

A black and white photograph of an elderly man, John Doherty, wearing a dark flat cap and a dark jacket over a white shirt. He is shown in profile, playing a violin. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape. The text 'Irish Traveller Musicians' is printed in the upper right corner of the image.

Irish
Traveller
Musicians

John Doherty (1900 –1980)

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Last of The Great Travelling Fiddlers

John Doherty was born in County Donegal and came from a famous family of Irish Travellers who worked as tinsmiths and travelling musicians. He was heir to a musical legacy extending back at least to the 18th Century, and which included his great-grandfather, Hugh Doherty.

He played with boundless ornamentation, including bowed and slurred triplets, rolls, cuts and double-stopping. Heavily influenced by the uilleann piping tradition, he often replicated the sound of the pipes' drones, by either retuning the fiddle to an open tuning, or by maintaining the fourth finger on the string below the pitch of the melody.

From the 1940s to the 1970s, John Doherty was sought out by national and international music collectors including The Irish Folklore Commission and the BBC. His music has appeared on over 12 albums.

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Cearta Sóisialta do Dheoraithe

Photograph courtesy of The Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA)

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