

# Sean Nós

The Term sean nós is used to describe unaccompanied solo singing, usually in the Irish language in which the words and the music are of equal importance.

Sean nós is a singing style developed over the centuries in Irish speaking Ireland and Gaelic speaking Scotland. It has been passed on from generation to generation. The style is deeply rooted in the rhythms of the Gaelic language and in the metres and rhythms of Gaelic poetry.

Songs are sung with free rhythm, the singer speeds up or slows down to suit the words which may sometimes sound distorted. Dynamics are not used. The singer ornaments the tune to convey emotion. No two performances of a song by the same singer will be identical.

Melodic ornamentation used may be melismatic, where a note is replaced by a group of adjacent notes, or intervallic, where additional notes are used to fill intervals between notes in the tune. Rhythmic variation also is common where the notes may be lengthened or shortened. Sean nós singing tends to have a nasal tone quality. Glottal stopping is used which interrupts the flow of air through the wind pipe. Extra meaningless syllables are sometimes added to words and some singers slow down at the end while others speak the final line of the song.

There are three regions associated with sean nós singings; Munster, Donegal and Connemara. These are all Gaeltacht areas and each has its own distinctive spoken dialect and sean nós style. In Donegal ornamentation is not used very often and it has a very regular rhythm. Salí Gallagher is a performer of the Donegal sean nós style. In Connemara a lot of ornamentation is used and it is very florid. The songs also tend to have a narrower range. Seosamh Ó hÉanaí is a sean nós singer in Connemara. The range tends to be much wider in Munster and many use vibrato so it is most similar to classical singing.