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Plus ça change...

My mother may opine otherwise, but I have never been one for nostalgia.

Recently, however, I paused to reflect upon the events of fifty years ago after reading 1971; Never a Dull Moment (David Hepworth), and watching the brilliant eight-part documentary series 1971; The Year That Music Changed Everything.

The 1960s began as a decade of dreams, buoyed by the election of John F. Kennedy, the youthful optimism of baby boomers, the civil rights movement, and the potential of a lunar landing. Sadly, it ended in a nightmare of nihilism with the assassinations of both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King in 1968.

That idealism imploded entirely in December of 1969, just months after the wonder of Woodstock, when mayhem took center stage at a Rolling Stones concert in Altamont, California. Elsewhere in the Golden State, the Manson Family murders shocked and shook the foundations of society. The following year saw the breakup of the Beatles, the deaths of both Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, as well as the Kent State killings - immortalized in Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's chilling ode Ohio.

The excesses of the 60s - free love, drugs, festivals, etc. - left an entire generation with a horrible hangover. As 1971 dawned, however, a sonic phoenix would rise from those ashes to repurpose their principles and, in the process, become a defining and watershed moment in the history of music.

Creative explosions by both established acts (Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Santana, Leonard Cohen) and emerging performers (Fleetwood Mac, Carly Simon, Stevie Wonder, Nick Drake) were aided by the fresh possibilities of long-play vinyl and FM radio. These revamped formats afforded artists both a better medium to reflect the times, and a better means to betray them.

In February, Carole King released her musical masterpiece Tapestry. Although she was happiest playing the traditional role of mother to her children, King's songs - I Feel the Earth Move, It's Too Late, and A Natural Woman - showcased a shift in women's social status. Joni Mitchell's beautiful Blue, released in June, further reflected the rising tides of the feminist movement. Women's Lib activists/authors Gloria Steinem and Germaine Greer were quick to claim and cite both works as inspiration.

Sexual identity also found a vital voice with recordings by newcomers Elton John (February) and David Bowie (December), each of which explored, questioned, and redefined traditional gender roles.

August saw the release of Who's Next, the bold and bombastic 5th studio album from British rockers the Who. The album's lynchpin - Won't Get Fooled Again - spoke to the disappointment of a generation with the lyric "meet the new boss, same as the old boss." The recording also marked the first use of the synthesizer in mainstream music.

The following month, John Lennon would unveil Imagine, whose anthemic title track remains both immensely popular and pertinent a half-century later.

In November, Sly Stone's There's a Riot Goin' On sounded the bell for Black activism, following-up on equally potent works by Gil Scott Heron and Curtis Mayfield earlier that year. Months prior, history was made when Isaac Hayes won an Academy Award for Best Original Song. Also that year, Aretha Franklin was recording Young, Gifted and Black - a theme that controversial heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali would riff on repeatedly in 1971, as would Black activist Angela Davis after the murder of writer George Jackson.

Nowhere was the Black American (or human) experience better expressed, however, than with Marvin Gaye's What's Goin' On. Long atop many critic's lists of Greatest Albums of All Time, the soulful and sexy 35-minute recording was both a creative tour-de-force and an artistic trojan horse with its themes of urban unrest, civil disturbance, economic hardship, ecological catastrophe, and the insanity of the Vietnam war.

Like Gaye, Jim Morrison of the Doors never shied from provocation. Weary from the pitfalls of fame, the Lizard King had exiled himself to Paris in 1971, where he died - like Hendrix and Joplin before him - at the age of 27. Although the singer/poet had become disenchanted with the promise of the 60s, he left a timeless literary legacy that is celebrated in a comprehensive new anthology, The Collected Works of Jim Morrison.

As with his peers, Morrison would (unknowingly) set the stage for pro-activism in the years to follow. It is ironic that the DIY ethos of 70s punk rock would find inspiration in the ideals of its hippie cultural counterpart. And while there have certainly been creative conscientious objectors since then - Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Ani DiFranco, Radiohead, and Rage Against the Machine foremost among them - few have had the same lasting impact as their sonic forebearers.

Similarly, Celtic music - once awash in songs of resistance and rebellion - seems to have succumbed to the shrugs of consumer culture. Perhaps only Dublin's U2 continue to fan the flames of critical thinking.

The parallels, and perils, of 1971 and 2021 are staggering; political corruption, cultural division, social injustice, racial and gender inequality, global and homegrown conflict, erosion of economy and ecology, media as propaganda, etc. - all dominate (and some might argue dumb-down) our consciousness and our conscience.

As such, there has never been a time when we have needed art to be an instrument of change more than right now. Thankfully, new technologies allow for more music to be available to more people than ever before. In the heads and hearts and hands of the true and good, that will surely serve us well. Perhaps it is wishful thinking on my part - or maybe merely a moment of future nostalgia - but my sincerest hope is that 50 years from today young people will look back on 2021 as the year that music changed something.

Stephen Patrick Clare
Editor-in-Chief

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Golden Discs

One man carries on the family business

Stephen Fitzgerald knows more than a little about the music business - it is, literally, in his blood.

Irish record retailer Golden Discs was founded in Dublin by his dad, Jack Fitzgerald (and Jack's business partner, Tom Rogers) in 1962 under the name Trans-Atlantic Record Agency.

"My father spent many years in Chicago in the 1950s and, noticing the popularity of music, decided to return home and set up his own store," explains Fitzgerald. "Initially he focused on vinyl imports from the United States which were very difficult to find in Ireland and the U.K. at that time."

The first brick-and-mortar storefront for the Trans-Atlantic Record Agency went up inside Dublin's Stillorgan Shopping Center in 1966. That sole shop was simply called The Golden Disc, named for the accolade given to artists who had sold more than 500,000 records. When more stores opened, each adopted the name Golden Discs.

Fitzgerald took over as President of the company in the 1990s and he remains at the helm today. Not only is it Ireland's oldest music retail chain, but Golden Discs is also the biggest, boasting 22 locations across the country.

Its core products are vinyl records and CDs.

"We are a very well-known and loved brand in Ireland. Everyone remembers buying their first album, and if you were born before the 1980s you probably bought it in one of our stores. It has been a roller coaster ride over the years as new formats came and went: from vinyl to 8-track tapes to cassettes, on to the hugely successfully CD and DVD formats of the 1980s and 1990s."

Things became even more interesting when the World Wide Web took over.

"The advent of digital formats created huge challenges for the industry and our business. File sharing and piracy was rife. Even in the traditional trade there was a lot of competition from retail specialists, supermarkets, and online e-tailers like Amazon - not to mention digital giants like iTunes."

Despite those difficulties, Golden Discs has adapted well to the ever-evolving online marketplace. In addition to its domestic website - goldendiscs.ie - the company recently launched a site catering specifically to the American and Canadian markets. Before, the business had to service the North American market via email orders. The focus of the new site is on Irish artists, traditional, folk, and Celtic music. They also carry the work of more contemporary performers, along with merchandise such as t-shirts and music or film-related books.

"We have an extensive range, competitively priced, and we usually ship within 24 hours of receiving the order, so we get a lot of repeat customers and new traffic from word of mouth or favourable reviews."

In fact, the business' exceptional customer service is a big source of pride for him.

> *"We regularly have people come into our stores just looking to talk about music and film and to see what has been recently released."*

"We go the extra mile for them; our staff are adept at listening to what people like and then making suggestions on other products the customer might be interested in - if you like it, have a listen, but there is never any pressure to purchase."

Although, with Ireland in its second wave of lockdown and all 22 Golden Disc shops currently closed, sales continue to pour in.

"Our online business has witnessed enormous growth this year and we are struggling to keep up with demand. Music is very emotive and nostalgic and has huge benefit to our collective mental health. It is very rewarding to know that we are part of that and especially wonderful when we hear feedback that we introduced someone to a new artist or sound or helped them track down something that they had spent years looking for."

Plans for physical storefronts, including Fitzgerald's long-time wish to open a shop in North America, will likely be on hold for at least a few months. That said, he is looking forward to watching Golden Disc's online market continue to grow in 2021. This will include broadening the business' reach and launching new product categories.

"We remain upbeat and confident that we will all get through this together as we have previous challenges in the past."

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The Kilted Coaches

Stephen Clarke and Rab Shields stay in shape and in style

Ever wanted to slim down to fit into that nice dress you have, or get back into the kind of shape you were in back in high school, only to be too embarrassed to set foot in a gym in your current state to follow through? A pair of Scottish lifestyle coaches understand - they've got your back and they're bringing their kilts.

Stephen Clarke and Rab Shields go way back together, although their first meeting was in the field of journalism, and not fitness.

"We met when we were 13," recalls Clarke, who was joined by Shields in a Zoom chat with Celtic Life International. "We both had a paper route, and we went from there. Our paths crossed a few times before we both became personal trainers."

"We always just enjoyed fitness," Shields chimes in. "We kept fit ourselves; we loved action movies, and we wanted to get action movie bodies. We realized we were quite good at it, and then we realized we liked helping people, and effectively, we decided to help people the best way we knew how."

The pair used to work as fitness trainers at a commercial gym, but they soon spotted a flaw in that model of training.

"There was a big problem with the health and fitness industry, in that a lot of people take themselves too seriously," says Clarke.

"And it is fuelled by social media," adds Shields. "People will see images of Adonises that are probably competition-ready that will say 'you can look like this in six weeks!' This is false, and it gives people unrealistic expectations. They feel like they will never get there, and it becomes a vicious cycle.

"Instead, we believe in making small, gradual changes that have a huge impact over a long period of time," Shields continues.

The duo formed their own lifestyle and fitness training program, although they don't consider themselves just personal trainers anymore - they are the whole package.

"'Coach' encompasses more," explains Clarke. "It encompasses everything; fitness, nutrition, psychology, lifestyle, mental well-being..."

"Sometimes, people are afraid to join gyms because they feel like they need to be fit before they join, so we break that barrier down," says Shields. "The main difference with our coaching plan compared to others is you actually get us. A lot of plans, people buy into them, and they just get left to their own devices; they go away and follow the plan to the best of their ability."

Clarke and Shields run their coaching business entirely online, with upwards of 500-600 members tuning in weekly from around the world.

"We start with a 12-week program," says Clarke. "Then it goes on to an ongoing membership, and then people can interact with us on video calls and get the help that they need."

As such, the member experience was largely unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. If anything, it might have galvanized some to use their time at home to improve themselves.

"It made people take stock of their health a bit more," Shields surmises. "I believe that it gave everybody a fright, especially when certain indicators came out related to the virus that, potentially, you were at more risk if you were extremely overweight. Certainly, people that we know or had spoken to took charge of their health and started looking at making changes."

Okay, so - why the kilts? Clarke and Shields explain that the kilts are about conveying the message that it is important to be the best you that you can be, not the perfect you.

"The kilts, for us, bring out our authentic selves," says Shields. "We can just be who we want to be at any given time. We have a joke that 'you can say what you want when you have a kilt on.'

> *"We are trying to inspire our clients to be the biggest and best versions of themselves."*

"We want to teach sustainable change, and the only way to do that is by creating solid habits."

"It is important that we create that mindset of 'there is no finish line,'" adds Clarke. "There is no finish line in life, other than death."

What's next on the horizon for the Kilted Coaches? A book? TV deal? Or just expanding their member base?

"All of the above, actually," says Clarke. "We do have a book coming, which will be next year. And yeah, we have a TV show that we will be starting to film shortly."

"In terms of our business, we are very mindful that, while we want to expand the membership, but we need to expand it slowly," adds Shields, who practices what he preaches - he is aware of the risk of taking on too much too fast and setting unrealistic goals. "If we had 10,000 members, how much of us would they get? We might expand that in the future but, for now, we are going to see how we manage it in the short-term."

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Building a Global Celtic Harp Community

Story by Allie Robertson

Harp, cruit, clarsach, telyn...whatever name you call it, the Celtic harp is a vital piece of Celtic culture and identity. Indeed, there is no other instrument, including the bagpipes, that can be as closely associated with the term Celtic as the harp - it references history, national identity and, of course, it sounds heavenly.

Harp playing in the Celtic countries can be traced back over a thousand years. Today, visit any Celtic music session around the world and you are likely to hear tunes written by the 17th-century blind Irish harper Turlough O'Carolan. Images of the Celtic harp appear everywhere - from the Irish currency to pints of Guinness.

The mystical qualities of the harp also appear in the Celtic folklore. In Irish tradition, Dagda - the father-figure of Celtic gods - had a harp that could make anyone who heard it laugh for joy or weep with sorrow, and playing it made the seasons arrive in correct order.

Despite its cultural importance, the Celtic Harp was almost extinct due to socio-political factors. However, thanks to a revival of interest that began in the 1960s - spearheaded by the likes of Breton harpist Alan Stivell and organizations such as Cairde na Cruite and the Clarsach Society - passion for the instrument has grown. The Celtic harp has never been as widespread or as popular as it is now, and this new surge of interest has encouraged harp makers to further develop the instrument, with the cost of a harp becoming less prohibitive and rentals more readily available.

And it is not just in the Celtic countries that the harp is booming. With many people looking to connect with their Celtic heritage through music, the instrument has become more popular in North America, Europe, and Asia. In the USA, the International Society of Folk Harpers and Craftsmen has over sixteen hundred members. There is also the Scottish Harp Society of America, and a Welsh Harp Society. There are Celtic harp festivals from Norway to New Zealand, and Facebook groups for Celtic harp enthusiasts now have thousands of members.

Growing up in Scotland, I was lucky to be immersed in Celtic music from a young age and have been playing the harp since I was 12 years old. Since 2005, I have been performing and teaching audiences and learners around the globe. I have showcased in the USA, Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Canada, Argentina and, in 2022, I will be playing on the remote island Svalbard.

At the start of the pandemic in March of 2020, like so many other musicians, my career came to an abrupt halt. From touring the world, playing 200 concerts a year, suddenly I was stuck in my little house in the West Highlands of Scotland, with no idea when touring would restart.

> *The thing I missed most about performing was the connection I had with people.*

And so, I decided to create a positive, warm, music-loving community that would connect harp lovers all over the world, and that might become a resource for anyone, anywhere, who wanted to learn the instrument.

I started going live on Facebook twice a week to teach a harp tune to anyone who wanted to join in. Participation grew as people realized that learning online didn't have to be an isolating experience. A thriving online community started to form that spanned the globe, with people of all ages and experiences, who shared a common love for the harp.

It became clear that there was a huge demand, particularly internationally, for harp tuition. Although interest in learning is at an all-time high, many people don't have a local teacher, and the cost of private lessons can be prohibitive, so the Internet could help to deliver high-quality video harp tutorials. Suddenly geographic borders and time-zone differences were irrelevant, and students were able to receive tuition in the comfort of their own home at whatever time suited. In this way, students could engage with the harp in an innovative way.

It has been exciting to watch this online harp community grow, and I am constantly thinking about new ideas on how to serve it better. I have now created two 10-week courses to teach the basics to beginners. In addition, I have had two Online Festivals with guest tutors from around the world, hosted weekend masterclasses, started monthly virtual jam sessions and formed a "Harp Chat" Facebook Group so that learners can share progress and get feedback from others. I love it when students post videos of their playing for their fellow students to see. It is amazing to see players of all ages and standards develop their skills and experience the joy of learning.

It is particularly exciting to see so many adult learners, as playing the harp also has benefits for physical and mental wellbeing, including improved memory and cognition, reduced stress, and relief from arthritis.

Of course, whilst the digital space has been incredible for developing and sharing music, you can't beat the thrill of a live concert or playing with others. Hopefully, festivals such as the Edinburgh International Harp Festival in Scotland and the Dinan Harp Festival in Bretagne will return in 2022.

My goal now is to grow the reach to as many harp lovers as possible and to help people realize that it is never too late to learn this wonderful instrument.

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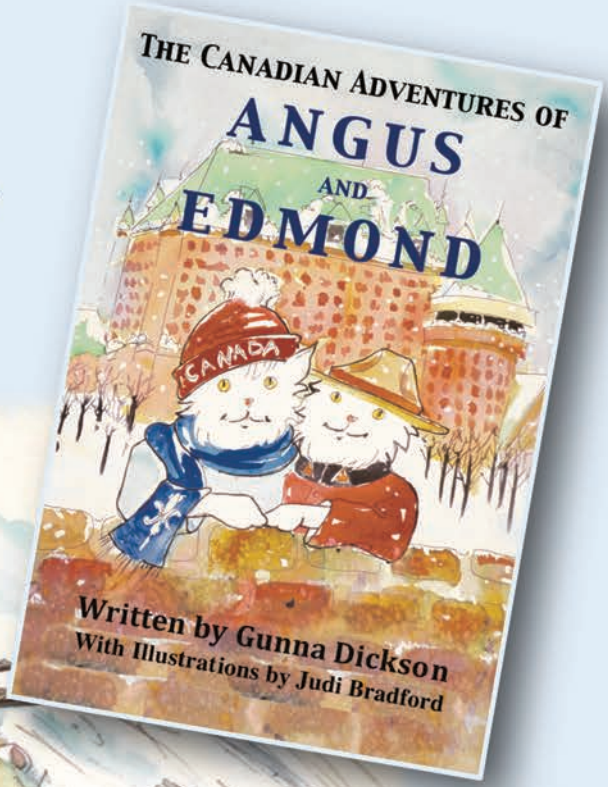

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Su-a Lee

Su-a Lee believes in the beauty of the cello

Born in South Korea to Korean parents, Su-a Lee lived in England, Hawaii, and New York before settling in Scotland. It was there, at the age of eight, that she discovered her passion for music.

"I initially started on the violin because it was offered at school, but I lasted less than two weeks because I didn't enjoy it one little bit," Lee shares via email from her home in Edinburgh. "The instant I heard the cello, I fell in love with the tone. When I was first allowed to bring a cello home from school my parents couldn't get me away from it."

Her interest in the instrument blossomed as a teenager and young adult. Classically trained, she attended a number of notable arts schools - including Chethams School of Music in Manchester, U.K., and Juilliard in New York City - and has been a member of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra for over 25 years.

Today, she continues to play for many of the same reasons as when she first began.

"I still love the sound of the cello, but I also love the feel of the cello. In fact, I love everything about it. The fact that you can encompass the whole thing in a big hug and that you feel the whole instrument vibrate when you play. It is so versatile in terms of melody, counterpoint, rhythm, and bass. It is the closest instrument to the human voice and even feels like a human spirit.

> *"It is an incredibly beautiful work of art in-and-of itself..."*

Lee - who performs both independently and with her band, Mr. McFall's Chamber - describes her sonic style as "versatile."

"I have an unwritten policy of mixing widely different styles in the same program - anything from progressive rock, tango, cartoon classics, folk, jazz, early music to contemporary classical. Since that time, and throughout my career, I have explored other cultures of music, studying Indian and Arabic music, and I work regularly with artists from different traditions such as folk, jazz, and world music."

She admits that a career in music is not without its challenges, specifically noting the need to juggle multiple responsibilities at once.

"A musician can't just be good at their instrument or craft; they also have to be good at social media, business, administration, digital technology...the list is endless. It is hard to find the time to be creative and practice."

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns have proved to be another test of character.

"It is absolutely tragic that all our gigs were cancelled overnight. I had a wonderful tour to Korea, China, Singapore, and Taiwan planned last May; a nine-city tour of the U.S. in October; as well as some wonderful festivals and a jam-packed schedule. Hamish, my partner, was supposed to launch his third solo album on the first day of lockdown."

Despite the difficulties, Lee notes that Scotland's music scene remains in strong standing.

"COVID-19 has not been very widespread in the Highlands, as we have been quite isolated and careful. I have been busy working with the (Nicola) Benedetti Foundation to deliver workshops and classes online. It is a whole new set of skills to present to hundreds of children all over the world on Zoom! But despite all of that, there has been some (necessary) questioning of what is important to each of us, and maybe some consideration about what we have learned in this pandemic to be able to take forward with us.

"Musicians and organizations are rallying to find imaginative ways of connecting with their audiences online," she adds. "There have been some tremendous results, including the Celtic Connections Festival, which ran a packed festival of stunningly recorded gigs online. Many other groups have been keeping an impressive online presence for their locked down audiences. Individual musicians have been learning new skills to stay connected digitally and there is no doubt that this will enhance possibilities once live music can happen once more."

To that end, Lee says 2021 will be an eventful year for her creatively.

"I am working on a really exciting project, which is challenging me to be creative and to learn new skills. The rewards are boundless when making music with kindred spirits and getting to visit so many cultures across the world."

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Karen Myatt

Canadian vocalist Karen Myatt explores the feminine spirit with Femoir

Karen Myatt has her grandmother to thank for her love of music.

"I grew up in a musical home, and I have been singing for as long as I can remember," shares the singer, who has Scottish/French roots. "My grandmother, Madeline Joudrey (nee: McLellan) - who is now 102 years old - played the piano daily and still plays entirely by ear. I was raised on the music of Gershwin, Porter, Berlin, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, and Rosemary Clooney to name but a few."

