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INTERNATIONAL

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Fáilte

The Mystique of Celtic Music

As a young lad growing up in northern Nova Scotia, our home was alive with music - bagpipes, fiddle, piano and more. Celtic music can stir the soul and bring us to our feet, and I enjoy any type of traditional music - with its distinctive lyrics, and variations in tempo - that is melodic and lively. The more haunting and soulful tunes have their own distinct way of drawing listeners into the narrative also.

I was recently introduced to the music of a group of traditional Celtic folk singers called Fisherman's Friend - Cornish lobster fishermen from Port Isaac who sing sea shanties, bringing life to working men's music, some of which is hundreds of years old.

Performing along a rustic and rugged Cornish coastline, this ensemble could be from any one of the great Celtic nations - Ireland, Scotland, Wales, or perhaps even Newfoundland.

Although many of us may be several generations separated from our Celtic homelands, memories of the "old country" are still firmly planted in our souls and our DNA. Tracing our cultural heritage and family genealogy goes beyond intellectual curiosity - the connection with our past keeps pulling us back for something of a more mystical nature. And while there are many "pulls" to our collective past, the music "of our people" might be the greatest.

In the early 1970s, a trio of Irish troubadours arrived on the shores of Newfoundland. There, Denis Ryan, Fergus O'Byrne, and Dermot O'Reilly - a.k.a. Ryan's Fancy - found a treasure trove of home-grown music and songs that they revitalized and reintroduced to the world.

Bob Hallet of Great Big Sea noted that "Ryan's Fancy grabbed Newfoundland music from its box in the back of the closet, where it lay almost forgotten, polished it and dressed it up. And, in doing so, reminded the rest of us how good it was."

There may have been other influential groups across the province at that time, but Ryan's Fancy were at the forefront of inspiring a new generation of Newfoundland musicians, including the Ennis Sisters, the Irish Descendants and Great Big Sea. The trio bridged generations, helping to uncover a rich tapestry of Newfoundland melodies.

Celtic in both spirit and style, the music of Newfoundland and Labrador was first brought to the region's shores by European fishermen centuries ago, and it still speaks to our people's long and rich seafaring history, albeit with subtle differences in melody and rhythm that give it a Newfoundland character.

This harkening to the past is in our Celtic blood. Whether its origins are Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Breton, Manx, Galician, Cornish - or via Newfoundland - the common Celtic thread remains a stirring call to come home.

Enjoy and may God bless!
Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

Inside!

Vol. 35 No. 2

45 Celtic Couture

Cover photo by David Stanton ~ Courtesy of Judy Clark
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Tracing Eileen's Heritage

Celtic Life Associate Editor Chris Muise digs up his family roots

I have written a lot of stories for Celtic Life International that I am proud of. I have had the opportunity to chat with movie stars and Celtic music legends, and I have written on a wide range of topics, including Celtic Christmas music, genealogy, and the evolution of golf, to name just a few.

But perhaps the piece that I am most proud of appeared in our 2020 holiday issue, in which I had the chance to write about my grandmother, Eileen Nickerson, by way of her Christmas Pudding recipe.

She was always one of my loudest cheerleaders in my writing career - asking what big scoop I was working on next, still beaming with pride even if that scoop was as ordinary as a fundraising bake sale, as if it was going to win me a Pulitzer all the same. I was thrilled that she would get to see herself in the pages of Celtic Life International, even if it was just for her pudding.

She would never receive that issue. Last October, Grandma Eileen suffered a stroke, passing away just shy of her 88th birthday. Thankfully, I was able to sneak a copy of that piece into her hospital room - care of my mom - before she left us, so she did get to see that snippet before her time ended. I was told that it made her genuinely happy.

Truly, she deserves more page space dedicated to her. When asked to contribute this edition's First Word column, I knew exactly what to write about; exploring her possible Celtic heritage.

I don't know as much about Grandma's background as I would like, in part due to the nature of our familial relationship; she is actually my step-grandmother. My maternal grandmother, Kaye, died of kidney disease when my mom was little, and my grandfather, Victor "Morse" Nickerson (1919-1994), remarried with Grandma Eileen 21 years before I was born.

I know a fair amount of my heritage on Kaye's side - long story short, I am a direct descendant of Samuel Cunard - and I am very familiar with my dad's lineage, as he had done a lot of research himself into the history of the Acadian Muises.

> *Regretfully, I didn't ask Grandma much about her own past while she was still around to share it.*

I began my search without much more than the information I could glean from her obituary, written by my aunt Susan - Eileen and Morse's only child together: Eileen was born in Brooklyn, NS, to Jack and Caroline Clarke. I asked Susan if she thought there might be any Celtic heritage in Grandma's family tree, but she didn't have too much to say, except that Clarke might possibly be of Cornish origin.

Indeed, a quick look into the etymology of Anglo-Saxon surnames reveals that Clarke, and many variations, was a popular surname throughout Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and derives from the word "clerk" - as in a scholarly clerk of the Holy Orders (thanks, irishsurnames.com). But I would need more than that to have a better picture of Grandma's history.

Having recently spoken to the folks at the Highland Village museum in Cape Breton, I remembered that they have an excellent genealogy centre, headed by Pauline MacLean. I called her up for some advice on where to go from there.

MacLean not only helped me locate Grandma's birth certificate, but my great-step-grandparents' marriage license, as well. Grandma was born where her folks had wed, Queen's County, Nova Scotia. That includes the seaport gem of Liverpool, as well as nearby Brooklyn, where Grandma grew up.

I read through Tom Sheppard's book, Historic Queen's County, to see if there were any significant Celtic settlers in the region. According to Sheppard, the village of Caledonia was settled by "six (or seven) Scots and one (or two) Irishmen" in 1817. But Caledonia is farther north of Liverpool and Brooklyn, where settlements were mostly founded by French, German, and New England pioneers. So, the Clarkes were not likely from that stock.

However, MacLean was eagle-eyed enough to see that Jack and Caroline's marriage license pointed to Jack's father, John James Clarke. We found his marriage certificate, from Cape Breton in 1907. He was listed as having been born in St. Pierre & Miquelon, a French territory in Newfoundland that acted once as the launching point for the whiskey trade during prohibition, with shipping aplenty from Scotland in the early 20th century. Now we are getting somewhere.

However, that is about all I have gleaned so far...and I have run out of space in this column, anyway. I am going to follow this research and see where it takes me, though - if there is more to report, perhaps I will get the chance to follow up someday. Either way, I know that Grandma would be tickled pink that I made it this far.

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one

Swedish Harp Fiddle

Meet Ian McMaster: an Englishman who has been making musical instruments for the last 15 years. For the last 13, he has been working on nyckelharpas specifically - and he is the only person in the United Kingdom known for making them. The nyckelharpa is an ancient instrument also known as the Swedish harp fiddle. Although McMaster can't play them himself, he dedicates 280 hours and 100 wooden pieces to making a single nyckelharpa. The combined cost of labour and materials make them a pricey instrument, with McMaster selling his work for as much as £2,500.

two

Scotch Eggs

Demand for scotch eggs has reportedly increased ever since United Kingdom cabinet ministers suggested they should be classified as a "substantial meal." Those living under Tier 2 lockdown rules in England can only order alcohol alongside a meal, so more people have been ordering Scotch eggs to abide by the rule and have their booze, too. Scotch eggs are whole soft or hard-boiled eggs covered in pork and breadcrumbs which, of course, originated in Scotland. Could this be the start of a Scotch egg revival?

three

Bilingual Dog

Due to COVID-19, a young woman in California missed out on her summer immersion program at Aberystwyth University. However, she continued to learn the Welsh language via online learning. As a result, her dog, Puck, became a surprise participant. Ariel Mira Jackson had to get up at odd hours in order to take in her classes live, but that wasn't a problem for her – or for Puck, who quickly won the hearts of her classmates. Jackson's mother, Sasha Paulsen, wrote about the experience and called Puck "one of the few Welsh-speaking dogs in California."

four

Barbados Tartan

The country of Barbados unveiled its official tartan at the end of 2020. The tartan had been in the works for several months and harkens back to Barbados' independence from the United Kingdom. The design incorporates blue, yellow, and black - the Caribbean island's national colours - as well as a broken trident which symbolizes its severance from the UK. Barbados, which shares heritage with Scotland and hosts an annual Celtic Festival, is now the first Caribbean nation to have an official tartan of its own.

five

Flamenco Dancer

To ring in the new year, Flamenco dancer Leticia Sánchez showcased her moves by recording a dance and sharing it online. At the start of January, Sánchez posted a video of herself dancing along to a piece by Spanish bagpiper Hevia. Her backdrop? Snow-kissed Glaswegian hills. Sánchez spent a few years travelling between Spain and Scotland, but she eventually decided to make Scotland her permanent home. During the pandemic, she has been sharing videos of her work and training, hoping people will connect over the energy and the culture.

six

Bagpipe Collection

The world's largest bagpipe collection resides not in any of the Celtic nations, but in France. The village of Cantoin is home to Maison de la Cabrette: a museum featuring the history of the violin, the history of the accordion, and a slew of bagpipes from around the world. There is much debate over the origin of the bagpipe, but today, different iterations of the instrument are played all around the globe. France also has the largest variety of bagpipes of any country, boasting 15 versions from different regions. Jean-Louis Claveyrole, the museum curator, spent two decades building his bagpipe collection.

Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at info@celticlife.com

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Angel Arutura

Angel Arutura is a Belfast-based social activist and environmentalist with Zimbabwean heritage. Growing up in Northern Ireland, Arutura was the only Black girl in her school year until high school. In recent years, she has become more outspoken about embracing her roots and discussing issues such as racism. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Arutura - who is currently studying geography - became especially interested in how racial justice and climate justice intersect. She runs a blog on Wordpress, on which she writes, "I think it is even more important to discuss the impact our daily thoughts and actions can have on the people and the planet. My goal is to help educate others, and to provide guidance on how we as a society can have a more positive impact on the world, both environmentally and socially." On her blog, Arutura tackles a variety of topics, including the Black Lives Matter movement, her struggles against beauty standards, and even recommendations for waste-free cosmetic products. In addition to writing, Arutura is also a presenter for The Blackout Show: a podcast which discusses African culture, racial discrimination, and prejudice in the United Kingdom. In an interview with ITV, Arutura said her little sister is a big source of motivation for her. "I can't let her go through the same thing that I went through. I need her to know that Black is beautiful, her natural hair is beautiful, her cultural features are beautiful. I really wanted to be a positive role model for her to look up to."

Jo Davies

A charity manager in Falmouth was recently honoured for her work helping families throughout Cornwall. Jo Davies is the CEO of the WILD Young Parents Project: an organization which aims to help young parents (under 23) and their children. The charity provides support with finances, food, mental health and more. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, regular in-person activities had to be put on pause. But Davies found ways to continue supporting families in a remote capacity. For example, project team members delivered essential items such as food or prescriptions all around the county. In December, a bespoke bench was placed in Davies' honour at the Eden Project botanical garden. In an interview with Cornwall Live, Davies said she hopes WILD will be able to launch its Believe in Us campaign within the next year. "The campaign aims to help policy-makers and the wider public understand how young parents have a distinct set of needs that are nothing to do with their choices and more to do with things that have happened to them through their own childhood, and some of the challenges they have to overcome that most of us never have to deal with. A lot of our young parents go on to wonderful things." As the pandemic continues, WILD is running its group activities and individual support online. This includes remote activities for children and babies, as well as support groups for families.

Cath Pendleton

A woman sometimes known as "The Merthyr Mermaid" is the subject of a BBC Wales documentary which premiered in late 2020. Cath Pendleton is a United Kingdom National Health Service worker from Merthyr Tydfil who also happens to be a stellar swimmer. The documentary focuses on her February 2020 swim inside the polar Antarctic Circle, as Pendleton was the first person to do a mile swim in those icy waters. Pendleton initially became interested in cold water swimming following a back injury in 2015. Not only did she find out she could tolerate the cold, but she also found it therapeutic. In 2018, she successfully swam the English Channel. She was then selected to represent Great Britain at the World Ice Swimming Championships in Russia. As part of preparing for her Antarctic expedition last year, she spent time in an ice-filled paddling pool in her backyard. When that wasn't enough, she took to lying in a chest freezer in her shed. With the support of Gerald Kennedy (an Irish open water swimmer who led the Antarctica 2020 International Swim), Pendleton was able to achieve her dream. "The nature of ice swimming - having to switch everything off and concentrate on what's happening with your body, knowing how long to swim for and when to get out - it's just my complete switch off, my happy place," Pendleton recently told Outdoor Swimmer. "I'm just never miserable in the winter." She plans to complete the seven swim Ice Sevens challenge in 2022.


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American Scottish Foundation Tartan Week

New York, New York

April 7-12, 2021

www.americanscottishfoundation.com

Amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic, the American Scottish Foundation (ASF) has worked diligently to unite the Scottish American community through weekly bulletins, bi-weekly podcasts, monthly online concerts, and other virtual events. The group's recent Tartan Kiltskate in NYC's Bryant Park was its first in-person, socially distanced event in a year, and plans for a hybrid Tartan Week 2021 are already in full swing. The New York Tartan Day Parade - organized by the National Tartan Day NY Committee (of which ASF is a founding member), the St Andrews Society of New York, and the NY Caledonian Club - will be held as a virtual celebration on Saturday, April 10. Leading up to the annual event, the ASF will host a Tartan Week Podcast on April 5 with invited guests and musicians. The following day, the Scottish Coalition USA will host a ZOOM Tartan Day Celebration with the presentation of the National Tartan Day Award to Gus Noble, President of Chicago Scots and the Caledonian Scottish Home, for his outstanding contribution to the community. April 7 will see the 250th Anniversary of Sir Walter Scott ZOOM event, presented in association with Abbotsford Trust, while April 9 and 10 will see Bryant Park hosting Sounds from Scotland free - though masked and socially distanced - lunchtime concerts.

East Coast Music Awards

Sydney, Nova Scotia

May 5-9, 2021

www.ecma.com

Atlantic Canadians are world-renowned for their warmth and hospitality, and perhaps no one does that better than Nova Scotians. Despite issues surrounding COVID-19, the province is blessed to be faring better with the pandemic than others around the globe, including some of its closest neighbours. As such, this year's East Coast Music Awards in Sydney, NS, will be a hybrid event, with a strong mix of digital and in-person events, including seminars, workshops, live performances, and the Awards extravaganza itself. Now in its 33rd year, the ECMAs are a one-stop shop for the very sweetest in sounds from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, with musicians and industry types coming together to explore sector trends, share best practices, and showcase both established and emerging Atlantic Canadian artists. The best kitchen-party in North America!

