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CelticLife

INTERNATION

Dressed to Kilt! *Sexy, Stylish, Scottish*

INSIDE!

Dropkick Murphys, Celtic Animation
James Zada, Louise Kennedy
Witches of Scotland, Les McKeown



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Fáilte

Alive and Thriving

Celtic culture was transformed forever on the banks of the River Liffey in Dublin in the spring of 1994. It was then and there that Riverdance made its international debut during the annual Eurovision contest.

Since that time, millions of people have been introduced to - and remain transfixed by - the pure energy and joy of this revamped form of traditional Irish step dancing. Like many others, I was exhilarated when I first saw Riverdance - the music, the movement, the magic - and I have experienced it time and again.

It is almost impossible to articulate what transpires when beautiful, haunting Irish folk music is paired with the fluidity of dance. For me, there was an instant and instinctual connection with Riverdance - one that created the catalyst to research and reflect upon my Celtic roots, inspiring me to delve deeper into the traditions and history of my people. However, it is also important to remember that when we inherit the past, we are given the great responsibility to ensure that our roots remain relevant to present and future generations. As such, the efforts of Riverdance's Michael Flatly, Moya Doherty, Bill Whelan, and Jean Butler made certain that audiences around the world would connect, and re-connect, with the vital and vibrant Celtic art form that is traditional Irish dance.

Our July/August cover story on New York City's premier Scottish fashion extravaganza Dressed to Kilt is particularly pertinent as an example of how our Celtic community continues to reimagine its classic customs. The annual event engages new audiences by showcasing contemporary designers from the Celtic nations (and beyond) - with a host of celebrities taking the catwalk - while aiding worthwhile charitable organizations. Stylish, smart and sexy, the gathering has enjoyed almost two decades of success, due in large part to its progressive messaging of both inclusion and diversity.

Like the creative genius behind Riverdance, the organizers of Dressed to Kilt understand the importance of preserving and promoting our customs through contemporary means. While younger generations recognize the relevance of their roots, they are most likely to embrace them via their preferred medium. The popularity of social media and streaming services present an ideal opportunity to engage our children and our grandchildren with their heritage, ensuring that our ongoing Celtic narrative remains alive and thriving.

Dressed to Kilt takes place on July 24 this year. Be sure to check it out, either in person or online.

Sláinte!
Siobhán L. Covington
Publisher

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Kilt ~ Sexy,
Stylish,
Scottish*



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Three models are walking on a runway, showcasing Celtic-themed fashion. The model on the left wears a black jacket over a white lace dress with a black sash. The model in the center wears a red velvet jacket over a white lace dress with a wide gold belt. The model on the right wears a brown tweed jacket over a white lace dress with a wide gold belt. In the background, a sign reads "THE ENLIVET" and "Dressed to Kilt".

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Plus ça change...

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

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

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

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

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

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

In February, Carole King released her musical masterpiece *Tapestry*. Although she was happiest playing the traditional role of mother to her children, King's songs - *I Feel the Earth Move*, *It's Too Late*, and *A Natural Woman* -

showcased a shift in women's social status. Joni Mitchell's beautiful *Blue*, released in June, further reflected the rising tides of the feminist movement. Women's Lib activists/authors Gloria Steinem and Germaine Greer were quick to claim and cite both works as inspiration.

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

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

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

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

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

Like Gaye, Jim Morrison of the Doors never shied from provocation. Weary from the pitfalls

of fame, the Lizard King had exiled himself to Paris in 1971, where he died - like Hendrix and Joplin before him - at the age of 27. Although the singer/poet had become disenchanted with the promise of the 60s, he left a timeless literary legacy that is celebrated in a comprehensive new anthology, *The Collected Works of Jim Morrison*.

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

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

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

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

Stephen Patrick Clare
Editor-in-Chief

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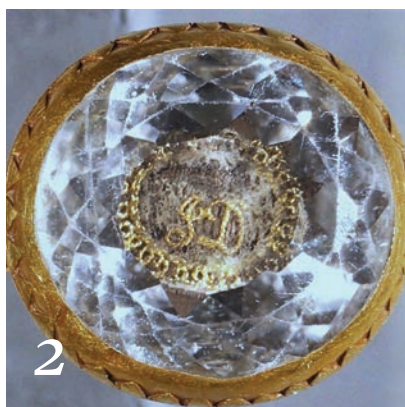
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one

Gaelic Immersion School

An independent Gaelic immersion school is set to open in Mabou, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia this coming September. With the support of the Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia, the Gaelic College and other stakeholders, a group of parents and community members have worked to make the school a reality. According to a press release, Taigh Sgoile na Drochaide will initially open with a cohort of Grade Primary students this year, adding a grade each successive year, building to a P-4 school within five years. It will be the first Gaelic immersion school in North America.

two

Manx Ring

A gold and crystal mourning ring was recently uncovered on the Isle of Man. The ring, found by a metal detectorist in April, is an estimated 350 years old and bears the initials "JD" or "ID." The ring, therefore, may be referring to 7th Earl of Derby and Lord of Man James Stanley. At the time of his death, Stanley used the name J Derby. The ring may have belonged to his wife, Lady Derby, or another mourner. It is now on display in the medieval gallery at the Manx Museum.

three

Hovering Ship

What would you do if you spotted a ship hovering over the water? Snap a photo, of course. David Morris did just that when he saw the strange sight off of Falmouth, Cornwall. This wasn't evidence of new technology, though - simply an uncommon optical illusion. Reportedly, this sort of mirage may occur when cold air lies close to the sea with warmer air above it. To Morris, the ship appeared to be floating in mid-air rather than on the water's surface.

four

Paul McCartney's Protest Song

"Give Ireland Back to the Irish" was released in 1972 and still resonates today. The song, performed by Paul McCartney and Wings, was part of McCartney's reaction to the events of Bloody Sunday: when British soldiers shot 26 civilians during a protest in Bogside, Derry. As McCartney has Irish roots on his mother's side, the issue felt personal to him. Although there was pushback, McCartney insisted on releasing the song. Predictably, the song was banned by the BBC and other media outlets, but Wings continued to perform it live.

five

Welsh Mountain

Wales' highest mountain is referred to, in English, as Snowdon. But a Gwynedd County councillor proposed that the English name should be scrapped, and the mountain should be exclusively referred to by its Welsh name: Yr Wyddfa. This Welsh name means "grave," as according to legend, the giant Rhita Gawr was buried on the mountain after a battle with King Arthur. The motion was not considered at council, as a Welsh placenames task group already exists, and they will be the ones examining the issue.

six

3D Map

According to researchers, a stone slab rediscovered in France may be the oldest three-dimensional map in Europe. Saint-Bélec Slab was initially dug up in Bretagne in 1900, but it was forgotten until 2014, when it was found in a French cellar. After studying the patterns engraved on the slab, researchers believe it is a map depicting an area of western Bretagne. The map is believed to date back to the early Bronze Age - sometime between 1900 BC and 1650 BC.

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



RIVER CRUISE IRELAND Shannon Princess

Take a luxury river cruise on Ireland's Majestic River Shannon, where the warmest of Irish welcomes awaits you onboard 'Shannon Princess' this fall.



This August and September sees Ireland lifting travel restrictions to overseas visitors. Fully vaccinated visitors will have no quarantine concerns and will be welcomed as valued friends with a heartfelt **'Cead Mile Failte'**.

What safer and better way to take a vacation this fall, than a cruise on the **Shannon Princess**, a luxury crewed hotel barge that cruises the River Shannon and her Loughs in Ireland.

Cruising through beautiful unspoilt landscapes, far from the hustle and bustle of crowds, the Shannon Princess explores Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and her idyllic rural villages.

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Family-run by the Gibbons family, and with a heritage that goes back to 1995, they pride themselves on delivering a great Irish cruise vacation. Shannon Princess is part of Ireland's Blue Book private rentals collection and offers a unique luxury twist on private escorted tours of Ireland.

Shannon Princess is the perfect way to explore what Ireland's famous River Shannon has to offer. Explore waterside villages, savour fantastic food, private shore visits and attentive service onboard. Guests will enjoy all the indulgent comforts of their own private floating hotel. Deluxe accommodations include air conditioning, a deck side spa pool, touring bikes, Wi-Fi and delicious dining, fine wines and indulgent Irish whiskeys and liqueurs.

During the cruise, private shore visits are curated by the vessel's Captain. These may include breath taking birds of prey displays at the stunning Adare Manor, home to the 2026 Ryder Cup. Not to mention sampling traditional Guinness & oysters in Galway, whiskey tasting and a visit to Leap Castle, reputed to be Ireland's most haunted castle.

Contact us through our website link to book now for Fall discounts for this August and September.



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Owen Hurcum

Owen Hurcum has become the first openly nonbinary mayor in the world. Originally from England, Hurcum moved to Bangor, North Wales, to study. They became enamored with the city and have lived there for several years now. They came out as nonbinary two years ago and describes themselves as agender and genderqueer. They even helped organize the first ever Bangor Pride in 2019. Hurcum, who had previously served on Bangor City Council as Deputy Mayor and local councillor, was elected as Mayor last year. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed their formal induction, but this past May, they were officially sworn in and donned the mayoral chain. In addition to making history for the queer community, Hurcum is an inspiration for young folks looking to break into politics: they are the youngest mayor in Wales. “I just want to say a huge diolch (thank you) to all the lovely messages that are still coming in,” Hurcum shared on Twitter. “I know representation is not just putting on the chain and I will be judged by what we do as a team for Bangor during my year in office, but still, I am glad my election has resonated with so many.” Their book, *Don’t Ask About My Genitals*, is set to be released in April next year. According to the book description, the work will include Hurcum’s personal story, and it aims “to help other young genderqueer and nonbinary people who might otherwise think they are all alone.”


Karen Weekes

In December, Karen Weekes will set off in hopes of becoming the first Irish woman to row across the Atlantic Ocean solo. Her goal is to complete the 3,000-mile journey, from La Gomera in the Canaries to Antigua in the Caribbean, in 75 days. In case of delay, though, she will have enough supplies for 100 days. “I will have a jet boiler and will eat a lot of hydrated food, which means pouring hot water into a packet and eating its contents. So, I will check what suits my stomach before I go. I will also bring a lot of protein drinks and snack bars and I will have a water-maker on board to desalinate the sea water,” Weekes explained in the *Sunday World* in March. “There is a huge amount of logistics involved, such as getting the right navigational and communication equipment.” Weekes is an endurance athlete who has undertaken her share of challenges in the past, including cycling across Canada in 2017. She has also climbed Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro. In addition to her athletic prowess, Weekes holds a PhD in sports psychology, and lectures at Munster Technological University. She has been planning and training for the row since last August. To prep for her journey, she is spending a lot of time at the gym and kayaking on Galway Bay. Alongside her training, Weekes recently launched the *She Can Do 2021* campaign, which aims to encourage more girls and women into the realm of “adventure sports.”


Yasmin Belhadj

Yasmin Belhadj is a climate activist at 16. According to a 2020 report, Cardiff - where Belhadj lives - is one of the world’s most at-risk cities from climate change. Some predictions estimate the city could be underwater by 2050 due to rising sea levels. As a result, Belhadj and many other Welsh youth have been calling for action. “There are huge companies that are refusing to change their ways to be more green and sustainable and are damaging our planet and politicians and governments are doing very little to mitigate this issue,” Belhadj recently told *ITV News*. In a piece for *voice.wales*, Belhadj wrote, “When the U.K. government pledges carbon neutrality by 2050, not only are these targets incredibly unambitious, but more importantly, the idea of carbon neutrality to our government does not mean reducing emissions and pollution. Their solution to the climate crisis is via offsetting emissions, which means producing carbon emissions in other countries so statistically and locationally, they have no responsibility for their actions.” Belhadj is also a coordinator for the *Teach the Future U.K.* campaign, which has branches in England and Scotland as well as Wales, and aims for students to be educated about the climate crisis. “Educators need to be trained in how to teach about these difficult topics in a way that empowers students, and they need funding and resources to do this,” reads the *Teach the Future U.K.* website. In addition, the campaign calls for climate-friendly school buildings.



Iowa Irish Fest

August 6-8, 2021 - Waterloo, Iowa

www.iowairishfest.com

This year is a big one for the Iowa Irish Fest. After a forced shutdown last year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the three-day gathering is back this summer for another weekend of Irish celebrations and culture. Held in the recently renovated Lincoln Park in downtown Waterloo, the get-together will host a series of live musical performances from the likes of Gaelic Storm, Scythian, Tallymoore, and others, as well as cultural demonstrations and traditional food and drink. This year's event will also include several "fan favourites," including the 5k ShamRock N Run, the High Nelly Bike Rally, the Celtic Cruise motorcycle rally, whiskey tastings and, as always, the extremely popular Highland Games. The festival will include a Family Fun and Learning area, with a variety of activities suitable for children of all ages. The Iowa Irish Fest has come a long way since its humble beginnings as a small, informal family picnic in 2006, and today it is one of the region's premier events.



Goderich Celtic Roots Virtual Festival

August 6 & 7, 2021 - Goderich, Ontario

www.celticfestival.ca

This year's Goderich Celtic Roots Virtual Festival will take place Friday, August 6 and Saturday, August 7, via the event's Facebook and YouTube pages. Hosted live from the Staysh in the quaint community of Goderich, Ontario, and with the help of the good folks at FauxPop Media, the online gathering will feature live musical performances from the likes of the Ennis Sisters, Sean Keane, Emily Flack, the Gilberts, Daoiri Farrell, Dave Curley, Farsan, and many more. New this year is the Robinson Emerging Artist Showcase - named after the festival's founders Warren and Eleanor Robinson - where artists from around the world will showcase their music to a panel of judges in hopes of appearing as part of the weekend event. The audience will then choose two winners that will receive mentoring about the music business and then return to the gathering in person to play the mainstage at the Goderich Celtic Roots Festival in 2022.



Fergus Scottish Festival & Highland Games

August 13-15, 2021 - Fergus, Ontario

www.fergusscottishfestival.com

The Fergus Scottish Festival & Highland Games is back this summer to celebrate its 75th anniversary 2021. Held completely online for the second time since it began in 1946, the three-day gathering will honour Scottish heritage and history through music, dance, athletics and more. After a very successful event in 2020 with their "Wee Digital Ceilidh," Festival organizers aim to take this year's virtual experience to the next level. The 2021 Festival - the "Wee Digital Ceilidh 2 Go" - will include everything found at the live festival, from Pipes and Drums, Heavy Events and Highland dance competitions to greetings from the Clans and musical contributions. In true "Scottish spirit," the event's planners are no strangers to challenges, and promise attendees an experience unlike any other. All festival events will be available online. Those looking for something fresh this year will be pleased as the Festival has several surprises "in its sporran" - including new features that have never been seen before.

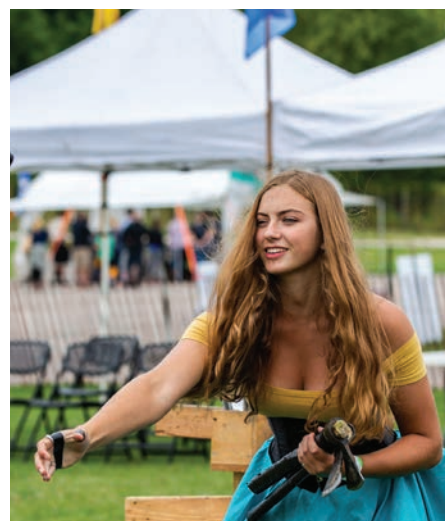
Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering *August 21 & 22, 2021 - Hamilton, Montana* www.bccg.org

The Bitterroot Celtic Games and Gathering returns this summer for its 12th year. Held at the historic Daly Mansion on the third weekend each August, the annual gathering is one of the biggest cultural events of its kind in Montana. Things kick-off early Saturday morning with an all-weekend schedule of musical performances on the Entertainment Stage, including the fabulous Harp Twins, Celtic quintet Swagger, folk duo House of Hamill, and trio TopHouse. Between sets, attendees will enjoy pipe band competitions, as well as Highland and Irish dance contests. Visit the Clan Tent Village (over 30 clans!) and watch the Entrance Parade of the Clans at 1pm each day. The weekend is full of ongoing events, including the extremely popular Highland Games on Saturday, which remains the largest athletic competition in Montana. Come evening, all are welcome to attend the free Ceilidh (hosted dance party), held from 7-10 pm in the Dance Tent. The festival's new refrigerated Beer Trailer will serve up an array of amazing local brews and mead. The weekend will also hold Scotch whisky and mead tastings, a horseback jousting demonstration, and over 50 vendors selling traditional food and wares. Sunday will see a variety of activities for public participation, including a Celtic Afternoon Tea, a Tug o' War, a Skillet Toss, a Beards 'n' Braids competition, as well as the "almost famous" Bonnie Knees contest. The wee ones can enjoy a series of age-appropriate play and activities, including the Juniors Highland Games.



Wisconsin Highland Games *September 3-5, 2021 - Waukesha, WI* www.wisconsinscottish.org

The Wisconsin Highland Games celebrates its 19th year in 2021 in the warm and welcoming community of Waukesha, just a few miles west of Milwaukee. This year's gathering has something for everyone, including an opening night awards ceremony, as well as an old-school ceilidh and fish fry. Saturday and Sunday serve up an array of activities, including piping and drumming competitions, heavy athletics, Highland dancing, a Celtic canine exhibition, sheep and duck herding, longbow shooting, ax tossing, haggis hurling, a single stick competition, and more. Visitors are welcome to stroll through the Celtic Marketplace and sample fares and wares from local and regional vendors, and the Clan area will feature a Parade of Tartans, along with resources for researching ancestry. Attendees will also enjoy live musical performances. A family-friendly event, the wee ones will be busy in the Lil' Rampant Lions Children's Area.



Canmore Highland Games *September 4 & 5, 2021 - Canmore, Alberta* www.canmorehighlandgames.ca

Looking for something special and fun to do this Labour Day weekend? The Canmore Highland Games - one of Western Canada's largest and most popular Celtic festivals - is returning to the Rocky Mountains for its 30th anniversary. This year, Canmore is "going back to the roots" of traditional Highland games, showcasing a series of individual competitions, as well as demonstrations in heavy sports, pipes and drums, and Highland dance. The two-day event will also bring back several fan favorites, including the British Car and Motorcycle show, the popular Sheep Dog exhibitions, the Celtic Market and vendor booths, the Tug O' War competition, and more. The festivities will also include a Taste of the Highlands event, where participants can sample from over 90 wines and Scotches from some of the world's top producers. The weekend will close out with the Canmore Ceilidh, a traditional evening of music and piping, as well as Irish and Highland dance. Canmore is keeping the safety of its guests and presenters a top priority, promising a safe and enjoyable experience for all.



