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Northern Ireland, The Irish Rovers

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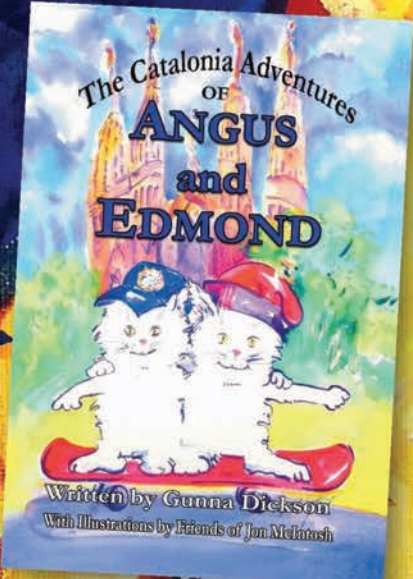
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Fáilte!

Time Stand Still

In reviewing the amazing array of articles that appear in our six editions from 2018, I had a most curious experience.

Winding my way through almost one thousand pages of material, I was transported back to the time and place I first read them. Mindful during those moments, time stood still; I was completely engaged and entertained, in an almost Zen-like state. I can only hope that our wonderful and devout readers have a similar experience with each edition.

I am proud of what we accomplished in 2018, and that we have continued to “connect the Celtic dots” around the world.

As such, our team has much to feel good about; our esteemed publishers and their family, our dedicated in-house staff writers and copy editors, our talented correspondents, our brilliant creative designer, our hard-working sales staff - all have put in countless hours to help us further our mandate over the last 12 months; to be both successful as a company and significant as a community.

Perhaps what I am most proud of this year, however, is the work we did with various cancer organizations across the seven Celtic nations. Our “Celts for Cancer” initiative raised awareness and tens of thousands of dollars for cancer research, prevention, treatment and services.

As it is for so many folks, it is a disease that hits close to home - perhaps, in my case, a little too close. My father, Kenneth - a proud Irish-Canadian (with Welsh and Scottish ties) - passed away from cancer in the summer of 2015. Shortly after, I underwent 7 weeks of chemotherapy and radiation to remove cancerous cells in my neck and throat.

Interestingly, like my father, my core concern during the malaise was not of myself, but rather the well-being of those around me; as many cancer survivors will tell you, we can deal with both the process and the end-result (good or bad) in our own time and on our own terms - however, it is not uncommon for us to struggle with the uncertainties of family, friends, co-workers and associates. Often, all we need is a little reassurance that the people we know and love are going to be alright, no matter the outcome.

Thankfully, my story has a happy ending, and as I approach the three-year anniversary of my final treatments, I am feeling and doing better than ever. In hindsight, and while I would not wish the experience upon anyone, my battle with cancer gave me many gifts, not the least of which has been a shift in perspective and paradigm; very quickly, and though it is an obvious cliché, the things that mattered to me just a short time ago now seem somewhat... insignificant.

Divesting myself of distractions has afforded me greater opportunities to focus upon the things that do matter to me; health, family, friends, travel, art, good food, and meaningful work. I smile and laugh a lot more these days as well. Most importantly, perhaps, I am mindful of my moments, where time stands still.

Bonne Nouvelle Année!

Stephen Patrick Clare, CEO & Editor-in-Chief

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Celtic Complexion

A pale-skinned American of Scottish descent, Jennifer Devlin Waller founded her company after finding mainstream cosmetics didn't suit her

As someone afflicted with rosacea - a condition that gives the face a flushed appearance - Jennifer Devlin Waller started her company Celtic Complexion in 2011 after discovering that natural oils benefited her skin.

It was a sea change for the Raleigh, North Carolina resident, who grew up in Miami and had spent over 20 years in the prestige cosmetic industry after jumping into the beauty business in high school.

"I became a makeup artist simply because I was so self-conscious of my rosacea and wanted to learn how to cover it up," she says. "I worked my way up the cosmetic food chain to become a Beauty Director for Nordstrom."

"Ironically, what started off as a genetic condition - people with a Celtic heritage suffer most from rosacea - was made worse by the toxin-laden cosmetics I would pile on my skin every day."

Waller explains that it wasn't until she met a holistic esthetician that she made the connection between the products she was using and the condition of her skin.

The esthetician advised her to use only natural oils. Waller took her advice and, within two weeks, her skin looked better than it ever had.

Waller was then torn between the career she had spent years building and exploring a holistic approach. She eventually quit her job and returned to school to become an esthetician.

Over the next five years, she read widely about ingredients and holistic remedies and started making her own products, which she used on her clients, friends, and family.

She also made her first visit to Ireland. When she stepped off the plane, she felt as if she was looking in a mirror.

"There were pale skins and rosy cheeks everywhere," she chuckles. "Growing up in Miami, everyone was tanned and always wanted to be at the beach - but when all your skin does is burn, it's no fun."

That trip to Ireland gave her the idea of helping others with the same skin type, so she formed Celtic Complexion. The company's core clients are women over the age of 35, of Celtic heritage, and who are concerned about the signs of aging.

"We are the only brand that focuses entirely on those with a Celtic heritage, which means every ingredient we use will benefit Celtic skin in some way. I purposely avoid ingredients that are known irritants for sensitive skin."

Her products are also used by celebrity makeup artists and women of other ethnicities who want an effective anti-aging solution for their sensitive skins.

Waller notes that Celtic Complexion, which she runs with her husband Steve, offers a "small but mighty" collection, including cleansers, serums, moisturizers, sunscreen and body products.

Their most popular products include the Calming Serum, which soothes rosacea, their moisturizing Celtic Complexion Crème, and a chemical-free sunscreen, which is 25 per cent zinc oxide.

Some of her products have been rated "excellent" by America's Environmental Working Group (EWG), and all are made fresh with minimal processing.

"Our sunscreen is the highest rated for safety. People search the EWG database to verify safe ingredients for their skin and then come visit our website to learn more."

The company's products have received many awards - including one from the Indie Business Association, which named one of Celtic Complexion's moisturizers Indie Beauty Product-of-the-Year.

As company CEO, Waller is a typical entrepreneur in that she does a little bit of everything, including research and development, marketing, and customer service.

Building a business is a process. When she started her company, she gained exposure by asking beauty bloggers for reviews. These days, she prioritizes social media which is especially important for an online store such as hers. She also sponsors high-profile events such as The Miss Mayo Ball and the Boston Irish Film Festival.

Waller has noticed that people are keen to make a connection to their heritage and support specialist businesses. She intends to launch a men's line in June in time for Father's Day, which will include a beard oil, shaving crème, bar soap and face balm moisturizer.

Furthermore, life as an entrepreneur is an adventure that has given her greater insight into her own heritage.

"And the good news," she smiles, "is that I look better now at almost 50 than I did in my early 30s."

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The New York Caledonian Club

*Originally founded in 1856,
The New York Caledonian Club
continues to preserve and promote
the region's Scottish heritage*

New York City evokes the image of immigrants greeted by Lady Liberty, sailing up to Ellis Island at the turn of the last century, on their way to becoming Americans. And though many were of Italian, Jewish, and Irish decent, the Scots had their exodus to the new world as well, and the community has a long history in the area.

"A lot of Scots immigrated here earlier than the Irish," says Sue Ann McDevitt, the 83rd and current chief of the New York Caledonian Club. "The bulk of Irish immigration occurred after the potato famine. Most Scottish immigration was following Culloden in 1746."

Many Scots came to New York at that time in indentured servitude. Most were Protestant or Presbyterian, and were firmly settled by the time the largely Catholic Irish immigrants flocked to the Big Apple.

"The Scots were much more established as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, whereas the Irish were seen as the Papists, the Catholics," continues McDevitt. "The cadre of the men formed the 79th Regiment of the Union Army, and they were the only kilted regiment in the history of the United States military."

She adds that the club has ties with much of both the city and the state's history. "At one point, Andrew Carnegie was involved with the organization."

While its mandate has changed over the last 161 years, the group's goal is to keep Scottish heritage alive - and more importantly, accessible - in modern Manhattan.

"Our main purpose, besides friendship and enjoying one another's company, is that we promote Scottish culture," explains McDevitt. "There are other organizations that are Scottish-aligned, but we offer Gaelic language classes - whether it's beginning speech, conversational, or reading - and we sponsor fiddling workshops, and Highland dance and ceilidh dancing workshops as well. And, in January, we are going to be hosting a course on tracing your roots in conjunction with the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society."

Speaking of genealogy, that is another way that the organization is unique; you need not prove your heritage to become a member, which can be of huge importance for those whose lineage is not as neatly mapped out as others. The open-door policy has the added benefit of making the New York Caledonian Club available to anyone interested in Scottish heritage, regardless of their own background.

*One of the group's core mottos is
"we are open to the world."*

Perhaps nowhere is that philosophy more evident than at the club's annual Burns Night Supper, where Scottish poet Robert Burns



is remembered over an evening of dinner, dancing, and a hugely popular silent auction that's open to members and non-members alike.

"It's one of our bigger fundraising opportunities," says Kyle Dawson, the club's treasurer, who estimates that the January event can account for 25 per cent of the organization's yearly intake. "It even helps us hold the Burns Night Supper itself; the ticket prices don't come close to covering what it costs us to host the soiree. We are more interested in people coming and having a good time than us making top dollar."

New York is an expensive city to live in, especially for young people, and Dawson and his peers are acutely aware of that.

"The youth in New York City - and when I say youth I mean Millennials, men and women in their 20s and 30s - they are always working," he notes. "When they do get out and do something, they don't want to spend a lot of money, as the sheer cost of living in New York City is very high. Keeping our prices down definitely encourages them to come out and have a good time."

Catching the interest of that particular audience is of vital importance to McDevitt.

"My mandate is to increase the younger member cohort. We need younger people to participate in order to guarantee - especially with the New York Caledonian Club - that this 161-year-old organization is around for another 160 years, and that the passion for Scottish culture is passed down to the next generation."

Tickets for the Burns Night Supper are available through the club's website. There is also a donation form for those wishing to support the club, either monetarily or with items to stock the silent auction.

"No donation is too small, and no donation is too big," says Dawson.

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Fogo Island, Newfoundland, once a very isolated outlet at the edge of the Earth, has been enjoying greater attention in recent years, due in large part to a particularly striking contemporary piece of architecture – the Fogo Island Inn.

While the Inn reflects the four hundred-year-old vernacular architecture and design aesthetics found on the island, another perhaps lesser-known structure, located in the National Historic District of Tilting, has also hosted travelers from around the world looking to experience the Island's distinct Irish culture and hospitality. The Shed, known colloquially as “Phil’s shed,” belongs to Fogo Island-born Maureen Foley and her husband Phil Foley.

Most days, Foley’s facility functions as an everyday workshop. However, it is also set up to entertain company when the opportunity suits, with ample seating and various knick-knacks and gewgaws hanging from the walls.

“This may sound funny, but our little shed has kind of become popular,” says Foley, who also serves as school secretary for the community on the island. “Most sheds start off as a place where the husband works outside with his tools, but ours just took off in a different direction.”

Most have heard of the renowned Fogo Island Inn, the spectacular hotel at the core of the island’s appeal as a travel destination. Foley’s structure, and the shed parties hosted there, have also become an integral part of the island experience.

So, what exactly is a ‘shed party’?

“It’s the same as a house party, only it’s in a shed,” laughs Foley, who has catered to a number of noteworthy guests over the years, including dignitaries from Ireland and a Mayor of Toronto.

“The greatest challenge, for any destination, is to be able to express the specific local ecology and materials and the ways



of thinking and doing that are of a place,” notes Melanie Coates, Director of Business Development for Fogo Island Inn. “That is something that simply cannot be packaged for consumption. The Inn belongs to the community and when visitors come to Fogo Island, they are hosted by the entire community.”

As such, the Inn has turned to Community Hosts to welcome guests into their lives and orient them to the island.

“We have created a loose organization of Community Hosts - a subset of our community - who are key to this,” continues Coates. “They are not employees of the Inn - they are fishers, teachers, fish plant workers, nurses and others who live on the island. It’s a bit like getting connected with a friend-of-a-friend.”

Maureen Foley has spent most of her life in Tilting, and cherishes her role as a Community Host. She and her husband have been welcoming people to shed parties on Saturday nights for years.

“About five years ago, when the hotel was nearing completion, my husband Phil was working on its exterior,” she shares. “The contractor was from Toronto, and all of his workers were young lads from Ireland. Winter days are full of adventure here, but in the evening, there’s not much to do socially for young people. During the winter nights, you kind of make your own fun. So, they spent their Saturday nights at our shed.”

Soon after the Inn opened its doors, guests found their way over to the small shed.

“They just kind of wander in,” chuckles Foley.

The hospitality comes naturally to the 200-some residents of Tilting, one of ten communities on Fogo Island; the region was largely settled by pre-famine Irish immigrants.

“We are very proud of our Irish heritage...”

“Up until the 1960s, our community was much more isolated than it is today. That is likely why we have maintained our Irish heritage and culture.”

Growing up in Tilting as a child, Foley recalls that life was slower; her parents never even owned a car.

“The warmth, welcome and overall openness of the people of Tilting, and Fogo Island, is second nature to all of us here,” she continues. “It really is a ‘win-win’ situation; visitors explore and learn about the local area and culture, and we make many new friends.”

Tilting will be the focus of Fogo Island Inn’s St. Patrick’s Day festivities this March, which will include a traditional Irish supper, explorations of the hiking trails used by the first Irish settlers to the island, and a visit to the community itself.

Although Foley’s shed is closed to visitors during the winter season, she is confident that guests will receive a hearty Irish welcome.

“There’s sure to be a get-together at the St. Patrick’s club, and there will likely be lots of music and dancing.”

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Bataireacht

The ancient Celtic art of bataireacht, or Irish stick-fighting, is alive and well. Chris Muise tells us more.



Roger Stone

If asked to name a martial art, most of us would probably fall back on one of the popular eastern styles, like Karate or Taekwondo. Or perhaps the more esoteric forms of Brazilian Jujitsu or Judo.

The Celtic people have a traditional martial art of their own, too - although it is not surprising to its practitioners when someone hasn't heard of it.

Glen Doyle is trained in the art of bataireacht, or Irish stick-fighting. Knowledge of this particular set of skills was, for generations, the exclusive domain of those in the Doyle clan.

"If you didn't have the surname 'Doyle,' you didn't learn it - my dad was really strict on that," he shares over the phone from his home in Ontario. "I teach what my dad taught me - it is a family tradition, passed on from my dad to me, and my dad learned it from my granddad, who learned from my great granddad, etc... we are five or six generations here in Canada."

Doyle's training began in 1972, at the age of seven. His father, Gregory Doyle, was a boxer and a veteran with the Canadian Armed Forces, who often said stick-fighting saved his life during the Korean War on more than one occasion. It is not surprising that Gregory and his four brothers were all soldiers, according to Doyle - Irish stick fighting

evolved from techniques that their ancestors perfected in combat.

"The stick fighting that I was taught was born on a battlefield. If a technique didn't work, you had your head bashed in. The techniques that did work during the faction fights were the ones that got passed on."

Doyle is the first in his lineage to teach the Doyle stick-fighting style outside of the family. He only does so because he convinced his father, who passed away in 1998, to let him share the tradition, lest the form end with him.

"I was his only son," notes Doyle, who was itching to share his experience with others. "I said to him, 'Dad, if I'm walking across the street one day and I get hit by a car, the system is done.'"

But Doyle is careful to teach to the letter of tradition, even though it limits his ability to expand the style into an actual sport.

"If you want to be a successful martial arts businessman, and you want your stick system out there, you're going to have to contemporize."

"I had to make the choice; do I keep the integrity of our system, or do I try to modernize it, open it up, or try to get it expanded at the cost of lineage and technique? I didn't want to do that, because it wouldn't be the way to honour my dad's memory."

Doyle's isn't the only stick-fighting style out there, though. Other forms have been passed down through generations. Some are similarly guarded with their family skills, while the keepers of others are doing their best to get more sticks in hands, knowing full-well that it means modernizing the art.



Glen Doyle

"What we do is 'in the style of' - not the father-to-son style that I claim was passed down to me," says Roger Stone, the founder of the Celtic Stick-Fighting Society in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Stone teaches a year-long, multi-discipline course, which includes Irish stick-fighting skills. He has contemporized some of the traditional techniques in order to make them more accessible and useful to a modern practitioner.

"If you do a style that was from 1820, how's that going to help you in a phone booth? You've got to modify your stuff as time goes on."

While Doyle still teaches the traditional style passed down along his bloodline, he has made peace with the fact that teaching outside the family means that it will be merged with other forms.

"Trying to keep the system from being integrated with other systems is impossible," he acknowledges, likening the world of modern martial arts to a salad bar, where people mix the techniques they like together. "If you are going to put the style out there, it is going to get adapted into other things. The identity still remains - it is just being blended."

"I have basically done what I wanted to do with it - the style will survive."



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The Rowan Tree digs deep into its Cornish roots

Of the seven Celtic nations, Ireland and Scotland likely have the greatest cultural influence on the global stage, particularly with regard to music.

A new quartet from Cornwall is hoping to get in on some of that sonic action, however.

The Rowan Tree - founded by siblings Tom Fosten (guitar) and Laura Garcia (flute/piano/accordion/vocals), along with Richard Trethewey (fiddle/vocals) and Neal Jolly (bass) - are quickly making big noise with music critics and fans.

Originally called The Grenaways, the band changed gears - and its name - prior to the 2017 Pan Celtic Festival in Ireland; as members experimented and jammed in preparation for the annual event, their style shifted from a contemporary vibe to classic Celtic melodies.

"Our sound is very much in a traditional folk style," explains Garcia, "although we like to combine the music we write with traditional Cornish tunes and songs, and those from around the world. A good example of this is a set of songs we play where the first is a traditional Cornish piece, which goes into a tune I wrote and ends with a snippet from a classical work written by an American composer."

"We have started to develop a really unique repertoire of material that represents all of the band members in different ways," adds Trethewey.

Things have progressed quickly for the fledgling foursome.

"It has been a whirlwind year for us," notes Garcia. "A few short months after we first decided to form the band we found ourselves playing on stage at the Festival Interceltique in Lorient. It was our very first gig, and our first rehearsal was on the ferry over to Brittany!"

"We then began working on new tunes. We recorded a self-titled EP, and one of the songs (Tresor) was entered into Kan Rag Kernow (the 'Song for Cornwall' contest), which - incredibly - we won. Then, we placed first at the Pan Celtic International Song Competition in Ireland, and went on to win the Liet International Song Contest in Leeuwarden, Netherlands."

"Winning the Liet has been the real highlight for us, as we dreamed of it but never really expected it to happen," shares Trethewey. "There were so many amazing artists competing, and it was one of those truly magical moments where the underdogs won!"

"Winning the Liet has to be the best thing to happen to us so far," Jolly concurs. "It really helped to validate what we are doing."

"It was the first time a band from Cornwall - singing in Cornish - had won, beating songs from 14 nations across Europe," continues Garcia. "It was such a privilege to even represent Cornwall, so to win felt like a dream come true!"

One of the band's core mandates is to promote traditional Cornish culture through their music - something, they believe, that is thriving at home.

"Traditional music has a much more visible place in the culture of Cornwall than in other places in England," says Fosten.

"It is a land full of brass bands, choirs, pub singing, and throughout history Cornwall has produced many world-famous singers," notes Trethewey.

"Cornwall has always had a rich music scene and we are generally very musical people..."

That thriving Cornish music scene could use some extra help branching out across the globe, however.

"Compared to other Celtic nations, we could do with more financial support for the younger generation of musicians coming up," admits Trethewey. "But the country continues to surprise and punch far above its weight."

"Cornwall is a small nation in relation to Ireland and Scotland, and it doesn't get a lot of funding to promote its culture," adds Garcia. "That said, there are people here who are working tirelessly to preserve and promote our customs and traditions."

"My hope is that, because of our success at events like the Pan Celtic in Ireland and Liet International in the Netherlands, people will learn more about Cornwall and Cornish music and culture, which will inspire more people to get involved," Trethewey adds.

With so much already accomplished in their first year, Fosten hints at a few things that their growing fan base can look forward to in the next while.

"It is an exciting time for us, and we have a very full agenda over the next while, including a fall U.K. tour, more recording, and the possibility of bringing in a fifth member..."

