

The Edge

reflection questions & episode transcript

In a typical year, Corrymeela’s meeting rooms — and dining and welcome areas — are filled with people discussing matters of politics, history and religion that have separated them. During this time of Covid, we are providing you with a transcript of each podcast episode, along with some discussion questions, to aid your consideration of the themes which emerge. You may wish to discuss these questions with friends, family, a group you establish on zoom, or use them for your own writing and consideration.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you’re gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness within the group. It might help to choose one of the [Very Short Story Questions](#). As with any group process, if you are talking about this episode with others, make sure to check that people feel safe enough, that the time is right for them, and make it easy for anyone who wishes to keep their considerations to themselves, or for anyone who doesn’t wish to join such a conversation.

1. Commenting on his own religious expression, Edge says that he finds “someone who is asking the right questions”. When it comes to your own curiosities about religion — or politics, or history — who do you think is asking the right questions? What is it about their questions that appeals to you?
2. Speaking about friendships and working relationships that have lasted over 40 years, Edge praises the power of compromise, saying it involves grace, wisdom, empathy and appreciation. What has been your experience of compromise? What has it offered you? Do you find yourself enthusiastic, or cautious when it comes to compromise in places of work, religion and politics? What might be some of the reasons for that?
3. Towards the end of the conversation, Edge says “Culturally, I’m Irish”. So many of us are multi-national in the belongings of our lives: political belongings, cultural belongings and so on. Do you have plural belongings? What are some of them? What’s your imagination of having only one place of political and cultural belonging? And if you have only one, how might you imagine the experience of having more than one?

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The Corrymeela Podcast. Interview with The Edge. Transcript.

Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama. In this first year of Brexit, and a century after the partition of Ireland, I'm in conversation with special guests, exploring contemporary Irishness and Britishness through the lenses of history, politics, art and theology.

This week I'm delighted that my guest is the world-renowned guitarist The Edge from the world-renowned band, U2. He was born David Evans to Welsh parents and grew up in Dublin, before finding global fame with the band he co-formed.

He talks to me about music and national identity and faith and art as resistance, dealing with criticism and his personal interest in reconciliation.

"In ways you might say I was somewhat inoculated against faith by my early church experiences..."

"...identity and belonging were things that I constantly had to deal with and try and navigate myself..."

"...if you get into the minutiae of politics in music, you're immediately - for some people - you're crossing a line..."

"...you can't ignore everything 'cause there is actually valid criticisms within the things that have been written about us. And personally, I want to know..."

"...I'd love to fully understand what it's like to be of a nationalist persuasion and really - like not just present day - but generations of nationalists, or conversely, generations of loyalists..."

"...we always talk about the collective ego of U2- that we have allowed our individual egos to be subsumed into the band ego".

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Hello. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is the multiple-award winning lead guitarist of U2, The Edge. Edge, thanks very much for joining us.

The Edge:

It's great to be on this, Pádraig. Always a pleasure.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Where are you talking to us from today, Edge?

The Edge:

I am currently in California, in a house (little house) in Malibu that myself and my wife bought 20 years ago. It's, you know, a very nice little place, but it's not an enormous house. But I love it. I love its kind of closeness and it's a... it's a simple house.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Lovely. Did you ever think you'd be spending as much time in that one house as you have in the last year?

The Edge:

It's been a bit of a revelation for me, because the last five years we've been travelling so much; the lockdown was enforced, obviously, on us all. But I wasn't- I didn't think I would enjoy it as much as I have. And I keep finding people who have actually enjoyed the lockdown. I mean, part of it was luck in our case: we weren't supposed to be touring, we weren't supposed to be making videos or involved in any group activity. If anything, this was a phase for our band where we were supposed to be writing songs and working on future projects and that's exactly what I've been doing. So I know I'm maybe unique or fairly unique in that regard - it didn't spoil any plans - but just the travel; just not travelling so much and being grounded in one or two locations - I've spent quite a lot of time obviously in Dublin as well - but it's been... there's something good for the soul about being in one place for a long time.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

There is indeed. I haven't been in the same place for this length of time for 20 years. We met a few years ago and the first thing you said to me was that you had an interest in reconciliation, so you were keen to talk about Corrymeela. And then you mentioned that you have Welsh parents (Welsh Presbyterian parents) and that that had given you a particular experience of Irishness and Britishness and Presbyterianism, and that's where the conversation started. So I'd love to start there again, because I've thought about how curious that is. Is it true that you had a Welsh accent at home and an Irish accent for your friends? When you were younger?