Scotland...
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Fergus Scottish Festival & Highland Games

2021 will see our
second virtual games.

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Ryan Gibson Guitars

Luthier Ryan Gibson crafts classic and contemporary guitars

Like all the best stories, the tale of how Ryan Gibson became a guitar artisan begins at the pub.

"Yes, it really is one of those stories," admits Gibson, who spoke with Celtic Life International via email from his home in Scotland. "I was attending a folk session in a pub in Portobello, just outside of Edinburgh. A friend leaned over and said the guy she was chatting to made his own guitar. I think my response was, 'You can't make your own guitar!' Turns out, I was wrong."

Humbled, but even more so curious, Gibson looked into the instrument-crafting courses available to him in Glasgow. However, as a professional musician, he never envisioned taking such classes with a future career in mind.

"At first, I just wanted to keep learning the craft of guitar making without that much intention for it to become my main work. I was enthralled by the craft and its history - these skills that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Any maker today could walk into the workshops of any of the old masters from the 18th or 19th century, pick up their tools, and carry on working. It is a connection that means a lot to me, and I try to balance the old and the new."

Evidently, the call of the trade was too loud to ignore. He opened his self-named guitar shop in 2012 in central Scotland. Now that the craft itself had been heeded, Gibson could listen closely to the softer clues in the woods he worked with in order to tease a

great guitar out of them.

"I use both machine tools and hand tools; the machines are great at getting some of the donkey work done, but the hand tools are essential for being connected to the work and getting the most from it. It is very tactile. I use the traditional Spanish method, where the top and neck of the guitar are joined first, then the sides, and finally the back. It is a very holistic method - the guitar comes together as one, as opposed to the body and the neck being made separately and then joined.

"I listen to the wood as I work it through all the many stages. I flex it and tap it until it tells me it is where it wants to be. There is no shortcut to this process."

Gibson says that young luthiers often make the mistake of searching for the 'perfect' guitar, when there simply is no cookie-cutter solution for how to turn a piece of wood into an instrument.

"Beginner makers are always after the secret 'code' to the perfect guitar. They want dimensions and thicknesses that will ensure the best tone. The truth is, there are no set of perfect dimensions I can tell you, as there are no two pieces of wood that are the same."

He knows that he still has plenty to learn himself, though. Recently, he has been looking at guitar-making with more concern for the sustainability of his materials in mind.

"We all have responsibility in looking after our world, and climate change is ever-present in my mind. The Leonardo Guitar Research Project really opened my mind to the possibilities of using native woods in fine guitars. As a non-profit organization, they are dedicated to educating players and makers to the possibilities of using sustainable wood.

"I have sat and listened to the guitars made from both traditional exotic species and native woods in a live 'blind' test, and you really can't tell the difference. From their research, they have found that listeners tend to hear the difference more between makers than woods. This confirms to me what I already suspected."

Up until now, Gibson's guitars have mostly been available just in the U.K. However, he has plans to expand - as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic passes.

"I want to branch out to Europe and beyond. I was all booked in for European guitar expos in 2020, but we all know what happened."

Until then, Gibson takes on each new project with aplomb, eager to learn something new from each guitar he crafts.

"As the famous French maker Daniel Friederich said when asked which one of his guitars was the best," quotes Gibson, "he replied, 'my next one.'"

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The Benedetti Foundation

Music education is thriving online at The Benedetti Foundation



The Benedetti Foundation, which was founded by Scotian violinist Nicola Benedetti in 2019, “puts on transformative orchestra and musicianship-based workshops for young people, students, teachers and adults that showcase what music education at its best can look and feel like,” says the organization’s Director Laura Gardiner.

Gardiner grew up on the coast of South-west Scotland. She was given a violin when she was only three years old and has been playing ever since. Later, she attended Leeds University to study music, before receiving a postgraduate diploma at the Royal Northern College of Music. “I think I knew I always wanted to teach from quite early on in my life. I would say my main inspirations in my early teaching career have come from my first teacher Brenda Smith, and from the founder of the National Children’s Orchestras of Great Britain, Vivienne Price.”

Brenda Smith was also Benedetti’s first violin teacher. In addition, Gardiner and Benedetti attended elementary school together. As it turned out, both took to teaching. Gardiner taught private viola and violin lessons while working as a schoolteacher in Lincolnshire, England, but teaching music eventually took precedent. “I hoped to create a similar musical community to that which I had grown up in for young people in this area,” she says. As a result, she founded The Oasby Music Group in 2013.

“As I established my teaching practice, I began to take my students to Nicole’s concerts, and we got chatting about what we were both seeing happening with music education,” explains Gardiner. This led to her taking on the part-time role of Education Director at the Benedetti Foundation,

“but very quickly as the Foundation grew, I became full-time and moved into the role of Foundation Director in April of 2020.”

Also in 2020, the organization launched its first virtual sessions. Musicians from all parts of the world, at all levels of experience, had the opportunity to participate in online workshops and tutorials during the month of May.

“We were overwhelmed with how well the sessions went over Zoom and it soon became apparent that we were able to reach so many more people this way,” adds Gardiner, noting that more than 7,000 people from 66 countries participated.

More virtual sessions followed, including the Global Violin Sessions the following November. “Mini Sessions” also became part of the online offerings: shorter, focused workshops taking place throughout the year. Since January 2020, the Foundation has met with more than 20,000 participants from 84 countries.

“The traditions of Scottish/Celtic music are undoubtedly still popular.”

“We are excited to expand our Global Violin Sessions to explore more of these folk traditions this year,” continues Gardiner. “Many of our Mini Sessions warm-ups have been known to begin with some fiddle tunes!”

At the time of interview, the Foundation was running its latest set of virtual sessions called Building Foundations: Exploring the Physicality and Psychology of Playing.

“The Sessions will help participants to address their physical and psychological

foundations and the majority of the content is open to players of any instrument,” explains Gardiner. “The sessions are intended to complement participants’ individual lessons or group tuition.”

Although she acknowledges that the pandemic has hit the performing arts especially hard, the online sessions have had their upsides. For example, there has been a much larger influx of adult learners than the Foundation has seen in the past.

“Nothing will ever replace the live experience, but we will now always look to a blended approach and find ways of having people physically present (once we are allowed to!) and accessing virtually. The live sessions will become an addition to our consistent, all year-round online work.”

For Gardiner, the rewarding aspects of her work are “all about the people.”

“Through the Benedetti Foundation, we have met thousands of young people, teachers, students, and adult learners whose enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication to music education is remarkable. Our ethos is to unite, inspire, and educate.

“From seeing familiar faces on the screens, to hearing from parents, carers, and teachers about their young people growing in confidence as human beings, feeling happier, becoming more curious and inquisitive, committing more to their musical development, interacting more freely, improving their mental health and making new friends because of our sessions - this is why we do what we do. We know how much joy there is to be had from making music together.”

www.benedettifoundation.org



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Edel Meade

Edel Meade connects the dots of folk and jazz on her latest recording

Irish musician Edel Meade began playing music when she was just seven years old.

"I began out of curiosity," she shares from her home in Limerick, where she works as an artist-in-residence. "I started off singing pop songs as a child, whatever I heard on the radio, while also taking classical piano lessons."

In primary school, Meade took lessons for the tin whistle and the recorder, and also sang in a choir. By 11 years of age, she had joined the notable Cór na n-Óg, an Irish choir made up entirely of children ages 10-12.

"I was assigned to singing the alto part, but I really wanted to be a soprano. The alto parts were always very boring, so I paid close attention when the parts were being taught so that I could go between singing the soprano parts and the alto parts. This was invaluable training. Vocal harmonies play a huge part in my music these days. I guess that is where it started."

From there, Meade's career developed quickly; she appeared in an array of musical productions, including Jesus Christ Superstar, Godspell and Hair, and performed in a variety of choirs across Ireland.

It was while pursuing a degree in Journalism in Dublin that her interest in jazz music really took off.

"I loved singing and playing Eva Cassidy songs on piano. I had the incredible opportunity to study in Chicago for a semester and that is where I came across jazz singing for the first time. After that, I came back to Dublin, reluctantly did the final year of my Journalism degree and then immediately signed up for another 4-year Degree course in Jazz Performance!"

Meade released her debut album *Blue Fantasia* in 2017, which received great critical and popular acclaim. The album included both original songs and "contemporary re-workings" of numbers by Irving Berlin, Thelonious Monk and Wayne Shorter.

"I enjoyed this period and have some great memories, but all along, I was eager to focus on my own song writing and figuring out what it means to be a creative artist, so I signed up for an MA in Song Writing at the University of Limerick and set about writing a brand-new collection of songs."

The result of her efforts is a new solo album, the recently released *Brigids and Patricia* - a blend, she notes, of contemporary, folk and jazz melodies.

"It was inspired by Irish history, folklore and modern culture. It is quite distinctive and original sounding."

The eight-song selection includes some of her favorite tunes, including *Lady Icarus* and *Song for Bridget Cleary*, which was inspired by the 1895 death of the Co. Tipperary native who was murdered by her husband because he suspected her of being a changeling.

"*Song For Bridget Cleary* is really important to me. Every time it is played or sung it keeps her memory alive. *Lady Icarus* is definitely a favourite also, as it is so adventurous. I was inspired by the incredible aviatrix Lady Mary Heath from Limerick, who, for a period of time in the 1920s, was one of the most famous women in the world."

Meade admits that the project took considerable effort - a combination of "blood, sweat and tears."

"I am a very creative person, so I am always getting ideas. But in order to shape them into something special, it is necessary to sit down and hone them into shape. Sometimes it happens quickly, other times it can take weeks for something to materialize."

Brigids and Patricia has already received a strong response.

"I have been blown away by the support. It has totally exceeded my expectations. The album has been played across RTÉ Radio and the BBC, from folk programs to jazz programs and everything in between and I have had a tonne of stellar reviews, so it has been really, really heartening."

She feels confident about the state of Irish culture, describing it as "incredible."

"The music that is being made here is world-class - and it is so diverse. There seems to be an array of vastly talented Irish women in particular, making incredible work. There has never been a better time for Irish music."

To that end, she is already planning her next recording.

"I am looking forward to more song writing and delving further into Irish folklore. I will be arranging some of my music to be performed with a string quartet, something I have been wanting to do for a long time."

www.edelmeade.com



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Ainsley Hamill

Ainsley Hamill celebrates the people and places of Govan with her debut full-length recording



It is no surprise that Scottish singer-songwriter Ainsley Hamill found a vibrant career in music. Born in the small village of Cardross on the River Clyde, Scotland, Hamill began piano lessons at the age of seven.

"I learned from a very talented woman from Cardross, Rosemary Wilson," she says from her home in London. "She has been an incredible inspiration to me over the years, encouraging me to write and compose my own material. It was through Mrs. Wilsons' summer concerts that I was asked to do my first gig at the Cardross ceilidh when I was quite young."

Over the years, Hamill's love of melody and rhythm was nurtured through music and dance lessons. She credits the likes of Tina Turner, Shania Twain and The Eagles as some early influences, and adds that her reasons for playing music have largely stayed the same since the start.

"I would like to think that there has been a natural evolution since I ran around the house singing Glasgow St. songs as a youngster. My singing style has certainly evolved over time, probably due to being more comfortable with myself and not caring so much about the thoughts of others. I have always loved to sing Scottish songs."

After completing her studies at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Hamill began working as a solo artist and as part of Glasgow-based trad band Barluath. In December of 2019 she released her first solo effort, an EP titled Belle of the Ball.

She admits that she still struggles to describe her sound.

"It is hard to define yourself and see yourself as others see you. It is a funny thing because a lot of people would place me within the folk genre, but others would say I have a jazz and pop influence. From my perspective, I am just me, it's hard to put a label on it."

The songsmith will release her debut full-length album *Not Just Ship Land* shortly. Hamill describes the eight-tune recording as a "mammoth project" that took her roughly two years to complete.

"The songs are based on the mostly forgotten and uncelebrated people and places of Govan, here in Scotland. Four songs were arranged for string orchestra and the remaining four had tracks built around them to create soundscapes containing guitars, piano, keys and sampled sounds. I worked alongside Malcolm Lindsay who ar-

ranged and played on the tracks. I also had Yvonne Lyon on backing vocals and the Czech Studio Orchestra conducted by Mikel Toms playing the string parts. The project started as a commission to write songs about Govan and I took much inspiration from a wonderful group of Govanites called The Govan Reminiscence Group.

"Each track has its own individual identity, and I feel connected to the characters and places."

The album includes several notable tracks, including the title track - the last song written for the album - and *Belle of the Ball*, which also appeared on her EP of the same name.

Although it is still early days, the recording has already received strong praise from listeners.

"The response to the album has been incredible. I love hearing people's connection to Govan - folks who have reached out after listening to it. I recently connected with the great niece of Belle Moore which was a lovely experience. It really brought Belle to life for me. It has also been wonderful to be featured as Folk Album of the month in the Guardian and other such publications."

Hamill feels confident about the future of Celtic music, even with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns.

"Scottish musicians are releasing incredible music these days. Some of my favourites are *Vincular* by Ron a Jappy, which I had the pleasure of singing and writing for, *Urranta* by Deirdre Graham & The Jazz Readers, and *Volume One* by Malcolm Lindsay & Simon Halliday."

She aims to remain busy for the remainder of 2021.

"This year brings some lovely creative projects. I will be planning the launch event for *Not Just Ship Land*. I have also been collaborating and will be recording songs in Gaelic and English for a new podcast series created by Noisemaker, and I will be recording an album with Fourth Moon and a duo album with Toby Shaer later in the year. Hopefully, there will be some gigs along the way too!"

www.ainsleyhamill.com

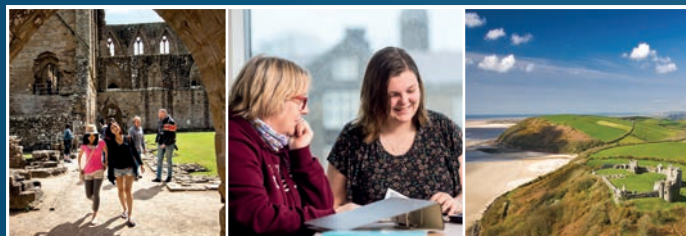


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James Zada celebrates his love of music with his latest album

There is no disputing the Celtic heritage of award-winning recording artist James Zada.

"My family tree traces back to the last native Prince of Wales, Prince Llewellyn," he tells Celtic Life International via email from his home in New Quay West, Wales. "My Welsh grandfather was Doctor Robert Hughes Parry, who was Chief Medical Officer of Bristol during WW2 and was made honorary physician to the Queen."

Although he hails from a predominantly medical family - his parents and grandparents were physicians - Zada found his own calling as a child.

"I have loved music for as long as I can remember. I used to make up songs as a very young boy. I thought everyone did. I grew up with records being played by my father and brother."

He describes those early sonic influences as "eclectic" - everything from James Last and Elvis Presley to country, rock, pop, and punk.

"It just made me feel alive and high. I would wake up every morning with my Walkman headphones wrapped around my neck. I lived and breathed music."

By the age of 13, he was committed to pursuing his vocation. That dedication paid off in spades, and since then Zada has sold over 1 million records worldwide and had his music appear in various television shows, including the highly celebrated American sitcom Friends.

Although initially interested in creating pop music as a teen, his career took an alternative direction in adulthood.

"I am also known as the recording artist Llewellyn and produce healing music," he says. "I discovered it from my sister who was a masseuse at the time. I then became a producer of instrumental-based music and signed to several labels until 2005 when I set up my own label - Paradise Music Ltd - that became one of the biggest instrumental labels in the world."

"The success of Paradise Music has enabled me to return to my original love of writing and recording songs," he continues. "Under the guise of James Zada, I am currently writing and recording songs again - stuff with an 80s/90s feel, but with a modern twist."

He admits that a career in music has not been without its challenges.

"In the early days I made nothing, and I felt the pressure to give up - so many opportunities snatched away and nothing to show for the years of hard work. People see you as a failure and not good enough. The industry is full of people that prey on others for self reward. You have to understand it as a business, and you must be tough to make it as a full-time living. Like many, I believed that someone would come along and do it all for me. Once you realize that it is down to yourself then you make your own success."

Still, the risks of the vocation are far outweighed by the reward of doing what he loves.

"Being creative has kept me happy. I would have been deeply unhappy in a non-creative job."

"I believe that music keeps you young and on a higher vibration that is healthy and better for wellbeing. Music heals. It heals others and yourself. I have had many letters and messages over the years from people that say my music has helped them through the darkest of times."

Recently, Zada released the full-length album *Free Love*. The 20-track collection, which includes some of his recent hits such as *A Beautiful Thing*, was produced independently.

"I put everything together myself. I write, perform, record, sing and produce myself. I overlay my vocals for backing vocals. Luckily, my wife Juliana is a beautiful singer, and she also added backing vocals."

Free Love has already received strong praise from listeners.

"People love what I am doing. I get compared to the late, great George Michael because of my vocal style. I take that as a huge compliment."

Never one to sit still for long, he is already back at work recording a deluxe version of the album which will be called *Free Love - Remixes*.

