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INTERNATIONAL

The Eco-Celtic Traveler



INSIDE!

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Dunrobin Castle, Anne Rice
Celtic Comics, Daisie Conway*



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Fáilte

Eachtraíochta, dànachd, and more antur!

The Ancient Celts were, without a doubt, avid travelers. Commonly believed to have originated in Western Europe, the Celts spread out and settled in places ranging from Turkey westward to the British Isles. It is theorized that they travelled, in part, for commerce - seeking out source materials for their superior iron craft, and trading goods that they manufactured.

Perhaps more pertinently, the Celtic world expanded thanks to the prevailing Celtic spirit of wanderlust. To this day, many of their place names survive - by way of example, Dundee, from the Celtic term dunum, meaning fort - providing vital clues as to where the Celts trekked and eventually settled down.

Even now, after many centuries of domesticity, the thrill of discovering new places remains firmly rooted in our Celtic DNA.

There is nothing quite as delightful as poring over an old map and planning a new adventure - especially when we are enticed and encouraged to learn the history and points of interest at a chosen destination.

In the Spring of 2018, my family planned such a vacation - celebratory in nature - for a very special person, my sister Michele. Touching down at France's Charles De Gaulle airport, we enjoyed a whirlwind week in Paris - truly one of the greatest cities in the world. It is easy to see why the Celtic Parisii tribe nested on the Île de la Cité.

Travel has the amazing ability to gently nudge (or jolt!) us out of our comfort zone, requiring us to learn new skills and urging us to be a little less rigid and a bit more resilient. It is a gift - one that, years later, will evoke a memory through a sight, sound, aroma, or taste. Travel presents us with souvenirs that last a lifetime.

To a certain extent, we tend to take travel for granted, thinking - until recently - that only limited economics or time might restrict our plans. Little did we anticipate that travel would virtually grind to a halt. So, it is with renewed enthusiasm that the coming year will see us once again pulling out maps, borrowing guidebooks, and navigating online travel sites.

In 2022, Celtic Life International will resume exploring the Celtic Nations once again as we return to travel. We are excited to share our January/February 2022 issue, with its focus upon sustainable and environmental tourism. Whether from an armchair, online, or on site - discovering the rugged coastlines of the Celtic routes of western Wales and eastern Ireland - we invite you to join us for the journey.

Siobhán L. Covington, Publisher



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Manx Minds

One woman has taken the mental health battle into her own hands



Originally from an area just near Belfast, Northern Ireland, Ali Vondy left home at the age of 26, determined to make a difference.

"I spent 3.5 years working in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa. I met my now-husband in the DRC. He is Manx, born and bred, and after we got married 25 years ago, we moved to the Isle of Man. We have lived here ever since."

Vondy started Manx Minds three years ago.

"I had travelled to England to complete Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for myself. I then trained as a MHFA Instructor in order to be able to deliver this excellent, evidence-based mental health training program - making it available to anyone right here on the Isle of Man."

"Manx Mind's is my own mental health and wellbeing training company. I am the sole owner and operator and provide support for businesses,

government, educational institutions, charities, and the general public, in person on the Isle of Man and England, as well as online across the world via Zoom."

Mental Health First Aid was first developed in Australia in 2001 by husband-and-wife Professor Anthony Jorm and Betty Kitchener when they realized that there was no mental health equivalent to physical first aid. The couple then designed an internationally recognized program of simple steps that can be used to help those in distress. The program is now offered in over 20 countries around the world.

Sadly, the shame attached to mental health issues is still widespread.

"Although things are improving, stigma still exists around mental ill health," states the Manx Minds website. "As a society, we don't tend to know how to take care of our mental health like we do our physical health. This means that people may not know how to support a friend, family member, or colleague who is experiencing a mental health issue, or where to go for support with their own mental health."

"It is estimated that 1 in 3 people on the Isle of Man could be affected by a mental health issue. This is a problem of epidemic proportions which is going largely unnoticed. It is agreed that early intervention needs to play a part in tackling this."

The company's core mandate is threefold; promoting positive mental health for all, providing excellence in training, and tackling stigma and discrimination around mental health.

"Manx Minds is working to better inform our delegates about mental health issues - how to respond in a crisis, support individuals until professional help can be accessed and promote recovery."

The training - which largely consists of one- and two-day classes, as well as a condensed half-day seminar - is open to all.

"It is important to note, however, that Manx Minds training is not therapeutic in nature," shares Vondy. "Courses are not designed to help someone currently experiencing a mental health issue themselves. Nonetheless, people who have had personal or close experience of mental health issues are often more empathetic to people experiencing problems, although it is not necessary to have had mental health issues to be able to help someone. All the MHFA/Manx Minds courses are designed for everyone, whatever their level of experience."

Both the public and private sectors are starting to take notice.

"In 2021, one of Manx Minds' corporate clients (Tower Insurance IOM) offered to sponsor training for senior students (ages 16-18) in every high school across the Isle of Man, to provide a basic Mental Health Awareness course. The hope is that completing this course will proactively tackle attitudes towards mental health as well as help young people to help and support each other when they experience challenges and difficulties."

The program is set to continue into 2022.

"Funding from other sources has been secured to extend the training to further cohorts of students as well as to the general public. Manx Minds is committed to tackling discrimination in the area of mental health through better training and awareness. I truly believe that this type of training - as well as encouraging honest and open dialogue about mental health - can help to preserve life, prevent harm, and promote recovery."

www.manxminds.com

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one

Betty Campbell Tribute

Wales' first Black head-teacher, Betty Campbell, is remembered as "a pioneer and a rule-breaker" as well as an educator. That is why a monument of Campbell was recently unveiled in Cardiff city centre square. The bronze bust was designed and created by sculptor Eve Shepherd, resulting from the Hidden Heroines campaign. Up until now, there have been no public statues of historical Welsh women anywhere in the country. The campaign sought to change that. Although Campbell died in 2017, her daughter and granddaughter have responded happily to the statue.

two

Money Heist-Themed Products

As the popular Galician Netflix series *La Casa de Papel* (in English, *Money Heist*) geared up for its series finale, some companies paid tribute to the show in unconventional ways. Recently, for example, the Estrella Galicia brewery announced plans to dress a special edition of its beer with *La Casa de Papel*-themed labels. These bottles have been released and distributed to more than 60 countries. For *La Casa de Papel* fans who aren't beer drinkers, there's an alternative: makeup. NYX Professional Makeup launched a line of cosmetics in November, including eyeshadow, highlighters, and lipsticks.

three

Brittany Real Estate

During the COVID-19 pandemic, from large French cities have descended upon the coastal region of Brittany for new homes. Looking to get in on the action? For a mere \$1.2 million (U.S.), *La Maison Pavie* could be yours. The six-bedroom home dates back to Medieval times and is nestled in the Breton town of Dinan. The property, which includes two conjoined buildings, totals 2,900 square-feet. The place is adorned with hidden bookcases, fireplaces, vaulted ceilings, and more.

four

Roller Coaster Tycoon

Welshman Ryan Hackett has had a passion for roller coasters from a young age. His love for the ride kicked up a notch back in 1996, when he was among those selected to brave the Megafobia - a wooden rollercoaster at the Oakwood Theme Park in Pembrokeshire - before it officially opened to the public. That day, Hackett rode the coaster a total of 21 times. Hackett, now age 61, recently took his 6,000th turn on that very same rollercoaster. In an interview with CBC, he even referred to the Megafobia by the nickname "Maggie."

five

Message to Scotland

Andre Huet of Quebec has been making surprise pen pals across the Atlantic Ocean. Andrew Eaton-Lewis, a resident of the Uig village in Scotland, discovered a message in a bottle on Cliff Beach. The message was dated Jan. 26, 2020, written in French and signed by Huet. This is the second of Huet's messages to be discovered in far-off sands: last year, a woman named Mary Bird found a bottle while participating in a beach clean-up event in Portland, England.

six

Breton Booze

Bretagne's Celtic Whisky Distillery has launched its first new bottled whisky in 20 years. The whisky, called Gwalarn (meaning "the northwest wind") was released in October. Gwalarn is a blend of different whiskies from distilleries in the Celtic region, brought together in Brittany and diluted with Breton natural mineral water. According to a report from The Spirits Business, "Gwalarn is said to present notes of grain, gingerbread and peat on the nose. The palate gives way to sweet flavours of vanilla and honey, as well as layers of leather and smoky tobacco."

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



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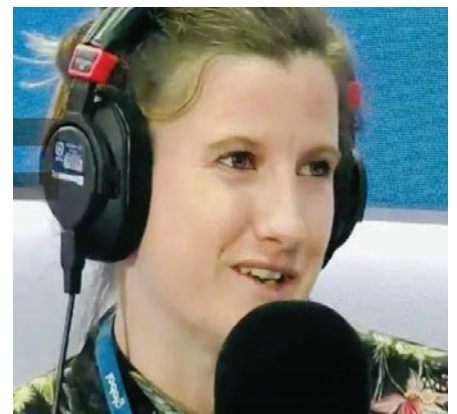
Bianca Ali

Bianca Ali spent her childhood in Grangetown: a southern community in the city of Cardiff, Wales. While Grangetown is a diverse community, Ali became increasingly aware of racism in her teenage years after moving to a predominately white area. She struggled throughout her time in high school, during which peers and teachers were less than understanding. Now 30, Ali is passionate about activism and spoken word poetry. She participates in protests as a leader of the Cardiff and Vale branch of Black Lives Matter. Earlier this year, Ali was fined for organizing a protest during the COVID-19 lockdown, which drew more than the limit of 30 people. The demonstration was to raise awareness of the death of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan, a Black man from Cardiff who died soon after being released from police custody. Ali said the protest was a community-driven effort, and she simply supported the cause. The charges against her were eventually dropped. In an interview with WalesOnline, Ali noted that it's especially important to fight for Black LGBTQ+ folks (such as transgender women) as well as Black people who are disabled. "They're normally swept under the rug in regards to getting a platform," said Ali. "I think it's incredibly important, and we will always have a stage, mic and door for anyone to have their say." In 2021, Ali received the Ron Todd Foundation's Inspiring Young People Award. "It feels amazing. I cried for half an hour when I saw the message about the award."



James Bassett

A Manx man recently took on the exhausting Lon Las Ultra race to raise money for a children's charity. James Bassett is a personal trainer from Peel, and while he'd run in long races before, he had never done it to this extent. The Lon Las Ultra is the United Kingdom's longest race, spanning 253 miles from Holyhead to Cardiff, Wales - the equivalent of 10 consecutive marathons and 20,000 feet of climbing. As if that weren't enough, runners must carry all their belongings with them (support cars aren't allowed) and meet a time limit of 88 hours. In the end, Bassett paired up with another runner for support and safety. "You get so tired that you can start making daft decisions so it was better that we stayed together, that way you can debate whether something really is a good idea," Bassett told IOM Today after the race. The two crossed the finish line in first place after 76 hours. "My wife and my sister were waiting for me with a big Manx flag, so I got to carry the Manx flag over the finishing line." It's hard to say what exactly kept Bassett going, but perhaps part of it was knowing he was raising money for The Children's Centre. The Manx charity aims to develop "a variety of community initiatives and services aimed at enabling children, young people, and families to realise their full potential." Bassett raised £2,490.

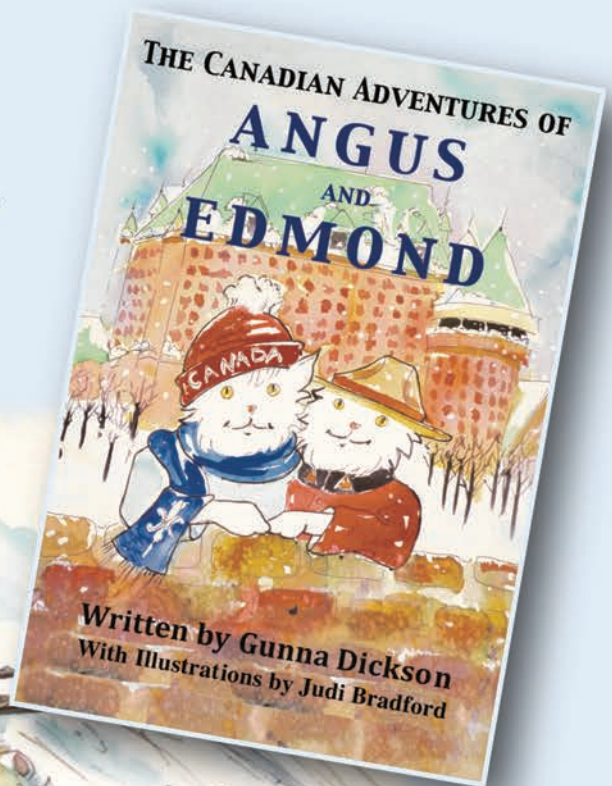


Rosie Pentreath

Rosie Pentreath used the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to move back to her hometown and start a passion project. Pentreath, who had been living in London, left the city for St Just, Cornwall. Growing up in the small town had its challenges: as a teen, she was nervous about how people at home would react to her coming out as a lesbian. Pentreath didn't end up coming out until her 20s, after she had moved to London. Now, however, Pentreath has found support in St Just and has even started a podcast called OUTcast. "It was internalized shame that stopped me from coming out, I prejudged everyone and assumed their response would be negative. But, in fact, everyone has been really supportive. I feel proud to have come full circle and to represent LGBTQ+ people here in St Just," Pentreath recently told Cornwall Live. Pentreath has previously worked for media outlets such as Classic FM, Reader's Digest UK, and BBC Music Magazine. The inaugural episode of OUTcast Podcast was released in September, 2021. The show, which Pentreath hosts herself, shares "coming out stories from engaging, courageous and inspiring LGBTQ+ people from all over the world." Since the podcast's inception, Pentreath has interviewed people such as Victor Iringere, a gay man from Nigeria who sought asylum in the United Kingdom and now lives in England. Other guests include transgender Anglican priest Sarah Jones, queer sex worker and author Tilly Lawless, and singer-songwriter Libby Pentreath.

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Jiminy Eco Toys

One woman is giving children and adults alike the chance to experience the joy of games, crafts and more while keeping the environment in mind.

Sharon Keilthy founded the Ireland-based company Jiminy Eco Toys in late 2018, inspired in part by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report that year. The report emphasized the need for the world to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

"For the first time I really understood that we are facing a climate emergency," Keilthy recalls via email. "I decided to become an eco-activist, and to use my business background by working to make one industry more sustainable in a hands-on way."

As a mother herself, Keilthy noticed how difficult it was to find sustainable toys: for her daughter's fourth birthday, it was impossible to purchase something locally that wasn't plastic wrapped in more plastic. The vast majority of toys, Keilthy says, are made using petroleum (crude oil) and have been sent from far-off countries - both of which contribute to CO₂ emissions. Keilthy suspected that she wasn't the only one who felt that she could no longer condone buying such wasteful products for her kids. As a result, she set out to retail and wholesale plastic-free, locally made toys and make sustainable play more accessible to folks in both Ireland and on the U.K. mainland.

"We started on a cold November morning at my local park market, with a tent, a table, and 20 products."

Today, Jiminy Eco Toys stocks more than 750 eco toys and books, and supplies more

than 30 shops around Ireland. The company stocks bubbles, craft kits, plush toys, puzzles, board games, and just about anything else one can find in a "mainstream" toy store. They even stock craft kits for adults. The key difference, of course, is that it's all about making a minimal carbon footprint as well as a minimal waste footprint.

Reuse of products is another way to reduce waste. So, Jiminy Eco Toys has also launched Rainbow Rentals: an initiative to provide reusable party kits for kids' gatherings, in an effort to combat the use of disposable, single-use products. The goal is to have Rainbow Rentals hosts in every locality in Ireland, so the rental kits are available across the country.

"We are now online-only and crafting ambitious plans to grow further - but also to eventually put ourselves out of business. The sustainable future for toys is that every toy on every shelf in every big toy store is made from plants - not just wood but also bioplastic - or recycled plastic. Then we will either retire or go solve some other problem!"

Until then, however, the company is facing challenges head-on. Despite a growing awareness of the climate crisis (not to mention experts' calls for urgency), Keilthy notes that anything "eco" is still a niche market. Virgin petro-plastic and far-away production is cheaper than natural or recycled materials and local production, "so as a business that is actively trying to keep this planet safe for our children, our margins are smaller and we are a less attractive investment opportunity

than a business that is actively destroying it.

"There are some fundamentals about how our economy is structured that act against environmentally friendly. The main one relevant to us is that virgin petro-plastic is eco-bad, but a sustainable substitute like bio-PE plastic costs more. Think about it: to get petroleum to the refinery, we need to go exploring - drilling, offshore rigs - then drill, frack, extract, build pipelines, etc. To get agricultural waste to the refinery (to make into bio-PE) cannot surely be more expensive than this. And the truth is, agricultural waste is not more expensive - it's that the petroleum industry is subsidized. We need 'the right thing to do' to be the same or lower cost as 'the wrong thing to do' - the world needs to unpack its entanglement in petroleum. It's not something that toys can solve alone, but maybe something toys can be a part of."

Even with these difficulties in mind, Keilthy says the toy industry is a fun sector to work in. What's more, she gets to pursue goals she feels strongly about as an eco-activist. "I love the community that has built-up around us to support our mission. I get so much encouragement and appreciation for what we are doing, and I have the opportunity to share information about sustainability with thousands of people who are curious to hear it. That is a real privilege."

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Seamus Kelleher

Seamus Kelleher sends a message of hope

Irish musician Seamus Kelleher was only 14 years old when he first took up the guitar.

"My sister had a cheap nylon string guitar," he tells Celtic Life International via email. "One day I picked it up and started playing a few notes. Within moments, I realized that there was something about the sound that I loved."

The Galway-native spent several months honing his craft and, within a year, had performed his first professional gig.

"I was pathetically shy, but when I picked up the guitar that went away and for those few moments on stage the other side of Seamus took over."

Kelleher's early career was eventful; at the age of 17 he opened for Irish rock band Thin Lizzy, and at 20 he joined a group called Rock and Roll Circus.

"They were all older than me, so it was like going to school every day for music. We were a big deal in Ireland for a few years. The band did a tour of America in 1974 and broke up shortly afterwards. During that tour, I fell in love with New York and figured it was the right place to continue my music career."

The Galway-native currently lives in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. He notes that he is still passionate about music.

"It is that connection with the audience that feeds my passion."

"I am more confident now - and hopefully a better musician - but I get just as excited as that fourteen-year-old who played my first chord at a school concert back in Galway in 1968."



Kelleher has since toured and performed all over America, including from 1995 to 2011 with Celtic rock band Blackthorn.

As well, Kelleher has spoken out about mental health over the years, leading to the creation of his Shine the Light initiative.

"During my late teens, I suffered from severe depression. I had a very abusive school situation. In addition, Ireland was on the verge of civil war with the Troubles in Northern Ireland. I have managed my depression and anxiety throughout my life, but things got bad when I started drinking at age 30. That made the depression worse and put me in a dark place. My drinking was out of hand and on a few occasions almost cost me my life."

