prodigy," he said. "And when you play a tune, people pat you on the back and say, 'You're great, you're fuckin' great, you're the best.' And really you know in your heart that what you just played was shit. Even at 15, you know if you played well or you didn't play well." Although he played well more often than not (he won 13 all-Ireland and all-Britain championships in nine years), he still went through a difficult period. By 18 he had fallen out with his parents and moved out of their house, into the home of his girlfriend and her family. That was where he found his first accordion student, who was his girlfriend's sister. Her name was Karen Tweed.

Tweed, of course, is now a well-known player, one of the top piano accordionists in Celtic music. She is a former member of the Kathryn Tickell Band and a current member of the Poozies and Swâp. All along, she's given Whelan credit for starting her out, a fact he appreciates. "Karen has been very gracious to me in her travels and very respectful of the help that I've given her in the past. She mentions my name in her music books, and that's humbling, and it's nice." Whelan was also close with Tweed's parents and named the tune "Dot's Polka" after her mother.

Whelan's success at fleadh and his reputation as a player soon came to the attention of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, an Irish music

organization that arranges world tours of the foremost traditional musicians. In 1979, he joined the Comhaltas tour and visited the United States for the first time. "I got the bug then. I hit America, and I had to come back." In 1980, he came to the U.S. again and has been based here ever since. His first job in America was with a showband called McKenna's Gold, who played on the thriving Irish entertainment circuit in the New York area. Hughie McKenna was the bandleader and drummer, and his sister Sharon was the singer. "Of course, I wasn't doing the stuff that I wanted to do," Whelan remembered. "It was, you know, 'Irish Eyes are Smiling' stuff, a little bit of country, a little bit of rock 'n' roll. We would do 'Okie from Muskogee' and 'Eight Days a Week.'" Although the showband sound was not exactly what Whelan was looking for, he was very grateful for the gig. "It was a very popular band in New York at that time. They were busy, so I was working four or five nights a week. I was 20 years old, not a care in the world, no money."

Whelan's association with the showband provided not only money but valuable contacts.



Kips Bay Ceili Band - New York City, 1991  
(left to right) Richard Lindsey, Pat Kilbride, Steve Missal, Whelan

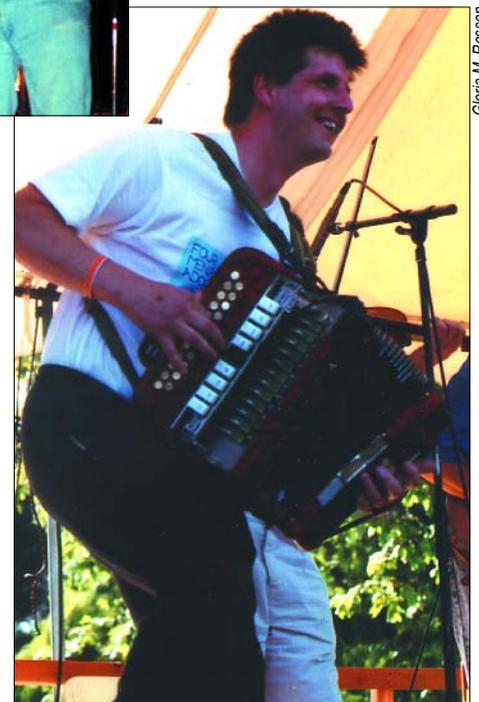
"It was great for me, because I didn't know anybody, and I was new to the country. People who had my *Pride of Wexford* album knew who I was, and people from the tour knew who I was, but outside of that, not that many people knew me." One person who did know him was Brian Conway, one of New York's best Irish fiddlers; he and Whelan had met at fleadh in Ireland. The two became friends and played gigs in the Catskills during the summer of 1982. "We actually competed together," Whelan said. "We won the North American duet championship, I think. I can't remember anymore. But we had fun, though!"

For some time, Whelan played with the showband and with Conway, honing his skills and enjoying himself. In 1984, he had a concert booked with Conway in Canada. "Brian called me up, and he couldn't make it. Something

came up, and he couldn't go. So he gave me Eileen's [Ivers] number. I think Eileen was 17 or 18, and I called Eileen to find out if she'd be interested in going to Canada. She said yes, and the rest is history."

