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Canada

Fáilte!

“Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened. Life goes on”.

In reflecting on events of the past few weeks, I was reminded of a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, “It is the secret of the world that all things subsist and do not die, but retire a little from sight and afterwards return again.”

On July 13, my mother, Jennie (Gillis) Macquarrie, passed away at age 94. She was a warm and wonderful lady who gave birth to 10 children, including two set of twins. Of strong faith, and with a positive outlook, she lived a very good, long life. The memories we cherish give us strength and hope as the circle of life continues.

Her unexpected passing prevented her from attending the marriage of granddaughter Alison to Glen Tindle on July 30. Her death took her before she was able to hold two newly born great-grandchildren, Annie Joan Crawford and Isabel Maria Macquarrie. Two days following her death, her granddaughter Jennie Lynn gave birth to twins, Duncan Allan Angus and Iris Maureen MacKenzie. Life goes on.

There was another passing in July that impacted our Celtic Life International family. Alexa Thompson, a former Editor of our publication, passed away on July 31st. Alexa was a delightful, humorous and talented editor, writer and author. She was keenly interested in the history, culture and heritage of the Celtic people. She brought great energy to our community and helped bring our magazine to new levels. Our sincere condolences go out to her husband David and their sons Jeremy and Steven.

In this issue you will find commentaries on the passing and rebirth of another sort. The decision of the U.K. to exit the European Union leaves several Celtic nations with difficult, albeit interesting opportunities. Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, while England (outside of London), Wales and Cornwall voted to leave. The U.K., now deeply fractured, is entering turbulent, unchartered waters.

Could the fallout from Brexit lead to another Scottish independence referendum? Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon maintains that the country’s future is within the EU, adding that it would be “democratically unacceptable” to be removed.

In Northern Ireland, the results may be taking a more positive path. Both Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists are openly suggesting, for the first time in hundreds of years, that a united Ireland is now possible. In recent times, throughout the fragile peace process, the 310-mile border between the north and the Republic of Ireland to the south has been dissolving. At present, 30,000 people cross the border each day.

In both Scotland and Northern Ireland it is entirely possible that there will be new beginnings. Life goes on.

Enjoy, and may God bless
Angus (Marcie) Macquarrie, Publisher

INSIDE

Volume 30, No. 5, October 2016

Our October cover shot features sisters Margie & Dawn Beaton of Nova Scotia

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DE*tha*DOL

Brexit could affect the export and protection of food from the UK

Stock up while you can. Since the majority of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, the future of certain tasty treats may be in jeopardy. There are about 75 geographical indications based in the UK – in other words, these products are protected by their names as places of origin. This is an EU law, however, so it's unclear how this will be impacted by Brexit. The Cornish Pasty Association, along with Scotch distillers, have expressed concern. According to a POLITICO article from June, 40 percent of Scotch whisky exports go to the EU. Reportedly, though, there's already a system in place for non-EU countries to register foods for regional or specialty protected status.

Monique the hen sails around the world with her Breton owner

Taking a beloved dog or cat on a trip is one thing, but what about a pet chicken? That's exactly what Guirec Soudee of Brittany is doing. The now 24-year-old began his sailing journey two years ago, with his hen Monique by his side. Soudee knew he wanted an animal companion, and after deciding a cat wouldn't be the right fit, he felt a hen was potentially a good choice. The unusual pair started off in the Canary Islands, made their way to the Caribbean and later, to the Arctic. In June, Soudee was moored in Greenland with no complaints from Monique. She even lays eggs at sea. Soudee told the BBC his future plans are to head down the Bering Strait towards Alaska.

Scottish woman covers songs by rapper Drake

"Hotline Bling" is now a little more Scottish thanks to Bette Reynolds. In April, Bette's son Stewart (known on Vine as Brittlestar) got the bright idea to record his 68-year-old mother rapping songs by Drake. For an additional Scottish touch, bagpipe recordings play in the background. The videos have been gathering attention online ever since. With some help from her son, Bette uses her own Vine account and now has almost 30,000 followers. Her repertoire includes "Energy," "One Dance" and "Started from the Bottom." Bette may be expanding her repertoire beyond the Canadian rapper, though – her account recently posted a "Scottish Kanye" video (featuring Kanye West's "I Love Kanye" lyrics) as well as "Scottish Panda" (a song by hip hop artist Desiigner).

Carmarthenshire, Wales offers two self-guided Cake Adventure Trails

Loosen your belt. The county of Carmarthenshire in Wales recently put self-guided tours together, highlighting the sweet secrets of the area. There are two suggested routes: one by bike and the other by car. The idea is to combine sightseeing with chomping down on delicious food. The car route, called the Cookies and Cake Tour, includes an exploration of Laugharne with Welsh cakes or buttered bara brith on the terrace of the Dylan Thomas Boathouse. The second route, the Great British Bike-off , is ideal for anyone looking to work off the calories as they go. With a total of five hours of cycling, the route hits highlights such as the Calon Café and Wright's Food Emporium.

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

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Celts in the Community

Jade *Konkel*

Meet the first Scottish woman to sign a professional rugby deal. Jade Konkel, originally from Inverness, was one of 16 women selected for the BT Sport Scottish Rugby Academy on a part-time basis in 2015. Konkel is the first of those women to get a full-time contract. She was then slated to undergo a full-time program at Broadwood Stadium, Cumbernauld. "It means everything to me," Konkel told the BBC. "It is a massive opportunity, and one I am going to relish every moment of." As a teen, Konkel would drive for over three hours from Black Isle to Glasgow each weekend for her rugby matches with Hillhead/Jordanhill. Her dedication may pave the way for other Scottish women to make their way onto the field. Konkel is also skilled in a number of other sports, boasting two seasons with the national league basketball club Highland Bears, and picking up two gold medals for shot-put and discus when she represented Scotland in athletics for the army cadets. She holds a black belt in the martial art of Goshin-Ryu Kempo as well. Now 22 years old, Konkel hopes to be a role model for young girls both as an athlete and a person.

James *Evans*

Welshman James Evans is not only a researcher in the Cardiff Medicentre at the University Hospital of Wales, but also a talented singer. Evans uses his musical prowess to help local and area charities, and has already raised thousands of pounds for various causes. He didn't stop there, however. Two years ago, Evans received a letter asking him to travel to St Joseph's Hospital in Newport for a bone marrow transplant. He had been on the bone marrow register for several years, but knew it was unlikely that he would actually be asked to donate. When the time came, however, he didn't hesitate. As it turned out, the transplant saved the life of a one-and-a-half -year-old baby. For Evans, the overnight stay in the hospital was a small price to pay. He received a thank you letter from the child's parents some time after the procedure, and has since worked to encourage others to become bone marrow donors. As a result of his selfless efforts, he was given the Health Hero award from Wales Online this past February. "To be able to play music and impact positively on charities is a very nice feeling," Evans told the publication.

Wendy *Megson*

Horses can help people work through issues such as stress, depression and even brain injuries. Thanks to Wendy Megson, equine therapy is now available on the Isle of Man. Originally trained as a counsellor in psycho-dynamic psychotherapy, Megson runs Manx Equitherapy at Lezayre Riding Stable. Some sessions involve horseback riding, but many are simply working with the horses in other ways. Since horses are herd animals, they are highly sensitive and able to respond to non-verbal communication from people. Recently, Megson told the Isle of Man Today that her oldest client was a 97-year-old woman referred to the program by the Manx Blind Welfare Society. "It was wonderful to see her working with one of our horses," said Megson. "She was able to walk without her sticks using the horse for support and she said it was a spiritual experience." A horse may need to be led around an obstacle, for instance, and the client will have to use problem-solving in order to tackle the challenge. The sessions can involve a single client or a group in a team-building exercise, and the lessons can be carried over to issues that clients may face in everyday life.

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first word

Maurice Fitzpatrick

Irish journalist and filmmaker Maurice Fitzpatrick follows the Brexit fallout from across the waters…

The British political scene most resembles a split little pea just now. Whereas her European neighbours, far on the other side of the table, continue to contemplate a smorgasbord, breakfasting à la Française, sipping espressos and swilling Weizenbier. The British palate will just have to get used to a narrow, less flavoursome, menu.

The extraordinarily self-destructive decision by the British electorate for Brexit has been the news story of the year and will be a news story for years to come. The diplomatic catastrophe that Britain has visited upon itself with Brexit is even now not fully apparent to its proponents. Why did they campaign for it?

Having once reigned over an empire upon which the sun never set, Britain has failed to make the minimum adjustment required to accept its substantial, but not paramount, importance in world affairs, and the Brexit vote is a clear symptom of that denial. In Europe, because of its economic might, Germany is in control and Little England is a secondary power.

Ironically, Brexit hastens - rather than delays - Britain's decline. The remnants of the ramshackle United Kingdom confederation and the Commonwealth are now in a terminal phase. "Rule Britannia", which became a come-all-ye at the recent European Cup Championship, has now become the anthem of the dispossessed with chips on their shoulders. Brexit campaigners have managed, if not to make England great again, at least to make it great cartoon fodder for satirical magazines the world over.

They have also deeply angered their younger demographic who voted to remain; Boris Johnson's Brexit campaign landed young British people in the worst politico-economic crisis of their lives, and the most amazing thing is that Brexit was - to use a tennis term - an unforced error. Britons blithely slipped on a banana skin that they planted for themselves. Even the most optimistic analysis can hardly see this decision as a victory for anyone, not even for political opportunists. Solid leadership is very necessary now in England and it is very hard to see from where it will emerge.

Grexit last July would have made a lot of sense since the Greek electorate would have been voting for its interests. And indeed when it did vote for the Syriza party, which avowed to ditch austerity, Brussels visited the worst of its authoritarianism on the Greek "leader," who capitulated to the pressure. For the English, being outside the single currency and significantly less shackled by absurd austerity doctrines that characterized the European response to the economic crash of nearly a decade ago, the justification that the Greeks had to leave was significantly less present. English people quite simply voted against their interests.

> *"One amusing consequence of Brexit on the island of Ireland is that we are all Irish now; a wave of Northern unionists have suddenly discovered their inner Irishness, and made a snatch for Irish passports."*

Even Ian Paisley Jr. has swapped his father's "never, never, never" mantra on association with Dublin for a message of actively encouraging his supporters to become Irish.

There has been organized chaos in Ireland since the Brexit result on June 24th. Gerry Adams sounded duff notes on RTE radio that morning, intimating that a united Ireland was now achievable. Meanwhile, Taoiseach Enda Kenny wants an all-Ireland forum to confront Brexit and declared his intentions to have one without consulting his diplomats or the Northern Irish First Minister.

Border counties in Ireland are now plagued with all manner of unwanted developments. The steady stream of fuel buyers from the North will thin out; the strong Euro relative to the Sterling is prohibitive for tourists from the UK; contracts between businesses in the north and the south may need to be renegotiated.

And then there are the renegotiations on a macro level with less favourable terms on offer. On BBC radio, former Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers offered this nugget: "I think we need a period to prepare our negotiating position and look at all the options, and I think have some informal negotiations with other European ministers." What negotiating position, what options and into which talks will Britain be admitted? Villiers, who welcomed Brexit and asserted that it would cause no change to the border situation, can avoid such questions - she has already been replaced by James Brokenshire as Northern Ireland Secretary of State in the new Tory cabinet. And the task of negotiating Brexit is now a cabinet brief onto itself, one placed on David Davis' desk.

The exit of a European country from the EU does not come out of nowhere. Europe's biggest error was introducing the single currency without mustering the political will to stand by it in the form of a sovereign federal bank. A second enormous problem is the way in which European Commissioners have taken over the running of Europe, increasingly acting without a mandate: the arrogance of President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in response to the democratic vote on Brexit is a good example. Thirdly, Angela Merkel's snapping of her fingers for other European leaders to attend her meeting in Berlin after Brexit is a poisonous symbol of how domineering Germany has become in European governance - a tendency which will now exacerbate.

But the legitimate gripes that European nations have against the EU administration were not the root cause of Britain's exit. Britain has never been wholly committed to Europe. Over four centuries ago, Shakespeare foresaw the impulse towards Brexit. In Cymbeline, the Bard characterized his country thus: "Britain's a world/ By itself". It's a small world though.

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UP FRONT

Professor Mark Drakeford makes the case for post-Brexit Wales

On June 23, a majority of people living in Wales voted to leave the European Union.

The result of the referendum was both a surprise and a disappointment; the Welsh Government has, and continues to be, a pro-European Union government. However, we respect the outcome of the referendum, and it is our job to make sure we get the best possible deal for Wales.

We will make sure Wales gets, at the very least, the same deal and the same opportunities within the union of the United Kingdom as it has received within the European Union.

People voted to leave the EU for a number of reasons. Some voted to leave because they are concerned about immigration; others because they did not like the idea of the EU and believe the U.K. will be better off on its own. Some voted to leave as a protest against mainstream politics, and others because they believed what the leave side was telling them.

Wales has been a net beneficiary of EU funding since devolution in 1999; we currently receive around £600m of additional funding every year from the EU, in structural funding, agricultural subsidies and grants.

EU funding has helped to regenerate the regions of Wales that were once prosperous from coal mining and steel making, but were later decimated by those industries' decline; it has helped thousands of people into jobs and even more to develop new skills. It is helping us to develop new forms of alternative energy generation, and to diversify our rural economy.

Wales' latest round of EU funding will carry us until 2020. Our immediate priority will be to ensure this important funding stream continues - whether via the EU or from the U.K . Government - to ensure crucial infrastructure projects are completed here at home.

During the referendum campaign, promises were made by the leave campaign that EU funds would continue to come to Wales in the event of a Brexit. These promises must be honoured when the U.K. leaves the European Union - every penny of EU funds must be replaced so Wales does not lose out.

> *"Membership of the European Union for Wales is about more than money, however."*

Wales may not be a member state of the EU - the U.K. is the member state - but we have developed important cultural, linguistic and political relationships with other EU members and regions. We want to maintain and develop these links further in the coming years.

We do not know what Europe - or the U.K. - will look like in two years' time. In the first month after the EU referendum in the U.K., a new Prime Minister and Cabinet were chosen by the Conservative party, and within my own Labour party a leadership contest is ongoing.

Wales must be involved in the deliberations and the negotiations. We want to see access to the single market retained with no trade tariffs or other barriers to trade. We have also been clear that any future deal the U.K. agrees to must be ratified by all four Parliaments in the U.K.

At home, the result of the EU referendum has revealed some deep divisions which must be healed. The vote has laid bare long-held dissatisfaction with inequalities in our economy and our society, which have been made worse by the years of austerity following the global banking crisis of 2008.

There is a deep-seated anger at the scarring impact of inequality in which deindustrialisation and the disappearance of dignified and respected jobs in Wales' old industrial economy have been replaced by unstable and insecure jobs in the new globalized economy.

We have yet to realize the full impact of the EU referendum; it is the single biggest challenge to face the U.K. in a generation. Whatever the impact, Wales and the Welsh Government will stay internationally-engaged, outward-looking and pro-business in our approach.

Professor Mark Drakeford is the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government in the Welsh Government, and the Welsh Labour Assembly Member for Cardiff West.

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Dr. Emily McEwan-Fujita is an author, researcher, and Gàidheal ùr (new Gael) living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Recently she answered our Seven Celtic Questions.

SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS

What are your own Celtic roots?

From my last name you can tell that I had ancestors in Scotland. On my father's father's side, my great-grandfather was from Scotland and my great-grandmother from Ireland. According to family records, they met in New York City in 1856. They made their way across the upper Midwest, and then unfortunately my great-grandfather abandoned the family. He was never spoken of again after my great-grandmother settled on the west side of Chicago. I read some of her letters to my grandfather during World War I and saw that she was very keen to instill a sense of Irishness - "never forget you're Irish, Joe." My grandfather passed that sense on to my father; my brother is named Patrick and I was almost named Colleen. The MacEwans were the hereditary bards of clan Campbell in Argyllshire.

Why are those roots important to you?

Everyone wants to have a sense of where they came from – there's a Scottish Gaelic proverb that says "Cuimhnich air na daoine bho'n tàinig thu,"- remember the people you came from. At the same time, I don't think it's healthy to get too obsessed with the fact that you were born in a particular family or place, especially if you are going to start judging others by the yardstick of birth or origin too. To me, Celtic is as Celtic does, or rather Gaelic is as Gaelic does. The most important thing to me is being able to speak the language and participate in Gaelic culture that way.

What does it mean to you to be of Celtic heritage?

Being of Celtic heritage means supporting - and getting involved with - a Celtic language. It also means being inclusive towards people who are of a different background, but who want to share in that Celtic language and culture. So I think a sense of roots is great, as long as it inspires people with the confidence to welcome new members into their community, or get involved with a community that's working towards positive aims.

How are you involved with the Celtic community?

I have just published a book titled The Scottish Gaelic Tattoo Handbook: Authentic words and phrases in the Celtic language of Scotland. It's available on Amazon and other online retailers, and can also be special ordered by any local bookseller. The book grew out of the Gaelic Revitalization blog, where I've been writing about Gaelic language and culture in Nova Scotia and Scotland since 2013. I'm also excited to be teaching a course on Celtic Christianity at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax this summer.

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive?

I really hate hearing that Gaelic is a dead language – I speak Gaelic and I am alive, thank you very much! Seriously, though, it saddens me that there is still prejudice against Gaelic in both Scotland and Canada. Americans might be surprised to hear it's a problem, but it's a bit like the prejudice against native Americans. Present-day attitudes are a holdover from the centuries during which the British government tried to destroy the language, and poison speakers' confidence from within. Unfortunately whole generations of Gaels were taught that Gaelic was like sex – it should only be done between consenting adults in private! Schoolteachers and other respected figures told parents not to "harm" their children by speaking Gaelic to them, and it was hard to question that. Unlike First Nations peoples, white Gaels had the chance for their children to assimilate as English speakers. Given the success of those efforts, it's somewhat miraculous that people are still speaking Gaelic today, but we are, in Canada and Scotland.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture generally?

We can always do more to preserve and promote Celtic languages and their cultures. I would advocate that people not separate the two, the language and the culture. The language is the link, whether it's Gàidhlig or Gaeilge or Gaelg, Cymraeg or Brezhoneg or Kernewek. There are many ways to support Celtic language communities – for example, by buying commercial music recordings by artists who use the language in real life, or donating to crowd-funding campaigns. There are even Celtic language learning holidays! Or write letters to support activists who are working to provide Celtic language education for children in Nova Scotia or other areas. Celtic culture is not all fun and games by a long shot – anyone who tries to make a living working with a Celtic language can tell you of the financial and other sacrifices they've had to make. It's sometimes frustrating when we see the glossy fun side of Celtic culture being promoted in English, while our community groups can't get the funding we need to do basic language activities. So I would love to see more integration between the "sexy" side of things, and the economic support that historically Gaelic-speaking communities need just to stay in existence, for example.

What can we be doing better?

