

Billboard

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWSWEEKLY OF MUSIC, VIDEO, AND HOME ENTERTAINMENT

NOVEMBER 11, 2000

Artists & Music

Ceili Rain Takes Its Celtic/Rock Sound To Cross Driven Label

BY DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

NASHVILLE—With positive lyrics and an engaging Celtic/rock sound, Ceili Rain has developed a loyal legion of fans in both Christian and mainstream-pop music circles. With the Nov. 14 release of its new project, "Erasers On Pencils," the band once again delivers a collection of insightful tunes with broad-based appeal.

Ceili Rain's 1998 Punch Records debut, "Say: Kay-lee," paved the way for the band to tour extensively, including stops in Rome for World Youth Day as well as U.S. dates from New York to Alaska. For its latest disc, the band has signed a deal with Cross Driven Records, the pop division of the Monroe, La.-based Here to Him label, whose roster also includes Shepherd Hall and New Zealand band the Lads. The album is being distributed in the Christian market via Provident Music Distribution. It will reach the general pop market in early 2001 via BMG.

Lead singer, acoustic guitarist, keyboardist, and band founder Bob Halligan Jr. says a chance meeting in a grocery store led to the band signing with Cross Driven. Halligan was chatting with former Benson A&R executive

Jackie Patillo when she introduced him to Here to Him president Glen Wagner, who immediately said he and his kids were Ceili fans.

"We started meeting, and we started to bring along the idea that Ceili Rain could be in the big pool," says Halligan of the band stepping up to the next career level. "We've been swimming in the baby pool for a while now. We've been doggedly erasing all the excuses for [remaining at that level]. Now, we're being allowed into the grown-up pool. Glen has facilitated that."

For the past two years, the band has toured relentlessly, and it's broadened its ardent fan base beyond Tennessee borders. For Halligan, the new deal with Cross Driven offers the best of both worlds: It gives much-needed label and distribution muscle to expand the band's presence in the market, while allowing him to retain all rights to his music. "In view of all the brouhaha with the issue of work-for-hire, I wanted to make a new record and own it myself," he says, noting that he's licensing his music to Cross Driven.

Halligan appreciates the value

of intellectual property. A veteran songwriter, he's had songs covered by a who's-who of artists including Cher, Michael Bolton, Rebecca St. James, Bob Carlisle, and Kathy Mattea. He currently operates his own publishing company and con-



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tinues to pitch to other acts in addition to serving as Ceili Rain's principal tunesmith.

Supported by a stellar cast of musicians—accordionist Buddy Connolly, drummer Chris Eddy (Duane Eddy's son), bassist Bob "Buff" Harmon, guitarist Raymond Arias, violinist Gretchen Priest, and Burt Mitchell on tin whistle, highland pipes, flute, and *uilleann* pipes—the Ceili Rain sound is characterized by an infectious Celtic/rock fusion and Halligan's intelligent, pas-

sionate lyrics. "Erasers On Pencils" covers a broad spectrum of emotional territory, with Halligan offering slices of his life in songs like "God Done Good" and "These Things Have A Way Of Workin' Out."

Is it difficult for Halligan to be so open and vulnerable in his writing? "Not for me. It would be a terrible missed opportunity for an artist not to lay one's soul bare. What else have we to offer but ourselves . . . ourselves as we relate to or resonate for other people? I find the things that really get to me are the things that really get to others."

He continues, "When I wrote the song 'Thanks,' it was delivered to me as I was awaking one morning. I ran down and played it on the piano into the tape recorder. When it was done, I just started sobbing uncontrollably. It was a song of gratitude, and it made me think of so many things in my life."

Halligan says there were 46 songs in contention for the project, and the band recorded 18 before narrowing it down to the 12 that appear on the record. "At that point, the songs chose themselves," he says of the project, which was

produced by Brent Milligan.

Before the act went into the studio, many of the songs had already been road-tested during Ceili Rain shows. The band, which recently signed with booking agent Holly Benyouski from Street Level Artists, plays both clubs and churches. Fine-tuning its material has obviously done the trick.

"I really enjoyed their first album," says Jimmy Moore, marketing manager for Christian Supply. "This new one grabbed me with the lyrics. Overall, it is a unique project that will fill a need in Christian music."

Dennis Disney, principal of Nashville-based D Squared Entertainment, is working with Cross Driven to market the Ceili Rain record, and he views the band as a unique entity. "The challenge with Ceili Rain is that they don't fit into the normal Christian radio format," he says. "They don't play 80 church concerts a year as a CCM [contemporary Christian music] artist would. What they do have going for them is great music. That they are playing outside the box creates a great story. Once people see them they love

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them."

Disney adds that there are plans to work Christian radio and that the first single will be "God Done Good." He says there are also plans to take a track to triple-A radio.

"He [Bob Halligan] speaks to the listener's heart, mind, and soul," says Phil Smith, music director at WJTL Lancaster, Pa. "He is a wordsmith and tells parables of faith rarely found in today's songwriters."

"Provident Music Group, our distributor, is very committed to it," Disney says of the set. "It's been amazing how Provident has embraced this band. They gave us some ship estimates that are much higher than what we thought they would do because they believe in this band, and they are hitting that number. We're

'The challenge with Ceili Rain is that they don't fit into the normal Christian radio format'

- DENNIS DISNEY -

thrilled with the attention we are getting from them on this band."

BMG has also been very supportive. In addition to going to mainstream retail through BMG, the Ceili Rain album will be sold through BMG Direct.

Disney says D Squared plans to be "pretty guerrilla" in marketing the Ceili record. "We can do some things much quicker than some of the bigger companies can," he says. "The other thing we have going for us is so many people, especially in Nashville, are really rooting for this band. People are willing to do some things to get these guys some exposure. Kathy Mattea called these guys a seven-headed Irish pop/rock monster. When she was asked to do a set at Fest De Ville in Nashville, she wanted to do something more Irish-oriented, and these guys were her first call."