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The Irish **Rovers**

George Millar and the Irish Rovers reclaim an old classic with a new album and tour



A full 50 years after the Irish Rovers' break-out hit song about green alligators, long-necked geese, humpty-backed camels and chimpanzees caught everyone's ear, band founder George Millar is holding out hope for the loveliest of all, the unicorns.

Until now, the jaunty unicorn song - with its story book imagery of Brother Noah building an ark and marching the animals in, two by two, while the unicorns hid and played silly games - seemed to spell the certain death of the mythical creatures.

And while, at 70 - and with more than 50 years in the music business - Millar has a thicker skin, a half-century of seeing the shocked dismay on the faces of generations of children as he sang about the rain pouring down and floating the unicorns away finally got to him.

"We have decided to put a stop to all those tears by re-releasing the original recording and adding one more song, a sequel to The Unicorn. We are calling it The Unicorn, the Continuing Story, and it is a part of our 50th anniversary celebrations," says Millar from his home in Victoria, BC, as the band prepares to tour the new album across the United States.

Truth be told, the youthful, Irish-born Millar never expected to hear a word about The Unicorn, a last-minute addition to their 1967 album of the same name. It is a record-

ing that Millar now views as staggeringly low-tech and short on instrumentation - even with the fancy fretwork of a young Glen Campbell on lead guitar.

"We thought we were done, but the producer asked for one more song. He wanted something a wee bit different, actually a complete contrast to the other songs on the record."

Band members looked at each other and immediately agreed that The Unicorn, written and released a few years earlier by Shel Silverstein, qualified as different. They'd already been playing it in bars and coffee houses, so quickly recorded it in one take, without drums or piano, to complete the album.

"We'd noticed that when we sang it the beer glasses would be set down on the tables and the conversation would fade away as everyone listened."

The add-on song became the album's title track and climbed to the top of the charts, though it took the band a while to catch up with it. The minute the recording was done they took off for Colorado where they were booked to play in Aspen and Vale for several months.

"It might be impossible for young peo-



ple today to appreciate, but we had very little contact with anyone back then - limited radio, no television, no internet, no cell phones, you didn't even make a long distance call unless you absolutely had to. We had no idea what was going on with the album while we were playing and partying in Colorado."

No idea at all until they were back on the road, nearing California early one morning. It was 3 a.m. and the car radio was on, though most of the Rovers were asleep until somebody yelled, "Oh my God, it's us!"

"We woke in a terrible hurry and heard a radio host, who happened to be an Irish lad, talking about a hit song and playing The Unicorn. We pulled over, jumped out of the car and raced around on the side of the highway, screaming and hugging each other, hardly believing our ears."

It was, Millar now knows, a pivotal moment for the Irish Rovers who went on to tour internationally to packed houses. At the

time, however, it was just a few minutes of unadulterated joy for aspiring musicians who had been only earning just enough for smokes, beer, and gas to their next gig.

The Unicorn reached No. 2 on US adult contemporary charts and sold 8 million copies, with versions eventually recorded in French and German. It also led former band member Will Millar, George's brother, to open a chain of pubs called The Unicorn.

"When we were recording the album, our second, we were hopeful we'd sell 7,000 or 8,000 copies and that would give us a hell of a pay day, by our standards."

With the 50th anniversary album and tour Millar, who immigrated to Canada with his family as a teenager, introduces a hopeful, new possibility for the adventurous unicorns.

"I got to thinking about our cold northern waters, about old Inuit tales and the mysterious narwhal. I imagined there might be a connection, a happier ending with the unicorns transformed, but still frolicking."

Other songs being re-released on the new album include The Black Velvet Band, Come In, The Man from Mullingar, Muirsheen Durkin, The Orange and the Green, Kellswater, The Wind that Shakes the Corn, Little Bridget Flynn, The First Love in Life, and Brady of Strabane.

Millar is joined on the new album by original Rovers members Wilcil McDowell, from Lame, Sean O'Driscoll from Cork on banjo, Ian Millar from Ballymena on vocals and guitar, Morris Crum of Carlough on accordion and keyboard, Scottish-born Canadian Geoffrey Kelly on flute and whistles, fiddler Gerry O'Connor from Dundalk, and Fred Graham, originally from Belfast, on drums.

Millar, who saw 15 other Rovers' songs make it onto the charts, including Wasn't That a Party, marvels at the differences in making music today from 50 years ago, when all musicians and equipment were brought together in a studio.

"Now we start out with me on Canada's west coast, just my voice and a guitar. We then send those tracks to Ireland where Wilcil will add on his accordion, and then down to Cork for more additions. The music goes north to south and back and forth across the Atlantic before we take off the first voice and put on the final voices."

Reflecting on the original band, he noted they were a fun-loving Catholic-Protestant mix, the sons of folks who got away from religious and political tensions in Ireland, thinking they could do better for their families in Canada.

"As a band we left politics out except maybe the odd song that went back to the 1798 Rebellion. We left the rebel songs to the Clancys and The Wolfe Tones and stayed away from religion, too, except for a funny song, The Orange and the Green. As far as the current band goes, I suppose we are still Catholic and Protestant - with maybe a few atheists thrown in - but we still prefer to sing about fun, whiskey, horses and pretty Colleens."

A half-century later, Millar still isn't sure what made The Unicorn such a massive hit.

"It is iconic, in a category with Puff the Magic Dragon and a few Beatles songs. We thought it was a silly little song, but it turned out that the joke was on us. It brought us great luck."

Back in 2013 the Rovers announced their farewell tour, but Millar notes that new dates keep popping up.

"I guess we'd have to say it is an extended tour. It is still going on, and before you know it we're apt to be working on another recording. At this point, I'm thinking we'll call it No End in Sight."

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The Chieftains

Irish musical legends The Chieftains mark their 55th anniversary with a string of international shows



Paddy Moloney shows no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

Even at the age of 79, the irrepressible founder of the world's most influential and successful Irish traditional band - which has six Grammy Awards and an Oscar to its credit - just wants to party on. He is already planning show details and booking performances into 2019.

"It'll be a boots-on job for me," says Moloney during a telephone interview from Japan, as the band wraps up its 2017 tour schedule. "That's the way I'd prefer to go out and, God willing, I will - but not for a while yet."

The only active original member of The Chieftains, which formed in Dublin in 1962, the renowned musician, composer and producer has always been the beating and bleeding musical heart of the band.

With 52 recordings to date, The Chieftains have a deeply loyal fan base for their traditional Irish music. Over time, they have broadened their audience by collaborating with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor, and countless others. More importantly, notes Moloney, the band has helped launch the careers of many young performers, among them dancer Michael Flatley, the brainchild behind the globally acclaimed Irish dance spectacular Riverdance.

"Once I did, indeed, worry about the future of traditional Irish music, but with the caliber of young musicians coming on, I have no worries today."

Sipping on roasted green tea a scant hour after sunrise in Tokyo, Moloney is multitasking; prepping the band's February and March



2018 tour of the United States, while still reveling in the joy of the previous day's workshop for 129 Japanese musicians.

"Think of it - 25 flute players, 7 pipers, 19 Irish harpists, and a whole lot of people playing the bodhrán. Could anyone imagine 30 years ago that the Japanese would go berserk over our traditional music? It was glorious."

Noting Japan is the only country in the world where The Chieftains have an actual fan club, as well as a group of female musicians who call themselves The Lady Chieftains, Moloney marvels at the blending of Japanese and traditional Irish music.

"When you mix in Japanese instruments - percussion, in particular - it is extraordinary. It is really quite something to hear Japanese drummers playing O'Neill's March."

His focus soon shifts to that evening's concert, also in Tokyo.

"We are honoured that the 83-year-old Empress of Japan is coming. As a young woman she came to Ireland to study music,

and do you know she plays the Irish harp herself?"

At the age of six, Moloney was entranced by a tin whistle given to him by his mother and, by nine, he was learning to play the uilleann pipes. While he enjoys classical and jazz music, and has fond memories of playing the ukulele during his school years, traditional music was his first and truest love. As a teenager, however, his friends were more inclined towards American rock 'n' roll - specifically Bill Haley and the Comets, and Elvis Presley.

"I'd sometimes get a slagging from some of the lads as I went down the street carrying my pipes, but it wasn't so many years before those slaggers were after me for concert tickets."

Moloney's earliest musical memories go back to summers spent at his grandparents' home in hilly, landlocked County Laois.

"In the evenings the neighbours would come in and start to play. The windows would all be open with the music pouring out into the countryside. It was a time of grand house dances and hooleys that went on until we had to get ready for Mass in the morning."

Moloney played in a number of acclaimed bands, including the Sean O'Riada's Ceoltoiri Chualann, before he brought folk musicians Sean Potts, Mick Tubridy and Sean Keane together for The Chieftains' first concerts and debut recording.

By day, he earned his bread and butter as an accountant, until he began managing Claddagh Records for then-Guinness heir - and loyal arts patron - Garech Browne.

“He provided the financial backing and I provided the shoe leather and got a good education in the process,” recalls Moloney, who produced more than 40 albums for the company.

The pair maintains their friendship, and today Moloney has a home in the Wicklow Mountains not far from Brown’s iconic Luggala estate.

It wasn’t long, however, before the band took flight.

In 1975, The Chieftains found themselves booked into Royal Albert Hall in London for a St. Patrick’s Day concert. Moloney took a bet that if the promoter could sell out the 6,000 seat venue, the previously part-time band would go professional.

As it turned out, there was not an empty seat - nor a dry eye - in the house. At evening’s end the crowd roared for an encore, and the critics followed up with rave reviews.

“It was selling out there that launched us internationally. We gave up our day jobs and from that point on we sold out Carnegie Hall and were ready to play anywhere.”

Since then, and with the official blessing of the Irish government, The Chieftains have roamed the world as cultural ambassadors, often receiving official welcomes at Irish embassies all over the globe. Not surprisingly, musicians have come and gone through the decades, and the scope of the once exclusively instrumental band has broadened to include vocalists and an array of dancers.

“Through the years we’ve always experimented, always tried to put together new sounds so that each show and each recording had something new to offer.”

The band marked its 50th anniversary in 2012 with *Voice of Ages*, an album of collaborations featuring aspiring young musicians, most

of them not yet born when The Chieftains first assembled.

“I didn’t want to release a ‘Best Of’ album,” recalls Maloney, “but instead something live and fresh, to prove that we were still alive and kicking.”

The critically acclaimed recording featured The Pistol Annies performing a Scots-Irish love song, and The Decemberists’ terrific take on *When the Ship Comes In* - a Bob Dylan classic favoured by the legendary Irish singer Tommy Makem.

The Chieftains were the first western group to perform at China’s Great Wall, and were also part of 1990s ‘Live at The Wall’ spectacular in Berlin. They were also first to give a concert at the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., and Moloney had the honour of performing at a Ground Zero memorial service in the U.S. The band even sent a flute and tin whistle to the International Space Station with American astronaut Cady Coleman.

Reflecting on the longevity of the band, Moloney pauses briefly to remember past members - such as his longtime friend, the eccentric harpist Derek (Ding Dong) Bell, who played keyboards, oboe and hammered dulcimer. He is also quick to praise his current band mates. The Dublin-born, bodhran-playing Kevin Conneff - with his old-style sean nos singing - became the band’s first vocalist when he joined in 1976. Matt Molloy from Roscommon, was raised on flute, tin whistle and drums, and played with Planxty before joining Moloney’s troupe in 1979.

“We will have a grand cast of musicians, singers and dancers when we hit the road next year, and I am looking forward to every minute of it. I don’t expect to be slowing down anytime soon.”

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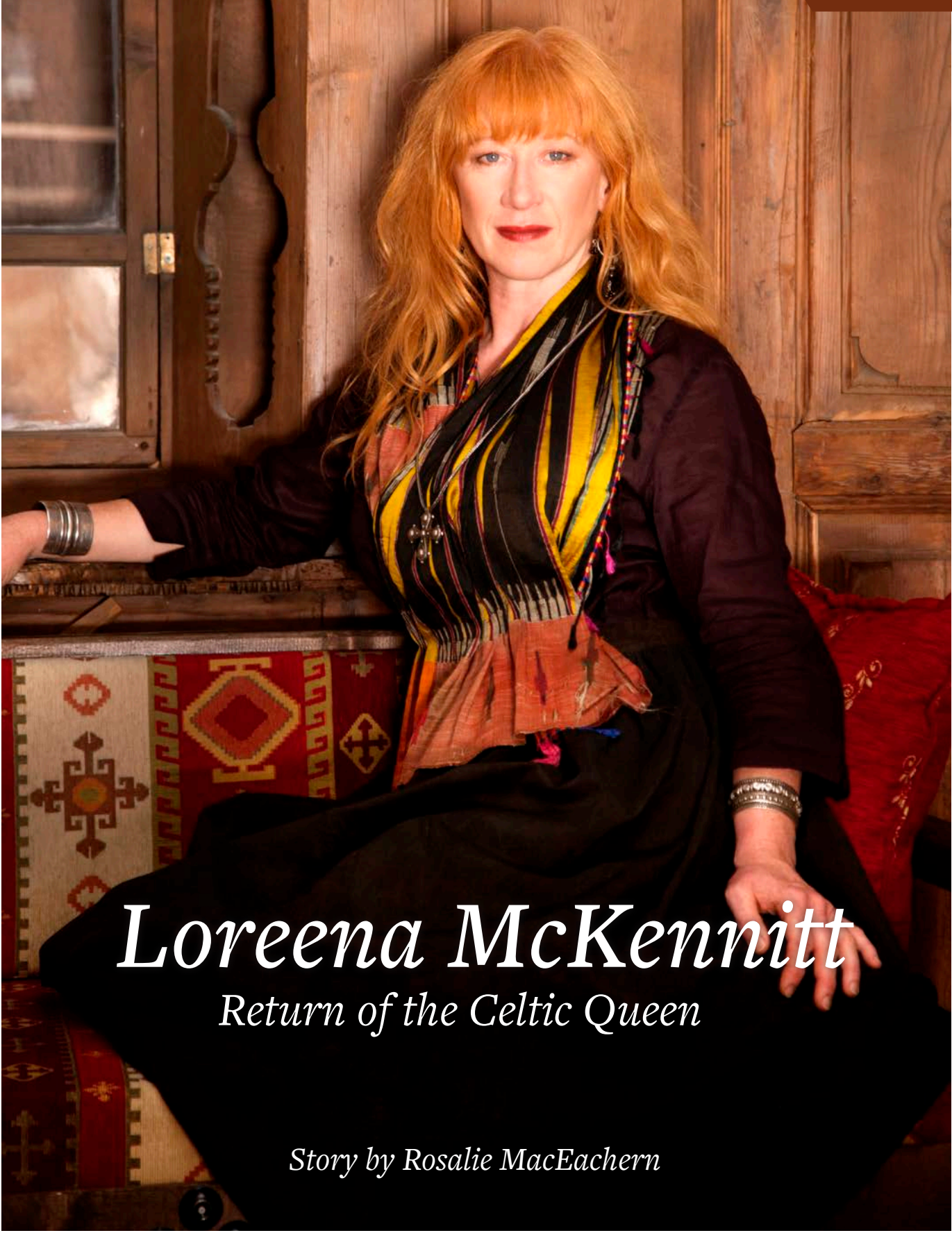
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Loreena McKennitt

Return of the Celtic Queen

Story by Rosalie MacEachern



On her stirring new album, *Lost Souls*, Loreena McKennitt sings achingly of love, loss and layered things, her music as complex and varied as the emotions it carries.

The nine-track recording is an eclectic weave of stories and songs inspired by a myriad of influences, including the works the English Romantic poet John Keats and Ireland's W.B. Yeats. Celtic and Middle Eastern touches are there as well, cultural and musical traditions that have enchanted the red-haired songstress for more than 30 years.

Her first album of original music since 2006's *The Ancient Muse*, and her first studio recording since 2010's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, *Lost Souls* was recorded from May to October, 2017, at Catherine North Studios in Hamilton, Ontario, and at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios, near Bath, in South West England.

"Life has been so full and demanding the past decade, both personally and professionally," muses the multi-award-winning vocalist and multi-instrumentalist over the phone from her home in Stratford, Ontario, two hours west of Toronto.

Best known for chart-toppers such as *The Mummer's Dance* and *All Souls Night*, McKennitt has sold more than 14 million records worldwide. She has been touring at a steady pace in recent years, after taking two years off to care for her ailing mother.

"When I returned to the road, life became very busy, so I am very grateful to have gotten back to the creative part of the process over the past year."

On *Lost Souls*, she accompanies her soaring soprano with both traditional instruments - harp, piano and accordion - and with other, unique musical paraphernalia, including nyckelharpa, oud, kanoun, flamenco guitar, and the precision beat and pounding rhythms of a Canadian military band.

It is exactly the sort of rich and textured sonic tapestry that fans have come to expect from McKennitt, whose debut album, *Elemental* (1985), set an early musical tone that would evolve over the course of two decades and more than a dozen studio and live recordings.

The songstress shares that some of the songs on *Lost Souls* are recent compositions, while others were pulled from the past.

"Four of the pieces on this album are works that I came to like and held onto until I found a place for them - a process that, in some cases, took many years."

*She describes **Lost Souls** as a "poesy of songs" - adding that the individual tracks are "like unexpected travelers that appeared on the paths of previous journeys."*

One such song is *100 Wishes*; originally written in 1991, the piece is steeped in Celtic and folk influence, and features lyrics taken from

some of the world's most heralded poets.

A more recent number, *Breaking of the Sword*, was inspired by McKennitt's participation in Canada's ceremonies recognizing the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

"I was originally asked to compose a piece for the occasion, but was later asked to play Dante's Prayer from my 1997 album, *The Book of Secrets*. I had already started thinking about a new piece, and I was further inspired by the statues I saw at the Vimy Ridge Memorial in France, particularly that of Mother Canada."

The Mother Canada statue is one of 20 sculptures that portray a young country mourning the loss of its dead.

Written from a grieving mother's perspective, *Breaking of the Sword* describes the joy of her son's birth, and how he grew to work in the fields and stables at home before being called to war.

"Losing a child is unimaginable - that loss and longing is felt the world over; it transcends borders and cultures and time itself."

As such, the loss in the song resonates beyond the mother to include the community where the young man was raised and the military family with whom he enlisted and fought.

"In a contemporary sense, families of those serving continue to make huge compromises and sacrifices to support their loved ones, regardless of their mission or task - from combat to humanitarian and search-and-rescue missions, to the demands of daily training and operations. We, as citizens, owe those who serve our immense gratitude and at the very least, the act of remembrance."

McKennitt, a proud honorary colonel in the Royal Canadian Air Force (435 Transport and Rescue Squadron, Winnipeg, Manitoba) recorded the haunting track with the Central Band of the Canadian Armed Forces, accompanied by the 90-voice Stratford Concert Choir. Fittingly, the song was released in advance of last Remembrance Day.

"I wanted the contributions to the piece to symbolize the circles in which the loss is felt."

A passionate reader with expansive interests, McKennitt explains that both the new album's title, and its title song, was inspired by Ronald Wright's compelling narrative *A Short History of Progress*.

"He suggests that we as a species may have lost our moral compass

with respect to progress, and that we have become lost souls."

It is an idea that hits home for McKennitt, who often suggests that people unplug from their technology, embrace nature, and enhance their personal relationships.

"The book gave me a tiny taste of the huge swath of history, and an appreciation of the large arc of time.

"It is concerning that, in the past, moral progress was of the greatest concern, but now tactical or strategic progress seems to be a higher priority."

"I have a real concern that, as a species, we have a propensity to get into progress traps, as we may be now. However, I believe that there is enough metaphorical language in a song like *Lost Souls* that everyone needn't be hinged to that concern. People can have different interpretations."

Her take on the traditional Irish tune, *Bonny Portmore* (from 1991's *The Visit*), is another example of musical metaphor; though the song concerns the loss of a lone tree in Northern Ireland, it also expresses a growing concern for contemporary ecological issues.

McKennitt, who appeared at Carnegie Hall last fall with environmentalist Al Gore and a cast of celebrities in a tribute to Planet Earth, has had a lifelong interest in forestry, wildlife and conservation, and regularly harvests from her own garden. She notes that her "green thumb" is likely rooted in her rural Manitoba upbringing, where her mother was a nurse and her father was a livestock dealer.