The duo of John Whelan and Eileen Ivers was one of the most electrifying acts in Irish music in the 1980s. In about 1984, Whelan started to book tours for the duo, playing first the Irish festival circuit, then the folk circuit, visiting venues like the Turning Point, the Towne Crier, and the Cherry Tree. "I remember a gig we did at the College of St. Elizabeth with Dougie MacLean," Whelan said. "It was Dougie's first solo tour, I believe. I think it was the first night, and he sold out of all the stuff he brought for the tour. He sold a *lot* of stuff. I remember he's on the phone to his wife: 'You gotta send me some stuff, I've sold out!' He was overjoyed. And again, the rest was history, look what he's done since then."

In 1987, Whelan and Ivers recorded the album *Fresh Takes*, still a landmark disc of new-style Irish music. The duo's bold approach, the startlingly original arrangements, and unusual tunes made a big splash; in fact, you either loved the album or you hated it. "We pissed off a few people," Whelan confided. "That's the thing, we were so different back then." But gradually the kinds of innovations they were introducing became a standard part of the Irish musician's arsenal. "Last year I went to see Lúnasa in New York," Whelan said. "Somebody in the audience, who's pretty big



Whelan in 1992



The John Whelan Band, 1998 -  
Liz Knowles, Robin Bullock, Tom Wetmore, and Whelan

## John Whelan Selected Discography

### Solo and Duo Releases

*Celtic Fire: Jigs, Reels & Waltzes*  
Narada (2001)

*Come to Dance*  
Narada (1999)

*Flirting With the Edge*  
Narada (1998)

*Celtic Crossroads*  
Narada (1997)

*Celtic Reflections: Misty-Eyed Morning*  
Narada (1996)

*From the Heart*  
Oenoke (1990)

*The Pride of Wexford*  
Outlet (1974)

### with Eileen Ivers

*Fresh Takes*  
Green Linnet (1987)

### with Kips Bay

*Digging In*  
Green Linnet

*Into the Light*  
Green Linnet (1996)

Whelan also appears on the Narada compilations  
*Celtic Odyssey* (1993) and *Celtic Legacy* (1995),  
as well as various Green Linnet and Celtophile compilations.

[www.johnwhelan.com](http://www.johnwhelan.com)

in the Irish music world, turned around and said, 'Doesn't it make you feel good to think that you in some way made this kind of stuff happen?' And I never really thought of it that way. It's really nice to hear somebody in the traditional world say that Eileen and I had some part in the progression of Irish music into the 90s.' Whelan's own evaluation of *Fresh Takes* was characteristically straightforward, neither falsely modest nor overblown. "It was fun," he said, "and I think it still holds up."

Eventually, Ivers and Whelan went their separate ways. Ivers played in several bands, including one with Seamus Egan, and was eventually hired to play the fiddle for *Riverdance*. Whelan, in the meantime, recorded his second solo album and joined a new band. Finding his previous U.S. record company restrictive and slow to pay for services rendered, Whelan recorded, produced, and

released the album project himself. A lifelong construction worker, he even built with his own hands the studio in which the album was recorded. Titled *From the Heart*, the cassette-only release won an honorable mention in the Indie awards in 1990. *From the Heart* has one of the great virtues of real traditional music: It still sounds fresh today. "Musically it's pretty solid," Whelan agreed, "a real throwback to my traditional roots." Then he added, with his characteristic candor, "If I had \$30,000 back in 1988 or 1989, it would have been a different album. I didn't, and for \$6,000, it's not too shabby." It's good enough that Whelan has remixed it; he plans to reissue it on CD, with bonus tracks, in the fall of 2001.

