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INTERNATIONAL

## *The Best of Celtic Life International 2020*

### **INSIDE!**

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Irish Rovers, Susie Wolff, Wondrous Wales  
Anna Ruadh, Celtic in the Time of COVID-19*



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# Fáilte!

## Hindsight

It isn't often that I am at a loss for words. When I am, however, I look to my past for inspiration. In particular, the work of American writer Ernest Hemingway never fails to get my creative engine into gear; "There is nothing to writing," he mused, "all you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed."

Certainly, Hemingway had a way with words. And yet I cannot help but wonder how he might have described 2020 - a year that, quite frankly, may almost be beyond words.

As pointed objects, words pierced our collective body-informatik over the past 12 months, with headlines that phased-in phrases such as the great reset, election fraud, institutional crisis, climate change, racial injustice, wildfires and more.

And then there were the "C" words - Coronavirus, COVID-19 - terms and conditions that, whether we like it or not, we have all signed off on.

Interestingly, this year's other global pandemic - fake news - has only strengthened my own personal and professional resolve to continue to produce a publication of the highest ethical standards; honesty, transparency and accountability now sit alongside engagement, entertainment and education as the sure 'n' steady stars by which we steer this ship.

As such, our core cause remains to build and launch other types of ships - relationships. Break down that word; relation-ships - implying vital vessels that carry a most precious cargo of ideas and emotions back and forth between peoples. Those thoughts and feelings then beget conversations which, in-turn, inspire action.

To that end, the proverbial silver lining amidst the clouds of 2020 is that - despite our physical distancing - there has never been a time in the history of our species when we have connected with one another so easily and quickly. With a myriad of on-demand social media options available at our fingertips, and techno-methodologies for communication advancing at an exponential rate, we continue to talk and share with those around us, and around the world, like never before.

I won't go so far as to say that it doesn't matter what we are talking about and sharing - some things are, perhaps, better left unsaid - only that the act and art of connection is being exercised and, like any healthy habit, brings a bevy of benefits to those seeking to exorcise the demons of disinformation and indifference.

The irony, of course, is that amidst the murky morass of recent months, a greater sense of clarity is emerging about who we are, where we are at, what we want and need, and how we are going to get there. It is easy to look back and see how the dots connected to bring us where we are today, however it takes a leap of faith - in ourselves and in life - to trust that the dots in front of us will continue to connect.

Hindsight of another sort would serve us well during these tumultuous times also; hard-earned life-lessons shaped the progressive principles of a people that prospered 2,500 years ago along Europe's western shoreline, where women enjoyed equal rights, those of different colour, background and beliefs were welcomed into a culture of inclusion, and communities worked together for the common good.

And while our ancient Celtic ancestors may not have left us many words per se, they did leave us maps and legends. Charting our future with foresight, we would be wise to look to our past for inspiration.

Namaste,  
Stephen Patrick Clare, CEO & Editor-in-Chief



# Inside!



13.

*Susie Wolff is driving the next generation of female motorsport talent*

23.

*Joanie Madden takes The Celtic Questionnaire*

27.

*The Irish Rovers return to form*

31.

*The Chieftains keep on keepin' on*

37.

*Stylin' with Scottish designer Lorna Gillies*

41.

*Belfast's Jonathan McFerran captures the Celtic spirit*

49.

*Wondrous Wales*

61.

*Celtic in the Time of COVID*

67.

*The Celtic Literary Landscape*

73.

*Cruising the Celtic countryside*

9. First Word / 15. Scene / 17. Syllables / 21. Sounds  
85. The Piper / 87. The Fiddler / 89. The Dancer / 98. Last Word



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*Celtic Life International correspondent Rae McKinlay  
explores the ancient art of Celtic storytelling*

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The open crackling fire greeted me when I walked into the pub on the night of the waxing moon. It offered both comfort and warmth, easing my apprehension. It was my second time at a storytelling gathering in Cork, but I sensed the welcoming ambience in the room as soon as I came through the door. The night flowed with stories, each of which wove its own particular magic over the hushed room.

Crack open a stone in Ireland and you will unearth a story. They are everywhere; in the rivers, in the mountains, and in our place names. The Emerald Isle is a place rooted in one of the richest and most oral folklore traditions in the world. Tales of epic voyages and transformations, of sorrow and loss, of Kings and Queens, and of quests for love, have been spun around the Irish hearth for centuries.

The storyteller - or seanchaí - was once a powerful and influential figure here, travelling from village to village, preserving the country's old lore and history. The storyteller was highly respected until the 17th Century and the advent of The Age of Reason and, thus, the written word. Before then, even Kings would be careful in their engagement with the seanchaí for fear of being cursed by him. Though storytellers were eventually removed from their high status, the custom continued. In time, however, they would wander penniless across the country, hoping for a bowl of broth for sustenance and an eager ear to hear accounts of old.

Cautionary tales which advised people of the foolishness of getting on the wrong side of the "little people" were voiced by the fire.

*In parts of Ireland stories would only be told in the evening because many people held the belief that the fairy folk disliked a story being told before dark.*

In addition to sharing Irish myths and legends, the storyteller also served as the bearer of tradition, particularly with regard to the importance of home and family. Often, the tradition-bearer would be female, and her repertoire would include anecdotes of those who had heard the terrifying

wail of the Bean Sidhe and had died as a result.

As I sat around the open fire that night I was enchanted by the power of story, propelled to destinations where time stood still, and characters and places long gone had come alive. A good storyteller does not view a story as something merely to be performed, but a treasure to be gifted on. Thus, the listener is an important element of storytelling. Storytelling is interactive, participatory and intimate. Without an audience of one or more, there would be no storytelling.

Whether fact or fiction, the importance of the narrative is in its perspective and, specifically, what truth lay within the tale itself and what can be harvested from it for personal growth.

The ancient custom remains popular in Ireland. There are now two storytelling groups in Cork alone, both of whose membership continues to grow, and there are many other groups around the country whose numbers are rising as well. The Cape Clear Storyteller Festival in Cork - which takes place each September - has proven very popular, welcoming visitors from across the country and around the world.

Thus, it would appear that - despite our newfound penchant for on-screen and technological lifestyles - people still enjoy a good story. Perhaps, as we rush headlong into our fast-paced lives, the art of storytelling offers something slower, simpler and connective. The appeal is understandable; anyone and everyone can participate, as there is something about the story's power to suggest, rather than dictate, that engages audiences. As booklovers know, a good tale can be a path for the adventurous mind to travel beyond the linear paradigm of the rational.

I am grateful for our nation's great oral storytelling tradition; both for the storytellers of the past and for the growing number of contemporary storytellers who are keeping the flame of imagination alive today and for future generations.

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Recently, while returning home to Dublin from the West of Ireland, my family and I stopped for a picnic lunch in West Meath at an abandoned farmhouse in a very rural setting. My brother Peter had been here before and suggested it as a quiet and peaceful place to stop. From a narrow country road, we turned in and parked in a clearing between the house and some old sheds, one of which was open revealed a portion of an early families farming history. A wooden spiked tooth harrow is set on top of an old horse drawn plow. The cone from an old gramophone, along with an old bicycle, accompanies the layers of history hidden here, and for now exposed to the destruction by time and the elements.

Exploring the grounds, we came across a Hawthorn tree in a field close to the house. The Hawthorn and the Blackthorn play an important role in Celtic Mythology. It was always believed that the lone hawthorn standing in the middle of a field was treated with much respect and some suspicion by farming communities. Whilst it was thought to be auspicious, bringing good fortune and prosperity to the landowner, it was also thought to belong to the magical folk of the Otherworld, the Sidhe. As such, it was never to be cut or harmed for fear of bringing their wrath upon the perpetrator. This particular tree had a massive rock set up against its trunk apparently to protect the tree when the field was being plowed and, in turn, spare the home-owner and his family any mischief or grief from the fairies.

With the place all abandoned and neglected for what appeared to be for a considerable time it aroused my curiosity as to what ever happened to its occupants and why so much was left behind.

*Ireland is filled with its lonely places and forgotten or lost small family histories.*

The Hawthorn is regarded as a very sacred tree to the fairies and is considered to have the most sinister reputation in Celtic tree lore. Because these trees flower in the spring, they were associated with the festival of Bealtaine, a sacred time in Irish mythology. The beginning of the summer season started with the Fire Festival at Beltane. Great bonfires would mark a time of purification and transition, heralding in the season in the hope of a good harvest later in the year, and were accompanied with rituals to protect people from any harm by otherworldly spirits. Serious ramifications were known to occur when one of these trees are cut down to clear the land. Farmers who have caused such destruction could suffer great misfortune for the rest of their days.

Those that heeded the fairy warnings would protect their tree by placing rocks and boulders around its base to protect the trunk from damage when the farmer plowed his land. This belief was taken so seriously that, in 1999, the upgrading of the National route from Limerick to Galway was delayed, rerouted, and eventually opened nearly 10 years after it was supposed to have started. The Clare County Council as part of their Contract had to protect the fairy tree 'access', which is not permitted within a minimum of a 15 feet radius, and a protective fence has been erected around it.

*The Hawthorn was often seen as a gateway into the fairy realms.*

Thomas the Rhymer, a Scottish poet in the 13th Century, claimed to have met the Fairy Queen by a Hawthorn bush from which

a cuckoo was calling. She led him into the Otherworld for a short visit, but when he emerged, he found that seven years had passed.

On a darker note, the 5th century St Augustine of Hippo decreed that un-baptized babies could not be buried in church graveyards. It was believed that instead they would go to Limbo and be lost forever. The Limbo of the Infants was a realm of the after-life, exclusively for the souls of un-baptized babies. These souls were believed to be in a blissful state, but they stopped just short of the full bliss of heaven. This was cold comfort for many bereaved parents. Limbo was taught up until the 1990s, and I remember the scary tales told by the Nuns - who, at that time, were considered the brides of Christ - rather chilling stories of the souls of the un-baptized destined to carry a candle for eternity, looking for the mercy of God. What good God would be capable of such cruel mercy on an innocent child?

Babies who died before baptism would be brought in secret - away at night from the public for a private burial, carried out only by the father and male relatives. Women had no role to play and mothers were not present. The deceased would be brought to the ruins of an old church, whether it was Catholic or Protestant. Both were considered consecrated grounds that would allow the mother and family some peace of mind. A folk belief was that if the mother brought the child herself it would increase the chances of her bringing another in the future.

When all else failed in locating a burial placement according to location, the deceased would be buried beneath a Hawthorn tree with the belief that the fairies would care for these souls as their own.

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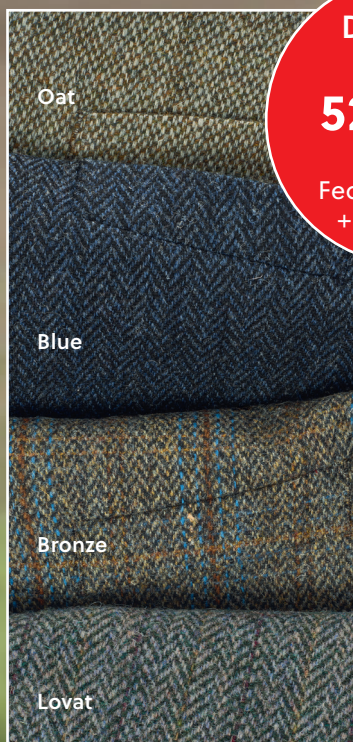
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# Susie Wolff

*Susie Wolff is driving the next generation of female motorsport talent*

Susie Wolff began karting at a young age and was named British Woman Kart Racing Driver of the Year when she was only 13. She started competing professionally in 2001 and officially retired from the sport 14 years later. After hanging up her helmet, she felt it was time to pass the torch.

"I took a step back and decided that I wanted to do something really good with my experience in motorsport," shares the 37-year-old Scotswoman via email. "I recognized that whilst there were some good women in the industry, there were nowhere near enough of them."

To that end, Wolff co-founded Dare to be Different, a non-profit organization, created as a call to action to the motorsport industry.

"From my own personal experience, I felt that unless we founded a grassroots initiative specifically designed to educate, inspire and encourage young female talent, nothing would change in the long term. Doors needed to be opened."

Wolff has been advocating for women in motorsport for years. In 2013, she was awarded an honorary fellowship at the University of Edinburgh in recognition of her role as an ambassador for women in sport. In 2016, she became an ambassador for She's Mercedes, an initiative that aims to empower women by giving them a platform to share their experiences, among other things.

"For women in particular, I don't think the media and social media are always helpful; they often can project this impression of women as 'having it all'...and you can, but it comes at a cost, and you have to prioritize - and the media doesn't necessarily reflect that reality.

*"The key comes in knowing what makes you happy, identify your priorities, and also realize that these factors can be different for everyone. No one size fits all, it is very personal."*

In February 2019, Dare to be Different announced that it would be uniting with the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA)'s Girls on Track program to create one initiative.

"Michèle Mouton (President of the FIA's Women in Motorsport Commission) and I have long been aligned when it comes to the need for (gender) parity in motor sport," says Wolff. "Uniting with the FIA in this way makes absolute sense. We are stronger together."

Today, Dare to be Different targets girls and women aged eight to 18 who are interested in a motorsport career. Participants get the chance to meet women in different aspects of the industry, from racers to mechanics. Ambassadors include Maria Costello, Tatiana Calderon and Charlie Broughton.

"We strategically selected a wide range of enjoyable and engaging educational activities that provide a unique insight into what a potential career in the vibrant world of motorsport can offer. The next step is to reach an even wider audience and to offer our events in more locations around the globe. Our collaboration with the FIA Women in Motorsport will help us achieve this goal."

Dare to be Different has garnered a positive response from the motorsport industry as well as other businesses - particularly those involved in STEM (science, technology, engineering, math). Motorsport event promoters have allowed the group to hold events during Formula E and Formula 1 races, as well as during the Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters in Germany and the Supercars Championship in Australia. In addition, Dare to be Different has reached more than 700,000 students through school events.

"Now that we are a joint venture with the FIA, we are not focused on volume of events or trying to be the biggest. What we want to do is foster strong and lasting relationships with the ASNs (the local motorsport authorities) to ensure that the activation is strategic, meaningful and leaves a lasting impression on the young ladies who participate. The impact we have from an inspiration and education perspective is the most important thing to me."

While initiatives like Dare to be Different can help widen one's network, Wolff says the key is for young women to believe in themselves - and that applies to any field that they are working in.

"Find out what it is that you feel passionate about and go for it. Don't be scared to stand up for yourself and be seen and heard."

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# Northern Ireland Food Tours

*For Tracey Jeffery, happiness is the scent of home baked bread*



Northern Ireland's cuisine has evolved greatly in recent years, and one woman from County Down is thrilled to be serving up her home cooking to hungry, globe-trotting foodies.

A former French and Irish language teacher, Tracey Jeffery has lived her whole life in Northern Ireland. As such, she is more than familiar with the local flavours.

"I have always made traditional Irish breads at home in my farmhouse kitchen for my young family," she shares via email. "And I had always dreamed of bringing guests into my home and inviting them to see the beautiful landscapes and coastline of County Down."

In 2016, she decided to bring that dream to life.

"I wanted people to be able to enjoy and appreciate our amazing food and drink, and everything that I offer comes from the immediate local area - less than five miles away."

Co. Down boasts a number of excellent local food providers, and - as part of her Northern Ireland Food Tours business - Jeffery takes guests straight to their doorsteps.

"They meet local producers, hear their stories, and enjoy their award-winning food and drink. Northern Ireland has evolved beyond recognition over the past few years; since we have had peace, we have enjoyed an increase in the number of visitors year after year. Our food is of such a high quality, due to the tremendous amount of rainfall that

we receive. Last year, we came first for Food and Drink in the World Travel and Tourism Awards."

Starting her tours in Belfast before weaving through to Mourne Mountains, pitstops include a meetup with a local cider producer, and an expedition harvesting oysters on Coney Island.

The most unique part of Jeffery's taste tour, however, is something only she can dole out.

*"I offer a stand-alone immersive experience - traditional Irish bread-making in my own home."*

"I live in a 17th-century thatched cottage on the shores of Strangford Lough, only 30 minutes from Belfast. I invite guests into my kitchen where they will enjoy homemade breads and sweet treats."

Like Eire to the south, Northern Irish cuisine is particularly known for, as you might surmise, potatoes; this even extends into their baked goods. The local Comber variety of potatoes, according to Jeffery, are as unique to the region as Champagne and Parmesan cheese are to their pockets of the globe. They are also perfect for Champ bread which Jeffery helps her guests prepare out of her own kitchen.

"They will also make soda breads and wheaten breads, which they can take home

with them along with a copy of the recipes. Guests love it, especially as they feel very welcome in my kitchen. It is a unique experience, as it can only take place with me. I have recently been awarded 5 stars from Tourism NI for my traditional bread-making experience - one of only 14 private companies in Northern Ireland to achieve this accolade."

As intrusive as it might seem to lead a foodie tour through your own house - and she is the first to admit, with two young boys in the house alongside guests, it can be a challenge to keep everything tidy - Jeffery loves her calling, and believes it reflects the innate hospitality the region is known for.

"I get to meet lovely guests - they come to me as visitors and leave as friends! I love what I am doing, and it honestly does not feel like work."

She is more than eager to tout the fantastic flavours of her home to the rest of the world but believes that more marketing is in order if Northern Ireland is to truly benefit from the bounty at its disposal.

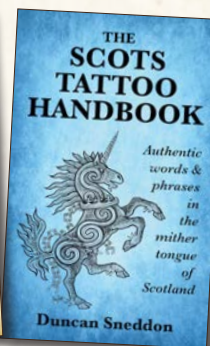
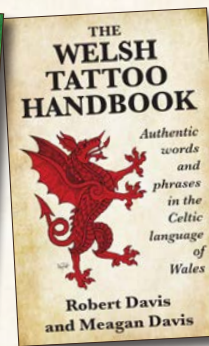
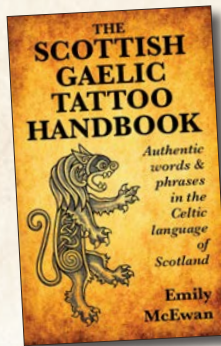
"We still do not shout about what we have here - we need to recognize that we have so much to offer our visitors. Now is the best time to come to Northern Ireland, as we are still much more affordable than most destinations, and visitors are always blown away by our food and drink."