Tartan Day South

Columbia, South Carolina

March 31-April 3, 2022

www.tartandaysouth.com

Like last year, Tartan Day South has been postponed once again due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. But event organizers are already planning their 2022 gathering, which will celebrate the event's 10th anniversary in grand style. The Festival stretches over 4 days at 4 different locations in 4 neighboring cities, kicking off with an opening night party followed by an evening of great Celtic music from three prominent bands. The main event is staged in the home city of Cayce with Highland Athletics, great music, exhibitions of traditional dance, herding dogs, birds of prey, and one of the top British Car shows in the southeast and much more. The Festival concludes with a Kirkin' of the Tartans service on Sunday morning at the beautiful Riverwalk Amphitheater. So, when you plan your travel schedule in 2022, consider a visit down to the Midlands of South Carolina!

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Richard Meyrick Guitars

Richard Meyrick finds inspiration close to home

Welsh musician and guitar craftsman Richard Meyrick has wanted to make guitars since he started playing them as a teenager.

"I always struggled with the cheap guitars I learned with that were terrible to play," he recalls in an email interview with Celtic Life International. "I dreamed of having a good, expensive guitar that would make me play 10 times better, but I couldn't afford one and no amount of mowing lawns on the weekends would get me one, either. So, I decided to build one for myself."

Meyrick admits his first attempt at making a guitar turned out "pretty terrible," though the instrument was playable. He kept at it. He then enrolled at London Metropolitan University to study guitar making and repair, graduating in 2007 and setting up his business just a year later. In the beginning, he was free to experiment as he liked. Now that he has a family to care for and bills to pay, he has become more business-minded. As a result, he notes, his workmanship has improved.

"The day-to-day running of a business is not something that I was ever really interested in and I have had to learn along the way. In order to make a success of making guitars on your own, you need to become a master of a lot of trades, from the rough processing of timber right the way through to the final finishing. It has taken a lot of trial and error - and huge amounts of hard work and patience from my family - for me to get to where I am today."

His company has customers all over the United Kingdom, as well as other parts of Europe. Much of its success has come from word-of-mouth at folk or blues clubs.

> *"Reputation is everything in this line of work, and I work hard to maintain mine."*

Meyrick mainly makes acoustic steel-string guitars, but he occasionally crafts classical, electric, and arch-top guitars as well. He has also built harp guitars, mandolas and more. In addition, he repairs or restores existing instruments and runs guitar-making classes.

"Repairing instruments gives me an invaluable insight into the different methods of guitar construction over the last 190 years," he shares, noting that the oldest guitar he has worked on was from 1832. "I am constantly having to come up with new ways of repairing these instruments. Teaching guitar making also keeps me on my toes and always looking for new ways to do each task. Guitar making, for me, means constantly questioning my work and asking if there are simpler or better ways to reach my goal."

While a quality guitar requires quality materials, quality craftmanship, and attention to detail, Meyrick points out that the idea of a great instrument is somewhat subjective.

"What may feel great in the hand of one player won't feel comfortable with another. The sound of a great guitar is much the same. I find that customers have an idea of their perfect guitar in their head and it is often not the same as other customers, which is why I make so many completely custom instruments."

Fortunately, the luthier has no shortage of inspiration. Born and raised in The Welsh Marches, "between the mountains of mid-Wales and the English border," he still resides and plies his trade in the area today - specifically, in the town of Abergavenny, near the Brecon Beacons National Park.

"The mountains around me inspire me every day and provide a great escape from the confines of my workshop." In fact, all of Meyrick's base guitar models are named after his favourite Welsh beaches, castles, and mountains.

On top of the natural landscape, Meyrick says that Welsh culture and heritage is thriving in the region.

"There are excellent museums nearby explaining the industrial past of the area. The industrial revolution began in an ironworks just over the mountain, so the area is filled with history. Many of the local theatres put on Welsh language plays as well as Welsh-themed plays in English. I may be a little biased because my son has just started at the local Welsh language primary school, but I think Welsh culture and language is much better supported now than when I was growing up.

"Thirty years ago, speaking Welsh wasn't cool and the only Welsh culture to speak of was the rugby team and women wearing funny hats (the traditional Het Gymreig). But now, our culture is seen as something to be proud of."

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Nathan Evans

Nathan Evans brings the past to present

For most of his adult life, Nathan Evans was a regular guy - a familiar face to the folks he delivered to on his postal route in his hometown of Airdrie, North Lanarkshire, Scotland, and to his followers on TikTok.

But practically overnight, Evans has become world-famous.

You may not know him by name, but chances are you have heard him singing that jaunty ditty that has been stuck in your head in recent months. At the very least, you have likely noticed the kids talking about sea shanties lately. You can thank Evans for that.

Via video conference with Celtic Life International, the 26-year-old explained how a simple video, made at the request of his TikTok fans, swelled into an online sensation.

"It happened back in July of last year when I was taking requests and different ideas from the comments on my TikTok videos. Somebody had said, 'could you sing a sea shanty?' I went away and researched them all and made a list of songs. Then, in December, I did a couple."

He tackled a few traditional ditties - Leave Her Johnny, Drunken Sailor, and The Scotsman - but his big hit was Wellerman, an 19th-century New Zealand whaling ballad about longshoremen who are worked to the bone, fantasizing about the sweets and drink that awaited them when the next supply ship dropped anchor.

Evans' rendition - filmed solo and sparsely from his bedroom - spread around the world thanks to the TikTok platform's Duet feature, where other users can add their voice to other TikTok videos. Daisy-chaining off each other, people across the globe chimed in, creating a harmonious choir of folks joining Evans in song - a virtual, digital, living-room concerto.

People are already calling 2021 the year of the sea shanty, as this was the first big meme of the first few months. Evans believes that the song caught on, in part, because people were eager for something hopeful and cathartic after the daunting experience that was 2020.

"Everybody is stuck in the house, going through this pandemic together, and the whole world is kind of just joining in. Back in the 1800s - singing a song like Wellerman – everybody was joining in, and it kept the morale high, kept everybody happy. This kind of took that and brought it into the 21st century.

> *"It is amazing, the positivity that this song is bringing. To see everybody smiling, laughing, and joining in - especially with the year everybody has had."*

"Amazing" is a word Evans has been using a lot since his big hit - he has had experiences most of us can only imagine; his cover topped charts - Wellerman and the 220Kid & Killen Ted Remix version hit #1 and #2 on UK iTunes - he cinched 500,000 TikTok subscribers, and he has signed with Polydor Records to release both his original rendition and the remix as singles. He even landed a spot telling his tale on Good Morning America, where he saw his face light up the Jumbotron in Times Square.

"I knew I was going to be singing them out, but I never knew that my face was going to be hovering over Times Square. I didn't know until I saw my screen in live time. I got the fright of my life!

"It is...surreal," he adds, referring not just to his GMA spot, but his whole meteoric rise to fame. "I still feel like I am talking about somebody else. I think it is because I am so busy, and I just constantly keep going and going. I have not had a minute to sit down and process what is going on."

Evans has thought about what he is going to do next, however; he plans to explore his musical opportunities now that he has the world's attention. But even if he lost all that attention tomorrow, it wouldn't change his desire to strum a tune.

"If you had to take all this away, I would still be making music from my bedroom. Now, I am just fortunate enough that people would actually like to hear it."

Evans also hopes his story will give others the impetus to keep putting themselves and their talent out into the world.

"If I can go from being a postman and just putting my videos up online, and I can get this break, sign with a record company, and put a single out there? It just shows that, as long as you keep going, take that first step, and just be you, then something good will come."

www.tiktok.com/@nathanevans

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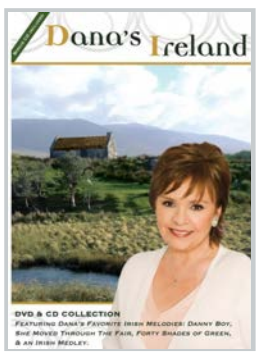

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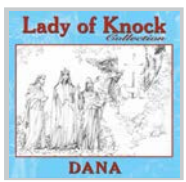

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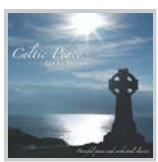

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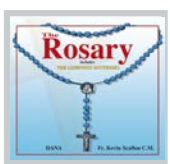

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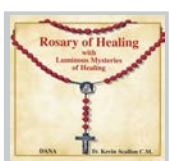

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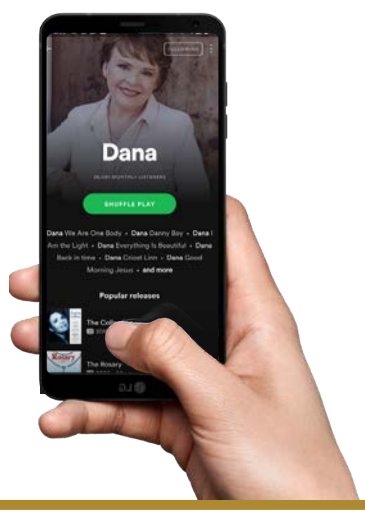

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Dana Rosemary Scallon

Decades after being discovered as a teenager, Dana Rosemary Scallon's musical calling remains as strong as ever

Dana Rosemary Scallon was born into a musical family in London, where her Northern Irish family had relocated to find work. When she was five, the family moved back to Derry, the city once inhabited by both her parents and her grandparents.

"Their roots were in Donegal," shares Scallon via email. "And, typical of many people from that county, their great-grandparents had migrated to Scotland seeking employment, remaining and raising their families there. So, my maternal and paternal great grandparents were from Scotland. I guess you could call that a fairly typical Irish family."

As a youngster, Scallon sang, danced, and played piano, competing in music festivals at Derry's famous Guildhall. "One in Gaelic with traditional music and the other in the English language with classical music." She also found a fondness for acoustic music and participated in folk sessions in various area homes. She eventually picked up the guitar - a more portable instrument than piano.

After winning a local talent competition as a teenager, a small Dublin record company awarded her with a contract. Born Rosemary Brown, Scallon used her childhood nickname (Dana) as her professional moniker. After releasing her first single, she represented Ireland in the 1970 Eurovision Song Contest, the annual televised talent competition that is still hosted in a different European country every year. She took the stage in Amsterdam and sang "All Kinds of Everything" in front of people from all over the continent.

"I was an unknown, amateur singer, still at school and about to take my final exams before going to college," recalls Scallon. "My ambition was to be a teacher of music and English literature, but on that fateful night in Amsterdam, I became Ireland's first winner of the Eurovision Song Contest. Overnight my song topped the charts throughout Europe and beyond and I was instantly a professional singer."

The single sold three million copies, launching a career that would see her record and release more than 30 studio albums.

Scallon was forced to put her musical output on pause in 1976, when she was diagnosed with a tumour on her vocal cord. "The consultant operated the following morning. It happened so quickly I didn't realize the seriousness of the situation."

Fortunately, the tumour was benign, but it took her years to return to singing.

"I had to learn to speak again and then, gradually, to sing. My voice, my life, and my priorities were changed completely, and I believe for the better.

> *"The experience helped me to grow stronger as a person and as an artist. It was a wakeup call to what was really important in life."*

Perhaps aptly, her 1979 album was titled The Girl is Back.

Scallon is grateful for the impact her work has had on others over the years. "I love it when people share their life memories with me and tell me how my music has been a part of their experience. I have always loved being with people, getting to know them and letting them get to know me. It is a great privilege to be able to share my music on stage, but I usually spend more time talking with people after the show than I do performing on stage."

Live concerts, of course, have their fair share of challenges.

"Like many other performers I know, I have walked on stage feeling totally brokenhearted at the loss of a loved one, or - as has happened a number of times - with a high fever of 103 degrees. You cannot burden your audience with how you are feeling, however, and so you must rise to the challenge of entertaining the people before you. Nerves are another big challenge, and I am often asked if nerves disappear with experience. The answer is that no, they don't, but you have to learn to control them."

Although performances are currently on hold for most artists due to COVID-19, Scallon's latest record, My Time, is now widely available.

"It was a wonderful experience recording it in Rome, Italy, with some outstanding musicians. It was a truly unforgettable experience, and I am looking forward to being able to share it."

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The Rumjacks

The Rumjacks' latest studio album signals change

For the uninitiated, The Rumjacks are a band of Celtic rockers from down under, known for their rollicking, frenetic style of pub music. Chances are, however, that you may have already heard of them, thanks to their tune 'An Irish Pub Song' becoming a viral YouTube hit.

Formed in 2008, the raucous quintet has never been shy of change, according to bassist Johnny McKelvey.

"The band was kind of pieced together at the very start, and some temporary members were involved until about a year later then we pretty much had the band properly set up," he explains in an email exchange with Celtic Life International. "We kinda' took a 'waste no time' attitude and began recording and touring non-stop. We slugged it out in Australia, worked as hard as we could, and realized that we needed to move elsewhere to make the band grow."

The Rumjacks relocated to Europe in order to get the exposure they needed to evolve. But their biggest change came last year when the band parted ways with founding member and lead singer, Frankie McLaughlin. While upfront with their fans about the split, this was a big enough shake-up that even they balked a little about asking supporters to accept someone new headlining the band.

"I know people get a bit nervous with changes sometimes," says McKelvey, adding in relief, "but not in this case."

Mike Rivkees was the one tasked with filling out The Rumjacks as their new singer/songwriter and - to the relief of everyone - he was more than suited to the task.

"It doesn't come without hurdles, as far as the fanbase's expectations," Rivkees tells Celtic Life International. "I think I was expecting a lot of turbulence, but everybody has been extremely welcoming."

"A big test was having Mike join, and it has gone down amazingly," adds McKelvey. "Previous fans have welcomed Mike with open arms, and as these songs come out, they have realized how talented he is and just how well he works as a new member of the band. We knew it would have mixed emotions and that is fine, but just how supportive everyone has been is mind-blowing.

> *"It is amazing to be in such a positive place as a band, and this feels like a new beginning."*

On top of the shake-up in the roster, The Rumjacks also wrote and recorded a whole album in lockdown while the band's members lived in different countries across Europe.

"Mike did some serious amounts of demoing, and we all shared ideas and did what we could remotely," says McKelvey. "We then had a chance to get everyone together in Milan, Italy."

"We all traveled there from different countries and basically locked ourselves in the studio for two months straight, crafting the album," Rivkees chimes in.

"We knew we had this chance all together, and made the most of every day," continues McKelvey, noting that the group's vibe was as on-point as the tunes. "We were super honest with each other, played around with ideas, and took everyone's opinions on board. We just worked in a supportive, positive environment, and finally started enjoying the process of recording music. I think it shows."