To help expand the band's fan base, Disney says, Kyle Fenton Promotions and Barb King Marketing have been hired to also work the project. There are plans to include the record in some of the record chain catalogs as well as to do special promotions in select markets. According to Disney, the label also plans to secure "price and positioning" at retail. The album will be available for download via EMusic.

"We've got to introduce Christian retail and their customer base to the music. So the band has graciously agreed to jump on a promo tour," says Disney. "They said, 'Tell us how many cities you want us to go to, and we'll go.' It's amazing."

Billboard

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWSWEEKLY OF MUSIC, VIDEO, AND HOME ENTERTAINMENT

NOVEMBER 11, 2000

Bridging Christian Music, Heavy Metal

Singer/Songwriter Is Comfortable Working In Both Genres

BY JIM BESSMAN

In the last year, Nashville-based singer/songwriter Bob Halligan Jr. has managed to bridge two seemingly mutually exclusive genres—contemporary Christian and heavy metal.

Halligan, who fronts the singular Celtic Christian group Ceili Rain (bagpipes, fiddle, button accordion, tin whistle, bass, guitar, and drums), wrote "Twist," a track from ex-Judas Priest vocalist Rob Halford's solo album *Resurrection* and at the same time released *Erasers on Pencils*, Ceili Rain's second album, on his Mima Rekizid label.

"I went from Jesus Christ to Judas Priest and back again," says Halligan, whose relationship with Halford dates back to 1982, when his song "(Take These) Chains" came out on Judas Priest's hit album *Screaming for Vengeance*. He then penned "Some Heads Are Gonna Roll," the hit from the band's 1984 *Defenders of the Faith* follow-up set.

"That got me elected as the 'first-call heavy metal sound doctor,'" continues Halligan, whose catalog also includes the Kix smash "Don't Close Your Eyes" and songs for such diverse acts as Kiss, Cher, Michael Bolton, and Joan Jett. "It was easier in the beginning when I was fuzzier about my faith: I was aware of the moral dichotomy but was not yet of an age [where] responsibility weighed upon me. But now it's something I take very, very seriously. So when Halford's manager called a year and a half ago and said he was going back to the Priest sound [and] would I write another song, I said yes, then hung up and said, 'How?'"

So Halligan dusted off his old Judas Priest albums and compared them with Halford's new work tapes.

"It was all very dark, and I knew I had to construct a subtext for myself that would allow me to sleep at night," he continues, characterizing the "heavy metal ethos" as demons, death, and destruction. "That's not part of my life, so I wrote a song from God's perspective, saying to the listener, 'You can try to twist away from me, but you're stuck with me.' And Rob and anyone

else who sings it can have their own interpretation."

Halligan recognizes a reverse irony in how an artist like Amy Grant—who "typically sings from a godly perspective and for her own reasons decides to introduce ambiguity into her lyrical message"—relates to Halford. He describes the latter as "an artist never known to address matters spiritual other than from kind of a cartoon-mythology point of view [who is now] delivering a song written from the perspective of the Creator—whether he reads it that way or not."

The self-published, WBOB (ASCAP) writer says he didn't discuss the lyric's meaning with Halford because he didn't want the artist to feel uncomfortable.

"But the song is the song," he notes, "and any song can be construed as a transaction between any two or more entities: mother and daughter, husband and wife, father and son, God and created being. Rob's great, and I do have a sense that he's connected with the notion of a higher power, even if it's not approached in a way similar to mine. But I don't require that, and I'll be gratified if he's at a place in life where if he reads this, he won't be shocked or dismayed."

Halligan's ecumenical outlook is reflected in Ceili Rain's universalist approach.

"The songs are written from a

Christian perspective, but they're not, as we say, 15 JPM—Jesuses per minute," he says. "They're written to be inclusive and inviting for both the most devout and the most atheistic. Anybody who might want some joy in life is apt to like them, and all are welcome in this place."

The melodious band is rightly likened by its leader to "the Beatles and the Chieftains in a room together with John and Paul in charge and saying, 'Paddy [Moloney, the Chieftains' leader/piper], we love what you're doing, but you've got to slow it down a little bit so people can take it in in one listen.'"

Halligan says, "Some people watch and drink Heineken, and others imbibe a different kind of spirit. We're happy with any way, so long as we can all be together in a room with a certain aroma in the air and people sniffing it in and taking whatever flavor strikes them. We're not interested in spoon-feeding or preaching or proselytizing."

Halligan's current songwriting output remains all-encompassing. Christian artists Bob Carlisle and Jeni Varnadau have recently recorded his songs, as have country artists Kathy Mattea and Joe Nichols.

"These are typical multi-interpretation songs brought to you by Hooligan Enterprises," he says of the country cuts, *Jesus* (his nickname).

BILLBOARD MARCH 10, 2001

Artists & Music

Punch Records' Ceili Rain Aims To Capture Its Live 'Party' On Debut

BY DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

NASHVILLE—After three years as one of Music City's most popular live bands, Ceili Rain makes the transition to recording act with the April 7 release of "Ceili Rain: Say KAY-lee" on Punch Records, a division of Nashville-based Power Entertainment Group.

"We wanted to emphasize the songs with emotional content a little bit more on the record than we do live," says lead vocalist/principal songwriter Bob Halligan Jr. of the transition from stage to studio. "Live, we tend to focus on being a dance band, being kind of a swirl of energy. That could grow tiresome on a record. So we tried to have more of a balance... It had a lot to do with ensuring the emotional center of

the band was well-represented."