The Edge:

I did. Um, not that I was necessarily aware of it, but my parents would tell me about it, certainly when I was a bit older, and I do remember being teased by my Irish friends about certain vowel sounds that were clearly different. And it became a sort of unconscious thing, to sound like my friends and to belong- to feel part of the gang. So, to this day, I have a very strange kind of accent that's hard to pin down. I mean, if... I couldn't even begin to describe it myself. People think it's very Irish, but it's not typically Irish. But nor is it... there's no hint of Welsh in it either. My father had spent a lot of time in London as a child. So he actually didn't have a strong Welsh accent, but my mother did. So I'm just a crazy mixed up kid really in that regard.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

People think my mother's Welsh but that's not because she has a mild accent, it's because she's from Cork *and she talks like this*, so they hear the sing-song and think that she's Welsh.

The Edge:

It's funny- the Welsh, the Cork and the Jamaican accents have certain sing-song characteristics which is interesting.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Do you think that the attunement to accent that you had clearly somewhere in your unconscious - you were hearing an accent at home and then hearing an accent with friends and modifying and being influenced with that - d'you think that led to music or was partly 'cause you were intuitively musical anyway? Because it is a listening to music that is an accent.

The Edge:

Yeah. Certainly music was something- music and rhythm were two things that I was fascinated with from a very young age. And I do remember playing biscuit tins to the music on the TV test card. That's how interested I was. I mean, it wasn't that that music was particularly interesting, but I loved the sensation of playing along and creating rhythms in time with the music that was on the test card. That was at a very young age, that's probably you know, three years old, four years old. And I think hearing, listening, for sure, was something that I did intently from a young age. And I was- I used to mimic accents, I was fascinated with them. I would - as a young kid - I would amuse my parents and my siblings by doing Australian accents or American accents, London accents... I was very interested in how different they all were. And Dublin accents- I mean, if you've spent time in Dublin, district by district, the accents are so varied and fascinatingly so, and one word... Like the word orange, you know, depending on what part of the city you might have somebody going 'orange' or '*orange*'; I mean such a wide variety of pronunciations of such a simple word: that always fascinated me.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

In preparation for this, I looked up the current information about the Welsh Presbyterians and there aren't that many of them. It was known as the Calvinistic Methodist Church as well. And it has 20,000 members. I had never known that there were Presbyterians in Wales, but they sound like an extraordinary history. But that must have been a strange dislocation, 'cause Irish Presbyterianism is very different to that. What was... where did your family find some kind of congregational connection once you moved to Dublin?

The Edge:

Well, I think it was a little bit of a compromise. I think my mother was brought up Baptist and my dad was Presbyterian, but there was no Baptist church within a five mile radius. So they opted to join the Presbyterian congregation. And you're absolutely right- there was a marked difference. I noticed it myself as a kid 'cause if we went back to Wales, as we did occasionally, we went to my father's church- the one he went to when he was a kid. The difference was... the degree of - I would say - joy and engagement; the music itself was so inspiring, when you went to Welsh chapel. In Dublin, it was a much drier experience and I didn't really take to it, to be honest. I know that the church went through different phases- I think latterly, it became much more joyful and less dry but I found it not that inspiring, and in fact, it didn't stimulate any interest. I didn't develop a faith really, through church. In ways you might say I was somewhat inoculated against faith by my early church experiences. I thought I knew what it was about and I just didn't click with it.

I think I probably also was aware of a sort of mild sectarianism that was going on, because when you're a kid growing up, you're just interested in social opportunities- you're interested in who're the cool kids on the street, so I was totally blind to the sectarian issues socially- never was an issue at all. But when I would go to our church services, I could tell that it was like a small little group - a little ghetto in some ways - and everyone seemed to be the same. The same mentality, same way of dressing, similar attitudes. And it didn't really attract me; I must say I found other people much more fun and much more full of life and it seemed to have somewhat ossified, the whole sort of scene. And so yeah, it was a funny experience to find your place growing up... identity and belonging were things that I constantly had to deal with. And try and navigate myself- to try and find the answers to who I was, and how I could connect with this place that I was living in.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What seems to be so interesting is that, from an early age you, rather than looking for those things in a national identity (not to say you didn't have national identities- you've got a few) or in a religious identity, you seem in other interviews to speak about music as this thing that converted you to an imagination. I have a friend who grew up in Sudanese refugee camps. He was one of the Lost Boys of Sudan and he was marched - I don't know how many hundreds of miles it was - when he was 11. And he lived from the age of 11 'til about 22 or 23, in all kinds of refugee camps back and forth across the Sudanese border with other places. And each one of them would be taken over by militias. And I was interviewing for a thing and he said that he started to go to church in those camps. And I said: 'what was it about religion that interested you?' And he said it wasn't religion, it was music. In fact - like, he speaks a bunch of languages - and he deliberately did this beautiful thing where he said: it was 'the *musics*' that influenced him. There was something about music that gave him a deep sense of belonging and identity. When I hear his story, I think of your story too: the way that music seems to have been a language in which you became fluent early, and have never stopped speaking.