There needs to be more emphasis on Celtic languages in the promotion of Celtic cultures. One definition of a "Celt," in fact the main one accepted in the field of Celtic studies, is someone who speaks a Celtic language. I would love to see Highland games and other Scottish, Irish, and Celtic-themed events deliberately seeking out Gaelic or other Celtic language organizations to participate. I would like to see them proactively making space for language-focused activities or information.

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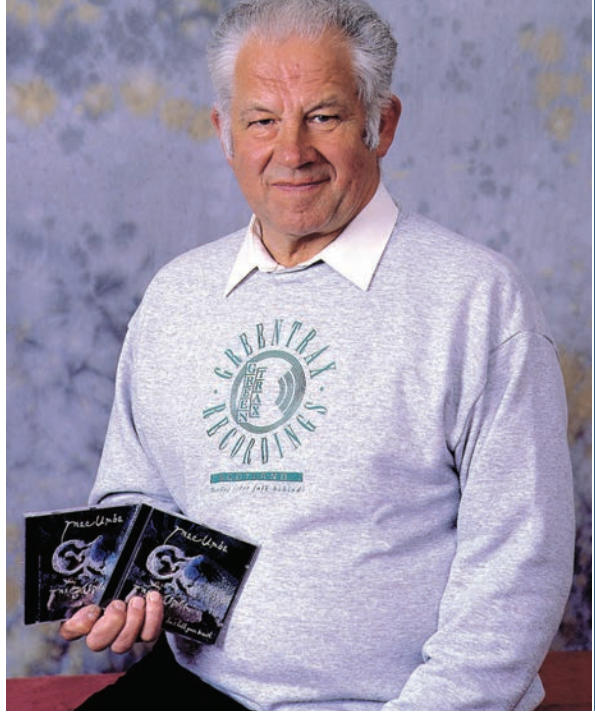
Edinburgh's Greentrax Recordings celebrates three decades of promoting and preserving Scottish music



Even after 30 years, Greentrax Recordings' 82-year-old founder and managing director Ian Green has every intention of carrying on as long as finances and good health allow.

A youthful Green joined the Edinburgh police department in 1955, retiring in 1985. By then he had reached the rank of inspector, but had also branched out to pursue his passion for music by organizing concerts, running folk clubs and co-editing a folk magazine, the fortnightly Sandy Bell's Broadsheet, which showcased the country's traditional music scene.

"When I retired I saw an opportunity to get more involved in the music industry and Greentrax Recordings was founded the following year," he recalls via email. "I simply felt that so much of the amazing musical talent in Scotland was being ignored by the major record companies."

And while he has fulfilled his original musical mandate, Green concedes that current times are challenging for the business.

"The most serious issue is the worldwide decline in CD sales. This is causing all record companies severe financial concerns and holds me back in promoting new and young artists."

Those economic struggles are tempered by the knowledge that he was never in the business "to make a fast buck."

"The greatest reward has been seeing Scottish music become better represented both around the world and here at home where a larger percentage of our population now has a greater awareness of its homegrown musical heritage."

The 30th anniversary is being marked by the release of a compilation double album, a re-launch of Green's autobiography, and a small celebration among artists and friends.

As an anniversary gives pause for reflection, he notes his personal favourite recordings have been Gaelic Women, Aly Bain and Friends - from one of the most successful Scottish television series of all time - and Eric Bogle's 5-CD box set.

"Another highlight includes being entrusted with the Scottish Tradition Series from the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies," Green adds.

Developing friendships with many established artists, including the late Jean Redpath, Barbara Dickson, Donnie Munro and The McCalmans, stands out for him, as does being on-hand as emerging artists such as Shooglenifty, Gordon Duncan, Cathy-Ann MacPhee and others, achieved worldwide recognition with Greentrax's help.

"The current Celtic music scene is in good health and the Scottish music scene is fit and well and more widely recognized because of the many fans that have the same interest at heart as myself. More than ever, young people are involved and interested in their musical heritage."

While Green is not the type to try to hold back progress, he views the Internet as both a blessing and a burden.

"On the one hand it helps to get the word out there, but it has also been responsible for the decline in CD sales. There is little success for our genre of music in streaming or in single tracks being downloaded. In any case, our CD booklets are usually full of information on the music and the artists, offering listeners the stories behind the stories."

His resolve, he believes, is a result of his roots, which go back to the 1745 uprising in the Scottish Highlands.

"My family left one part of Scotland, changed their name to Green to avoid being hunted down, and settled in Banffshire. We were on the run so we must have been on Prince Charlie's side."

His ancestors worked at a slate mine in Banff, where the owner gave each member of the family a small piece of land on which to build a home and grow crops. Eventually all the small crofts became a farm which was sold off in the late 20th century, before Greens scattered far and wide. He was born in Morayshire, where his own parents were a head gardener and a servant in the estate houses.

"I am proud and humbled by the many awards the company and I received. In truth, Greentrax Recordings grew far larger than I ever anticipated, mostly as both established and emerging artists understood our commitment to the music itself.

"The artists respect my lifetime involvement in the industry and feel they can trust me – and that alone is reason enough to keep going."

www.greentrax.com

Hiraeth trilogy

Liz Riley Jones

The Hiraeth trilogy is a contemporary Welsh fantasy - a brutal love story inspired by Anglesey's Pagan Celtic past.
Ffantasi gyfoes Gymreig yw'r drioleg Hiraeth - stori garu greulon a ysbrydolwyd gan orffennol Celtaidd, paganaidd Ynys Môn.

amazon.co.uk

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Samantha *Holland*

When an English sculptor struggled to express herself in three dimensions, she reached for pen and paper...

Amazingly, those first few notes scribbled by Samantha Holland eventually became a single story. Within a few years, her exploration of writing led to the publication of three novels - the Hiraeth trilogy - under the pseudonym Liz Riley Jones.

"Writing a book and making a sculpture are similar in more ways than one might imagine," explains the artisan via e-mail. "Each needs a strong basic structure from which everything else hangs, and both media rely on multi-faceted layers to work effectively as a whole."

While the Hiraeth trilogy takes place in modern Wales and Ireland, the over-arching plot is largely inspired by Celtic history and mythology. Telling the tale of a hidden druidic community, it follows two main characters: Mona is an orphan who finds herself in danger while discovering her own druidic ancestry; Cai is a warrior who turns out to be Mona's love interest.

The word "hiraeth" cannot be directly translated into English, but it is associated with grief and longing for home. The individual book titles are shown in both English and Welsh: a mark – marc, a burden – baich, and a loss – colled.

> *"It is Celtic language that remains the key driver in the narrative."*

"The druidic community portrayed in the series represent first-language speakers in the Celtic West, and the dying 'magic' as those remaining languages struggle to survive. My 10-year long battle to become a Welsh learner ignited a fuse that has been smouldering ever since."

Music is also a large element in the books - so important, in fact, that Holland included links to various Spotify playlists on the Hiraeth website. She describes the music as "an immensely powerful link" between the two protagonists.

"Mona has an old, tatty mp3 player, and Cai is gifted a brand new iPod. Both machines are symbolic of memory and growth because they contain the music loved by the people they love."

The music on the website is broken down between "pink mp3" and "blue iPod," but it's also categorized by individual characters. Artists such as Glen Hansard, David Gilmour and World Party are all part of the mix.

"The genres range far and wide because so many different tastes are incorporated into the playlists - from Celtic folk to thrash metal, from opera to country."

Holland's stories draw from other concepts that have influenced her over time, including female empowerment, ecology, parenthood, and what she calls "the myriad nature of love."

"I had been carrying the Hiraeth themes in my head for many years. Having the opportunity to delve and untangle them over the course of the trilogy has come as relief. In reality, there's still a fair amount of unravelling left to do, but I am happy I have managed to tell the story that wanted to be told."

She admits that writing can be a painful experience; dealing with characters, for example, was particularly difficult.

"Throughout the process, a few of the personalities I thought I had created constantly disobeyed rules of plot, timing and common sense. I often found them too difficult to fight, and ultimately gave in and let them have their way."

Looking into the minds of multiple characters at once caused her to think and feel in ways she hadn't before.

"That pain forces growth," she notes. "The more you practice, the better you become. The last book in the trilogy is more confidently written than the first due to the years of time and practice between them."

Now, the stories Holland never intended to write have been read by many. As a supporter of the Welsh language, she was thrilled when the Welsh Books Council deemed Hiraeth of enough Welsh interest to be sold from their Gwales.com website.

"I was surprised that it was so well-received. Both subject matter and genre are a little niche, and I wasn't expecting the momentum the series has gained – both here at home and in North America.

For now, she continues her dual-role of both sculptor and scribe. She is currently working on other stories relating to the Hiraeth series and has recently finished a large sculpting project.

"Sculpture and writing are inextricably linked for me now. They are passions that change but never seem to lessen in potency, with one often triggering the other."

www.hiraeth.me

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Paddy Rock

Pennsylvania's Paddy Rock Podcast is quickly becoming a beacon of Celtic culture

Phil Duckworth had three revelations before becoming truly obsessed with Celtic music.

The first took place around 1990, when he was blown away by Newfoundland-based folk band Great Big Sea at the International Freedom Festival in Windsor, Ontario. Later, while living in Ottawa, he picked up his first copy of Shite'n'Onions, a compilation CD distributed by a popular online Celt-Punk zine. Then, in 2003, after getting married and moving to the United States, Duckworth attended the Irish 2000 music and arts festival.

"That was it," recalls the now 42-year-old via email from his home near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. "I was all in and could not get enough."

Inspired by the music of The Glengarry Bhoys - one of his favourite acts - Duckworth launched the Grinning Beggar Celtic Music Podcast in January 2011.

"I decided everyone in the world had to hear this amazing music," he explains, adding that "everyone I knew would hear me say 'Celtic' and automatically assumed it was Grandpa McVicar drunk on a barstool singing old Irish folk songs. And while I cherish those songs, such was no longer the case and I was out to prove it."

Duckworth now owns and operates PaddyRock.com – the online home for his sonic sojourns. The program has evolved into two distinct shows: one highlighting punk and rock, and the other showcasing Celtic music's "American roots." It is a time-consuming gig, as he does everything from programming the music and interviews to running the website and an accompanying YouTube channel. It is also a challenge to stay up to speed on new music, as there is so much out there.

"Some of it sounds pretty old hat, but there is a lot of really new, cool and unique stuff being released," he notes. "As for the live music scene, that is fundamentally flawed from the top to bottom: venues pay too little, which forces the artists to charge more, and then only a few fans show up anyway. The question is how do we fix this?"

In spite of those issues - or because of them - Duckworth has doubled up his efforts.

> *"I don't want to simply see this culture survive, I want it to thrive."*

"I want to know that on any given night I go can out and see a quality live band without having to travel two hours. So I support the bands, the live events, various cultures, sub-cultures, and the fans that make it all up. Paddy Rock might be my vehicle to do this, but without the fans it would be absolutely nothing."

The rewards, he adds, far outweigh the demands: he is always learning about, and listening to, the music he loves; he has had the opportunity to chat with plenty of musicians - some of whom have since become close friends; and he has been to countless concerts and festivals to take in live performances.

"The greatest reward of all is when people write or message me and tell me how much they love what I do, and how it improves their day or their life. I have received many messages from service men and women and law enforcement officials over the years, and that means a lot to me. I am happy to give something back to these folks."

Duckworth isn't planning on slowing down any time soon. From his perspective, more people are developing a taste for Celtic music than ever before. The number of young people and children at Celtic festivals is on the rise, as are emerging artists like the Kilmaine Saints.

As such - and though Duckworth is quick to confess that his passion and Canadian background leads to the dropping of an occasional f-bomb or two during the podcasts - he does his best to keep the shows clean and family-friendly.

"If we all do a little bit we can save our music scene. It's all in doing and not just saying."

Eventually, Duckworth hopes to make the podcast a full-time career by turning it into a full-on indie radio station. Until then, he will continue to grow the shows - and his audience - with a kaleidoscope of classic and contemporary Celtic music, tidbits of trivia and news, and insightful interviews.

"I'm stoked about the possibilities," he shares. "There are so many directions this could go in. But, at the core, Paddy Rock will always be about great tunes for great people."

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Qristina & Quinn

Growing up on Canada's west coast, sister and brother Qristina and Quinn Bachand enjoyed the freedom to find their own high-energy sound

It is busy times for Celtic duo Qristina and Quinn Bachand.

Qristina, who already has university degrees in biology and health sciences, is working on a Masters degree in traditional Irish music performance at the Irish World Academy in Limerick, while Quinn is returning to Berklee College of Music in Boston this fall, studying American roots music and audio production.

With an impressive collection of awards and scholarships already under their belts, the sonic siblings spent the better part of the summer months teaching music and performing across Canada, both as a twosome and with a bigger band, in support of their most recent release, Little Hinges.

Raised in Victoria, British Columbia, the pair was exposed to all manner of music from an early age.

"My father is a luthier, so we always had instruments around us," explains Qristina during a telephone interview. "My parents were and are great facilitators. They made things happen for us."

Quinn points out that his mother, who is their manager, is Spanish and comes from a family of flamenco dancers. Her early preference, however, was for the Irish bodhrán.

"We were just naturally interested in music because they had such a collection of instruments, tapes and vinyl."

Qristina chose a violin and began playing at the age of five. Quinn, who is five years younger, also began with the violin, at age four. Both excelled at classical violin before embracing the fiddle. Their passion for performing took off when the two joined Daniel Lapp's BC Fiddle Orchestra.

"The social part of playing in a group always appealed to me so I never took private lessons," notes Qristina. "Music, to me, is an extremely social thing."

She recalls two shows that piqued her interest as a youngster.

"I went to a highly choreographed show called Barrage when I was around 10 years of age, and then my parents took me to see Natalie MacMaster in concert in Vancouver. I just fell in love with the fiddle."

Quinn, who now plays a guitar built by his father, started his sojourn with the six-stringed instrument at the age of 10 as a way to accompany his sister.

"I thought the guitar was a really cool instrument," he shares. "It has led me to western swing and gypsy jazz, as well as Celtic music."

Within a few years he was playing with multiple Juno Award winning fiddlers Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster.

"In the early days some people had issues with Ashley's style because it wasn't entirely traditional Cape Breton, but Qristina and I never encountered that.

> *"On the west coast we heard Irish, Scottish, Cape Breton and even Quebec styles, so there was no established form for us. We were, and are, open to everything."*

Quinn adds a contemporary edge to traditional Celtic melodies with unique harmonies, hard-driving strumming, inventive chord voicing and powerful rhythmic effects. He is also the frontman in the gypsy jazz band Brishen.

"I'm really inspired by Django Reinhardt. I like the old style rhythm guitar and styles made famous in France and Belgium," he explains, adding that he also plays Irish tenor banjo, clawhammer banjo and bouzouki.

Qrisitna's early interest in Cape Breton fiddling was enhanced by a music exchange her mother organized.

"I was one of 12 young fiddlers to spend a week and a half in Nova Scotia. We went to the Gaelic College and to the local square dances. For the next two years I was completely captivated by the Cape Breton style."

Her interest gradually drifted toward Irish music, but she says the performer that still inspires her the most is Scottish musician, singer and songwriter Dick Gaughan.

"I've decided to go with music in a bigger way and I know there is more music to digest in Ireland. It is only now I'm beginning to think in terms of a full-time career."

Both brother and sister are enjoying teaching as well as performing.

"I'm going to be teaching with Tony McManus, one of the first Celtic guitar players I came across," says Quinn. "He's a legend to me so I can't wait."

The Bachands' musical development is mirrored in their three albums; the first two are entirely instrumental, however Little Hinges features Qristina's sultry vocals.

"I've always loved to sing but performing in festivals gave me the push I needed to add vocals," she muses. "Quinn is also singing more and he has a great voice. We're developing, working it out slowly."

www.qbachand.com

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Scotcon

Put those comic books aside – this convention is for those who geek-out over all things Scottish…

Inspired to connect her countrymen and women, Shelley-Anne Aitken dreamed-up the concept of Scotcon, a two-day gathering that celebrates the country's past, present and future.

"I love my country and I wanted to give something back," she shares via e-mail.

Scheduled for September 3-4 in Edinburgh, Scotcon will feature regional food and drink, arts and crafts, historical displays, genealogy analysis, sports, dance competitions, Highland games, weaponry displays, battle re-enactments, a "Battle of the Clans" musical skirmish, and more.

"It will be the first of many such conventions," says Aitken, who was born in central Scotland and is currently studying Gaelic. "My hope is that Scotcon will grow and develop each year to showcase the most relevant stars and allow for the true Scottish experience that only Scotland can deliver."

By way of example, she points to one of this year's showcases called "Scotland Through the Years."

"We wanted to focus on the forgotten craft trades that are no longer seen by our youth and are dying out with our older generations; wool waulking, calligraphy, sword making, leather working, weaving, cobbling, etc. These skills are no longer in practice and must be preserved. Promoting them, alongside our living history re-enactments, will engage the younger generations and teach them about our proud and rich history – and without them even realizing that they are learning!"

Scotcon has lined up an array of other attractions for the event also, including musical acts and a "sports village" where workout-wannabes can stretch their muscles. For fans of the smash-hit STARZ television series Outlander, several of the show's celebrities will be in attendance, including Steven Cree, Rosie Day and Robert Cavanah.

For Aitken and the rest of her Scotcon team, preparation for the weekend's festivities has had its fair share of challenges.

"As a first-year event, the issue has predominantly been about exposure - how we network and inform people about what we have on offer. We have also found securing sponsorship exceptionally difficult; with Brexit, nobody has stood up to support our cause, and we have been forced to rely solely on revenue from ticket sales."

While she understands that an inaugural event might seem risky to some, she is confident that the first festival proves its appeal to attendees. Popularity is not Scotcon's core mandate, however, as Aitken aims to bolster local and area community groups.