McKelvey says his favourite song on the album is the track 'Rhythm of Her Name,' whereas for Rivkees, it is a toss-up between that one and 'Goodnight & Make Mends.'

"It is always uncomfortable for me to write about personal issues," admits Rivkees. "But as a songwriter, you have to be vulnerable if you are going to write anything relatable. With the passing of a close friend during the pandemic, it was inevitable that it would make its way into the writing."

McKelvey and Rivkees are eager to know which tracks become the fans' favourites and hope to be able to play them all on stage as soon as they can.

"Well, once we are allowed, it will be back to what we know best, and that is touring," says McKelvey. "Fingers crossed that things improve, as we really want to present Hestia nice and loud on stage."

"That is up to our little friend, COVID-19," adds Rivkees. "In the meantime, we will be releasing music online, and pumping out a ton of video content."

www.therumjacks.com

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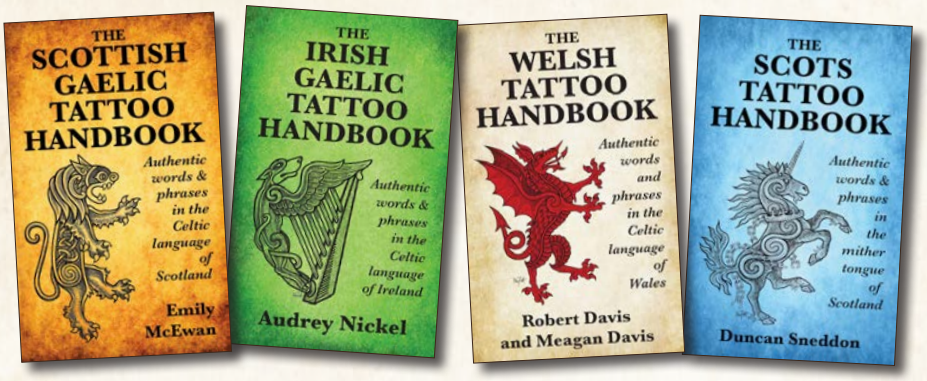

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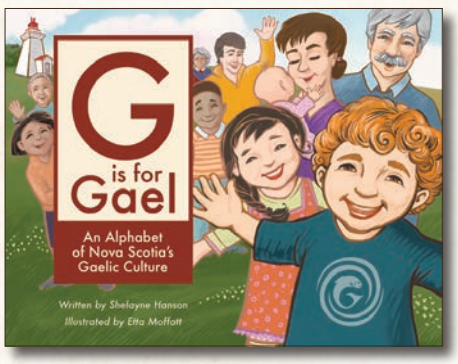

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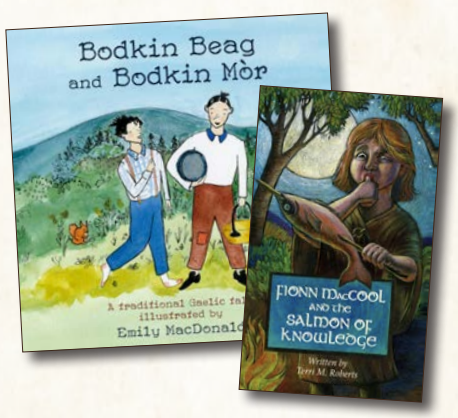

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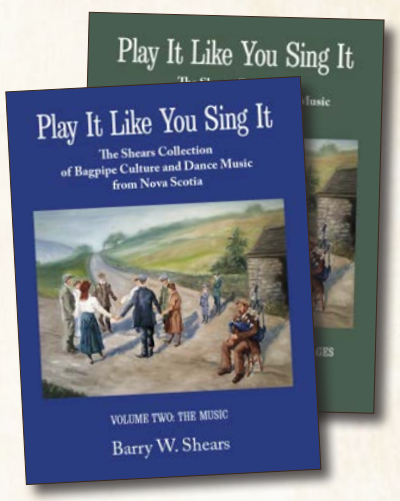

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Sarah McQuaid

Sarah McQuaid's first live recording is magic...

Genetically speaking, singer-songwriter Sarah McQuaid is a bit of a mixed bag. Born to an American mother and a Spanish father, she has traced her lineage back to England, Germany, and Ireland.

"I lived in Ireland for 13 years before moving to England," she shares via email from her current home in the great Celtic nation of Cornwall. "First in Dublin and then in County Wexford. My husband is Irish, and our two children were born in Ireland - like me, they have dual Irish and U.S. citizenship."

McQuaid has played instruments for as long as she can remember, with her first foray into music beginning when she was just three years old.

"That is when my mother started teaching me to play the piano. I began playing guitar as soon as I was big enough to hold one. I just really took to music in a big way - it came to me very naturally and easily, and I found it very absorbing. I could easily spend a couple of hours simply noodling on the piano or the guitar. I think I was about seven or eight years old when I wrote my first song. It was dreadful, but I was proud of it and I wrote it all out in proper musical notation."

Since then, the award-winning musician has released several recordings, including 2018's popular If We Dig Any Deeper This Could Get Dangerous.

She notes that her reasons for playing music have not changed since childhood.

> *"I see music as a wonderful way of connecting to other people. Like a lot of performers, I am quite shy offstage, but when I am onstage the music just takes over. It is a lovely feeling."*

Although this year has been a struggle for many artists - the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked sheer havoc on the entire music industry - McQuaid has not let it slow her down. In addition to offering an array of online workshops for both emerging and established artists, she recently completed work on St Buryan Sessions, a 15-track live album and video series set for release over the coming months.

"When COVID-19 hit and I had to cut my tour short, I was trying to figure out what to do, and it occurred to me that I had always wanted to record a live album. I feel that there is a kind of magic that comes out in a live performance that you just don't get with a studio album. I also wasn't keen on the idea of livestreaming gigs, partly because the internet where I live isn't great, and partly because there are so many things that can go wrong technically, and I just didn't want to have to deal with that!"

To help her cause, she set up a crowd funder.

"I managed to raise enough money to be able to spend two days filming and recording in this beautiful church just up the road from where I live. I have been singing in the choir there for over 10 years, so it was a comfortable, happy place for me to sing in, and the space is just gorgeous, so I felt that the atmosphere of the place itself could supply the magic even though I wouldn't have an audience in the room."

McQuaid has already released two singles from the album, The Silence Above Us, and Charlie's Gone Home. Both tracks give insight into what listeners can expect with the full project.

"I think that it is the best album that I have ever made, and I love it that it is just me, performing live - so what you are seeing and hearing is what you would be seeing and hearing if you were at a typical concert of mine. In the first single, I am playing a beautiful grand piano in the church. And it is lovely visually too - you can actually see the reflections of the woodwork and the stonework in the lid of the piano when the camera pans across it."

McQuaid expects 2021 to be another busy year; in addition to finishing up with St Buryan Sessions, she has a crop of other projects lined up.

"I want to get back to writing and recording new material - I have an idea of maybe releasing some short little EPs of two or three songs each, which could eventually be collected as an album. And then, hopefully, I can eventually get back out on the road."

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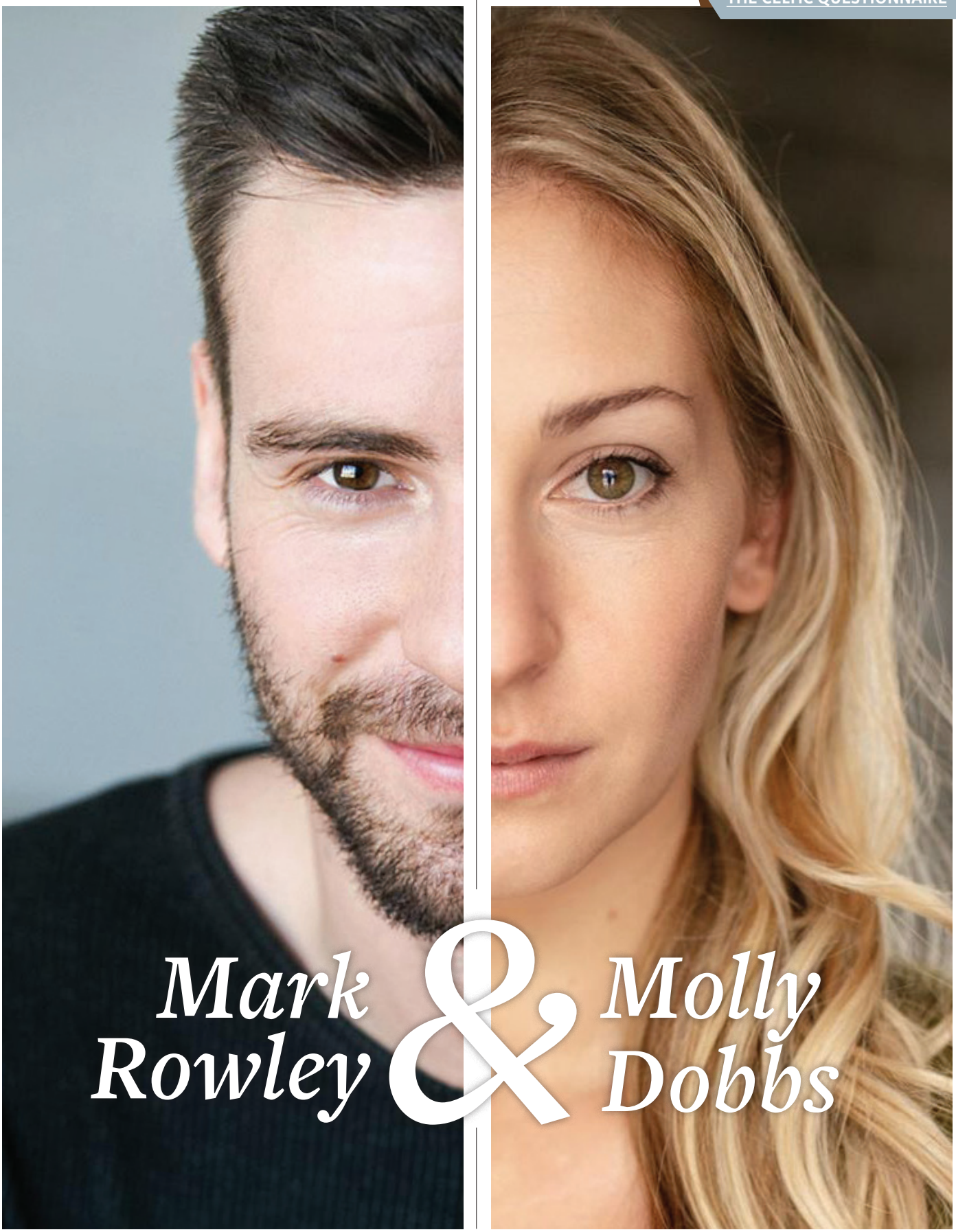

Mark Rowley & Molly Dobbs

In the midst of lockdown, Scottish actor Mark Rowley launched The Actors Community: an online space where both aspiring and amateur actors can take classes and workshops with people in the industry. Recently, Rowley and his acting partner, Molly Dobbs, chatted with Celtic Life International about the project and their shared passion for acting, theatre, and film.

Where did you grow up, and where are you living now?

Mark Rowley: I grew up in Scotland, a place just outside Glasgow called Paisley. I am kind of based in London, but I think that is the thing with acting isn't it? You go all over - you travel all over. I am in another place just now, filming. I would love to talk about it, but it is one of those things where I had to sign a waiver. I think the main places for us - and I am sure Molly will agree as well - for our kind of work it is either London, New York, or Los Angeles, which is good.

Molly Dobbs: I am from central coast California: San Luis Obispo - halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. I grew up there and moved to Glasgow when I was 18, and that is how I met Mark. We went to school together at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. And then I moved back to the U.S. and was kind of doing the traveller life, going around to different states and getting work where I could. It was November 2019 - I married my husband, who is English, and I moved over. It was like, a seven-year plan of, ok - how are we going to get Molly back in the country? So, I got married and moved over. And now I live in London. I love it. I never want to leave.

What inspired you to get started in acting?

MD: My dad was an actor. He always wanted to be. He was an actor and then stage manager. He was one of those who really wanted to do the thing but didn't have the talent for it. He was wicked smart. He is the smartest person that I have ever met. And he had like, 10 degrees. My family was always super, super artistic. So, it was kind of just like - not required - but it was like, "Well, you are going to dance classes, you are going to be in singing lessons." And I just really loved that and never wanted to do anything else.

MR: I think, for myself, I wasn't really good at that many things in school. I ended up going to a youth theatre and that was the first time someone said, "hey, you are good at something." And it felt amazing. It was such a warm and embracing feeling. Like, "Whoa, someone said I am good at something and has belief in me." So, I think that was just such a profound moment in my life, such a young guy as well. And then I ended up going to see a play called Death of a Salesman and I loved it. I was so moved. I completely forgot where I was. And these people on stage - I cared about them more than anything. Kind of like the world just disappeared, and I was just a spectator, just looking at these people's lives. And I was like, "Oh, that's really cool. I want to do that."

Mark, in the Netflix series The Last Kingdom, you played an Irishman although you are Scottish. I know that is not abnormal, because we have seen Gerard Butler and Ewan McGregor play Irish - it happens all the time. But is that a weird feeling?

MR: Yeah, a little bit. But I think it is really fun. And I have some Irish friends and stuff as well, so I wanted to do a good job - make sure that it sounds tip top, you know, really good shape. And it is quite nice when people go, "Oh, I thought you were Irish."

A career in the arts is going to be challenging anyway, but it is probably increasingly difficult now with COVID. And like you said, travel is such a big part of what you have to do. What drives you or inspires you to keep going?

MD: The first thing that comes to mind is, I think, just watching stuff, I feel like whenev-

er I watch stuff, I am just like, "God, I want to do that!" We watched Ma Rainey's Black Bottom the other day, and it reminded me that I miss live theatre so much. And I miss going to shows and I miss being in a show and being in rehearsal, and it just made me realize that after a year of having to be a bit more low-key, I just still miss it and love it. There is nothing in my life that brings me that happiness like being in a rehearsal room, taking notes and dissecting characters and doing weird animal impressions of who you think your character would be as an animal and all that stuff. It is like that toxic relationship you keep going back to; "No! I still need it!"

MR: I think that self-improvement is always a thing - "Can I get better? Can I defeat my own demons inside my head?" And then when you do, it feels great. But it is also, I think we are surrounded by positive people - and, especially now, it is so crucial that you have people lifting you up instead of bringing you down. But in terms of inspiration to keep going, I suppose it is just that - keeping the momentum of "actually, I can get better." You are never going to be absolutely flawless and perfect, and there is actually something really beautiful and liberating about that. One of the things about acting is self-discovery. You can live so many lives as long as you have the courage and belief to go there, then you really can, which is something really beautiful that a lot of people don't get to do. As well as that, I was reading a play recently with my friends. And obviously, with so much stress going on in the world, it was so liberating to get a little bit sassy, shooting some lines out. There is some sort of therapy involved in what we do.

