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Kobe, JAPAN	---	2:00 pm
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At Sea	---	---
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HONG KONG	1:00 pm	Overnight
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Beijing, CHINA	---	4:00 pm
Dalian, CHINA	7:00 am	4:00 pm
Seoul, SOUTH KOREA	8:00 am	6:00 pm
Jeju, SOUTH KOREA	10:00 am	6:00 pm
Nagasaki, JAPAN	8:00 am	6:00 pm
Miyazaki, JAPAN	8:00 am	5:00 pm
Kochi, JAPAN	8:00 am	5:00 pm
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At Sea	---	---
Aomori, JAPAN	8:00 am	6:00 pm
Hakodate, JAPAN	8:00 am	6:00 pm
Muroran, JAPAN	8:00 am	4:00 pm
At Sea	---	---
At Sea	---	---
Petropavlovsk, RUSSIA	7:00 am	7:00 pm
At Sea	---	---
At Sea	---	---
Cross International Dateline	---	---
At Sea	---	---
Seaward, ALASKA	8:00 am	5:00 pm
HUBBARD GLACIER	am	pm
GLACIER BAY	am	pm
Skagway, ALASKA	7:00 am	8:00 pm
Juneau, ALASKA	7:00 am	11:00 pm
Icy Strait Point, ALASKA	am	pm
Ketchikan, ALASKA	8:00 am	4:00 pm
At Sea	---	---
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the Big Idea

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Some years ago I had the good fortune of meeting Pierre Elliott Trudeau, then Prime Minister of Canada. Though our chat was brief, his words left a deep impression on me - words that still resonate to this day; "Great minds discuss ideas, average minds converse events, while small minds talk about other people..."

And while, in principle, I continue to hold this maxim to be true, the foundation upon which Celtic Life International now exists is...people.

Upon taking the magazine's helm in early 2012, I made two simple suggestions: first, we rebrand from Celtic Life to Celtic Life International to better reflect our growing global audience, and second; to subtly shift our focus towards becoming a publication about people.

My reasoning on the latter was this; in our media-rich culture, one in which we are bombarded with stories, statistics, sound bites, video clips, images, etc, on a nearly minute-by-minute basis, audiences are ultimately looking for some sort of connection with what they are absorbing.

Whether it is online, in a book, at the movies, on the radio, upon a theatre stage, through a television screen, or - in our case - via a bi-monthly print publication, people relate first and foremost with other people.

Like a mirror, contemporary media reflects our collective ideas, emotions, experiences, perspectives and opinions. To that end, we are no longer awash in Andy Warhol's world of "Pop Culture" - instead, with so many windows open to the lives of others,

we now experience the perks, and perils, of living in "Peep Culture."

That said, Celtic Life International's success and significance over the last half-decade has come from getting to the heart of the "stories behind the story." While we may publish pieces about travel, cuisine, culture and our robust Celtic heritage, ultimately our readers connect with the people involved, be it a piper, a Highland dancer, an historian, a chef, or a small business owner.

Thankfully, the vast Celtic world has no shortage of interesting people with incredible stories to tell, and I am grateful for having the opportunity to speak with them each day - in person, by phone, and via email. My life is deeply enriched by these discussions, most of which involve the sharing of ideas.

Similarly, I am blessed to be surrounded by the best crew in the business; our small staff is never short of big ideas on how to better serve our Celtic community. Their commitment to the Japanese business concept of Kaizen - the idea of continuous, daily improvements - has been central to our evolution.

Enough can't be said about our contributors, also; be they professional writers or passionate Celts, their dedication to detail makes my daily duties that much easier.

I am appreciative, as well, for the many wonderful relationships we have developed with our partners over the years; artists, advertisers, promoters, event organizers, schools, societies, organizations, and the like - each of whom work with us to help create win-win-win scenarios for the Celtic Diaspora.

That Diaspora, it should be noted, is made up of unique, hard-working individuals who make all kinds of vital and creative contributions to Celtic culture. Today, I am both proud and honoured to call some of these good folks my friends; Eleanor McGrath in Toronto, Lisa Risley in Halifax, Bob Currie in New Jersey, Sarah Nagle in California, Michael Davies and Annie Wealleans in Wales, Ken McIlroy in Northern Ireland, and too many more to mention.

And then, of course, there are the Macquarries - Marcie and Cabrini and their kids - who have been like family to me over the last five years, welcoming me into their world with open arms.

All of this leads me to our readers, without whom I would have less reason to get up each morning - especially during the long Canadian winters! Of all the rewards that come with the gig, none are greater than the feedback I receive about the magazine. While we do get the occasional brick (one woman wrote to me, complaining that our fashion pages constituted "Celtic porn"), the bouquets have been overwhelming. Recently, an email from 15-year-old Rebecca Shea of Boston reminded me why I do what I do each day.

"I never really thought about where I come from before I read your magazine," she wrote. "I love the idea that I am a part of one big Celtic family."

Stephen Patrick Clare
Managing Editor

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Highland Village

Cape Breton's Highland Village is the only centre of its kind in a Gaelic-speaking area outside Scotland

Gaelic greetings, fiddle music, farm-yard animals, a blacksmith, traditional classes, and an authentic old-world meal simmering over an open hearth - visitors will find all of this, and more, on site at Atlantic Canada's historic Highland Village, locally known as Baile nan Gàidheal.

"It is a magical place that tells the tale of the Scots in Nova Scotia," says Denis Ryan, a Tipperary-raised Halifax businessman with a degree in folklore. "There is no North American story of any greater importance than this one."

Ryan, a longtime member of rollicking Irish folk band Ryan's Fancy, currently chairs a campaign that hopes to raise \$1.2 million for the enhancement of the iconic community.

Baile nan Gàidheal's magic, he points out, is in both the physical setting on a lofty Iona hilltop above the majestic Bras d'Or Lake - from which all four of Cape Breton's counties are visible - and in the poignant story of hardship and perseverance it tells.

"The Scots settled in a beautiful but rugged part of this country and worked their asses off to survive and see their children educated. They held onto their oral traditions of story and song and even managed to preserve some of their language. It is all here for the world to come and see."

With its gardens, carding mill and farm-life setting, the village exemplifies the self-sufficiency of the early Scots.

Costumed animators guide visitors through 11 period buildings, sharing stories of Highland immigration, the language spo-

ken in the homes, and the music, proverbs, and expressions that continue today. There is a research centre for those interested in genealogy, and walking guides are available in French, German and Spanish.

M. A. MacPherson, president of the village's board of trustees, is banking on provincial and federal support for the upgrades, which include a new visitors' welcome centre.

"Our existing village is wonderful in so many ways, but our infrastructure needs a shot in the arm to bring it up to today's standards. A new entry point will improve our visibility and make it much easier to direct visitors, and to expand to our programs and exhibits."

Renovations will see the existing entrance building evolve into a cultural resource centre, and the addition of new interpretive and support structures.

Last year was the site's most successful ever, thanks in part to a growing number of cruise ships stopping in Sydney, with passengers making the scenic hour-long drive to the facility.

"We have seen a significant overall increase in cruise ships, Canadian visitors, Americans, and local people," notes village director Rodney Chaisson. "We've just had the announcement of a second cruise ship pier to be built in Sydney, so we must be able to accommodate the increase in numbers."

Currently, the village focuses on four periods in the story of the Nova Scotia Gaels: the social and economic upheaval in the western Highlands and islands of Scotland that drove them to seek a new land; the clearing of forests to establish homes; the settlement and growth of communities among the pioneers and subsequent genera-

tions; and the 1880s to the 1920s - a period of outmigration.

"With the improvements to our facilities we will continue to tell the story of the Scots well past the 1920s," continues Chaisson, who has both French and Scottish blood.

Noting that the Nova Scotia community of Iona - which shares its name with a small Scottish isle - is bordered by four Mi'kmaq reserves, Chaisson adds that the centre also hopes to better represent the relationship between the Scots and the region's indigenous peoples.

Highland Village first opened as a small log cabin museum in 1962 after area residents made a persuasive, all-Gaelic pitch to the provincial government. Several structures, including a school and a saw mill, were added through the years. In 2003, Malagawatch Church - originally built for a Presbyterian congregation in 1874 - was loaded onto a barge, sailed 15 kilometers down Bras d'Or Lake, and incorporated into the site.

"Iona is a predominantly Catholic community, but we were happy to have the addition of a Presbyterian Church because it is all part of the Scottish story," explains M. A. MacPherson. "I also see it symbolizing the widespread support for the village, which is one of the area's largest employers."

Ryan sees tremendous possibilities for the 46-acre property, which is located in a UNESCO-declared biosphere reserve.

"It reminds me of Bunratty Folk Park (County Clare, Ireland) which attracts tens of thousands of visitors annually. It is vital that we continue to promote our great heritage, both here at home in Nova Scotia and abroad."

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Earlier this year, the cheeky “Kilted Yoga” video went viral across various social media platforms. The short clip starred a handsome Scottish duo, practicing yoga before a woodland backdrop, clad in nothing but their kilts.

Tristan Cameron-Harper and Finlay Wilson began their journey together following an event at BBC Headquarters in Glasgow, Scotland.

“The program, called The Social, was a new platform on the BBC networking scene that gave people in Scotland the privilege to showcase whatever they would like to show with the general public - subject to approval, of course,” explains Cameron-Harper, who was born in the British Channel Islands. “Finlay is a yoga teacher, and I am someone who enjoys doing yoga; I was involved with the discipline when I used to play professional ice hockey - it helped me with all the bumps and bruises.”

Cameron-Harper, who is of both Celtic and Nordic background, could envision himself collaborating with Wilson on something unique.

“After seeing him on social media, and attending a few of his classes in my hometown of Dundee when I was younger, I knew I’d work with Finlay. He wanted to do a yoga video and I love the outdoors and enjoy meditation, so he suggested we should do a yoga video together. The clicker would be the end scene, where we drop our kilts. Initially we didn’t get the go ahead, but after Finlay made a video showcasing him and his dog doing yoga poses - which got millions of hits - it gave us more freedom to play about with our ideas.”

The resulting video was an overnight success, racking up over 52 million views on Facebook alone.

“It has been a turbulent and exciting couple of months,” admits Wilson, who was born in Lanark. “The reception has been incredible; we have been on most TV stations over here and many others internationally. We have been featured in magazines and newspapers all over the world, and we have just returned from New York, where we walked down 6th Avenue as part of the Tartan Day Parade to screaming crowds who came to see us.”

Incredibly, in the wake of all the success, Wilson received hate mail regarding both the video and his sexuality.

“So many people got in touch about that vile letter,” he shares. “People may not think that homophobia is an issue anymore, but un-

fortunately it is alive and thriving. And I will take it head on.”

Wilson began practicing yoga 11 years ago, after having surgery on both of his legs. Since then, he has been trained in “Forrest Yoga” and now owns and operates a studio in Dundee.

“Forrest Yoga is a fusion of shamanic ceremony with yoga to create a highly focused practice,” he explains. “I have studied and delved into Celtic Shamanism to bring the sense of ceremony to people I teach in a way that resonates and connects to this land.”

The two agree that there is a deep connection between the sacred practice of yoga and the rich history of the Celts.

“There is a synthesis between ancient Indian practices and some ancient Celtic practices, including Druidism,” notes Cameron-Harper. “Plus, we are seeing more links between imagery of Hindu Shiva and Celtic Cernunnos. The term Druid, technically, comes from a Sanskrit word meaning ‘Knower of the Tree.’”

“It doesn’t matter what your religious beliefs are, the fact is that our ancestors celebrated being part of nature, changes of the seasons, animals, and they understood the power of our earth and sky. There is a connection between that and improving our state of well-being, both mentally and physically.”

In the coming months, Wilson will continue to focus on running his studio and developing classes, workshops and retreats. Cameron-Harper will keep growing his online presence via his website, North-Blog, pursue a mountaineering career, and further his involvement in saving dogs from the Korean meat trade.

Neither will forget the significant message behind their popular video.

“It is important that we put phones away sometimes, take a break from laptops...just get away from modern technology in general and go outside,” Cameron-Harper reminds us. “It is vital that we remember our connection to the beautiful earth we are standing on - especially nowadays.”

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Daniel GreenWolf

A rich thread of magic is woven through the tapestry of Celtic culture, rooted in the myths and legends of yore

“Magic is a great way for me to express my opinions and my heritage, which is primarily Irish, Swedish, Russian, Polish and French Canadian, while connecting with children and adults in a very childlike way,” shares the Connecticut resident by email.

As with all illusionists, GreenWolf thrives on the awe that audiences experience when confronted with something they were not expecting or did not think possible.

“It gets people to think and be skeptical at the same time,” he muses. “It is very paradoxical, and I love that element of what I do.”

The 31-year-old performer credits his mother and father with sparking his interest in magic at a young age.

“My parents have always been storytellers, and being Wiccan - a polytheistic religion focused mainly on nature - and fantasy geeks, they always made sure we got a healthy dose of magical tales in our lives.”

The youngster was also inspired watching magician Jeff McBride on television.

“He was wearing this outfit that looked like something out of Lord of the Rings, and he was doing an act with masks and cards that was unlike anything I had ever seen before.”

GreenWolf’s first mentor, Joe Lantiere, introduced him to the Inner Circle of Bizarre Magick, a small organization of ambitious magicians who aimed to be more than mere birthday party illusionists.

“They combined stories with unique visual artistry to create a different kind of magic. Sometimes darker, sometimes ritual-like, sometimes silly, but always magic with a meaning. I was instantly drawn to it.”

He also found inspiration in shock-rocker Alice Cooper, who incorporated the supernatural, theatrics and heavy metal music into his live concerts.

“And then there was Michael Flatley; his penchant for the grand spectacle - a combination of Irish dance, modern theatre and ancient Irish themes - pointed me towards the kind of experience I wanted to create for audiences.”

Today, his own act - called Celtic Magic - mixes close-up, parlour and stage illusions with Celtic myths and legends built around histori-

cal themes, all set to Irish music.

“Some of the stories are taken from thousands of years ago, while others are drawn from my own experiences growing up in an Irish family. It is a real mélange of humour, sincerity and high energy.”

One of his signature pieces is titled Irish Need Not Apply, which documents the difficulties of Irish immigration to the United States.

“It is very relevant, given the current climate of immigration issues here in the U.S.,” he explains. “I get to shine a light on these things, and a lot of magicians won’t do that. I can be very personal with my story-telling in that regard. I don’t think a lot of magicians dare to bare their true selves, or their perspectives or beliefs, on stage.”

The biggest challenge of his profession, he notes, is shaking people from their preconceived notions of what a magic act can be.

“I wear a kilt and I perform in face paint, so I don’t fit the mold of the average magician.”

“There are people who think I am just an amusement act, others who absolutely love what I do, and even those who think that I am the spawn of Satan and possess evil powers - which, for the record, I don’t! And then there are those people who come up to me in tears because a performance has connected with them on some sort of deeper, visceral level.”

GreenWolf continues to grow that audience, recently performing for more than 10,000 people at Six Flags New England’s Fright Fest, and sharing the stage with a number of Celtic musical artists, including Enter the Haggis. His hope is to become a mainstay at Celtic festivals and Highland games.

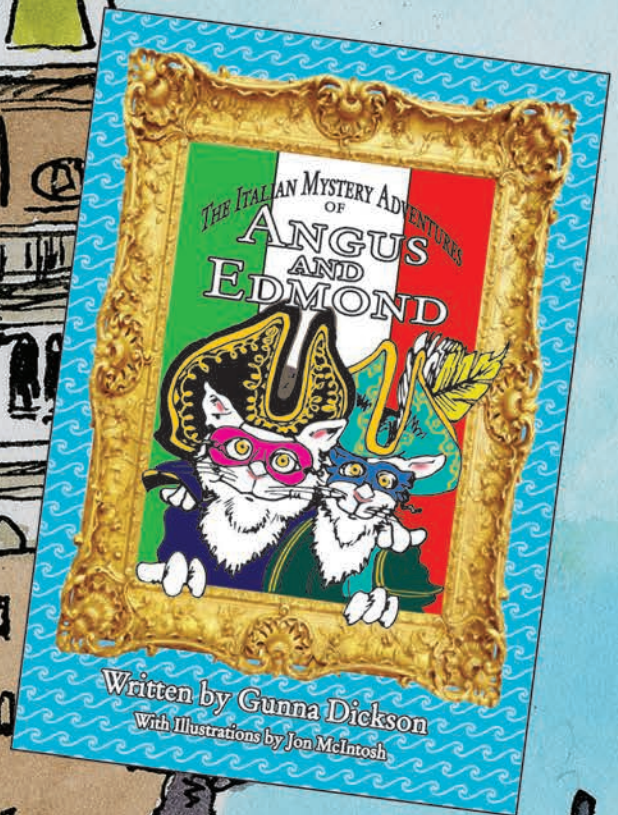
“People in North America, particularly in the USA, have a strong connection to their heritage - in a lot of cases because we are misfits. More art, more music, more books, and more shows will definitely resonate with anyone who feels even a little connection with Celtic culture.”

www.danielgreenwolf.com

CATS AND CLUES

With the Highlands of Scotland and Key West adventures behind them, Angora-mix brothers Angus and Edmond are resting up at home in New York City when they cross paths with a shady rodent and begin receiving cryptic messages. The clues lead them to Italy -- the opera in Milan and carnival in Venice -- where the mystery unfolds and danger threatens.

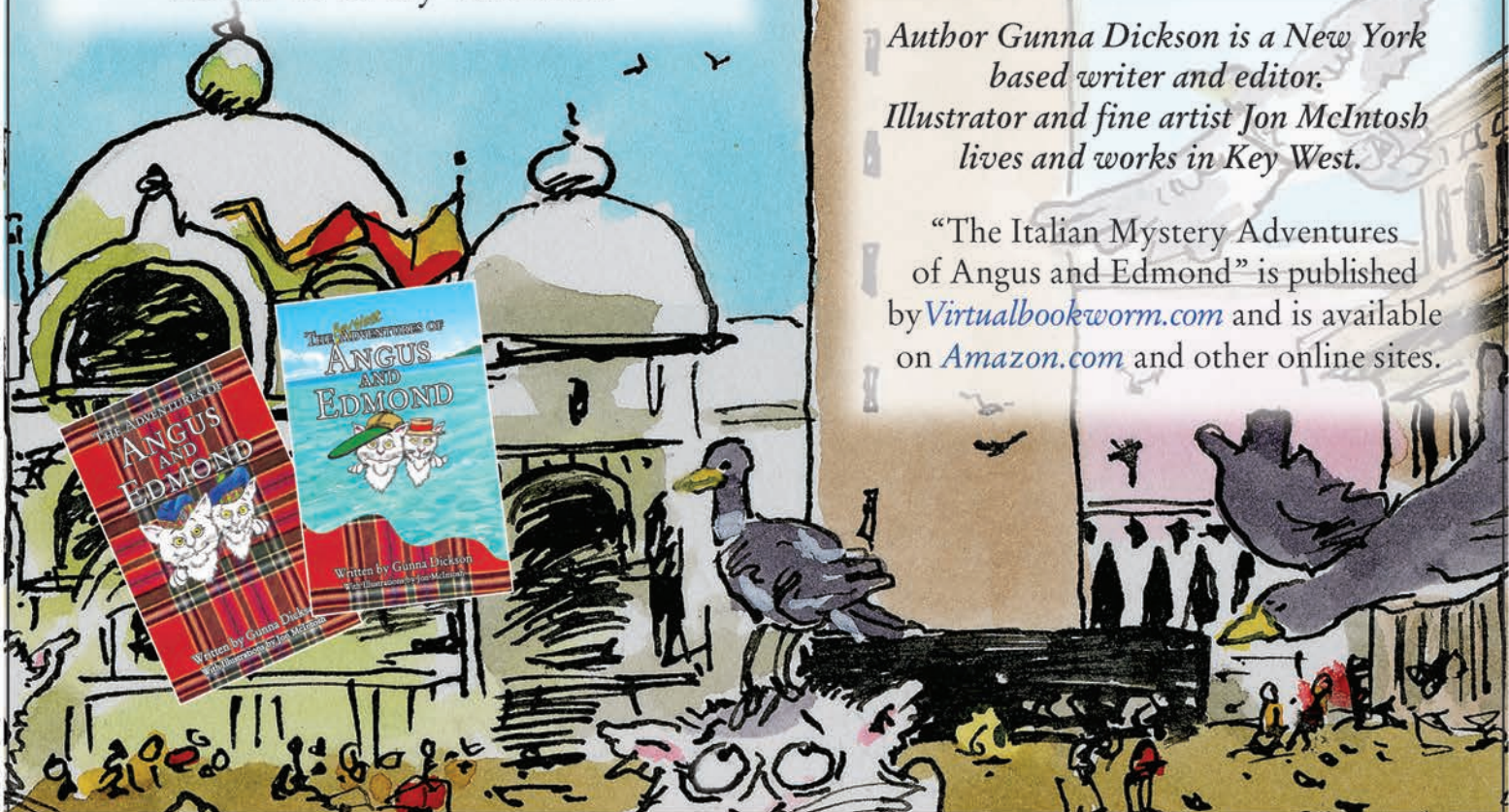
Animal lovers and children of all ages will enjoy this third book of lively cat tales.



Author Gunna Dickson is a New York based writer and editor.

Illustrator and fine artist Jon McIntosh lives and works in Key West.

“The Italian Mystery Adventures of Angus and Edmond” is published by Virtualbookworm.com and is available on Amazon.com and other online sites.



Izzy Wheels



Two Irish sisters are using one big idea to break down disability stigma

Isabel and Ailbhe Keane - sisters and best friends from Galway, Ireland - are changing the way people look at wheelchairs.

The idea was prompted as Ailbhe began work for a project during her final year at The National College of Art and Design in Dublin. "I came across a brief which asked me to 'Empower the lives of people living with a long-term lifestyle-related health condition.' Immediately, I thought of my sister, Isabel, who has been a wheelchair user all of her life," Ailbhe recalls.

Isabel lives with a condition called spina bifida: "When a person is born with this condition it means that the neural tube which carries messages from the brain to other parts of the body is unprotected by the vertebrae in a certain area," she explains. "In my case, when I was born the neural tube was exposed at the base of my back."

Growing up, Isabel and Ailbhe used to "dress up" Isabel's wheelchair for special occasions such as holidays and parties. "This always created a lot of positive attention and gave her a big confidence boost," says Ailbhe. "I wanted to revisit this concept and see how far I could take it."

The result was a range of colourful spoke guards (think hubcaps for wheelchairs) for Isabel's chair. Ailbhe aptly named the project Izzy Wheels, and coined the tagline: "If you can't stand up, stand out!"

"I was genuinely delighted when Ailbhe told me that she wanted to focus on improving the aesthetics of wheelchairs for her final year project," shares Isabel, who's currently a student at the National University of Ireland.

"I knew that she was aware of the positive relationship that I have with my wheelchair, so I was really excited to see how she used her bucket-loads of creativity to depict this."

Ailbhe also created an Izzy Wheels Instagram account to put photos of the snazzy spoke guards on display. Soon enough, she was getting messages from people, including wheelchair users and their parents, wondering how they could purchase these designs. In the summer of 2016, Ailbhe opened an online store and started taking orders.

"It all happened very fast from there. I went straight from being a student to running my own business full-time. I haven't looked back since and can't believe how fast it's still growing. I joined Enterprise Ireland's New Frontiers Entrepreneur Development program this January, and I was given an office, funding and business mentoring."

The public response has been incredible. The sisters even won the Accenture Leaders of Tomorrow award for 2017. As Ailbhe points out, Izzy Wheels has a following outside of wheelchair users - it appeals to anyone who appreciates good design. The spoke guards are meant to be an accessory, like a handbag or a pair of shoes, so the different illustrations lend themselves to various styles and moods. A set of spoke guards featuring Schnauzer faces was inspired by the Keanes' dog, Pompie. A pink, sprinkled donut, flying toucans, and even Christmas designs are just a few of the things chair users can sport on their wheels.

Ailbhe isn't the only person doing the designing. Izzy Wheels had its first artist

collaboration collection in January. The collection, titled "Roll Models" was launched at the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) Fashion show. A portion from the sales went to the IWA.

"The artists were all so incredibly kind and wonderful to donate their designs to Izzy Wheels," says Ailbhe.

"Since launching that collection we get messages every week from artists all over the world asking can they create a design for us."

"To keep up with demand we are launching a new collaboration collection this summer with designs from all over Europe."

For Isabel, the stylish spoke guards have given her a new way to embrace who she is.

"From the first time I wore my Izzy Wheels out in public, people have approached myself and my wheelchair completely differently. Up to then I think some people felt a bit uncomfortable acknowledging the fact that I am in wheelchair as though my disability was kind of a taboo subject. Now that I am clearly drawing attention to it, it's like letting people know 'I know I'm in a wheelchair and I am 100 per cent comfortable with it.' My disability is part of who I am and I think it is important to embrace everything that makes you, you."

www.izzywheels.com

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Celtic League of Asturias

A growing movement aims to have Asturias acknowledged as a Celtic nation

Fernán Morán, President of the Asturian Celtic League, believes that Asturian Celtic culture needs to be nurtured at home and recognized internationally.

Asturias is an autonomous community in northwest Spain with ancient Celtic traditions, although its Celtic language died out in the Middle Ages.

For that reason, Asturias - and neighbouring Galicia - were rejected as national members of the international Celtic League in the mid-1980s. The league decided on a linguistic criterion for national membership, arguing that an area should only be considered Celtic if a Celtic language has been spoken as a historical community language within living memory.

Morán disagrees.