While she remains inspired by her family matriarch, Myatt found other influences after leaving her hometown of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

"I studied music in New York City, discovering the rich culture of jazz, blues, and Broadway. Today I find inspiration in all musical styles and art forms. Music has always been both a physical and spiritual experience for me, so I still sing for the same reasons that I did as a youngster. What changed was my yearning to share ideas that may reach someone in some small but important way."

Much of that desire evolved out of sheer life experience.

"I have had the great fortune to visit some of the greatest cities in the world and be touched by various cultures. This, along with a passion for novels, films, and music, led to my development both as a person and as an artist. The result has been a deeper connection to the world, its history, and the amazing array of art there is to be consumed and created. Expanding my mind and heart awakened my creative spirit."

That artistry came to full fruition with her recently released sophomore recording, Femoir.

"It is tough to pinpoint exactly when the idea for the album planted itself in my psyche, but it definitely had something to do with a cappuccino and a cannoli at a café in Rome. That afternoon, it occurred to me that many of my favorite countries, characters, and cultures share a common theme; the preservation and promotion of beauty, sensuality, intuition, and creativity - all eternally feminine traits."

A musical melange of original compositions and contemporary standards, the 14 songs on Femoir explore the transcendent feminine spirit through a fusion of soul, rock, jazz, and worldbeat.

"Without sounding too abstract or ethereal, everyone and everything has this divine connection."

"It is a story that has been told throughout history and will continue to be told into the future - women, female archetypes and figures, but also the presence of the feminine spirit in all people, places, and things. The theme of a universal, infinite narrative is present throughout the album, however there is another motif of mystery, a sort of unseen, unspoken spirit. It is incredible how this little idea sort of whipped itself into being - the seed was planted, though it was the many voices and souls that came together that really allowed it to grow and become a living, breathing expression."

Some of Canada's most renowned musicians appear on the new album, including Chris Mitchell (saxophone), Matt Myer (trumpet), Lisa MacDougall (keyboards), J. Rimbaudelaire (guitars), Adam Fine (bass), Geoff Arsenault (drums), Shimon Walt (cello) and Jennifer Jones (violin).

"The recording process allowed me to discover a new voice, and being surrounded by world-class musicians and technicians made the experience all the more inspiring. It was magical. The time and the team were just right, and it all fell into place. A 'let go and let God' sort of experience. There were moments where I would say, 'there - what is that whirring? That hum? Who's playing that - it's so cool!' But there would be no related track, no decipherable instrument, and so it was chalked up to the frequency that was created when sounds blend and a new sound emerges - the ghost in the machine - and it whisps in and out all over the album. I like to think that is the Femoir spirit."

Myatt believes that most people relate to a song as it rings true in their own lives and memories.

"A really great piece of music can tell many stories through one narrative, so the listener has the freedom to interpret, fill in the blanks, find themselves in the song. Perhaps the most important thing is knowing what not to say - leaving a space between the notes, where the spirit of the song can live - like little secrets that are whispered amongst the words and melodies."

With the album launched and the video for the title track going viral, the coming months will see Myatt and her band touring across North America.

"It is a very exciting time, and I could not be more grateful. This journey has been beyond fulfilling. My grandmother is very proud."

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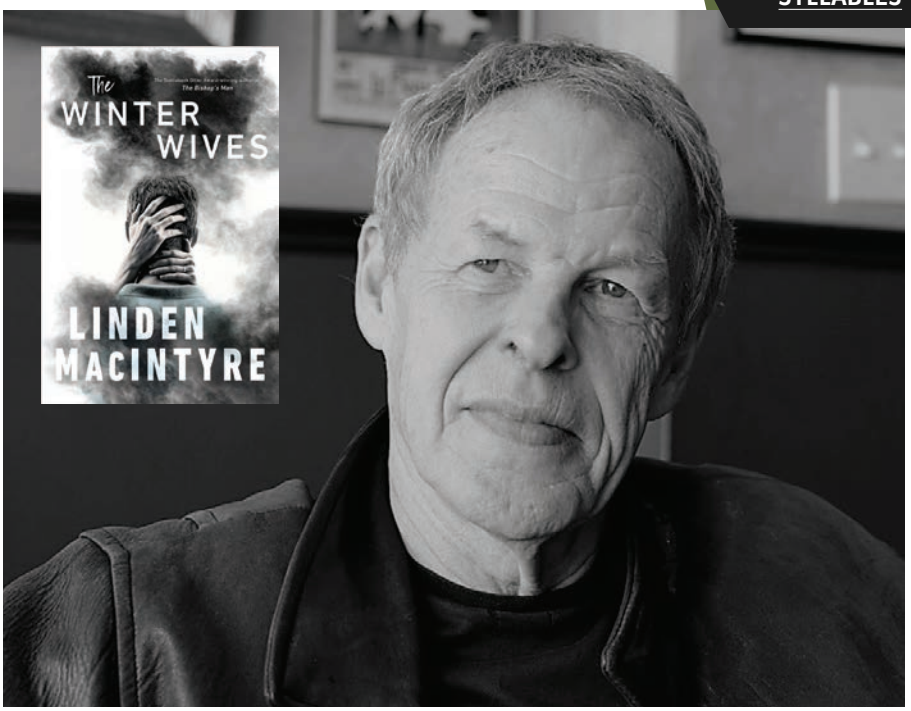
MADE OF STORIES

Linden MacIntyre

The award-winning Canadian author and journalist explores complex human relationships in his new novel



In his essay Being and Nothingness, French philosopher J. P. Sartre noted that "Human reality is constituted as a being which is what it is not, and which is not what it is."

This quote opens Linden MacIntyre's latest literary effort, The Winter Wives - an emotionally driven narrative that addresses identity and the intricate psychology behind long-term relationships.

Although only recently released, MacIntyre has been whittling away on the novel for years.

"I started out with a general interest in the impact of dementia on individuals and in relationships," shares the scribe with Celtic Life International by phone. "Early onset dementia creates a rapid disintegration of one's personality and memory and can change one's character quite significantly."

MacIntyre was inspired to tell the tale after reading a feature story in the New York Times about a man who researched his ancestry to gain a deeper understanding of his own health issues.

"I was curious about the normal evolution of a relationship based on what we know about people and how what we know about people can change over time. That sort of conceit that young people have about knowing everything about their friends is an illusion - it is simply never true that you know everything about everybody."

The Winter Wives follows four individuals whose lives have been intertwined for decades: the financially successful and well-respected Allan, his quiet friend Byron - the novel's protagonist, who lives with a physical disability resulting from childhood trauma and has spent years caring for his mother with Alzheimer's - and the titular Winter wives, Peggy and Annie, who are married to Allan and Byron, respectively.

The narrative begins the morning after a long night of drinking when Allan suffers a stroke. The group is thrown into a web of deception and lies as they discover Allan's successful business empire was secretly an illegal drug trade. This realization sends the remaining three - namely Byron, who is preoccupied with the notion that he may be developing early onset dementia - on a quest to better understand themselves and their social circle.

> *"It is a profound story about human relations and how lives change."*

"I believe that we know only about another person what that person wants us to know. Then, of course, when that person loses control, say in an illness like dementia or through the consequences of an accident, we start to see different people. That is basically what the book is about - four people that, early in life, get to know each other awfully well. They admire or are infatuated with one another and form a kind of bond that lasts all their lives. Then, of course, as life unspools, they discover that they don't really know that person that well at all."

MacIntyre admits that writing the novel had its fair share of challenges, noting specifically his desire to respectfully navigate writing from the perspective of someone with a disability without sharing that lived experience. Despite those issues, the project was filled with reward.

"It was fun to write, and it came together rather quickly. For me, the story turned a corner at a certain point in the second half. It was a book that I hadn't really sweated or worried about and then suddenly...it finished itself. The whole thing just became a legacy. I fully understood what was happening and why it was happening, and I understood the peculiarities of it."

While it has only been on shelves for a short while, The Winter Wives has already garnered considerable critical and popular acclaim.

"My publishers sent copies off to some really serious authors and they sent back really stunning reviews. Readers have also responded very positively. It has also been on the Canadian Bestsellers list for a few weeks now."

MacIntyre is already working away on his next project, which will see him make a return to non-fiction.

"It is rooted in the Irish War of Independence, from 1920-23. I don't want to go too deeply into it because it is kind of a delicious story. Although it explores the Irish struggle for Republican independence, it is told from a Canadian angle. I am quite taken with it so far."

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Donna Morrissey

Newfoundland Author Donna Morrissey makes peace with her past

Donna Morrissey is the perfect example of "it's never too late."

"I was in my early forties when I started writing," she tells Celtic Life International via email. "It was something I started at a friend's prompting, and it took flight with each and every word I wrote. I wrote for no particular reason except the glory of linking words together and creating images and telling stories from my past. It is the same today, 25 years later - I write for the pleasure of creating stories."

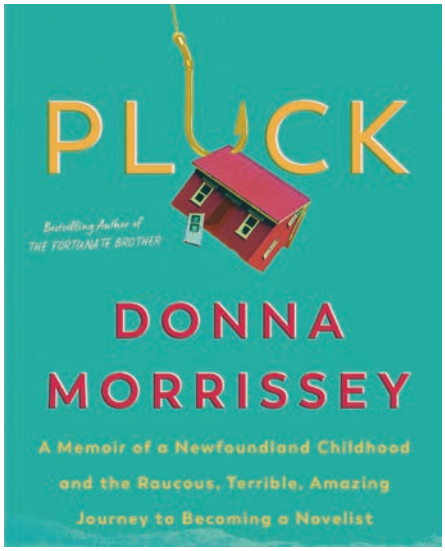
Over that quarter century, Morrisey has become a household name in Canadian literature, penning six books, including her immensely popular debut Kit's Law (1999).

"It is difficult to judge how one has grown as a writer over the years," she shares. "I know that I have - it is sometimes painful to read my earlier stuff. I can't believe those stories came out of me - I would never be able to recreate it. And yet, I would write my sentences differently today - or maybe not - that would interfere with the voice of the story. It is always the same - each time I re-read something I have written I want to rewrite it and make it better. So, have I grown? I don't know...I will always be growing. Am I getting anywhere? I don't know."

Morrisey's latest effort, Pluck, is a fresh venture for the seasoned author. Taking a break from fiction, the 320-page memoir depicts her years coming-of-age in Newfoundland and Labrador.

> *"Pluck is the story I have always wanted to write."*

"It took me six novels to get to that point. The stories of my mother and father, of me and my siblings. Each book of fiction mirrored some of those stories, but never enough that I felt satisfied. And then the day came when it felt as though I had no more fiction left in me. But I had my story of my mother, my brother, my father...and so it felt like the time was now for that memoir, which is as much as my mother's story as my own."



The new narrative explores a variety of subjects, including mental illness, cancer, grief, despair and love - all told with Morrissey's signature wit and charm.

She admits that the project could be both challenging and painful.

"I was seeing myself as the main character. I was so used to writing fiction that I objectified myself and wrote as though I were a character - which the publisher put the boots to – 'we don't want a character, we want 'you.'' That was tough. And humbling. To speak of oneself for so long felt like indulgence. But, eventually, the events kind of took over and it felt as though I were writing a work of fiction - but reality-based.

"It was also a great learning process," she continues. "How to write a memoir without hurting people. How to not take control of the story when it is as much of your sibling's story as your own. How to keep perspective and see the story from the outside while writing it from the inside. How much to leave out, what to include, how to disguise people so as not to bring undue attention onto them. The one good thing about writing a memoir is there isn't much to do in terms of research."

In the end, Pluck was a labour of love.

"The ending was the most rewarding part. Knowing that I had written this tribute to my mother and her tough story. And to my own. Lots happened in my family - tragedies, grief, and all the ramifications of that. I suffered a breakdown from the guilt I incurred from the accidental death of my teenage brother when he was on my watch. It nearly destroyed me. Watching my mother's battle with the fallout of my brother's death and then her battle with breast cancer - it was brutal. But we survived as a family. It was our love that kept us together."

The book is already resonating with readers and critics.

"Thus far the response has been surreal. I am astonished at the incredibly wonderful feedback, the people who have come to me wanting to share their stories of grief or loss or mental illness and spirituality. Everyone connects with suffering and joy; everyone has a story to tell. So many wish that they could write their story, and I tell them 'you can.' Simply sit and write it for you. Be the hero in your own story."

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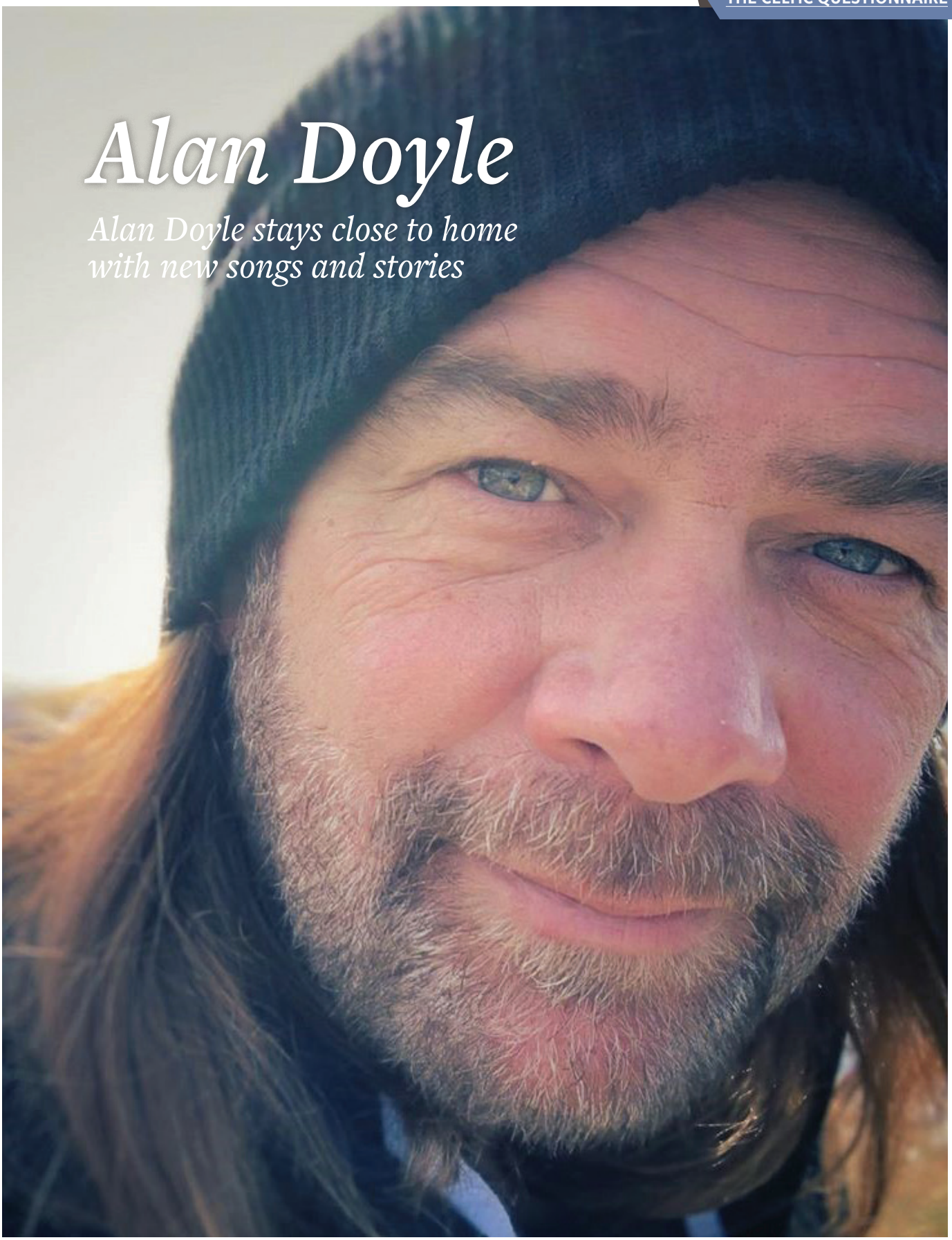

Alan Doyle

Alan Doyle stays close to home with new songs and stories

2020 was supposed to be a busy year for Alan Doyle, with plans for both a book tour and a 5-leg international concert tour. Like all of us, COVID-19 forced him to reschedule his agenda. However, it did not stop him from working his arse off to bring people together with song and story. Recently we caught up with the singer/songwriter/author from his home studio in St. John's, Newfoundland.

How has 2020 been for you? When last we spoke, you were getting ready to go on tour.

It was one of the most unique years of my life. We played a gig on March 8th in Vancouver, in the first of what was to be five legs of the Rough Side Out tour. We flew home the next day for 10 days off, with a plan to reconvene in Mississauga. Of course, none of that happened. I went from March 9th until just a couple of weeks ago without playing a gig - the longest span that I have gone since I was 11 years old. So, I turned my attention to things that we could do, including a bunch of charity work online for the Dollar a Day Foundation, recording an album over the Internet with some friends and finishing another book. I am glad, actually, that I had things to turn my attention to, because now - as we enter what feels like another break in stride - we have something new out there for people to enjoy

Last time, you were still deciding what your third book would be about. What did you end up going with?

Well, here is the funny thing; I had just started a longer, travel-related discovery book. Of course, as soon as it became apparent that travel was going to be impossible, I put that whole project on hold.

However, around a week later, Penguin Random House called me and said, 'we would really like to put a title out from you this fall. We think people are really going to need it and enjoy it - is there anything light and humorous you might be able to do in a month?' I said I could probably manage a book of short, funny stories that are somewhat disconnected, but are somehow connected as well. The book became All Together Now. There is a mix of a few stories from my young life growing up in Petty Harbour and the unique characters and a few crazy things that we did. And then there is a bunch of road stories from interesting experiences that I have had touring around the world for the last 20 years - some of which I handled really well, and some of which I handled very poorly. For me, writing the book was a good mental health break. It gave me something to focus on and do - and laugh about while I was writing. The book itself is crafted to remind us what a night out at the pub is like, like we are all sitting around, telling stories. Hopefully, when people read it, they will feel a little bit more connected.

You were also working on the Songs from Home EP.

That was a project that MusicNL started just after the shutdown. Me, Rachel Cousins, the Ennis Sisters, The Fortunate Ones, and The Once all got together and did a record, primarily over the Internet while in lockdown. We recorded five songs - one by each of us - that I produced, and then I produced a sixth one called It's Okay that we all sang on together. The result of all that is Songs From Home, which came just a short while ago.

The music video for It's Okay feels a lot like what everyone has been going through as of late.

Yeah, it was a joy to virtually connect and gather in whatever way was possible at the time - to be in the same room with those guys, even though we were not in the same room.

What were the challenges involved with the recording?

Well, I have done work a lot like this before. I have been working virtually with people since 2010 - I started when I was on the Robin Hood film set. The composer was in Germany, and I was in England. So, with Songs From Home, I said, 'I think if we all learn from each other, and I show you how I have been doing this for the last decade, we could actually work together very closely without actually being in the same room.' I showed the other artists how to set up a home studio that was virtually connected to others, and how we could all seamlessly record and perform on the same project together, virtually simultaneously.

You brought your expertise to the project.

Heh, that sounds like a strong word for anything I know how to do! It was super nice to get something out during this time, and to demonstrate what we Newfoundlanders can do, even when the chips are down. I found that very exciting. It was also a great learning experience, as will happen any time you gather that much talent under one (virtual) umbrella. You constantly learn new things from each other. It is just one of the great joys of doing a collaborative thing like this, no matter how you do it.

You live-streamed some concerts, too.

Yeah, and they did very well. We had people from, I think, 27 countries around the world jump on and watch us play here in St. John's. It was a real trip to bring Newfoundland songs to Russia, and Germany, and Egypt! I have streamed simpler things before but setting up a five-to-six camera shoot, with a full lighting and audio rig - basically, producing a mini television show for two and a half hours - that was really the first time.

What about live-streaming a whole concert felt new or stood out to you?

The desire for people to be in a room that they can't be in is something that we were trying to satisfy. As opposed to television, where people are content to sit and listen, the trick to the live-stream world - and we were lucky enough to have so many people in the audience, all socially distanced - is to create an environment where the viewer would love to be in that room. And you give them as close an experience as you can.

Assuming that we return to some sort of normal over the coming while, what is on your agenda for the months ahead?

Oh, I don't know, and I would be a fool to guess. It is, though, in all honesty, the question of the day. I have lots of fun stuff to do; more records, more books, and I am working on a musical for the Charlottetown Festival. I have no trouble occupying my time with fun and interesting things. What they are going to be will depend on what we are allowed to do, as we inch our way back towards our lives on the road and on-stage. I don't think we are going to get to do that at least until the summer, and perhaps even not until much later than that. If I had one wish for 2021, it would be exactly the same wish I had for 2020 - to get out on the road and have everybody come to our concerts. But I have no interest in doing it if we can't do it safely. Once we can, I will resume business as usual. But one of the greatest opportunities of the whole COVID-19 thing afforded me is a summer - about eight or nine weeks in a row - where I simply took time off to be with my family. I have not had a summer off since I was 12. We had great weather, and it was a beautiful, wonderful time. Plus, I built a bunch of decks in my backyard! However, I would be lying to you if I said I didn't desperately, desperately miss touring and being on-stage, or on a tour bus with my best of friends. I dearly miss it, I do - but such is life right now, and we will make the most of it.