MD: It is super cathartic. Super cathartic, especially now. It is like the emotional equivalent of going to a kickboxing class.

Can you tell us about The Actor's Community and how you got involved?

MR: I have always wanted to have some sort of an outlet place where actors can go and be creative. I really do feel as though - and they are really good at this in America - that I am constantly learning, going to class, growing all the time, always working

a room, you know, and having a support network. And in the U.K., we don't really have that. Always in the back of my head I was like, I want to do something - I want to create something where it is fun. Where people can come together and learn. Not from teachers, but other actors, who are making money and paying their bills, and actually doing life with acting. And then lockdown happened, and I went, "Well... perfect timing." I am definitely one of these guys where after like two weeks, if I don't do something, I just start to go mad. So, I was like, right, this is it. This is my project. And then I got in touch with Molly, and everyone else. We just started to build a team of people that want to help develop a creative community to help people. And that is what we are doing, really. So far, it is going really well, and people are loving it. Eventually we are hoping to open something up in London for teenagers and kids.

MD: It is so strange as well, because not all of us (instructors) have met in person. As soon as we are allowed to see each other again, we are all going to meet and have a barbecue in the summer.

What is rewarding about that kind of work - actually being able to teach and share what you have learned with other people?

MD: I have a friend who actually has another RCS (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) friend, who is a music director, and we talk about this a lot. How all the energy that you expend being an actor doing your own craft - you have to get that back somewhere; you have to regain that inspiration. And for a lot of people, it is through watching things or the applause or going to class themselves. But I find - and I am sure that Mark will say the same - the best way to regain inspiration is by teaching. You expel all of your energy doing your own craft and then you get it back by facilitating others doing that.

MR: I would say, off the back of that, you just see people break down barriers and then just build up the courage and get more confident with time. You are like, "yes, that's what I am talking about!" I always love that bit, though, because then you go, "Right, ok, you have set a bar? Now you can't go below that. You have levelled up. You can't level down."

www.theactorscommunity.org

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Duckett Calligraphy

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands puts pen-to-paper about putting pen-to-paper...

Ste (as in Ste-phen) Duckett looks out from his window in Dysart on the southern edge of the Kingdom of Fife. He has just finished another two minutes on a piece of illuminated calligraphy that he has been working on. Two minutes is the most he allows himself to spend at any one time without a pause. It is intense work, and the potential to make a mistake and ruin hours of labour is high. From his window he looks over the Firth of Forth towards Edinburgh to the south and Berwick-upon-Tweed to the east.

Beyond the Isle of May and Bass Rock guarding the entrance to the Firth he can see out over the North Sea. It is a landscape of ever-changing weather and colours. Here the golden dawn glints on the surface of the water, and during the day the landscape can be coloured with blues, greys and greens, with evening bringing deep, darkening blues as the moon and stars emerge. For this specialist in Celtic calligraphy the views provide a moment of respite for the eyes, but are also a source of inspiration for his art. The tranquility allows thoughts, words and passages to flow while the colours inform his palette. After a few minutes he turns back from his window and resumes work on a page from a very personal project - Windows Into The Night. It is a book of thought-provoking quotations, each inspired by nighttime and taken from a different source.

Each page is beautifully scribed with coloured lettering and an illuminated window motif derived from the starting letter of the quotation. Today's illuminated window heads a quotation by Canadian writer Charles de Lint. It reads, "You can't stand up to the night until you understand what's hiding in its shadows." The journey that has brought Duckett to where he is today is as exciting as it is varied, yet those words are of greater significance to him than many people understand.

Duckett and his two brothers grew up in Birmingham, England. His parents were professional musicians and played in a local symphony orchestra. His mother was a cellist and his father played French horn. Collectively, the family had an interest in history, stately homes, literature and music that all merged comfortably with the family's involvement with St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham. Designed by Augustus Welby Pugin in the Gothic style, it was the first cathedral to be built in Britain since the Reformation. By the time Duckett was seven years of age the cathedral had become his second home.

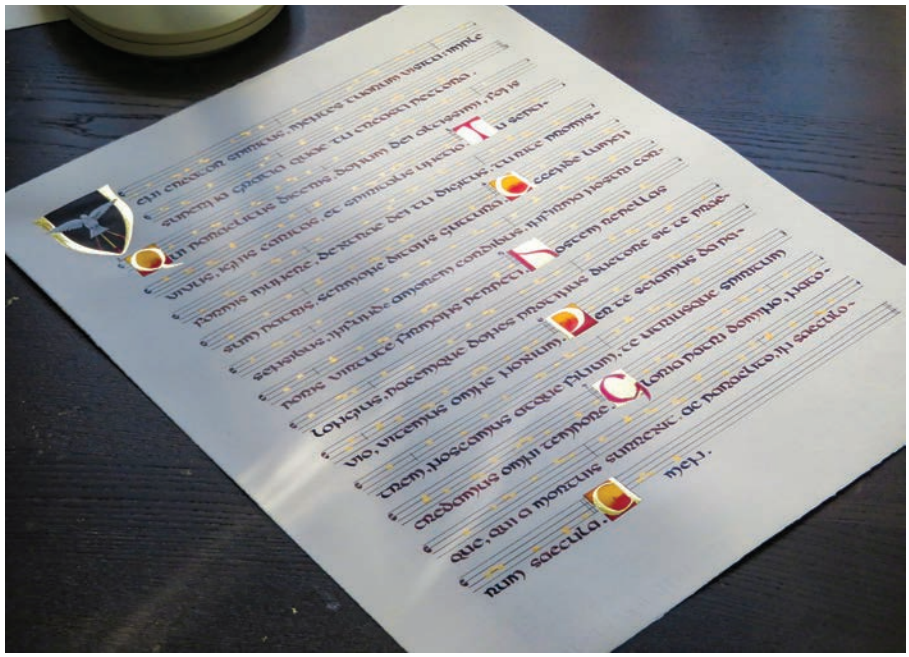
"For a young boy it was a fascinating, almost mystical place: the huge spaces, towering arches, stained glass windows, the smell of burning incense, flowing robes, rich vibrant colours, the sound of thunderous organ music echoing off the stonework and big, leather-bound books with ornate lettering."

He started his musical journey as a choirboy in the cathedral choir and by the age of nine he felt a strong calling to the priesthood. As his commitment to his faith grew so did his interest in lettering and music. By the age of 12 he was practicing rudimentary calligraphy and by 15 he was learning to play the organ. It was at school when he was studying for his A-level exams that things began to unravel. He encountered the first manifestation of a personality disorder and a serious, debilitating depression that was to become a recurring feature of his adult life - although it would be another two decades until it was diagnosed. With his studies unfinished he withdrew from school.

At 18 years of age Duckett found himself unsure what to do with his life. Having been influenced by visits to stately homes, literature founded in the English class system, and the pomp and ceremony of cathedral life, he wrote a letter to Buckingham Palace asking about the requirements needed to become a butler. To his surprise they offered him a position as an under butler, which he accepted. It was there that he learned the skills of butlering. Perhaps surprisingly for someone suffering from depression there followed an 18-month period as an undertaker which he regarded as, "Not being dissimilar to butlering - it is basically dressing up and looking after people." He returned to butlering, and for the next nine years held positions at Hagley Hall in Worcestershire, Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire, Hatfield House in Hertfordshire for Lord and Lady Salisbury, and Arundel Castle in West Sussex for the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk. While living at Arundel he held the position of second assistant organist at Arundel Cathedral and sang in the choir. At the age of 23 an opportunity arose to travel to Chicago where he lived for five months. It was during his stay in America that he met several fellow organists, played in a number of churches, and made many friends who have remained an important part of his life. Upon returning to the U.K. Duckett took up the position of under-butler to the 11th Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, as well as the role of organ curator at the palace's chapel. It was during his five years there that he again felt the draw of the priesthood and in a moment that he describes as a "reconversion" he enlisted as a novice monk at Mount Saint Bernard, a Trappist monastery in Leicestershire.

At first, life in the monastery was perfect. He eschewed the trappings of modern living, giving up everything except for his journals that held his writing, poems, and thoughts over many years.

Rising at 3:15a.m. each day he would climb the stone steps to the top of the tower and watch the dawn unfold over 200 acres of monastic landscape. Music remained a big part of his life and here he sang and played the organ. During long periods spent alone in his cell he practiced his calligraphy, drawing influences from writings to be found in the monastery and from the famous Book of Kells and Book of Durrow. Upon the death of a parishioner in Woodstock, the local priest remembered Duckett's passion for lettering and sent him a collection of professional calligraphy equipment that had belonged to the deceased. He spent many hours honing his skills. After two years of monastic life the depression started to resurface and he realized that, although the simple life suited him, the most important things to him were his family, nature and the great outdoors, music, and calligraphy. He left the monastery and returned to Blenheim Palace as head butler.



In 2019 he made the decision to move to Dysart in Fife to be near to his brother and his family. Now he lives a simple life with his Ragdoll cat, Chestnut, and concentrates on producing beautiful, thought-provoking pieces of calligraphy. Working only with high quality papers and inks, he specializes in Celtic calligraphy, often fusing elements of ancient and modern Celtic designs; the smooth, elegant curves and rounded hand suiting his style. His framed works adorn the walls of private residences, chapels and medieval halls in the U.K., North America and Montenegro. He undertakes private commissions but also produces unique greeting cards, medieval block-notation music manuscripts, prayers, biblical passages and illustrated books, and sells his work through his website and Etsy shop. He is the only calligrapher in Scotland who has been accepted as a corporate member of the Guild of Master Craftsmen.

Completing the Charles de Lint quotation for his Windows Into The Night book, Duckett lifts his head to gaze out of his window again. The light is starting to fade. The cat sits on the windowsill and together they gaze out over the Firth of Forth. They both know how to see through the darkest of nights.

All photos by Ste Duckett

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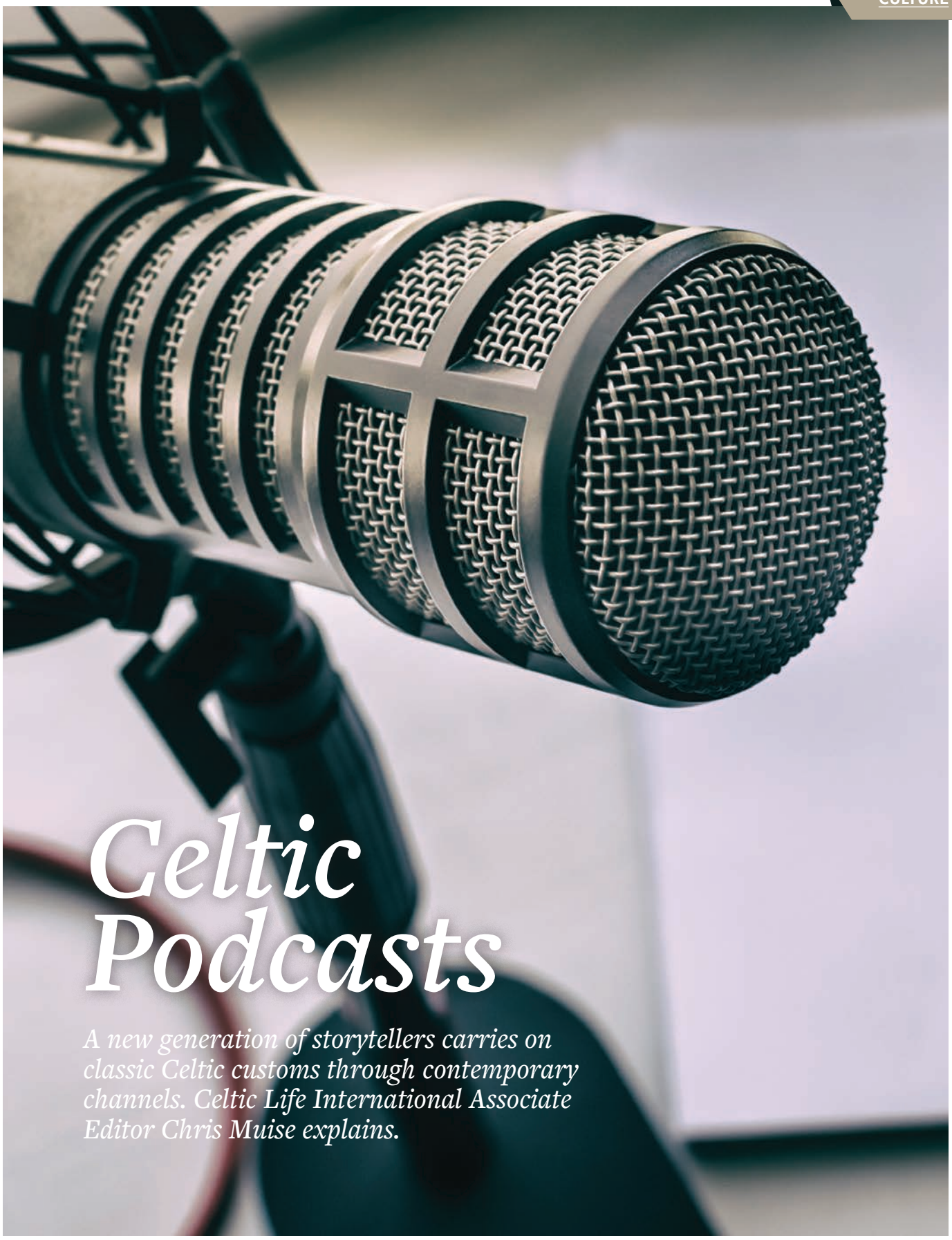

Celtic Podcasts

A new generation of storytellers carries on classic Celtic customs through contemporary channels. Celtic Life International Associate Editor Chris Muise explains.

Marc Gunn

Eoin Ó Conchúir

Marc Gunn, sitting in an office filled with musical instruments and recording equipment, reminisces about the first time he fancied himself as a curator of music.

"In 1988, I transferred all my eight-track tapes to cassette, and pretended I was a DJ," he tells Celtic Life International via Zoom. "My pet peeve back then was when DJs would talk over the music."

Today, Gunn gets to call the shots of his own radio program, which he hosts from his home in Atlanta, Georgia. Except, it is not broadcast via radio - technically, it is a podcast.

Podcasts aren't exactly new technology, but more people are discovering them lately as they remain holed up inside during the COVID-19 pandemic and looking for good ways to pass the time. For the uninitiated, podcasts are basically self-made audio broadcasts - a combination of "broadcast" and "iPod" (the first devices to typically carry them) - that listeners can download and enjoy at their leisure.