He has been sober for seven years now.

Recently he released his memoir (also called Shine the Light), which he hopes will positively impact those with a shared experience.

"The book was a way of sharing my story with my children, but as things evolved, I realized that it might be a way to help folks who struggle with their mental health issues and addiction. It is a message of hope."

"It is not a self-help book in the traditional sense but there are a few chapters dedicated to explaining what to do if one struggles with mental health issues and addiction. I think it is particularly good for the parents of teens as it provides insight into the world of a teenager who is struggling. We see a lot of

that these days, so I hope it provides a fresh perspective. But the book is also a love story of sorts where I talk about my courtship with my wife that lasted way too long. Despite some of the heavy content, there are also some very funny stories. I have been blessed with a life filled with adventure."

Kelleher admits the project was not without difficulty, noting specifically the need to re-live dark and upsetting times in his past. Still, he says that both the book and the initiative were worth the trying times.

"There is something wonderful about that moment when you receive your book in the mail. I felt a sense of accomplishment and relief that I had finally put my story down on paper. When people tell me they were touched by the book, my heart fills with joy."

The coming months, he shares, will be busy.

"In addition to 170 shows already on the books all over the country, I have several motivational speeches planned. I love speaking to young people and corporate audiences. I incorporate music into my Shine the Light presentation. It disarms the audience and allows me to go deep with them. I am also heading to Nashville at the end of January to do my third solo album. So, God willing, 2022 will be a productive and fun year."

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This year's Out To Lunch (OTL) festival takes place from January 8 to 30 at a variety of venues in Belfast. The annual gathering, now in its 17th year, is the mid-winter arm of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival (CQAF), which takes over Northern Ireland's capital city for 11 days each April/May.

Festival director Sean Kelly originally started the CQAF in 1999 - with help from a few close friends - shortly after the signing of Northern Ireland's 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

"I initially trained as a teacher and taught English for several years but realized quite quickly that the teaching life wasn't for me," he shares with Celtic Life International via email. "I moved sideways into programming literary events for an arts centre and found that I loved conceiving and delivering interesting events. I was truly bitten by the programming bug and, more than two decades later, I still get a buzz when a great artist or band is in front of a great audience and that wonderful alchemy happens.

"These days, my key responsibilities are artistic programming, fund-raising, and financial management. We have a small team of freelance staff responsible for marketing and operations also."

Like the CQAF, OTL's core mandate remains the same as it did when it first launched.

"Our ethos is about promoting local artists and helping them to develop their careers," explains Kelly. "We platform new artists, bring iconic artists to the city and bring visitors here at a traditionally quiet time of the year. Beyond that, we seek to build the

arts infrastructure in the city and have helped establish new venues such as the Black Box."

As successful as the annual post-Christmas gathering has become, the gig has not been without its trials, especially recently.

"COVID-19 presented numerous challenges that we could never have foreseen or planned for, but we managed as best we could by moving to livestreamed events, etc. Aside from that, funding is an annual challenge with public representatives who don't seem to value the arts highly, or at least value them highly enough to invest sufficient public funding in them.

"The wealth of talent is amazing," continues Kelly, "but the support given to artists is very poor and this has worsened dramatically with the emergence of the pandemic. So many talented artists have left their vocation at this point and are seeking other ways to make a living. It is an absolute shame."

The solutions, he shares, are obvious.

"More support - grant support, residencies, business training, marketing support, radio play for local artists, live music venues prioritized over new office developments which are no longer needed - the list is endless!"

Despite those ongoing issues, the payback is plentiful.

"At a basic level, organizing great events that live in the memory is a reward in and of itself. However, the festival has also played a lead role in regenerating Belfast's city centre through arts and culture, and it has been hugely fulfilling to see the positive change the arts have made in this area of the city."

Through both OTL and the CQAF, Kelly

and his cohorts have brought many world-renowned musical artists to Belfast over the years, including Patti Smith, Sun Ra, Sinéad O'Connor, Billy Bragg, St. Etienne, Rufus Wainwright, Echo and the Bunnymen, Nick Hornby, Buck 65, Sly & Robbie, and countless others.

This year's OTL festival lineup is equally impressive, with an array of amazing local, regional, national, and international artists set to take the stage.

"Everything from folk icons Fairport Convention to great rising talents like Aoife O'Donovan and Amythyst Kiah," notes Kelly. "There will also be the screening of music documentaries, poetry readings, and even a potato bread baking workshop!"

And, like potato bread, OTL continues to be a source of sustenance.

"We are much more sustainable these days having grown our box office income considerably. Sometimes this means operating in a more commercial way by increasing ticket prices or programming a few more mainstream artists but, at its heart, the festival still has a very 'alternative' and 'fringe' feel, and we never want to lose that.

"We want to grow every year, in a manageable way, by about 5-10 per cent in terms of the number of shows and size of our audience. We think the gathering can become one of the major winter festivals in the U.K. and Ireland."

www.cqaf.com



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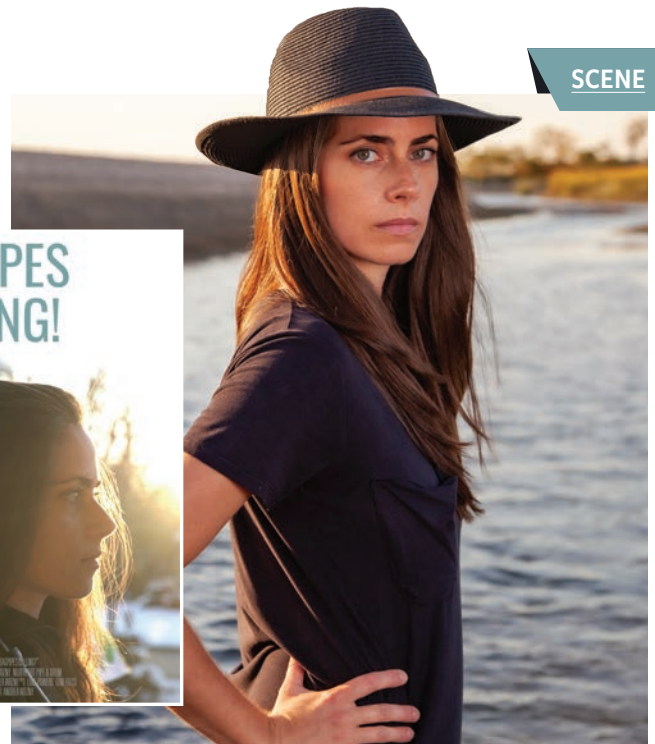
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Andrea Wozny

One bagpiper is breaking down barriers



Filmmaker and musician Andrea Wozny has been working in documentary film and television for more than 15 years. However, her interest in film goes back much further than that.

“One of my earliest memories is running into a film set with my parents while we were walking in New York City,” recalls Wozny, who grew up on Long Island. “I was enthralled with the lights, the cameras, the allure of it all - that a world was being created in one time and place and then experienced in some alternative universe (the movie theatre).”

She was influenced by her father, also - he frequently had a camera on hand to take videos and photos. Wozny would borrow his gear for school assignments and involve her brother as well, turning him into an actor or a makeshift prop. She remained passionate about the arts as a kid and into her teen years but didn’t discover documentary filmmaking until college.

“I was in a class that required watching a documentary as part of the curriculum. I was moved by its power to convey and communicate complex ideas in such a condensed period of time. That power drew me towards the medium.”

The power was so alluring, in fact, that she opted to take a year off from school to intern for the Media Education Foundation. The company produced (and still produces) documentaries focused on the impacts of American mass media. There, she honed her craft. She later interned for Academy Award-winning documentary maker Barbara Kopple, who Wozny credits as a major inspiration.

“One reason I believe I didn’t pursue filmmaking until later is because growing up I never saw women as directors. Women in film were most always celebrated as actors. It never dawned on me that being a filmmaker/director was a role that I could pursue.”

Fortunately, that has since changed.

“Thankfully now there are many great directors that happen to be women - and hopefully there will continue to be more directors of all genders and identities.”

These days, Wozny lives in Brooklyn and has multiple producer and directorial credits to her name. She also happens to have a love for bagpiping.

“I grew up playing the clarinet, and I got interested in world/folk music in college. When I got out of school, I wanted to take up another instrument, and the bagpipes were the most unique folk instrument that I had access to.”

In 2020, she released *Bagpipes Calling!* - a documentary short celebrating the Irish and Scottish heritage of Long Island. The film features Northport Pipe and Drum, the band in which she plays.

“The premiere of *Bagpipes Calling!* was unique because it took place on March 12, 2020, the night before everything shut down due to Covid. I premiered the film at a wonderful independent community cinema in my hometown - the Cinema Arts Centre in Huntington, NY, a place my family has been going to for decades that has always been

supportive of me.” Northport Pipe and Drum participated in the screening and even gave a live performance following the film. “It may have been the first time a bagpipe band performed in a movie theatre.”

Wozny has nothing but glowing things to say about her band and its members - which includes seasoned players such as Luke Powers and Tom Falco, as well as Wozny’s own mother. So, it came as no surprise when she wanted to pay tribute to the group through film.

“We have a special band, people from all backgrounds and walks of life: young, older, men and women. With that, there is great spirit and camaraderie in our band, and I wanted to share that. I am also proud to have found a band that embraces women. That I have been able to grow and thrive in this band, and to do that alongside my mom, who joined at the same time as I did, has been a special experience for us.”

Bagpipes Calling! is available to stream on Wozny’s website for \$5. She hopes, in the future, to create a documentary series featuring her bagpipe band travelling to Ireland and Scotland.

For the time being, however, she is focused on finishing her first feature-length documentary: *Native in America* - a biographical film that tells the story of an Indigenous (Ojibwe and Lakota) musician and actor, “who after a difficult past found healing through the arts.”

www.andreawozny.com

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Triskele Hearth

Past spiritual practices enrich the present

Celtic culture has been embedded in Reverend Erika Rivertree's family life - and her personal identity - for as long as she can remember.

Although her family has been in the United States for several generations, Rivertree's ancestors hailed from "the Celtic heartlands of Northwestern Europe," including Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. She also has roots in England, Germany, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden.

"My last ancestor to immigrate was a maternal great-great grandmother, Mary Davidson from Invergowrie, Scotland," says Rivertree.

Rivertree was born in Richmond, Virginia, where she spent her childhood surrounded by evidence of her family's Celtic legacy. "I grew up listening to Scottish bagpipes, eating Scottish foods, and going to Scottish festivals with my dad, who celebrated our Clan Lamont heritage. My mom's family are proudly Irish and a little Welsh, which has always been a prominent part of our family history. My introduction to Irish folk music and folklore was through my mom. My love of Celtic cultures and history has continued to inspire me throughout my life, and I have studied as much as I can about it along the way."

Today, Rivertree is a Celtic Priestess living in Louisville, Kentucky. She started the Triskele Hearth fellowship in 2018, "to provide spiritual support, community, and life guidance for sacred living in the Celtic tradition."

"I offer classes, seasonal celebrancy, all stages of life rites, and I make supportive ritual crafts such as candles, organic body care, teas and tisanes."

While it can be challenging to get the word out about her work, Rivertree uses social media and regularly posts on a blog for The Highland Bard website. The blog covers everything from mythology to recipes. She also includes guides to her own spiritual practices, such as a candlelight contemplation in honor of Imbolg (or Imbolc) - a Celtic festival marking the midpoint between the

Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox.

"Take some time to include contemplation (by candlelight if you can) on what the spirit of this ancient holytide means for us in modern times, especially for those of us living in modern, industrialized cities," Rivertree writes. "How do you relate to the concepts of preparation, purification, and piety, in both a practical and spiritual or mythic sense? How do you sense these flowing, or being blocked, in your life?"

Incorporating Celtic spiritual practices into one's daily life, Rivertree explains, can be as simple as a daily devotional and prayer or contemplative practice. She recommends learning a Celtic language and then incorporating that into a regular devotional. She is currently practicing Gaelic herself. While she notes that Celtic culture is widely celebrated in America, she wishes there were more language programs available.

*"The warm character of
Celtic spiritual practices has
a rhythm to it that flows with
the change of seasons..."*

"Often it is simple offerings and prayers. They are personal and devotional in a way that is intimately connected to the local landscape. Celtic spirituality awakens you into a direct experience of sacred living through an attunement with the local landscape wherever you happen to live. It is rooted in relationships and co-creativity; this synergy of mutual interdependence and inclusivity is one reason why it is especially relevant and important today."

In Celtic spirituality, such as Druidry or Paganism, respect for nature is key. Perhaps this is why there is such an emphasis in connecting with spirituality here on Earth, rather than trying to reach some other realm.

"There is a knowing that our everyday, waking life is not the only dimension. The influences of that way of being or perceiving are keenly felt in our extant mythology and



folklore traditions. It is the idea that there is no separation from the sacred or divine. Everyday life is imbued with sacred qualities, interconnected patterns, and other ways of being that are around us all the time. I have heard this called 'silver branch perception.'"

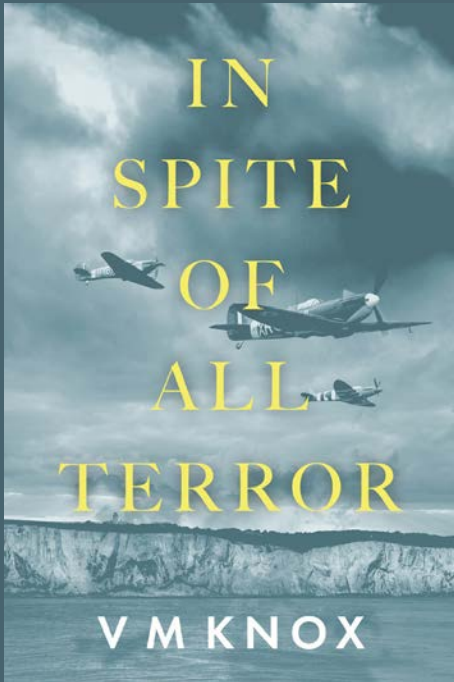
Those who open themselves up to these practices will experience "an awakening of the heart to authenticity, an inspired passion for life and creativity, a deeper connection to others and sense of belonging, and an awareness of how interconnected all life is that encourages living with reverent presence and integrity."

And, for those looking to grow their own spiritual lives, Rivertree has a few words of advice: "Always keep a sense of humor, don't take for granted either time or good health, nurture your curiosity for life, heed your intuition, and have the courage to be yourself and forge your own path in life."

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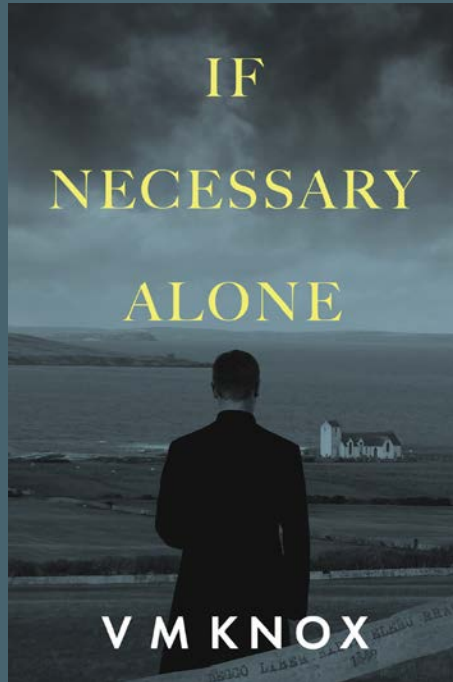


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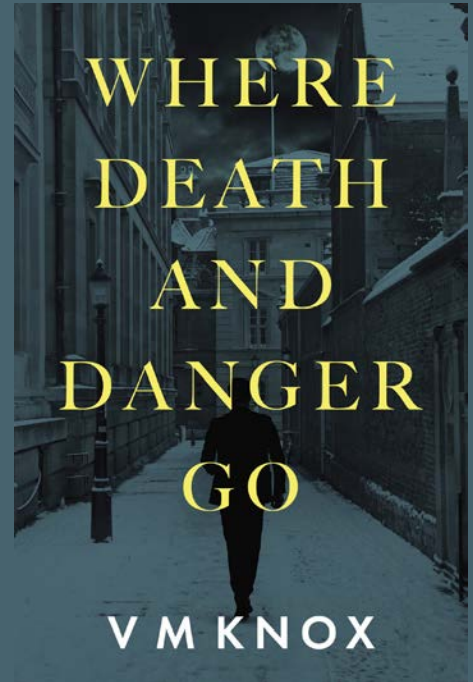
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Book 3

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Daisie Conway

Music is a constant companion for Daisie Conway

Northern Irish musician Daisie Conway's earliest memory of playing music was when she was just six years old.

"I started piano lessons after school before going to my grandparents' house," she shares with Celtic Life International via email from her home in Larne, north of Belfast. "When I was seven years old, I was bought my first fiddle - an eighth of the size of a full violin - and was taught how to play Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. Music was a big part of my childhood.

"My father and my little sister also play traditional Irish music," she continues. "I grew up performing at sessions and competitions all around Ireland."

In addition to playing the piano and violin, the 19-year-old is also an award-winning vocalist.

"In secondary school I played in the school orchestra, sang in four school choirs, and began singing lessons in classical and musical theatre with Susan Shepherd. I was shy and only started to find the confidence to sing in front of an audience when I played the part of Frenchie in Grease when I was 16, as part of the school musical. I was the youngest cast member, and the experience had a major impact on my musical ambitions. I then had the courage to share my music with everyone and was accepted into both the Northern Ireland National Youth Choir and Belfast Operatic Company."

She continues to play and perform for many of the same reasons today, further crediting Taylor Swift, Maisie Peters, Aine Cronan McCarthy, and Ed Sheeran as a few of her biggest musical inspirations.

"Music is an integral part of my life - it always has been and always will be."

"I am currently balancing my career as a singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist with a degree in primary school teaching with music at St Mary's University College,



Belfast. As I have gotten older, I have learned to better appreciate the benefits of music, as it has given me confidence, relieves stress, and has helped build a wonderful network of friends. Music has given me many amazing opportunities and a career both as a singer and a future teacher."

One of her biggest vocational highlights was uploading her solo performance of "I've Been Waiting for You" from the musical Mamma Mia online.

"I couldn't believe that it went viral. I have had so many unexpected opportunities over the past 12 months, and it has been such a whirlwind."

Conway also performed at the Celtic Songbirds livestream, where she duetted with Andrea Begley, and has opened for Irish singing legend Brian Kennedy. Recently, she was also selected as one of only five young singer-songwriters for the '21 Artist for the 21st Century Program, which was supported by Northern Irish actor and filmmaker Sir Kenneth Branagh.

Not unlike many in the entertainment industry, she has had to make some adjustments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It has brought lots of new challenges to the music industry which has required resilience and innovation in using new ways to reach your audience. During the past 18 months this has involved taking part in lots of livestream concerts both regionally and

internationally. I have used the time to write songs and develop myself as an artist."

