

NO DEPRESSION

The Roots Music Authority
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Bua: Now, it's widely known that Celtic music and Americana can never mix. But I'm going out on a limb here to add the Irish trad band Bua to my list of highlights for No Depression. You can't understand what Americana means if you don't understand how Irish music influenced America, and nowhere was this influence more powerful than in Chicago. The key character at the center of this influence was **Chief Francis O'Neill**, Chicago's chief of police at the turn of the century. A former sailor and world traveler, O'Neill kept his ties to Ireland strong by recruiting his police officers from the ranks of unemployed Irish immigrant musicians.

Word was that you if you wanted a job on the force, you had to go into O'Neill's office to play some tunes with him before you were considered for the job. O'Neill was also a tireless collector and transcriber of traditional Irish music, pulling from his sources on the force to track down and write up new tunes. He published a number of seminal tune books that continue to influence musicians both in American and back in Ireland (and now across the world). And outside of his work with Irish musicians, he also cleaned up Chicago's rampant corruption and graft and became quite the folk hero. Bua draw from the rough-and-tumble world of American Irish music. Tunes played in smoky dancehalls rather than fancy concert halls, tunes taken from dusty books rather than YouTube videos, a world largely forgotten in today's overly polished Irish music world where the high-gloss of mega-tours like Celtic Women have largely blinded the public to the power of Irish trad. Lead singer Brian Hart has a soft, beautiful voice with a slight American accent that grounds the music on our continent. He's studied the old style of singing in Ireland's remote Connemara region, and sings in Irish Gaelic as well as English. He also brings Irish sean-nos dance to the band. Sean-nos dancing is a rare tradition that's quite removed from the prancy-prancing Irish stepdancing most people recognize in Riverdance. It's closer to the floor and closely matches the rhythms of the tunes. Along with fiddle, flute and guitar, Bua have enough twang to represent the Celtic side of Americana, but keep their ties to the Old World strong.

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