"The deluxe version will contain lots of remix versions and possibly be around 30 tracks or more in length. I am working with several plugging and promo companies with a goal to build a strong team of industry specialists."

www.jameszada.com



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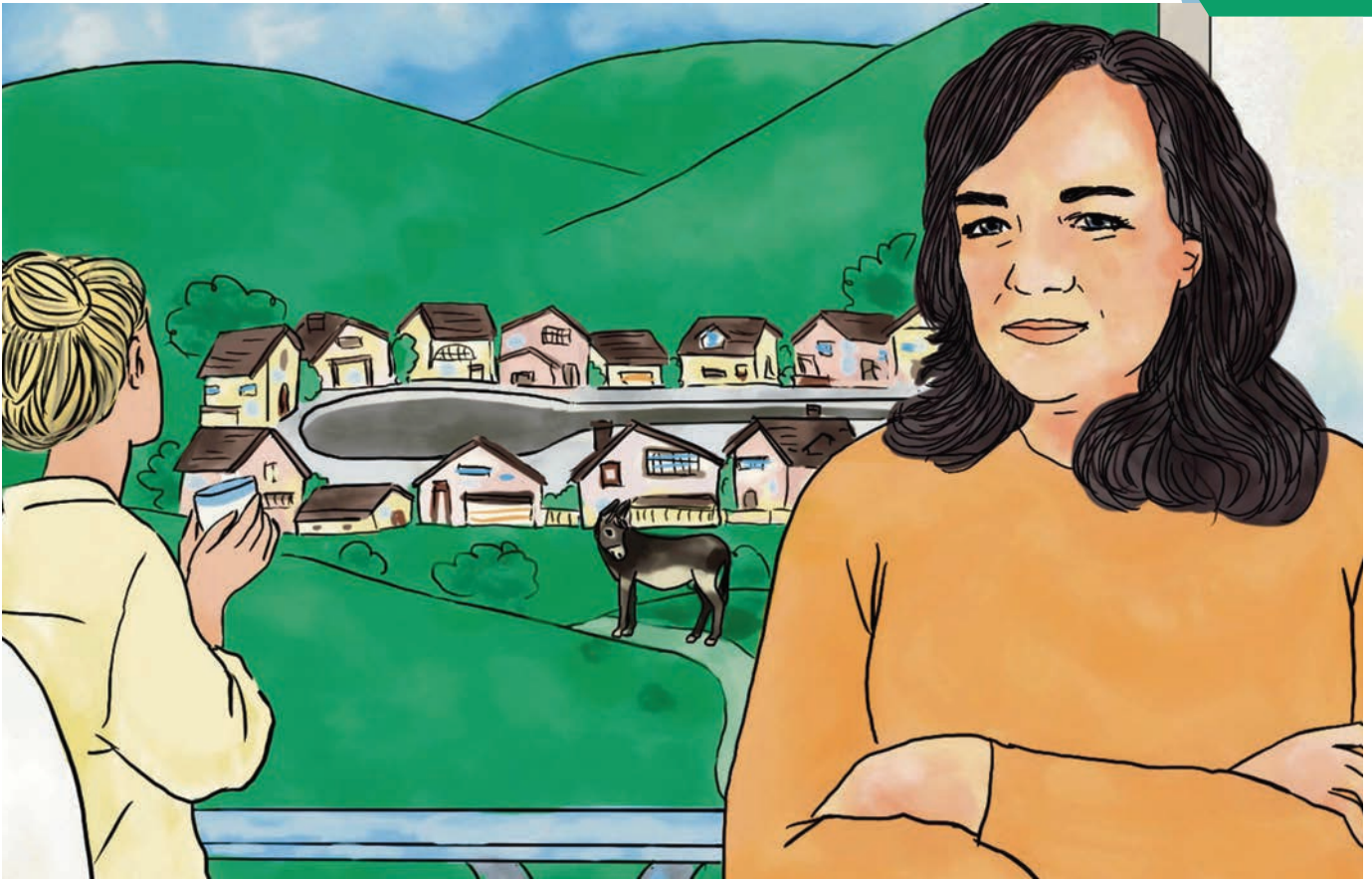


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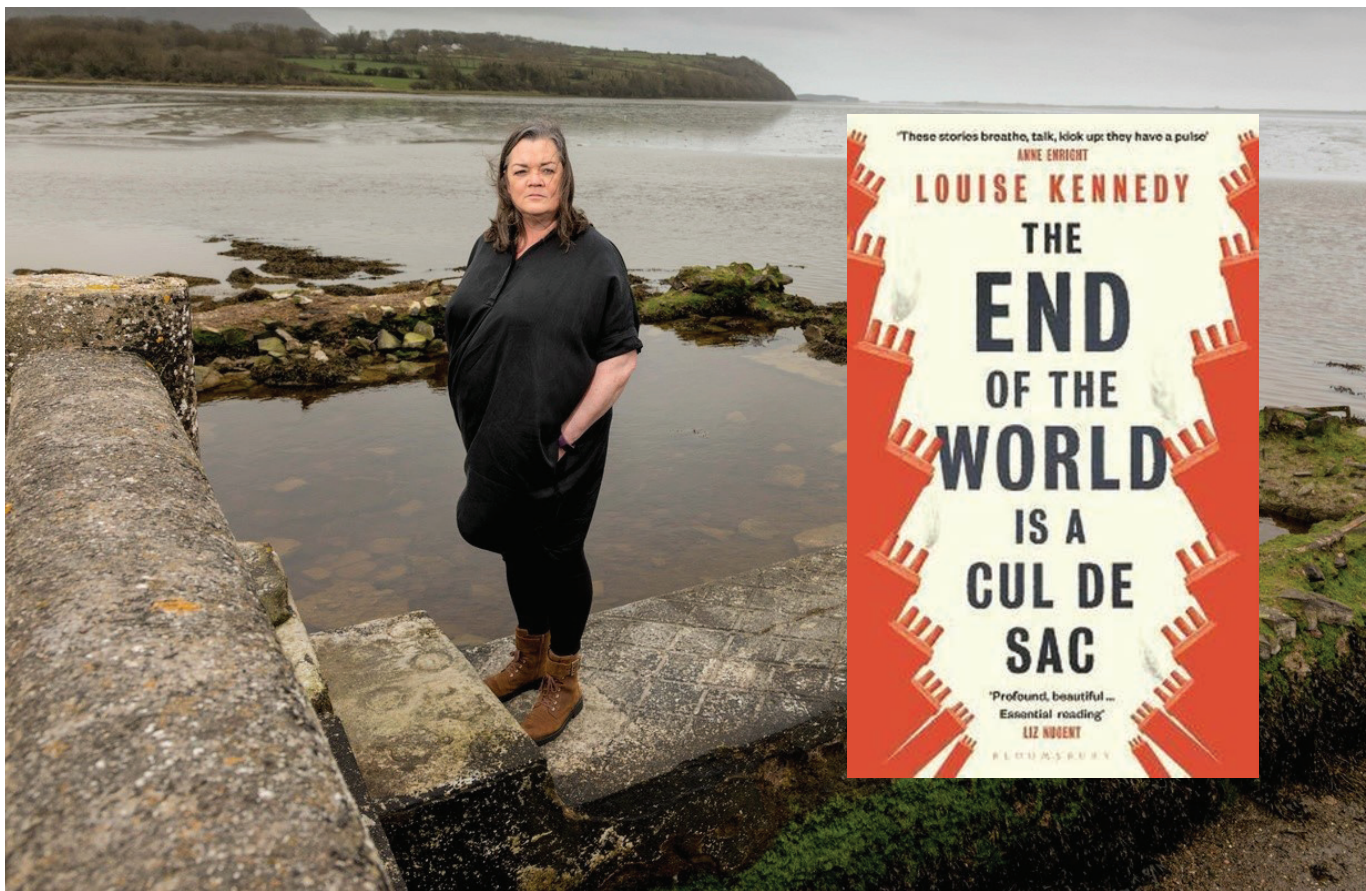
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Louise Kennedy

Irish author Louise Kennedy discovered writing later in life. Celtic Life International correspondent Eimear O'Callaghan tells us more.



There is a tentative “Hello?” followed by an embarrassed chuckle before Louise Kennedy’s image bursts onto my laptop screen. Apologizing for being late, she explains that she has been in bed, unsure if she is suffering the side effects of her first COVID-19 vaccination. Thankfully, she isn’t.

At 53, Kennedy is one of Ireland’s most successful emerging writers. Her debut collection of short stories, *The End of the World is a Cul-de-Sac* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), went to a nine-way auction. In 2019 and 2020, her stories were shortlisted for the £30,000 Sunday Times Audible Short Story Award, and her debut novel will appear next year.

Such success is remarkable by any standard. It is especially so for Kennedy, who only began writing at 47 after working as a chef for nearly 30 years.

“It’s kinda’ weird,” she says, “having to think of myself as a writer now, instead of a chef with notions.”

Kennedy may be witty and self-deprecating, but her stories are dark. They portray a contemporary, troubled Ireland where relationships struggle in hostile circumstances: a marriage doomed by an abortion, ‘ghost’ housing estates built and abandoned on the

roar of the Celtic Tiger, a farmer operating a cannabis factory to pay off debts, people haunted by the legacy of Northern Ireland’s 30-year conflict.

Life is challenging and often cruel for her female protagonists.

“They are the characters who came to me. Maybe it is because of the national discourse when I was writing - about the economy, the campaign to repeal Ireland’s ban on abortion, women taking responsibility for caring, things like that. And I see many lonely people in relationships that aren’t working.”

What sets Kennedy’s stories apart is the rich vein of Celtic culture and tradition that underlies them, fusing the modern with the ancient. References to fairy forts, healing wells and megalithic tombs, and the ancient Irish belief that “hares were shape-shifters related to the *sídh*e, because a hare screams like a woman when it is hurt.

“I have always loved that kind of thing. One of the first books my mother bought me was Sinead de Valera’s *Irish Fairy Tales*. But I think, too, it is about where I live.”

Kennedy was born in Belfast but now lives in Sligo, a town on the Wild Atlantic Way. The home she shares with her accountant husband is “a 1960s, semi-detached house

in a cul-de-sac,” she notes, “bought in a hysterical Celtic Tiger decision.”

“I live in an estate in town, and I look through the window at lots more houses like my own. But from one of the windows upstairs, I can see Queen Maeve’s Cairn, built around 3000 B.C. with a passage tomb beneath it. In Irish mythology, Maeve was a queen of Connacht.

“One of the biggest megalithic burial sites in Europe is just two kilometres away. There is a 1940s housing development here, built around a little stone burial site. The workmen wouldn’t touch it and priests placed statues between the ancient stones. According to folklore, disrespecting these tombs brings a curse.”

One of her favourite places is Hazelwood, an ancient woodland immortalized by the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats in *The Song of Wandering Aengus*. It is where her two children, now 21 and 18, took their first steps.

“This ancient culture, it’s right here. It’s all around me. It seeps into you.

“It is kind of strange, that sense of people being here before you and leaving their mark. It is hard to avoid it coming out in the writing.”

Kennedy’s family moved from Belfast to



Hollywood, County Down at the height of 'the Troubles.' As Catholics, she shares, they were hugely outnumbered there by Protestants and felt vulnerable and exposed.

"Catholics with businesses were easy to identify. Our names were over the door. A neighbour was killed by Loyalists. As a 5-year-old, I shouldn't have known that, but I overheard adults talking about it and spent a lot of my childhood distraught that my father would die the same way."

When the family's pub was bombed for a second time, they moved to the Republic. Kennedy graduated in Social Science from University College Dublin and worked briefly as a social worker in both Dublin and London.

"But I couldn't do it. I was a sponge for other people's misery."

She returned to Ireland after "a year in an horrific job in a London bank, putting microfiches into alphabetical order." But London, and the availability of 'exotic' ingredients unheard of in Ireland, had awakened her interest in cookery. She borrowed the money for a Cordon Bleu course and began her 30-year career as a chef in Ireland and, in the nineties, Lebanon.

'Kind of weird,' 'kind of strange,' and 'kind of remarkable' are phrases that pepper our ninety-minute Zoom conversation, as though life constantly takes her by surprise. Writing never featured in Louise's plans but, in 2014, a friend coaxed her to accompany her to a writing group.

"I had never written anything, and I didn't want to go. All the others were already writ-

ing, and I made a fool of myself, telling them I was only there because my friend made me go. I felt intimidated and out of place. It was upsetting but kind of weird too. I must have been curious because I went back again."

Later that year, Ireland's economic downturn forced Louise to close the bistro she had opened in 2007. But she discovered, at 47, she was finally doing what she was destined to do.

"I have found myself flooded by words and ideas ever since. The process of writing felt familiar."

"I was used to turning up to work when I didn't feel like it. I was used to putting in long hours, trying to apply discipline to create something, trusting that going through the motions would eventually yield something. I think my circumstances focused my writing. It was a mental escape from debt and stress."

Kennedy is slowly adjusting to her success, having initially found it quite overwhelming.

"It was exciting, but it was a lot to take in. Publishers were love-bombing me and I was having to take their calls in the kitchen or the library where I should have been working. I cried a lot. Before that, it was just me getting up in the middle of the night and putting on my dressing-gown to go out to my shed to write. I started to realize things were getting serious."

Much of the publicity surrounding the

scribe's success has focused on her age. That doesn't bother her, she says, although she rails against the emphasis put on 'young' writers.

"I have had lots of women telling me they are feeling encouraged that I started writing very late. They are starting to believe that they can give it a lash in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Most women these days are working, in jobs as demanding as men's. They give birth to the children. They often end up caring for parents. It is really hard. I don't know how they're supposed to tap into any kind of creativity with so much on their plates."

Like many things in her life, her forthcoming novel follows an unexpected turn of events. In March 2019, while procrastinating about finishing a PhD on the Irish writer, Norah Hoult, Kennedy was diagnosed with melanoma and underwent several rounds of surgery. Confronted with the prospect of death, she gave herself three months to complete a novel, writing five thousand words every week.

Her doggedness, the willingness to turn up when she didn't feel like it, saw her complete "a shockingly bad first draft" that her agent later submitted with her story collection.

"When I Move to the Sky is set in the North of Ireland. It is about a teacher in her 20s whose family's pub is blown up. Sounds familiar?", she laughs. "The woman has a relationship with someone she shouldn't go near. She is kind of good craic, but things are chaotic, out of control."

She hopes that, at 53, she has done her last shift in a kitchen. In terms of writing, however, she admits there is no way to circumvent the hard work.

"It is not like I just sit down, write 4,000 words and win a prize. I could spend months on a story and lose sleep over it. The amount I have written since I have started is nuts, but I still have to turn up every day and flex the writing muscle."

Twenty-one years ago, when she was in the final throes of labour with her son, a midwife leaned down beside her. 'You're not that Louise Kennedy, are you?' she asked, referring to the internationally renowned Irish fashion designer of the same name.

As a wonderful new Irish voice, there is little doubt that in the future this writer will be recognized as "that" Louise Kennedy.

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Witches of Scotland

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

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

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

brutal prosecution of the Presbyterian Covenanters.

While reading about a 2004 crime - two teenage boys were found guilty of “violating of the sepulchre” after taking Mackenzie’s skull from his grave in Greyfriars Kirkyard (they were the first people to be charged with such a crime in more than a century) - and studying the history of Mackenzie in the Faculty of Advocates library, Mitchell found an old biographical account of Mackenzie’s life. The work noted that Mackenzie had also been involved in the witch trials, and he doubted many witchcraft accusations. In fact, he generally attributed confessions to torture. The book also “talked about the torture of a poor woman who was so demented with her accuser saying she was

a witch, she asked them, ‘Can you be a witch and not know it?’” recalls Mitchell. She sympathized with this bewildered woman who had no one to defend her.

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

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



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

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

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

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

justice,” notes Mitchell.

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

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

Mitchell and Venditozzi aren’t the only ones passionate about getting justice for accused witches. Mitchell was surprised to find how many other people are taking

it upon themselves to research. Some are doing so independently on their own time. Others, like researchers at Edinburgh Napier University, have undertaken formal projects. Dr. Nicola Ring, a nurse and associate professor at the university, is leading a study which highlights the ways in which nurses and midwives were branded as witches and persecuted. Ring and her team are supporters of the Witches of Scotland campaign.

“I didn’t expect the number of people who are interested in the witch hunts and have been pursuing their own inquiries,” says Mitchell.

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

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

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



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

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

from dysfunctional homes.”

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

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

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

“If we think something like this can’t happen again, then we don’t know history. These things do repeat if we don’t address them.”

And she is right. “Satanic panics” - and the fears that spawned them - are part of humanity’s more recent history as well as



our present. False confessions are also a prevalent issue. “There have been so many miscarriages of justice throughout the centuries right up to now, because people are convicted on false confessions,” muses Mitchell. “In terms of criminal justice, it has a very modern resonance.”

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

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

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The Enduring Legacy and Presence of Colm Cille

As Celtic Life International contributor Michael Newton explains, one man's imprint on Gaelic culture is deep and undeniable.

2021 marks the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of arguably the most important and influential man in the intertwined heritage of Scotland and Ireland. He stands on the threshold of recorded history, one of the earliest individuals about whose life we know many concrete details. His name was on the tongues of Gaels every day for centuries and even accompanied exiles who immigrated to North America.

He served as a bridge between many divides in his time: between Ireland and Scotland, between paganism and Christianity, between the Gaelic and Pictish worlds, between orality and literacy. His life story is itself bound up with the destiny of the Gaels in the British Isles.

He is best known in English by the Latin form of his name, Columba, although that was not the name he was given at birth. His father, Fedelmídh, was a member of the most powerful family in Donegal, the Northern Uí Néill. When his mother was



Michael Newton

pregnant, she had a dream that an angel gave her a beautiful cloak covered in colourful, fragrant flowers. The cloak flew into the sky and then descended, covering all of Ireland and Scotland. She said that she was sad to lose such a beautiful cloak, but the angel explained the meaning of her dream: she was pregnant with a son who would help to spread Christianity across the land.

This anecdote has lovely imagery, but it may have even greater significance: the Latin word for the Gaels, Scotti, was probably a borrowing of the Gaelic word *scot*, meaning “flower, cream of the crop” - a word that the native Gaelic élite would have used for themselves when encountering Roman warriors, traders, and ambassadors. Modern scholars, as well as medieval Gaels, understood the success of the church to be pivotal to the flourishing of Gaelic culture, especially under the direction of this scion

of the Uí Néill, whose parents named him Crimhthann, meaning “fox.”

It was the Gaelic custom for the children of aristocrats to spend a time in fosterage, and Crimhthann’s foster-father was a Christian who educated him in the teachings of the church. Crimhthann took to the faith with zeal and devotion, gaining such celebrity for his religious work that he was given a new name - Colm Cille, meaning “church dove.”

He didn’t always live up to Christian ideals of peace and docility, however.

Once, he was at the center of what is sometimes characterized as the first copyright dispute in Gaelic history. One of his mentors, Fintan, returned from Rome with a rare treasure - a copy of the Psalms. Colm Cille borrowed it and Fintan eventually got suspicious of why it was taking him so long to return it. He found out that Colm Cille had written out a copy of this precious manuscript without his permission. Fintan was furious and brought the case to King Diarmaid mac Cearbhaill of Tara. The King ruled in Fintan’s favour, deciding that Colm Cille had to return the Psalms to him and also give him the copy that he had made.