In August 2021, she released her first original single "Calendar," which was followed up by "All You Gave Was Goodbye" shortly thereafter.

"The core reason I decided to share my first singing video online was to bring anyone a bit of happiness during what was such a dark time during the first lockdown - everyone was struggling in some way. Music is a way of connecting with others around the world by sharing similar personal experiences through song. That is a beautiful thing."

Conway is currently gearing up to release her third single, "House without a Home," early in 2022.

"The story of the song explores the emotional journey of betrayal, heartbreak, and eventually peace, following the end of a relationship where the 'home' you had built with love was brought down again by broken promises and pain.

"I will also be working on the release of my first album with plans to perform at the Belfast Mela Festival, the Friends Goodwill, and the Dalriada Festival, in addition to further developing myself as a primary school teacher."

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Brandon McPhee

For one Scottish musician there is no “plan B”



Brandon McPhee says that his love of music came honestly.

“I started the button accordion at age 10 because I was influenced by my grandad Donald,” he shares with Celtic Life International via email. “From the very first minute of playing the accordion, I knew that music was exactly what I wanted to do with my life.”

McPhee spent the next two years learning the instrument. He is mostly self-taught, and still learns to play most songs by ear.

The native of Wick, in northern Scotland, joined the country band Manson Grant and the Dynamos when he was 16 years old and his passion for playing and performing soon went into overdrive.

“I will forever strive to be the best I can be by giving it my best effort to attention and detail. There is no plan B for me.”

Though just 25 years of age, McPhee has enjoyed many notable moments in his career. Playing a variety of musical styles, including folk, country, and traditional melodies, he has performed for Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace, won the All Scotland Senior Accordion Championship title, and reached the top of both the Joyce Ramgatie Country Music and European Country Music charts.

He has also recorded several albums, including his debut *A Starr is Born*, which he released when he was only 11 years old.

Breaking into the music industry, he admits, has been a huge challenge.

“I would love to get my music much further afield and travel the world taking Scot-

tish culture with me. National airplay is difficult to get in Britain now, and we depend mostly on the smaller and independent stations for airplay.”

Still, he says the vocational rewards make it all worthwhile.

“The feeling I get walking on stage simply can’t be described...”

“For me it’s got to be the best in the world. The best part is knowing that people enjoy, support, and share my music. I always go to the door to greet people at the end of the concert, and I am always so grateful how many people take the time to give me their thoughts on the show and how much they enjoy it. I think without the personal connection with the audience I would not get the full benefit.”

McPhee believes that the role of the modern-day musician is twofold - creating great songs and then sharing them.

“A good song or tune is one that has a hook, catchy words, or a catchy melody that sticks in your head constantly - a song that has a true meaning to sing or play with feeling. I think a variety of music on stage that has been well rehearsed, and the band all complement each other and know what they are going to do before they even do it. The audience plays a huge part in a good live show, and without the atmosphere and response it would just be a ‘show.’”

He muses that, as music is a universal language, all categories should be given their due respect.

“Music is labelled too much into different categories and some categories do not get the same recognition and promotion. Music never fades; it is the individual that decides to fade it. I wish there was more recognition for individual countries and their cultural arts - Scotland, Ireland, and Germany, to name a few. The Internet has been a great thing in terms of being heard on a worldwide platform, but with streaming and download royalties being lower than a boiled sweet no matter how many hundreds or thousands of streams or downloads you receive the financial rewards are very small.

“I think if there was better national coverage for musicians of all categories and better royalties online it would be a good start. I personally have always preferred a CD, cassette, or vinyl as you have something for your money to keep forever. I have released several CDs but never a record or cassette - maybe one day.”

McPhee says he is looking forward to what 2022 has in store.

“I would like to continue with even more concerts, getting further afield and spreading a little touch of our culture. I would love to tour Canada, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand one day. Sir Jimmy Shand is a huge inspiration of mine, as well as Foster and Allen, and they all toured these places - it is a huge ambition, and I will work as hard as I can to make it happen.”

www.brandonmcphee.com

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Cady Finlayson

One fiddler makes the melody shine



Cady Finlayson's Celtic music origin story is something of a classic: after spending years studying and playing the traditional violin, she realized her passion was elsewhere.

"One year a lightbulb went off and suddenly my heart was in Celtic music," she tells Celtic Life International via email. "The ballads reminded me of the folk songs my mom had played for us as kids on the autoharp, and the singing we would do in the car. The Celtic tunes made me want to get up and dance. That is how I knew I was supposed to be playing Celtic music. Also, I am part-Scottish, so it feels like coming home. Celtic music...really draws me in."

Finlayson studied the Irish fiddle in New York (where she currently resides) with renowned fiddler Brian Conway. There, she received the President's Award Scholarship to study at the Blas Music Centre in Limerick, Ireland.

"I have now been playing Celtic fiddle for more than 20 years, from libraries and retirement homes to festivals, bars, and concert halls. I write my own tunes in addition to playing traditional Celtic tunes, and I have produced several CDs."

Over her career, she has released five albums, including her debut recording *Shines Like Silver* (2002), the popular *Irish Coffee* (2007), and her most recent album *Celtic Purple* (2019) - all of which combine traditional and modern styles of music.

"I love traditional Celtic tunes and I also love to play with them and add influences such as American folk and global percus-

sion. The opening track of the *Irish Coffee*, for example, is a traditional Irish reel called *Tuttle*, and we added some serious percussion, turning it into more of a World Music track. For me, making the melody shine is the top priority, and I think that comes out in my playing."

Finlayson's career has been filled with highlights, including performances at Carnegie Hall and the McPherson Scottish Festival in Kansas.

As with others in the performing arts, however, the past two years have been trying at times.

"Spending all of 2021 on Zoom was a musical challenge. I taught violin online, conducted a youth orchestra online. I wasn't able to perform live, but my love for music carried me through."

Still, she is confident about the future of the instrument.

"Fiddling is sociable, fun, and provides the chance to bring one's own individual style to music."

"Many of my private students have shown an interest in Celtic fiddling and if you watched the surge of Sea Shanties on TikTok during the COVID-19 pandemic, you would see that the new generation is carrying along those old traditions just fine.

"I am lucky to live in a city and state where so much is being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture," she continues. "We have Irish arts centers, the NY Cale-

donian Club, the NYC bar scene with Irish and Scottish sessions, and the Catskills Irish Arts Week which is a whole week of classes and concerts to keep the tradition alive. I do think there are opportunities to bring in new audiences because people are curious about it."

The key to growth, she believes, is taking a fresh and holistic approach to entertainment.

"Sometimes just performing isn't enough. People need a full experience, including a visual showpiece to accompany the music. I have worked with Irish dancers and experimented with TV and video, including creating and producing my own TV show *A Fiddle Around Town* that always includes Celtic music. I am constantly thinking now about how I can grab an audience's attention in all ways. Sometimes that involves surprising them - like when I commissioned dubstep dancer Alcy Caluamba to choreograph and dance to a Celtic beat."

Finlayson is already working on her newest project; *The Quiet Light Project*.

"It is a multimedia production exploring blessings, poetry and wisdom from the ancient Celts. I was inspired by the words of poet John O'Donohue and the idea that we all have a light inside us. Music, videos and spoken word are blended throughout. That is for 2022...and I am really looking forward to playing live music again at some point soon."

www.celticfiddle.com



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Lori McCarthy

Celebrating the cuisine and culture of The Rock

Lori McCarthy describes herself as an Educator, a storyteller, and a cultural food ambassador. A fiercely proud resident of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and of Irish and English heritage, she has been dedicated to the culinary arts for as long as she can remember.

"I have spent years in the food world," she shares with Celtic Life International via email. "I went to work in the kitchen of a private country club when I was 15. After that, I worked in the tourism sector in the summers, and in kitchens each fall and winter. I left the restaurants 12 years ago to open a personal chef business and, later, my Culinary Excursion company, Cod Sounds."

Cod Sounds isn't just a tour, notes McCarthy. Instead, she and her small but dedicated team provide a unique culinary education through workshops, online blog posts, and bespoke food experiences.

"Intimate experiences create the environment to have real conversations with people. Guests will open up more and ask questions about life here and the culture here that they may not have the opportunity to discuss in larger groups and tours. I get to cook whatever I want and share the stories of this place - the food and culture that is so deeply rooted in who we are. When people leave, they have a better understanding of why our foods are so important, how they came to be, and how we need to take care of the land, resources, and stories so that they are here for future generations."

McCarthy recently released her first book, *Food, Culture, Place: Stories, Traditions and Recipes of Newfoundland*. The work was inspired by her time growing up on The Rock.

"It is a lifetime of collected historical photographs. We really wanted to showcase how important harvesting wild food and eating together are to our culture.



"Our food tells the story of who we are, and we wanted to explore the foods of this place a little deeper - creating the recipes came naturally."

In addition to recipes, *Food, Culture, Place* also showcases storytelling.

"It was important to give context to the photographs and the recipes to deepen the cultural understanding of food and this place. We also thought it would be neat to capture the three elements - food, culture, and place. I have never seen a book really do this in the way that we have."

The new tome has already received great response; Timothy Charles, lead Chef at the province's renowned Fogo Island Inn said: "The simple joy and honesty of this book lends a clear and practiced voice to a much-needed conversation - one regarding the global importance of ruralness and the cultures that exist and evolve there."

McCarthy is currently organizing an upcoming book tour.

"We are planning a series of dinners to promote the book - a cross-island book tour collaborating with establishments such as local breweries, restaurants and inns."

She says that the conversation around

sustainable food is important, but notes it is also incredibly complex.

"Sustainable eating is a loaded topic. I have difficulty with the word sustainable and living on an island where more than 80 per cent of our food is imported and we have a four-month growing season. We try to preserve foods that are on the island as much as we can, passing it on in the book through our recipes, and we try to engage people in harvesting and preservation skills that can be passed on to generations of new mindsets that are growing and evolving. These things take time, but I am very hopeful."

More pertinently, perhaps, both the book and her vocation aim to share the culture of her homeland with the rest of the world.

"As we are still living so closely as communities, like the generations of our families before us, it means that we can continue to pass on culture, skills, and old stories and traditions every chance we get. We are always eager to share what we have, be it food, stories, last year's bottled moose, or a package of salt fish. So much of what we do - all the foods we harvest and preserve - is simply so that we can give it away to anyone that comes by to visit, even a perfect stranger."

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A close-up portrait of Janiva Magness, an American blues singer. She has dark, wavy hair with bangs and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her hand is resting against her forehead, and she is wearing a dark, patterned top and a long, multi-strand necklace with beads and small gold accents.

Janiva Magness

*American blues singer Janiva Magness lives to tell.
Story by Stephen Patrick Clare.*



Janiva Magness comes by the title Queen of the Blues honestly. Born and raised in Detroit, the 64-year-old songstress left home as a teenager after losing both of her parents to suicide. After a few rough years, she found her calling in life after seeing Otis Rush in concert. Since then, she has recorded 15 albums, toured the world, won a multitude of awards, and lived to tell.

You have Celtic connections do you not?

Yes, my paternal grandfather was full-blooded Scottish. My mother is half-Irish, although that side of the family history is a bit of a brick wall as she was an only child and there is simply no one left to ask. On my father's side, my aunt made a life's work of exploring the Magness family genealogy. She left a massive three-ring binder, which I have now, that traces our lineage back to a gentleman named Mackness. There is all sorts of stuff in that binder - a family crest, old photos, a few handwritten letters.

Do you have any interest in those roots?

Oh yes. I mean, I have read the binder from cover to cover, and I have added a little bit here and there and shared it with my family. I lovingly say that there have been a lot of preachers, drunks, and beauty operators in our family tree. I have been to Scotland on

tour, and I felt an immediate connection there, like I was walking on home turf. I felt very riveted - almost magnetized - in Edinburgh. I kept seeing people that looked like me.

Do you think those roots informed who you are and what you do?

I have no doubt that my Scottish DNA had an impact on my ability to survive. The Scots are tough, headstrong, resourceful people, and those qualities must have trickled their way down through our family gene pool to me.

Is that Celtic influence anywhere in your music?

Absolutely. When the Scots and Irish came to North America, they brought their music with them. So many of them settled in the South and that influence is there in country music, jazz, and the blues. While it may not

seem immediately apparent, you can hear Celtic roots in the melodies. Certainly, the Irish sense of melancholy informed the blues, both musically and lyrically. And there is the storytelling element also - no one spins a yarn quite like the Celts, and that is a central component in all music, and particularly in the blues.

The Irish, in particular, seem to have a real affinity for the blues.

Of course. Given what they have been through over the centuries the appeal is more than understandable. Much of Ireland's traditional music - the jigs and reels - arose from places of hardship, either to reflect those difficulties or to overcome them. In that sense, it really is no different from what we have heard from the great American blues artists. Sometimes I feel like people don't truly understand what blues is about - it is, first and foremost, healing music. And, for me, it captures the power and resiliency of the human spirit.

Is that why you got into it?

Yes, though at the time I didn't recognize it - I was caught up in the power and immediacy of the music, the blues scene itself, and all the pitfalls that came with it - you know what I am talking about here. But I was a kid, really, when I first got into it. In retrospect - and today it is much easier to connect the dots of the past than when I was actually going through it - it was a form of self-therapy. I was able to give voice to something that needed to be expressed, that refused to stay silent. I was giving intangible things some sense of tangibility. In some ways, the blues - and music in general - saved my life.

Are those the same reasons that you continue to sing today?

Yes and no. Look, if you get to my age and you aren't carrying any baggage from your past then you haven't been living. For sure, I still have some deep wounds and scars that need to heal, and that is an ongoing process. Over time, those have lessened, but some of them are still there. On the other hand, writing and recording and performing bring me great joy and help me to celebrate life. I love to travel and see new places, experience different cultures, try new foods, and meet new people. I am still filled with wanderlust and wonder.

Your 2019 book, *Weeds Like Us*, was a way of sorting that stuff out as well?

Yes, it was. It was quite a process, and the writing took a long time. You could even say it took a lifetime. But it was important for me to cut through the myths I had been telling myself about myself and get to what was, and is, real. They say that truth is better than fiction, and that was certainly my experience with the book. I also wrote it in hopes that it might help someone out there who might be struggling. I mean, what's the point of surviving all that heartache if you don't share the story? I am just so grateful that I lived long enough to tell it.

Will there be a sequel?

You never know! Maybe ask me again in another 50 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given us all a little extra time.

Yes, for better or for worse. Mostly, however, it has put me out of work. The music industry has been hit hard, and between not being able to tour and the availability of music online, artists have very little opportunities to generate revenue these days. I have done a few things here and there that have helped, but everything has come to an almost complete standstill. And I'm sorry, but streaming concerts just don't do it for me, either as a performer or as a member of the audience. The experience is flat. I need to be there, in the flesh, to truly enjoy a musical experience.

What have you been doing over the past 18 months?

I have mostly been writing and prepping music for a new recording. We go into the studio shortly and I hope to have the album ready for release in the spring, followed by - say your prayers - tour dates. A few years ago, I began writing and recording original music. Prior to that I had dabbled in my own music and lyrics, but mainly I had been interpreting other people's music. Which, when you stop to think about it, is really another form of creativity. I love the challenge of taking someone else's song and making it my own; finding my place in the music, wrapping my head and heart around the lyrics, and breathing new life into it. This new record will likely feature both my own songs and a few covers.

I imagine the new songs will reflect your own personal growth.

Again, yes and no. At the end of the day, the blues are the blues; the rhythm, the groove, the growl - it hasn't really changed that much over the last century, nor should it. You can still dance to it, you can still sweat to it, you can still sing along with it, and you can still connect with it on some sort of deeper, primal level. And that is still part of the appeal of it for me - the sheer soul and spirit and swagger of the music. On an entirely other level, however, it reflects - perhaps both consciously and unconsciously - who and where I am in my life.



And where is that?

Oh, I am in a really good place with myself these days. I am healthy and happy - young enough to fully understand and enjoy what I do, and old enough to know better! For most of us, there is a certain wisdom that comes with age - usually life lessons that are the result of decades of bad decisions! But I wouldn't change any of it. If I had the chance now to speak with my younger self, I would tell her to go for it in exactly the same way. And I would remind her to believe in herself, and trust that everything will work out in the end and that, one day - with a little luck - she would live to tell.

www.janivamagness.com

Janiva Magness Discography

1991	More Than Live
1997	It Takes One to Know One
1999	My Bad Luck Soul
2001	Blues Ain't Pretty
2003	Use What You Got
2004	Bury Him at the Crossroads
2006	Do I Move You?
2008	What Love Will Do
2010	The Devil is an Angel Too
2012	Stronger for It
2014	Original
2016	Love Wins Again
2017	Blue Again
2018	Love Is An Army
2019	Change In The Weather

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Riverdance Turns 25

*Ireland's celebrated cultural spectacular returns
from hiatus with a new cast and show.*

Story by Stephen Patrick Clare



“I am really excited for the opportunity. It feels like I have been working my entire life for this moment.”

A quick glance at her resume confirms her ambition; born and bred in Aghyaran, Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland, Dolan first danced for the Carson Kennedy Academy in Belfast as a child, later winning several major titles - including the 2010 World Irish Dance Championships (Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne). After attending the Riverdance Summer School in 2016 she became the show's youngest lead dancer in history the following year at the age of 19. Among other notable highlights is her 2018 performance for Pope Francis at Croke Park in Dublin in front of more than 80,000 spectators. Her journey to the top of the Irish dance world was captured in the 2020 BBC documentary “Born to Riverdance.”

“It has been quite a wild ride,” laughs Dolan, who has developed a significant following on her social media outlets, includ-

It is almost impossible to measure the impact that Riverdance has had over the last 25 years. To properly detail the iconic Irish dance and musical production's origins and history would take hours, even days or weeks. Simply put, it is almost beyond words.

Alas, let us turn to Wikipedia for a succinct summation.

Riverdance is a theatrical show consisting mainly of traditional Irish music and dance. With a score composed by Bill Whelan, it originated as an interval performance act during the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest, featuring Irish dancing champions Jean Butler, Michael Flatley and the vocal ensemble Anúna. Shortly afterwards, husband and wife production team John McColgan and Moya Doherty expanded it into a stage show, which opened in Dublin on 9 February 1995. Since then, the show has visited over 450 venues worldwide and been seen by over 25 million people, making it one of the most successful dance productions in the world.

“Yes, that about sums it up,” smiles the show's Executive Producer and Director Pádraic Moyles via Zoom.

Moyles is joined on the call by the production's principal dancer Amy-Mae Dolan.

“The show has brought so much joy to so many people around the world,” she shares. “And it still does, maybe even now more than ever.”