"Asturies have occupied the same territory for more than 2,800 years," he explains. "All the parameters of Asturian culture are Celtic: folklore, mythology, archaeology, history, crafts, etc."

"A language by itself does not have the capacity to confer identity or nationality to anyone. A Vietnamese person can learn the Welsh language perfectly, but that does not make him Welsh."

Morán notes that although the Asturian Celtic tongue is extinct, remnants of it remain in the current language.

"The very name Asturias comes from the Celtic root Stour, which means river, or river course, a name that is often seen elsewhere in Europe, as in the Stour rivers in the U.K."

He adds that other Celtic nations are also losing their languages.

"Except in the case of Wales, where 20 per cent of the population speaks Welsh, the rest of the Celtic nations are in a really dangerous situation."

To support his claim, he points to figures obtained through research.

"In Bretagne, only 6.7 per cent of the



population speaks Breton. In Ireland, 1.5 per cent of the population speaks Irish Gaelic. In Scotland, 1.1 per cent of the population speaks Scottish Gaelic. On the Isle of Man, the language is considered almost extinct. In Cornwall, only 100 people speak Cornish, so it's also considered almost extinct.

"In Asturias we may have lost our ancestral Celtic language, but we have kept alive all the other factors that shape our Celtic culture and identity."

He points out that the first mention of the Asturians as a Celtic tribe came in 29 BC, in the work *Geography* by the Greek historian Strabo. At that time, women inherited property and held other powers indicative of a matriarchal society.

"Until recently, these features were preserved in Asturian territory as the custom of the covada, which consisted of the woman giving birth and continuing with her daily work while the man took care of the newborn."

"These people had great knowledge of the natural environment, and they used medicinal plants. The economy was diverse with surpluses used in trade. There was livestock and agriculture. Tribes such as the cilúrnigos made excellent metal cauldrons that were sold throughout the Atlantic Arc. They were also great goldsmiths."

According to Morán, Asturias received two waves of Celtic populations. The first was of Britons in the sixth century AD. Their arrival is reflected in local place names like Beach of the Bretones and Bretones Village. There was also a wave of Irish, arriving in the sixteenth century to escape ongoing conflict with England.

Today, Asturians hold an array of annual Celtic events to showcase the strength of the culture.

"In the capital of Oviedo, every Saturday and Sunday from May through October, there are parades of bagpipe bands in the city centre," shares Morán. "There are food, beer, cider and literary events. There are also Celtic crafts and gold and silver markets."

The Celtic League of Asturias was formed in 1980 with the aim of making Asturias known as a Celtic nation. It now has close to 1,600 members worldwide, and is active at international events, including the largest annual Celtic gathering in the world - the Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Bretagne - which has recognized Asturias as a Celtic nation.

While the global acclaim is welcome, Morán says that he feels most rewarded for his work when he sees children dressed in traditional Asturian costumes and playing the bagpipes and drums.

"Or when I ask children about Asturian mythology and they know it is related to the mythology of other Celtic nations. Or when I go to a Celtic festival and see the flag of my nation flying alongside those of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man, Bretagne and Galicia."

"Going forward, we will continue to work hand in hand with our Celtic brothers and sisters for the preservation and promotion of our culture."

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International Celtic Art Day

Social media forum designates June 9 to celebrate and promote Celtic art



June 9 has been designated as International Celtic Art Day. The announcement comes from a group of contemporary Celtic artists, scholars, traders, and Celtic art lovers that have been exchanging ideas online since June 9, 2000. The group is comprised of many of the leaders of the current Renaissance of Celtic art, including Michael Carroll, Ruth Black, Aidan Breen, Courtney Davis and Stephen Walker.

"The choice of the ninth of June to celebrate Celtic art seems almost obvious," explains Walker, a Celtic jeweler in upstate New York who serves as the group's moderator. "The Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow - both great medieval masterpieces of Celtic art - are associated with the Irish Saint Columba. June 9 is his feast day."

Columba is also an excellent example of the international nature of Celtic art. In the year 563 AD, he left Ireland over a controversy regarding the copying of a book and took up residence on the Scottish Isle of Iona. From there, he traveled to Pictland, in northeastern Scotland, to preach the Gospel. Columba's network of churches and monasteries expanded far beyond these regions in the generations that followed. The style of Celtic art that spread across Northern Europe from the 6th to the 10th centuries was a direct result of the network of contacts begun by Saint Columba.

While most people think of modern Celtic art as something copied from the past, Walker says the creativity and original designs that come from the imaginations of today's Celtic artists are evidence that the style is constantly evolving.

"Celtic art is the style and tradition that has been passed down from early medieval Scotland and Ireland. The knots, interlace,



spirals and key patterns have become emblematic of a sense of ethnic identity and heritage. This is often done by copying designs and images from the past, but the most authentic expressions come from a mastery of the art form so that new and original art is created.

"Celtic art is popular because it is beautiful and mysterious, and it connects people to a sense of their past and heritage."

Chicago visual artist Michael Carroll, whose grandparents emigrated from Ireland in the early 1900s, believes that the Celtic art movement is as relevant to the times as the Cubists were to theirs.

"This resurgence of Celtic art has been primarily fueled by the proliferation of the internet, and social media. Where once people of Celtic heritage were scattered and isolated, they have now come together to form a professional community - and so have their artists."

That creative community, which currently connects on Facebook, will host a number of cultural events on June 9 - both

online and in person - showcasing contemporary Celtic artists, including calligraphers, illuminators, painters, sculptors, digital designers, woodcarvers, jewelers, tattoo artists, and more.

Fiber artist Ruth Black of Inverness was an early supporter of the concept, and is excited about promoting the celebration in Scotland.

"I will be holding an 'Open Studio' day at my workshop and inviting people to come in and learn felt-making skills. They can also get an education in Celtic knot-work designs by assisting me in making a large wall panel to decorate my studio. I also hope to get other artists to try out Celtic designs in their own particular practices."

The first actual event to be scheduled for International Celtic Art Day is an Open Studio exhibit by artist Angelique Moorman in the Netherlands. The concept has also seen support expressed from forum members in Spain, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

Going forward, Walker is confident that those who call themselves Celtic artists will continue to share ideas and encourage each other.

"This year, being the first, will be largely experimental. We will see what works and build on those efforts that get traction."

Carroll concurs.

"We hope that International Celtic Art Day will become an annual tradition, one that will reflect and promote the continuing public interest in the art. The aim is to raise public awareness of our Celtic heritage, celebrating not only ancient masterpieces like the Book of Kells, but also the new ones being produced by living artists today."



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- Fiddle & Viola with Patsy Reid
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- Gaelic 1 & 2
- Gaelic Conversation Course with Muriel Fisher
- Piano Accordion with Addie Harper Jr & Stephanie Harper
- Button Box with Robert Nairn & Fergie MacDonald
- Gaelic for Irish Speakers (Beginners)

21 - 27/07/18

- Fiddle course with Alasdair Fraser
- Cello course with Natalie Haas

23 - 27/07/18

- 'Exploring Skye' (Beginners Gaelic) with Muriel Fisher

30/07 - 03/08/18

- Gaelic 1, 3, 5, 7
- Gaelic for Irish Speakers (Advanced Learners)
- Traditional Music Ensemble with Innes Watson
- Isle of Skye Piping School with Decker Forrest

06 - 10/08/18

- Gaelic 2, 4, 6, 8
- 'A Seascape of Gaelic Song' with Margaret Stewart
- Clarsach with Ingrid Henderson

13 - 17/08/18

- Gaelic 1, 3, 5, 7, 9
- Digital Photography with Cailean MacLean
- Gaelic Creative Writing with Alison Lang

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Two American brothers team up to create one unique musical experience

In 2010, Damon and Brian Stout combined their love of Celtic music with their passion for Pink Floyd to create a sonic offspring, the aptly-named Celtic Pink Floyd.

Growing up in Jackson, Mississippi - which is, interestingly, a sister city to Carrickfergus, Ireland - the duo were immersed both in their Scottish-Irish ancestry, and in various forms of musical study.

The brothers began their journey as pre-schoolers, learning violin by the age of 7, and taking piano lessons with a Julliard-trained neighbour. Later, they picked up the French horn and trombone, performing with a German-based touring band as teenagers.

"A few years later came jazz, rock and other concert bands," notes Damon via email. "Additionally, with more influences around, we put together a few garage bands playing for parties, talent shows or whoever would have us. A life in music - with no back-up plan, of course - ensued."

The idea for Celtic Pink Floyd, he explains, arose by chance.

"It was while hearing 'On the Turning Away' (from Pink Floyd's 1987 album, *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*) one morning that the light bulb first went on. It is essentially a folk song, and arranging it to Celtic instruments sounded like an interesting idea."

That led the Stouts to a closer examination of Floyd's music, unveiling more Celtic influences.

Within a year, the band of brothers had released their debut, eponymous recording, which included classic Floyd tunes 'Another Brick in the Wall,' 'Wish You Were Here,' and 'Comfortably Numb.'

"We thought it might be interesting to take those existing Celtic undertones and expand them to create a 12-track album," says Damon.

"It is hard to go wrong with an iconic band like Floyd and their huge catalogue of songs...adding Celtic instruments and arrangements seemed like a fun musical challenge that could prove rewarding."

With a nine-member band, however, taking the show on the road was out of the question.

"The logistics and financial backing for touring would have been prohibitive, especially since it was a first album and we had no idea how the music would be received."

While interest in the group grew, band members took on other commitments that kept them busy over the next few years. When they finally rallied to take a shot at a second album, the Stouts were now living thousands of miles apart.

"I am in Los Angeles and my brother is in Chicago," says Damon, "so there are some frequent flyer miles being racked up. The other five members - Mary Morales (keyboards), Bryan Dobbs (guitar, mandolin), Rachel Grace (fiddle), Patrick D'Arcy (pipes) and Forrest Robinson (percussion) - are in LA, which is where we are currently rehearsing."

Recommitted to the project, the group started working on a new album last year - titled 'You Owe it to the People' - which is scheduled for release in 2018.

"During those recording sessions we decided to put out our 'Live, In Studio' album first," says Damon. "It was originally only going to be a rehearsal tool for upcoming live shows, and was put together in about a week, but it came out better than we expected."

In fact, the band was so pleased with the way the recording session turned out, they resisted the urge to overdub any of the tracks, which include 'Have a Cigar', 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond', and 'Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun.'

"We are fairly confident Celtic music fans will like it, and we are really stoked by how many Pink Floyd fans have embraced us. It is a great feeling to strike a chord with both fan bases."

"It is also quite rewarding when Celtic music fans tell us they aren't very familiar with Pink Floyd but, after hearing what we do, are going to explore their music further. Equally exciting is when a Floyd fan says they aren't familiar with Celtic music and never suspected a Celtic arrangement would do their music justice."

The true test, says Stout, is when the band takes the stage.

"We recently opened for The Young Dubliners and that show helped to solidify all our expectations that not only can we pull this off, but the crowd really responded to our arrangements and overall take on Pink Floyd."

www.celticpinkfloyd.com



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Archy Jay

- aka The Snake Charmer

In a milieu dominated by big burly men, one petite young woman from New Delhi is grabbing all the headlines...



Archy Jay - aka The Snake Charmer, as she is known on social media channels - is getting rave reviews for her piping skills, particularly her unique takes on popular music, including songs from the *Gladiator* and *The Walking Dead* soundtracks.

The daughter of a middle class family, the attractive 25-year-old was a well-known vocalist and an accomplished acoustic guitar player before the bagpipes captured her fancy.

"What completely inspired me and caught my attention was watching the folk-metal band Eluveitie on YouTube," she shares via email. "They had a bagpiper - I had never seen or heard anything quite like it before."

Determined to be "as cool as" that group's piper, Jay gave up fast-tracking a career in international e-commerce and financing to teach herself to play the chanter in late 2012. Within two years, she had a handle on the instrument.

"Learning to play without a teacher was no joke, and I knew I had to put in more effort and time than anyone else; practicing

twice or thrice a week was simply not going to cut it for me."

She credits strangers who responded to her e-mails and messages with guiding her through the early days of learning, when she often felt overwhelmed. Five days of instruction from Finlay MacDonald at Scotland's National Piping Centre put polish on her basic mechanics, and she returned home ready to take the next steps.

"I was told that Mr. Finlay would be the right instructor for me, as he employs a lot of unconventional styles of playing. He understood what I wanted to do with my piping, and taught me the appropriate techniques. I have utmost respect for him."

Currently, Jay plays a semi-electronic bagpipe called Redpipes - an instrument suggested to her by champion Canadian piper Jim McGillivray on a visit to Canada in 2013.

Her method, she acknowledges, is anything but traditional.

"I mostly play the chromatic style, but since I have already broken some of the traditional playing rules I might as well go all out and experiment with everything and see how it works on the bagpipes."

She is aware that there may be those who are not sold on what she does.

"I find the bagpipes beautiful and unlike any other instrument out there. It is only a matter of presenting them in the right way by blending them with different genres or styles of music. That's what I am heading for, and I am sure people are going to love it."

"Love it" might be an understatement; her YouTube channel has already racked up more than one million views, and she is counting on the popularity of those videos - where she appears as both a solo artist and with a number of musical collaborators - to warm up audiences at home.

"Bagpipes are very new to India, and my hope is to start pulling people here toward this new sound."

Recognition outside of her home country has been building steadily since her video version of AC/DC's *Thunderstruck* went viral, grabbing global attention, and inviting interviews by BBC Radio Scotland and the *Daily Express*.

"To be recognized like that by the foreign media was quite a pleasant surprise and gave me my first sense of real achievement," she notes, adding the American metal band Lamb of God also publicly shared her version of one of their songs.

In addition, California-based composer Bear McCreary - whose credits include the soundtracks for *Outlander*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *The Walking Dead* - recently acknowledged her work on the pipes in several of his compositions.

Jay admits that being raised in India means that she is not as well-versed in Celtic music as many pipers, but she is impressed with the Celtic music she has been exposed to in recent years. She considers the late Piper Duncan Gordon, of Pitlochry, Scotland, a particular inspiration.

"Also, initially, I did not know the importance and relevance of the kilt to piping and to Celtic culture, and wore it just because it looked so damn good! And people here in India are really fascinated with it as well."

www.facebook.com/ArchyJay

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Manx quartet Birlinn Jiarg fuses past and present to create a sound and style all their own

Birlinn Jiarg's debut recording, *Seamount*, features a mix of original compositions and traditional tunes - ramped up into a refreshing urban 'trad.'

Though only months old, the new release is sitting well with fans and reviewers, including Stephen Hunt of fRoots Magazine - who called the group "New Kids on the Rock" - and has credited them with "bringing something new to the party."

"When they really let fly with two harmonizing whistles, guitar and bodhran they can't help but evoke the name of (Anglo-Irish 'trad' legends) Flook," continues Hunt. "It is a testament to their collective abilities that they don't need to shy away from such comparisons...an exciting and distinctive debut from a young group with real potential."

The band is simply thrilled to have its first album in circulation.

"Recording *Seamount* was very rewarding, especially holding the actual physical copy," says multi-instrumentalist Beccy Hurst.

Hurst, now 25, was born and raised on the Isle of Man. By the age of 13 she had become immersed in traditional Manx music, attending local sessions, and teaching herself the basics of both the whistle and the concertina. Within a few years, she left a myriad of musical and dance projects to study folklore at university in Newcastle on Tyne in England.

There, she met fellow musician Alasdair Paul.

Paul, 23, is from Scotland's northwest highlands, where he was introduced to the pipes in his school years before taking up the guitar and studying traditional Gaelic music and culture.

In 2015, the pair teamed up with Freya Rae, a master on the clarinet and flute, and bodhran player Callum Younger.

"We may all currently reside in Newcastle on Tyne, but we are all from different places in the British Islands," Hurst points out.

Rae, 26, grew up in the Scottish Borders region where, as a young child, she was inspired by the social aspects of playing in small hall bands and at family ceilidhs.

Younger, 24, is from Birtley, Gateshead, and was lured from his school lessons as a teenager by the irresistible beat of the drums.

"We found our sound fairly quickly once we were all part of the band," notes Hurst. "Now that we have greater familiarity with one another as players, the material is coming together more easily."

Although playing together requires steady practice and dedication, Hurst says the band members encourage and inspire each other.

"We will adapt a traditional Manx tune, putting our own stamp on it."

"It is not our intention to improve the tune - we just like to perform it in a different way, and with an unusual combination of instruments, so that our individual personalities come out through the music."

A good tune, she believes, begins with a strong melody.

"All of us agree that it must be catchy, but not cheesy. It all comes down to how it is played and arranged, and that is why we

modify our repertoire to fit our own taste and style."

While the band members enjoy the perks of their profession - writing, rehearsing, recording and touring - the business side of music is less appealing.

"One of the main challenges is always the irregularity of work as a musician," shares Hurst. "Some periods are extremely busy while other times during the year there may not be much work - although this has its advantages also, as we all need down time to rest and regroup."

She adds that some of the credit for both the band's current success, and the growing popularity of Celtic music and culture in general, must be given to government groups.

"On the Isle of Man we are very fortunate to have organizations such as Culture Vannin who do everything they can to preserve and promote Manx culture."

With their first recording now under their belts, Hurst and her band-mates are currently putting the finishing touches on several new videos, and are preparing to go back on tour, which will include stops at the Warwick Folk Festival and the Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Bretagne in the coming months.

"We play music because we enjoy music, the social scene, and performing at gigs and festivals. The chance to travel, see new places and meet new people is a great thing, as is the opportunity to showcase our unique culture in unique ways."

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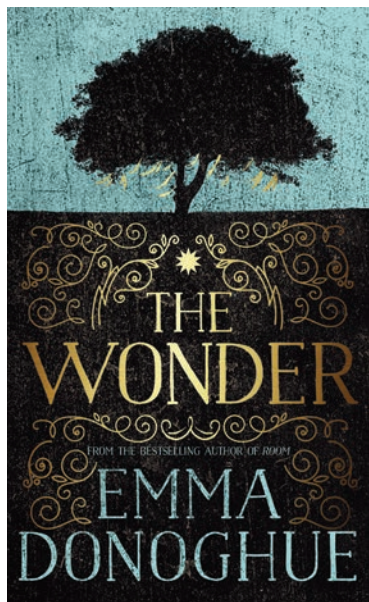
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Claire MacKay is an ethnobotanist and medical herbalist, based in the Scottish Highlands and consultant to the Outlander TV series. Also a writer, her work was included in Diana Gabaldon's bestselling; Outlandish Companion, and she is about to publish her own book Outlander Herbal, a guide to the herbal remedies of the series.

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Emma Donoghue

After the overwhelming success of Room, and with a new novel atop the bestseller list, Emma Donoghue shows no signs of slowing down...

For Irish-Canadian author Emma Donoghue, research and writing are inseparable.

"I go back and forth between them," she says over the phone from her home near London, Ontario. "The internet has made that so much easier."

Born in Dublin, Donoghue spent years commuting between Ireland, England and Canada before settling down. The 47-year-old has penned a plethora of novels, short stories, screenplays and the like, ultimately finding her voice in historical fiction. And though she has been writing professionally since she was in her 20s, it wasn't until the critical and popular acclaim of her 2010 novel, *Room* – and the Academy Award nominated film adaptation five years later – that she became a household name.

Her latest effort, *The Wonder*, is Donoghue's first full-length work since 2014's *Frog Music*. Set in 19th century Ireland, the book tells the tale of a "fasting girl" – a child who claimed to be able to survive for long periods of time without eating. There were multiple cases of these girls in the Victorian era, and Donoghue researched dozens of files for the new narrative.

"I was fascinated by the fact that these long-term fasts clearly had something to do with what is now called eating disorders," she explains. "Eventually, I decided I would write a fictional version that would draw on all the aspects of this phenomenon that I found most interesting."

These real-life cases were spread out from the 16th to 20th centuries across both Europe and North America. Donoghue chose the year 1859 for her fictional account.

"I decided that Ireland after the famine would be the perfect time and place for this story because it was so interesting to set the idea of voluntary fast against involuntary hunger."

Writing about *The Wonder*'s protagonist, 11-year-old Anna O'Donnell, proved to be a challenge.

"I knew that most of my readers would be assuming that she was a hoaxer, pathetic or deluded in some way," shares the scribe. "I wanted to give her a lot of strength...she's intelligent, she's sensitive, she's warm. Even, in some ways, an ordinary child. I tried to make her feel like a real child even though she is in this extraordinary position."

Interestingly, Donoghue notes that, for her, the central character is not O'Donnell, but rather Lib Wright, a professionally trained nurse who serves as the novel's narrator. Unlike many untrained nurses of the era, who were considered a type of domestic worker, Wright is cultured, educated, and "book smart" – qualities that cast her out of the community.

"I was taken by the idea of a nurse, who would be – who was supposed to be – a kind of objective, neutral observer, but who finds that her presence is making things worse. It is a real ethical nightmare."

The contrast between Wright and the O'Donnell family is a sharp one; the nurse is English, middle-class and schooled, while her patients are Irish peasants.

Bringing in a "crucial third element" (as

the author puts it) in the form of a reporter who records O'Donnell's perplexing situation only served to heighten the tension.

"I wanted to complicate that contrast by putting in a Dublin-based, Catholic journalist who is quite educated and worldly, but still understands the locals. All the characters start questioning themselves and changing, and moving a bit closer together."

The Wonder made the shortlist for the 2016 Giller Prize this past September, where it received high praise from the jury: "The Wonder does what we as judges yearned for – allowed us to forget we were judges, and just become readers, hooked and wowed," reads the citation on the Giller website.

And while all of the hoopla surrounding both the new book and the film adaptation of *Room* pushed Donoghue's popularity through the roof over the past year, she isn't feeling the pressure to meet or exceed past performance.

"It's amazing enough to have one big bestseller in your life, so I certainly don't feel I have to every time. It would be ridiculous to let a really happy career be, in any way, overshadowed by anxiety because of writing one bestseller."

She does, however, appreciate the accolades and attention.

"The New York Times gave *The Wonder* to Stephen King to review, and that only happens if they're taking you seriously."

www.emmadonoghue.com

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Barbarian Found

With his first book,
Barbarian Lost,
Alexandre Trudeau
returns to the Middle
Kingdom on a mission





As a child, travelling with his father - former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau - Alexander Trudeau was captivated by China's immensity, intimacy and intricacies. Recently, the documentary filmmaker-turned-author returned to the 'Sleeping Dragon', only to find it very much awake.

CL: Let's start with your family history here - you have Celtic roots do you not?

AT: Yes, both of my parents have Scottish ancestry. On my father's side there are the Elliots, and on my mother's side there are the Sinclairs.

CL: Does that heritage impact who you are today?

AT: Yes, it does, very much so, as I think it does for a lot of Canadians. The Scots are fiercely proud of their roots, and I count myself among that group. Our ancestors were really at the forefront of building this country, with their spirit of adventure and sense of bravery. My great-grandfather, on my mother's side, immigrated here with his family and became a schoolteacher. He was also, apparently, a very good storyteller.

CL: The Scots have always excelled at spinning a good yarn.

AT: Yes, that's a big part of my heritage, for sure. For a long time I thought of myself more as a story liver; however, my need to carve out a profession has turned me into a storyteller of sorts, first through filmmaking and now with the book.

CL: Let's talk about that story then. What motivated you to write *Barbarian Lost*?

AT: There were a number of motivations at play. The first was quite a simple one actually; I was asked to write a short preface to a re-edition of my father's book on China, and the publisher (Douglas & McIntyre) saw that I could write and had a lot to say about the country. So they asked me to consider putting together a full book of my own on the subject. I said yes, mostly because I was driven by my own need to make some sense out of China; I have been watching it from afar since that first trip there with my father in 1990, and I have been witness to its emergence as a dominant world power. I'm a bit of a geo-political junkie, so understanding how the world works is intricately interwoven with better understanding the complexities of China and its role on the global stage.

CL: You often use the image of a river in the book to describe China.

AT: I'm not sure that I intended to do that, but in hindsight I can appreciate the symbolism. It is important to understand that China is not a country; it is a civilization - perhaps even a way of life. And while that civilization is ancient, and has appeared almost stoic like a river for thousands of years, more and more we are seeing that it is actually quite fluid and dynamic as it flows into the sea of global influence. The other misperception we have is that there is one China; China today, or at least my China, is made up of many different peoples. Sometimes they speak in harmony, while at other times they are a mass of contradiction. And that is part of the complexity that I undertake to detail in the book. And with China, you can't travel there without coming under the spell of the ebb and flow of the Tao; the spinning of the eternal wheel that is China's story, with great periods of alternating darkness and light.

CL: The journey seemed an internal one for you, as much as it was a physical voyage.

AT: All journeys are. One travels, first and foremost, in a mental way. Travel is a frame of mind, where we can let go of what we know, and visit places that are unknown.

CL: Is that the difference between being a tourist and being a traveler?

AT: Yes, perhaps. A tourist rarely leaves their comfort zone, whereas the traveler leaves one's preconceived notions behind and doesn't look back. A tourist is packaged with a plan, and becomes alarmed when that schedule is disrupted, whereas a traveler puts oneself at the mercy of a place and a people, in a good way, where those things will dictate the agenda.

CL: It appears that you went out of your way in China to be a traveler.

AT: I wouldn't know how to be a tourist. I've never been that interested in sightseeing, unless I stumble upon something by accident. To really understand a place and people, like China, it means going beyond and behind what it is trying to show you, or what is propped up. Actual meaning is found in the nitty-gritty, the daily heartbeat, which often means going off the beaten track - like being in people's homes, and essentially being where they are.