> *"Raising funds for our charities is our fundamental mission as we recognize the importance of small organizations. Without support, some of these charities will lose important staff members or even stop servicing the people of their respective communities completely."*

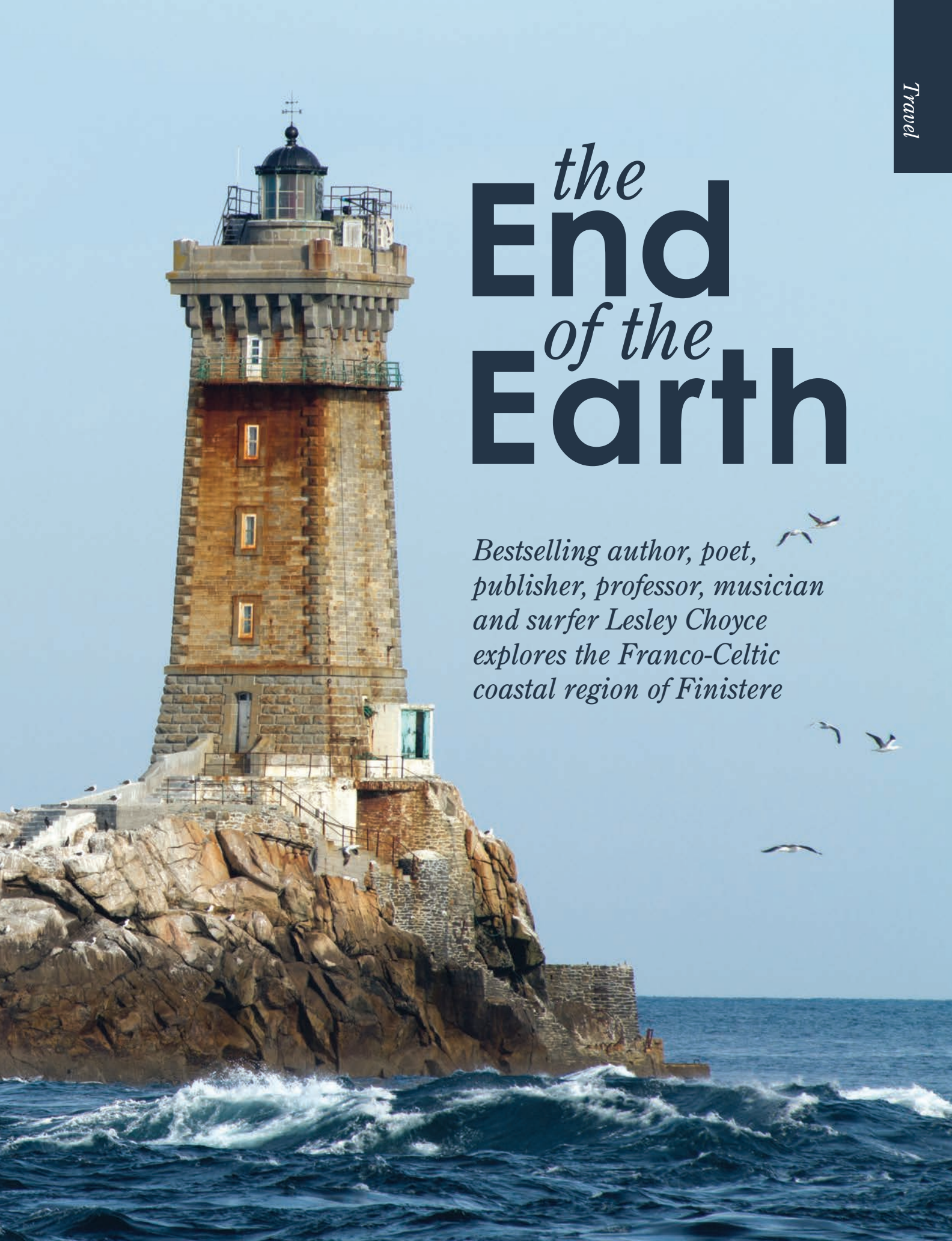
Scotcon will donate a portion of its ticket sales to two charities, including Youth Theatre Arts Scotland. As its title implies, the group's mandate is to provide opportunities for young people to participate in theatre across the country. The other, Stirling District Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), allows community members to freely connect with advisors to obtain professional guidance for debt problems, legal issues, consumer rights, and more.

"Each charity has been chosen because of a personal connection one of our executive team members have with its cause. CAB was chosen as I work with these individuals every day and I see their struggles on an ongoing basis. Youth Theatre Arts Scotland was chosen because of their association with Outlander, and the work that they do with youth who are economically disadvantaged, or have physical or learning disabilities."

For Aitken, Scotcon is a win-win-win scenario.

"I believe that sometimes Scotland's people forget how strong a nation we are, and that we have fought so hard for what we have. It is important that we remember and give thanks to those who have come before us, honour where we are today because of what they have done, and carry our culture forward for future generations."

www.scotcon.scot



the End *of the* Earth

Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and surfer Lesley Choyce explores the Franco-Celtic coastal region of Finistere

Most mornings when I wake up at my home in Nova Scotia I head to the ocean, if nothing else, to stand there and reflect that right here the continent ends.

If I had the proper means, I could step off land and go straight across that ocean to those farther shores in Ireland, Cornwall or Brittany. I have an affinity for most any place on earth where the land meets the sea. I remember once standing on the rocks at Land's End in Cornwall enamoured with the realization that, for England, this too was one of those exquisite peninsulas where the land gave way to the sea. Although I knew that France was somewhere south and a bit west of there, I didn't have that much of a hankering to visit that not-so-distant shore at that time.

But then I found out about Finistere. Yes, for those who recall their Latin, the name refers to yet another land's end, or - as some of us prefer to think of it - "the end of the earth." To ancient folk on these shores - a sub-region of Brittany that has its own unique culture and temperament - that was what it seemed. And here was Finistere - catching my attention as a part of the Celtic world that I had never explored.

And so this past spring, my wife Linda and I flew to Paris, all the while me dreading the six hour drive from Charles de Gaulle Airport to this distant land in Brittany to the west. The ride, however, turned out to be most excellent, especially the backroads of Brittany that would take us to our rental cottage in the tiny community of Hanvec. We settled in nicely with a living room view of rolling farm fields and green forests and, after our first sip of wine, I pondered how it was that I had never visited or even thought much about this grand, green idyllic place.

"Various locales in Finistere had popped up on my radar before the trip. One of them was the town of Pont-Aven because it had inspired the painter Paul Gauguin in the 1880s. It also boasted the world's most picturesque public washroom."

While I wouldn't have flown to France just to see the well-photographed WC, I was impressed that it was a unique site – a tidy stone structure perched above a river in a village peopled with artists and tourists. Gauguin had spent considerable time in Pont-Aven, inspired by the surrounding beauty of the place before heading off to even more exotic Tahiti for inspiration.

Linda and I hiked the nearby Bois d'Amour on a trail running along the river with a multitude of wild flowers, marred only slightly by the rear of an abandoned factory that could not fully diminish the verdant romantic atmosphere.

Huelgoat was also on our agenda for the week because I'd seen pictures of massive moss-covered boulders and read about supposedly enchanted forests at the doorstep of the town. The hike through the boulders was most impressive with a mix of sunlight and mist that evoked images of angel wings in the crisp morning air. Although the "Trembling Rock" didn't seem to tremble anymore, the passage down to the "Devil's Grotto" was definitely a descent to another dimension.

Legends suggest that the boulders were strewn here by an ancient Celtic giant or by Gargantua, himself, who dropped his weighted load of rock because he had been served a bad bowl of oatmeal in town. There are Arthurian legends about the place, and more reputable research showing that this neighbourhood was once inhabited by a long-gone ancient Celtic tribe. Beat writer Jack Kerouac, of On the Road 1950s fame, is descended from ancestors in this unique corner of France, as well. I felt something strange and wonderful while hiking beneath the great boulders in the mossy canyon and would return there again to feel both the ethereal spirit of the place and the Kerouac connection that made the village so evocative for me.

I almost passed up on Locronan, a well-preserved and well-touted old stone town. Founded by Saint Ronan, it dates back to at least the fifteenth century and remains pretty and authentic enough that Roman Polanski came here to shoot his visually stunning feature film, Tess, based on the Thomas Hardy novel. It seemed to keep cropping up in tourist brochures – something that often sends me scurrying in other directions - but I felt wonderfully at home here, wandering the old cobbled streets among sturdy stone buildings. I even bought my wife some earrings and a sweater which suggests the town had worked its own mystical charms on this wary and usually miserly traveller.

Concarneau - "France's third most important fishing port" - was another of those brochure towns and we headed for the Ville Close (walled town) along the harbour. A seafood lunch seemed in order and I bought the local skate dish, which was tasty enough but filled with long thin sharp bones that made for an almost suicidal meal. Experts describe skates as "cartilaginous," and that too made it less than appealing.

It could have been the skate that put me in a bad mood, but when we walked into the walled town and found it crowded with tourists milling through ancient stone buildings with gaudy shops selling mountains of Chinese-made kitsch trinkets, I found myself longing for the green rolling hills of Hanvec so we made our retreat.

Roscoff is a busy seaport that was to the north of Hanvec and we drove there through vast acreages of artichoke fields and

canola crops. Roscoff's damp stone streets reminded me much of seaside ports on the other side of the English Channel from here - Yarmouth and Portsmouth and the like. In fact, in Roscoff, you could board a ferry and make your way to Plymouth overnight, or even further to Cork in Ireland. Just outside of town, the Jardin Exotique is a bit of a surprise with its multitude of plants from many climates and continents.

"And then there were the stories about "Onion Johnnies" - Breton farmers from years gone by who grew famous pink onions, boarded vessels with their bicycles, and sold them door to door in England, charming housewives with their accent and berets. I couldn't help but wonder if these jaunting Onion Johnnies perhaps contributed to the population across the water. Talk about serving the customer."

My quest for the end of the earth led me to the Crozon peninsula and the several capes at some of the further points of land reaching into the North Atlantic. Pointe des Espagnols has a 60-metre-high cliff looking across the narrows of Goulet de Brest, which is a strategic point of entry - both military and commercial - into the harbour of Brest, the largest city in the region.

Pointe de Pen-Hir has some grand views of the Atlantic from equally high cliffs, but it also provides a sombre reminder of sadder days along these shores. For here stands The Cross of Pen-Hir, honouring Breton fighters who continued their efforts against Hitler in World War II, even after the nation had fallen to the Nazis. Part of the inscription reads, "France has lost a battle, but France has not lost the war. In the free world immense forces have not yet given up. One day these forces will crush the enemy."

Cap de la Chevre has sandstone cliffs nearly a hundred metres high. It was wild, windy and barren the day we were there, with extraordinary views south and east. But it was Pointe du Raz that I accepted as our symbolic end of the earth for this trip. The final narrow ridge of ragged rock stands high above the Baie des Trépassés, which translates as Bay of the Departed with "departed" meaning "dead." This undoubtedly refers to the number of watery deaths that have occurred here

through the centuries from ships crashing into and floundering on the spikey-toothed rocks. Gustave Flaubert and Victor Hugo made this wild and dangerous promontory famous in their writings in the nineteenth century.

Beyond the tip of land there is a lighthouse called La Vieille (The Old Lady) on a tiny rocky island named Gorlebella (farthest rock) that is visible on clear days. It has become legendary in photographs with mountainous waves slamming into and over the top of it. As I peered out towards it on a calm day, I could still imagine those saltwater behemoths pounding it over and over.

Pointe du Raz fit the bill for what I was looking for on this trip – a remote spot, much like Land's End in England (but without quite so much commercialization); a grand spot for wind and wave and gull squawks, and an afternoon outing to a place of stark beauty where one could imagine both the civilized world left behind and the seaward mysteries that lay ahead.

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Celts on Exhibit

Our award-wining photojournalist Tom Langlands revisits the meaning of Celtic with a visit to the National Museum of Scotland

On Thursday, June 23 of this year, I had two important entries in my diary. The first was to visit the Celts exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. The second was to cast my vote in the referendum to decide if Britain would remain part of the European Union or would leave in what has become known as Brexit. As I drove to Edinburgh that day these two things seemed unconnected; but as I walked into the gallery housing one of the most stunning exhibitions I have seen in recent years, they became inextricably linked in a way I had never considered.

Celts is an incredible exhibition with more than 300 stunning objects brought together from across Europe, spanning a period of 2,500 years. It is as thought-provoking as it is mesmerizing.

I imagined the speed of the reconstructed Newbridge chariot – the original was built around 400 BC and was part of the first recorded Iron Age chariot burial in Scotland, and is the oldest in the UK. Elegant and sleek, its sensuous, wooden curves and colourful hide-clad carriage bear all the hallmarks of the iron-age equivalent of a modern day sports car. I sensed the strength of the German Glauberg warrior immortalized in a frightening life-size statue, and I heard the terrifying sound from a carnyx – a tall, decorated horn used to intimidate enemies in battle. The feeling of power of a warrior-people was further emphasized in elaborate shields, swords and oversized headgear.

All of this was counterbalanced by the delicacy and exquisite artistry of the many smaller exhibits. Switching my gaze from the gold brooches - featuring warriors and wild animals, to the elaborate geometric patterns in gold filigree, silver and amber of the Hunterston brooch - it was difficult to fathom the skills needed to create such masterpieces. Similarly, the craftsmanship evident in the four gold torcs discovered in Blair Drummond, Perthshire in 2009 was astonishing. These magnificent items of jewellery - found by an amateur metal detectorist on his first outing - show artistic influences and skills from Scotland, Ireland and southwest France.

> *"Along with being a collection of amazing Iron Age objects, the exhibition asks the deeper question; who were the Celts?"*

It was the ancient Greeks who first coined the term Celts around 500 BC. Herodotus, the father of history, used it to describe people living near the source of the Danube. Later, Julius Caesar became the nemesis of the tribes of Gaul, noting that some referred to themselves as Celts. Subsequently, other historical documents place the Celts or their influence across much of modern mainland Europe stretching to the fringes of the former Roman Empire on the Atlantic coast.

As such, are we to assume that a single group of Celts spread across the whole of Europe, bringing a cultural and artistic homogeneity with them?

The case presented in the exhibition is that there is no archaeological evidence to support the concept of a unified Celtic people. Recent DNA profiling also confirms that there is no common ancestry amongst the people of lands that regard themselves as Celtic. Yet the objects on display, which were gathered from across a huge geographical area and over a large timespan, display many similarities of ideas, shared technical skills and stylistic interpretations. So what is happening?

Prior to the expansion of the Roman Empire, and the Christian religion that came with it, the tribes of Europe were evidently well connected. Many of the pieces in the Celts exhibition have been created with materials found far from the source of the object's discovery. Similarly, some of the skills used to create these items belonged to craftsmen in distant lands. Many of the exhibits symbolize power, wealth and status, and are the consequence of important trading routes and the sharing of artistic styles and cultural diversity. Thought processes - such as chariot burials – are shared amongst distant peoples, and torcs made in southwest France appear in Scotland. These are only some of the many examples that exist. The Romans brought with them even greater trade benefits, along with further erosion of former boundaries. People were adapting to influences from afar, but interpreting them in ways that still permitted their own unique character and culture to show.

Perhaps the stunning Gundestrup cauldron, found dismantled in a bog in Denmark, best exemplifies what was going on at the time. Dated between 150 - 50 BC, it measures 69 cm (27 in) in diameter and 42 cm (17 in) in height. At first glance

this is a truly impressive feasting vessel. But it is also much more significant in that the cauldron is constructed of seven outer and five inner silver plates, into which have been hammered or stamped enigmatic scenes depicting gods and goddesses, sacrifices, animals, warriors and carnyces. These characters, stories, myths and legends are the foundations of a belief system that was immensely important to the vessel's creators and users. This was a highly treasured piece that had been carefully hidden and possibly given up as a votive offering in a bog – an ancient place of spiritual significance. Although the Gundestrup cauldron displays what we regard as Celtic influences, its imagery also draws from many other traditions and cultures, including some from the Middle East. It represents a powerful fusion of cross-cultural ideologies and craftsmanship. Furthermore, the materials and skills used to craft it were located far from Denmark. The silver and the manufacturing method suggest it was created in modern day Romania or Bulgaria.

This is where Celts presents a conundrum; one can conclude that the concept of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, Isle of Man, Brittany and Galicia being Celtic lands is an erroneous 18th century attempt to explain the cultural similarities between these territories and also their differences when viewed as part of the wider European picture. It is an impression further compounded by romanticized, Victorian myths. So the message of Celts is that there was no unifying European Celtic race or culture.

However, this is at odds with what I saw. There are torcs, bizarre animals and musical instruments on the Gundestrup cauldron that I saw on other exhibits from across Europe. Likewise, sophisticated and remarkably similar geometric patterns appear on apparently unconnected shields, jewellery and headwear. So, if I was not witnessing the art of a definable Celtic people then I was witnessing several groups of people that are connected intrinsically through trade, art and culture while still retaining elements of their own individuality and uniqueness.

"To what extent do cultures and peoples have to overlap before they become defined collectively?"

The lands at the western extremities of the Roman Empire relied less on difficult trading routes across occupied territories than on the easier option of trading across the seas. All the modern, so-called Celtic lands are connected by relatively short sea crossings and so it could be expected that while retaining their own cultural identities, they would be influenced by what was going on in the lands of their immediate seafaring neighbours and partners. In this way, a sense of a shared identity evolved. That is not to suggest that the wider European picture did not influence them, for undoubtedly it did.

As I drove home that evening I considered the Victorian, romanticized notion of the Celts and the artefacts of a stunning exhibition. Perhaps it is our cultural connectedness rather than any genetic grouping that defines us as Celts. Maybe it is the cross-cultural sharing between a group of seafaring lands on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean that makes us what we are. I believe that each of the Celtic lands has a unique but shared heritage, and even if it is a romanticized view, I am happy to call myself a Celt. Erroneous as the origins of that modern title may be, it provides a sense of identity and the opportunity to embrace and celebrate what it is that sets us apart from other cultures. But I also know that my Celtic heritage is connected to and - at least in part - born of a wider European history and diversity.

I called in at the polling station that evening, collected my voting slip and made my mark. I concluded that I am proud to be labelled a Celt from a unique country that shares its cultural roots with a cluster of like-minded coastal lands that in turn are connected historically and inextricably to modern day Europe. The following morning I arose to the news that the political map of Europe was changing again, and although the full implications of Brexit will only become apparent in the months and years ahead, I take solace in the fact that the Celts - whoever they were and are today - have helped shape a continent for over 2,000 years and will continue to do so for a very long time to come.

Celts is at the National Museum of Scotland until September 25

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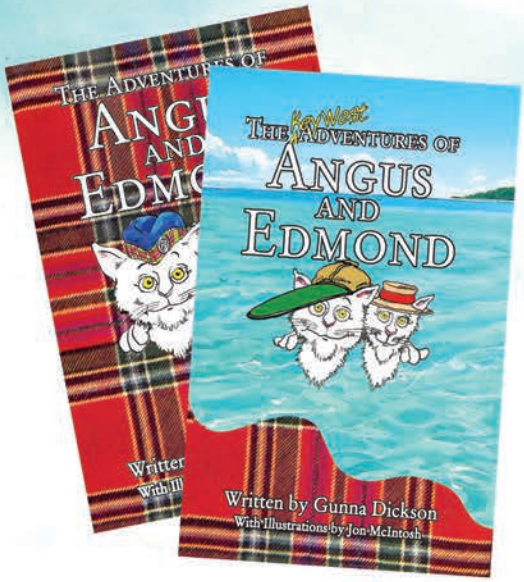

Just back from the Highlands of Scotland, Angus and Edmond pack up their tartan gear, and find themselves looking for beachwear.

In this second book of lively cat tales, the brothers receive a surprise invitation to visit Key West and set off on a road trip from their home in New York City. On the way they stop to see the Liberty Bell and Rocky Balboa in Philadelphia, patriotic sites in Washington D.C., a Civil War battlefield in Maryland, and a theme park in Florida.

A feast of fun for animal lovers and children of all ages.

Author Gunna Dickson is a New York based writer, editor and translator. Illustrator and fine artist Jon McIntosh lives and works in Key West.

"The Key West Adventures of Angus and Edmond" (ISBN 978-1-62137-879-2) is published by *Virtualbookworm.com*. It is available in hardcover and softcover at *Amazon.com*, *Amazon.co.uk* and numerous other online sites.