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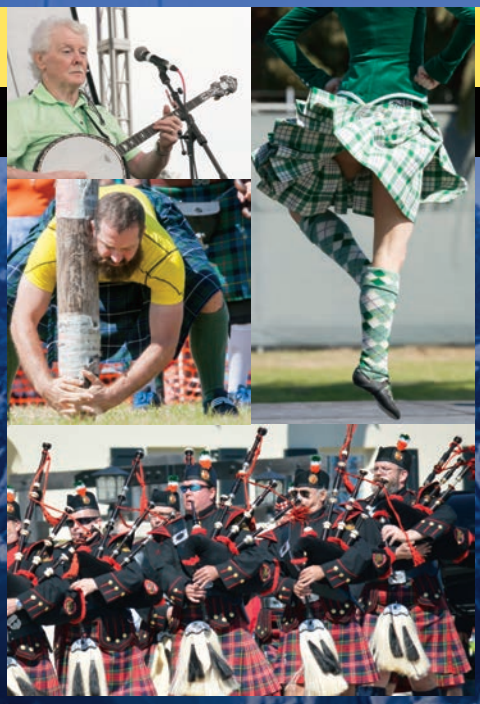

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Teenage Fanclub

The Scottish alt-rockers return with a new album

Kurt Cobain once called them "the best band in the world."

"Yeah, that was a bit something to try and live up to," jokes Teenage Fanclub's vocalist and guitarist Raymond McGinley with a roll of the eyes. "I am not sure that we ever really deserved that title, to be honest. I think that any band on any given night can be the best band in the world."

McGinley comes by his humility honestly. Born and bred in Glasgow, the wiry songsmith is soft spoken, humble, good humoured, and thoughtful in his replies.

"The music industry is a very different beast today," continues the 57-year-old via Zoom from his home in Glasgow. "Even prior to COVID-19, which has all-but-destroyed live music and touring, it was getting tougher and tougher for musicians to make a living. And not just musicians, but many others involved with the machinery of music; management, record labels, publicists, booking agents, etc. And the Coronavirus pandemic affected everyone in the concert industry - promotors, tickets agents, road crews, etc. It hasn't been easy on us - we had to postpone a lot of shows - and I imagine that it can't be easy on younger artists who are looking to carve out a living."

While revenue has certainly diminished, McGinley says that it was never the point.

"If I had gotten into music to get rich, then I never would have gotten into music - I would have become a banker or a stockbroker. I got into music because I had

to - there was an energy there that I tapped into. And that is still why we do what we do."

"We" is the band's current lineup; accompanying McGinley on vocals and guitar is his longtime musical cohort Norman Blake. Original drummer Francis Macdonald continues to keep the beat, while Euros Childs and Dave McGowan bring added texture and colour to the band's sound with keyboards, bass and backing vocals.

Founded near Glasgow in 1989, Teenage Fanclub released their first album, A Catholic Education, the following year. Although it didn't break any sales records, the recording was a critical success, praised for its blend of pop sensibilities and hard rock guitars.

"We were a part of that post-punk, alternative rock movement," says McGinley. "The music scene in the late-1970s and into the early 1980s in Glasgow, Belfast and London was dominated by punk and new-wave - the Clash, Stiff Little Fingers, the Alarm, Big Country, Aztec Camera, Depeche Mode, and so forth. And then you had the American bands like the Ramones, R.E.M., the Replacements, etc.

> *"There was a spirit there that anyone could pick up a guitar or sing, and that there really were no rules when it came to making music."*

That spirit has remained intact over the course of the band's 32-year career, which has seen them release a dozen full-length studio recordings and perform thousands of concerts around the world.

"Well, I suppose like anything in life, the secret is to just keep going. Not too long ago, (Mick) Jagger was asked why the Rolling Stones were so successful. His reply was that 'we simply outlasted everyone else'. It really is a matter of endurance."

Like the Stones, Teenage Fanclub has endured their fair share of ups and downs over the years; the band's early-to-mid 1990s "trilogy" - Bandwagonesque (1991), Thirteen (1993), and Grand Prix (1995) - rocketed them to fame and fortune. And though follow-up recordings from 1997-2016 never reached the same number of listeners, each did well on the charts in the U.K. and elsewhere.

"More importantly, we became better songwriters," notes McGinley. "We have

Norman Blake & Raymond McGinley

never been content to simply rest on our laurels. The commitment, first and foremost, was to evolve as artists, and to simply serve the songs as best we could."

That mindset is at the core of the band's latest recording, Endless Arcade, which was written and recorded prior to the pandemic.

"Because it had been a while since releasing our previous record (Here, 2016), we had plenty of good new material to work with and, as well, the opportunity to properly craft those elements into stronger songs," McGinley explains.

Time has served the band well, and both longtime fans and new listeners will be pleased; Endless Arcade is a minor masterpiece, its 12 tunes a lesson in smart-pop/rock songwriting, clever and deceptive in its easy, Beatles/Byrds-esque melodies and harmonies.

"Oh, those influences are there to be sure," muses McGinley. "There is no sense in trying to deny or downplay one's roots. We all come from somewhere, right?

"Endless Arcade is very much the result of everything that we have heard, seen, and lived through. Hopefully the sum is greater than the parts, and that our fans take to it."

The April 30 release of Endless Arcade was preceded by a series of videos for the songs Home, The Sun Won't Shine on Me, I'm More Inclined and In Our Dreams.

"Obviously, with the current situation as it is, those were all filmed close to home," shares McGinley. "Actually, it was great to simply get together with the boys and to be in the same room with everyone at the same time. Even though we live fairly close to one another - Scotland isn't that big of a country - it had been some time since we were all able to connect. And I am sorry - the online thing is great, and I get that it is necessary these days - but there is no substitute for being there, in-person."

The same can be said for concert experiences. As of now, the band only has a handful of dates scheduled for 2021, including a couple of festivals in Spain this summer. U.K. shows have been reset for the spring and summer of 2022.

"There are likely to be more dates added as things progress, but it has been tough," admits McGinley. "We are very much a live act and we have spent many years on the road honing what we do and growing our audience. That flow of recording and touring has been seriously interrupted."

In the meanwhile, he and his bandmates are making the best of being at home.

"Well, it has given me more time to play music (McGinley lists off an impressive collection of unique guitars), and to noodle around with new sounds and song ideas. I have obligations to family and friends as well, so that keeps me busy. And, you know, if you have to be holed up somewhere for any length of time, then I suppose Scotland is as good a place as any."

Unlike many of their musical contemporaries, the group never felt the need to relocate.

"Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, is just the right size for us. We have everything we could possibly need and want. And I love how unpretentious and unassuming people are here - rock star attitudes and airs don't go over well with Scots. We are down-to-earth folks, and I love just being able to be a regular, run-of-the-mill bloke every day, doing all the routine, around-the-house stuff.

"It may not be London or Paris or New York or Los Angeles, but it is home, and it keeps us humble - which is really good if you are the best band in the world."

circa 1991

Teenage Fanclub Discography

A Catholic Education (1990)
The King (1991)
Bandwagonesque (1991)
Thirteen (1993)
Grand Prix (1995)
Songs from Northern Britain (1997)
Howdy! (2000)
Words of Wisdom and Hope (2002)
Man-Made (2005)
Shadows (2010)
Here (2016)
Endless Arcade (2021)

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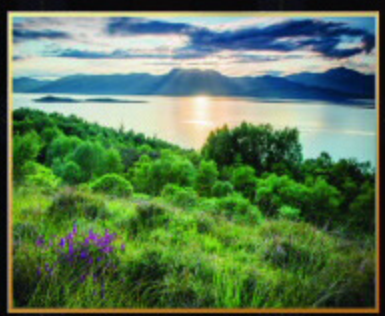

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Cassandra Wilson

World renowned vocalist Cassandra Wilson knows the healing power of music.

Story by Stephen Patrick Clare.

Even with an impressive resume of studio recordings and stage performances - not to mention years of critical and popular acclaim and an array of awards - vocalist Cassandra Wilson has things other than music on her mind these days.

"I believe that there is a spirit in each and every part of nature," shares the 65-year-old singer via Zoom from her current residence in New York. "And that spirit has the power to heal. And our world needs some serious healing right now. Nature can do that."

Wilson will soon be getting back to the garden herself, as she prepares to return full-time to her family's old homestead in Jackson, Mississippi, where she was born and bred.

"I just think it is time for a change of scenery for me. Given the current conditions with COVID-19, I have been a bit depressed over the past year - I haven't picked up my guitar in months, actually - so hopefully I will find some motivation back home. There are some really fantastic players down there, and I won't be that far from one of my favourite cities in the world, New Orleans, which has always been a place of great musical inspiration for me."

Fresh inspiration could not come at a better time for Wilson, who - like others of her profession - has struggled with the stoppage in work brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

"The music industry has been completely decimated," she sighs. "For musicians like myself who need to be on the road in order to earn a proper living, it has been devastating. Along with that loss of income, I miss meeting new people and seeing new places and all of the hustle and bustle of touring and traveling. Actually, I miss just having the opportunity to go somewhere other than the corner store."

On the topic of travel, I relay the tale of my 2019 visit to Donegal where, on the wall of a small village bar called McGrorys Hotel, I spotted one of her concert posters.

"Ah, Culdaff," she smiles, referring to the venue's locale. "What an incredible and beautiful part of Ireland, and the world really. And the people there were so warm and gracious. That was a very special experience for me."

It wasn't her first time on the Emerald Isle.

"I was in Cork in 1985 or 1986, I believe. It may have been part of the (Guinness) Jazz Festival. It was beyond lovely, and I recall feeling like a part of me was home.

"I remember everything being really green. In fact, I don't believe that I had ever seen so much green in my life before."

Wilson's Celtic connection didn't stop there; in 2017, she performed at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin with a bevy of brilliant "trad" players, including Liam O'Maonlai of Hothouse Flowers. The year prior, in Manhattan, she took to the stage with six-time All-Ireland fiddling champion Martin Hayes from Co. Clare and "trad" guitarist Dennis Cahill, whose family hails from Co. Kerry. And, in 2015, she was honoured with the Spirit of Ireland Award from the Irish Arts Center in New York City.

"Of all the awards that I have received over the years, that may be one of the most special and meaningful for me. I think a few people were surprised by that."

While Wilson's West African roots are no surprise to her fans and followers, her personal, ancestral ties to Eire, and to Celtic culture - which she first uncovered in 2014 - might come as a revelation.

"My father's family name, Fowlkes, is Welsh, and my mother's maiden name is McDaniel, which is Irish. Where I grew up, in my neighbourhood, it wasn't uncommon for African American families to have Scottish or Irish or Welsh last names. It wasn't something that we, as a people, ever really spoke about, however, nor do we really speak of it today, mostly as much of that narrative remains tinged with shame."

She points to the heavy influx of Scots and Northern Irish immigrants who settled along the USA's eastern seaboard and deep south during the late 1700s and early 1800s, and the ensuing enslavements of Black people across the region.

"In all likelihood, these were often the family names of plantation owners who assimilated Black slaves into their homesteads. It is a difficult narrative for many African Americans, and the idea of our people having - and honouring - their Celtic ancestry isn't something that has ever really been explored or examined in any depth."

There have been, however, exceptions on that perspective.

"The politician John R. Lynch (1847-1939) is one example of someone of colour from the South who embraced his Celtic roots. He was bi-racial, I believe, and he was quite proud of both sides of his family. And there were also many others in the area at that time, and in the years that followed, who were the result of bi-racial relationships or marriages. That is certainly nothing to be ashamed about."

Given recent events across the United States - the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests - it is clear that the country's longstanding racial divide remains.

"I am not sure which is worse; the blatant, obvious kinds of racism, or the subtler variety that sits just below the surface. Regardless, they are both stupid.

"All I know is that ignorance still exists everywhere, and I believe that it isn't the unknown that tears people apart - it is the fear of the unknown."

She holds out hope, however, in the young people of today.

"With the world at their fingertips, they have greater access to information - and the ability to share those new ideas - than any generation that came before them. They are not only informed, but they are empowered, engaged and proactive about what matters to them. If anyone can change a narrative and heal the planet, they can."

Music "has charms to soothe the savage breast," as well.

"Music can reach inside of people and challenge them, change them. It spoke to me as a young person, and it still speaks to me today, both as a fan of music and as a creator of music. I always have to be ready to answer to the muse, either with a notepad or with some sort of recording device, even if it is three o'clock in the morning. I still get some of my best ideas in the middle of the night. Or on long walks out in nature, by a lake or in the woods, where there is plenty of empty space. It is important, for anyone - and

perhaps now more than ever - to get in touch with those thoughts and those feelings."

Going home will likely give Wilson the time and space to do just that.

"Well, that is my hope. That part of the U.S. is rich and robust in natural beauty, and it is filled with spirits. The culture is very diverse also - sort of this unique, hybrid mix of African, English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Spanish, some Haitian and Gullah - more spirits. Lots of different types of whiskey too - maybe my favourite kind of spirits!

"And musically, it is all over the place as well, which I love. There are so many distinct styles going on - blues, country, gospel, roots, rock - which is inspiring for artists of any sort, especially those who like to break the rules once in a while."

Bending the notes - i.e., breaking the rules - is something that Wilson has built her career upon.

"My roots may be in jazz, which is wonderful as it has given me a really solid musical foundation, but I have never been constricted to one genre or another. That didn't always please the purists who thought I should 'know my place' - in fact, I have been arrested by the 'jazz police' a few times. I have nothing against those folks - and I completely understand and respect where they are coming from - but I love, and I am inspired by, all types of music."

Often - as evidenced by her stirring version of Son House's classic Death Letter Blues or her torrid take on Billie Holiday's spellbinding Strange Fruit - that music can be stark and sparse, calling to mind both Leonard Cohen's line "there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" and the ages-old adage "music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent."

"The heavier tunes - that is the spirit expressing itself also. Finding my voicing in those songs, singing them, is a natural, organic process and one of the ways that I exorcise whatever demons I might be carrying around. Those darker thoughts and emotions - maybe old wounds - need to come out of the shadows, and into the light, in order to heal."

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The Dropkick Murphys

Celtic Life International Managing Editor Chris Muise catches up with Ken Casey of Boston's favourite barroom brawlers

It has been 25 years since the Dropkick Murphys drop-kicked onto the Celtic punk rock scene, but for founder Ken Casey - even with the release of the band's latest album, Turn Up That Dial - it has been a difficult year to celebrate that milestone. Recently Casey spoke with Celtic Life International about the sextet's past, present and future.

What are your own roots?

I was born and raised in Boston. I have been here my whole life, and this is where I will always be unless someone makes me a better offer. My grandparents and great grandparents were Irish, and I still have some relatives who come to the shows and such over in Ireland. Obviously, Boston has a close connection to Ireland, and that is the same with my own family.

When and why did you get into music?

I have always been a music fan, from the traditional Irish melodies that I was introduced to by my grandparents and whatnot, to the rock 'n' roll that I first heard as a kid, to the punk rock that I discovered as a teenager. But I actually got into the band because of a bet! I was in my early 20s, and I had talked about starting a band with friends, just to play cover songs in a basement - never to play out in venues in front of people. So, a buddy of mine said to me, 'You are always talking about starting a band. My band has a show in three weeks, and I dare you to open

for us!' Now, I can't resist a good bet, so the next thing you know - with only three-weeks' notice - we put a band together and played our first show. It started out as a joke, and yet here we are - 25 years later.

Are they the same reasons you do it today?

No, it has definitely taken a turn...thank God! Because he never paid me for that bet, I would still be playing for that $30 wager! I think that, in the beginning, it was for a laugh. Then, as we started to develop a little more on each stage, we set some goals, picked up some fans, and it was like, 'Oh my God, people might actually like this!' Then it took on a whole new meaning once we had an actual connection with a real fanbase. I would say the opportunity to play live music to an audience that knows our songs and sings the words back to us - that feeling is priceless. So, no, I am not complaining about that $30 as I believe I won in the long run.

What are the challenges and rewards of the gig, especially during COVID-19?

Well, before COVID-19, it was the best job in the world. I had never travelled before the band, and since then, I have had the good fortune of seeing the world. The downside is, although we love being on stage for 90 minutes each night, the other 22-and-a-half hours of the day we are away from our family and friends. I have kids, so I have missed a large chunk of their lives. But it has also given me the opportunity to put a roof over

my family's heads, and provide for them, so it is a give-and-take situation. As far as COVID goes, I think that the music industry was affected more than others. It has been especially difficult for fans. Socially distanced shows just aren't going to work for us - we are pretty much going to have to wait until people can get right back in there again together. So, it has been tough - we miss the fans, we miss working. We have done four livestream shows during the pandemic, and we are very proud of those - they went great, and they kept us maybe more relevant than a lot of bands. However, at the same time, four shows in a year? We usually play 125 shows each year on average.

What lessons from the pandemic will you carry into the future?

We are going to continue to stream our St. Patrick's Day show in Boston, for sure. A lot of our fans have made it a goal at some point in their lives to come to Boston to check out one of our shows but streaming the live show on St. Patrick's Day will give others around the world the opportunity to see us. Maybe when we are in Europe or Ireland or elsewhere, we can organize a live stream from that particular venue at some point also.

You previewed your new album on St. Patrick's Day, correct?

Yeah, we played some songs from the new album, and then we just did another show, where it was the full-on record release party. We played the full album, front-to-back, and then a bunch of other songs afterwards. We got a chance to play the whole album live, which was a nice feeling.

What are your thoughts on the current state of the Irish and Celtic culture?

In a city like Boston, it is so prevalent, you almost take it for granted. I don't think you need to promote the culture, because it is still so strong here. Obviously, it has been a little diluted as the city of Boston gets more gentrified. Some people have had to move out of the old Irish neighbourhoods, simply as they can't afford to live there anymore. But in the Boston area, it is still strong. We have toured the Canadian Maritimes, and I was like, 'Wow, this is cool,' to see how big Celtic music still is. I remember the first time I drove through Cape Breton and the diversity of one town alone was insane; one highway sign is in English, and then the next one is in French, and then the next one is in Gaelic. I couldn't believe what I was reading. I think that Irish and Celtic culture is in fine shape.

What is on the band's agenda for the remainder of 2021, and into 2022?

The rest of this year will be all about finding new and unique ways to promote our new album. We have made music videos for almost all the songs on the record, which is something we would not have done in the past when we might have done just one or two. We will release those, staggered, through the

summer, to keep the album alive. Then, we will be doing some shows here in America in August or September with Rancid and The Bronx - we are calling it the Boston to Berkley II tour. For 2022, we will be undertaking a big European tour, playing Ireland, the U.K. and elsewhere. It will be some of the biggest arenas we have ever performed in, including 3Arena in Dublin, the Hydro in Glasgow, and Wembley Arena in London. Between having a new album, and the pent-up demand for live music, we will need to play these bigger venues. So, there is some good to come out of it, I guess. To get to play Wembley Arena is something I never thought would ever happen. Although there is no guarantee that everything will be better by that time, we have to keep making plans and hoping for the best.