And, these days, there are so many podcasts that it is difficult to determine exactly how many there are, as they can be about almost anything, and started by almost anyone.

Gunn started The Irish & Celtic Music Podcast in 2005, in part to promote his own band at the time - The Brobdingnagian Bards - but more so, to promote other indie Celtic groups that struggled to find a platform.

"As I was promoting the band, I realized that there were all these other independent bands that were not getting heard. I started the podcast because I thought it might be a neat way to promote them. I set it up in a format that appealed to me, something that I could listen to, as much as anything.

"Everyone has a different idea of what Celtic music is. I wanted to create something so that anyone who was curious about Celtic music could find a nice entry. And it didn't have to be just traditional music."

Today, the show is still going strong, broadcasting weekly, and boasting an average of 10,000 downloads per episode. Gunn starts each episode with more traditional sounds to set the mood, offers a more diverse mix of different styles in the middle, and always concludes with a set of Celtic rock tunes so as to end on a strong note.

> *"The format just draws you in and gets you excited about the music."*

A desire to share the kind of music he wanted to hear is something that Gunn has in common with Gareth Olver, another Celtic music podcaster on the other side of the world.

"It has been going nearly four years," says Olver, host of the Celtic Punkcast, from his living room in the Grampians region of Victoria, Australia. "I play music from the Celtic Punk and Folk Punk scenes, with a dash of trad thrown in there from time to time. A little bit of Pirate Metal, as well. Basically, this is the music that I love listening to that I couldn't find anywhere. You never see it on the TV. If I can give another voice to these artists, to get their music out to new ears, why not?"

Podcasting isn't just the domain of musicians, however. Podcasts can be - and often are - about any topic you can think of, from entertainment, to history, to politics, and every nook and cranny in between.

Take Sian Powell's Celtic Myths & Legends podcast, for example.

"It is about Celtic myths and legends - so, yes, I am very inventive," Powell chuckles via Zoom from her bedroom in Wales. "It says what it is on the tin."

Powell uses her platform to share all the folklore and customs that she fell in love with while studying for her Masters in Celtic Studies at the University of Wales Trinity St. David.

"I have covered a breadth of subjects, actually. Sometimes I will talk about folkloric creatures. Sometimes I will discuss something a bit grander, such as medieval literature or mythology, like the Mabinogion. Sometimes I will explore folk customs, like wassailing, and the Mari Lwyd. I have covered an eclectic range."

The Bitesize Irish Podcast, meanwhile, works to encourage a love of the culture not through lore, but through language. The host, Eoin Ó Conchúir, runs Bitesize Irish as a program to help people learn the Irish


Sian Powell


Gareth Olver

tongue, and as a way to keep morale high.

"The Bitesize Irish Podcast is very much like a motivational piece. It is in the English language, not Irish. A lot of it is how to get yourself to do Gaeilge gach lá - Irish every day. Because people kind of beat themselves up a lot. How do we deal with that enormous task of the journey of learning a language?"

Podcasts under the Celtic umbrella - which covers a wide berth of topics - can even be seen as a continuation of spreading oral history and culture, much to Powell's delight.

"You have essentially just said that I am a modern-day Taliesin! But, of course, you are right - oral storytelling is very integral to lots of different cultures. If you go back far enough, you have bards in the various Brittonic courts, who would be telling these tales.

> *"Folklore and podcasts are a natural fit. It is just a continuation of the storytelling tradition."*

Besides the Celtic connection, one thing that all these podcast hosts share is the desire to make a difference - even if only a few people are listening.

"I never, ever expected that I would get any listeners," says Powell. "Now I am at a point where I comfortably get in between about 3,000 to 4,000 listeners in the first 30 days of uploading an episode. That seems simply incredible to me, because essentially, I am just some random woman talking to myself in my bedroom in front of a microphone. But I also know that I am talking to people.

"It is a strangely intimate thing sometimes. People will be listening to your podcast when they walk their dog, or in the car with their family, driving to somewhere, or in the bath! People listen to podcasts in all sorts of places, and all sorts of moments from their lives. To be that random voice that they are listening to is a huge responsibility."

It is, however, a responsibility these podcasters cherish, as connecting with listeners around the world - over a topic near and dear to their hearts - is what makes these programs as popular as they are.

"It is a two-way thing - a relationship of sorts," says Powell. "Every now and again, there will be a random person that is tuning in from somewhere like Zimbabwe or Thailand."

"I had a guy who was in Antarctica send a picture in," Gunn gushes. "So, it is certainly about building a relationship with the fans."

"That is the beauty of podcasts," adds Olver. "No matter how niche it is, someone out there has a shared interest with you who can help you with your knowledge base and give you a bit of enjoyment for an hour or so."

That is great news for those looking to start their own program.

"I love the idea of permission-less content," says Ó Conchúir. "Nobody gave me permission to do a podcast."

> *That is the democratic nature of this medium - anyone can do it.*

For those looking to try their hand at podcasting, the hosts we spoke to all have the same advice; don't worry about the cost (it is usually negligible); don't worry about sounding perfect on your first try (you will get better at it). In other words, just get it out there and do it.

"I would encourage more people to set up podcasts," says Ó Conchúir. "This is your story - tell it!"

"It is not broadcasting - it is narrowcasting," adds Powell. "If you have a niche, you are going to find your people, or they are going to find you, eventually. And not to get too philosophical, but it is something to be proud of."

Gunn thinks back to his younger self, playing DJ with his eight-tracks, and wonders what that person might think of him now, the host of a worldwide broadcast that brings people together in the love of Celtic culture.

"He would be wowed, which is kind of still what I am saying. Literally several times a year, I am in awe that this is something that I can do. I just love that it is possible."

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Newfoundland Saga: Part Two

In the second installment of a feature series, Lesley Choyce walks the Rock

My official Newfoundland road map didn't have nearly enough detail for my liking, but I did see a large green chunk of something labelled Witless Bay Ecological Reserve which I decided we should definitely explore. The only problem was that it appeared to be entirely off the shores and in the Atlantic Ocean. Therein existed the largest puffin colony in North America if not the world. Alas, without a watercraft it looked like we would return home without seeing a solitary puffin (or whale or iceberg.) But then there were reasonable reasons why this was the case and, well, the rugged hiking and rollicking music were themselves enough to call the trip a success. And we had just begun.

Travelling hither and yon without a hard itinerary is definitely the way I prefer to travel so we didn't really give Witless Bay a good look over. As we drove on, I continued to wonder about the name (as usual), so Linda looked it up and found it was named for a Dorsetshire captain named Whittle. Hence Wittle's Bay. When Captain Whittle passed on, his family buggered-off back to England and the folks left in town said something like, "Well, I guess we're now Whittle-less Bay." It would be like if I moved my clan out of East Lawrencetown, Nova Scotia, and my neighbours celebrated the news by renaming the town, "Choyceless Town." At any rate, the name whittled its way down to Witless Bay over the years and now has a population of about 1,600 or so who have the offshore

Lesley on the Rocks -Avalon Peninsula

puffins, whales, and icebergs pretty much all to themselves when the tourists are not around.

There is a crab processing plant there that does not generally give a public tour and, locally, the town is famous for as much political turmoil as a small community could muster for itself. Back in 2017, the whole town council got itself elected unopposed in a most Soviet manner and then voted to do away with the previous guidelines for ethics, conflict of interest, land use, and such. There was a backlash, and the council voted to hire a criminal lawyer to see if they could muzzle their critics. Having learned this, I decided I would henceforth not do further research into local politics and instead commune with rocks, trees, wind and waves, as was my penchant.

I took a couple of backroads beyond a place called Mobile and then Tors Cove, expecting to get lost again - but happily so this time. One windy paved single-track road took me to Burnt Cove where the pavement came to a halt at a pebbly little beach in the middle of town where a middle-aged man in high rubber boots was collecting fish from the water in a bucket. We had stumbled on a capelin scull the like of which I had never seen before. Capelin are smallish fish - much

Bell Island Lighthouse

like smelt - that spawn in June and July and then many (mostly males) die and drift in ashore where they are collected for cooking, salting, for bait, or for tossing on your garden so you can grow some mighty fine potatoes and cabbage. It is the end of the life cycle for the fish, but the capelin scull has been a blessing for many a coastal inhabitant in these parts since the 1500s or earlier.

Just off the coast from Burnt Cove were the exquisite islands of the Ecological Reserve: Gull Island, Green Island, Great Island - and, yes, Pee Pee Island. On a pristine day like this, they beckoned but clearly were beyond our reach. A final drive further south took us to Cape Broyle, Island Cove and Admiral's Cove, but we had reached the limit of our daily tether and were ready to follow the Irish Loop back to St. John's.

For sustenance, Linda convinced me to dine at the St. John's Fish Exchange which

Linda in Quidi Vidi

sounds funky enough to suit my taste but was actually an upscale fine-dining establishment near the harbour with oversized black and white photos on the wall of men in rubber outfits filleting fish the size of my living room sofa. I wondered if once upon a time it really was where Newfoundlanders traded fish. "Trade ya' these two mackerel for that nice fat cod you got there." That sort of thing. But no, I suppose that was just my imagination.

I can report, however, that the fish was tasty and the wine expensive as is common in such ritzy chow houses. But at least we had enough paella left for the next day's lunch and we consumed enough seafood to buoy our spirits and make a second visit to Broderick's where we were entertained by a most excellent Stan Rogers style performer. He preferred to sing each tune either sideways to the stage or with his back to the audience, a style of performance I had only seen with young edgy hip-hop artists. But he had a bellowing, mellifluous voice and some original tunes that melded well with the Dayboil brew that helped finish off a most extraordinary day.

I was determined to seek out more material about the Irishness of Newfoundland.

After studying the map of the Avalon Peninsula, however, we realized that we would not be able to do the complete Irish Loop this trip. We would settle for Irish music when we could find it and some celebratory pints of Murphy's and Guinness. However, the lad delivering pints to our table at Broderick's informed us that there was a current crisis in town concerning a dearth of draft Guinness. It had something to do with a change in distribution and, if I understood it correctly, the shame-faced server sadly reported that the Guinness had to find its way to St. John's by way of Toronto. And, apparently, until the distribution deals were settled, the pubs of the city would not be pouring any pints of the dark brew any time soon. Clearly St. John's was a city in crisis, and it would not be resolved until well after we left.

Back in our loft at night, I could have done more research into the waves of Irish immigrants down through the centuries, but instead decided to formulate a list of pubs in town with Irish names or themes. Within a stone's throw of our roost on Duckworth Street was O'Reilly's Irish Newfoundland Pub, Bridie Molloy's, Kelly's, Shamrock City, Trinity, Greenslieve's, Celtic Hearth, Erin's, and the Ship to name a few. Other Celtic establishments included The Rose and Thistle, The Black Sheep, Rob Roy, and Trapper John's Screech Pub. We would not have enough time to report on the goings on at each venue but would save that until a future date when those bastards in Ontario had permitted the Guinness to flow freely back into the worthy pubs of Sin City.

In the morning, we headed north to Portugal Cove and drove around the harbour trying to figure out how to get on the ferry to Bell Island. We ended up on a film set where everyone was from out of town and, even though the ferry was within sight, none of the cast or crew could suggest how we could get on it. So, we drove around town some more until we saw a man in a little white booth waving to us. We paid for a round trip and drove our Mazda into the belly of the beast. There is not much to say about the crossing of what they call "The Tickle" although I had intended to wax most eloquent about the waters of Conception Bay and the magnificent view of the high cliffs of the island as we approached. Instead, we got yelled at when we tried to leave our vehicle to go up on deck and endured the crossing inside our car listening to the CBC report how bad COVID-19 was in the U.S. and in other parts of Canada.

The great thing about getting off a car ferry is that you feel like you have arrived somewhere exotic after a lengthy ocean voyage.

Well, this one wasn't lengthy - 20 minutes tops - but when you are stuck in the hold of a big steel vessel and the front of

the ship cracks open for the light to smack you in the face, it is like you have arrived at a brave new world. Bell Island is actually a brave old world.

The island itself is about nine kilometers long and a mere three kilometers wide. According to Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, "Reports of iron ore on Bell Island go back to at least 1578, when a merchant from Bristol, England, reported finding iron deposits there. In 1628, members of Sir John Guy's colony in Cupids sent iron samples from Bell Island to England for analysis." Apparently, the reports were good because mining iron became the mainstay for islanders even though the earliest settlers came there to fish, farm, and harvest seals. The mining of the ore lasted from 1895 to 1966, but things slowed down when the Germans stopped buying from Bell Island during World War I and next the Depression knocked the wind out of it during the "Dirty Thirties." The town of Wabana was at the centre of it all and we wondered what might be left to see of the rusty glory days gone by.

The sun was out, and it had that million-miles-from-anywhere feel to it that always puts a big smile on my face. I could see from my map that the island itself was shaped like a ship and I thought we should drive to the bow of the ship which, in my mind, meant driving north to a place called Long Harry Point. There was a lighthouse there (of course) and, although I am not a huge fan of lighthouses, we headed there. Let's face it; most lighthouses are disappointing once you actually see them, especially the modern, automated kind. But there is almost always something interesting near a lighthouse and that was true for Long Harry.

There was a little café there, but it was closed. Some men were sawing boards and hammering away on the construction of a shed. If we weren't on our quest for a true Bell Island adventure, I would have liked to just walk over and lend a hand. What could be more satisfying than sawing some boards and hammering ten penny nails into wood on a day like this? But Linda was itching to run her 10 kilometres, so I slapped on a little backpack to hike along as her stalwart companion and coach.

At this most northerly tip of Bell Island, we located a grassy trail heading due south on the east side. The sky was blue, we were high above Conception Bay and an eagle soared above us as we headed south on the path. As the sound of workers diminished and my wife disappeared ahead of me on the trail, I savoured the warm sea breeze (almost an oxymoron in these parts) and put one foot ahead of the other. Could there possibly be a moment more satisfying than this? If your soul is weary and you need to reboot your brain, I suggest heading to Long Harry on a grand summer day and follow my footsteps.

Well, the trail snaked along the cliffs and, for the most part, it was on the edge of a big grassy field with wildflowers and more dragonflies. Studying some local lore later in the day, I learned that this field was known to be a place where lovers in this century, and the two previous ones, would come to get away from civilization and do what lovers do. So, I assume that many a lustful Bell Islander had once cavorted here and tamped down the leaves of grass in this bucolic piece of heaven in their lovemaking.