"I don't recall much music in my home as I was growing up. I really only remember my grandmother playing the piano if our parents were away and she was putting us to bed."

She credits the musical community of nearby Morden with giving her the opportunity to learn, play, compete and perform.

"I started piano lessons at age five and then joined a children's choir. After that there were festivals and I enjoyed all of it. I was attracted to musical theatre, folk and Celtic music as I encountered it, but certainly not in the way that a youngster on the east coast of





Canada might have been immersed in that cultural music tradition.”

In high school, she developed an early appreciation of literature. Later, she enrolled at the University of Manitoba to study agricultural sciences, with a view to becoming a veterinarian. Three months into her courses, she dropped out to pursue her true passion, music.

“I like to say that music chose me. I felt that if I didn’t go with it I might always regret not having taken that chance.”

McKennitt spent four years at Stratford Theatre, playing, acting, composing, and reading to broaden her education.

“When my contract was not renewed I borrowed the money my parents had set aside for my education and made my first recording in a barn studio in Elora, Ontario. I had about 30 cassettes made, and would set out on Friday night from Stratford to Toronto so I could be up early to sell them at the city’s St. Lawrence Market.”

Her musical career grew steadily after she founded Quinlan Road - her own record label and management company - in 1985. She had released three full-length albums by the time she signed with Warner Brothers in 1991. Despite the major-label interest, however, her experiences as an ‘indie’ artist afforded her the business savvy to continue managing her own career.

“I would love to say I knew what I was doing when I decided to

be my own manager, but it was more about the process of learning what I did not want to do. It wasn’t the norm for most performers, and I can remember the folks at Warner Brothers in Los Angeles were a little surprised by my resolve to carve out my own career, but they eventually resigned themselves to my decision.”

That decision, she acknowledges, has come at a price.

“It is quite time-consuming. It means that I create less, but I can better take care of what I have created. Actually, I feel that it is a model that most people in the normal world - the world outside of the music industry - can relate to.”

Eschewing the typical trappings of celebrity, McKennitt continues to live and work in the quiet and quaint community of Stratford.

“The music business has changed drastically in my time. I now have an office of five, and being a small, self-contained enterprise has allowed us to remain standing while other deserving artists are not. It concerns me that it is now a much more challenging environment for artists who are just starting their careers.”

Early on, McKennitt felt the pressure to record and release a new album every couple of years.

“It wasn’t until the geography of my career widened that I allowed myself to be guided more creatively.”

While she had been drawn to Celtic music since the late 1970s, and her appreciation of the genre certainly deepened during the 1980s after visiting Ireland and Spain, she points to a 1991 visual arts exhibit in Venice that really opened her eyes to the scope of Celtic history.

“I remember being struck by the realization that these people



were much, much more than a collection of anarchists dating back into history. I began to learn about the geographic and historic spread of the Celts, and I was drawn into a rich, ancient tapestry of sounds and rhythms and stories.”

McKennitt notes that her musical journey has been a unique way of exploring her own Irish roots.

“There is something very infectious about the process. I think I headed off into history as an act of musical travel.”

“What really intrigued me was discovering myths, stories and practices that mirror each other, yet come from entirely different geographic areas.”

She was also inspired to study formal Irish history.

“It was a piecing together of the puzzle. I began to examine the music and the instruments and arrangements in the context of history, politics and economics to get a broader picture, a better understanding. Music has been the vehicle of my self-education in that it allowed me to explore history and culture in a more academic way. Because of that, I have perhaps been able to stretch the boundaries of traditional Celtic music.”

McKennitt is naturally drawn toward the spiritual, and believes that an open and relaxed mind allows for enhanced creativity. She refers to being ‘visited by ideas’, and loves to wander through new and spacious landscapes in places like Tuscany and Spain with a notebook

and recording device. Those experiences eventually become lyrics and melodies.

“Sometimes, the creative process is not unlike the determined trial and error of playing with a Rubik’s Cube.”

Her travels to Africa, the Mediterranean, China, and most recently, India, have enhanced both her world view and her worldly music, strengthening her already-held belief that we are all extensions of each other’s history.

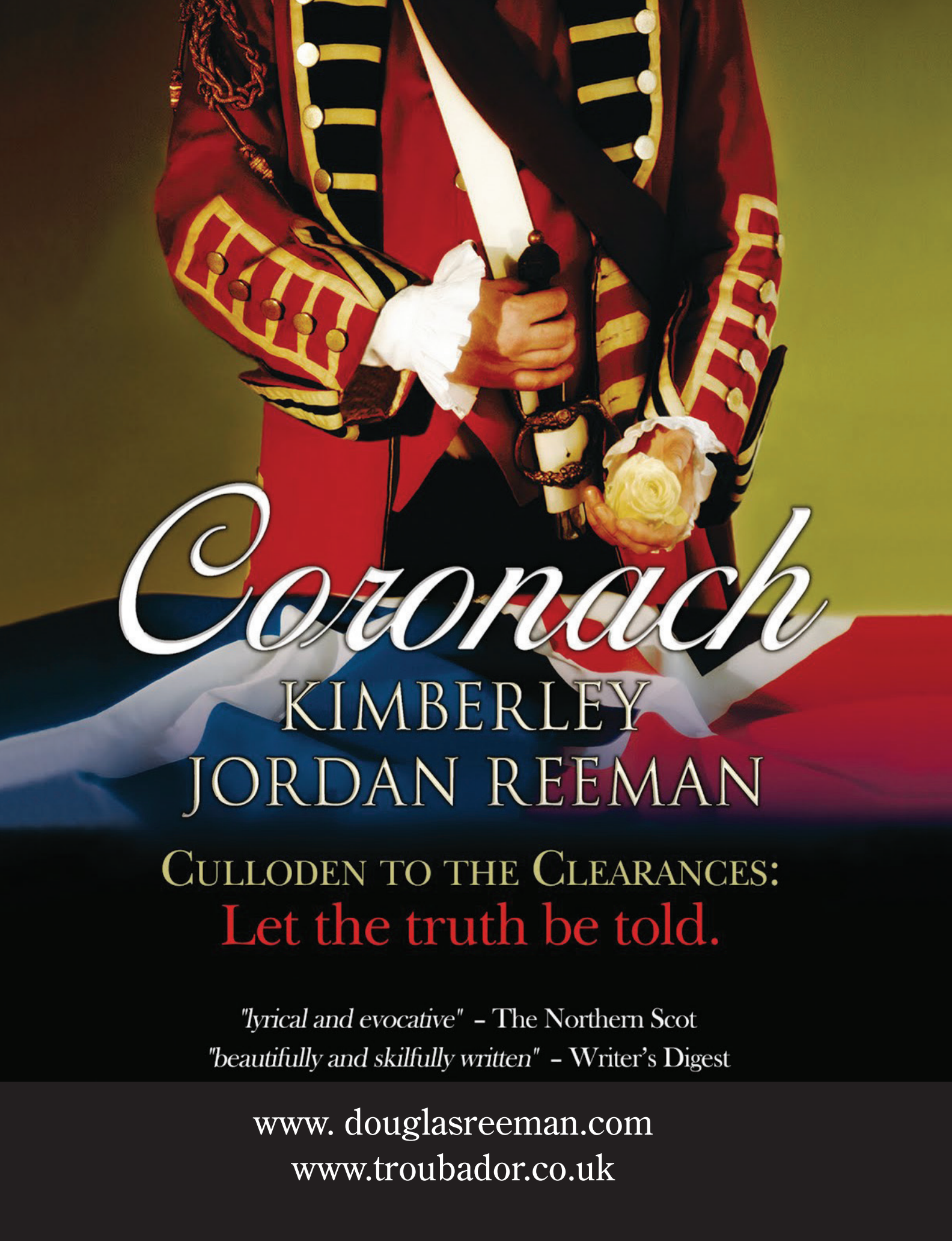
“Wanting to learn about our neighbours is also a desire to learn about ourselves. I have simply chosen the Celts vehicle in which to do this. No doubt I could have chosen another conduit for my music and experienced just as interesting a journey as I have had with Celtic history. But that vehicle has taken me to so many places worldwide, and also down paths and into themes with little Celtic connection whatsoever.”

Interestingly, McKennitt admits that *Lost Souls* is considerably less Celtic than much of her past works.

“It does not follow the next chapter in my pursuit of the history of the Celts, but I still think that most people will be open to it.

“Given all of the personal and professional demands of the past decade - and the fact that the band will be on the road for 18 months starting this fall - I am just really glad and grateful to have had the opportunity to write, record and release new music.”

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A person in a red and gold military uniform, likely a Scottish Highland Guard, is shown from the waist up. They are holding a sword with a white scabbard and a white rose. The background is a solid olive green.

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Mike Peters sounds von a deadly disease



Despite a series of serious health issues in recent years, Welsh rocker Mike Peters continues to carry the creative flame, influencing fellow musicians around the world and inspiring a new generation of followers with his philanthropic efforts in the fight against cancer. Recently we spoke with the 59-year-old frontman for The Alarm from his home in Dyserth, North Wales, where he has been enjoying some down time with his family.

Let's start with a question you likely get all the time - how's your health?

Ha. Yes, that one does seem to come up. I feel great, thank you; strong, healthy, happy... never better actually. I have my off-days here and there for sure, but that is to be expected. I am very fortunate, however, to have great people around me who crack the whip and keep me on track, and so long as I follow their direction I am in good hands.

You've had quite the journey.

It's been something of a wild ride for sure. In 1995, I was diagnosed with lymph cancer, went through treatment, and survived. Ten years later - almost to the day - I was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. And then, as if all of that wasn't enough, my wife Jules was diagnosed with breast cancer in the spring of 2016.

That is a lot to handle.

It has been a little overwhelming at times, yes. Inevitably there are going to be those moments of self-pity, when you ask yourself 'why is this happening' or 'why me?' But, gratefully, those moments are just that - mo-

ments. The miracle has been in understanding that the cancer journey has been a blessing of sorts, not a curse. Not that I would wish it upon anyone - surely there are easier ways to enlightenment - only that I wouldn't be the person I am today without having gone through these experiences. To be truthful, Jules has dealt with all of this far better than I have - she has been solid as a rock, and a shining example of strength, dignity and grace.

How have those experiences changed your perspective on life?

Well, it really changes everything doesn't it? Very suddenly, the things that once mattered to me don't seem to matter all that much anymore. The parts of my life that I perhaps once took for granted - my life, my health, my family, my friends, my career - I have utmost appreciation for these days. That sense of mortality, something that we don't necessarily have in our younger years, becomes an ever-present reality. Knowing that you could be gone at anytime allows you - or perhaps drives you - to live each day to the absolute fullest, as if it were your last. This may all sound a bit cliché, however I am sure that most people who have been through some sort of life-threatening illness or situation will say the same.

And your decision to get involved, to give back, arose from where?

Gratitude - gratitude for being alive, gratitude for my health, gratitude for the incredible people I have around me...and gratitude for being in a position to be able to give something back.

Along with fundraising, how much of an educational component is involved with your efforts?

It is a huge part of what we do. In fact, I would go so far as to say it is at the very core of our mandate. One of the biggest issues we face in the fight against cancer is the sheer volume of disinformation that is out there. Cancer gets a lot of visibility, in large part because so many people are touched by it - we all know someone that has been affected by the disease in some capacity, be it a family member, a friend, an acquaintance or a co-worker. There has never been more dialogue on the topic than there is today, and much of that discussion - as with everything now - takes place online. A simple Google search brings up, literally, millions of pages dedicated to cancer; definitions, causes, treatments, fundraising opportunities, holistic options...there is so much to sift through. And because our understanding of cancer is still very much in its infancy, our knowledge of the disease is constantly changing, evolving. What was important and relevant one day may no longer be so the next day, so it is vital that everyone involved - medical teams, researchers, fundraisers, and especially patients and their family members - stay as informed and up-to-date as possible.

Part of the problem, I imagine, has to do with public perception?

Very much so. There is this huge stigma surrounding cancer. When many people hear the "C" word they just assume it is an automatic death sentence. And, in the past, perhaps they had good reason to think that. However, that is simply not the case anymore; today, there is massive amounts of



money being put into cancer research, education for prevention, better technologies for treatment, more holistic options, stronger aftercare and support programs, and greater resources generally. Because of that, survival rates have risen steadily in recent years, and more and more survivors are enjoying longer and healthier lives. But, again, all of that starts and ends with individual responsibility; people need to be proactive with their health, and a large part of that is sifting through the available information.

How can everyday people, perhaps those not affected by the disease, best get involved?

There are so many opportunities these days that it might be somewhat confusing as to where to begin. My suggestion would be to look at getting involved with something in your local community - perhaps an area fundraising event, or support visitations with those who are presently undergoing treatment. The important thing to remember here is that every little bit counts, and it all adds up to make a big difference. We are winning the war on cancer - I am living proof of that.

And you are a living example of someone making a difference.

First and foremost, I am very fortunate to have lived to tell my tale, and I am very lucky to have both the means and the mediums to do so. The concerts, the tours, the documentaries, the hikes, the interviews, the speaking engagements...it is all a bit of a whirlwind actually. The best part of it all, and I say this with great humility and earnestness, is meeting and talking with individuals who are go-

ing through treatment, those who have survived, and those who will not survive. The rewards of those one-on-one encounters are mostly intangible, and they are immeasurable.

Do you ever get tired of it?

No. I mean, it can certainly be exhausting at times, especially the heartbreaking stories - they cut right to my soul. And the travel can be tiring. There are some days that I simply don't want to be that guy - I would rather just be at home being a normal husband and dad. I have to constantly remind myself that my experiences with cancer are not my life and identity, that they are merely a part of my story, in much the same way that being a musician is only a piece of who I am.

Let's talk rock 'n' roll. You still love what you do obviously.

Best career move I ever made. Actually, it's the only career move I ever made. Ha. Yes, I still love doing what I do. That fire is still burning bright.

Are the reasons you keep going the same as why you started in the first place?

Yes and no. Obviously my cancer experiences have pushed me in new directions, but fundamentally there remains something inside of me that seeks some sort of creative expression. Music has been an outlet for as long as I can remember. As most artists will tell you, I didn't choose music - it chose me. The benefit of coming-of-age in the U.K. in the mid-to-late 1970s was coming under the spell of punk rock. All of these great bands - the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Jam - had a

huge influence on me, both stylistically and philosophically. The whole DIY ethos of the punk and new-wave movement inspired me in that, if these people could just get out there and make it happen, then so could I. And I still have that approach when it comes to certain areas of my musical life, particularly with regard to writing songs.

That ethos is still a part of your makeup today.

It is, yes. The old adage that 'if you want something done then do it yourself' has served me well over the years, in all areas of my life. The difference now is that I no longer have that youthful angst and the 'me against the world' mentality. Perhaps some wisdom has crept through the cracks over time. Today, my attitude is much more 'we are all in this together' - whether that pertains to music, my foundation, and especially my family and friends.

What's next on your agenda?

It's shaping up to be another busy year. We just released a new mini album for World Record Store Day, called Where The Two Rivers Meet. The Alarm will be on the road through the spring across Europe and the USA. Some of the American shows are a part of The Gathering series, an audio/visual celebration that brings the band's fans together from around the world. And, always, there is the ongoing work with my foundation. So the proverbial plate is full. Right now, however, I am content to simply enjoy some down time with my family.

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Kelty and Me and a Brief History of the West Highland White Terrier

~ By Lesley Choyce



It is a frosty spring morning as I sit in my warm kitchen at Lawrencetown Beach in Nova Scotia. My wife Linda is working, so I am home alone - well, not really alone; my dog is sitting on a chair beside me. Yes, he is sitting there, watching me write this, looking a bit like one of those dogs in that silly but ubiquitous 1894 painting titled *Dogs Playing Poker*, by Cassius Marcellus Coolidge. Unlike any of the dogs in the artwork, however, Kelty is a two-year-old West Highland White Terrier - a Westie.

He is a most lovable pet most days, but on occasion becomes a little West Highland Terrorist when the spirit moves him.

For as far back as I can remember, there has always been a dog in my life. Sadly, we outlive our dogs, and I have outlived nearly a dozen. But it is not a morning to be mourning - nor to be pondering mortality. It is a day to plan for the future.

I have a sabbatical coming up and have decided that some sort of grand adventure is in order. My fondness for the U.K. - and for the Celtic world in general - got me thinking about a land-based circumnavigation of Great Britain. Linda and I would drive around, paying homage to dead poets and novelists, find small villages with funny names, and drink local brews at England's smallest pubs and other sudsy establishments with names like the Cock Inn and the Broken Whistle. We'd meet fabulously quirky and eccentric Brits, Scots and Welshmen, and I would write a book about it.

But we wouldn't leave the mutt behind this time. Instead, we'd drive around England, Scotland and Wales with a dog. It was a most exciting idea.

Two authors were partly responsible for inspiring this peripatetic quest. One was Bill Bryson, who had written two wonderfully funny and insightful books about his travels in England. The second was Tony Hawks, who had written a most hilarious book titled *Around Ireland with a Fridge*.

Prepping myself for the upcoming odyssey, I first wrote to Bill Bryson, believing he was living in New Hampshire, requesting an interview. He promptly wrote back with the following: "Thanks for your inquiry. I am afraid I haven't lived in New Hampshire for 15 years, which kind of suggests that you haven't been following my work terribly closely for quite some time. I am afraid I am not able to give interviews at present." I guess it was his semi-polite way of saying "go-fly-a-kite."



Nursing a bruised writer's ego, I am still working up the courage to write to Mr. Hawks, bracing myself for yet another scathing brush-off, but hoping that a man who has hitch-hiked the perimeter of the Emerald Isle will see my own humble quest as modestly noble and offer up some advice.

In my mind the whole adventure was shaping up nicely: fly with my wife Linda and dog Kelty to Glasgow, rent a car, go first to Poltalloch, the legendary origin of the modern Westie, then over to Edinburgh to sit in the back at The Elephant House café where J.K. Rowling reputedly wrote her first Harry Potter novel. We might possibly take a quick nip over to 6a Nicolson Street, where she did more writing - now the location of Jimmy Chungs Buffet King restaurant. Then it would be down to Sibson in Leicester-

shire, home of my ancestor, William Percival Choyce, before moving on to Wales to Surf Snowdonia, the world's first inland surfing destination - all with Kelty along for the adventure.

At Christmas, someone had even given me a book titled Good Guide to Dog Friendly Pubs, Hotels and B&Bs. In it, Fiona Stapley notes that "8.5 million households in Britain own a dog," and that she takes her Labrador to many friendly pubs where they offer her black pet "biscuits and other treats such as pig's ears and a sausage or two." I was convinced immediately that, without a doubt, Kelty's first tasting of pig's ears would be a highlight in his young life.

But alas, the kind folks at the airline informed me that you can't fly into the U.K. with a dog in the cabin - they could only go

in baggage. And there was simply no way we were about to let that happen. The Brits, for all their love of dogs, had thrown a mighty wrench into the works, the bureaucratic bastards!

We almost gave up on the idea. I went looking for advice on how to get a dog into the U.K. and discovered that we could travel over on the Queen Mary from New York and take the pooch. The only problem, however, was that it would cost many thousands of American dollars - more bad news.

A little more digging, however, revealed that we could fly to Paris with Kelty and smuggle him into the U.K. in our rental auto strapped down on a rail car through the Chunnel. It smacked of a slightly tamer version of something from Mission Impossible and I immediately knew it was the



to do. So we booked tickets to Charles De-Gaulle instead of Glasgow and paid an extra \$50 to keep our dog with us in a carrier at our feet. "Around England with a Dog" would have to begin on French soil, and we would make our landing in England not far from Hastings where the French army under William of Normandy successfully invaded England in 1066.

Some might wonder why go to all this trouble just to take the family mutt to a foreign country.

Well, dogs are damned important to some of us - man's best friend and all that. Let's face it. Dogs are loyal and lick your face. They are exuberant and fun-loving. I'd always had mixed breed dogs but, with the arrival of Linda in my life, came a pure-breed Westie. Kelty's predecessor, Murdo, was a purebred Westie that required expensive grooming and who slept on the bed. Murdo died of cancer a few years back and we mourned his loss for a full year before Linda convinced me we needed a new dog - a puppy - and a Westie of course. The only problem was there was not a single Westie puppy to be found for sale in the Maritimes. We had to drive to Ontario and escort our new puppy home to Nova Scotia, where we three are living happily ever after.