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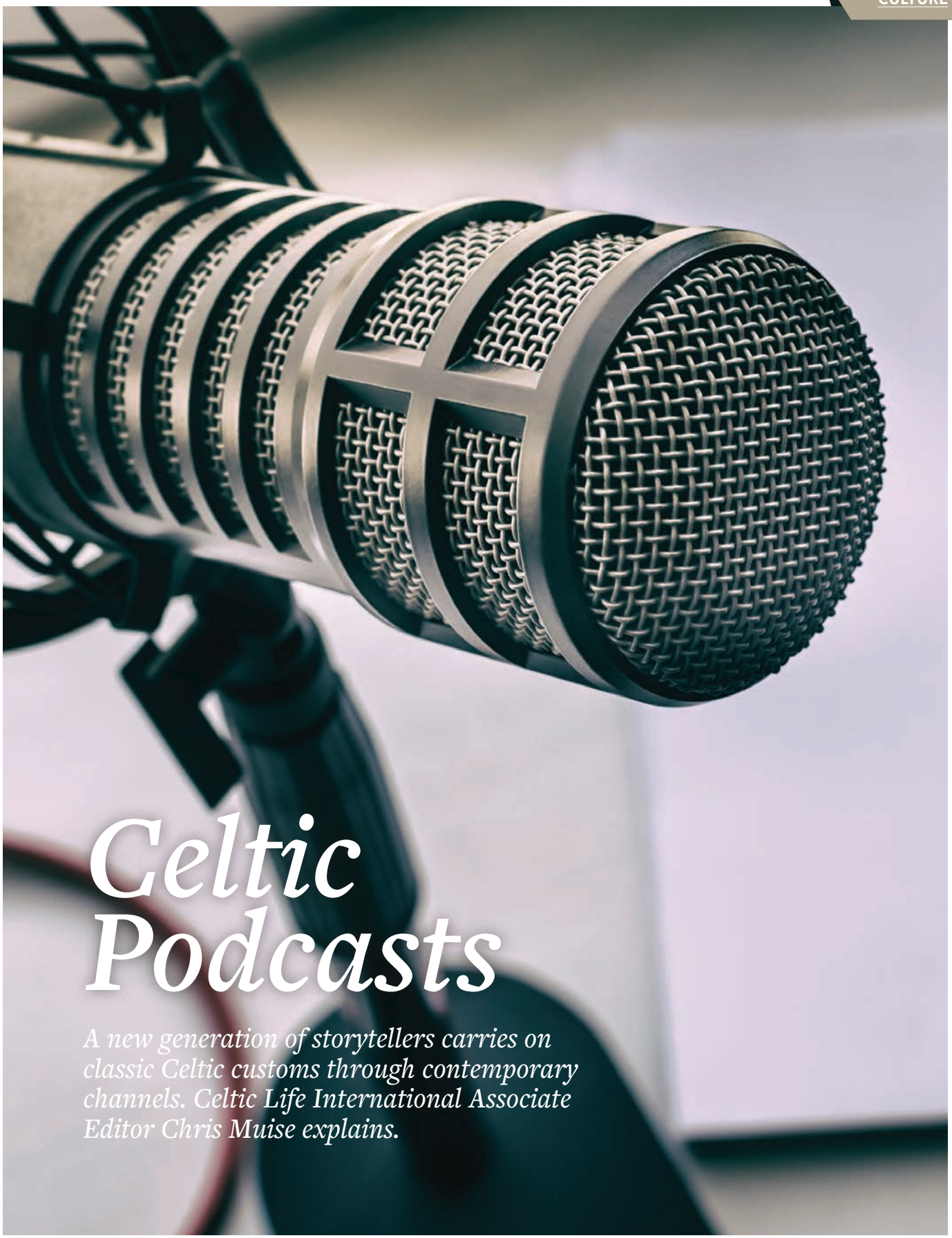

Celtic Podcasts

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

Marc Gunn

Eoin Ó Conchúir

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sian Powell

Gareth Olver

tongue, and as a way to keep morale high.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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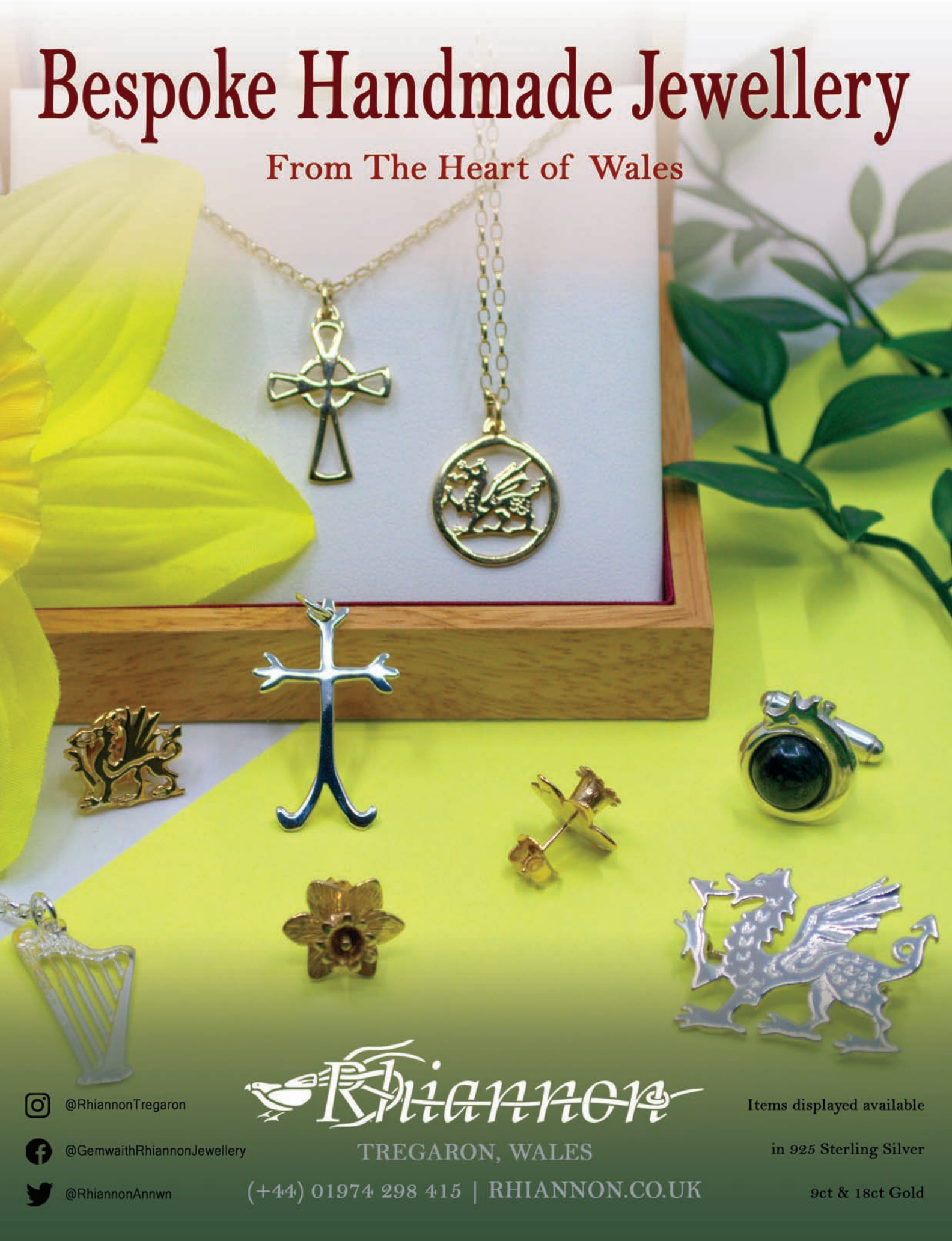

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Witches of Scotland

Two women seek long-overdue justice in Scotland. Celtic Life International Managing Editor Rebecca Dingwell gives us the details.

From 1563 until 1753, the Witchcraft Act was part of Scottish law, making "witchcraft" a capital crime. During this time, an estimated 3,837 people - mainly women - were accused of the practice in Scotland. Many of the accused were tortured and subsequently executed. While the Witchcraft Act has been history for centuries, there has been no pardon or apology to those who suffered because of the law. Claire Mitchell and Zoe Venditozzi hope to change that with their Witches of Scotland campaign.

Mitchell is a criminal lawyer by trade. She first became interested in the witch trials while researching George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh (a.k.a "Bloody Mackenzie"). The Scottish barrister was known for his brutal prosecution of the Presbyterian Covenanters.

While reading about a 2004 crime - two teenage boys were found guilty of "violating of the sepulchre" after taking Mackenzie's skull from his grave in Greyfriars Kirkyard (they were the first people to be charged with such a crime in more than a century) - and studying the history of Mackenzie in the Faculty of Advocates library, Mitchell found an old biographical account of Mackenzie's life. The work noted that Mackenzie had also been involved in the witch trials, and he doubted many witchcraft accusations. In fact, he generally attributed confessions to torture. The book also "talked about the torture of a poor woman who was so demented with her accuser saying she was a witch, she asked them, 'Can you be a witch and not know it?'" recalls Mitchell. She sympathized with this bewildered woman who had no one to defend her.

> *"That really affected me. I have that really strong, instinctive sense of wanting to make things just and things right. And that story really stuck with me."*

So began Mitchell's research on the witch trials. Later, upon reading Where are the Women?: A Guide to an Imagined Scotland by Sara Sheridan, Mitchell realized just how much historical women have been sidelined

in public spaces. During a walk in Princes Street Gardens, it struck her even harder. "I thought, 'there's no evidence of women here' - there are no statues to women, their names aren't on any plaques. And there are a lot of plaques and statues in Princes Street Gardens."

There are even statues of a bear and of a dog. "Not only isn't there anything that records good things about women, but there isn't anything in Scotland that records the fact that thousands of women suffered a terrible miscarriage of justice."

This realization sparked anger and urgency. "I just stomped home and wrote the Witches of Scotland manifesto," says Mitchell.

In addition to a pardon and apology, the campaign is also pushing for a national memorial dedicated to those accused and convicted of witchcraft. This memorial would differ from existing monuments such as the Witches' Well in Edinburgh, which marks a site where many accused witches were murdered. The plaque (mounted above the well in 1912) reads, in part, "some used their exceptional knowledge for evil purposes while others were misunderstood and wished their kind nothing but good." There is no admission of wrongdoing in the inscription, and it still assumes that those killed were, in fact, witches. "It doesn't even acknowledge there was a miscarriage of justice," notes Mitchell.

As luck would have it, Mitchell met author Zoe Venditozzi through mutual friends. The two bonded over an interest in true crime stories and even floated the idea of a true crime podcast, but Mitchell decided to prioritize the Witches campaign first. So, Venditozzi got on board and the pair started the Witches of Scotland podcast. In the beginning, the pair thought they might end up with a few episodes, but now there are dozens of available installments. The show discusses a variety of issues related to the witch hunts in Europe and beyond. For example, Mitchell and Venditozzi spoke to archaeologist Douglas Speirs about Lilias Adie: Scotland's most well-known accused witch. "Lilias is famous because she's the only one where you can actually go and see her grave," notes Mitchell.

Adie died in prison in 1704 and was buried in Torryburn. The burial site was robbed in 1852 and her remains are now considered missing. In September 2019, a search was launched so Adie can properly be put to rest. The following year, three plaques were placed on the Fife Coastal Path to commemorate the accused women of Culross, Torryburn and Valleyfield.

Mitchell and Venditozzi aren't the only ones passionate about getting justice for accused witches. Mitchell was surprised to find how many other people are taking it upon themselves to research. Some are doing so independently on their own time. Others, like researchers at Edinburgh Napier University, have undertaken formal projects. Dr. Nicola Ring, a nurse and associate professor at the university, is leading a study which highlights the ways in which nurses and midwives were branded as witches and persecuted. Ring and her team are supporters of the Witches of Scotland campaign.

> *"I didn't expect the number of people who are interested in the witch hunts and have been pursuing their own inquiries," says Mitchell.*

"Also, the number of people who, with their own money, put up markers to where women were killed as witches."

Since the Witches of Scotland campaign launched, Mitchell and Venditozzi have been contacted by people living in places where "witchcraft is still used as a method of persecution against vulnerable groups," says Mitchell. Leo Igwe was one of those people.

Igwe is a Nigerian human rights advocate who founded Advocacy for Alleged Witches (AfAW). "We need to check the activities of our so-called pastors and other self-styled men and women of God who use the Bible

or Holy books to perpetrate and justify atrocious acts and human right abuses," he wrote in 2008. In particular, he has spoken out against Helen Ukpabio: founder of the Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries in Cross River State, Nigeria.

On the podcast, Igwe noted that men, women and children all face accusations of witchcraft, but it's often easier for accusers to target women and children. "Women occupy a weaker social position, and they are seen as those who the label of witchcraft could easily be placed on, with little or no consequences," he explained. "The children that are targeted are sometimes children from dysfunctional homes."

Igwe "thought it was really important that we were doing something like this, because it helps him say, 'look, here is another country telling you that this is rubbish,'" says Mitchell.

Mitchell and Venditozzi have recently developed yet another goal: helping to create a Museum of the Witch Hunts in Scotland. "People really want to know about their own history," says Mitchell. She points out that places such as the United States and Iceland both have museums on the topic, and those countries had relatively few people die as a result of the witch hunts. "We think a good way to memorialize the women would be to have a museum of witch hunts. We are adding to our list of what we want to do, and that's the most recent - and certainly one that's caught the public imagination."

Mitchell also notes that this is more than educating about the past. It could impact the future, as well.

> *"If we think something like this can't happen again, then we don't know history. These things do repeat if we don't address them."*

And she is right. "Satanic panics" - and the fears that spawned them - are part of humanity's more recent history as well as our present. False confessions are also a prevalent issue. "There have been so many miscarriages of justice throughout the centuries right up to now, because people are convicted on false confessions," muses Mitchell. "In terms of criminal justice, it has a very modern resonance."

Although the Scottish Government has not committed to any subsequent action, it did respond to Mitchell and Venditozzi's lodged petition in March. In part, the statement read, "The Scottish Government acknowledges that those accused and convicted of the offence of witchcraft were women who faced discrimination and had very little protection in law from allegations of criminality including witchcraft."

As far as supporters of the Witches of Scotland are concerned, their advocacy for those women will no doubt continue.

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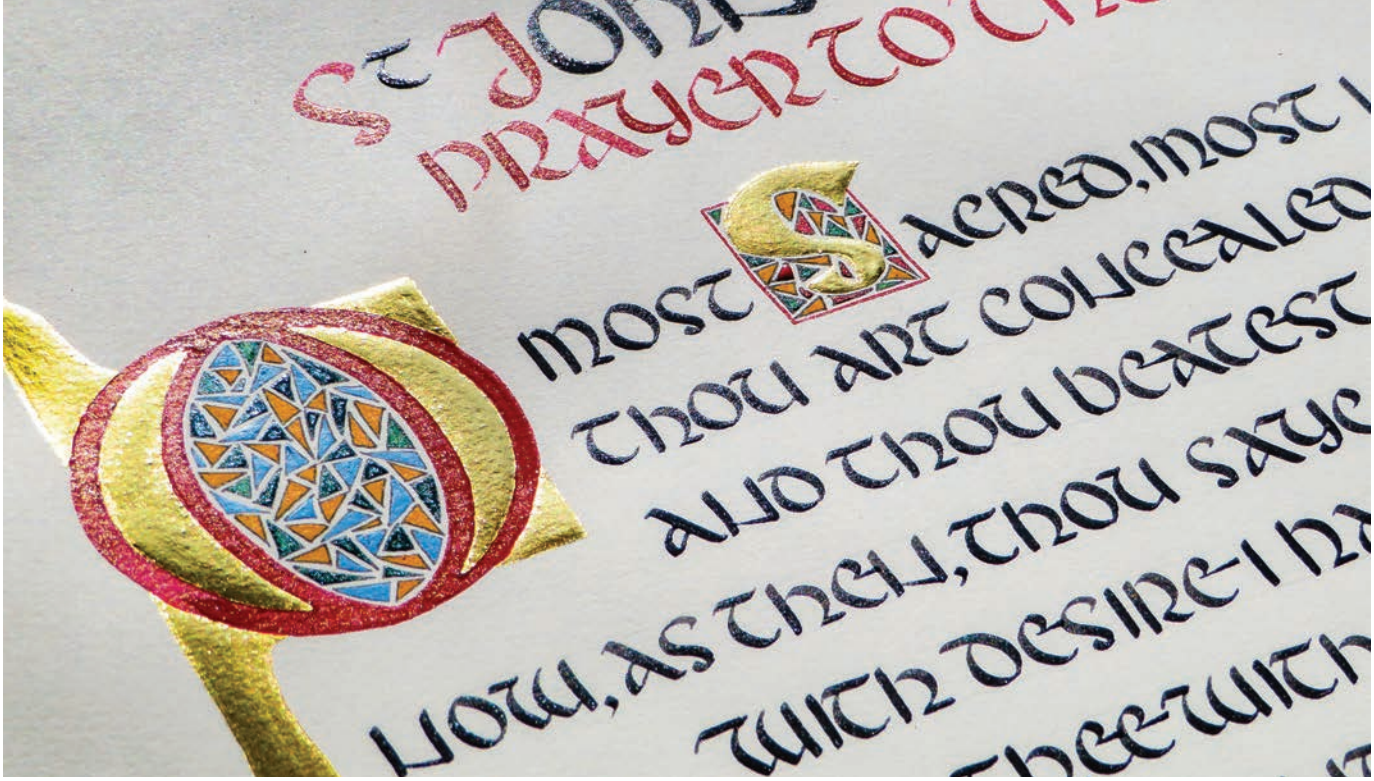
Duckett Calligraphy

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



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

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

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

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

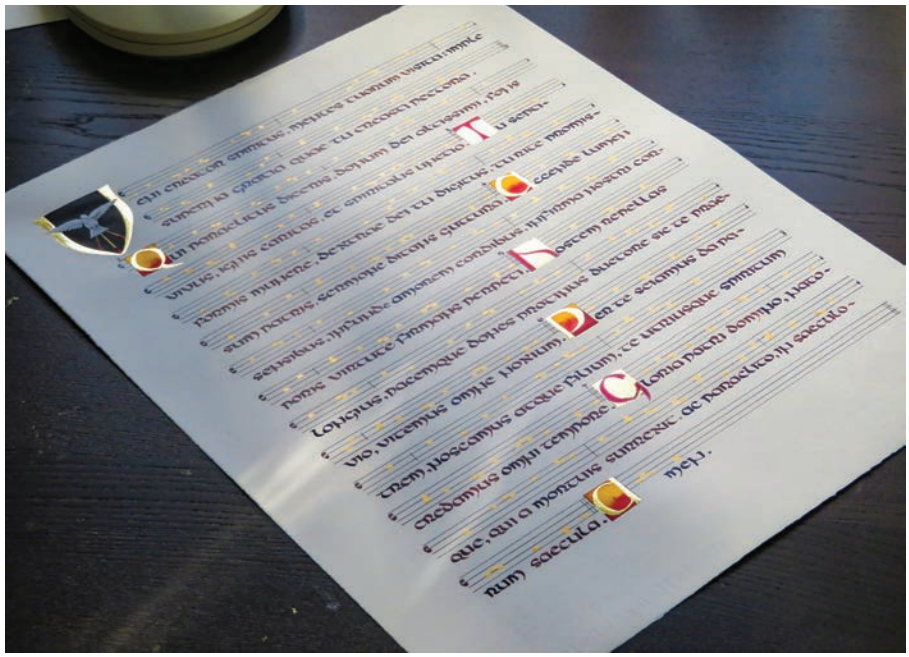
"For a young boy it was a fascinating, almost mystical place: the huge spaces, towering arches, stained glass windows, the smell of burning incense, flowing robes, rich vibrant colours, the sound of thunderous organ music echoing off the stonework and big, leather-bound books with ornate lettering."

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

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

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

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



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

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

All photos by Ste Duckett

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IAIN of New Scotland

with a foreword by Diana Gabaldon, author of *Outlander*

Thirteen-year-old Iain is homesick for the Highlands of Scotland. It's September 1773, and he has just arrived in Nova Scotia with his parents and little sister after the long, disastrous, Atlantic voyage of the ship *Hector*. They wanted a new life in New Scotland, but the land agent lied to them! With no money, no food, no shelter, and winter fast approaching, how will they survive? Author Margaret MacKay of Pictou County, Nova Scotia draws on the experiences of her ancestors to weave this tale of Highlanders in a new land. Perfect for Grades 4 and up, and historical fiction fans of all ages.

