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# CelticLife

INTERNATIONAL



## *Intimate* Ireland



**INSIDE!** Máiréad Nesbitt, Byrne & Kelly,  
NYC Tartan Week, Celtica Radio, Martin Scott Powell,  
Ulster Bound, Remembering Stuart McLean

DISPLAY IN LIFESTYLES  
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UNTIL MAY 2017



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Clansman Publishing Ltd.  
PO Box 8805, Station A, Halifax,  
NS, Canada B3K 5M4

Celtic Life International is an ethnic journal  
published in Canada six times a year by  
Clansman Publishing Ltd.

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher  
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Subscriptions:  
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)  
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850  
Fax: 902-835-0080  
Email: subscribe@celticlife.ca

Advertising:  
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850  
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Email: sales@celticlife.ca

Please send review books and CDs to:  
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NS, Canada B4B 1H1

Please return undeliverable  
copies of Celtic Life International to:  
PO Box 8805, Station A, Halifax,  
NS, Canada B3K 5M4

Publication Mail Registration:  
No. 40050439 ISSN 1918-0497

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Celtic Life International acknowledges the  
financial support of the Government of  
Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund  
of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

**Canada**

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# Fáilte!

**E**thnic atrocities against humanity have, sadly, been a part of history for hundreds of years. I often wonder why we, as a modern society, have not recognized the failures and destruction of these behaviours over the centuries. Why do we simply not get it?

On January 30, a 27-year-old political science student, known to be a right-wing extremist, walked into a Quebec mosque and killed six innocent Canadians who were targeted for practicing their faith.

This was a despicable act, and an attack on all of humanity.

In recent months, we have heard much about immigrants, refugees, and efforts to keep them out. When walls, isolation, and cultural divide are on the agenda, religious and racial hatreds rear their ugly heads.

Explicit expressions of bigotry and hatred by government leaders - statements that refugees will import generations of terrorism, extremism, and radicalism into our schools - encourage those who have been looking for a license to lash out.

It is said the young Quebec student was influenced by several political leaders, who by the poor example of their words and actions, almost legitimize this kind of like-minded behavior. This is not "leadership."

Following Brexit, hate crimes surged in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Neo-Nazi stickers with swastikas appeared in Glasgow, placed by a far-right group who were encouraged by the "No" vote decision. Their message was "leave" and "go home."

Every generation has had its own ugly, fear-based reaction to immigrants and refugees.

In Scotland, the Clearances evicted untold thousands, ripping families apart. The Irish suffered unimaginable hardships under Kings James II and Charles I, and later under Oliver Cromwell. Many of our ancestors were chased from their homeland by politics, war, discrimination, and poverty.

Most of us have immigrant roots - we were all once strangers in strange lands. Today, in countries like Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, the immigrant experience is deeply woven into the national fabric, creating social and cultural integration, and economic vitality and prosperity. It is this diversity that makes us unique.

In a democratic society, it is incumbent upon us to reaffirm our freedom to practice our faith and cultural traditions.

This begins at the grassroots level: it has been recognized that young children and students face an alarming level of fear and anxiety in the classroom where racial and ethnic tensions exist. Yet, it is the classroom where truths that build the foundation of a just society are introduced to young minds.

Young people everywhere present our best chance to stand together against racism and build a tradition of strong, multicultural communities where peoples from around the world are welcome, and where diversity unravels the seeds of hate.

In this issue, Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare returns to Ireland, a country that was once plagued with fear and division. As he discovers, Eire has evolved into a progressive and intelligent society, where all cultures are welcome.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Muslim families of Quebec.