CL: The soul of China's people, and even its landscape, reveals itself in the book.

AT: Again, I'm not sure that was intentional. It is challenging to capture something so intangible, so instead of making these grand statements about the spirit, I aimed for a collage of sorts - snapshots of individual people and places, with the hope that a bigger picture would emerge from that. Ultimately, the soul of China is the Tao; the rhythm of that ever-spinning wheel. That rhythm is not something that is easy to see sometimes; it's not always logical, and I'm not sure that the Chinese people are always aware of it because they are in the middle of it. In fact, many of them are quite surprised by what is happening to their country. However, there were small hints of it, glimmers here and there that showed themselves to me during my travels.

CL: How is writing a book different from filmmaking?

AT: From a practical perspective, filmmaking is a much smaller palette to work with; I have an hour to say what I have to say. Whereas, with the book, I had this huge, empty canvas to fill in over a much longer period. And where filmmaking invites dialogue and the participation of others, long-form writing is a solitary act. I used to think that all you needed to write a book was mental aptitude - big ideas and sheer brain power. Now I understand that it requires bravery above all else. It takes great courage and endurance to sit before a blank page each day and go to work. I have even more respect and admiration for writers after going the distance with my own book.

CL: Did you accomplish what you set out to accomplish with the work?

AT: That is really for others to decide. Does the reader get a strong feeling for China? Do they become fascinated with the country? In that sense, my goal was to write something that was both light and deep at once - that was easy and accessible to read and yet carries some weight as well. Will people get a better understanding of how China works after reading it? Time will tell I suppose. I hope so. But, yes, I feel good about the book.

CL: What has the response been like from the people around you?

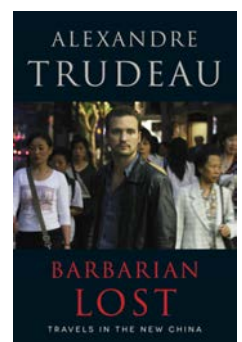
AT: I think they all appreciate it. Some of them are surprised, perhaps, by how easy it is to read, and some of the light-hearted humour. They think I am this very serious and complicated guy. And, given how private and reclusive I have been at times in the past, some were surprised at how candid I was, and how much of myself I put out there in terms of my failures, my mistakes, and so forth.

CL: Now that you have written a book, will there be others?

AT: As I said earlier, I've always considered myself a story liver. However, storytelling is a way to keep living those stories. There may have been multiple trips to China, but then there was this completely other journey that took place in my mind as I was writing the book. That process revealed many things about China that I hadn't considered while I was there. And being a man of many interests - film, geo-politics, journalism, art - I really enjoyed writing. And there is something about travel writing that is so immediate and honest and natural - I went there, I saw this, I did that - that it is very rewarding as a storyteller. So, all that said, I am revisiting some of my old travel journals looking for opportunities.

CL: You've been quite pro-active with art - have you considered politics?

AT: I'm more of an intellectual and a lone wolf than an activist. I've stood up for social justice in this country, and will continue to do so, but activism is something I mostly admire from afar. I guess that I also have a difficult relationship with political action; I feel that it gets in the way of pursuing ideas. I certainly have ideas about how the world should be, but I'd rather find that voice in my art that in any political arena. And now that I am a father myself, I need to think about how I live my life every day and what kind of example I am setting for my own children.



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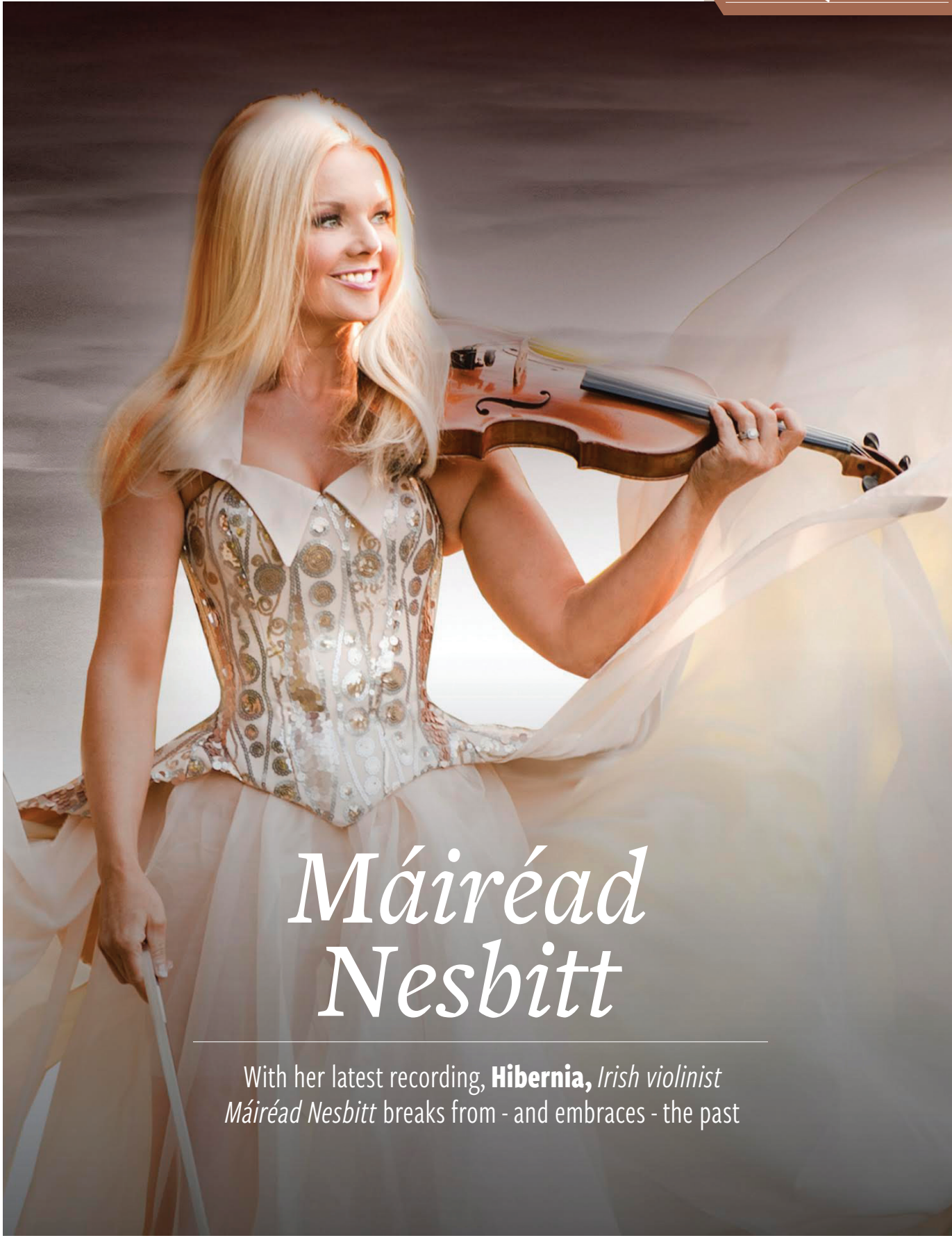
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Máiréad Nesbitt

With her latest recording, **Hibernia**, Irish violinist
Máiréad Nesbitt breaks from - and embraces - the past

As a founding member of Irish supergroup Celtic Woman, violinist Máiréad Nesbitt has recorded over a dozen albums and performed to appreciative audiences all over the world. A highly acclaimed musician, she has shared the stage with the likes of Michael Flatley, U2, Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor, Clannad, Emmylou Harris, David Bowie, Sting, and many more. Recently, she spoke with Celtic Life International about her passion for her profession.



What are your own roots?

I was born and raised in the beautiful countryside of Loughmore, Co. Tipperary. It was an idyllic place to grow up, and it is still my favourite little piece of Ireland.

What originally got you into music, and are they the same reasons that you do it today?

As a child, there was always a great deal of music happening in our home and in our community; both my mother and father performed and taught music, and my sister and four brothers all played various instruments. So, things could get quite noisy at times! I fully embraced it, however, starting on the piano, and later switching over to the fiddle by the age of six. The common denominator between then and now is the constant inspiration of my parents. They are still involved with just about every aspect of my career.

What inspired the new recording, and why now?

It has been a while since I put out a solo recording (*Raining Up*, 2006), and I have been so busy writing, recording and touring with other artists since then that there was simply never time to focus

on my own material. I would do bits of composing here and there, but it wasn't until I was able to clear the slate, so to speak, that I was in a position to actually sit still long enough to put all the pieces together. The title, *Hibernia*, reflects my passion for Latin and the links between the classical world and our way of life in Ireland. My aim was to convey the clash, or contradiction, of these two thematic streams running side by side. The album also reflects my two primary influences as a player - classical and Celtic - and my love of both genres.

You have some serious accompanists on *Hibernia*.

I was very fortunate to work with a number of amazing players, including Mick O'Brien, Nick Bailey, Noel Eccles, Nathan Pacheco, and Colm Ó Foghlú, who wrote and co-wrote much of the material with me. They were all simply brilliant, and it was a real pleasure to work with people who are so enthusiastic about music. And, of course, my mother and father and my sister and brothers were all involved as well.



The Orchestra of Ireland makes an appearance also.

Yes, and I love what we were able to do with the ensemble. Kenneth Rice (leader) and Liam Bates (conductor) did a fantastic job accentuating the songs, letting them breathe and stand on their own, without overcrowding the melodies. It was a lovely touch, as was having the Cashel Set Dancers appear on the album, which, I believe, is a first for a studio recording.

You are currently working on a family album as well?

Yes, and that will be out in the spring. The tentative title is Devil's Bit Sessions, which reflects the looser, more light-hearted nature of the recording. The album has a real folksy feel to it, and finds its roots in the music that we heard daily growing up in rural Ireland.

What is it like to work alongside family members in that milieu?

It's been brilliant, actually – good craic as we say in Ireland. A lot of people think that there is this tremendous potential for disaster with these kinds of situations, but that certainly has never been the case with us. We have always been a very closely knit family, and we bring out the best in each other both as people and as players when we are together. It really doesn't get any better than having the opportunity to work and play with the people who are nearest and dearest to your heart. I am so blessed that way.

Is your own creative process more 'inspirational' or 'perspirational'?

Good question. I think it is both, really. A lot of ideas for writing, recording or performing come at all different hours, so I always have to be open and ready for them when they magically appear. To be honest, many of them never make it to the studio

or the stage, but it is always better to have more creative ideas than little or none. My favourite moments are improvisational – getting caught up in a melody, losing myself in the music, or feeding off the energy of another musician's performance. That ability and freedom to improvise comes about from knowing my instrument inside and out. As such, a lot of time and effort goes into allowing for those spontaneous 'moments' to occur. It takes a great deal of effort for a studio recording or a live show to appear seamless. What audiences experience is the end result of many, many hours of blood, sweat and tears by a large number of dedicated people.

How have you evolved as an artist over time?

From early on, I have been fanatical about practicing. I play all of the time, and my technical skills continue to develop the more that I play. And I think it is important to be humble as a musician, and as a person; to know that there is always something more to know, to love to learn, and to remain open to new ideas and experiences. I've had the very good fortune of working with some highly skilled players over the years who have challenged me to grow as a player, and I have taken something from all of those opportunities. Perhaps one of the biggest lessons I have learned in recent years is knowing when not to play – to lay off the gas pedal a little, as it were, and allow the songs the space to breathe on their own.

Miles Davis once said that music exists in "the space between the notes".

True enough, though I believe the original quote came from Claude Debussy. Any artist, no matter what discipline – music, dance, theatre, sculpture, painting – will tell you that art, or beauty if you will, works best when there is a relationship at play with an audience: having that 'space between the notes' engages people – inviting them to fill in the blanks with their own imaginations, and making them part of the story or experience. In that regard, I have no use in performing for an empty auditorium or concert hall; as a musician, it is an empty experience.

Speaking of performances, when do you hit the road?

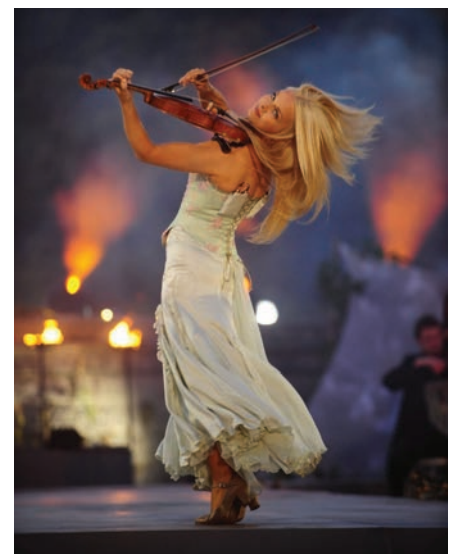
We haven't made any formal announcements just yet about touring this year, but it is definitely on the agenda. I have been happy to be at home this past while, enjoying the time with my family and in the studio. I have been busy with media and promotions for Hibernia in recent weeks, and I am getting

ready to release my own brand of Celtic violins, but I am starting to get that itch for live shows again, so it will likely be sooner than later, I believe.

Why do you think that Irish music and culture has exploded on the global stage?

There are a number of reasons, I believe. Obviously, the internet has made everything just that much more visible and accessible. Certainly, productions like Michael Flatley's Riverdance and Lord of the Dance, which have taken our traditional customs and brought them into a more modernized context, have introduced our culture to new audiences around the world. The same can be said for acts like Celtic Woman and Celtic Thunder. And we have some really incredible contemporary artists in Ireland – U2, Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor, Clannad, Damien Rice – who have all struck a chord with listeners, shining the spotlight on Ireland for more than a generation now. And I think that some credit must be given to our governments, who have done well to invest in the arts over the years, making it possible for musicians such as myself to enjoy the careers that we do. Irish culture has always been distinct and unique – we are a nation of storytellers, with a great history of music and literature. We are also a country of emigrants, and our people can be found all across the planet. That is both our greatest tragedy and our greatest triumph: we've lost so many for so long. Thankfully, they have carried our customs and traditions with them wherever they have roamed. And I am both very proud and honoured to be able to do the same in my own way.

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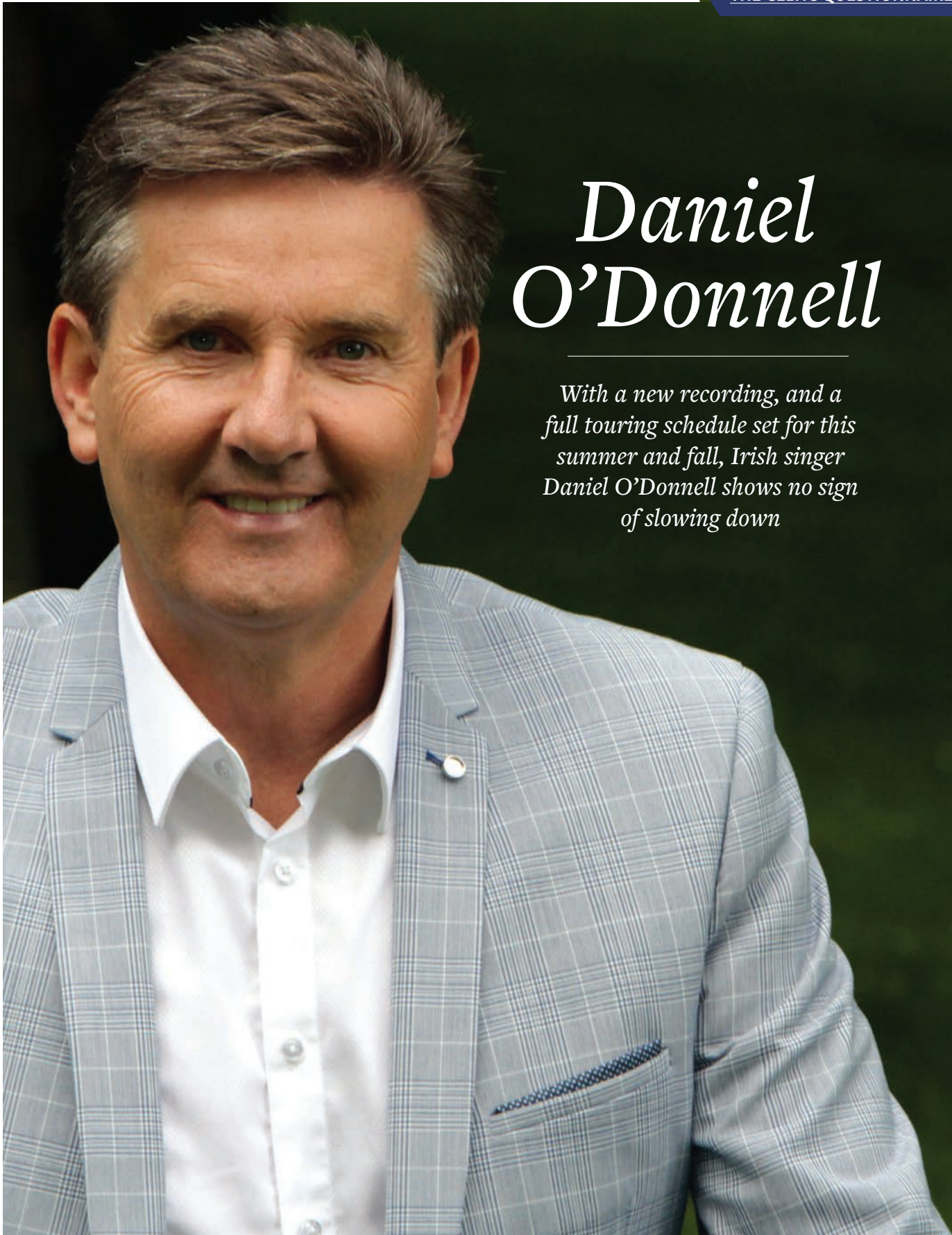


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A portrait of Daniel O'Donnell, a middle-aged man with short, light brown hair, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a light blue and white checkered blazer over a white button-down shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

Daniel O'Donnell

With a new recording, and a full touring schedule set for this summer and fall, Irish singer Daniel O'Donnell shows no sign of slowing down



It has been a busy few months for Daniel O'Donnell. Hot on the heels of a new recording - Back Home Again - the native of Kincasslagh, Donegal will be taking the stage in dozens of cities across North America and Europe over the coming months. Recently, he spoke with Celtic Life International about his agenda, Irish culture, and more.

You have a lot on the go these days.

Aye, indeed I do. And I love it. In fact, I love it now more than ever.

Why is that?

It sounds a bit funny saying it, but perhaps the younger me took a lot of things for granted. It is not that I haven't worked hard, or stopped to count my blessings along the way - I have. It is just that these days I have a broader and better perspective on everything, and a greater appreciation for my life. Maybe that is the greatest benefit of being older.

Do you find touring harder now?

No, I don't find life on the road to be that difficult at all. After so many years of doing this, I have found a very comfortable routine for myself. There are moments when I am tired, for sure, but thankfully they are few and far between. I suppose the hardest part is being away from my wife and family for extended periods. I do speak with them daily, which is thankfully much easier today than it was just a few short years ago, but there is really no substitute for being there in person.

What are the rewards?

There are so many things that I am grateful for; undoubtedly, doing what I love, and loving what I do is first and foremost for me. And I simply love entertaining people, knowing that the music has moved them in some way - sometimes with a smile, sometimes with a tear. It may sound like a bit of a cliché, but walking off the stage at the end of a show, having just done my job to my very best of ability, is really all the reward I need or want at this point in my life.

Your audience has grown with you over the years.

Yes they have, and I am very fortunate that way. As you can imagine, the majority of people in the audience each night are older folks. Many of them have seen me perform on previous tours, so it is not unusual for me to see familiar faces prior to, or after the show, or

even from the stage. It is quite heartwarming and inspiring actually; I love to talk with people, and to listen to them share their stories about their heritage, their travels to Ireland, and how much the music has meant to them over the years.

What is it that keeps them coming back?

The music - it has always been, and it will always be, about the music. There is obviously something special about the songs I record and perform that resonates with audiences. Perhaps it is nostalgia - a longing not just for Ireland, but for the simpler times of years past - that touches the hearts of listeners. The thing about the songs I perform, and particularly the traditional Irish tunes, is that they are quite emotive; the lyrics and melodies are rarely neutral - they are either joyfully upbeat, even funny, or they are somber ballads. There is very little middle ground, and I can see that from the stage each night; eyes will be wide with laughter, or wet with tears.

What about younger audiences?

On the whole, there are very few young people at my concerts. They are there, but most of them are children that have accompanied their parents or grandparents. Still, they seem to really enjoy themselves and are often the most enthusiastic ones in the hall. It is lovely to connect with them after a performance, and to know that in some way the show has brought these families a little closer, and that the kids have a greater sense of their history and heritage.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote that history and heritage among younger people?

On the whole, yes. Let me preface my reply by saying that young people today have both the best and the worst of the world at their fingertips. What I mean by that is that, given the tremendous technology now available to them, the opportunity for learning about the world is one hundred times what it was when I was a youngster - perhaps even a thousand times greater. As we have seen, that has both its advantages and disadvantages, and there is certainly a lot of



disturbing stuff out there that we are being bombarded with on a daily basis. That said, the chance for young people to explore and learn about Irish customs, history, heritage and the like has never been greater. What used to take months, and even years, to research, now only takes a few seconds. There has never been better or easier access to our music, our literature, our art, and so forth. On top of that, the success of big-scale productions like Riverdance, Celtic Thunder and Celtic Woman over the last two decades has renewed an interest in Irish culture around the world, and not just with ex-pats, but with audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Are there ways to improve that?

First off, credit must be given where it is due; the Irish government, and in particular our tourism industry folks, have done an exceptional job carrying the message of who we are and what we have to offer to markets across the globe. There is always room

for improvement, however, and perhaps a stronger investment in our arts sector would help. People in North America and elsewhere can make a difference by attending Irish and Celtic festivals, concerts, and so forth. Support for Irish Studies programs in the universities is another great way to preserve our heritage, as is the development of websites and mobile apps to promote the learning of the Gaelic language. Ultimately, however, I believe it is the responsibility of individual families to carry on their own unique traditions and customs within the household. Our past is akin to the roots of a tree, firmly planted in the rich terrain of history. Young people will have a better sense of who they are and where they are going when they understand where they come from.

And you are a part of that?

I like to think that I play my part in that process, yes. The Irish have a great history of storytelling, and much of our culture is based

in our poetry, literature, film, and music. The songs I sing each night tell tales of our past - of who we were, what we have endured, and who we have become. I feel both honoured and humbled to be a part of that tradition.

How long do you intend to keep going?

Ha - as long as they will have me! All joking aside, I have no intention of retiring anytime soon; there are still places for me to see, people to meet, and songs to sing. In truth, I've never felt better, healthier or younger, and I am still very passionate about my profession, so there is no reason for me to stop or even slow down. They will have to cart me off the stage at some point, I suppose, but with any luck it won't be for some time.

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I was born in Tipperary town, and I grew up in Clonmel, County Tipperary, where I am still based.

From an early age I loved drawing figures, and then I studied fashion design in college. My foundation year tutor encouraged me with fashion illustration. However, it was not until a friend mentioned that they would buy and frame my drawings that I actually thought about selling them.

The best thing for me is to be calm and organized. I am always a bit nervous when I start a new sketchpad, but then I just get into it, and when I am relaxed the drawings have more energy and my line is better.

I just love starting a new range and seeing how they evolve, as I never really know what I will sketch before I begin to work. It takes time and patience to get to the stage where I am happy with what I am doing, and that in itself gives me a certain confidence and ability to create new work.

The fashion industry is extremely tough, so I admire any designer or company that survives. It is great to see a new crop of Irish designers, such as Simone Rocha, doing so well.

I am currently artist-in-residence at the Maryborough Hotel in Cork. I am working on a series of café-style drawings for the facility, which is a new venture for me.

www.janeryan.com





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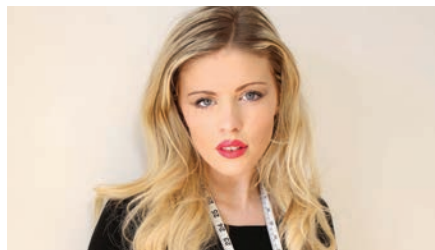
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I was born and raised in The Black Isle in the Highlands of Scotland. My Highland roots and Clan Mackenzie heritage have been the foundations of the inspiration behind my brand and all it stands for.

My great grandmother was a professional seamstress and her father was a tailor. I used to watch her sew the most beautiful sequin patterns onto the plainest of sweaters and transform them into statement pieces - her style



was iconic. As a child, I would always sketch clothes and I decided at ten years old that I would be a fashion designer.

I began to sew at thirteen years old and left the Highlands at seventeen to embark upon my Fashion Design degree. I've been extremely head-strong and focused in what I want to do from a young age, and I have never looked back or even questioned my career path. I was born to do this.

I started my company at the age of 21 and have sold my pieces all over the world - I won Best New Scottish Designer in 2016, which was a great milestone. My collections are authentically unique - I was trained by Scotland's largest

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Scottish Seabird Centre

*Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands
explores the ecology of the Scottish Seabird Centre*

PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

Each of the modern-day Celtic lands has a coastline and a special relationship with the sea that, in many ways, defines them. Over the centuries, the ocean has been an important source of food and a means of travel. It has both separated and united seafaring Celtic peoples, and has been the inspiration for many aspects of Celtic culture. It has shaped our history, and we ignore its importance at our peril.