Hoping to avoid a tedious internet research on the subject of Westies for this article, I made a library reservation for what I thought was the definitive tome on the dog breed - West Highland White Terriers by Sara Green. When I arrived at the library,

however, I discovered it was a children's book. It had such great photos of lively tongue-protruding, tail-wagging Westies that I checked it out anyway, and found a wealth of information. I also concluded that I had made a big mistake as a young lad when I gave up on those colorful slim volumes about volcanoes, spiders, Uruguay, and how things work, in favour of dull, wordy and picture-less books for more mature readers.

I devoured the book cover to cover and was reminded that Westies are "small, friendly dogs with shiny white coats." Well, not my dog after a trip to the beach where he has rolled in sand, mud, and washed-up unidentifiable sea creatures that had been decomposing for at least a week. But underneath, yes, white it is.

I didn't know about the double-coat made up of a "short and soft" undercoat and a coarser outer-coat of wiry hair, but here was a two-coated dog. I also discovered that our noble beast was descended from Cairn Terriers, who have a darker coat. Apparently, back in nineteenth century Scotland, some Cairns had white puppies which were thought to be weak and poor hunters. That was undoubtedly a lie but, back then as today, people believed what they wanted to believe, true or not.

The book tidied up the story about Edward Donald Malcolm of Poltalloch who, in the 1800s, started breeding the white dogs because "it would be easier for hunters to recognize their white dogs in the fields or woods." Well, I already knew that Colonel Malcolm himself had shot one (if not more) of his own darker Cairn Terriers while hunting foxes, so the breeding was an attempt of

sorts to offset his own incompetence as a huntsman. But, nonetheless, he gave us the modern Westie. He called them Poltalloch Terriers because that was the name of the town where he lived.

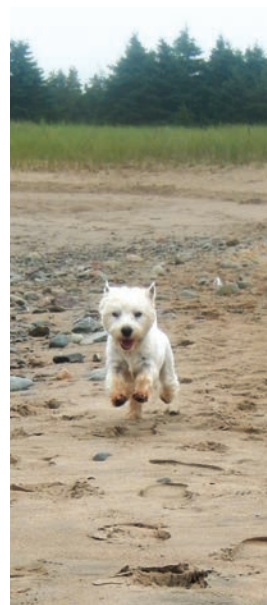
And indeed, Poltalloch is first on my list of places to visit in the U.K. - a most appropriate pilgrimage to the sacred soil where Kelty's ancestors roamed the fields, chased rabbits, and sniffed each other's butts.

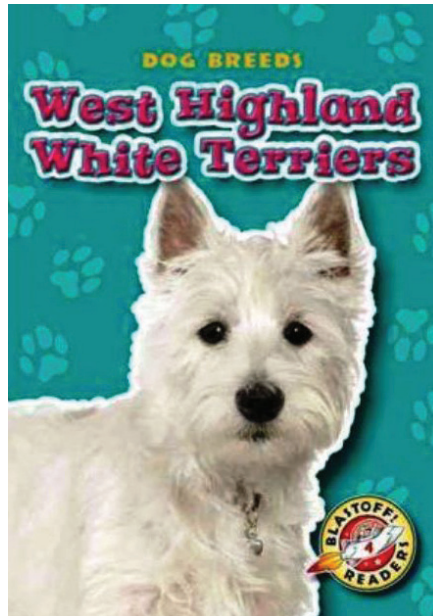
Westies are darn good at digging. Apparently their claws grow faster than other dogs for just this purpose. They like to dig deep and follow tunnels made by animals living underground. In fact, the name "terrier" comes from a Latin word meaning earth. This was labelled a "fun fact" in the child's book, allowing me to remember that, yes, once upon a time facts really were fun, as opposed to today when "facts" are no longer fun and, so often, are not even facts at all.

Kelty, like his ancestors, is a great digger and if we had rats, I'm sure he would heartily enjoy catching them and biting into their necks, then swinging them left and right like his Poltalloch cousins have done for over two hundred years. Apparently, Westies also have extra-strong tails, so if they are stuck down deep in a rat hole, you can pull them out by their tail and it won't hurt them, although it would surely be a significant discomfort. I have seen Kelty "unhinge" his back legs as well, sprawled out flat on the



Linda & Kelty





floor in a pool of sunlight. These are very versatile and agile dogs, indeed.

Early Westies had several different names, and this annoyed dog breeders so much that the Scottish Kennel Club gathered in 1904 and, after what I envision as a highly charged debate involving scathing Scottish insults and many glasses of Scotch, came up with the official name of the breed: West Highland White Terrier. And that was that.

Today, I am told by Ms. Green, "Most Westies just dig for fun." But some are trained to work with deaf people; when they hear crying or doorbells or smoke alarms, they use their nose or paw to inform their deaf companions - how ingenious is that?

Modern dogs, even Keltie, are related to those howling wolves I occasionally hear on moonlit nights here on the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia. But they came into their own about 100,000 years ago. About 30,000 years ago in Europe, humans started to domesticate dogs - or at least dogs started hanging around the campfire hoping someone would toss them a bone. Domestication led to breeding for certain desired traits. Hunting and guarding were big ticket items, and West Highland Terriers certainly have that going for them.

White dogs probably first appeared in Spain, although I could not find an explanation as to why the Spaniards wanted a white dog more than anyone else. Some time in the 1500s, James VI of Scotland gave a white terrier (but not the modern version, and probably not pure white) as a gift to Henry IV. There are no reports as to how well the dog fared while Henry spent considerable time

during his kingship fending-off assassination attempts and rebellions.

Just so you won't be as confused as I was, James VI (the dog giver) became James I of England after the death of Elizabeth I. Certainly he brought some terriers south with him as Scottish comfort against the many conspirators who gave him trouble as well, including one Walter Raleigh. And it was this James I who granted a charter to Sir William Alexander in 1621, giving him rights to a large parcel of land in the New World that would one day be Nova Scotia, present home of Linda, Keltie and me.

Unlike King Charles II, he did not name a dog after himself, but in Volume 12 of *Classical Review* (1898), there is an article about a most convoluted discourse that took place in Cambridge back in 1614-1615 involving "King James I on the Reasoning Faculty in Dogs."

One way or the other, it is clear that dogs helped influence, if not shape much of the history of Scotland, Britain, and other nations.

Dogs have inspired poetry and paintings as well, of course. One fine example is the 1839 painting by Sir Edwin Landseer - *Dignity and Impudence* - of a bloodhound, representing dignity, and a small white terrier, well, representing the alternate quality.

I have discovered there is much ink spilled on the subject of Westie breeding, definitions of a pure breed, and the world of show dogs - none of which is my cup of tea. Nor would I want to get into an argument in a dog-friendly pub about which lineage or breed is nobler than the others. There seems to be a considerable number of various of-

ficial competitions as well that involve Westies, including agility competitions, "conformation shows" (sounds nasty to me), a dog sport called coursing ability, earthdog trials, freestyle (more like it) and, God help us, something called "obedience and rally."

I am certainly not an advocate that everyone should go out and buy a Westie; it turns out that between vet bills, endless grooming, and making travel arrangements for the small white creature, you could probably raise a child for less.

Famous Westies abound, and I was surprised to learn that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, considered the founder of Pakistan, had a Westie. A Westie also appears on the label of Black and White whisky, as well as on Cesar dogfood throughout the world. You should never tell an owner that all Westies look alike - even though, for the most part, they all do look alike.

I grew just a tad jealous when I learned that J.K. Rowling's West Highland White Terrier, Bronte, won a cutest dog competition. The headline in the *Scottish Sun* read, "THE MAGIC MUTT: JK Rowling's adorable West Highland Terrier Bronte earns top marks in cute pooches competition WeRateDogs." I mean, isn't literary fame and unspeakable wealth enough?

I am hereby giving Ms. Rowling's fair warning that we are headed her way and, although I may not be as famous a writer as the author of the *Harry Potter* books, I have a dog that I think is both smarter and cuter than any in the U.K. And there will be photos taken to prove it - lots and lots of photos.

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*Lesley Choyce
explores Edinburgh*



There's not much to say about the urban sprawl heading into Edinburgh from the south. It looked like a lot of tough neighbourhoods where it would be easy to get into a scuffle in a pub if you spoke highly of a football team from England. But once we had made our way towards Old Town and got rid of our vehicle in a car park near Waverley Station, the city began to weave a spell over my wife Linda and me.

We paid a most handsome sum of money to stay at the Fraser Suites just a block from St. Giles Cathedral. It was a tad uphill from the car park (well, everything in Old Town seems to be quite up or down) and if rolling luggage over ancient cobble stones is exotic in your world, then this is the place for you. And I am indeed one of those travellers - excited by the notion that famous and notorious men and women from centuries past had helped to polish these stones with the soles of their shoes the same as me.

I had a small agenda of things to seek out in Edinburgh: pubs with dogs of course, literary connections, exploration of as many dark nooks and crannies as possible, and conversations with locals about whatever was forefront on their minds.

Those conversations, as it turned out, were harder to come by than I thought. It seemed that everyone we met on the street was from somewhere else. The street in question was High Street, and the section we traversed most was the famous "Royal Mile." I would later learn that thirteen million tourists visit Edinburgh each year, so that explained the great diversity of folks cavorting about in the city.

On a Saturday morning we hiked further uphill to Edinburgh Castle and were not surprised to find it mobbed with visitors.

The castle was built on an extinct volcano, but it hasn't erupted for 350 million years, so most of us there that day felt reasonably safe.

By the entrance to the castle grounds was a plaque that read, "NEAR THIS SPOT IN 1625 Sir William Alexander of Menstrie, Earl of Stirling, received sasine, or lawful possession of the royal province of Nova Scotia by the ancient and symbolic ceremony of delivery of earth and stone from Castlehill by a representative of the King. Here also (1625-1637) the Scottish Baronets of Nova Scotia received sasine of their distant baronies." In essence, below our feet was a small patch of Nova Scotian land declared so that men granted free land in Nova Scotia didn't actually have to go to the trouble of traveling there to make their claim. So there we were, over 4000 kilometres from my home province, yet still standing (or at least looking at) Nova Scotia soil. William Alexander, as it turned out, was a busy man and never did visit Nova Scotia. Inside the castle you will find more tourists than I was comfortable with but if you want to see the Stone of Destiny (the rock, not the movie) you'll have to pay your money and take the tour.

The statue that made the most impression on me along the Royal



Mile was that of Adam Smith. I had never seen a statue of an economist before and, thanks to the fact I'd been reading Arthur Herman's *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, I had learned that Smith "thought of himself primarily as a moral philosopher" and believed, unlike the church of his day, that man was primarily good rather than bad.

I hadn't made up my own mind whether Adam Smith himself was a good guy or a bad guy. He'd said things like, "All money is a matter of belief." And "Man is an animal that makes bargains: no other animal does this – no dog exchanges bones with another." But Smith also said, "The real tragedy of the poor is the poverty of their aspirations."

Alas, whatever we contemporaries felt about the man, seagulls on this fine spring day had been sitting on Mr. Smith's metallic head and his face had been whitewashed by their plenteous droppings, reminding me vividly of the same fate of Winston Churchill's statue in Halifax where the old public library once stood. So goes the fate of philosophers and politicians. Later, in Glasgow, pondering the famous traffic cone covering the head of Lord Wellington, I would reflect on what a hard life it is for statues in the U.K. where people and creatures can do them disservice at any time of day.

Not far from Mr. Smith, I noticed a formation of stones in the ground in the shape of a heart. This turned out to be a mosaic called the Heart of the Midlothians, where there once stood a prison built in the fifteenth century. Many executions had taken place here over the years at this very spot. There is a tradition of people spitting on the stones, perhaps initiated by the lucky ones (many of them simply men who did not pay their debts) released from jail over the centuries. Most folks I saw that day were too polite to spit and, in truth, many walked right over the spot without noticing it.

Right alongside of the Heart of the Midlothians was yet another statue – that of Walter Francis Montagu Douglas Scott, the 5th Duke of Buccleuch. Among his other accomplishments, he is given credit for importing Labrador Retrievers from Newfoundland to Europe for the first time in the 1830s. In my mind, his other political achievements fell to the wayside and it brightened my day to see yet another Canadian connection, especially one involving dogs.

Linda thought we should lunch at the Elephant House where it was reported that J.K. Rowling once did some writing or research for the early Harry Potter novels.

The sign outside says "The birthplace of Harry Potter" – but that may be stretching it a bit. Who knows?

Inside, it was a noisy, happy little restaurant on the King George IV Bridge. The "bridge" itself confused me somewhat in that it didn't seem to be over any body of water, but looking down from the bridge, was a whole other level of the city with narrow streets and ground level stores. I couldn't quite figure out how this could be since we, too, were on ground level. It was like peering into another world below us and it was indeed as Harry Potteresque as a thing could be.

I still had a small grudge against Ms. Rowling because trashy newspapers in England and Scotland had claimed she had the cutest West Highland White Terrier in the U.K. I thought my own Westie much cuter and soon he too would be in the U.K. and we would try to right this wrong. Nonetheless, there we were for lunch in her former haunt with memorabilia from herself and great gobs of Harry Potter graffiti aplenty on the walls of the loos. I ordered haggis, neeps and tatties ("Our Scottish national dish") for lunch in honour of the occasion and found it most filling.

Back on the Royal Mile we wandered down as many narrow alleyways (or closes, as they are called) as we could. Among the many are Advocate's Close, Anchor Close, Old Post Office Close, and the curiously-named Fleshmarket Close – which refers to what was once a butcher's market rather than a place for street sex. Mystery writer Ian Rankin borrowed the name for the title of one of his novels where a number of dark and brutal events occur.

Down one alleyway, we came upon The Writers Museum which is blessedly free and open to the public. The building dates back to 1622 and displays artifacts and images of Robbie Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson. Behind a glass case, Stevenson's high



top shoes looked like he had just taken them off yesterday and I was rather impressed to see a photograph of the author of *Treasure Island* imbibing kava with some shirtless citizens of Samoa. I'd read *Treasure Island* as a lad and it had not occurred to me that perhaps drugs were involved in the creative process.

There was much ado in the museum about Burns' poetry and it prompted me to recite what I could remember of "A Man's a Man for a' That" until my wife grew embarrassed enough to elbow me in the ribs to MAKE ME desist. A few steps further along, staring at a bust of Walter Scott, I couldn't for the life of me remember reading a single thing by such a famous Scottish writer and wondered why his fame lingered while his writing fell out of favour.

Stumbling upon Devil's Close, we ambled into a pub called The Devil's Advocate to quench our thirst and moved on to dinner at an establishment called the Filling Station on High Street where I ordered a curry dish, having done my duty earlier in the day to partake of the Elephant House haggis.

Pubs and restaurants there are aplenty in and around the Royal Mile.

Halfway through my curry, it occurred to me that here in Scotland I was eating Indian food, in England I opted for Italian food, in the U.S. Mexican food, and in Canada, I preferred Thai.

The following morning, Wetherspoon's near the train station provided nourishment for the day in the form of a tasty but lumpy egg, a couple of rashers of bacon, a delightfully bulbous sausage and the inevitable black pudding (it's the blood that makes it black, yes?). I

couldn't help but notice that a large percentage of men were drinking large mugs of beer with their breakfast and, asking a waiter why that might be, he explained that Monday was a bank holiday.

As you can tell, I probably have not done the city full justice, having skipped or merely glanced at some of the more famous sites, both ancient and modern, of Edinburgh. The bagpipers were in tune on most corners, and I confess I was shocked at the cost of an authentic kilt. During the day, buskers juggled large knives while atop rolling planks, hen parties sang a Helen Reddy song in unison, and a number of young inebriated semi-clad men covered a reasonable rendition of "Wonderwall" by Oasis, then ran off, leaving one of their own behind who turned his back on the throng of curious onlookers and urinated on the wall of St. Giles Cathedral, whose crown-shaped steeple dates back to the fifteenth century.

Heading back along King George IV Bridge, we stopped by Greyfriar's Kirk which has "stood in the same spot since 1620 - the first new kirk to be built in Post-Reformation Scotland." Here we came upon a shrine erected to a dog known as Greyfriar's Bobby that much reminded me of the statue of the loyal dog Hachiko I had once stumbled upon in Tokyo.

Bobby was a Skye terrier (closely related to Westies, I might add) who "guarded" his owner's grave every day for fourteen years after the man's death back in the nineteenth century. In a nearby bookstore, I noted that there were at least twelve children's books written about Bobby and at least two animated movies. Clearly, loyalty in dogs is admired by Scots and authors in many parts of the world.

So far we had failed to find any dogs in pubs, but as luck would have it, the closest pub to Greyfriar's Kirk had two large dogs, a black one and a white one, lounging on the floor, dutifully waiting for their masters who were drinking McEwan's ale. The establishment was called Sandy Bell's Pub and it purported to be famous for its folk music. A fiddler and a guitar player were tucked in a corner improvising something closer to jazz than folk, but it was a comfortable and pleasant place to ponder the story of Bobby, and to see how dogs behaved in the presence of Scotsmen drinking beer.

On a shelf over the bar was a bust of a man and a note on the wall indicated it was the "head of Hamish Henderson." I wondered what a replica of this man's head was doing in a pub and later learned Hamish was a poet, songwriter, collector of folk songs and lore, as well as a soldier and a communist - quite the list of accomplishments. I couldn't help but take a moment of reverie to wish that someday a pub owner would think enough of me to place a replica of my head over the bar to keep a watchful eye over generations of patrons. Alas, it was a foolish and ill-conceived idea if ever there was one.

I also noted a sign over the bar that read, "No Football Colours Allowed," and I asked a gent sipping scotch what that was all about. "Fights," he said. "Ya can't have two different colour shirts in one pub or you have trouble."

Two colours presumably indicated fans of two different teams.

Combine that with enthusiasm and alcohol and presumably you have fistcuffs.

Then he pointed out the window across the street to yet another pub, an Irish one called McSweeney's. "You want to see some ruckus, you should go over there." And sure enough, outside McSweeney's stood two sturdy bouncers waiting for football trouble to come their way.

But I found it not in our best interest to do further investigation into football team loyalty and hostility.

I liked the way drinkers casually walked over and around the lounging canines whose weary eyes indicated they'd be much happier sleeping under the front porch. So, in the name of research, I asked the young tattooed barmaid with a nose piercing the following question: "How does having dogs in the pub change the nature of the place?" As you might guess, it came out sounding rather formal and stilted.

The young lady gave me a funny look but an honest answer, "Well," she said, "the dogs are much nicer than the drunks." Truth be told, I saw no drunks at Sandy's, but then it was the middle of the day. After that, it was a final hike back to High Street where a new piper provided the official sound track for the advancing fog rolling slowly but inexorably up the cobblestone street from the North Sea below.





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Northern Ireland

As Celtic Life International's Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare explains, young people are changing the taste, face and headspace of Northern Ireland



Through the Dark Hedges

As Northern Ireland transitions from past to present, there is a sense of cautious optimism about its future.

Despite its post-Brexit uncertainty and its post-Troubles struggle for identity - one that bares and blurs the lines of Irish history (and the History of Ireland) - the region and its 1.8 million residents are confident that their darkest days are behind them.

"Young people here who were born in 1998, or after, have no immediate memories of The Troubles," notes journalist and author Eimear O'Callaghan over steamed mussels at Harry's Shack in Port Stewart. "For many of them, it was as if it simply never happened."

O'Callaghan, whose bestselling memoir *Belfast Days* recounts her tempestuous teenage years in the city's Catholic, west-end enclave of Andersonstown, believes that letting go of Ulster's immediate past is both a blessing and a burden.

"On the one hand, it is very important that we continue to discuss the conflict, so that we may heal and learn from those tragedies. On the other hand, it is quite understandable that the next generation just wants to move on from it..."

While the area's biggest export has traditionally been its people - and specifically young people looking to build better lives for themselves in Europe, North America and Australia - there is a growing sense of hope and trust amongst millennials that two decades of peace has brought about an enduring prosperity, and perhaps, a reason to stay.

The numbers appear to support that belief. Northern Ireland's unemployment rate remains low at just 4.7 per cent. The capital city of Belfast is booming with huge growth in both the IT and financial sectors, and continues to cement its reputation as an entrepreneurial hot-spot. Most significantly, perhaps, the region's tourism sector is expanding at an exponential rate; in 2016, visitors spent over £860

million (1.128 billion USD) in Northern Ireland, with 4.6 million overnight stays sold, and close to 100 cruise ships calling into port. As well, business tourism has seen a 25 per cent spike since 2015.

