

ETCHED IN THE BLUES

Good evening, I'm greatly touched and honoured to be asked to give this inaugural Rory Gallagher lecture as part of the Regional Technical College Arts Fest.

When Rory was growing up, as a young boy like many of us of that generation, the only place to hear music was on the Radio. This meant many nights under the bedclothes with a torch, tuning the "Wireless", (because that is what we called it in those days!), to Radio Luxembourg or American Forces Network. There Rory was to hear and warm to the playing of Chuck Berry, early Elvis Presley, and closer to home, the wonderful skiffle playing of Lonnie Donegan. Rory Gallagher was a warm spirited gentleman who sought out a form of Music which was to shape him and his career, and for his entire life he remained true to it. He adopted his own "duck walk". He discovered Muddy Waters and Albert King by tuning to American Forces Network this was the only exposure to this form of Music in Europe at that time. As was the case with many children of the '60's he began by playing for the family, with various Roy Roger's and Gene Autry's songs. But of course he later developed, and as a 9 year old got his first Guitar. But, it was at 15 he got the instrument which was to stay with him all his life, - a Sunburst Fender Stratocaster – which he bought for £100.00 back in 1961. I remember talking, on many occasions, to him about it, and he said he used to have a few battles with it, but more often than not the Fender won out. And, the extraordinary thing there is the link, because there is a link. When I interviewed, on a few occasions when I met him, the legendary B.B. King who unlike Rory, gave his Guitar a name. "Lucille" saved B.B.'s life on a few occasions. He was in a particularly horrific car crash, and only for the fact that he had "Lucille" in the car, the neck of the Guitar ended up rescuing him.

Really, if one talks about Rory, one is talking about the "First Real International Rock Star" that this country ever had and it's very often forgotten. I sometimes feel that there is a cultural imperialism in this country that looks at people outside Dublin as being lesser. By virtue of the fact that he came from Cork, although born in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal, Cork adopted him. I've had the pleasure of living in this city for the past year, and I've experienced at first hand how that can work! There is an emotion in this city that has a link with the Mississippi Delta and I'll come to that in a moment.

I'm going to play you a few segments of music. The first piece is from the legendary Taste. But, before we hear that, I'd like to give you a piece from Guitar Player from 1990, all of 5 years ago, written by Tom Wheeler where he defines the Blues, and there are many definitions over the years of the Blues.

"WHAT IS THE BLUES?"

"Blues is an affirmation of the spirit, a howl of pain, a bawdy punch line, a railing against injustice, a longing for peace and rest, a prayer for salvation, an ode to a homestead, a poem of regret, a boast of prowess, a family portrait, a celebration of love, a junkie's lament, a documentary of a juke-joint stabbing, a tale of a life lived on the highway, an open letter to God, or to Satan. Blues is subtle, brutal, ecstatic, and mournful. It is the music of soil, of the street, of the heart. It is deceptively simple in structure, boundless in expressiveness. It's Guitar music, by and large, from the ghostly

acoustic wailings of Robert Johnson to the electrified shootouts of countless bar-room guitar-slingers over a half-century later”.

That’s the blues, and for all his life Rory stayed true to that Blues.

My parents, when I was a young fellow, particularly my father, used to say to me, “to thine own self be true”, using the Shakespearean quotation. Well, there is no question I’m sure in my mind, and of those who followed Rory religiously over the years and followed his glittering career, that he was always true to that particular dictum. The first piece of music I’d like to play for you was certainly one of the first I heard, and I bought the album that this came from McHugh himself, in a bike shop, under the bridge in Dublin’s Talbot Street. They used to do ‘on the up and at you’ which was a kind of hire-purchase. So I bought a record player on hire-purchase. I convince my mother that I needed a record player you know I was keen on music. And so, I bought 3 albums and amongst them was this Taste album and this is the opening track from it called “What’s going on?”