Back to the Land

As Celtic Life International correspondent Frances J. Folsom explains, the St. Tola Goat Farm in western Ireland is a labour of love

Tucked away in the diverse, rugged landscape of the Burren near the town of Inagh, County Clare, you will come across rich pastureland dotted with grazing goats. These animals are part of a herd that belongs to Siobhan Ni Ghairbhith and her life partner John Harrington at St. Tola Goat Farm.

The farm, and the multi award-winning cheese made there, is named for St. Tola - the patron saint of County Clare. St. Tola settled here in the year 700 AD. He was Bishop of Clonard, Gwynn and Hadcock, and founded his church in what later became known as Dysert Tola. As Siobhan explained, "St. Tola is buried at Dysert O'Dea Castle near Corofin, five miles over the road from our farm."

It has been nearly twenty years since Siobhan left Galway city to return to Inagh and farming. While in Galway, she taught at an all Irish language primary school, Scoil Iognáid, in Salthill, and studied marketing and business at Galway University.

When I visited the farm and met her (and the goats) I understood why she left the security of a steady paycheck and pension. The countryside, deep in the heart of Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, is ruggedly beautiful.

"My family has been farming in Inagh since my grandfather bought his farm in 1930," she told me. "My roots are here. So, when this farm came up for sale I made the leap to become a farmer, going back to the land."

"There are few cheese-makers that actually make cheese on a farm. It's imperative we look after the land we have. It's not about getting bigger and better; it's about the farm, and getting back to the land."

Siobhan started a hands-on education in making cheese at St. Tola in 1998. Her teachers were then-neighbours Meg and Derrick Gordon, who ran the farm as a small business. The following year, when the Gordons announced their desire to retire, Siobhan and John bought the property outright. They increased the size of the herd to 200 goats, hired seven full-time employees, and leased sixty acres of pastureland from her father.

Having owned the Kush Shellfish Company in Kenmare, County Kerry for thirty years, John brought a wealth of marketing skills to the new business.

Soon after, the couple set up shop at local and area farmers' markets, handing out samples to curious customers. It wasn't long before word of mouth and intense marketing to restaurants, wholesalers and shops, brought on a rush of orders. The pair furthered their reach by connecting with Failte Ireland, the Burren Ecotourism Network, the Burren Food Trail, the Irish Farmhouse Cheesemakers Association, and the Irish Raw Milk Presidia of Slow Food Ireland.

As St. Tola goat cheese is hand-crafted in small batches, making it takes several days.

While touring the farm, and over bites of the wonderful St. Tola Ash Log, Siobhan explained the almost week-long process.

"We milk 200 goats twice a day, early morning and evening. The fresh milk is pumped from the milking parlour into the vats in the cheese house."

"Every morning the milk is heated to between 18 to 25 degrees Celsius. It is then pumped into large muslin bags. We use a special milk culture to test the pH, when it has dropped to a certain level, then we add the traditional animal rennet. This helps the milk to split between the curds (the solid fatty bit) and the whey (the watery bit). The milk is then left to stand alone in a warm room for 24 hours. We do not touch it at all during this time allowing the curds and whey to gently develop.

"On the second day we drain the curd. The milk has now split into curds and whey. We want the curd for the cheese making, so we slowly winch up the cheese cloth muslin bags and allow the whey to drain off for another 24 hours. There is no pressure put on the draining bags - the cheese drains simply through the force of its own weight.

"On day three we fill the moulds. The drained curd is now ready for moulding. It is weighed and gently mixed with 1% salt until it is smooth and creamy. Some of the curd is used immediately for our fresh St. Tola Divine curd, so it is put into tubs and is ready to use. The rest of the curd is softly hand-ladled into log or crottin moulds. This is very labour intensive but this gentle handling ensures that we get the softest, creamiest of textures. The less the curd is handled the better the final resulting cheese. The cheese continues to drain in the moulds for 24 hours.

"On the fourth day we apply the ash or maturing on the plain cheese. The moulded cheese is now put into a cold room for a minimum of 24 hours, but ideally for 72 hours. If the cheese is destined to become an ash log, then we take it out of its mould at this stage and apply a very thin layer of food grade charcoal. This acts as a seal around the cheese, it lowers the pH on the skin of the cheese and acts as a natural preservative.

"On the final day we mature the cheese. All of our cheese is matured to our customer's specific requirements. Therefore it is only when the cheese comes out of the moulds that we then decide what we are going to do with it next. Some of our customers like our cheese very fresh and light and in this case the cheese goes into a cold refrigerator until we sell it. A cold refrigerator will slow down maturation.

"However, classic St. Tola is known for its beautiful, wrinkled, golden rind on the outside. This is formed by the natural growth of a harmless mould called geotrichum. All of our cheeses will eventually develop this mould to some degree. That being said, we can aid this process by placing our cheeses in special maturation chambers or armoires. These are set to higher temperatures and variable humidity. In this way we can aid the growth of the golden rind in a more controlled way. Our mature St. Tola is left in these armoires for a number of days and turned daily until the golden rind has formed. When that happens these cheeses are wrapped and packed ready for dispatch."

Along with making the cheese, there is no end of other tasks to keep the couple busy, including milking the goats twice a day, feeding them, watering them down, mucking out their barns, spreading hay, and herding them to and from pastureland. And then there are the ongoing demands of running a successful business; delivering to customers, setting up at farmers markets, ordering supplies, and keeping the finances.

"I sometimes wonder if I was stark-raving mad to leave my regular job all those years ago," Siobhan laughs. "It's not an easy life, but it's a good life – truly a labour of love."

www.st-tola.ie

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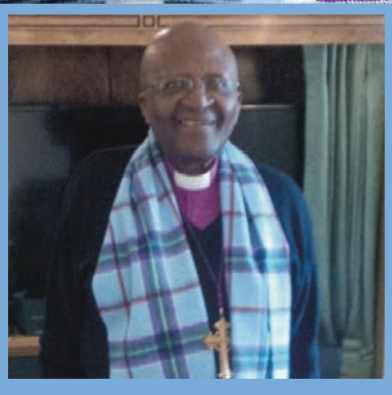

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Regina Tierney

www.celticfusiondesign.com

I grew up in a little parish in County Clare called Kilnamona (the Church in the Bog). My family has lived here for generations. According to lore, our ancestors originally came from Cahercommaun Fort, which is located in the Burren National Park, around 500 BC.

When I was younger, I just didn't resonate with what I saw in the shops or in magazines. I found it difficult to find clothes that suited my personality, I longed for clothes with natural fibers. I felt connected with my Celtic culture and my roots and I wanted to express that through how I looked.

I started with very simple ideas, purely motivated by my desire to create clothing I could identify with. The craftsmanship and design of my work is evolving each year, and it has become much more refined.

Being creative is as natural to me as breathing; when I get into the studio and start generating ideas and new concepts it is difficult to stop.

I have created an entire look; the waistcoats and shirts for both men and women were designed to complement each other, the woman's skirts and trousers were designed to go with the shirts and waistcoats. I chose the materials because of their vintage rooted feel, and those were the fabrics I wished to wear but couldn't find on the market.

The greatest reward is meeting someone who really connects with the design. It has happened many times that a person has discovered my work and has dreamt about the clothing I've created. This kind of connection is beyond words.










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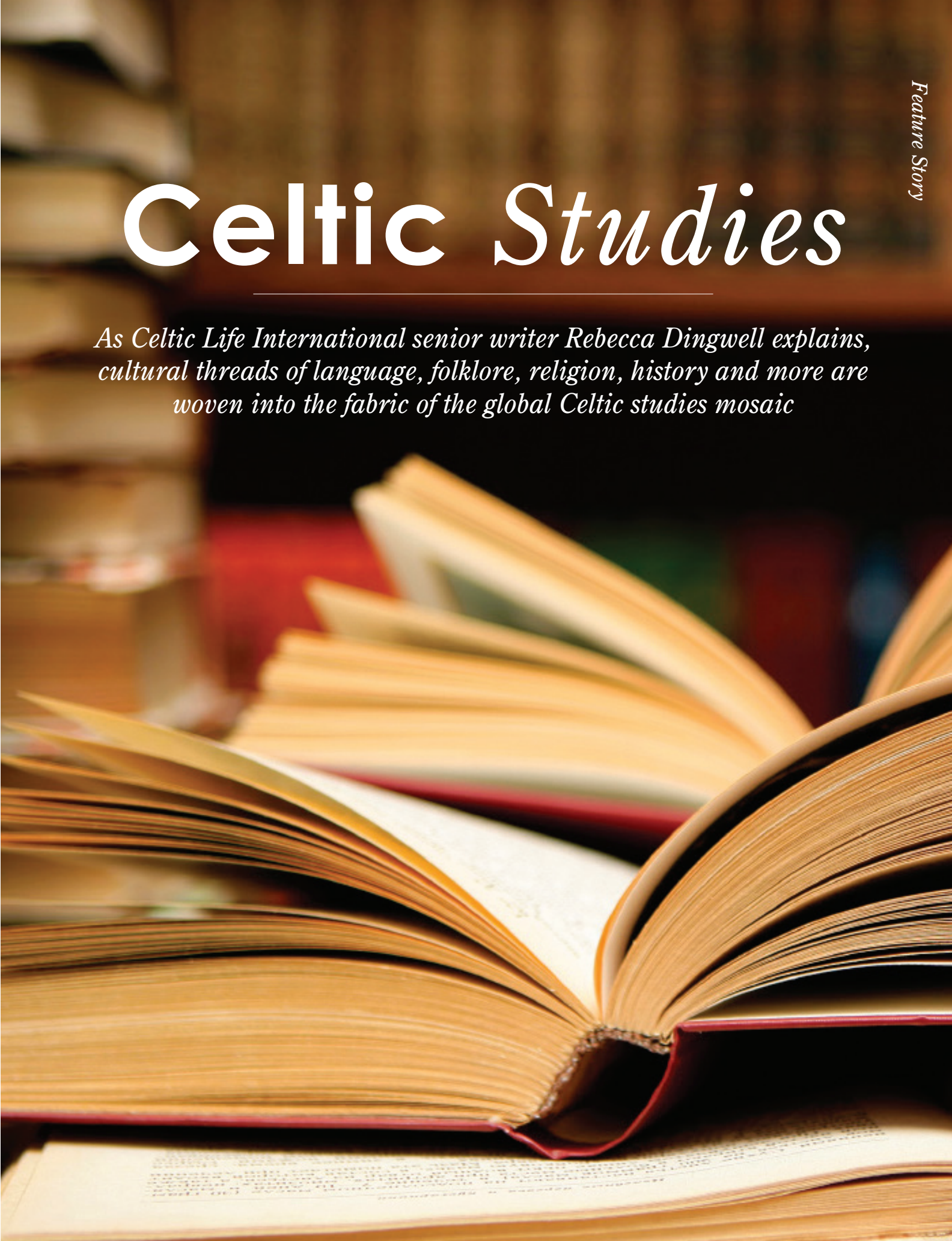
Celtic *Studies*

As Celtic Life International senior writer Rebecca Dingwell explains, cultural threads of language, folklore, religion, history and more are woven into the fabric of the global Celtic studies mosaic



Elaine Eichner

Eamonn O'Ciardha

With two bachelor degrees already under her belt, Elaine Eichner enrolled in the MA Celtic Studies program at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She recently finished a summer program in Irish language and culture, and found herself craving more.

"I'm one of these people that is interested in lots of different things," she laughs over the phone from Lampeter on the country's west coast, where she is taking an intensive Welsh language course.

"You know," continues Eichner, "there is an awful lot of study in Celtic studies that's a little bit wishy-washy. I didn't want that. I wanted something more rigorous, more academic, more fruitful."

Trinity Saint David's MA is a distance program, so it's not necessary for students to travel to Wales.

"It works very well," says Eichner, who describes herself as "semi-retired." Distance learning helps her work around her own schedule. "I can time things, so I take on quite a lot of work and conferences generally in the Christmas term. But I try very hard to do very little paid work in the summer term."

As with most university degrees, certain modules at Trinity Saint David are mandatory – but students do have a say in what pathway they would like to take. For instance, they may choose between subjects such as culture and society, medieval, or sanctity and spirituality.

"I often find that students tell me that they wish they had studied this subject long ago," says Jane Cartwright, the program director for the MA. "They quite like the range of different topics as well."

Cartwright has been teaching for over 20 years. Like the rest of the program's staff, she speaks both Welsh and English. "You can take your MA in Celtic Studies through the medium of English or you can take it entirely through the medium of Welsh if you want to," she explains.

Those who take the courses in Welsh usually live and work in Wales, but the range of students taking classes in English can be broad – from those living in Canada to students all the way in New Zealand.

Students who have no Welsh language experience but wish to learn, like Eichner, have the option of taking the university's intensive residential program. Due to the large Welsh-speaking population in Lampeter, students have the chance to speak and practice Welsh on a regular basis. However, there's also an online language course available for those unable to travel.

"It might just be that the students are interested in how the Welsh have survived so well and how the language has been kept alive," speculates Cartwright.

Eichner admits she has no intention of becoming a fluent Welsh speaker, but getting familiar with the language adds to her experience with Welsh transcripts.

"Things come up when you're looking at the literature or you're looking at the raw text," she shares. "You realize that a translation is always kind of a second-hand look at something. So, it was fascinating to think, 'could I get a first-hand look at some of this?'"

Language is a core component of Celtic academic programs.

Éamonn Ó Ciardha is the summer school coordinator for Irish language and

Paul Birt

literature at Ulster University. He believes that Irish writers have made great contributions to global literature, and many of them continue to write in the Irish language.

"It's the oldest written vernacular in Europe," he explains. "Some of the great works of 20th century Irish have been translated into dozens of languages."

Ó Ciardha spoke to Celtic Life International via Skype from Ulster's Derry campus, where systemic discrimination against Northern Ireland's nationalist community sparked decades of sectarian conflict. There was a time when it was – at best – frowned upon to speak Irish. Now, the language is enjoying a renaissance of sorts.

> *"Many people are rediscovering the languages of the islands."*

"We at the university have been beneficiaries of that. We are part of it, obviously – but from a business perspective, people are coming back. They are interested and they are engaging in the community."

Once that interest is piqued, many are likely to take it a step further by pursuing a degree on the subject. This rediscovery of Celtic languages reaches beyond the Celtic nations themselves. For example, Nova Scotia, Canada is home to the island of Cape Breton, where Gaelic is still used by many.

"We live in the heartland of what we might think of as the only living Gaeltacht outside of Scotland and perhaps Ireland as well," says Heather Sparling of Cape Breton University. The institution offers Gaelic courses, and students may even choose to pursue a Gaelic minor. More recently, the institution has partnered with the Gaelic College in nearby St. Ann's to offer a four-week immersion course over the summer months.


Jane Cartwright

"For all sorts of historical reasons, it makes sense for us to have this program," notes Sparling, who is a Gaelic speaker herself.

> *"It's not a dead language, and it's not a dead culture. It's a living culture."*

The demographic of the program varies, but Sparling believes Gaelic complements many interests and other courses offered at the university – from local folklore to traditional music.

"We've had a lot of students who come in as fiddlers. They understand that there's a connection to the language there that they want to know more about."

Language is just one piece of the puzzle that is Celtic studies. CBU's Celtic Concentration, for instance, is interdisciplinary. In other words, the program includes language but it is not limited to it.

"Some students may be less interested in language, but are interested in other aspects of the culture," explains Sparling. "They take a mix of courses in folklore, music, literature and history."

In the University of Ottawa's Celtic minor program, the focus is mainly on modern views of the Celtic world, including undergraduate courses The Music of the Celts and Celtic Cultures in Transition. The university's Celtic Studies chair, Dr. Paul Birt, says that those subjects are more likely to appeal to students.


Yoko Hemmi

"We have two major clienteles for Celtic courses: those who are studying for the Celtic minor during which they have to study 10 Celtic courses in all, and those who take Celtic courses as electives."

Several of the courses have attracted upwards of 100 students. "One of the most common reasons is the heritage of the student and an opportunity to learn the language and to hear about the contemporary situation – say in Ireland, Wales or Scotland," Birt continues.

"A very large number of students have no particular connection to the Celtic world, but often find it is to their liking."

Other gateways into Celtic studies include an interest in contemporary Celtic music, paganism or Christianity. For an associate professor at Keio University in Japan, a fascination with the Celts was sparked by her love of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings.

"The story's elves led me to the world of medieval romances, thence to medieval Irish and Welsh literature," explains Yoko Hemmi. She founded the Japan Celticists Society in 1979, which was renamed as Japan Society for Celtic Studies in 2004.

Hemmi has lectured on medieval Celtic literature in the past as part of an English Literature seminar series at Keio, but notes that there are currently no Celtic studies programs in Japanese universities. That said, 110 people are part of the Japan Society for Celtic Studies thanks to their interest in the genre's literature, languages, history and arts.

"I'm afraid there is no demand for teaching Old Irish or Middle Welsh at Japanese universities," she admits. "Although there are some private study groups reading medieval texts in their original languages, and there are also small groups learning modern Irish and Welsh languages. Those who took PhDs in Celtic studies abroad volunteer to teach these groups. Many of the members of the Japan Society for Celtic Studies attended summer language courses in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, too."

Although it's not an official academic program, Japan's Celtic studies society shows how the appeal of learning about the Celts stretches far and wide. From the United States to Australia, classes and societies are available for those itching to absorb information. The question is, could a graduate with a Celtic studies degree hope to apply their education to a career?

"There are no practical uses for Celtic studies in Japan, such as job opportunities, but people just want to learn out of interest," notes Hemmi.

This may not be the case in other places, however.

At the University of Ottawa, Paul Birt says that Celtic studies courses are often aligned with other disciplines, such as medieval studies or classics. Celtic Woman: Myth and Reality, for example, is cross-listed with women's studies.

"The wide range of topics covered by Celtic studies appeals to an equally wide range of students who discover how the Celtic world is very much connected to the real world they live in."

"The study of how Celtic languages function in society is also very much at the cutting-edge of the more international discipline of language revitalization and attracts students who are interested in that field," Birt adds.

Éamonn Ó Ciardha agrees.

"Irish studies is a microcosm for the study of humanity," he claims. "You've got the major themes of history, literature, discourse, politics, peace and conflict."

Ó Ciardha doesn't dismiss that some stduents want to engage with the subject simply for the subject's sake, but he feels it can be a good backdrop for master's degrees, including international business or even law. It's also helpful for international students who may decide to stay in Ireland to further their education, look for an internship or job.

"At least you know something about the country that you'll end up working in."

Jane Cartwright of Trinity Saint David feels "there are all sorts of practical applications" for Celtic studies.

"Students that work in tourism or work in history and fields of heritage would benefit," she says. However, Cartwright also has students who are in the master's program purely out of interest. "I have students with PhDs that are doing an MA," she shares. "It's not that they need the qualification, it's just that they want to learn about the subject. I did have a student that already had eight MAs that completed this MA."

Heather Sparling is able to list off CBU graduates who have found employment through their background in Gaelic. For instance, one grad is currently working as a teacher in Scotland.