It was a warm sunny day when I visited the picturesque harbour at the historic heart of North Berwick. Here, on Scotland's east coast by the southern approach to the Firth of Forth, I inhaled the delicious aroma of cooked lobster as it drifted over the small fishing boats bobbing in their sheltered haven. The Lobster Shack was doing brisk business. Its offerings of fresh langoustine, crab, mussels and line-caught mackerel served on the quayside, typified a Celtic nation's relationship with the sea.

A harbour seal surfaced between the boats and it eyed me quizzically before sliding back into the depths. A few miles offshore lay

nology that could permit viewing of the birds from the shore.

Following years of hard work and determination, the Scottish Seabird Centre opened its doors to the public in 2000. The facility is a registered charity and is one of the world leaders in remote wildlife viewing. It started with two cameras on the Bass Rock, and one on the island of Fidra. This was followed with cameras on the Isle of May Nature Reserve, relaying images and sound from both the grey seal colony during the winter pupping season and from the breeding puffins in summer. From these humble beginnings, the Centre grew into a venue that now attracts over 270,000 visitors each year.

Chief Executive Tom Brock is aware of the important role that the centre plays, and also the need for diversification.

"We are a conservation and education charity, and all income is re-invested in this focus. So, for example, we lead and collaborate on conservation projects such as SOS Puffin, and also engage around 4,000 schoolchildren a year through pre-booked educational visits.



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

the craggy outcrop of the Bass Rock that I had visited on numerous occasions to photograph the world's largest colony of northern gannets. Standing by the harbour wall, picking the succulent flesh from my takeaway lobster, the relationship between man and the ecology of this coastal environment was apparent all around me. It was a fitting place to find the Scottish Seabird Centre and learn about why it came to be here, along with its plans to become Scotland's National Marine Centre.

North Berwick was granted Royal Burgh status in 1373. It was a small ferry port in Medieval times, and over the subsequent centuries became an important fishing port. Like many small towns around the country, North Berwick benefited from the arrival of the railway in 1849, and around that time, the creation of an open-air seawater swimming pool that now sits alongside the Scottish Seabird Centre. By the early 1900s, summer visitors flocked to the quaint historic town with its bracing sea air, and for many years North Berwick flourished. Over the decades following WWII, disposable income increased for many, and cheap foreign travel became a reality. The nature of tourism changed, and with it so did the good fortune of North Berwick. By the late 1980s North Berwick was at its lowest ebb.

It was then that a local businessman - community councillor and keen ornithologist Bill Gardner - had an inspired idea. Gardner understood the international importance of the Bass Rock and its gannet colony, and he was also aware of the existence of remote camera tech-

"We understand that seabirds are part of a complex ecosystem, and they should be researched and appreciated within the wider marine environment."

"This is part of our rationale for evolving into the National Marine Centre."

The National Marine Centre is a £5.7M project that will build upon the success of the existing facility, and is destined to become Scotland's leading marine science visitor attraction. Through expansion and alterations to the existing Centre, the new building will provide much needed additional space and unique facilities designed to engage, excite and inspire audiences of all ages. It will be a hub for education, conservation and research-based activities that, according to Brock, will "build environmental citizenship that will help in the vital work of protecting and conserving our marine heritage for future generations."

The National Marine Centre's foundation is the valuable legislation and work of the Scottish Government, that has shown a commitment to the protection of the important, yet often fragile, marine environment around Scotland's shores. The 2015 National Marine Plan promotes both the sustainable development of marine environments and the sustainable use of their resources within the country's inshore and offshore waters. The Scottish Government has also created several



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

Marine Protected Areas in order to safeguard some of the most iconic and endangered habitats and species.

Professor John Baxter is the Head of the Scottish Seabird Centre's Marine Advisory Group, as well as Principal Advisor for Marine at Scottish Natural Heritage. He is only too aware that our seas are often low on the priority list when it comes to the environmental concerns of the general public – believing it is often a case of 'out of sight - out of mind'. But with amazing habitats that support over 5,000 species of invertebrates and plants along with a vast array of birds, fishes and marine mammals, Baxter knows the pressures that are being placed upon these ecosystems.

“The marine environment of Scotland supports a fantastic array of habitats and species.”

“However, it faces a growing number of pressures such as climate change, ocean acidification, pollution, and invasive species, as well as challenges such as the sustainable exploitation of living resources and the potential consequences of offshore renewable energy developments which are as yet not quantified.”



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

Baxter is passionate about the sea and the incredible variety of life that it supports, but he also understands the need to find the right balance between man and the sea.

“There is increasing pressure on the marine environment due to reliance on seas for food, transport and energy.”

Education lies at the heart of the National Marine Centre project. The current arrangements with schools will be expanded to create an outreach program to engage with institutions all across Scotland. The focus of the Centre's current exhibitions will diversify to interpret, explore and share more widely the marine environment and marine wildlife - above and below the waves - with interactive exhibits.

Partnerships are planned with area organizations, including universities, to share aspects of local, national and international research.

To date there has been development funding of £290,000 awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and a further £3.5M is ring-fenced for the cost of the building works. There has also been support from East Lothian Council. The full project team, including architects, has now been appointed, and the final challenge is to raise the remaining £2M that will bring the plans to life.

I breathed the sea air by the swimming pool that had once made North Berwick a special place for visitors, and I looked up at the Scottish Seabird Centre and out to the Bass Rock with its white-encrusted cap comprised of thousands upon thousands of birds. I could only see a fraction of the incredible marine environment encompassed by the blue sea in front of me. Through the vision of Bill Gardner, and the many that have made his dream a reality over the subsequent years, it seems that North Berwick may once again become a place to take a very special dip into Scotland's seas.

Donations to the National Marine Centre project can be made via the facility's website;

www.seabird.org
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Trans-Celtic

As more individuals embrace their true selves, the Celtic nations undergo a transition in identity. Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns explains.



Sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) can be dated back to the early 20th century, with gender transitioning reaching even further into the past. Denmark native Lili Elbe - the inspiration for David Ebershoff's international bestselling novel, and subsequent film, *The Danish Girl* - was the first SRS recipient on record, undergoing the procedure in 1930.

However, and despite all of the recent media attention, the term "transgender" still remains a mystery to most.

"The majority of people haven't encountered a transgender person," explains Irish social worker, and creative nonfiction writer, Declan Henry. "This will change in the years to come, as more and more people are coming out as Trans than ever before - and some are even now coming out early in their teenage years."

Henry, who was born in the small village of Ballymote, County Sligo, spent two years researching and writing his recent book, *Trans Voices: Becoming Who You Are*. His website describes the work as "a sensitive exploration of life for transgender people in today's world."

"Up until two years ago, I'd never met a transgender person - or certainly not knowingly so," admits the author. "I wanted to speak with people who were transgender and hear their stories. I wanted to demystify the wrongful image that the media has portrayed of some people having 'sex change' operations on a whim - and to clear up several other misconceptions that society have about Trans people."

Attitudes toward the transgender community - who make up the T in LGBT - have become universally polarized.

And while efforts have been made to create a safer world for Trans individuals over the last decade, there is still ample work to be done. Just this year, President Trump revoked the Obama transgender bathroom guidelines - a system in public schools that allows transitioning teens to use the bathroom of their choice.

In 2004, the U.K. passed the Gender Recognition Act, allowing transitioning men and women to legally identify with their preferred gender after receiving the opinion of two medical professionals. Ireland passed similar legislation in 2015.

"The Gender Recognition Act allows Trans people to gain legal recognition without seeing a doctor or needing medical treatment," explains Henry. "Although the Act was seen as a positive step forward for transgender rights in Ireland, it faced criticism for having exclusions within the Trans community itself. At the moment, the Act fully excludes Trans people under 16, and disallows people who are non-binary (i.e. those who may not want an 'M' or 'F' on their birth certificate) to be legally recognized. It will be reviewed in September."

David Beattie, better known as Layla Talks via his social media channels, is an Irish journalist and author who is currently undergoing a gender transition.

"The beginning was quite intimidating," explains the Killiney-born writer. "There's an awful lot to do and unfortunately, in Ireland, there's not that much information available on how to go about transitioning. The hardest part has been the indignity of the process in Ireland; I had to be diagnosed twice, and I have had to go through all sorts of obstacles in order to transition. I really struggle with the idea that I'm not trusted to make my own decisions."

Though just 19 years of age, Beattie has already published two books, cultivated a healthy following through social media, and





created his own podcast, Tangerine Dreams. In his books, titled *Who Cares* and *Just Sayin*, Beattie covers a range of subjects, including accounts of his own transition.

"I think it's varied", says Beattie, describing the attitude in Ireland toward Trans people. "Most people have a 'live and let live' approach, but they also don't really want to hear about your transition. Others are very encouraging, recognizing that there's a huge need for support in the community. Then there are some who take a nastier approach. Luckily, I don't seem to encounter many of them in Dublin."

He adds that the best way to change attitudes is through education.

"People need to experience a loved one going through this. Exposure also helps; people telling their stories in the media, in art, and in conversations will get the public thinking about transgender issues.

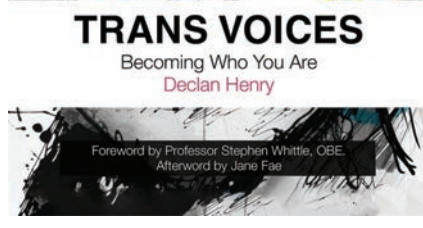
"For me, the best part has been slowly becoming more comfortable in my own skin, and feeling better about myself every day."

Attitudes toward the transgender community of Ireland are similar to those in the neighbouring U.K., with a mix of praise and criticism.

In January, Sandra MacDougall, an ex-Royal Scots soldier who recently underwent SRS, told the *Daily Record* that she regretted ever having the procedure - the heckling and name-calling she endured in its wake was, to her, more painful than living in "the wrong body."

In North Wales, the BBC reported that a transgender employee of Bodnant Welsh Foods was allegedly referred to as "it" by her manager - who was also said to be considering terminating her employment.

Still, both Ireland and the U.K. are considered to be some of the safest places in the world for Trans people to reside.



"Up until a few decades ago, life here was firmly under the rule of the Catholic Church, and the rights of LGBT people were practically zero," notes Declan Henry. "Thankfully, the opposite is true now. It is a clear demonstration that the Irish value and accept people from all walks of life - a much-welcomed liberation from the shackles of the past, which kept the LGBT community in Ireland silent and disempowered."

Governments in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the U.K. have been progressive in regard to Trans rights, and there are more resources and organizations available to Trans men



and women than in years past. In Scotland, the Scottish Transgender Alliance aims to educate both the public and those going through transition. In Wales and the rest of the U.K., the Beaumont Society offers support for Trans people and their families. In Ireland, the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) has worked tirelessly to promote and preserve the rights of Trans individuals.

"I think the role of TENI, and organizations like us, is to stand up and give a voice to our community," says Torm Glavin, the group's Administrative Officer. "It's important that Trans people have representatives who can speak for them in many different arenas. We hope to continue to strive and help Ireland's Trans community fulfill their fullest potential."

While all agree that it is essential to keep the political wheels moving forward on Trans-related issues, the emphasis must remain on those who are in transition, and those who are struggling with their own gender identity.

Trans individuals must be reminded that, at the end of the day, they are in control of their own lives and their choices, and that - ultimately - they must do what is best for them.

"Listen to yourself," advises Beattie. "As much as it is vital to have support, this is a journey that must be taken on one's own. Take the time to figure out your unique preferences and identity, and don't let anyone persuade you away from your own truth. People's opinions and observations about your life are irrelevant. Never do something because you think it's what you 'should do.' Stand up against norms and challenge everyday rhetoric if you need to."



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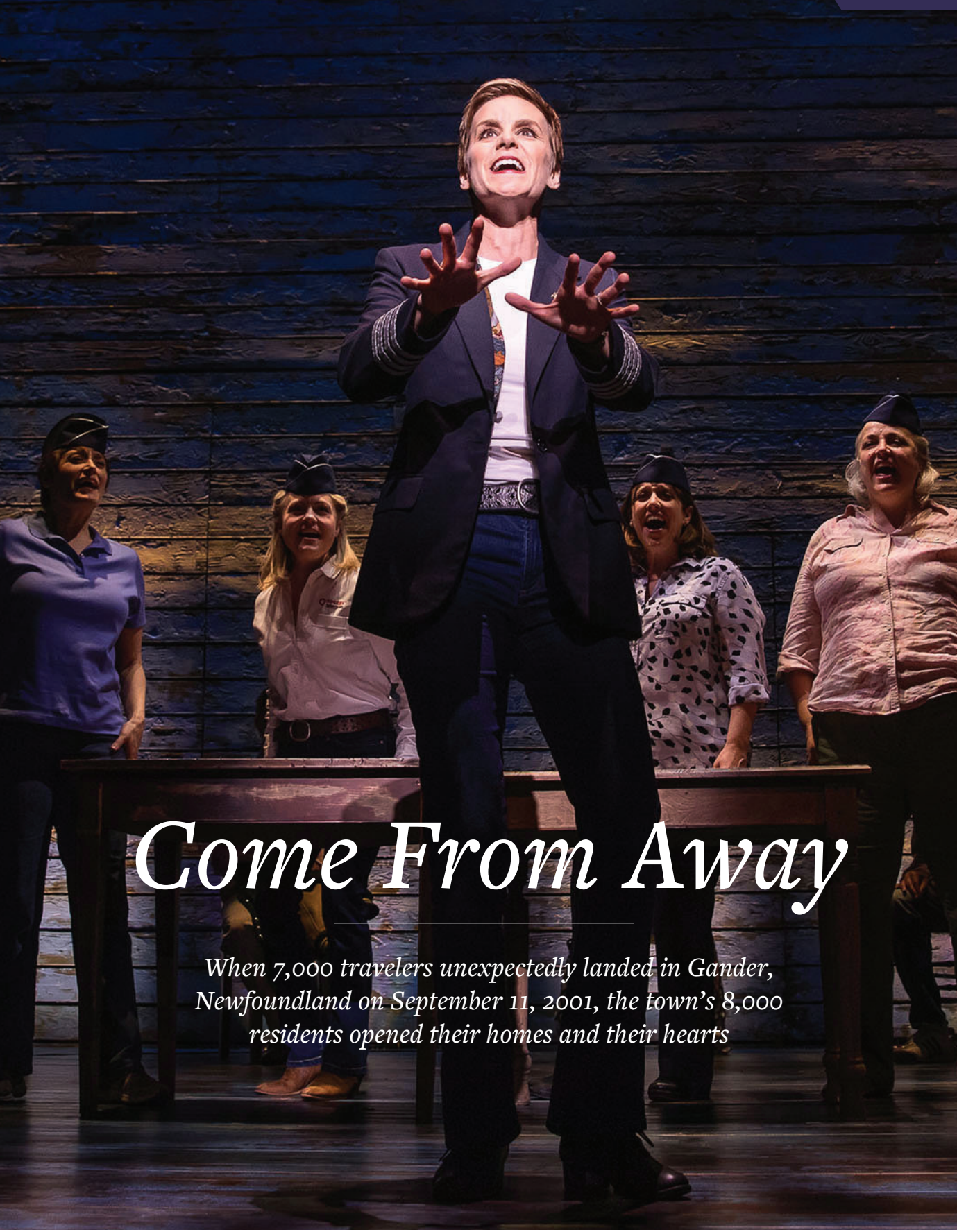
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Come From Away

When 7,000 travelers unexpectedly landed in Gander, Newfoundland on September 11, 2001, the town's 8,000 residents opened their homes and their hearts



David Hein & Irene Sankoff

There is a telling moment towards the finale of *Come From Away* - a moment so brief that it is easy to miss amidst the on-stage swirl of music and mayhem.

"Wanna' hear a good Newfie joke?" asks Gander's jovial mayor to no one in particular.

"Knock-Knock," he says aloud, before quickly delivering the punch-line, "Come on in, the door's open..."

Though fast and fleeting, that single moment speaks to the warmth and welcome extended to confused and frightened travelers whose 38 planes were diverted to the northern Newfoundland community on the day of the World Trade Center attacks.

There are so many memorable moments in the smash Broadway musical, in fact, that show-goers are hard-pressed to pick out a particular favourite after the 90-minute performance.

"I loved the music," says Greta Warren of Manhattan. "The songs and the fiddles and guitars were all so upbeat and uplifting. I just wanted to invite them all over to our place afterwards for a party."

"The accent and the dialect," notes Nick Ricci of Staten Island. "And all the quirky little things about Newfoundland culture - the bit about having to kiss the cod was hilarious."

Others were touched by the show's message of hope.

"What got me was that these were all true stories," shares Alan Douglas of Pennsylvania, who attended the performance with his wife and two grandchildren. "This community, which no-one had ever heard of, just dropped everything to help people they had never met."

"It was very, very heartwarming," adds his wife Lorraine. "Not only to see people come together during a time of tragedy, but to do so

without any sense of self-interest. If only the rest of the world were like that..."

For *Come From Away* co-creators David Hein and Irene Sankoff, that kind of audience approval means more to them than anything.

"That first week we opened on Broadway was a little nerve wracking to say the least," admits Sankoff over the phone from the couple's home in Toronto.

"Aside from dealing with all of the last-minute logistical and technical issues, and tweaking the timing of lines, the musical cues, and so forth, we were playing to some of the most seasoned and sophisticated theatre-goers in the world. We had no idea how it was going to be received by audiences - as with all things on Broadway, they would make or break the run."

The play was an instant triumph, aided by the attendance and accolades of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Ivanka Trump, as well as numerous other political dignitaries.

"I was a little more confident," says Hein, who grew up on the Canadian Prairies.

"I believed we had something special that would hit home with people, but hearing the buzz on the street after those first shows confirmed what I knew in my heart."

Critics and industry types also loved the production; to date, *Come From Away* has picked up a plentitude of prominent prizes, including a Tony Award in June for Best Direction Of A Musical.

Sankoff, a native Montrealer, says the honours have been overwhelming.

"To be honest, when we first came up with the idea for the play, we would have been happy just to have had it run the high-school and community center circuit."

The road to success was paved with love.

Hein and Sankoff first met at York University in Toronto in the early 1990s. Moving to New York City in 1999 to pursue careers in music and theatre respectively, they married in 2001, shortly after 9/11. Later relocating back to Toronto, the couple collaborated on *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding*, which first presented at the Toronto Fringe Festival, before graduating to the 700-seat Panasonic Theatre.

"The epiphany for us with that show was that it worked because it was based upon a true story," shares Sankoff, explaining how Hein's mother had come out of the closet and remarried later in life. "Audiences connected with it because it was real."

When it was suggested that the duo consider applying their new-found musical formula to Newfoundland's role in the 9/11 attacks, the pair flew to Gander for the event's 10th anniversary. There, they met and interviewed hundreds of locals and "come from aways" who had gathered to commemorate and celebrate a decade of friendships.

"It was very emotional," recalls Hein. "Though so much had changed over those ten years, the bonds between these people had been fused tight by the intensity of that initial experience. There certainly was no shortage of stories to tell."

The twosome honed in on several key narratives, including a gay male couple's concern with small-town prejudice, an Egyptian Muslim man facing fear and backlash, a budding love affair between a British gentleman and a woman from Texas, an urban black man's shock at wandering through friendly white neighbourhoods, and two mothers of firefighters - one of whom is desperately trying to contact her son who is on site at Ground Zero.

"We were really moved by these people's stories," says Sankoff, "so we knew that audiences would be as well."

"There were so many mixed feelings - confusion, hope, joy, sorrow, anger - an entire spectrum of human emotions and experience crammed into just a few days."

Despite its remote location, Gander - whose heyday was in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, following the construction of an international airport to service overseas flights - proved to be an ideal setting.

"Newfoundlanders are resourceful and resilient," notes Hein. "And they are truly a unique and amazing people; the way they speak is incredibly distinct, as are their customs and traditions. In a lot of cases, the humour was already built right in to what we were trying to do. There was no real need for us to add any flavour, colour or character - it was all there."

By the same standards, the music came easily.

"I have always been a huge fan of traditional Celtic and Irish music," continues Hein. "I grew up on the sounds of Great Big Sea, Shanneyganock, and a whole bunch of other great bands and artists from Newfoundland, so putting the songs together for this show - especially the jigs and reels - was a lot of fun."

Come From Away would come together over five years, with the pair researching, writing, and refining the production. After intensive work-shopping in both Canada and the USA, a bidding war from producers ensued, leading to successful runs in San Diego, Seattle, Washington, Toronto, and now, *The Big Apple*.

"I guess it's all downhill from here," laughs Hein.

All kidding aside, the couple is thrilled to continue sharing Newfoundland with the world.

"Knowing that the story has resonated with audiences, and that we have touched people in some way, is truly its own reward," says Sankoff. "If they can leave the theatre holding onto a memory, or perhaps a moment - or even a series of moments - then we have done our job, and maybe the world will be a better place for it."

For Hein, the return is closer to home.

"The reward for me has been sharing these incredible moments, each and every day, with my beautiful wife."

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The Utopia of Iberia

It is a fisherman's dream; hundreds of rivers hosting thousands of fish. Celtic Life International contributor Graham Mole reflects on his time in a Spanish paradise



Given the chance to create Utopia, I would start, like any game fisherman, by making the perfect river for trout and salmon.

Cool, clear water would gush from snow-capped mountains, tumble in torrents through rocky gorges, then slide serenely through wild flower meadows. It would be stuffed with fish hungry for my flies.

Optional extras would include a perfect climate, fabulous food and fine wine, and a comfortable fishing pub with a knowledgeable and helpful landlord.

Then I would wake up, cursing that it could not possibly be true. But it is a reality. I know, because I have been there; the Celtic corner of northwest Spain - glorious Galicia, known as The Land of a Thousand Rivers, and Asturias, a veritable fishing Valhalla.

But even Paradise is not bereft of problems; the fishing in Spain is governed by a myriad of rules. Just obtaining a proper permit can be a nightmare: first, you must visit a government office to get the licence, before going to a bank to pay for it, then returning to the first office to finish the procedure. To date, I have done it four times.

Thankfully, there are now a number of guide services - including the wonderfully titled Gourmet Fly - which take care of these little inconveniences, along with booking hotels, suggesting meals, and providing the right fishing tackle.

These services are particularly useful for a first trip, as first glances of government literature can be confusing. One year, English pamphlets read "Trout from the first Sunday in March to the 15th of August." The locally-issued Spanish leaflet countered with "No trout fishing until May 11." The truth was that you could fish the river Narcea for trout from April onwards, providing it was by spinning a dead minnow.

The Narcea is a prime salmon river, and the ban on fly fishing until May protects the just-hatched salmon.

It is a legacy of Franco, a passionate salmon angler himself, that entire rivers can be rested so as to stay pristine and host larger fish. Angling is restricted on some river sections known as "cotos" - sign-posted as "Coto de Pesca" - to ensure they are not overfished. Only three anglers a day are allowed, allocated by a local "sorteo," or lottery.

The crucial question for a visiting sportsman is how to fish. The best answer is to adopt local methods.

Area residents use artificial flies, but unlike our single dry fly, they attach five to a plastic sphere called a "boya" or "buldo" - from the French "bulle d'eau," meaning "water bubble."

Like Galicia, rivers in the neighbouring province of Asturias are idyllic, the stuff of dreams.

In the river Sella, there are game fish; brown trout, sea trout and salmon. Brown trout populate the rivers Puron, Bedon and Pilo-na, while the stunning Deva river hosts mostly sea trout and salmon.

There is a good spring run of salmon, sparkingly clean 55 centimetre fish that average 12lbs. Trout are smaller at 25 centimetres on average, while their sea-faring cousins are usually closer to 35 centimetres.

On one of my first trips there I stayed at La Fuente Inn at Cornellana, near Oviedo. The fishing was superb and incredibly affordable. Nobody ever did as well as the hotel's landlady, however, who would appear before each breakfast with a freshly-caught basketful of trout.

She never did divulge her angling secrets, nor did she tell me about a quaint local - and potentially lethal - custom. I had waded thigh-deep into the middle of a nearby river when, suddenly, a handful of locals began screaming frantically "Abre Embalse!!!" Apparently, a huge dam had been opened upstream and the water was rising fast. I waddled in my waders as quickly as I could back to shore.



In nearby Llanes, owner of the Montemar hotel Jose Alberto Concha took me to fish a river high up in the Picos de Europa Mountains. After a white-knuckle drive - we were often just inches from dropping hundreds of feet down the cliff side - we arrived in Campo de Caso, where the river Nalon winds its way through gorges and, in one case, actually weaves through the inside of a mountain.

Southwest from there, the place to go is up the 100-odd hairpin turns to the river Najerilla. At first, white water crashes down the crags, then glides through the rocks, surging through the limestone walls of a gorge, urgently seeking the plain. Thirty kilometres downstream it reaches the Rioja wine capital, Logrono.

It was in Logrono that I met the river's saviour, 70-year-old Theodore Sabras, who - after 25 years of dogged determination and diplomacy - had saved the waterway so it could be enjoyed by avid fishermen from around the world.

"I wanted to create a brotherhood of fishermen, people who think as I do. Those who care for rivers will always be welcome here."

For centuries the valley's trout had been fished ruthlessly by the locals. The fish were a lifeline, a larder to be abused. When hotels in Logrono demanded more trout for a growing number of hungry tourists, poaching became a way of life. Sabras foresaw the future, disgusted by the vision. "I had to repay nature for the favours she has showered on us," he explained. "She gave us such beauty. We could not just throw it away."

So, using his influence as president of the local fishing society, the organization was awarded a ten-year contract to manage just over 13 miles of river in the valley on behalf of the State.