With a host of natural and man-made attractions across the area - and as trust in a lasting peace continues to develop - those numbers are expected to soar even higher in the coming years.

A game-changer, of course, has been Game of Thrones.

The massively successful HBO television series has been shot on location across the six counties for seven seasons, bringing big bucks into Northern Ireland's burgeoning film sector and inspiring fans from around the world to explore the region's raw and rugged landscapes.

"Thronies, we call them affectionately," chuckles Tourism Northern Ireland representative Billy Scott, referring to the series' huge throng of followers. "They are mad for the show, and we are happy to have them here."

Scott is quick to note that while the region has always been a popular destination for those-in-the-know travelers, *Game of Thrones* has pushed Northern Ireland's uniqueness into the global spotlight.

"The show is what has gotten visitors through the door. Once they are here, many of them are quite surprised to discover who we are and how much we have to offer. And word has spread like wildfire, especially through social media."

That's good news for a place renowned for decades of difficulties.

"Things are still a little shaky," cautions Scott. "And yes, it will take some time to rebuild broken bridges, but we are heading in the right direction. There is a sense of hope here now, one that I have not felt for some time, that there is some light at the end of those 'Dark Hedges' - especially, and most importantly, amongst our young people."

Together at the Table

If a culture is characterized by its cuisine, then a group of young culinary artisans are redefining Northern Ireland's identity.

"Twenty years ago, you would be hard-pressed to describe Northern Irish cuisine," admits Adrian Morrow, the youthful manager of Glenarm Estate in County Antrim.

"Unlike Italy, France, Japan and elsewhere, where the food is instantly recognizable, we are only now making a name for ourselves in the culinary sector."

Along with homegrown dairy, poultry and vegetable produce, Morrow lists meat and seafood as staples of the region's diet.

"Here, at the estate, we specialize in locally-sourced smoked salmon and Short-horn beef. We offer our product on-site, and sell it at area markets on weekends. We have picked up a few awards over the last year or two, and that has helped to shine a spotlight on the 'real food' industry in Northern Ireland."

Just a few miles west, Ursa Minor Bakehouse in Ballycastle serves up the very best in 'real' bread.

"We have taken things back to basics," says 28-year-old master baker Dara O'hArtghaile, who - along with his wife Ciara - founded the facility in 2014. "Our bread has only three core ingredients; flour, water and salt. We use no preservatives, nor additives of any sort. It tastes as it should, as it traditionally did for our ancestors."

The result is a hearty, wholesome - though never heavy - sourdough base that is both delicious and nutritious. Along with fresh, daily-baked loaves, the couple and their 10-person team produce a number of other delights, including an assortment of organic, artisan coffees, cakes, and pastries.



"We also work with several local and area food producers to help educate people on the benefits of healthy eating," says Dara.

"It is a shift in the lifestyle paradigm here, and it will take time, but there are many of us now moving in the same direction."

Sandy Cole agrees.

"Our motto is Forward Thinking Farming," says the 26-year-old co-manager of the family-run Broughgammon Farm in Ballycastle.

Along with his parents and siblings, Cole is committed to environmentally-sustainable food production.

"We work with a farm-to-fork philosophy," he explains. "Our main product is cabrito (goat) and free-range rose veal. We raise the animals in the most humane and ethical manner possible, and they are always properly groomed and well-fed with natural grass and hay."

The business' biggest challenge to date, he notes, has been the backlash against the consumption of meat products.

"One of our aims here is to provide proper information on the nutritional benefits of a balanced diet. We do that through a variety of in-house events, including our 'Goatober' festival, our annual 'open-farm' weekend, themed dinners, and workshops, where we emphasize food quality over quantity."

"People are always amazed to learn that there are so many great ways to properly prepare and enjoy meat - as we say here, whatever floats your goat."

Options are a hallmark of Northern Ireland's progressive palate, and you won't find more anywhere than at the Walled City Brewery in Derry-Londonderry.



"Right now, we have 10 craft beers on tap," notes the site's twentysomething brewmaster Josh Kyle, adding that many of the ales are monikered to reflect the area's personality, including 'Stitch' (linen industry), 'Wit' (Irish humour), and 'Cherry-London-cherry'.

"While the art of craft-brewing isn't new, it is relatively new to our part of the world. Guinness and the other major producers have had a monopoly on the marketplace for a long time here, so we have our challenges to be sure, but so far so good."

Founded by James Huey and his wife Lou in 2015, the brewery - which also serves up artful appetizers, main plates and tapas - rests its head upon the four pillars of FLAQ; flavour, local, authenticity, and quality.

"We really do have something for everybody," continues Kyle. "If someone says that they don't like beer, we reply that it is only that they haven't found their favourite flavour yet."

The trend towards artisan food is a major step towards better physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health for the region's residents, says holistic nutritionist Debbie Caskey.

"We have seen a major shift in the way that we think about food and eating in Northern Ireland over the last two decades," says Caskey, who also runs the Stradeen Luxury Boutique Bed & Breakfast in the stunning seaside town of Port Stewart.

"A food revolution by any other name is still a revolution...and this one leaves a much better taste in our mouths. And what's great is that the movement is all being driven by young people - young people who are working together, often across once-divided communities, with a simple and common vision for the betterment of Northern Ireland. There is room for everyone at that table."



For the love of learning

A myriad of multi-media museums and exhibits are engaging, educating, and entertaining students across Northern Ireland.

Learning in Northern Ireland has been a hot-potato issue for generations; the 1923 Education Act, granting free primary and secondary level institutional learning for all, was embraced by some communities and rejected by others. In 1947, the Act was revised to include university-level schooling. By 2000, the Act had been semi-repealed, with small annual tuitions imposed. Since that time, schooling costs, both in 'State' (Protestant) and 'Maintained' (Catholic) schools have soared.

"It is one of our foremost challenges," explains Derry-Londonderry Deputy Mayor John Boyle, a long-time area resident and councillor. "Not only do we need to invest in attracting students to our schools, but we need to find new ways and means to keep them here once they have graduated."

A former schoolteacher, Boyle believes that education is the key to the region's future growth.

"The love of learning, and of ideas, will ensure a peaceful and prosperous tomorrow for our young people. Ideas inspire communication which, in turn, creates connections. As we have seen, the worst thing we can possibly do as a community is to stop talking with one another."

And while enrolment at all levels has been steady over the past two decades, other public institutions have taken a lead in learning.

The Siege Museum and Exhibition in downtown Derry-Londonderry hosts a permanent display of the history of the Siege of Londonderry (1689) and of the Associated Clubs of the Apprentice Boys of Derry. Included in the museum are artifacts, video, audio, and other interactive forms of media. Visitors can also experience one of the finest collections of meeting rooms used by the Loyal Orders; the Apprentice Boys of Derry, the Orange Order, the Women's Orange, and The Royal Black Institution.

"We just love seeing young people walk through these doors," shares manager Billy Moore. "And they love seeing the period costumes, the replica ships, cannons and swords - it makes it all very real for them. This isn't a boring old history book or lesson - it is our heritage, here and now, brought to life through an engaging experience."

Moore adds that museum staff members are also involved in many outreach and community initiatives, including sharing infor-

mation, resources, and best practices with other local institutions.

"It helps to generate greater dialogue and understanding between our communities."

One of those likeminded facilities is the newly-expanded Free Derry Museum, located outside Butcher Gate - one of four arched entryways along the city centre's 17th century Derry Walls - just a few blocks down the hill from the Siege Museum.

Located at ground-zero of the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre in the Bogside district, the one-floor exhibit honours those who perished or were wounded during a peaceful civil rights demonstration on January 30, 1972.

"It is said that if we are unwilling to learn from our history, then we are doomed to repeat it," states site director John Kelly, whose brother Michael was among the 13 murdered by British paramilitary that day. "That is one of the core messages we teach visiting school children, whether they are from here or away."

"The wee young ones are certainly the most inquisitive. They aren't afraid to ask the tough questions, some of which might seem quite obvious, but - for whatever reason - rarely seem to be asked by adults."

Kelly says that older students marvel at the centre's multi-media displays.

"Along with authentic articles - such as handwritten notes, imagery, art, posters, banners, clothing, and even weaponry - the audio and visual elements give the kids a modern, present perspective on the past. We also offer an in-house app for their mobile devices, and many of them enjoy greater engagement with the exhibit via that method."

Similarly, in Bellaghy - less than an hour's drive southeast of Derry-Londonderry - the Seamus Heaney HomePlace uses a myriad of mediums to edify audiences of all ages about the life and work of the region's finest scribe.

"I like to think that Seamus himself would have approved of what we are doing here," smiles manager Brian McCormick, who also happens to be Heaney's nephew. "Like the man himself, and his writing, HomePlace is deceptively simple and modest."

Sure enough, behind the bright and spacious two-floor veneer are a maze of playful and interactive displays that include touch screens, video reels, audio recordings, photographs, block and sliding puzzles, jigsaws,

hats and helmets, objects to see and touch, and a special creative zone where visitors can dress up, write, draw, colour, craft, or simply sit down and read.

"We work with many schools across the region," notes McCormick, "and the students are always engaged, educated and entertained. The hope is that most of them will leave here with a greater appreciation of Seamus, his poetry and prose, and the arts in general."

"Perhaps the most important thing, however, is to get our young people thinking and talking together, and thus inspire a life-long love of learning."





Creating Culture

St George's Market is the last surviving Victorian covered bazaar in Belfast. Located close to the River Lagan and the city's Waterfront Hall, the facility was refurbished in the 1980s and now hosts over 300 vendors each weekend, including food sellers, gift retailers, and crafters of all sorts.

"I have been making and selling bespoke jewelry here for about six years," shares local artisan Dawn Newberry, who fashioned her business - A Thousand Kisses - after a Leonard Cohen song.

"There has been a real resurgence in arts and craft here over the last two decades, especially amongst younger people. These days, it is not unusual for students of our local art schools to start up their own businesses right after graduation."

Efficient online merchandizing, and cost-effective social media, means that young people can now afford to set up shop regularly at area agoras.

"I need to be here each week," continues Newberry. "Customers need to see my work in person, feel it, and try it on. And it is important for me to meet people face-to-face in this milieu, chat with them, and get to know them."

"There is something very special about this space; look around you - there are lots of teens and tots about, and no one is staring at a screen."

"Our young people are talking with one another, laughing aloud, experiencing this together as one community."

Outside the bustling market, about two dozen men and women, some from away but most from home, have gathered for a guided food excursion.

"I am impressed that we are seeing more and more area residents join us each week," says Taste & Tour guide Caroline Wilson. "I think that many of them, especially the younger ones, are pleasantly surprised to learn what we've got cooking in our very own backyard."

Over four hours, Wilson and her troupe tramp around the city centre, sampling an assortment of locally-produced artisan goodies, including organic breads, meats, fish, sweets, and more.

"Most of the spots we stop along the tour are run by men and women in their 20s," notes the thirtysomething. "They hold high ideals about their craft, and they are true wizards at what they do - mixing and matching natural ingredients into something scrumptious and nutritious."

That culinary alchemy is on display just down the road, in the city's creative Cathedral Quarter where, each day, the youthful Master Chef Gareth McCaughey and his team at The Muddlers Club spin basic and whole dietary elements into gastronomic gold.

"We are always dreaming up new and inventive ways to prepare and present our meals," smiles the lightly-bearded and heavily-tattooed hipster, pointing to his eatery's multi-course menu. "With nouveau cuisine, things can get quite imaginative in the kitchen - sometimes, maybe a little too imaginative."

"When we get it right, our patrons let us know, because their plates are clear, they pay their bill, and they come back. When we get it wrong, however, we usually know right away by the small explosion on the grill followed by a big poof of smoke arising from one of our pots or pans. I suppose it is a little like chemistry class used to be in school. But sooner or later we figure out the right formula, and the final results are delicious."

Belfast's changing tastes are accompanied by its changing face; the city's Cathedral Quarter is also peppered with dynamic and diverse street art.

"The city is awash with works from both established and emerging artists," says Adam Turkington of Seedhead Arts, who - among his many roles in 'Alternative Ulster' - organizes Belfast's annual, autumn 'Hit The North' street art festival.

"The majority of the murals are done with spray paint, but some of the pieces are so good and so complex that you would swear that they had been done with oils and brushes."

Colourful collages from the likes of Nomad Clan, AKA Cbloxx, Aylo, Dan Kitchener and Irony have given a new voice - and look - to local and area residents.

"Belfast has always been covered in graffiti," notes Turkington. "However, most of it was of a divisive nature. Some of that stuff is still there, for sure, but almost all of it has now been painted over by the next generation."

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Celtic Cuisine ~ Back to the Future



For generations, Celtic cuisine was synonymous with corned beef, boiled cabbage and haggis. Once staples of the traditional diet in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man, Bretagne, Galicia - and everywhere the Celts roamed - they are now pieces of a much grander platter that includes local, fresh, and seasonal ingredients - all used to create both classic and contemporary culinary delights.

Interestingly, for many, the future of the Celtic palate might mean going back to basics.

Growing up on a farm in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Cabrini Macquarrie maintained a diet similar to that of her Scottish and Irish ancestors; simple, no-nonsense dishes, prepared with family members mulling around the kitchen.

"Gardening was an important aspect to our livelihood," she remembers. "We stored vegetables and fruit all winter. The philosophy of 'farm to table' was in vogue back then, only we did not recognize it at the time."

Macquarrie - who contributes a bi-monthly recipe in Celtic Life International, and is the publisher of Cabrini's Celtic Kitchen cookbook - is a mother of four and a seasoned hostess. She has long admired the approach that Celts took to preparing and enjoying meals.

"I believe the Celtic people had an appreciation for eating well that had not been fully acknowledged until recently. Today, we have become accustomed to having all sorts of added sauces, dips, dressing and toppings on our food. However, this can too often disguise - rather than enhance - the true taste of what we are eating."

"The Celts, perhaps out of necessity, had less of everything at their disposal, and learned to relish the simplicity of food for its intrinsic value. Their diets were garnered from the sea and the land, and needed little enhancement."

"Today we are more cognizant of what we place in our bodies. As we become more aware of nutritional value in different foods, we can take advantage of fresh, seasonal, locally sourced food."

Brenda Anderson agrees.

"We have only now started to understand how very lucky we are here in Scotland," explains the director of Tasting Scotland, a food and travel company. "I mean, chefs from around the world literally clamber over each other for our delicious and nutritional produce."

Anderson, a native of Aberdeen, Scotland, began her career in the Hospitality and Tourism sector at the age of 17. Over the years she has witnessed the evolution of Scotland's culinary culture.

"Different generations continue to eat different types of food, but the differences are decreasing. Young people are eating traditional Scottish fare more than ever before, with street-food trucks at beer festivals and informal restaurants within craft breweries making it great to be feasting upon the food of our forebears. Recently, there has been a big resurgence in the consumption of oats, and something like savoury porridge - when paired with other ingredients - is now being enjoyed at lunch or dinner."

Authenticity, she believes, is the key ingredient.

"That goes all the way through to the service we receive when dining out. Eating Scottish produce is important, and so is value for money."

"It is absolutely worth paying as much as you can afford for quality produce that is both local and seasonal."

On the Emerald Isle, local ingredients are vital to Ireland's recent food revolution.

"Most good restaurants now even list the farmers, purveyors, cheese-makers, etc. on their menus," says Irish-American author Margaret Johnson.



Born in Massachusetts to an Irish-American family - her maternal grandparents are from Kerry and Cork, and her paternal great-grandparents are from Dublin and Cork - Johnson has become renowned in the culinary industry as 'the Irish Cook'.

In 1984, she took her first trip to Ireland, becoming "beyond smitten" with the country and its cuisine.

"After traveling there many times, and noting the country's new food trends, I combined both interests into my first cookbook, Ireland: Grand Places and Glorious Food."

Johnson has since published 11 follow-ups, including Favourite Flavours of Ireland, Tea & Crumpets, The Irish Pub Cookbook, and The New Irish Table.

With over 20 years of experience, she has become an expert in the field of Irish food.

"Prior to the early 1990s, no one was paying much attention to the country's cuisine. It was not until the island's chefs realized they had some of the best ingredients right in their own backyard that people started to take notice. They were among the first to promote the 'farm to table' philosophy, and have been championing it ever since.

"At the end of the day, it is pretty simple," she concludes. "Authentic Irish cuisine uses authentic Irish ingredients. Anything else just isn't the real meal deal."

The use of local ingredients is also now at the core of good cuisine in other Celtic nations, including Cornwall.

"Menu creation for me is all based on what I can get locally," explains Adam Vasey, chef and owner of Schooners Bar and Restaurant in St Agnes. "The idea with Schooners is to have fresh regional food in a relaxed environment."



Vasey recently reopened the beloved, seaside eatery, which was originally owned and operated by his parents.

"I actually started off working for my mum here at the restaurant, years ago. She is a totally self-taught chef - she loved seafood and learned as she went along. The smells that came out of that kitchen - and the sight of fishermen bringing lobsters straight off the boats - stuck with me, eventually informing my decision to become a chef.

"My business partners became really excited about the prospect of taking it on, and we assumed the lease last year. There is quite a lot of family history and heritage here."

Located by the beach overlooking the St. Agnes Heritage Coast, Schooners is an ideal locale to watch the sunset with small plates and a bottle of good wine.

"It is very important for me to fit the food with the surroundings. This is a casual part of the world, and our dining experience reflects that. Instead of formal, fine-dining, we do interesting seafood-centric dishes, including local white crab, avocado, and crispy St Ewe egg, or scallops on the plancha with crispy chicken wings."

As such, fresh produce is at the heart of the menu.

"One way that eating choices have changed is that everyone is so much more aware of provenance. It seems ridiculous to fly ingredients in when we have amazing stuff right on our door step. Seasonality is fundamental now. Years ago, it was about getting exotic and expensive ingredients from as far afield as possible.

"Today, the emphasis is on food that is good and close and made with love by enthusiastic people who care about the product."

"Good hospitality is also essential," he continues. "I have always believed that food is only part of the story when it comes to having an enjoyable dining experience; staffing plays a huge role in this, as does music, decor and surroundings - if the whole thing fits together,

customers will have a memorable experience."

Like Vasey, Scottish chef Craig Grozier believes that good food is close to home.

"Over the last ten years we have been regaining our passion and understanding of locality and seasonality," explains the owner-operator of Fallachan restaurant in Glasgow. "This is something that our European Celtic brothers and sisters never lost. The combination of the food and family life in these cultures is generally paramount and has managed to remain ingrained to this day."



Grozier follows nature's timetable when creating his unique menus.

"This means that during game season we use wild Scottish game, pick the different wild mushrooms, herbs, and seaweeds that grow each month, and we consistently use Scottish shellfish and seafood. The traditional grains of Scotland are also always on our menus somewhere. This really defines our culinary philosophy."

Established in 2012, Fallachan is described as a 'tailored dining experience.' Along with daily, in-house offerings to the public, Grozier and his team also offer their services privately - for events and as consultants - where they can branch out with new ideas.

"Creativity plays a huge part in menu development. We are using old and traditional ingredients and pairing them with new techniques."

"Even more importantly, some old techniques go hand-in-hand in defining the new style of Scottish cooking, all the while never forgetting the core ingredients this country has survived on for hundreds of years."

He notes that Celtic cuisine continues to influence other cultures, and vice versa.

"If we look at the historical Celtic map of Europe, countries such as Portugal - which has a strong Celtic influence - are renowned for Cod fishing and for introducing simple preserves such as salt cod, now a popular ingredient globally. Additionally, a place like Paris - with its Celtic heritage - has had a massive impact on the way food is prepared and presented around the world; every cosmopolitan city has some sort of Parisian style bistro or restaurant.

"Furthermore, I - and a handful of other chefs in Scotland - have found that we have similarities to other island cultures of the world, such as Japan. Ingredients used there are very similar to what we have available in Scotland; shellfish, seaweeds, and the like, have greatly inspired our style of cooking."



**Jude
Kereama**

Culinary cross-pollination is top-of-mind for Jude Kereama at his Asian-fusion restaurant Kota in Cornwall.