The band's name, loosely translated from Gaelic, means "heavenly party." Led by Halligan, the ensemble plays pop/rock music infused with Celtic sounds. Halligan describes its style as "if you imagined the Beatles and the Chieftains in a room together, with John [Lennon] and Paul [McCartney] in charge saying to Paddy Maloney, 'We love what you're doing, but can you slow it down a little bit? So that people can take it in in one listen.'"

A Syracuse, N.Y., native, Halligan is a successful songwriter with cuts recorded by a wide variety of artists, including Judas Priest, Michael Bolton, Cher, Joan Jett, Rebecca St. James, and Kathy Mattea, who recorded "Love Travels" as the title cut of her



CEILI RAIN

current album. (Ceili Rain also cut the tune on the band's album.)

Halligan hatched the idea for Ceili Rain in 1989 with his wife, Linda, but he didn't actually put a band together until moving to Nashville in 1995. The group's current lineup is former Orleans member Lance Hoppen on bass and vocals, Buddy Connolly on button accordion, Gretchen Priest on fiddle, Raymond Arias on guitar, Lang Bliss on drums, and Skip Cleavinger on whistle and pipes. The album was produced by Bill Halverson, known for his work with Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Eric Clapton, and the Texas Tornados.

After discussing contracts with several labels, Halligan opted to sign with Punch Records. "John Maucere [the label's founder] is a rock'n'roll guy,

maybe the only one in Nashville," Halligan says. "He was a major believer, and I felt like he had the financial and mental guns to do the job. This is a guy who will not take no for an answer."

Punch is also home to Gary Vincent & the Swamp Honkys, Ned Massey, Laura Powers, and Jack Curry. The label is distributed by Navarre in the U.S., and Maucere just secured distribution in Europe through Grapevine.

"I couldn't be more excited about Ceili Rain," Maucere says. "They have continued to build and build. This is a global record."

Last fall, the label tested the album in a campaign at 20 Target stores and got positive results. Tower Nashville also sold a few test copies. Tower Nashville buyer Tom Demalon says the band has a good reputation around town. "I

expect them to sell," he says. "The copies we had have already sold."

The first single, "I Don't Need A Picture," goes to triple-A radio Sunday (1). According to Punch marketing director Faith Quesenberry, plans also call for distribution of a four-song sampler—the single along with "Love Travels," "Long Black Cadillac," and "Call Home"—to college and AC stations.

Management and booking are currently being handled by Power Entertainment. The band has been performing dates in numerous markets, including New York; Philadelphia; Boston; Fort Worth, Texas; and Little Rock, Ark. Upcoming shows include the Whisky a Go Go on Wednesday (4) in West Hollywood, Calif., and Disney World March 16 and 17 in Orlando, Fla.

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2000

South Bend Tribune

MUSIC REVIEW

Ceili Rain's performance spirited, playful

By **ANDREW S. HUGHES**
Tribune Staff Writer

SOUTH BEND

It says as much about the critics as it does Ceili Rain's songs that this Celtic rock band's works invite radically different interpretations from review to review.

Some critics see a song such as "I Don't Need a Picture," the tuneful, attention-grabber from their debut album, as an affirmation of Christian faith based on the notion that you don't need to see Christ to believe in him. Other critics find a secular interpretation in the song's lyrics and see it as a traditional love song.

I fall into the latter camp, one of the critics surprised to learn Ceili Rain has attracted as much attention from the Christian music press as it has the mainstream press.

In concert, Ceili Rain's songs remain just as open to interpretation as they do on record.

They also come alive with wit and warmth under the twinkling performance of this septet from Nashville, Tenn.

Bob Halligan Jr., who has written songs for such hard rock bands as Judas Priest and Blue Oyster Cult, leads Ceili Rain as its songwriter, vocalist and energetic frontman.

Throughout the band's Tuesday

performance in the Moreau Center for the Arts Little Theatre at Saint Mary's College, Halligan gave an exuberant, playful performance matched by his band.

Live, Ceili Rain rocks much harder than on record but retains the tuneful, pop sensibility that governs most of its songs. At times, however, the volume was too loud, especially on the drums.

The band's Celtic instruments — bagpipes and tin whistle by Burt Mitchell, button accordion by Buddy Connolly and fiddle by South Bend native Gretchen Priest — tended to serve as refrain and counterpoint instruments on the more pop-oriented songs.

"That's All the Lumber You Sent," however, opened with a rollicking Celtic motif that was reprised in the middle and for a smashing conclusion. "666" came off as one of the better hybrid pieces, mainly because of the song's jig structure throughout, and "Tween the Jigs and the Reels" had the same Celtic rock vibe of Black 47's "Funky Ceili."

Priest, who played in the area bands D.M. 51 and A Web of Lies before moving to Nashville in 1995, was the obvious focal point for much of the audience's attention, and she didn't disappoint.

On "The Big Snow," her wah-wah-inflected violin added an ap-

propriate otherworldly quality to the bridge, while the bagpipe, accordion and violin freak-out just before the song's coda was a brilliant display of dissonance and chaos.

On a joyous cover of the Beatles' "All You Need is Love," Priest, Mitchell and Connolly did a wonderful job replicating the horn section from the record, while Halligan, bass player Bob Harmon and guitarist Raymohd Arias sounded excellent on the song's vocal harmonies.

The musical highlight of the concert was the instrumental "Hug Yourself," a chance for everyone but Halligan to step into the spotlight with a solo section, and each member excelled, giving the band a different sound with each solo piece.

Although some songs — "It Only Ticks When You Do It" and "Ceili Rain," for instance — make explicit references to God, a song such as "That's All the Lumber You Sent" can just as easily be interpreted as a serious spiritual reflection as it can be interpreted as a buoyant, whimsical take on what happens when we get to heaven and must face our final reckoning.

Ceili Rain's performance showed that religious or not, Celtic or not, the band's philosophy comes through as a positive force that invites its audience to join together in a spirited, open community.