I think the first time I saw Taste was in the National Stadium in Dublin in 1969. But many of you here in Cork had had sneak previews, particularly with the original line-up of Eric Kitteringham and Norman Dammy, and then again when Rory expanded the band and changed the line-up. But there was one legendary club here in Cork, that I have spoken to many of Rory’s fans about over the last number of years, and that was the 006 Club in Leirim Street which was the “Cavern” I suppose for a lot of students and for a lot of fans. But my first memory of Rory was seeing him in the Stadium where he walked onto the stage with Charlie “Ritchie” McCracken on Bass and John Wilson on Drums and he was like a guitar-slinger! He had a Vox AC30 amp. sitting on the side of the stage he strapped that Guitar on, that Fender Stratocaster, the Sunburst and tore into it! But he was a master of a whole lot of disciplines now. He had soaked up on a whole lot of different influences and we come back to the Mississippi Delta. Because the theme of tonight if there is one is to celebrate Rory’s musical life because there is a lot to celebrate. He has left quite a legacy of music his lyrics are quite poetic. I heard the Deputy Lord Mayor Maureen Quill mention Seamus Heaney earlier and Rory certainly had a sense of poetry about him. But his playing the link between Muddy Waters and Rory may not seem an obvious one but Muddy Waters was to have I think probably the deepest impression on Rory. He recorded with Muddy in ’71 at the London Sessions. The album was released in ’72 and appearing on that album you had people like Georgie Fame, Rick Grech from Blind Faith and Muddy himself who was born in Rolling Fork Mississippi. And Muddy Waters was the epitome of Blues men and because Muddy moved from the Mississippi Delta born on the Stovall Plantation there up to Chicago to an urban environment where he practiced his Blues and developed his Blues. But he never lost touch with the Folk Blues, with the Acoustic Blues and although he changed and framed Electric Guitar playing as far as the Blues was concerned he also had a considerable influence on popular music as we know it today. Were it not for Muddy Waters the Rolling Stones would never have been called The Rolling Stones because they took their name from Muddy. But the link between Muddy and Rory is considerable. As I say the meeting that Rory had with him was to leave a lasting impression on him and on the number of occasions on which I spoke with Rory whether it was informally or whether we were doing an interview together, Muddy’s name would always come up. And I have this particularly passionate view and you may say it a romantic one, but I also firmly believe that Rory held it in the fact that we are in the Delta here in Cork this is Swamp-land and whilst it may not be the Mississippi there is an abiding link with cork. But you might well say “Where was Rory’s Chicago?” well it ended up being London. So therefore he

moved from the Delta of Cork which shaped his music and all kinds of influences to London which became his Chicago.

Now, I'm not forgetting his Showband days and many of you may well have felt that we would gloss over that because I really feel that there is a derisory attitude taken to the Showbands. Now Rory being the non-conformist that he was would have seen the Showbands in a "tongue-in-cheek" fashion. But the Fontana developed into the Impact virtue of the fact that that was the natural chase of things in those days because the Fontana became for all intents and purposes a Beat-group so they needed rather more accessible names and that was the way it worked. But I know that Rory certainly found it very confining having to wear the buttoned jacket. In essence Rory is also and was a fashion Icon although he was a very unwilling one. This it became something of a difficulty for him later on in life. He was the man who arrived out whether it was every Christmas here in City Hall in Cork or for that matter in the Stadium in Dublin or in Kelly's in Portrush in those Plimsoles, the Jeans, the Check Shirt and the band raised in the air and doing that Duck-walk across the stage.

He had that magnanimity and that effervescence that only goes with great Blues men but he always stayed true to it. He was a self-taught musician like many off the great Blues players. And there is a great sense of irony in fact whilst Rory started off with a plastic Guitar from Woolworths many of the great blues players started off with Cigar boxes. Because they would get a cigar box and attach a long piece of wood and I'm sure some of you may remember those old Pantry screens or Larder screens that used be out in the backyard before the invention of fridges and for those of you who don't you missed out on something because there was real butter then! But they used get this wire and they used put it on the Cigar box and I remember talking to a Blues man from Florida - Sonny Rhodes - and he said to me "I used cut my fingers to the bone but my uncle he used to whoop me when he discovered where I took the wire from" . So Rory had all of these kinds of connections.

As I say I saw him first in '69 with Taste and during his solo career with a whole host of people. He was close to the music of Fleetwood Mac and he was close to the music of John Mayall and his Bluesbreakers and to a whole host of other British Blues men who I'll come to in a moment. But I think we should have another piece of music and this was without one of Rory's sweetest pieces. He loved this particular piece and it was originally performed in an acoustic fashion by the legendary Muddy Waters. It's called "Can't be Satisfied and it's followed by a short piece of chat from Rory where he introduces Blind-Boys Fuller's "Pistol Slapper Blues" - Effortless playing there by Rory- And he particularly adored the playing of Big Bill Broonzy. Big Bill Broonzy - "Banker's Blues" I think a lot of you will be familiar with. But he had a huge knowledge of Acoustic blues Players where it was the Slide playing of Tampa Red or Earl Zebedee Hooker who was from Clarksdale in Mississippi where another famous resident - John Lee Hooker - came from. Rory soaked up like many teenagers of that particular period all these particular influences and he especially went for the guys who played the real Blues as far as Rory was concerned. So they went from Blind Boy Fuller, Blind Blake, Tampa Red and these guys were very real very proficient in their art and great players. They used say of Blind Blake that he played in a number of keys and tunings and the phrase "the right hand of God" is often used to describe that technique. He recorded the Parliament label, and they used call it "piano sounding Guitar". But one of the people that is often left out of Blues who is not often talked about and certainly she was a huge influence on Rory's playing, particularly when it came to Slide playing was the legendary Memphis Minnie. She was one of the first Blues players to use a National,

back in 1929 and one of Rory's proudest possessions was his brown 1930s National which he played in studio – that piece was recorded for “Blues Time” back in September 1992.