The oldest surviving book in Ireland is said to have been created by the hand of Colm Cille. We don’t know if this is true, but it was treated as a powerful holy relic in the medieval era and was carried into battle as a talisman by the O’Donnells of Donegal. It is for this reason that it is called An Cathach

- “The Battler” - even though it is actually a copy of the Book of Psalms.

Not long after that incident, Colm Cille left Ireland with a dozen of his Uí Néill kinsmen to set up a new monastery on an island known in English as Iona. Nowadays Iona is within the territory of Scotland, but at the time it was in the orbit of a kingdom called Dál Riata that spanned from the north of Ireland and into the part of Scotland now referred to as Argyll. Colm Cille became the archetypal exile in Gaelic tradition, even if his short jaunt across the Irish Sea pales in comparison with the trans-Atlantic journey of modern emigrants.

The sea connected rather than divided people in those days, and Iona was ideally situated to give Colm Cille and his disciples access to a multitude of the kings and ethnic groups that dominated the British Isles in that era. Iona became a beacon of learning and art, instrumental to the advancement of Christianity in Pictland and Northumbria. Colm Cille was Scotland’s first national saint, and even though Saint Andrew came to replace him as the dominant religious figure in the Lowlands, Colm Cille (or “Calum Cille,” as he is known in Scottish Gaelic) remained dominant in Gaelic Scotland to the present. One of his relics, the Breccennach, was even carried by Robert the Bruce into the Battle of Bannockburn against the English in 1314.

There is an island in the Firth of Forth called Inchcolm where there was a monastery devoted to Saint Columba. Fortunately, a manuscript of Latin hymns written to him by the monks of the island during the Middle Ages contains stanzas such as:



*“O Columba, hope of Scots,
by your merits’ mediation
make us companions
of the blessed angels. Alleluia.”*

Most of what we know about Colm Cille’s life comes from a book that Adomnán, the ninth abbot of Iona, wrote about him in the late seventh century, about a century after Colm Cille’s death. It is incredible not only that the most important manuscript containing a copy of this book appears to have been written on Iona during the lifetime of Adomnán, but that it survives in Germany, where it was brought by one of the scholar-monks of Iona.

A host of saints feature in Gaelic folklore,

but Irish folklore collectors in the twentieth century gathered more traditions about Colm Cille than any other saint. He was such a central feature in Gaelic consciousness that a day of the week is associated with him: Thursday. Many traditions and sayings are attributed to Saint Columba, including those brought to Nova Scotia and survive to the present.

I heard a very interesting prophecy attributed to Colm Cille from my friend Lodaigh MacFhionghain (Lewis MacKinnon), the CEO of Gaelic Affairs in Nova Scotia, which he heard from his father, and he in turn heard from Iain Aonghas MacIosag, another native of Inverness County, Cape Breton: Mun tig crìoch air an t-saoghal, bidh na samhraidhean ’nan geamhraidhean is bidh na geamhraidhean



’nan samhraidhean (Before the world comes to an end, the summers will be winters and the winters will be summers). It is not unusual for apocalyptic lore to describe a world turned upside down, but the echo of current climate change issues is eerie.

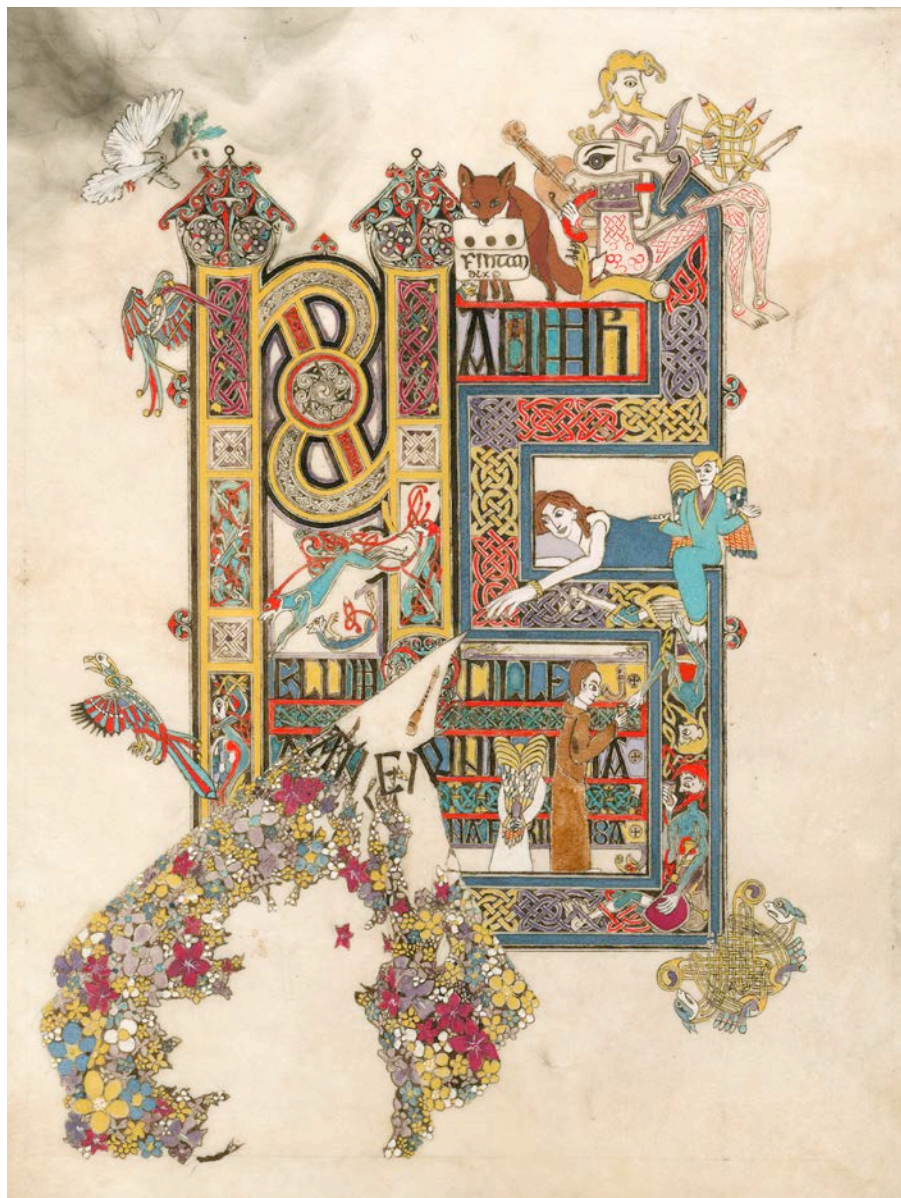
Colm Cille’s imprint on the Gaelic culture of Scotland, Ireland, and the diaspora is broad, deep, and undeniable, and it is fitting that the joint initiative Colmcille 1500 is commemorating his legacy in 2021 in all these places. There is a raft of artists, musicians, writers, and scholars involved in responding to this cultural and historical heritage in creative ways, and I am honoured to be amongst them.

I have been collaborating with an amazing visual artist, Thomas Keyes, on a re-imagining of this artistic and literary material in our own times. Thomas was born in Ireland and started out working with graffiti in Belfast, but he now lives in the Scottish Highlands and is one of the only people who still produce illustrated manuscripts from raw elements - animal hides, plants, lichens, feather quills, and so on - like monks did in the Middle Ages. I have taken a number of the traditional tales about Colm Cille’s life and adapted them into modern Scottish Gaelic and English. Thomas, in turn, has produced an amazing carpet page depicting scenes from these stories, ornamented with the detailed, stylized, mesmerizing Celtic geometric designs whose lineage goes back to the Iron Age - but with some contemporary twists.

Our collaboration will continue to work on other major legends and heroic figures from Gaelic tradition, but it is certainly fitting for us to begin with the foundations laid by Colm Cille.

Michael Newton earned a PhD in Celtic Studies from the University of Edinburgh. He has written both books and articles about Scottish Gaelic tradition, culture, history, and literature.

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As Celtic Life International Managing Editor Chris Muise explains, the Emerald Isle's animation industry brings the past to present

Irish Animation

Irish culture has long been passed down from one generation to the next through the tradition of storytelling, regaling listeners with tales of great deeds, great men, and fantastic myths.

Today, many artists on the Emerald Isle are doing the same, although aided by a boost in technology. As the animation industry in Ireland continues to boom, old-

school soothsayers and minstrels are being replaced by storyboards and motion capture.

Ironically, the beginning of that story goes way back to a land before time - literally.

The first animation studios in Ireland were US-based companies that set up shop in Dublin, including Murakami-Wolf - which produced the classic Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles cartoon, among others - and Sullivan

Bluth Productions, studio of the acclaimed animator Don Bluth. Classic films, like *The Secret of NIHM*, *An American Tale*, and *The Land Before Time* were crafted in Dublin. It was around then that Gerry Shirren jumped on board with Sullivan Bluth as a production manager.



Robert Cullen

"I joined that studio at the end of The Land Before Time, and the beginning of the All Dogs Go to Heaven era," Shirren recalls to Celtic Life International via Zoom from his office in Kilkenny. Shirren is currently the managing director at Cartoon Saloon, a studio which - as he explains - traces its DNA back to Sullivan Bluth.

"Ireland now has a couple of studios that grew out of the demise of Bluth's. Certainly, the studio that I had (TerraGlyph) was one of those. Brown Bag was probably the first independent Irish one of that group, which included mine, as well as Kavaleer Productions and Boulder Media. And then Cartoon Saloon set up.

"The college brought out a whole new breed of lovely, talented animators," he continues, referring to Ballyfermot College of Further Education. "They all got into

business for themselves, and now we have this group of three or four studios that are going back to that era. They are the current elder statesmen, if you like, of the animation sector in Ireland."

One of these 'elder statesmen' is Robert Cullen, founder and creative director at Boulder Media. Cullen started the studio with six employees in the late 1990s, with their main export being eCards.

"If you remember, these were sent to someone in an email to wish them a happy birthday," shares Cullen, also via Zoom, from his home in Dublin. "I taught myself Flash - probably the very first version - and did a few cards. That is how the company started. For the first three years, we did online content, some adverts, and some comedy sketches."

Those learned skills would pay off a few years later, when Boulder was given the chance to create test footage for the Cartoon Network series, Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends. Other, larger studios vied for the gig, but it was Boulder's expertise in the 2D style of Flash animation that won over the producers.

"Amazingly, they gave us the gig," laughs Cullen. "We went from six people to, like, 30 people in the space of six weeks. There were no models on how to produce a Flash show, so it was just a matter of trial and error, for many, many months. It was a baptism by fire."

Today, Boulder Media is one of the top service animators in the industry, largely hired by networks to animate cartoons like Transformers, My Little Pony, Danger Mouse, and many others. These jobs would have



Gerry Shirren

traditionally gone overseas to Asian studios, until the digital revolution in animation techniques made studio production more affordable.

Boulder has been comfortable in their lane so far; pretty much every studio that emerged from that wave of Ballyfermot grads has developed its own niche.

"Each studio did its own thing," confirms Cullen. "Brown Bag focused more on pre-school shows and CG. Other studios developed their intellectual property, while we focused on service work, for the 8-to-10-year-olds action-comedy market.

"There was lots of work, and we weren't going to step on anyone's toes."



Cartoon Saloon may have picked the most ambitious corner of the industry to inhabit - hand-drawn theatrical pictures.

"I have known the founders, Tomm Moore and Paul Young very well from the time they left college," Shirren recounts. "I shared my tuppence worth of advice, for whatever it was worth, and then we worked together on-and-off. It kicked-off for them, eventually, when the feature film got finished, released, and became the critical success that it was."

That film was *The Secret of Kells*, first released in 2009. It tells the tale of a young boy named Brendan living in a monastery in 9th century Ireland who meets a forest fairy named Aisling while repelling a Viking expansion. The film draws directly from Irish folklore and literature and is the first of a trilogy of such films by Moore. By the time

the second picture was released - a tale of selkies titled *The Song of the Sea* - Shirren had officially joined Cartoon Saloon.

When we spoke to Shirren, the firm's latest picture, and the third in the trilogy - *Wolfwalkers* - had just been nominated for an Oscar for Best Animated Feature.

"That is our 5th Academy Award nomination," he notes, pointing out the time-tested tale of friendship between the film's main characters, Robyn and Mebh. "These are small stories with a universal appeal. With *Wolfwalkers*, a straightforward friendship develops between the two girls who are from completely different backgrounds. They are set up from the start to be at loggerheads with one another, but they develop a friendship quickly.

"There is a big appreciation of being able to bring that bit of Irish-ness to international audiences. And that has been welcomed by the audiences where we have screened the films."

Shirren describes the Irish animation industry as small but significant, with about 1,500 to 2,000 people working in the industry today. And while everyone has enjoyed their niches so far, the animation industry - like artistic talent itself - is always evolving.

Boulder Media is about to release a *My Little Pony* film, which they made in conjunction with the property holders on the creative, storytelling side - not just providing animation services this time but creating the characters as well.

"We are just about wrapping it up," says Cullen. "I can't say too much about it, of course, but it is the first CG film to be produced wholly in Ireland, which is great. It has been a fantastic journey on the movie."

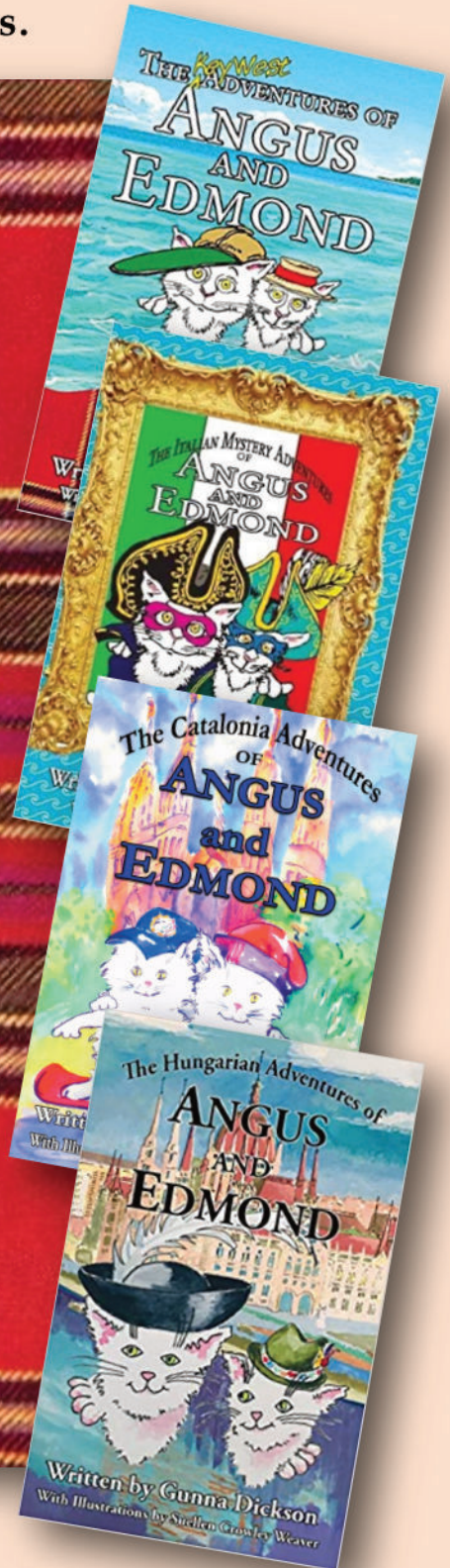
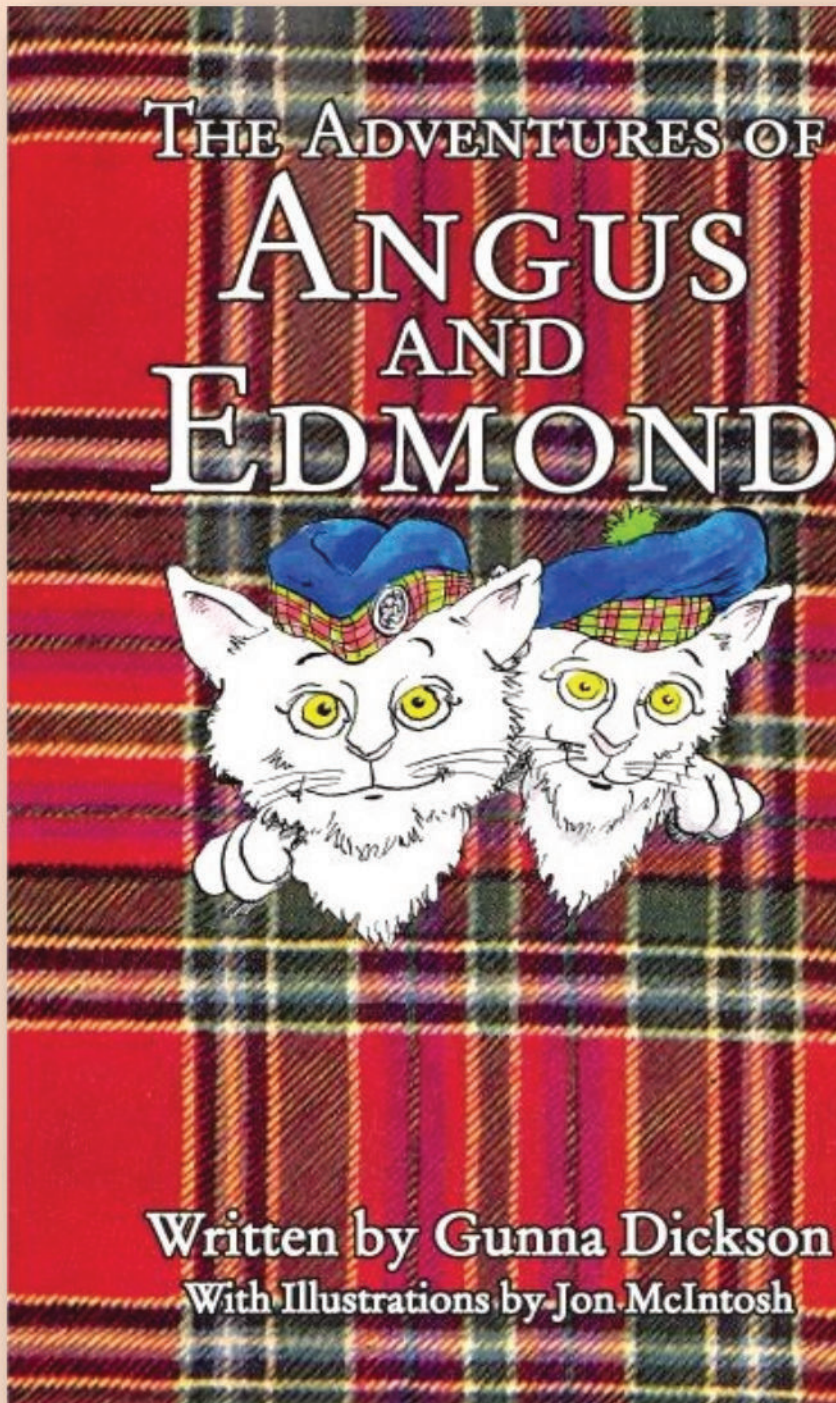
Cullen isn't afraid of stepping on any toes with this move into features. He figures, with the onset of streaming services hungry for original content, animators in Ireland won't be without work anytime soon.