Franklin band gets heavenly gig

Celestial rock 'n' roll Franklin band Ceili Rain, which combines the lilt of Celtic music with pop rock 'n' roll, will play the Vatican this summer

By **KATHRIN CHAVEZ**
Staff Writer

FRANKLIN — A man dies, goes to heaven and meets St. Peter.

The heavenly greeter offers to show the man the house he has built for himself through his life actions. Passing a stone mansion and other nice houses, the saint stops in front of a small shanty.

In answer to the man's horrified reaction, St. Peter says "That's all the lumber you sent." The resident of the mansion passed earlier built his home "with his heart."

The story in a song from the band Ceili Rain carries a fundamental Catholic belief that grace and works are a necessary combination for heavenly rewards.

Ceili (pronounced KAY-lee) Rain is not exactly a Catholic band, but Bob Halligan Jr. — the band's founder, leader and lead singer — is a member of St. Philip Church. And since he writes most of their songs as well, a bit of Catholic theology can slip into the lyrics.

"Because of my Catholic upbringing, I have a lot of points of intersection spiritually and linguistically with the Catholic church," Halligan said.

In August, the band will have its most heavenly gig yet — it has been invited as one of 15 American performers to World Youth Day at the Vatican.

It won't be its most lucrative playing date, however. The band has to pay its own way and is sponsoring a concert June 19 to raise funds for the trip as well as benefit St. Philip's youth mission trip this summer to South Bend, Ind.

Halligan doesn't particularly like his group being known as a Catholic band.

"We don't view ourselves as a Catholic band per se. We wish the terms Catholic artist or Catholic music didn't have to exist, anything that ghettoizes the band's image or our ability to reach all souls, all spirits, all eyes and ears is a limiter," he said.

But there are differences between Catholic groups like Ceili Rain and Christian evangelical musicians, he said.

"To a Catholic audience, evangelical Christian terms may as well be Greek. Anointed and convicted is just not the way we talk. There's not really a lot of Catholic lingo," he said.

The upcoming trip to Rome is particularly exciting, he said. Several stages for artists of different countries will be set up. Officials are expecting 2.5 million young people to attend the occasional worldwide youth event, which will include a Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II.

Halligan says he prefers the secular definition of catholic — which means universal and all-inclusive. His favorite song at St. Philip is "All Are Welcome in This Place."

"Not just Hindi, saved, transcendental meditators, people wearing Timex watches — a serial murderer we hope would be locked up somewhere — but the true spirit of the word catholic is universal," he said.

Ceili Rain's message is more subtle than that of many evangelical Christian groups, he said.

"It has to be to reach people. I'm a



songwriter and a singer. I let my songs do the talking. We put an aroma out in the area, and people breathe it in. If they like it, great," he said.

Halligan's own ancestry is Irish, but he eschewed bagpipes and tin whistles for the rock 'n' roll of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones while growing up in Syracuse, N.Y.

His wife led him to see the light. She became interested in Celtic music several years ago, and he discovered he liked it, too. She suggested he integrate his love of pop rock 'n' roll with Irish sounds.

"I said that was easily the dumbest idea I ever heard. I tried it and I have never been the same since," he said.

The band is a blend of the two musical traditions. The lilt and exuberance of Celtic music is captured by bagpipes, fiddle, tin whistle and accordion. But guitars also carry a

prominent, although mainly supportive role.

"One way I've described the group is, imagine the Beatles and the Chieftains in a room together. But John and Paul are in charge, and they're saying 'Paddy, we love what you're doing, but can we slow it down a bit so people can take it in and listen,'" he said.

The idea of having a conventional rock band has no appeal for Halligan at all now.

Other changes have happened in his musical career. Recordings of songs he wrote have sold more than 25 million records, performed by artists such as Michael Bolton, Cher, Kathy Mattea, Blue Oyster Cult and Judas Priest, he said.

From Judas Priest to the Vatican?

The song he wrote for Judas Priest — "Some Heads Are Going to Roll" — sounds like it is the generic heavy metal call for death

and destruction, he said, but the lyrics actually are a warning against nuclear holocaust.

Now he prefers to leave the dark lyrics behind and write "from the light."

Ceili is an Irish word meaning party in the sense of a wedding reception with music and dancing. Rain means, well, rain.

"Ceili is also close to the Latin word coeli, meaning heavenly, celestial — it's a downpour of heavenly partyiness," he said.

The concept of heaven is important, because Halligan believes God has everything to do with the band's essential meaning.

"It's like God saying 'Pay attention to this. This is not fun and games, not about being a rock star. You work for me.' It's what motivates me, what gets me up in the morning. I've got the greatest boss in the world." ■

Ceili Rain will perform at a benefit concert at 7 p.m. June 19 at St. Philip Catholic Church, 125 East Main, Franklin.

Tickets are \$7 for adults and \$5 for children younger than 12. Tickets will be available at the door.

Proceeds will benefit Ceili Rain's trip in August to World Youth Day at the Vatican, and the St. Philip youth mission trip this summer to South Bend, Ind.

Billboard

THE SOUND OF THE CITIES

NASHVILLE

Local **Noise**

FIVE ACTS BOUND FOR GLORY

By Deborah Evans Price

CEILI RAIN

The sounds of bagpipes and a lone drummer begin wafting through the night air, and anticipation builds as Ceili Rain prepares to storm the stage. It's the combination of



spirited stage antics and engaging songs that has made Ceili [pronounced "Kay-lee"] Rain one of the most popular live acts in Music City. A Celtic pop/rock ensemble led by singer/songwriter Bob Halligan Jr., the band is comprised of button accordionist Buddy Connolly, drummer Lang Bliss, guitarist Raymond Arias, bassist Andrew Lamb, fiddler Gretchen Priest and Skip Cleavinger on whistle and pipes.

