

N.Y. pub bans 'Danny Boy' on St. Patrick's

All is not lost: Michigan pub to stage 50-hour marathon of song

Ap Associated Press

updated 7:11 p.m. ET, Wed., March. 5, 2008



Owner Shaun Clancy poses for a picture behind the bar at Foley's Pub and Restaurant. (AP Photo)

NEW YORK - It's depressing. It's not usually sung in Ireland for St. Patrick's Day. And its lyrics were written by an Englishman who never set foot on Irish soil.

Those are just some of the reasons a Manhattan pub has given for banning the song "Danny Boy" for the entire month of March.

"It's overplayed, it's been ranked among the 25 most depressing songs of all time, and it's more appropriate for a funeral than for a St. Patrick's Day celebration," says Shaun Clancy, who owns **Foley's Pub and Restaurant**, just off Fifth Avenue opposite the Empire State Building.

The 38-year-old, who started bartending when he was 12 at his father's pub in County Cavan, promises a guest free Guinness for singing any other traditional Irish song at the pub's March 11 pre-St. Patrick's Day karaoke party. On other nights, guests will be rewarded with a surprise.

Not everyone agrees.

A pub near Detroit — AJ's Cafe in Ferndale, Mich. — is staging a "Danny Boy" marathon on St. Patrick's Day weekend, offering 1,000 renditions of the song over 50 hours.

The song's lyrics were written by English lawyer Frederick Edward Weatherly, who never visited Ireland, according to Malachy McCourt, author of the book "Danny Boy: The Legend of the Beloved Irish Ballad." Weatherly's sister-in-law had sent him the music to an old Irish song called "The Derry Air." His new version was published in 1913 and became a huge hit when opera singer Ernestine Schumann-Heink recorded it in 1915.

Some say it is symbolic of the great Irish diaspora, with generations of Irish fleeing the famine and poor economic conditions starting around 1850. Others have guessed it is sung by a mother

grieving for her son or even by a desolate lover — depending on how one hears lyrics like "The summer's gone, and all the flowers are dying/ 'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide."

In the 1940s, "Danny Boy" was recorded by Bing Crosby, became the theme song of television's "Danny Thomas Show" from 1953 to 1964 and has been a vehicle for vocal stars from Judy Garland, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash to Cher and Willie Nelson.

But for the rest of the month, Foley's will be "Danny Boy"-free.

"I'm glad! I'm glad! I'm glad!" exclaimed Martin Gaffney, 73, a retired passenger ship waiter who said Wednesday he planned to croon his old Irish favorites, like "Molly Malone" — whose theme is also hardly a barrel of laughs.

A sort of unofficial anthem of Dublin also known as "Cockles and Mussels," the song tells the tale of a beautiful fishmonger who plies her trade on city streets and dies young of a fever.