"There is so much demand for content at the moment - more so than ever, really. Especially in Ireland - it has been growing steady now for the past ten years at least, and it is getting more and more recognition."

"I see it as being a core part of the Irish film industry," Shirren adds in agreement. "It'll be a cornerstone of it, and we see it growing. The opportunity is there. The business is there. The creativity is there."

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Purves Puppets and Biggar Puppet Theatre

As our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands explains, one family takes a hands-on approach to puppetry.



In an age of computers, tablets, smartphones and sophisticated gaming consoles, you may be forgiven for thinking that the ancient art of puppetry must have succumbed to the onslaught of modern technology. However, a small, family-run puppet-theatre company in Scotland understands and appreciates that there is still a fascination with this old-school form of storytelling.

Biggar Puppet Theatre is the home of Purves Puppets and is the realization of a lifetime of dreams and effort by Ian Purves, with this help of his wife Jill and their children Colin and Victoria. Purves can trace his fascination with puppets back to some of

his earliest childhood memories. His parents were teachers; his father was Scottish and his mother English, and they spent some years in India prior to Purves' birth in Islington,



London. Soon after, the family relocated to Hawick in the Scottish Borders where they settled. It was there, at around the age of four years, that Purves started to take an interest in puppets, perhaps influenced by the Asian art and artefacts brought back from his parents' travels that adorned the family home.

This was also an era of few television sets and families made their own entertainment rather than having it streamed into the home. With teacher parents, the Purves' house was a place that inspired fun learning and imaginative exploration, and puppetry was a perfect outlet for the creative imagination of a young boy.



As a child, Purves' early puppets were made from just paper, cardboard, and string, but they would become ever more interesting and complex as time went on. His father built him a little stage from plywood complete with painted scenery and a miniature lighting set-up, while his mother helped him write storylines, and with a gramophone player providing suitable background music, they would put on shows.

It soon became the norm that a puppet show was part of the entertainment whenever friends and family gathered.

Meanwhile, future wife Jill had been born in Plymouth but brought up in Dunfermline before her family relocated to Hong Kong where she lived for three years. Like Ian, she was influenced by cultural traditions of the Far East, developing a special enthusiasm for dressmaking before returning to Scotland.

They were destined to meet at Edinburgh University where Ian was studying for an honours degree in English Literature, while at the same time running a university puppet club. By now he was performing with his puppets at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and their collective interests in puppetry and dressmaking made for a perfect combination as they began creating their own productions. They married in 1970, set up home in Edinburgh, and during the same year Purves Puppets was born as a professional enterprise. This would be followed by a son, Colin, and a daughter, Victoria. Ian initially



worked as a teacher and in his spare time put his literature degree to good use writing his own puppet theatre scripts, including 'I-don't-know-what, from-I-don't-know-where' - an adaptation of a famous Russian folktale. This became their first professional production and their respective parents assisted with the show. They soon made their mark on the Edinburgh scene and - on the back of appearances at the Fringe - it wasn't long before the Purves Puppets name began to spread internationally.

The children were involved from a young age and travelled with them as they took their shows on the road in the U.K. and abroad. Under the auspices of the Queen Noor of Jordan Foundation that promotes

cross-cultural links between countries, they were invited to perform in Jordan and Syria. There were also invitations to showcase in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where they performed in the National Theatre in front of an audience of 2,500. Other countries included Spain, Italy and Malta, and they were amongst the first westerners to perform in Poland, behind the Iron Curtain. Although Ian wrote the scripts, he made sure that the accompanying storyline was recorded in the native language.

"It was important to us that our act was easily interpreted by whatever country we were performing in and relevant to that specific audience. For that reason, we avoided storylines or gags that might be interpreted as having a political slant."

They learned over the years that interest in puppetry, like many forms of expressive art, can come and go and is subject to both changing national tastes and the influence of new things that come on the scene. As Jill explains, "Puppetry is a greater part of the culture of Slavic countries than here in the U.K., but when something like Jim Henson's Muppets or the British satirical Spitting



Image show comes along then there is a resurgence of interest in puppetry.”

Although the family had moved from Edinburgh to resettle in the village of West Calder in West Lothian, their desire to promote the art of puppetry was still driving them towards new goals - particularly the idea of establishing their own theatre. It was Jill who found a property in Biggar - a town in the former burgh of South Lanarkshire in Scotland’s Southern Uplands and, importantly, located midway between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The property was an attractive family home that also had an adjacent coach house that could be converted into a puppet theatre. They acquired the property and Biggar Puppet Theatre was created.

With experience in most types of puppetry, they now specialize in productions using black light where scenery and characters are illuminated using ultra-violet light and the operatives, clad in black, can move about unseen. For Ian, it is a method that reflects vivid colours, draws viewers into imaginary worlds, and enhances the experience, “It is not without its problems though, as it is all too easy for black-clad puppeteers to trip over each other on a dark stage.”

Productions were family affairs with Ian and Jill writing the scripts together and all family members recording the voices. Jill and Victoria created stunning costumes



for puppets, and Colin became increasingly involved in the technical side with special effects, lighting, and sound. Victoria is the Grand Puppeteer, holding all the strings of the business together. Over the decades they have worked alongside some of the most famous names in Scottish show-business, including Andy Stewart, Jimmy Logan, and The Krankies. Purves Puppets has spent years promoting Scotland and aspects of its popular culture to international audiences. The Loch Ness Monster - Nessie - has been seen on stages across the world and Scottish music has been heard - and sung - by many foreign audiences. As a family they are cultural ambassadors and continue to entertain audiences worldwide. Now in their

80s, Ian and Jill have concentrated their efforts at Biggar Puppet Theatre, where they also offer puppetry workshops and tend to a shop, a tearoom, and a playpark.

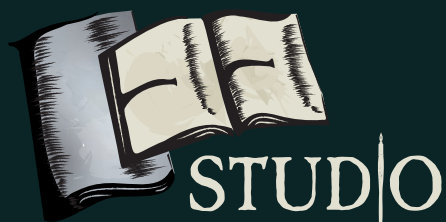
Colin has taken the skills he inherited and has moved on to working with some of the biggest names and companies in film and stage productions. He has operated puppets in Star Wars, Jurassic Park, and The Muppets, but also works on other aspects of computer-generated imagery and special effects. He still lives locally and assists with family productions whenever possible.

As with many businesses, it has been a difficult period for Purves Puppets with the theatre closed due to COVID-19 lockdown. They have used their website and social media to continue reaching out to audiences with online theatre, backstage tours, and productions available for download. As the world starts to open up, Jill is excited to get back out doing what she loves most - entertaining audiences with puppet shows. Ian agrees enthusiastically, adding, “We would love to have the chance to perform in North America. It is one corner of the world where Purves Puppets hasn’t yet been staged!”

*All photographs courtesy of Purves Puppets
www.purvespuppets.com
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The Dropkick Murphys

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

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



What are your own roots?

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

When and why did you get into music?

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



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

Are they the same reasons you do it today?

No, it has definitely taken a turn...thank God! Because he never paid me for that bet,

I would still be playing for that \$30 wager! I think that, in the beginning, it was for a laugh. Then, as we started to develop a little more on each stage, we set some goals, picked up some fans, and it was like, 'Oh my God, people might actually like this!' Then it took on a whole new meaning once we had an actual connection with a real fanbase. I would say the opportunity to play live music to an audience that knows our songs and sings the words back to us - that feeling is priceless. So, no, I am not complaining about that \$30 as I believe I won in the long run.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

got a chance to play the whole album live, which was a nice feeling.

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

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

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

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



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

www.dropkickmurphys.com

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MADE OF STORIES

Newfoundland Saga: The Road to Spectacle Head and Back

*In the fourth installment of a feature series,
Lesley Choyce walks the Rock.*





Holyrood

As the COVID-19 crackdown continued and my classes were being taught online (not pretty for an old sod like me), my wife Linda and I decided to undertake yet another Atlantic Bubble trip to St. John's, Newfoundland, and explore more of the Avalon Peninsula. While "The Rock" is not exactly in our backyard, we had overlooked it as a travel destination for over a decade, opting instead to boogie board in Sligo, Ireland, or poke around the fairy-haunted glens of Betsy-y-Coed in Wales.

But on a bright morning, we boarded a flight with our other masked companions for the province's capital city. On my list of places to explore this time were Holyrood, Cupids, Brigus, Bareneed, Hebb's Cove, and Dildo. In addition, we hoped to revisit Cape Spear and possibly take a quick trip to Signal Hill to curse the gods who had drenched us there on our last visit.

I had rented a compact car for our travels from Budget but when we got there, a kindly young woman said she had upgraded us to a black Chevy Equinox. I said no thanks, too



big, a veritable tank of an SUV that I had seen too many times on Homeland. It was, at least in my mind, the standard vehicle of the American FBI and CIA. If memory serves me at all correctly, I had also once stared down George W. Bush in one of those behemoths during his singular visit to Halifax in 2004. I was holding up a surfboard at the time, with the slogan "Surfers for Peace" right to his face as his motorcade drove up Robie Street. According to my memory, we made eye contact for a longish portion of a second and he had a most befuddled look that is still etched in my memory.

The rental woman admitted at that point that it was actually the only vehicle they had available, so that settled things as I tried to explain my antipathy toward the big bossy black Chev. I still didn't like the idea that

locals would think we were American Feds out in the boonies on some clandestine mission, but my wife assured me I was yet again delusional, so we drove it away from St. John's International Airport in search of groceries and beer as is our tradition when visiting foreign (or not so foreign) territory. This too proved to be just a tad troublesome, as there was a strike underway of grocery and liquor store workers and we had to deke around suburban neighbourhoods, well concealed behind tinted windows, until we could find a liquor store and no picketers.

We drove on down to Duckworth Street where we had again rented an apartment, this one above a Philipino restaurant in a part of town that had many other interesting looking ethnic eateries.



Linda and Lesley

As a general rule, when traveling, we tend to eat ethnic foods that are not part of the local cuisine.

Indian food is the staple for places like Ottawa, or anywhere in Ontario for that matter, as you never really want to settle for something labeled “Canadian.” Lebanese food would be the best bet while in Halifax and, of course, any restaurant with an exotic foreign sounding name might get you through travels in the U.K. In the USA, pick Italian or Mexican, of course. Don’t get me wrong, I would gladly eat an Irish breakfast in Nova Scotia or even a feed of Newfoundland cod tongues at home as well. It is just more exciting to see what the local version of ethnic is whenever you find yourself peckish on a journalistic junket like this.

Thus, for our first meal, we settled on a highly praised (by TripAdvisor at least) unique Asian vegan restaurant called The Peaceful Loft, which was just a few blocks down from our apartment. It turned out we were the only patrons - probably because we were having dinner at 4 o’clock in the afternoon. There was no alcohol involved (are vegans non-drinkers? I wondered), but the aromatic tea was on the house and our host was undoubtedly the most friendly and convivial restaurateur on the entire eastern seaboard of North America. On the menu were dishes from Macau and a lot of foodie things that were vegan replacements for ham, chicken, and fish. I can’t explain how they do that - or even why - but it was all great to eat and the sauces were homemade and unique.

Later, we revisited Broderick’s on Water Street for some much-craved-for Newfoundland and Irish music. Once again, the performers were top notch.

The next morning it was off to Cupids and Dildo. I believe I got lost yet again trying to get out of St. John’s in our big black beast, ending up among the shopping malls of Mount Pearl and Paradise thanks to some insidious conspiracy probably created by chain store moguls. Eventually, we found the elusive TransCanada Highway and pointed our Equinox a bit south and west as if we were about to drive the entire 7,821 kilometres from the east coast to the west coast. We passed through Butter Pot Provincial Park, so named for a rounded hill of that name that supposedly looks like a butter pot - which was lost on me as I didn’t know what a butter pot was supposed to look like. Then we cruised north on Route 62 to Holyrood. I was fairly certain the name of the town referred to the Christian cross in Anglo-Saxon, but some speculate that it is more specifically named for Holyrood

House in Edinburgh, even though the town was mostly settled by the Irish like so many towns on the Avalon Peninsula. Although the community was originally settled for fishing and farming, the town’s website notes that, “in the 1890s when the fishery was in chaos, Holyrood men could be found shipping on the Great Lakes, building the subways of Boston, searching for gold in the Klondike, working in shipyards in Philadelphia and Seattle, and a host of other occupations.” And if I hadn’t spotted an ill-placed oil refinery along the shoreline, we might have stopped to see if any descendants of those men were around to share some lore about the town and its history.

But it was on to Lakeview and Harbour Main along a stretch of glorious coastline. I guess the thing that struck me most was how tidy everyone’s house and yard were and how green and lush were both the yards and the forests. If you know where to look in this rock-strewn province, you will find enticing pockets of green and grand deciduous trees. And that is certainly true of this southern shore of Conception Bay. It is a most pleasant scenic drive on up to Marysvalle and Georgetown, but when we stopped to gawk at the hilly coast and pristine waters, I was cognizant that we still might appear as American spies as we took snapshots of the grandeur. Or were we possibly scoping out a potential location for a safe house for Soviet defectors?

Now, just because we had decided to travel to Cupids and Dildo, it was only partly true that we were headed out there because both towns sounded funny and interesting. Both had a bit of history to them, naturally, and I had researched some hiking trails that sounded out of this world. We paused for a sip of coffee in Brigus, so named for the town of Brickhouse in England although it was mostly settled by Irish and Welsh. Here was the home of a range of famous explorers whose last name was Bartlett, including Robert Bartlett who had accompanied Peary on his Arctic explorations.

Then it was on to Cupids Cove, the site of Cupids Plantation, which to me sounded completely illogical. I associated plantations with the American South where settlers grew cotton and tobacco and those seemed to me to be the most unlikely cash crops this far north. However, I soon learned that a “plantation” was simply a settlement. According to the provincial Heritage folks, “Thirty-nine colonists set out from Bristol in 1610 under John Guy, an experienced Bristol merchant. They had detailed instructions; they were to fortify the settlement at Cupids (then known as Cuper’s Cove) in Conception Bay, experiment with farming, cut spars and planks, make salt, potash and glass, collect samples of ore and, significantly, to fish and trade in cured fish and train oil.” Train oil, really? Okay, well that was what they called the oil made from the blubber of whales in those old days. John Guy, as it turned out, was a bit of a greedy bastard, wanting more land and not always paying his men. So, one might wonder why the former Newfoundland government (before Confederation) put his mug on a postage stamp and elsewhere?

Officially, this was the second oldest English colony in the New World after Jamestown in Virginia. However, things did not go smoothly. Poor soil, difficult climate, death, and pirates plagued the early settlement. But it was a start. And the rest, as they say, is history.

As we pulled into Cupids, I accidentally pushed a button on the dash and the roof opened up. The Big Chev, it turned out, had a hidden sunroof that stretched over the front seat and the back. This was obviously designed so that someone, perhaps an army sniper or terrorist, could stand up and shoot at adversaries while driving to or from some crime scene as they did in the Jack Reacher films. But now, looking up, I could see that Cupids had greeted us with more blue skies and wispy clouds.

Cupids today is a fishing community among other things. We



drove around the harbour and on to the end of the road near Spectacle Head. The trailhead was well marked so Linda ran on ahead as I took my usual ample time ambling up the stoney path on a couple of humpback hills that reminded me of the ones near Peggy's Cove back in my home province. I noticed some coyote scat - or at least that was what I thought it was - and also some other forms of dung that had the colour of blue like in the old bottles of ink you would pour into an inkwell. As I watched Linda ascend a steep grade on a bare rock slope, I then noticed the abundance of blueberries growing on the low wild shrubs. A taste here and there convinced me that these were the best tasting blueberries in the world but then remembered that I had said that to myself back on Bell Island. And no, I decided, I did not have to make a final decision as to which crop was most excellent, damn it.

As I hiked to higher elevations, I decided that making such inquiries locally might raise further suspicion that we were on some covert mission to discover the secrets of coastal Conception Bay - the lush green yards with their concrete gnome statues, the apparent fecundity of the land, the abundance of fish, and free-for-the-harvest fruit. No, better to keep questions to myself.

You see, since my wife was often ahead of me on these jaunts, I had lots of time to think about a wide range of questions that haunted my curious brain. The names of towns like Witless Point, Bareneed, Come-by-Chance, Old Shop and, of course, Cupids. Then there were the famed town heroes/villains: the scoundrel John Guy and the pirate Peter Easton who threatened the town. The local lore and the price of a cottage down the road on Cod Jigger Lane.

It is amazing the stuff that goes through your head when you are breathing heavily and hiking to the top of a place like Spectacle Head.

Head, for example, is a reference to a headland, in case that was not completely obvious as it was not to me when I first moved north to asylum in Canada. Up until then, I thought that the colloquial use of "head" referred to someone who did drugs or was used as a reference in bands with names like Radiohead, Motörhead, the Talking Heads or Machinehead.