The guest musicians on *From the Heart* included a whole cadre of New York-based Irish musicians who were in the first lineup of Whelan's new band: The Kips Bay Ceili Band. The band had its roots in the first meeting between Whelan and the Irish singer and multi-instrumentalist Pat Kilbride, in 1988. That was a hard time in Whelan's life. He was recently divorced, and about to remarry, to his current wife Louise. "I hit the bottle heavy for a couple of years," he confessed. "And after I met Louise, I had that lag time. I was still kind of drinking and partying." Kilbride asked Whelan to play a concert with him, and Whelan accepted. When the time came for the gig, Whelan was out drinking instead. "It was right after that that I quit drinking," he remembered. "Pat had something to do with me quitting, too. 'Cause Pat also quit drinking in '88, just before I did!"

With both musicians clean and sober, the way was clear for music. Kilbride had just moved to the U.S. and released his CD *Rock and More Roses*, a solo disc made up of tracks he had recorded while living in Europe. With none of his usual bandmates around, Kilbride decided to form a brand-new group to promote the album. "At that time he lived in Kips Bay in New York," Whelan said, "so he called the band The Kips Bay Ceili Band." The Kips Bay Ceili Band was originally conceived as an all-star lineup of Irish musicians with rock accompaniment. It began with Kilbride, Whelan, Ivers, flute player Joanie Madden, and uilleann piper Jerry O'Sullivan. The rhythm section consisted of Richard Lindsey on bass, Steve Missal on drums, and Henry Grendel on keyboards. This lineup of the band played only a few times, first at CBGBs and then at a New York club called the Albuquerque Rodeo Bar. After that, there wasn't enough money to support an eight-piece supergroup, and members fell away, leaving a core group of Kilbride, Whelan, Missal, and Lindsey.

Many Celtic music fans remember Kips Bay (as the band came to be called) as a fun-loving, enjoyable party band who enlivened many festivals from 1988 to 1996. What they did was not all that adventurous, and they did not arrange all that much material, so Whelan calls his tenure with the group "a long time doing the same shit." Whelan did mitigate the sameness with a lot of onstage and offstage antics; using wireless hookups for his box, he would play whole gigs while strolling among the audience members and interacting with them. He also changed his look and his hairstyle frequently, sporting mohawks and brushcuts in various colors, which often drew flak from Irish audiences. "People thought, 'He's just trying to be hip,'" Whelan said. "But you know what? I grew up in the early days of punk rock. And that was all happening shit to me, the Sex Pistols and all that. I was right there in the early 70s. So coming here and having a mohawk was not a big deal to me. But being in this conservative Irish world, it was 'That Whelan guy is strange!'"

Kips Bay afforded Whelan the opportunity to travel, play music, and have fun. It also got him back in the recording studio for two albums, *Digging In* and *Into the Light*. Of these, the first is by far his favorite. "Musically [*Digging In*] was interesting; it was a little different. I think it incorporated a lot of elements that the band had. Richard did a lot of jazz, so you had those elements in there, Pat would do kind of traditional acoustic with a folk-rock edge, Steve with his Billy Idol rock 'n' roll drumming. So I think we brought that whole thing together." *Into the Light* was a different story, a pop album without much room for Whelan's traditional background. "If it was rock 'n' roll I might have enjoyed it more. But



Once Upon an Accordion Tour, 1998 -  
Robin Bullock, Daniel Thoron, Whelan, and Chris Parkinson

I think it was much more pop-rock, light and airy kind of stuff. That wasn't for me."

Creating an album he didn't like was all the more frustrating, given that he had been composing his own music all along, music that Kips Bay didn't perform. Just as *Into the Light* was being conceived, Whelan was approached by Narada Records with the idea of producing a Celtic album that would fit the label's laid-back groove. Whelan jumped at the chance. "I got the opportunity with Narada," he remembered, "and all of a sudden, it wasn't even a window, it was a colossal gate opening up!"

Whelan was seen as a hard-edged traditional player with rock leanings, so it was difficult to go to work for a new-age label playing mellow Celtic tunes. "I did get a lot of flak about that, about the new-age thing, and the word 'Celtic,'" he remembered. "I took a lot of shit for that." Still, he sees *Celtic Reflections* as an enjoyable album that moved his creativity to a new level. "It was an interesting challenge for me to be able to do something different, and to have the creativity, and to bring a little bit of myself to the project. I wasn't able to do that with Kips Bay. This was really me." As for the new-age moniker, Whelan doesn't think it fits. He sees the album as part of the Irish tradition. "I see it as a lot of slow melodies and interesting arrangements," he explained. With a grin, he added, "Narada didn't think it was new age, either!"