Originally scheduled for 2019/2020, the famed Irish spectacle - like everything else on planet Earth - went on hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

“It was completely unexpected, of course,” notes Moyles, who has been with the company - first as a dancer and, more recently, in his current role - since 1997. “We have never seen anything like it and there was a lot of waiting on when and where and how we were going to get back out on the road. In my position as one of the core leaders of the show it was vital to remain upbeat

and optimistic.”

As per the adage, the real job of a leader is to create other leaders.

“Yes, that's it exactly. And Amy-Mae is an ideal candidate to carry on that legacy, as she will be leading the dance team when the tour resumes in January in the USA.”

Almost amazingly, despite her young age, Dolan feels no pressure.





ing her YouTube channel, where she posts behind-the-scenes clips from the Riverdance tour alongside her own Pilates instructional videos.

"All my years of training and hard work have paid off in ways that I never could have imagined," she continues. "It is a dream come true. And I have made so many great friends along the way. We are much more than friends at this point, however - we are a family."

Moyles echoes the sentiment.

"We are very much a family, for sure. When we talk about the people of Riverdance, we aren't just speaking about the present cast and crew - think of all the past members that have been involved with the production over the last 25 years; the dancers, the musicians, management, the directors, the stagehands...a huge amount of people have come and gone in that time. A few who met while working on the show got married and had children, and now some of those young ones are with us. It has become a generational experience."

That is true of audiences as well.

"Folks who might have seen the show years ago are now bringing their kids and their grandkids to the performances," continues Moyles. "For some it has become a part of their own family tradition."

Dolan says that creating memories for others is beyond rewarding.

"I look out into the audience during the show and see people smiling together or laughing together or tapping their toes and it makes me feel all warm inside. Those are the times that you live for as a performer - knowing that, even if it is only for a few moments here and there, you have made a positive difference in someone's life."

While Riverdance is renowned for its brilliant choreography, moving musical overtures, and elaborate stage sets and lighting, it is the human element that audiences connect with most.

"The show is, ultimately, one of storytelling," notes Moyles. "It is very Irish in that regard. We are natural storytellers, given our history of myths and legends."

"Beyond the flash and glitz it is a story of people - their ideas, their emotions, their experiences... these are things that resonate on a deeper level."

As such, he says that focus is key for performers.

"It may sound a little strange, but if a dancer is thinking about what they are going to have for lunch or where they are going to go out after the show while they are on stage, the audiences pick up on that."

"Oh, absolutely," agrees Dolan. "There are a million things that go through your mind while you are up there. The real trick is just to let them pass and continue to concentrate on each moment. While the steps and routines are committed to memory, you really have to stay on your toes and remain mentally focused at all times."

The chance to connect with audiences in-person often comes post-performance.

"I love meeting people after the shows," continues Dolan. "The feedback is fantastic, especially when you meet a young dancer that has just been completely blown away by the performance. Seeing that you have perhaps inspired a little girl or boy to take up Irish dance, or perhaps encouraged someone to keep dancing or even motivate them to explore Irish culture a little more, is a big part of why we do what we do."

Not surprisingly, many of those meet-and-greets are with Irish ex-pats.

"There are a few of them about," laughs Moyles. "Actually, I am always pleasantly surprised to meet people that have absolutely no connection to Ireland at all - no roots, no heritage, no family relations. It is interesting, though; often they are the ones who connect with the show the most."

Moyles sometimes takes a seat in the venue to gauge what audiences are experiencing.

"I love watching people's reactions to what is taking place on stage. It is quite something to see them smile or nod their head or lean over and share a thought with the person next to them. On occasion,



during intermission, I will even head to the men's room just so that I can hear more of what people are thinking and feeling about the show."

So far, reviews have been beyond positive, with critics calling the new production "stunning," "spectacular," "hypnotic," "thrilling," "breathtaking," and "unforgettable."

"The U.K. tour was brilliant," says Moyles. "We began anew in late summer and went right through to December. It felt so good to be back out there after all the delays and issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. And the audiences just went wild. I think they were just so happy to get out of the house and return to some semblance of normalcy."

"It is amazing to think that something that started a quarter of a century ago could continue to evolve and touch people around the world."

With tour dates scheduled across North America, Europe, and Asia over the coming 12 months, the show shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

"Oh, I wouldn't be surprised if it went for another 25 years at this point," muses Moyles with a grin. "The demand is certainly there, and so long as we have the will and the creative energy and the talent, we will continue to perform for people everywhere we can. The possibilities to grow the show, and to further inspire audiences, are limitless - almost beyond words."

www.riverdance.com

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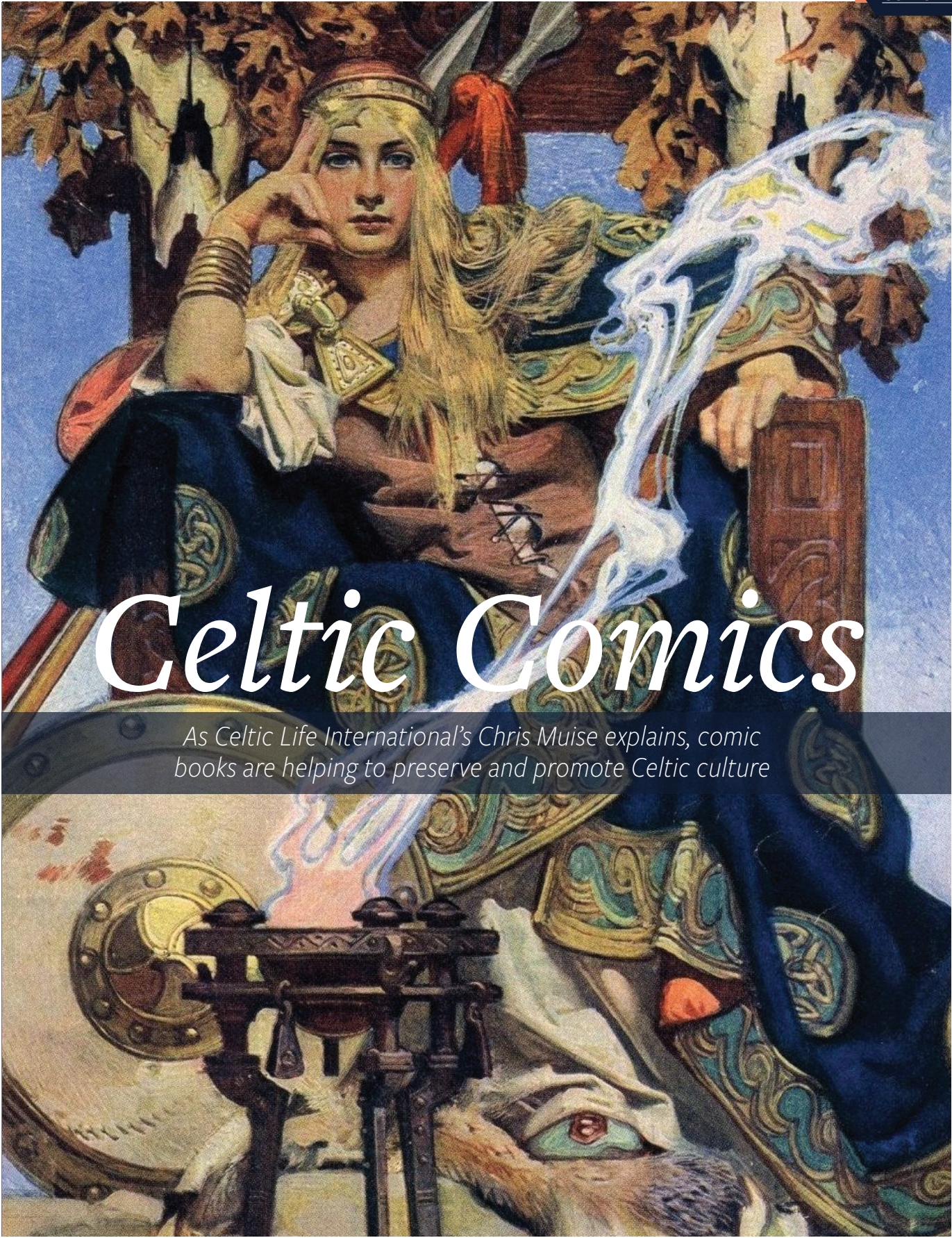
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Celtic Comics

As Celtic Life International's Chris Muise explains, comic books are helping to preserve and promote Celtic culture

Taking a cursory glance at pop culture today, it is hard to believe that once, and not too long ago, comics were considered childish and for nerds and dorks only. Now, everything has a touch of comics in it.

Marvel (and to a lesser extent, DC) are making major money with movies based on their classic superhero characters. Animated flicks about the Spider-Verse and Krypto the Super Dog are entertaining families across the globe. Some of the best, award-winning television shows are based on characters that originated in the funny pages. Spider-Man even made it onto Broadway!

Since many of the more famous comic characters draw inspiration from folklore around the world, some of those cultures have received a boost in recognition over the last half-century also. How well would we all know the Norse pantheon if it weren't for The Mighty Thor? And while a fictional nation, Black Panther's Wakanda has done a lot to elevate the status of African culture in the global consciousness.

So, what about Celtic culture? Has it been pushed by the power of pulp?

There have certainly been Celtic influences in the world of comics, along with characters inspired by Celtic folklore. Perhaps most famous is the mutant Banshee, aka Sean Cassidy, from the X-Men comic series - so named for his superhuman scream that allows him to attack enemies and even fly.

Neil Gaiman's seminal Sandman series drew inspiration from many of the world's myths and legends, including the Faerie folk - in the series, the bard himself, William Shakespeare, is shown to have been commissioned to write A Midsummer Night's Dream for the Faerie king and queen, Oberon and Titania.

There are other examples, but it gets more niche as we go. Why, then, haven't the Celtic myths and legends taken hold in comics like other folklore has?

When Irish comic creator Nick Roche was young, sneaking away in the basement of The Book Centre in his hometown of Wexford to read the latest issue of The Dark Knight Returns, the comics he was exposed to didn't feature many Irish icons, and that didn't exactly surprise him.

"I had a strange relationship growing up with my Irishness," Roche explains, chatting with Celtic Life International over Zoom from his home office in Waterford, where he now resides. "I guess I never thought it was 'cool.' You didn't see it represented that often, outside of Ireland. And the kind of



Emily McEwan & Angus MacLeod

media that Irish TV stations and such were producing was all a little bit cringey.

"There was never anything really that contemporary for us as teenagers. I never paid too much attention to the folklore. It always felt like the Norse or Egyptian mythology had, like, a bigger budget. It looked a bit more epic."

Even the mainstream superheroes were less plentiful in Ireland in the 1980s, with Marvel having its own U.K. distribution, and with unique titles in that system. Those comics, Roche recalls, were more often based on television tie-in titles, like Knight Rider, the A-Team, and Transformers.

"Because the things I was into were TV shows where the cars are almost characters, those were the comics I leaned into."

Fittingly, Roche got his big break in comics when IDW Publishing tapped him to write and draw some of their Transformers titles, with Last Stand of the Wreckers becoming a smash hit. Before that, however - self-publishing comic zines in the 1990s - he did dabble in creating an Irish superhero.

"In 1995, I did my own comic called Captain Ireland, which had nothing to do with Ireland, apart from the name. At the time it came out there was an influx of American tourists, and I knew that they would buy anything with the word 'Ireland' on it."

That was when Roche started to notice Irishness getting "cool," so to speak; U2 was the biggest band in the world, and Irish boy bands plagued the countryside. Over time he began to appreciate what Ireland had to offer pop culture.

"As an adult I realized that I enjoyed the stories. In Ireland, what could be fantastical

or part of the mythology - i.e. what makes it spooky - is because it seems like the everyday life. It is not giant thunder gods or things like that. Scarenthood was born from that thinking."

Scarenthood is one of Roche's latest periodical productions. Together with Irish colourist Chris O'Halloran, the comic series tells the story of four parents who try to solve the mystery of the ghostly happenings percolating under their kids' preschool.

The idea came about when his own daughter entered preschool for the first time.

"I found myself having to mix with other humans - which, for a comic artist, is rather unusual..."

"Through talking to these parents, and going through the mundane, parental minutiae, I thought, 'this isn't what being a grown-up should be about. Wouldn't it be cool if we were doing something else?' There are woods nearby - let's go hunt some ghosts!"

Roche's Scarenthood depicts a modern Ireland - where LGBTQ folks and people of colour are just as Irish as any bloke named Flynn or Diarmuid, and one in which classic folklore and contemporary society bleed into one another.

"It has been nice to marry the traditional stuff in the comic with the 'new' Ireland."

Meanwhile, in Goose Cove, Nova Scotia, Angus MacLeod is bringing something even rarer to comics; Scots-Gaelic.

Actually, he has been doing it for a while - the world only just now noticed.



Nick Roche



"The artwork, that is something that I have been doing ever since I was a child," says MacLeod, a Gaelic teacher, who has been writing and drawing his own Celtic folklore-inspired comics in Gaelic for years as an evening hobby. "I basically lived in the comic book world when I was a kid. I really didn't have any goal of having it published. The idea was always in the back of my mind, that at some time, at some point, maybe that would happen. But it was never a motivational factor for doing it."

That time, that point, came recently, courtesy of Dr. Emily McEwan, president of Bradan Press, which publishes books about Gaelic culture, often in the Gaelic language. McEwan learned of MacLeod's treasure trove during a sales trip to Cape Breton.

"While we are sitting there, having tea, he pulls out this stack of manila folders, and each one had these pages sticking out of the

side," McEwan tells Celtic Life International. "He had been working on them for years and years. I guess I was the last person to realize that. Even my husband was like, 'oh yeah, I've seen some of Angus' stories.' How did I miss this?"

Just like that, Bradan Press was in the graphic novel business, publishing a handful of MacLeod's stories as an anthology, under the title *Ás a' Chamhanaich*.

Some of those stories include a woman's fight against a creature that can change from a man to a horse called a *Glaistig*, a crippled fisherman lost at sea contending with creatures of the deep, and the life tale of an elderly woman who was once the town beauty, as told by a former admirer who believes her aging is a story of finding serenity, rather than one of failure.

MacLeod already has enough strips on hand for a second volume, and he is currently working on a third.

McEwan has also added a second comic - *Wild Rose*, by Halifax author Nicola R. White - to her catalogue by crafting the official Gaelic translation. She believes that comics in Gaelic can be used like comics in other languages have been used in the past - as a tool to help young people learn the language.

"It benefits those working to renew the Celtic languages. When readers have that visual element there are more hooks to hang it on, as opposed to just words on a page."

While publishing comics can be a challenge for smaller publishers like Bradan Press - it took the help of a few grants to bring the Gaelic translation of *Wild Rose*, aka *Ròs Fiaidhaich*, to bookshelves - McEwan is eager to publish more going forward.

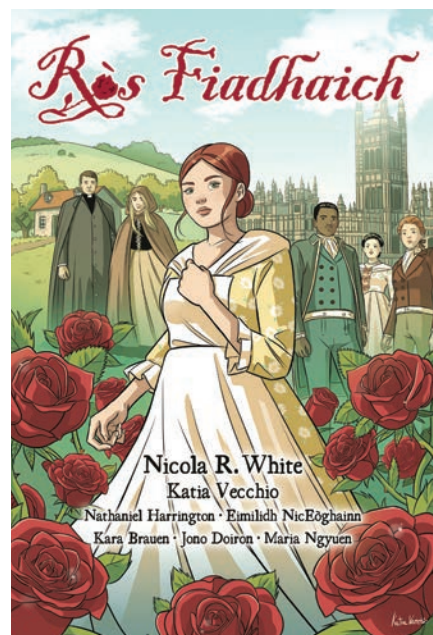
"If there are artists who are interested in telling these kinds of stories, we would definitely like to hear from more people. There are so many different aspects of stories that could be told through this medium."

Roche, who has more stories planned for his *Scarenthood* gang, recently saw copies of the title in The Book Centre, and describes the pride he felt seeing something he made with a very Irish identity sold in his hometown comic shop.

"It is the place that was responsible for me doing what I do. And getting to see my own book in my hometown - one that is about Ireland and modern parents and mod-



Nicola R. White



ern concerns - is a great feeling."

Roche notes that today, in the digital age, being a Celtic comic creator and making titles with more Celtic identities is possible in a way that they weren't when he was growing up.

"The Irish are really well-represented in the wider comics industry in America because so many are now working for Marvel and DC. There are Irish comic companies, yes, but none of them are big powerhouses yet. However, things like crowdfunding make the Irish comics industry, and comics about Ireland, even more possible and plausible.

"It feels like the industry here is in a healthy place. There have been comics professionals working in Ireland over the last 10 or 15 years. And, as more Irish comics come out in the coming years, the opportunities to promote and preserve our culture will grow."

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Auchterarder **House**

*Tom Langlands explores
a Scottish architectural gem*



Living in Scotland, I am rather spoilt for choice when it comes to selecting castles or stately homes to visit. However, occasionally, I discover an architectural gem that has been hiding just off the mainstream radar. It isn't necessarily the biggest or the most lavish and yet it can surpass all my expectations on account of its setting, history, architecture, beauty, and the love and care that has gone into creating and maintaining a piece of my nation's cultural heritage. Auchterarder House in Perthshire is such an example.

Secreted on a wooded knoll set in 20 acres of mature grounds - less than four miles from the world-renowned, five-star Gleneagles Hotel with its four golf courses, and a mere two miles from Auchterarder High Street - sits a gem of Jacobean-style, domestic architecture. Designed in 1831 for Lieutenant Colonel James Hunter by the famous Scottish architect William Burn - albeit with subsequent additions and alterations - its sandstone walls, crow-stepped gables, sculpted window-head dormers, and circular tower articulate an imposing villa. Pass through the large wooden doors below the arched, stone portico and you step into an interior of sumptuous spaces with wood-panelled walls, decorative plaster ceilings, textile wallpapers, and crystal chandeliers - all augmented by an impressive art collection.

Following a major restoration project by current owner Robert Wiseman, this unique, private home is now available as an exclusive rental property with its website claiming it to be 'one of the most luxurious houses to rent in the Scottish Highlands.' After a guided tour of the property by House Manager Wilma Hutchison I would concur with that opinion - it is outstanding.

Although the Renaissance-styled interiors have a certain grandeur, the site remains modest in scale and not overtly ostentatious. It felt like a cozy, inviting, family home.

Perhaps that impression was reinforced by the presence of a six-foot, decorated Christmas tree in each of the house's ten period-style bedrooms, along with an even larger tree in the hallway - part of Wiseman's preparations for his own family's Christmas gathering.

I can imagine them carving the turkey on the elongated dining table with glasses sparkling below the Waterford crystal chandelier while being overlooked by Charles E. Gordon Frazer's anthropologically important oil on canvas - Cannibal Feast on the Island of Tanna, New Hebrides, a hint of Wiseman's dark humour. Later, they may retire to the drawing room for a recital on the baby grand or a reading in the library from any of the leather-bound volumes on the twenty-five yards of shelving. Alternatively, take a moment to read a framed, original letter by Bonnie Prince Charlie that sits alongside a watercolour by the great Scottish artist Sir William Russell Flint - such is the eclectic nature of the house's collection. For anyone wishing to enjoy a movie there is the comfort of the cinema room or alternatively there's the quiet atmosphere of the billiard room.