A Syracuse, N.Y., native, Halligan began his career as a songwriter, landing cuts by a variety of acts, including Michael Bolton, Cher, Kiss and Judas Priest, and releasing his own pop album on Atco before moving to Nashville in 1995. He began getting cuts by country and Christian acts, such as Kathy Mattea, Rebecca St. James and Sierra, but his main goal was to start a band that combined his rock sensibilities with his love of Irish music. Thus Ceili Rain was born. Loosely translated from Gaelic, the band's name means "heavenly party." Halligan describes them as "Imagine the Beatles and the Chieftains in a room together, with John [Lennon] and Paul [McCartney] saying to Paddy Maloney, 'We love what you're doing, but can you slow it down a little bit, so that people can absorb it in one listen?'"

In April, the band released its debut album, "Ceili Rain: Say KAY-lee," on Nashville rock indie Punch Records. (They are distributed to the general market through Navarre and to the Christian retail market via New Day Distributors.) Since then, "I Don't Need A Picture" has made inroads at Triple-A and adult-contemporary radio. The band has hit the road, performing nearly 100 dates this year, from Vermont to California, but Nashville is still home. "I'm excited about the way we click with Nashville, because it can be a jaded audience. You can get that golf-tournament applause," admits Halligan. "But we're a lot different from the average band. People come to be lifted up, and it seems to be working."

December 12, 1998

The Washington Post

July 31, 1998

CEILI RAIN
"Ceili Rain"
Punch



When you've written songs for everyone from Judas Priest and Kiss to Michael Bolton and Kathy Mattea, as Bob Halligan has, it's safe to say that your ear for pop hooks is matched only by your musical rootlessness. It wasn't until he formed the Nashville septet Ceili Rain in 1995, in fact, that Halligan rooted his pop instincts in a specific musical tradition. That tradition is Celtic folk music, and the band features virtuosos on the fiddle, accordion and bagpipes. Yet the group also boasts a rock 'n' roll rhythm section, which puts a muscular punch behind the Irish dance tunes.

What holds it all together on the debut album, "Ceili Rain," is Halligan's Top 40 songwriting, which provides lots of melody for the acoustic soloists and blunt hooks for the rockers (who include Orleans bassist Lance Hoppen). Halligan sometimes goes overboard; the title track, for example, is so corny it makes "Riverdance" seem subtle by comparison.

Much more often, though, Halligan's catchy folk-rock hooks and clever phrasing remind one of the Lovin' Spoonful. "Peace Has Broken Out," his hymn about Northern Ireland, may be short on analysis, but it cries out for singing along. "That's All The Lumber You Sent," a fable about meeting St. Peter at the Pearly Gates, is as bouncy and tuneful as it is clever. Best of all is the first single, "I Don't Need A Picture," a simple but infectiously joy love song.

--Geoffrey Himes

SPOTLIGHT



CEILI RAIN

PRODUCER: Bill Halverson
Punch Records PEG 006

Led by singer/songwriter Bob Halligan, this Nashville-based band weaves pop, rock, and Celtic sounds into an intriguing musical tapestry. The music is fresh and innovative, and the band's debut disc captures the charm of its live shows, especially on the buoyant "You Then Me Then You Then Me," the rollicking "Long Black Cadillac," the fiery "666 Degrees," and "I Don't Need A Picture," which is spinning at triple-A radio. Most of the songs—which are musically satisfying and lyrically life-affirming—were penned by Halligan, a veteran tunesmith whose credits include Judas Priest, Michael Bolton, Cher, and Kathy Mattea. In addition to his songwriting talents, Halligan is a passionate vocalist whose gifts shine on the shimmering ballad "Call Home," the powerful "Peace Has Broken Out," and the group's signature song, "Ceili Rain." A stunning debut that could spawn the industry's next big rock band from Nashville. Contact: 615-320-1250.



PUNCH

Reviews & Previews

APRIL 25, 1998

Billboard
NEWSPAPER

SPOTLIGHT



CEILI RAIN
PRODUCER: Bill Halverson
Punch Records PEG 006

SPOTLIGHT



JIMMY PAGE & ROBERT PLANT
Walking into Clarksdale
PRODUCERS: Jimmy Page & Robert Plant



August 1998



Ceili Rain
Ceili Rain

PUNCH

So you think Nashville's nothing but a country-'n'-Jesus music mecca? Betcha'd never thunk a seven-piece Celtic folk-rock band would stand Music City on its jaded, cauliflower ears!

But that's exactly what's happened with Ceili Rain (pronounced *kay-lee*, a rough Gaelic word for "party"). This jubilant, hip-shakin' band—with its big showmanship splashes and subtle strokes of Christian lyrical themes—has packed out Nashville clubs over the past couple of years. The group has also attracted attention outside of Nashville, winning the praise of general market music critics and the affections of a vast array of record company execs.

While the band's sound is a smart mix of traditional and modern instruments (bagpipes, accordion and fiddle melodies weave in and out of bass, drum and guitar patterns), Ceili Rain's lynch pin is singer—and acclaimed veteran songwriter—Bob Halligan, Jr. His lyrical vision is tightly focused on *Ceili Rain*. Standouts among the 12 tracks include the foot-stomping, shamrocky ditty "That's All The Lumber You Sent" (covered recently by Eli on *Things I Prayed For*), the harmonious, driving ballad "I Don't Need A Picture" (covered without comparison by Considering Lily last year), and barn burners "Long Black Cadillac" and "666 Degrees." You will also find here the original take of "Love Travels," which became the title track to Kathy Mattea's latest effort.

Ceili Rain's music will inspire even the most wallflowerish among us to dance, and you don't even have to be Irish to join the party.