*Celtic Reflections* was a huge success by traditional music standards. It sold 30,000 copies in its first year, and has since sold 90,000 more. It changed his career. "Almost overnight when I signed to Narada, people's attitude changed, just like that," he said. "I always correlate that with when I was doing construction and taking Metro North into the city with all the suits. And I'd be there in my torn jeans, and my Carhartt jacket, and my scruffy look, going in to do construction all day. People wouldn't want to sit near me 'cause I was this dirty, scruffy construction worker. And yet, when I

took the train into the city to do music projects or recording projects, I'd have this whole different look. Somebody would talk to me, and a conversation would start, and the next thing you know this guy is the CEO of some company, and he's interested in me because I'm this guy that's on the stage and recording and producing and writing. And that guy could have seen me the day before and not put it together that I'm the same person." Suddenly, with Narada,

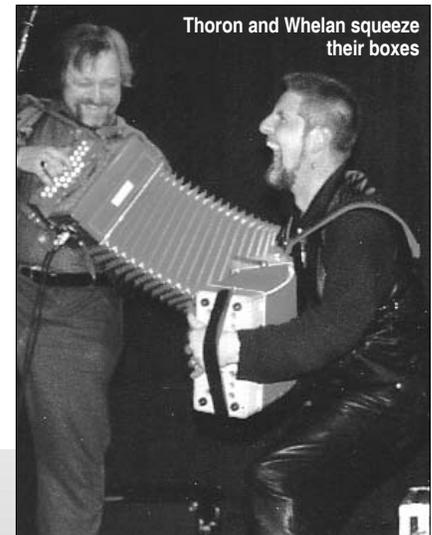
John Whelan got respect.

Whelan went on to record four more albums of Irish music for Narada. *Celtic Crossroads* featured Irish tunes and songs with a wide range of guest musicians and explored the common ground between Celtic and country. It surpassed *Celtic Reflections*, selling 50,000 copies in its first year. His third album for Narada, *Flirting With the Edge*, didn't do as well. "It's not that the album didn't do well, by Celtic standards," Whelan pointed out. "It sold over 20,000 units. But by Narada's standards, that's not so good." Whelan stands by the album, which featured performances by world music stars Oscar Lopez and Samite, and guest vocals by Connie Dover and Bernadette Peters. "I think that in a lot of ways that's still my best album," he said, "and there's a lot of interesting arrangements on that album." So why the low sales figures? Whelan blames it on the

acquisition of Narada by Virgin and the consequent hyping of the band Leahy — a Virgin property — as Narada's flagship Celtic group. "My album was the second Narada release on Virgin — Leahy was the first," he explained. "Here you have a Virgin-owned group that had a tremendous amount of backing from Virgin, \$80,000 to do a video. Virgin buys Narada, and says, 'You're the Celtic experts, you deal with it.' In fairness to Narada, what choice did they have? The new boss was saying 'Show me what you can do.'" It was a big disappointment for Whelan. "With my second album for Narada, I'm already up 20,000 units. So I get Bernadette Peters, and I get Samite, and I get Oscar Lopez and I'm thinking, 'This thing is gonna kick ass!' And it didn't happen. It died."

*Flirting with the Edge* was also the only album to feature the John Whelan Band, a quartet made up of Robin Bullock (cittern, guitar), Liz Knowles (fiddle), Tom Wetmore (bass), and Whelan. Although Whelan had

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## JOHN WHELAN *Celtic Fire*

Narada World 70876-15281-2-1 (2001)

John Whelan's new solo CD finds him teamed with some of the top young Americans involved with Irish traditional music. It's a joyful album, full of the natural fire of Irish music wedded to the energy of youth. Whelan's quick, lively and dry accordion sound blends beautifully with the fiddles of Jim Eagan and Patrick Mangan, the uilleann pipes of Eliot Grasso, and the flutes and whistles of Aran Olwell. Rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment by guitarist Flynn Cohen, percussionist Paddy League, and bass player Tom Wetmore ensure rich and full-sounding arrangements, making this album greater than the sum of its parts. It's the kind of album De Dannan pulled off in the 1980s: tight, vivacious, and impeccably played.

