

# Fergus O'Byrne: East Coast Icon

By Ryan O'Connor

Today, the traditional music of Atlantic Canada is renowned across the world.

Performers such as Natalie MacMaster, the Rankins, and Great Big Sea have international reputations and have toured across the world.

The success of this musical genre, however, is relatively recent. As a matter of fact, it was not until the 1970s that this music began to be accepted outside of the small communities where it was born.

One person that has witnessed the dramatic transformation of the East Coast's music scene is Fergus O'Byrne. According to O'Byrne, the Atlantic Canadian musical breakthrough of the 1990s was a direct result of the hard work put forward by the region's musical forefathers.

"I believe that over the years, because of the groundwork that performers like Ryan's Fancy, John Allan Cameron, [and] Rawlin's Cross to name a few, both the public and the music industry people have realized the commercial potential of music from the East Coast."

O'Byrne is no stranger to the music industry. Since arriving in Canada in 1967 from his home of Dublin, Ireland, he has had a distinguished career. Shortly after arriving in Canada, he co-founded the group Ryan's Fancy, which went on to become a heavily respected act, having championed Atlantic Canadian music on their own nationally televised CBC series.

After a successful run in the industry, thirteen years in total, Ryan's Fancy called it a day. "In 1983 we decided to go our separate ways and follow our own interests"

O'Byrne added. "Denis [Ryan] became an investor/stock broker, Dermot [O'Reilly] continued in the music business, and I went back to school and got a degree in Education while I continued performing."

O'Byrne's best known work since the demise of Ryan's Fancy has been as part of a duo with Jim Payne. This duo had an unusual beginning.

"I knew Jim for a good while before we actually worked together. One year in the early nineties we worked together on the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival...an act failed to show so myself and Jim rounded up a bunch of singers and went on and led off a bunch of shanties and work songs."

The off-the-cuff performance raised some eyebrows. According to O'Byrne, "it was suggested by a record industry guy



that we should look to recording some of the material."

The result of this suggestion was the 1995 CD "Wave Over Wave," which has received acclaim as one of the strongest collections of Atlantic Canadian traditional songs available.

O'Byrne and Payne have travelled extensively, this year

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**THE EVENT TENT**

**Wednesday,  
September 27**

Baba's Lounge: Mark Browning

**Thursday,  
September 28**

Baba's Lounge: Eyes for Telescopes  
Brennan's: Mark Green  
Myron's: Poppa Shine  
Olde Dublin Pub: Richard Wood

**Friday,  
September 29**

Arts Guild: Improv comedy with 4Play  
Baba's Lounge: Downtime  
Brennan's: Mark Green  
Olde Dublin Pub: Richard Wood  
Panther Lounge: The Rude Mechanicals

**Saturday,  
September 30**

Baba's Lounge: The Rude Mechanicals  
Myron's: Great White North  
Olde Dublin Pub: Richard Wood  
Panther Lounge: Gob/Flush

**Sunday,  
October 1**

**Monday,  
October 2**

**Tuesday,  
October 3**

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