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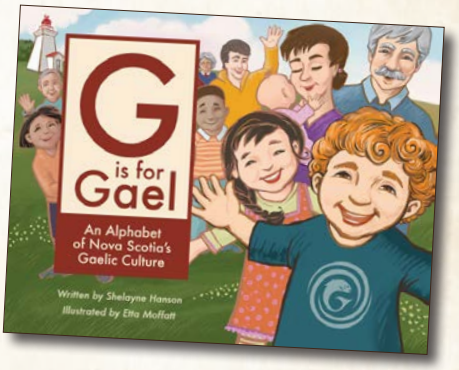

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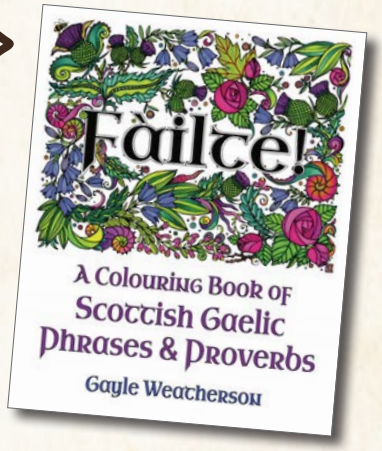

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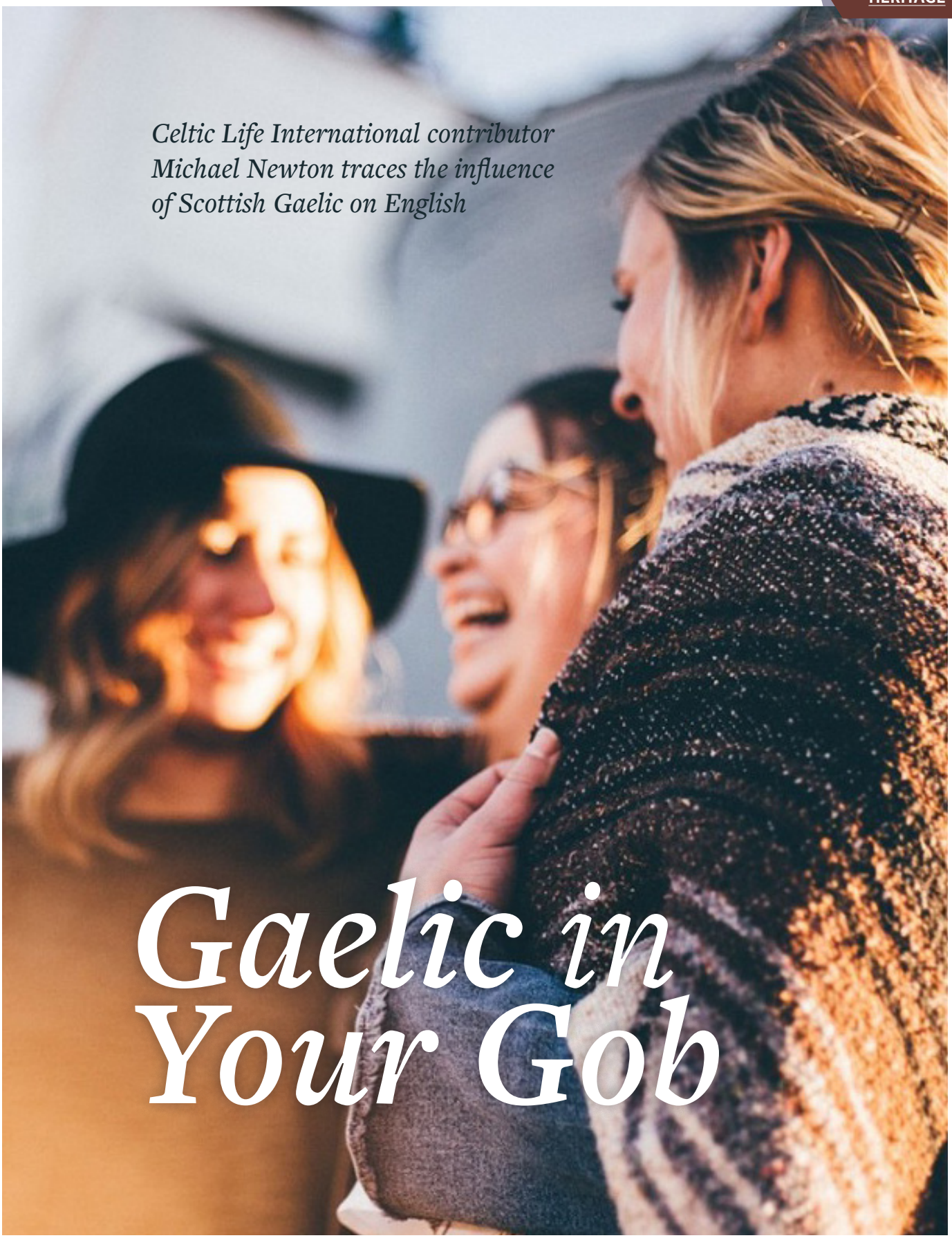


Celtic Life International contributor Michael Newton traces the influence of Scottish Gaelic on English

Gaelic in Your Gob

Language is a funny thing. We all acquire language as children, usually without thinking much about it. Speaking seems as natural as breathing or thinking. And yet language carries with it culture, history, and identity in ways that are so subtle and complex that it occupies the entire careers of trained experts.

Scottish Gaelic - the language of the founders of Scotland and the native language of the Scottish Highlands - has endured almost a thousand years of persecution and neglect. And yet it survives, even if just by a thread. Some very positive developments to benefit the language and its speakers have emerged just in the last few years.

Michael Newton

The DuoLingo language learning app started offering Scottish Gaelic in the Autumn of 2019 and has already drawn over 500,000 people to it, surpassing anyone's wildest expectations. While not all those users are going to become fluent speakers, it has given new opportunities to people to learn about Scottish Gaelic who might not have had the chance otherwise - and to have fun doing so in the process.

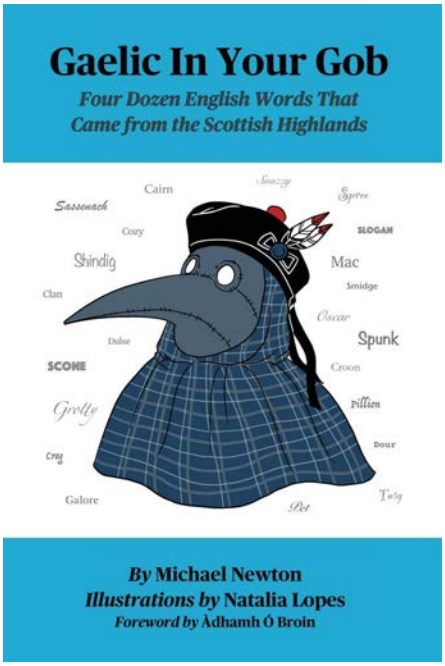
Anglophones learning Gaelic will encounter many words that seem familiar, so it is not surprising that one of the most common questions to arise is: What words in English originally came from Gaelic? Answering this question accurately is more complicated than it might seem. For one, both Gaelic and English are ultimately descended from an ancestral language called "Proto-Indo-European," that existed sometime between 4500 BC and 2500 BC, and there are still words bearing the marks of this common origin. On top of that, both Gaelic and English borrowed words from Latin, French and Norse in the Middle Ages. And then there are words whose similarity is due to pure coincidence.

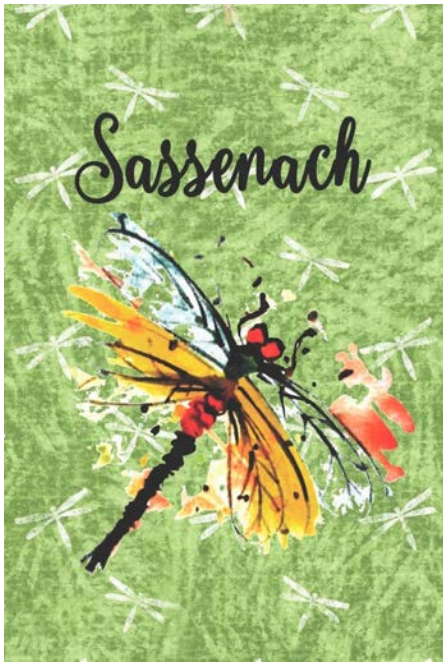
The study of Celtic languages has long been neglected and under-supported.

However, those efforts too have received boosts lately that aid in understanding how they have evolved over time and interacted with other languages, including the various forms of English of neighbouring communities, such as Lowland Scots. The results provide unique windows into the histories of these societies.

I have just finished a book called Gaelic In Your Gob which identifies 48 common words in "mainstream English" that were borrowed from Scottish Gaelic, often via Lowland Scots but sometimes directly into the English of England and, in a few cases, within a North American setting. I have written a short essay about each word, outlining the evidence for the appearance of the word in English and how it came to be borrowed, along with fascinating and amusing tidbits that illuminated the lives and minds of people in the past. I will offer a couple of simple examples.

I will start with the word "gob" itself that appears in the title of the book. This is a slang term referring to the mouth, usually with mocking, sarcastic, or humorous overtones. It has been used in modern British idioms such as "gob-smacked" (to be astonished), "gobstopper" (hard candy) and "gobshite" (a loud-mouthed or indiscreet person).





Although it is commonly assumed that "gob" is a late borrowing from Irish, it has actually been in use in Lowland Scots since at least the sixteenth century. The word entered Northern English dialects by the late seventeenth century and the street-slang of London by the mid-nineteenth century. The Lowland Scots word was borrowed from the Scottish Gaelic gob, which refers primarily to the beak of a bird. This progression from Scottish Gaelic to Lowland Scots and then to other varieties of English is a common pattern in the histories of many words that originated in Gaelic.

The word gob is used for both bird beaks and the human mouth in Gaelic, with overtones of mockery or sarcasm. A common Gaelic admonition used by adults to silence a child is Dùin do ghob! "Shut your beak!"

Gob is used metaphorically in Gaelic for things that resemble beaks and mouths. Gob-dubhain is the end of a fishing hook and gob-claidheimh is the point of a sword. Gob is also used of the end-point of landscape features and can be found in such Scottish place names as Gob na h-Éist (Nest Point) on the Isle of Skye and Gob na Cananaich (Chanonry Point) on the Black Isle between Fortrose and Rosemarkie.

Gob appears in Gaelic adages that comment on human failings and flaws. All talk and no action? In Gaelic, that's Gob mór, ugh beag "Big mouth, little egg."

Another Gaelic borrowing worth examining is "cairn," especially as the cairn has become a common form of memorializing Highland emigrants and their legacy in many parts of the world.

A "cairn" is a pile of stones, sometimes arranged neatly to form a stable structure or sometimes to create the impression of a megalithic ruin. Cairns are generally understood to commemorate the ancestral dead in one way or another. The Gaelic term carn was borrowed into Lowland Scots by the sixteenth century - or was at least familiar to Scots speakers. As you might expect, the word "cairn" also appears in the works of Robert Burns and Walter Scott as well around the turn of the nineteenth century.

One of the most iconic cairns in the Highlands was built in 1881 in the shape of a tower twenty feet high at Culloden, commemorating the battle fought there in April of 1746. A replica of this cairn was built in Knoydart, Nova Scotia, in 1938, near the graves of three soldiers who had fought at the Battle of Culloden and emigrated later to Canada.

The original Gaelic word, carn, is used in hundreds of place names across Scotland. The most mammoth instance is the Cairngorms mountain range in the Eastern Highlands - although this name was not actually created by Gaelic speakers or natives of the region. It seems to have been invented by Colonel Thomas Thornton, an Englishman who toured the area and published memoirs of his tour in 1804. The native name for the mountain range is Am Monadh Ruadh (The Red Mountain). Although monadh is a commonplace word in modern Scottish Gaelic, it was a medieval borrowing from Pictish.

The earliest surviving explanation of the significance of the carn is from an Old Gaelic tale composed in the eighth or ninth century called Togail bruidne Dá Derga "The destruction of Dá Derga's hostel." The narrator of the story digresses for a moment to describe these monuments:

"For two causes they built their cairns: first, since this was a custom in marauding; and, secondly, that they might find out their losses at the Hostel. Every one that would come safe from it would take his stone from the cairn: thus, the stones of those that were slain would be left, and by that they would know their losses."

In other words, before a battle, every warrior would place a stone in the heap. If they returned from the battle alive, they would remove a stone from the pile. The body count thus corresponded to the number of stones left in the cairn; a tall cairn signifies a tremendous loss of life.

The cairn offers a metaphor for the linguistic debris embedded in English after centuries of conflict with the Gaelic world. There is evidence galore about the history of Gaelic and English, and the communities that spoke these tongues, to be found in the rubble, even if it takes a great deal of time and care to sift through it. Although it would be misguided to overestimate Gaelic's influence on English or even feel the need to validate the status of Gaelic through that influence, there is still an interesting and important story to tell through the history of these words. Gaelic In Your Gob is my effort to tell that tale in a fun and engaging way.

Dr Michael Newton has a Ph.D. in Celtic Studies from the University of Edinburgh and teaches courses online about Scottish Highland heritage via https://hiddenglen.org

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Clanlands!

Two men crossing a country by boat, bike, motorcycle, and camper van - what could possibly go wrong?
Story by Stephen Patrick Clare

The last time that Celtic Life International spoke with Graham McTavish (February 2015) he had just jumped into a cab in Philadelphia on a frigid winter morning.

"Ah yes, I remember," says the ruggedly handsome Scottish thespian. "We were filming Creed (part of the ageless Rocky Balboa saga), and it was bitterly cold as I recall."

I remind him that he is only one of two actors - the other being Sylvester Stallone - who has appeared in both the Rocky and Rambo film franchises.

"Yes, yes," he chuckles. "I suppose that is one of my claims to fame. I truly enjoyed working with Sly, and I still speak with him on occasion. He is a great guy and a highly underrated talent, and we have had a wonderful time working together. Perhaps the only unpleasantry was having to deal with the weather. I have never been good with the cold, and I am still not I'm afraid."

Speaking via Zoom from his (warm) hotel room in London - where he has been working on location for the past while - McTavish is relaxed, at peace with himself and his profession, even during the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"It has certainly been a difficult time for most people; locking down at home, the restrictions on travel, and with so many challenges to the economy. I consider myself quite fortunate to have been able to continue working through all of this. In fact, I have never been busier."

Having just celebrated his 60th birthday, McTavish is indeed enjoying a very productive mid-life; along with a variety of roles in London and elsewhere, the Glasgow native is excited for a possible return for the 6th season of the smash STARZ television series Outlander. In addition, he and his Outlander co-star Sam Heughan have just released their first book, Clanlands, a recounting of the dynamic duo's madcap adventures criss-crossing their native homeland.

"I think what amazed me the most, aside from actually writing a book, was seeing how very little I knew of my own country."

McTavish can be forgiven his unfamiliarity with Scotland. Although born and bred in Glasgow, he has resided in a number of other locales over the years, including England, the USA, Canada, and New Zealand, where he currently resides full-time when he is not away on location.

However, it was in Scotland where he first cut his teeth as an actor - writing and performing skits and sketches in school. Later, after studying English literature at Queen Mary University in London, he picked up a number of roles in regional theatrical productions. Since then, he has savoured success with stints on television, in cinema, doing voice-over work for animated films and video games, and more.

"Really, the only thing that I have never done is radio, which is rather odd as so many people have told me that I have a good voice for radio. I suppose that is their roundabout way of implying that I have a good face for radio also."

All joking aside, McTavish inched closer to the old-school, on-air medium when he and Heughan began discussing Clanlands.

"The original idea was simply to produce a regular podcast with the aim of exploring the history, culture and people of Scotland. However, and as so often happens with Sam, a few drinks later and we are planning a book and a full-on television series. Funny how these big, outlandish ideas for world domination always seem to occur when he

and I are together and there is a bottle or two involved. Perhaps I should have known better - right from the get-go, the possibility of disaster, of the whole project going horribly wrong, was quite high. Nonetheless, we prevailed."

Though daunting at times, piecing together the book - which is subtitled Whisky, Warfare, and a Scottish Adventure Like No Other - came fairly easily to the pair.

"There was no big secret to it really," muses McTavish. "Each day, I would make some time to get my bits down on paper, and Sam would do the same. Often, I would write something, send it along to him, and he would send his parts back to me fairly quickly. It was a lot like having this dialogue, this conversation, going back and forth between us. We got into a nice routine with it, and then one day it was done - almost out of nowhere."

Editing the tome was another matter altogether.

"The real challenge came with figuring out which parts we wanted to keep and which to discard."

"There were so many great stories in there that we wanted to tell, and there simply was not enough room to fit it all in. If we had kept everything then the book would have been thousands of pages. And, even after we had brought the book down to what we thought was proper scale, the publisher's editing team had a go at it and reduced it even more."

Still, both he and Heughan were satisfied with the final draft.

"Oh yes, we were quite pleased with the end result. Thankfully, the last revisions were placed in the hands of professionals and they did their due diligence to make some sense out of what we were trying to say. Without them the book may have come across as incomprehensible; the drunken ramblings of two University frat boys on a long-distance road trip - sort of a Rick Steeves meets Jack Kerouac kind of thing."

Since its release in November, Clanlands has received both critical and popular acclaim, topping bestseller charts around the world.

"The response has been a bit surprising to be honest," shares McTavish. "Although, given how popular Outlander has been, I suppose it should come as no surprise at all really. Perhaps the most rewarding part of it all, however, has been reading the online reviews from readers. They have been most generous and favourable, and many offer insights into the book that neither Sam nor I had considered."

Outlander author Diana Gabaldon provided the book's forward.

"Diana is a lovely, lovely woman and she was so kind to have offered that. Having the great fortune to have worked closely with her over the last few years I am always impressed with, and inspired by, her tremendous work ethic. She is so energetic and enthusiastic about everything she does. It really is amazing when I consider how long it took Sam and I to write one book, and how much effort went into it, knowing that she has produced so many of these epic narratives."

Some of the material that did not make Clanlands final format does appear in the upcoming STARZ companion television series Men in Kilts, slated for world-wide release in early 2021.

"Well, as the saying goes, that was an entirely whole other ball of wax," laughs McTavish, adding that seeing the pair's (mis) adventures on film helped to jog his memory.

"Let's just say that we may have enjoyed a wee dram or two here and there."

"Again, we were thrilled with the way it worked out. I feel that it successfully captured and conveyed the story, and the stories, that we wanted and needed to tell; about the country we love, and the wonderful people we met. The whole thing was quite an experience, and perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime event for both of us."

The biggest challenge, he notes, was getting "out of the way."

"It would have been all-too-easy to make the series all about Sam and I - our relationship, our frat-boy shenanigans, and so forth. That, to me, is a secondary story - a side story if you will. Our focus was primarily to better understand where we came from as a people, where we are today, and where we are going."

Ultimately, that past, present and future would be uncovered in the lives of everyday people that they encountered along the way.

"Everyone has a story to tell, and so very many of them were incredibly fascinating and enlightening. And to think that all of these conversations began with a single question - 'tell us about yourself.' I recall filming one episode where we sat down with a gentleman named Richard from the Scotch

Malt Whisky Society. Along from getting schooled on our national beverage, Sam and I were rather taken aback, in a good way, by the man himself. And I think that is what the audience will connect with the most with both Clanlands and Men in Kilts - other people; specifically, their experiences, their thoughts and feelings, their perspectives, and their opinions. Really, at day's end, in any aspect of the arts, we are all looking for that connection, that conversation, that relationship to - and with - one another."

McTavish's own bond with Heughan - his long-time "partner in crime" - was illuminated as well.

"When you spend that much time in close quarters with someone you get to know them pretty well - perhaps even more than you wished to know."

Traveling by a myriad of modes, including tandem bike, boat, motorcycle (with sidecar!) and camper van, provided the pair with ample opportunity to grow their friendship.

"The camper van was a little cramped at times - both Sam and I are over 6', so leg room was at a premium. And there were occasions when we got on each other's nerves for sure, but mostly we got on quite well. However, as with anytime you put two boys together for any length of time, things could get a little, er...odorous?

"One thing that I didn't know about Sam was that he only earned his driving license at the age of 30. So, knowing that he only had ten years of road experience under his belt was a little unnerving at first - not that I let that on at the time - but obviously, as I am here talking with you now, I somehow survived."

McTavish is confident that audiences will enjoy the duo's on-camera dynamic.

"I hope we don't burst anyone's bubble," he smiles. "And by that, I mean that people are so used to seeing us in our roles on Outlander - in the kilts, with the armour, in a different time and setting - that they may get put off completely when they realize that we are your common, run-of-the-mill, everyday guys - or worse; that we are really nothing more than two overgrown boys on some sort of ridiculous drunken escapade."

More poignantly, he is hopeful that the book and series may encourage and entice more people to visit his home country.

"Scotland has so much going for at right now. Of course, there is our history and our landscape and our people, but we also have tremendous cuisine and a really vibrant arts scene. Every time that one of our people takes center stage - perhaps a chef or a musician or an actor - audiences see for themselves what this country can bring to the table."

That table is a little less full these days, given the recent passing of the legendary Sir Sean Connery.

"Ah, Sean," sighs McTavish. "What a huge loss for us here at home and for the world. A brilliant man who left his mark on an entire world of film lovers. He really was, and will forever remain, a generational icon whose impact is simply beyond words. All of us are still reeling from the news, and I have no doubt that his death will be felt for many years to come. He did more for this country than most people will ever realize - his political stance, his philanthropic efforts with so many non-profit organizations, and his generosity of time supporting creative cultural endeavours. Actors like Sam and I would have never had the opportunity to enjoy the kinds of careers that we do today without him."

Those shoes, he adds, will forever be too big to fill.

"As Sean proved, an actor's goal is not only to be successful in one's vocation but to try and have some significance as well."

"Both Sam and I - and I believe this to be true of many of us who have been involved with Outlander and other projects - would like to share our experiences with younger people looking for a career in the performing arts, and support them in whatever way possible. If anything, maybe we can tell them what not to do.

"My advice for those people would be quite simple, actually," he continues. "Do what you love and love what you do and never give up. When you think about it, that is good advice for anything in life, really."

McTavish, it appears, has taken his own counsel.

"Like any career, acting has its ups and downs and there are some days when it can feel like work and it isn't as enjoyable and then there are the other days that leave you smiling and satisfied. Thankfully, for me, those are the majority. So, I have no complaints, really, and I am grateful each and every day to be in a position to pursue my passion."

As such, he is enthusiastic about the long-awaited sixth season of Outlander.

"As you can imagine, a few things are still up in the air given the current situation with COVID-19, but my understanding is that the plan is to put it out into the world sooner than later. I feel like we still have a lot to offer our viewers - that we have yet to reach our creative peak yand that there remains a huge amount of storyline left to tell. And I can say the same for Clanlands and Men in Kilts - really, we have only just started to scratch the surface of Scotland with these. Certainly, if it promises to be as much fun as the first one, then there could be sequels."

For the time being, however, he is content to stay safe and warm.

"I have a trip to Scotland planned shortly, and after that I will be heading home to New Zealand for a while to spend time with my family and ride out the pandemic. While Scotland will always be my homeland, the weather is significantly better in the southern hemisphere."

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Being Buster Brady

Mrs. Brown's Boys star Danny O'Carroll opens up about his home life, his desire to return to work, being Buster Brady, and the importance of keeping a sense of humour. Story by Stephen Patrick Clare.