Now I have a few more pieces to play for you just two. But one of the things about Rory was the number of honours he received. Around the time of the Temple Bar Blues festival in '92 he was inducted into the Fender Hall of Fame. I know that he was deeply touched by that, because he had just seen James Burton who is an alumnus of that august few playing himself and he valued and really respected James as a player. But I know that Rory was really touched because he said to me at the time there were very few accolades that he felt he had achieved. He felt he had stayed close to what he had wanted to play and this he always did and never expected awards for staying true to the Blues.

He's had a huge output of albums right from the early days of Taste, right through the '70s.

The '80s were a fallow period but the '80s were a fallow period for all Blues players and for a lot of fine musicians where they be Blues or not and that is often forgotten. We shouldn't categorize Rory just as a Blues player because he was a much broader player than that. He was a fine Rock Guitarist and was greatly respected by a lot of great Rock Guitarists. He played with the legendary Jerry Lee Lewis. He also worked and recorded with Albert King in Montaux. And he we come back again to Muddy Waters because he had a great affinity with Muddy. He was telling me one time that they use go up and do a gig and he'd jump in the car and he still has the car or at least the car is still around to this day - a Ford Commodore – and he used to jump into that and Muddy rode in that car with Rory and it was a very special thing to Rory to spend that kind of time with Muddy Waters.

Now, for those of you in the audience tonight who wouldn't be familiar with Muddy Waters, he is, or was, certainly the essence of the Blues. But he was a Buddha like man, he had an extraordinary presence about him. I had the distinct pleasure of seeing him in, I think it was, the late “70's in the Aula Max in Earlsfort Terrace, and I had an argument with my father before I went to it because, I was dying with the flu and it was a real case of “You are into all this strange music, it's a pity you wouldn't get on with your studies”. But I never got on with my studies because, my passion, and I feel greatly honoured, as I said at the outset tonight, to be giving this talk because, my passion was music, my passion is the Blues and always will be, and Rory stuck true to that dictum from the minute he picked up the Guitar. But he was also open to a whole lot of other forms of music. He worked with the Dubliners, and when he worked with the Dubliners playing “Barley and Grape rag”, he was quite phased by it! But, what he didn't realise was that they were also phased by it! They were greatly flattered by and honoured to have a player like Rory in their midst. He also worked with Davy Spillane, with Phil Counter, and a whole host of others, and I don't want to leave people out, because there was a whole lot of people. Rory had, in terms of music, an extended family, which is very symptomatic of Blues music. But, it's also symptomatic of great music; it doesn't matter if it's Blues. He played from here (heart) (sic) and he never forgot that. And, if there's anything that brought me to his music, in the first place, and probably brought a lot of you to his music, it was the fact that he played from his heart. He had a spirit and he never lost that spirit, and he played with that spirit in mind. So, he had guys like Gerry McEvoy and Brendan O'Neill who were in the band for a long time and who worked so closely with him and who were greatly shattered, obviously, at his passing. He also had some other fine drummers, like Wilgar Campbell and Rod De'Ath. He also had his long-term sideman, piano player Lou Martin, who played at the R.T.C. when that gig happened in

November 1993, it was yesterday 2 years ago. Lou was a really good guy and really close to Rory, and Mark Feltman, who is the recent member of the extended family and a greatly cherished friend. But, there are other guys who were there, obviously going right back to their days here in Cork City. People like Tom O'Driscoll, Joe O'Herlihy, Phil McDonnell, John Earle and his lifelong pal and a genuine good egg- Johnny Campbell. And, somebody said to me the other day when they heard that I was giving this talk, they said "but, like Rory was one of our own In fact, if he was home and wasn't out touring, you would pass Rory on the street and you wouldn't necessarily say hello to him". But, he respected that because he was being left to his own. Rory was a very private man, and that is the way it should be. There was no room, and shouldn't necessarily be an accolade, for brashness. Brashness does not signify talent. Dignity is always the essence and if there is anything one could say about Rory it is the fact that he had great dignity.