Today, the river is flourishing, though the fishing is, admittedly, quite challenging; early activity means you need to be out on the water by 7 a.m., before the sun rises into the valley. Following a brief flurry of flies that gets the fish feeding around lunchtime, an afternoon siesta after a glass or three of Rioja is recommended. There is little point in trying your luck again until early evening, when you can cast your lines until dark. By then, you will have worked up a proper appetite for a four

or five course dinner around 10.30 p.m.

Not that much further on is the river Irati, which flows down from the Pyrenees to Pamplona, and was a favourite haunt of Ernest Hemingway. The nearby Cafe Iruna still serves up the great American writer's favourite dish, trout bleu.

Hemingway fished the river with a worm, but locals employ a metal spinner. Using an artificial fly on the end of my line, I found it a huge challenge, as the river is rapid and the fish even quicker.

Back in Asturias and Galicia, though the main season finishes at the end of August, fishing is allowed through September so long as the catch is not taken home. This is called "sin muerte" or "without death." This time of year is ideal for tourists and travellers, as the rivers are barely used at all by locals. Unfortunately, poachers still work the waters through the autumn.

My September trip proved to be a reconnaissance mission of sorts, and I am already planning a late-spring or early-summer trip for this year. Spain, especially the northwest Celtic corner of Galicia and Asturias, is an angler's paradise.



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It started in Halifax, Nova Scotia, quickly branching out across four Atlantic Canadian provinces. Within a short while, it wove its way through Quebec and Ontario, en route to Alberta and British Columbia. Then, like all good Canadian snowbirds, it trekked south along the eastern seaboard through Maryland, the Virginias, the Carolinas and Florida, before heading west to Texas and California, north to the state of Washington, and back east via Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Massachusetts.

In recent years, it has made its way to more exotic locales, including Australia, New Zealand, Cuba, Brazil, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Israel and South Africa.

And, of course, it has found its way home to the motherlands of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Brittany and Galicia.

Today, it connects the Celtic dots all around the world, reconnecting people with their history and heritage, and creating a vision for the future of a global community.

As Celtic Life International celebrates its 30th anniversary, founder and publisher Angus M. (Marcie) Macquarrie reflects on his publication's rich and rewarding journey.

"Interest in Celtic culture has always been what has driven us to do what we do," he says. "It is an innate curiosity about what we share, and who we share it with."

"As with others before us, we are merely doing our part to preserve it and pass it down to future generations."

Like the Macquarrie family themselves, the magazine found its footing with honest, hardworking and humble roots.

Celtic Life International first published in 1987 as a simple newsletter - a small vehicle of communication for Nova Scotia's International Gathering of the Clans.

"I had some experience publishing a weekly community newspaper (Scotia Sun of Port Hawkesbury, NS)," explains Macquarrie, "and I was invited to generate some extra publicity for the event. The newsletter we put out at that time proved so popular that when the gathering was over the interest remained and we were encouraged to continue doing it."

He recalls St. FX (university, Antigonish, NS) sociology professor Dan MacInnes insisting that the newsletter, and Celtic culture, belonged on a bigger stage, perhaps even serving an international market.

"I was piqued by what he said, but I knew all too well the costly limitations of print and distribution. His words, impossible though they seemed at the time, stayed with me."

With a small team of support, and limited funding, Macquarrie nonetheless committed to putting out a quarterly publication. And though he no longer recollects who bought the first subscription, "I remember it was \$20 cash that somebody handed to me in a restaurant."

The seeds of Celtic Life International were sown years earlier during Macquarrie's boyhood in northern Nova Scotia, where hardwood stands give way to farm fields that roll down to the sea. The Arisaig area was settled by families from the western highlands and islands of Scotland between 1791 and the early 1800s. Most of these Highlanders had family on the losing side at the historic Battle of Culloden.

"The Macquarries came from the Isle of Eigg, and the Gillis clan - on my mother's side - arrived from Morar. My bloodline also contains MacLeods, MacLeans, Chisholms, MacDonnells, MacDonalds and Robertsons."

Born into a Gaelic-speaking household where traditions were held high, he savoured the stories recounted by older generations, and took piping lessons as a youngster.

"My Macquarrie grandfather, who was born in 1862, travelled to Scotland for a year in 1889. From his correspondences, it was evident that he proudly considered himself a supporter of the Jacobite cause."



From an early age I was exposed to storytelling, piping, fiddle music and step dancing.

"I am defined by the blood that runs through my veins."

That heritage, notes Celtic Life International's Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare, makes Macquarrie a natural seanchai.

"Story-telling and Celtic culture are synonymous with one another and Marcie is fascinated with stories of human beings, especially those of Celtic heritage."

Macquarrie and his partner in Celtic Life and family life, Cabrini MacIsaac Macquarrie, were raised within 20 minutes of each other. She shares his west coast Scottish roots on her father's side, and her mother was Newfoundland Irish.

"We met at a dance at the 4 Valleys Fire Hall, not far from where we each grew up," she remembers with a smile. "We both liked the old-time music, and there was a band playing there that night."

"Cabrini is my beautiful bride," beams Marcie. "And her involvement with the magazine has been essential from the get-go. It would not have survived without her input, skills, and endless support."

Before long, as part of a Nova Scotia tourism delegation, Macquarrie carried copies of his fledgling magazine - now called The Clansman - on a trade mission to Baltimore.

"I think it was somebody in the department of tourism who'd actually named it The Clansman, and we quickly realized that the title of the publication wasn't going to go over well in the deep American south, so we changed it to Celtic Heritage - a more fitting name, as the content had evolved to a more inclusive cultural publication.

"In the beginning, I was thinking only in terms of Scottish heritage. But slowly, over

time, we began to wake up to the rest of the Celtic world."

The refocus expanded the publication's audience from Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada, to eastern Ontario and the eastern United States.

Alison Macquarrie-Tindle, one of the Macquarries' four grown children, came of age with the magazine, watching it evolve from a small publication to a global voice.

"Both my parents have worked extremely hard to grow the business and they never gave up," she says. "They always found interesting topics, new music and books to review, fresh ways to write innovative features...and of course, Mom's cookbook (Cabrini's Celtic Kitchen) has been fun for all of us."

The publication's evolution was aided via a series of well-timed, well-placed pla-teaus.

"Early on, the technology was a nightmare," recalls Macquarrie, "although at the time we didn't realize it. Our circulation numbers were low, and it was costly to promote to new subscribers. As a result it took a lot longer to reach new people."

Within just a few short years, however, advances in technology made it simpler, and more affordable, to reach a wider audience.

"With increasing computer capacity, we were able to develop a database of subscribers much more efficiently. At that point we could reach more people at less cost, and new methods of production and printing made publishing easier."

By the mid-1990s, the magazine had re-branded as "Celtic Life" under then-editor Alexa Thompson, emphasizing lifestyle and Celtic culture as a "living, breathing" entity.

"Alexa did an excellent job keeping us relevant for a long time," continues Macquarrie. "Her focus on contemporary Celtic culture helped us to define, and to some degree refine, what it means to be Celtic today."

Clare says that was a turning point for the publication.

"Alexa recognized that there were people of Celtic heritage all over the world. She jumped on board the globalization train, and our numbers grew quite quickly."

By the time Clare took the reins in 2012, immediately renaming the magazine Celtic Life International to better reflect its ever-expanding readership, the publication was ready to reach even further heights.

"I had worked in print journalism for a long time," shares the native Montrealer, who is of Irish heritage. "And while I saw, first-hand, the toll that the internet was taking on newspapers and magazines, I also saw the tremendous online opportunities for Celtic Life."





Organizing committee for Nova Scotia's International Gathering of the Clans
(Marcie top row, 3rd from right)

"Stephen is a very smart, experienced and ethical journalist," says Macquarrie. "He is incredibly tech savvy and capable, and he understands the power of digital platforms to grow our reach to an almost limitless audience."

Today, between the bi-monthly print and digital editions, a recently revamped website, and strong social media channels, Celtic Life International reaches almost 2.5 million readers in 71 countries, making it the largest community of its kind in the world.

"We have also partnered with the biggest Celtic-themed events in the world," continues Clare, "including the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, NYC Tartan Week, Festival Interceltique de Lorient, Celtic Colours International Festival, The Pipes of Christmas, and countless Highland Games."

While he acknowledges the magazine's dramatic rise, Clare is quick to reiterate that it remains a family-run endeavor.

"It started as a grassroots family publication and, despite the massive growth, has maintained those family roots and values."



With former
First Minister of
Scotland Jack McConnell

"I mean, this is literally an actual family; a mom and dad and four kids, who - together with a few employees - have reached out to all four corners of the planet."

For the Macquarries, those Celtic customs are shared in blood as well as ink; music has been an ever-present soundtrack in the family home; son Hector has won local and international piping competitions, and Alison, along with her younger sibling Sheena, plays the piano, as does the youngest daughter, Meaghan, who has recently taken up the fiddle.

In addition, Alison was a Highland dancer.

"I danced for years, beginning as a small child and continuing into my twenties - Highland dance, step dance and Irish dance. Mom and Dad always encouraged my development, and never hesitated to take me to competitions and summer camps at the Gaelic College to further my abilities.

"Both my parents are proud of their heritage, family, and Celtic culture," she continues "They taught us the importance of knowing who we are, and where we come from. The ability to connect with our past has been important to them, and it is a beautiful value they taught all of their children."



With second
cousin Jack White

By turns, as Marcie and Cabrini have passed along Celtic customs to their own children, Celtic Life International is an extension of their commitment to the global Celtic family.

"The passion Marcie has for it has kept it going when others, God knows there must have been many, couldn't make a go of things," says Halifax businessman Denis Ryan, who grew up in Tipperary, Ireland. "He's always had a fierce determination to find a way, to get it done. Look at it today, every issue getting better and better, always informative, and the presentation is first class."

Dr. Breesha Maddrell, director of Culture Vanin on the Isle of Man, suggests the bi-monthly is a "bright and modern way" of connecting Celts from around the world.

"Being one of the smaller Celtic countries, we - maybe more than anyone, perhaps - know the importance of sharing ideas, of belonging to a continuum - a seamless cloth - whether for the language, music and dance or culture, generally."

Alan Bain, president of the American Scottish Foundation, has been instrumental in establishing Tartan Week in NYC and co-chairs the annual Scottish North American Leadership Conference.

"I always find the magazine of great interest, and it is through sharing information that we strengthen our various organizations. Teaming up with other Celtic peoples creates additional opportunities for all of us."

Bob Currie, president of Clan Currie worldwide and founder of both The Pipes of Christmas and Tartan Day on Ellis Island, looks to the publication for inspiration.

"I've been with Celtic Life International since it was Celtic Heritage, printed on dingy newsprint. I love its new energy and social media presence. It has been a great teacher



With Victor Spence
- founder of the World Peace Tartan



With Welsh actor Ioan Gruffudd

in how to use social media to promote the culture. Keeping in touch can be as simple as a poignant photo or a bagpipe joke."

Tartan Day founder Jean MacKaracher Watson of Halifax, NS, a warrior for Celtic culture, says that Celtic Life International's evolution has been nothing short of triumphant.

"There were years when promoting our culture took very hard work, so it is encouraging to see how far we have come. I still love the local stories, but isn't it a wonderful thing that a little magazine from Nova Scotia has become so well known and read in places like Toronto, the U.S., and in Scotland, itself?"

Catherine McArthur, whose Scottish family history moves back and forth across the Quebec-Ontario border, put her daughters into highland dancing at a young age. Today she has a daughter who plays the pipes, a grandson who pipes, and another grandson who is a fiddler. She also purchases five subscriptions each year to Celtic Life International.

"I received it first as a gift, and after reading a few editions I started giving it as a gift. I read most everything, but I certainly enjoy the recipes."

Many transplanted Celts, including history buff Andy Thomson of Antigonish, NS - who recently had his DNA analyzed to see if there was anything he did not yet know about his Scottish heritage - turn to the magazine to stay in touch with their roots.

"I grew up in Glasgow and came to Canada in 1965. Growing up, I think we Scots felt a connection to our homelands, as many of us had a grandparent or two come from there, but we didn't have any sense of Celts around the world. I find it quite amazing to read stories of Celts in such far-flung places."

Long-time reader, Ron "D.D." McDonald - also of Antigonish - sees Celtic Life International as a window to the world.

"You almost believe that you can make your way to Ireland right through the pages themselves," he

says, referring to a recent cover story. "Every issue is a journey to places I may not have been, or may not even have thought to go."

Clare loves the analogy.

"I like to think that we take you somewhere with each issue...and not necessarily with any particular destination in mind."

"If anything, the journey is the destination - with a beginning, middle, and an end...similar, perhaps, to a fine meal with an entrée, a main course, and a delicious dessert. When done, we want our readers to feel fulfilled, and that their lives have been enriched."

To that end, he says, it is all about the quality of content.

"In our 'surf and scan' world of macro and micro media, the Celtic life International experience - both in print and online - has to be entertaining, educational, and, perhaps most of all, engaging.

"Preserving and promoting cultural identity, especially to the younger generations, is a huge responsibility," he adds. "It's not enough for us to be successful; we must continue to be significant to our readers and to our community."

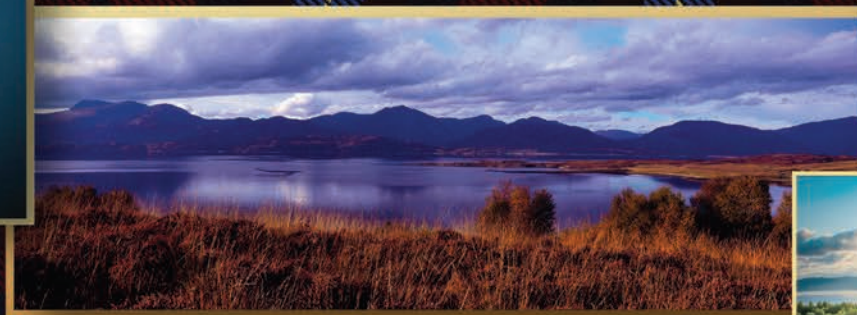
Macquarrie agrees.

"As it has been since we put out that little newsletter 30 years ago, and as it remains to this very day, our readers are the most important part of Celtic Life International. They are the reason that we do what we do, and they are why we are looking forward to doing it for another 30 years."



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Celtic Fusion

As Celtic Life International Senior Writer
Chris Muise explains, Celtic music today might not
be what we think it is...



How great is it when you are cycling through radio stations, maybe on a quiet drive through the countryside of wherever you happen to be, and the folk masterpiece *We Rise Again* – performed by Cape Breton supergroup The Rankins – roars out over the airwaves? It makes you feel almost immortal in a sense, connecting you with generations of people who came before.

One of the great Celtic power ballads known the world over, the band's version of *We Rise Again* introduced Celtic music to whole new audiences.

But just how Celtic is it?

That's not to cast any doubts on the Rankin family, or the authenticity of their work – obviously, their music can be considered Celtic by today's standards. But ask a Scot alive during the Highland clearances? You might have gotten a different answer.



Heather Rankin

"It is going to be different from what you'd hear in Scotland today, or what you would have heard in Scotland 200 years ago," says Heather Rankin, who first performed the song with her family in 1993. "It has evolved over the last couple hundred years here. Now, it is all relative to where you are, and who you are talking about."

This brings us to the question; what is Celtic music? Is it the same everywhere? What has it been, and what has it become?

Today, it is almost impossible to define Celtic music as one single thing. Instead, Celtic Life International broached the topic with a number of performers, musicians and music experts to get their perspectives on an ever-evolving genre.

"I can understand why people would have difficulty describing it," says Ellen MacIsaac, a Celtic music professor at both Ottawa University and Carleton University in Ontario.

One of the first things MacIsaac asks of her students at the start of each school year is to try and define Celtic. The answer is never obvious.

“One of my favourite tricks is to play them pieces from Wales and Brittany, and then ask them if they think it sounds Celtic? Often, the answer is no. Without seeing the visual context of anything Celtic, people don’t necessarily know that they are listening to a Celtic piece of music.”

MacIsaac adds that it can be difficult to even identify what sounds, melodies, and themes make up the DNA of Celtic music, as the Diaspora has produced so many disparate styles over the centuries. Often, it comes down to context.

“We are accustomed to hearing certain kinds of music and calling that Celtic. What makes something Celtic? Well, part of it is the expectations of the people that are listening.”

“In North America, we have our own particular take on things because we look back on our ancestry with very rose-tinted glasses - a very romantic notion of Celtic identity - that doesn’t necessarily have much to do with life on the ground in a Celtic country.”

In North America, the sounds of fiddles, pipes and drums belting out classic folk tunes at pubs and festivals is considered traditional “Celtic.” In an actual Celtic nation like Ireland, that stuff is outdated, equivalent to The Charleston or The Jitterbug.

“For them, the traditional stuff is old hat,” says MacIsaac. “I met a lot of people in Ireland who would swear up, down, and sideways that Celtic Woman doesn’t qualify as ‘Celtic.’”

So does that mean “traditional” Celtic music isn’t traditional? No - it just means that it is not traditional to everyone.



Dawn Beaton

“It depends where you are from,” says Dawn Beaton, the artistic director of the Celtic Colours International Festival in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Beaton and her sister Margie grew up playing traditional Gaelic tunes on the fiddle, but Beaton recognizes that what she calls traditional is fairly new in the grand scheme of Celtic music.

“We pull some of our repertoire from the more immediate past,” she explains, “Cape Breton-composed tunes from the last 80 years or so.”

Those eight decades of music are informed by the culture that came before it, of course, but older tunes were largely - almost exclusively, even - passed down by oral tradition. From one generation to another, small changes were inevitable. With time, and with vast migration patterns, those changes snowballed.

“For some of the really old, old tunes, who really knows where they have come from?” muses Beaton. “We might sometimes think we’re playing a Scottish tune, when really it is Irish in origin. So much of that music went back and forth between those two countries before coming over here.”

It’s hard to keep it all straight - even in the same region. Cape Breton’s Celtic Colours International Festival showcases talent from across Atlantic Canada each autumn, and Beaton says that a sensitive ear can distinguish differences in style and form, even from community-to-community.

“To the untrained ear, it probably sounds quite similar. But there is a very interesting difference between Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and most of Nova Scotia - even within Nova Scotia, and even within Cape Breton!”

Centuries of evolution isn’t the only factor affecting Celtic music, however; today’s players want to put their own stamp on the sound.

“The sheet music that you get in a music book is just a skeleton, really,” continues Beaton. “You might start with that, but eventually you will put your own inflection on it.”



Afro Celt Sound System

“How could there not be change over time? There is naturally going to be different influences on Celtic music and how it is performed.”

That said, Beaton notes that much of the music still being played on Cape Breton Island is largely the same as when the Scottish Gaels first settled the region hundreds of years ago, and that she and many others strive to keep it that way.

“We come from very humble roots, and it’s not only ours to take off in another direction.”

There are others, however, who aim to push the genre to new places.

“Call it Celtic fusion, cross-Celtic, or perhaps pan-Celtic,” says Celtic Life International’s Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare, a long-time musician, music critic and historian.

“Like most other sonic styles, Celtic music has pollinated across musical and geographic boundaries, with all sorts of great new sub-genres popping up, including Celtic Death Metal, Celt-Rock, Celtic Jazz, Celtic Rap, and more. It’s quite exciting to witness the evolution.”

Clare counts Calan, Eluveitie, Afro Celt Sound System, Shreem, Mägo de Oz, and the Waterboys among his favourite contemporary Celtic artists, but notes a special affinity for Celt-Punk.

“The Pogues, the Dropkick Murphys, the Mahones - there is something about the melange of traditional melodies and hardcore aggression that gets the blood going.”

He’s not alone in that regard.

“We are a punk band with Celtic overtones,” says Tobin Bawinkel of Chicago’s Flatfoot 56.

“My parents were heavily into bluegrass and folk music, and we played all the time as a family. I picked up the guitar when I was 12, and I fell in love with punk soon after. Flatfoot 56 started as a hardcore band, but came under the Celtic influence after we discovered the Clancy Brothers, the Chieftains and the Pogues.”

Finny McConnell can relate.

“For me it was the raw energy of the Pogues, the Clash, and the Who,” shares the frontman for Kingston, Ontario rockers the Mahones.

“Growing up in Ireland, there was music of all sorts going on in the clubs and on the streets. We had Rory Gallagher, the Clancys, Thin Lizzy, U2, Stiff Little Fingers, the Dub-

liners...it was this huge smorgasbord of styles and sounds.”

Heather Rankin experienced Celtic fusion first-hand at a Kansas City Showcase.

“It was like a metal punk band that did bluegrass, but they were definitely Celtic,” she recalls. “I couldn’t put my finger exactly on what it was that they were going for, but I could certainly hear the Celtic influence in it.”

Rankin is no stranger to pushing the Celtic envelope; her group often put a contemporary spin on classic Celtic tunes.

“We harmonized a lot, and often used electric and non-traditional instruments. I believe it is what made us interesting. Otherwise, it would just be the same songs, played the same ways, and nobody would care. Because we allowed other influences to find their way into what we were presenting, we were able to bring a bigger audience to Celtic music.”

“You can’t put music in a museum.”

Of course, Celtic fusion has its critics. It’s not hard to see how some purists might scoff at something like Celtic Punk, and decry it as illegitimate. But then again, that kind of attitude is hardly new.



"There will always be the perception from the older generation that the younger generation is taking it and changing it," says Beaton. "I think that's been the complaint for every generation for the last 200 years... there's naturally going to be different influences on the music and how it's performed."

But is Celtic fusion music truly Celtic music? Or is the Celtic element a mere affectation - a flavour to spice up the melody? Again, it comes down to context, and what listeners bring to the table.

"By all means, it's Celtic," insists Rankin. "If it makes you think that, then it's got to have some Celtic elements."

Although Celtic fusion might be experimental, that doesn't mean it dishonours Celtic customs; a Celtic Death Metal band might be more in tune with Celtic heritage than purists.

Ellen MacIsaac believes that young artists across the seven Celtic nations are looking for new and relevant ways to express their cultural pride and identity.

"By way of example, look at Wales where there has been a big push over the last 25 years to resuscitate their language. Incorporating it into contemporary music is one way of doing that."

MacIsaac explains that traditional folk music in Wales dissipated when the Methodist Church discouraged the use of the Welsh language. As a result, most of the country's residents now consider religious hymns as folk music.

"Today, however, you find pop artists and folkie singer-songwriter-types in Wales writing in Welsh, but taking it in a completely different direction to save the language."

She also points to the new wave of Irish heavy metal bands that incorporate ele-

ments of Eire's legend and lore into their throaty refrains.

"These bands reference all sorts of mythological events. For example, they might write about the legend of The Táin - the famous Cattle Raid of Cooley - one of the great epics of Irish tradition. In that regard, they are delving deeper in history than most folk musicians. It's a great way to preserve and promote that heritage to younger audiences."

So, to recap: if wild offshoots of traditional Celtic music can be considered truly "Celtic," but traditional Celtic music might not be as traditional as we think, then what exactly is Celtic music today?

The best answer is probably all of the above.

Given how far back the history of the Celts goes, and how wide-spread their descendants are today, it is almost impossible to pigeonhole the genre to fit any one concise description.

"That's like trying to figure out how to undo a knot," says MacIsaac. "Where do you even begin?"

Celtic music is almost like an organism. It is a living thing, and all the individual parts need each other to keep the whole creature alive.

"I think we are able to attract a wider audience to Celtic music when we allow other influences to weave their way into what we are presenting," says Rankin. "Celtic music has to evolve to expand its audience, and reach younger people so that it doesn't die out with the older generation."

Celtic fusion, she continues, draws in new listeners who might not have otherwise been interested in the genre. That initial point of contact could help them better appreciate the core traditional Celtic experience.

"Of course, you're going to have pockets of purists, and you're going to have places where the music stays the same for a number of generations."

"There is something for everybody," adds MacIsaac. "The tradition-bearers are there at the core, while the experimental stuff is there to draw people in. Gatherings like Celtic Colours International Festival are ideal for showcasing those things."

"There is a place for both," agrees Beaton, "so long as there is both."

Perhaps the most exciting development in Celtic music these days is seeing its popularity grow on the global stage.

"It is really starting to branch out," says MacIsaac, adding that Celtic music enthusiasts are popping up in places you might not expect, including Tokyo, where Comhaltas - the Irish Music Association - has been talking about opening a chapter.

"We have a long history of Celtic music being the fundamental expression of the Celtic peoples, whether they come from the Celtic nations, or from any of the Diaspora groups around the world. And for a long time, we owned it. It was our way of expressing ourselves.

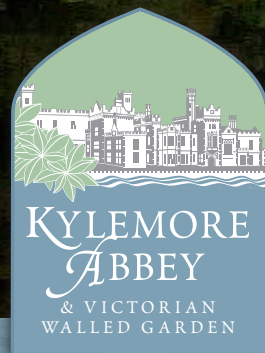
"Today, people who aren't necessarily Celtic in background are getting into it. It's moving away from being an isolated cultural expression to becoming something else, though I'm not sure there is a name for it just yet. I'm very interested to see what ends up happening."

