

For Immediate Release

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**Beloved song *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* written by
Newfoundland and Labrador's Otto Kelland to be
inducted into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame at the
37th East Coast Music Awards Gala, presented by Rogers in St. John's, May 8**

The Irish Descendants to perform ballad at Gala



Songwriter, author and model shipbuilder Otto Kelland

(St. John's, NL) – One of Newfoundland and Labrador's most beloved songs, ***Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's***, written by native son **Otto Kelland** in 1947, will be inducted into the [Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame](#) (CSHF) at the **37th East Coast Music Awards Gala, presented by Rogers** at the Mary Brown's Centre in St. John's on Thursday, May 8.

Performing the ballad as part of the induction ceremony will be well-known and multi award-winning Newfoundland and Labrador Irish folk group, **The Irish Descendants**, who are celebrating 35 years this year.

"Let Me Fish Off Cape St Mary's is the quintessential NL folk song! It embodies all the elements of this place that we cherish and hold dear," says Con O'Brien, lead singer of The Irish Descendants. "NL is harsh and often unkind, but this song reminds us of and illustrates to the world why we cling on to the land and ocean we inhabit. Of all the songs we have sung there is

none more powerful than what we affectionately call The Cape. And I'm proud to say that Otto Kelland always said that The Irish Descendants version of his song was his favourite."

The Irish Descendants' version was a duet with Con O'Brien and John McDermott and was included on the 1997 Certified Gold, JUNO award-winning recording, *Gypsies and Lovers*.

"A masterwork of Canadian songwriting, *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* so vividly captures the identity, pride, and resilience of Newfoundland and Labrador's outport communities," says Nick Fedor, Executive Director of the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame. "Otto Kelland's deeply poetic lyrics and haunting melody have become part of our national musical fabric, passed down through generations and resonating far beyond the Atlantic coast. We are honoured to celebrate this timeless ballad and Kelland's enduring legacy at the East Coast Music Awards in St. John's, the place that inspired it all."

Tickets for the 37th East Coast Music Awards Gala, presented by Rogers are on sale now at ECMA.com. The Gala will also be live streamed worldwide at ECMA.com.

Songwriter, author and model shipbuilder Otto Kelland, born in 1904 in the small coastal community of Lamaline, Newfoundland and Labrador, was a member of the Order of Newfoundland and the Order of Canada. He was a police officer and became supervisor of a penitentiary. He died in 2004.

"It's heart-warming that this song and his works still mean something to people today," says Kelland's daughter Jocelyn Kelland, who will be present for the Induction Ceremony.

Kelland was inspired to write the lyrics after meeting a very young fisherman on the waterfront. This desperately homesick fisherman related that he had been working off the coast of Boston, but he would rather fish in his own dory off St. Mary's and eat only one meal a day, rather than have three meals a day in a big city.

Kelland therefore wrote his slow-tempo, mournful anthem from the point of view of the outport fisherman, a lifestyle with which Kelland, a Newfoundlander by birth, was very familiar. The poignant lyrics reflect the fisherman's working conditions, where death on the sea is a real danger, while painting Cape St. Mary's as he would have seen it from his dory: fog, seabirds, and the rugged cliffs of the southwest tip of the Avalon Peninsula.

The much-loved lyrics of *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* paint their picture using terms that Newfoundlanders know well, such as Western boat (schooner-type fishing vessel); combers (long, curling waves); caplin (a type of smelt); dory (small fishing boat); a Cape Ann (fisherman's oilskin headgear); and hag-downs (a seabird).

Kelland's songwriting skill is further evident in his choice of a gapped major hexatonic scale (a scale having only six pitches) for his tune, rendering it distinctively Celtic in style. The song is also polished structurally - note the symmetry of six verses of six lines each (there is no chorus). There's great attention to detail where the second line of a verse repeats for emphasis at the end of that verse; and in the repeated notes in the final phrase, which toll slowly and sadly like a death knell.

All in all, it's no wonder Kelland's composition has been adopted across Canada.

Now nationally revered, *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* has thrived. The song's earliest days are shrouded in mystery, but it probably spread locally at kitchen parties and other gatherings in towns and outports where, in the 1940s, electricity, radio and recordings were not often available. As improvements such as electrification and the establishment of CBC Radio arrived in the province's rural areas, more opportunities arose for residents to listen to and learn *Let Me Fish* and other local favourites.