The place reminded me somewhat of Bempton Cliffs in England because you could stand along the cliff edge and watch birds nesting on the walls below while gulls and other sea birds flew in the sky below your eye level - swooping, gliding, and catching the updrafts effortlessly. No puffins mind you, despite the Newfoundland tourist propaganda, but the place had everything else I required for happiness that day. (Did I mention, I really liked everything about Long Harry and his point?) Oh, and the time of the season was right for blueberries. Buckets of them - if you had a mind for it and a pail. I had the mind but not the firkin, so I gorged on fistfuls until my lips turned blue and, when Linda doubled back for a mid-hike kiss, she wondered what I had been up to.

We logged at least four kilometers out and the same four back, but the trail itself wandered off south for many miles and Robert Frost was in my head saying someday we should return and see where it goes.

And so, the morning itself was like a dream, a very good one, and you know what those moments are like that you wish will never end.

I think I had soggy shoes by the time we arrived back to the Mazda for sandwiches. The workmen were eating lunch as well and the hammers had ceased as I put my wet socks on the dashboard to dry in the sun which gave me a powerful déjà vu of doing just this very thing in some previous life... or perhaps on a previous trip on another continent. If you are like me, wet black socks drying beneath a windshield after a near-celestial hike is an image to carry around in your head on dark winter days.

After Long Harry, I have to say, the rest of Bell Island was a bit of a disappointment. We motored down to Wabana and I found it a little depressing. It was a mining town after all and when was the last time you found a mining town cheerful? There was a museum there and a hockey rink and some government buildings and most things were closed including what appeared to be a dinner theatre that, in healthier times, provided entertainment based on the history of mining on Bell Island.

Bell Island Ferry

Witless Bay

This reminded me of a most famous entertainer who had hailed from Bell Island - the amazing Harry Hibbs. Tourism Bell Island describes that Harry this way: "With his laid- back personality, his salt and pepper hat, his pipe and his button accordion, he became Bell Island's and Newfoundland's ambassador across our great nation." I remember being introduced to Harry Hibbs accordion records in the early seventies while living on Cape Breton Island when a couple of draft dodgers introduced his work to me. For a while there, my absolutely favorite music performers were Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and Harry Hibbs. Two Jims and a Harry. Apparently, Harry sold over 8 million records to draft dodgers and music enthusiasts even beyond his "great nation."

I sipped cold coffee as we drove the western perimeter of Bell Island south to Lance Cove and looped back around to catch the ferry to the mainland - well, not exactly the mainland because Newfoundland is, of course, an island itself, although a bloody big one.

I think I dozed on the ferry ride back to Portugal Cove or just fell into a nice post-hike self-hypnotic trance which always reminds me that you have to do something physical each and every day or you turn into a neurotic pear, if you know what I mean. Driving off the lower deck of the ferry MV Flanders, the attendant who waved us on was smiling like Buddha, or at least someone who had just heard a really good joke. I wondered what that was all about other than just another good omen that reminded me that, while the rest of the world was going to a COVID-19 hell, we were out bouncing about on our smallish adventure filling our soggy boots with bog water and filling our minds with happy thoughts and exploits.

"And wasn't it Buddha himself who had said something like, "As you walk and eat and travel, be where you are. Otherwise, you will miss most of your life"?

So, with Smiling Buddy's image still swimming in our heads, it was determined we should next seek out Quidi Vidi Brewery, the birthplace of Dayboil IPA, for some snacks and beer supplies before heading back to our roost above the Trinity Pub.

On the way, we drove past the airport again and through some suburban sprawl that seemed to have been placed there to remind us that Newfoundland was a land of contrast. For here were shopping centres flush with all the imaginable chain stores and restaurants possible, snarled traffic, unhappy pedestrians, and endless pavement. It all made the northern tip of Bell Island seem like a fantasy. I thought we should escape this zone as soon as humanly possible, so I proposed we take a short side trip out to Logy Bay. We had flown in over Logy Bay as we were landing a few days back, and there were some fine-looking mountainous headlands thereabouts. It turned out to be a bit more developed than I remembered it, as the suburbs had demonically creeped seaward to swallow up bogs and fields with cookie-cutter housing.

Many years ago, I had worked for Canada's Conservation Renewable Energy Branch of the government documenting "alternative energy" and renewable resources in Atlantic Canada. The job had taken me to visit a cutting-edge pioneer of composting toilets who lived in Logy Bay. He was a professor of some sort (Composting maybe?) and he had what was reported to be the largest biological toilet in North America. For those of you unfamiliar with this type of apparatus, it requires no water and sometimes no energy and I know you are thinking – it is just a big outhouse. But not quite.

As I recall, the Logy Bay professor had constructed his new home on the steep hillside looking out to sea with the whole first floor beneath the living area as a giant composting chamber for human waste. Apparently, the bigger it was, the better things would compost. It was all a matter of keeping the proper temperature and humidity and, in the end (no pun intended), you would have perfectly harmless compost you could put on your turnip patch. (Well, not my turnip patch.) The idea, of course, was to stop wasting water, use less electricity, and not pollute the environment. At the time, I was impressed enough to go back to Nova Scotia and buy my own commercial biological toilet which was more or less a disaster. But to this day, I still admired the great composter of Logy Bay who had invited me to inspect first-hand the sacred chambers where the famous composting took place.

But now, weary from travelling, I failed to locate the house on the seaside hill and found that the citizens of Logy Bay had succumbed to streetlights, stoplights, sidewalks and other symbols of modernity. It was just another bedroom community now although the sea still splashed the rocks along the shore enthusiastically as it had for the last several million years. Maybe Quidi Vidi would be more appealing.

And it was. Sort of. Quidi Vidi is a bit hard to find but everyone travelling to St. John's eventually gets there. It is picturesque - just like in the provincial traveler's guide - but it feels like it is trying too hard to be what a Newfoundland fishing village should look like. It was fairly empty of tourists thanks to the pandemic. (There is, perhaps, always an upside to global health crises.) The streets are narrow and steep, and we drove to the end of one snaking road where we located what looked like some great hiking trails. So, we made a note that we had to return here to hike the Cuckold's Cove trail on a future day.

Quidi Vidi Brewery was mostly closed, but they had a small outdoor shop selling caps and t-shirts and we bought a couple of Calm Tom's and a Dayboil for the apartment. Later that evening, we dined on leftovers in our fridge and returned to Broderick's for more Newfoundland and Irish music.

www.lesleychoyce.com

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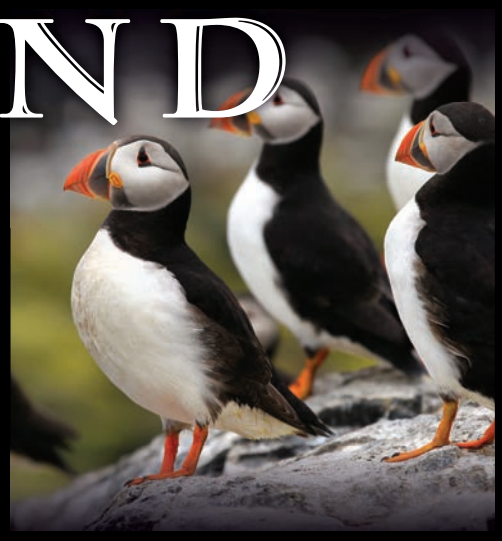

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Judy R. Clark

Scotland

I grew up in a small town in the Highlands of Scotland called Fort William. I went on to study at Heriot Watt University in The Scottish Borders and qualified with a First-Class Honours degree in Fashion Design for Industry. I later interned for the late Alexander McQueen and, on my return to Scotland, set up my own label. I was nominated as young designer of the year in Scotland, and so I returned to focus on my new collection. Scotland has a very rich and diverse textile industry which I am very proud to use in my work. The bespoke fashion market in Scotland is perhaps more niche, but that is what makes it so special and coveted.

www.judyrclark.com

Jacqueline Quinn

Ireland

I am originally from Kilbarrack, the same place as Roddy Doyle and he grew up around the corner and his parents and my parents were the best of friends. I currently live in New York, and I have been here for 26 years. I started sketching when I was 12, it was raining in Achill Island and my dad bought art paper and coloring pencils and the first sketch I drew was a woman in a lime green trouser suit. I have since worked with the likes of Jessica Simpson, Guess, DKNY, Kathleen Kennedy, Courtney Love, the Duchess of York, Rachel Ray, and many others. Fashion is my passion and I love what I do.

www.jacquelinequinn.com

Lucy Jones

Wales

My family is mostly from Llanelli, but I was born and raised in Cardiff. The earliest memory I have of creating clothes was when I was around 7 - I used to cut up and glue and decorate old clothes that I had grown out of or could no longer use. I believe that everybody should have access to products that showcase who they are, or what they want the world to see. My customers are predominantly wheelchair users, or people who just love well-made bags. Our product line is an assortment of detachable accessories, such as wallets, cupholders, bottles and bags, that attach to the frames of wheelchairs using a piece of hardware we designed, so many of our customers are shopping from one another after seeing it on a friend or peer. I believe in intentional design, where every detail serves a purpose. I like when aesthetics and function go hand in hand, where one informs the other, and vice-versa.

www.liveffora.com

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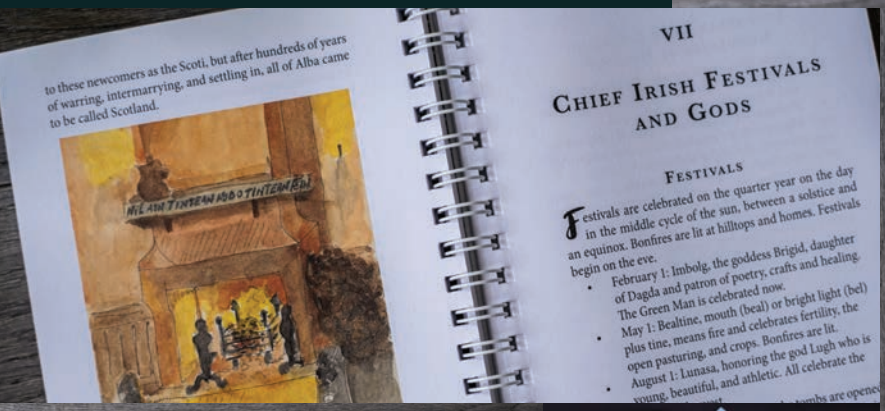

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Green Thomas

(Emma Green & Alan Thomas Dibble)

Scotland / Northern Ireland

We have always been interested in art and discovered that you could actually go to college to study it after being nudged by enthusiastic teachers at school. We both studied design specializing in textiles at art school and met while taking classes in fashion knitwear at Central Saint Martin. We always had a love of pattern and colour that transferred easily into working in fashion. Both of us are children of the 70s and 80s and still love a bit of pattern excess. We are rooted in the heritage of Scottish textiles, but our work is very contemporary. We like people to recognize the patterns, but also to be surprised by our interpretation of them.

www.greenthomas.com

Claire Christian

Isle of Man

I was born on the beautiful Isle of Man (Ellan Vannin to the locals). And though I was starved of fashion when I was growing up, I was surrounded by green rolling hills, the sea, and views of the seven kingdoms. I was interested in fashion when I was very young - from the age of 3, I would demand what I wanted to wear and how I wanted to style my own look, much to the frustration of my parents. Later this developed into a way of life for me, I never stopped thinking about fashion, and this translated through art and design. My bespoke pieces are unique and there are no other items like them in the world, which is ideal for those who aim for individuality.

www.clairechristiancouture.com

Regina Tierney

Ireland

I grew up in a little Parish in Co. Clare called Kilnamona, and my family has lived here for generations. According to family lore, our ancestors originally came from the Burren National Park and dates to around 500 BC. As a young person, I just didn't resonate with what I saw in the shops or in magazines and I found it difficult to find clothes that suited my personality, I longed for clothes with natural fibres. I feel connected with my culture and my roots and I wanted to express that through how I look. Celtic is that which identifies me - my landscape and the culture that has gone before me - and creating Celtic fashion is taking this culture and applying it to clothing which is appropriate and tasteful to our modern pallet.

www.celticfusiondesign.com

Rachel McMillan

Scotland

I was born in Glasgow, Scotland, where I still reside. My grandparents have Irish, Scottish, and Italian roots. I have always been interested in art and creative subjects. My grandmother was a dressmaker and I loved to go and visit her when I was young - she would teach me to knit or let me do arts and crafts all afternoon. My aesthetic has developed over the years into soft, comfortable clothing for the eco-conscious woman. Being an advocate for slow fashion, I am intent on designing high quality lasting pieces rather than following seasonal trends. My textile prints definitely make my designs unique and are usually what catches someone's eye. I love the whole process of print design, using traditional painting and drawings and mixing in modern digital editing software to create endless repeats and colour combinations.

www.rachel-mcmillan.com

Daryl K
Ireland

I grew up in Dublin, in a Southside suburb. I studied Fashion Design at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and subsequently moved to New York in 1986. I now reside in North East Pennsylvania. Fashion became a means of self expression in my teens. My mother was very stylish and an expert dressmaker, she got me started and encouraged me to go to Art College. London's fashion scene was very exciting and it was close enough for me to visit regularly. Rock 'n' roll icons in the U.S. and the U.K. provided an authentic style that was more than just fashion. Through these influences, I found my own sense of style and it was then that I also needed to create the clothes to express it.

www.darylk.com

Jayne Pierson

Wales

I am Welsh, but I have lived in London and Dallas, Texas for 12 years respectively. I currently reside in rural west Wales. Before I was a designer, I was a singer songwriter in my band. I have always loved creating characters and an interest in writing songs about them or performing them onstage or putting them on a catwalk. For me, it is more of an interest in storytelling through fashion, film, and music. Each collection is like a song or a chapter in a book. The album or book being the band or brand. I have always ensured my brand is ethically minded, socially responsible, sustainable and slow fashion. Everything I do is bespoke and made to order and I never mass produce anything. I have worked hard to develop a specific signature in regards to shape, line and form.

www.jaynepierson.co.uk

Pan Seared Scallops with Stornoway Black Pudding

THE CELTIC CHEF
with Gary Maclean

As an educator, I love that I can not only teach practical elements of cookery but also highlight and share what I know about wonderful ingredients and sustainability. This is a relatively simple dish, but it relies on great ingredients and precise cooking to make it stand out. Two of Scotland's most iconic ingredients marry beautifully to make this classic dish. I always use hand-dived scallops, as it is the most sustainable method of harvesting this incredible ingredient. Black pudding is a real speciality of Scotland, and Stornoway black pudding is particularly good. Black pudding has been made in crofts on the Hebridean Isles for hundreds of years, and it is so unique that in 2013 it was awarded Protected Geographical Indicator of Origin status.