Keen to learn more about the history of this fascinating house I spoke with Wiseman via video link from his home in Surrey. His enthusiasm for the property and his knowledge of its history was obvious. Records show that following the death of Hunter in 1887 the property was acquired by James Reid. Reid was the Glasgow-based owner of a successful, locomotive-building company, and it was during his ownership that the building was further expanded and altered. Following Reid's death, the property passed to his son Hugh. By the early twentieth century Hugh Reid was head of the amalgamated North British Locomotive Company supplying steam locomotives to railroad companies across the world, including Canada, Mexico, France, Japan, and New Zealand. Following his death in 1935, his son Andrew inherited the house.

Throughout the years the Reid family showed a great love for Auchterarder House and displayed significant philanthropy towards many projects and causes in Auchterarder, Glasgow, and Scotland generally. During WWII, Andrew Reid made the house available to the pupils of Glasgow's Laurel Bank School for Girls who were evacuated to avoid the German bombing raids on the Clydebank shipyards. For



many of the girls this was their first experience of country living and of residing in a rural mansion. The resultant bonds of friendship and the memories created remained with them long after the war ended. Their story is immortalised in the book *The Time of Our Lives* by Dr. Joyce B. Deans.

In the early 1980s the house was sold to become a hotel. Dignitaries reputed to have stayed there included former US President Ronald Reagan and former British Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major. By the end of the 1990s it was acquired by the Wren's Hotel Group before finally being purchased by Wiseman in 2002 with the intention of restoring it to its former glory as a family home. Wiseman's family had made their fortune in the milk industry. His father - also Robert - founded Robert Wiseman dairies in 1947, having started by delivering milk with a horse and cart from the family farm. The company was to become one of the biggest milk suppliers in the UK. For Robert Wiseman Junior the connection with the town of Auchterarder started forty years ago.

"It began as a place to get away from the grey skies and wet weather that can often affect the west coast of Scotland where I grew up."

"As a family we loved Perthshire so we bought a small house in Auchterarder where we could spend summer holidays and take weekend breaks." Once restoration works on Auchterarder House began in 2003, Wiseman quickly realized that years of poor maintenance and underinvestment would soon see the £1.2M purchase price pale into insignificance. "It seemed that every time we opened something up, we encountered further problems. All the electrics and plumbing needed redoing, there was vegetation growing behind the wall linings, and we discovered dry rot behind the ornate

timber panelling." Undeterred, he restored the house, paying studious attention to every detail. Specialists were brought in to advise on the restoration of the interiors and landscape consultants advised on the design and management of the grounds. Even a muddy depression in a waterlogged field was excavated to form Lily's Lochan. With over ten thousand oxygenating plants, the small loch - named after his daughter - supports a stock of native brown trout and a seasonal, colourful, lily display. Heron and ospreys visit the loch, deer wander the grounds, and red squirrels scurry through the trees. Wiseman's passion for the property remains evident, "It was a difficult, challenging, and costly project but the building deserves it. It has a great history and some amazing people have lived here over the years. For my family it has been a wonderful home and lots of great memories were made here."

As the years went by and his family grew up and left, he considered putting the property back on the market. When the time came, however, he realized that he didn't want to part with it.

Rather, he decided to turn it into an exclusive, lettable, 10-bedroom luxury property that could still be used as a family home when necessary. That decision gave rise to the second major refurbishment project of Wiseman's ownership and ended with the house I have just viewed. Although the property retains its historic character it offers facilities for the disabled, state-of-the-art Wi-Fi, and other mod-cons to be expected of modern living. I am cautious about the overuse of superlatives, but this is a truly outstanding, wonderful, and architecturally important piece of design and restoration. It oozes quality, with an attention to detail and an obvious love and care that few owners are willing - or can afford - to lavish on a two-hundred-year-old house. For anyone who wishes to experience staying in an iconic, historic building with stunning interiors and an impressive art collection, situated in a beautiful and private location that can boast great views and with Scottish wildlife on your doorstep then undoubtedly this is a property worth considering.

www.auchterarder-house.com

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All photographs courtesy of Auchterarder House



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The View from Dunrobin Castle

*Residents in North Sutherland, Scotland, are hoping to return small-scale settlement to land cleared during the Highland Clearances of 1814-18. Working through three entities - the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust; Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council, and Strathnaver Museum - they are seeking a community buyout of an area managed by Forestry and Land Scotland. Canadian author Ken McGoogan wrote about that clearance in his book *Flight of the Highlanders: The Making of Canada*. Here is an excerpt.*



Harriet Beecher Stowe

“**E**verything here is like a fairy story,” Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to her husband in September 1856. “The place is beautiful! It is the most perfect combination of architectural and poetic romance, with home comfort.” Stowe, the celebrated American author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, was describing Dunrobin Castle, which is situated in the Sutherland Highlands some eighty-five kilometres north of Inverness. The place is splendiferous, no question.

The first time Sheena and I visited, in 2016, I had just begun researching the Clearances and had only a vague idea of what Dunrobin represented. Like Stowe before me, I was dazzled by the magnificence of the place. Would you believe 189 rooms? And a history dating back to at least 1401, when

the Norse-Gaelic Lords of the Isles built a square keep here with walls six feet thick. In one splendid room after another, we admired paintings of this duke and that lady, not quite sure of who was who. In the Music Room we found a surprise - a gorgeous full-body portrait of the Irish chieftain Hugh O’Neill (1550 - 1616), whose resistance politics could hardly be more out of place.

The next year, while staying at the nearby Golspie Inn, we visited Dunrobin Castle for the second time. I had a much better grasp of what and who merited my attention. During the Rising of 1745, a Jacobite army stormed and seized Dunrobin. The 17th Earl of Sutherland narrowly escaped through a back door. He sailed to Aberdeen, joined the army led by the Duke of Cumberland, and subsequently regained his castle. In 1765, his eleven-year-old granddaughter, Elizabeth Sutherland, inherited Dunrobin and its extensive estates. Twenty years later she married the wealthy politician George Granville Leveson-Gower, also known as Lord Stafford, who later became the 1st Duke of Sutherland.

At this time, Lord Stafford enjoyed an income of £300,000 a year. The countess had brought into the marriage her 4,494 square kilometres of Sutherland. In 1803, Stafford inherited still more estates from his uncle, the Duke of Bridgewater. Together, this well-connected pair - Lord and Lady Stafford - were among the richest couples in Britain.



Lord Stafford

Dunrobin Castle contains portraits of both and paintings also of their son, the 2nd Duke of Sutherland, and his wife, the Duchess Harriet. Their daughter, Elizabeth Georgiana Campbell, Duchess of Argyll, was the one who, in 1854, played host to Harriet Beecher Stowe, filling her head with denials and obfuscations about the Clearances while squiring her around London and, later, Dunrobin.

In the gift shop, I picked up an illustrated,

large-format paperback entitled *Dunrobin Castle: Jewel in the Crown of the Highlands*. The text does not ignore what the Sutherlands did. But it portrays Lord Stafford as a “do-gooder” who was “shocked by the primitive conditions of his wife’s tenantry.” The book quotes another baronet explaining that Stafford was one of those reformers “willing to dedicate his life and fortune to making other folk do something they found desperately disagreeable for the sake of what he believed to be their future good.”

Using his enormous personal wealth, “he destroyed the old ways of life in Sutherland by uprooting the pastoral inhabitants of the hills and glens and moving some of them to housing on the coast where they could earn better money working in industries which he himself had financed.” That housing includes what are now stone ruins clinging to the dangerously wind-swept cliff edge at Badbea Clearance Village, where farmers were invited to fish and pick kelp.

Lord Stafford, we learn “was too much influenced by [economist James] Loch, and the clearance work was carried out at great speed by his agents whose harshness is still remembered.” Stafford “lost a great deal of money in his ‘philanthropic’ indulgences” but created “a modern communications system in Sutherland, and while he was hated at first, he came to be respected by many at his death, though there are still Scots who can see no good in him and many regard him as an enemy of Gaeldom.”

That would be why the locals have repeatedly tried to topple the towering, one-hundred-foot-tall statue that Stafford erected of himself just north of the nearby town of Golspie. Many of the five thousand people he evicted from Sutherland glens “were forced to emigrate and this accounts for the wide scattering of Scots throughout the British Empire. It was their hardy characteristics and imaginative minds which contributed so much to the building of that empire.”

So, you see, Stafford was right to do what he did. It all worked out in the end.

As we explored Dunrobin Castle and its magnificent gardens, I couldn’t help feeling that one man, above all, deserves to be commemorated here. That man, a stonemason named Donald Macleod, is remembered only by a rough stone cairn at the side of a two-lane highway that winds north to the Strathnaver Museum near the coastal town of Bettyhill. As for Dunrobin Castle itself, by the time we left, I considered it the most



politically incorrect edifice in Scotland. Why so?

In 1811, Lord Stafford was serving as a member of Parliament when the British government passed a bill offering to pay half the cost of building roads in northern Scotland. The north had none to speak of because the Romans, who had occupied England from AD 43 to 410, never gained control of Scotland. Stafford and his wife had recently hired three wealthy, well-educated men - Patrick Sellar, William Young, and James Loch - to suggest ways to “improve” their land holdings and make them still more profitable.

His three emissaries advised Lord and Lady Stafford to move people away from the broad and fertile river valleys - Strathnaver, Strath Brora and the Strath of Kildonan—and to convert these regions into giant sheep farms. The people could be sent to allotments and put to work fishing and mining kelp on the coasts of Sutherland. The Staffords, Patrick Sellar wrote, “were pleased humanely to order” this new undertaking.

The interior of Sutherland would be given over to shepherds and Cheviot sheep and tenant farmers would be removed to the rocky coast and “placed in lots of less than three acres, sufficient for the maintenance of an industrious family, pinched enough to cause them to turn their attention to the fishing.” This benevolent action would “put these barbarous Highlanders into a position where they could better associate together, apply themselves to industry, educate their children, and advance in civilization.”

In 1813, the Staffords - also known as the Sutherlands - offered their tenants new lands on the cliffs north of Helmsdale at rocky, windswept Badbea. The farmers had a choice. They could either become her-

ring fishers and kelp pickers or they could emigrate. Ninety-six opted immediately to depart for faraway Rupert’s Land (a massive expanse encircling the east, south, and west of Hudson’s Bay). They crossed the water to Stromness and sailed on the emigrant ship *Prince of Wales*. After finding Badbea uninhabitable, others followed. In the two decades ending in 1831, the Staffords slashed the population of Kildonan from 1,574 people to 257.

How did they manage this? In 1814, Patrick Sellar gave orders to burn hill-grazing areas so there would be no food for the tenants’ cattle and the people would have no choice but to depart. Soon he was ordering the burning of villages. In May of that year, 430 people were evicted and forced to move to the coastal town of Brora. Sellar himself personally directed the clearances. To force the people out, he had the roofs of their houses pulled down and the timbers set alight to prevent rebuilding. Such is the sanitized version.

As it happened, a courageous young stonemason named Donald Macleod witnessed Sellar in action. Born in the 1790s, Macleod had grown up in a traditional blackhouse listening to worried discussions about the worsening conditions for Highland farmers like his own family. Between 1772 and 1791, nearly seven thousand people had left the counties of Inverness and Ross. At this point, those who emigrated had faced pressure but had not been forcibly evicted. They had simply been ordered to move from their viable ancestral holdings onto miserable plots of land on the famously blustery Scottish coast.

Yet even on those barren, rocky shores, the displaced farmer was not to be his own



man. He was to become a fisherman, yes. But he was also expected to pick kelp, seaweed trapped among the rocks, an activity that could provide more profits than sheep. These profits would go mostly to the laird, of course. And so, during the brief kelping season in April and May, men who had once been farmers stumbled around on rocks in the freezing cold waves gathering green weeds for poverty wages.

This kelp-gathering required a massive labour force. Landlords expressed dismay when, despite their efforts to populate the coast, those they sent there thwarted their good intentions by retreating to Inverness or Glasgow, or else by joining the military or even emigrating. To maintain the flow of profits from trading in kelp, one laird insisted that “if the [fertile farming] country has any inhabitants at all, they must be expelled.”

In the spring of 1814, Patrick Sellar ordered all the tenant farmers to quit Strathnaver, that rich farming valley along the River Naver, where for generations their forefathers had tilled the soil. A few days after sending the first notice, Sellar ordered the pasture to be burned so the people would have to move their cattle. During previous removals, farmers had been permitted to carry off the door frames and timbers of their houses for use at their new allotments. This time, with most of the able-bodied men away from home, seeking pasturage for their cows, Sellar waved off that consideration and ordered groups of strong men to oust the aged, the infirm, the women, and the children.

Sellar himself had recently gained control of these lands and he meant to turn them into profitable sheep farms. The tenants had expected that, according to precedent, they would be allowed to remain a while in their ancestral homes, salvaging their crops while slowly they relocated. They were shocked into disbelieving silence when Sellar and his henchmen began knocking down their homes and setting them to the torch. Anything they were unable instantly to remove, the marauders destroyed.

Sellar personally directed this orgy of destruction, as Macleod and other witnesses later attested. One old man stumbled off among the trees and rocks and wandered, disoriented, before succumbing to the elements. Several small children did not survive.

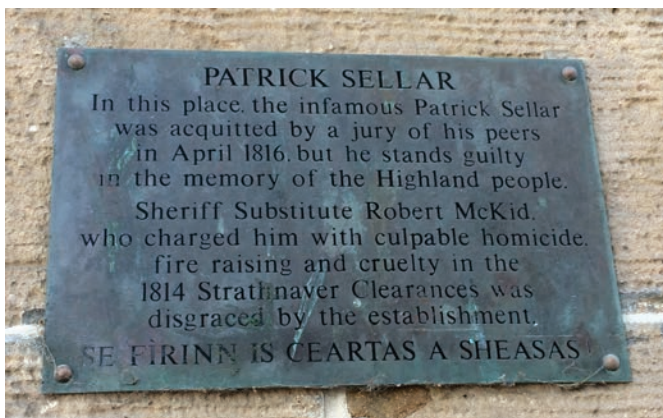
“To these scenes,” Donald Macleod wrote—first in newspapers, later in pamphlets and a book—“I was an eye-witness and am ready to substantiate the truth of my statements, not only by my own testimony, but by that of many others who were present at the time. In such a scene of general devastation, it is almost useless to particularize the cases of individuals; the suffering was great and universal. I shall, however, notice a few of the extreme cases of which I was myself eye-witness.”

Macleod wrote of John Mackay’s wife, Ravigill, who while trying to pull up and preserve the timbers of their house, fell through the roof. “She was in consequence taken in premature labor, and in that state was exposed to the open air and to the view of all the by-standers.” A man named Donald Munro, sick in bed with a fever, was expelled from his house and left vulnerable to the wind and the rain. Donald Macbeath, an old man, bedridden, had the roof of his house torn off, and lay in the elements until he expired.

Patrick Sellar and William Young and their hired thugs put three hundred houses to the torch, even as Macleod and a few other able-bodied men struggled to remove the sick and the helpless before fire engulfed them. Macleod would never forget the cries of women and children, the bawling of cows, the barking of dogs. Sellar had the roofs of the houses pulled down and the timbers set ablaze to prevent rebuilding. “I was present,” Macleod wrote, “at the pulling down and burning of the house of William Chisholm, (in the town of) Badinloskin, in which was lying his wife’s mother, an old bed-ridden woman of nearly 100 years of age, none of the family being present. I informed the persons about to set fire to the house of this circumstance and prevailed on them to wait until Mr. Sellar came. On his arrival, I told him of the poor old woman, Margaret Mackay, being in a condition unfit for removal. He replied, ‘Damn her, the old witch, she has lived too long - let her burn.’”

Later that night in June 1814, Donald Macleod climbed a hill and counted 250 blazing houses. “Many of the owners,” he wrote later, “were my relatives and all of whom I personally knew; but whose present condition, whether in or out of the flames, I could not tell. The fire lasted six days, till the whole of the dwellings were reduced to ashes or smoking ruins. During one of those days a boat lost her way in the dense smoke as she approached the shore; but at night she was enabled to reach a landing place by the light of the flames.”

Four decades later, the celebrated Harriet Beecher Stowe read what Donald Macleod had written and was moved to write about the Sutherland Clearances. She had received an account, she explained,





containing some “ridiculous stories about the Duchess of Sutherland” that had been circulating in America. “There were dreadful accounts of cruelties practiced in the process of inducing the tenants to change their places of residence,” she wrote. “The following is a specimen of these stories.”

Here she quoted a passage by Donald Macleod, which he had first published in the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle* in 1840, and then in a booklet, *History of the Destitution in Sutherlandshire*. She quoted the passage that began, “I was present at the pulling down and burning of the house of William Chisholm...”

Stowe took advice from Elizabeth Campbell, the Duchess of Argyll and the granddaughter of the original Lady Stafford, who had orchestrated the clearances. On her advice, the celebrated American author had consulted Patrick Sellar’s fellow conspirator, Mr. James Loch. This gentleman assured her that “the only thing like a fact stated in the newspaper extract” is that Mr. Sellar was accused of acts of cruelty. He had challenged this account, Loch added, by suing the sheriff substitute who affirmed the story and “obtained a verdict for heavy damages.” He neglected to mention that the testimony of several eyewitnesses notwithstanding, he had engineered the court’s verdict. The sheriff left the country, he said, and both he and Sellar “are since dead.”

Stowe quoted James Loch as adding that, thanks to Lord and Lady Stafford, Sutherland was flourishing: “nothing could exceed the prosperity of the country during the past year; their stock, sheep, and other things sold at high prices; their crops of grain and turnips were never so good, and the potatoes were free from all disease; rents had been paid better than was ever known...As an instance of the improved habits of the farmers, no house is built for them that they do not require a hot bath and water closets.”

In truth, all this was fatuous nonsense. A journalist set the record straight in the *Northern Ensign*, insisting that Sutherland had slid backwards in population and land values, and had “no shipping or commerce, no post offices, no banks, not a newspaper or a press or a bookshop.” Nevertheless, Harriet Beecher Stowe relayed Loch’s report as gospel in her 1854 book *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*. At the same time, this world-famous darling of the abolitionist movement - her *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had sold 300,000 copies - asserted that Donald Macleod’s eyewitness accounts of the Clearances were fabrications. According to Stowe, the stonemason was a fraud and a liar.

Two years after *Sunny Memories* appeared, Donald Macleod sat shaking his head over the book in the town of Woodstock, 145 kilometres southwest of Toronto. From Edinburgh, where he had worked latterly as a bookseller, he had recently crossed the ocean after losing his wife. Now nearing seventy years of age, Macleod had made his way to extended family in this bustling town in what is now Ontario. Along the way he had consulted with the activist-journalist Donald Ross, who had written so eloquently about several Clearances before emigrating to Nova Scotia. Ross had encouraged him to respond to Stowe’s vicious libel.