The Edge:

Hmm, I think that's true. And I think for me also, the music to be found in churches could be unbelievably powerful and affecting and told much more eloquently of the faith of the parishioners than anything else. And it seemed... there was on the one hand this celebratory, exaltive expression of faith, and then in this other context a kind of much more dour and joyless expression. And I just couldn't connect with one but the other was fascinating. And again, the entry point - yes, you're right - was the music and the singing. And I actually remember Bono sharing with me a story of when he was probably about 15, was on a holiday in Wales and went on one Sunday morning to chapel and was swept away by the music, by the singing. And he joined in with gusto. And he remembers one of the first affirmations of him as a singer occurred right there and then, when people in the row ahead of him turned around and like gave him the big thumbs up as he was letting rip! But... the music for me was key, definitely key.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

The American poet Audre Lorde said: 'poetry is not a luxury'. I think you can say the same thing about music. You know, music isn't just an entertainment that you do in the evening times or just to have something enjoyable, but it seems to be something primal in us. What is the necessity of music in you, and obviously you've made an entire career - successful career - as a musician: what is it that you know about the necessity of music in populations of people?

The Edge:

I agree that it is somehow hardwired in a way that language is not. So all I can say is, in my life absolutely, it's been a way for me to receive and to share deep deep emotions that I couldn't convey in any other form. I think they say music as a form is - you know - other artists are jealous of how powerful music can be (if you're a visual artist or sculptor or in any other art form) and I get that, because it does have that ability to communicate deep deep emotion. And I think it's probably - from an anthropological point of view - it probably predates language. And it does seem to trigger parts of the brain that are beyond the rational frontal lobe - that sort of conscious brain - [it] seems to go into the subconscious; it seems to stimulate a different part of the brain. And I think that [there] has been studies done on it on that basis, that it does light up other areas.

So I'm still just kind of discovering, you know, I feel like there's no end to what you can learn and discover about it. But it does seem to be a form that will reveal the musician and the singer, it reveals them in their expression. And so, you know, the deep sort of emotional pain of a people's experience is evident in their music, the joy - also the celebratory defiance - is evident in their music. And so it's no- I don't think it's an accident that some of the most evocative, powerful music comes from, for instance, African Americans, who've been through these generational struggles, and their music (and particularly their gospel music) is so powerful, because the message of the gospel and the message of the Bible, if you have grown up in an African American family, is so much more vital. And you know the story of the Exodus [and] the words of Christ means so much more. And I think that kind of comes through in their music.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

When I was 15 or 16, I remember witnessing kind of a cross-border argument about you. There was Baptists from Belfast and Baptists from Cork, arguing about whether The Edge was a proper Christian or not. I was their Catholic friend who they were hoping to convert so I knew that according to them, I was probably on the way to hell. And they didn't know I was gay (I knew I was gay) and my guess is, had they known that they might have sent me to hell quicker! I know that the question of religion has been present in so much of your work: there's texts quoted in inlay cards for albums; there's references to religion (sometimes endorsing it, sometimes critiquing it) throughout your work. These days, what questions or what curiosities are you bringing to the question of religion and public life, in your own life as well as in your art?

The Edge:

Well, I think that I long ago had to accept that religion was flawed; that whenever people try to explain the inexplicable, express the inexpressible in some kind of rules-based, formal way, it's always going to have shortcomings. And so once you accept that there is no perfect religious persuasion, there's no perfect theology, there's no perfect expression of these ideas, then I think, you can start to just look upon it as: well, what's the best, what's the most appropriate? And I think it comes down to the people. So for me, I am completely agnostic when it comes to the question of what is the best form of religion and faith. I find great wisdom and great insight in all forms of Christianity, in Judaism, in Buddhism. And I think that the pursuit seems to be (so far in my experience) similar - and about the Muslim faith as well, by the way - the similar attempt to reach out to something beyond us: a greater, a higher power, something of the Divine.