And a former Celtic Concentration student is now studying Gaelic education and will be a Gaelic teacher in Cape Breton's school system.

"There's a number of places people can get jobs," she says. "The other thing I would say is that there are reasons to take university degrees that may not be obviously linked to a job."

Sparling encourages her students to do what they love, because they won't be happy with a subject they don't enjoy.

"Even if you do get a job in that, what are you going to do? Do something you don't like for the rest of your life?"

Sparling is convinced that if a student follows their passion, "the doors will open."

> *"It may not be an obvious career, but they will have the knowledge and the skills and the background that they need to get a job that will be fulfilling to them."*

Although many students want to learn about the Celtic world, and such education can contribute to a larger purpose, it can be challenging to keep departments afloat. Sparling believes it's a tough time for universities in general.

"Probably especially for Nova Scotia because of our demographic challenges," she says, referring to the decline of the province's young population. Students who come from elsewhere in the country or the world can't be depended on, either.

"That is always going to be a smaller number of students for us. And really, the primary attraction for us is our local students, because they're the ones that are coming out of the Gaelic-speaking communities."

She also points out there isn't much in the way of support for any of the humanities or social sciences at the moment.

"Right now, there's so much focus on getting a degree that feeds directly into a job, even though that's largely a myth. Even if you do a science degree or a business degree, it doesn't necessarily lead you into a job."

Some subjects, muses Sparling, are simply seen as "more useful" than others. And while the arts and humanities are often seen as less functional, they can have useful outcomes.

"They're just not socially recognized right now, the way they might have been in previous times. So as a result, I find that it's just generally difficult to get attention to Celtic and Gaelic for sure."

The University of Ottawa's Celtic Studies program also faces challenges, despite growing student interest. Some of those students have voiced their wish to do a major in Celtic studies rather than the facility's existing minor degree, but Paul Birt admits that "growth is not an easy option." They only have one professor who teaches the subject on a full-time basis.

Birt also sees the value in offering online courses.

"I think this could be an excellent initiative given the potential interest in the Celtic world in Canada," he says. "I believe there is such a thing as Celtic Canada, and it is something everyone can enjoy and partake in.

> *"There are many people beyond the age of undergraduate students who would enjoy learning in a structured way about their Celtic heritage, or just because it is interesting and enriching."*

"Such a scheme would of course require additional funding and human resources, however."

Jane Cartwright says each individual university is responsible for promoting its own Celtic studies program, and the key is grabbing the attention of the right people.

"You have to target who you perceive to be your target audience," says the Welsh professor. "But I think that Celtic studies is quite popular at the moment."

She credits that status to the slew of incentives to take Celtic-themed courses, whether a student's interests lie in language, folklore or history. She also points out the widespread reach of Celtic studies, citing a Celtic department she worked for at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in Poland.

"I was surprised that they had a Celtic studies department – they actually had a huge English department," Cartwright recalls. "There was a professor there that just felt that Celtic languages – Welsh and Irish – were particularly interesting, so everybody that studied English had to choose either Welsh or Irish (as well)."

The continued enthusiasm for the Celtic world in academia makes Cartwright hopeful for the future, particularly in terms of the continued survival of Celtic languages. Such hope may not be unfounded, if students such as Elaine Eichner continue to enroll in Celtic programs around the world.

"The thing that has fascinated me most," Eichner says of her studies, "is how everything weaves together."

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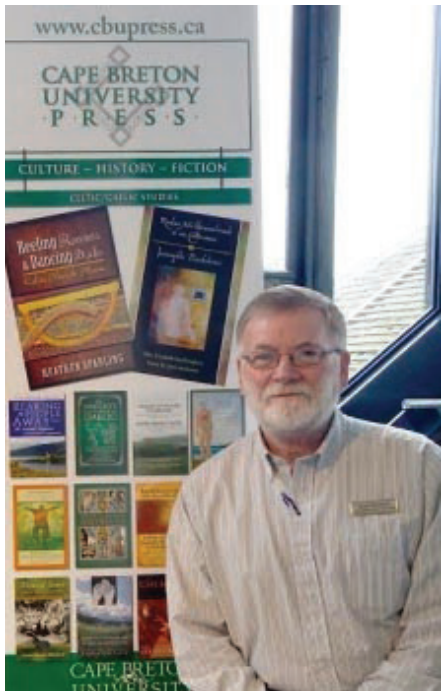

Cape Breton University Press

Across the Celtic Diaspora, Cape Breton Island shines with a vital and vibrant Celtic creative culture. Perhaps best known for music, song and dance, the Island is also home to a litany of literary lions, including Frank MacDonald, Alistair MacLeodand Douglas Arthur Brown. Cape Breton University Press has been at the forefront of the region's publishing sector since 1974. Primarily a trade book publisher, CBU Press has also published children's books, adult fiction and non-fiction. Over the past decade, there has been increased emphasis on Celtic and Gaelic related subject matter, including non-fiction books on Gaelic tradition, music, song and dance, and Gaelic poetry. With a mandate to publish Atlantic Canada literature, with a particular focus on Cape Breton Island, CBU Press publications fill a critical role through the development, encouragement, dissemination and promotion of literature and scholarship in local, regional, national and international markets. From The Clearances to bardic tradition, fiddling, step dancing and mouth music, to The Naughty Little Book of Gaelic, CBU Press books are available worldwide through Amazon and others, both in print and e-book formats.

www.cbupress.ca

Canadian School of Irish Studies

With support from Canada's Irish community, Irish Studies at Concordia University in Montreal continues to evolve exponentially. The School of Irish Studies is now an independent academic unit offering both a Major and a Minor in Irish Studies. These multidisciplinary programs offer more than twenty courses in twelve disciplines each year, attracting over nine hundred students. Students can combine Irish Studies with other programs of their choice, and many are eligible to qualify for free tuition. Last year, the program gave more than $120,000 to both undergraduate and graduate students to pay their fees as well as for trips to Ireland. Irish Studies provides a foundation in several disciplines that improves career options. And while the focus is on Irish history and culture, ultimately the issues go beyond Ireland and resonate around the world, broadening a student's educational experience, widening perspectives on the contemporary world, and enhancing job prospects. Its six distinguished professors, annual visiting speakers from Ireland, and a close-knit mentoring environment, make the School of Irish Studies one of the world's pre-eminent locations for the study of Ireland and its Diaspora, and a dynamic educational center that is transforming lives.

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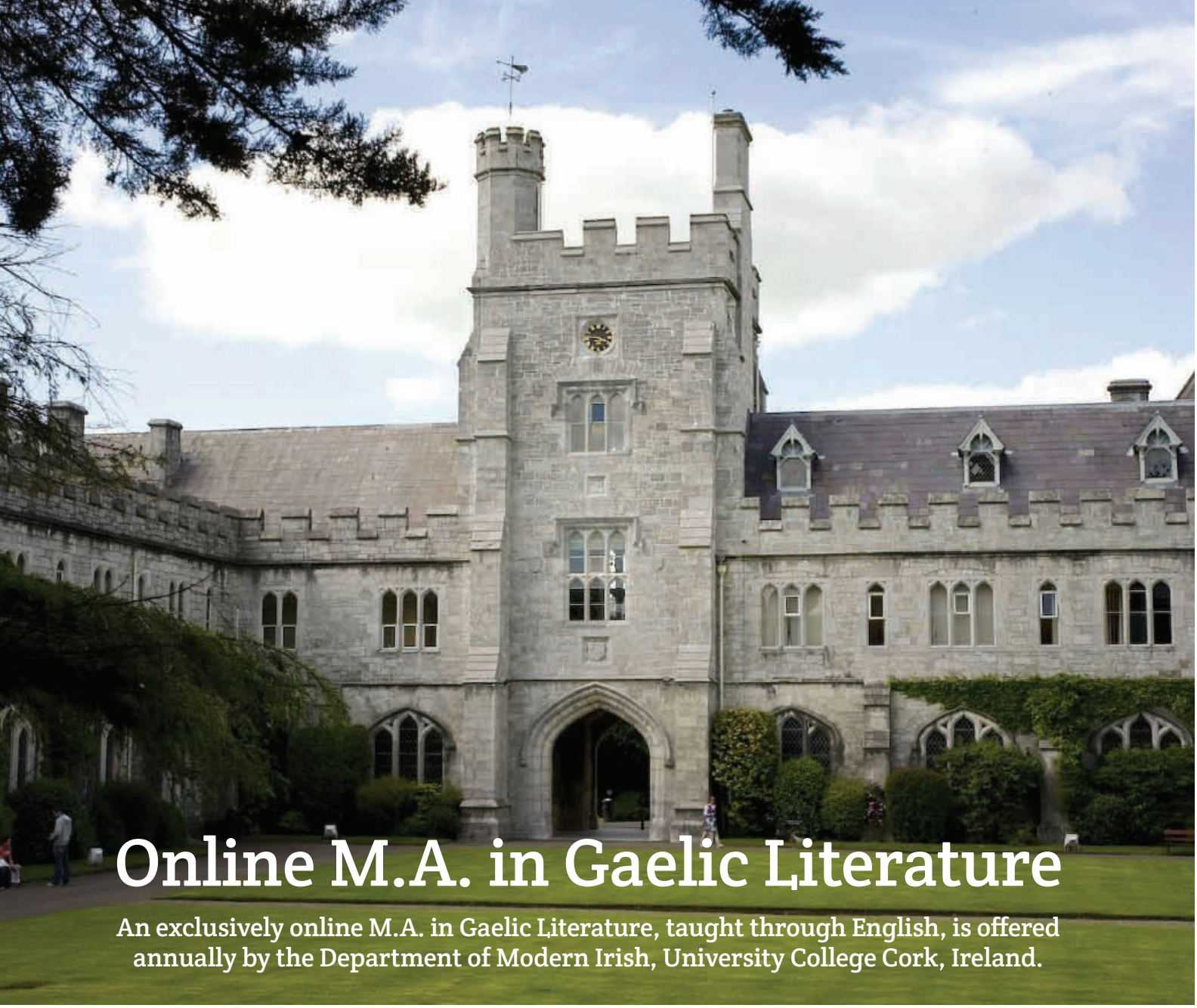

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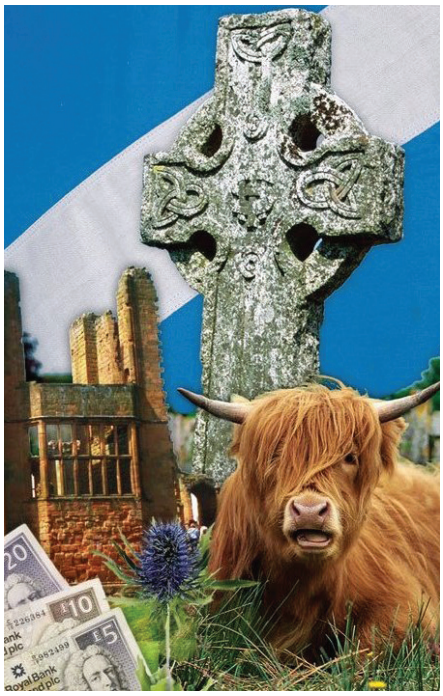

The Atlantic Gaelic Academy

Bob Leonard, executive director of the Atlantic Gaelic Academy, is a native of Cape Breton. "The Gaelic language is part of my heritage and roots, and your roots form part of your identity. It is important to know where we come from, and to appreciate the tradition and culture of our ancestors." The school was formed nearly a decade ago to teach students to read, write, and speak the language. Currently over 100 pupils enroll in the online classes each year. "The AGA makes the learning of Gaelic available throughout the world. The classes are conducted in "virtual classrooms", with students and the teacher in their own homes, and everyone connected at the same time. The classes have all the attributes of in-person classes, but with less external distractions, and a more relaxed environment, which is more conducive to learning a language. We also provide a pronunciation guide, with sound files spoken by a native Gaelic speaker for each word, which is available to students at any time day or night. We have dialogues and stories with sound files as well, and unique "verbal training" sessions, which help to develop a good accent, or 'blas'."

www.gaelicacademy.ca

The Elphinstone Institute

The Elphinstone Institute is a centre for the study of Ethnology, Folklore, and Ethnomusicology at the ancient University of Aberdeen, Scotland. The Institute offers both a one-year introduction to the study of Scottish Folklore and Oral Traditions and a graduate program in Ethnology, Folklore, and Ethnomusicology, exploring song, music, dance, custom and belief, storytelling, childlore, material culture, sports and pastimes. Staff and students use ethnographic methodologies to explore ideas of identity and belonging, meaning and function, drawing on an exceptional heritage of traditional music, ballad and song, story, lore and language, and developing interest in how traditions and cultures are created, adapted, reinterpreted and renewed in contemporary contexts, both at home and abroad. Monthly public lectures and an ethnographic film series operate throughout the academic year, and the Institute publishes a refereed series of scholarly publications. Students and staff take part in our public engagement partnerships with local organizations and individuals in the form of joint research projects and community initiatives at festivals, displays, conferences, and participative workshops that increase public understanding of the importance of vernacular culture in society today.

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University College Cork

The Online MA in Gaelic Literature offered by the Department of Modern Irish at University College Cork aims to provide students with an in-depth introduction to the texts and authors that, through a period of more than 1,200 years, created a distinctive literature of incredible variety, giving full expression to the many identities of the Gaelic world. Drawing on the knowledge of recognized experts from the Department of Modern Irish in the field of Gaelic Literature, the program may be taken full-time (one year) or part-time (two years). The course is taught in English, and so no prior knowledge of any Gaelic language is required. Students choose six taught modules from a menu that includes a course on the Irish Language for beginners, and later complete a minor dissertation of between 12,000 and 15,000 words. Access to all reading material is provided as part of the course, and as registered students of University College Cork, course-participants are entitled to use all the electronic resources available through the University's Boole Library. As an online-only program, the curriculum is available to students around the world, making it an attractive and affordable education alternative.

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Celtic Colours

Against the crimson and gold of Cape Breton's high wooded hills, the roar of the Atlantic and the sparkle of the island's vast salt water lakes, Celtic Colours International Festival celebrates its 20th anniversary over nine days this October

Story by Rosalie MacEachern

In small towns, rural harbours and picturesque villages, traditional Cape Breton musicians are getting ready to host their cultural counterparts from around the world for the 20th edition of Celtic Colours International Festival (CCIF).

Gifted musicians from Japan, Russia, Spain, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the Isle of Man, the United States and seven Canadian provinces will cross the islet's Canso Causeway to the place so poignantly penned in the lyrics of Kenzie MacNeil's Cape Breton anthem, "We are an island, a rock in the stream, we are a people as proud as there's been."

Visiting artists will perform with the region's fiddlers, pipers and dancers in communities along the famed Cabot Trail. Amidst ocean vistas and old-growth forests, by the picture-perfect Bras d'Or Lakes and along the Fleur de Lis Trail, all will be united by the transcending language of music for nine crisp days and starlit nights from October 7 to 15.

Scottish singer, songwriter and composer Dougie MacLean, Irish fiddler Liz Doherty and Galician piper Carlos Núñez are among the international artists appearing at this year's festival. Fiddlers Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac, Gaelic singer Mary Jane Lamond, and pianists Doug MacPhee and Mac Morin will comprise part of the Cape Breton contingent. The Unusual Suspects, the festival's largest act, is richly international in scope; they are a 27-member Celtic folk orchestra arranged and directed by Scottish musicians David Milligan and Corrina Hewat, with help from Cape Breton's Allie Bennett.

CCIF's marquee attractions may be the 49 concerts staged all across the island, but the festival also includes over 250 cultural events and exhibits, and more than 50 community meals where visitors can sit elbow to elbow with Cape Bretoners, enjoying home cooking and warm hospitality, often forging lasting friendships over seafood chowder, fishcakes or a Thanksgiving turkey dinner. In keeping with the island's predominantly Celtic heritage, many concerts and events take place in Gaelic-named communities like Boisdale, Inverness, Iona and Glendale. The gathering also honours the region's French and Mi'kmaq roots, with activities scheduled for the villages of Belle Cote, D'Escousse, Eskasoni and Membertou.

Twenty odd years ago, Celtic Colours International Festival was the magnificently ambitious dream of Cape Breton musicians Joella Foulds and Max MacDonald, a pair of strategic thinkers with deep convictions. Today it is an internationally renowned festival that brings $11.5 million to the island economy each autumn.

In 2015, 20,568 tickets were sold, representing 88 per cent of total capacity. The festival featured 405 artists, 77 per cent of them from Cape Breton, and staged 47 concerts and 268 workshops or events in 33 different communities. Festival-goers came from all 50 of the United States, all Canadian provinces and territories, and 31 other countries.

To commemorate its 20th anniversary, this year's festival will present themes of both remembrance for things past and hopes for the future. On opening night, which features Symphony Nova Scotia, tributes will be paid to departed musicians Buddy MacMaster, Jerry Holland, John Allan Cameron, Raylene Rankin and Rita MacNeil.

"These are artists known throughout Cape Breton and beyond by their first names," says Foulds, who will be performing the tribute to Rita MacNeil, having been her backup singer for many years. "They were great friends of Celtic Colours, so we will remember them and treasure their music."

The seeds of Celtic Colours were sewn when Foulds and MacDonald teamed up to bring the East Coast Music Awards show to Cape Breton in 1995.

> *"We were determined to do something more to attract greater attention to Cape Breton music and culture."*

Their research took them to Glasgow's then fledgling music festival, Celtic Connections.

"We had ideas, but we wanted to see what they were doing," Foulds notes. "Max and I both met dozens of very generous people and then traded information all the way home. By the time we got back to Cape Breton we had worked out a model for a decentralized rural festival."

The pair was adamant that the gathering had to incorporate the region's many small communities where the music and culture had been passed down through families.

"People had come to the town of Sydney to work for generations, but it was in the rural communities that the music thrived. We also knew that a festival in one location would not have the buy-in of the community at large and we needed the support of the whole island."


Joella Foulds

MacDonald remembers a pivotal meeting at Celtic Connections when he and Foulds were desperately working the room. He was introduced to Scottish guitarist Tony McManus, who has since become a CCIF favourite.

"Tony listened to our story and immediately took me to meet Carsten Panduro who was running a music festival in Denmark. Carsten understood the challenges and proved very helpful."

When start-up money for CCIF was not forthcoming, Panduro came to Cape Breton to put his weight behind Foulds' and MacDonald's efforts.

"A big imposing guy from away, full of enthusiasm and experience, and on our side," MacDonald remembers with a smile. "He told the government officials that Cape Breton music was known around the world, and I've always thought that is when the tide began to turn in our favour."


Max MacDonald

The decision to stage the festival in October was initially made to avoid competing with longstanding attractions, rather than simply to celebrate the region's colourful autumn foliage.

"We had summer events like the Broad Cove Concert, which had been running for 40 years, as well as the Big Pond Concert, so we didn't want to tread on them. We knew we'd have greater credibility if we could build on what they had already created," Foulds explains, adding she hoped to strengthen the island's "pride of place."

Though restaurants and motels in rural Cape Breton traditionally closed after Labour Day, Foulds and MacDonald saw the fall as an extended opportunity for local and area businesses.

