

Matt & Shannon Heaton

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SHORT STORY: Boston-based husband-and-wife duo Matt & Shannon Heaton offer updated and traditional Irish music on flute/guitar/bouzouki/accordion, stirring traditional-style singing, and a fresh, appealing stage show. Their Feb 2009 CD "Lovers' Well" (songs of loss and love) is their 4th as a duo.

SOUND SAMPLES: [Lily of the West:](#) [Lao Dueng Duen](#) [Brad's Honeybees](#)

VIDEO: "[Hangin' with the Heatons](#)," 2008 Short Documentary by Justin Bell and Christine Giordano with clips of Heaton performances, plus interview clips about the history of the duo.

PHOTOS: [Album Cover](#) [M+S Close Up](#) [M+S Close Up with Instruments](#) [M+S Live](#)

Every Irish traditional musician has a collection of peak session memories: the spontaneous night of tunes after hours in the back of a pub, the house party in rural Clare with that wonderfully ancient concertina player, the songs swapped backstage at a festival.

Matt and Shannon Heaton share many similar Irish music memories, because they have performed together from their first meeting in Chicago in 1991. Behind their Irish flute- and guitar-driven tunes and stirring songs is a deep well of mutual memories, setbacks, and triumphs.

Having built their act from years of touring together (first with band Siucra, then as a duo), Matt and Shannon have grown into thoroughly entertaining performers. They bring to the stage a depth of shared experience and a love for Irish music; their stage banter is comfortable, often hilarious.

“Their playing is masterful and inventive, their arrangements city-smart and spacious.

Still, they never forget that Irish music is, at its heart, a neighborly form meant for sharing, not showing off.”

—**Scott Alarik, *Boston Globe***

Musically speaking, the Heatons play the heck out of their instruments (Irish wood flute/accordion, guitar/bouzouki). After years of study in Chicago, and many nights of music in Clare, Galway, and their adopted home of Boston, Irish Music Magazine’s John O’Regan wrote, “their duet playing is tight, sweet, and tasteful, lacking nothing on either technical expertise or instrumental virtuosity.”

As for their singing, when Matt and Shannon perform centuries-old songs, it feels current, conversational. They make traditional music relevant to American audiences. O’Regan wrote “songwise [there are] hints an older domestic sound, the familiar down home harmonies of The Carter Family and Tim and Mollie O’Brien.”

Like Richard Thompson or Nic Jones, the Heatons’ music comes from a traditional aesthetic, a devotion to strong traditional bones, and a passion for reaching out to the modern world around them. They are devoted to Irish traditional music and uplift listeners by connecting with each other and the people around them.

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HISTORY: Before focusing on Irish music, Matt earned a classical guitar degree, played with Chicago popsters the Flavor Channel, and fronted Nuevo tango group Orquesta Atipica. Meanwhile Shannon studied flute and ethnomusicology at Northwestern University, joined Matt's tango band, and took weekend trips to Chicago's *Wat Dhammaram* to continue the Saw Oo (lap fiddle) and Thai singing studies she began when she was an exchange student in Thailand.

SHANNON: By the time Shannon was 16 years old, her favorite mixed tape included Highlife music (from her family's tenure in Nsukka, Nigeria); Native American stories (from her parents' research trip for their book *Let My People Know*); traditional Thai songs on Saw Duang and Saw Oo (from her year in Suphanburi, Thailand); and as much of Matt Molloy's 1984 "Stony Steps" as would fit on the rest of the cassette.

Early exposure to languages and folk melodies instilled in Shannon a love of tradition. From her early piano and recorder lessons (from her mom and Belgian neighbor in Nigeria) to her flute and Irish flute studies in Chicago, Shannon was drawn to traditional music. And when she first heard Irish flute playing on her Grandpa Murphy's turntable she was hooked on Irish.

Though she specializes in Irish wooden flute and traditional Irish-style singing, adores the Chicago musicians who started her out, and is deeply involved with her local Boston traditional music scene (she co-founded Boston's Celtic Music Fest and teaches for Boston's Comhaltas), she has retained a deep interest in world music, especially the music of Thailand. She and husband Matt Heaton included their own Irish-style version of Thai classic "Lao Dueng Duen" on their 2009 release "Lovers' Well" (their 4th as a duo).

MATT: Matt's first taste of professional music was behind the organ console as a page-turner for his father Charles Heaton, a noted organist and composer. After a couple of false starts on the piano and trumpet, Matt picked up his first guitar, a Harmony electric plus amp (and butter dish) for \$35 at a garage sale. After the amplifier exploded, he focused his energies on the acoustic guitar.

Though he studied classical guitar at Northwestern University (MMus) and Italy, played rock in Chicago, and tango in Denver, it is Boston's vibrant Irish music scene where he has made his musical home. What began as an obsession with an unlabeled cassette tape (which later turned out to be "The Planxty Collection") and a courtship with a young Irish flute player named Shannon, has led to a vibrant Irish music performance career. In addition to his duo work with wife Shannon, he is highly sought after as accompanist, and has performed with traditional luminaries Aoife Clancy, Robbie O'Connell, Emily Smith, and the Boys of the Lough.