



'Danny Boy' Ban Sparks Emerald Ire

The 'Sweet Caroline' of Irish Ballads Is Banned in One New York City Pub



Owner Shaun Clancy poses for a picture behind the bar at Foley's Pub and Restaurant in New York, Wednesday, March 5, 2008. Clancy has banned the popular Irish song "Danny Boy" for the month March, just in time for St. Patrick's Day. (Seth Wenig/AP Photo)



By CHRIS FRANCESCANI
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It began with the muttering of a cranky New York City pub boss named Clancy, and might have died there, the way so many offhand comments deep inside dark taverns do.

It was just a whine, really. But that whine has grown into a rant heard round the world.

After 18 years behind a bar, Manhattan pub manager Shaun Clancy had decided he'd had enough of "Danny Boy," the maudlin Irish evergreen that has haunted the hearts and ears of Irish bar owners for nearly a century. What's more, the lyrics are constantly butchered by boozy patrons, he insisted.

Clancy banned the song from his tavern for the month of March.

Since banning "Danny Boy," Clancy has been profiled in 70 newspapers around the world, from The China Post to the Derry Journal, as well as The Associated Press and dozens of television and radio stations.

He's done 60 interviews for news outlets in six countries. And he's taken more than one crank phone call from angry or simply bored citizens who laughingly -- or bitterly -- burst into the song as soon as he picks up the phone.

Widely decried among well-traveled publicans, the song has become to many the "Sweet Caroline" of Irish ballads -- a once epic weeper that's been bastardized by overuse into a gin-soaked, sing-along parody of itself.

Or at least Clancy thinks so.

'There's More to Ireland Than "Danny Boy" and Lucky Charms'

Particularly, he said, on Tuesday karaoke nights at Foley's, Clancy's midtown Manhattan pub.

"Everybody thinks -- whatever race, creed or color -- that after three pints of Guinness, you're entitled to get up there and butcher the song."

"The Irish are not known for being a depressed group of people," Clancy said. "For the song associated with them to be 'Danny Boy' -- that's kind of akin to the Yankees winning the World Series and the fans breaking out into 'Ave Maria.'"

Clancy insists he's not trying to be disrespectful of the song, which is well-loved by many and has become a staple at the funerals of American police officers and firefighters.

"It's a beautiful song," he said, "if Elvis, or Bing Crosby or some Irish tenors are singing it. But there's more to Ireland than 'Danny Boy' and Lucky Charms," he said of the breakfast cereal with a leprechaun logo.

'You Call Yourself an Irishman?'

"It's amazing how it took on a life of its own," Clancy told ABC News last week. "It was just me opening my big mouth!"

Hundreds have chimed in from all over the world.

"You call yourself an Irishman? What a crock of bull..," wrote tyrant4321, in an amusing e-mail with the subject line "From a Man With a Pair" that Clancy shared with ABC News.

"Now we know why we Scots are so much better than you. Grow a pair of Irish [testicles] and stop whining about 'Danny Boy.'"

"Don't mean to offend," wrote jgregory in an e-mail. "But you're basically the dumbest thing I ever heard of."

"You're being childish," wrote djoe1164.

Even some patrons were surprised to learn of the ban.

"Are you kidding me?" asked Bob Smith, a 48-year old insurance salesman from Queens. "Please! As if that's the only song that drunks botch! It just doesn't make sense to me."

But Clancy said the overwhelming majority of e-mail he's gotten has been positive and supportive and he showed ABC News a notebook full of them to prove it.

Danny Boy -- the Irish 'Freebird'

"I just want to thank you for banning that damned song," wrote Lloyd Valentine. "It's among one of my Top 10 most overplayed songs, right behind 'Freebird,'" the '70s Lynyrd Skynyrd rock anthem.

"Mr. Clancy, I'd like to hug your neck," wrote Linda Thurman.

One individual, writing under the screen name jcrumb1, said in an e-mail fairly dripping with sarcasm, "Shame on ye, Clancy! I hope yer proud. Yes, ye got yerself noticed alright. Well done me, lad."

Even a Detroit radio station hitched its wagon to news of the ban and began promoting a "Danny Boy" marathon, a contest in which patrons will sing 1,000 back-to-back renditions of the song in the hopes of breaking a world record. Or so they say.

Many of the negative e-mails and phone calls Clancy said he's received have accused him of staging a publicity stunt, an allegation he denies. He said a friend of his who heard him talking about banning the song for a month called a friend at the AP and the wire story was picked up all over the world.

Clancy said the bar, which was bustling Friday night, doesn't need the attention.

Regular customers agreed.

"I don't think they need the publicity," said Laura Morton, who works in the neighborhood and often drinks there with her friend Racheal McElroy. "I call this place Cheers. It's a great place to come and drink."

Not so, according to a man from Australia who after reading about the "Danny Boy" ban apparently launched a petition to have Clancy, a naturalized American citizen and fifth-generation barkeep, deported.

"I may have to throw myself on the mercy of the American people after this one," Clancy said, laughing.

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