“Essentially, we use local seasonal produce but with a slight Asian twist,” he explains. “I personally think using ingredients from different cultures adds more diversity to the Cornish food scene. People’s tastes in food have grown, and palates are much more varied today.”

Kereama - who is of Maori, Chinese and Malay descent - became interested in Cornish cuisine as an adult.

“My wife’s family have lived in Cornwall for many years, and it was after my first visit that we decided we should open a restaurant here. I loved how Cornwall reminded me of New Zealand, and it felt like a home away from home.

“Cornwall also has some of the best ingredients in the U.K. right on our doorstep. I am inspired by all the produce available to us, both from our suppliers and from foraging.”

It took some time, but Kereama eventually found the perfect location to launch his fare.

“It was purely by chance that we stumbled upon the community of Porthleven. After renting a restaurant for a year, another site came up for sale, so we bought it and named it Kota - which, in Maori, means ‘very large Oyster’.”

Cornwall, he notes, has quickly become a popular food destination.

“What has changed most is the passion in which local and area chefs are cooking with regional ingredients. Tourism is booming in Cornwall, and the food scene has grown with it.

“When we first opened - about 14 years ago - we were told ‘nobody around here will like that kind of food’ - but I stuck to my guns, as I can only cook from the heart, and it paid off.

“I love introducing people to new flavours...”

“We serve up things like lamb and molasses with pecan crust, steak with Chimichurri and sweet potato dauphinoise, Bombay chicken pizzas, Duck Hoisin pizza, crab spring rolls, and various chillies and curries. We offer our patrons the opportunity to sample international food that they might not find elsewhere in the area, or that they would never cook at home.”



**Brenda
Anderson**

Brenda Anderson agrees that cultural influence plays a role in the changing of tastes.

“The French influence that is very much a part of Scotland’s legendary cuisine culture continues, but food is - of course - as fickle as fashion! The avant-garde techniques developed mainly in Spain, and the Scandinavian influences of simplicity and of being at one with nature’s bounty, are also evident here. Modern interpretations of classic Scottish dishes, and the greater use of local and seasonal ingredients, sums up what has been happening here for the past 10 - 15 years.”

The rise of the internet has also been a major factor.

“Blogs are really important to promoting both traditional local cuisine and also new and modern concepts,” says food blogger Lauren Aloise.





An American ex-pat now living in Spain, Aloise operates the popular food blog Spanish Sabores, sharing culinary travel tips and recipes from the region and beyond.

"When I moved here in 2009 I needed a creative outlet. I had studied hospitality and tourism management and worked in restaurants for many years, so I decided to document my discovery of Spanish cuisine and recipes. Soon enough I was blogging about all of my foodie trips and sharing recipes with my followers.

"My goal is to give readers a glimpse of what life is like for me in Spain, as well as the knowledge to eat well when visiting. I also hope to inspire people to cook delicious Spanish recipes at home."

After nine years online, Aloise has specific opinions about the

need for food blogging in smaller areas, like the Celtic nation of Galicia.

"They have replaced guidebooks in many ways," she explains. "As Galicia is still a rather unknown little corner of Spain, food blogs are crucial to getting the word out about the local food scene and inspiring people to visit.

"I personally love traditional Galician food and wine - some of my favourite wines in the world come from the Ribeira Sacra. Santiago de Compostela is home to one of the country's most beautiful food markets, and also boasts some delicious tapas bars. I especially love a place called A Moa, which serves traditional Galician dishes with a modern twist."

Whether the chef's focus is traditional recipes or modern mixes, the crux of Celtic cuisine is fresh ingredients, sourced locally. Food should be healthy and sustainable, and - hopefully - delicious.

With that in mind, and a stack of recipes books on her knee, Cabrini Macquarrie considers the future of food, both at home and beyond.

"As obesity, blood pressure, and diabetes levels all rise, people are going to be rethinking their lifestyles. More and more, folks want products that are grown free of pesticides, preservatives, steroids, and other chemicals. We are looking for fresh, seasonable, locally-sourced ingredients, prepared with simplicity and sustainability in mind. That 'farm to table' philosophy, and the idea that 'we are what we eat' - are both at the core of traditional Celtic cuisine; the food of our ancestors. Perhaps, for us and for the generations that will follow in our footsteps, a healthier future means going back to the basics."



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Celtic Spirits

With an influx of new distilleries, whisky has never been more popular or profitable. Celtic Life International gets some spirited advice on the world of spirits



Ally Alpine



Whisky is quickly becoming the drink of choice throughout the Celtic nations. While its presence is nothing new, its level of popularity has grown exponentially in recent years. As new distilleries and shops open their doors, more people are developing a taste for uisge-beatha - the water of life.

Whisky - or whiskey - is a distilled alcoholic beverage made of a fermented grain mash. Grains can include corn, wheat, rye and barley, and are often malted. Once distilled, the grains are aged in a wooden cask, traditionally made of white oak.

In 2003, Ally Alpine opened up Celtic Whiskey Shop in Dublin, selling spirits from Ireland, Scotland, and beyond. Alpine - a seasoned whisky connoisseur with over 30 years of experience in the industry - offers daily tastings of in-house whiskies.

"I initially worked for Oddbins Wine Merchants," he explains, "and then I had a brief period working in a Long Island Liquor store, before moving to Ireland and opening Oddbins here. I then started the Celtic Whiskey Shop, and in 2016, I opened Celtic Whiskey Bar & Larder in Killarney."

A native of Glasgow, Alpine believes that whisky enjoys strong standing in the Celtic nations.

"I personally can't speak for Wales, Cornwall and the rest of the Celtic nations, as it seems that they are all very much at the fledgling stage," he admits. "For Scotland and Ireland, however, sales are booming and there is a lot of new investment happening."

"Confidence is high, and new distilleries are being built at an unprecedented rate. At the same time, demand for mature whisky has never been higher."

While both Wales and Cornwall's whisky industries remain in their infancies, they are already producing great product.

"In Wales, for example, Penderyn is quite a niche operation and is flying the flag there," says Alpine.

Launched in March of 2004, Penderyn is Wales' leading whisky, and is arguably one of the best within all the Celtic nations. A single-malt that is crafted in a specially commissioned still, the spirit is flavourful and powerful, and wed with fresh spring water that flows beneath the distillery.

"The palate is crisp and finely-rounded, with the sweetness to balance an appetizing dryness," said the late Dr. Jim Swan, known to many as the whisky Einstein. "The unique distillation process produces a single-malt whisky that is supremely smooth, light in character, softly gold in colour and does not require a chill filtering."

Jim Murray, author of the Whisky Bible, agrees.

"A ceaseless experience," he describes of Penderyn's Madeira finish. "A gentle massaging of the taste buds. The light cocoa infusion just tops it off perfectly; more charm than Tom Jones, hitting just as many pure notes...and just a fraction of his age."

Similarly, in 2000, Healey's Cornish Cyder Farm distilled their debut whisky. It was the first whisky to be crafted in Cornwall in over 300 years, produced right on Healey's Farm and then transported to nearby St. Austell's Brewery. The spirit was inspired by St. Austell's chief brewmaster Roger Ryman after a visit to Scotland.

Isle of Man and Brittany share a similar story.

Brittany is home to Warengem, the distillery responsible for Brittany's first whisky, Brittany Blended Whiskey. The spirit has been described as both fresh and woody, with a rich and robust finish.

On the Isle of Man, the Manx Distillery has created its own whisky



called Manx Spirit. Currently, the firm offers two formats; ManxRed, which has been distilled from blended whisky aged at five years, and ManxBlue, a beverage distilled from pure malt whisky. Intense in flavour, many are calling it “the spirit of the island.”

For Celtic Life International readers, Alpine has a few suggestions.

“If you like the classic light Irish-style then something like Teeling Small Batch or Writers Tears Copper Pot would be a great starting point. Richer, more complex styles like Redbreast from Ireland, or Springbank from Scotland, are very charming whiskies favoured by collectors. If you like your spirits with a bit of smokiness then Laphroaig, Kilchoman, and Ardbeg from Scotland, or Connemara from Ireland, are good examples of the style.

“In terms of some of my own favourites, Ireland’s Midleton Distillery still rules the roost, but there are a few that are catching up very quickly. Scotland has almost too many to choose from, but Springbank, Macallan, Isle of Arran and Glengoyne are currently making stunning single-malts.”

Alpine acknowledges that, though the sector is currently booming, there is a still room for more growth.

“The industry in Ireland has diversified a lot recently as distilleries learn and experiment with different methods and styles. Even a well-established producer like Midleton has been exploring new avenues with the Method and Madness range. Other distilleries are looking at single origin barley whiskies, as well as new and interesting wood finishes.

“There are always ways to improve. The challenge right now is that there is not enough mature whisky to cope with demand. Producers must look at ways to make young whisky taste better. The alternative is to restrict supply and wait for their maturing stock to age a little more.

The other side to that story is that the market could quite possibly be flooded with new whiskies once existing stock reaches legal maturity.

“Most people are cautiously optimistic,” he continues.

“There is a history of boom and bust in the sector, but hopefully lessons have been learned from previous experiences.”

“The difference now is that there is a truly global market for Irish and Scottish whiskies, and there is more emphasis on quality than before as drinkers move away from blended whiskies to single-malt and single-pot still styles.”

In the end, Alpine believes the most important thing is to know your own personal preferences.

“You need to find out what styles you like and seek out more whiskies with a similar flavour. A good whisky should not taste harsh, but should have good intensity of flavour and finish without seeming hot or astringent.

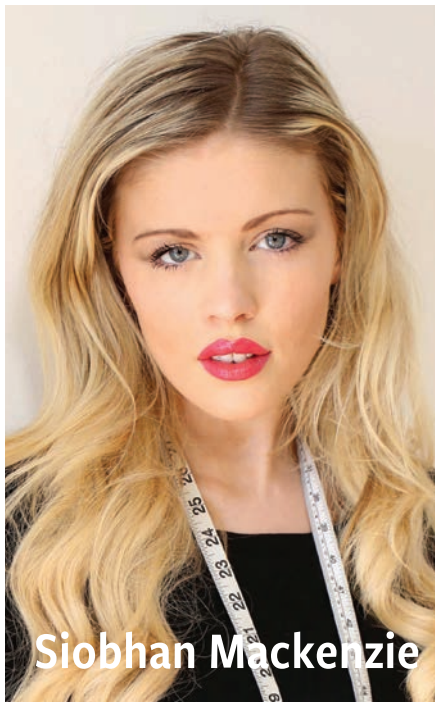
“Try to go to an organized tasting or visit a shop like ours where you can sample two or three whiskies before buying a bottle. Even people who claim to dislike whisky are likely to find at least one that they like. The trick is to figure what styles appeal to you personally.”

www.celticwhiskeyshop.com

The Celtic



Thread



Siobhan Mackenzie



Jane Skovgaard and Charlotte Cargin

Take a quick stroll through any of the many Highland games and Celtic festivals found around the world each year and there is a good chance that you will catch some colourful Celtic costumes; Scottish tartans of all shapes and styles, Irish sweaters and peaked caps, and traditional tall hats worn by the Welsh and Bretons. If you are lucky, you might see the rich garb of Galician Gaitas, classic Cornish dance outfits, and even marvelous Manx headdresses.

And while many Celtic peoples still wear their ancestral identity on their sleeves, their clothing - and their identity - is being redesigned.

That dynamic - the process of defining, redefining, and refining what it means to be Celtic today - can be seen via the shift in styles.

Call it Celtic couture, Celtic chic, cross-Celtic, pan-Celtic...whatever the moniker, it reflects the evolution of a people and its culture.

"It is the combination of old world Celtic and contemporary design," says Regina Tierney of Celtic Fusion from her home near Ennis, Co. Clare, along Ireland's plush west coast.

Raised amidst that lush landscape, Tierney was exposed to a myriad of ancient Celtic traditions; embracing and expressing those customs through design is how she chooses to celebrate her heritage.

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

Although contemporary Celtic attire might not always resemble the traditional wear worn by your forebears, threads of that legacy remain, passed down through generations.

For many of today's top Celtic designers, the passion for fashion began at home.

"My great grandmother was a professional seamstress and her father was a tailor," shares Scottish stylist Siobhan MacKenzie. "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 of age that I would be a fashion designer."

Aideen Bodkin of Dublin had a similar experience.

"My mum and grandmother showed me how to knit, crochet, embroider and sew. I enjoyed being creative. I got my first sewing machine at 13. I loved it, and I knew right away what I wanted to do with my life."

Deirdre Duffy of Co. Mayo, Ireland, was first introduced to design by her grandmother as well.

"She was an Aran hand-knitter in Ballinahown. At the time, a lot of housewives would knit Aran sweaters for Irish companies to send to the U.S.A. Granny was a super-knitter; her hands knew the stitch more than her brain did. I never remember actually learning to knit - I was just surrounded by it all the time as a child and it seeped in by osmosis."

Some took that family crafting to imaginative places.

"I was fortunate to have two very stylish grandmothers," shares Jane Skovgaard of Kinsale-based Charlotte & Jane, near Cork. "Each had beautiful clothes made for them, which they would help to design with their dress-makers. I found this fascinating, and loved that they would involve me. As a child, the first thing I would do when visiting them was head straight to their wardrobe and browse through their clothes, bags, gloves, jewelry, and try on all their shoes. I would lay out outfits for myself, and often put on fashion shows with my cousins and sisters as the models. I always had my own ideas about how I wanted to dress, and started making and customizing my own clothes at the age of eleven."

Nova Scotia designer Veronica MacIsaac, whose parents Mac and Rosemary are world-renowned kilt-makers, is carrying on her family's tradition.

"I have been in the tartan world all of my life, and I can't remember a time I wasn't interested in fashion. My mother taught me to sew when I was four, and I was always welcome to be creative with bits of fabric. I remember my mother and I made tartan sheath dresses



Chloe Duggan



Claire Christian

for a festival and people were constantly commenting on them. That's the first time it ever occurred to me there could be a demand for tartan clothing."

From homespun roots, the pattern towards professional success varied; some undertook formal training, studying at art schools or design institutes, while others mentored under established labels. Many simply made their own way, learning from their daily, hands-on experiences.

And while ways and means may have differed, the goal for each has been the same; to produce the best item of clothing possible.

"I like quality and timeless beauty," shares Nova Scotia stylist Katherine Feiel. "I want to know that a garment is so well-made that it will stand the test of time, and that it won't be so trendy that I cannot wear it for a number of years."

Across the Atlantic Ocean, Belfast-based couturier Chloe Duggan agrees.

"Quality is everything; it affects how long-lasting your garment is, how it fits and drapes on the body, and how it feels to wear it."

She adds that the idea of timelessness runs contrary to modern society's penchant for disposable - or "throwaway" - culture.

"I want my clients to fall in love with my pieces and have them as staples in their wardrobes for years to come. Good quality doesn't always cost a fortune either, which is commonly misconstrued with higher-end clothing."

South of the border in Dublin, designer

Niall Tyrrell believes it is all about how one wears it.

"A good item of clothing should always feel just perfect when you put it on; it should make you feel great, give you confidence and - above all - it should feel like a great friend that you can rely on. This, I believe, is the secret language of good clothes."

Down the street from Tyrrell, Katie O'Riordan of Theo & George shares the sentiment.

"You need to look and feel good in the piece. There is nothing that makes someone look better than confidence - and a beautiful garment will do this."

"A good item of clothing comes back to the threads and the fibers that it was created with," adds Regina Tierney. "When something is real you can feel it with your fingers and your heart."

As such, notes Scotalian fashionista Silvia Pellegrino, a fine piece is born from the love and intention that has been put into it.

"Every detail must be cured; from the choice of the fabrics, the color combination and the tailoring, to the font type used on your swing tags. I believe in offering not just a design, but a whole experience."

Bringing that experience to life is not without its challenges, however.

Ask any fashion designer and they will tell you that, while truly a labour of love, piecing it all together is hard work.

"It is always a challenge to come up with something new and fresh every season," ex-

plains Fiona Heaney of Dublin-based Fee-G. "And with commercial deadlines there is a time constraint on the creative process. Also, some elements are simply outside of my control, including fabric quality, trims, construction, patterns, etc - there are many aspects involved in the process."

Staying ahead of the curve is essential, says Paul Sullivan of Ireland's Eye Knitwear.

"Like any business, you need to continually innovate. We are always looking to improve in every aspect of what we do. In addition, you have the constant change that is a feature of the fashion and clothing industry, with several new knitwear collections needed every year - and that means changes in trends, colours, shapes, etc, so you are constantly developing new products."

For some, balancing business and family life can be stressful.

"Time management is the key," shares Irish hat-maker Suzie Mahoney. "Both areas of my life are very important, and it is imperative that I don't miss out on family demands. That is a non-negotiable."

"Learning new IT and social media skills is also a necessary part of maintaining a visual presence in the marketplace. Having experience on computers, and having support available to me, allows me to learn and to adapt my business to these challenges."

Manx designer Claire Christian concurs.

"Consumers today are more demanding, quality-savvy, and have unpredictable purchase power. We need to work harder to keep up with smarter shoppers, reaching customers in new, but personal ways through technology."

Siobhan MacKenzie agrees that generating visibility in the marketplace is a must.



Natalie B Coleman



Niall Tyrrell



Fiona Heaney

"It is challenging as a small brand with a unique product; you are a small fish in a very big pond, and you don't have the same type of marketing budget as a large brand so you have to be innovative in the ways you try to reach your customers."

Others see troubling trends in the marketplace.

"The retail industry as a whole is challenged at the moment," admits Katie O'Riordan.

"Consumers are demanding instant product availability and access, and the fast-fashion movement has trends starting and disappearing overnight. This is making it more challenging for independent designers to compete with major retailers. Independent boutiques are closing at a rapid rate, and consumers are spending their clothing budgets on disposable, inexpensive clothing."

"It is a competitive industry," adds Natalie B Coleman of Dublin. "High Street has taken over from independent designers, so it is particularly important to not try to compete, but to offer an alternative in something that is uniquely-crafted."

As Charlotte Cargin of Charlotte & Jane believes, however, where there is a will, there is a way.

"Starting and running a business is an enormous challenge. We had to begin at the very bottom and slowly, through hard work and sheer determination, work our way up. That first year we sewed every garment ourselves, working day and night, and living on little else but rice! But we laughed our way through the hardships, as we knew in our hearts that it would all work out in the end. Thankfully, we had enormous support from the media and encouragement from our clients. When we reached the point that we had so many dresses to make we could no longer do it alone, finding suitably-trained dress makers was a huge challenge. So, for a year we taught a dress-making course alongside running the business, and we are now blessed to have four wonderful local dress-makers working with us."

Long hours, hard work, high costs, strong competition, an erratic marketplace, labour issues, balancing family life, keeping creative - it is a wonder that so many designers continue to do what they do.

"I consider myself an entrepreneur and really enjoy being my own boss," says Katherine Feiel. "I can work when and how I choose and benefit personally from my hard work. I love the creative aspects, being finicky and making a piece as absolutely beautiful as possible, coming up with new ideas and solutions to design challenges. I think my absolute favorite reward is the reaction I get from satisfied clients."

It is a common sentiment.

"The biggest reward for me is a happy customer," says Siobhan MacKenzie. "It makes everything worthwhile."

"Seeing my designs being worn by ladies all over the country is the greatest reward of doing what I do," agrees Fiona Heaney.

"I wake up happy, knowing that so many people can feel inspired and more confident in their daily life experiences because of my designs," adds Silvia Pellegrino.

"Doing something I love and having people appreciate the effort that has gone into the design and craftsmanship is beyond fulfilling," notes Natalie B Coleman.

"The greatest reward is meeting someone who really connects with my designs," shares Regina Tierney. "Many times, a person has discovered my work and has dreamt about



Regina Tierney



Silvia Pellegrino

the clothing I have created. This kind of connection is beyond words."

Multi award-winning Irish designer Marion Murphy-Cooney can relate.

"I take great pride in designing for the special occasions in people's lives. This is what motivates me, and it is my favourite part of the job. Those experiences also make me realize the power of clothing, and that it is a language all its own."

"I cherish creating quality, sustainable clothes that are ethically made and fashion forward," says Katie O'Riordan. "Ultimately, I love the process of design; from concept to production, to seeing my garments being worn on the street."

To that end, for many designers, the journey is the destination.