Even with so much time and space on his hands, 38-year-old Irish actor and producer Danny O'Carroll is keeping busy on the home front. Recently we spoke with the star of Mrs. Brown's Boys from his home in northwest Ireland.

You are in Donegal, correct?

Yes, I am. I was born in Dublin, but I bought a home here in Donegal when I was 19, so I have been in the area half of my life. We moved down the road a while back to be closer to my wife Amanda's parents, and we are one big happy family these days. And it is a great place to raise our two kids (Jamie and Blake) - the community is very safe, and everyone is really friendly and there are lots of opportunities for them to keep busy with outdoor activities. It is a very beautiful part of the world, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What has life been like for you during lock down?

I suppose that it hasn't been that different for us than it has been for anyone else. Everything just came to a full stop, and we really haven't gone anywhere. That has been both a blessing and a curse. On the plus side, I have enjoyed just being at home with my wife and my kids - playing games, going for walks, cooking, and having these big, sit-down meals together each day. On the other hand, I do miss travelling and performing in other parts of the world. Mostly, though, I miss my dad (show founder Brendan O'Carroll - a.k.a Mrs. Brown). He has been in Florida during all of this, so at least he has had good weather, but I would give anything to visit with him - just to see him in person and give him a big hug and know that he is healthy and happy.

What do you miss most about touring the show?

It's funny, y'know - at first, when COVID-19 hit and we were just forced to close-up shop, I was ready for a break. Between the series, the movie, the live show, and other work-related commitments, it has been pretty much non-stop for all of us for years. And that catches up with you over time. The little holidays here and there help, but you never really get the time and space to just be and breathe for very long. So, the first six months were like 'oh, this is great, all this time and space'. And then, like everyone else, I started getting a little restless, wondering 'geez, when is this going to end'? I kept busy, but more and more that little voice in my head was like 'I can't wait to get back to doing what I love'. Along with the travel and the performances, I miss the audiences and meeting people. I love it when we are performing somewhere, and some Irish ex-pat stops in to say hello and immediately we are like long-lost best friends. Mostly, though,
I miss just being with my family on the road and having those day-to-day adventures and experiences with them.

Being so close-knit on the road must be challenging at times?

You would think so, right? Many people can handle their families for a few days on holiday or at Christmas time, and then the baggage comes out and issues and conflict arise. But it is not like that at all with us. We rarely have difficulties, if ever. We all get along quite brilliantly on set and on tour. I am not sure if it is supposed to be that way, but it is with us.

Why is that?

Well, I believe it is because we all have a lot of love and respect for one another, both as people and as performers. We bring out the best in one another and working on something like Mrs. Brown's Boys - which has become so massive around the world – also brings out the best in us. It has given all of us something much bigger than our own individual selves to be a part of. And I don't mean only the cast, but all of the crew and the support also. What we do is very much a team effort, and it has been like that from the very start.

How much of that is because of your dad?

Oh, he is almost entirely to blame! Seriously, though, he is the glue that keeps it all together - it is his vision, his mission, his project. We all contribute creatively in our own way, for sure, but he is the one who puts all of the pieces together into a big picture. And he is always so good with everyone - patient, supportive, understanding...

And funny...

Oh, you don't know the half of it. I mean, audiences see the 30-minute show on TV or the couple of hours on stage during the live

performances, but that is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg - there are many, many hilarious moments off-stage as well. Some of those moments eventually find their way into a script, or sometimes they even find their way onto the stage that same day - especially some of the inside jokes between the cast members. Sometimes the unscripted stuff is the funniest, but sometimes it just bombs altogether. Either way, I love those moments the most.

Some of those impromptu gags can be...dangerous.

Again, you don't know the half of it. With dad, you always have to be on, to be ready, because you just never know when he is going to break script. He does that all of the time on the TV series - somebody will blow a line or just start giggling and he will just run with it, take it in an entirely different direction altogether, and it usually works out even better than what the scene had originally called for. With the live show it is always a risk, as there is simply no turning back once it starts. There are no retakes. That's what is so great about it for us, as performers, because it keeps us on our toes creatively and no two shows are ever the same. And when it works, it takes the experience to new and hilarious places for the cast, the crew, and the audiences. However, it doesn't always go well, and those are the moments when you are just left standing there on stage, cringing to the sound of crickets.

How hard is it to stop being Buster Brady once you've left the set or stage?

It isn't hard at all. Over time I have learned to just leave it at the door at the end of the day. It was maybe a bit more difficult when we first started the series because I was younger,

and I hadn't really fully established my own identity yet. But being married and having kids has really settled me. My family keeps me grounded and rooted in reality and they remind me every day what is truly important in life. I am happiest being a husband and a dad and I think that is really what I was born to do more than anything.

How much is Danny O'Carroll like Buster Brady?

Oh, not at all really. I mean, it is inevitable that you bring bits of yourself to the role each day - maybe little pieces of your own persona that peek through now and again - but I am not nearly as funny as Buster. Now, having said that, whenever Paddy (Houlihan, who plays Dermot on the show) and I get together it is always a laugh. We have been best friends since we were sperm, and when we connect in person, on the phone, or online, there is a good chance that there will be a giggle or two or a dozen to be had. So that comedic chemistry that audiences see on the screen or on the stage is pretty much what we are like with one another in real life.

What's next on your agenda?

Well, that's the big question, right? Who knows how long this pandemic thing is going to keep us locked down - all we can do is be as prepared as possible when the restrictions are lifted to start moving forward again. I am keeping quite busy though, writing, exercising, being involved in raising funds and awareness for a variety of charitable organizations, and, of course, taking care of my wife and my kids. Or maybe they are taking care of me. I mean, we need to maintain sone sense of normalcy through all of this, because at some point, hopefully, things will go back to the way they were. And I also think it is important to keep a sense of humour during these times. Comedy is more essential than ever.

www.mrsbrownsboys.com

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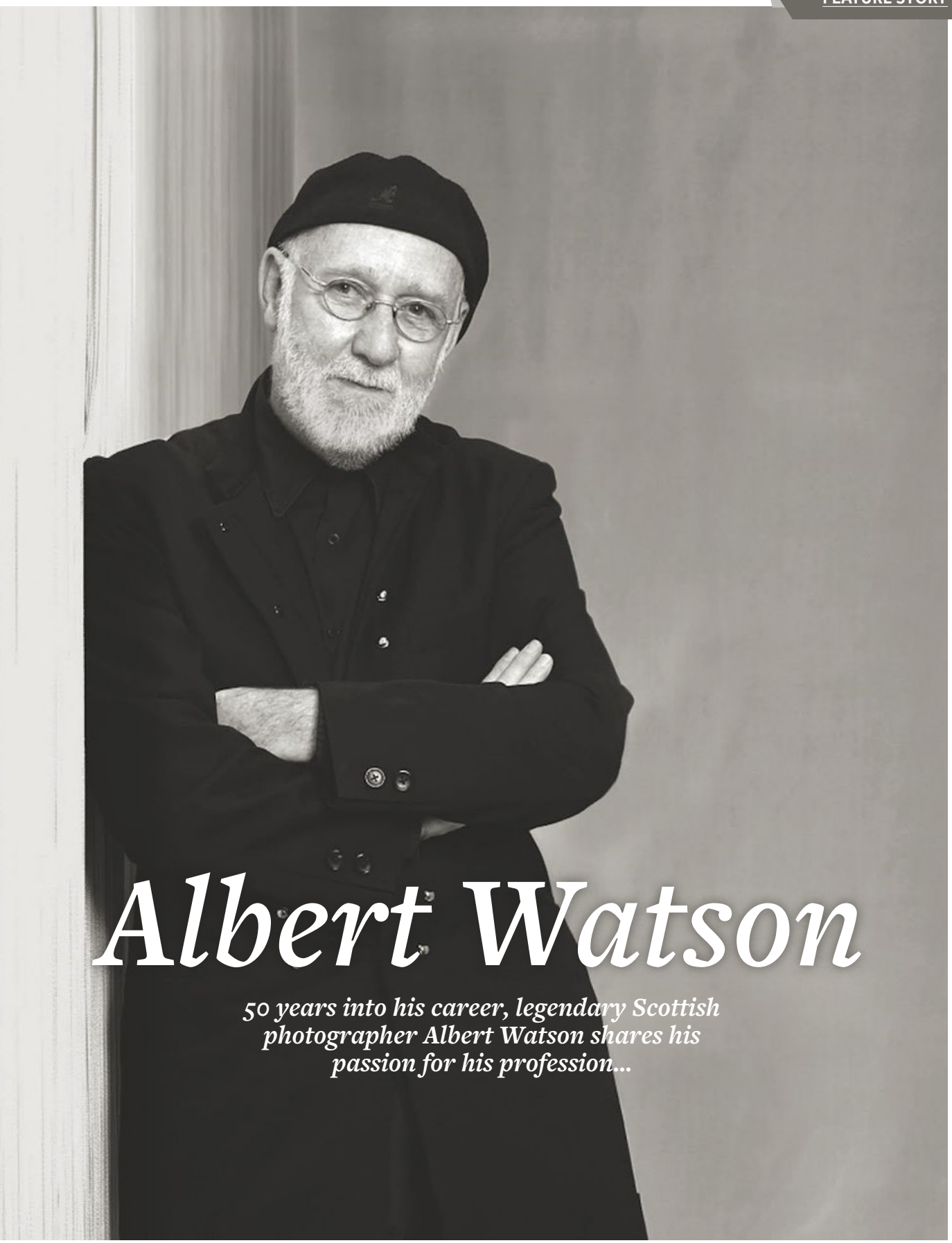
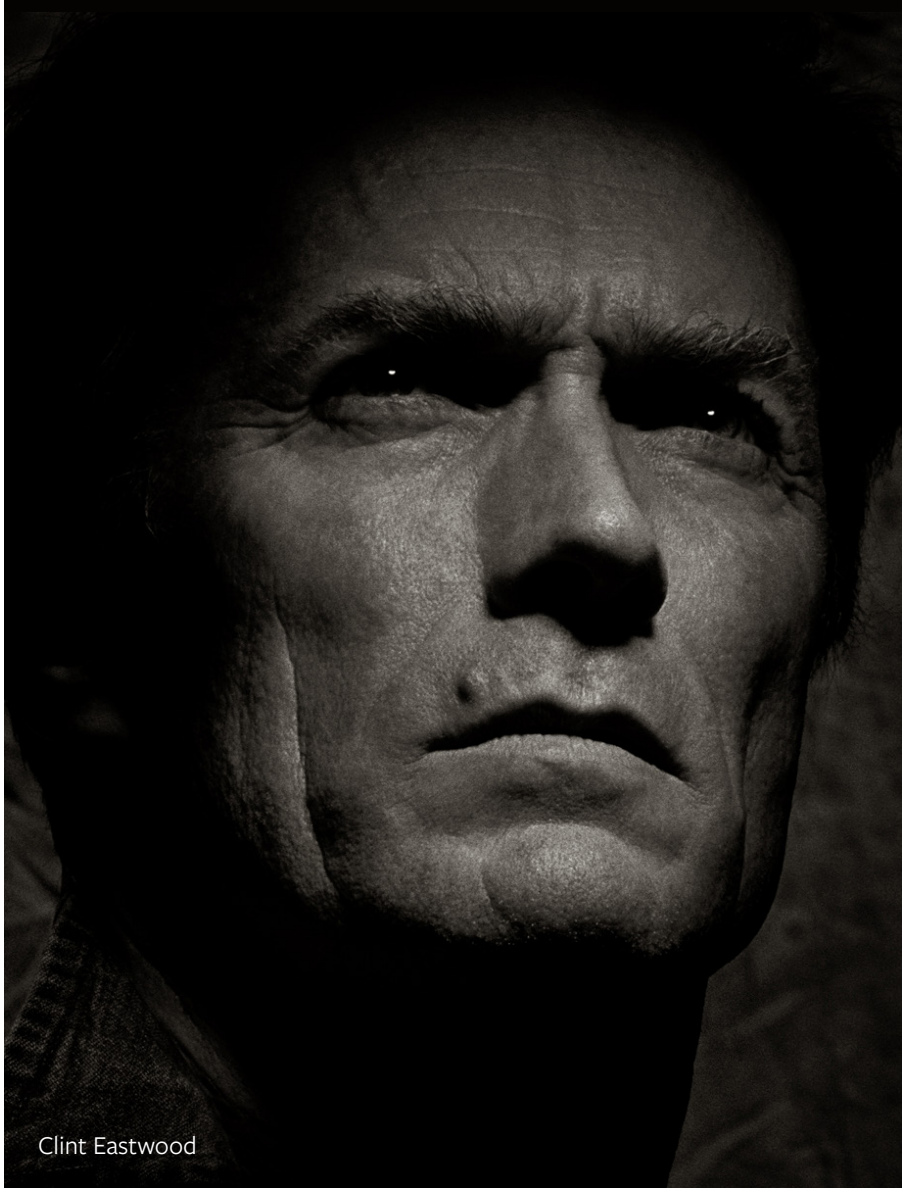


Albert Watson

50 years into his career, legendary Scottish photographer Albert Watson shares his passion for his profession...

Sean Connery

Christy Turlington



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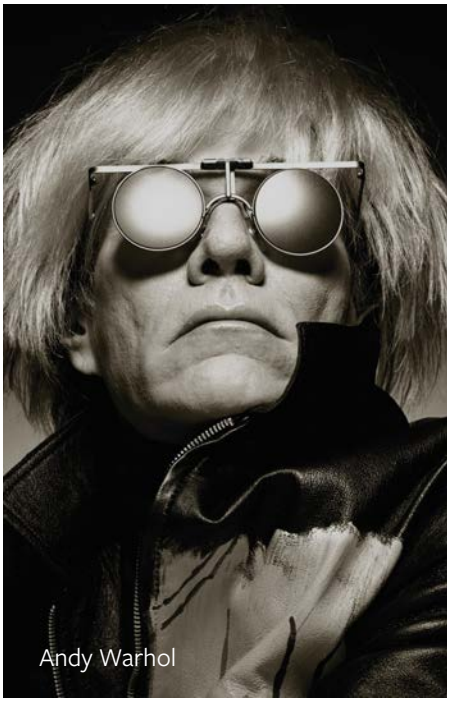


Andy Warhol

I was born in Edinburgh, and grew up just south of there in Penicuik, Midlothian. In school I studied graphic design, film, and television. My interest in the visual arts led me to photography.

As a young man, I was intrigued by Scottish scenery. There was something special about the variables in the light and weather atop the country's raw and rugged landscape that spoke to me.

Later, after moving to America in the early 1970s, I became fascinated with the human form and the landscape of emotion in the eyes and expressions of people.

I have had a very long journey in photography. From the first minute I picked up a camera, I have had that passion and I still have that passion. I have always kept an interest in still life, portraiture, and fashion, and I like to run all these things together.

I have been in New York now for 40 years - working, always doing my own projects, really holding on to all these experiences from the past, but always looking towards the future. I have had a circuitous journey to photography, but I've learned a lot along the way, and my experiences have had a great influence on how I work now. Perhaps most importantly, I have always followed my curiosity.

Learning photography is like learning to drive a car: the first time you get in a car, you think, I'll never manage this, I am going to kill somebody. I am going to hit a wall, or, even worse, kill myself. And, after a week of lessons, you feel a little bit better about things. Then, in time, you begin to drive almost automatically...once you get over the hurdle of technical things in a car, you have learned to drive it.

Similarly, you learn to drive the camera, really know the camera inside out, study different kinds of lighting and understand what each can give you, and, when you have learned all of that, it opens doors creatively.

Good photographers learn to look inside

David Bowie

Uma Thurman

Sade

their photos. When I was starting out, I'd have a vision in my head of a shot; I just didn't have enough experience to carry it out. But your photography will get better the more you do it. In the beginning, you need to be shooting a hundred pictures a day, just keep shooting, keep shooting and analyzing the picture.

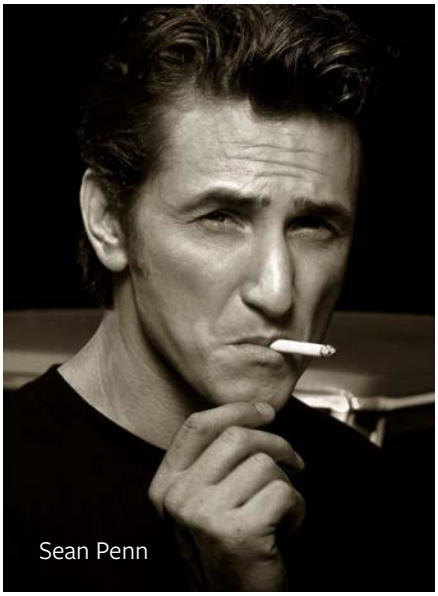
Put it on a wall, stare at it, go to sleep looking at it, and then, when you wake up in the morning, have another look. Then put it in a drawer and pull it out a week later, because great photography has to stand the test of time. You should be equally proud of an image you took 20 years ago as of one you took today.

Everything in photography is a delicate balance. You have to work very hard, but if you truly want to be a photographer and you are passionate about it, your passion should absolutely carry you through.

www.albertwatson.net

Tupac Shakur

Keith Richards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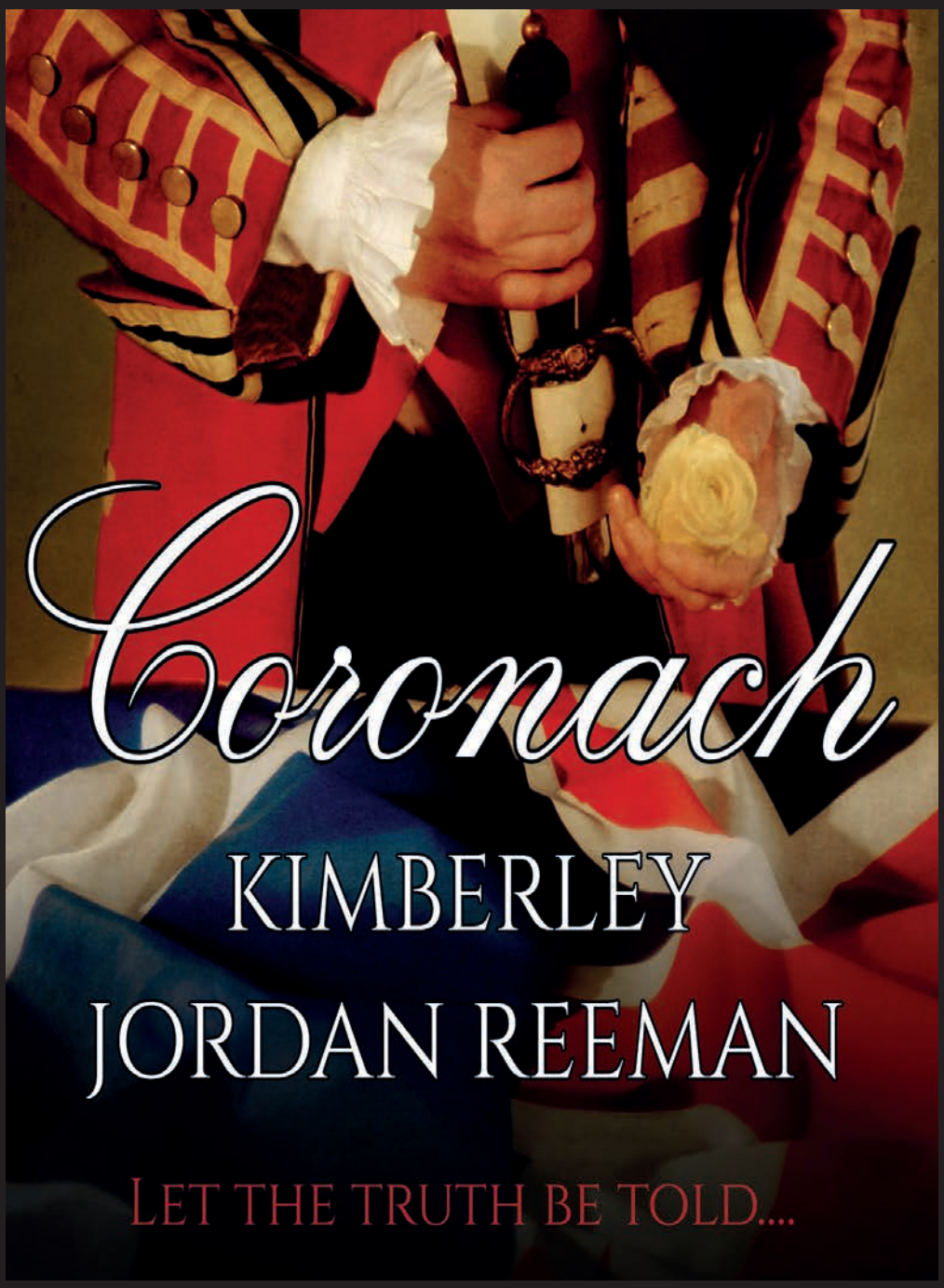
Celtic Fusion has become an outward expression of my own taste and my connection to my ancestors. I am a woman of the world; I travel a lot, I seek new ideas and trends, and I combine the new with the old to create something that allows me, and my clients, a chance to reconnect with our roots in a way that is both fashionable and wearable. It is the combination of old-world Celtic and contemporary design.