"When we considered the wonderful backdrop of the season, that became another piece of the puzzle we were assembling," continues Foulds. "A few of us came up with the name which we felt reflected our environment and our culture."

Foulds and MacDonald could have started small with shows in a few locations and built the event year by year. Instead, they gambled that their grand dream would ignite across the island.

"The artists were with us, but we were sensitive to people not recognizing gold in their own backyards," explains MacDonald. "We had to demonstrate to friends and our neighbours that our artists were world-class."

They mustered together 26 concerts for the inaugural festival in 1997, and opening night is still seared into MacDonald's memory.

"The great Irish musician Sharon Shannon came on stage and began to play. There was dead silence, no reaction, and I knew the audience was filled with a whole bunch of 'Show Me' people. Then, slowly, feet began tapping and by the end of her first set people were screaming. It was in that moment that I knew Celtic Colours was born and would live."

Looking back, Foulds is grateful to the festival's early supporters and volunteers.

> *"Our learning curve was so great and our resources so limited. We relied heavily on friends and friends of friends. We've never lost our reliance on volunteers, but we got better at organizing through the years."*

McManus, who came from Scotland to play at the second Celtic Colours and was later an artist-in-residence, remembers connecting with the Cape Breton delegation in Glasgow.

"There was a great meeting of musical cousins with various Rankins and Barra MacNeils making their presence felt at the festival in Glasgow. There was a buzz in the air even then that a big festival was in the works for Nova Scotia."

Former Nova Scotia premier, and now CEO of Colaisde na Gàidhlig - Cape Breton's Gaelic College - Rodney MacDonald, recalls step dancing at a CCIF concert in Mabou that first year.

"There was great excitement around the idea of Celtic Colours. We knew it could be the beginning of something but we could never have imagined the reach that the event would have."

He watched in awe as champion Scottish fiddler Alasdair Fraser worked his musical magic at that show.

"To have a great fiddler from outside our own community, someone who'd come from a great distance, to play for us and with us, was something most of us had never experienced."

Other performers that night were teenage fiddlers and step dancers Dawn Beaton - now artistic director of CCIF - and her sister Margie.


Natalie MacMaster


Tony McManus

"We'd been doing Mabou concerts for years but there was a noticeable change in the air," shares Dawn, who will perform with her sister this year at two shows at Fortress Louisbourg, a partially restored 18th century French command post that is now an historic site. "In the following years we had opportunities to meet and play with performers we'd never had before. The world opened up for our musicians."

That first festival brought $3 million to Cape Breton, more than enough to recharge organizers.

"We were exhausted and elated," says Joella Foulds. "Nobody could deny it was a success. Celtic Colours had actually put our people on an international stage and given them exposure to musicians around the world."


Ashley MacIsaac

Through two decades audiences have enjoyed a wide range of music, including Irish, Appalachian, Nordic, Cajun, and much more.

"It was not always familiar music," smiles Foulds, "but people opened their ears and minds and hearts to it and that has been so encouraging."

As always, this year's line-up is as varied as the venues that host the concerts, which include community centers, churches, fire halls and performance centers. Among the first shows to sell out are those at Fortress Louisbourg. "Step into the Past" features a period meal, followed by a lantern-lit walk to the beautiful chapel in the King's Bastion where an acoustic concert takes place by candlelight. A second show, "Music of the Night", offers a similar meal and stroll through the fortress grounds where music spills out of a tavern and stories of rum-running are told around a wood fire.


Corrina Hewat

This year, CCIF coincides with the 50th anniversary of the iconic Men of the Deeps who will perform in their customary overalls and pit helmets. Formed as a choir of working and retired coal miners to convey the toil and solidarity of those who ply their trade underground, the group has nine albums to its name, and is the subject of two National Film Board of Canada documentary films.

Also celebrating its 50th anniversary is Cheticamp's Doryman Pub. "Fiddlers' Homecoming: Fifty Years at the Doryman" will pay homage to the longstanding bar, and remember three of the Acadian fishing community's finest fiddlers, Marc Boudreau, Arthur Muise and Joe Cormier.

Celtic folk orchestra The Unusual Suspects had its origins in Scotland in 2003, and musical directors Corrina Hewat and David Milligan were thrilled when all 33 members were invited to CCIF the following year. Hewat called the invitation a brave move on the part of Foulds, and admits they wondered if they could recreate the jazz and folk blend with Cape Breton and visiting musicians. Happily, they managed to do just that in 2004 and 2006, and again have high hopes for this year.

"We have fiddlers, pipers, guitar, piano, harp, flutes, accordions, a jazz horn section and a kicking rhythm section made up of international musicians such as Cape Breton's own Barra MacNeils, and fiddlers such as Mairi Rankin, Wendy MacIsaac and Andrea Beaton, plus Scottish musicians Patsy Reid and Mike Vass and Tom Callister of the Isle of Man," says Hewat. "From the Irish band Flook we have Sarah Allen and Brian Finnegan on flutes and whistles, along with Cape Bretoners Matt MacIsaac and Kenneth MacKenzie, who also play Highland pipes and which we just had to have."

Hewat promises the concert to be "a whole festival in one show," adding that she and Milligan will pair the folk jazz big band with step dancing in deference to their hosts.

While CCIF opens in a reflective mood, Dawn Beaton notes the closing concert, "A Toast to 20 More!" will be forward-looking.

"We've deliberately chosen a wide range of young, contemporary musicians, from our own region and beyond, to symbolically look toward the future, to hint at what the years ahead may look like. The show will explore the particular slants these creative musicians bring to traditional music, including a taste of Gaelic rap."

It will be a meeting of the hard-driving traditional fiddler Ashley MacIsaac and Scotland's Griogair Labhruidh, aka G-Croft, a core member of the popular fusion collective, Afro Celt Sound System. Descended from long lines of pipers, Labhruidh is a master piper, guitarist


Rodney MacDonald


Dawn and Margie Beaton

and Gaelic singer who recently collaborated with composer Bear McCreary to produce music for the hugely popular Outlander television series.

Slainte Mhath, a Cape Breton band that toured internationally for a decade, is reuniting for the closing concert which will also feature Le Vent du Nord, a Quebec-based roots band. Joining them will be multi-instrumentalist J.P. Cormier - who claims to have never missed a festival and never will – along with the Gaelic College's Nuallan pipers, Michigan-born step dancer Nic Gareiss and the island's Fileanta step dancers.

In assembling their shape-shifting puzzle of a music festival, Foulds and MacDonald relied on the intrinsic kinship with past musical tradition, the willingness of islanders to roll up their sleeves for what they hold dear, the lure of the island's scenery and the natural hospitality of its people. This combination, which saw them through their first year, was not diminished when MacDonald left eight years ago, and remains strong today.


Griogair Labhruidh

Piper Kenneth MacKenzie knows that the measure of a Cape Breton piper has traditionally been his ability to play for dancers, a standard recognized in this year's Pipers' Ceilidh.

"It is always an honour to perform there but especially this year since it is honouring both Alec and Duncan Currie. Alec was an amazing dance piper from Cape Breton and was an uncle to John MacLean, one of the biggest influences on my piping and someone I admire a great deal, while Duncan Currie was a relative of mine from South Uist, through my father."

There is scarcely a back road in Cape Breton that Dan MacDonald has not travelled to get to one concert or another in the past two decades. For many years he was a stage manager for a concert every night, his wife Vonnie assisting and then taking over site management.

"It is still exciting after 20 years. We get to hear the music right up close, get to know the musicians and see them year after year."

"We love the new acts or new combinations that rock the venues," he continues. "We love the audience reaction, particularly from those who are attending for the first time. Magic happens here."

For Tony McManus, who now lives in Canada, the beauty of Cape Breton Island is matched by the value its people put on their music.

"The physical setting is stunning and there is a pride in the music and an appreciation of those who make it a part of the fabric of life on the island."

CCIF, he believes, is more than a great festival; it goes a step further by "investing in musicians," giving them an opportunity to stretch their skills with commissioned work, new collaborations and original compositions.

"Joella and Max had a dream of how the musical culture of the island could serve as a platform for an exceptional and uplifting event. They have succeeded hugely in realizing that dream and now it is one of the best events on any traditional musician's calendar. It's a good year when I'm asked back and this will be a good year."

Front row centre at many CCIF concerts is a group of animated women waiting for the music to start. They are the MacInnis sisters, the daughters of the late Cape Breton fiddler, Dan Joe MacInnis of Big Pond. Arriving early secures them not only front row seats but the chance to talk to concert-goers.

"We love the entertainment, both the traditional and not so traditional, like Daniel Lapp playing Celtic music on a horn. But we also love to hear how visitors are enjoying our island."

Marie MacPhee has been known to invite visitors and artists home for a cup of tea or a ceilidh.

"One year a young couple from Australia or New Zealand sat with us and asked us where they could get a real Cape Breton Thanksgiving dinner. I gave them my sister's address because we'd all be there and there would be plenty of food and music. We had a great time together and Celtic Colours has brought us many friends."

It's those kinds of experiences that Joella Foulds will miss most when she resigns her position after this year's gathering.

"I'll go with an easy heart, knowing it is in good hands. Twenty years of Celtic Colours - that is an accomplishment for all of Cape Breton to celebrate."

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Mec Lir

The music, the people and the late night/early morning breakfasts served at the Festival Club all contributed to luring Mec Lir back to Celtic Colours for the second consecutive year. Formed in 2014, the Isle of Man-based band blends traditional fiddle tunes with modern backing, always ensuring it is the melody that dominates. The band consists of virtuosic Manx fiddle player Tomas Callister, along with Adam Rhodes on bouzouki , David Kilgallon on keyboards, and Greg Barry on drums. From their home turf to Brittany and beyond, the group guarantees to get audiences dancing. The quartet released their debut CD - Not An EP - last year, and have since recorded two new singles, released early in 2016 - the epic reels set 'Chase The Ace' and pumping polkas 'The Ram.' They began 2016 playing to sold out audiences at Glasgow's Celtic Connections.

Joe McGuiggan

Joe McGuiggan will be tapping his way across Cape Breton Island in conjunction with Celtic Colours. His early love of dance was encouraged by his mother, and since the age of seven he has been performing in the traditional style of the west of Ireland. Born in County Derry, Northern Ireland, and now a resident of Donegal, his grace and musicality make him much in demand. Over the years he has been inspired by old Irish step dancers and now plays a key role in preserving their steps and style. McGuiggan won the All Ireland Traditional Step Dance Competition in 1991, and was runner up in the sean-nós step competition at the Oireachtas Na Samhna in 2006. He performs at festivals throughout Ireland, including Fleadh Cheoil na h'Eireann and the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention in Derry, and also dances socially and passes on the Donegal steps at weekly classes and workshops.

John John Festival

The ease with which Celtic music travels round the world will be brought home to Celtic Colours audiences this year when John John Festival of Japan takes the stage. Performing more than 150 shows a year, the three-piece band is quickly becoming Japan's most popular Irish/Celtic group. The trio has been together since 2010 and already has four albums to its credit, despite nonstop touring of the busy festival circuit. In 2014, the band's bodhrán player, Toshi Bodhran, visited Celtic Colours and delighted the Festival Club with his late night performances, so he is returning with Mana Okubo on fiddle and Hirofumi Nakamura on guitar. The group's glee in taking part in Celtic Colours is evidenced on its website, where it notes it is the first Japanese Celtic band to be honored with an invitation. Expect a new CD from this lively group sometime soon as well.

Keyreel Raskolenko

A Russian violinist and composer now studying at a Christian school in Texas, Keyreel Raskolenko taught himself to play Cape Breton-style fiddle. Born in Uzbekistan and the product of a non-professional musical family, his early training was as a classical violinist, but he found it limiting. He was living in Moscow when he began playing jigs and reels, and he admits his family was a bit taken aback as Celtic music - which he describes as "positive and energetic" - was largely unknown in Russia. In the five years since he has been playing, it has increased in popularity among young people. He has been to Scotland to study fiddling on the Isle of Skye and visited Cape Breton in 2013, meeting up with the fiddlers' association and impressing members with his technique and spirit. Intrigued by the possibilities of musicians from all over the world working together, Raskolenko is as interested in hearing other artists as he is in performing for Celtic Colours audiences.

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Gail Holdner

Gail Holdner has worked all 20 Celtic Colours festivals, first as a staff member and later as a volunteer. These days she is a stage manager, responsible for having everything from the music stands to the piano perfectly placed in whatever venue she is attending. The gig is a perfect match for her professional background, and Holdner often takes on shows that require considerable rehearsal time. “I see my job as creating an environment that relieves anxiety and makes the artists happy,” she shares. “I’ve got experienced volunteers with me, and good people to call on if need be.” She notes that the annual gathering has reinforced the region’s pride in its culture. “Celtic Colours has done an amazing job of sharing Cape Breton at its best,” she says, adding that the wide range of venues, which change from year to year, is intrinsic to the festival. “One of my favourites is in Orangedale, where there is a small church with amazing acoustics and a wonderfully intimate setting, making every concert a great and unique experience.”

Jimmie Campbell

Jimmie Campbell - cyclist, firefighter, first responder and member of the retired teachers’ ceilidh band Chalk Dust - happily directs traffic and greets concert-goers outside St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Sydney Mines. As he recalls, CCIF was going strong for a number of years before the church, with its beautiful sanctuary, vaulted ceiling and great acoustics, was converted to a festival concert venue. “We met all the requirements. Some of us were looking at it strictly as a fundraiser, and it has been very successful that way, but it became so much more to us.” The tradition at intermission at St. Andrew’s is for the artists - Men of the Deeps and Scottish folksinger Archie Fisher among them this year - and concert-goers to share cookies and drinks. “It has put us in the forefront, welcoming local musicians, visiting artists and people from all over. I love hearing where people are from, how they are enjoying the island, and helping them to get the most out of their time with us.”

Gerardette Brown

Gerardette Brown followed her husband Blair - who first volunteered as a driver - into the ranks of CCIF volunteers. Her administrative skills soon had her helping to coordinate drivers. She has a wealth of stories to share, including one in particular that is close to her heart. “Years ago the drivers were asked to look after the sale of artists’ CDs at concerts and were offered 10 per cent of the take.” The drivers formed an association which would then donate that 10 per cent to young people interested in carrying on musical traditions. “To date we’ve contributed $56,000, so we are a pretty proud little association.” She has served on the festival board as secretary and in charge of policy and governance, and has visited festivals in Scotland as well. “We’ve got a gem on our hands. The event has brought a lot of money to the island and paid for the roofs, ramps and new appliances in many of our smaller venues, but it is preserving the music that makes us most proud.”

Lee Price

Lee Price works at Cape Breton’s historic Fortress Louisbourg year-round, but by late summer he is making plans for Celtic Colours. Price helps to coordinate more than 50 drivers who meet musicians at the airport and ferry them to destinations around the island. “We are the first to welcome them, to deal with any worries they may have, to make them feel at home and guide them around, sharing our communities with them.” His recollections are many, but his best memory is of a fun-loving Irish band that made the hours fly by. A Celtic musician himself, he takes in as many concerts as he can between organizing drivers and handling CD sales. “The biggest thing for me is seeing how the island comes together to make everyone welcome. I love meeting people who are so taken with the beauty and our music.” He has no doubt that CCIF, and its many volunteers, will continue to carry the music of small island communities well into the future.

Judique

The village of Judique on Cape Breton's western coast proudly throws its doors wide open for CCIF, as it has done since the event's inaugural year. Its community centre is home to the gathering's sell-out Guitar Summit, which will feature J.P. Cormier, Dave MacIsaac, Scott MacMillan, Allie Bennett, and Tim Edey this year. Another concert will pay tribute to the mentorships between local legends and young players, many of whom will carry the culture into the future. Home to the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre - which collects, preserves and promotes traditional Cape Breton music - there is always music in the air in Judique. It is also a perfect place to pick up a few Gaelic phrases, try your hand at fiddling, learn to square dance, or catch a lunchtime ceilidh. Settled by Highlanders from Moidart and Glengarry on Scotland's west coast, its green hills roll down to a stretch of beach where visitors can savour some of the island's most stunning sunsets.

Glace Bay

Unlike most Celtic Colours' venues, Glace Bay's Savoy Theatre was built almost a century ago as a performance hall for live shows, including concerts, theatrical productions and boxing matches. Decades later, it was purchased by the town and restored to its Victorian splendor. A venue since the first year of CCIF, the Savoy will this year host internationally-acclaimed Cape Breton fiddler Natalie MacMaster, along with her husband, fiddler Donnell Leahy, and Newfoundland folk band, The Once, in a show titled Two Fiddles, Two Pianos, Three Voices. Though MacMaster - who grew up in Troy on the island's western shore - has travelled the world with her fiddle, she is never more welcome than when she comes home. Glace Bay once had as many as 12 collieries in operation. The coal mines have since closed, however, due to economic recession. Today, retired miners take visitors underground at the Glace Bay Miners' Museum, and nearby row houses built by the mining companies are still on display and open to the public.

Ingonish

St. Peter's Church, Ingonish, with its majestic white spires on either side of its double doors, has been a CCIF concert venue for more than a decade. With past shows named to reflect the local landscape, including There is Music in the Hills and Mountain Time, this year's concert follows tradition with the aptly-titled The Hills are Alive. Located at the eastern entrance to the Cape Breton Highlands National Park on the famed Cabot Trail, the town of Ingonish became home to French, Irish and Scottish settlers over a few hundred years. When it comes to music, however, everyone is welcome. This year, Scottish singer-songwriter Archie Fisher - whose songs have been sung by such legends as Liam Clancy, Tommy Makem and Stan Rogers - will be joined by the Newfoundland folk band The Once, as well as Cape Breton pianist Dougie MacPhee, fiddler Paul Cranford, and fiddler and pianist Sarah Beck, who is also a potter with a store on the island's Artisan Trail. Before the music starts there is time to walk the beach, play a round of golf or hike in the wooded hills where moose are often spotted.

L'Ardoise

L'Ardoise, most commonly known by the English pronunciation "Lord-ways," is a picturesque fishing village where residents rally to host CCIF events each year. Located along Cape Breton's southern shore, the area's early settlers were Acadians who plied the waters in small boats. During the annual musical celebration, a lobster pound is magically transformed into a dining room, and chances are you will find yourself dining alongside the fishers who hauled your dinner from the sea. This year, L'Ardoise's Full Slate concert - so called because the village takes its name from the deposits of slate found along the shoreline - will feature the internationally acclaimed band The Outside Track, comprised of local fiddler, singer and stepdancer Mairi Rankin, Irish singer Teresa Horgan from County Cork, Edinburgh harpist Allie Robertson, and Fiona Black, a gifted accordion player from the Scottish Highlands. Other performers include Mec Lir from the Isle of Man, Cape Breton-born piper Matt MacIsaac, who also whistles and plays guitar and percussion with Natalie MacMaster's band, and another Island son, Mac Morin, who is equally captivating as a pianist and stepdancer.