--Dave Urbanski

Average Customer Review: ★★★★★ Number of Reviews: 9

john.entzminger@erols.com from Oakton, Virginia, near Washington, DC , August 5, 1999 ★★★★★

Even Gramas and Grampas will love this CD!

I don't know what took me so long to discover this wonderful blend of Celtic and rock band music CD in the bookstore. It is absolutely captivating! We love it! Our son-in-law has it now and I think I may never get it back! It is worth going back to the store for another. We love Christian music of all kinds and Mr. Mulligan and company have made a hit with us. We look forward to another one soon.

kathleen@iinet.com from So. California , July 10, 1999 ★★★★★

Celtic Christian Rock taken to a whole new level

As a lover of Christian praise and worship music as well as Celtic music of all kinds, I was still put off this CD by the raggedy looking young folks on the back photo until I heard the music unexpectedly and flipped for it! It's Celtic, it's rock and it's Christian in a way which I expect will lead to a couple dozen "imitators" in no time.

The song writers as well as the singers and musical artists all have a fun, delightful sense of humor that shows up in many ways. They also have that Irish way with words. I can't pick a favorite song because I like almost every one a lot. It's also a great CD to put on for dull jobs like house cleaning etc. You can't be too down with this lively and fun music helping you along!

If you like Celtic, Christian and/or rockin' music give this a try. It's not quite like anything you've ever heard before, but I really expect that you'll come back for more.

A music fan from Raymore, Missouri , June 17, 1999 ★★★★★

This one is a must!

A joyous blend of traditional Celtic instrumentation with modern rock rhythms. The lyrics grab you by the heart and don't let go. If you don't live differently after hearing this CD - you're already dead.

gobez@minot.com from Far East of Eden , May 13, 1999 ★★★★★

Nobody can say that Christian music isn't creative!

Wow! If you like Celtic music and Christian music, you'll love this CD, and that's all there is to it. Aye, ye Irish laddies an' lasses! Listen to this samples! If it doesn't get your blood pumping, you're not Irish!

We've got it all, folks, from a Christian 70's funk band (Soulfood76) to a Celtic Christian band. I love Christian music!

A music fan from Washington DC , April 23, 1999 ★★★★★

Celtic rock with energy

Intriguing mix of celtic and rock. A friend told me about it and I'm delighted. The CD has tremendous energy.

A music fan from Butte, Montana , March 24, 1999 ★★★★★

Haunting, evocative

This album contains a pleasing marriage of traditional Celtic instruments and rhythms with modern

collection.

A music fan from Maryland , October 25, 1998 ★★★★★
another example of excellent christian music

Those of you who do not see this as christian must not have listened to the words. This is truly a new era in the history of christian music. Bob Halligan brings to the industry a fresh combination of celtic rock and awesome praise. This is definately worth buying!

martdm@ibm.net from Syracuse, NY, USA , July 23, 1998 ★★★★★
An extremely intriguing, fun, and interesting CD

This CD is a fabulous mix of tradition and innovation. Celtic rhythms combined with modern rock, along with thought provoking lyrics, make for an extremely fun and interesting ride.

In an era fraught with unimaginative musical offerings, Bob Halligan Jr. & Co. are to be congratulated for producing such an intriguing and excellent CD. I recommend it (and Ceili Rain's live show) highly to all!

LowellParker@msn.com from Dallas, TX , June 12, 1998 ★★★★★
An outstanding CD! Unique, well-crafted songs with energy..

Bob Hallagan, Jr., has always written superb songs, and these are some of his best. The Celtic Rock sound he has created is very unique, and appeals to a wide audience, ranging from Country to Alternative to Rock. On stage, Bob puts on an excellent show that I would recommend to anyone. You should not only buy a copy of the album, but buy some for your friends, too. Ceili Rain is definitely a CD to have!!!

Billboard

The Year In Music 2000

CRITICS' CHOICE



JIM BESSMAN

Special Correspondent

1. **Porter Wagoner**, "The Best I've Ever Been" (Shell Point). Country music like it oughta be.
2. **Joe Jackson**, "Night And Day II" (Sony Classical). Genius songwriter/composer

balances past pop brilliance with more recent classical explorations in sequel to 1982 masterpiece.

3. Tie: **Ceili Rain**, "Erasers On Pencils" (Mima Rekidz); **Laura Love**, "Fourteen Days" (Zoe/Rounder). Celtic Christian rock band and Afro-Celtic singer-songwriter offer new testament to supreme creativity.
4. **Doug Sahm**, "The Return Of Wayne Douglas" (Tornado). No one loved baseball, people and music more than the great, late Doug Sahm. This country disc—recorded before his untimely demise last year, under the name he used for his country gigs—is the perfect epitaph for a legendary life lived to the fullest.
5. **Jill Sobule**, "Pink Pearl" (Beyond Music/BMG). Delightfully delivered character sketches from a truly unique pop stylist.
6. **Shirley Caesar** at the Beacon Theater, Oct. 18. Fiery pastor proved a cross between Gladys Knight & The Pips and James Brown, generating so much spiritual heat that she even had to fan her stage monitors!
7. **Chumbawamba**, "WYSIWYG" (Republic/Universal). Cutting commentaries on contemporary life by English anarchists, as ever, accompanied by beautiful music.
8. **Travis Tritt**, "Down The Road I Go" (Columbia). Stripped-down acoustic slant suits renegade country star fine in a splendid return to form via label change.
9. Tie: **Jess Klein**, "Draw Them Near" (Slow River/Ryko); **Halford**, "Resurrection" (Metal-Is/BMG). Striking debut by Boston singer-songwriter-guitarist a la Maria McKee, and pyrotechnic comeback by heavy-metal giant.
10. Soundtrack, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" (Mercury). Bluegrass rejuvenated by soundtrack to the Coen Brothers' marvelous movie.



DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

Country/Christian Music Editor

1. **Don Henley**, "Inside Job" (Warner Bros.). Intelligent, passionate,

sometimes vulnerable—a brilliant album. (The tour was also No. 1 in my book.)

2. **Randy Travis**, "Inspirational Journey" (Atlantic Christian/Warner Bros.). So good I cried.
 3. **Lee Ann Womack**, "I Hope You Dance" (MCA). Beautiful voice, great songs.
 4. **Ceili Rain**, "Erasers On Pencils" (Cross Driven). Celtic pop/rock with heart and soul.
 5. **Third Day**, "Offerings: A Worship Album" (Essential). Uplifting!
 6. **Wayne Kirkpatrick**, "The Maple Room" (Rocketown). Well worth the wait.
 7. Tie: **Trisha Yearwood**, "Real Live Woman" (MCA); **Phil Vassar**, "Phil Vassar" (Arista).
 8. **Brenn Hill**, "Trail Through Yesterday" (Real West). A young cowboy keeping the spirit of the West alive. Gene and Roy are up there smilin'!
 9. Tie: **NewSong**, "Sheltering Tree" (Benson). Soul-enriching!; **Salvador**, "Salvador" (Myrrh). Santana meets Billy Graham. These guys shake the rafters.
 10. Tie: **matchbox twenty**, "mad season" (Atlantic/Lava); **Chris DiCrocce**, "American Dream" (Flyboy).
- Too Good Not To Mention: **John Michael Montgomery**, "The Little Girl" single (Atlantic); **Charlie Daniels**, "Road Dogs" (Blue Hat); **Plus One**, "The Promise" (Atlantic/143).

Billboard's Most Highly Acclaimed Independent Pop/Rock Record For 1998 is...

Ceili Rain

THE
YEAR ¹⁹⁹⁸
MUSIC

The Critics'
Poll



JIM BESSMAN
Contributing writer

1. **Lisa Germano**, "Slide" (4AD). Brighter in outlook than past work but no less intense—and ever captivating.
2. **Elvis Costello with Burt Bacharach**, "Painted From Memory" (Mercury). Best songwriter collaboration since Bacharach-David and McCartney-Costello.
3. **Laura Love**, "Shum Ticky" (Mercury). Funkifying her inventive Afro/Celtic folk sound, Love deserves major mainstream breakthrough with this second major-label turn.
4. **Ceili Rain**, "Ceili Rain" (Punch Records). Versatile songwriter Bob Halligan (covered by Judas Priest, Cher and Kathy Mattea) scores big himself, fronting a novel Celtic Christian rock group featuring bagpipe, accordion and tin whistle.
5. **Corky Siegel's Chamber Blues**, "Complimentary Colors" (Gadfly). Second blues-classical fusing from legendary Chicago blues harmonica/piano ace again blurs boundaries, delightfully so.
6. Tie: **Richard X. Heyman**, "Cornerstone" (Permanent Press); **Greg Trooper**, "Popular Demons" (Koch). Outstanding discs from veteran New York singer/songwriters.
7. **Sweet Honey In The Rock**, "25" (Rykodisc). A cappella female group's continued celebration of African-American musical heritage makes it an enduring national treasure, as this 25th-anniversary commemorative re-emphasizes.
8. **Bruce Hornsby**, "spirit Trail" (RCA). Hornsby showcases expanded keyboard mastery on ambitious two-disc set that never flags.
9. **Kristin Mooney**, "Living Alone" (Egg). Beautifully moody outing from Roseanne Cash-like Minneapolis singer/songwriter, known to some for longtime vocal backing for fellow Gopher Peter Himmelman.
10. **Mas Mamonnes**, "Aguagero Y Parranda" (Conconjones). Tangy New Orleans Afro-Cuban jazz nonet blows new life into the venerable Crescent City Jazz scene.

DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

Country/Contemporary Christian Associate Editor



1. **Ceili Rain**, "Ceili Rain" (Punch Records). Music that makes your feet want to dance and your soul soar. My life is richer because Bob Halligan, Jr. and his band make this music.
2. **Don Williams**, "I Turn The Page" (Giant). One of country music's masters returned with the best country album of the year.
3. **Lari White**, "Stepping Stone" (Lyric Street).
4. Tie: **Newsboys**, "Step Up To The Microphone" (StarSong); **Margaret Becker**, "Falling Forward" (Sparrow).
5. Tie: **Steve Wariner**, "Burnin' The Roadhouse Down" (Capitol); **Deryl Dodd**, "Deryl Dodd" (Columbia).
6. Tie: **The Bellamy Brothers**, "Reggae Cowboys" (Bellamy Brothers Records/Intersound); **Brooks & Dunn**, "If You See Her" (Arista).
7. Tie: **Chris Rice**, "Past The Edges" (Rocketown); **dc Talk**, "Supernatural" (ForeFront).
8. Tie: **Michael W. Smith**, "Live The Life" (Reunion); **Bob Carlisle**, "Stories From The Heart" (Diadem/Jive).
9. **Richie Sambora**, "Undiscovered Soul" (Mercury). Most underrated album of the year.
10. Favorite singles: Country: **Diamond Rio**, "You're Gone" (Arista) and **Tim McGraw's** "One Of These Days." Christian: **Bob Carlisle**, "We Fall Down" (Diadem/Jive). Southern Gospel: **the Bishops**, "Reach The World" (Homeland) and **the Steeles**, "It's By Love" (Daywind).

December 26, 1998
Billboard

December 5, 1998

NASHVILLE—With three nominations each, Steve Earle and Lucinda Williams led all nominees for the 1999 Nashville Music Assn. Awards.

More than 200 artists are nominated for the awards, to be presented Feb. 10 at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center's Andrew Jackson Hall.

Those who received two nominations each were Jim Lauderdale, Vince Gill, Emmylou Harris, Michael W. Smith, Edgar Meyer, Nichole Nordeman, and the late Rich Mullins & A ragamuffin Band.