Linda waved to me from the pinnacle of the first hilltop as she stood beside a stone sculpture of sorts called "American Man." It wasn't really much like a man at all but a neatly piled formation of rock that had been around since the 1930s. It had been vandalized a few times over the years probably because there would always be someone in most any community who would want to take down the proverbial American male a notch or two. But it was always rebuilt, and one local said that there was really nothing American about it. It was just a corruption of "Marking Man." And, of course, that is how these things go. All that aside, here was a well-orchestrated pile of the flat slate slabs that were meant to represent the barrel-like body of

a person. It was made from the same stones that made for slippery going on this hike. Linda had already charged off from there to the next pinnacle as is her way. I huffed and puffed until I too stood shoulder to shoulder with the American Man.

I caught up with my dear wife atop Spectacle Head, so named because the view was spectacular. It was one of those places where you take a dozen or so photos, blown away by the sweeping panorama of sea, sky and cove, only to return home to discover the photos did little to reveal just what a spectacle it was. Enough so to want to make you stop taking photos and just live, breathe, and take in the moment. Which we all should do more often anyway, and to hell with Pinterest and Instagram.

Back down at sea level, drinking cold stale coffee (which always tastes so good on a dead-end road in a place like Cupids), we hastily decided to buy a cottage here. Cupids had woven a spell over us, and this should absolutely be our second home - a seaside haven with a deep, rich, convoluted history, a quiet place far away from the havoc of modern civilization. As the coffee grew colder, Linda did a quick recon on her phone (so often a mistake) to discover that land and houses were not cheap here. A tiny fisherman's shack of 400 square feet across the harbour on said Cod Jigger Lane was going for a mere \$199,000. Apparently, there were scads of people out there wanting a cottage in this cozy corner of the Rock. So, alas, it would not be our second home.

I had sussed out a second hike here, the less appealing sounding Burnt Head Trail. I slowly tooled the hefty Equinox back through town, waving through the open skylight at the older men and women tending their tulips in raised beds, until we came to another dead end at a cemetery. I really like walking around cemeteries, and I think we ate the sandwiches we had brought among the many headstones of the Morgans and Bishops who had been planted here. We have even gotten to the point where we are connoisseurs of headstones, saying things like "That would be a nice one to have," as we eat our homemade chicken and pickle sandwiches and point to a really snazzy black granite marker with an etched image of a spaniel or a Harley-Davidson.

Now, if you ever find yourself parked at the trail head for Burnt Head Trail, you will discover that you are looking at an old church that once hosted the attendant graveyard populated by the Morgans and Bishops. And the church, which is in most excellent shape, is - or at least was when we were there - a bed and breakfast. It was, however, now closed for COVID-19 or other dire reasons. As we began our second hike of the day, we discovered that someone had built an outdoor Elizabethan theatre in the backyard of the church B and B. Apparently some entrepreneurial animateur must have staged plays there of a traditional nature during the warmer months.

Most certainly there was a story here about its origins and, in typical Atlantic Canadian fashion, I couldn't help but assume it was a "Come-From-Away" - presumably a theatrical husband and wife team from Toronto or some other distant city. As we headed into the beautiful wilderness behind Cupids' answer to the Globe Theatre, I could clearly picture a married pair of PhDs in English Literature, both on the grey-hair side, sitting in their posh urban digs over a bottle of Malbec saying, "If only we could move to a remote corner of North America, somewhere at the end of a road and buy an old church to fix up, set up an inn for art lovers to come and do yoga, make pottery, read poetry, and participate in mounting a consummate version of King Lear in a bucolic setting with the sound of mosquitoes buzzing in their ears. If only..."

And the brilliant thing is that they must have done just that until certain harsh facts of real life on a remote coast kicked in as ticket sales failed to materialize without any big-name stars willing to come



to Cupids for an off-off-off Broadway Shakespeare production. But I still bet there was a tremendous amount of naïve enthusiasm involved, which I personally endorse and so should you. Follow your dreams, brothers and sisters! Climb every mountain. Ford every stream. Until you end up in a swell place like Cupids staging A Midsummer Night's Dream.

And if this is already planting images of rural thespian heaven in your head, then the good news is (or was when I was there) that the whole shebang is for sale. For, as we were walking past the theatre to our right and the graveyard to our left, I found a large red and white For Sale sign that had been ripped off the building by either a typical hurricane-like nor'easter or some local ne'er-do-well Shakespeare hater.

Well, into the woods we went and were thrilled to discover that the Burnt Cove hike exceeded all expectations, even topping Spectacle Head. There were forests, fields, and streams aplenty and the kicker was a jagged, mountainous coastline with deeply indented canyons filled with swishing seawater, swaying seaweed, and wondrous waves that deserved their own audience applause which we were glad to provide. All the world's a stage, indeed, and we were front row and centre. And I should reiterate that we liked everything about Cupids very much. Before we left, I parked at the intersection of two gravel roads to study the map, not far from the driveway of a man who was cleaning out his garage. He eyed us suspiciously as Linda pushed the button to open up the hidden sunroof and I don't blame him. I was hunkered over the map, but Linda noticed that he was yelling something to us and then retreating into his house. I assumed he probably was just offering us a friendly hello or a "Whaddayaat?" but he could have been going for his gun. Either way, Linda advised that we vamoose, so we made our exit from a place that had now etched its way into our hearts.

Linda was advising me to stop being so bloody sensitive about the appearance of our spymobile, so I decided maybe we should get some fresh, hot coffee and wondered out loud if Tim Horton had found his way to these shores of Conception Bay. Sure enough, there was one in Bay Roberts, and it was filled with boisterous men in overalls talking up a storm. After the bucolic charms of Cupids, Bay Roberts was a bit of a shock - heavy traffic, strip malls, and just too crowded for my liking. Linda asked me why I had ordered a coffee big enough to share with an entire football team, but I found that it settled my mind a bit as we drove north to Spaniard's Bay and east towards Trinity Bay, listening to "Night Drive" by Garnet Rogers with its most excellent distortion guitar.

When you pull into Dildo, the first thing you notice is the wooden sign with the name of the town perched on a hill above the harbour, a kind of homage to the famous Hollywood sign in California.

It speaks of the sense of humor that seems to pervade the town that has been the butt of jokes for perhaps a century or more. The name has proverbially "put the town on the map" much in the same way that it has for a number of other communities such as Condom, Intercourse, Penistone, Middlefart, and Shitterton.

Not to mention Hell, Wetwang, Ball's Falls, and Punky-doo Corner. In an article titled "There's No Place like Dildo," the unnamed author suggests that none other than James Cook named the town while surveying the coast, but that seems unsubstantiated. The author rightly states, however, that here, "Houses hug the rocky shores, following the twists and turns of the road which, no doubt, lies atop

the walking trails of old."

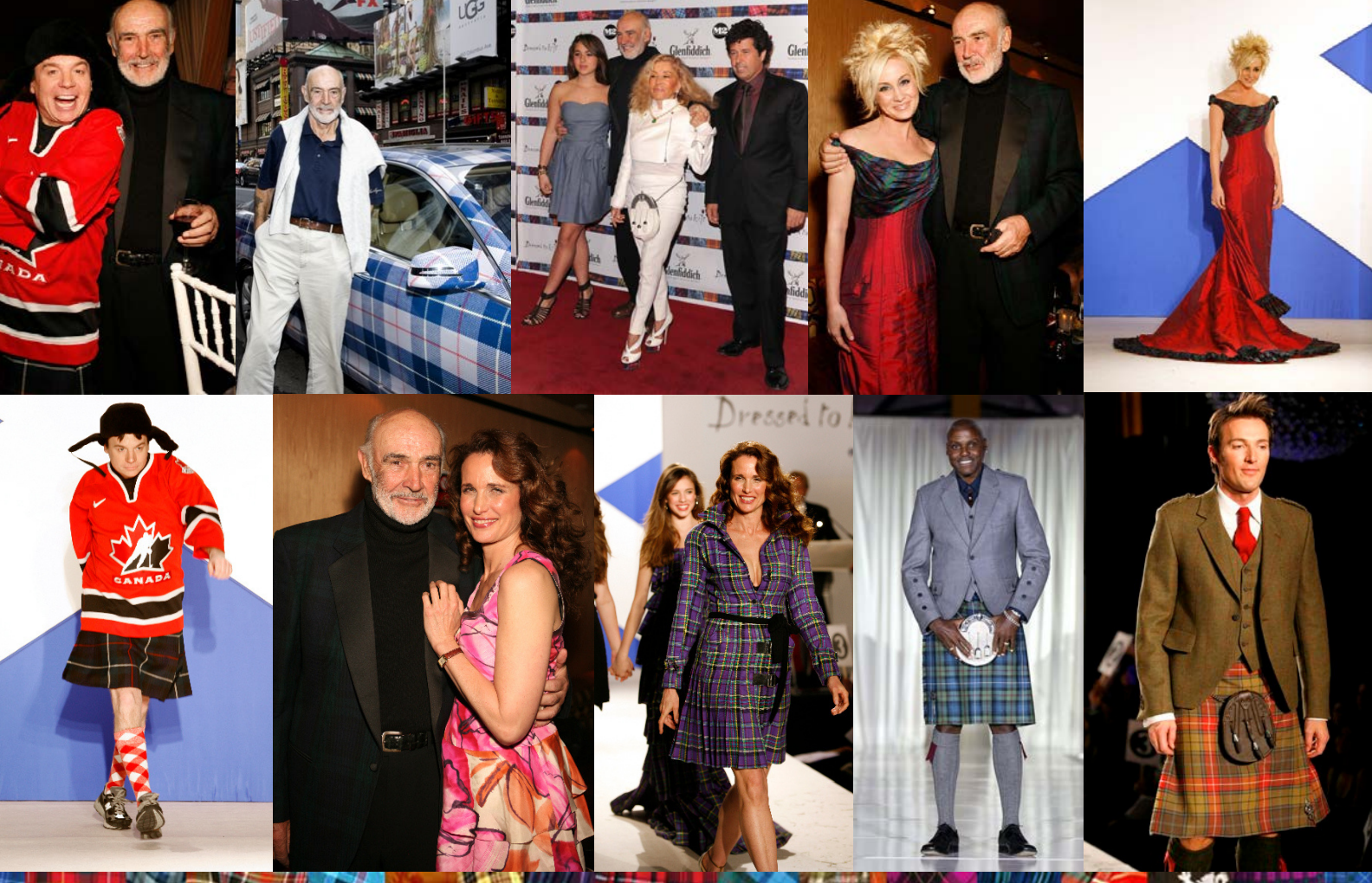
I had been told that the name was a reference to a wooden peg used to help keep an oar in place while rowing a dory, but Atlas Obscura says it is an older reference to a glass tube - something like a test tube. It also claims that "Many have found the town's name to be offensive, filing petitions to have it changed. However, the majority of the community of Dildo is just fine leaving the name as it is." So, clearly the debate over the name has been going on for some time now although the pro-Dildo faction rules, even promoting the annual Dildo Days to attract as many curious tourists as the town can handle. We cruised back and forth looking for the craft beer brewery that further promotes the moniker, eventually finding it and buying a couple of cans of Blue-Eyed Bouys, a Pilsen Thank You, a Saltwater Sour and, of course, a Where the Helles Dildo? before leaving town.

Back on Highway 60 headed south to the TransCanada and home, we discovered the Yes B'y Indian Kitchen - dynamite take-out Indian food that made for our evening meal. I was a bit disappointed that we didn't have more time to explore the rest of the Baie de Verde Peninsula that separates Conception Bay from Trinity Bay. But we would be back to investigate the more northerly Heart's Delight, Turks Cove, Old Pelican, and especially New Melbourne, which actor/comedian and fellow surfer Sean Majumder told me was the surfing capital of Newfoundland.

My spirit was somewhat deflated that evening when I learned that, in a few days, a hurricane was predicted to come ashore at our home at Lawrencetown Beach back in Nova Scotia. I spent a couple of hours on the phone with the airline trying to rebook an earlier flight so we could get home to batten down the hatches before the big wind. During the call, I learned that all that propaganda about being able to rebook for free during the pandemic was baloney. You can rebook without a fee, yes, but you have to pay extra for whatever the current price was for seats - which was substantially more than what we paid. So, after a bit more consultation with the Environment Canada weather site, we decided that we would most likely arrive home before the storm hit so we decided to stay in Newfoundland and keep our expedition rolling.

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Dressed to Kilt

Dressed to Kilt is one of the leading cultural fashion shows in the world. Celtic Life International Associate Editor Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns explores the history of the stylish extravaganza, the importance of this year's Indigenous designers showcase, and the event's future.



Gerard Butler

Ask anyone with a passion for the past and they will undoubtedly tell you that reigniting interest in traditional culture is no easy feat.

These days, traditions can quickly fade into the back of our minds, easily exchanged for more contemporary interests, and lost amidst endless chatter and distractions. The speed of life has become dizzying, especially in an age when the world is, literally, at our fingertips, awash in social and streaming media. In his bestselling book *Future Shock*, American author Alvin Toffler noted that, in modern society, by the time we have adapted to a single change, another hundred have already taken place.

However, one need not exist independently of the other. Classic and contemporary customs can co-exist, and some might even argue that current trends can breathe new life into older conventions.

For Dr. Geoffrey Scott Carroll, founder and chairman of New York City's annual Dressed to Kilt fashion extravaganza, the past permeates the present.

"We do really need to celebrate our roots," shares Carroll by phone from his home overlooking the Long Island Sound. "And I believe it is vital that we not only pass that heritage along, but also explain to future generations why it is so important."

"That said, I have gone to many Scottish events here in the States - and I am not being critical here - but a few things came across as just drop dead boring, and with little, if any relevance with what is going on in today's world. With a lot of the Scottish celebrations, we tend to go backwards. You know, the 'twee this' and the 'twee that'. The challenge for us was to make Scotland look cool and relevant."

Originally from Peebles, Scotland, Carroll moved to NYC from Brussels in

the early 2000s. He was quick to note that cultural staleness at a Manhattan charity dinner.

"It was one of the older Scottish charities in the area, and they did great things, but it was just a typical rubber-chicken, black-tie dinner. I didn't see anyone under the age of 50 that night. It had no significance to the modern world, and that simply made no sense to me."

After some thought - and a few chuckles among a few good friends - he came up with the idea of hosting a stylish soiree showcasing Scottish men in kilts.

"When everyone stopped laughing, they said, 'Geoffrey nobody is going to pay you a bloody dime for this,'" he recalls with a giggle. "I thought they were wrong; I am a businessman first, and I follow my instincts. My instincts told me that my idea was a winner."

"I had no background in fashion whatsoever, but I knew Scotland, I knew my heritage, and - most pertinently - I had a closet full of kilts."



Alan Cumming



Sean Connery and family

Established in 2003 by Carroll and the late Sir Sean Connery, Dressed to Kilt has become one of NYC's premier fashion shows and goodwill events. Aptly described as a night of "charity, fashion and fun," the gathering has generated significant interest since its inception, attracting the attention of many notable celebrities, including Gerard Butler, Anne Hathaway, James McAvoy, Mike Myers, Brian Cox, Keifer Sutherland, and many more.

Carroll remembers the first festivities with fondness.

"It was held at the Council of Foreign Affairs on Park Avenue. And although we had sold only a few tickets prior to the event, I arrived at the venue and there was a line-up around the block - it was completely sold out, and it was fabulous. We had no idea what we were doing, and we made many mistakes, but people loved it. We had the appropriate music with the appropriate model or designer, and the audience was



Mike Myers

shouting and cheering. It was just off-the-charts fun, and nothing like a normal fashion show."

As the event evolved over time so did the featured designs and wares. The media celebrated that growth, with the New York Examiner calling it one of "New York's hottest fashion shows", the Wall Street Journal proclaiming that "for one night the Scots own the runway", and Scottish newspaper The Scotsman lauding it for breaking Celtic stereotypes and showcasing "edgy" new fashions.

"Thankfully, we now know a great deal more about fashion," laughs Carroll. "Over the years we have helped more than one hundred Scottish firms promote their products and capabilities, slowly moving away from Park Avenue cocktail dresses,

frocks, and gowns, and towards a theme of Country Lifestyle fashion - everything from Downton Abbey to the Dakotas. And, as we moved into the realm of high-profile people, we started to get a ton of international press coverage. It blew us away."

Although much has changed, Carroll says that the event's heart will forever remain the same.

"The objectives haven't changed in the last 20 years: to promote a more contemporary vision of Scotland; to provide real commercial opportunities; to showcase and promote Scottish talent of all ages; to promote Scottish fashion; textiles and style industries; to raise funds for worthwhile charities on both side of the Atlantic and - perhaps most importantly - to leave the impression with all attendees that Scotland



Andie McDowell

can be a benchmark for being the very best in the world.”

Over the years, Carroll and his team have worked hard to highlight diversity on its runway, including models and designers from a variety of different backgrounds - Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, the disabled, and Transgendered people. DTK was the first event to unveil the LGBTQ+ tartan kilt.

“Every year we wonder how we can expand on it; how can we make it better, more interesting and more exciting? How can this year be better than the last and attract more people?”

By way of example, Carroll points to the 2019 DTK show, the idea for which came about after a discussion with a close contact.

“One of our Navy SEAL friends told me that he grew up in Scotland but spent his summers in Wisconsin as his father was a chief of the Oneida tribe. He noted that the similarities between Scottish clans and Native American tribes are uncanny: the size and structure are basically the same, the number of tribes and clans are basically the same, and their histories are also alike. So, he suggested that we do a show that highlighted both cultures and I thought, why not?”

Carroll and his crew dove in head-first, studying the history and connecting the dots, discovering all sorts of connections between the Highland Scots and North American Indigenous peoples. He was then introduced to Tisha Thompson, an entrepreneur and member of the Mohawk tribe with strong connections to several Indigenous designers.



Jessica Matten

“She said it was the coolest thing that she had ever heard and told me to count her in. She agreed to invite several Northern tribe designers - Mohawk and Iroquois, among others - and we would include Indigenous models on the runway. And so, about a third of that show involved these designers and models, and our audience just loved it.”

Those models included Brenda Schad - the first-ever Native American international supermodel - actress and model Jessica Matten, Ashley Callinbull - the first Indigenous woman to become Miss Universe - and First Nation actress Grace Dove, known best for her role as Leonardo DiCaprio's wife in the award-winning 2015 film *The Revenant*.

Matten, who is Red River Cree Metis, was working on the show *Frontier*, alongside co-star Jason Momoa, when she got the call to participate in *Dressed to Kilt*.