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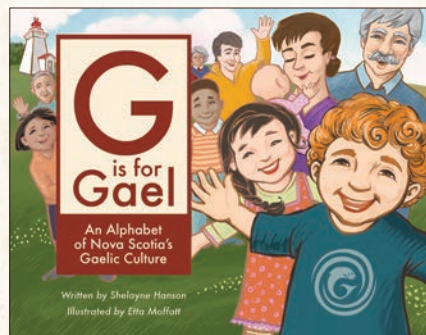
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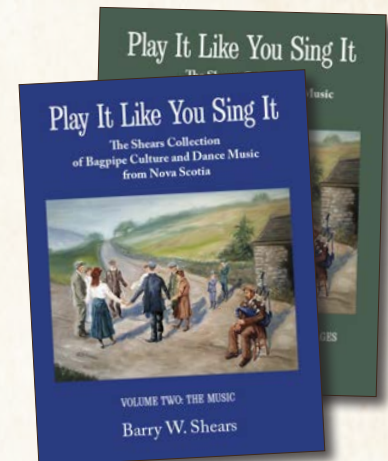
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# Anna Ruadh

*Gaelic language publisher Bradan Press translates a Canadian classic*



It has been just over a year since Celtic Life International last spoke with Emily McEwan-Fujita, the passionate president of Nova Scotia's Gaelic language publication Bradan Press. In that time, she and her team have worked on a myriad of projects, from poetry collections to music books, all with the mission of connecting "readers worldwide with Gaelic language and culture."

One such project - a Gaelic translation of the Canadian classic *Anne of Green Gables* - has been in the works for over three years.

"At the time, I was invited to dinner with Diana Gabaldon, the author of the *Outlander* series," McEwan-Fujita shares via email. "She was visiting Nova Scotia to do some research for her next book. Among the local authors and booksellers at the dinner was Lisa Doucet, a manager at a children's bookstore in Halifax. Lisa also happens to be a serious collector of *Anne of Green Gables* and other books by L.M. Montgomery. She asked me if there was a Scottish Gaelic translation of *Anne*. I said there wasn't, so she suggested that I do one! That idea really appealed to me on multiple levels, so as a publisher I immediately started to think about how such a thing could be accomplished."

It was through her preliminary research that McEwan-Fujita met with Dr. Kate Scarth, the director of the L.M. Montgomery Institute at the University of Prince Edward Island.

"She urged me to attend the LMMI's biennial conference in June of 2018 - and it was a fantastic experience! I had the privilege of meeting some distinguished Montgomery scholars, and hearing the latest academic research on the worldwide significance of Montgomery's work and foreign language translations of *Anne*. That convinced me

that there would indeed be a wider interest in a Gaelic translation of *Anne*."

Translating the book, which eventually earned the title *Anna Ruadh*, was not without its challenges.

"Funding was by far the greatest challenge. People doing the work needed to be paid fairly. Initially, about two years ago, we applied for a Gaelic Books Council grant in Scotland. They have been extremely supportive of our other Gaelic publishing projects, and this time they very reasonably asked us to show support from our own province first. So, we had to wait several months and apply for a grant here in Nova Scotia. We applied and carefully explained in the application that we would get some matching funding from Scotland contingent on getting the provincial grant. And they turned us down anyway! That was a blow."

In June of 2019, McEwan-Fujita turned to an online crowdfunding platform to support production costs.

"It is risky, with no guarantee of success. I ran a 30-day Kickstarter campaign to raise \$15,000. It was almost constant promotion work for 30 straight days - I didn't have any days off that month. We were very fortunate to receive support from people in about 10 different countries, everyone from native Gaelic speakers and scholars, to professional book editors and librarians, and *Anne* fans and collectors. In the end we raised just over \$17,000 in total."

Although that sounds like a lot of money to publish a book, it's not - especially once you factor in Kickstarter's usage fees, Canadian sales tax, shipping costs, and more. Even still, McEwan-Fujita says that working alongside Gaelic translator Mòrag Anna Nic-Neill and illustrator Etta Moffatt made it all worthwhile.

*"We are so pleased with how the book turned out.*

*Not only is it beautiful to look at, but it gives us an enduring, endearing new image of one of our favourite characters."*

"I loved seeing Etta Moffatt bring *Anne* to life visually with her incredible cover illustration. And Mòrag Anna's translation also conveyed all the humour and the sadness in the story so well that you would think Montgomery had originally written it in Gaelic! It really is fun and rewarding to read."

*Anna Ruadh* is currently available for order on the Bradan Press website.

McEwan-Fujita says Bradan Press will be busy in the coming months, working on several upcoming releases and adjusting to the world's new normal. The company has no plans of slowing down, she explains, noting that the Gaelic language has a very important place in Canada.

"Even Montgomery herself had Gaelic roots, as did her beloved Prince Edward Island. Translating this book felt like a homecoming, in a way.

"Bradan Press is, and will continue, to try and help people reconnect with their Gaelic roots, which have been erased in the history books and often even in family memory. We will try to help everyone connect with whatever they love about the language and culture."

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# Emian

*Pagan folk band Emian celebrates Celtic culture with their latest release*

Those curious about the power of fate need look no further than Emian, the talented pagan folk duo based in Southern Italy. While the group's two members, Emilio A. Cozza and Anna Cefalo, were born and raised in entirely different regions of the country - Salento and Campania, respectively - they were fortunate to meet each other in 2011 at a community house for artists in Cumae.

"It was love at first sight," recalls Cefalo via email. "Before launching Emian, we played in two different Celtic projects, but we soon started to play together for fun. Before we knew it, requests for gigs began to pour in. We needed a name, and the first thing that came to mind was to join our first names...and so Emian was born!"

She notes that the couple come from distinct musical backgrounds.

"Emilio's great-great grandmother played tamburello salentino (tambourine) in public for serenades, so he grew up listening to stories about her. Over the years, he learned to play the tamburello salentino, the guitar, percussion, violin, flute and many other instruments, including bagpipes, both Scottish and medieval.

"I started to play music because, as I always like to say, I have it in my blood," she continues. "My entire family played music, and most of them were in bands. I started studying classical harp in Conservatorio when I was 11. In 2002 I bought my first

Celtic harp. I also studied classical and modern dance from the ages of three to 12. My first performance as a singer was at 13 and, in 2004, I started to learn how to sing with the harp. Now I play the Indian harmonium and some percussion also."

After performing various gigs and recording a handful of singles, Emian released their debut full-length album *AcquaTerra* in 2013, which Cefalo describes as a "dedication to the folk of the Celtic areas." The pair then went on to record three additional albums, including *Winter Solstice* (2014), *Khymeia* (2016) and their most recent effort *Egeria* (2019). While still led entirely by Cefalo and Cozza, the later albums were supported by fellow musicians Danilo Lupi and Martino D'Amico.

Cefalo notes the band's style and sound is a true musical melange.

"Not only is our music Celtic, but it is Balkan, Northern European, Mediterranean - totally original. We have taken musical influences from the whole world. We love combining past and present to get new results. At the same time, we have never forgotten the purity and beauty of acoustic folk music. Our hope is to always keep both aspects - pure acoustic folk music and the folktronic pagan folk. We are inspired both by the outer world and the inner world: a memory, a sound that we liked, the voice of a new musical instrument, and even the natural world."

She admits that a career in music can be challenging, especially in a place like Italy where the trade is rarely taken seriously.

*"For us music is a real thing  
- it is not just a hobby -  
it is a full-time profession and  
something we live for."*

"Because of that, there are sacrifices; study, money invested in instruments, hours of work, strenuous journeys, frustration, and so on. This is especially true for independent artists like us, as we end up doing the work of an entire team.

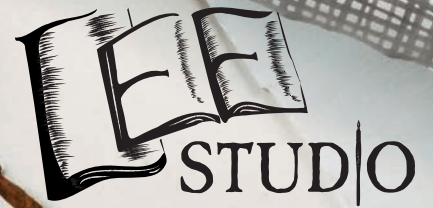
"Fortunately, the rewards are worth all of the work; the people who support our music and who sing our songs, the folks we have met on our journey, the musicians we have learned from, the opportunity to travel and experience other cultures, and the simple joy of composing new material."

While things have slowed down in the past few months, Cefalo says that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is not enough to stop Emian from doing what they love.

"We are following protocols and we have had to cancel or postpone a few things, but we will keep on creating music and hope that the situation will be resolved soon as we still have many ideas and projects to realize."

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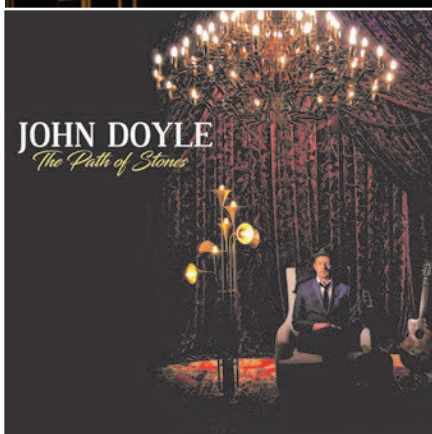
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# John Doyle

*Irish troubadour John Doyle returns with his most authentic album yet*



**P**ursuing a career in music is a no-brainer when you grow up in a family like John Doyle's. The Dublin-native spent many of his formative years surrounded by the stirring sounds of traditional Ireland - which, he says, he "heard from both sides."

"I always loved the music," he tells Celtic Life International via email. "It sunk in deep. It really felt like a language I had to communicate in. My father, Sean Doyle, is and was a lovely singer and collector of traditional songs. His father was an accordion player, as was my uncle on my mother's side."

Although his first foray into music was with the accordion, it wasn't long before the young performer settled his sights on a more contemporary instrument.

"I was about 10 or 11 when I started playing the guitar. At the time I played it upside down, as I am left-handed, and it really consumed me. I have had a love for the guitar ever since. I eventually began busking, which is where I met the singer Susan Ryan (now McKeown), and we started to play and write songs together. That was when I considered playing professionally for the first time. We lived in Dingle, Co. Kerry for a year and, in that time, I happened to meet the wonderful musician and guitarist Steve Cooney. He saw me playing and advised me to start pursuing the vocation professionally, which really boosted my confidence."

Doyle wasted no time heeding the advice and worked swiftly toward a fruitful career

in the music industry. Originally a member of the award-winning supergroup Solas, the 41-year-old pursued a solo career in 2000 and, taking inspiration from the likes of Andy Irvine, Paul Brady, and Dick Gaughan, quickly defined his own style and sound.

And though that style and sound has certainly evolved over time, he still aims to stay true to his original mandate.

"I am always trying to refine my playing to suit myself more. I like to see how I can blend vocals and guitar or bouzouki into a unified sound and make it feel as one. I still think of music as a language that I can communicate in, however - it transcends many barriers.

*"Sometimes I feel that I am speaking for my ancestors when I play music - as if I am speaking to them."*

Recently, Doyle released his first full-length studio album since the very popular *Shadow and Light* album (2011). Titled *Path of Stones*, the 11-track recording is both powerful and mesmerizing in equal measure and introduces listeners to a more relaxed and rooted side of him.

"I have been working on this album for a good several years, off and on. Other projects kept seeming to come up and they would shift my attention for a while, but I would

come back and chip away some more on it. A good few of the songs and tunes have their base in Co Sligo. There is one song based in Teelin in Co. Donegal close to where some of my relations live. The album is a bit more reflective than the others; there is a hint of longing in virtually all the songs, and each track holds something special for me.

"I tend to write songs and tunes in waves of inspiration. Most of these songs or melodies were written in Ireland, and there is an energy to them that always reminds me of home. So, maybe the Emerald Isle herself is part of the inspiration."

He notes that the album has already garnered a tremendous amount of critical and popular acclaim.

"I really didn't know what to expect as it is a little different - more 'laid back,' than my previous releases. However, I am really happy about the response, and just having people like what I create is a joy and reward in itself."

Not one to rest between projects, Doyle is already jumping onto his next.

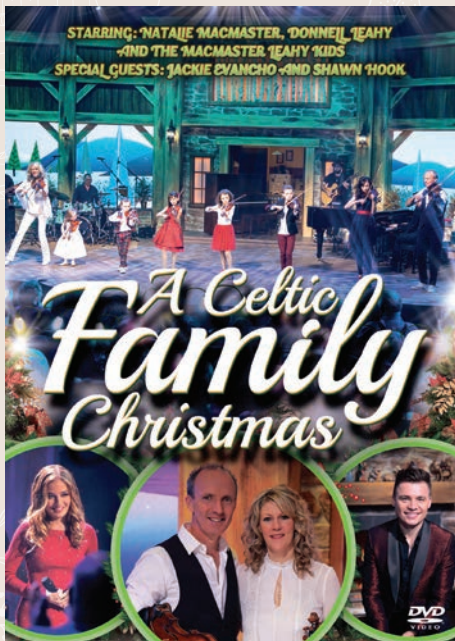
"I am excited about a duet album with Mick McAuley that will feature Oisín McAuley. In this time of isolation it's good for me to keep busy with projects - to keep playing and writing and singing as much as possible."

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# *Cherishing Joanie Madden*

**L**ike most folks, Joanie Madden has had a bit of extra time on her hands in recent months. Recently the world-renowned musician - who has fronted Cherish the Ladies for 35 years - spoke with Celtic Life International about her past, present, and future.





### What are your own roots?

I was born in the Bronx, New York, of Irish parents. Both of my parents emigrated from Ireland: my mother is from Miltown Malbay, County Clare, and my father is from Portumna, County Galway.

### Where do you currently reside?

I live in Yonkers, New York, in the very Irish neighborhood of Woodlawn. I also have a home in County Clare where I love to spend a few months of the year.

### When and why did you start playing music?

I was fortunate to grow up in a musical household with my father, Joe Madden, a very well-known and respected musician on the Irish-American scene. When my father arrived in New York, he joined an orchestra led by the legendary Sligo fiddler Paddy Kiloran where he played for a number of years until Paddy retired and handed the band over to my Dad. Joe Madden's orchestra was born, and over the course of decades

he played hundreds of events, including weddings, balls, dinner dances, and various other functions. I was one of seven children, and my father noticed early on that I had music in me. After brief stints on the fiddle and piano (two lessons!), I found the instrument that called to my heart - the whistle. My father's great friend, noted flute player and National Heritage award winner Jack Coen, lived just five doors away from us and I went to him for my first lesson when I was 12. I was immediately hooked, and I would run home from school to play at every opportunity. When I was 14, my family moved to Yorktown Heights in New York, and from there on I taught myself. New York has some of the best Irish traditional players in the world and I was lucky to have great flute players as influences, including Jack Coen, Mike Raffety, and Mike Preston - the flute player with the Tulla Ceili Band. As soon as I knew two tunes, I was in my dad's band and loved performing from the get-go.

### Are they the same reasons you do it today?

I fell in love with Irish music - there is just

something about it: it's like a drug, when it gets under your skin, there is no stopping it. I went away to college to be an accountant because my mother told me I was good with numbers, but I quickly realized that I wanted to make my living playing Irish music and that I would simply be miserable doing anything else. Much to my parents' dismay, I quit college and went after my dream to make a living playing Irish music.

### What are the challenges involved with the vocation?

Anyone who tells a musician that we have the life of Riley has never walked in our shoes. Let me tell you - it is not easy being a musician: you have to create your own work, there is no stability, no pension, an erratic work schedule, and life on the road is very hard. Keeping a band together is not easy, but thankfully I was tenacious and, along with the band, we never gave up.

### What are the rewards?

Undoubtedly, it is the people that make all the work and effort worthwhile. To know



that you have touched someone's life with your music, to give someone a bit of happiness and let them forget about their problems for a few hours, and to receive all the touching emails and letters that we get from our fans, make all of the struggle worth it. At the end of the day, to be able to do what you love for a living is beyond rewarding.

### **When did the band first come together?**

We got together thanks to Dr. Mick Moloney and the Ethnic Folk Arts Center in New York City. In 1983, myself, Eileen Ivers, and others had a great year representing America at the All-Ireland Championships, bringing home a number of gold medals: Eileen won the fiddle, I won the whistle, the flute, and the duet competition with Kathy McGinty, and together with a 10-piece group placed 3rd in the senior all-Ireland ceili band - and we were all women, except our drummer, Tommy Smyth. Mick thought this was astounding and called me up to help him organize a series of concerts featuring women musicians to celebrate the growth of women's role in Irish Music. I suggested the title, Cherish the Ladies - the name of a traditional Irish jig - and those first three concerts all sold out.

### **How has it evolved since that time?**

This year marks the 35th anniversary of our first concert in New York City. It is quite remarkable that those three concerts evolved into my life's work, having since performed over 3,000 concerts around the globe in the finest performing arts centers and recording seventeen albums along the way. We certainly grew in showmanship: the quality of our music, and the addition of incredible dancers add much to our shows. We grew as a band and, thankfully, people have continued to follow us and support us, allowing us to keep doing what we do.

### **How would you describe your sound today?**

I am so proud of all the women and men that I get to share this with each and every night, and I am so lucky to be surrounded by such talent and to have them by my side for all these years. In the group, I play flute, whistle, and sing harmony vocals. Mary Coogan has been with me for 35 years and she plays guitar, banjo, and mandolin. In addition, we have Mirella Murray (accordion), Kathleen Boyle (piano, harmony vocals), Nollaig

Casey (fiddle), and Kate Purcell (singer, guitar). Each member is individually spectacular and creative on their instrument, bringing something unique to the table to create our collective sound and style. We all come from musical families where the gift of our fathers music was the most precious thing that they could have given us. We have all had music passed down to us, and though we want to add to it, we never stray too far from those traditional roots. When it comes to arranging, we compose much of our music, and we also spend a lot of time going through old manuscripts picking out tunes that are hundreds of years old, perhaps long forgotten, and bringing them back to life. I like to think we have a unique sound - no one sounds like us and we don't sound like anybody else!



### **What have been some career highlights?**

Wow, there have been so many! One of the greatest experiences has been performing with symphony orchestras: we have been the guest soloists for many of the top symphonies in America and have performed over 300 orchestral concerts and, in that regard, we are one of the most successful pop acts in history. The thrill of playing the penny whistle alongside a 100-piece orchestra never gets old. Other highlights include performing at Bob Dylan's private party after his 35th anniversary concert at Madison Square Garden, playing on the Great Wall of China, playing at the White House and performing at the Olympic Games.

### **Is your creative process more 'inspirational' or 'perspirational'?**

I only write when something comes to me. I am not one to sit down and simply start composing - something must affect me or move me, and when I start composing I write in a few minutes.

### **What makes a good song?**

A catchy melody, a hook, a great story, and strong chorus.

### **What are your thoughts on the current state of the Irish/Celtic music scene?**

The level of virtuosity is nothing short of amazing. Kids around the world today are playing at such a high standard, and the music is in a great place. Festivals do a good job at showcasing Celtic rock bands, but I would like to see greater emphasis placed upon fiddles, flutes, accordions, and bands that perform traditional tunes.

### **Is enough being done to preserve and promote Irish/Celtic culture generally?**

You would have to go to a lot of cultures to see as much promotion and as many young people involved with music, dance, sports as the Irish. The number of kids playing music, Irish dancing, and competing in Gaelic athletic games is astounding - we are the envy of any other ethnic group. There are many teachers that continue to pass the music down via things like Skype, and parents and grandparents are doing their part to make sure the kids get to lessons. It is wonderful to see.