Most of the tunes are traditional, in arrangements worked out by Whelan. Most feature his agile and vibrant box playing up front, leading the others with brisk authority. But Whelan also gives the younger musicians a chance to shine on their own. The set of reels "East of the Hebrides/The Trial of Jim Kelly" is led by the pipes, flute and fiddles and backed with deft guitar from Cohen; the first tune shows you what these kids are capable of on their own. Wetmore's bass makes its presence felt early, but Whelan's accordion takes its time, sneaking up during the course of the set before coming to the fore. It's a sweet set of tunes and a really nice production job as well. The following set, "Fletch Taylor/The Gifted Father T," also begins with the kids, this time foregrounding Paddy League's unusual and engaging brand of percussion. From the opening strains of "Bucks of Aranmore" to the final rumbles of "Bernard Murphy's Polka," *Celtic Fire* is an inspiring and agreeable listen.

— Steve Winick (Philadelphia, PA)

## John Hartford

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was covered by hundreds of other musicians. In 1971, Hartford released the landmark acoustic album *Aereo-Plain*, with dobro player Tut Taylor, fiddler Vassar Clements, and guitarist Norman Blake, setting the stage for progressive bluegrass. Most recently, Hartford was one of the performers on the hit soundtrack to *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

Last summer, at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival, Hartford clearly was wracked by cancer. But his musical spirit propelled him. He played, taking breaks during his sets to sit at the rear of the stage as band members played solos. When he sang, he popped throat lozenges to soothe the effects of his therapy. He assured the audience that he was going to be OK and going to be around for a while.

— Stephen Ide

## John Whelan

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planned for the band to be a long-term project, that, too, died. "Here I am now in my 31st year from the first paid gig that I had," Whelan said, "and when I started the John Whelan Band, it was like starting all over again. It's kind of crazy to be put in that position." Disputes with the band's manager caused tensions between members. Meanwhile, Knowles got the offer of a lifetime, to be the fiddler in *Riverdance*. The band splintered. Only Wetmore, an excellent bass player, still tours and records with Whelan.

Whelan's fourth Narada album, *Come to Dance*, was a showcase for Whelan's brilliant playing of traditional tunes and old-fashioned

arrangements. It returned to form in popularity, selling 30,000 the year it was released. Whelan's latest CD, *Celtic Fire*, features the accordionist accompanied by some of Irish music's rising young stars, including Patrick Mangan, Eliot Grasso, Aran Olwell, Paddy League, Jim Eagan, and Flynn Cohen. While Whelan is eager to see how it will sell, he is more interested in the message it sends. First, it will demonstrate the importance of teaching and mentoring in the Irish music tradition, an idea to which Whelan is committed. "No matter what you do in your life, you're gonna live and you're gonna die," he explained. "When you die, you hope that you leave something behind. And if I leave anything behind it's [my students]. I know that sounds corny. But I passed something on, and they've respected what I've passed on." In addition, an album like *Celtic Fire* will set the youngsters on a firm footing. "For me it was important to do a traditional album for the kids, to kind of set the foundation like I did when I did *The Pride of Wexford*," Whelan continued. "To do this pretty solid traditional thing, and then you guys gain the respect of people in that genre, and then nobody can give you shit."

Whelan's Narada contract ends with *Celtic Fire*. He doesn't know whether either party will choose to sign a new one. In the meantime, he's concentrating on working with the young musicians from *Celtic Fire*, as well as other less established groups. He has begun producing albums for young bands; in the last year he has done projects for groups called Knot Fibb'n, Blackthorn, and The Shipping News, all of whom do a mixture of traditional and original music. He also plans to get into artist representation, because in his own words, "artists that are doing great stuff won't get a look, because some corporate asshole just doesn't see the value of what they do." In fact, Whelan's plans to be a cultural advocate go even further. "We're in the process of negotiation with a major corporation to buy a building or build a building in Milford [Connecticut] and create a cultural institute," he said.