Celtic culture is evolving. Our language, our arts and customs - all of the elements that comprise who we are as a community - are being redefined and redesigned. Our sense of style is a vital - and very beautiful - part of that refashioning. Still, there is simply no denying where we come from. Our heritage is deeply woven into our DNA, and what we wear is the outward expression of who we are. These are the threads that preserve and promote our cultural identity.

Photo credit @doorusphoto

FROM CULLODEN TO THE CLEARANCES...



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Celtic Stew

Traditionally, our Celtic ancestors followed the seasons and food sources, cooking and baking whatever produce may have been available to them at the time. They were forced to do so out of necessity and were influenced by short growing seasons, looking to nature as their guide and source of nutrition and medicine. Today, we have every type of produce conceivable and can access food from almost any part of the world in our neighbourhood supermarket. Eating in harmony with the seasons is healthy and accentuates the flavour and freshness of the foods we eat. Hundreds of generations of nutritional awareness was collected by our ancestors, so it is important to recognize the wisdom of the old ways. Our food will taste better and just as importantly, we will be supporting local food systems, stimulating development, and creating employment opportunities. When the Europeans arrived on the shores of the Americas, they were helped by the native population who had been living off the land for generations. Not only did they help feed their new neighbours, but they provided medicinal assistance drawn from nature. During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for each of us to support our farming neighbours and local markets. Sourcing foods locally minimizes food waste and spoilage due to transport. Vegetables that are in season for our winter months include beets, cabbage, rutabagas, carrots, potatoes, leeks, garlic, onion and squash. There is much to enjoy in this list as we braise, roast and stew through the colder part of the year.

Ingredients

1 lb. stewing meat
½ tsp each of salt and pepper divided
1 tbsp olive oil
2 med-sized sweet potato peeled and cubed
3 carrots peeled and sliced
1 small chopped red onion
1 tbsp fresh minced ginger
2 cloves of garlic minced
2 cups of beef broth
1 cup milk
2 tbsp. flour
2 cups chopped kale leaves
½ cup natural yogurt
2 tbsp. chopped cilantro

Instructions

Sprinkle beef with half each of salt and pepper. In a large cast iron skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Brown beef all over and place on a plate. Reduce heat to medium. Add onions and cook, stirring for 3 minutes. Add ginger and garlic stirring to coat well. Add broth, remaining salt and pepper, and return beef and any juices back to the skillet. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a gentle simmer, cover and cook for 30 minutes. Stir in sweet potatoes and carrots. Cover and simmer for about 10 minutes or until beef is tender. In a small bowl, whisk milk and flour until smooth. Stir into stew along with kale and cook, stirring for about 5 minutes or until thickened and kale is wilted. Remove from heat and serve in bowls. In another bowl, stir together yogurt and cilantro. Dollop on top of stew in each bowl to serve.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini - cabrini@celticlife.com

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The KWM Whisky Calendar is back for the 8th straight year. This year's calendar includes 24 50ml premium whiskies, a custom logo Glencairn glass and a 100ml Scotch Malt Whisky Society whisky for Christmas Day. Participants can follow along on social media and the KWM Blog, as well as the five 5 Day Recap Virtual Tastings over the month of December. We like to call it 25 days of dram fine whisky! $435+gst.

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Crafting Whiskies

with Andrew Ferguson

The global whisky industry has been on a tear for the last two decades. This is one of the longest sustained periods of growth the sector has ever seen. A number of distilleries that had closed and mothballed in the 1980s and 1990s have reopened. Other established players have seen considerable investment and expansion. While it isn't the first major boom experienced by the industry, it is unprecedented in one key respect - it has seen thousands of new distilleries open all over the world.

Some of these new distilleries are large and ambitious, built with the goal of serving a growing global market. The majority, however, are small craft distilleries, built with more modest and often local aspirations. Canadian whisky expert Davin de Kergommeaux's 2020 book The Definitive Guide to Canadian Distilleries lists no fewer than 200 Canadian distilleries, up from barely a dozen a decade ago. It would be impossible to do all of them - let alone all craft distilleries in the Celtic world - justice in just one page. So, instead, I am going to highlight a few of my favourites, all of which have bottled whisky of at least three years of age.

Scotland has at least 130 active distilleries, up from around 100 about a decade ago. This number may not seem that impressive by comparison to the more than 200 distilleries in Canada and 1800 in the US. But keep in mind Scotland is a small nation, with less than 5.5 million people, and its landmass is roughly 1/8 the size of the province of Alberta. The Scotch whisky industry is also the most established and global of all, and consumers expect maturity and value.

One of the most unique distilleries to open in Scotland over the last two decades is the Dornoch Distillery in Sutherland. It was founded in 2016 by Phil & Simon Thompson, who run the Dornoch Whisky Castle Hotel along with their parents. The hotel was already a destination for its excellent whisky bar before the brothers decided to build a distillery in a 47-square meter, 135-year-old former fire station. The facility only produces 30,000 liters a year (for comparison: Glenlivet can produce 21 million L annually), roughly half of which is laid down as whisky. Gin production has helped to get the company's name out there and help finance the laying down of whisky. Their first single malts, both three year olds, were released by the distillery late in 2020.

Ireland, including the Republic and Northern Ireland, has close to 40 active distilleries, which is an enormous improvement considering there were only three in operation prior to 2007.

> *It may come as a surprise to many that, until recently, most Irish whiskey brands were produced by one distillery.*

Thankfully that is changing in the country with the best historical claim to have invented whiskey.

One of my favourites from the new crop in Ireland is Dingle Distillery, founded in 2012. The distillery was a natural offshoot from one of Eire's first and most successful craft brewers, Porterhouse Brewing Company. If they could take on Irish brewing industry heavyweights like Guinness, surely, they could muscle their way into the Irish whiskey industry, which had just three distilleries at the time. Like a lot of craft distilleries, their whiskey making was financed at least in part through the production of other spirits. And it didn't hurt that they own their own network of pubs to drive sales. Dingle Gin became the best-selling Gin in Ireland in just five short years. Their first single malt whiskey was released in December of 2015, and since then their whiskies have found their way to a number of markets around the world.

One of my favourite Canadian craft distilleries is Dubh Glass (pronounced Douglas) in Oliver, BC. The distillery was built by the passion, blood, sweat and tears of owner and master distiller Grant Stevely. Stevely, as he is affectionately known, is a former ski patroller who dabbled in distilling while working for the Sunshine Village ski resort in Alberta. Founded in 2015, in the heart of BC's Wine Country, the distillery has been releasing small amounts of whisky - mostly single casks - since 2019. The production is small, so the whiskies are primarily sold directly by the distillery and tend to sell out quickly. I have been very impressed with their early releases, and I also count myself a fan of their Noteworthy Gin. It is in my opinion one of the best craft gins made in Canada - and there is no shortage to choose from!

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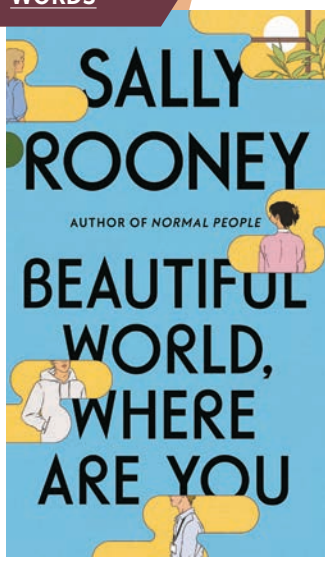


Beautiful World, Where Are You

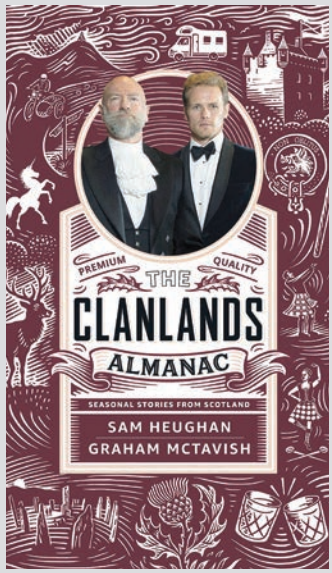
By Sally Rooney
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
368pp / $28

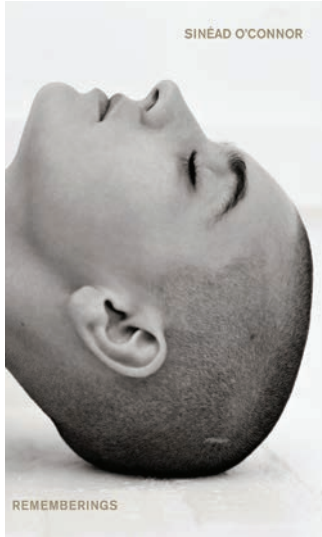
After the outrageous success of her 2018 blockbuster novel - and subsequent award-winning television series - Normal People, the pressure was on Co. Mayo scribe Sally Rooney to produce another bestseller. With advance sales and pre-orders at record breaking highs, big things were expected for Beautiful World, Where Are You. In addition, the author's decision to reject an offer from an Israeli publisher in support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement only served to stir the suspense even more. Thankfully, the tender and tough tale of four friends/ lovers lives up to the hype. Awash with themes of romance, loyalty, betrayal, sexuality, and social caste systems, and adrift in an undercurrent of uncertainty, the new narrative is telling testament to the Irish gift for storytelling.
~ SPC

The Clanlands Almanac

By Sam Heughan and Graham McTavish / Mobius
320pp / $25

One of the perks (or perils!) of receiving advanced reading copies of new novels is that reviewers can't wait to spill the beans to family, friends, the public, etc. So, that said, I'm not going to. Instead, I can report that The Clanlands Almanac is more than a companion piece to the wildly popular television series Men in Kilts (aka Clanlands). Instead, the 320-page tome is a devilishly detailed, blow-by-blow account of two best friends crossing Scotland in an old camper van, stopping along the way for a history lesson or a wee dram of whisky (or often both). I can also report that the book is better than the series, and that both long time and newbie fans of Outlander will not be disappointed.
~ SPC





Rememberings

By Sinead O'Connor
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
304pp / $29.95

Much has been made of Sinead O'Connor's recently released autobiography. Sure, the Irish songstress has been no stranger to controversy since bursting onto the world music scene in the late 1980s - everyone recalls her tearing up a photograph of Pope John Paul II on Saturday Night Live in 1992 - and Rememberings bares all, including her challenging childhood, ongoing struggles with mental health issues, highly publicized threats of suicide, sporadic spiritual conversions, online spats with fellow celebrities, and more. However, lost amidst the endless chatter and tabloid fodder is her music. More than a confessional, this enlightening and engaging work offers insight into the intellect of a creative genius. O'Connor may be outlandish, opinionated, and occasionally over-the-top, but there is no denying her talent. ~ SPC

The Pull of the Stars

By Emma Donoghue
Little Brown & Co.
288pp / $23.99

After a dozen dazzling works of fact and fiction, Irish Canadian author Emma Donoghue takes her game to the next level with The Pull of the Stars, a terrific tale of Nurse Julia Power and her medical charge at a Dublin hospital during the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. Over three days, Power and two orphaned young women create unique and lasting bonds in the facility's "lockdown" ward, sharing past pains, present challenges, and future hopes against a backdrop of disease and despair. By turns tender and tough, the moving and memorable narrative will both break and warm reader's hearts. Given the stunning parallels with the current global COVID-19 pandemic, and the daily stories told by frontline workers, the story feels all the more familiar.
~ SPC

Van Morrison
Latest Record Project Vol. 1

It has been a half-century since Van the Man released his landmark album Tupelo Honey. Since that time, the Belfast Bard has produced over three dozen recordings and, in the process, has redefined the term "White Soul." His newest effort - the aptly titled Latest Record Project Vol. 1 - honours that tradition with 28 terrific tunes that find the songsmith both on familiar ground and fresh turf. Putting aside the silliness surrounding his anti-vaccine anthem, Where Have All the Rebels Gone, Morrison continues to grow and shine as a musical artisan, with little chance of slowing down soon. Thankfully, and unlike many of his aging peers, he refuses to repackage himself for profit. Instead, he is committed to carving out character, and not caricature. ~ SPC

Inhaler
It Won't Always Be Like This

There has been a lot of hype surrounding the first full-length release from Dublin quartet Inhaler. Thankfully, that excitement is more than merited, as the 11-song album delivers a post-power-pop punch of "all killer, no filler." A sonic swirl of style and substance, It Won't Always Be Like This showcases a songwriting brilliance that hasn't been seen or heard since the early days of U2. Fitting, perhaps, as lead vocalist Elijah Hewson is the son of U2's formidable front man Bono. Dad took a hands-off approach however, and the result is a recording that both pays tribute to - and builds upon - the city's rich rock roots. And though the apple may never fall too far from the tree, just don't call them U22. ~ SPC

Edel Meade
Brigids and Patricias

There have certainly been some uniquely creative female singer/songwriters over the years - Bjork, Laurie Anderson, Jane Siberry and Patti Smith to name but a few - and Ireland's Edel Meade is a welcome addition to that troupe. From her days busking on Grafton Street in downtown Dublin, through her studies in jazz, and onto her Joni Mitchell and Billie Holiday projects, Meade's quirky and quaint vocal style and avant-garde approach were evident on her critically acclaimed 2017 debut Blue Fantasia. She takes it to the next level with Brigids and Patricias, an eight-song sojourn of stripped-down original tunes and spoken-word pieces that celebrate the feminine spirit. While perhaps not to everyone's taste, the album is sure to grow on both new and long-time listeners. ~ SPC

Karen Myatt
Femoir

Canadian songstress Karen Myatt explores the feminine spirit with her stunning sophomore recording Femoir. Soulful, smart, spirited, sexy, and sassy, the album's 14 terrific tracks assess the art of the anima with an array of astonishingly original songs and smooth standards. With the vocalist's vital and vibrant melodies shading both strong and soft atop a moody melange of guitars, keys, horns, bass, and percussion, the release has already drawn great acclaim from critics, listeners, and industry insiders; Cassandra Wilson calls the new disc "Absolutely stunning! Mesmerizing..." and Arts East says "this is the finest and most important recording to emerge from Canada in years..." Indeed - bold and beautiful, Femoir is a masterful and meaningful work of melodic art and Myatt is a musical tour-de-force. ~ SPC

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Valerie Byrnes

Valerie Byrnes is passionate about the pipes, both as a player and podcaster

Valerie Byrnes first heard the call of the bagpipes when she was just 10 years old.

"The high school in my hometown of Upland (California) has a bagpipe band and they performed at my elementary school," she recalls via email. "I decided that day that I would learn to play once I got into high school. It stirred something inside of me that I had not felt before."

Now 34, Byrnes lives in Riverside County and has been a piper for 20 years. "I have taken breaks, but I keep coming back to it because I am so in love with the sound and the feeling that it gives me. I also appreciate what it is that pipers do, carrying on a craft - and all of its traditions - that have been around for hundreds of years."

While there are opportunities for piping jobs in California, Byrnes admits that getting consistent work in a full-time capacity can be difficult, and that gigs and events have mostly served as a side business. She also hosts the Lady Pipers' Podcast, which she records out of her home and which showcases female pipers and bands both past and present. One episode, for example, shares the story of Elizabeth "Bessie" Watson - a young Scottish suffragette and piper who played at feminist demonstrations as a child.

> *"I will take my podcast as far as it takes me and continue to tell amazing stories of women in piping history."*

Since picking up the pipes, Byrnes has performed at a number of high-profile events and venues "that I never could have dreamed of playing. Most importantly though, I have met some remarkable people, including my best friend, who is also a piper."

She plies her trade on a set of David Naill bagpipes that she bought in 2004 and describes her sonic style as a mix of classic and contemporary.

"I love mixing the pipes with other instruments, such as guitar, and playing modern songs on the pipes. I think one of my favorite newer tunes to play is 'We Will Rock You' by Queen."

To date, career highlights include playing for World War II veterans' funerals, performing at the memorial of Jeremiah MacKay (a piper and sheriff who was killed in the line of duty), gigging at the World Championships in Scotland with the Kevin R. Memorial Pipe Band in 2004, playing in a Celtic Rock Band, and co-running and performing with the Scottish Rejects Pipe Band with her best friends.

Perhaps her most prominent gig, however, was playing the pipes for promotional events for the smash STARZ TV series Outlander. There, she had the opportunity to meet Diana Gabaldon, the author of the Outlander book series (Byrnes even played "Happy Birthday" for the scribe), as well as the show's cast members and executive producer Ronald Moore. She notes that both the book and TV series "have gone a long way to promote Celtic culture," especially Scottish history.

As someone of Irish heritage, Byrnes hopes that her home state does more to preserve and promote Eire's unique culture. "Personally, I would love to see more Irish festivals out here in California, like I have seen in the mid-west. The festivals out there take over whole towns for the weekend during the summer and it is great fun."

Although public performances are currently limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she still believes that the best way to get young people involved in bagpiping is by allowing them to hear the music in person. "Anytime I play in public I get great feedback. Kids are curious about the world and what it has to offer and just giving them a little encouragement - showing them that this can be fun - helps to spark interest."

For the most part, Byrnes is staying mum on her plans for this year. She notes, however, that she plans to continue playing solo for the immediate future. "You never know what life will throw at you and bands are always looking for pipers, so maybe I will give that some thought when there is opportunity. Until then, my pipes and my podcast will keep me happy."

www.anchor.fm/piper-valerie

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Ivonne Hernandez

Fiddler Ivonne Hernandez honours her heroes

Most of us are lucky if we ever get the chance to simply meet our heroes. Ivonne Hernandez is even more fortunate - she has had the opportunity to play the fiddle alongside many of hers.

In an email exchange with Celtic Life International from her home in Vancouver, British Columbia, Hernandez shares how she went from a toddler idolizing the greats to getting to fiddle with them as equals.

"My younger sister and I both took Suzuki violin lessons when we were three or four years old. We grew up listening to traditional South American folk music, Canadian folk and fiddle music, jazz, and classical music, mainly.

"I was also very tiny, so I started with a smallish fiddle, and got bigger ones as I grew. I loved playing any music that I heard by ear and playing it on the fiddle - and I still do."

After an early and decisive victory at a local fair's fiddling contest playing the tune Turkey in the Straw - which she had memorized from listening to a Don Messer cassette - Hernandez was bitten by the fiddling bug.

"I played a lot of Canadian fiddle contests growing up, but I was very influenced by Cape Breton, Scottish, and Irish fiddling as well. I am a traditional fiddler at heart because that is what I played as a young girl.

> *"What I like playing most, however, are tunes and arrangements that push the boundaries of what fiddling can do, while still staying true to my roots."*

"I love the juxtaposition of taking a standard trad tune and arranging it more progressively to see what can be done with it. It is a fun challenge, but I still want to honour the tradition, too."

Like her heroes - fellow fiddler phenoms Natalie MacMaster, Mark O'Connor, Calvin Vollrath, and Stephane Grappelli – Hernandez has racked up a multitude of honours over the years, including two Canadian Folk Music Awards, five Grand North American Fiddler awards, a Western Canadian Music Award and, in 2017, a Juno Award.

She is quick to credit those influences for her sonic success.

"The combination of all these different styles of fiddlers has really shaped my playing. To this day, I still listen to and love all of those artists. It has been fun, as I now feel like I have come full circle - I have performed and toured with these folks, and we are friends now, except Stephane Grappelli, of course. But I do know his partner, and we had dinner at their flat in Paris when I was there last, and he showed me all kinds of Stephane's letters, photos and fiddles."

As it has been for many artists, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented all sorts of challenges to Hernandez's career. She has adapted well, however.

"The past year has been a bit crazy for everyone, but I have been doing a lot of teaching online and the odd concert, workshop, symposium, etc. I am still leading my teen fiddle group, Coastline, and we will be doing some recording soon. I have also been working with some long-time friends - we have finally had time to work on some tunes, and we will be going into the studio to record this summer. It has been a while since I have done my own album, so I am looking forward to that.

"I also finally had time to put a bunch of videos together," she adds. "#MagicMondays is a series I recorded while touring over the past five years, where I meet up with friends I see on the road at different festivals or camps. We sit down and have a little chat and play a tune together. #FiddleFridays is a tutorial video series of really common session and/or dance tunes that I always get asked about, so I thought I would help to share the fiddle love and post teaching videos on how to play these tunes.

"I am pretty proud of myself for working hard to be able to get to this point in my career. There is still a lot more I would love to do, though, and I believe that it is good to always have new goals and challenges."

www.ivonnehernandez.com

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The Gardiner Brothers

The Gardiner Brothers come of age

Irish siblings Mike and Matt Gardiner - known professionally as the Gardiner Brothers - began dancing before they had even entered school.

"Both of our parents were Irish born and wanted us to have some sense of Irish culture while living in America," explains Matt, the younger of the two siblings, from his home in Galway. "Our older sister Anna was taking an Irish Dance class and when Michael was old enough he decided to try it out. By the time I came along, I just assumed that it was a regular part of our everyday life."