### **What is on the band's agenda for the remainder of 2020?**

With our 35th anniversary year we had a very busy calendar, but now we have been completely grounded with COVID-19. No one saw this coming. We are now figuring out ways to stay in touch with our fans via Facebook and YouTube until we are able to get out on the road again. And I have had to postpone my Mediterranean cruise until September of 2021. That said, I know that we will rise above and get through this.

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# *the Irish* Rovers

The Irish Rovers return to  
form with a new recording.  
*Story by Chris Muise.*





**A**fter a brief stint away visiting with family in British Columbia, Irish Rovers frontman George Millar is back where he feels most at home - in a recording studio.

"We are just about to release our new CD," he tells Celtic Life International over the phone.

"We are calling it Saints and Sinners," he continues. "I think we probably fit into one of those two categories - the fans can decide which one we belong in. I just finished it, just before going to Vancouver. I have given it a couple of days off - I don't want to listen to it just yet. I will give it a few more listens to make sure there are no little glitches that need to be fixed, and then I'll send it off. It should be out early in the new year."

Millar says that long-time fans of the Rovers, whose career spans over five decades, will love the new album.

"There are some absolutely decadent Irish-type drinking songs. I mean, there's not an Irish or Celtic band in the world that doesn't have some good drinking songs like Whiskey in the Jar, and Whiskey You're the Devil, and all of those songs that everybody seems to know and do. And there are actually a few love songs here and there because, you know, there are saints out there as well."

That said, Millar admits there is at least one surprise he is looking forward to unleashing on the fans.

"We did a bonus track. We were having a bit of fun in the studio, and I wrote a very different kind of song for us."

Inspiration for the new tune came while on vacation in Hawaii.

"I was walking along the beach and somebody was playing some Bob Marley stuff, which I happen to really quite like - very popular in Hawaii. So, I thought, 'what a neat little song that was.' I think it was Buffalo Soldiers. I really liked the rhythm, so I put together a piece we call The Irish Reggae Band. We're going to post it on our website for our fans this Christmas. They can listen to it and decide, 'what the hell is going on with this?'"

The new recording is both a culmination of one year's work with the Irish Rovers and also, perhaps, a precursor to the next year's - and next decade's - adventures. The band will tour in support of the album, starting this February. It could be their last time out on the road, or it could be just the beginning of another busy decade - that is for the fans to decide.

"We are on a sort of a long farewell tour, and any time it gets near to the point where we think we will call it a day, I get a call from Bill - who takes care of these things for us - saying, 'okay, there's another tour - they really want you back. Like, Australia - they want us to go back to New Zealand and Australia. We said goodbye there two years ago,

but Bill says, 'well, I know, but they want you back!'"

*"If people want us back,' I replied, 'we'll end up like Cher, for God's sake! On our fifth farewell tour,' However, if we are all feeling good and healthy - and if the audience wants us - there is no reason to pack it in completely."*

The Rovers have found a nice groove in recent years, with shorter tours across North America and a few dates in Ireland and elsewhere each year. By all accounts, it is a routine their fans are happy to settle into, so long as they get the chance to experience all their old favourites.

"I have learned over the years that I can write new songs, but it's not always what people want. They don't mind a couple of new songs now and again, but they still want the black velvet band. They want to hear The Orange and The Green, or Lily the Pink, or The Unicorn. Those are the ones they learned as children, and these are the songs they want to hear."

Millar doesn't begrudge people loving their old favourites - he acknowledges that everyone, from Gordon Lightfoot to Paul McCartney, are always asked to play the hits.





That is just the nature of the business. However, he still manages to slip in a few of the newer tunes in concert.

"Many of the songs that I write are written to sound like they fit our band, like they are 200 years old. That's the idea. So, the new songs fit the repertoire perfectly - so much so that people don't even know it is a new song. They think that maybe they have just never heard it before.

"And if somebody in the audience wants to hear a particular song, I will ask the band, 'do we remember it?' And if we half-remember it, we'll give it a go."

Admittedly, the Rovers have a lot of material to remember - especially Millar, who has been a member since he co-founded the group with Jimmy Ferguson back in 1963.

"My cousin George joined us from Ireland about three months later," Millar recalls. "We traveled to the west coast of Canada - to Calgary, Alberta - where my brother Will was living, and had a little TV show for children. He joined the band, and from there, we drove down to San Francisco and started our career at a place called The Purple Onion.

"It was great," he says, adding that he was thinking about the old days recently after working to digitize their older TV broadcasts. "Peter, Paul, and Mary were there. The Smothers Brothers were across the street. Even the Grateful Dead, in those days, were playing in there.

*"Those were just great times.  
When I see those old TV shows  
I think, look at how young we  
were. We were boys."*

And while the Rovers still sing many of their classic songs, the way they make music has changed drastically since they recorded *The Unicorn* at Universal Studios with Glen Campbell.

"There was my Ripley guitar, Glen Campbell, my cousin Joe played a harmonica, and they brought in a bass player. That's all it was on *The Unicorn*," Millar says, with a twinge of amazement. "Just the harmonica, two guitars, and a bass. And it became this huge hit all over the world.

"Those recording sessions were so much different than it is now. Today, I can do so much more in my own little house, here in my own little studio. Back then, we sat around in a semicircle. The sound of my guitar would leak into somebody else's mic, and the accordion would leak into everybody's mic, because it was so hard to control. But that was how it was done.

"Now, the process is incredible; I send tracks to our keyboard guy Morris (Crumb), who then sends them along to Cork, where Sean (O'Driscoll) records his banjo and mandolin. Then it's off to Gerry (O'Connor, fiddler), before it is all sent back to me, and

then we have Geoffrey (Kelly) record his flute parts. It is all done piecemeal, but it works."

While he admits that some of this digital wizardry is still a bit mystifying at times, Millar is thrilled that new musicians today have the means to blaze their own trails, independent of corporate hit-makers.

"Record companies held everything over you in those days, and I'm not sorry to see a lot of them go to tell you the truth. Many of them had the upper hand over the artist. There's not an artist that I have ever met, from the Beatles to Sting, who have not had to either sue their record company, or at least promised to go to court over it and then get some sort of a requisition."

That freedom also allows bands like the Rovers to have more control of their own musical future - so long as the fans like it. But he seems happy to leave that up to them.

"Now that we have our own record company, we release whatever we want to, whenever we want, hope that our fans are going to like it. Again, it is all up to them; if they don't want to see us anymore, that's great. If they don't want to listen to us, that's fine, too. We have had a long and rewarding career, and I will never, ever run it down. No regrets. But so long as the fans keep asking, we will keep doing it."

[www.theirishroversmusic.com](http://www.theirishroversmusic.com)





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# *The Chieftains*

*Paddy Moloney and the healing power of music*

*Story by Stephen Patrick Clare*





**P**addy Moloney is a titan of his industry - a musical giant who has spent a lifetime rubbing shoulders with the likes of royalty, religious icons, world leaders, business czars, captains of art and culture, rock stars, celebrities and more.

Though slight of frame with a slight hunch, the Dublin-born musician, composer, and producer - who also happens to be the founder and leader of the Irish musical legends The Chieftains - casts a big shadow.

Despite his grand standing amongst his musical peers, the 81-year-old is humble and soft-spoken, charming and cordial, warm and welcoming.

"Hello, how are ya' then?" he asks, taking my hand in his as we sit down for an afternoon chat at The Arms Public House inside the Lord Nelson Hotel in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The server comes by to take our orders. Coffee with milk for me. Moloney looks at

his watch, smiles slyly and says, "Well, it is after 12pm, so a double Jamesons, straight-up please," before turning to me and adding with a giggle, "You know, I got into the music game for the free drinks, and I'm damn well staying in it until I get some."

We make small talk as we await our drinks.

"Aye, we have been here several times," he nods, speaking of Atlantic Canada. "A lovely part of the world. Fine folks. There's a few Irish about. Lots in Newfoundland. We don't make it over this way often enough, but when we do it is always a grand time; good food, good drink and lots of great music."

"That could be the story of your life," I reply with a smirk.

"Ha, indeed," he laughs. "Well, that is not so bad then is it? I am quite blessed that things turned out as well as they did. It has been quite a ride."

That journey began at the age of six,

when Moloney's mother gave him his first instrument, a tin whistle. In time, he would pick up the Uilleann pipes, the button accordion and the bodhran.

*"My mother had no idea what she set in motion all of those years ago. If only she could see me now!"*

"Actually, I believe that I always had that music in me, even as a youngster growing up in Dublin. Once I had my hands on those instruments, it was like magic - the melodies just started pouring out of me."

The rest, as they say, is musical history; in the early 1960s, Moloney would join his first band, Ceoltóirí Chualann, with leader Seán Ó Riada. That group would form the basis for The Chieftains, who debuted in the fall of 1962. Over the next half-century, the group would release dozens of albums and



play thousands of concerts for millions of people around the world.

"We were kids," he recalls with a twinkle in his eye of those early years. "Back then, we were just pleased to play for pocket money or a pint of Guinness. Don't tell anyone, but we would have done it for free! We really had no idea what we were doing or how long it would last. We still don't. These days, we might have a bit better understanding of our instruments, and of what music is and can be, but we are still just winging it for the most part."

Moloney's modesty is both authentic and endearing. Despite an epic, larger-than-life resume replete with an array of awards, accolades and achievements, his demeanor is one of honest and hard-won humility.

"We have had the good fortune of making a living doing what we love, what we must, and we have traveled around the world doing it. All of these years, all we have been doing is carrying the message of music and, hopefully, making some sort of difference in the lives of a few folks."

Meeting people, he notes, is still the best part of the gig.

"We have always taken the time to chat with fans and friends. That hasn't changed since the very beginning. Everyone has a story, some comic and others tragic. We all

share those things in common, and it is the music that brings us together in celebration and in grief."

Many of those close encounters have been with fellow musicians. I begin dropping names, and Moloney willing replies.

Mick Jagger: "Very smart, and an extremely hard worker. He gets a bad rap for being a good businessman, but he knows music as well as anyone - especially the blues."

Paul McCartney: "A brilliant songwriter and a natural talent. A living legend with no ego whatsoever."

Sting: "A genius, really. He knows what he wants in a song and spares no expense or effort in bringing it to life."

Stevie Wonder: "He is a teacher at heart. I learned so much just being around him, and some of those sessions are among my most memorable."

Bono: "One of the funniest guys I have ever had the pleasure to know, and one of the most passionate about music."

Van Morrison: "How can you not respect someone so dedicated to his craft?"

Bob Dylan: "Unique - a one-off. There is nobody else in the world like him, and there never will be."

The list of past creative collaborators is endless; Madonna, Pavarotti, Moya Brennan,

Elvis Costello, Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris, Tom Jones, Marianne Faithfull, Ry Cooder, The Pogues, Sinéad O'Connor, Bon Iver...

*"I think that what has kept us around for so long is a curiosity about where we can take the music."*

"We never hung out with those folks just because they were celebrities or to party - we had work to do; songs to write and record and perform. There may have been a few drinks along the way, surely, but it never got in the way of the music."

In an era when excess got the better of so many of his musical peers - from Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison to Phil Lynott, Kurt Cobain and Amy Winehouse - Moloney has kept his priorities straight and his house in order.

"Oh, my wife gets all of the credit for that. And my three children. Without them, I'd no doubt be homeless."

I remind him of Keith Richards' adage, "I am happy to be here. Actually, I am happy to be anywhere..."







"Ah yes," he laughs. "A bit of a miracle, really, that one. An incredible musician and band leader in his own right, and I have never known him to turn down either a drink or a session. He just loves to play."

As if the list of rock stars and musical dignitaries weren't long enough, there were mainstage performances for the likes of Queen Elizabeth II during her first ever official trip to Ireland in 2011 ("Gracious, as expected..."), and Pope John Paul II in 1979 ("Great sense of humour, and a keen ear for a melody..."), where the Chieftains performed for over 1 million people at Phoenix Park in Dublin. They were the first group to appear at the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. (1983) and - that same year - atop (!) the Great Wall of China. Another wall, this time in Berlin, was the site of a show with Pink Floyd frontman Roger Waters in 1990.

"It has been incredible to witness modern historical events first-hand, with my very own eyes. To experience these things, to be a part of them, is so very humbling. For me, they have served as reminders of how truly small we are in the grand scheme of things, but how big a difference we can make."

In 2002, Maloney and his bandmates took part in a memorial concert in New York City for the victims of 9/11.

"I was invited to Ground Zero, where I played a lament for the (rescue team) on my little tin whistle. It was then and there that I realized that the world we live in, the one I grew up in, would never be the same, and that - more than ever - music was needed to help heal our wounds...that we, as a band, needed to keep going and try to reach as many people as we could in the time that we had left."

I remind him that "music has charms to soothe a savage breast..." - a phrase taken from the poem *The Morning Bride* by 17th century English playwright and poet William Congreve.

"Aye, that is surely true enough," sighs Moloney, now sipping his second double Jamesons.

*"Music has worked wonders  
for me through the years, and  
hopefully ours has done that for  
others as well."*

Moloney and his musical cohorts - Matt Molloy and Kevin Conneff - are currently on the road in the USA on their "Irish Goodbye" tour.



"An Irish Goodbye is an expression we use when someone leaves a party without telling anyone," he explains, "usually by quietly slipping out the back door when no one is watching."

I ask about the significance of the tour's moniker.

"Oh, I wouldn't read too much into that," he smiles. "So long as there are still people who want to come out and hear us, and so long as we have our health, we'll be there."

That audience has evolved over the decades.

"A lot of these folks have been with us since early on, and it is always a pleasure to see the same faces at the shows. We are all a little older, and perhaps a little slower, but we are all still going. What has been truly wonderful has been seeing these people bring their children, and grandchildren, along to the concerts. Music, and in our case traditional Irish music, is a great way to bring families, friends and communities together."

The Chieftains are sharing the stage with some friends of their own on the current tour.

"We've got musicians and dancers and other performers that will be joining us for each show - many of whom we have played with in the past. And you never know who is going to turn up for a tune or two. That is part of the fun for us, and for the fans also."

With stops scheduled in Irish hotbeds like Chicago, Pittsburgh, Boston and New York, there will likely be no shortage of expats in the audience.

"Yes, we do get a lot of Irish, of course, but you would be amazed at how many people come out to the shows who have absolutely no Irish or Celtic blood at all."

***"That is the power of music; it goes beyond race, age, sex or religion. It goes beyond identity entirely. It really has that kind of power."***

So long as that power is at play, Moloney and The Chieftains will continue to play.

"Who knows how long we will keep doing this? I guess we will just keep going as

long as we are breathing. I mean, really, at this point, why stop?

"Now, that said, if you had told me in 1962 that we would still be performing in 2020 I'd have told you that you were daft. It was simply inconceivable to us back then that we would have gone on to do the things that we have done, and that we are still doing. Don't get me wrong - I have no complaints at all. You see, I didn't choose music, it chose me - and I have cherished every moment of it, and every gift it has brought me, and I still do. I wake up every morning full of appreciation that the magic is still there and that, for whatever reason, the melodies are still pouring out of me."

As our server is set to pour Moloney another double Jamesons, he puts his hand over the glass.

"Aye, that'll do for now, thank you" he smiles, throwing me a mischievous wink. "We've a show to do here tonight, and surely there'll be plenty more drinks about later... maybe even a few free ones."

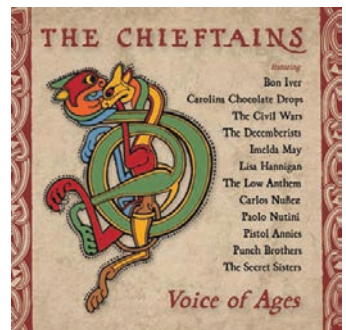
[www.thechieftains.com](http://www.thechieftains.com)

## DISCOGRAPHY

*The Chieftains* (1964)  
*The Chieftains 2* (1969)  
*The Chieftains 3* (1971)  
*The Chieftains 4* (1973)  
*The Chieftains 5* (1975)  
*The Chieftains 6: Bonaparte's Retreat* (1976)  
*The Chieftains 7* (1977)  
*The Chieftains Live!* (1977)  
*The Chieftains 8* (1978)  
*The Chieftains 9: Boil the Breakfast Early* (1979)  
*The Chieftains 10: Cotton-Eyed Joe* (1980)  
*The Year of the French* (1982)  
*The Grey Fox* (1982 - OST)  
*Concert Orchestra* (1983)  
*The Chieftains in China* (1985)

*Ballad of the Irish Horse* (1986)  
*Celtic Wedding* (1987)  
*In Ireland* (1987 - with James Galway)  
*Irish Heartbeat* (1988 - with Van Morrison)  
*The Tailor of Gloucester* (1988)  
*A Chieftains Celebration* (1989)  
*Over the Sea to Skye: The Celtic Connection* (1990 - with James Galway)  
*The Bells of Dublin* (1991)  
*Reel Music* (1991)  
*Another Country* (1992)  
*An Irish Evening* (1992)  
*The Best of the Chieftains* (1992)  
*Music at Matt Molloy's* (1992)  
*Far and Away OST* (1992 - with John Williams)  
*The Celtic Harp: A Tribute to Edward Bunting*

(1993 - with The Belfast Harp Orchestra)  
*The Long Black Veil* (1995)  
*Film Cuts* (1996)  
*Santiago* (1996)  
*Long Journey Home* (1998)  
*Fire in the Kitchen* (1998)  
*Silent Night: A Christmas in Rome* (1998)  
*Tears of Stone* (1999)  
*Water from the Well* (2000)  
*The Wide World Over* (2002)  
*Down the Old Plank Road:*  
*The Nashville Sessions* (2002)  
*Further Down the Old Plank Road* (2003)  
*Live from Dublin: A Tribute to Derek Bell* (2005)  
*The Essential Chieftains* (2006)  
*San Patricio* (2010) (with Ry Cooder)







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# Lorna Gillies

[www.lornagillies.com](http://www.lornagillies.com)

I was born and raised in the Scottish Highlands - it is in my blood and in my heart. Being a Highlander plays a huge part in my work.

I first became interested in fashion in high school. I loved colour and was interested in fashion from different eras. My main interest was in the craft of design and tailoring. I then studied Theatre Costume in Edinburgh and later moved to Melbourne and gained experience with several boutique fashion labels.

In 2015, I moved back home to Ardnamurchan to start my fashion label and here, on the west coast of Lochaber, I am surrounded by the familiar lochs and hills, which

continue to inspire me. Historical costume continues to be my passion to this day.

Everything is designed and handmade by me. I avoid the fashion trends. Slow fashion appeals to me more; using local, quality fabrics and making something that will last - something you can wear for years, that stays with you, has a story that you can pass down to your daughter or your granddaughter.

I have started working with tartans more recently, as I love using traditional fabrics to create something elegant and with a fun, quirky edge; vibrant colours with a historical flare.

There is nothing like seeing a client delighted with their new coat. It is very rewarding to help a woman feel like she can take on the world. You see it, it is a magic feeling - when someone wears something that they feel good in, their whole posture changes and they exude confidence.