*Enjoy, and may God bless*

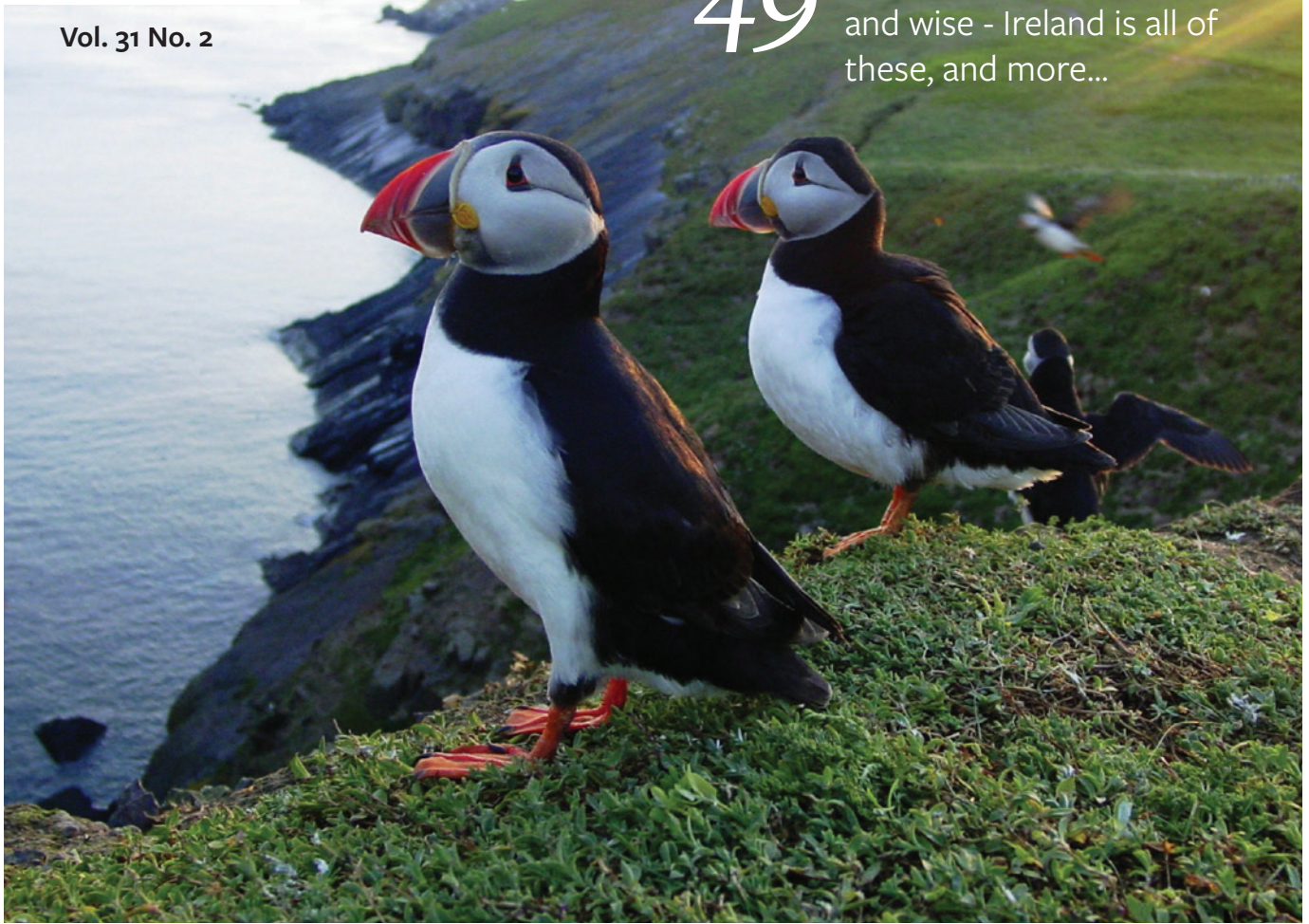
**Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher**



# Inside!

Vol. 31 No. 2

49 Warm, welcoming, witty and wise - Ireland is all of these, and more...



19

Nova Scotia's Highland Village keeps the past present

29

NYC goes mad for plaid with Tartan Week celebrations

37

Photographer Martin Scott Powell shoots for the stars

45

Irish violinist Máiréad Nesbitt breaks from - and embraces - the past

63

Melanie Ward explores Ireland's Cavan Burren Park

27

Neil Byrne and Ryan Kelly discuss their new documentary film

33

Tom Langlands tours the Scottish Seabird Centre

41

Irish Illustrator Jane Ryan draws the line

55

Correspondent Chris Brauer gets tangled up in Dingle

67

Lesley Choyce get under the skin of Ulster

9. First Word / 21. Celtica Radio / 23. Steve McCarten / 25. Cormac O'Caoimh  
75. Dram / 79. The Piper / 81. The Fiddler / 83. The Dancer / 98. Last Word



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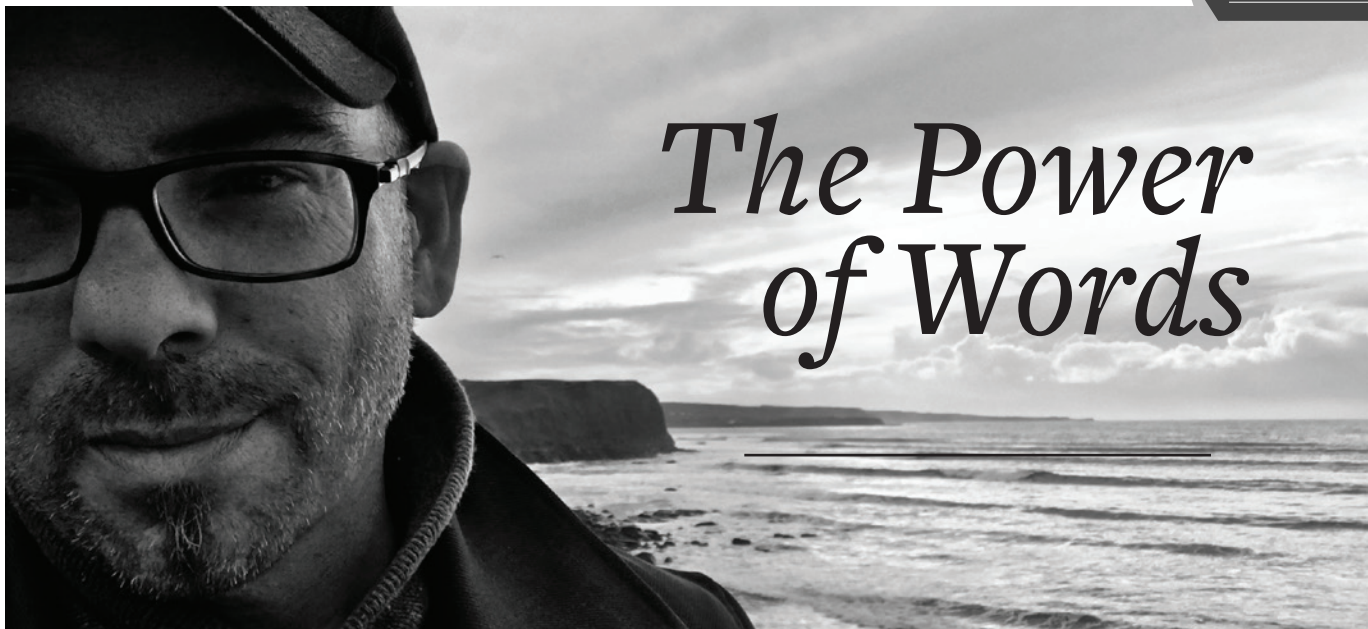
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# The Power of Words