So you know, I'm just open and it tends to be for me you know- I find somebody who I believe is asking the right questions and has wisdom to offer and I'll happily take counsel and take a blessing from somebody from any religious persuasion if I believe they have that gift to give me. So that's kind of my current situation, and so I've been outside organised religion for years but still consider myself to be a seeker. I consider myself to be a Christian, but I also would have to point out that Jesus was Jewish, so maybe I should be able to claim to be of that persuasion as well. You know, there's so much overlap, I think it sort of becomes ridiculous to have to stick within one way of thinking and seeing the scriptures and not allow yourself to gain insight from all sources.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah, I was looking at some of your recent work *Songs Of Experience*- a line from Blake. And in Blake's work, *Songs Of Innocence and Experience*, he is speaking about redemption, but also religious hypocrisy and social reform. And the

more I was reading Blake's *Songs Of Innocence and Experience*, the more I understood that that was a title that was particularly appropriate for the kind of work that seems to interest you: with critique, as well as with a certain hope for hopefulness that there might be a story that can help us, but that we can't be naive about the fact that that religious story has also been destructive at times.

The Edge:

Mmm, yeah I think that's true. Again, good intentions, you know? I've been reading a lot about the early period of Methodism and its adoption in the United States of America, which is really the beginning of what you might call the modern evangelical movement (the nonconformist religious movement that involved Methodists) and George Whitfield, who was the great- the first evangelist to take his sermons outdoors. Because a lot of churches didn't like the ideas that were being put forward and actually barred him from preaching in their building, so he went outdoors. And it's a fascinating sort of history of how that flowering - the Great Awakening - really changed society, at the time in a really great way. But it had limitations.

You know, these ideas were revolutionary of their time. And they had people for the first time take personal responsibility in their relationship with the Divine; they inspired people to read the Bible themselves and to really make it a personal journey, rather than the intercessor of a priest, which had been the previous idea. But when it came to social justice, as much as they were - they included African Americans in their churches and it really kickstarted Black church in America, that movement - they still didn't have the imagination to think beyond slavery as an institution. So George Whitfield had an orphanage that he set up in Bethesda, Georgia, and initially, Georgia had no slaves. It was set up by the Quakers, named after George III, and it was a sort of visionary utopian concept; this colony would have no slaves. But economically, it started to really fall behind and struggle. So George Whitfield actually lobbied the Governor of the Georgia economy to change the statute, to change the law, to allow slavery to come to Georgia and in fact was successful and ended up bringing and hiring and getting slaves for his orphanage.

So it's like, you know, if you... no matter how inspired the movement, no matter how well-intentioned, you can always - particularly in retrospect - look back and go: they just didn't get it. They were, they only went halfway, they didn't really... So I think it's an ongoing thing- I think each generation is built upon the good of the previous and hopefully can add a new chapter of greater enlightenment and a greater sense of how we should live with each other.

Corrymeela is Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organisation. Working with thousands of people a year, Corrymeela supports groups to deepen inclusion, peace and belonging, and later in this episode we'll hear more from The Edge about his interest and support in the reconciliation work of Corrymeela: *"the fact that it exists is like a beacon. You know it's so important I think: really, really crucial"*.

These remotely recorded podcasts come from our kitchen table to yours because we can't be together in the same room talking about these important topics in this important year. So, if you want to take this conversation further, we've got some discussion and reflection questions for you, and a full transcription too. You can find those on our website - corrymeela.org/podcast - or linked in our shownotes.

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and with me today is the legendary Edge from the world-renowned band, U2.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Much of what you're talking about here in terms of a curiosity about religion - even your curiosity to read about Methodism in the United States - so much of that circles around the question of the word 'God'. You seem to push yourself over and over, like there's lines from one particular song that really interested me: 'Peace on Earth' you know, it comes from *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (an album that has a lot of hope in it), but 'Peace on Earth' is referring to the Omagh bomb in 1998, and there's a line: 'their lives are bigger than any idea', 'cause some of the victims of that bomb are named. And it seems to be that religion there is a big idea that you're saying people's lives are bigger than a big idea, and even a limited view of God: that people's lives are bigger than the idea of a limited name of God. You seem to keep on [being] curious about pushing these things out in response to troubles that you see around you.

The Edge:

Yeah, I think growing up in Ireland, obviously The Troubles and questions of nationalism and unionism were ever-present. And I guess we all in the band, we all instinctively felt that to resort to violence was always going to be a failure: a failure in the present and a failure in the future. And the thought that you would justify taking somebody else's life based on your idea- that's not... it doesn't have democratic support. It's like you're imposing your idea through violence on a community. Just... to us it always seemed cock-eyed and just so wrong. So yeah, I think we still would hold on to those convictions: that ideas have to serve people and the idea that... that they are the highest priority and that people can be sacrificed for those ideas we just vehemently disagree with. And so it was difficult at times, because I guess if you get into the minutiae of politics in music, you're immediately... for some people you're crossing a line and it does incite some people to kind of walk away.