I believe Scottish design is thriving; we have our own cloth manufacturing - including lace, velvet and tweed - and we also have more and more boutique manufacturing companies popping up to make clothing. There are many talented designers, and the beauty is that we are all so different from one another.









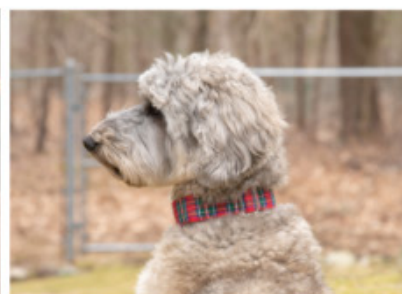




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# Jonathan McFerran

[www.jaimcferran.com](http://www.jaimcferran.com)

I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. My mother is descended from the Republic of Ireland on her father's side and Portland, USA on her mother's side. My father's heritage stems from Scotland on his mother's side and Northern Ireland on his father's side.

I've always been very artistic and creative. As young as I can remember, I was always drawing or painting. It really kicked off in my childhood when I was mesmerized by film posters such as the Star Wars posters by Drew Struzan - so much so I would try and recreate them. When I was in my teens, however, I became more interested in photography.

After my studies I tried my hand at digital photography for the likes of Belfast

Fashion Week, New Look Retailers and other projects. In the end, however, it just wasn't as creative as I had hoped and so I got involved in photo-illustration, a form of digital art that uses multiple photographs composited and blended together to create a completely new image.

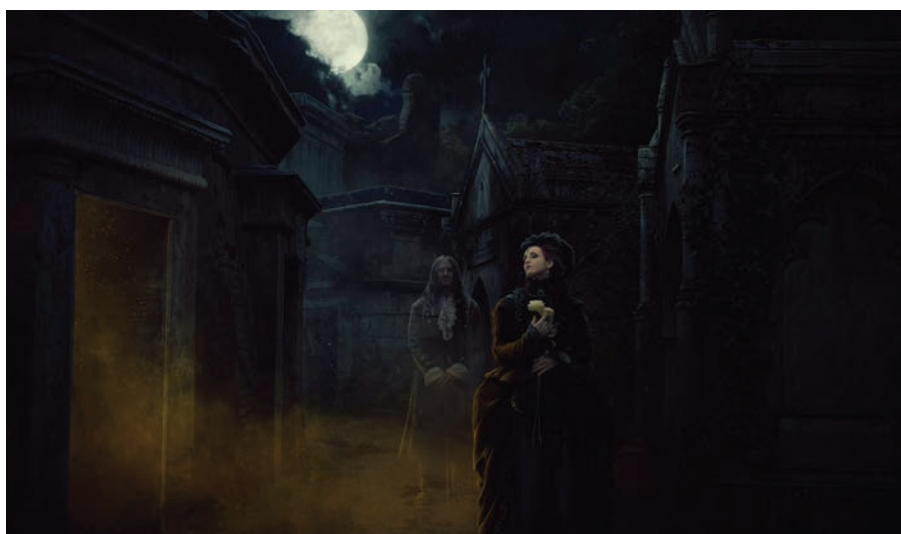
My work has taken many forms over the years. As I have gotten older, I have refined my techniques and processes and developed a style that I am well versed in. I describe my work as an exploration into dark fantasy. I have always been interested in Celtic mythology, I like the mystery in the stories, and the imagery of the ancient folklore speaks to me deeply. One of my favourite stories is the tale of Ceridwen

and Taliesin from Welsh mythology.

The reward really comes from seeing the finished image: a fully realized piece of art based on my own vision. There is nothing more satisfying than having an idea and then seeing that idea translated into a piece of art. It is exciting and fulfilling and inspires me to stay creative.

I like to believe that my art tells a story. I want people to look at my images and immediately be able to create their own world around them. As if my images are snapshots in time, I want to allow the viewer to create a narrative. This is what I think is unique about my work; that immersive quality that lets the viewer write a story to complement the image.













LIAM O'SHIEL

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## Kelvin Gillmor

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The combination of constantly changing light that sweeps across the West, and the uniquely rugged and beautiful landscape makes Galway one of the most interesting places in the world to photograph. There is a visual feast of incredible locations to visit, and there are hidden gems around every corner...





## Trish Punch

[www.trishpunch.com](http://www.trishpunch.com)

Irish weather allows for beautiful light conditions that really show off the textures of the rugged scenery. It is impossible to capture a scene in the same light twice. There is an overwhelming connection to the past written in the landscape. From our castle ruins to our Stone Age monuments, every inch of land tells a story. It is that combination of an ancient history and wild natural beauty that strikes a chord with me...

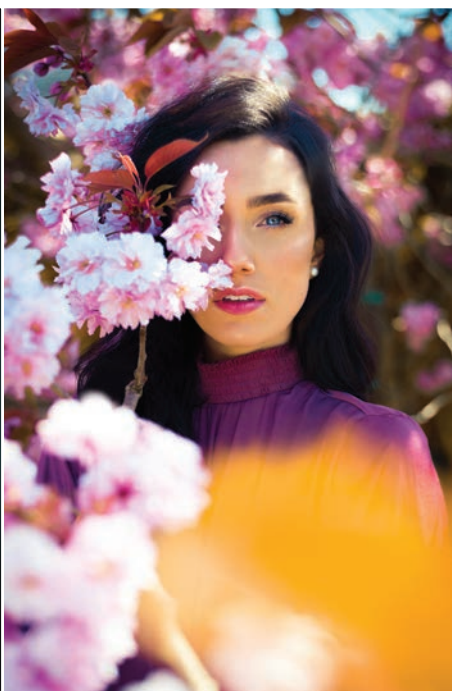






**Julia Dunin**  
[www.juliadunin.com](http://www.juliadunin.com)

Galway has so much to offer; a vivid art scene with all sorts of festivals all year round and many artists that have made the West of Ireland their home. People are really friendly and there is a great community spirit. The food and nightlife scene are rich and lively, and it is a great place to study and work. And, just on our doorstep, we have the stunning Connemara National Park and Clare, famous for the Cliffs of Moher and the Burren...







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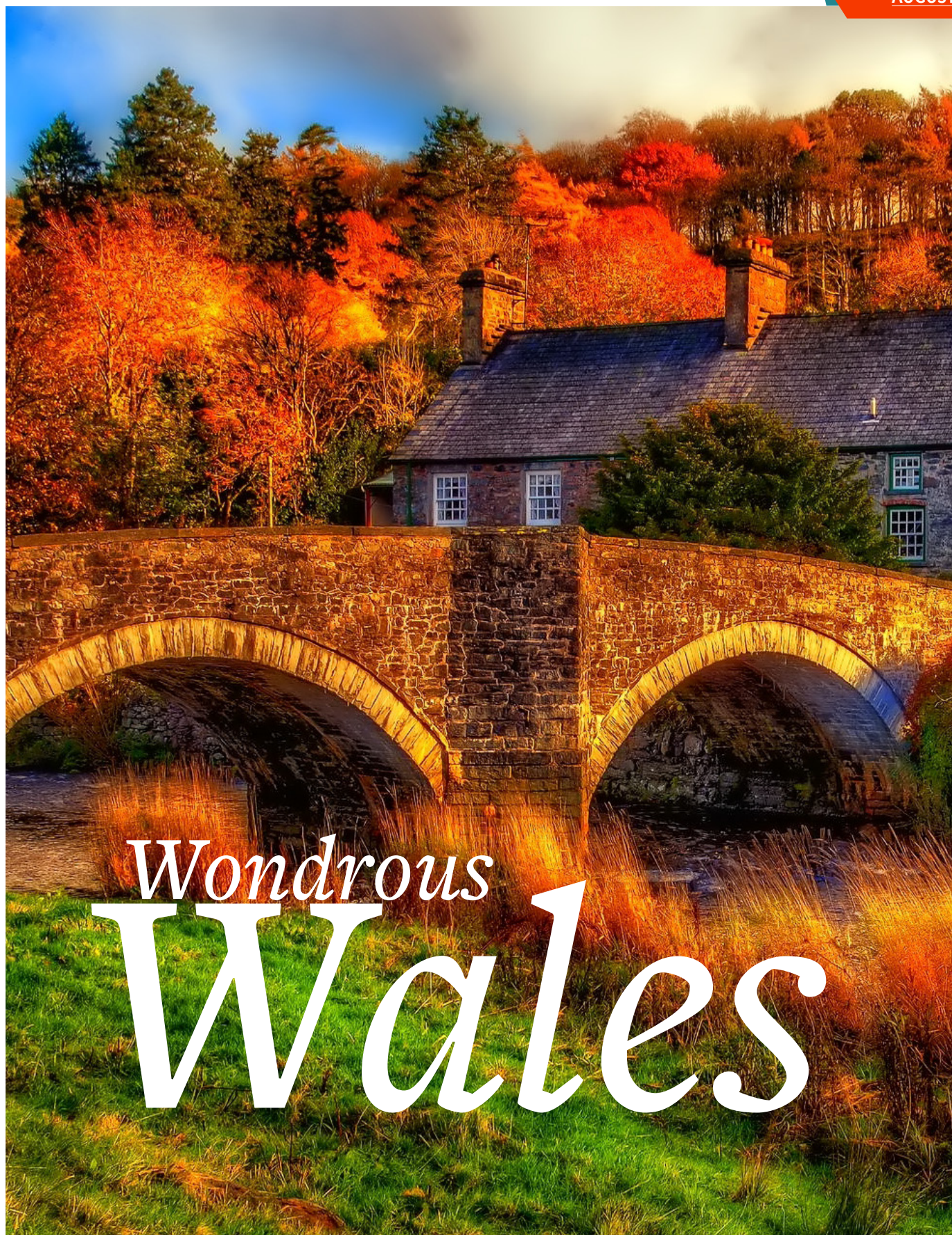
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# Nigel Forster

[www.nigelforsterphotography.co.uk](http://www.nigelforsterphotography.co.uk)

I have lived in the Brecon Beacons in Wales since 2002 and have worked as a photographer since 2010.

Initially, my interest was simply capturing images - and that is still what inspires me today. As I now do photography for a living my emphasis has changed, and I mix my teaching and commercial work with capturing my own images. I have never taken images to sell; if I happen to sell some, that's great...but it doesn't influence my shooting style.

You cannot work successfully as a photographer unless you are inspired by what you do. To me, the subject comes before photography rather than the process itself. I don't think that anyone gets into photography to get rich. However, the work is immensely rewarding in other ways; I get to go to some beautiful places, and I have plenty of freedom and flexibility with my time. Also, I always

enjoy seeing my work in print and it is always nice when people say how much they enjoy my work. That gives me great satisfaction.

The strength of my work is - and has always been - based on its simplicity of composition and control of natural light. Most of my personal favourite images are "unique" as I favour the spontaneous and unplanned approach rather than photographing familiar and well photographed places.

I'm not one for planning a location and waiting several hours and several visits to get the perfect conditions; my approach is far more about going out with the camera and seeing what happens. This leads to far more individualistic, unique, and creative images than the planned approach. That's not to say there aren't plenty of early climbs up mountains and being out in difficult weather, but I enjoy that and certainly enjoy seeing the results.

Wales is a small country, but it has an incredibly varied landscape with a great mix of mountains, coastline, heritage and industrial landscapes, woodlands, waterfalls and much more. Our industrial heritage also means that it's not "chocolate box" and, at times, not pretty. But that only adds to its photographic potential. Allied to that, it has a cool maritime climate which means lots of changeable weather with dramatic light, perfect for photography, tremendous seasonal variation, and colour. It's difficult to find another country with such a great mix of landscape and climatic conditions within such a small area.













# Mike Alexander

[www.landscapeswales.com](http://www.landscapeswales.com)

My roots are all Welsh, deeply embedded in the upper Swansea Valley. It was the home for so many generations of my family. Both grandfathers were coal miners and my father worked in the coal mining industry. During my teenage years we lived in the small mining village of Tumble, at the head of the Gwendraeth Valley. I spent the first 16 years of my working life in Pembrokeshire and for the past 30 years I have lived in Barmouth, a small seaside town in the south of the Snowdonia National Park.

I have always felt the need to make things, whether it is images, sculpture, furniture or wood turning. Though I always longed, most of all, to create images, I never quite succeeded until I discovered photography.

The principal driving force in my life is nature conservation. My interest in photography was ini-

tially driven by the opportunity of unlimited access to wildlife and in particular seabirds and an opportunity to sell photographs and supplement an otherwise rather small income.

Photography is, in my world, the endless pursuit of that perfect image, though I doubt that I would recognize one if I saw it. Someone once told me, or perhaps I read it somewhere, that the only way to take a good photograph is to take the same photograph over and over - and that is what I do. It means endless hours of waiting for the light, for that elusive, or imagined, perfect combination of form, composition, colour, and contrast.

My story is best told through photography, it is my photographs and not my words that best reveal my passion and love for Wales. Wales might no longer be a true wilderness, but we have a glorious

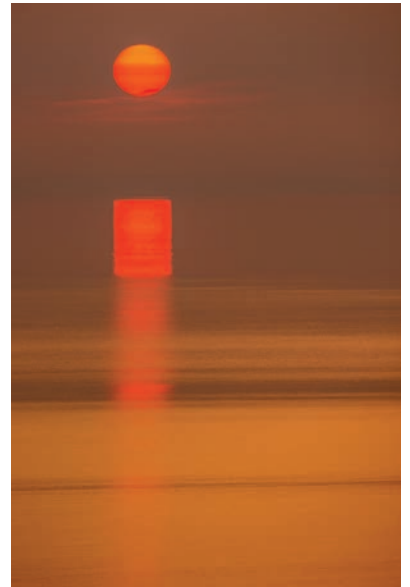
landscape that has been shaped over thousands of years as the mainly unintentional by-product of generations of people toiling to provide a living for their families. Our cultural landscape is special and precious, it speaks quite loudly and clearly of our relationship with nature. Our culture, our language, music, poetry, and art are in turn, a reflection of our landscape.















# Matthew Williams-Ellis

[www.matthewwilliams-ellis.com](http://www.matthewwilliams-ellis.com)

I first started taking photos on family holiday when I was about 16, and from there it was just a hobby that spiralled out of control. I love to travel, and I think photography encourages an inquisitive eye when on the road.

I still love the freedom and excitement of producing travel photographs – never quite knowing exactly what is around the corner. I have a personal project of a series of six-minute exposures that I get a lot of enjoyment from too. I always feel very relaxed and lost in thought as I create them.

I used to shoot anything and everything. Now I tend to go to a location, with more of a plan of why and how I am photographing, and what I want to achieve. Often

this is because I have a brief, but it is also because I have realized the benefit of visualizing how I want the photos to be.

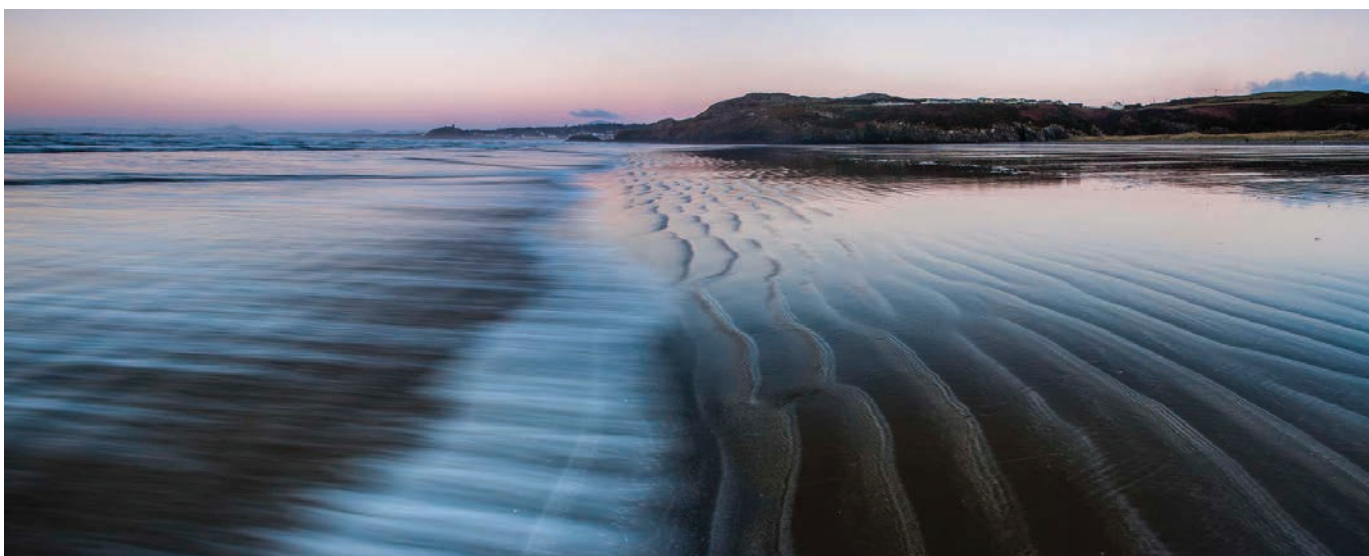
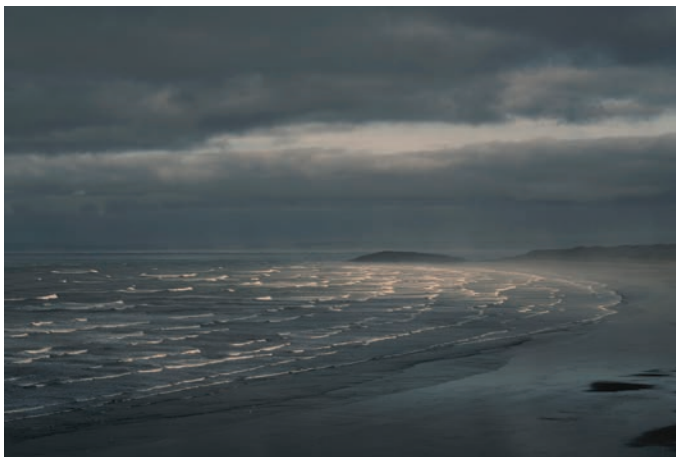
Photography is simply an individual's view of the world. So, in some respects it is hard not to be unique. Having said that, some locations have been photographed in every way, shape, and form imaginable. When I am in these situations, being unique is an active thought process. I force myself change angle, even if I don't know why. I change lenses to alter how I am viewing the scene, or I stop shooting all together, and analyze the scene rather than just clicking, clicking, clicking. Versatility and variety are key aspects of what makes my collection of

images unique.

A photo is good if it tells the story that was intended, or if it evokes an emotion or curiosity.

Wales has stunning landscapes with lots of wildlife, and fascinating history and heritage. The mountains of Snowdonia are one of my favourite areas in the U.K. Nowadays, they are a playground for me as a photographer, and they are also a sentimental location, as we used to go on family holidays there every year when I was a child. I also run an annual photography trip to Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire to photograph the puffins. Wales offers a variety of experiences with a relaxed pace – very attractive to a photographer or any creative types.