I want to play you a piece of music now. One of the men that Rory particularly respected was the great Blues man Alexis Korner. And Alexis, in his own way, brought a whole lot of people into English Blues, but also brought Rory into a whole circle of Blues players, and was very, very instrumental in affecting and shaping the way Blues goes on and the way people listen to the music. You have to remember that a lot of these records and artists weren't easily accessible. And in fact, when I first came to Cork, I met a guy and I have to apologise he may well be in the audience tonight. But he told me that there was a time when, if you were down at the 006 Club in Leitrim Street, you would stand with a John Mayall album hoping that someone would come up and talk to you, on the basis that they might have one, or for that matter it could be Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac, the one with the dustbin lid on the front of it!. So, there was this kind of thing going on. We forget that an awful lot of connections with music in those days were by word of mouth. There was nowhere to hear it, and I have to say that whilst I work for the august organisation I work for, I am quite appalled by the fact that you don't hear Rory's music on the airwaves in this – his own - country. In fact, it's a crying shame. But, I am not here tonight to be controversial, and certainly Rory wouldn't thank me for that and I have no intention of doing that, but I just had to say that it is a shame. This next piece was taken from an album called "Fresh Evidence", which Rory recorded on 1990. When I spoke to him after the R.T.C. gig, out at the campus all of 2 years ago we sat chatting in Jury's until the small hours, myself and himself and Lou Martin and we were recounting some of the great Blues players. I did an interview with Rory the following day at around lunchtime-it was a kind of time that suited us both! But the thing is that we didn't overdue it. There is this myth that goes around, Rory never played in, and he never went in that "fast lane" and I think that there has been a lot of speculation and very poor speculation in the media about the fact that Rory played the Rock Star. He was never that man. He was far too dignified to go down that particular road and it should be said because I don't think I have been heard often enough.

This is a piece from Rory taken from "Fresh Evidence" "Alexis" his tribute to the man. Now the thing about Alexis Korner was that Rory loved his playing, but as I already said, he also played with a whole host of other fine musicians. There are a number of musicians whom one wouldn't necessarily think of as listening to Rory's music or enjoying his music. But what one has to realise is that he had that generosity of spirit and strength to his playing that no matter what background a musician came from one could spot it straight away, whether on the Fender Stratocaster or the Fender Telecaster

or for that matter on one his acoustic Guitars. He was a very fine "Bottleneck" player and really loved playing it.

There are two pieces I would like to avert to now. Donal his brother and manager was saying to me earlier that the family was greatly touched by many of the lovely tributes they got from various people, from some of his fans from all over the globe. And I think that that is one thing that is often forgotten is that Rory had a global presence. He was loved in Germany and Japan. He was loved in Eurasia, down around Auckland in New Zealand, in Australia and right throughout in U.S.A. And in the U.S. they are about to or have already released an album called "A Blue Day for the Blues" which is a compilation of Rory's work.

I saw Rory after the Taste gig in 1973 at the Reading Festival where he had the distinction at the National Jazz and Blues Festival of being the one person the one outfit who played it the most times. That Festival is still going today, although it is now a Heavy Metal Festival. But Rory played that Festival on the opening night on the 24th August 1973 and I'll never forget his version of "Hands Off". My parents weren't too sure what the circumstances of my travelling to Reading were! I hitched in a horsebox with a man from Dorset and I hadn't a clue what he was saying but he got us to Reading. Well I think he got us to a racecourse near Reading and so we got there for the weekend! And there were loads of arguments about pitching the tent but that all went with it! So long as we got there to see Rory and I know that there are an awful lot of people not alone in the audience tonight but all around the country and all over Europe who went to the same lengths to see somebody like Rory because it was a very special part of their lives. For a lot of us he shaped us he carved our appreciation of particular forms of music in various ways. One of the pieces I would like to read for you if I may is a letter I got from a guy who works with Concern out in Mozambique. And I suppose the great pleasure I had in doing "Blues Time" on Radio for the 3 ½ years that I did it was the connection that it gave me with blues fans similar to myself. We are of a similar disposition we enjoy Good Music. He said:

It's now a few weeks since I learned with great sadness of the death of Rory Gallagher. Rory's "Live in Europe" was one of the first albums I bought as a teenager and he remained a firm favourite of mine from then on. I saw him perform countless times in the seventies when I still lived in England and every new Rory album was always a treat.

After a number of years living in various countries around the world I moved to Donegal in June 1990 (at the same time "Blues Time" started on RTE 1 I believe). I spend many an hour working while listening to the show – I always taped it religiously to last me until the following week (I even won the Blues Time prize once!). I still have many of the tapes and brought them with me to Mozambique- in fact I am listening to one this evening which is what prompted me to write to you.