The folk music revival of that period brought great interest in the folk songs of the Atlantic provinces, with researchers "collecting" songs in remote villages such as Cape St. Mary's. Kenneth Peacock, one such researcher, heard *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* from local singers during his 1951 song-collecting field work in Newfoundland. He turned his research over to St. John's businessman Gerald Doyle, who published the song in the 1955 edition of his enormously popular book "Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland."

Although *Let Me Fish* had still not been recorded, it was further spread by two more songbooks which introduced it to audiences outside Newfoundland: firstly, the 1958 songbook "Favourite Songs of Newfoundland" by the influential Canadian folksinger Alan Mills, featuring piano arrangements by Peacock, and secondly, the 1964 volume "The Folksinger's Passport to Canada."

Interest in *Let Me Fish* spread rapidly after Mills's songbook was distributed to schools across the country, but it wasn't until 1962 that the first known recording of *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* was finally made on the LP "Songs of the Anchor Watch," a collection of Kelland's compositions sung by Leonard Meehan on the Citadel label (CTL111).

As the song spread, musicians far and wide recorded their own versions. Among many Newfoundlanders who recorded *Let Me Fish* are Dick Nolan (a 1963 country version); the St. John's CJON glee club; actor Gordon Pinsent (1968); and folk musician Harry Hibbs (1971). Recent covers include those by singer-songwriter Kim Stockwood; jazz singer Heather Bambrick; and Juno nominees Rum Ragged.

Among the earliest "come from away" musicians to record *Let Me Fish* were folk singer Omar Blondahl in 1971, and the RCMP Band. The popular Irish Canadian folk band Ryan's Fancy performed it on their 1977 TV show and later sang it for Queen Elizabeth II; Denis Ryan also recorded a heart-wrenching version with traditional Irish-style ornamentation. Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame inductee Stan Rogers recorded *Let Me Fish* in 1983, and Juno-winning cellist Ofra Harnoy has recorded an instrumental version.

Interestingly, *Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's* became a protest song when the province's economy was overturned by the 1992 cod-fishing moratorium.

About Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame

The Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame (CSHF) is a national and non-profit organization that is dedicated to honouring and celebrating Canadian songwriters and those who've dedicated their lives to the legacy of music. The CSHF also works to educate the public about these achievements, and to foster the next generation of songwriters through year-round initiatives and events. In December of 2011, SOCAN (the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada) acquired the CSHF; and the Hall of Fame continues to be run as a separate organization, guided by its own Board of Directors, comprised of both Anglophone and Francophone music creators and publishers, as well as representation from the record industry. The CSHF's mandate aligns with SOCAN's objectives as a songwriter and publisher

membership-based organization. For more information about the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame, visit: cshf.ca.

About The Irish Descendants

Celebrating 35 years this year, The Irish Descendants are Con O'Brien on lead vocals and guitar, Rowan Sherlock on mandolin, fiddle, piano and vocals, Jeff Kinsman on bass and vocals, and Madeline Carter on fiddle and vocals. From the rocky coastal outposts of the Island of Newfoundland, The Irish Descendants have carved a prestigious reputation over the years guided by the leadership of Con O'Brien. They have toured throughout North America and beyond, sharing the music of their ancestral Irish home and that of their beloved Newfoundland and Labrador. With impeccable musicianship and vocal prowess, combined with amazing stories and wit, the group continually deliver vivid memories of who they are and where they come from to satisfied audiences wherever they hit a stage. The band's discography includes 14 studio recordings, with two certified Canadian Gold Albums, a JUNO Award along, three East Coast Music Awards and they are currently nominated for a 2025 ECMA for *Album of The Year*. For more information on The Irish Descendants, visit: theirishdescendants.com

About ECMA

The East Coast Music Association (ECMA) is a regional collaboration of people in the music industry of Atlantic Canada that fosters, develops, and celebrates East Coast music and its artists locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. The ECMA annually produces the ECMAs, one of the top music industry events in Canada, which includes an Award Show, a Festival, an Industry Conference, and the Accelerator Program.

For more information on the 2025 East Coast Music Awards, Festival, and Conference, taking place May 7-11 in St. John's, visit: ECMA.com.

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