"I really enjoy the time that I set aside simply to design," notes Niall Tyrrell. "The ultimate

creative reward is having an inspired concept in my head and watching it come to life through a sketch, which then leads to the creation of a pattern, leading to the finished garment - all of that began with an idea."

Jane Skovgaard sums up success succinctly.

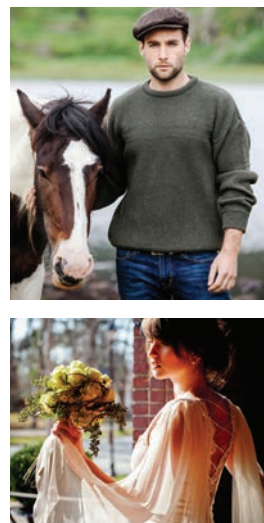
"The rewards are plentiful. The satisfaction of having set up our own successful business is enormous, and the perks of being self-employed are amazing - we are now able to take time out when we need to feed ourselves with new inspiration.

"And we absolutely love working directly with each client and seeing how joyful they are to have beautiful custom-made outfits. We meet wonderful people all the time and help them to look their best for significant occasions in their lives. There is simply nothing better than receiving messages of thanks from satisfied clients, along with photographs of them wearing our designs."

While most reap a bevy of both personal and professional rewards, there is also the deeper satisfaction of knowing that they are a piece of something bigger than themselves - something that continues to grow over time. As such, like their businesses and their creative crop, Celtic couture is a work in progress.

"Celtic culture is evolving," says Regina Tierney. "Our language, our arts and customs - all of the elements that comprise who we are as a community - are being redefined and redesigned. Our sense of style is a vital - and very beautiful - part of that refashioning.

"Still," she adds, "there is simply no denying where we come from. Our heritage is deeply woven into our DNA, and what we wear is the outward expression of who we are. These are the threads that preserve and promote our cultural identity."



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Niall Tyrell



I am originally from Galway in the west of Ireland, and I now live by the sea in Sandycove south of Dublin.

As a child I was always artistic, and it was a natural progression for me to be drawn to a creative career and go to art school. I always had a keen eye for style, but it was at art school that I decided to pursue a formal career in fashion design.

Over the years my work has evolved from the early days of experimentation to a modern, refined look with an emphasis on clean lines, texture and colour. My signature could be described as timeless elegance with a romantic twist.

It all begins with a single idea. The ultimate creative reward for me is having an inspired concept in my head

and watching it come to life through a sketch. That leads to the creation of a pattern, which takes me to the finished garment.

I sell directly from my downtown Dublin showroom where I offer bespoke and couture services with my seasonal collections. We also make all of our garments in Ireland, a fact that we are very proud of.

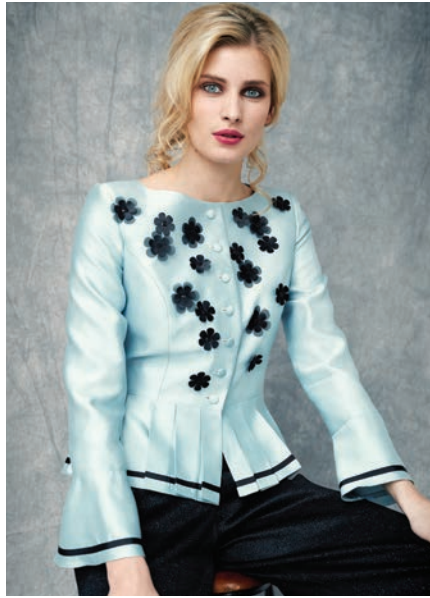
It is always a challenge to keep an eye on all aspects of running a business, but the reward has been to develop an excellent brand reputation in Ireland and beyond. Over the years I have designed dresses for Irish nominees for the Oscars, Golden Globes, and the Grammys, as well as for two female Irish Presidents, actresses, politicians, and film and television personalities.

A good item of clothing should al-

ways feel just perfect when you put it on; it should make you feel great, give you confidence and - above all - it should feel like a great friend that you can rely on. This, I believe, is the secret language of good clothes.

The Irish fashion scene is flourishing as there is a great desire to create here, with many diverse markets in the style sector. Established designers are doing well, however there can always be more state support for emerging designers. Specifically, greater government resources to develop incubation units for both manufacturing and sampling would help young creative types make their mark and get a stronger foothold in the marketplace.

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All my drawings are sketched by hand, and I date them with a signature and year so I can see how my work has evolved over time...









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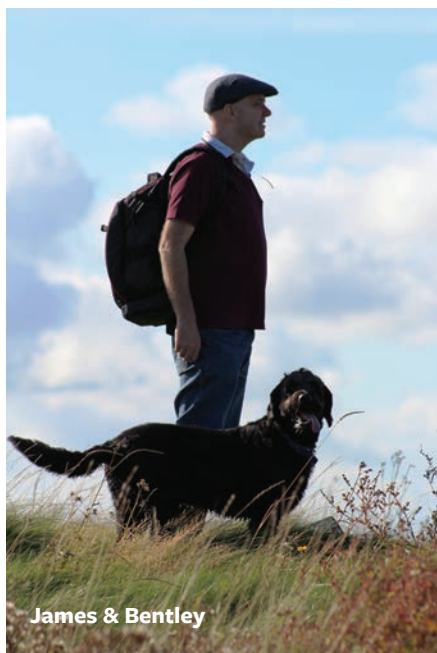
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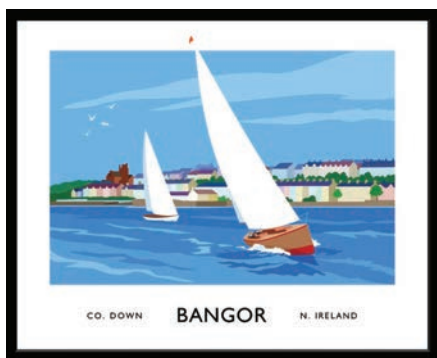


James Kelly

*Visual artist James Kelly brings
Northern Ireland's rich and colourful past
into the present*



I was born and raised in a small village on the Ards Peninsula, Co. Down, into a family of seven children. Dad owned his own petrol station and repair garage and Mum was a typical stay-at-home mother of the day.

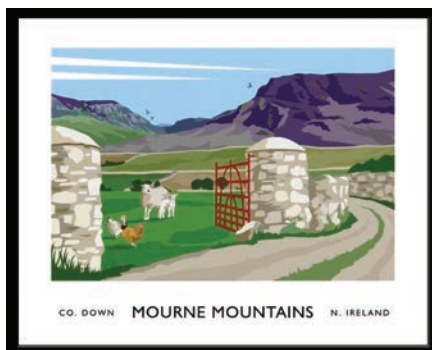


The shores of Strangford Lough - now regarded as an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - were at the bottom of the garden and a natural playground for an adventurous, nature-loving boy. In my early years I was often to be found roaming amongst the whin bushes, clambering over rocks or making rafts out of just about anything I

could find. As I got older into my teens I would be using our 18ft boat with an outboard fishing rod and a handful of doorstep sandwiches just in case! If I wasn't on the waters I was on the sports field, playing hurley at our local club or kicking football with my friends.

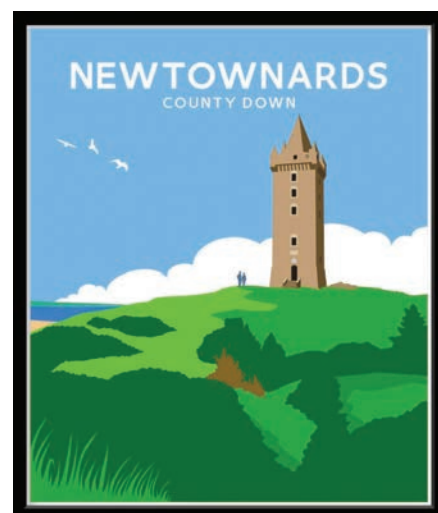


My mum used to joke that I was born with a pencil in my hand, and that I had an eye for detail and an inquisitive mind. My earliest memories include waiting eagerly for the grocery delivery just so I could get my hands on the cardboard boxes to make everything from ships to aeroplanes, and many a garage/aeroplane hanger was made from Kelloggs boxes, egg cartons and newspaper.

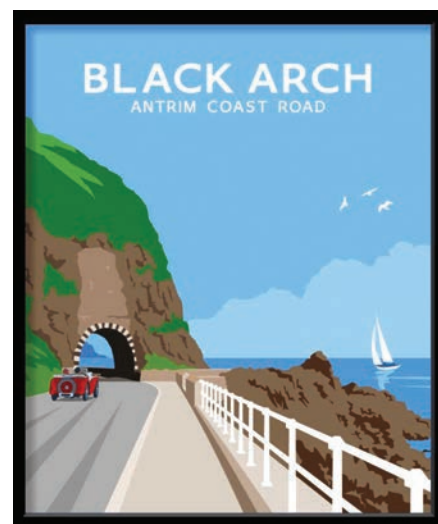


Whilst toys weren't in short supply, as far as I was concerned they could always be improved by creating a scene/diorama to act as

a backdrop to wherever my imagination was heading that day.



My elder sister Dymphna who was studying Textile Print was always encouraging me with gifts of paints and pens and even slipped me a few quid as a reward for doing well in my art exams in school. Her influence continued to play a part when she convinced me to take my art seriously and go to university where I studied Graphic Design.



My art has developed through a few different styles and mediums

mostly due to my study of Graphic Design. I've enjoyed learning and using airbrush techniques, water-colours, oils and acrylics. Working as a traditional sign writer since my early 20's, I developed a passion for lettering and some of the old techniques and methods used by the masters of this craft including working with gold leaf.



In the field of sign writing, I was exposed to a lot of the signage and advertising media of the early twentieth century. I was also fortunate enough to meet a few of the old characters of the trade whose love of this artform inspired me to look deeper and develop my own style. I have drawn inspiration for this collection from what I've seen and learnt of the advertising posters of a bygone era.



Everyone has their own opinion on what art is, some try to pigeon

hole what makes one piece better than another be it the level of fame achieved by the artist or simply the price they paid. In my opinion however, good art doesn't and shouldn't have to be expensive or exclusive. So what makes a good piece of art? I suppose it's something that speaks to the soul, something that transports the viewer or even just something that allows the viewer to escape from the hurly burly of the modern life if only for a few minutes.



I have never set boundaries or goals for my creativity. Life isn't linear, it has corners and who knows which corner I'll take next, or even what's going to be round the other side. Every day is a new day.



The biggest reward by far is that I'm able to earn a living from doing what I love. It also enables me to work around family life and gives me an excuse if one were needed to look again at the beauty of Northern Ireland.



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Jenny's Apple Pie



My mother-in-law, Jenny Macquarrie, was one of the kindest people I have ever met in my life. Sadly, she passed away last July. Every fall, she would make 5 pies for each of her daughters and daughters-in-law, including myself. She would deliver this to my house unbaked and frozen so I could take one out of the freezer whenever

I liked. Later in life, the number was reduced to two, still just as delicious and just as welcome. Later still, the number was reduced to one and then there were none...I often think of her and her kindnesses, of which, there were many. As another year is upon us, I honour her memory by sharing her warm and wonderful recipe for Apple Pie.



Ingredients

Pie Crust

5 cups flour
1 lb. shortening
1 large egg
1 tbsp. salt
1 tbsp. sugar

Apple Pie

8 medium size apples
1 cup white sugar
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tbsp. cornstarch
1 tsp. lemon juice
3 tbsp. butter

Instructions

Pie Crust

Sift dry ingredients into large mixing bowl. Cut in shortening. Break egg into a 2-cup measuring cup and beat with fork. Add water to the level of the 1 cup mark. Beat again with fork. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture, pour in liquid, mixing lightly with a fork and tossing flour in from the sides until all is moistened. Knead. Wrap and keep in refrigerator until required. Makes two pies.

Apple Pie

Pare apples and slice thin. Place apples in a bowl with sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon, cornstarch, lemon juice and butter. Toss apples until covered with ingredients. Place in pie plate which has been lined with unbaked pastry. Wet the edge of the crust with cold water. Place top crust. Seal and flute the edge. Cut slits in the top crust. Bake at 450°F for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 375°F. Bake until browned and apples are tender, 45-60 minutes.

Bliadhna mhath ùr! ~ Cabrini

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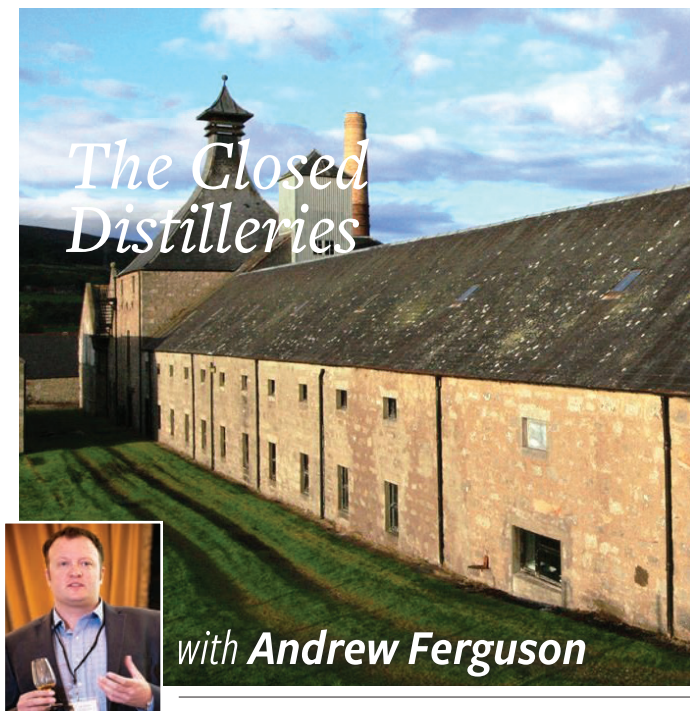
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In October of 2017, seemingly out of the blue, it was announced that the closed distilleries of Port Ellen, Brora and Rosebank would reopen. The timing was curious to say the least; Brora and Port Ellen had been shut down since 1983, and Rosebank since 1993. The 1980s and 1990s were a turbulent time for the Scotch Whisky industry. When the whisky bubble of the 1960s and 1970s burst, the effects were disastrous. A huge proportion of Scotland's distilleries were taken out of production, many closed (seemingly forever), and those still standing saw their production cut back dramatically.

It wasn't until the early 2000s that Scotch Whisky began to catch its stride again. The boom of the 1960s and 1970s was fueled by Blended Scotch whisky. The present boom, which began in the mid-2000s, has been focused on surging global demand for single malts. Demand for whiskies from closed distilleries like Port Ellen took off during this time. In the mid-2000s, a distillery-bottled Port Ellen could be had for about \$300, with independent bottlings selling for as little as \$150. By 2010 those prices had doubled, and were heading north. Today you will be hard pressed to find an independent bottling of Port Ellen for less than \$2000, and a distillery bottling for less than \$5000. Which begs the question, if they were going to reopen the distillery, why on earth did they wait so long to do it?

As it stands Brora and Port Ellen aren't set to reopen until 2020, by which time they

will both have been closed for nearly 40 years. In the case of Brora at least, the distillery's single pair of stills and its buildings remain relatively intact. They will likely be able to recreate a spirit profile close to that which has brought it such fame over the last few decades. The promise of recreating Port Ellen is far more nebulous. The distillery will be housed in a new building kitted out with all new equipment replicated from "detailed records." Only time will tell whether either spirit will resemble that of its forbearer. Still, I ask why reopen them, and why now?

The cynic in me sees two motives; envy and greed. Envy on the part of Scotland's largest drinks company, jealously coveting some of the attention and excitement being lavished on the nearly two dozen new distilleries which have opened in Scotland over the last few years. Many of these are selling futures of their new make spirit, and/or will be bottling inaugural releases at inflated (collectible) prices. I also see an element of greed, as they must surely be getting close to running out of casks of Brora and Port Ellen to bottle of these rare malts, and that will entail a loss revenue.

I want to give them the benefit of the doubt; I want to believe the new whiskies will be good and live up to the enormous reputation of the originals. And I want to believe that they are doing it for the right reasons. Their press release says the decision was influenced in part by "demands from existing enthusiasts, but it also reflects the strong growth in the single malt Scotch

market and the opportunity to create new generations of whisky consumers."

But again, the cynic in me suspects it is because they think there is a gold rush of new distillery whisky releases coming, and they want their share of that pie too. Can we expect to see \$200 inaugural release 3 year olds in 2023? I wouldn't be surprised!

Independent bottlings of Brora and Port Ellen are getting rarer, but they offer considerably better value than the distillery bottlings.

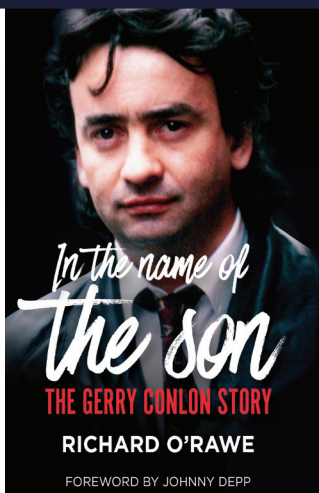
Gordon Macphail Rare Old Port Ellen 1980; *The best priced whisky from this closed distillery we can find, with candied fruits, liquorice, and buttery-oily peat. A bargain at \$1900.*

Port Ellen 37 Year 18th Release; *A very well reviewed, classic Port Ellen, at a big price-point. Oily, with bbq, spicy peat, and white fruits. \$5250*

Gordon Macphail Rare Old Brora; *The only Broras we have seen in recent years, other than the official bottlings, have been from Gordon Macphail. Tropical and waxy, with clean peat, smoke. \$1200*

Brora 34 Year 2017; *Like this year's official release of Port Ellen, the Brora has been well reviewed. Layers of fruit, classic waxy tones, and gentle peat. \$2200*

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In the Name of the Son; the Gerry Conlon Story

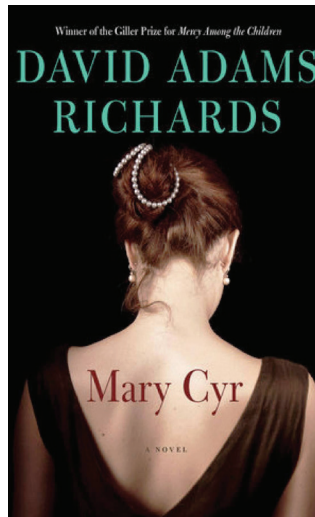
By Richard O'Rawe
Merrion Press / 252 pp / €13.99

After fifteen years of wrongful imprisonment for the 1974 bombing of the Guildford Pub, Gerry Conlon blew almost €1 million of British government compensation money in just five years. Broke, broken, addicted, alcoholic, and suicidal, the former Falls Road resident hit rock bottom. Before dying of lung cancer in 2014, Conlon rebuilt his life, becoming a leading civil rights activist both at home and abroad. Though his legal struggle was masterfully told in the 1993 film *In the Name of the Father*, Conlon's childhood friend Richard O'Rawe gives us a stirring glimpse of the man behind the myth. More than a rags-to-riches-to-rags-to-riches story, and forwarded by Johnny Depp, the book paints a powerful portrait of a people and place during Northern Ireland's most troubled times. ~ SPC

Dead Men's Trousers

By Irvine Welsh
Penguin Books
432 pp / £16.99

After the massive success of his first book, *Trainspotting*, Scottish novelist Irvine Welsh published over a dozen novels and short story collections, and dabbled in screenplays and theatre. You would never know it, however, as that debut narrative overshadowed all that followed. Perhaps sensing that, the author returns to the scene of the original crimes with *Dead Men's Trousers*, resurrecting the core cast of characters, including Mark Renton, Simon "Sick Boy" Williamson, Daniel "Spud" Murphy, Francis "Franco" Begbie, and others. While I would be remiss to shout out a spoiler of any sort, I will tell you that - even a little older, if not a wee bit wiser - the slick style and swagger of our favourite Scottish street punks hasn't aged a day. ~ SPC



Mary Cyr

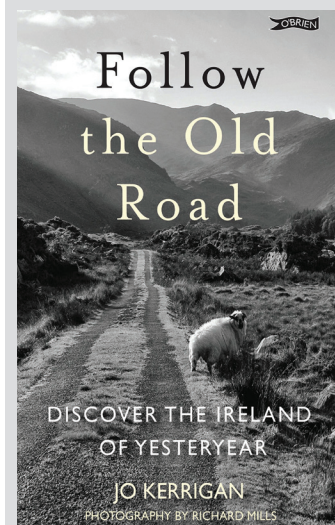
By David Adams Richards
Doubleday
420 pp / \$34.99