The Nashville Music Awards were begun in 1994 by Leadership Music to spotlight all genres of music active in the Middle Tennessee area, ranging from classical to country, rap to blues, bluegrass to folk, Christian to rock, and gospel to roots. Benefits from the awards show go to music-related area charities.

A listing of acts whose albums are nominated follows:

Roots music: Paul Burch & the WPA Ballclub, Steve Earle, Duane Jarvis, Lonesome Bob, Lucinda Williams.

Bluegrass: Eddie & Martha Adcock, John Hartford, Bobby Hicks, Nashville Bluegrass Band, Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder.

Blues: Big Al & the Heavyweights, Aashid Himons, Johnny Jones, Delbert McClinton, Rick Vito.

Children's music: Bob Howard, Rachel Sumner, the Animal Band, Barbara Bailey Hutchinson, Wendy Whitten & Rick Florian.

Classical: Butch Baldassari & John Mock, Enid Katahn, Edgar Meyer/Emerson String Quartet, Nashville Mandolin Ensemble, Classical Brass.

Christian: Rich Mullins & A ragamuffin Band, Newsboys, Nichole Nordeman, Chris Rice, Michelle Tumes.

Country: Vince Gill, Faith Hill, Alan Jackson, Jim Lauderdale, Randy Scruggs.

Earle, Williams Lead Nashville Music Assn. Noms

BY CHET FLIPPO

Folk: Kate Campbell, Nanci Griffith, Riders In the Sky, Greg Trooper, Gillian Welch.

Independent: Emmylou Harris, lambchop, Ceili Rain, Kirby Shelstad, Tommy Womack, various artists (for the album "Nashpop").

Instrumental: DeFord Bailey, Craig Duncan & Jo-EI Sonnier, David Grier, Phil Keagy, Brent Mason.

Jazz: Beegie Adair Trio, Alison Brown Quartet, Bela Fleck & the Flecktones, Schvilkus, Antoine Silverman.

Pop: Dez Dickerson, Josh Rouse, Sixpence None The Richer, the Evinrudes, the Mavericks.

Rap: Big Lou, Blow Pop, Playa G, Untouchables, Utopia State.

Reissue: "Ernie's Record Mart," "From Where I Stand: The Black, Experience In Country Music," "Tennessee Plowboy: Eddy Arnold," "The Complete Hank Williams," "Y'all Come: The Essential Jim & Jesse."

R&B: Bo, Max Carl & Big Dance, the Guy Smiley Blues Exchange, BeBe Winans, CeCe Winans.

Rock: Bare Jr., Wes Cunningham, Iodine, Matthew Ryan, Screamin' Cheetah Wheelies.

Traditional gospel: Bobby Jones & New Life with the Nashville Super Choir, the Cathedrals, the Steeles, various artists ("Smoke On the Mountain"), Kelli Williams.

Following is a list of act nominations:

Artist/Songwriter: Bill Anderson, Garth Brooks, Steve Earle, Rick Elias, Jim Lauderdale, Dolly Parton, Josh Rouse, Michael W. Smith, Steve Wariner, Lucinda Williams.

Songwriter/composer: Gary Burr, Beth Nielsen Chapman, Fred James, Ty Lacy, Dan Penn, Annie Roboff, Leslie Satcher, Tom Shapiro, Phil Vassar, Craig Wiseman.

Male vocalist: T. Graham Brown, Earle Gaines, Vince Gill, Raul Malo, BeBe Winans.

Female vocalist: Emmylou Harris, Martina McBride, Tracy Nelson, Jaci Velasquez, Terisa Y earwood.

Group/duo: Diamond Rio, Swan Dive, the Mavericks, the Nashville Chamber Orchestra, the Wilkinsons.

Unsigned artist: Ruby Amanfu, Hillary Lindsey, Rod McGaha, Rebecca Stout, the Billygoats.

Background vocalist: Vicki Carrico, Chris Koenig, Tom Wesley Ryles, the Carol Lee Cooper Singers, Dennis Wilson.

Producer: Peter Collins, Steve Earle and Ray Kennedy, Mark Heimmerman, Paul Worley, David Z.

Engineer: Richard Dodd, Mark Howard, David Leonard, Justin Niebank, Dave Thoener.

Song: "Never Been Unloved" (written by Michael W. Smith and Wayne Kirkpatrick), "Paint By Numbers" (Matt Mahaffey), "Right In Time" (Lucinda Williams), "This Kiss" (Robin Lerner, Annie Roboff, Beth Nielsen Chapman), "Wide-Eyed" (Nicole Nordeman).

Video: "Lullaby" (directed by Roger Pistole), "Postmarked Birmingham" (Robert Deaton and George J. Flanigen), "There's Your Trouble" (Thom Oliphant), "This Kiss" (Stephen Goldmann), "You're Gone" (Peter Zavadil).

Musician awards: Bass: Chris Feinstein, Viktor Krauss, Edgar Meyer, Victor Wooten, Glenn Worf. Percussion: Steve Brewster, Lalo Davila, Greg Morrow, Tommy "Musa" Smith, Roy Wooten. Guitar: Jay Joyce, Buddy Miller, Jack Pearson, Redd Volkaert, Biff Watson.

Miscellaneous stringed instrument: Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Dan Dugmore, Stuart Duncan, Conni Ellisor, Carl Gorodetzky, Fats Kaplan, Anthony Lamarchina, Darrel Scott, Mary Kathryn Vanosdale.

Miscellaneous wind instrument: Jeff Coffin, Jim Hoke, Jim Horn, Bobby Taylor Bobby Taylor, Dennis Taylor. Keyboards: Pat Coil, John Hobbs, John Jarvis, Steve Nathan, Jerome Reed.