And I do remember on one occasion, early on after we recorded the *War* album, which had the song 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' we actually, for the first time ever - I think the album might not even have been out or might have just come out - we played Belfast, and obviously are a bit nervous playing 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' in Belfast. So Bono, without saying anything to us beforehand, he just got on the mic and he just said: 'this next song is not a rebel song, but just want to say if you don't like it, we'll never play it again. And this is called 'Sunday Bloody Sunday''. And the place went absolutely bananas. But we saw 10 people walk out- immediately just turn around and walk straight out of the building, and realised: wow, okay, music can be divisive, particularly when you're going to talk about and reject those ideas that form part of people's identity, you know- it's difficult.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah 'cause they can feel attacked by that, even though you're making valid points but nonetheless you understand that the music opens up the heart and therefore, the jab to the heart can feel even stronger.

The Edge:

Yeah, we got a lot of pushback from - you know - the hardline nationalists during those years, because I guess we were probably costing them support, costing them donations from Irish Americans who thought that the struggle was still the same struggle that had always been going on. And we were just saying: no, it's not, it's not.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So you continually do find ways, maybe less to be party political, but nonetheless to be political, in what you're doing. Does that always come with a sense of risk for you?

The Edge:

I think there's always a risk, yeah. But I mean, I remember some occasions- we performed 'Mothers of The Disappeared' in Santiago in Chile. And we brought some of the madres onto stage and allowed them a moment to be acknowledged by the crowd. And again, you know, there were large sections of the audience that really did not appreciate that- they thought that they were not happy to be reminded of their existence. And I think we, we think about art I suppose as being something that has to have a certain saltiness, a certain substance, and politics is just part of it, you know? Politics, religion, sexuality; it all has to be there because to rob it of any of that makes it that more - I don't know - lacking in the ability to connect with people and hopefully provoke questions. And art I think, is - has to be - confrontational. I mean, all the artists that we were inspired by understood that and knew that... people like John Lennon, Bob Marley. The whole- the punk rock movement was basically a kind of political statement (some would say too much of an anarchist statement, from some quarters) but we saw the social justice aspect (antiracism and a sort of more progressive side of it) so we really gelled with that.

You know I think something about Ireland, maybe it's because we are a small country we are therefore forced to kind of look out to the world, and with our history of having been colonised, it gives us a slightly different perspective on social justice, and the Irish (I don't know if it's still the case, but certainly in the '70s and '80s) the Irish were the most incredible givers to charitable causes in Africa, particularly. So the generosity of the Irish was there, there was something- it connected deeply on an emotional level, injustice. And we certainly, we inherited that, I would say that's something we could definitely point to the Irish sensibility as being responsible for that. I mean, when we first discovered Amnesty International it was through friends in Ireland, and I think Live Aid and Bob Geldof- that would seem to me to be a very typical expression of a sort of Irish way of seeing the world.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I was reading an article written by Ian Walker in *The New European* and he said: 'Irishness is about movement, migration, borders and place. And so are U2. And so are the last 30 years for many of us'. I found that to be a really interesting way of speaking about U2: as a result of a particular period of time in Ireland, as well as a particular period of time in the world.

The Edge:

Yeah, I think it's probably no longer the case, because technology has kind of made connections that has equalised society across the globe. Obviously, I'm talking about now sort of Western connected society. But back in the time when we were first coming through as a band, that was certainly not the case. I mean, it's hard to explain to a current generation what it was like to grow up in Ireland in the late '70s, and '80s. And it really was, it was such a kind of outpost of Europe. And you know, we also had America, which in some ways was kind of like going to Mars, but it was at least something you knew about through television. But it was really different. Ireland in those days was very, very insular, and very different to what it is now.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

With success like yours, your private life, your financial life, your religious life will all be up for public comment. How do you live with that? 'Cause ultimately, those public comments, some of them are just predatory; some of them are

trying to make moral points. Who do you listen to, and how do you sustain yourself a) in ignoring what you want to ignore, but b) maybe in taking wisdom in from criticisms that you want to take in? How do you hold that?

The Edge:

I think you have to develop a bit of a thick skin, you know, it was harder in the early days, because things would affect you. But I think you make a very good point- like you can't ignore everything. 'Cause there is actually valid criticisms within the things that have been written about us. And personally, I want to know: I want to learn, I want to be better, I want to get better. So anything that's valid, I'm open to. And then there's stuff that's just born from a different place- it's not a genuine criticism, it's just coming from an attempt to demean and dismiss and, you know, it's quite easy to sense the spirit of what you're reading and what you're hearing and you just have to be selective and try and be as honest as you can be. And if criticism is accurate, you know, take it on board.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and today I'm with The Edge from the Irish band, U2.