Festival *focus*

Halifax Celtic Festival

Sept. 16-18
www.halifaxcelticfest.ca

The Halifax Celtic Festival aspires to bring all Celtic cultures together to celebrate with the greater community, according to founder Rick Grant. Attendees will enjoy a weekend of music, activities, arts, sports and food. The gathering kick-offs with several lead-up events, including a rousing Celtic music concert featuring the Ellenvale Junior High Orchestra, and an evening seminar on the link between Celtic language and song, with musical entertainment to follow. The festival marks the 395th anniversary of the naming of the province of Nova Scotia with flag-raising and cake-cutting ceremonies, a presentation of the World Peace Tartan, and songs from various Celtic nations. The Celtic nations theme carries over into evening entertainment with music and dance featuring the bands Jug in Hand, Celtic Rant, and more. On-site demonstrations of hurling and Gaelic football will be staged, and a youth rugby tournament is also in the works. Food vendors will serve up a selection of traditional Celtic fare, and travel information will be available for those interested in visiting Celtic countries and regions. The festival is free and open to the public, and promises great music and plenty of family activities. There is a good chance a few pints are to be had after hours also!

Seaside Highland Games

Oct. 7-9
www.seaside-games.com

The Seaside Highland Games in Ventura, California bills itself as the premier Scottish festival on the Central California Coast. This year, the event is excited to announce the return of the 3-D Marine Aircraft Wing Band of San Diego, which delighted last year's attendees. The Browne Sisters and George Cavanaugh will also be back with their popular traditional Scots-Irish sound. Also returning is the hometown sibling band Celtic Spring, which tours internationally, delivering Scottish, Irish and Cape Breton music with youthful exuberance, its fiddlers having studied under acclaimed artists Alasdair Fraser, Natalie MacMaster, Martin Hayes and Liz Carroll. Renowned piper Eric Rigler will be performing with multi-string instrumentalist Dirk Freymuth and is promising some surprises interspersed with his usual traditional repertoire. Other California bands, including The Angry Brians, The Ploughboys and The Wylde Rovers will also be taking the stage. The traditional highland heavy weight competitions are also on the bill, as is competitive dancing, piping and fiddling, including a special competitive category for pipe majors. The Scottish Fiddlers of Los Angeles, under the direction of Jan Tappan, will also appear. For the past 35 years they have entertained audiences with hard-driving reels and strathspeys, as well as slower waltzes and beautiful airs. Scottish country dancing, clan tables, a British car show and children's activities will all be part of the gathering as well.

ReJigged

Oct. 21-23
www.rejiggedfestival.com

This edgy, up and coming independent festival in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, celebrates new directions in music and dance, based on the rich Celtic cultural tradition. As the place where sean-nós meets nua-nós, the gathering seeks out and promotes the best in both established and emerging talents, along with international music and dance in the "new trad" genre. Festival founder and artistic director Glenn Coolen - who is also a piper and multi-instrumentalist - wants the festival to be both a platform for performance and also a venue where artists can come together to learn and share. This year, "Tunemakers in the Round" will see musicians pull their chairs into the centre of an historic church, leaving a stage area to Irish and Quebecois dancers from the high-energy [ZØGMA] production Sokalo Remix. The following night, the production is back with fiddler Troy MacGillivray and musical friends. After the show, a looser, late-night ceilidh will bring all of the festival's performers and instructors to the floor. Callers Colleen Putt and Elizabeth MacDonald will have the audience dancing square sets until the wee hours of the morning. Quebecois fiddler Marie-Pierre Lecault, Irish dancers Liam O'Scanlain and Edwina Guckian, and Scottish singer Andy Webster are among this year's special guests. A children's Gaelic program is also part of the weekend.

The Aztec Highland Games

Oct. 1-2
www.aztechighlandgames.com

The Aztec Highland Games in New Mexico, is home of the Four Corners Regional Championships: a mainstay of Scottish athletics in the southwest USA. The competitions will take place on the second day of this year's Aztec Highland Games, based on the previous day's classes. This includes Men's Masters, Men's A, Women's Masters and Women's Open. Each athlete will be part of a team representing one of the "four corners" states - Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah - and each will try their hand at the caber toss, hammer throw and foot race before the champion team is crowned. For youngsters looking to try their hand at athletics, kids games will be taking place as well. In addition to the on-field activities, attendees can enjoy a wide range of performers, including The Kitchen Jam Band, Devil's Dram and The Knockabouts. Dance competitions, from sword dance to Irish jig, are sure to be entertaining as well. Visitors will see more than traditional Celtic dance, however, as Red Desert Muse – a local belly-dancing troupe – will grace the stage with their Middle Eastern footwork. Visitors are encouraged to allot an extra day or two in order to visit attractions around the city.

Stone Mountain Highland Games

Oct. 14-16
www.smhg.org

Now in its 44th year, the Stone Mountain Highland Games brings its sights and sounds to Georgia once again. The festival is entirely run by volunteers seeking to promote and preserve the Scottish heritage of the southern state. It is suggested that you don a tartan if you have one, though it is not a requirement for entry. All the staples of a great gathering will be held on the beautiful grounds of the Stone Mountain Park meadow. Athletic events, Highland dancing, Scottish harping, as well as piping and drumming will all be part of the festivities. This year's host artists, the Atlanta Pipe Band - one of the top bands in the Eastern United States Pipe Band Association - will wow music fans with its big, bold sound. Other Scottish traditions will be part of the games as well: attendees will have the chance to participate in the Scottish country dancing demonstrations, the Kirkin' o' the Tartan, and the Parade of Tartans. Clan and tartan tents will also be on site for those seeking a peek into the past, with over 100 clan associations and societies participating. Alexander, the 16th Duke of Hamilton, is slated as this year's honoured guest.

Central Virginia Celtic Festival and Highland Games

Oct. 22-23
www.vacelticfestival.com

An autumn festival with dozens of events awaits at the Central Virginia Celtic Festival and Highland Games. A variety of competitions are scheduled for both the musically and athletically inclined – the piping and drumming competition is a favourite, but there will also be contests for harpists and fiddlers. Heavy athletics and hurling demos are set to be part of the celebrations as well. Saturday's festivities begin at 10 a.m., with a whisky tasting at 10:30 – but not to worry: its 5 o'clock somewhere! If that's a little too early in the day, additional tastings will be on tap throughout the afternoon and on Sunday. Single malt Scotch whiskies will be available to try, while Scotch enthusiast Kenneth Blankenship talks attendees through the proper way to "nose" and taste the splendid spirit. Those with a song in their heart and an itch to move their feet can take part in dancing competitions or rock out to the various musicians and dancers set to perform on the Smithwicks Music Stage. For the youngsters, the" Wee Ones Area" is available with face-painting, pumpkin-painting, bounce houses, as well as kid-friendly athletic games. Be sure to take an umbrella, too, as the festival will go ahead rain or shine.

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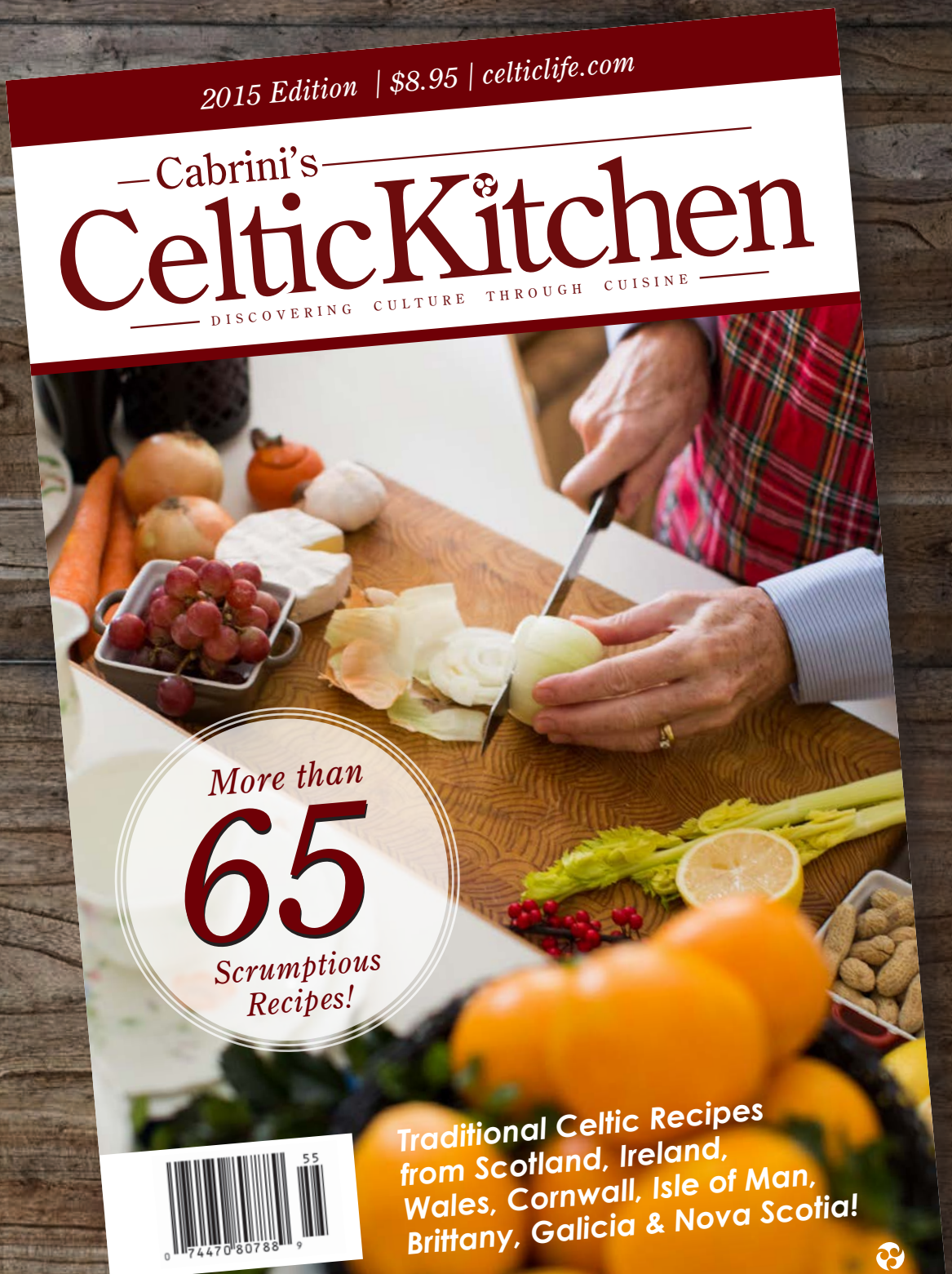


Cabrini's Kitchen

Haggis Lasagna

Fall is soon upon us and I am presently harvesting a bumper crop of zucchini from my garden. Jack and the Beanstalk could not have matched the growth of my glorious gourds. After gifting some, I was still left with an overabundance, so I decided to make a lasagna, a hearty fall dish using zucchini instead of pasta noodles. I peeled and sliced the zucchini into thin strips to be used between the layers of flavours and textures. I browned the ground beef and added a can of haggis for something different and delicious. It provides an easy way to eat your vegetables, and makes a double batch so there is plenty for sharing.

INGREDIENTS

2 T olive oil
8 cloves of chopped garlic
1 med. chopped onion
1 lb ground beef
1 15 oz can Scottish haggis
1 tsp salt
2 tsp ground black pepper
1 T dried oregano
1 T dried basil
1 28 oz can diced tomatoes
1 28 oz can crushed tomatoes
¼ cup chopped parsley
2 cups natural goat yogurt
1 can cream of mushroom soup
2 eggs
1 & ¼ cup frozen spinach
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
1 large peeled zucchini cut lengthwise in thin strips

INSTRUCTIONS

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat and saute chopped onion and garlic until tender. Add beef and cook until browned. Drain off fat. Stir in salt, black pepper, oregano, and basil. Add haggis to this mixture and heat thoroughly. Add in the can of diced tomatoes, the can of crushed tomatoes, the parsley and simmer for 10 minutes.

In a separate bowl combine the goat yogurt, eggs, soup and frozen spinach which has been thawed. Cover the bottom of a 13 X 9 baking dish with some of the meat/haggis sauce. Top with 4 strips of zucchini. Spread yogurt mixture over the zucchini strips. Add 4 more zucchini strips to cover the yogurt mixture. Cover this layer with the rest of the haggis/meat sauce. Add 4 more zucchini strips. Bake in the preheated oven at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese and broil for approximately 10 minutes or until browned. Let stand 15 minutes before serving. Serves 8.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini

P.S: I would like to invite all readers to send me their favourite recipes, and their favourite memories that go with them. Please send to: cabrini@celticlife.ca

On the Road
Part One

In the first of an exclusive two-part feature article, whisky expert Andrew Ferguson explores Scotland's established and emerging distilleries

With wind, waves and lashing rain pressing in from the Atlantic, I just made the last ferry off Islay. The island was packed with people desperate to leave before the storm, and the ship took extra time to fill every possible inch of the car deck. I'd spent the previous ten days, like most of the others on board, partaking in Feis Ile, an annual fete of island culture, song and - most importantly - whisky.

This was an extra special Feis, as two of Scotland's oldest distilleries, Ardbeg and Laphroaig, were marking their 200th anniversaries. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to connect with whisky lovers from around the world and toast the occasion. But while the first part of my journey was focused on feting some of Scotland's oldest distilleries, the latter was spent visiting some of its youngest. Over four days I drove more than 1000 kilometres on winding Scottish coastal and mountain roads to visit five new distilleries, all in the name of whisky.

The first day's drive took me up the west coast from Kintyre past Oban to the Ardnamurchan peninsula. Ardnamurchan is one of the most remote and unspoiled places in Scotland. Fittingly, it is home to Scotland's most environmentally friendly distillery. Ardnamurchan Distillery was built by Adelphi Distillery, an independent bottler of Scotch whisky. Adelphi's established business was struggling to grow, and the writing was starting to appear on the wall. Surging demand for Scotch whisky globally, and the tightening of the supply of matured stocks, meant that they would need to secure their own supply if the company was to continue to evolve. They are not alone; more than a dozen new distilleries have been built in Scotland over the last decade, some by independent bottlers worried about supply, and others by firms wanting to ride the industry's growing wave. These new distilleries will likely be joined by dozens more in the coming years - nearly every other month plans are announced for another distillery.

Adelphi found a suitable location about midway along the south side of the peninsula and plans were put forth for its construction. Opened in June of 2014, the distillery was built into the coast above Loch Sunart, just west of Glenborrodale Castle. The facility has its own hydroelectric generator, powered by the same water which cools the spirit in the condensers. It also has a biomass boiler which uses woodchips from local forestry, the area's main industry.

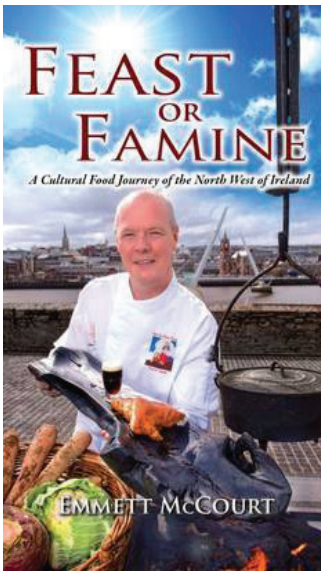
If my drive up the peninsula was any sign, access to fresh water would not be a problem! The storm's rain, battering the peninsula's mountainous coast, was washing across the road in impromptu streams at seemingly regular intervals.

The drive, one of the more arduous I've ever experienced in Scotland, was made all the more interesting by the fact that this singletrack road, barely wider than a bike path, served two-way traffic. How the malt lorry that narrowly missed hitting me navigates the road on its regular visits is beyond me, let alone the construction vehicles needed to build a distillery. Never particularly generous, the road narrows to just 3.3 metres on one of the bridges, a figure which would dictate the size of the distillery and its equipment; its widest tool, the mash tun, could itself be no larger in size if it was to make it down the road.

Ardnamurchan is producing both unpeated and peated spirit (legally not whisky until it has spent three years in oak), which they are filling into casks of American (ex-bourbon) and European (ex-sherry) oak. The barrels are laid down in a traditional dunnage, earthen floor warehouse carved into the cliff behind the distillery. At the time of my visit, the distillery was in the midst of filling its first peated spirit into casks, and my whisky club had purchased one of these futures. I would have the privilege of filling our barrel, only the fourth such peated barrel ever filled at Ardnamurchan. After nosing a number of ex-bourbon and Tennessee whiskey barrels, I settled on a very honeyed cask which had previously matured bourbon from Woodford distillery. The first spirit from Ardnamurchan won't legally be whisky until June of next year, and it will likely be a while longer until the distillery bottles its first release. But the spirit samples I tried showed great promise. As for my club's cask, it will be nearly a decade before it is bottled.