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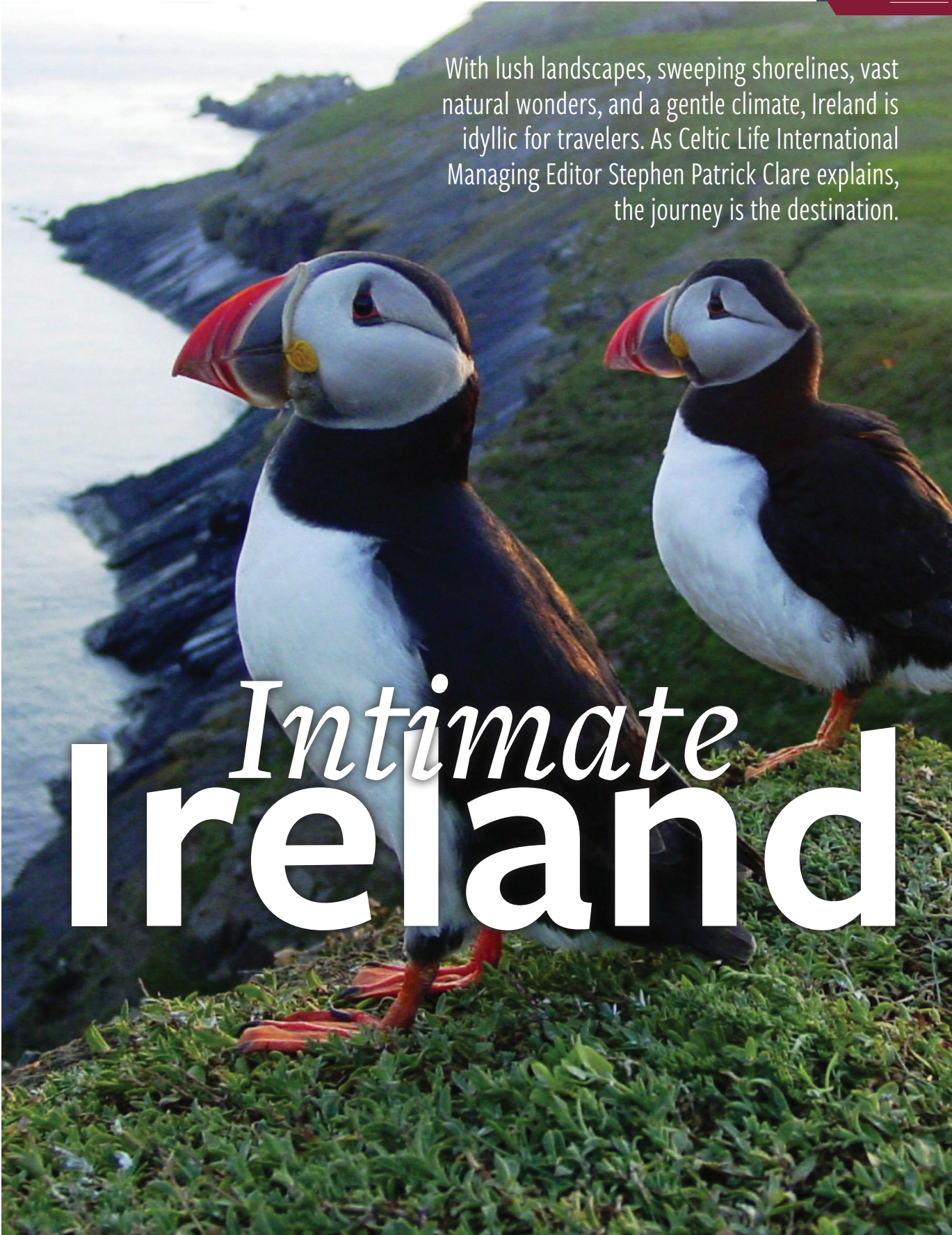
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With lush landscapes, sweeping shorelines, vast natural wonders, and a gentle climate, Ireland is idyllic for travelers. As Celtic Life International Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare explains, the journey is the destination.

A photograph of two puffins standing on a grassy cliff. The puffin in the foreground is facing left, looking towards the ocean. The puffin in the background is facing right, looking away from the camera. The ocean is visible in the background, and the cliff is covered in green grass.

Intimate Ireland

Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way (Slí an Atlantaigh Fhiáin) stretches 2,600 kilometers along the country's wondrous western coastline. From County Donegal's Inishowen Peninsula in the north, to Kinsale, County Cork in the south, the trail weaves and winds its way through nine counties and three provinces.

Going north from Galway, travelers are treated to mostly untamed terrain; Gaelic is the first language in Spiddal; wild ponies run through wide-open fields in Connemara; waves wash over the ragged, rocky inlets of Mayo; time stands still by the sea in Sligo, and flora and fauna overflow in lush Donegal.

There is no shortage of adventure here, be it hiking the hills, biking the back roads, surfing, kayaking, horseback riding, bird-watching, fishing...the outdoor activities are endless.

Spend a few hours in Killybegs or Cleggan, or on Achill Island, and you will discover a people that are as hardy as the land upon which they live. As with the environs, however, their rugged skin belies a softer spirit.

South and west – through counties Galway, Clare, Kerry and Cork – that craggy exterior seems to dissolve and dissipate before your eyes, like a light Irish mist after the rain. There is an inherent softness to the landscape, and its inhabitants, both of which are gentle and open.

GALWAY (Gaillimh)



Sheena Dignam

Founded in the 12th century, the port city of Galway is a kaleidoscope of culture. Along with its rich and diverse history, the town enjoys a vibrant arts scene, second in the country only to Dublin.

The large percentage of dark haired residents - known as the Black Irish - testifies to the area's past trading ties with Spain and France. The pastel skin, however, speaks to the region's strong Celtic ancestry.



Despite that DNA, the temperament - like the weather - is mild and moderate. People here seem at peace with their place and

lot in life; smiles and laughter can be heard across the busy city center, where restaurants and bars are filled with happy, hungry patrons.

"There a tremendous culinary culture here," shares Sheena Dignam of Galway Food Tours. "We now have such a wide selection of cuisine and spirits that there is, literally, something for every taste."

Bright and lively, Dignam leads locals and those from away on daily dallies around town to sample sweet and savoury snacks, including a selection of regionally produced cheeses, artisan breads, free-range coffees and teas, and delectable chocolates imported from...County Clare?

"That's right," affirms Dignam, who studied the culinary arts in France before returning to her native homeland. "The local produce movement is very strong here. As this part of Ireland was never really industrialized, our soil and water have remained relatively clean for centuries, meaning that our ingredients are just about as pure and natural as can be...including those used in our chocolate."

Galway is renowned for its scrumptious seafood, of course; both the salmon and oysters live up to their billing.

"Sushi is a big deal here now as well," notes Dignam. "The fish and kelp, both of which come straight from the bay, make it fresh and delicious."

Also on tap is Poitín, a once-illegal Irish moonshine made from cereals, grain, whey, sugar beet, molasses and potatoes.

"In the past, a half-glass of this stuff would make you blind," explains Dignam. "More recently, distilleries in Ireland have started producing a milder version of it. It is still made with the original ingredients, all locally sourced, but just mellowed down a bit to soften the blow.

"Mellow is good word for Galway," she

adds with a smile. "We are pretty laid back here, and that's a big reason why I came home."

Where to Stay:

The House Hotel

~ www.thehousehotel.ie



Where to Eat:

The Kai Café

~ www.kaicaferestaurant.com

What to Do:

Galway Food Tours

~ www.galwayfoodtours.com

CLARE (Chláir)



Kevin Costello

As the crow flies, the distance from Galway to Tralee on is less than two hundred kilometers due south. And while busloads of tourists traverse major motorways, rushing to their next destination, my guide and I have chosen to saddle our bags to the shoreline.

"It's a little longer," says Dublin native



Kevin Costello from behind the wheel of his Mercedes noir. “About four hours – but you’ll get a truer sense of the west coast and its people that way.

“And,” he smiles, “you’ll have better stories to tell when you get home.”

As personable as he is professional, Costello is the epitome of Irish hospitality; a wealth of both warmth and wisdom, his knowledge of Eire’s history and culture is second-to-none – all of it accented by tidbits of personal tales and a swath of homegrown wit.

“But remember,” he says with a smirk and a wink, “as we say here in Ireland; never let the truth get in the way of a good story.”

Stories are a-plenty as we pass through The Burren, a 560-square kilometer expanse of barren limestone landscape. Once a tropical sea, the tough terrain is now inhabited by a sizeable population of flora, fauna, foxes and fowl.



In nearby Kinvara, Dunguaire Castle has towered over the waterfront since the 16th century. A few miles up the road, Kilfenora Cathedral has stood, in one form or another,

for almost 1500 years. On site, an ancient graveyard hosts one of the finest collections of Celtic crosses in the country.

“Though no one knows for certain, I believe that the Celtic cross comes from two sources,” muses Costello. “Christianity gave us the basic structure – the ‘t’ foundation – while the Celtic symbol of spirituality – the sun – is set into the top half of the stone. The cross represents an integration of two cultures, rather than the domination of one over the other.”

Like elsewhere, the church has had its struggles on the Emerald Isle in recent years. However, steeples still sit high atop the nearby villages of Ballyvaughn, Lisdoonvarna and Doolin.

The latter town is a gateway to the magnificent and majestic Cliffs of Moher, which are still the most popular tourist attraction in the country.

“By spring this place will be full of tour buses,” says Costello. “And you’re likely to hear accents from all four corners of the globe.”

He adds that while Americans and Europeans still make up most of the site’s annual visitors, an increasing number of folks from afar are making their way up the stairs to O’Brien’s Tower for a clear view of the cliffs.

While the famed locale still draws hundreds of thousands each year, the real treat for travelers is due south, along the coastal route from Lahinch to Milltown Malbay to Kilkee and Kilrush. On one side of the road, a big sky and stunning shoreline merge into a mural of mauve and blue; on the other side, lush green foliage and muddy boglands blur with quaint inns, cozy pubs and all sizes of sports stadiums.

“The GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) really brought us together as a country,” explains Costello. “Hurling and Irish Football in particular are games that are distinctly our own. These fields are where our communities meet, talk, laugh and share; spaces where we can rally behind the home county, or against opponents; places where people take pride in being Irish.

“When (Oliver) Cromwell arrived in 1649, he all but wiped out our culture,” he notes. “Language, schools, religion – all decimated... we weren’t even allowed to own our own land anymore.

“It wasn’t until we gained our independence in 1922 that we began to recover our sense of identity. And even then, it wasn’t really until the 1980s that we began to appreciate and embrace where we come from, and who we are today.”

As we board the ferry to cross the Shannon Estuary from Killimer to Tarbert, Costello continues.

“Gaelic has been mandatory study in the schools for some time, and there are now all sorts of incentive programs designed to encourage young people to embrace the language. There are parts of Ireland today where Gaelic is spoken openly and fluently.

“You see, we are a people of words; for centuries, our customs and traditions were passed down aurally from generation to generation to ensure the survival of our identity. That’s why we have produced so many poets, playwrights, authors and musicians – it is a guarantee of sorts that being “Irish” will continue to survive, and even thrive. It is also why we continue to celebrate our rich and robust mythology – filled with faeries, kings, queens, leprechauns, legends and lore...we are a story-telling people.

“And remember,” he laughs, “we never let the truth get in the way of a good story...”

Where to Stay:
Royal Spa Hotel
~ www.royalspahotel.com



Where to Eat:
StoneCutters Kitchen
~ www.stonecutterskitchen.com

What to Do:
Cliffs of Moher
~ www.cliffsofmoher.ie

KERRY (Chiarraí)



Joe Joyce

The Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry is beyond breathtaking; one way roads wind their way through majestic mountains, overlooking vast fields of green and clear blue lakes, and hugging rolling coastlines.

The scenery is also beyond words, so much so that it will likely take me days, if not weeks or even months, to fully digest its immensity and impact. Even my two cameras cannot possibly capture and convey the size and scope of Connor Pass, Sleat Head, Dún Chaoin, the Blasket Islands, and Skellig Michael.



Our aim is to be settled into the quaint village of Killarney by day's end. I mention to Kevin that I have a history of sorts with the town going back to 1989; a long-ago bender, with an ensuing "hangover heard around the world", that eventually got me off the bottle for good.

"Care to discuss the details?" he asks.

"Let's not go there right now," I reply with a smile.

Ironically, perhaps, our first stop this day is the Dingle Distillery. Though the modest artisan facility has only been in business for a decade, it has already made a strong name for itself in the country's gin and vodka market. The company released its first triple-distilled whiskey this past November.

"Right now we've no whiskey on site," apologizes Joe Joyce, who conducts personal tours of the building. "We are only producing two casks per day at present, and we simply can't keep up with the demand."

Like his Irish author namesake, Joyce is a man of many words; within minutes he launches from pleasant small-talk into a fiery sermon on the history of the renowned spirit.

"Two centuries ago, Ireland had over one hundred legal distilleries, and our whiskey was recognized around the world as the finest on the market. Sadly, by the beginning of the last century, we had but two distilleries left."

Explaining that the Irish whiskey industry evaporated due to a perfect storm of politics, prohibition, and cheaper production methods (in Scotland primarily), Joyce notes that the country's spirits would not be dampened completely.

"We would not give in to pressures, nor would we sacrifice the quality of our product. We have always prided ourselves on being unique in the marketplace; pot-stilled, with centuries of experience.

"The truth of the matter is we don't actually make the whiskey here... all we really do is provide the finest ingredients and the ideal conditions to allow for time and nature to do its thing."

Nature, it appears, has been kind to the industry here; today, Irish whiskey is again acknowledged as the finest on the planet, with older distilleries firing up their pot-stills after years of inactivity, and new facilities emerging across the Emerald Isle each year. A rein-vigorated Irish Whiskey Association, a newly groomed Irish Whiskey Trail, yearly festivals and popular tasting events all bear witness to the enduring spirit of Eire's spirits.

"We also may have had a little help from above," he whispers, looking upwards beatifically, then noting that local and area monks were the first in the world to develop Uisce Beatha - Gaelic for "The Water of Life."

"Most distillers today use the same basic three-part process when making whiskey that the good friars did back in the day; fermentation, distillation and maturation.

"Here, however, we also recognize the

fourth part," he smiles, pointing to his belly; "Destination."

"And don't forget the fifth part," I pipe in. "Inebriation."

"Ha," laughs Joyce. "You've some experience with that one now, do ya' lad?"

"Let's not go there right now," I reply with a smile.

Later, in Killarney, I walk around town as the sun sets, struggling to reconstruct my fateful fall from grace all those years ago. While I've no memory of the night in question, I do sport a small tattoo on my left bicep as a souvenir of the soiree.

Where to Stay:

Ballygarry House

~ www.ballygarryhouse.com



Where to Eat:

The Chart House

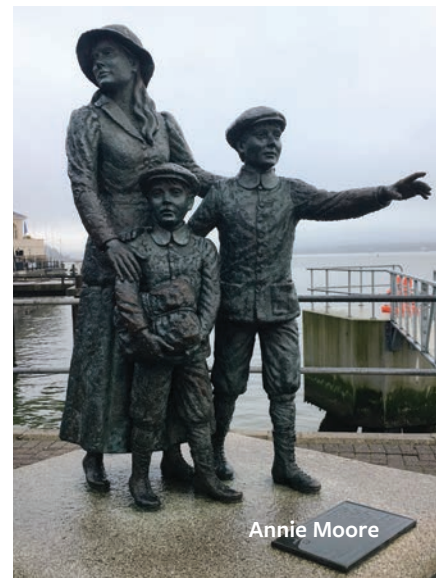
~ www.thecharthousedingle.com

What to Do:

Muckross House

~ www.muckross-house.ie

CORK (Corcaigh)



Annie Moore

The route from Killarney to Cork is highlighted by sloping roads through rolling hills, hushed forests, trickling streams, and quiet lakes. Nature seems at ease in this peaceful place; big skies bring soft rain and gentle mists, with wisps of cottony clouds scattered overhead. Sheep, goats, horses and cows graze lazily in farmer's fields and on mountainsides - most are silent spectators, immune to the human race taking place on



the region's motorways and back roads.

Drivers here are courteous, and civil. Area road signs, both in English and Gaelic, politely remind those behind the wheel to watch their speed. One clever billboard casually spells out the region's road rules with a simple Tóg Go Bog É - Irish for 'Take it Easy'.

The mood is light and relaxed, a reflection of a people at ease with themselves. A closer look sees that soft sensibility infused into every aspect of their daily lives.



Stephen Clare

Restaurants cater to a milder palate, and a good pint of Guinness makes a creamy complement, with Irish whiskies ideal for smooth after-supper sipping.

The music, also, is without edge; nightly 'seisiúns' at local pubs showcase the lovely lilts of Irish melodies, the soft strumming of

guitars, shimmering tin whistles, the fine finesse of fingers upon fiddles, and the angelic voices of those who carry the tunes and traditions of their forefathers.

Similarly, softly-spoken Gaelic seamlessly rolls off the tongues of area residents. And while both music and language may be windows to the Emerald soul, the Irish are a people whose kindness, civility, and homespun hospitality are rooted in the land, sea, and sky.

Nowhere will the visitor feel more at home than in the country's soft south, where small puffs of sweet turf smoke arise from fireplaces in roadside homes and cottages.

Passing through the timeless villages of Macroom, Clonakilty, and Kinsale, it is easy to understand the longing for home felt by so many ex-pats around the world.

Many of those people - 3 million between 1851 and 1970 - would leave Eire from the harbour town of Cobh in the south. The quaint community, just east of Cork, might be best known as the last port of call for both the ill-fated Titanic and Lusitania ocean liners.

The Cobh Heritage Center along the city's waterfront is a bevy of information on Irish immigration; displays, interactive exhibits, short films, and more, detail the terrible trials of those forced to flee the Emerald Isle because of famine, poverty, oppression, and injustice.

There are tales of triumph too, including the story of Annie Moore, the first Irish

immigrant to be processed at Ellis Island in New York in 1892. Moore built a new life for herself in the new world, as did tens of thousands who followed in her footsteps. The Heritage Center celebrates those successes, listing names of notable politicians, religious leaders, captains of industry, entertainers, artists, and social activists who bade farewell to home for greater fortune on distant shores.

The tragic far outweighs the triumphant here, however. In truth, the country's history, heritage, culture, and identity - some might say the very heart and soul of Eire - was sent out into the world from Cobh's cradle. The site's small docks were scenes of endless tears, heartache and grief; "living wakes" were daily ritual for generations of families, as they said goodbye to loved-ones, likely never to see them again.

Here, that sense of sadness and sorrow still sits like a soft Irish mist over all; a remnant of the past that permeates the present - it is a different sort of softness, however; perhaps more of a gentle melancholia.

Now, as I prepare to leave this lush land, this ancient abode of my ancestors, I feel it also.

Where to Stay:
Ballymaloe House
~ www.ballymaloe.ie

Where to Eat:
Café Paradiso
~ www.paradiso.restaurant

What to Do:
Cobh Heritage Centre
~ www.cobhheritage.com





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Aberdeenshire and Beyond

*Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and
surfer Lesley Choyce revisits Scotland's stunning northeast*



Nearly twenty years ago I had the good fortune of being writer in residence at the Aberdeen International School - a posh, well-appointed facility near Aberdeen for kids from all over the world. Aside from my pleasant, daily duties of talking with students about creativity and writing, I had enough leisure time to hike along a local canal path, go bike-riding through the back roads, and generally ramble around the most agreeable countryside my shoe leather had ever encountered.

My teacher-host, fellow Nova Scotian Andy Field, even took me surfing. At first, we ventured just south of Aberdeen, where the water was surprisingly warm (as it turned out, the sewage plant emptied into the ocean thereabouts.) Later, we sported wetsuits on a pebbly beach right in downtown Stonehaven, dropping in on small North Sea waves before the backdrop of a bustling village that dates back centuries. Fortified with a couple of pints of Guinness, we even stole onto one of Scotland's famous public golf courses just as the sun dipped. Luckily, I was able to blame my poor performance of the "gentleman's game" on the diminishing light.

When my residency ended, I promised myself that I would return to explore this northeast corner of Scotland, with its sumptuous land and historical riches. Thus, my wife Linda and I recently enjoyed a few adventures in that part of the world, renting a small stone cottage in the tiny village of Pitmedden. It was a converted one-room schoolhouse really, made of solid blocks of granite, and conveniently located in the

front yard of a newer house owned by a professional self-help guru who drove the shiniest BMW that I had ever seen.

We seek connections in this world, wherever we go, and there was another thread that brought us here, albeit a sad one; a friend of nearly thirty years, Jim Lotz, had recently passed away from pancreatic cancer. Jim was a brilliant independent thinker, an activist and author, and a feisty, good-natured Brit who had immigrated to Canada to roam the arctic, fight for social justice, and dole-out advice to younger writers like me: "Don't ever listen to the bastards who say you can't do it. Just get on with it and bugger all."

I had helped edit Jim's autobiography, *Sharing the Journey*, and the book had been at the printer as he lay dying. He had grown up in Liverpool, and watched as his neighbourhood was bombed by the Nazis before he was shipped off to the safer environs of Aberdeenshire, near the town of Oldmeldrum. Of the Scottish countryside, he had this to say:

"This hard, barren land touched some deep, responsive chord in my nature. I enjoyed roaming through glens and over moors, happy in my own company, delighting in the scenery and the romantic history of the Highlands, while coping with atrocious weather."



Our own explorations of the area actually took us farther afield from Aberdeen and into a broader expanse of coast and mountains sometimes labelled the Grampian region, although this appears to be a label of political jurisdiction slapped onto this part of northeast Scotland sometime between 1975 and 1996. The name comes from the bold and somewhat bald mountains of the region (8,700 square kilometres of them), and - as Jim Lotz pointed out - it is one lovely and evocative piece of geography.

I dutifully delivered a copy of Jim's book to a state-of-the-art library outside of Oldmeldrum, though the librarian didn't quite know what to make of it (or me.) If anyone is out and about there, however, do me a solid and check to see that it is at least catalogued and on the shelves.

As the name implies, Oldmeldrum really is quite old. The Meldrum family built a castle here around 1236. The third Earl of Buchan reportedly found shelter for his soldiers here around Christmas of 1307, before being defeated by Robert the Bruce in a nearby battle not long after that.

In Oldmeldrum, I dutifully sampled the wares at the famous Garioch Distillery, but declined to purchase the more expensive vintage whiskeys with price tags in the range of \$400 - \$500 US. Linda and I did find refreshment at a downtown pub with a nautical theme. It was a wonderfully cramped and convivial establishment in one of the many grey stone buildings of the town.

Our favourite pub, however, was the more contemporary BrewDog

brewery in Ellon to the east. This is one of Scotland's new breed of craft brewers, whose motto appears to be "Equity for Punks." No one was quite able to explain to us what that meant, but they had a great line of hoppy beers and good hospitality. The business was founded way back in 2007 by two guys named James and Martin. James had this to say about the origins: "Martin and I were bored of the industrially brewed lagers and stuffy ales that dominated the U.K. Beer Market." And, as they say, the rest was history. In actuality, what - on the surface - appeared to be an indie-business run by some highly creative counter-cultural young brewmeisters was actually on its way to becoming a very lucrative multinational corporation.

Like James and Martin, I too was weary of stuffy ales, and BrewDog's Punk IPA (my personal favourite) was proving to the quaffing masses that the new brew in town was taking over.

Hiking mountains and getting wet in salt water are always on our agenda if possible when we travel. We found our first waves for boogie-boarding in the waters of Fraserburgh Bay to the north, well insulated by wetsuits of course. It was a sandy haven of hikers, surfers and kite-surfers, where everyone was friendly and kind. If you are in that neck of the woods, the dunes alone are worth the excursion.

Fraserburgh itself is a major bustling fishing port. We had read reports of heavy drug use among young bored fishermen who would return from the sea with money in their pockets and a craving to get dangerously high, but alas we found nothing but good vibes among the



locals, both young and old. In town, we discovered a house known as Maggie's Hoosie, a traditional fishing cottage preserved for tourists. The spinster Maggie Duthie lived there until she died in 1950 with an earthen floor, no heat or electricity, and a lifestyle not unlike that lived by her ancestors two hundred years ago.

With a good map you can find curiously named towns in this part of Scotland that are almost always worth a visit.

In particular, I was curious about a place called Udny Green, which turned out to have a beautiful town commons and an upscale restaurant named Eat on the Green. After much deliberation, the maitre'd took pity on us and gave us a small corner table if we promised not to stay longer than an hour. On the wall were photos of the Queen, Pierce Brosnan and Sean Connery. It was that kind of place. We polished off the pricey meal and headed off to check out Pettymuick, Tillygreig, Whiterashes, Port Elphinstone, Balhagard and Inverurie. Then, while taking a break in Burnhervie, I spied - on a map - a symbol for a nearby ancient monument called The Maiden Stone.

The Maiden Stone was a bit hard to find - located in a field with no fanfare, south of Pitcaple, off a back road, and west of a town called Chapel of Garioch. The road itself was one of those interesting rural avenues; a single lane about the width of a sidewalk, but most perfectly paved - as if designed for elves driving miniature automobiles.

Since there was no one else on the road but us, our tires straddled the path as we made several wrong turns until we found the sought-after Maiden Stone. When approaching the stone, we met a rather excited English tourist who was snapping photographs from every possible angle. Happy to see us, and eager to share his enthusiasm for what appeared to be an upright lichen-covered pink granite rock with a notch cut out of it, he told us that it dated back to the 8th century when the Picts lived hereabouts. According to legend, the daughter of a laird made some crazy bet with a man who turned out to be the devil. The impetuous young lass, on her wedding day no less, bet the stranger that she could finish her baking task quicker than he could build a road to the top of a local mountain. If he lost, then she would marry him instead of her betrothed. I queried the informative Englishman why someone would make such a bet, especially on her wedding day, but he had no clear explanation, and seemed miffed that I would even ask.

At any rate, the devil being the devil, built that mountain road in

a jiffy and came to claim his young bride. The laird's daughter made a run for it and swore she'd rather turn to stone before marrying the likes of Satan. And thus, she got her wish.