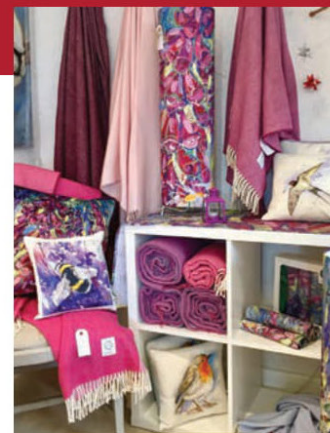




# THE CHRISTMAS PARCEL



Noreen Walshe



Painter Noreen Walshe has recently launched the Living Ireland Collection, which is a departure for her into the world of textiles. The collection showcases Irish flora and fauna, the seasons and local Irish landmarks as her favourite paintings are translated into cushions, lampshades, lamps, table runners, napkins, tea towels and art bags. The collection also includes 100 per cent Irish wool throws and cashmere and merino lambswool scarves.

The Christmas series of products focuses on the Boyne Valley where the artist lives. Popular places such as Mrs O's pub on the Hill of Skryne, the Hill of Tara are highlighted in the prints along with seasonal robin.

*\*Packaging and postage not included.*

Added to this collection of homeware and wearables is her newly published book 'The Christmas Parcel' a memoir in text and illustration of childhood in Limerick city in the late 50s.

Available at [www.choicepublishing.ie](http://www.choicepublishing.ie) & [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

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# *Celtic in the Time of Coronavirus*

*As Celtic Life International  
Associate Editor Rebecca Dingwell explains,  
the Celtic community comes together  
during times of crisis*





This summer, there are no ceilidhs, clan gatherings or kilt runs. Fields usually occupied by heavy athletics competitions or the colours and sounds of pipe bands will stand empty and quiet. On February 11, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 (a.k.a coronavirus) outbreak a global pandemic, and it is impacting everyone in every part of the world, to varying degrees. COVID-19 has caused governments to veto large gatherings and - as a result - shut down concerts, sporting events and businesses. Celtic Festivals and Highland Games are no exception.

Staff got the call 24 hours before the St. Augustine Celtic Music & Heritage Festival was set to begin on March 13: the city had pulled their permit and ordered the event to close. By that time, rental equipment had been delivered and set up. Staff had been working on the previously permitted City Events Field since Tuesday, March 10. The opening night whiskey tasting event was sold out at 120 seats. Almost 1,500 general admission tickets had been sold.

"I would expect that this crisis had a more profound effect on our Celtic Festival than on other events," Albert Syeles, one of the festival organizers, shares via email. "It was cancelled at the last minute, with everything in place."

In retrospect, Syeles knows the city made the right call. However, there is no denying its impact.

"Our Celtic Festival in March is our annual fundraiser and that normally pays for all the other things we do year-round," says Syeles, who is the president of St. Augustine's Romanza organization. Romanza promotes

arts and culture events in St. Augustine, Florida. "We are relieved to find that our bank account is not completely drained, so we are trying to plan for next year."

Preparing for 2021 presents its own difficulties. Without the revenue from the 2020 festival, and the questionable status of government grants, it is hard to say when they will be able to put deposits down for performers or start advertising.

"Nonetheless, we hope the health crisis will subside by then and we believe our festival can help bring back a sense of normalcy and may even stimulate the local economy."

By early spring, many summer event organizers made the call to proactively cancel their festivals, avoiding similar last-minute decisions. For several of those events, such as the Greater Moncton Highland Games & Scottish Festival in New Brunswick, it was

the first time they have ever had to scrap it.

Steve Tweedie, Co-chair of the Moncton Highland Games, says that organizers decided to cancel in late March: more than a month before the festival was scheduled to take place. Even if mass gatherings had been allowed again by May, Tweedie explained, Highland dance groups and pipe bands would have gone weeks without meeting and would likely be unable to compete.

"Those groups would have gone so long without practicing or anything, we probably wouldn't get the numbers coming out for the competition," Tweedie explains via telephone. "We couldn't even get judges to commit to it, because travel was all questionable."

The timing is especially unfortunate for the Moncton Games, as it was slated to host the men's and women's lightweight world championships for heavy athletics. This would have been the first time the men's championship was hosted in Canada, and the first lightweight women's championship period. Since the games were cancelled early, Tweedie said the financial consequences are minimal. But the disappointment stings.

"There is a lot of effort that goes into trying to organize it. This would have been our fourteenth year.

*"It really takes the wind out of your sails when you have to cancel an event like that."*

Meanwhile, the organizers of the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo are run off their feet, as ever.

"There is no show this year, but I feel like we are working harder - in different ways - than we have ever worked before," notes Scott Long, the Tattoo's managing director and executive producer.

The Tattoo was one of the first major events in Nova Scotia to cancel. They issued a press release on March 21. "For us to cancel early was the best way for us to survive, moving forward," explains Long. Considering all the marketing, travel and accommodation costs, it just didn't make sense to continue rolling out the plans while everything was so uncertain. They refunded all tickets "without any questions asked."

Over on Canada's west coast, Iain MacDonald said the Saskatchewan Highland





Gathering and Celtic Festival is one of the lucky ones. Like Moncton, organizers in Regina halted plans early. Any profit incurred from this year would just go towards a subsequent event, anyhow. “We had not done any media or posters - the expenses that we had laid out so far are very minimal,” says MacDonald, who is the vice-president of the festival. “We will actually be in a pretty good position going into the fall when we start planning for 2021.”

### Vendors and Small Businesses

MacDonald also runs a business called Reelpipes, selling everything from bagpipes to drumming supplies and Highland dress. Since pipe bands are no longer getting together to practice (in the traditional sense, at least), musicians don’t need the amount of gear they normally would.

“Pipe bands consume a lot of reeds and drumheads and they need new equipment for members. That is kind of an ongoing thing in the season, and right now, that has stopped 100 percent. Nobody is ordering anything because they don’t need it.”

He is not alone. COVID-19 has been especially impactful for vendors who typically make their bank on the Celtic festival circuit. No festivals means that there is almost nowhere to physically sell their wares. The St. Augustine Celtic Music & Heritage Festival, for example, was expected to welcome 13 food vendors as well as 43 merchandise vendors from all over the United States.

For Keltic Nations, Ingrid and Greg McPherson’s Ontario-based jewellery business, three major events were pulled from their schedule. This included the local Celtic festival and a large wedding show, the latter of which was postponed to October. Ironically, though, sales have improved as of late.

“I think this is because we have ramped up our advertising and have been posting a bit more content to social media,” Ingrid shares via email.

*“Folks also have lots of time to shop online now and perhaps are more mindful to be supporting small businesses.”*



Hilary Creighton of Scottish Creations is in a similar situation. Demand hasn’t gone down, she said, but it has become harder for suppliers to fill orders. Creighton curates a slew of products from independent businesses in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and with strict quarantine rules and slower-than-usual postal services, it hasn’t been easy to get those products in the hands of customers. Fortunately, customers have been understanding, and suppliers have “gone above and beyond” to keep things moving. That said, pushing sales isn’t Creighton’s main priority.

“Actively selling right now - morally, it doesn’t feel OK to me. People know we are here, and if they do reach out and they do want something, we are all here to help.”

Creighton is keeping Scottish Creations in touch with its customers through regular giveaways on its Instagram page. She is also rolling out a program called “Scots - Working Together and Helping Each Other” across Canada and the United States.

Through the program, Scottish Creations “is offering discounts to Scottish organization members,” explains Creighton. “We have done that in the past, of course, but the difference now is that we are matching that discount and donating it to the organization. Most of these event organizations are not-for-profit and they too need all the help they can get.”

### Musicians

Bands and musicians are unable to tour at all. The American Rogues, a group made up of a large roster of talented Americans and Canadians, are one of many Celtic-style bands on a forced hiatus. The virus hit just as the Rogues were gearing up for their St. Patrick’s Day shows. In a matter of days, events in Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Niagara Falls were cancelled. In the weeks that followed, Celtic festivals and music festivals announced more cancellations from March until September. On top of scrapped shows, the American Rogues have also had to put their upcoming album, *The Hammer*, on the backburner.

For Nelson Stewart, the American Rogues’ vocalist and multi-instrumentalist,



Hilary Creighton



it helps to keep things in perspective. Although losing so many shows during the band's busiest time of year affects both the musicians and the fans, Stewart says, "we have been lucky to have our health and we all know it is important to support the front-line workers in their fight against the virus." On a personal level, it has been painful for Stewart to be unable to visit his grandson, Sid, who has participated in past Rogues' performances.

"As a band, the American Rogues will recover from this and move forward undaunted.

*"Things will be that much sweeter after this forced separation when we all get together again to celebrate Celtic culture."*

Kyle MacCallum of the Celtic folk-rock band SYR also hopes the music scene will come back stronger. While the pandemic has impacted SYR and its show schedule, it didn't stop the group from releasing its latest single, Legacy. The release party could no longer take place, of course, but the music has had a positive reception online. MacCallum brought his love for the metal genre into more traditional Celtic sounds.

"It is a little harder than most of our other songs, but I was excited to see what people would think," he shares. "Luckily, they have been very receptive to it and very encouraging."

### Going Online

In addition, SYR has used tools such as livestreams to continue reaching its audience. The band has even set up a Patreon page, which provides access to content, including behind-the-scenes videos and livestreams, for a few dollars a month. In spite of all the challenges, MacCallum is steadfast in his belief that artists - and people in general - will bounce back.

"I am a firm believer in people's resilience, as cliché as that sounds. Art makes us human. We have heard that argument thousands of times."

Plenty of other bands are still putting music out into the world as well. Amid fan requests, the American Rogues have also released an online venture with the help of



their engineer, Chris Donaldson. Recently, the band's "quarantine edition" cover of the Game of Thrones theme song hit YouTube.

"It took a fair bit of time to bring everything together with so many moving parts and physical distancing, but we had a lot of fun doing it - even our dogs got into it!" laughs Stewart. "The video has been getting great response online and several kind people have said it was exactly what they needed right now."

Another musical group, Gaelic Storm, has also had to hit pause on their usual routine, which typically includes 150-200 days of touring a year. However, they are getting content to their fans in new ways. Steve Twigger, the band's guitarist, notes that the band is currently doing weekly livestreams on Facebook each Friday at 5 p.m. (CMT).

*"Every day is a new day and we are coming up with a few things to keep the lights on and stay connected as a band and connected to our audience."*

Similarly, some festivals are following the trend of finding ways to keep momentum going through the internet. Albert Syeles and Romanza St. Augustine recently put together an online production of St. Augustine's Romanza Festival of Music & The Arts.

"It featured over 20 concerts, poetry readings, dance exhibitions, etc. by many of those same groups that were scheduled for Romanza's live shows," says Syeles. "And it included some of the Celtic bands that had







been scheduled for our Celtic Festival in March.”

The Saskatchewan Highland Gathering is looking into the possibility of a digital “beer tent.” Pipe bands are holding meetings on video chat programs such as Zoom. Musicians are turning out music and playing tunes on porches or in driveways. And so, Celtic culture is still at people’s fingertips, if they know where to look. That said, it doesn’t fully replace in-person community-building - or funding, for that matter.

Scott Long said the Nova Scotia Tattoo has been “forced to innovate,” as has everyone else. While online marketing isn’t new for the organization, it has never had to lean on the internet so heavily before. This spring, the Tattoo launched its first digital project: a virtual massed pipers performance of “Amazing Grace.” The video was dedicated to Abigail Cowbrough and the crew of the HMCS Fredericton, the victims of the mass shooting in Portapique, Nova Scotia, and all the essential workers on the frontlines during this pandemic.

Similar projects are coming down the pipeline: more massed pipers, drums and even a virtual choir performance. “Hopefully, at the end, we can stitch them all together and put together some sort of a virtual tattoo that will be able to be streamed online.”

### So, What Now?

It is still too early to predict what this time next year will bring. Despite all the online ventures, Long says, nothing can replace the revenue lost without ticket sales. He points out that the performing arts sector was the first industry to “get hit” by COVID-19 and, as it is considered non-essential, it will probably be one of the

last industries to return once the pandemic recedes.

“I hope people understand how important the non-profit arts organizations are as we move through this. Let’s hope the government recognizes how important these events are - the Tattoo or a local Highland games or Jazz Festival - are to our communities. Not only economically, but also culturally.”

Nelson Stewart feels similarly. During this time, especially, music has given people hope.

“The arts stepped up in their own way and reminded people that there is definitely a need for them. I am sure one of the images many of us will remember in the years to come will be people in Italy and around the world singing to each other from their balconies. When they had lost so much, they still had music.

“When the time comes, everyone needs to get out to their local Celtic events and support those who put so much into making them possible.”



Nelson Stewart and his grandson Sid



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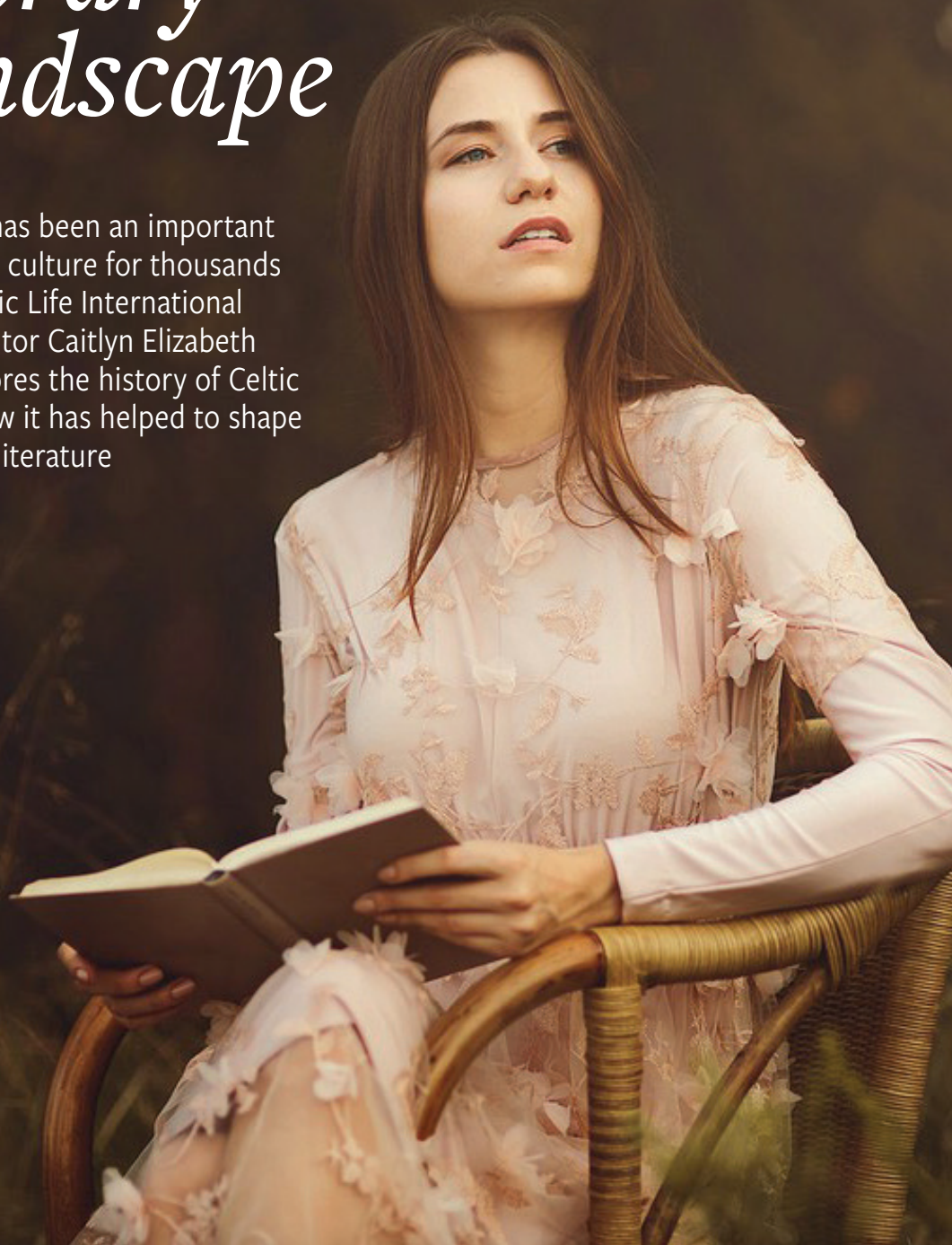
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# *The Celtic Literary Landscape*

Storytelling has been an important part of Celtic culture for thousands of years. Celtic Life International Associate Editor Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns explores the history of Celtic story and how it has helped to shape modern-day literature







**T**here are a bevy of building blocks that comprise a culture. It starts with location, later evolving with language, dialect, and a series of social mores and norms. Then, tiptoeing quietly between society's hierarchies and laws, emerges the presence of art and story.

One could argue that stories are the most crucial component of any given society. Some of the first stories, known today as fairy tales and myths, were created to celebrate and preserve an endangered culture. The Grimm brothers - Germany's scholarly, story collectors - were urged to publish their collection of tales after the French occupied Germany in the early 19th century. Similarly, contemporary authors like Angela Carter and Welshman Philip Pullman have used their craft to remind readers of these mythical anecdotes and, in the process, have shaped and reshaped culture.

Like their Anglo and Germanic neighbours, the seven Celtic nations have a tremendous tradition of tale telling.

## THE PAST

Pinpointing the dawn of the Celtic story - and documenting it in 2500 words - would be next to impossible. For thousands of years, long before the printing press or even the invention of a written language, stories were shared orally, passed fluidly from community to community.

Storytellers of ancient Celtic times were considered important pillars of society. In

their travels they shared, collected, and often reworked tales, both old and new. And while it is possible that many of these stories would have picked up themes and elements from their neighbouring countries, the heart of the Celtic story remained distinct. One need only turn to the Book of Kells at Trinity College Library in Dublin, Ireland, as an example of cross-Celtic literary pollination; the work was produced between the 6th and 9th centuries in monasteries in Scotland and Ireland.



**Dr. Ranke de Vries**





James Joyce

“What makes Celtic literature and storytelling special is the amount of interaction with the supernatural,” explains Dr. Ranke de Vries, an Associate Professor of Celtic Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. “White animals with red ears that come from the Otherworld, or severed heads that burst out singing, women who live under water, that kind of thing.”

Although Dr. de Vries was born in the Netherlands and is mostly of Dutch heritage, it was the compelling nature of Celtic storytelling that became her passion.

“I have absolutely no Celtic heritage at all - but that doesn’t impact my love for Celtic languages and cultures in any way. I was always interested in the Middle Ages, and I have always loved languages and stories - I would devour collections of myths and fairy tales, especially tales of King Arthur (whose legend finds its roots in Celtic stories). In high school, I read a Dutch retelling of an Irish tale, Deirdre and the Sons of Uisneach, reading it over and over again, along with a book of translated medieval Irish saga texts by Maartje Draak, a Dutch Celtic Studies scholar, called *Van helden, elfen, en dichters* (‘Of heroes, elves, and poets’). Then, in my final year of high school, I discovered that Utrecht University in the Netherlands offered courses in medieval Celtic languages, literatures and cultures, particularly Old and Middle Irish and Middle Welsh, and so that is where I went.”