Ingredients

12 king scallops

12 slices black pudding

300g / 12oz carrots

50g / 2oz butter, unsalted

2 banana shallots

50g / 2oz plain flour

½ lemon

Few sprigs of dill, seasoning and oil

Instructions

Your first task is to make a carrot puree, so peel and chop the carrots into even sized pieces. Place the carrots into a pan with half of the butter and a little salt, cover with water and bring to the boil. Once the carrots have cooked, drain them into a colander over a bowl to catch the cooking liquor. Pour the carrots into a liquidizer and blitz down. You might have to add some of the cooking liquor to get it going but be careful not to add too much as it will make it too watery. Adjust the seasoning and put to one side. Next, evenly slice the black pudding. I have used baby black pudding, so the slices are smaller. Next, cut the shallots into thin rings and dust with flour, in a small pan with a little oil shallow fry until crisp and put to one side. Then, pop the black pudding into a moderate oven around 170°C. Lastly, it is time to cook the scallops; place a pan onto the heat and, once hot, add a little oil. Place the scallops into the pan in a clockwise direction so that you know what order the scallops went in the pan (and what order in which to remove them.) Once your first scallop has taken on some colour it's ready to turn, quickly turn all your scallops, once they have all been turned remove the pan from the heat, squeeze in some fresh lemon juice and the remainder of the butter. Coat all the scallops with the lemon and butter mixture and remove from the pan. Place the scallops onto some kitchen paper to absorb any excess butter. By this time, the black pudding should be cooked - arrange the pudding onto the plate topped with the scallops and crispy shallots. Add the carrot puree and finish with a few sprigs of dill and onion seeds.

Slàinte! Gary • www.garymacchef.com

Strawberry Rhubarb Coffee Cake

Last March, I was in Boston visiting family when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. The United States would close its borders and anyone travelling was advised to get home immediately. I aborted my trip, grabbed a flight home, north to Nova Scotia. Strains of coronavirus only grew louder and stronger as the year passed, and more restrictions kept everyone in lockdown. Masks, physical distancing and handwashing are now our new norm. It is with these thoughts in mind that I welcome the first fruits and vegetables of the season. I welcome them like never before as they impose their innate order on our crazy world. I can only hope that this order will breathe much-needed life back into the entire planet - if only! Rhubarb with its early shoots of red and green is working hard to push its way through the ground and greet the new day. Its tangy flavour will not be denied. Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!

Ingredients

3 cups sliced fresh or frozen rhubarb (1-inch pieces)
1quart fresh strawberries - mashed
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 cup sugar
1/3 cup cornstarch

Cake
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup butter - cut into pieces
1-1/2 cups buttermilk
2 large eggs - room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Topping
1/4 cup butter
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 cup sugar

Instructions

In a large saucepan, combine rhubarb, strawberries, and lemon juice. Cover and cook over medium heat about 5 minutes. Combine sugar and cornstarch; stir into saucepan. Bring to a boil; cook and stir 2 minutes or until thickened. Remove from heat and set aside. Preheat oven to 350°. In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Beat buttermilk, eggs, and vanilla; stir into crumb mixture. Spread half of the batter evenly into a greased 13 x 9-inch baking dish. Carefully spread filling on top. Drop remaining batter by tablespoonfuls over filling. For topping, melt butter in a saucepan over low heat. Remove from heat; stir in flour and sugar until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle over batter. Lay foil on lower oven rack to catch any juice spillovers. Place coffee cake on middle rack; bake 40-45 minutes. Cool on a wire rack.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini
- cabrini@celticlife.com

All About Ardnamurchan

with ***Andrew Ferguson***

When Kilchoman Distillery opened on Islay in 2005, it became the first new distillery built in Scotland in more than a decade. Over the last dozen years, no fewer than 29 new distilleries have opened. The new distilleries are mostly small and independent, setting them apart from the industry's established players. One of the most hotly anticipated new distilleries is Ardnamurchan, which launched its first-ever single malt Scotch whisky in late 2020.

I have made the trek to Ardnamurchan at least three times since ground was broken on the site in 2013. One of the most remote distilleries in Scotland, it is a 90-minute drive from Ft. William down a long and winding road on the unspoiled and untamed Ardnamurchan peninsula. The drive is not for the faint of heart, especially if it is raining. The single-track road, barely wider than a bike path, twists, drops, and rolls with the landscape, and in a deluge, the burns wash across the road.

The Ardnamurchan Peninsula juts out of Scotland's mainland above the island of Mull. Wild and rugged, it was a training area for Special Forces in WWII as it could easily be cut off from the rest of Scotland. The distillery was built in the hamlet of Glenbeg, perched above Glenmore Bay, with views of the Morvern Penninsula and the Isle of Mull. On a sunny day you can see the picturesque burgh of Tobermory, the capital of the Isle of Mull.

Ardnamurchan was established by Adelphi Distillery LTD, an independent bottler named for a distillery which closed in 1902. Realizing the supply of whiskies for independent bottlers was tightening up, they made the decision to open their own distillery. They selected a site on land belonging to one of their directors, which allowed them to build a green distillery, heated by locally sourced wood chips and hydro powered by the same river which supplies the distillery's cooling water. The malted barley is sourced from the farms which surround the firm's bottling warehouse near Dunfermline, across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh.

> *The distillery is modern, but takes an old school approach to making whisky, with long fermentations and a slow distillation.*

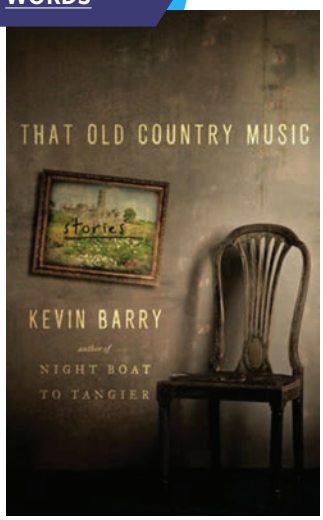
In June of 2014, the first spirit trickled off the stills at Ardnamurchan. It took them a little while to get used to using the biomass boiler for heating and dial in their new made spirit. But it has, for the most part, been smooth sailing since. The distillery produces a mix of unpeated and peated (35ppm) spirit, which it matures in dunnage floor warehouse carved into the hillside above the distillery.

With more than 10,000 casks now in bond, the company recently added three new warehouses on site, which it has already started to fill. The distillery is also equipped with floor maltings, which it has yet to use. Only a handful of distilleries in Scotland still have a floor maltings in use today, as they are more labour intensive and expensive to operate than sourcing malt from commercial maltings.

Ardnamurchan has released a few teasers over the years, mainly to showcase the potential of their future whiskies while waiting for them to reach maturity. Scotch whisky must be at least three years of age before it can legally be called whisky, and most single malts are rarely released at anything less than 10 years of age. The first release of Ardnamurchan single malt, AD 09.20:01, was bottled in September of 2020, and is a marriage of peated and unpeated malts, matured in a mix of bourbon and sherry casks. Though it is just five years of age, the whisky is very balanced with a complexity and maturity found normally in older expressions - a sure sign that Ardnamurchan is on the right path.

Though more than a little off the beaten track, Ardnamurchan Distillery is well worth a visit. The distillery offers tours and has a visitor center. There is local accommodation and other things to see and do in the area. The distillery can easily be visited on a day trip from Fort William, or even by ferry from Tobermory. It has been a few years since my last visit, and I am looking forward to the next!

www.adelphidistillery.com
www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



That Old Country Music

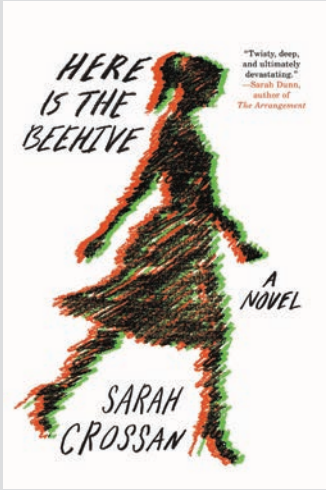
By Kevin Barry
Penguin Random House
208 pp / $29.95

After the stunning success of Night Boat to Tangier (2019), it would have been all-too easy for award-winning Irish scribe Kevin Barry to rest on his literary laurels and stick to formula. Instead, the Limerick-born author chances all, and challenges his audience, by weaving and winding his way through a series of short-stories about the dark - and often dark-humoured - heart of the Emerald Isle. The result is a kaleidoscopic collage of "love, sex, melancholy, and magic" which beautifully captures and conveys the rich inner life of both a people and a place. And while the tales themselves may be tall and true, the real treat for readers is experiencing the work of a master craftsman at the very top of his literary game. ~ SPC

Here is the Beehive

By Sarah Crossan
Little, Brown and Company
288 pp / $25

Normally, I am quite suspicious of books that have been hyped beyond belief by authors, publishers, publicists, and media. Sadly, more often than not, literary releases rarely come as advertised. Gladly, that isn't the case here. While reluctant to review this highly touted narrative upon its late-2020 release, I recently caved and gave it a go. A bittersweet story of love, betrayal, death, and reconciliation, Here is the Beehive marks both a departure of sorts for Crossan (having mostly written YA novels) and an arrival into the world of adult fiction. And though the work has been targeted primarily to female readers, audiences of all sorts will find the work engaging and entertaining. Without doubt, it will soon find its way to the big screen. ~ SPC



Whisky Sommelier: A Journey Through the Culture of Whisky

By Massimo Righi, Davide Terziotti, Rino Duca, Fabio Petroni
White Star
240 pp / $80

Those who know me are aware that I gave up the bottle almost 30 years ago. Putting the "plug-in-the-jug" hasn't kept me from enjoying the culture of alcohol however - especially whisky and wine, everything about which I learned from my father (for better or worse.) That said, those looking to better understand and appreciate the art and science behind blended and single malts will savour the spirit of this comprehensive study on the much-loved spirit. Crammed with history, old posters, recipes, listings, colour photographs, charts, how-to tips, and much more, Whisky Sommelier is an ideal bar-side companion for both seasoned sippers and curious newbies itching to discover the pleasures of a wee dram. It is enough to drive a man back to drinking. Almost. ~ SPC

Temperando: La Gaita Gallega Y Su Mundo

By Fernando Molpeceres & Dario Nogueira
Casa del Libro
376 pp / €28

While some might argue that Galicia is not, technically, a Celtic nation (given that ancient dialects are nearly extinct), one must look only to its great history of music to contend otherwise. In Temperando, authors Fernando Molpeceres and Dario Nogueira explore the rich world of La Gaita - bagpipes that remain a cultural institution in northwest Spain. Part one examines the instrument itself, while part two explores the history of those that built and played the instrument. Part three includes musical listings and tablature for future pipers. Peppered with tidbits of trivia, and beautifully illustrated with both black and white and colour imagery, the 376-page tome leaves little doubt that Celtic culture is alive and well in both Galicia and its neighbouring region of Asturias. ~ SPC

Karen Matheson
Still Time

As the vocalist and frontwoman for Scottish supergroup Capercaillie, Karen Matheson has enjoyed creative success both in the studio and on the stage for over three decades. 15 years in the making, Still Time - her fourth solo recording - is both fresh and familiar at once. While her style remains soundly set in Scottish soil (The Aragon Mill, Lassie Wi' the Lint-White Locks, Diamond Ring, Ae Fond Kiss), the new album also marks a maturity in material and musicianship for the songstress; Little Gun echoes the haunting Donegal airs of Enya and Clannad, while Laurel to a Wreath is pure pop. However, it is the folky world-beat vibe of the album's opening track, Cassiopeia Coming Through, that best hints at things to come. ~ SPC

Carwyn Ellis & Rio 18
Mas

This album blew my mind. Welsh singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist, producer/arranger Carwyn Ellis cut his creative teeth as the driving force behind Colorama, later working with a who's-who of major artists (the Pretenders, Edwyn Collins, Saint Etienne, etc..) and releasing a strong series of soundtracks also. Following up on his 2019 recording Joai!, Mas is a musical mélange that fuses the Welsh language with South American melodies and rhythms. Against a backdrop of bossa nova, samba, cumbia and tropicalismo, the clever songsmith tackles topics such as climate change, migration, megacities, and more, with 11 powerful and uplifting tunes. The result is a recording that is both poignant and playful. Ellis adheres to the adage first put forth by novelist Tom Robbins that "minds were made to be blown." ~SPC

Toxic Frogs
My Lucky Own

If the name Toxic Frogs alone isn't enough to lift your spirits during the long winter months (on top of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown), then the rock 'n' rollick of this super six-song EP is sure to do the trick. Fun, festive, and best played at maximum volume for full effect, My Lucky Own showcases the raucous and energetic vocals of Ella Beccaria atop a blistering barrage of electric guitars, banjo, violin, bass and drums. The five-piece female ensemble fires on all cylinders with the title track, as well as The Shamrock's Jig and Bestie Life. A guest appearance by Finny McConnell of Celt-Punk stalwarts The Mahones on Thank You Humanity takes the album to new heights, making it a must-listen for St. Patrick's Day. ~ SPC

GF Morgan
Driftwood

Driftwood is an apt title for the latest release from American journeyman musician GF (Jeff) Morgan. Having performed music of all genres for the better part of four decades - sharing the stage with the likes of Jerry Jeff Walker, Asleep at the Wheel, Tommy Makem, Tom Paxton, and New Riders of the Purple Sage - the veteran singer-songwriter weaves his life experiences into a tapestry of 13 superb songs and stories. Highlights here include Blue November Day, Coming of May, and Tommy's Gone - all of which showcase an artist who is both road worn and travel-weary, and yet - like a true Celtic troubadour - lives to carry the torch of tradition to new generations of listeners. Think Luke Kelly meets Jim Croce. ~ SPC

Alastair Briggs

Alastair Briggs plays for the sheer love of the pipes

With both Scottish and Irish heritage, Alberta native Alastair Briggs can trace his roots back to Clan Johnston (or Johnstone).

"We had family that were equine warriors protecting the Scottish Borders from the English," he shares via email from his home in Edmonton.

Now 42 years old, Briggs had aspirations of being a bagpiper since the age of three.

"My uncle was a piper with the Shriners and my mom had asked him to come and play a few tunes at our house. He obliged and played early one morning, waking me up and, in the process, scaring the living daylights out of me. Ever since that day, that sound resonated within me and I started listening to bagpipes and pipe bands on some Black Watch records that my parents had."

Before taking up the pipes, Briggs tried his hand at other musical instruments, including the recorder, piano, guitar, snare drum and the double bass - which he played in the Edmonton Symphony Youth Orchestra. Then, once he turned nine, the bagpipes became part of his repertoire. He started out playing with the Edmonton Boys Pipe Band (now the Edmonton Youth Pipe Band), which he would later go on to instruct.