And so, in the autumn of 1856, Macleod sat at a kitchen table perusing the relevant section of Stowe’s book. She had quoted him at length: “Fire was immediately set to the house, and the blankets in which (the dying woman) was carried out were in flames before she could be got out. She was placed in a little shed, and it was with great difficulty they were prevented from firing it also. The old woman’s daughter arrived while the house was on fire and assisted the neighbours in removing her mother out of the flames and smoke, presenting a picture of horror which I shall never forget, but can-

not attempt to describe. Within five days she was a corpse.”

That scene from 1814 haunted him still, though he had tried to put it behind him. In 1818, he had married Betsy Gordon, the bright-eyed daughter of Charles Gordon, a man highly respected in Farr and all along the north coast of Sutherland for his religious and moral character. Having apprenticed with his own father as a mason, Donald Macleod had taken to travelling south every summer to work around Inverness or even Edinburgh, where he could earn better wages. In winter he returned to Rossal Place at Bettyhill to live among family and friends.

As a result, he had witnessed countless scenes of destruction and devastation, including one that, in 1820, culminated in the death of his worthy father-in-law. That admirable man had left six orphans in a state of destitution—for before he drew his last breath, he had seen everything he owned destroyed and his house razed to the ground.

With his wife, Macleod had taken in the six children. Two years later, because his wife needed his help at home, he gave up his summer travels and worked locally for less money. If he had been less outraged by injustice and of a more crouching disposition, he might have moved south and survived there indefinitely. But seeing oppression and persecution flourish around him, and having learned that Lowlanders endured no such treatment, Macleod proved unable to hold his tongue. He became a marked man, and his powerful enemies - Patrick Sellar chief among them - yearned to make an example of him.



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The Art of the Scarf

Rachel Devine

www.tir-dhaimh.com

I am Scottish born and bred, originally from Hamilton. I do have some Irish ancestry though - my paternal grandfather from Donegal. We have recently been doing some family tree research, which is pretty exciting, and the next step is actually taking a trip to Ireland to look through the local church records.

I am back in Hamilton again, after about 15 years in London. I first moved there to complete my degree in fashion design and ended up staying a little longer than I expected. When my husband and I found out we were expecting, we decided to move back to Scotland to be closer to our families (he is Scottish too) and enjoy the green spaces and slightly less hectic pace of life with our little one.

I have been interested in fashion for as long as I can remember. I love fabric, trims, buttons, and prints, and the possibilities of what you can do by combining those elements. My wee granny was a milliner and a talented seamstress and that influenced me from an early age.

When I started my career, I was working for high-street labels - fast fashion. I became quite disillusioned with the whole industry, as it just became a constant churning out of cheap and disposable clothing and I felt like there just wasn't any love in it anymore. From there I worked with higher-end labels, who valued quality and craftsmanship. That reinvigorated my love of the industry and steered me towards a slow-fashion approach.

I started Tìr-Dhàimh whilst on maternity leave with my little boy to have a project for myself whilst I wasn't at work.

I create timeless quality accessories that can be worn

time and time again and will last. My print designs are inspired by Scottish nature, rather than driven by trends.

Each print is a combination of different techniques, including photography, sketching, painting and digital applications - although they are all taken from Scottish nature and wildlife, I try to design the prints so that they are Scottish in a more subtle way.

It is an exciting time for fashion in Scotland. When I left to go to London, I felt like there weren't that many options around Scotland for young designers, but since I have moved back, I have been pleasantly surprised to find many great, innovative, ecologically, politically, and ecologically aware independent brands, all making their mark at home and further afield.







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The Eco-Celtic Traveler

*With the world on the verge of emerging from lockdown,
the Celtic tourism sector is searching for greater sustainability.
Chris Muise tells us more.*



Scotland



Genevieve Sheehan

The last time Celtic Life International spoke to Genevieve Sheehan - founder and CEO of Sheenco Travel in Ireland - the COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdown had stalled not only her company's plans to expand into the North American tourism marketplace, but - more personally - it prevented her from sating her wanderlust.

Recently, Sheehan has been able to pick up where she left off, and satisfy both of those goals by travelling to the United States to begin the process of opening up franchises there.

"I flew out pretty much as soon as any-

thing opened," she recounts over a Zoom chat from her office in Goleen, Co. Cork. "I took eight flights in eight days, and I enjoyed every one of them."

Sheehan has already been to New Orleans and Raleigh, North Carolina to attend franchise shows, and has trips planned to attend more in Texas, San Diego, New Jersey, and New York early next year.

Like herself, there are many people around the world itching to sojourn to interesting new places after nearly two years of restricted travel.

"Everyone is coming out of COVID-19, and the phrase 'revenge travel' has become a real buzzword. Revenge travel means 'I just want to go and have a good time.'"

But the world didn't sit around in a vacuum with us while we were barred from holidays abroad. The events of the pandemic - alongside concurrent events, such as the floods and wildfires that made clearer than ever that climate change is a real threat to the earth and our way of life on it - have made us more aware of the inequalities around us, about the fragility of our global supply chains, and how our actions impact the planet.

The question we must ask ourselves, then, is, "Should we go back to the way things were?"



Lesley Choyce

Sustainable tourism, or "eco-tourism" is an idea the tourism sector has been noodling with for a while now. Since the onset of the pandemic, more people in the industry are realizing the importance - and the value - of adopting sustainability as a core operating philosophy.

Ireland.com recently boasted that the city of Belfast had been named one of the top 20 global sustainable destinations by the Global Destination Sustainability Index, using that acknowledgment to promote Titanic Belfast, the Game of Thrones walking tour, St. George's Market, and the city's plethora of museums and art galleries. More to the



The Old Cottage Hospital

point, it was pointed out that this move towards sustainability was intentional.

“Earlier this year, Visit Belfast launched the largest-ever green tourism city partnership at a dedicated ‘Sustainable Belfast’ event,” reads the media release from Ireland.com. “This involves a new partnership with global sustainability experts Green Tourism and gives more traders in the city the opportunity to secure gold, silver, or bronze accreditation for their efforts to meet best-practice sustainability standards. With a choice of hotels that already have the green light for being green, acres of delightful parks and well-maintained gardens, plenty of green travel and shopping options, plus an array of eco-friendly eateries, it is easy to immerse yourself in one of the world’s most sustainable cities.”

It’s not just Ireland. Swansea University in Wales published a study in 2020 on sustainable tourism development in the country and identified numerous areas of potential growth in this sector. Meanwhile, VisitScotland.org touts “Net-Zero” bundles, offering tours of Scotland’s first net-zero distillery Nc’Nean, a night club that collects body heat produced by the guests dancing to run the power, and a trip to a Scottish wind farm.

“Ireland and Scotland particularly, but also Wales - they all rely very heavily on tourism to sustain the population,” says Sheehan. “It is the biggest industry in Ireland and Scotland, for sure.”

During the pandemic, Sheehan took to Eire’s great outdoors.

“Ireland has some of the best hiking trails you will find. I walked the Burren Way, for example, which is a hiking trail that goes all the way from the bottom of Co. Clare, and along the Cliffs of Moher which, of course,

are famous for their beauty. There is one that is on my bucket list that looks amazing; it is a trail from Roscommon to Dublin, and it actually traces the route that a family walked to get to a port to emigrate around Famine times.

“Depending on your fitness level, you can do it over five or six days, staying in lovely little properties along the way,” she adds, noting that eco-tourism needn’t come at the expense of luxury. “When I do these walking tours, I like to stay in a nice luxury room, with a bath to soak the muscles at the end of the day.”

Nature and history are what captures the imagination of Lesley Choyce, who long-time Celtic Life International readers will recognize as this magazine’s premier travel correspondent. As he explains over Zoom from his home in Lawrencetown, Nova Scotia, he might not be an eco-travel “purist” - however, he tries to be cognizant of the size of his carbon footprint while traversing off-the-beaten-path places.

“As often as possible, get out of the car,” Choyce offers as advice. “If I am committing those particular crimes, driving my car down the road to get someplace, the more time I can spend off the road, on my feet, is going to be good for me and good for the environment.”

But sustainable tourism isn’t just about visiting places that are eco-friendly, or choosing a nature walk over a pub crawl.

Eco-tourism is just one aspect of sustainable tourism. With the level of calamity

at risk from climate change, the travel industry is going to need to squeeze every drop of efficiency out of the travel stone if there is even a hope of leaving a viable world for our grandchildren to explore someday.

Luckily, according to Sheehan, the tourism industry is already on that path in many ways, and they got a lot of practice during the pandemic.

“It was interesting, because in some ways, you had less people flying around, but then we took a huge step backwards because we were wrapping everything individually in plastic. So, a lot of them were going away from the little individual, miniature shampoos and all of that, to try and be more sustainable.”

Sheehan thinks that it will be some time yet before the majority of travellers demand full eco-friendly tourism, but they will still contribute to promoting sustainability without even noticing it as destination providers work best eco-practices into the back end. And when tourists do notice those changes, they will feel positive for having chosen a globally conscious venue.

“I went on a fan trip in Scotland, and I know they are really working to promote sustainability at Visit Scotland. They gave me a car, and it was a hybrid. That is one of the ways we are seeing a movement towards better choices. And that is great - you can get a very comfortable hybrid - it had heated seats and everything. There is a car that you are feeling good about driving, because you are doing your bit, but you are still very comfortable, in a very ‘luxury’ surrounding.”

Sustainability also isn’t just about the natural environment. Economics and the social climate need to be sustainable, as well, for a tourist attraction to remain viable.

When Choyce travels, he is very conscious of the fact that while to him, this is a destination, to others, it is home.

“It is always to have as much respect for the people and for the land and keep your environmental footprint as small as possible. And while I like to pretend that I am not a mere tourist, I actually am. I can see that we have intruded - whether we intend to or not - on the lives of the people. And although those people, if they live in the middle of a high-tourist destination, accept that, I can also see why they might resent it.”

Tourism isn’t necessarily bad for a destination community, so long as there is bal-



ance. The way that Sheehan runs Sheenco internally, she feels like she is bringing economic opportunity to communities through tourism.

"The way we look at sustainable tourism is a little bit more focused on how we run as a business," she says, touting that every Sheenco employee works from home by design. "We are not running additional buildings for offices. I live in a tiny little village out on the edge of the Wild Atlantic Way. There is no need for us to be located in urban centres - the ability for us, or anyone in the tourism sector, to be self-employed in rural locations is a huge step for sustainability."

One destination in Norris Point, Newfoundland, exemplifies practically every aspect of the sustainable tourism initiative, The Old Cottage Hospital.

"It was built in 1939 as part of the cottage hospital system, to bring healthcare to rural and remote communities," says Joan Cranston, coordinator for the Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital Heritage Corporation, the non-profit entity that preserves and utilizes

the old hospital.

The facility was constructed to emulate the cottage hospital system that worked so well in the Scottish Highlands. "That hospital was built by the people. The government only paid for the foreman and the nails; all the labour and all the materials were donated. All of the seven communities that it served, the men would walk there, they would come by boat, they would stay there, and sleep in the foundations. They all gave their hours and materials - that way, they would be able to be patients at the hospital."

Cranston worked at the hospital as a physiotherapist during its operational tenure, starting in 1988. When the Newfoundland government decided to regionalize the provincial healthcare system, the old building was closed and put on the chopping block. But members of the community banded together to take on ownership of the structure instead.

"It was still in excellent shape - it was one of the largest and best-built of the cottage hospital system," explains Cranston,

adding that only minor refurbishments were undertaken at the time - meaning the building is very much the same one the community erected in the 1930s.

"When you adaptively reuse a heritage structure, you have automatically reduced your carbon footprint by not tearing down and building new."

"Over time, it has since evolved to serve community needs."

Files offices and medical wards were converted into a public library and a community radio station. Cranston continues practicing physiotherapy in their health and wellness centre. The kitchen is used to host classes to teach community members about healthy eating, and all the old medical equipment has been collected and curated as a medical tools museum.

Much of this has been funded in part by



Belfast

the converted upper floors, where the Old Cottage Hospital built a hostel for eco-conscious backpackers from across the globe.

"We will make our money from people who come from away, but the whole purpose is to provide," shares Cranston. "We also offer affordable, low-cost rental to small start-up businesses, so they evolve over time."

COVID-19 has forced the hospital to rethink how they approach tourism, with the hostel being out of commission since the pandemic hit. However, Cranston knows that maintaining the tourism aspect to the facility - and maybe even focusing the outreach to tourists besides just backpackers - is necessary to not just keeping the hospital sustainable, but the whole community also.

"I think that we can make tourism more targeted and more sustainable," Cranston muses, looking back to the community members who first built the hospital. "How resourceful they were in building it? We need to be resourceful like that and use our resources more wisely. We can be an example."

What are the rest of us to do, then?

Abandon fun trips to big metropolitan areas, and resign ourselves to slogs through dreary country woods? No, of course not - not that you could convince folks like Sheehan even if that was the case.

"No, I am afraid not," Sheehan laughs. "I like to travel!"

Sheehan feels that approaching sustainable travel as an all-or-nothing question isn't realistic, or helpful. She believes that the draws - and the necessity - of sustainable travel will emerge over time. Although being an outspoken proponent could speed up that process.

"There are people now - and those numbers will rise as awareness grows - who are going to go and look for companies and places that operate sustainably," says Sheehan, admitting, "we are probably not leveraging that enough, to be honest with you. It is something that I probably need to do more of."

She has since signed up with Sustainable Travel Ireland.

Choyce, who rarely goes on guided tours,

also encourages trying your best to be conscientious when you wander abroad. There is much at stake.

"We have to respect the fact that travel really is a privilege; if we can do it at least as well as we can, and we can urge the whole industry to move towards sustainability, it is going to be there for our kids and grandchildren. But we are awful selfish, I suppose. We are dying for COVID-19 to go away, if for nothing else, so we can go and travel the world again.

"And in some ways, it is never going to be quite the same as it was. It is never going to be quite as easy and it is never going to be quite as fun as it was, because of these big changes. It is not just going to be the pandemic - it is going to be the environmental changes, the global warming. These things keep changing, and we are part of the problem. Anything that we can do to reduce that can only be a good thing."

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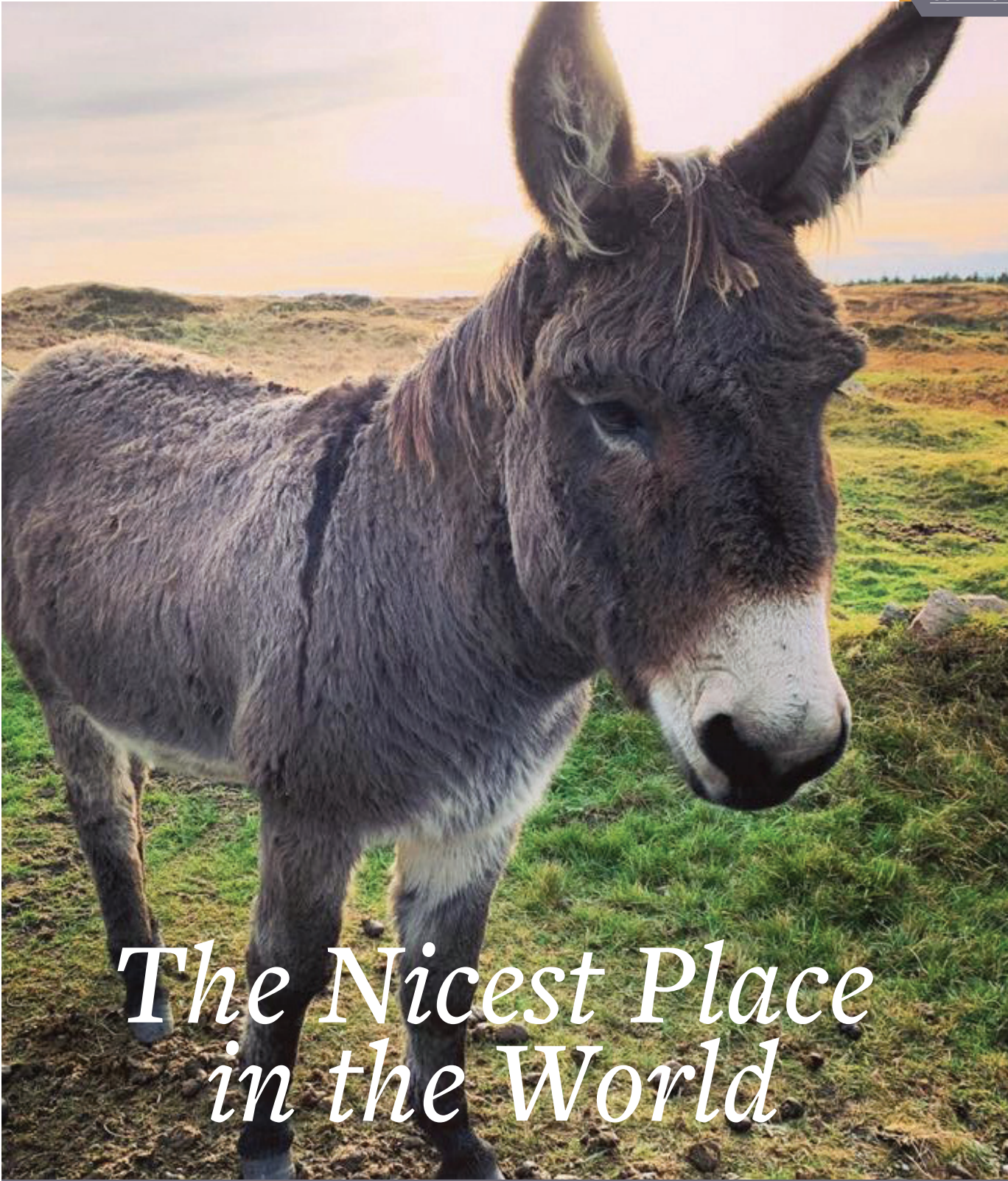
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The Nicest Place in the World

*As Celtic Life International correspondent Tara O'Grady explains,
Ireland continues to be a source of inspiration...*



Tara O'Grady

Two months before my beloved granny Nora passed away, I interviewed her on the farm in Donegal, Ireland, where I spent every summer of my life. She shared her thoughts on love, marriage, and the mysteries of the universe. She also revealed something that I have inherently always known; that Ireland is the nicest place in the world.

"If World War II hadn't broken out, I would have stayed another few years in England where your granddad had a job, but I would still come home to live in Ireland," she spoke into my tape recorder.

"Why?" I asked.

"Everyone did that could afford it," she replied. "Ireland is a nicer place to live. It's the nicest place in the world."

"What's so nice about it?" I asked, even though I already knew the answer.