My visit to Ardnamurchan complete, my day was not yet at its end. I had a lot of ground to cover in just four days, and so there were still many long miles ahead of me. I headed back down the peninsula, past the town of Fort William, and into the Great Glen. My drive took me along much of Loch Ness to the city of Inverness from where I would set off the next day. The next stop was Thurso, the northernmost mainland village in the United Kingdom, and the new home of Wolfburn distillery.

www.fergusonwhiskytours.com

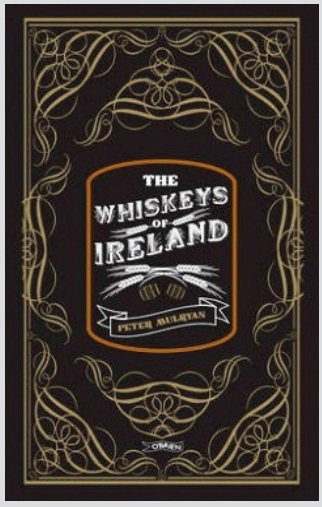


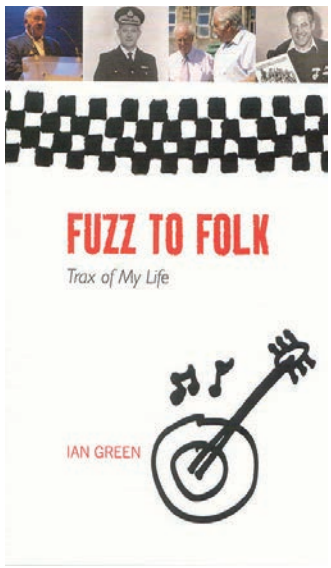
Feast or Famine
By Emmett McCourt
Guildhall Press
272 pp / €19.99

Known more for its Molotov cocktails than its highballs and hors-d'oeuvres, Northern Ireland has never been a hot-bed of haute cuisine. Until now, that is. Credit Derry culinary master Emmett McCourt with changing perceptions with this terrific and tantalizing table-top tome. Subtitled A Cultural Food Journey of the North West of Ireland, the work is much more than a mere collection of regional recipes; seasoned with images, wit and poetry, and flavoured with pint-sized chapters on local restaurants, pubs and culture, Feast or Famine explores the rich and robust history of the area and its residents. Foodies of all sorts are sure to savour the many scrumptious seafood recipes, as well as guidelines on how to properly prepare dairy, meat, chicken, vegetable and dessert dishes. ~ SPC

The Whiskeys of Ireland
By Peter Mulryan
O'Brien Press
192 pp / €19.99

With the recent reinvention of the Irish whiskey industry, and new and revitalized distilleries across the Emerald Isle now putting together record sales numbers around the world, this definitive digest could not have been better timed. Peppered with photographs, sketches, and tidbits of trivia, the richly-detailed tome pours over the sector's past challenges, bringing it to present tense with the insight of an industry insider. Drawing upon his experience and expertise, author (and distiller) Peter Mulryan covers all bases with chapters on distilleries old and new, the distillation process, the difference between single malts and blends, and proper ways to both drink and taste the "water of life." An engaging and entertaining effort that will appeal to both the whiskey novice and the long-time connoisseur. ~ SPC



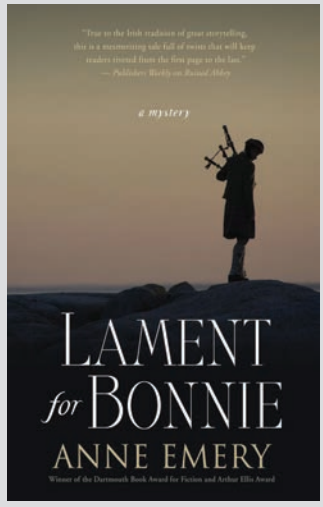


Fuzz to Folk; Trax of My Life
By Ian Green
Luath Press
334 pp / $28.95

With Edinburgh's Greentrax Recordings celebrating its 30th anniversary this year (see our "Celtpreneur" story in this issue), a re-examination of founder Ian Green's five year-old autobiography is a worthy endeavour for those with a passion for Scottish music. And while the work traces Green's rise through the police force ranks, his retirement from active duty and his forays into the world of recording, the book's real raison d'etre is its first-hand accounting of Scotland's established and emerging artists. There is no denying the author's ear for a good melody, nor his work ethic, and though he had a team of like-minded music lovers by his side, Green's drive and determination to share his longtime passion has enriched the lives of countless listeners around the world. ~ SPC

Lament for Bonnie
By Anne Emery
ECW Press
532 pp / $26.95

Multi award winning Canadian author Anne Emery shows of her Nova Scotia roots with her ninth full-length mystery novel. When young Bonnie MacDonald goes missing, her Cape Breton clan, a family of musicians, step-dancers and fiddlers, begins footing around the region for suspects. Soon, others get involved in the hunt, including a curious cop from Montreal and an old-school bluesman, and it isn't long before murky family secrets bubble to the surface. The author's ability to say more with less invites readers along for the dark ride, and the island's Celtic culture serves as a stage to both the story's soaring narrative arc and a quirky cast of characters, providing a glimpse into the Atlantic Canadian communities settled by Scots over two hundred years ago. ~ SPC



Red Hot Chilli Pipers
Octane

The boys in plaid are back with a vengeance. True to title, Octane roars out of the starting gate with driving, distorted guitars for ZZ Top's La Grange. Over the next hour, listeners are treated to a tempest of other terrific covers, including Queen's Fat Bottomed Girls, White Stripes' Seven Nation Army, Van Halen's Jump and a smokin' version of Tears for Fears' classic Everybody Wants to Rule the World. Though there is nothing subtle about their style, and nothing new in terms of substance, there is no denying the band's tremendous talent and tenacity - hey, if it ain't broke, don't fix it right? And with the songs still ringing in your ears for days to follow, your bagpipe fix will surely be satisfied. ~ SPC

Doolin
Doolin

Trad from Toulouse? Believe it. France's best Irish balladeers return to form with their fifth full-length recording. The eponymous album takes listeners through thirteen terrific traditional and original tracks - from up-tempo jigs to tender tales - showcasing the sextet's superior skills for songwriting and arranging. Guitars, fiddles, whistles, accordion, bodhran and bass all ring and jingle with the sound of 'ye ould country', sounding both classic and contemporary at once. A cover of Bob Dylan's Ballad of Hollis Brown is a nod and a wink to the band's folk-rock roots, and three homegrown tunes - Chanson Pour John, Le Dernier Kouign Amann and Le Jupon Blanc - pay homage to their homeland. An excellent and engaging effort from one of the genre's finest ensembles. ~ SPC

The Led Farmers
Katie

Holy Hipsters! Though these indie Irish folk-rockers look, sound and feel like they just stepped out of an advertisement for Tullamore Dew whiskey, there is nothing posed about the Emerald Isle quartet's homespun harmonies and magical melodies. The first single, Share the Wealth, sounds like The Pogues on speed. Likewise, Rare Old Mountain Dew, The White Set, Inconvenient, Space and a rousing live rendition of Irish Rover kick Celtic arse. Katie has its quieter moments also, and stirring versions of Star of the County Down, The Foggy Dew and Raglan Road are sure to bring a tear to the eyes of ex-pats everywhere. And while the band continues to make its mark at home, it won't be long before audiences around the world connect. ~ SPC

Jennifer Licko
Sing

Somewhere between her Scottish Gaelic past and her rural Appalachian present, singer/songwriter Jennifer Licko has built herself a harmonic homestead that fuses the two worlds into a holistic hybrid of sure sonic joy. More simply said, the eleven songs on Sing celebrate the sheer exuberance and exaltation of singing. Certainly spirited, and sometimes even sacred in its reverence for vocal melody, Sing twists and turns through Seinn O Churadail O, He Na Milibhig, and the rollicking roll of Ruidhlidh. Elsewhere, Flying High, Light the Way and The Tide are smoother, showcasing the singer's softer side. In bridging the gaps between eras, Licko has done something that very few artists ever get to experience; she has created a style and sound that is distinctly her own. ~ SPC

Kelso Highlander Festival

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www.kelso.gov/visitors/highlander-festival

Although he moved to England at age five, Martin Mckay stayed connected to his Scottish home…

Martin Mckay

As a youngster, Martin Mckay often returned to Scotland over the holidays to visit his grandparents. Back then, his grandmother would always have tickets to the Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

"I think that fate must have played its part in those years," muses Mckay, now 42. "Those visits to the Tattoo shows were where I was deeply influenced by the power of the pipes and our deep, long history as Scots. Watching the pipers burst through the portcullis and admiring the regiments march up and down the castle esplanade was a hypnotic experience."

He admits he wasn't a child prodigy. In fact, Mckay didn't pick up the bagpipes until his early 20s. A far cry from a "straight-A Student" – he hated school – he wondered if he would even be able to read music.

"This turned out not to be an issue," he explains. "Instead, I implemented a very specific structure to my learning process."

Today, Mckay plies his trade as a piper-for-hire with weddings, birthdays and other events. The traditional musician plays everything from slow airs, marches, reels and jigs. He also plays piobaireachd, or ceòl mòr - early piping music that was taught by singing the tune.

The piping life is everything he imagined it would be when he was a youngster.

"The music is so powerful it transcends all logic, all rules. It's a unifying experience for myself and all. Without my pipes, I'm empty. It's my history, and my people's history."

Speaking of history – Mckay is fiercely proud of his heritage; his background lies with the Mckay clan, who hail from the Scottish Highlands. He's even a distant relative of Kenneth McKay, a piper from the British Army's 79th Cameron Highlanders.

"Kenneth performed with great bravery playing the piobaireachd 'War or Peace' during a lull in the battle at Mont-Saint-Jean near the village of Waterloo, France in 1815," he notes.

Though on a smaller scale, McKay has made some history of his own when he recorded for the BBC Kids worldwide musical show ZingZillas.

"This was an important undertaking as kids are our future," he shares. "To be able to encourage music participation on a world stage for children was an honour."

He has also been awarded a distinction in bagpiping from The College of Piping in Glasgow for his achievements.

"Starting late in life is not a hurdle. Coupled with hard work and a sprinkling of talent, a journey undertaken with belief and the ability to dream will deliver ultimate success."

Mckay doesn't downplay the labour needed to go into that success, however. The sound of the bagpipes draws great crowds, he says, and being at your best means playing every day. Since each of the notes must be kept in tune, they often need to be altered.

"The instrument keeps you on your toes as you must maintain the air tightness of all the joints. At the end of the day, it is an instrument that must be as air-tight as possible to maintain better control for ultimate expression."

Mckay is fortunate to live and travel in places where Celtic culture is strong, spending much of his time between Ireland and Scotland. The customs of both places runs deep, he says, praising their positive family values and traditions.

> *"It's these traditions and upbringings that preserve and maintain interest in ancient Celtic cultures. Opportunity from supportive families will always help younger generations embrace Celtic arts."*

He might be biased, but Mckay believes younger generations do have an interest in piping, especially if they hear the music in person.

"Music has no barriers. Obviously bagpiping is unusual - it's not mainstream - but then again, mainstream doesn't always mean best."

Mckay's grandmother, the woman who inadvertently planted the seed of his piping career, lived to be 100 years old. On that birthday, she received a card from Her Majesty the Queen. Mckay gave her the gift of his music.

"I played my pipes for her and her dear friends in the care home that was just across the road from Craigmillar Castle, one of the Scotland's best medieval castles."

www.pipermckay.com

Marie-Pierre Lecault

Marie-Pierre Lecault's fondness for the fiddle goes back to her formative years

Born in Quebec's beautiful Laurentian Mountains region to a family of music lovers, Marie-Pierre Lecault began her musical journey with classical violin lessons at the age of four. Inspired by her older sister's efforts with the instrument, she was taught by both her mother and her great-uncle.

"I have a bachelor of music in classical music performance, but I have always played traditional music," she explains. "My father used to listen to traditional musicians, so from a young age I was immersed in that genre."

It was only after graduating from university, however, that Lecault's talent for 'trad' took to new heights.

Those skills will be on display this October, when she appears with the Montreal-based percussive dance company [ZØGMA] at the ReJigged Festival in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

The thirty-something instrumentalist says that traditional fiddling is "more relaxed, more human," adding that it took years of hard work to acquire a signature sound which she now describes as "rich and colourful." She searched a long time before finding a proper bow, and even longer to determine the best strings for her fiddle, concluding "the hank of horsehair gives me more precision."

> *"The best thing about finding one's sound is that the search is never really finished."*

"And then that acoustic sound must be transferred to an amplified sound for concerts, so it is vital to find the right microphone, the perfect pickup and preamp."

Lecault believes her "musical personality" emerged after she finished her classical studies.

"For me, the challenge was to slowly fade out of my classical training and ease into the traditional music milieu. It happened gradually, leaving me time to cut the umbilical cord and feeling good about it."

She credits Quebec virtuoso André Brunet with influencing both her musicality and enthusiasm.

"When he started playing with (folk group) La Bottine Souriante, I was a young teenager. I didn't know that I would choose the same musical path several years later, but I knew that I wanted to sound like that."

Lecault now teaches at traditional fiddle camps with Brunet, noting that it is a great experience to work with her childhood idol.

"I give traditional music classes to students of all ages, but I notice that more young people are getting involved. Unlike classical music classes, where parents usually register their children, these kids sign up for traditional music because they want to."

The real trick of the trade, she shares, is about finding balance.

"You have to learn to juggle slowdowns and be able to turn around quickly. Holidays are scarce and exhaustion threatens because you have to work constantly not to be forgotten. I find it more and more difficult to find a balance between my artistic life, my personal life, and my many projects."

She has already enjoyed an enviable career, with rewards coming in the form of world travel, musicians met, friendships made, and the simple joy of playing.

> *"A good fiddle tune comes from the way it is played. If a musician is inspired, with a groove and a good sound, you can really hear it."*

"For myself, I love crooked tunes, tunes that are a little quirky - the kind of songs that challenge my own abilities as a player."

Lecault has been collaborating with [ZØGMA] since 2005 when she joined its Rapaillé production. The piece was presented more than 80 times, and toured Niger, South Korea and California. She continued with its follow-up, Sokalo, and now takes her place with the current Sokalo Remix production, a full-scale spectacle that includes Irish dancers and musicians.

"It is a show of great technical precision from dancers and musicians. The storyline behind Remix is built around memories of our careers over past years and the importance of these experiences in the making of who we are now. The result is a beautiful artistic adventure connecting the cultures of Quebec and Ireland and showcasing musicians and dancers who value their traditions."

The Fusion Fighters dance company combines classic and contemporary dance

Stretching the limits of Irish dance, while still maintaining its traditional form, is what drives Fusion Fighters dance company founder and artistic director, Chris Naish.

"It is something that I am very careful about," explains the Bristol, U.K. native about his five-year-old project. "I never want to overstep the boundaries so far that everything gets fused together beyond recognition."

Of Irish heritage, Naish followed his older sister into dance at the age of four.

"My mother was a champion Irish dancer when she was younger," he shares. "So when Irish dance classes were advertised at the local community centre in Bristol she put my sister in. The teacher kept asking every week if 'The Boy' wanted to join. My mother was a little hesitant at first, but she finally gave in once the teacher offered free lessons."

That was back in 1983 when Naish considered dance nothing more than "a bit of fun."

By the age of nine, things got serious when he joined a more established dance academy, Sean Eireann McMahon.

"Our teachers, Rose Ellis and Gordon McMahon, were renowned for competing at the highest level, so we found ourselves deeply involved in the ultra-competitive, cut-throat circuit of Irish dance."

Those years garnered him an array of awards, including all Ireland and National titles, as well as World Champion with ceili and figure dance teams. It wasn't until the revelation of Riverdance, however, that Naish knew with certainty his future would be in the performance side of the art. He later danced with Michael Flatley in corporate shows for both Riverdance and Lord of the Dance, and was a principle dancer for Celtic Woman's 10th anniversary tour.

Recently he performed with Riverdance composer Bill Whelan's 200-member orchestra led by Lord of the Rings conductor Johan De Meij and long-time Riverdance lead, Tara Barry Phelan. He appeared in the BBC1 documentary Jigs and Wigs as well.

"I'm also proud to have co-created a project called Sneaky Steppers which produced Tourism Ireland's most successful ever campaign - 'Sydney Station St. Patrick's Day Flashmob' - which gained more than 10 million views."

Despite the great experiences and considerable success, Naish yearned for something new and uniquely challenging.

"The idea for Fusion Fighters came when I was living in New York, and working for several years on how to fuse a variety of dance forms that I was trained in – Irish dance, body percussion, tap dance. I would often arrange experimental collaborations.

"I just knew I couldn't stop until I created my own company with performance opportunities and workshops where I could make this new dance form available for others to both watch and learn."

Since then, Naish has been presenting his work in fresh and unique ways - something he is proud to pass along.

"The dancers have been adapting quickly, which has meant we can now perform even more elaborate pieces and with larger groups. The production is getting much better over time and the videos we are producing are becoming more professional and gaining more exposure through our growing community."

Sustained by encouraging feedback from both his dancers and the audiences, he tries to appeal to each.

"People from all over are really excited to see something new, but glad we're still keeping the traditions of Irish dance and music involved."

At the end of the day, Naish wants the performances to have a Celtic vibe, featuring enchanting Irish music and the power of Irish dance – the very things that attracted him to the art as a youngster.

Fusion Fighters was recently this year's guest performers at the World Irish Dance Championships in Glasgow. The troupe also hosted a major show in Limerick featuring workshops, seminars, video projects and performances. With a cast of more than 40 highly-skilled international dancers performing traditional Irish dance, body percussion, tap, sean nós and contemporary dance, Naish assembled a full stage production in one week. Speaking before the event, he predicted it would give a new generation of Irish professional dancers extensive experience in what it takes to perform show choreography for a live audience.

"I enjoy working with today's generation of dancers on projects that completely modernize Irish dance and challenge how performance can be presented."

www.projectfusionfighters.co.uk

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Alexandra Jane Thompson; 1948-2016

Celtic Life International lost one of its own this summer, with the passing of former managing editor Alexandra Jane Thompson.

Born in Caterham, a County of Surrey, England, she was the daughter of the late Alistair Gordon-Ingram and Barbara Steel. Thompson began her career as a professional writer, editor and researcher after immigrating to Canada, taking the helm of Celtic Life International in 1995.

"By then, Alexa was already quite involved with the Celtic community here in Halifax," remembers the magazine's publisher Marcie Macquarrie. "We knew each other through mutual friends and acquaintances, all of whom kept telling me to get her involved with the publication in some way. It took a couple of years to connect, but when we did, there was no turning back."

Macquarrie was particularly impressed with Thompson's love of local lore.

"She was very knowledgeable about Nova Scotia, which was our core audience at the time. Having her take over the day to day operations of the magazine took us to new levels, both in terms of our content and our reach."

One of Thompson's major initiatives was to rebrand the publication from Celtic Heritage to Celtic Life.

"She recognized that Celtic culture was a living, breathing culture," notes Macquarrie. "That it was as profound in the present as it had been in the past, if not more so."

He adds that the change in focus from classical to contemporary opened the doors to new article ideas and audiences.

"Under Alexa's guidance, we evolved from a traditional, history-based publication to a modern lifestyles magazine, with an emphasis on the people of our community. She often said that people didn't necessarily want to read about dates and facts, but were interested in the individuals involved - the stories behind the stories. She understood that people related to the ideas, emotions, experiences, opinions and perspectives of other people. In that way, she began to connect the Celtic dots both here at home and around the world."

Current managing editor Stephen Patrick Clare recalls meeting Thompson for the first time at a coffee shop in downtown Halifax.

"At that time I was freelancing for a number of local, regional and national publications," he says. "Alexa had seen my work and was interested in having me contribute to the magazine."

Clare's first impressions were lasting impressions.

"She was as personable as she was professional - extremely pleasant, and an excellent conversationalist. She could talk about anything; art, politics, spirituality, economics. She was more than educated, she was cultured.

"What really impressed me was how truly passionate she was about all things Celtic," he continues. "Alexa understood that it wasn't enough for the magazine to be successful - it had to be significant also - and she was determined to develop Celtic Life into a hub for the global Celtic community."

It was under Thompson's tenure that the publication made its first forays into the online world.

"She was very excited about the opportunity to reach a greater audience across the Diaspora," remembers Clare. "And not only was she interested in bringing people of Celtic heritage closer together via the internet, she was eager to inform and inspire non-Celts about the culture as well."

By 2010, Thompson had extended Celtic Life's reach, overseeing the building of a new website, and setting up social media accounts.

"Alexa laid the groundwork for our online community, which today reaches millions of people each month," shares Clare. "Her initial vision for the magazine has come to life."

After leaving Celtic Life in 2012, Thompson continued to write for a number of area publications, sharing her passion for the province she called home. She also helped develop drug educational programs, and worked with First Nations youths in her spare time.

Macquarrie says that she will be sorely missed.

"She was deeply entrenched within the Celtic community - Alexa knew everyone, everywhere - and she truly enriched the lives of these people, many of whom became close and dear friends. Her contributions cannot be overstated."

On July 31, after a brave battle with cancer, she succumbed to her illness at the age of 68. She is survived by her husband David, her brother Simon, her children Jeremy and Steven, her granddaughter Brianna, and the Celtic community at large.

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