"It wasn't until I attended the Coeur d'Alene School of Pipes & Drums in 1987 that I learned about some of the best pipe bands out there with the like of the 78th Frasers and Strathclyde Police."

Briggs has generally stayed true to traditional musical style on the pipes, currently playing a silver set of David Naill Bagpipes with Victorian engraving. "The tonal properties are stunning with a mellow blend of tenors and a deep, rich bass."

For more than three decades, piping has remained his personal passion.

> *"I am still piping today because I love the music, the sound and the history."*

"For me, there isn't anything more personally satisfying than a nice performance on a well-tuned instrument," he continues. "As of now, I do enjoy performing more than competing. If my pipes are singing to me, I know that to the not so well-educated ear it must sound really good. And that, really, is the best form of acknowledgment."

For Briggs, his most treasured memories are the times he has spent in bands. His achievements with the Alberta Caledonia Pipe Band (otherwise known as AlCal) and his collaboration with the Wajjo African Drummers are among his career highlights.

"The friendships that I have made along the way are actually the best part for me."

He has experienced his share of accolades as well, including AlCal's 7th place finish in the Grade 1 division at the World Pipe Band Championships in 2001.

"Placing first in the qualifier at the Worlds was definitely a wonderful achievement especially when we didn't have any idea of where we stood on the international stage."

And, although he admits that solo competition has never been his forte, he was awarded the Lieutenant General Quinn Award for the best cadet piper in Canada when he was 18.

These days, Briggs is a part-time piping teacher. He believes that the sheer cost of the hobby is a barrier to young people who might otherwise be interested in the instrument. More affordable music programs, he says, could help remedy this.

"Bagpipes and other musical instruments can help with respiratory strength, concentration, stress and depression relief, coordination, posture, mathematics in timing, and exercise. Getting involved in the community and making sure the instrument continues to be heard will draw people's interests. The skirl of the pipes is unprecedented and one that is so obscure yet delightfully haunting it will garner the attention of any audience."

Going forward, he hopes to once again pick up some of the other instruments he learned to play when he was younger. He also aims to eventually take another trip to revisit his roots.

"I would like to return to Scotland and compete at the World Pipe Band Championships so that I can introduce my family to some friends from around the world and show them another part of the world where my family is from."

In the meantime, he will continue teaching pipes to anyone who is willing to learn.

"I have always wanted to be a piper and am grateful for where piping has taken me around the world. It really is amazing how many wonderful people you can meet playing bagpipes. Music truly is the international language of all humanity."

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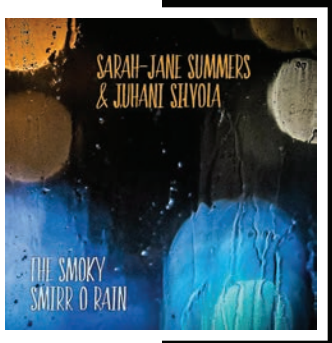

Sarah-Jane Summers

Sarah-Jane Summers has been immersed in Scottish Highland culture since childhood

Sarah-Jane Summers was the fifth generation of her family to live on the same farm on the outskirts of Inverness and started learning Gaelic in school by the time she was eight. Outside of school, she would go for tea and speak Gaelic with a family friend, whom she called her "Gaelic Granny."

It came as no surprise, then, that Summers embraced her heritage even further by taking up the fiddle. In fact, her entire family decided to pick up the instrument at the same time.

"My mum had wanted to learn her whole life but had never had the chance," explains Summers via email. "What she didn't know was that a distant relative, Alexander Grant of Battangorm (a.k.a Sandy Battan), who was a friend of the family, was one of the most respected and important fiddlers in the Highlands."

Grant became well-known in the early 1900s, forming the Highland Strathspey and Reel Society (HS&RS) in 1903. He also designed fiddles - the very style of fiddle that Summers would play while she was growing up. Grant died in 1942 and the HS&RS folded, though was later revived by Donald Riddell, who had been taught to fiddle by Grant. Like his mentor, Riddell sought to preserve the traditional fiddle style as it was deeply important to him.

Summers joined the society when she was nine. Although Riddell was strict - "When we played concerts, the audience had to listen and follow; they weren't allowed to clap along" - Summers remembers his teaching style fondly.

"Donald was not just a great teacher, but also a great raconteur. He had a deep knowledge of the traditional Highland style, and his passion for a good strong strathspey is something he most definitely passed on to me. To learn from someone who had learned from a relative of mine has always been a hugely important circle to me. Both Donald and I felt like he was giving the gift of the tradition back to my family."

Riddell taught Summers until he passed away in 1992. He instilled in her a sense of responsibility to pass the art along, which led her to take an interest in teaching the fiddle as well.

> *"Music is a huge part of my identity and of my form of communication with both myself and others."*

In 2010, Summers left Scotland for Norway. There, she earned a master's degree in Norwegian folk music and free improvisation on Hardanger fiddle at The Norwegian Academy of Music. She still resides in Norway today with her husband, Juhani Silvola. Silvola is a guitarist and the couple often collaborate musically. He is, says Summers, "a fantastically open-minded, inquisitive, responsive, intelligent and fearless musician."

Typically, balancing the logistics of touring while parenting their young child is a challenge, but with issues such as Brexit and COVID-19 now in the mix, the couple has had to face new difficulties. It hasn't stopped them from staying creative, however.

"Juhani and I recently wrote and arranged an hour of music, which we performed with a chamber orchestra at Oslo World Festival in October. It was such a buzz to have a completely free creative licence and just follow where the music wanted to go."

The third album from the duo, The Smoky Smirr O Rain, will be released this coming May. "Most of the spring release dates have been cancelled due to coronavirus. We are really looking forward to the ones that actually happen."

These days, Summers says her "musical identity" is still very much in Highland music, though her style has been described a variety of ways by different audiences. She currently plays an Italian fiddle with a Noel Burke bow.

"I am always equally interested in the bows people use, as different bows can radically change the quality of sound. When I played it for the first time, I was amazed at the extra layer of frequencies that suddenly sprang out. It is precise and responsive, yet gutsy, resistant, and demanding. It is an equal partner."

For 2021, Summers will continue to record music with her other equal partner, Silvola, and she also hopes to record a new solo album of improvised music.

"Time not touring is always a good opportunity to develop both musically and creatively."

www.sarah-janesummers.com

Moira Miller

Moira Miller passes her passion on

Moira Miller has been dancing for most of her life. She was initially inspired in 1997, after taking in a performance of Michael Flatley's Lord of the Dance at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre.

"I sat mesmerized the whole show and told my mum and dad that I wanted to do what they were doing on stage," recalls Miller, who was four years old at the time. "My dad is a folk musician, and we would regularly travel to gigs and festivals from a young age. I grew up listening to traditional music, so I guess this, too, had a part to play in my interest in Irish music and dance."

Starting with ballet and tap, it was Irish dance that eventually stole her heart.

"Irish dance was never just a hobby. I would eat, sleep and breathe Irish dance growing up and now it is just a part of me. There is no better feeling than stepping into the studio, putting on your shoes, and flying across the floor. It is my happy place."

Miller later took to teaching dance, starting off at Indepen-dance in Glasgow, an inclusive dance company, teaching disabled and abled students at both professional and non-professional levels. "I learned a lot from the fantastic people at this company and I knew I wanted to pursue teaching as a career."

Now 27, she currently lives and works in Falkirk, Central Scotland. She is a primary school teacher as well as a dance teacher. She opened the Miller Academy of Music and Dance in 2015 and operates the facility with her sister, Rhona. They teach students aged 4-23.

"We are like one big family. I like to provide different opportunities for the dancers, so not only do they perform at competitions, but we also host bi-annual dance shows. Through this, the dancers get the opportunity to explore different styles of Irish music and dance and learn a little bit of the history along the way."

Looking back, Miller credits her parents and teachers as some of her biggest influences, and she notes that Lord of the Dance was an ongoing source of inspiration.

"Every night before bed, I would watch Lord of the Dance on repeat. I could probably still dance all those steps in my sleep. Even now, there are so many creative artists out there collaborating with musicians all over the world to create new and innovative content. This is probably my biggest influence right now."

Miller's involvement in Irish dance from a young age meant that she had to juggle her schoolwork and social life with her passion. She missed out on parties and other social events. Her family went on Irish dance trips in lieu of vacation. It was all worth it, however.

"When you want something, you make it work..."

Some of her fondest memories are from dance trips, and she has made life-long friendships as a result of her career.

Miller has a slew of competitive accomplishments as well; the 2018 WIDA (World Irish Dance Association) World Championships in Maastricht is among her recent experiences. There, she was crowned Traditional Set Dance World Champion. She passed on her prowess to her students as well, training the Miller Academy dancers to compete at the World Championships in 2019. "We took 13 dancers over to Eindhoven to compete in both solo and team dances and our two youngest dancers won the World title for their two-hand."

Although the past year has been difficult for the dance community, physically distanced outdoor practices, Zoom classes, and virtual competitions have made ongoing connections possible.

"Every year, we host the Falkirk Open Feis for dancers to attend and compete. This year, we will still be going ahead, but virtually. It won't be the same as a real feis, but it does allow the opportunity for dancers from all over the world to compete. We hope to welcome friends from America, Europe, Australia, et cetera. We hope that, as restrictions ease, we will be able to host our Miller Academy show towards the end of the year. I am sure we can work around the challenges if not and put together a virtual event for this, too.

"I know all my dancers are looking forward to getting back together again so a team night will definitely be on the cards to celebrate all their hard work during these challenging times."

www.facebook.com/MillerAcademyID

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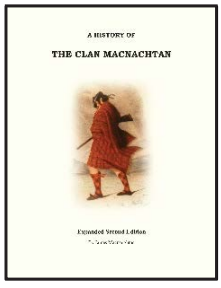

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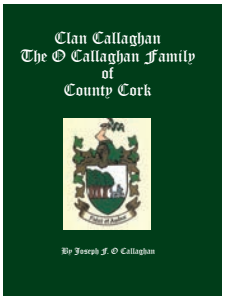

This impeccably researched and stylishly written family history traces the O Callaghans (Callaghan, Callahan) from their mythic beginnings in Ireland to their present-day progeny in County Cork, Spain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and other places. Prepared by Fordham University Professor Emeritus Joseph F. O Callaghan, the book narrates the clan's fortunes from the 17th-century extension of English control throughout Ireland to the great Irish diaspora of the 19th and 20th centuries. Included are genealogical charts that outline the O Callaghan lines of Rathmore, Clare, Tipperary, Muskerry, Banteer, Dromore, Glynn, Lismehane, Spain, and Philadelphia, the author's place of origin. Persons with the following surnames are likely to have Callaghan connections: Barry, Butler, Callaghan, Callahan, Condon, Fitzgerald, Gillman, Gould, Grehan, Lacy, Lismore, Lombard, MacAuliffe, MacCallaghan, MacCarthy, MacSweeney, O Brien, O Connell, O Keeffe, O Mullane, O Neill, O Sullivan, Roche, and White.

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SOPHIE; 1986-2021

News of Sophie Xeon's unexpected death reverberated across the internet at the end of January. The Scottish musician and producer, known publicly as SOPHIE, died from an accidental fall in Athens, Greece at age 34.

Sophie was born and raised in Glasgow, growing up on cassette tapes of electronic music. From age nine, Sophie expressed a desire to drop out of school to pursue a musical career - which, of course, Sophie's parents did not allow. However, the determination remained, and Sophie soon began DJing events as a kid and teen. It was this determination that would eventually bring Sophie to L.A., sought-after as a producer by some of music's biggest names.

As an adult, Sophie kept busy with a variety of projects, including a stint in a band called Motherland and work on a short film "Dear Mr/Mrs." Sophie began releasing eponymous music in 2012, but it was the following year that really put the musician on the map. Sophie's genre-defying dance tracks inspired fascination and adoration from people like Jessica Dunn Rovinelli. In a tribute piece for The Guardian, Rovinelli wrote, "In 2013 it didn't matter to me, as a not-yet-out-even-to-myself transgender woman, whether or not Sophie was transgender. What mattered was that in early singles, such as the genre-redefining 'Bipp' that year, we felt as though we could become something else."

The track did not feature Sophie's own vocals (former Motherland bandmate Marcella Dvsi sang), nor was Sophie's face revealed at the time. Despite the anonymity, however, Sophie's influence grew. The follow-up single titled "Lemonade" was more successful than "Bipp" and even landed a spot in a McDonald's commercial. Soon, other artists took interest in collaborating with this mysterious genius. Sophie later worked with the likes of Madonna, Nicki Minaj, Charlie XCX, Vince Staples and Kendrick Lamar.

Sophie eventually stepped into the spotlight with the 2017 release of "It's OK to Cry." For the first time, Sophie's own image and voice were used in a track, as the artist sang, "I hope you don't take this the wrong way / But I think your inside is your best side." Sophie subsequently began performing live.

The following year, Sophie opened up in an interview with Paper magazine about being a transgender woman. That said, Sophie didn't like using pronouns and is mostly referred to by first name.

> *"An embrace of the essential idea of transness changes everything because it means there's no longer an expectation based on the body you were born into, or how your life should play out and how it should end. Traditional family models and structures of control disappear."*

Sophie's first full-length album, Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides, hit the market in 2018. Fittingly, the album was released under U.K. record label Transgressive. It was nominated for the Grammy Award for Best Dance/Electronic Album and, although the award ultimately went to Justice for their Woman Worldwide album, Sophie's record was lauded by music critics and fans alike. "For all the praise that could be heaped on the bulk of SOPHIE's output, the best that comes to mind is that it sounds like no one else could have made Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides," Peter Boulos wrote for Exclaim. "This is the kind of music that, in 20 years, we may look back on as a pivotal point in changing the trajectory of the pop music sound."

A remixed version of the album was released in 2019. Sophie's latest release, a single titled "Unisil," came out just a couple of days before her death. Fader's Jordan Darville described it as "a very intense, rollicking track somewhere between an alien spaceship's dancefloor and its self-destruct sequence announcement."

After the news of Sophie's death broke on Jan. 30, artists and admirers around the world mourned the loss of life and talent. "The world has lost an angel," Sam Smith shared on their Twitter account. "A true visionary and icon of our generation. Your light will continue to inspire so many for generations to come." Likewise, Jack Antonoff called Sophie "a saviour of pop." Collaborator and friend Charlie XCX penned a lengthier tribute, writing in part, "It's really hard for me to sum up the connection I felt with such an amazing person [...] It's impossible to summarize the journey I went on with Sophie."

Though the artist's life was tragically short, Sophie has made a lasting impact on music and, perhaps most importantly, the lives of the LGBTQ+ people with whom Sophie's work resonated.

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