

Traditional Irish band Altan to perform April 3 at UCSD

March 11, 1998

Media Contact: Ruth Baily at University Events, 534-0497, rbaily@ucsd.edu or

Jan Jennings, 822-1684, jnjennings@ucsd.edu

TRADITIONAL IRISH BAND ALTAN TO PERFORM APRIL 3 AT UCSD

Altan, praised by the Wall Street Journal as "one of the preeminent Irish bands in the world today," will perform at 8 p.m. April 3 in Mandeville Auditorium at the University of California, San Diego.

The Journal calls Altan's musical performances "traditional, undiluted and uncompromised" and its Virgin Records debut album, Blackwater, "the Irish musical tradition at its unadulterated best, spurred by dazzling instrumental playing, memorable singing and deft arrangements."

Quintet members are Mairdad NI Mhaonaigh, playing the fiddle and singing in her native Gaelic and in English; Dermot Byrne, button accordion and melodeon; Ciarn Tourish, fiddle and tin whistle; Daithi Sproule, guitar and vocals, and Ciaran Curran, bouzouki and bouzoukiguitar.

Lead vocalist Mhaonaigh says the one thing the band has always tried to avoid is imitating any other band or sound. "The reason we would never play another type of music is we don't know it and we don't come from that background," says Mhaonaigh. "I think bands can quickly lose their way when they veer off from what they do best."

Altan's repertoire comes from County Donegal in the Northwest corner of Ireland, an area with a long history of exchanging labor and music with Scotland. The result is a distinctive style combining the melodic quality of Irish tunes with the power and drive of Scottish music.

Altan's name comes from Loch Altan, a lake near Gweedore in northwest Donegal, the birthplace of lead singer Mhaonaigh. Her father is a leading figure in preserving and promoting the Donegal fiddle music that Altan is popularizing around the world. The group has been featured at major festivals and concert tours throughout Europe, Canada and the United States.

The New Yorker calls the award-winning band a "superstar that has set new standards for Irish music." Its awards include being named Best Traditional Act at Ireland's National Entertainment Awards; Best Traditional or Folk Act in a poll by Hot Press magazine, the Irish equivalent of Rolling Stone, and Band of the Year by London's Q magazine.

The last three albums Altan made for the independent Green Linnet label, The Red Crow, Harvest Storm and Island Angelwere each picked as the Celtic/British Isles Album of the Year by the National Association of Independent Record Distributors and Manufacturers. No Gaelic band in the association's 24-year history has won more awards.

Altan's latest album, *Blackwater*, includes jigs, reels, hornpipes and strathspey and songs sung in Irish and in English by Mhaonaigh. Writes *Billboard*: "On this outstanding work fiddler/vocalist Mairad NI Mhaonaigh takes center stage" and calls the album "a step forward for a deserving band."

"*Blackwater* is very much in line with earlier Altan albums, alternating instrumental numbers with songs featuring the ethereal voice of NI Mhaonaigh," writes the *Los Angeles Times*. "The focus remains absolutely on the Donegal roots."

Altan's April 3 performance is sponsored by the UCSD University Events Office. Tickets are \$18 general admission, \$16 for faculty, staff and senior citizens, and \$14 for students. Tickets are available at the UCSD Box Office, 534-8497, and at Ticketmaster outlets. For further information, call the UCSD University Events Office at 534-4090.

(March 11, 1998)