*“I loved the beauty of the languages, the challenges in learning them, and the strangeness of the stories.”*

Specializing in Medieval Celtic storytelling, Dr. de Vries notes that narrative was crucial to the Celts.

“Stories were intimately connected with history - the boundary between mythology

and history that we draw in the present day was not as clear-cut back then.

“Medieval Irish authors also tell us that the stories were meant as *gairdiugud* - something that both entertains and instructs. We find evidence of the importance of stories from medieval literature itself as well. At the beginning of the *Acallam na Senórach*, ‘The conversation of the Old Men,’ a text from the late 12th or early 13th century, St. Patrick is worried that he might be enjoying the stories he is told about the warrior Finn Mac Cumhaill (Finn MacCool) a little too much. But then angels come down from heaven who instruct him explicitly to have the tales written down for the sake of posterity.”

She believes the power of a story is only as strong as its storyteller.

“Historically, there were professional and amateur storytellers. The professional storyteller was called a *filí*. The *filí* composed poetry and satire and was supposed to know a certain number of stories, depending on his poetic grade. The word for an amateur poet was *bard* (in contrast, in medieval Wales, *bardd* was the term for a professional poet).

“Poems themselves were incredibly important,” she continues. “Honour and status were of the utmost importance in medieval Irish society as it is depicted in the texts, and so losing your honour or status

was a terrible thing. A poet could destroy a king by writing a satire against him - and it could be restored with praise poetry. This, as one might imagine, is part of what made poets rather powerful, in addition to the fact that they were the keepers of lore and history. Jim Henson’s *The Storyteller*, one of my favourite TV series from the late 1980s, summed it all up quite nicely in the opening: ‘When people told themselves their past with stories, explained their present with stories, foretold the future with stories, the best place by the fire was kept for the storyteller.’”

## THE PRESENT

Some of the biggest names in classic and contemporary classic literature - Robbie Burns, Dylan Thomas, William Butler Yeats and Oscar Wilde, to name a few - are of Celtic descent, and were known to share stories of their experiences growing up in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and beyond.

In particular, Dublin-native James Joyce dedicated a number of his works - most famously his short story collection *Dubliners*, and his semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* - to detailing the daily life of a middle-class creative on the Emerald Isle. Joyce was a prime example of how intrinsically linked Celtic authors are to their homelands and history. As he once said, “When I die, Dublin will be written on my heart.”

The popularity of Celtic literature has not waned in the modern era. Diana Gabaldon’s hit STARZ series *Outlander* has renewed interest in Scottish history and, two years ago, Irish author Anna Burns won the esteemed Man Booker Prize for her novel *Milkman*, a coming-of-age story set during the Irish Troubles.

Award-winning author Colm Toibin also shares Celtic heritage. Born in Enniscorthy, a small town in southeast Ireland, he began writing poems as a teenager before



Kirsty Logan





Colm Toibin

transitioning to prose in his early 20s. By the age of 25, the scribe was already working on his debut narrative, *The South*, the first in a long line of literary triumphs. His 2009 book, *Brooklyn*, later became a feature film starring Irish actress Saoirse Ronan.

Toibin believes that the concept of Celtic literature has grown much more nuanced in the modern world.

"In Ireland, when I was growing up, we read a great deal of English, American and European fiction and poetry. It was only through reading Yeats that I came to Celtic literature. I love some of those stories now, especially 'The Tain' and 'The Children of Lir.' But I think writers go their own way, and some Irish writers are not influenced by Celtic literature at all. In others - for example Flann O'Brien, Patrick McCabe, Kevin Barry - you can see a comic tradition at work.

*"Stories have a way of striking inspiration for new stories."*

"From about the year 1900, new translations began to appear of the old stories that had moved from a purely oral tradition to the written form courtesy of the early Christian monks. These translations were made by figures like Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde, and then later by poets such as Thomas Kinsella and Ciaran Carson. They are vivid and alive, and exciting and fresh."

Kirsty Logan - a Scotland-born author of two novels and three short story collections rooted in Celtic folklore and mythology - shares that her home country has had a huge influence on her writing.

"So much of Scottish culture is water-based," she explains. "Glasgow isn't by the sea, but it has a strong history of shipbuilding - the U.S. still buys old ships that were built on the Clyde river by Glasgow's shipbuilders, because they are so good. I love Scottish mythology and folktales, and many of those stories - selkies, kelpies, mermaids - are

based on the sea. On a map, Scotland is a very craggy country, with many small islands off its north and west coasts, so there is a great connection to the sea. To give you a sense of it, England has over 5,000 miles of coastline - but mainland Scotland, despite being much smaller, has over 6,000 miles, or over 10,000 miles if you include the islands. And that's not even mentioning all the lochs. As Angela Carter put it, 'I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the bottles explode.' That's what I want to do with my stories too. And in Scotland, you can't help being influenced by the sea. Scottish writers are connected to our mythology and our landscape in a way that can be difficult to understand if you haven't grown up with it."

## THE FUTURE

It isn't just scholars and authors who take interest in Celtic literature and story - readers are asking for it too. Some of the



most popular books and literary franchises in the world today have distinct connection to stories from ancient Celtic times. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* spin-off, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, includes a beast-like creature that is not unlike the Scottish Kelpie; and many fantasy narratives - from the popular *Young Adult* series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas to Holly Black's slightly more sophisticated *The Folk of the Air* Series - include faerie-like characters, which were made popular in Ireland. Even Australian author Hannah Kent has tried her hand at Celtic storytelling with her 2016 release *Good People*, which documented the real-life murder of a young boy in the 19th century who was said to be a changeling.

Dr. de Vries believes that every bit helps to preserve the past.

*"While the practice of storytelling has changed over time, it has continued up to the present day in many Celtic speaking countries."*

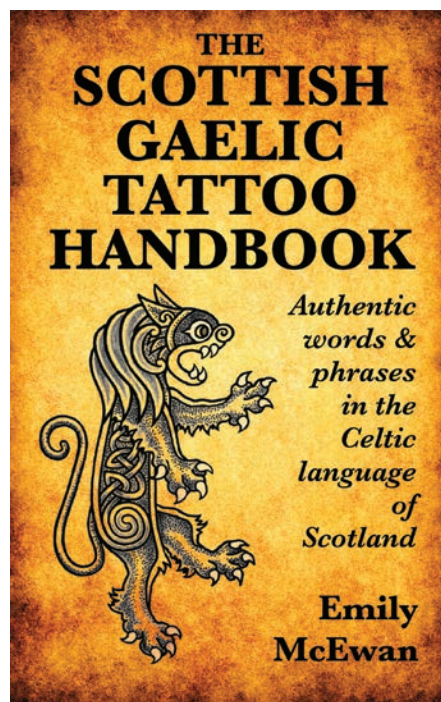
Beyond books and TV series, festivals and government-funded organizations work to support the perpetuation of Celtic culture and story.

"Here in Nova Scotia, there is a lot being done; stories - learning them, understanding them, and telling them - form an important part of Gaelic (or Gàidhlig) language instruction, and we are very lucky to have the Gaelic Affairs Office, which works tirelessly to promote the Gaelic language and culture. They have a number of mentoring programs, including a program for youth called *Na Gaisgich Òga* that runs in conjunction with the Gaelic College in St. Ann's, Cape Breton. There are also language immersion programs and weekends, and several popular festivals in Cape Breton in the summer and autumn, including *Kitchenfest* and *Celtic Colours*. Locally, there is a lot of music, and people hold impromptu *cèilidhs* and take informal language courses. Most crucially, children here can choose to learn Gaelic as a language in school, which also includes studying cultural customs and tales.

"We have Dr. Heather Sparling at Cape Breton University leading the Language in Lyrics project, which aims to create a database of Gaelic songs in Nova Scotia. And then of course various universities in Nova Scotia offer Celtic content; at St. Francis Xavier University, the Celtic Studies Department offers a variety of courses on both medieval and modern Gaelic language,



literature, and culture to undergraduate and graduate students, and there are Celtic-related courses at Cape Breton University, while there are courses in Irish language,



history and culture offered at St. Mary's University."

Dr. de Vries also notes that there are several educational websites that contain recordings of stories and songs, like Gael

Stream (Sruth nan Gàidheal) at St. Francis Xavier University, An Drochaid Eadarainn and Caint mo Mhàthar, which was initiated by the Nova Scotia Highland Village Society and is in collaboration with other organizations like Comhairle na Gàidhlig (The Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia). While Dr. de Vries is impressed with the efforts of the province's education system, she admits that there is more work to be done.

"It would be great if governments learn to see the value of fostering the various cultures present in their countries to stimulate these cultures," continues Ranke. "One example of that might be the establishment of immersion schools here, like you have in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, as in my opinion, knowledge of the language is necessary to truly understand the culture. The languages are beautiful, and they deserve to be studied. The other thing is that people need to want to learn the languages and use them in everyday life. If they don't, the languages will die, and that would be devastating to the culture. Last summer, I was in Bangor in Wales for a conference. It was really heartening to hear teenagers casually chatting in Welsh and using it daily."

Being that future of Celtic literature is dependant on the existence of a traditional language - Gaelic, Irish, Welsh, and so on - Dr. de Vries does have concerns.

"Some of the Celtic languages are in danger of disappearing, and that would be a disaster. But then you see popular books or TV series that use Celtic languages to an

extent, like Outlander, and that might give the field a boost again and encourage people to find out more. While I am not worried that the various Celtic peoples - and people who identify as Irish or Scottish, etc. - will stop celebrating their respective cultures, I am very worried about the languages themselves."



For Colm Toibin, however, the future is clear.

"Good books find good readers," he says. "The best thing is not to force these texts on anyone. They have lasted for thousands of years, and so it will go on."





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# *The Road to Devon: Wales to Devonshire*

*Lesley Choyce cruises the Celtic  
countryside of England*





We were on the last leg of a long-awaited, month-long circumnavigation of the U.K. and various pockets of the Celtic World. My 32-year-old daughter, Pamela, was due to have twins shortly after our return to Canada but, waking up one morning in our stone cottage in Wales, we learned she was going into premature labour.

I heavily invested my day in worrying about Pamela as my wife Linda texted back and forth with Kathy Craig, who was staying with my daughter in her hospital room. I tried to let my faith in the Canadian healthcare system override my many concerns as a father, but I felt the inevitable fear that any parent feels when they are far from their child in a time of need.

Linda ran through the town at 6 a.m. the next morning as I walked my worry and my dog up into the forest behind the slate homestead. As we passed a hostel, I saw an assortment of people, young and old, eating toast and granola and speaking in several languages. The \$300 running shoes I had salvaged from the outdoor store dumpster felt great on my feet as we left the paved road and trekked through a narrow forest trail with wet and shiny leaves on either side. Kelty was acting crazy, sniffing whatever it was that he detected.

I've lost much of my sense of smell over the years, so I probably don't have the capability to use the six million olfactory receptors in my nose, but dogs reportedly have 300 million of them in their nostrils and use forty times more of their brain than we poor humans to process scents. Here, in the woods of Wales, Kelty's brain was on fire trying to sort out whatever traces of animals had passed through here overnight. I felt guilty every time I tugged on his leash to

move us back towards our cottage.

Soon we were on the road, headed east on the A5, with little traffic and still not quite sure if we should bail on Devon and make a run for the Eurotunnel in Folkestone. There was little traffic and the hills of Wales were green and benign beneath a blue-sky hosting cotton puffs of clouds.

*As my troubled mind turned  
over like the drum of an old  
cement mixer my father once used,  
a guiding spirit that had no name  
assured me that all would be well  
back home in Nova Scotia.  
Stick with the plan.*

Alas, the miles rolled reasonably by as we drove back towards England through Pentrefoelas, Glasfryn, Cerrigydrudion, past Ewe-phoria again, then Druid and Corwen. The traffic jam in Llangollen was long gone as we breezed through and headed towards Shropshire. And then, at nine o'clock in the morning, at the very instant we crossed the border from Wales to England, Linda received a text from Kathy Craig. Pamela had given birth to twin girls: Genevieve Kathryn and Scarlet Lesley. They were eight weeks premature. Pamela's illness had triggered something, sending her into labour and the doctors had performed a Caesarean operation to bring the babies safely into the world.

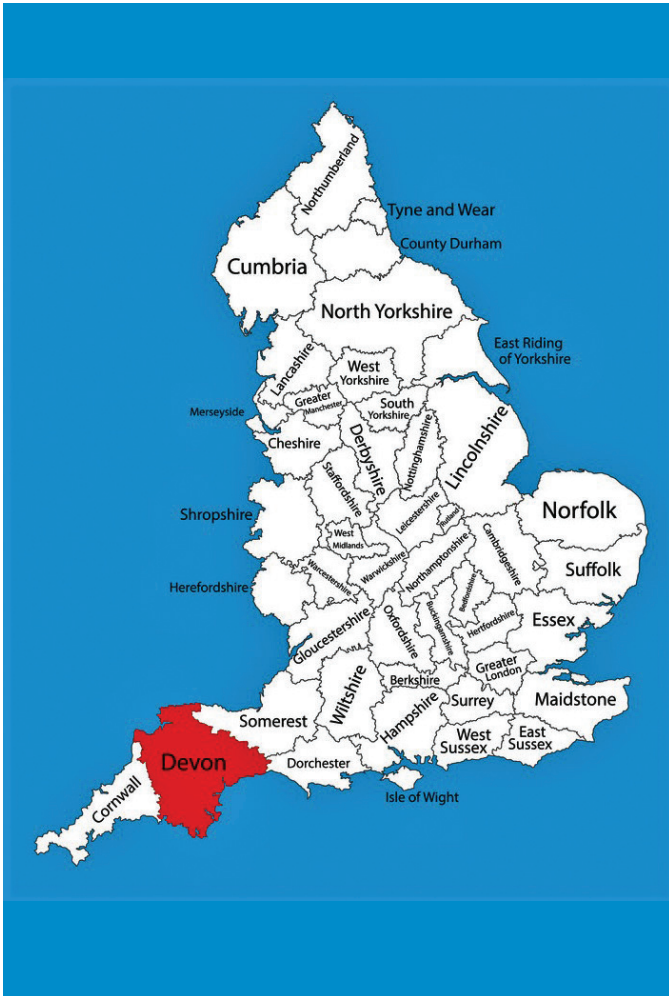
I felt both happy and sad, remorseful that we were so far away yet relieved that the babies were okay. Eight weeks premature seemed like an awfully long time ahead of schedule. What might that

mean to their health, to my granddaughters' ability to survive? Linda and I drove on in silence through Oswestry and on towards Shrewsbury. A second message and a third assured us that the babies were "fine," that Pamela was recovering, and there was no reason to return home. The twins would, however, remain in the neonatal intensive care unit for quite some time and it was likely that we wouldn't even be allowed to visit them for safety reasons even if we were at home. Pamela was being well cared for and Kathy would keep us up to date on everything.

I don't remember much about the drive after that: we connected with the M5 at Wolverhampton and turned south - Worcester, Tewkesbury, Gloucester and all the rest was a bit of a blur. The urban sprawl and industrial calamity of Bristol drew my attention, but it soon gave way to more green hills on both sides of the motorway and the broad blue expanse of Bristol Channel, where so many ships in centuries gone by had departed this Old World, heading across the Atlantic to America and Canada. It was a morning to give worries over to grander thoughts about births and beginnings. At least I tried.

Linda and I fussed over what we should do as we passed the familiar turn-off to Cheddar and headed towards Taunton where my father had once stayed at a home as a soldier during the war. He and a comrade were driving a truck carrying a salvaged bomber wing they had picked up at Land's End, shuttling it to an airbase near Bedford. The hosts had served them a traditional English breakfast he would never forget - eggs and greasy toast and blood sausages and fresh trout they had caught in the stream outside their door that very





"It was the first time I ever had fish for breakfast," I could still hear him say. And it was the voice of my dead father in my inner ear now clearly telling me that all would be okay with Genevieve, Scarlet, and Pamela - and so it was that I continued to quell the voices suggesting otherwise.

I was dead tired of driving and worry when we pulled into the Tesco parking lot outside Exeter. It was hot and humid as Kelty and I made our traditional foray around the perimeter of the pavement jammed with cars, seeking out small pockets of shade and dead grass. As always, I found myself studying the trash on the ground as Kelty unleashed his 300 million olfactory receptors to do their work sniffing out the passage of other dogs, cats, squirrels, hedgehogs, and humans. There were quite a few empty Skittles packages in the weeds and Marlboro Gold cigarette boxes. A condom or two indicated that not everyone in the vicinity had the luxury of a private bedroom for their sexual activity and I wondered if the broken comb was part of the story somehow. And, yes, there were plastic cups, bright red or orange, and those damn plastic straws the Hangin' Pizza people back in Betws-y-Coed had been preaching against.

Growing weary (and still a little more than worried), I plonked down on a patch of dead grass beneath a sickly pine tree. A grey-haired man with a small bag of groceries was just arriving back at his Mercedes parked at my feet and saw us sitting there. Travelling with a dog almost certainly always gives strangers cause to say something to you. He must have noted the exhausted look on my face because he said in a most friendly manner, "I know just how you feel," and I wasn't sure if it was addressed to me with the sad-dog look or Kelty with his tongue hanging out as he panted from the heat. But it was an act of small kindness in a world currently populated with litter and fretting. The man made a small motion with his hand - as if he were tipping his hat, only he had no hat, as he opened the door of his gray Mercedes and sat down.

At long last, Linda returned with a wobbly cart full of groceries and we thought we had but a short drive to our home rental - Little Hazelcote Cottage - near Manaton in (or on?) Dartmoor. We had been



Hosham Steps





**St James Church**

given two sets of directions - one taking us south and one taking us north - and I chose the northerly approach which would take us through Moretonhampstead, near the home of Tony Hawks, which was what had set the Devonian wheels in motion to begin with. This turned out to be a monumental mistake.

Our directions were faulty to say the least and I had not expected the roads in this part of Devon to be so narrow and poorly maintained.

This, despite the fact that Mr. Hawks had well warned all his readers of this fact in his book, *Once Upon A Time in the West Country*. He claimed that Devon has a “10,000-mile labyrinthine network of lanes” and, upon reading that book, I hoped that one day I too would be an author who could use the word “labyrinthine” effortlessly in my prose.

When we arrived in Moretonhampstead, I was of the opinion it was too busy and crowded and that we should not dawdle but push on to Manaton on the back roads described by our host as “the shortcut.” The roads had no names, and there were a few signs pointing towards towns like Sloncombe, Postbridge and Chagford, but none pointing us to Manaton. “Turn left at the white barn,” and “At the difficult crossroads, take a sharp left” proved to be of no real help and pretty soon we were lost.

