In many areas, the modern world tends to look back in time with a feeling of superiority - but not always! We have here a lesson in humility for any young buck who thinks themselves ahead of a lad from a quiet townland in County Westmeath around 1900. Here are two examples of Richard Lewis O’Mealy’s publicity material which show him to be in total control of his public image. We can also see that he has come to expect positive reaction from reviewers.

The first is a 1905 flyer for a concert in the Lecture Hall of the Presbyterian Church, Strabane, incorporating press quotes and a full length sketch of Richard with his pipes; the second is the “O’Mealy Memo” which has a photograph of Richard at the top left of the front page with the rest of the page blank for writing. It includes 2 pages of press quotes with dates ranging from March 1901 to February 1904.

Between them, we are shown a confident young entertainer who appears to be playing quite a number of engagements to appreciative audiences; these performances mixed music with lecturing about the instrument and music in general and this must have made for a very interesting evening’s entertainment.
R. L. O’Mealy is no wallflower waiting quietly to be noticed - he is using technology to
his advantage; by advertising more than just his concert, he is also showing people that he
has critical acclaim and ensuring that his self-created “celtic-revival” image is
recognisable to all. Everything is well thought out, and in common with other aspects of
his life, it is forthright and self-assured - any professional entertainer of today working on
their publicity would be more than satisfied with these examples of product advertising.
Indeed, while discovery of such material might be expected in an investigation of a
modern performer, it is highly unusual in somebody playing an obscure minority musical
instrument one hundred years ago!

R. L. often played to audiences unaccustomed to Irish music. Having had experience of
same, I find these audiences to be open-minded and more receptive than typical Irish
music audiences who tend to have pre-conceived ideas about who you are and what you
do. While O’Mealy’s general audience were celebrating him, we get a glimpse of how he
was perceived by his peers in Éamonn Ceann’s piece for An Piobaire III (1901-2) where
he says that O’Mealy “…spoiled his performance by the ridiculous costume he wore”.
Ceann says nothing whatsoever about O’Mealy’s playing but goes to great length to
describe his clothes and even the colours of those clothes!

Both the memo and the flyer date from roughly the same time, around 1904-05. Richard
was 30 years old at this time and quite obviously at the height of his career as a
performer. He may have published more publicity material in later years but if he did,
none of it has surfaced. His career would have continued on until the beginning of the
great war during which it must have declined.

After the war, his wife Nelly was very ill and died in 1920. We are told by his family and
friends that he didn’t perform publicly for a number of years after her death. While we
know he broadcast quite regularly, other than reports of him playing at the Tristernagh
Feis, we have no accounts of concerts in later years. In fact, he mentions in his letters to
the Delaps² that concerts are hard come by and if it were not for the odd “engagement”
from the BBC, he would “not be able to stay here at all”. I presume he meant that he
wouldn’t be able to afford to live in his present house and would have to move back
down the housing ladder. All of this paints a very different picture to the highly
successful and hopeful career depicted below.

[Note: The memo press quotes are included as verbatim text below the scans. The flyer
and memo can also be downloaded from the associated files section with this article.]

¹ Interestingly, Éamonn Ceann attended the 1908 Jubilee Celebrations in Rome, in honour of Pope Pius X.
As the Irish athletes marched into the arena, they were piped in by Ceann dressed in an 11th century Irish
costume with kilts. This was only six years after he had ridiculed O’Mealy for the very same thing!

² See 3.13.1 “A method for Miles” for more on these letters.
Mr. R. L. O'Mealy,
The famous Irish Piper will appear in Ancient Bardic Costume at the Eloquency Competitions on Monday, 27th February, 1905.

PRESS OPINIONS.

PAN CELTIC CONGRESS.

"Mr. O'Mealy contributed some exquisite melodies on the Irish Piping. The native instrument, under his masterly manipulation, seemed to bubble over with rollicking tunefulness."—The Irish Times, Dublin

"This gentleman's playing of the Irish bagpipes is one of those unique artistic achievements along traditional lines that musicians of culture will thoroughly appreciate. Mr. O'Mealy's pipes stand in the same relation to the ordinary instrument of the itinerant piper that a Rudal-Carte clarinet of to-day does with the clarinet of Handel's time."—Belfast Evening Telegraph.

BRITISH ASSOCIATION IN BELFAST.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the well-known Irish Piper, was also present, clad in his picturesque costume, and the visitors from England and Scotland were especially interested in this clever musician, and in the instrument which he knows how to use with such effect."—The Belfast News-Letter.

"... The music was soft and sweet... perfect harmony produced by a master hand, with such subtlety, such grace and power of inflection, that the audience were spellbound."—Cobhains Constitution.