Johnny Cash knew the answer too. After his first trip to Ireland in 1959, he wrote a song about his love for the people, from farmers to fishermen, but especially for one particular Tipperary girl with "lips as soft as eiderdown." He described Ireland as the "emerald of the sea" with its 40 shades of green.

Ireland inspired more than just visiting songwriters. Hollywood filmmakers captured the colorful countryside and people as well. While John Wayne filmed the classic

romantic comedy *The Quiet Man* on location in Mayo for six weeks in 1951 with director John Ford, locals toured the actor's family around the area, from Galway Bay to the Ring of Kerry.

This tiny green island in the north Atlantic also inspired thousands of creatives born within her borders. The Yeats family is one exceptional example. While brothers Jack and William Butler Yeats were painting landscapes and writing poetry in Sligo, their

sisters Elizabeth and Lily promoted Irish arts and crafts and taught others how to utilize the natural setting to awaken creativity.

Ireland awakens the human spirit like no other place on the planet.

That can't be proven, only experienced. You can listen to all the songs, watch all the films, and read all the poetry about this magical place, but until you set foot on her soil and become seduced by the unhurried pace of life - one of Eire's many charms - you won't fully understand what Johnny Cash was singing about.

When the rest of the world clamored on, Ireland somehow maintained its sacred energy. I felt it as a child and even more so today when I return to my family's home. Perhaps the lack of concrete and steel built up on every surface let the land breathe naturally as it needs to communicate with us. That openness of earth underfoot allows for the transfer of magnetic energy from the planet's core which pulls at human heart strings, plucking the music from our spirit. Whether you consider yourself musical or not, you will be humming a tune in your head before you leave Ireland's shores. She insists on collaborating with you on a creative level. You won't be able to escape the desire to create. The land has something to say and wishes to speak through you as you step across fields filled with purple heather and confident sheep. Be here now, it says. Be present. Just be. Even the spiders have something to say as they weave their webs between iron gates and hedges glistening from the sun after a morning shower.



Everything seems to be communicating with us in Ireland from every crevice and portal. Just prior to the pandemic, I attended a family wedding in Donegal. The day before the ceremony I searched for a 4,000-year-old Neolithic dolmen in a farmer's field. The ancient stone tomb was guarded by four soulful donkeys named Donal, Desmond, Declan, and Diarmuid. Nearby, on the shore, I found sea caves that also felt like portals to another dimension, where jellyfish lingered on white naked sand with no sign of footprints. After a brisk walk through the dunes, past waterfalls that looked like Guinness, a steaming bowl of potato leek soup with a side of brown bread lathered in golden Irish butter welcomed my hunger. This is the Ireland I know and love. These are the experiences I often share with first timers to the Emerald Isle.

An emerald is a healing stone with a strong vibrational energy that brings balance and clarity of thought. It is green, the colour of Ireland, and it is also the colour of the heart chakra. No wonder that visitors and locals are in love with the land.

That is why Johnny Cash called Ireland the "emerald of the sea." He and his wife June Carter stayed in Markree, the 17th century castle in Sligo, in 1990 while he filmed a music video on the property. Not far from the castle, W. B. Yeats wrote about the Lake Isle of Inisfree in his poem in 1888. The sound of the lake lapping the shore inspired a deep sense of peace in the core of his heart. And the Man in Black was seen wandering around Markree's five-hundred-acre estate in blissful solitude. Both Cash and Yeats understood and practiced the



healing powers of sound through encounters with music and nature.

Wellness, as a travel trend, is on the rise, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Citizens of the world spent much of 2020 communing with nature in their own backyards. But now that restrictions are being lifted, travelers yearn to explore beyond their backyards searching for more than just a few snapshots and souvenirs while visiting new destinations.

Seekers are on the move craving meaning, inspiration, and transformation. Exposure to nature and the arts is the objective to lift spirits and nurture wellbeing.

I am so looking forward to returning to Ireland through the lens of wellness and creativity to inspire my own spirit but also help awaken others. It has been a challenging few years, and I know I am not alone when I say I need to renew my spirit.

If my granny were alive today, we could stop in for a cup of tea and a chat. After hearing about the woes of the world, she'd most likely say, "Just sing yourself happy." It is good advice. The birds do it every day.

"Granny, tell me then, what is so nice about Ireland?" I asked as I held the tape recorder below her grin.

"Its people, its green fields, its hedges, its fences, its rivers, its brooks. Everything about Ireland I love."

Tara O'Grady is a singer-songwriter, educator and author born to Irish immigrants in New York City.

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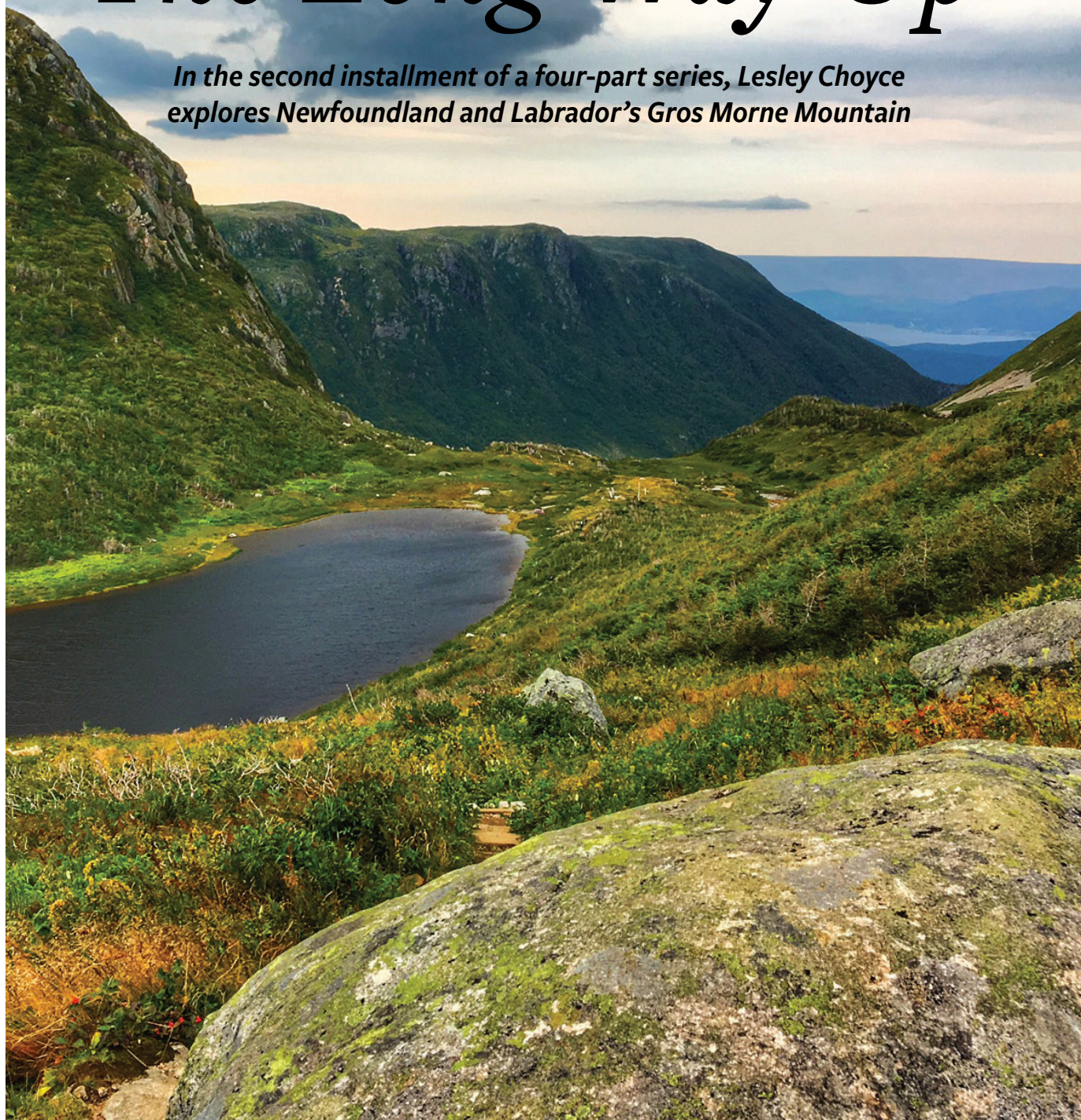


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The Long Way Up

In the second installment of a four-part series, Lesley Choyce explores Newfoundland and Labrador's Gros Morne Mountain





The second tallest mountain in Newfoundland, Gros Morne is a formidable flat-topped massif whose name means “great sombre” - although on a sunny day like this, that seems hardly appropriate. However, it is formidable and - as I stare up towards the ragged slope where we will scramble to the summit - I have second thoughts about the climb. But I remind myself that whole continents collided on this site 1200 million years ago, and that 570 million years ago I would be swimming here in the long-gone Iapetus Ocean wanting to get to some higher ground. So, in due reverence to all things of the distant geological past, I am convinced that we should march ourselves out of the lowlands and ascend into the heavens.

Now, this may not be a fair assessment, but Gros Morne is a funny looking mountain. It doesn't have a dramatic peak. In fact, it is fairly flat on the top - which turned out to be grand, with lots of room to explore the moonlike landscape. As we stopped to sip some water and watch those early bird hikers scrambling up its side, I told my wife Linda, “It looks just like a loaf of your sourdough bread when it comes out of the bread maker.”

She agreed and then pointed to a couple of antlike specs moving high up on the steepest part of the slope near the top. “Is that where we are going?” she asked.

It was. Before us was a rock-strewn crease up the side of the sourdough loaf that was known as “The Gully.”

“Are we ready?” she wondered out loud.

Although our predecessors, likely ambitious athletes who had veritably sprinted from their Honda SUVs in the parking lot to get at it, looked like they were barely clinging to a face of crumbling rock, I said, “Yes, now or never.” I immediately realized this was the sort of Hollywood line used by screenwriters about to kill off the lesser characters in an action movie. And with that thought in mind, we began the ascent.

I guess most mountain hikes start out somewhat easy and get harder the higher you go. This one got harder exponentially, starting out as a kind of tease really, designed by cataclysmic geological and

environmental forces that had shaped this rock monster. The lower spongy trail gave way all-too-soon to a mean-spirited jumbled alleyway of loose sharp rocks. You had to choose each footstep carefully, so we spent most of our time looking down at igneous rocks shaped like every possible configuration in the geometric universe. I found myself stopping more and more frequently, just to get my breath the higher we went.

It was at this point that I first began to enjoy a kind of joyful comradery with the other hikers, many our own ages.

Linda went ahead of me, and I did my pause-and-lean-over-to-suck-oxygen routine until my head stopped spinning. We would pass one couple and then, later, they would pass us, and we'd make small funny remarks about the tumbling rocks unleashed by some reckless hiker above. Or we might discuss in breathless voices how difficult this whole endeavour had suddenly become. I worried over the health of a couple of men who stopped for a smoke on a precarious ledge, and became jealous of the hikers with better shoes and smartly strapped aviator sunglasses that kept them from falling off their heads and down the scree.

A couple of sturdy professional Newfoundland men in Tilley hats ascended at a similar pace as me, and one guy had some kind of high-tech watch that allowed him to periodically announce the current temperature, altitude, and distance we had come on the whole hike so far. (What? Only 6 kilometres? Are you kidding?) But most intriguing was that he could tell exactly what angle we were climbing - a whopping 75 degrees. “Wait a minute,” I said. “Isn't 90 degrees straight up?” “You bet,” he answered.

The “trail” became alarmingly steep after that, I am loathe to report. Linda, seeing the summit - or at least the levelling off of the mountain - seemingly not too far above, forged further ahead as I



grew more and more cautious and accordingly sluggish. I yelled for her to stop and let me catch up which, surprisingly, she did. And when I caught up to her, gulping for air and aching in the calves, I saw that she was talking to a couple with a dog - a little leashed brown terrier who had made it this far. What on earth was a lap dog doing up here? I wondered. Sure, we had travelled around the U.K. with our own pup Kelty, but not up unyielding mountains like this. I had to admit, however, that the dog looked more comfortable with the height than its two owners.

After that, Linda made the mistake of following in the footsteps of a handful of young yahoos who had t-shirts proclaiming they were part of some sports team - soccer or rugby or possibly something even more brutal. They were making a charge up the final extra-steep section of loose, undependable scree as if they were a scantily clad battalion taking some remote mountain top in a war. I tried to call her back because I saw other saner individuals angling off to the right where there was actual shrub growth and a somewhat easier path, but no luck - she couldn't hear me and was determined to stick to her ill-chosen route.

So, like a loyal and faithful hubby, I followed her up the scree - to the shorter but much more difficult hand-over-hand scramble to the top. Once I caught up to her and we regrouped to catch our breath, we made the mistake of looking back. The sky was crystalline clear by now and I was pretty sure I could see California. The view was just great, but we were awfully high up in the atmosphere and the 75-degree grade had been nothing compared to the angle we were on. Gulp.

Side by side, and as slow as snails, we moved upward, hands and feet in unison, faces planted inches from the loose rock that grudgingly allowed two moves forward while sliding one move back. In truth, there was no way out of this predicament but up.

Once we could again stand more-or-less upright, there was still a bit of a hike along sloping solid stone (an easier one) until we reached the iconic sign where all the other hikers were getting their pictures taken. We were at the top of the mountain, seemingly the top of the world. Worries vanished and all was well in Morneville that morning.

We ambled away from the small crowd, and I sat us down on some bench-like flat rocks beneath a vast blue canopy of sky. For some reason, I thought we were probably halfway along on the full trail and that the trek across the top of the loaf and downward would be a piece of carrot cake, but I was wrong. However, lunch was attended to by a lone rock ptarmigan who was sitting nearby, only about a meter away, camouflaged as nature had provided for him and nonplussed at our presence. I pointed him out and we both gazed into his dark, peaceful eyes as he watched us eating with avian curiosity.

According to Parks Canada, "The waters of the ancient Iapetus Ocean lapped the sandy tropical shorelines of old North America. That sand, now cemented into rock, makes up the top of Gros Morne Mountain." I read this bit of news while eating those miniature carrots you buy in the supermarket that really aren't miniature carrots but big carrots that have been whittled away by machines to make you think they are baby ones. The news about the tropical ocean and the sand (like the carrots) reminded me that many things - well sometimes it seems - all things are not as they appear to be. Nothing around here looked sandy or tropical. But then many moons had passed since those sweaty beach days of yore and much water had flowed this way and that - always downhill. And, amazingly, here we were, Linda and I, pandemic refugees of the twenty-first century, having our lunch in this magnificent mountaintop patio of slab stone and open sky with our own personal ptarmigan gazing on.

Before we had finished eating, though, the ptarmigan had simply vanished. I mean, if ever a bird could turn himself invisible at the



drop of a feather it would be this one. If you've ever encountered a batch of them (a covey, a flock, a congregation) - as I did once years ago while hiking up Mt. McKinley (now Denali) in Alaska - you would swear they simply turn from rock to bird and back to rock as easily as you or I change our shirts.

*You can walk quite a long way atop
Gros Morne Mountain, stunned by scenery that is
spectacular in all directions.*

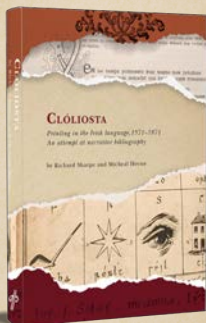
I am fairly certain that we were looking north towards Ten Mile Pond and a river that fed this incredible inland fjord. I could get into some discussion as to what is and isn't a fjord, but I will leave that to someone with more expertise. I will note, however, that if you think you need to go to Scandinavia to view such dramatic rocky manifestations, you are wrong - they exist here in plenitude on the west coast of Newfoundland. Most of the more jaw-dropping finger lakes I saw simply don't make it to the ocean, although they once did. And don't be alarmed or dismiss them if they are labelled on your map as a "pond." Western Brook Pond is the granddaddy, of course, but Baker's Brook Pond and Trout River Pond will all take your breath away as well.

The jaunt across the top was so splendid that we both forgot about the difficulty of actually making it to the top. My right knee was hurting a bit, so I adjusted my knee brace and braced myself for the long, long downhill trek home. A short way into the descent on some crudely fashioned but effective stairs, the damn knee began to hurt. Downhill for some of us is often harder on our bodies than uphill and I guess I fall into that category. Linda reminded me that it was much farther back this "easier" route than the full-frontal assault path up the Gully, but we had already been cautioned not to go back down that way. So, I reckoned this was our only way home.

www.lesleychoyce.com

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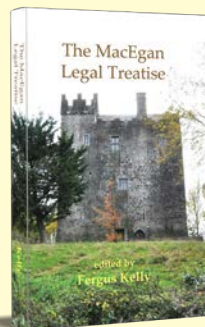


Clóloista is a catalogue of more than three centuries of printing in Irish, from the earliest instances of the language in print down to the eve of the modern revival. Entire books printed in Irish as well as pamphlets and other ephemera are described in detail. Information is provided on the Irish types used, on the background, content and reception of the works catalogued, and how they relate to the manuscript tradition.

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NEW PUBLICATION



Early Irish Law Series Volume VIII

This Treatise is attributed to Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin (MacEgan), chief judge of the province of Connacht, who died in battle in 1309 alongside his king Aodh Ó Conchobhair (O'Connor). It is of special importance as it provides a professional lawyer's account of Irish 'Brehon' law in the period after the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169. The castle photographed here is Redwood (Coillte Ruadha), Co. Tipperary, occupied from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries by descendants of Giolla na Naomh.

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THE CELTIC CHEF
with Gary Maclean

Braised Oxtail

Oxtail might not be in your shopping basket every week, but if you have never tried it before it's worth a go. I love everything about this cut; the flavour is incredible, and the texture is quite unique. A one-pot wonder, it can all be done in about 30 minutes, and cooked in 45 minutes, if you have a pressure cooker. A good butcher will be able to sort you out with the tails and they will also cut them up for you. Eating oxtails dates back as far as the consumption of beef when all the animal was used, and no part went to waste. This is a prime example that the muscles that work the most taste the best. They also make the best soup ever - it was my favourite growing up.

Ingredients

1 Oxtail, cut through the joints (1kg to 1.5kg) 2.3lb to 3.5lb
 2 Carrots, peeled and chopped into dice
 ½ Savoy cabbage, shredded
 2 sticks Celery, peeled and chopped into dice
 ½ head Celeriac, peeled and chopped into 2 dice
 2ltr Brown stock
 25g Tomato puree
 ½ bulb Garlic, chopped
 175ml Red wine
 25g Plain flour
 2 sprigs Rosemary
 2 sprigs Thyme
 100g Baby onions, peeled
 1 tin Butter beans
 100g Mushrooms, quartered

Instructions

If you don't have a pressure cooker pre-heat oven to 150°C/ 300°F. Prepare the vegetables, the size and shape don't matter, keep the cabbage separate. Brown the oxtail in a pot or a tray with the oven set to 200°C/400°F. Remove from the pan and add the carrots, celery, baby onions, mushrooms, and celeriac, soften the vegetables, and add the garlic and cook for two minutes, followed by the tomato puree and the flour. Add the red wine. Cook this out until the wine has all been incorporated into the rest of the vegetables, then add the brown stock and the herbs. Pop the browned oxtails in, pop the lid on the pressure cooker and bring up to pressure. Once it is pressurized reduce the temperature and cook the oxtails for about 50 minutes. If you don't have a pressure cooker use a large casserole dish in the oven for about 2.5 hours at 150°C/300°F. Once the meat is falling off the bone remove all the oxtail onto a tray and allow to cool until you can handle it. You will find that the oxtail muscle is made up of little round nuggets of meat that will just pop out leaving the bone and fat behind. Pop all those little nuggets of meat back into the pot. Add the shredded savoy cabbage and the butter beans and bring to the boil. Double check the seasoning, I think a good few turns of cracked black pepper work amazingly well with this dish.