To make matters worse, I had soldiered us on down a potholed slim donkey track of some sort with ancient stone walls on both sides, taking us deeper and deeper down into a gully with massive blackberry vines scratching the car on both sides. At the bottom of

the gully there was a stream - the River Bovey I would later learn. I found a pull-off just before a narrow ancient stone bridge but then noticed that just across the little bridge were two police cars - those miniature British versions that Americans find funny. Someone told me that these smallish cop cars are often referred to as “pandas” or “jam sandwiches,” but I’m not sure I should believe that.

Tired and frustrated from too much driving and plenty of getting lost, we got out to take a breather, walk the dog and wonder what was going on there on the other side of the stream.

It was then that a man in a tweed jacket walked over to us from out of a field and eyed with some suspicion our French license plate. The field, he said, was his property and he wondered if he could help us. I explained we were lost but asked him what the police were up to.

*“I’m afraid there’s been an incident,” he said.*

*“Is someone hurt?” Linda asked.*

*“I’m afraid so,” he said.*

*“I hope they’ll be all right,” I said.*

*“It doesn’t look like that’s the case,” he said.*

*“What happened?” Linda asked.*

*“It’s hard to say,” he answered.*

*“Anything we can do?”*

*“Not a thing. The police have things under control.”*





I asked for directions to Manaton and he pointed back up the steep narrow road we had just driven down. I thanked him, packed the befuddled dog back in the car and we made the ascent, slamming into one pothole after the next.

Halfway up we suddenly saw a large cube van of an ambulance headed our way, scraping itself on both sides of the narrow roadway as it approached.

***“What are we going to do?” Linda asked.  
“Nothing to do,” I said. “I gotta back up.”  
“It looks impossible.”***

I wanted to agree but I had little choice. Remembering my father’s advice from the earliest days of driving instruction, I levered the top half of my body around, jammed the car in reverse and proceeded a white-knuckle descent back down to the little river with the ambulance and our Fiat nose to nose. When we arrived at the bottom again, the landowner was opening a gate to his pasture to allow us to back in as the ambulance stopped in front of us, blocking us in.

Whatever tragedy had occurred in the clearing across the bridge, we will never know. Somebody died, but we don’t know who or why or how. We checked the local news in days thereafter and never found out more. Someone may have drowned but it wasn’t much of a river. Or someone committed suicide out here in the woods of the Dartmoor Forest. I’ve been told that often suicides are not reported in the news lest they promote others to copy the deed. Could this be true?

Whatever the case, it was a day of twin births and the death of an unknown person by unknown cause. When the ambulance driver returned to the truck, I apologized and asked if she could move the vehicle just enough to let us out. She did and we slowly skittered up the steep hill again.

At Little Hazelcott Cottage, we settled in and called it a day.



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## Flan Quarantine



Plagues and quarantines are not new to the world; in 1666, the bubonic plague struck the village of Eyam in Northern England. Its 750 residents held a meeting and devised a plan for containment of the disease. They decided to voluntarily quarantine themselves with no one leaving or entering the village until the plague had ceased. This took 14 months and cost the village dearly with one third of the population succumbing to the plague. However, it eliminated the spread to other villages and towns. A quarantine cor-

don was established with a one-mile radius marked by a ring of stones. Food was left at the boundary stones by nearby farmers in exchange for gold coins submerged in vinegar. The vinegar was thought to cleanse the currency. Though we have been caught up in this pandemic, the seasons are oblivious to it. Spring is here and summer approaches. It is time that we prepared a flan together and topped it with our favorite berry sauce. I have opted for Haskap as it is regarded as a super berry because of its high nutritional value.

### Ingredients

2/3 cup white sugar  
1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk  
2 cups heavy cream  
1 cup milk  
5 eggs  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

#### Haskap Berry Sauce

1/3 cup of fresh Haskap berries  
1 tbsp of raw honey  
1/8 tsp of cinnamon

In a food processor combine all ingredients until smooth.

### Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). In a small nonstick saucepan, heat the sugar over medium heat. Shake and swirl occasionally to distribute sugar until it is dissolved and begins to brown. Lift the pan over the heat source (4 to 6 inches) and continue to brown the sugar until it becomes a dark golden brown. You may slightly stir while cooking, but continually stirring causes the sugar to crystallize. Pour caramelized sugar into a 1 & 1/2-quart casserole dish or a large loaf pan, and swirl to coat the bottom of the pan evenly. In a blender, combine sweetened condensed milk, cream, milk, eggs and vanilla. Blend on high for one minute. Pour over the caramelized sugar. Place the filled casserole dish into a larger pan and add 1 inch of hot water to the outer pan. Bake in preheated oven for 50 to 60 minutes, or until set.

*Salud! Cabrini - [cabrini@celticlife.com](mailto:cabrini@celticlife.com)*



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## Ben Nevis distillery

with Andrew Ferguson

**B**en Nevis distillery was established in Fort William in 1825 along the banks of the River Lochy at the foot of Scotland's tallest mountain, Ben Nevis. Though the distillery was founded by Angus McDonnell, it would be his kinsman - the literally larger-than-life 'Long John' McDonald - who would make the distillery famous. As you might have guessed from his name, 'Long John' was a giant; 6'4" and built like a brickhouse.

At that time, the British Empire was obsessed with Queen Victoria, and Queen Victoria was equally smitten with Scotland. Her subjects often travelled north on the newly built railroads deep into the Highlands to see what all the fuss was about. The town of Fort William, and Ben Nevis, became a popular attraction. Many of the visitors were not prepared for the conditions of the high mountains in the Highlands, where weather can turn very quickly. When things went awry 'Macdonald, a well-known sportsman, was often sent off to find them.

Long John's fame spread across the United Kingdom, when in 1841, the Duchess of Buccleuch failed to return from a trek up the misty mountain. Having set off in the dark with a large bell, he returned later that evening with the young Lady and her party. Newspapers across the United Kingdom carried word of his heroics.

McDonald became a partner in the distillery in 1830, taking full control the following year. He was a savvy businessman with a flair for publicity. In 1841, stories in the press reported that the Duke of Sussex and King of Holland were among his customers. He sent a

cask of Ben Nevis to Buckingham Palace to be opened on the 21st birthday of the newly born Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. The Press ate the story up and his legend grew. In 1848, Queen Victoria paid his distillery a visit. Ben Nevis whisky was a hit, selling all over the U.K., but the ailing man had massive debts. With a downturn in the market for Scotch whisky, and the banks unwilling to extend his loans, Macdonald died bankrupt in 1856.

His son Donald then stepped in, purchased the distillery and revived its fortunes. He rebranded the whisky Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis, put an age statement on the bottle and sales soared. In 1878, with demand for whisky surging again, Donald expanded the distillery. By 1886, when the Victorian whisky writer Alfred Barnard called on the facility, it was distilling over 1 million liters a year, employing more than 230 men, and exporting Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis all over the English-speaking world.

The McDonald family retained control of the distillery until 1941. There would be a number of owners over the following fifty years, including Canadian booze baron Joseph Hobbs. But by 1986, surplus to demand, Ben Nevis Distillery was closed as a market correction wrought devastation on the Scotch whisky industry as a whole. The closure was short-lived, however, and the distillery's prospects revived when, in 1989, it was purchased by the Nikka Whisky Co. of Japan. Nikka's interest in Ben Nevis was primarily to support their own Japanese Blended Whisky. It may come as a shock to some, but Japanese whisky producers are not prohibited from us-

ing foreign whisky in their bottlings, and most do, although the rules governing that are set to change. Currently up to 75 percent of Ben Nevis' production is sent to Japan every year.

Dire though this may sound, the takeover by the Japanese was not all bad. In 1991, the new owners opened a visitor center, and in 1996 they started bottling and selling Ben Nevis as a single malt. Distribution of official bottlings of the whisky is fairly limited, but independent bottlings can be found with a little effort. Ben Nevis distilled in the mid-1990s has developed a bit of a cult following. Count yourself lucky if you are able to track down a bottle of Ben Nevis 10 Year, or better yet the newly released first batch of cask strength whisky. The advert on the facing page features a stunning exclusive cask bottling of Ben Nevis that I was fortunate to source for my store. And this is to say nothing of the lovely and award-winning Nikka From the Barrel Blended Japanese whisky, in which there is almost certainly a healthy dollop of 'Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis too!

If you visit, there is plenty to do in the Fort William area, including mountain biking, hiking, water sports and, of course, climbing the famous Ben Nevis. A trek up the mountain takes 4-8 hours depending on your level of fitness. Don't get lost though, the mists hide dangerous cliffs, and Long John McDonald and his bell aren't around to rescue folk any longer!

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'A blizzard of wit and wisecracks'  
The Times

## marian keyes Grown Ups



### Grown Ups

By Marian Keyes  
Michael Joseph Books  
656 pp / \$31.95

There has been so much popular and critical acclaim about Marian Keyes' latest effort, *Grown Ups*, that there has been the very real threat that the publicity will outperform the plot.

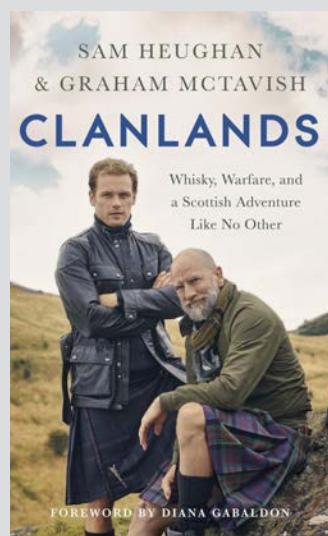
Thankfully, that hasn't been the case, as the Irish author has pieced together a novel of epic proportion.

At 656 pages, the work isn't so much a singular storyline as a complete immersion into the lives of the Casey family. By turns tender and touching, the massive narrative will have readers in stitches on one page and in tears on the next. Charming, irresistible, poignant and profound, it is - without doubt - a leading candidate for a number of literary awards and, more importantly, a worthwhile investment of the audience's time and attention. ~ SPC

### Clanlands

By Sam Heughan  
and Graham McTavish  
Quercus Press  
352pp / \$32

Subtitled *Whisky, Warfare and a Scottish Adventure Like No Other* - and paired with the forthcoming STARZ television series of the same name - *Clanlands* features the fun and fascinating forays of *Outlander*'s leading men as they make their way across their home country via camper van, boat, bicycle and motorcycle. With a moving forward by author Diana Gabaldon, the book chronicles Heughan's and McTavish's journey into the heart of Scottish history, exploring everything from the country's landscape and culture to its people and their rich heritage. Along the way, readers are treated to tasty tidbits of trivia, stunning scenery, a few heated discussions (they are Scots after all) and loads of laughs - a true testament to the joys of two friends traveling together. ~ SPC



A NOVEL



RODDY DOYLE

Booker Prize-winning author of *Paddy Clarke's Ha Ha Ha*

### Love

By Roddy Doyle  
Viking Press  
336 pp / \$27

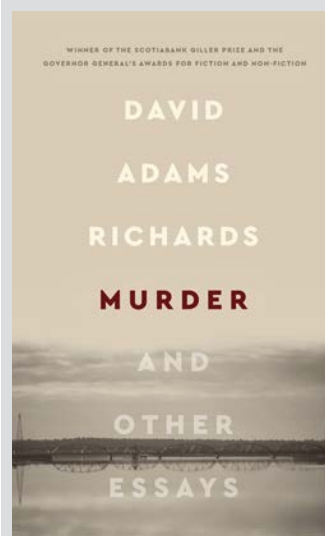
After the overwhelming success of his debut novel *The Commitments* (1987), it would have been all-too easy for Roddy Doyle to call in the rest of his career. Instead of sitting on his literary laurels, however, the Dublin-based scribe took his writing to new and amazing places over the course of more than three decades and a dozen works of different genres. His latest effort, *Love*, tells the tale of two old friends who reconnect in a pub after years of not seeing one another. Over a few pints, each opens up to the other, sharing the triumphs and trials of their lives. Hilarious and heartfelt, the work is an insightful and inspiring look at the many perks and perils of men amidst mid-life crisis. ~ SPC

### Murder and Other Essays

By David Adams Richards  
Penguin  
320 pp / \$32.95

David Adams Richards is my favourite Canadian author, and with good reason; rich, robust, dark and dense, both his fiction and non-fiction works are thought-provoking and challenge readers' perspectives. Such is the case with his most recent release, *Murder and Other Essays*.

Poignant and powerful, this collage of conceptual visages covers a number of topics, including (obviously) murder, marriage, traveling, nature and even his beloved sport of hockey. Though the pieces sit well independent of one another, the scribe masterfully weaves the thread of truth through the tome, tying seemingly loose ends to one another to create a complete read. As a bonus, the book includes a number of the Richards' poems, offering further insight into the mind, heart and soul of a literary lion. ~ SPC







## Clannad

### *In a Lifetime Anthology*

Full disclosure: Clannad are my favourite Irish/Celtic band of all time. Alas, as half a century of superb songwriting will attest to, the blatant bias is well deserved. This outstanding anthology is available in a variety of formats; the double CD and double LP options are great for both long time fans and newbies, however the Deluxe edition - which includes 5 CDs, 3 LPs, a 7" single, a beautiful hardcover book, postcards, and a poster - is ideal for those seeking the true sound and spirit of Eire. And though the band has not been as creatively prolific in recent years, vocalist Moya Bennis and her musical siblings have created a powerful, profound, and poignant body of work that stands the test of time. ~ SPC

## Niall Horan

### *Heartbreak Weather*

The former frontman for super-boyband One Direction may not be a media darling like his past bandmate Harry Styles. However, the Mullingar, Co. Westmeath native makes the case for mega-stardom with his sophomore release, *Heartbreak Weather*. Chock full o' catchy pop hooks, bouncy beats, and beautiful ballads, any of these 14 tracks could be slated for mass streaming. And while the singer/songwriter never dives deeper than old-school lyrics on love and love lost, his Irish roots are showing every step of the way; along with the accent, whispers of traditional jigs and reels simmer just below the surface of the melodies. As such, you can take the boy out of the Emerald Isle, but you can never take the Emerald Isle out of the boy. ~ SPC



## Biffy Clyro

### *A Celebration of Endings*

Scotland has produced its fair share of great rock 'n' roll bands over the years - Nazareth, Teenage Fanclub, Primal Scream and The Jesus and Mary Chain to name just a few. However, none achieved the mass popular and critical acclaim enjoyed by alt-rockers Biffy Clyro. The Kilmarnock-based trio has quietly gone about their business for the past 25 years, releasing 8 studio albums and performing to millions of fans around the world. As evidenced on their latest recording, *A Celebration of Endings*, the band has taken their hard-rockin' style and sound - seasoned with smart-pop hooks and clever lyrics - to new levels of sonic swagger with 11 terrific tracks of guitar-grinding, drum-driven melodies. A kick-ass effort that is best enjoyed at top volume. ~ SPC

## The Waterboys

### *Good Luck Seeker*

After a string of disappointments (*Modern Blues*, 2015 / *Out of All This Blue*, 2017 / *Where the Action Is*, 2019), Mike Scott hits all the right notes with *Good Luck Seeker*, an inspired effort that sees the Scot-turned-Irish troubadour return to roots. Folksy and fun, these 14 tracks run the range from playful (*Dennis Hooper*) to poignant (*My Wanderings in the Weary Land*) to poetic (*Postcards from the Celtic Dreamland*) and profound (*The Land of Sunset*). Along the way, the bard tips his hat to his muses and musical forebearers Bob Dylan, Van Morrison and John Lennon. While some critics have been rather harsh with the album's musical meanderings, Scott should be applauded for rekindling the sparks and flames of his sonically adventurous spirit. ~ SPC





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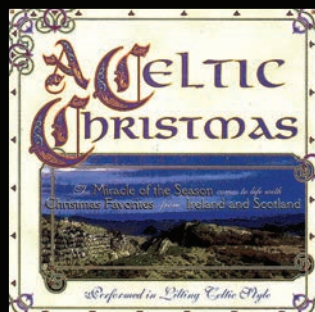
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## *It was love at first sound for piper Bras Rodrigo*

**S**ome fall in love at first sight, but Bras Rodrigo didn't even have to lay eyes on the bagpipes before he fell head over heels.

"I was inspired by its sound," shares the 41-year-old via email from his home in Spain. "Below my house, they taught bagpipes. I was walking with my grandfather, who I was very close to, and heard something special. Without having seen the instrument, I told my grandfather that I wanted to play what I was hearing. It turns out it was a bagpipe."

Thirty-five years later, he now plays the pipes professionally in concert, records albums, and teaches bagpipng to younger generations.

"I play Asturian bagpipes mainly, although I can also play the Scottish and Galician bagpipes," says Rodrigo, who was born and bred in Asturias.

"It is a small and beautiful Celtic country nestled in the Atlantic Arc, in Northern Spain. I am Celtic, like all the inhabitants of the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal. According to the latest research by the prestigious geneticist Bryan Sykes at Oxford University, the original Celts were from Asturias. Study of the DNA of the inhabitants of Great Britain attests to this in his book *The Blood of Isles*. Irish legends say that Saint Patrick arrived in Ireland from Spain and that King Breogán conquered the Emerald Island from the tribe of the Danu."

Celtic Life International readers are

more than familiar with Galicia, the best known of Spain's Celtic regions. Rodrigo is quick to provide a cultural primer on the Celtic-ness of his homeland, however.

"Our national instrument is the bagpipe and our national dance is the prima dance - which is very similar to the Andro Bretons. We speak Asturian, and our colours are green - for our meadows and tall mountains - and blue, for our sea.

"We have fabulous food; the main dishes are the Fabada, the Asturian Pote stew, rice pudding, and casadielles. And we are the largest cheese capital in Europe, with great variety.

*"Our landscape is a true paradise and our people are cheerful and hospitable."*

The Asturian bagpipe, also known as *gaita asturiana*, is not unlike the more familiar Scottish pipes, though its dimensions are longer than other regional cousins of the same key and it is characterized by different finger hole placements. This allows it to hit various octaves, via a technique called *requintar*.

"I am still in love with the Asturian bagpipe; its tradition, its sound, its history, its aesthetics...for all of those reasons, I have dedicated my life to it."

Rodrigo has taken that passion to new places in recent years.

"I like to innovate and experiment. This year, I launched a new invention - the LED Bagpipe. It is a bagpipe with LED lights, creating the sensation that the player plays on a beam of light. The lights change colour, intensity, and speed to the rhythm of the melody that the piper is playing."

He has become equally innovative with his style of playing.

"I don't really have one defined style - some people say that I have my own sound, the Bras sound. I like to experiment with and merge many styles, from the songs of Native American culture, to classical music, and even rock, and of course, folk and the most traditional sounds."

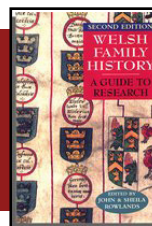
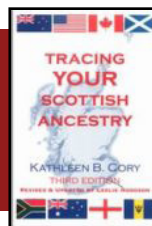
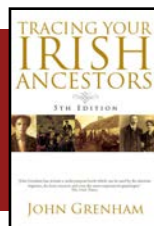
Evolution, he believes, is as important as tradition.

