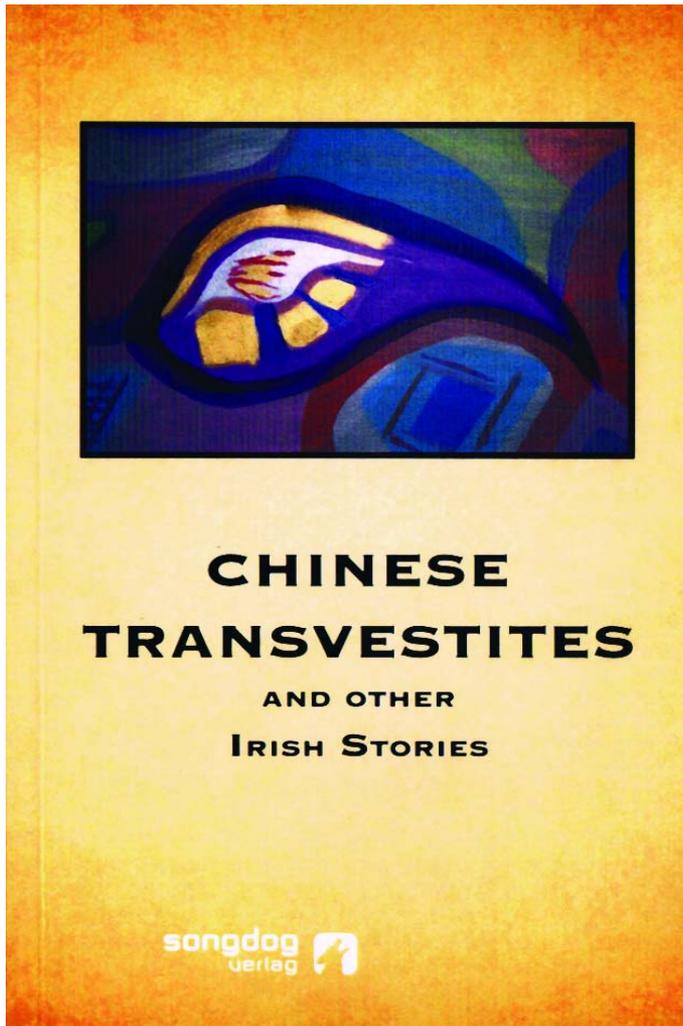


CHINESE TRANSVESTITES & OTHER IRISH STORIES

Edited by Gabriele Haefs, Paperback 133 Pages, Songdog Verlag, Vienna, ISBN 978-3-9503557-3-4.



This collection was inspired by the story *Session* written by Mick Fitzgerald. Gabriele Haefs, a fan of Fitzgerald's writing, took on the task of gathering together work that would take Irish music as a linking if not always central theme. She admits that there was little by way of material from the classical or rock genres of Irish music to draw on, consequently the music mentioned here is traditional, folk and ballads, material evidently Haefs really likes and our readers are familiar with.

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This is an amalgam of work, both fictional and documentary, from 14 authors, most of who were born before 1960. Some are well-known to us, Mick Fitzgerald, Pádraig Pearse, Brian McNeill, Andy Irvine and Petr Pandula. Irish contributors Evelyn Conlon, Rachel McNicholl and Rita Kelly are joined by 15 year old Fionn Ruigrok from Dublin. The rest of the team is made up of German writers.

Some pieces are very short, for example Dublin based Ralf Sotschek takes up only 2 of the 133 pages with his satire on

Irish rock media, whilst Ulrich Joosten's *The Harper of Hardenstein* occupies 32 pages. She weaves a complex story, including verses in Irish and German, it is a Gothic fairy story, in a tradition extending back to Thomas Crofton Croker and the Brothers Grimm in the 1820's. The Grimm's translated Croker's Irish fairy stories, collected in South Munster when Croker was still in his teens, there is a long history of shared folk culture between the two countries.

For factual material Gabriele Haefs' sensitive personal remembrance of Pádraig O' Cara is triggered by a bar of coconut chocolate, a favourite of the Bearna musician. Another nostalgic consideration of a musical life that we won't see again, is Petr Pandula's *Micho, Gussie and Pacho Russell*, part autobiography, it explains why Pandula has been so active in promoting Irish music in Germany and why his festivals always have an element of the pure drop about them.

The dark side of music casts a shadow on Pádraig Pearse's *Brigid of The Songs* and Rita Kelly's *King of the Fairies*. Both treat the gift of music as a curse, from which only death is the escape, judge for yourselves whether the curse was happy one to shoulder or not. Secrets are at the heart of Karin Braun's comic story *Puking Goblins*. A German Mayor is in trouble, not because his marriage is a sham or his peccadilloes are illegal, but because he has booked a punk band to play at the town's annual Irish festival.

Andy Irvine's *Dankeshcon, Bitterschon, Widersehn*, is an anecdote of the hours after a gig, this involves a lot of drinking and wandering around the old rope way of Hamburg, it is a story to rival the best schemes of Myles Na gCopaleen, with visits to the railway station for beer and an encounter with the local police. Kersten Fletner's *We're All Gone, Gone in The Years Babe*, tells the backstage story of the nurse looking after Shane McGowan as he toured Germany in an almost constant stupor. Almost a mirror image of Irvine 'story, this is about drinking before, not after the gig.

Top marks for writing goes to *Silverlining* by Mick Fitzgerald. A wry look at life in early morning Dublin, replete with oddball characters who interrupt Fitzgerald as he tries to engage in a day of filming.

The prurient title of the book comes from an incident in the story, and there's a great old song in there too, sung in the Cobbelstone as the lads from the fruit market get their first pint of the day at 7:30 am. In *The Horseman's Word*, Brian McNeil's moves the action and the language to Scotland, with the bulk of the dialogue

in a latter day Doric. Putting the correct title to a tune is central to Evelyn Condon's story *The Name Of It*, familiar to many of us who are keeping a musical household.

The last story in the book *Dear Mr Bongo* by Ralf Sotschek, reminds us that even Bono, possibly the most famous Irishman in the world, relies on populism for his prominence. It is an acidic litmus test of fame and a truly funny end to this intriguing and affectionate collection of stories.

Seán Laffey