"I want to have a theater, a recording studio, a storefront, some classrooms for teaching, and we're gonna have this whole complex inhouse for not just Irish music but for bluegrass and other folk music, too."

Whelan feels strongly that such an institution is appropriate. "How many people have an opportunity like I have?" he asked. "This is not about being a millionaire or making lots of money. It's about having a career and doing something that you love, and being able to make money and pay your bills and your mortgage and feed your kids, and still do what you love. That's a great gift. We need to make time to give back to the culture that has given us so much."

## Continental Drifters

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"It was a hard record to make," Holsapple reflected, "in some emotional ways. It was a nice place to make an emotional record, because [the studio] is on 13 acres of riverside property, so you could actually take a walk to the edge of the property if you needed to cool out. Everybody probably needed a moment or two, during this record, to settle their own hash."

"We don't usually work with a producer. We didn't this time. We've been known to use this thing called 'the producer cap.' Susan had a Pittsburgh Pirates cap that belonged to her father that we brought to the studio one time. We found that the producer cap was what we could use to keep it down to one speaker at a time. The person would have to wear that and say their piece. [The cap] has not been used recently, but we seem to have been able —"

Walton, unconscious of irony, interrupted. "It disappeared, but the concept, and the ability to listen to the person that has the floor — doesn't have to have the hat anymore — whoever stands up and has an idea, everybody will listen to it."

"This band is special because the people that found each other needed the other people," said Walton. "Musically, it's that kind of soulmate feeling: 'I can't do this, but you can.' We all kind of fill up empty spaces...we can't do it by ourselves."

"When I say we were a drinking club," Holsapple clarified, "I didn't mean it in a pejorative way. It means we enjoy each other socially. I think about bands like Pink Floyd that communicate through their lawyers, and I think about bands like the Drifters that get together and make food for each other,

and watch each other's kids, have a good time, shoot a bucket of balls."

Although an extended family of musicians often joins the Drifters onstage, Walton says that they prefer not to play unless all the members can be there. "People thought, 'Oh, you're not a real band — this is just another project.' We're all doing this for a reason. We're doing it because we love it. This is not a side project; this is our life."

On the brink of *Better Day*, the Continental Drifters would indeed seem to be the primary focus of its members' musical lives. They're not without other projects. Peterson and Cowsill tour as the Psycho Sisters. Holsapple went on the road with Hootie and the Blowfish in 1998 and still works from time to time in a record store — a perennial supplement to his rock-god career. Peterson's still performing with the Bangles, who broke up in 1989 and reunited 10 years later. And the night of our interview, Broussard was drumming for the opening act, the Uptown Ploughboys ("That's spelled 'Pluffboys,'" advised Holsapple helpfully).

But it all comes 'round again to the Drifters. "This band has, in more than one way, at more than one moment, saved probably all of our lives," said Peterson. "You could be having the worst day and get onstage and something's gonna happen in the middle of that show that's gonna make you so glad that you're alive and so glad that you're in that moment that it's almost spiritual. It is, kind of, because it's about people coming together who love the same thing."

After midnight, when the mosquitoes have sucked us dry and we've refilled ourselves with Abita Amber, the band tunes up. Cowsill and Holsapple hunch over instruments, face to face, tuning. They look very retro — Cowsill in her maroon crocheted sleeves and Sandy Denny bangs, Holsapple in pink tie-dye and the ever-present blue bandanna wrapped around his head. Peterson's spiral blonde curls shimmer as she tunes her electric guitar. Walton runs around like a foreman: Balding, amiable-faced, with a navy zip-front jacket, he looks less like a rock legend than a junior-high-school math teacher. Maché looks Jaggerish and saturnine in a bowling shirt. Young Broussard, behind the drums, looks every bit "the new guy." They're just a bunch of folks from across the river — ready to ride another dream.



Whelan with Bernadette Peters during *Flirting With the Edge* recording sessions in 1999