Edge, can I ask you about 'Van Diemen's Land', that lyric you wrote about John Boyle O'Reilly- an Irishman sent off to penal servitude in Australia, who ended up being an editor of a newspaper in Boston in the US. I'm really curious about that. Is it true that it's the only song that only you sing on all the albums? Or are there other hidden ones on some B-side somewhere?

The Edge:

I don't think I can think of another one. So I think it is true. I wrote it (I didn't expect to sing it) but... I wrote it almost as an exercise. The story is: I was with my wife and we were taking the kids up in the Boyne valley and looking in that area where there's so many megalithic tombs- Newgrange is the most famous one, but there's two: one in Dowth and Knowth. And they haven't been developed for visitors so they're kind of... you can just see them from the outside and they're fascinating as well, even though you can't enter the passage itself. So I'm there and I think it's... I'm actually, I'm going to get confused between the two of them, but one of them has an 18th century orphanage attached, which at this point was disused. But on the wall was this plaque commemorating John Boyle O'Reilly saying this is where he grew up. And I read the plaque and it described this writer-activist who wrote pamphlets in protest against the mistreatment of Irish people by the British, and how he had been arrested and charged with treason of some sort and sentenced to servitude in Australia, and was sent off to Van Diemen's Land. So I read a little bit more about him and I got very inspired by this character- as you say, he did go off to Van Diemen's Land; after a number of years was able to escape and made his way eventually to Boston; ended up being the editor of *The Boston Globe*, and had a very long life and career as a respected journalist in Boston.

But he just was an early social activist really, and it just shows you, I suppose, that we have actually made progress: we're no longer jailing dissenters and sending [them] off to the colonies. So, on one hand, he was an inspiration and another hand, it was kind of to take a little bit of solace and say: well, okay, people like John Boyle O'Reilly were the ones who kind of paid the price personally to create progress, but we're now living in a world that's actually benefited from their protest, from their attempts to call out injustice and to speak truth to power. So there is progress, there is a reason to keep doing so... as I say, each generation moves things forward a little bit and he just was a character I was really taken by.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I looked him up before chatting to you- did you know that after he died (and he died young), his wife published a book of his poetry?

The Edge:

I think I might have [it] in the library somewhere. It's a while since I would have done my research on John Boyle O'Reilly- that's a good reminder to go and search it out.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Where do you see the function of hope (in music, as well as in wider politics and society) and what gives you hope?

The Edge:

Well, I think I'm - by nature, I think - a cautious optimist; I definitely don't believe in a kind of naive, 'it'll all work out by itself' mentality; I think you have to be vigilant, and you have to be engaged and you have to kind of force the hand towards justice and progress. I think that's important, but I am optimistic, and I believe that hope is crucial, because without it, there is no incentive and inspiration to action. I think, right now I think some of the biggest major concerns are environmental. I think we saw - unfortunately with COVID-19 - those issues slipping from the headlines, but they will be back front and centre as soon as COVID-19 is behind us. But I think it's important to maintain hope in the face of, particularly those challenges which seem right now to be a lost cause; you know, if you listen to the narrative coming from the environmental body it seems right now that they've lost the hopeful vision. And I think that that's a shame, I think we should be more attempting to find solutions than we are just to pointing out the problems that we face. And that's the balance: one has to be real, one has to be honest and truthful. But I think to lose hope is to allow despondency to take over. And I think that's the thing that we can't allow to happen- we've got to motivate and inspire action. And that's, I think, where U2 would generally try and get engaged is in something hopeful and positive and towards a solution.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

As a band, like you've stayed together for 46 years: four friends, you've bound to have learned all kinds of things about collaboration and conflict and communication and space from each other and, you know, working back together. What do you think you've learned about conflict in the context of all of that work?

The Edge:

Well, I think a couple of things. Cooperation. I mean, there's great books written on cooperation- there's one by a fellow, Michael Axelrod I think, on the evolution of cooperation, which is a scientific book, but it basically explains the need and the benefits of cooperation. And what he talks about is how cooperation is when the joint effort rewards the individual to a higher extent. And so cooperation exists in most avenues of life. Society is one giant kind of organ of cooperation, but it can break down very easily if people feel betrayed or taken advantage of, or like they're not being treated fairly.