I don't know why but it seems very hard to believe that Rory is dead – I suppose we expect blues players to go on for ever, or at least reach a ripe old age. Like thousands of others I didn't know him personally or ever meet him, but I think a large factor in Rory's popularity was the perception that he was a really nice, no frills, down to earth bloke who put it all into his music – and that it was some of the best blues music by any standard. The start of one concert at Leicester's De Montfort Hall – a teasing, tantalising repetition of the opening riff of "Messin' with the Kid"- will stay in the memory forever.

That's from a guy called Nick Cavan-North who works in Mozambique with Concern. There have been many beautiful tributes paid to Rory but the one thing that should be the theme of tonight's talk is the fact that Rory always encouraged people. If young guys came up to him with a Guitar and said "look how do you do such and such, how do you make that work? He would always sit down with them, he always had time, he had openness, a generosity of spirit which an awful lot of the time should be there but with others it isn't. He was one to encourage, a characteristic endemic to Cork people. This is not necessarily true of the rest of the nation. But the essence of it is that we need to encourage, as a nation we do. If somebody makes the effort, and they don't have to be brash doing it, we need to tell them that they are doing a good job and that applies to all areas of life. It doesn't necessarily limit itself to music. Because as a nation we have no right to say we can't do it right unless we sit down with people and say to them "Yes, you are doing a good job" and pat somebody on the back. If they are not doing it right, give them constructive criticism, because that was the essence of Rory. He always held that spirit, they call it "Kefi" in Crete, they call it different things in different countries, but to Rory it was the essence of him. He was always true to the Blues.

There are two other pieces I would like to read for you before I finish this evening and we will then follow with some footage of Rory from "The Old Grey Whistle Test". The first is from a fan of his I met about a fortnight ago well it's less than that, on Wednesday 8th November at a Memorial Service that the family organised in London in the London Oratory on Brompton Road. During the Cold War the Oratory was used by spies as a "dead letter" drop site and Rory held a great affinity with the Brompton Oratory, seeing as he was such a fan of the writer Dasiell Hammett and the whole area of espionage. He included in his repertoire a dedication to Hammett: - "Continental Op" and "Philby" to spymaster Kim Philby. One of the remarkable things about that day was that you had many Guitarists, many musicians coming to pay their tributes who didn't have the opportunity to come to the funeral here in Cork. It was particularly touching to see some of the lesser known guys there also somebody like Peter Green who Rory would have held in great regard. I got an opportunity to speak to Peter Green. Now many of you will know that Peter has been through the mill and he is a rather fragile individual but a lovely man, a lovely gentle spirit, and he was somebody who held Rory in great respect. Bob Geldof has said that life as a 14 year old would not have been the same without Rory Gallagher. Rory inspired an awful lot of us whether we were 13 or 14 or older to stand in front of the wardrobe mirror with a tennis racket and try to play the Blues!! And believe me we need that because live music must be kept going because it is the essence of us. As a nation we have the ability to brighten people's hearts and we must never lose touch with that particular spirit. There is another fan of his who travelled all the way from Vacaville in California who is originally from Tipperary and he said that as a 14 year old he jumped out of his boarding school and headed on the road to Dublin. He hitch-hiked on January 1st 1975, "for my first concert and my God what show!! What a feeling I had as I left that concert. The mood of the audience was incredible, something I will never forget. The greatest things that happened in my close association with Rory's music were great lessons learned" He says, "he was true to himself. That was Rory. You can be humble and great there are no shortcuts and nice guys do finish first" That was from Patrick Kennedy.

There is one final piece I would like to read for you, if I may, and it to a large extent sums up the generosity of spirit that was Rory. His music lives on, as I said there is a huge legacy of his material there and I apologise if I have overlooked any particular areas in this talk tonight which I have called "Etched in the Blues" because the man was etched in the Blues. Here are words from someone who

showed up at his funeral here in Cork and I met him at the Church, and that was Martin McCarthy. Now Martin McCarthy is not a name you would automatically associate with Rory, but Martin, a wonderful traditional folk singer, who is held in high regard, and Rory were kindred spirits. And Martin if I may quote sent a lovely tribute to the Gallagher family:

“Words like fire, passion, friendliness openness these are all words which apply. He was an open book. But one word, and one word only, can apply it seems to the person who makes life worthwhile by example, who loves his trade and the people who play it and one who tells them so. Who makes his peers feel good by his simple presence; Rory Gallagher graced music as he grace humanity. The word is Grace.”

My name is Marcus Connaughton. Rory Gallagher – born on the 2nd of March 1948, he passed on to the great Blues house in the sky on the 14th of June 1995.....