The tallest mountain we chose to climb had the curious name of Mither Tap, and we arrived just as a bus of school kids were embarking on the hike through the well-marked forest trail that led to the base of the mountain. Standing a mere 1,279 feet above sea level, Mither Tap has a commanding granite summit looking out over the other Bennachie mountains. As the trail became steeper we huffed and puffed our way to the glorious summit as giggling Scottish schoolboys kicked pebbles down on us from above. Their harried and embarrassed schoolmistress begged them to stop, shouting down apologies to us below. Despite the pelting of stones, the view from the top was well worth it on a clear day like this when you could see for miles.

Although I am occasionally of the opinion that "if you've seen one castle, you've seen them all", Linda persuaded me that we should at least take-in Castle Fraser down around Moneymusk and Craigeearn.

I drove past Castle Fraser once, pretending not to see it and thought I might get away with it, but unfortunately there was a big sign at the next crossroads pointing back to the estate. I parked, and grudgingly paid for admission. (It is probably unreasonable of me, but I feel that castles, ruins and ancient monuments should be free and open to the public, like The Maiden Stone in her grassy remote field.)

But if you are going to pick one castle in the Grampian region, Fraser is probably as good a pick as you will get. The grounds are beautiful, and it is considered one of the "most elaborate of Z-plan castles in Scotland." Most castles have stories, and if those stories are intriguing enough then most of us don't really care if they are true or not. At Castle Fraser, it is said that once upon a time a young princess was murdered (why, we do not know) and as she was carried down the stairs, her blood stained the steps so badly that they had to be covered over with wood. Today, I am sure, professionals with the right tools and detergents could have solved the problem - but who are we to judge?

And, yes, it was a pretty darn good castle as far as castles go. As we walked back to the parking lot where a pair of swans from the castle pond seemed to be studying our rental car, I wondered out loud exactly how and why that murder happened - if it happened at all - and





why such stories seem to linger on for centuries, while undoubtedly countless good deeds by generations of the Frasers go unremembered.

Interestingly, awhile later while falling asleep in front of the TV watching Helen Mirren in *The Queen*, I thought the location in the movie looked familiar, and sure enough, Castle Fraser it was.

Before heading home, I longed for one more foray to the sea and I noted a nature reserve named Forvie just north of Newburgh which would allow us another visit to the BrewDog in Ellon on our way home. On the way to Forvie, we passed what seemed to be miles of coastland that had been privatized and developed into a golf course. I wondered how the people of Scotland had allowed such pristine coastal land that had remained unbothered for centuries to be bought up and developed this way. Later I would learn that none other than Donald Trump had bought up the coastline in 2014, investing \$290 million US to create the Trump International Golf Links, and in the process decimating what were once legally protected sand dunes. Suffice it to say, Mr. Trump and his links did piss off a fair portion of the population of the region.

The beach and waters at Forvie, however, were providentially protected. Linda and I hiked out to the sea along the beautiful Ythan Estuary, home of “the largest breeding colony of little terns on the east coast of Scotland.” The water was blue, the sky was cloudless.

Helicopters transporting workers to and from the North Sea oil rigs did nothing to detract from the beauty and sanctity of the place. The sand felt glorious under our bare feet. The terns swooped and swirled above and, at the mouth of the estuary, we began to hear an other-worldly chorus of low moaning voices drifting towards us in the wind. As we continued to walk, the sound grew louder. Soon enough, we saw a dark, undulating mass of something on the shores across the river mouth from us.

When we reached the sea, we realized that it was a large community of seals - perhaps a hundred - lounging on the sands across from us. Their voices were loud now, drowning out everything else, and their song stirred something within me. Young seals dove from the shoreline into the clear blue water, swam and played, and then hopped back up on the sandy shoreline. That farther shore was an empty, flawless expanse of coastal wilderness, where the terns, seals, gulls and other creatures of the wind and sea would be free and safe. For a while at least.

As we turned and headed back to civilization, sand sifting through our toes, we felt blessed by the birds and beasts and privileged to have encountered this pocket of pristine wilderness, here in a land where human habitation goes backover 14,000 years.



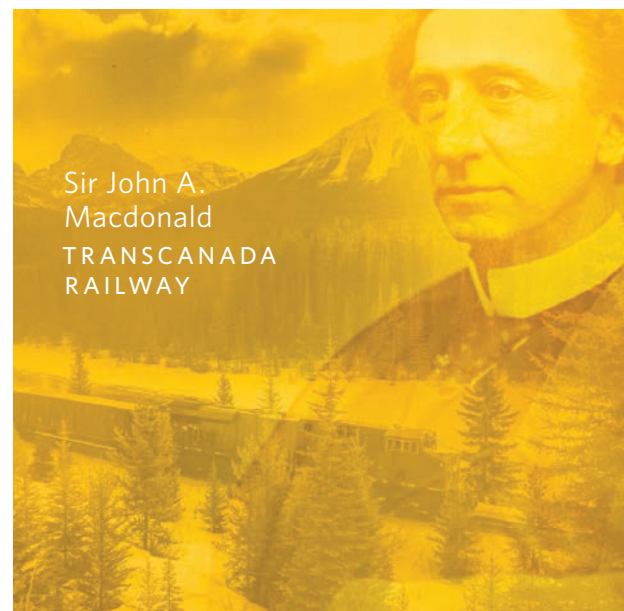
They say the Scots built Canada.

We say we're still at it.

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Stonehenge

As Celtic Life International correspondent Gerald Herter explains, the ancient site of Stonehenge still evokes Celtic mystery and mystique

Times had changed in the forty years since my wife, Lori, and I had last viewed Stonehenge firsthand. Back then, a pilgrim could wander in and around the huge stone monoliths, touching and leaning against the cold silent columns, while contemplating the mystery of how they came to be and why.

We were not alone back then, but the number of fellow travelers paled in comparison to the multitudes we found ourselves among on our recent return to this ancient manmade wonder. Rather than complaining, however, we breathed a sigh of relief when we discovered just how close we had come to competing for space with a much greater horde of enthusiasts. Only through some quick, last minute maneuvering were we able to avoid inadvertently arriving at Stonehenge on the day of the summer solstice, when the sun rises directly over the site's strategically placed "Heel Stone." While holding profound meaning for the tens of thousands that

Walking outside the visitor center, near the realistic recreation of a Stonehenge era village, we noticed the first direct tie to Celtic lands. Specimens on display of Stonehenge boulders represented the two rock types that formed the monument. The larger sarsen stones, composed of sandstone and weighing up to 50 tons, originate from the Marlborough Downs area 20 miles away. However, the smaller, four-ton bluestones, long considered to have originated in the Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire, Wales, about 150 miles away, have given rise to a recently renewed controversy over their origin and how they got here, freshly stoking an age-old mystery.

Scientists first theorized the Welsh origin of the bluestones about a hundred years ago.

Since then, further studies have led to general acceptance of that theory. Then in December, 2015, archeologists - completing a multiple



descend on the monument for that unique experience, for us just the usual crowds on a non-solstice day were challenge enough to contend with.

The routine masses were now kept in check, first by requiring an orderly queue at the relatively new visitor center, followed by a short shuttle bus ride to the actual site. There, a safe distance is maintained several yards away from the multi-ton stones by a rope cordon.

To be fair, the National Trust has done a commendable job in crowd control while providing attractive educational opportunities to learn all about the world heritage site.

A highlight of the visitor center is the 360 degree "Stand in the Stones" experience which gives the sense of being within the stone circle, while taking the viewer through a progressive visual chronology of how the site may have looked down through time, as well as during the winter and summer solstice.

year dig - claimed to have found the specific quarry at Craig Rhos-y-felin in Pembrokeshire, pinpointing the source of the bluestones. That claim has been disputed in recent months by another group of scientists, who contend that the quarry-like features at Craig Rhos-y-felin are in fact natural occurrences, with no evidence of man-made intervention. These scientists furthermore renewed another long-contended theory that glacial action brought the bluestones to the Salisbury Plain, and not the colossal efforts of the early people.

A stone harder than granite, bluestones had also given rise to old folk tales that attributed magical healing qualities to them, perhaps justifying their transport from such a long distance. Even this theory is disputed by those who contend that there was no such use found at Welsh sites, and the stones appear to have arrived at Stonehenge too early in time to even be associated with this idea. Another view, how-

ever, poses a connection to an ancestral identity that Welsh settlers wanted to bring with them, possibly joining it with the local tradition.

Whether these or other theories prove true, a walk around the path circling the magnificent monument reinforces the notion that the bluestones must have displayed uniquely special qualities to justify their transport from such great a distance so long ago. Viewing them today, the size and presence of the bluestones pale in comparison to the towering sarsen stones, which - at over 20 feet tall - stand more than twice as high as the bluestones. Though originally 80 bluestones formed an inner circle and horseshoe within the more prominent sarsen outer circle, many have been removed or broken over the ages, leaving the remaining specimens to appear in a less orderly pattern.

With heads filled with wonder and immense respect for the ancient ones who erected Stonehenge, we retreated to nearby Troutbeck

Quarried nearby, the stones range up to forty tons or more in weight and rise ten to eighteen feet high.

A distinct advantage when walking these circles is the freedom to touch and experience the immense stones up close.

Other than loosely forming the shape of a circle, the Avebury stones do not appear to display the sophisticated workings or design of Stonehenge.

While strolling the pathway, we encountered two Bobbies on patrol. They were cordial but looked a little out of place. We asked for directions and what they were expecting. "With the coming solstice,



Guest House in East Chisenbury for a time of quiet reflection. Sitting on the back deck of our room in the rural setting, we sipped on wine while watching a family of swans leisurely float by on the River Avon, a mere twenty feet away. The Avon also winds its way near Stonehenge, a possible means of transport for the bluestones, as well as for the dead being carried from neighboring prehistoric sites.

The next day we walked around another mysterious stone circle complex, this time in Avebury, about 20 miles north of Stonehenge, in the Marlborough Downs region mentioned above. While not as striking as Stonehenge, the Avebury stone circles are surrounded by a circular earthen berm, a thousand yards in circumference, encompassing a large portion of the village of Avebury. An outer stone circle with a thousand-foot diameter encloses two inner circles. In total, there were originally thought to be over one hundred stones in the complex.

the stone circle draws crowds," one replied. "But with the overcast skies and rain threatening, the enthusiasts appear to be holding off."

A little further along, we found a dozen solstice devotees gathered near a standing stone, making ready to celebrate the dawn of summer. One curious group member, seeing us reading from a brochure, approached with a somewhat confused look on his face. "Do you know what this is all about?" he queried. Unsure of his intent, we offered him our brochure, which he perused. Thanking us, he returned to the group, still appearing oblivious, but resigned to carry on. A friend had most likely talked him into joining the fun without belaboring the details.

Later, when we had settled into the aptly named Covenstead B & B in nearby Glastonbury, our hostess, an aficionado of all things occult, explained that the group we met at Avebury was most likely enacting a

pagan or druid ritual related to the solstice. A little nervous about the occult-themed nature of our accommodation, we opted that night for the Handfasting Honeymoon Suite, hoping that any untoward spirits would prefer less uplifting rooms. Handfasting was an old Celtic tradition where the newly wed couple's hands were literally bound together, symbolizing their commitment to stay together eternally.

Waking refreshed the next morning, and having experienced no strange occurrences during the night, we were treated to a sumptuous breakfast by our hostess, who proceeded to describe another mystery connecting Stonehenge, Glastonbury and Avebury to the Celtic world. The locations of Glastonbury and Avebury put them directly on the St. Michael Ley Line. Furthermore, Stonehenge, through a geometric, geographic correlation, though not situated physically on that Ley Line, has an indirect connection.

Since I had never previously heard of a "ley line," Lori gave me a quick lesson. According to Wikipedia ley lines "are apparent alignments of places of significance in the geography or culture of an area, often including man-made structures. They are, in the older sense, ancient, straight trackways in the British landscape, or in the newer sense, spiritual and mystical alignments of land forms."

The term originated from British archeologist Alfred Watkins, who in 1921 noticed what appeared to be alignments of ancient monuments and geographical features across Britain. He concluded at the time that they were early trackways, as described in his book, *The Old Straight Track*. Though Watkins drew no spiritual significance to the lines, in recent times such theories have created renewed interest in them.

While there are various theories as to the origins and meaning of ley lines, solid evidence is hard to come by. Some draw a religious purpose, possibly of guides that led ancient ones to sacred places or burial chambers. Others try to connect them with the earth's magnetic field.

The St. Michael Ley Line is considered astronomical, since it follows the route the sun takes on the spring festival of St. Michael, the 8th of May each year. The geometric theory comes into play with Stonehenge, as the St. Michael Ley Line through Glastonbury and Avebury forms a perfect right triangle with the location of Stonehenge.

Skeptics contend that with the proliferation of ancient monuments and geographic features in the British Isles and greater Europe, ley lines can be conjured up by drawing lines in just about any direction. Irrespective of the veracity of the ley line theories, Stonehenge has been identified as the hub of several ley lines, even a circular one. The relationship to the St. Michael Ley Line provided the second tie-in to the Celtic world that Lori and I noted. Heading in a southwesterly direction after passing through.

Avebury and Glastonbury, the line proceeds like an arrow across Cornwall all the way to St. Michael's Mount at the tip of the protruding peninsula. That was reason enough for us to explore the picturesque Cornish Celtic countryside en route to the line's namesake origin.

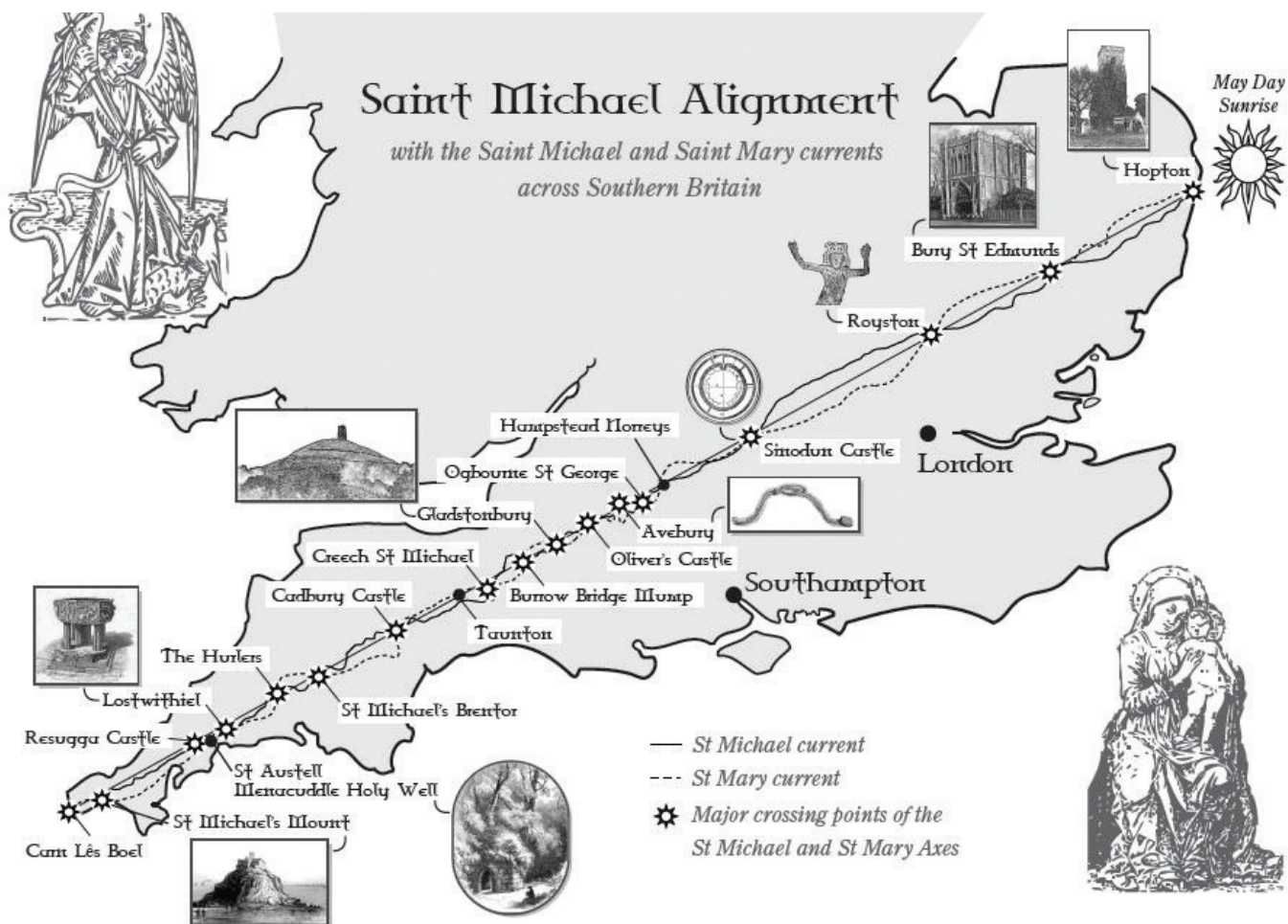
The next day, navigating our way through Cornwall, we decided on the picture-postcard fishing village of Port Isaac as our base of operations. Port Isaac is on the northern coast of Cornwall, about two-thirds of the way from Glastonbury to St. Michael's Mount. Fans of the British television series, *Doc Martin*, will recognize the village as Port Wenn, the setting for the medical comedy drama. In fact, our lodging was the old schoolhouse from the show, which has been converted into



The Old Schoolhouse Hotel. The dramatic view from our second-floor bedroom windows took in the village and seafront to the left, and Doc Martin's home and surgery directly across the harbor.

Though we could have sat for hours absorbing the idyllic scene from that historic perch, our immediate objective the following day was St. Michael's Mount, a couple of hours further south. Nearing the western tip of Cornwall, the road turned toward the southerly coast approaching Mount Bay, near the entrance to the English Channel. To our front, rising majestically 250 feet from the sea, stood the regal form of the St. Michael's Mount castle and chapel, separated from the mainland by a narrow sand causeway, about a half mile in length.

Legend has it that in the fifth century St. Michael the Archangel first touched down on earth at the peak of the isle. We were surprised that this sacred figure was so closely associated with what for some is a rather fantastical, metaphysical concept of the ley line. St. Michael, after all, is known as a condemner of paganism and heresy, and is a patron saint of Cornwall. Nevertheless, the St. Michael Ley Line got its



name from the number of religious structures the line passes through, such as churches bearing St. Michael's name on Brent Tor in Brentor, Wales, and on Glastonbury Tor.

King Arthur also comes into play along the ley line. He is said to have battled one of the giants that folklore maintains built the isle of St. Michael's Mount. The purported grave of King Arthur and his queen, Guinevere, can be observed today amidst the Glastonbury Abbey ruins. He even may have used the route of the ley line as a hunting path.

Fortunate to arrive at St. Michael's Mount during low tide, we gingerly walked the quarter mile cobblestone way from the mainland beach out to the isle. Passing through the village-like setting of shops, gardens, and restaurants, we continued up the path to the castle. Along the way, we spotted a small stone heart set amidst the cobblestones. From another legend of giant killers, the heart is all that remains of a vicious giant, Comoran, who terrorized the island inhabitants during King Arthur's time. However, the giant killer this time was a lad named Jack. He dug a pit, then covered it over, so that when Comoran passed, he fell in, with just his head sticking out. Jack slayed him, becoming the hero, Jack the giant killer.

The trek to the castle was steep and the stones uneven, but we finally made it. On this gorgeous sunny day, we were captivated by the panoramic view - stretching for miles out to sea and inland, far beyond the bayside resort town of Marazion.

While early history is sketchy at times, in 1080 CE the Earl of Cornwall - a half-brother of William the Conqueror - granted ownership of St. Michael's Mount to its larger counterpart, the Mont-St-Michel in France. While under French control, the church was completed in

the twelfth century. Henry V took back dominion for Britain in 1414. Then in 1659, Colonel John St Aubyn acquired the property, beginning an unbroken tenure of over 350 years, which continues today with the twelfth-generation family of James St Aubyn, who still resides in the castle. Though they turned most of the island over to the National Trust in 1954, the St Aubyn's retain a 999-year lease to live in the castle and run the visitor business.

As our time delving into Celtic mysteries was drawing to a close, a final coincidental connection came to our attention. In the year 1275 a powerful earthquake simultaneously destroyed the churches on St. Michael's Mount and Glastonbury Tor.

Digging further, we discovered a 2003 book, *Ley Lines and the Earth's Energies, An Extraordinary Journey Into the Earth's Natural Energy System*, by David Cowan and Chris Arnold, that describes a line of earthquake epicenters that coincide with the St. Michael Ley Line.

Though people at the time may not have grasped the possible scientific explanation for the phenomenon, mystical religious connotations were readily and fearfully envisioned. In 1755 on November 1, All Saints Day, a similar, yet even more destructive earthquake struck. Known as the Great Lisbon earthquake, the magnitude 8.5-9 tremor caused such massive devastation that many feared that the wrath of God had invoked divine judgment.

The diverse scientific, religious and superstitious theories of the Celtic past are certain to perplex visitors and locals alike for a long time to come. Even so, the opportunity to experience these people and places first-hand is sure to enrich the journey.



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Cruising the Cornish Coastline



Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and surfer Lesley Choyce catches a few waves in Cornwall

I first noticed photographs of monstrous waves crashing into the seawalls of Sennen Cove in the far, southwest corner of England while surfing the internet a few years back.

These behemoth sea monsters - spawned by massive North Atlantic storms - not only slammed into the rocks, but sent geysers of salt-water up and over the two-and three-story buildings along the coastline. Waves like that speak to my deep subconscious, luring me with their danger, their power, and their majesty.

My wife Linda and I had already explored a fair chunk of the Celtic world - including during prior travels to Cornwall - but we had never ventured this far down to the toe of that geographical boot. And, with images of those winter waves haunting me, we planned to see what magic Sennen Cove and its environs had to offer.

It is an easy overnight flight from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Heathrow Airport, but one never really gets enough sleep. Thus, the next morning found me in a familiar rental car with an equally familiar groggy, befuddled state of mind. Anyone listening in would have heard me stating out loud to myself, "Stay on the left," as we entered the multitude of busy roundabouts around Heathrow, strategically situated to challenge and confound sleep-deprived North Americans.

There was just enough mediocre coffee, and even more mediocre hamburgers, from the Roadchef restaurants on the M class highways to sustain us as we fled the London suburban traffic, heading toward the wilds of Cornwall. Wisely, we didn't do the drive all in one day, but spent the night at an old lopsided inn near Buckfastleigh with the

nearby, babbling Dart river singing us to sleep in the most cozy accommodations from a previous century.

The next day, we made our way onward to our rental home a few miles inland from Sennen Cove, a converted stone barn on an estate situated beneath some very large trees that hosted the largest population of crows I'd seen anywhere on the planet.

Alarm clocks were not needed here, as the crows provided a cacophonous wake-up call at the break of dawn.

Breakfast was in the upstairs kitchen which, according to the notes provided by the owners, was once a hayloft in bucolic days gone by. It was my first breakfast in a hayloft as far as memory serves me.

We set out in the wrong direction the next morning, anxious to leave the squawking of blackbirds in search of coastal peace, so we ended up going south and east until the road ended at Porthcurno, where there was a busy parking lot at an outdoor theatre hanging on the edge of a cliff.

Minack Theatre, looking decidedly more ancient Greek than modern English, was created by a wealthy theatre enthusiast in the early 1930s, hosting innumerable Shakespeare plays ever thereafter. The grounds were filled with a multitude of beautiful flowers and their attending butterflies. We ventured around the cliff tops and hiked our



first patch of the 630-mile-long South West Coast Path. The British are to be commended for their hiking paths, and this one is a gem. It stretches from Exmoor National Park in the north to Poole in the south, and has some of the most dramatic scenery in the world by my estimation. Sure, I'd never hike the whole thing in this lifetime, but I'd pick away at a fair stretch any time I could find myself in the neighbourhood.

Mousehole (pronounced "mowsull") was not far up the shore from here, and it remains a great little seaport with narrow streets, stone buildings and old men who can offer up genuine sea stories from rugged days gone by. At a local pub, something straight out of an old pirate movie, we ate some deeply fried fish and green pea soup - thick enough that the spoon could stand upright in the middle of the bowl. Though it was touted as a soup, my suspicion was that it was yesterday's leftover mushy peas, a dish that bewilders even the most seasoned Anglophile.

I think my wife wanted to forge on to Penzance, but I was pretty certain it was not my kind of place - urban, touristy, and the setting for a Gilbert and Sullivan musical. Instead, we headed home, picking up rations of food (hake, rice and Brussels sprouts - a feast for kings!), and beer (Hobgoblin, Cornish Knocker and Devon Dumpy) along the way.

During our time in Cornwall, we hit the aforementioned South West Coast Path at several junctures, including Cribba Head, Porthcurno Sands, Logan Rock and Gwennap Head to name a few. The trail was

always good, the weather always windy, and the look-offs dizzying and beautiful. The hikers all seemed cheerful and self-satisfied with their ruddy cheeks, rucksacks, telescoping hiking sticks and drippy noses. I don't mean to suggest they were snobbish; salt air does that, you see.

Knowing way too much about the history of British colonialism, I kept thinking, too bad their ancestors hadn't just stayed home and decided to go out for a good long walk instead of wanting to conquer the world. But then again, hindsight is often 20/20.

Long before the British set their ambitions on making sure the sun would never set on their empire, this part of Cornwall was settled by the Cornovii, a Celtic group of people who lived here during the Iron Age.

They seemed to have had this wonderful rugged land all to themselves until the Roman armies bullied their way north.