"... Mr. O'Mealy, the famous Irish Piper, created quite a furor of applause; his marvelous manipulation of the historic pipes, and the exquisite musical results thereof, being the theme of general remark during the subsequent part of the night."—The Newsy Reporter.

"Mr. O'Mealy assisted by Mr. Manning on the violin... This combination of pipes and violin is Mr. O'Mealy's own idea and produces a really beautiful effect."—Irish Times.
Press Notices.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the famous Irish Piper... His playing was warmly applauded, and he had to bow to an air that would break no denial... at last retired amidst a great outburst of applause... Mr. O'Mealy achieved a distinct success."—The Belfast Irish News.

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I think that future Irish composers will find an unfailing source of inspiration, and more hints towards a legitimate technique, with due appreciation of idiom and nuance, and tempo, in Mr. O’Mealy’s playing than elsewhere.

... There is the right ring about this playing; it goes straight to the heart; the whole art of the thing is healthy and sound."—Belfast Evening Telegraph, 20th November, 1902.

"Two imperative encores showed the influence of his music upon the audience."—The Irish News, Belfast.

"Mr. O’Mealy was a delightful change... He has great powers of execution, and is very expressive. In the old Irish airs he played with all the feeling that could be imparted to them, and in the old plaintives, reels, and jigs, he rattled them off in a pleasing style. Mr. O’Mealy is a refined performer... no doubt that at the Cork Exhibition the Irish Pipes will be recognised as the sweetest of all instruments."—Belfast Evening Telegraph, 11th April, 1902.

"The programme was all that could be desired, possessing features at once novel and engaging. Chief among these were the selections on the Irish Pipes... The music was soft and sweet... perfect harmony produced by a master hand, with such sublety, such grace and power of inflection, that the audience were spellbound."—Corkman Constitution, 9th March, 1901.
PRESS NOTICES.—Continued.

"Such a success at last year's concert, again enchanted all with the music of his Irish Pipes."—The Glasgow Examiner.

"A feature of the evening were the selections on the Irish Pipes by Mr. R. L. O'Mealy."—Belfast Northern Whig, Sept. 27, 1903.

"A brilliant executant on the Irish Pipes. His selections were cleverly rendered, and were an object lesson of the music that can be produced on the national instrument of Ireland. . . . There can be no doubt that for a mixed audience at a concert the Irish Pipes carry off the palm for music, especially when manipulated by such a past master of the art as Mr. O'Mealy."—Newry Telegraph, 12th April, 1902.

"A very attractive feature of the proceedings were selections of Irish airs played by the popular Irish Piper, Mr. O'Mealy, which deservedly secured the heartiest applause."—Londonderry Sentinel.

"Gave a very fine selection on the pipes . . . an air that would break no dish! . . . very heartily applauded."—Belfast Irish News, 13th Dec., 1902.

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IRISH PLAY IN BELFAST.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy gave a masterly performance on the pipes, which was received with the utmost enthusiasm."—Belfast News Letter, 27th Sept., 1902.

"Gave two welcome selections on the union pipes . . . inimitable dance-rhythms come tripping off his keys . . . There is no laughter like the laughter of the pipes in Mr. O'Mealy's hands; the jig is a compelling thing, and the reel nips off in that deliciously saucy fashion that knows no peer."—Belfast Evening Telegraph, 17th Feb., 1904.

"The chief attraction on the programme was the playing of Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the famous Irish piper . . . He is a marvel, a genius . . . His playing is a masterpiece of refinement."—Coleraine Constitution, 1903.

CONCERT OF IRISH MUSIC.

"Mr. O'Mealy . . . played some of his Irish slow and dance airs, the latter with inimitable humour; as a contrast to this, the slow air was most beautifully sung on the clarinet. An encore was responded to. It is interesting to mark the effect of the pipes on an audience; nothing else has quite the same exhilarating effect."—Belfast Evening Telegraph, 12th Jan., 1903.
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CONCERT ON NEW YEAR'S NIGHT.

“. . . Popularly known in the City by his past appearances . . gave a number of selections . . was in every case imperatively encored. The music that he took out of his pipes was indeed beautiful, and the expression perfect. . . . To hear him alone was worth a visit to St. Columb’s Hall on New Year’s night.” —Derry Journal
BRITISH ASSOCIATION IN BELFAST.

Lord Shaftesbury's Garden Party.

“Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the well-known Irish Piper, was also present, clad in his picturesque costume, and the visitors from England and Scotland were especially interested in this clever musician, and in the instrument which he knows how to use with such effect.” —The Belfast News-Letter, 13th Sept., 1902

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