The 'Bard of the Miramichi' is back with his best novel in more than a decade. Exploring the larger themes of power, loss, remorse, conscience, and redemption, Canada's finest scribe (and newly-appointed Senator) David Adams Richards takes readers from the slums of South America to the east coast tributaries of his native New Brunswick. When a young boy is found dead in Mary Cyr's hotel room in Mexico, the trail of justice uncovers the dark and murky depths of her family's fortune. En route, Officer John Delano - familiar to readers from the author's previous works - uncovers corporate corruption, and wrestles with the demons of his own past. A stirring and powerful narrative that further cement's Richard's legacy as the country's finest literary craftsman. ~ SPC

Follow the Old Road

By Jo Kerrigan & Richard Mills
O'Brien Press
304 pp / €16.99

Journalists for both the Irish Examiner and the Evening Echo, Jo Kerrigan and Richard Mills were each born and raised in quaint West Cork on the Emerald Isle. Their first-hand experience with the country's rich and robust heritage is on full display in this terrific tome. With a strong balance of text and photographs, the prolific pair captures and conveys the spirit of the island's past - and its people - finding the essence of each in both Eire's better-known spots and its many quirky nooks and crannies. The result is more than a look back at 'ye' old country' - instead, as the past permeates the present, readers are reminded why Ireland is what it is today. A wonderful work that will surely inspire. ~ SPC





U2

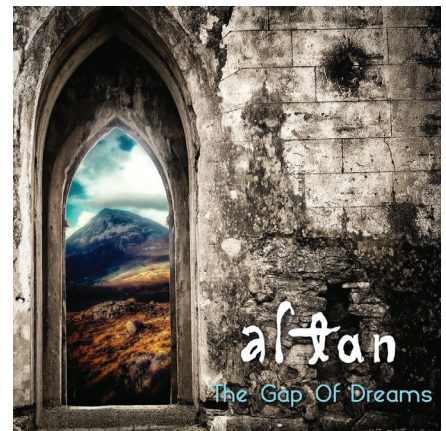
Songs of Experience

The much-delayed follow-up to 2014's *Songs of Innocence*, U2's 14th studio album comes of age with all the aches and pains of middle age. While the Irish supergroup retains its signature sound, aided by the stellar sonic workings of no less than nine producers, the band soars off into new thematic directions; at their lyrical core, *Love is All We Have Left*, *Lights of Home*, *The Little Things That Give You Away*, and *13 (There is a Light)*, bring mortality into focus, as if front-man Bono - perhaps inspired by recent, undisclosed health issues - can see the end. Thankfully, the smart-pop sensibilities of *American Soul*, *Red Flag Day*, and the first single, *You're the Best Thing About Me*, keep the heaviness in check. ~ SPC

Altan

The Gap of Dreams

Ireland's plush, north-westernmost county of Donegal has produced the island's most beautiful music through the years; Clannad, Enya, and more traditional fiddlers than you can shake a bow at. After more than three decades of writing, recording, and touring, Altan has honed their skill and sound, carrying the sonic torch of both their predecessors and their peers. On their 13th studio album, *The Gap of Dreams*, the quintet tears through *Seán sa Cheo / Tuar / Oíche Fheidhmiúil*, *The Tullaghan Lasses / The Cameronian / The Pigeon on the Gate*, and *The Templehouse Strathspey & Reel / John Mhosey McGinley's / The Mermaid of Mullaghmore*, before bringing the tears on *Dark Inishowen*, *Bacach Shíl Andaí*, and *Níon a' Bhaoigheallaigh*. An absolutely masterful myriad of music. ~ SPC



Connla

The Next Chapter

Despite the forgettable album cover and title, *The Next Chapter* from Northern Ireland quintet Connla might very well be the best 'trad' recording I have heard over the last while. Upon further research, I was pleased to discover that the band - whose members hail from both Armagh and Derry, and met while studying music at the University of Ulster - have picked up an array of awards and accolades since the release of their debut EP in 2015. Deservedly so, I might add. Singer Ciara McCafferty's lush harmonies lilt effortlessly over gentle uilleann pipes, flutes, whistles, harp, guitar, and more on this strong selection of 11 classic and contemporary compositions - further proof that Celtic culture is alive and well in the six counties. ~ SPC

Eamon O'Leary

All Souls

Fans of Tom Waits, Townes Van Zant, Eliot Smith, JJ Cale, Simon & Garfunkel and Leonard Cohen will want to wrap their ears around Eamon O'Leary's stirring debut recording for Reveal Records. By turns tender and touching, the Dublin-born troubadour, who now resides in New York City's Lower East Side, reveals both light and dark sides of the soul with this haunting, beautiful, booze-infused collection of melodies. Make no mistake; the simplicity of these ten terrific tracks belies a deeper, more masterful craftsmanship - rarely heard in our age of obvious, over-the-top commercial clatter - where life, love, loss and redemption are found in the spaces between the notes. Wise, wily, and ever-so world-weary, the Irish songsmith is sure to become your new best-kept secret. ~ SPC



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Matt MacIsaac



Matt MacIsaac does what he loves and loves what he does



Canadian piper Matt MacIsaac is no stranger to Celtic culture. His parents - who own and operate MacIsaac Kilt Makers in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia - are both of Celtic stock; his mother is of Scottish descent, and his father has Irish roots. His sister, Veronica, is one of the foremost tartan fashion designers in the world.

"Growing up in that part of the country, my family listened to a lot of the popular Irish and Scottish groups of the day," he shares via email.

As such, MacIsaac - who now resides in Ontario - believes that he was born to play the pipes.

"Piping has always been an important part of my life. Even before I knew how to play, the pipes were all around me. My mother's three brothers - Kenny, Allan, and Ian Mackenzie - all play the pipes. Listening to them throughout my infancy and childhood inspired me to learn."

Other influences included Allan and Iain MacDonald from Glenuig, Scotland, and the renowned Dr. Angus - one of the best-known pipers in the world - who lived close to MacIsaac's grandmother.

"I was fortunate to have had several formative lessons with him when I was young, starting at about the age of 10."

More than twenty years later, MacIsaac still yearns to learn.

"I continue to play the pipes because I love it. I haven't really known anything else besides piping and music. Talk to anyone who plays pipes in a band or on their own, and they will probably agree that it is very much a way of life, rather than a hobby, or even a career."

Over the years there have been many career highlights, including winning a Silver Medal at the 1998 Oban Games piping competition.

"Shortly after that, I left competitive piping for a long while and went on the road as a touring musician. Being in Natalie MacMaster's band when we toured with Bela Fleck and the Flecktones was a massive treat for me, as was recording on several of her albums."

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

"Making a living when you work in a niche market isn't always easy. It is certainly rewarding to do something you love as a career, but sometimes it can be difficult to choose between what makes financial sense and what would be most creatively rewarding."

"It also requires a lot of self-promotion and marketing. As a traditional musician, the general approach - whether nature or nurtured - seems to be 'don't talk about yourself.' However, it seems to be a necessity these days."

MacIsaac currently plays a set of Fletcher drones, and considers himself to be a 'modern traditionalist.'

"In some ways, I would call myself a traditional piper - while in other ways, not at all."

"If I am playing in a folk band I sound fairly traditional. In a pipe band, my sound is more modern. But when I am in solo piping setting, I am a modern traditionalist."

After a recent trip to Edmonton for a workshop with the Edmonton Youth Pipe Band, he was inspired to become more involved with up-and-coming pipers.

"I am honestly not doing near enough at the moment in that regard. I'd like to change that."

Despite the abundance of daily distractions, he believes that young people are still very interested in piping.

"It's a bit daunting, trying to compete with sports, devices, short attention spans. But I do think there is still interest out there for young people to join an organization that teaches and promotes musical skills, social interaction, physical activity and discipline."

In addition to working with students at his home studio - both in person and online - MacIsaac will be busy over the coming year, with teaching gigs at the National Piping Centre's Virginia School in June and at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton in August. He is also the Pipe Major of the 400 Tactical Helicopter Squadron Pipes & Drums, a competitive Grade 2 Pipe Band based in Borden, Ontario.

"On the performance side of things, I will be playing with the wonderful group Beolach from Cape Breton at a few shows, and a new piping album is on my list of things to do. I guess we will see where the year takes me."

www.mattmacisaacmusic.com

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Emerald Rae

American fiddler Emerald Rae mixes it up on her latest recording

“My voice and songs are fairly contemporary, but they are heavily influenced by traditional, old-time tunes and Celtic music,” shares Emerald Rae via email.

On her recently released self-produced, self-titled album - which includes an edgy take on the classic ballad Deep Salt Sea - the young fiddler seamlessly blends past and present.

“I think things need to be updated,” she notes. “I see a lot of heritage-based promotion that excludes people who don’t have Celtic blood. This is a subtle - but important - distinction, especially for someone like me who has no Celtic blood whatsoever. My roots are mostly Azorean Portuguese and French Canadian.”

Descended from a long line of fishing folk in the historical seaport of Gloucester, Massachusetts - where she still resides today - Rae was encouraged to sing, dance, and play from an early age, simply to be part of the joy that music brought her family.

“I started singing as soon as I could talk and picked up the fiddle when I was seven years old. Shortly after that, I got into Scottish fiddling because my mother decided to learn the bagpipes.”

Over her 20-year musical career, she added to her artistic arsenal, stretching out creatively.

“I learned how to step dance in multiple styles. My fiddle drones like the bagpipes or strums like a ukulele or jangles like a flamenco. I am always trying to push myself and I often have to learn a new skill to pull off the song I just wrote.”

Somehow, she says, it all works.

“It is a bit like figuring out a logic puzzle to fit all the bits of inspiration together.”

Unlike her previous album, *If I Could Fly*, where she played an array of instruments, Rae’s new recording features only voice and fiddle. And though she has performed in many bands through the years, the new, pared-down sound has given her greater freedom to marry older and newer melodies.

“Celtic music is just as relevant as it has always been. Each new generation brings new ideas and new flavours, so it can mature like a fine wine. The biggest problem is that usually the older generation doesn’t like to see it evolve...but it must.

“Tradition is a living, breathing thing that needs to grow and change and have air to breathe...”

She estimates that she has learned thousands of Irish and Scottish tunes over the years.

“I love a solid pop song, but I have a thing for ballads too. A good song is in the ear of the listener. I am always curious to see what people think of my tunes and how they interpret them - it can sometimes be way more interesting than what I was thinking when I originally wrote it.”

At the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Rae learned the art of improvisation and majored in film scoring - each discipline helping



her to better understand and appreciate the practical aspects of creative composition.

“My love for contemporary music has always seeped out in my fiddle tunes and songs. The last two decades of my life has been all about abundance - something I like to bring to my songwriting.”

To further fuel that lifelong passion, Rae regularly takes time to reflect.

“When you are in the game this long, you have to reassess your reasoning every so often. My enjoyment of it certainly keeps growing the more that I am able to fully express myself creatively.”

The life of a travelling musician, she admits, is considerably less glamorous than people may think.

“It is definitely not for everyone and it is tough mentally. It is like being any entrepreneur - there is a mountain of challenges, but if you work hard the rewards are plentiful. For every tough day, there is a seriously fun day, so I can’t complain.

“When you get on stage and play something you have made, that is yours, that took years to learn how to write and people love it - there is simply nothing better than that. And I am always grateful to have received so much love and support from other musicians through the years, as well as from music fans. We are like a big, global family.”

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Paula Roberts

Paula Roberts has her feet on the ground and her eyes to the skies

It was the Spanish style of flamenco that first captured the heart of Prince Edward Island-based dancer Paula Roberts. However, she eventually tapped into her Irish roots as well.

"I grew up with a French-speaking mother and an English-speaking father," shares Roberts via email. "Interestingly, though, both of my grandmothers had parents who were born in Ireland, and perhaps that is why I have always been drawn to Celtic history. My grandmother on my mother's side told me that her father, Thomas Galy, came to Canada from Northern Ireland and worked on the railway in the 1930s. He and his French wife had four children. When my grandmother was four years old, both her parents left for Ireland and abandoned their children. All four children were adopted by French families. Although I was born in New Brunswick, I spent the majority of my childhood and adulthood living on Prince Edward Island, a place that is steeped in Celtic traditions."

Roberts' love of dance began at age six, after seeing the 1983 short Canadian documentary film *Flamenco* at 5:15.

"I remember feeling the passion, like a moving musician," she recalls. "Later in life, I picked up the art of choreography when I was doing gymnastics in school. My coach would laugh at how much detail I would incorporate into the choreography of my gymnastic routines. I always knew that dance was in me. I used to get together with friends and have dance-offs, and they tried to prompt me to do solos for their friends and family members. Even though I was flattered, I never took it seriously."

"There was a singular moment, however, where I recognized the dancer in me ~ one that set me on a path that gave me a reason for being, and let me live an inspired life."

That awakening came in 1997, when Roberts was staying with her grandmother in New Brunswick, working at a convent. After watching Michael Flatley's televised performance of *Lord of the Dance* at that year's Academy Awards, there was simply no turning back.

Soon after, she rented a *Lord of the Dance* tape and began to seek out Irish dance instructors. And while she couldn't find anyone proficient in that particular discipline, she did find a flamenco teacher and a ballet teacher. Roberts' own determination - and a friend who shared her interest - eventually allowed her to learn the Irish style.

"I studied the *Lord of the Dance* tapes for hours and hours. I got a pair of tap shoes, and then a pair of Irish shoes. Even though the Irish shoes were clunky, and it took some time to figure out how to use them, the possibilities excited me."

A couple of months later, while working at an Inn in Stanley Bridge, PEI, fate intervened.

"Once again, synchronicity - even perhaps divinity - would reveal itself to me," remembers Roberts. "A girl I was working

with at the time just so happened to be a very experienced step dancer and teacher. We became friends, due in large part to our shared love of both *Lord of the Dance* and *Riverdance*. For us, these shows were like the biggest thing in the world."

Since those early days, Roberts' hard work has brought her to places she only once dreamed of, including New York, Las Vegas, and Toronto. She even landed a private audition for *Riverdance*. She's had multiple solo shows on PEI, sharing her own brand of creative choreography with captivated audiences. One of her most memorable experiences took place in Dublin, Ireland, where she performed at a private conference for the FBI.

"That was the first time anyone had ever asked for my autograph."

Although she notes that "any opportunity I have to share dance on stage is a career highlight for me," she is still in hot pursuit of her biggest dream - "to create and choreograph a world-touring dance show."

"It has been a long journey, but I feel as excited about the prospect of fulfilling that vision now as I did when I first started - perhaps that is the bit of Irish in me that stubbornly doesn't give up!"

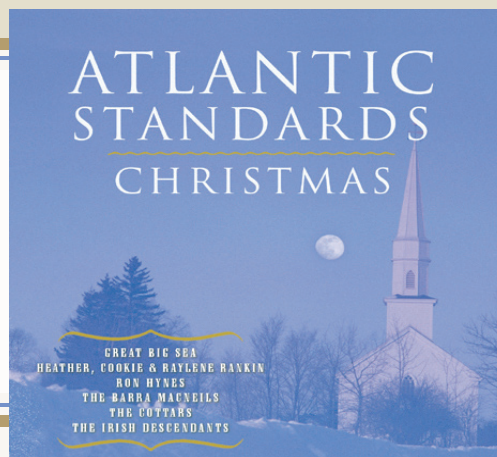
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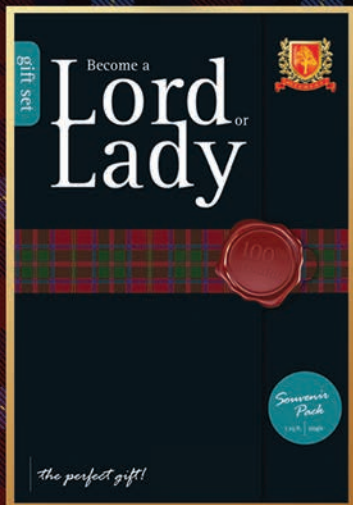


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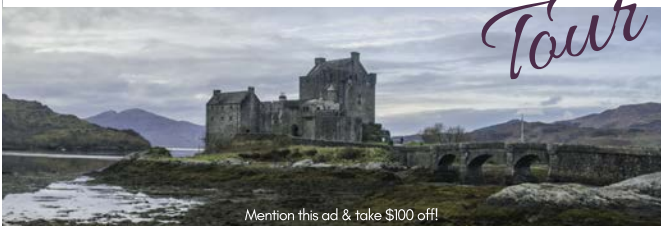
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Dolores O'Riordan;

1971 - 2018



As a teenager, Irish singer Dolores O'Riordan ran away to embrace music. Later, when the fame it brought proved too much, she ran from it. Ironically, as she was laid to rest in her native Ballybricken, outside Limerick, it was her own iconic music that played softly in the background.

The 46-year-old vocalist for The Cranberries, one of Ireland's greatest musical exports, was found dead in her London hotel room on January 15. While the cause of death is yet to be established, police do not consider it suspicious.

Fellow musicians reacted with shock and sadness, while Irish political leaders lamented the loss of an acclaimed artist who carried her country's flag wherever she went.

Irish singer Andrew Hozier-Byrne, better known as Hozier, described O'Riordan's voice as unforgettable.

"It threw into question what a voice could sound like in the context of rock music. I'd never heard anyone use their instrument that way."

Cranberries' guitarist Noel Hogan pointed to her rich musical legacy, which includes such mega-hit songs as *Linger*, the aching story of a first kiss, and *Zombie*, a compelling response to an IRA bombing in England that killed two children.

"There are only a few artists who get to have maybe one song they are remembered by," he told *Rolling Stone* magazine. "Dolores has so many."

Although O'Riordan battled depression and anorexia, and was recently diagnosed as bipolar, Hogan, who was in contact with her shortly before her death, insisted she seemed well, was in good spirits, and was anxious to get to work on the group's first new release in six years. She had come to London for a recording session.

O'Riordan left home at 18, against her family's wishes, to go down the short road to Limerick to audition for a teenage band, The Cranberry Saw Us, in 1990. During her audition she shared the early lyrics for *Linger*, which appeared on the band's first album, *Everybody's Doing It So Why Can't We?*

"We were all blown away that this small girl from Limerick had such an amazing voice," Hogan continued. "The fact that she was not already in a band was a miracle."

The group toiled, toured, and shortened its name. Although early critics panned their music as dull and traditional, the public fell in love with its stirring melodies and O'Riordan's haunting, mercurial voice - one which never lost its distinctive Irish accent.

With its alternative, punk and pop elements, overlaying an intrinsic strain of Irish folk, The Cranberries sold 40 million records worldwide, with four top 20 albums on *Billboard*'s charts and eight top-ten singles. It was the kind of fame O'Riordan, the youngest in a working-class family of seven, dreamed of. For an inexperienced young band, however, the pace proved to be punishing. Both O'Riordan and Hogan later reflected they should have slowed down.

For 20 years the seemingly feisty, yet fragile singer was married to Canadian Don Burton. When The Cranberries took a six-year hiatus in 2003, Burton, O'Riordan and their three children moved to Ontario where they spent much of their time on a lake in Buckhorn, north of Peterborough.

"I got sick of being famous," she told the *Irish News*, adding she was treated as an ordinary person in Canada and was able to volunteer at her children's school.

Despite her fame, she insisted that the best years of her life were spent at home with her family.

"I love being a mom," she told the *Irish News* in 2015. "My kids don't see me as a famous person or have any kind of expectation. I'm just their mom."

In 2009 the band reunited to celebrate O'Riordan being named as an honorary patron of the University Philosophical Society at Trinity College in Dublin. Within months they were back touring internationally. Their final album, *Something Else*, was released last April.

Thousands turned out to wake O'Riordan in two Limerick churches before she was given a modest and traditional Catholic funeral in Ballybricken, in the church where she once played the organ and sang in the choir. With her mother, her brothers and sister, her former husband, her children, and all members of the Cranberries in attendance, the Mass began with a recording of her duet with Luciano Pavarotti, *Ave Maria*. As family members carried her coffin from the small church, she could be heard singing *When You Are Gone*.



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