But I think the other thing to not leave out of that equation is compromise. And I think compromise - and I'm sure you've realised this in your work in reconciliation - compromises kind of got a bad rap, you know, people see

compromise as a weakness, a kind of a lack of resolve, a lack of determination; but in fact, I see it the opposite. I think compromise is where you... it involves grace, it involves wisdom, it involves empathy and appreciation for the other person's position. And I think if you can combine the right measure of compromise with that spirit of cooperation, I think that's, that's where you can reap huge benefits individually. And I so often see that breaking down where people aren't able to compromise... and therefore their cooperation stops functioning and then everyone suffers. And it's kind of really frustrating to see that happen, particularly when it's a great rock and roll band that you realise fell apart because of relationships and trust breaking down. But, you know, it's not to say it's easy to get that balance and to have the self confidence and the trust in each other that you're actually prepared to compromise; feeling like you're not necessarily always going to see the benefits, and you might in the short-term feel like you have been not accounted for or [been] taken advantage of, but the collective wins. And that's the thing- we always talk about the collective ego of U2; that we have allowed our individual egos to be subsumed into the band ego, and so if the action helps the band, no matter who's sort of getting the credit or who's doing the work or whatever, it doesn't really matter as long as the U2 collective wins: then we all win. That's basically how it works, but that's an easy thing to say, actually, to make it happen is very challenging at times.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You know, if the music thing doesn't work out for you, there's a job for you at Corrymeela!

The Edge:

Well, I suppose, I don't know if you've ever come across the enneagram?

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I have, yeah.

The Edge:

So we recently came across it. And I was told - well actually not told I realised myself - I was a nine. And the nines are the peacemakers. So maybe you're not wrong!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Well, even from a young age, you were finding ways to speak in different accents to be understood. That's a very interesting technology that you landed on there, maybe you're still doing that.

The Edge:

I'm sure I am in some way. And that sense of belonging, you know, like, if that's in jeopardy, as a kid you have to employ all your talents to kind of fit in: that becomes an imperative.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah. What is your curiosity about reconciliation? Like when we met, you were really interested in talking about Corrymeela, but more so thinking: let's talk about reconciliation. What interests you about that?

The Edge:

I think specifically in the Irish context, because, obviously, growing up in Wales, my parents had no sectarian kind of inclinations at all. When we got to Ireland, I hung around with people from all different backgrounds; [it] never occurred to me to look upon people in any different way based on their religious persuasions. So my mum used to say, she would occasionally - because of the church - she'd end up going up to the North as part of some church outing. And she said on a number of occasions at the end of a long, lovely social occasion with her, you know, Northern Irish fellow Presbyterians, she would - out of pure curiosity - she just broached the subject of the united Ireland. And, you know, like: 'we live in Dublin, it's lovely down there, people are lovely. It's very like up here: what exactly is the fear?' and she said, without fail, it would be like a portcullis had come down. It was like the conversation had totally ground to a halt. It was beyond consideration, beyond imagination- the idea of a united Ireland; and she wasn't advocating it, she wasn't suggesting it, she wasn't trying to sell it. She was just curious about why it was so fear-inducing, why it was so out of the question. Because I suppose identity hadn't been an issue to her. We were living in Dublin but she had no misgivings about her own traditions and ideas.

I was making my own way, I suppose. But it left me feeling: wow you know, I'm in this position where I'm not really... I don't have a polarity in this regard. I'm not- there's no faith of my fathers involved in my history- I'm totally free of any of that. So I was just curious. I'd love to fully understand what it's like to be of a nationalist persuasion and really - not just present day - but generations of nationalists, or conversely, generations of loyalists. It's foreign to me. So I was always curious to know more and to try and get a better understanding of what drove it, and what prevented people from moving beyond it, more to the point.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Well, I know I speak for my colleagues at Corrymeela to say thanks for your support and curiosity as well.

The Edge:

Well, I just want to say congratulations to you and the whole team and Corrymeela- the fact that it exists and you know that it is non-denominational, originally set up by Ray Davey and he was a Presbyterian, but there's no sectarian polarity at all there. And it's doing some amazing work. I'm such a fan. And so just thanks for all the hard work and I'm sure at times it must feel like really hard to see the benefits on a societal basis, but the fact that it exists is like a beacon. You know it's so important I think: really, really crucial. And yeah, may it... long may it continue.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Edge. Thanks very much for your time and for your generosity in this conversation.

The Edge:

My pleasure.

Our guest this week was the legendary musician The Edge, the guitarist from U2. Don't forget to listen right to the end when Edge has some fascinating answers to our 'Very Short Story Questions'.

Thanks for listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama and I'll be back with another episode next week.

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The Corrymeela Podcast is a FanFán production. The researcher and producer is Emily Rawling. The podcast was mixed by Fra Sands at Safe Place Studios.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Could you tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you, Edge?