“They contacted my agent and asked if I was interested,” she explains. “It has been a beautiful partnership since then, and I made some friends for life. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I haven’t been able to go back, but I am really hoping to be a part of it again this year.”

Matten’s involvement with *Dressed to Kilt* took on an educational role as well.

“Geoffrey didn’t really know that there were a lot of Native-Scottish mixes, so I was able to open that door for him a bit. If you know Metis culture here in Canada, we are all Scottish and Native mixes or French and Native mixes. That is what Metis is; Metis means ‘mixed.’ I am a direct descendant of Cuthbert Grant, who was the first Metis leader of Canada, and his nephew was Louis Riel. They were both known as ‘half breeds,’ which is obviously a derogatory term. With that, there was a lot of mixing within the Cree communities. I have a lot of First Nations’ blood in me as well. Half of my family is from Peguis First Nation.”

Matten says she is incredibly proud to have worked alongside Carroll and the team at *Dressed to Kilt*, calling the work they do “beautiful.”

“I believe that we make these connections in your life for a reason, and I always try to honour those connections. Geoffrey is the nicest person ever. We bonded right away. It was reminiscent of some past-life thing. He is so good-hearted, and his intentions are certainly in the right place.

“Showcasing Indigenous designers at *Dressed to Kilt* came in a little bit before it became trendy to have alliances with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Colour) movements and the call for greater diversity. Those doors still need to be kicked open a little more, but Geoffrey and his partners have spearheaded some strong momentum in that direction.”

Carroll agrees that inclusion took DTK to the next level.

“It added a new dimension to our show. It was an incredibly well-received addition, and we will be doing it again this year.”

As expected, DTK 2021 will look a little different. Aside from the current challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is also a personal motive - the passing, last October, of Carroll’s friend, and show co-founder - Sir Sean Connery.



Keifer Sutherland

"It still feels weird calling him the 'late' Sir Sean Connery," sighs Carroll. "We can't think of anything more profound than honoring Sean and his family this year. It will be a fitting tribute."

To that end, and in commemoration of the actor's life and accomplishments, the Connery family - working with tartan designer, and fellow Scot, Mark Gibson - designed and commissioned the Sir Sean Connery tartan.

"The first 25 meters of the cloth has been finished in Scotland and is now being sent to the designers to make into clothes for the runway," notes Carroll. "It is a combination of the colours of the places that the family and Sean loved the most: the Bahamas, Scotland, and France. It is bright, bold, summery, and very stylish. It is possible that Connery's granddaughter will be taking the runway in a kilt made of the material at this year's show."

Some of the show's cast are scheduled to share their experiences with the Scottish thespian to honour his memory.

"Before they take to the catwalk, a few folks will speak about how and when they met Sean and what that was like," Carroll says. "These could be funny or serious stories, or whatever. We have about a half a dozen people who are going to share. We want everyone to know what a wonderful family man he was and how much he loved his homeland."

Honouring Connery and his family, and returning the Indigenous-Scottish showcase, have struck a chord with the public.

"I am blown away by how many tickets have been sold," shares Carroll. "People want to get out, go to parties, dress up and dance. They want to do exciting things and meet new people. Think of all the people you have not met in the last year. None of us have met people - we have all been stuck at home watching TV."

Not even COVID-19 will stop this year's festivities.

"If you show your vaccination certificate at the door, you will be fine and can come on in. If not, we have a team ready on-site to immediately give you a quick test, and by the time you get from the front gate to the castle, you will have the results. Everyone will be tested, and we have 100-150 Scottish tartan masks - donated by the Scottish Lion in Nova Scotia - at the ready if need be."

In addition, the decision to livestream the soiree will help it to reach a global audience.

"Instead of 400 people, we could get up to 40,000. It is a totally new business model for us, and we hope to do better for our designers and for our charities. Everyone involved in the show - be it the designers, celebrities, etc. - all have their own social networks that they can promote the show to."

"Who knows what will happen. This is a huge new variable, but we believe it is a really positive opportunity for us."

For those attending in-person, this year's show will be held in the Mill Neck Manor House, a Tudor-styled Great Gatsby estate built in the 1920s on the Gold Coast of Long Island.

"It is over-the-top stunning in the summertime," Carroll says. "We have never done a show in the summer. We figure that if this goes well, then we will just keep it during that time of the year. Half the show will be done indoors - we no longer use an actual runway, we put chairs on either side of the catwalk - inside of the main hall of the castle. And then we will venture out onto a magnificent patio."

Several big names are already confirmed to appear, including Scottish rugby player Thom Evans and his internationally-renowned girlfriend/entertainer Nicole Scherzinger, author and former Navy SEAL Will Chesney, and Scottish 9/11 survivor Andrew Cullen, among others.

Dressed to Kilt also plans to honour those who have been working at the forefront during COVID-19.

"It is called Real Heroes," explains Carroll. "These are the doctors, the nurses, and all the emergency workers who worked during the worst of the pandemic at NYC hospitals. We will have four or five people come out and we expect them to stand up and salute them for their efforts."

Carroll's biggest hope, however, is to move and inspire future generations.

"The show has emotional moments and will bring tears to your eyes, and it will also have moments where you can't stop laughing. It is not a normal fashion show. It is much more fun. I like to say we put a modern glove over a traditional hand, with contemporary music and style. If you don't have that 'modern glove' then you lose people. We reserve a third of our tickets, at reduced rates, for millennials and those tickets sell out faster than anything else, and they rock to the beat of the music. They add electricity, emotion, and extra excitement to the show. It is essential to create something special that is multi-generational - to both reignite an interest in our older traditions, and to create new ones."

www.dressedtokilt.com

Sweater Shop



www.sweatershop.com
Direct from Dublin, Ireland

Since its inception in 2002, Dressed to Kilt has showcased the stylings of both established and emerging designers and textile manufacturers. This year's event carries on that tradition.





Glenisla Kilts

With more than three decades of experience in the textiles industry, Glenisla Kilts is one of the foremost producers of bespoke highland dresses and kilts. Employing over 50 people, the Lanarkshire-based company uses a unique, highly specialized method of production that combines sheer human skills with the latest available technologies - creating a place, and a product, where passion meets precision. Leaders in their field, Glenisla has worked with several notable organizations and groups over the years, including one of their largest and most notable clients, the Royal Regiment of Scotland. www.glenislakilts.co.uk



Harris Tweed Hebrides

Harris Tweed has been a beloved Scottish fabric for over a century. Traditionally handwoven in the homes of islanders of the Outer Hebrides, Harris Tweed today continues to use a specific artisan system of manufacturing and, thanks to the 1993 Harris Tweed Act of Parliament, can only be produced in its Outer Hebrides homeland. Established in 2007, and located on the Isle of Lewis, Harris Tweed Hebrides employs bold colours and state-of-the-art equipment for fashion, home furnishing, accessories, and more. The fabric has been featured in the work of designers Vivienne Westwood, Chanel, Alexander McQueen, among many others. www.harristweedhebrides.com



Calzeat

It is almost impossible to discuss Scottish fashion without mentioning Calzeat. Founded in 1974 in Symington, the family-owned business is a premier manufacturer of jacquard textiles, with a dedication to producing quality items and providing top-notch customer service. Their range of goods include everything from jackets and wraps to home accessories and plush toys. The company's world-renowned scarves come in a variety of traditional and contemporary styles. Calzeat also showcases a popular Celtic Collection, replete with Celtic imagery, including Celtic Crosses, Celtic stags, and more. www.calzeat.com



House of Bruar

A premier retailer of independent fashion, House of Bruar highlights an expansive collection of products made from traditional materials, including tweed, cashmere, merino, and more. Both their online shop and physical storefront in Perthshire highlight the company's expertly curated and designed apparel, tailor-made for either classic or casual occasions. If you are in the area, be sure to visit the facility; it is an immersive experience with a fully functioning Scottish food hall and gallery on site. www.houseofbruar.com



House of Cheviot

Established in 2002, House of Cheviot is an internationally renowned manufacturer of luxury socks. Over the last two decades, the Hawick-based company has become synonymous with the textiles industry. The company produces a variety of sock styles, including country, shooting, kilt, and haute couture. Each pair is created from premium fabrics, including wool blends, cashmere, and alpaca yarns. The company's items have been featured both on TV and in films, including award-winning Netflix series *The Crown* and the *Wonder Woman* film franchise. Cheviot is also the official sock manufacturers for Scotland's Commonwealth Games team. www.houseofcheviot.com



Walker Slater

Founded in Laggan in 1989, Walker Slater is a tweed specialist with storefronts in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London. The company offers a variety of items, including ready-to-wear tweed jackets, coats, trousers, three-piece suits, and more. Their attention to detail and clean designs have earned them several awards, including Scottish Fashion Retailer of the Year at the Scottish Fashion Awards in 2015, Scottish Online Retailer of the Year from the Herald in 2016, Scottish Grooms Wear Supplier of the Year in 2017, and Best Edinburgh Business at the Scottish Business Awards in 2018. Walker Slater is world-renowned for its tailoring services as well, offering high-quality, made-to-measure garments.

www.walkerslater.com



Mackenzie Edinburgh Leather

Established in 1990, Mackenzie Edinburgh Leather handcrafts some of the finest leather products in Scotland. Now based in Edinburgh, the company produces an amazing array of handbags, belts, sporrans, briefcases, and more. All of their goods are manufactured entirely in-house by a team of seasoned and dedicated crafters who work with patience, passion, and precision. Mackenzie is also a trendsetter in sustainable business modeling, aligning themselves with environmental organizations such as DHL Go Green, Pelle Conciata Vegetale in Toscana, and Changeworks Recycling.

www.mackenzieleatheredinburgh.com



Judy R Clark

Thanks to her eccentric, cutting-edge designs and signature style - employing everything from Harris Tweed to Scottish lace - Scottish designer Judy R Clark has produced a jaw-dropping portfolio of stylish items through the years: dresses, jackets, suits, and more. Over the past decade, she has worked a number of high-profile fashionistas, including the likes of designer Alexander McQueen and retail giant Urban Outfitters. She has also been the recipient of several awards, including Designer of the Year at the Scottish Style Awards, Best New Designer at the Scottish Variety awards, and the JOLOMO award for Innovation and Creativity.

www.judyrc Clark.com

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THE CELTIC CHEF
with Gary Maclean

Summer Strawberries

For me, nothing says summer more than the start of the Scottish strawberry season. You can smell this amazing fruit the second you walk through the door of the supermarket. Scotland's soft fruit production has gone up over the years, doubling over the last decade due to improved technology and the use of polytunnels. Scottish strawberries are very sweet, and the country's temperate climate allows the berries to have up to 17 daylight hours in June, July and August, but without heavy levels of heat. This allows the berries to ripen slowly, so that they produce more sugar and, thus, a sweeter berry. Scotland produces more than 2,900 tonnes of raspberries and 25,000 tonnes of strawberries per year, making it a hugely important crop for the Scottish economy. When you visit Scotland in the summer be sure to look out for this incredibly tasty fruit. I have been making this little concoction for 30 years - a tasty combination of fresh strawberries with a wee slice of the tropics.

Ingredients

500g fresh strawberries
3 passion fruits
75g sugar
1 lime
1 vanilla pod (split lengthwise) or extract

Instructions

The first thing is to make the passion fruit, lime and vanilla syrup. Half and scoop the pulp from the passion fruit into a small pot, split the vanilla pod in half lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and add to the passion fruit. Next, using a potato peeler remove the peel from the lime, and with a knife carefully remove the white pith from the skin. Cut the skin into very thin strips and add to the passion fruit and vanilla, before adding the sugar. Now half the lime and squeeze the juice into the pot. I find if you microwave the lime for a few seconds you get much more juice from it. Pop onto the stove and bring to the boil. Once boiled, remove from the heat. Now you can prepare the strawberries. Be sure to always wash the strawberries before cutting off the stalk - the strawberry is waterproof up until you cut into it, and if you wash afterwards the fruit will just absorb the water and go mushy. Lastly pour the syrup over the freshly prepared strawberries about 20 minutes before you serve them up.

Slàinte! Gary
www.garymacchef.com



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For the love of Lagavulin

with **Andrew Ferguson**



Lagavulin Distillery is nestled between Laphroaig and Ardbeg, on the southern coast of the Scottish Isle of Islay. The Queen of the Hebrides, as Islay is known, played a seminal role in the history of Scotland and the United Kingdom. The Lords of the Isles ruled the west coast of Scotland and parts of Northern Ireland from Islay, independent of England, Scotland, and Denmark, until 1493 - nearly four centuries. After their defeat, the title 'Lord of the Isles' was incorporated into the Scottish, and eventually British, Royal Families. Today, in addition to being the Prince of Wales, Charles is also Lord of the Isles.

The base of power for the Lords of the Isles was set on two tiny islands in Loch Finlaggan, not far from Port Askaig, in the north of the island. But Islay's southern shore was also a power center. Remnants of this history can be seen at the haunting Kildalton Chapel, where a well-preserved 8th century Celtic Cross was found. The coast is rugged and dotted with small, sheltered bays, including the one which protects Lagavulin. At the entrance to that bay, the ruins of the once impregnable Dunyvaig Castle can still be seen.

Lagavulin translates from Scots Gaelic to "Mill Hollow" and is believed to be one of the oldest settlements on the island.

Lagavulin Distillery was officially established in 1816, but there is some evidence of no fewer than 10 small, illicit distilleries oper-



ating on or near the site as early as the 1740s. The Victorian whisky writer Alfred Barnard references a smuggling fraternity operating in the area as early as 1742. By 1816 the various operations had merged into a pair of side-by-side distilleries, Lagavulin and Ardmore, both of which had gone legit.

The Johnson family, founders of Lagavulin, acquired Ardmore in 1825 and by 1837 had absorbed it into the Lagavulin complex. The distillery began to attract wider acclaim in 1862 after it was purchased by the blender Logan Mackie. Logan's nephew Peter Mackie would become one of the pivotal figures in the Scotch whisky industry of the late 19th century. Peter Mackie took charge of Lagavulin in 1878 and would also go on to establish the Craigellachie Distillery and found the White Horse blend.

In addition to Lagavulin, Mackie also represented the nearby Laphroaig Distillery, situated just two miles down the coast in another small bay. When this relationship ended in 1906 Mackie was incensed. He set about building a nearly perfect replica of Laphroaig at Lagavulin, and even poached a few of its employees. The new distillery was called

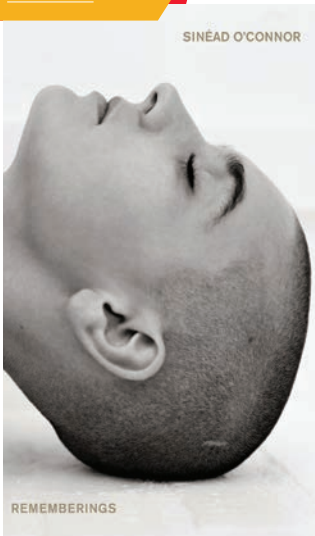
Malt Mill, and while the heavily phenolic whisky was of good quality, the gamble never quite paid off - at least not in the way Mackie had hoped. Try as he might, he just could not quite replicate Laphroaig. Malt Mill ceased production in 1962 and has never been seen as a single malt.

In 1927, White Horse Distillers, including Lagavulin, became part of DCL, a forbearer of Diageo, the world's largest drinks company. The whisky was selected by the firm as one of its six Classic Malts in 1988, giving birth to Lagavulin 16 Year. A famous whisky writer, Michael Jackson, referred to it as the Aristocrat of Islay, for its elegant smoky profile. Incidentally, this was the whisky which got me interested in Scotch, and it remains a benchmark by which other mature Islay whiskies are still measured today.

In addition to the 16 Year there are annual releases of Lagavulin Distillers Edition (finished in PX Sherry) and a 12 Year Cask Strength. The most recent addition to the core range is an 8 Year, first released as a limited edition in 2016 to celebrate the distillery's 200th anniversary. It is a feistier expression, inspired by Alfred Barnard's visit to the distillery in 1880s.