"For me, today, the challenge is all about helping new generations better understand that the bagpipe has quite an ancient history behind it. I want my students and to appreciate that tradition, while at the same time being innovative and adapting the sound and music to popular culture. It is important that we have an idea of both where we come from and where we are going."

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# Paul Anderson

*Scottish fiddler Paul Anderson plays to preserve the past.*

Paul Anderson's introduction to the fiddle sounds like something out of a children's book: while visiting his grandparents at their farmhouse in Mains of Kincaigie, near Tarland (the house he lives in today), the then-5-year-old boy explored every nook and cranny in the home before spotting a treasure beneath a spare bed.

"I found an old fiddle under there," he recalls via email. "I developed a fascination with the instrument almost immediately, and regularly disappeared upstairs to pull it out from under the bed when visiting my grandparents. Eventually my granny said that if I learned to play, I could keep the fiddle."

The instrument was a natural fit for Anderson, who came from a long line of four-stringers. His grandmother's family, the Cromers, had connections to Peter Milne - known also as the "Tarland Minstrel" - teacher to Scottish musical legend James Scott Skinner.

Anderson - who has now been playing for over four decades - notes that the reasons he continues to play are the same as when he started.

"I love the sound of the fiddle. I also grew up with a strong interest in Scottish history and learning to play Scottish music was a large part of why I wanted to learn the instrument: it is an expression of my culture and heritage."

He even plays the same instrument he found beneath his grandparents' bed all those years ago. "It is a fine French instrument, made in 1893 by (Charles Jean Baptiste) Collin-Mezin and lends itself well to my traditional style and sound."

"I took lessons in Scots fiddle for six months from Angus Shaw of Banchory, a well-respected tutor, before studying with Douglas Lawrence, who was the most acclaimed pupil of Hector MacAndrew with whom I studied for several years. Hector was regarded as Scotland's finest traditional player of the 20th century and could trace his musical lineage directly back to Niel Gow, the father of Scottish Fiddle Music. Hector even gave (violinist) Yehudi Menuhin lessons in Scottish Fiddle. As a player with the Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society,

I also played with great older players with whom I learned a lot from without realizing it."

His career has been filled with several notable highlights, including a 10-week U.S. tour in 1992.

"It was quite an experience. We performed to audiences from between 250 to 12,000 and did 53 concerts in 29 States. I also won Scotland's most prestigious fiddle competition, the Glenfiddich Scottish Fiddle Championship in 1995. I played at Sean Connery's 80th birthday party in Edinburgh Castle, and have two collections of my compositions published. I have also performed regularly for the Queen and all the senior members of the British Royal family and, as she is the Head of State, that is a huge honour regardless of whether you are a Royalist or Republican."



*All these achievements have not gone unnoticed and, today, a life-size painting of Anderson hangs in Scotland's beautiful Aberdeen Art Gallery.*

Although he believes there are more young people playing today than ever before - noting the contemporary and distinctive styles emerging throughout Scotland - Anderson says more can be done to preserve Scottish culture as a whole.

"What needs to be improved is support for the Scots language. It lags behind Gaelic. Other than BBC Alba, which features mostly Gaelic-speaking artists, there are very few outlets for traditional Scottish music and song in the mainstream media. Thus, if you are not a Gaelic speaker, like most folk in Scotland these days, there are virtually no outlets other than a couple of weekly radio shows for hundreds of traditional musicians and singers. And, if you are from the North East or the eastern half of Scotland, unless you perform in a trendier and more contemporary style, there are virtually no conventional outlets. Unfortunately, that means that most people here are not fully aware of their own culture and heritage."

As expected, Anderson's live performances have been put on a temporary hiatus due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, he remains focused on connecting with his audience.

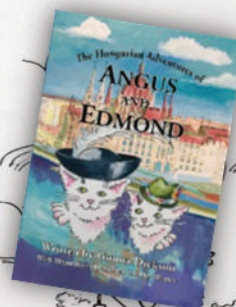
"I have been doing online concerts each week on Facebook, as well as a weekly fiddle workshop. I am also writing music and have started work on a second symphony to accompany my first based on the Poems of Ossian. I am due to perform in California in October but that is looking more unlikely. Things have been changing so quickly that it has become increasingly difficult to plan ahead. That said, I continue to play to preserve the past."

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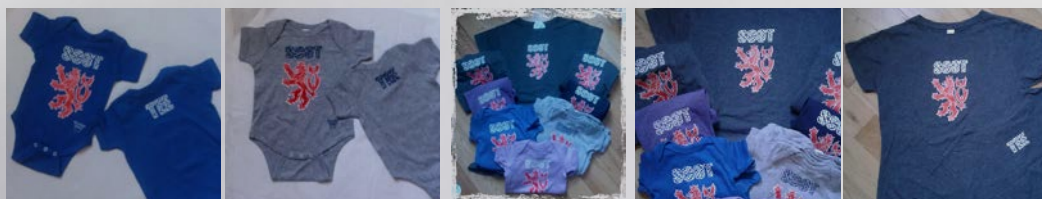


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# David Geaney

*Irish dancer David Geaney performs for the sheer love of it*

It has been just over 20 years since David Geaney first took an interest in Irish dance. Then only five years old, he became enamoured with the ancient art after watching his sister in an award-winning performance at a local community feis.

"After that, all I wanted was a medal," recalls Geaney via email. "I didn't care what I had to do to get it, I just wanted my own medal. I took a couple of Irish dancing classes and I am still here today."

Geaney - now a resident of Dingle, Co. Kerry - later won championships across Europe, including both the 2011 TG4's An Jig Gig and the 2012 Kerry's Got Talent competitions.

In 2018, the 25-year-old dancer took his career to new heights, performing his own show - Velocity - on Broadway.

"Ever since I was a youngster, I have dreamed of seeing my name in lights in Times Square - and that dream came true; we performed a three-week run in The New Victory Theater. Coming out of the stage door seeing my name next to the likes of Harry Potter, Aladdin, The Lion King, and so on was just incredible...I don't think it will ever be topped."

While the accolades and awards have been more than rewarding, Geaney says that he continues to perform for the sheer "love of it."

*"There isn't a moment that goes by that I don't think about dancing - I can't stand still...I'm always tapping my feet or my hands making different rhythms."*

Inspired by the likes of Fred Astaire, The Nicholas Brothers and Gene Kelly, he describes his personal style today as a mix of all the things he loves.

"While I am a trained Irish dancer, some of my biggest inspirations are tap dancers.



I would like to think I have quite a natural, traditional vibe to my style. That said, I do incorporate modern tricks from other genres every now and again, and I wear modified shoes with metal taps and aluminum heels. Most within the circle would describe my style as traditional, but outsiders might liken it to sean-nos - meaning old style or tap."

Today, Geaney splits his time between international tours and performing at his family's renowned restaurant, The Dingle Pub.

Overall, he feels confident about the future of Irish culture and dance.

"It only continues to grow in popularity. With the influence and impact of social media these days, and the reach that certain Irish dancers have, it is helping to encourage more young people to get involved in the hopes that they might one day reach higher standards. And, given the increased demand for Irish music around the world - and the amazing touring artists who promote it - the interest in dance has risen as well.

"As with everything, though, you can always do more. I do think that the artists in all walks of Irish and Celtic culture do an amazing job to preserve and promote our unique heritage. Perhaps in tough times like this,

however, more could be done to help struggling artists around the world who depend on the arts for their income."

He notes that one way to increase job security is for the government to implement a wage subsidy scheme between pubs and their long-serving musicians.

"Running at 30 per cent capacity and having live music doesn't make financial sense for musicians at the moment. With the government's help it would be great to see Irish culture thriving again, with a greater number of people employed."

Like many of his colleagues, Geaney anticipates a difficult end to 2020, with even more uncertainty around the forthcoming new year.

"It has been difficult to adapt. You have to try to come up with different ways of staying in touch with the audience so you can stay relevant. Thankfully, I have a great social media following, which I have focused on growing. When we do get back out on stage again, I hope to be performing to them in a live setting and not virtually. To that end, I am currently preparing for my first full U.S. tour of Velocity in 2021."

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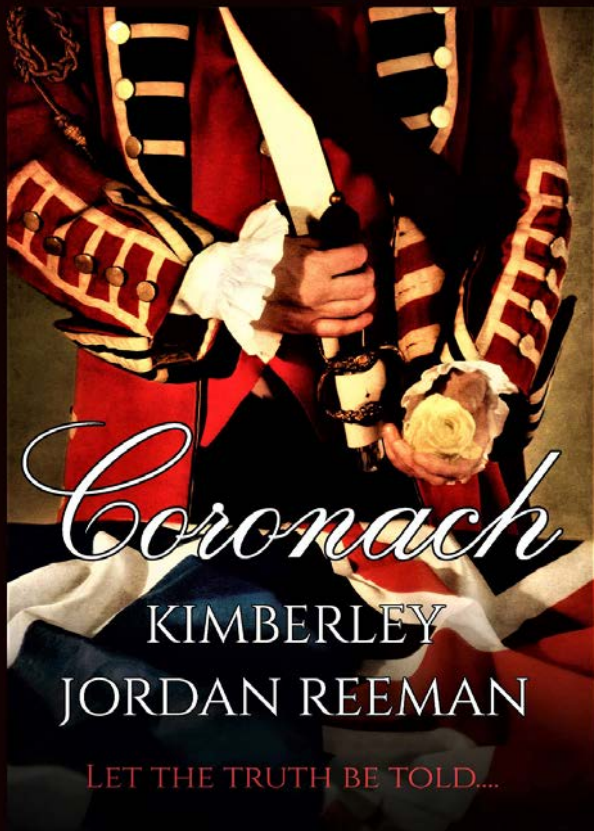


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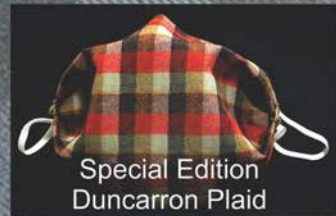


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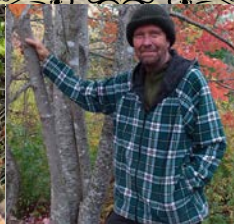


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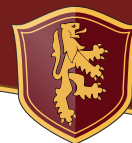




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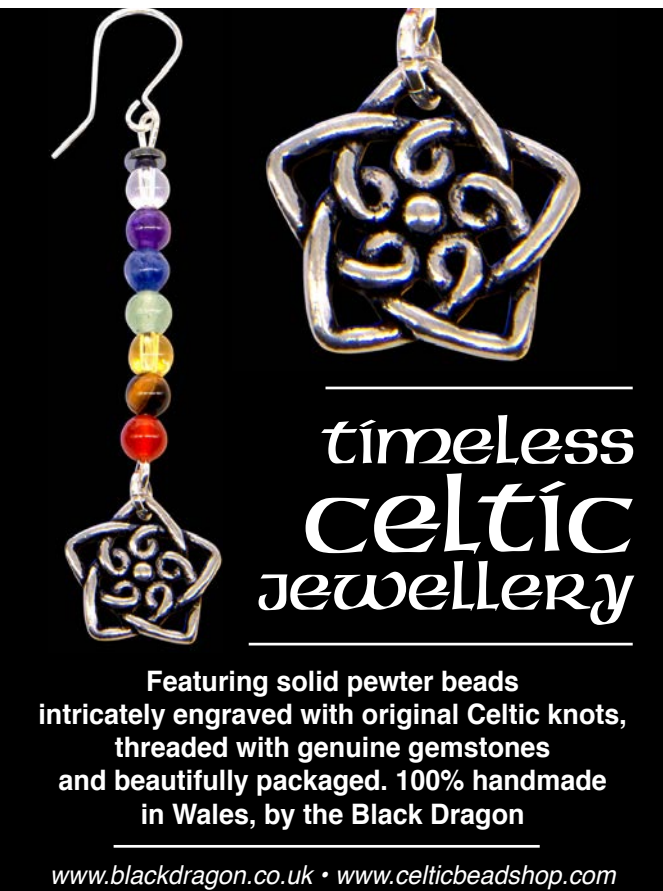


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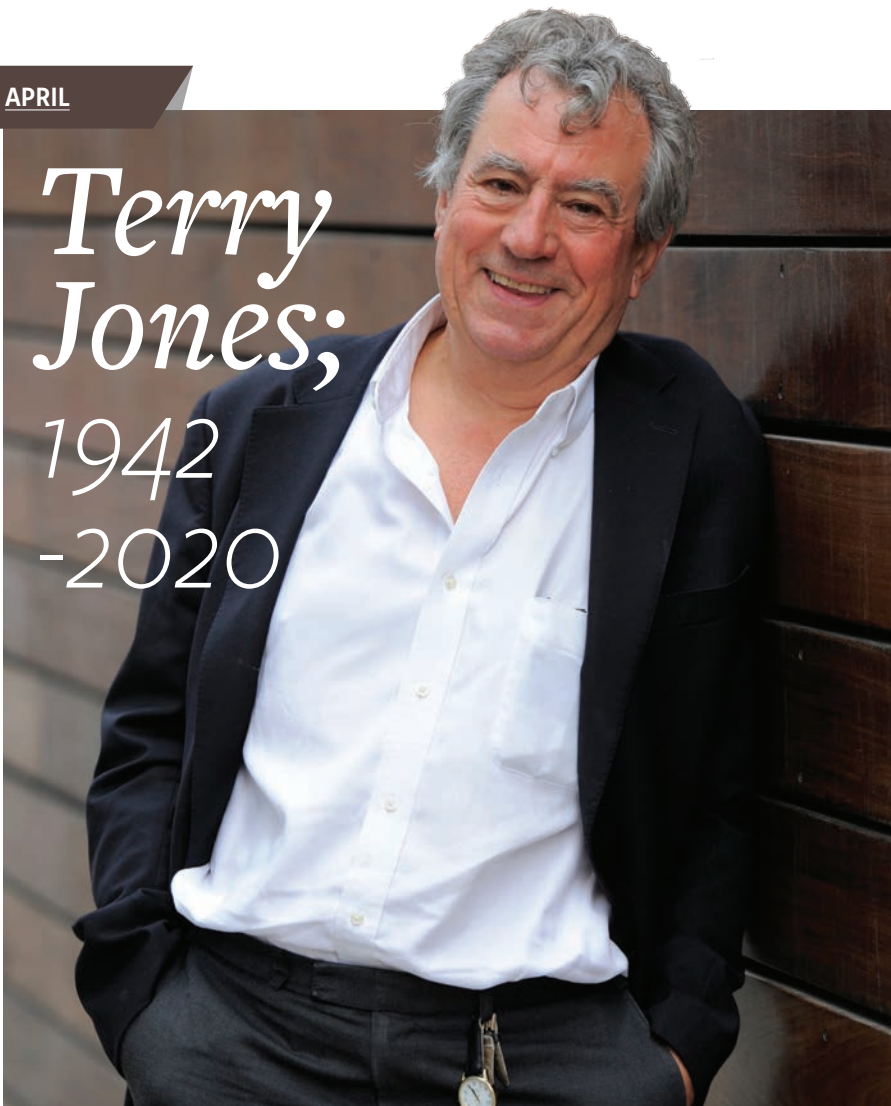
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# Terry Jones;

## 1942

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**T**erry Jones, comedic actor of Monty Python fame, left many admirers heartbroken when he passed away in January at age 77.

A statement from Jones' family read, "We have all lost a kind, funny, warm, creative and truly loving man whose uncompromising individuality, relentless intellect and extraordinary humour has given pleasure to countless millions across six decades."

Jones was born in Colwyn Bay, Wales, in 1942. Although his family left the country for England when he was just five years old, Jones always proudly identified as Welsh.

In his young adult life, he studied English at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, falling in love with history, particularly the medieval period. Jones met future castmate Michael Palin while at St. Edmund Hall and the pair performed comedy together in the Oxford Revue - a true foreshadowing of what was to follow.

Before Monty Python took the world by storm, Jones joined Palin, Graeme Garden, Bill Oddie, Jonathan Lynn and Tony Buffery in the sketch comedy series *Twice a Fort-*

*night* (1967). He also appeared in *The Complete and Utter History of Britain* (1969) and *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (1967-69). Along with acting, Jones had writing chops, too: he wrote for satirical television show *The Frost Report*, among others.

Monty Python's *Flying Circus* took off in 1969. The sketch comedy series starring Jones, Palin, Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Eric Idle and Terry Gilliam won over audiences in the United Kingdom but didn't pick up in the United States until a few years later. In 1971, the first film from the Monty Python troupe was released: *And Now for Something Completely Different*. Jones co-directed the next movie, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, with Gilliam. He went on to direct the two subsequent Monty Python films - *Life of Brian* and *The Meaning of Life*. Monty Python became a phenomenon. The troupe toured the world for live shows and, in 2004, a musical comedy called *Spamalot* was adapted from *The Holy Grail*. Jones played multiple Monty Python roles and was largely known for his portrayal of female characters.

However, Monty Python wasn't his only claim to fame. He directed other film projects, wrote for comedy TV and theatre, and penned serious work on medieval and ancient history. He also wrote a number of books for children, such as *The Saga of Erik the Viking*, *The Knight and the Squire* and *Nicobobinus*. In 2016, he directed Robert Ross' *Jeepers Creepers* - a play about fellow comic Marty Feldman.

Jones' last public appearance was in 2016, when he received an outstanding contribution to television and film award from Bafta Cymru in Wales. The awards ceremony took place only a few weeks after he had announced that he had been diagnosed with degenerative aphasia: a severe strain of dementia. As the illness affected his speech, his son Bill stood by his side onstage and spoke on his behalf.

"The struggles at the moment we're having - it's a bit hard, but we're so proud of him," Bill said, through tears.

Jones is survived by Bill, his two other children Sally and Siri, and his wife Anna Söderström. He also had three grandchildren.

In addition to his career accomplishments, Jones is remembered as a kind soul. After his diagnosis, he became an advocate for dementia awareness and fundraising for research. According to the Telegraph, his brain was donated to further dementia research at the University College London's Institute of Neurology.

Shortly after his death, actress Minnie Driver shared a heartwarming story on Twitter. She ran into Jones back in 1992 after getting lost on her way to an audition.

"Rather desperately, I stopped a man for directions. He started to explain but then said it would be easier to show me. He walked me there, told some stories, then came in to charm the casting director because I was late."

Python castmate Eric Idle also took to Twitter, saying of Jones, "I loved him the moment I saw him on stage at the Edinburgh Festival in 1963. So many laughs, moments of total hilarity onstage and off we have all shared with him. It's too sad if you knew him, but if you didn't you will always smile at the many wonderfully funny moments that he gave us."

While there may be too many of those funny moments to list, there's no doubt people all over the world will curl up in front of their television screens and continue to watch them for many years to come.



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