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The Case for Clynelish

with *Andrew Ferguson*



I have a personal connection to the Clynelish Distillery - one that goes well beyond my love of their whisky. This connection is a little bit at odds with my love for the whisky if I am being honest. The distillery was founded by the Marquis of Stafford, aka the 1st Duke of Sutherland, one of the worst actors in the dark period of Scottish history known as the Highland Clearances.

The Highland Clearances took place between 1750 and 1860 in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Tens of thousands of tenant farmers were cruelly and systematically evicted from their homes so that their farmland could be used for the more profitable grazing of sheep. Many were forced out of their homes at gunpoint and shepherded away to live in towns and villages while their meagre possessions went up in smoke. The displaced peoples were compelled to become fishermen, kelp harvesters, or hard labourers.

In later stages of the clearances, after it became apparent that the displaced peoples were struggling to support themselves and were suffering from famine, landlords turned to "assisted passages." Tenants who were selected for "emigration" had little choice but to board ship and depart for places unknown. This is almost certainly how my mother's ancestors found their way to Canada.

I am a member of the ancient Clan Gunn on my mother's side. The Gunns claim Gunni as their founder, who was himself the descendant of Viking raiders. Gunni's wife, Ragnhild, was the sister of the Earl of Orkney, who granted her estates in Caithness. The Gunns would play a prominent role in the far north-east of Scotland - the lands of Caithness and Sutherland - for the next 500 years. There is still a strong Gunn connection to these lands,

but the Clearances did much to break the Clan system and Gaelic culture.

In just six years between 1814 and 1820, the 1st Duke of Sutherland alone evicted more than 3000 families - no fewer than 15,000 people from Caithness and Sutherland. One old woman was burned alive after refusing to leave her home.

The Clynelish Distillery was founded by the Duke of Sutherland in 1819, ostensibly to give some of his newly unemployed tenants something to do. But I recall another version of this story, which implies that the distillery was opened, not out of commercial intent, but rather to drive the illicit distillers operating on his lands - the last holdouts to his Clearance - out of business. It seems this man's cruelty knew no bounds, at least by modern standards. Whatever the truth is, the distillery has survived to this day, and has somewhat of a dedicated following for its whisky.

The original Clynelish Distillery was closed in 1968, after a new modern Clynelish distillery opened adjacent to it in 1967. The old distillery, renamed Brora after the town, was temporarily revived between 1969 and 1983 to supply demand for the booming Blended Scotch industry. In the years since, Brora has become a highly sought after and collectible whisky. This might have had something to do with its owner Diageo's decision to reopen it after nearly 40 years.

The Brora (the original Clynelish) and Clynelish Distilleries are located side by side on the outskirts of the picturesque seaside town of Brora. The latter recently opened a state-of-the-art visitor center and, like its older sister distillery, has developed a bit of a cult following - in this case for a specific

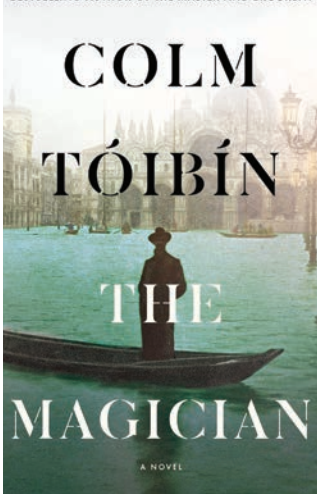
trait. Clynelish has a distinctly mouth coating waxy profile which sets it apart from all other Scottish single malts. There was a bit of a panic many years back when the spirit temporarily lost some of this character after an overly thorough cleaning of the distillery's equipment during the silent season. The collection of "gunky" oils in the feints receiver is behind this signature trait and is now carefully replaced after its cleaning.

The Clynelish 14 Year distillery bottling is a classic but has been harder to find in recent years.

The whisky is also of signature importance to, and one of the biggest components in Johnnie Walker Gold Label blend. Keep your eye open for independent bottlings of Clynelish, especially from Gordon & Macphail and Signatory, they are always excellent.

The town of Brora is located a little over an hour north of Inverness and boasts a few nice hotels and a lovely oceanfront links course. There is also plenty of great hiking and mountain biking in the nearby mountains. One peak in particular, Ben Bhraggie, looms over the scenic nearby town of Golspie and boasts spectacular views of the Dornoch Firth, the Black Isle (a peninsula) and the Moray coast beyond. While you are there, you can pay your respects to the notorious 1st Duke of Sutherland, who built an imposing monument to himself atop the Ben. How you choose to do that is up to you, but I have a few ideas!

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The Magician

By Colm Tóibín
McClelland & Stewart
448 pp / \$34

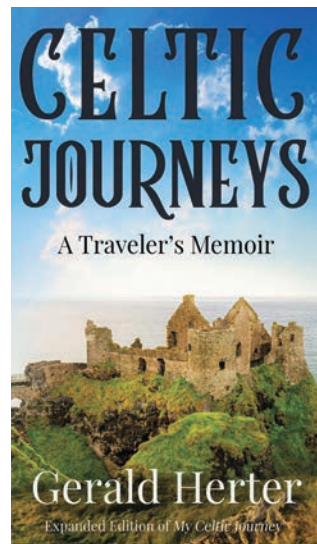
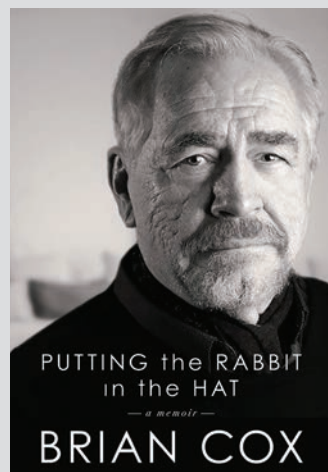
In theory, Colm Tóibín's latest novel has all the hallmarks of a masterpiece - crafty characters, a clever plot, a solid setting, political intrigue, family mystery, history, betrayal, romance, redemption, and more.

Despite all these epic elements, however, the tale of Thomas Mann's external and internal journey during WWI and leading up to the rise of Nazi Germany fails to come together in any kind of cohesive capacity. Taken individually, each chapter shines as single, vibrant vignettes. As a whole, though, the work feels incomplete, as if some narrative thread meant to tie the work together has gone missing amidst the mosaic. While it is rare for the multi award-winning Irish scribe to miss the mark, he can be given a pass this time around. ~ SPC

Putting the Rabbit in the Hat

By Brian Cox
Grand Central Publishing
384 pp / \$36.95

Fans of HBO's smash-hit television series Succession might be (pleasantly) surprised by Brian Cox's memoir. Although the Scottish thespian has received much (and much deserved) critical and popular acclaim for his powerful portrayal of Logan Roy - the gritty, hard-nosed, Machiavellian patriarch of a New York media family empire - his real-life tale is robust with homespun humility and heartfelt humour. From a troubled, working-class childhood in Dundee to his days plying his trade in Hollywood, the author does well to detail the life of a working actor. As readers might expect, while the fame, riches, glitz, and glamour of show business can be both attractive and abundant, the day-to-day realities of regular family life, friendship, health, happiness, service, and personal development are higher dramas. ~ SPC



Celtic Journeys

By Gerald Herter
Leananshee Press
261 pp / \$16.95

California author, and long-time Celtic Life International contributor, Gerald Herter has been enjoying his retirement.

A former CPA, he - along with his wife Lori - racked-up the air miles (pre-pandemic, one assumes) with a variety of visits to Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and beyond.

Recounting the couple's adventures upon many roads less travelled, Celtic Journeys explores the homes and hearths of Herter's ancestors.

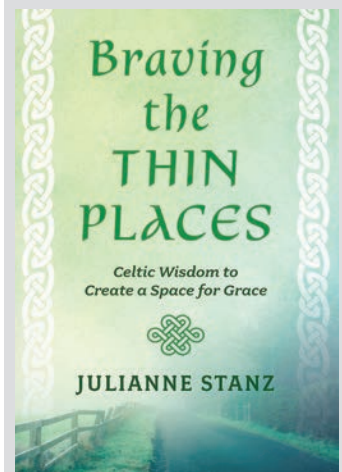
More than a travelogue, however, the scribe examines the complex heroes, history, traditions, and culture - as well as a bevy of spiritual beliefs and practices - of the Celtic nations, inviting readers into both the stunning physical landscapes and the deeper, ethereal soulscapes.

Masterfully written, and awash in warmth, wit, and wisdom, this is a must read for ex-pats everywhere. ~ SPC

Braving the Thin Places: Celtic Wisdom to Create a Space for Grace

By Julianne Stanz
Loyola Press
160 pp / \$15.99

It is both interesting and ironic that a Jesuit-based publishing house would opt to produce a book of Celtic wisdom. As the Celts were primarily pagan in their practices, it might seem like an odd fit. Au contraire. Kudos to Irish writer, speaker, storyteller - and devout Catholic minister - Julianne Stanz for connecting the dots between beliefs. Drawing upon the age-old traditions of prayer and meditation, the wisdom of the natural world, and highlighting the importance of religious ritual, the author examines the practical, hands-on application of spiritual principles in everyday life. Personal growth, she notes, only occurs when ideas become actions, and - she concludes - it doesn't matter how you get to God, so long as you get there, and stay there. ~ SPC





The McDades

The Empress

Alberta-based trio The McDades have received so many awards and accolades since their inception in 2000 that they must be a wee embarrassed at this point (how typically Canadian, eh?) The Washington Post even called them “the Dizzy Gillespie of the tin whistle.” Though perhaps a bit extreme, the reviewer wasn’t that far off. On their new album, *The Empress*, The McDades again incorporate such an amazing array of instruments and styles that the music is simply beyond proper description. Woven through the tapestry of the engaging 11-song mosaic, however, is a Celtic thread of traditional melody that firmly cements their legacy as contemporary carriers of classic customs. Vocalist (and violinist) Shannon Johnson just might be one of the finest singers in the genre today. ~ SPC

Gwenifer Raymond

Strange Lights Over Garth Mountain

As a guitar player myself, my ears are attuned to those who know their way around a fretboard. While my own affinity might lean towards the electric guitar (Jeff Beck, J. Mascis, Pete Townshend, the Edge, Carlos Santana, Thurston Moore, Jimi Hendrix) I have a deep appreciation for acoustic players, if only that the instrument itself is much more difficult to play, let alone master. So, that said, Welsh six-string virtuoso Gwenifer Raymond’s latest recording *Strange Lights Over Garth Mountain* has been on endless repeat since I first received it a few weeks ago. The fine, finessed fingerpicking flows so fluidly across these 8 torrid tunes that one will either be inspired to pick up a guitar for the first time or quit playing entirely. ~ SPC



MALCOLM MACWATT



SETTLER

Malcolm MacWatt

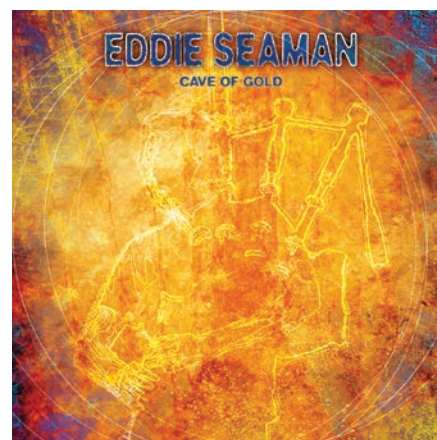
Settler

Picking up where he left off with his 2020 EP *Skail*, Scottish singer-songwriter Malcolm MacWatt ups his game with *Settler*, a selection of 10 songs that bridge the gap between classic Celtic melodies and contemporary Americana. Although the acclaimed songsmith - who was born and bred in Morayshire, with the Highlands and the North Sea on his doorstep - is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, composer, and arranger all his own, he is joined here by musical heavyweights Eliza Carthy, Gretchen Peters, Kris Drever, Jaimee Harris, and Laura Cantrell. The result is a masterful and moving lo-fi, Trans-Atlantic collection that touches upon themes of wonder, wanderlust, nature, beauty, time, love, and redemption. Spirited and soulful, the new recording will resonate with fans of Wilco and The Waterboys. ~ SPC

Eddie Seaman

Cave of Gold

Edinburgh piper, whistler, composer, and instructor Eddie Seaman kicks it old-school with this terrific and timeless 11-track studio recording. From the opening salvos of Bryce Jigs to the closing drones of Salute to Donald, the mega-talented musician and his band take listeners back in time through the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland. Highlights here include Fiddle Bee, O Dwyer of the Glen, Langstom’s Pony, and Unknown Warrior. The masterpiece, however, is the collection’s centerpiece - *Uamh an Oir (Cave of Gold)* - which showcases the fine lush lilt of Gaelic singer Maeve Mackinnon. More than the sum of its parts, the new album is a vibrant and vital effort to preserve and promote Celtic culture in an age when music has become a disposable commodity. ~ SPC



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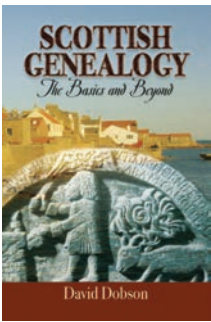
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SCOTTISH ROOTS

**Scottish Genealogy:
The Basics and Beyond**
By David Dobson



While this publication identifies the major sources and repositories for those just getting started on their research, what makes this book stand out from all the rest is its focus on the other, less commonly used, sources that will allow researchers to advance their research. For each research topic—including statutory registers, church records, tax records, sasines and land registers, court records, military and maritime sources, burgh and estate records, emigration records, and much more—Dr. Dobson has compiled an extensive list of the publications and archival records that most researchers have not heard of. It would take years for any other individual to compile such a far-reaching bibliography and compilation of relevant records in Scottish archives. David Dobson was born in 1940 in Carnoustie, Scotland. Most of his working life was spent at Madras College, St. Andrews. He has been an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Aberdeen, the University of Edinburgh, and at present, at the University of St. Andrews. He is the author of more than 200 books, including *Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1607-1785*, *Scottish Trade with Colonial Charleston, 1683-1783*, and numerous historical and genealogical source books. He now lives in Dundee and is working on further source books.

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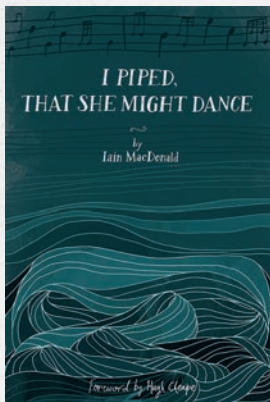
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**Anne Rice;
1941-2021**

Four decades before the likes of Stephenie Meyer were making sexy ghouls a part of the modern zeitgeist, novelist Anne Rice was pioneering the genre with her Vampire Chronicle series, including the best-selling book *Interview with the Vampire*, made all the more famous by the 1994 cinematic adaptation starring box-office heartthrobs Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt.

It is not unfair to say that Lestat de Lioncourt and Louis de Pointe du Lac walked (or flew) so that the likes of Edward Cullen and Bill Compton could run.

In December, Rice - one of many Irish storytellers to grow the lore of the modern vampire, up-to-and-including Bram Stoker himself - passed away at the age of 80, as reported by her son Christopher via her Facebook account.

"It breaks my heart to bring you this sad news," the statement reads. "Earlier tonight, Anne passed away due to complications resulting from a stroke. She left us almost nineteen years to the day my father, her husband Stan, died. The immensity of our family's grief cannot be overstated. As my mother, her support for me was unconditional - she taught me to embrace my dreams, reject conformity and challenge the dark voices of fear and self-doubt.

"In her final hours," the statement continues, "I sat beside her hospital bed in awe of her accomplishments and her courage, awash in memories of a life that took us from the fog laced hills of the San Francisco Bay Area to the magical streets of New Orleans to the twinkling vistas of Southern California. As she kissed Anne goodbye, her younger sister Karen said, 'What a ride you took us on, kid.'"

A ride is one way to describe Rice's early years, as chronicled by her biographer, Katherine Ramsland.

Born Howard Frances Allen O'Brien, Rice enjoyed two Irish lineages. Her mother Katherine came from "an old and respected Irish family." Rice once explained her male-gendered birth name on her website thusly, "My birth name is Howard Allen because apparently my mother thought it was a good idea to name me Howard. My father's name was Howard, she wanted to name me after Howard, and she thought it was a very interesting thing to do. She was a bit of a Bohemian, a bit of mad woman, a bit of a genius, and a great deal of a great teacher. And she had the idea that naming a woman Howard was going to give that woman an unusual advantage in the world."

Rice later changed her moniker while attending Catholic school to her more recognizable pen name.

Her father, Howard, was of the Irish Channel of New Orleans, what Rice once described as a "Catholic Ghetto," where she herself was raised.

When she was 15, her mother died from the effects of alcoholism, and her father shipped her and her three sisters to an orphanage, which Rice described as "something out of *Jane Eyre*...a dilapidated, awful, medieval type of place." Howard quickly remarried before taking the children back and relocating to Texas. Despite the reunion, Rice still considered this part of her life as a betrayal on her father's part.

However, the move led to some good, too; it was here that Rice met her future husband Stan while the pair studied journalism at Richardson High School. Her new life wasn't all bliss, however; in 1972, the couple's first child Michele (aka "Mouse") passed away. Rice described having a prophetic dream about the loss; "I dreamed my daughter, Michele, was dying - that there was something wrong with her blood...it was horrifying. Several months afterward, she was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia."

Given her past challenges, it was no wonder that Rice felt something of a kinship with Nosferatu and others of the kind, who she described as "these elegant, tragic, sensitive people. I was really just going with that feeling when writing *Interview with the Vampire*. I didn't do a lot of research."

Published in 1976, *Interview with the Vampire* became Rice's breakout title, launching her into fame and the hearts of goth kids around the globe. And while she herself was a bit dismissive about the Twilight-style vampires - once musing that she "feels sorry for vampires that sparkle in the sun" - it is hard to argue that she didn't help pave the road ahead of them.

Rice's family plans on having a celebration of life in the new year in New Orleans, as noted by her son Christopher, "This event will be open to the public and will invite the participation of her friends, readers and fans who brought her such joy and inspiration throughout her life."

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