Lagavulin is open to the public for tours and tastings. If you decide to visit, I recommend taking the warehouse tour. And while there, do not pass up the opportunity to wander out to the Dunyvaig castle. The view looking back at the distillery is worth the walk!

www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



Rememberings

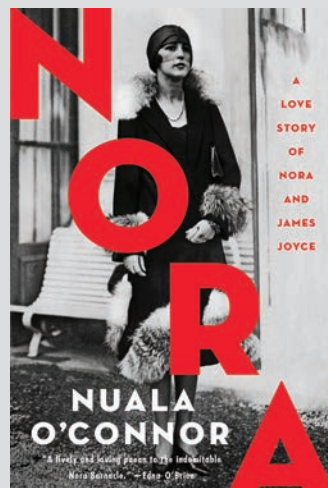
By Sinéad O'Connor
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
304pp / \$29.95

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

Nora: A Love Story of Nora and James Joyce

By Nuala O'Connor
Harper Perennial
496pp / \$16.99

Although my preference is always to read actual, physical books, I settled for the digital version of this sweeping narrative for the sake of time. And while I am not opposed to ebooks, per se, I could not help but feel that something was missing from the experience. That said, Irish scribe Nuala O'Connor's epic reimagining of Nora Barnacle's lengthy love affair with James Joyce is a great read in any form. As the couple adventures across Europe, Joyce acquires literary renown with *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Finnegan's Wake*. All the while, his better-half struggles to support him through an array of health and financial issues. Perhaps fittingly, Joyce modelled Molly Bloom in *Ulysses* after his longtime muse. ~ SPC



Northern Protestants on Shifting Ground

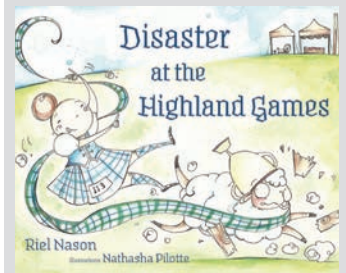
By Susan McKay
Blackstaff Press
288pp / \$29.95

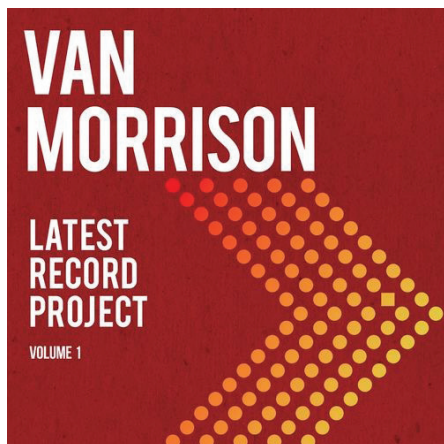
With so many weighing in on the influx of issues currently impacting Northern Ireland - Brexit, the border, paramilitary aggression, the Troubles, same-sex marriage, abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, a United Ireland, and more - journalist Susan McKay's latest look at Ulster's shifting political, economic, social, and cultural landscape offers a refreshing and personal perspective. Conducting more than 100 interviews with politicians, pundits, business leaders, religious figures, artists, soldiers, revolutionaries, victims of violence, and everyday folk, the author presents a poignant portrait of a people and a place in transition. Interestingly, through the colourful tapestry of opinions and experiences a common thread emerges - humour. It is heartening to see that, even amidst the turmoil - or perhaps because of it - the Irish wit remains wicked. ~ SPC

Disaster at the Highland Games

By Riel Nason & Nathasha Pilotte
Chocolate River Publishing
32pp / \$15.95

With a title like that, the possibilities are endless. I mean, really, what could possibly go wrong with caber tossing, axe throwing, or haggis hurling - especially when mixed with whisky tastings? However, this children's story tells the tale of one young girl's efforts at a Highland dance competition. And though Kate practices and prepares with her teachers and classmates, things inevitably go awry come contest day - both on and off the stage. Brilliantly rhymed by Riel Nason, and beautifully illustrated by Nathasha Pilotte, both from New Brunswick on Canada's east coast, this terrific tome is a wonderful way for parents and grandparents to get the wee ones interested in their heritage. Kudos to the publishers for preserving and promoting Celtic culture and customs. ~ SPC





Van Morrison

Latest Record Project Vol. 1

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

Tom Jones

Surrounded By Time

After the death of his wife in 2016, Tom Jones could have been forgiven for calling it a career. Instead, after some time off, the Welsh crooner went back to work. Following a few months of touring, Jones holed-up with his son and a supporting cast of superb studio musicians. The resulting recording, *Surrounded By Time* (his 41st!) is a critically-acclaimed, albeit curious collection of cover songs that are clearly near and dear to the singer’s heart. As such, many of the melodies will seem unfamiliar to most. However, audiences will surely savour the 81-year old’s takes on tunes by Cat Stevens and Bob Dylan, as well as his stirring version of The Waterboys’ classic oceanic ode *This is the Sea*. Well played Sir Thomas! ~ SPC



Alan Doyle

Back to the Harbour

There is a reason why Newfoundland’s favourite son Alan Doyle gets so much love here at Celtic Life International. Along with a bountiful back-catalogue of music from his days fronting *Great Big Sea*, the Petty Harbour native has been prolific since going solo, putting out a string of strong albums and books. Produced by multi-award-winning singer/songwriter Joel Plaskett, and featuring musical cohorts Kendal Carson and Cory Tetford, *Back to the Harbour* showcases six songs that shine a spotlight on Doyle’s softer side. Along with three original compositions, the EP features a trio of acoustic-based cover songs, including works by Ron Hynes, the Everly Brothers, as well as an old-school sea shanty. It is truly a treat to hear the boy from The Rock belting ballads. ~ SPC

Bùmarang

Echo Land

Montreal-based Bùmarang know a thing or two about trad. Veterans of the city’s rich and robust Celtic music scene, and having performed with the likes of Michael Bublé, Lhasa de Sela, Cirque du Soleil, among many others, it was only a matter of time before the trio - David Gossage (flute, guitar, whistles), Kate Bevan-Baker (vocals, fiddle), Sarah Pagé (harp, harmonium, bouzouki) - pooled their talents in the studio for their debut recording. The result, *Echo Land* - a reference to reflections upon, and reverberations of, the past - features 11 hauntingly poignant pieces that are sure to evoke long-dormant emotions from ex-pats everywhere. Fans of Clannad and Enya will be familiar with the moving, mystical melodies, which arise like a morning mist in Donegal. ~ SPC



SCOTLAND

— 2022 ESCORTED TOURS —

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Tever

*Pablo M. Díaz García
knows the power of
the pipes*

Pablo M. Díaz García, known professionally as Tever, believes that Spain needs to overcome its “low cultural self-esteem.” Residing in the northwest region of the country, García taps into his ancestral culture by playing the Asturian bagpipes.

“Spain has 50 different provinces and in each of these have unique culture, music and language,” says García, who lives in Oviedo, the capital of the Principality of Asturias. “Outside of Spain, people think that our country is only about bullfights, flamenco, and paella, but that is a misperception. While the south of Spain enjoys Mediterranean culture, northern Spain showcases our Celtic heritage. On my first trip to Bretagne in France, I really felt at home, as it was so similar to Asturias.”

García took up the pipes (or, in Spanish, “gaita”) in 1998, during what he calls the “bagpipe boom.” This boom was thanks in part to Hevia (José Ángel Hevia Velasco), an Asturian bagpiper who released his popular tune *Busindre Reel* that year.

“During this time, many young people in Asturias started to play the bagpipe,” explains García.

Eventually, his hobby became his profession. In 2007, he began playing with the Pipe band *Camín de Fierro* - a group founded by the councils of Proaza, Santo Adriano and Teberga. “We have released two CDs, one of them this year - they are a mix of rock and traditional Asturian music. We have played a number of large festivals, including Guingamp, Confolens, and the Festival Interceltique de Lorient.”

García has a solo career as well.

“I am a versatile piper. I am a traditional piper when playing in customary settings, but I love exploring different musical styles.”

His recent solo project, *Fechu’n PLA*, is an EP that is being released single-by-single, with each song coming out once a month for six months.

“2020 was a very difficult year for musicians, obviously. In this new world, artists must adapt to these changes by offering different ways to access content.”

Each single has a different theme and multimedia elements. *Gaita Hero*, for example, includes a video inspired by platformer video games. The protagonist is, appropriately, a man decked out in traditional piper attire, complete with the pipes on his shoulder. And the game’s enemy? None other than a “bug” called COVID-19. The piper crushes the bugs and advances through the levels while the music plays in the background. PC and mobile versions of the game are even available for download, so listeners can try their hand at being “gaita heroes” themselves.

“I think musicians need to master any and all available tools to create and share their own style. In my case, I am always trying to evoke emotions and reactions from my listeners. My music creates a certain ambience, and my hope is that people can simply tune-out their problems when listening.”

As if all of that weren’t enough to keep him busy, García also teaches the bagpipes, which he calls “one of the best rewards in the world.” His Asturian *Gaita Online* course teaches the origins of the Asturian pipes as well as the practical aspects of how to play.

“Nowadays, in Asturias, young people don’t know enough about their own customs and traditions. One of my goals is to share what I know about our cultural history with young people, in their own language. And we absolutely must pass along our Celtic culture to our children.”

Tever’s *Fechu’n PLA* project wrapped up in April, but García is still hard at work. His Pipe band, *Camín de Fierro*, recently released a new album called *Rock and Fierro*. García is also working on a book about 20th century traditional musicians on Proaza and Teberga councils, during which he hopes to collect music for a full-length album. On top of that, he is also picking up the uilleann pipes - the Irish version of the bagpipes.

“The bagpipe is an ancient musical instrument, but we should be building new ways to explore its possibilities. I believe that Asturian bagpipes will provide us with all sorts of rewarding opportunities in the future.”

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Ivonne Hernandez

Fiddler Ivonne Hernandez honours her heroes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Like her heroes - fellow fiddler phenoms Natalie MacMaster, Mark O'Connor, Calvin Vollrath, and Stephane Grappelli



- Hernandez has racked up a multitude of honours over the years, including two Canadian Folk Music Awards, five Grand North American Fiddler awards, a Western Canadian Music Award and, in 2017, a Juno Award.

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

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

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

"The past year has been a bit crazy for everyone, but I have been doing a lot of teaching online and the odd concert, workshop, symposium, etc. I am still leading

my teen fiddle group, Coastline, and we will be doing some recording soon. I have also been working with some long-time friends - we have finally had time to work on some tunes, and we will be going into the studio to record this summer. It has been a while since I have done my own album, so I am looking forward to that.

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

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

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Alana Mclaughlin

Dancer Alana Mclaughlin carries the torch of tradition

Although Alana Mclaughlin is a resident of Scotland, she is keenly proud of her Irish heritage. Both her mother and her father hail from County Donegal and “have always kept in touch with their Irish roots, mainly through the Irish dance and music community.” Thus, it comes as no surprise that she took to Irish dance as a youngster.

Inspired by her mother, Mclaughlin broke into the world of dance when she was just five years of age.

“As soon as I started, I loved it,” she shares with Celtic Life International via email from her home in Glasgow. “And to quote my mother, I took to it like a duck takes to water. Especially when I won the championship at my first ever Feis!”

Mclaughlin went on to dance competitively for 12 years, winning over 50 titles, including the Great Britain Championships. She won the All Scotland Championships a total of nine times. By the age of 17, with hundreds of medals and trophies to her name, she began performing with professional Irish dance shows.

“There have been so many highlights, but I would say having the opportunity to travel the world doing what I love and getting to experience places like China, Taiwan and Abu Dhabi are at the top of my list.”

Now in her mid-30s, Mclaughlin focuses much of her time on teaching. In 2015, she launched the Alana Rose Irish Dance Company in Clydebank, Scotland. As her main influences in dance were her teachers, Myma and Carmen Kennedy, it seemed fitting that she would choose to share what she had learned with other dancers.

“I decided to cut back on performing with the shows and open my own dance school to fulfil my dream of passing on my love of Irish dancing to others.”

In an interview with the Clydebank Post at the time, Mclaughlin said, “Most of all the classes are about enjoyment, fitness and making friends.”

More than five years later, the school is still going strong.

“My students range from three years old to adults, which is great, as the World Irish Dance Association (WIDA) encourages all abilities and ages to compete. My students should expect a real supportive experience - it is certainly fun, but it is also lots of hard work.”

To make things accessible, she keeps class costs as low as she can.

“For parents, however, it can be somewhat expensive for costumes - especially when the dancers get to the higher levels and want to stand out from the crowd.”

Seeing her students succeed and persevere makes it all worthwhile.

“The biggest reward is seeing my dancers working hard to achieve their goals, watching them win medals and trophies for their hard work and - most of all - enjoying what they do.”

“I am also grateful for the life-long friendships that have developed between our dancers. And there are important life lessons that come with Irish dance - that even when dancers don’t do well at a Feis they can simply get back up and try harder and never give up.”

As with many who ply their trade in the world of arts and culture, Mclaughlin’s biggest current challenge has been coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown. “I have tried to keep dancers motivated the best I can with online classes. And WIDA has enabled online competitions, which is great. Although, I must admit that it is a challenge in-and-of itself having a toddler at home while I try to teach online!”

Looking ahead, she hopes classes will get back to “normal” this year and that her students will soon be able to take the stage again. Fortunately, Irish dance remains a popular outlet for young people in the area.

“Glasgow has a huge Irish dance community with lots of schools affiliated with different organizations. There is still a great interest in Irish dancing here with many new young students joining all the time.”

www.facebook.com/Alana-Rose-Irish-Dance-Company-1072109846189546



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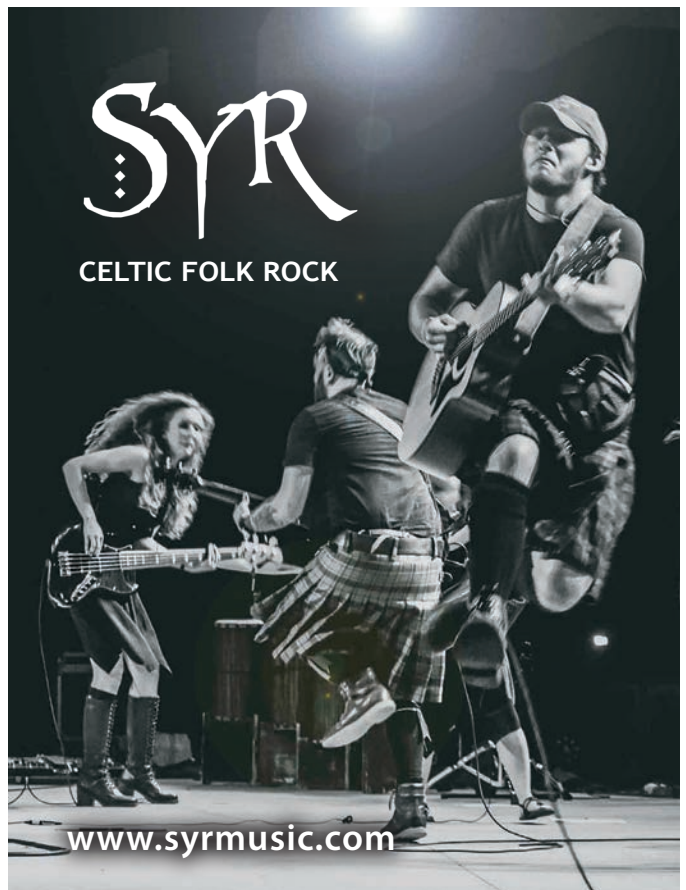
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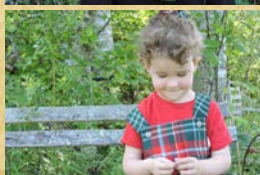
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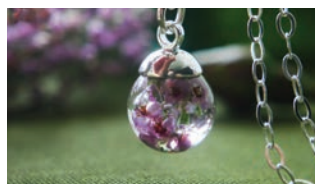
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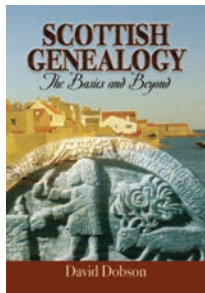
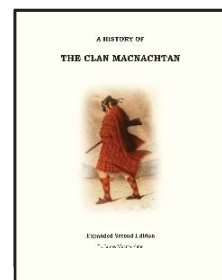
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David Dobson was born in 1940 in Carnoustie, Scotland. Most of
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St. Andrews. He is the author of more than 200 books, including
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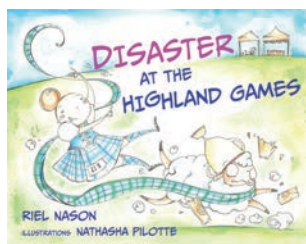


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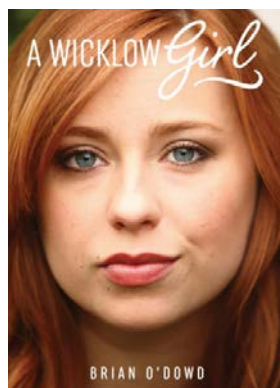
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Les McKeown; 1955-2021

Leslie Richard McKeown, former member of the Bay City Rollers, has passed away at age 65. He led the Scottish pop-rock group as vocalist from 1973-78, during the band's peak.

"It is with profound sadness that we announce the death of our beloved husband and father Leslie Richard McKeown. Leslie died suddenly at home on Tuesday 20 April 2021," his family wrote in a statement.

McKeown was born in Edinburgh to Irish parents, Francis and Florence. At age 15, he dropped out of school to join his first band: Threshold. A few years later, manager Tam Paton approached McKeown about joining the Rollers, as the band's singer Nobby Clark was ready to call it quits and the group needed a replacement. After filling in for a gig at an American airbase in Perth, McKeown officially left Threshold and accepted his new role. Unbeknownst to him, the Rollers would soon propel into stardom.

Although the Bay City Rollers had been around since the late 1960s, the band made its breakthrough after McKeown got involved. "Remember (Sha-La-La-La)," with

McKeown on vocals, was a major hit - and the Rollers' popularity skyrocketed thereafter. "Money Honey," "I Only Want to Be With You," and "You Made Me Believe in Magic," all charted on The Billboard Hot 100. Some even argued the Rollers were as big as The Beatles (if not bigger) during this period. It wasn't all happy times, however.

McKeown would later write about being introduced to drugs by Paton, who also allegedly abused the band members. In May 1975, McKeown struck and killed an elderly neighbour with his car and was convicted of reckless driving. Still, he was pressured into performing the day after the accident. "The Rollers' management had no time to give McKeown a chance to deal with the incident, they were already planning the next stage of their global domination by breaking them in America," reads a BBC article from April.

He left the Bay City Rollers through a mutual agreement in 1978. He met his wife, Peko Keiko, that same year. His solo albums were relatively unsuccessful, but he eventually hit the tour circuit with his own version of the Rollers, which he called Les

McKeown's Legendary Bay City Rollers. He also worked with acts such as Irish boy band Westlife and English boy band 5ive.

McKeown reflected on his past in his autobiography, in which he wrote;

"I've always been expected to uphold an image and very few people know the real me."

"In the '70s, I was the milk-drinking, clean-living virgin the Bay City Rollers' manager made me. When that illusion was shattered, I was the drug-crazed, hell-raising fallen idol the press made me. Later, in the '80s and '90s, I was a figure of nostalgia of neither one former identity nor the other. Finally, in the 21st century, I can be myself. Although generally people that meet me for the first time seem to think I'm pretty normal...considering."

In 2008, McKeown faced his longstanding alcohol and drug problems and checked into rehab for four months. Despite his addiction issues and numerous affairs, his wife Keiko stayed with him, barring a brief separation. The pair's marriage spanned three decades, and they had a son, Jubei, together.

"Leslie was a good husband but, of course, everybody has ups and downs," Keiko told MailOnline. "I went everywhere to the concerts with our son. We had lots of good times and hard times. Leslie struggled with his own demons. His dying is a terrible shock but now he is in peace."

In 2015, McKeown reunited with former Rollers bandmates Alan Longmuir and Stuart Wood for a sold-out comeback tour. That same year, BBC Scotland dove into the popularity of the tartan-clad lads in the documentary "Rollermania."

At the time of his death, McKeown was planning a 2021 tour with Les McKeown's Legendary Bay City Rollers. A private funeral took place in London on May 23, which honoured McKeown with music and a eulogy from long-time friend Irvine Welsh.

"Honoured to be asked by the family to give a tribute to an old friend. Goodbye bud, you spread a lot of joy," Welsh wrote in a tweet.

Following the news of McKeown's death, a social media campaign encouraged fans to buy his single "Goodbye" from the album *The Lost Songs*, which allowed him to top the charts yet again.

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