

# Matt & Shannon Heaton: biography

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Guitarist/singer Matt Heaton and Irish flute player/singer Shannon Heaton have been making music together since their first meeting in 1992. They met in Chicago via romance, albeit someone else's, when Shannon needed a guitar player to play for a wedding gig that never ended up happening. Despite the loss of the gig, Matt & Shannon gained a musical—and eventually romantic—partnership.

Together, they built up their traditional Irish music skills on Irish flute and guitar in the Chicago sessions (learning from John Williams, Liz Carroll, Brendan McKinney, Denis Cahill, and Kevin Henry). When they began bringing in singing, they focused on their favorite aspects of both Irish and American traditions, ending up with new songs that sound traditional, alongside centuries-old ballads with fresh new melodies.

For years, the two worked as active side players for several Celtic music luminaries, including Robbie O'Connell, Aoife Clancy, Boys of the Lough, Emily Smith, Eamonn Coyne, and Halali. And during a three-year “sabbatical” in Boulder, CO, Matt and Shannon formed the band Siucra with Colorado singer Beth Leachman and later, Vermont fiddler Sam Amidon, putting out three acclaimed recordings.

In 2003, the Heaton's began focusing their creative energies on their duo, coming up with ways to create a full and varied sound with just two people. They put out their first duo album, “dearga” in Oct 2003. It was a mix of traditional tunes and original compositions, with three vocal numbers. Dirty Linen called it “ a fine mix of reels and jigs with a dynamic rhythmic tension, and an infectious spirit and vitality that translates into bright, uplifting music that will make you smile.”

Scott Alarik of The Boston Globe called "Blue Skies Above", the Heaton's' March 2006 release, “masterful and inventive, their arrangements city-smart and spacious.” This, their second CD, contained more singing and tackled a wide range of subjects: lovers lost at sea, a conversation with death, the summer harvest in Nebraska, a twentieth century disaster, and learning to ride a bicycle. The CD's title comes from Shannon's self-penned last verse of the traditional song “The Blackbird”, highlighting the Heaton's' style of merging traditional and original lyrics and melodies.

Their third duo release “Fine Winter's Night” (Nov 2007) is not your run-of-the-mill Christmas release. Matt and Shannon present a banquet of songs dating from the 12th to the 21st century, their convivial blend of voices — supplemented by ever-tasteful and adept accompaniment on guitar, bouzouki and Irish flutes — gives "Fine Winter's Night" a sound that is simultaneously homegrown, refined and timeless. The music on “Fine Winter's Night” ranges across a spectrum of moods and emotions much like the holiday season itself: a mix of poignancy, jubilation and reflection.

Matt and Shannon Heaton make traditional music relevant to American audiences. They embrace

the solid Irish roots in their music, play the heck out of their instruments, and aren't afraid to step out and sing from their American musical and social experiences. "We're out to get everything we can out of two musicians. The more we put into it, the more we get out of it--and so, we think, do our audiences."