The duo has been on the Irish dance scene for almost two decades now, and Matt says that their reasons for performing have largely remained the same over that time.

"We are both extremely proud of Irish culture - we just fell in love with it from an early age. And the opportunities that have come from dancing have been beyond incredible; we have travelled all over the world and seen many things that one could only dream of as a child."

The 21-year-old describes the duo's style as "beautifully rhythmic" - crediting that, in large part, to the lessons that they received from the Hession School in Galway as youngsters. And though heavily influenced by traditional Irish dance, the pair combine contemporary elements whenever possible.

"We try to incorporate different styles into our routines to showcase how modern and athletic Irish dancing has become," says Matt. "We emphasise the rhythm in our routines as we believe this is one of the most important parts of the dance, and certainly one of the most captivating as well."

The siblings have enjoyed an incredibly successful career to date, boasting five world titles between them. They have also performed with Riverdance in front of 90,000 people - including the Pope - in Dublin's Croke Park, and they have danced in a number of notable venues, including the 3Arena in Eire's capital and Radio City Hall in New York City.

However, their biggest moment, notes Matt, happened in 2015.

"We were both attempting to win our respective age group at the World Championships in Montreal. No other siblings had won the World Title in the same year as each other for nearly 40 years. I won, and then Michael won. It was simply incredible."

While Matt acknowledges that a career in dance is not without its many challenges - not the least of which is the huge physical toll competitive dancing can take on the body - he says that the rewards make it all worthwhile.

> *"As with any sport, if you work hard enough, you will eventually achieve your goals."*

"Our vocation has taken us all over the world from the U.S. and Canada, through Europe and even to China and Japan. So, we have had the good fortune to see the world doing something that we love."

He shares that Irish dance has never been as big, nor as global, as it has been in recent years, even with the added challenge of the current global COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is great to see governing bodies of music and dance put on global competitions and challenges as well as workshops and camps to keep younger people involved. We are always proud when we travel outside of Ireland because our culture is loved and adored all over the world. You might be in a tiny town in the middle of America or in the biggest city in China, but you will always find yourself an Irish pub with a cracking music session going on. The next generation of Irish musicians and dancers is going to be a strong one."

The pair are excited, and cautiously optimistic, to get back to form in 2021.

"Given the current situation, we have very little planned in terms of performances. However, we will continue to dance and share our videos on our various social media platforms. We want to keep promoting Irish culture and showcasing Irish dancing at the highest level all over the world. Hopefully, over the coming while - when things eventually go back to normal - we can get back on the road with Riverdance and start touring the world and seeing those smiles in the audience once again!"

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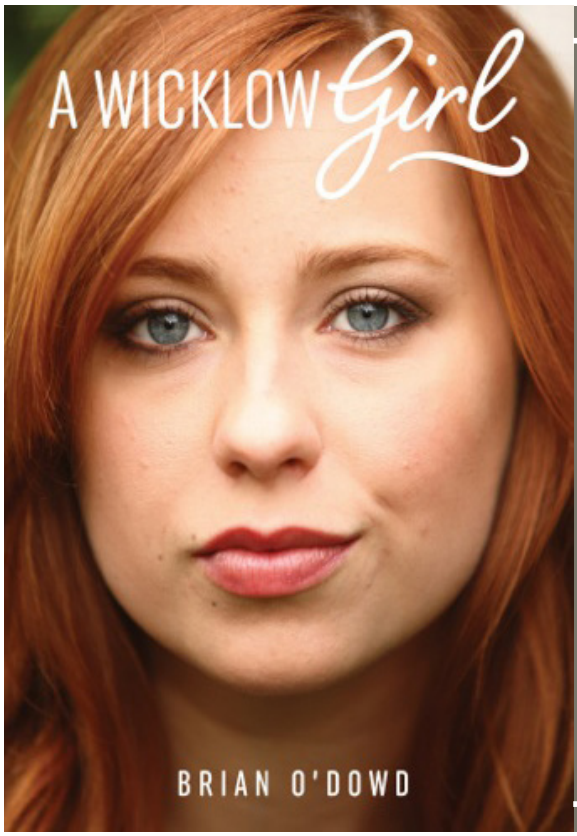

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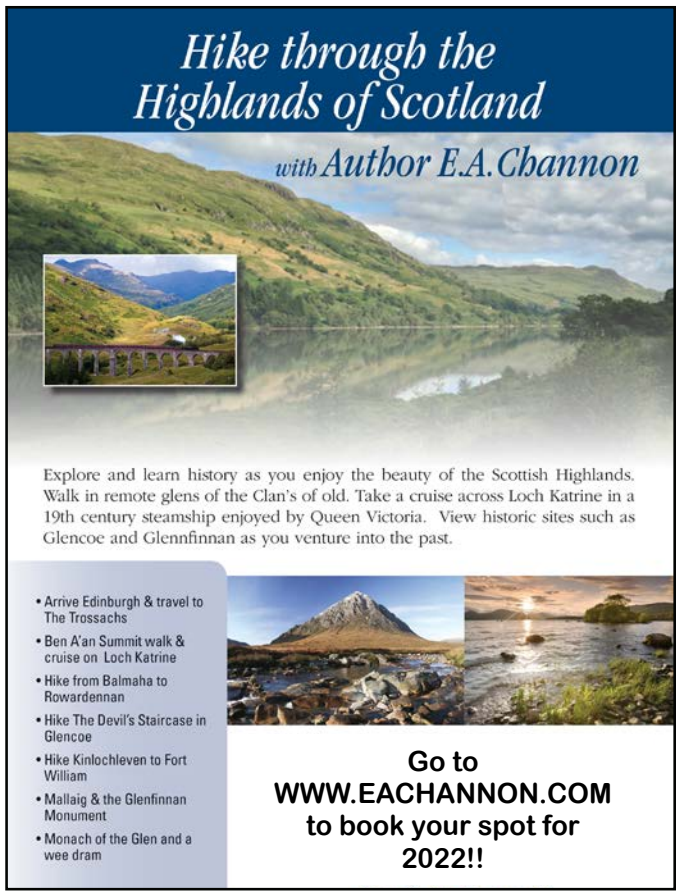
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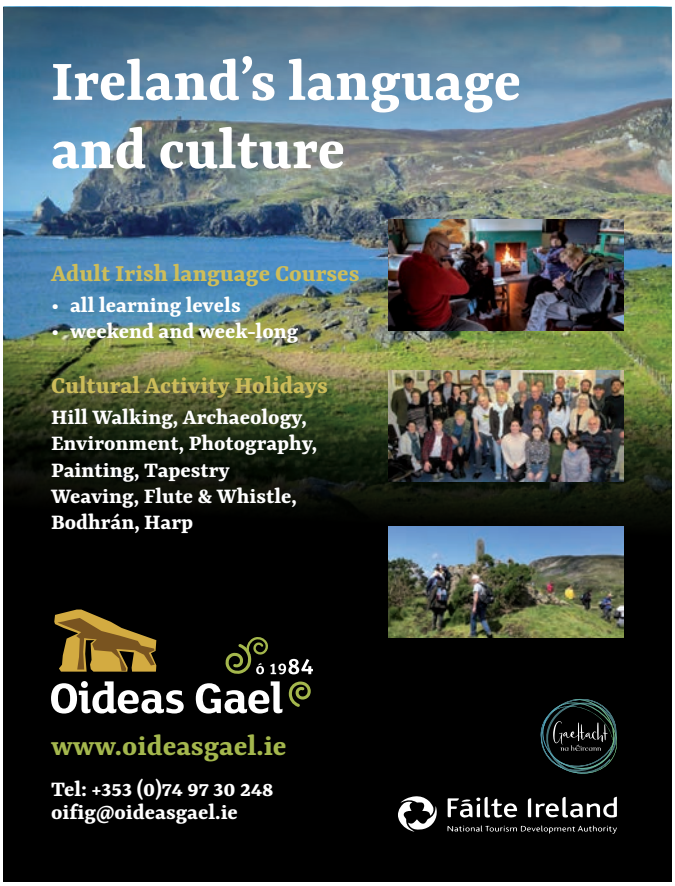
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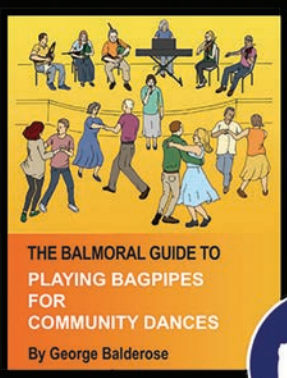

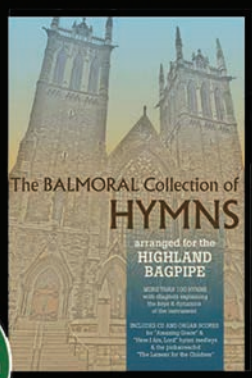

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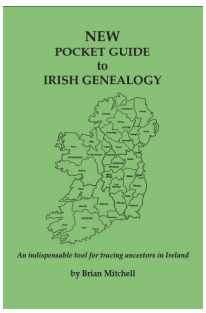

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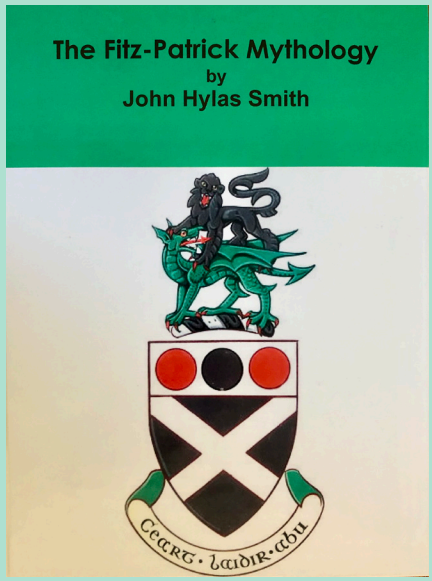

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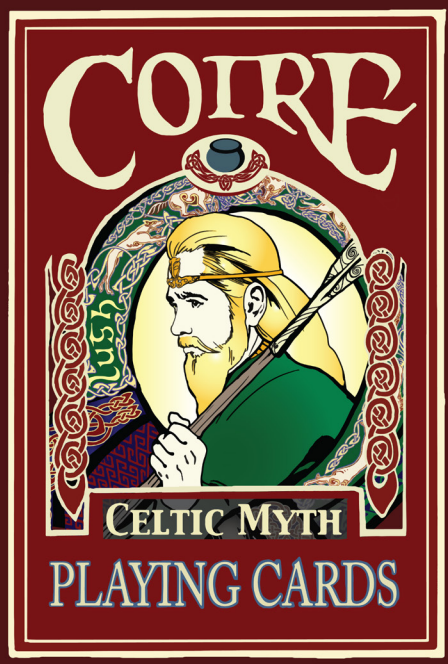

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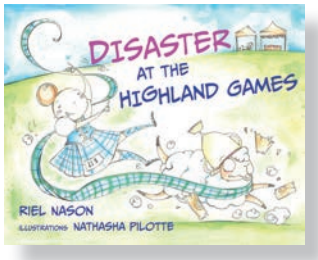

Kate doesn't really need to practice her dancing, does she?

Everything will be all right on the day of the Highland Games, won't it?

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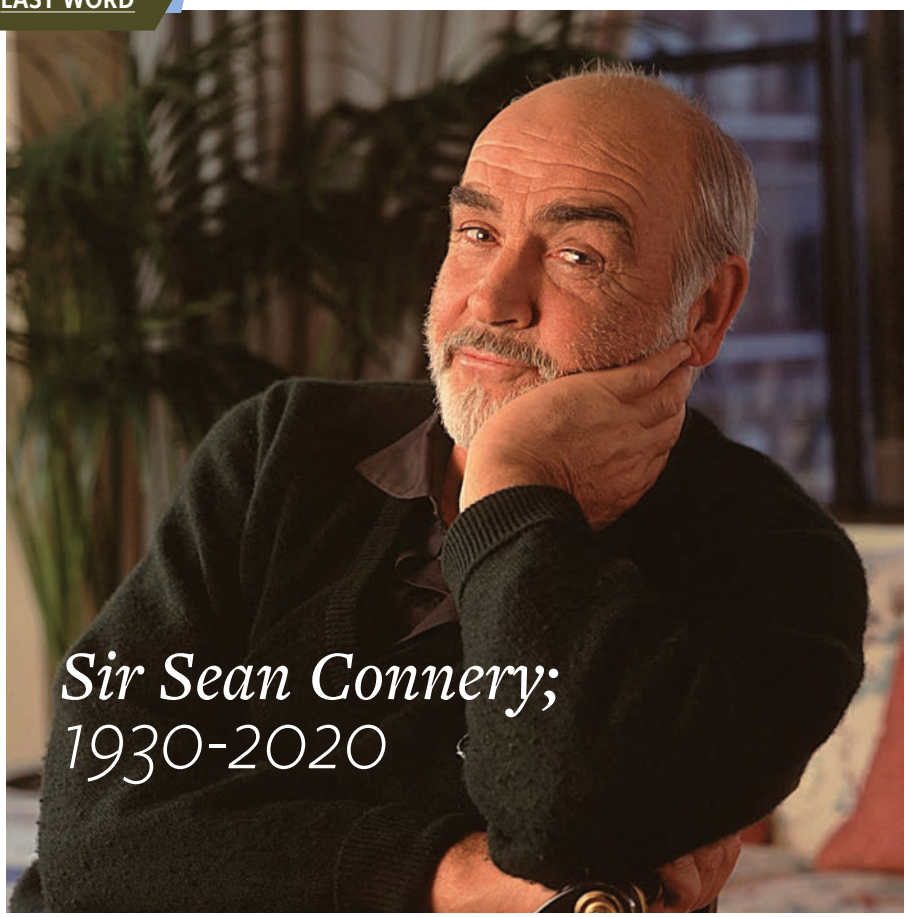

Sir Sean Connery; 1930-2020

If you have been a movie buff at any point over the last 60 years, then chances are that you have seen something starring Sir Sean Connery.

Reclusive in later life, Scotland's finest thespian passed away quietly at home at the age of 90 this past October.

Connery did not come from a Hollywood legacy family that would ensure his spot in the spotlight, but rather grew his gift from humble Scottish roots. Born Thomas Sean Connery in Fountainbridge, Edinburgh, his mother was a cleaning woman, and his father a lorry driver.

His own career began as a milkman, earning a mere £1 a week. Stints in the Royal Navy, as a lifeguard, and as a lorry driver - like his father before him - were to follow.

Even his shift to the entertainment industry came about as a way to supplement his income; as a teenager, Connery's commitment to bodybuilding enabled him to earn extra money posing for students at the Edinburgh College of Art. Later, at a bodybuilding competition in London, he caught wind of auditions for musclemen for a production of South Pacific. Initially a member of the chorus, his natural on-stage charm and charisma saw him quickly move up to the larger role of Lieutenant Buzz Adams.

Of course, the role that made him a household name was Bond - James Bond. A bit of an odd choice, some thought initially, including Bond's creator, Ian Fleming; James Bond is famously English, and Connery was undeniably Scottish, with his prominent accent. Interestingly, it was producer Albert Broccoli's wife Dana who was instrumental in selecting Connery for the role.

History proved her right, of course, as the actor's rugged sex appeal and debonaire swagger were a perfect fit for the quick-quipping spy, helping to make every film in which he portrayed the character profitable and, more often than not, critically acclaimed. Even Fleming was convinced, and he would eventually write Connery's Scottish heritage into Bond's backstory.

Connery was never thrilled with the idea of playing James Bond for too long, however, and worried that Bond would be all that he would be remembered for played a major part in his backing out of the franchise.

And though iconic as 007, he would be equally remembered for his later work.

As the years went on, notable roles included Robin Hood in Robin and Marian, the immortal Ramirez in the sci-fi cult classic The Highlander, fellow screen hero Indiana Jones' father in The Last Crusade, Captain John Mason in action hit The Rock, Russian submariner Marko Ramius in The Hunt for Red October, and perhaps most notably, Irish American cop Jimmy Malone in The Untouchables, which earned him an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor.

Despite his age, Connery played leading, heroic roles well into his career. His final on-screen appearance was in League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, playing the part of fictional 19th-century adventurer Allan Quatermain. The stress of trying to save the picture in editing was apparently so daunting that it convinced him it was time to retire from acting at the age of 73. He even turned down the opportunity to play the wizard Gandalf in Lord of the Rings, as well as the chance to reprise his role as Indy's dad in The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, noting that retirement was "just too much damned fun."

LXG wasn't his final role, however - that honour goes to the titular character in Sir Billi, an animated film about a Scottish skateboarding veterinarian. Although it was not a big-budget production, nor was it a critical darling, it would be Scotland's first feature-length animated film, and Connery agreed to come out of retirement and lend his voice to the project to help galvanize the fledgling animation industry of his home country.

Film may have made him famous, but that wasn't all that defined him. Controversy sometimes followed Connery, such as his love affairs with women, and his personal and financial support of the Scottish National Party (which campaigned for Scottish independence) that likely kept him from Knighthood until the year 2000.

Enjoying retirement to the very end, Connery died at his home in the Bahamas - where he had filmed Thunderball decades before - and is survived by his wife and son. An icon of the Golden Age of Hollywood, he left the world having left a lasting impact on film behind him - and much, perhaps, to his own relief - not just as "that guy who played James Bond."

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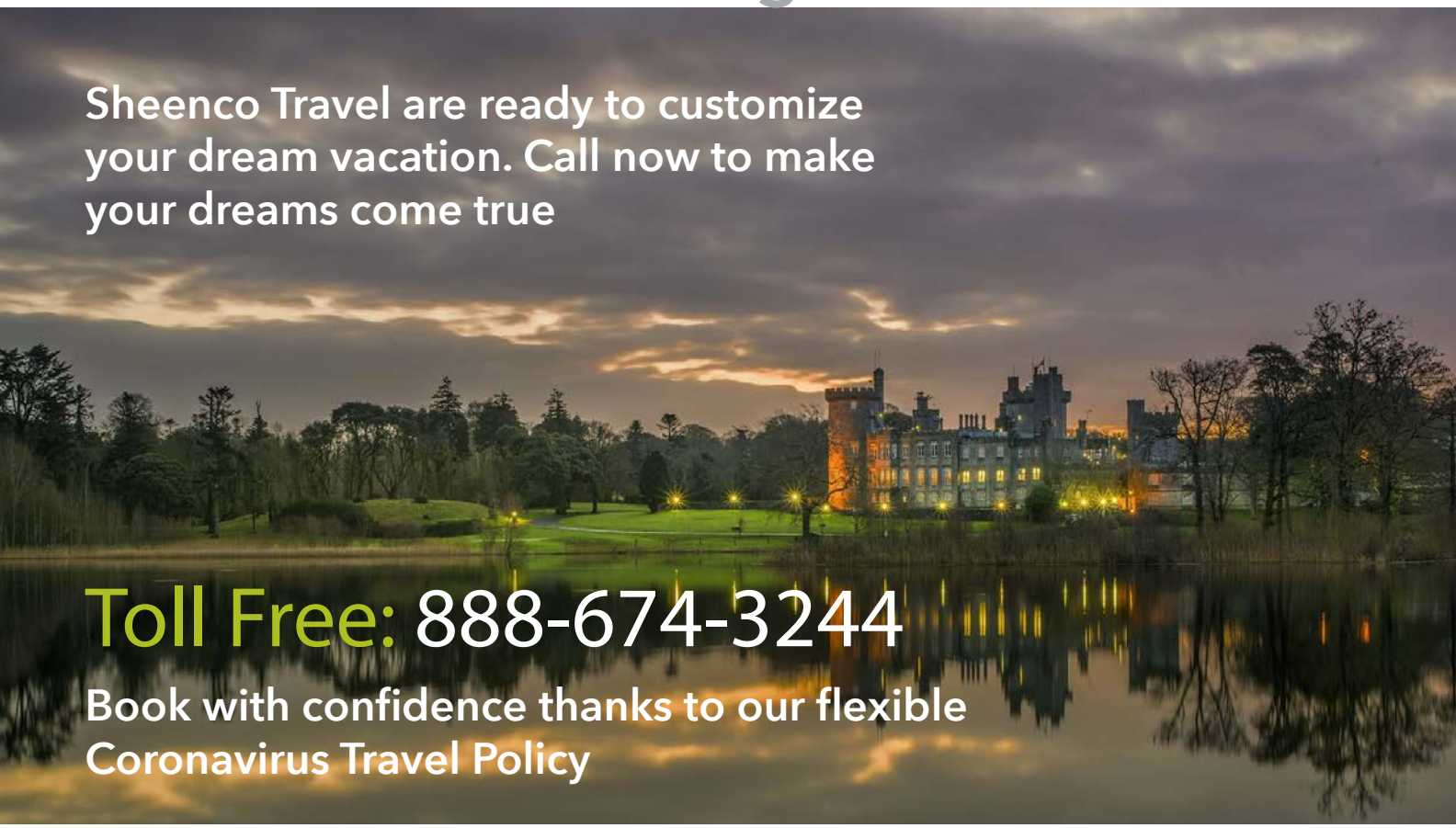

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