The Edge:

There's been many times where I've had to ask myself: who am I? from a national point of view. Because growing up in Ireland, I clearly have adopted Ireland as my home and culturally speaking, I am Irish. When my dad would turn on the rugby matches, and it was Wales versus Ireland, and he was cheering with great enthusiasm for the Welsh team, I used to get confused. And so I'd say my sense of nationalism is for sure Irish, but I would say it does get knocked a little bit, not at any other sport. But rugby is where I fall into a kind of dichotomy of identity.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And what three people from one of your cultures, present or past, would you want to be in a lockdown bubble with?

The Edge:

Roger Casement would be one of them, for sure. I think he's a fascinating character. I believe he was one of the great Irishmen, historically, on a global stage. I mean his work in the Congo and his work in South America and the Amazon. He was knighted for that work, deservedly so, I know he had misgivings at the time whether he should accept the knighthood, but he was knighted for very good reason because he really, I think, basically kickstarted the whole universal human rights movement. I would say Flann O'Brien, because we all need a good laugh and I think I am such a massive fan of everything he wrote. I think - when I think of Ireland - I think of good times and humour and no better personification of Irish humour than Flann O'Brien. And Eileen Gray- I think she'd be amazing 'cause Eileen Gray is sort of an unsung Irish hero; she was heavily involved in art and design at the beginning of the 20th century... many people would say that she was largely behind some of the ideas that became modernism in terms of art, design and architecture, and influenced Le Corbusier and a lot of the Bauhaus people and she was very, very celebrated in France in fact, a bit like Sam Beckett. I think the French thought she was French.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

When was the first time you read or saw or heard something and thought: that's me.

The Edge:

Yeah, I have to say it would be music. You know, I'd always loved music as a fan growing up and went to concerts from quite a young age- went to see Rory Gallagher as a 13 year old and Thin Lizzy and Horse Lips from about 14. But the first time I actually saw a band, and I went: 'okay, that is me, I can do that' was The Jam on *Top of the Pops*. I just... and it's funny- Bono had the same realisation. Because *Top of the Pops* was the only show where you got to see live music during those years; the *Old Grey Whistle Test*, I guess you could also but that was on the late night and we didn't get to see that often. But the *Top of the Pops* was a kind of primetime show where you got to see bands occasionally. Mostly it was not very interesting pop, but occasionally something great. And when The Jam came on, I just got punk rock in three minutes. It just... I was like: 'okay, that's me, I'm in'. It was the combination of the commitment and the intensity of the feeling expressed in the music, but also, the fact that it was, it was a kind of GarageBand sound. It was like: we could make that sound. It demanded commitment and intensity over musicianship and that was such an inspiration for us. And for me, particularly personally.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What are you reading at the moment? It's the last question, totally out of curiosity.

The Edge:

I'm actually reading some history about a fascinating poet that grew up in America in the end of the 18th century. Her name is Phillis Wheatley. Phillis was brought to America as an African slave, age seven years old I think (they're not absolutely sure how old she was). And they don't know her African name. And they don't know exactly where she came from. But she was put up for sale at the end of Boston harbour in 1765 (thereabouts). She was bought by a family called the Wheatleys, and the name of the slave ship was Phillis. The Wheatleys decided they would name her Phillis Wheatley. She was brought up... and for reasons that are hard to fathom, based on the norms of society at that time, she was educated. And she was... she seemed to take to learning so naturally, and with such obvious intellectual sort of powers that the Wheatley family just kept upping her levels, so she didn't get just a basic education (as most women got in New England in that era), she started to get a full classical education. And she was being taught Latin and Greek. You know she read extensively, she read voraciously. And then, age 15 she started writing poetry. So Phillis Wheatley starts to write about what's happening in America in the lead-up to the American Revolution and she decided or her owner, Mary Wheatley, I think decided to send some of these poems into local newspapers. So she starts getting published. And she's writing all kinds of things about the sort of nascent revolution. So Phillis Wheatley ended up getting audiences with George Washington; she met with Benjamin Franklin and she was a slave.

It's just such a fascinating story. She did go to London, she got published in London, and setting foot on English soil she actually had her freedom, but decided to go back to America to reestablish her enslavement, I believe because she believed that America- that whatever the revolution would end up becoming would involve emancipation, would involve a kind of promised land for African Americans, and she wanted to be part of that. That belief in America is so inspiring because right now it seems like America's going through such a dark period, and it's kind of... some seem to have lost sight of what it was set up to be, which is the beacon on the hill. To know that this young African girl believed in it, to that extent, is really inspiring.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Edge, thank you very much for giving us your time and coming on The Corrymeela Podcast.

The Edge:

My pleasure, Pádraig.

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