Linda and I waited for the right wave conditions to don our wetsuits and go boogie boarding at Sennen Cove. Those killer winter waves had long-since subsided, and the beach adjacent to the town boasted sparkling blue water, pristine waves and hard packed white sand. The lifeguards hassled us a bit to stay in the swimming area rather than the surfing area and this rankled my wife, who wanted to surf the more powerful waves down the beach. Nonetheless, the sea was kind to us that day as we smashed about in the North Atlantic until our arms were limp and our spirits revived.

Aiding the surly Sennen Cove lifeguards back in 2005 was Bilbo, a Newfoundland dog who had been enlisted to help watch over swim-



mers and surfers alike. He was retired in 2007 when the town imposed strict regulations preventing dogs from being on the beach in the summer. This angered many locals, and there was a public outcry to bring the dog back to his beach, but Bilbo was never reinstated.

Back at our hayloft one evening, we discovered we had neighbours. An elderly couple from London was renting another cottage on the property for a few days and they invited us up for gin and biscuits. I was fearful at first it might be one of those boring British social occasions that you see in old BBC programs, but thankfully I was wrong.

William and Beth had already begun the party before we arrived, and we deduced they had partaken more of the gin than the biscuits. Like most British folks who discovered we were from Canada, they asked if we knew their cousin in Toronto. No we did not. But they were cheerful and full of fun and we swapped travel stories and laughed until the sun settled itself and the crows began their evening festivities, bragging and gossiping about their accomplishments of the day. At this point it was time to retire to the hayloft for some salmon, potatoes, rocket salad, and a bottle of brew called The Parson's Nose.

On one of our driving days, we headed to St. Michael's Mount while listening to John Prine, Van Morrison and Lenny Gallant. As we were wending our way through one of the insidious roundabouts just outside Penzance (I knew it was an evil, decadent town), I must have been driving too slow because a local woman in a silver Mercedes convertible nearly rear-ended us and, as we came out of the roundabout, she hammered on her horn and sped past me on the narrow roadway, lifting a finger in the air to indicate she was not appreciative of my more casual driving style. I blamed it on the inbreeding of wealthy aristocrats and thought no more about it as we drove on to Marazion.

The castle and gardens at St. Michael's were glorious. It's one of those places you can only walk to at low tide - and if there is one thing I know - it is that tide and time wait for no man.

So we had timed it just right. At high tide, a boat is provided for ill-prepared tourists who have not studied their tide charts. The island is a kind of twin of Mont St. Michel across the water along the coast of France. St. Michael's Mount is on a ley line and said to be a place of miracles that once was a destination for pilgrims. Visions of St. Michael himself were said to occur here, and the island has had more than its share of famous visitors over the years. Even Queen Victoria and Prince Albert showed up unannounced in 1846. The owners, the St. Aubyn family, were not at home, so a housekeeper kept them entertained until they sailed off on the royal yacht.

Back in Sennen Cove I rented a surfboard, took to the sea with some locals, and was humbled as I usually am the first day surfing in unfamiliar waters. While young punks gracefully slipped into long green walls and kicked their boards high into the air on the close-outs, I dutifully did my routine. I would paddle hard, stand, hear the laughter of the wave as it drove the nose of my board into the water and tap me on the head ever so gently before flipping me head-over-heels mercilessly into the watery trough beneath. I would then come up spitting sand and sea, and proceed to repeat the performance until I felt that I had grown appropriately intimate with the waters of Whitesand Bay.

Of course you don't travel to this part of the world without going

St. Michael's Mount





to Land's End. I had been warned by Lonely Planet that it had been "developed" with shops and a theme park, so I was braced for the shopping mall atmosphere of the developed part. But it is one hell of a fine location. I like places on the margins, and I couldn't help but like Land's End. Once you walked ten minutes beyond the tourists at the cluster of stores, museums and restaurants, it was back to the South West Coast Path at its best, high up above the sea with craggy cliffs in both directions. The wide-open, rugged landscape is starkly beautiful wherever you look, and the endless deep narrow coves are my kind of places. Tiny purple brilliant flowers dot the ground, and once again, everyone you meet has a drippy nose and a smile on their face.

When you think about the U.K. you don't usually think about rugged beauty, but this place has a ton of it.

You could probably walk the entirety of the coastline of this large island on trails established by forward-thinking men and women who understood the value of a good walk on a windy day.

From Land's End, if you had the proper boat, you could sail east to the Netherlands (rounding Gwenapp Head, of course) south to France (perhaps landing at Mont St. Michel), southwest to Brazil (or onward to Antarctica) northwest to Iceland and Greenland (arcing around Ireland where necessary) or west to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia (with not a darn thing in the way). And for many English sailors of centuries past, Land's End was often the last bit of England they would see before sailing off the horizon headed towards foreign lands.

For me, standing there on a high cliff, looking out past the besieged Longships Lighthouse on its tiny island of rock, I knew we had only scratched the surface in our discovery of this welcoming ancient corner of the Celtic world and would return again to see whatever we had missed.





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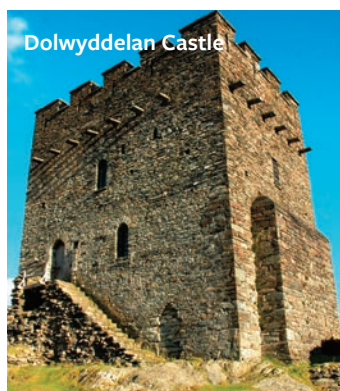
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Hidden Gems of Llywelyn the Great's Snowdonia

*As Celtic Life International correspondent
Gerald Herter explains, Wales' Snowdonia region
is a treasure trove of history...*



Dolwyddelan Castle



Taliesin monument



Tŷ Hyll



Llewelyn



Gerry and Lori Herter

Driving the narrow, twisty lane out of Trefriw in Northern Wales, I doubted that the quality of the crude track had improved much in eight hundred years. Llywelyn the Great, Lord of Snowdonia, traversed up this wooded hill in the twelfth century when visiting Llanrhychwyn Church, since then known as Llywelyn's Church. Founded in the 6th century by Welsh Prince Rhychwyn, nothing remains of the earliest structure. But with parts of the current building dating to the early twelfth century, the church is considered the oldest in Wales still offering services to this day.

My wife, Lori, and I were exploring historic, but out-of-the-way places in the vicinity of the popular Snowdonia village of Betws-y-Coed. The affable Bernard Owen, local villager and owner of Snowdonia Safaris, was our guide for the day. Having chanced upon Owen during a previous visit to the Capel Gorman monolithic portal tomb, we were impressed by his breadth of knowledge of the area's ancient sites.

Owen had picked us up at our local accommodation, the charming Tan-y-foel Country House Bed & Breakfast, set in the serenely scenic hills of the Conwy River Valley, a couple miles above the quaint community of Llanrwst. After tea and conversation with our gracious hosts, Ria Smith and Chris Dossi, we were ready to set out. By the end of the day, this part of Wales would hold new meaning for us, as we gained a brief glimpse into the distant past, where Llywelyn the Great and others from his House of Aberffraw flourished for a time.

Towards the close of the twelfth century, Prince Llywelyn became ruler of the principality of Gwynedd, the successor state to the Roman Empire covering Northern Wales.

Having sustained a reign of more than 40 years marked by numerous armed conflicts, Llywelyn was subsequently given the name "Great" by Welsh historians.

While in residence at his hunting lodge in Trefriw, Llywelyn was said to have built the Llanrhychwyn church for his wife, Joan, daughter of England's King John. The straight, rectangular lines of the structure and curved wooden beams supporting the ceiling are consistent with architecture of that time.

When we entered the small church on a rainy summer Sunday afternoon, two parishioners were preparing for the service scheduled to begin. They graciously shared revered centuries-old highlights, such as the square stone baptismal font, aged oak door hung low with wooden hinges, coffin bier hanging on the back wall, and stained glass windows dating back to the fifteenth century. They pointed to one window portraying a somber God peering over Christ on the cross, where upon close examination, God's hand could be seen holding up the cross.

Sensing that Owen had several more storied locales to show us, we knew we couldn't stay for the church service. So we bid farewell to our friendly hosts and pushed onward to a nearby marker, memorializing the sixth century literary figure, Taliesin.

Approaching the site, we passed by Llyn Gerririonydd, which our learned guide called a hidden lake, because of its remote nature. Situated high above Trefriw, the lake tranquilly shimmered alongside the forested slopes of Mynydd Deulyn (Mountain of the Two Lakes). Though maintained as part of Gwydyr Forest Park by the Welsh Government, the

lake appeared to be a well-kept secret of the local residents.

On the far side of the lake we spotted the Taliesin monument, just up from the shore on a grassy green knoll. As Abel Heywood described in his 1869 *Tourists' Guide to North Wales*, the lake "is renowned as having had on its margin the abode of Taliesin, 'the chief of the bards.' He is said to have been found when a babe on the shores of the lake by Gwyddno Garanhir in the sixth century." As Heywood reported a century and a half ago, Taliesin was "cherished by the Welsh people" even then. He shared that a prophecy of Taliesin's "relating to the Ancient Britons, is still extant, and has been remarkably verified; it is as follows: - 'Their God they shall worship; their language they shall retain; their land they shall lose, except wild Wales.'"

However, the location for the monument was disputed even back in the nineteenth century. As Joseph Hemingway reported in his 1842 book, *Panorama of the Beauties, Curiosities, and Antiquities of North Wales*, "Lord Willoughby d'Eresby has lately erected a monument which his lordship intended should identify the spot where the poet resided; but unfortunately his lordship has mistaken the site, and placed the column at the west end of the lake, when it is very well known that Taliesin was addressed at Llidiard Coed y Blawd, at the east side of the lake."

For we modern travelers, either end of this enchanting lake could be equally appreciated for the inspiring quality that the revered poet found here. Lori and I had first encountered Taliesin when visiting the Welsh architect Frank Lloyd Wright's winter home, Taliesin West, in far off Arizona. Wright admired the poet and sensed that architecture developed and evolved from folk legend and myth, much like Taliesin's work.

From the hidden lake, we retraced our steps and headed toward a hidden valley south of Betws-y-Coed. On the way however, we stopped at the not so hidden, but still fascinating Tŷ Hyll, the Ugly House. Along the



Pont Fawr



Fairy Glen



Llanrhychwyn Church

main road between Betws-y-Coed and Capel Curig, the Ugly House appeared as an odd structure whose sides and chimney bulged with misshaped rocks and boulders. Legend has it that a couple of nefarious characters from the fifteenth century invoked an old tradition which stated that if a house was built in a day, the dwelling and surrounding land became the property of the builders. The four foot thick walls, crudely thrown together using moss instead of mortar, gave credence to the incredible story.

Preserved nowadays by the Snowdonia society, the Ugly House has been transformed into an invitingly cozy tea room and visitor center. Taking note of that, Lori and I returned later for a traditional lunch of Welsh rarebit. The Society has transformed the second floor into an informative exhibit of their local honeybee breeding program, established to support the threatened species. As the exhibit points out, the importance of honey goes back thousands of years. In the tenth through twelfth centuries, the Old Laws of Hywel Dda demanded fines for honey theft. Hywel Dda was a Welsh king from the House of Dinefwr, which competed with the House of Aberffraw for dominance in Wales.

Back on the road, we proceeded to remote Cwn Penamnen valley, near the village of Dolwyddelan. Here, what remains of Tai Penamnen reminded us of American Indian ruins that are prevalent in the western United States. All that is left of this fifteenth century community are piles of stones outlining the pattern of the original dwellings. At some time in the past, a landslide had swept over the buildings, leaving them hidden from sight.

Owen walked us through the archeological excavation site, which early on was the residence of Maredudd ab Ieuan, a later successor to Llewelyn the Great through the House of Aberffraw. Maredudd was also founder of the Wynn family of Gwydir.

Beginning as a single dwelling, Tai Penamnen was expanded over the centuries by a variety of owners, including a poet and

musician, Angharad James, until finally being abandoned early in the twentieth century. Owen pointed out a well and bee boles in the remains of the wall. Bee boles were the ancient predecessors of the modern bee hives, such as those described at the Ugly House.

Nearby we spotted the square, three story gray tower of Dolwyddelan Castle, looming from the top of a prominent hill. Guarding a main route, the castle was thought to be built by Llewelyn the Great in the 13th century.

Known to have captured a number of castles during his rule, Llewelyn was considered, from a practical standpoint, to be the first Prince of Wales.

And though he never claimed that title, he was instrumental in the effort that forced his father-in-law, King John, to sign the Magna Carta in 1215.

Dolwyddelan Castle came into play for the House of Aberffraw again in the 15th century when Maredudd ab Ieuan acquired and upgraded the fading bastion for his residence, prior to moving to Tai Penamnen. In between times, the armies of England's King Edward I had controlled the castle for a while when Wales was conquered in the late 13th century.

Even Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, mentioned above in connection with Taliesin's monument, had a role restoring Dolwyddelan Castle in the 19th century. As it turns out, Willoughby became owner resulting from his standing as a descendant of the Wynn family of Gwydir.

Squeezing in one final stop before returning to Tan-y-foel, Owen paused the car for a moment by picturesque Pont Fawr, a narrow three-arch stone bridge over the River Conwy in Llanwrst. The bridge was built in 1636 by Sir Richard Wynn, yet another descendant of the House of Aberffraw. Llanwrst, like Trefriw, was known in earlier times for the wool

trade. Nowadays, tourism is a bigger draw. The pretty little town afforded a fitting end for our journey, given that the parish church there was the final resting place of Llewelyn the Great.

With our foray to out-of-the-way spots now finished, Lori and I marveled at the rich history that accompanied the seemingly obscure hidden gems that Owen had shared with us. So much so, that the next day we returned to another of the lost treasures that we had originally found with Owen. Fairy Glen is an enchanting little gorge accessible by a popular walk from Betws-y-Coed. Owen described a legend that claimed if you went there on the night of a full moon in summer and sat on a rock in the glen, a fairy would tap you on the shoulder and talk with you.

Fairy Glen, while beautifully scenic, exuded an eerie quality that was spooky enough that we decided against tempting the legend at night. Instead, in the afternoon we located the unique place along the glen that eluded all but the most thoroughgoing visitor.

Looking down on Fairy Glen through thick trees and ferns from an old stone bridge crossing the Machno River, another much more ancient bridge could be seen. Dating to the 14th century, now overgrown with hanging greenery, the narrow bridge had served drovers of that era tending their cattle and sheep. We could only imagine if any of the characters from our visit to the other sites had placed foot on this bridge so long ago.

The following morning, our sojourn at Tan-y-foel drew to a close. Over one final sumptuous breakfast, we entertained our hosts, Ria and Chris, with tales of wonder gleaned from the nearby hallowed settings, whose historic events and people we had but glimpsed from afar. Grateful for the information, Ria then asked, "Have you been to the slate mines? They're full of history." "No," I said, "but that gives us an excuse to return someday."



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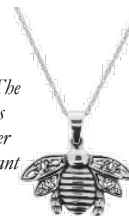
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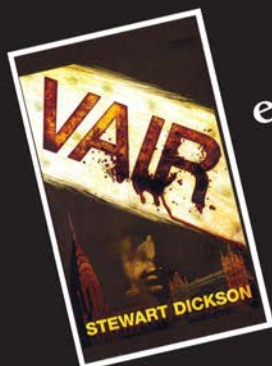
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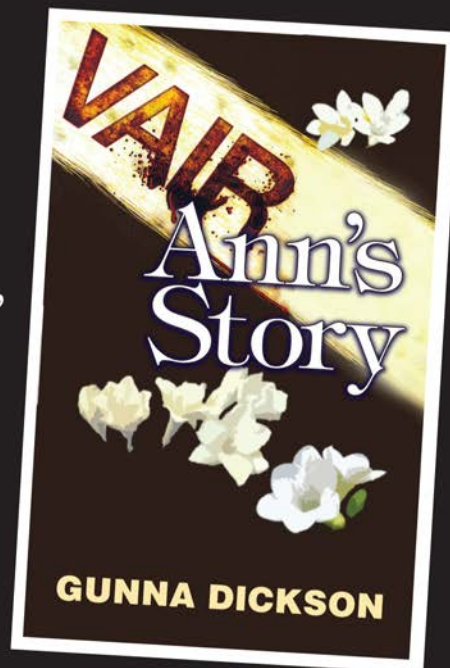
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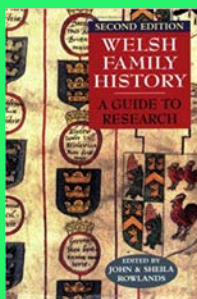


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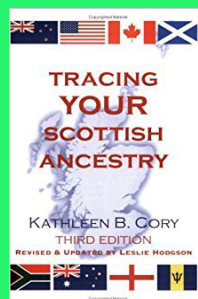
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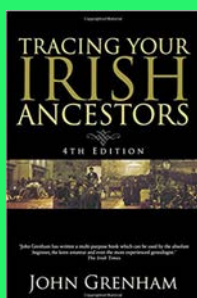


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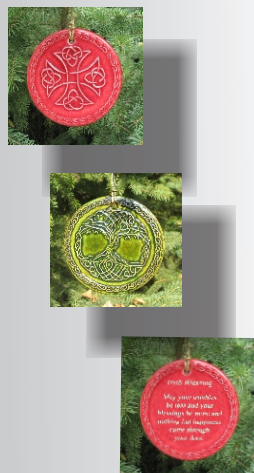
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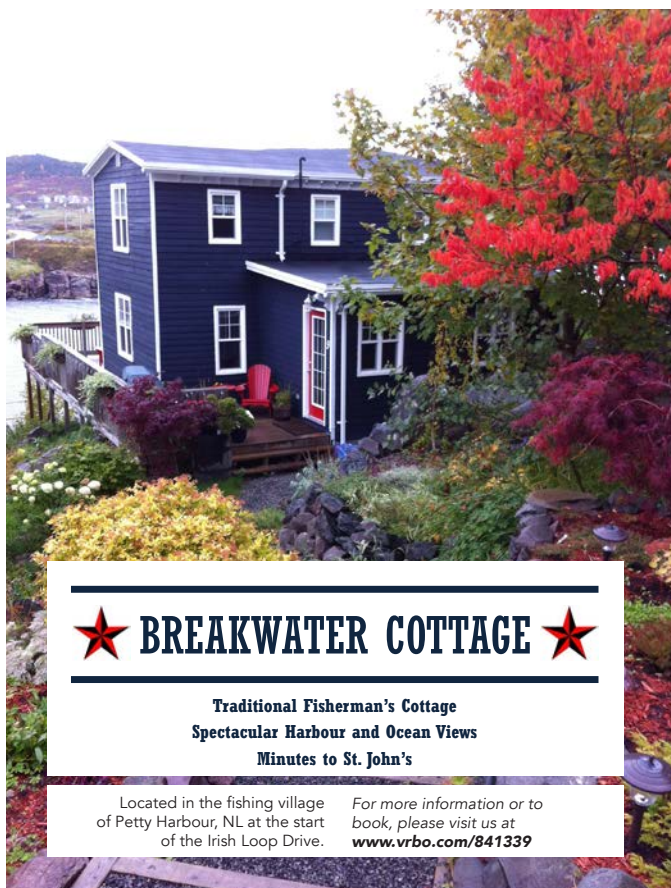
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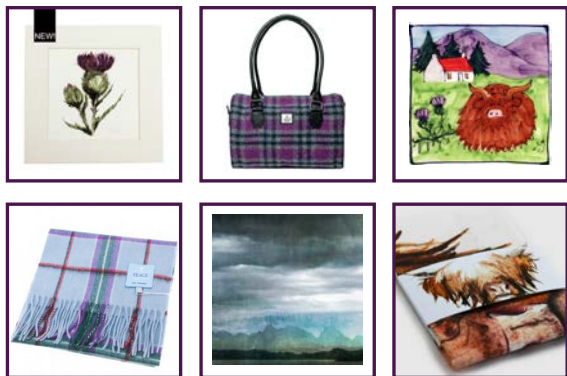
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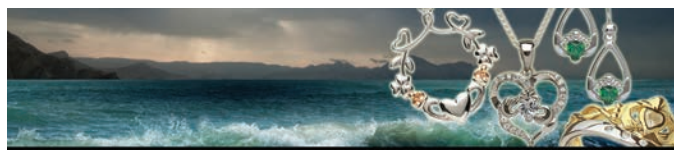
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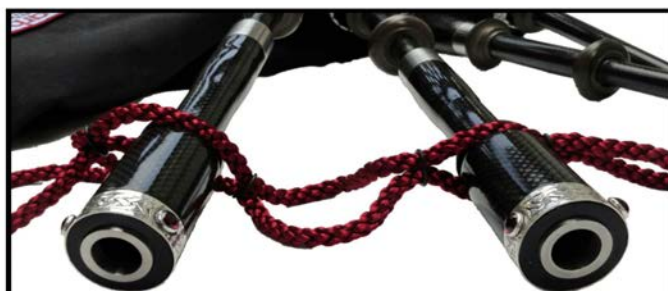
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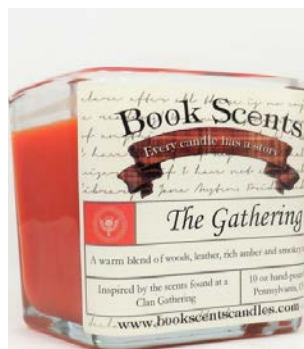
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Each year, Celtic Life International receives hundreds of books and recordings for review. Although, admittedly, not everything gets a look or a listen, we always aim to give authors and musical artists a fair shake. Recently we revisited works that graced our pages over the past 12 months, and below are the best of the best. For more reviews, please visit our website.



9Bach

Anian

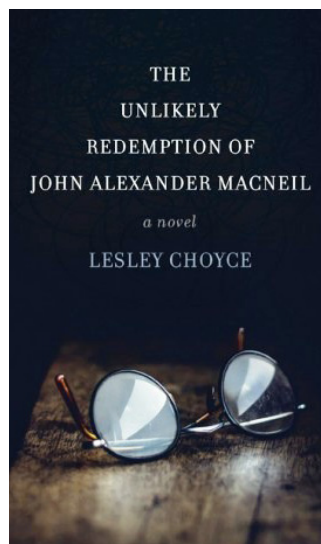
How this recording managed to slip through my fingers last year remains a mystery; everyone knows I am a sucker for a pretty face with a prettier voice. More than a Welsh version of Enya, Kate Bush or Bjork, singer-songwriter Lisa Jen pushes her six-piece band to the brink of Celtic alt-folk with stirring, soulful vocals. Anian - the Brythonic word for nature - does well to express the spirit and soul of a hearty people, their lush landscape and their ancient language, in hushed and haunting tones. Beautiful and breathtaking, these 11 superb soundscapes caught the ear of Peter Gabriel and his Real World Records, a feather in the cap for any artist, let alone a little-known group with big things on the horizon.



Calan

Solomon

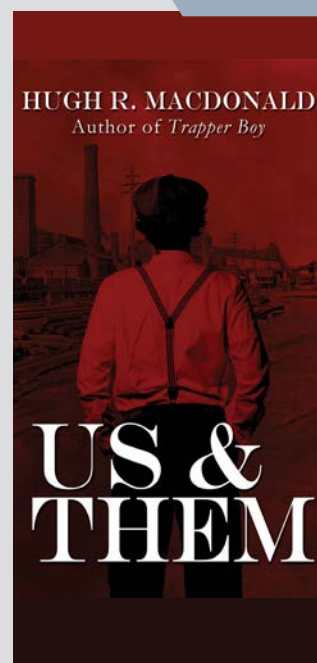
Who knew that traditional Welsh folk-rock could sound so damned...sexy? I am tempted to leave the review at that, and leave the rest to readers' imaginations. Now that I have your attention, however...Fronted by vocalist Bethan Rhiannon, who sings in both English and her native language, and featuring an all-star lineup of players, Calan absolutely kill it with their fourth studio recording, Solomon. Stellar sound production, and a few special guest appearances - including noted Welsh poet Nigel Jenkins - take these twelve terrific tunes to new heights, and make for a stirring and stunning sonic journey through Wales' rugged and robust musical landscape. It is no wonder that critics and fans (me, on both counts) are quick with kudos for this quintessential Celtic quintet.



The Unlikely Redemption of John Alexander MacNeil

By Lesley Choyce
Fernwood Publishing
228pp / \$21

With over 90 books to his name already, bestselling Nova Scotia author, poet, publisher, professor, musician, surfer - and Celtic Life International contributor - Lesley Choyce proves that he remains as profound as he is prolific with his latest novel. Set in rural Cape Breton, The Unlikely Redemption of John Alexander MacNeil is the story of an elderly curmudgeon whose daily rituals - including cooking breakfast each morning for a wife that has been dead for thirty years - are upset when a pregnant teenager suddenly shows up at his door unannounced. Warm, witty and wise, the author does well to create a quirky chemistry between the pair that develops over a strong narrative arc. An excellent gateway into the work of a great writer.



Us and Them

By Hugh R. MacDonald
Cape Breton University Press
160 pp / \$11.99

Though a mere 160 pages, Hugh R. Macdonald's terrific tale of one young man coming of age in the coal mines of 1920s Cape Breton punches well above its weight. Following a fatal mine accident, 16-year-old JW Donaldson begins questioning both his company's practices and the industry's impossible working conditions. Before long, he recruits the help of a local union man in an effort to effect change. And while resistance from the public and private sectors proves strong, as is the concern from his family and friends, Donaldson prevails. Though listed as a novel for Young Adults, Us and Them is a vital read for anyone interested in Nova Scotia's long and troubled labour history, and the power of the individual to make a difference.



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