

Benedict Flynn
TALES OF IRISH MYTHS

Read by **Dermot Kerrigan and Marcella Riordan**

JUNIOR
CLASSICS



The Tale of Cú Chulainn

1	The birth of Cú Chulainn	8:11
2	Cú Chulainn gets his name	4:56
3	Cú Chulainn takes up arms	3:55
4	The wooing of Emer	5:42
5	Forgall gets desperate	7:29
6	The island of Scáthach	6:06
7	The return of Cú Chulainn	5:38

The Children of Lir

8	The sea god Lir	6:14
9	'The wife of Lir is dead'	5:00
10	Aoife went into the cold house of Lir	4:35
11	Aoife drives to the shores of Lough Derryvaragh	5:35
12	Lir sees four swans at Lough Derryvaragh	5:32
13	The Sea of Moyle, The Western Sea	2:51
14	The Island of Inis Glora	7:33

The Tale of Finn Mac Cool

15	The birth of Finn Mac Cool	5:21
16	Demna grew up straight and tall...	3:00
17	Finn leaves his foster mothers	7:29
18	Finnegas and the salmon of knowledge	3:16
19	How Finn won his father's place in the Fianna	10:34
20	Finn and the Fianna	2:03
21	The Curse of the Quicken Trees	11:23
22	On the hilltop...	3:27
23	The birth of Oisín	11:04
24	Niamh of the Golden Hair	4:11
25	The return of Oisín	11:11

Total time: 2:32:16

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TALES OF IRISH MYTHS

Storytelling has always been at the heart of Irish culture. The *seannachie* or professional storyteller of today is the descendant of the *filidh*, a class of storytellers in ancient Celtic society who were a cross between poet and priest. The *filidh* had a vital role. They were entrusted with the history and wisdom of their people, contained in tales and legends. Before the spread of Christianity and writing, this learning was passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Each *filidh* had to be able to recite from memory three hundred and fifty tales. They had to cover a whole variety of subjects including battles, adventure journeys, cattle raids, visions, and stories of the wooing of wives. Over the course of time these different tales became woven together and added to by storytellers until they developed into the cycles of stories we know today.

The earliest Irish legends are about the *tuatha dé Danaan* – the people of the goddess Danu, who arrived in Ireland far back in prehistoric times. They had the power of gods when they came, but with

time their magic weakened until they were defeated by an invading race of mortals called Milesians. After this the gods retreated to their *sidhe*, or fairy forts, and, making themselves invisible, left Ireland pretty much to be ruled by mortals. This is the situation at the beginning of the *Children of Lir*, whose tragedy is to drift as swans between the two worlds, neither fairy nor mortal.

To mortal eyes the fairy forts looked like grassy mounds, or the ruins of ancient fortresses, but within, the gods lived lives of ease and luxury. Sickness and pain were unknown to them, or old age. The gods did not stay in their palaces however. When the mood took them they ventured out to meddle in the affairs of mortals especially at the time of the winter festival of *samhain*. And this is where many of the stories begin.

The stories of *Cú Chulainn* are different. The gods are not as important as the heroes. They revel in the goriest fighting and most amazing feats of bravery through their own efforts, not magic powers. Even so, the line between the gods and men is

not clear: Cú Chulainn is the son of a god, Lugh, even though he is a mortal.

The Ulster cycle, the name of the collection of stories about Cú Chulainn, are what is known as Epics. They belong next to the *Tales from the Greek Legends* or *The Adventures of Odysseus*.

The tales about *Finn Mac Cool* belong to a different world again from the stories of *Cú Chulainn*. The ancient gods shimmer in the background, but now they are truly Fairy people and very little of the divine remains in them. The epic hero still fights at the river ford in the *Palace of the Quicken Trees*, but only as part of the tale, not the point of it.

Finn and the Fianna belong to a later date, and the stories about them are more

like the tales of *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*. The epics of *Cú Chulainn* have become the Folklore of *Finn Mac Cool*.

But just the same, in his turn, Finn's time defending the shores of Erin from invaders comes to an end. The tolling of the Christian bell that calls to Oisín when he returns from Tir-na-nÓg, the land of eternal youth, brings those tales to a close, and a new era of fairy tales and little people begins. But those, as any good storyteller would say, are stories for another day.

Notes by Benedict Flynn



Dermot Kerrigan trained at LAMDA and has since appeared in much Shakespearean theatre including *Richard II* at the Royal Exchange, Manchester and *Romeo and Juliet* with the RSC. He has also appeared in modern plays at The Royal Court and toured extensively with Shared Experience. He also reads *Classic Chilling Tales*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The New Testament* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Marcella Riordan began her career at The Abbey School in Dublin and has worked in theatres all over Ireland and the UK, including Druid Theatre and Lyric (Belfast). She has worked extensively on BBC Radio and RTE in Dublin. Her previous work on James Joyce texts includes playing Gerty McDowell in Anthony Burgess's *Blooms in Dublin* (BBC/RTE), Zoe in *Ulysses* (RTE) and Molly Bloom for Naxos AudioBooks' recording of *Ulysses*. She was awarded Best Actress for her portrayal of Nancy Gulliver in a BBC Radio adaptation of Jennifer Johnston's *The Old Jest*.

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The Children of Lir

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Benedict Flynn

TALES OF IRISH MYTHS

The Tale of Cú Chulainn • The Children of Lir
The Tale of Finn Mac Cool

Read by **Dermot Kerrigan and Marcella Riordan**

It is a mysterious world that this selection of stories from the treasure house of Irish myths and legends describes. Here the line between the fantastical and the real is blurred: mortals and immortals live strange entwined lives; nature and high magic exist side by side. It is Ireland under its old name, Erin, a country of ancient gods with fading powers, who dwell invisible in fairy mound palaces, waiting for a chance to meddle in the affairs of men.

In the *Children of Lir*, Erin is a land of harsh enchantment and tragedy – even for a sea god, whose innocent children are so cruelly cursed by their foster mother. In the epic tales of *Cú Chulainn*, it is a proud realm of valiant heroes and near-impossible quests for love. In the stories of *Finn Mac Cool* Erin is a kingdom of glory where Finn leads his band of warriors, the Fianna, through their perilous adventures in defence of Erin's shores, to a place in Irish legend forever.

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