

# Golden Discs Now Available in U.S.

## FROM THE HOB

Paul Keating



It is a time-honored rite of our youth remembering our first purchase of a music recording. Browsing through record stores and holding an album in your hands with dreams of acquiring it and bringing it home to play over and over and make a connection with the artists who have helped shape who we are.

For many people who were reared in Ireland or visited from the U.S., that experience may well have taken place in a Golden Discs shop somewhere around the Emerald Isle offering the widest array of popular styles to satisfy a music-mad nation.

Golden Discs, named for the symbolic golden record sales achievement of 500,000 units, was founded in 1962 by Jack Fitzgerald and Tom Rogers after establishing the TARA record label (Trans-Atlantic Record Agency) in Ireland which would eventually release a number of historic Irish recordings in its own right.

Fitzgerald had spent time in Chicago and upon his return to Ireland saw a huge demand for vinyl long-playing records from the U.S. and British market in Ireland. His instincts were spot on as the Golden Discs operation at its peak included 36 stores and a customer base of more than 40 countries as Ireland's oldest music retail chain and through its [www.goldendiscs.ie](http://www.goldendiscs.ie) website.

The chain has recently launched a new website designed to service the North American marketplace, establishing a [www.goldendiscs.com](http://www.goldendiscs.com) operation just in time for the Christmas shopping season.

It may seem counter to the trend we



Stephen Fitzgerald, executive director of Golden Discs.

have been seeing about a family-owned operation trying to survive, much less launching a new initiative in an industry where music recording is challenged constantly by technology or big box retail. Golden Discs has survived economic downturns, mega-store operations like HMV, Virgin and Tower Records, digital file transfers like Apple and the latest worldwide monster Amazon, and still maintains 22 outlets in Ireland.

Current managing director Stephen Fitzgerald, 46, who took over running the company in 2008, said they considered a store in New York at one time but pulled back.

Still, the number of inquiries by phone and email suggested enough interest to try an online overture which only had to be tweaked to handle a pared down catalog that would still be of huge appeal to either immigrants

with first-hand knowledge and affinity for the Golden Discs brand, or Irish Americans anxious to get their hands on Irish exports of well-known and iconic artists. The dot com site was meant to be a stand-alone carrying contemporary, popular, modern and older folk or trad.

In this task technology can be a friendly asset making fulfillment of orders more efficient within 24 hours and processed through the postal services of Ireland, the U.S. or Canada at a reasonable shipping cost.

While the Irish site can offer 15,000 items including a number of children's DVDs, the U.S. version focuses on music recordings old and new across a broad range of genres in CD and the ever-more popular vinyl format appealing to oldsters, millennials and even teenagers who view everything old as new again.

Says Fitzgerald, "Vinyl or CD sales still have a value for a number of consumers who want to go beyond the convenience of digital files with a better listening experience with a product they can hold in their hands with the artwork and sleeve notes and something they can put on their shelves along with the books they love. It speaks to you and your musical tastes and who you are."

The online catalog may not be exhaustive but it is fairly extensive, and one recording that caught my eye which is indicative of a lot of what you can find at [www.goldendiscs.com](http://www.goldendiscs.com) is a new collection of Christy Moore songs from his earliest years compiled in a multiple set package.

The site it is well worth sampling for many other artists also who have dominated the Irish soundscape for decades and continue to do so home and abroad.

## Irish Arts Center's Online Gala

IT is one of the more glamorous galas in the annual Irish social scene around New York in the fall when the Irish Arts Center organizes a highly lucrative and impressive gathering of artists and well-heeled supporters of that once humble cultural enclave in Hell's Kitchen on West 51st Street.

For more than a decade the annual gala has raised millions on its own in conjunction with a astounding \$60 million campaign that will soon see the Irish Arts Center move around the corner for its main operations in a spanking new state of the art facility on 11th Avenue in the equally revitalized neighborhood now more commonly known as Clinton.

The pandemic once again has altered the circumstances for such gatherings publicly, and the intrepid Irish Arts Center folks will turn to the world wide web for a special evening on Thursday, December 10 that will for the first time be open to the general public.

It is always such a star-studded affair both for honorees and attendees in places like the New York Athletic Club for years and lately at the fashionable Cipriani 42nd Street, but this year the star-power will shine virtually.

The one-night-only affair is called "Together Until We Gather: A Virtual Spirit of Ireland Gala" which thanks to the web will be viewable around the world

and herald in a new bright and highly anticipated future in its new space later in 2021. The pandemic shut down operations for a full three months earlier this year but work quickly picked up again and the final stages are very close at hand.

Slated to appear or perform this year are Joanie Madden and Cherish the Ladies, Elvis Costello (last year's guest of honor), Irish singer Loah, Arturo O'Farrill, Declan O'Rourke, Camille O'Sullivan and Sting, all of whom have been long-time supporters of the center or have appeared there.

From the literary and acting orbit are Gabriel Byrne, Roma Downey, Paul Muldoon, Colum McCann, Liam Neeson and a few other surprise guests, and the guest of honor with be the former TD Ameritrade CEO Joe Moglia. There will be a Zoom VIP reception kicking off at 6:30 p.m. that evening with the virtual show starting at 7 p.m. More details about participating as a sponsor or contributor can be obtained through [www.irishartscenter.org](http://www.irishartscenter.org) in advance.

Needless to say, whatever funds are raised will be put to immediate good use in continuing an active online presence for the center's programming which has been inventive and eclectic as usual all these months since last March. They even managed to host three online terms for the multidisciplinary classes which



Elvis Costello.

have reached students from as many as 28 states.

And to prove there is a silver lining in even the darkest clouds, the Irish Arts Center commissioned 26 artists with wide-ranging perspectives and disciplines in what they call the "Grásta" project "to create short works that respond to the idea of finding grace in uncertainty, to find meaning in the chaos, and perhaps even some redemption, as we recognize the fear and sadness we feel." The results will be unveiled in future programming beginning this season into next.