PHOTO CREDIT: CELTIC LIFE

## *It started with a book.*

As I have recounted within these pages on numerous occasions, it was Leon Uris' masterwork *Trinity* that inspired my first solo visit to Ireland. Reading, and repeatedly re-reading the bestselling novel of Irish independence stirred something within me as a teenager, driving me to distraction, and eventually, in 1989, driving me across the Atlantic at the tender age of twenty-two.

I had previously visited Ireland as a child with my family. And while my recollections of that voyage are dim, I do recall a distinct sense of belonging whilst there - likely as both my father and mother have roots on the Emerald Isle. Perhaps, however, it was something more.

I have always been a traveler, like my father, and like his father before him. Though - as with my siblings - I am adopted, the travel bug is nonetheless in my blood. I am blessed (or cursed) with both wanderlust and wonderlust.

Those traits have served me well over time, both personally and professionally; a long love of learning, combined with countless landscapes, makes for a life and career that are rich and rewarding. I am grateful each day for my good fortune.

As good fortune would have it, I have been lucky to visit Eire several times in recent years, exploring Dublin, the Ancient East, the Wild Atlantic Way, and Northern Ireland over the last half-decade. I have my favourite spots; the capital city is wondrous for walking, vital and vibrant with its tremendous heritage, amazing architecture, fine food, and bustling nightlife; Galway is

a cornucopia of arts and culture; Donegal is lush and lyrical at once; the coastal route from Derry to Belfast is breathtaking, and the Dingle Peninsula has me dreaming of retiring by the sea.

For travelers, Ireland is ideal; airports are centrally located and easy to navigate for those coming and going; well-kept roads make for quick and easy drives; bus and rail lines link all major destinations; hotel and hostel options are aplenty; the cuisine is wholesome and world-class; there is no shortage of good craic wherever you roam, and the people are warm and witty to a fault.

Of course, no agenda would be complete without attending to the attractions; Dublin Castle, the Blarney Stone, the Burren, the Cliffs of Moher, Derry's Walls, the Titanic Museum, and many more - each a testament to both the country's incredible history and its vast natural beauty.

*It is the other Ireland, though - the hidden-in-plain-sight Eire - that makes it so intriguing. Getting lost here isn't a dilemma, it is an opportunity.*

As such, there is nothing quite like stumbling upon 9th Century ruins in Waterford, browsing a back-alley bookshop in Temple Bar, experiencing a double-rainbow by the sea in Kenmare, catching a glimpse of wild Connemara ponies in Clifden, sniffing the scent of a turf fire while hiking the hills of Donegal, or walking into a mid-morning music seisiún in a small pub in Westport.

Credit Tourism Ireland, and all of its affiliated arms, for not only knowing a good thing when they've got it, but for going the extra mile to see that visitors are able to experience all that the Emerald Isle has to offer, and ensuring that everyday tourists feel like travelers. The organization's counterparts in the other Celtic nations could learn much from their Irish peers on how to properly make visitors feel not only welcome, but at home.

And home is where the heart is, and my heart is in Ireland. Well, a little piece of it is left behind with every visit anyway. And I make sure to take a piece of the island with me each time I return from my travels there; photographs, souvenirs, mementos, memories, and new found friendships are all part of my mental and emotional landscape both at my house and at the office. I even manage to smuggle a little bit of turf back with me each trip.

However, it is the writing - the journals, the stories on the website, the social media postings, the tiny scraps of note-paper, the bits and pieces of never-completed poems and lyrics, and the full flesh of finished essays and articles - that keep my adventures in Ireland alive.

Perhaps, one day, it shall all end with a book.

*Stephen Patrick Clare*  
Managing Editor





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## *What exactly does it mean to be Celtic in the modern world?*

~ Sandra Keller, Seattle, WA, USA

Hi Sandra, thanks for the note – an excellent question. One of the major impediments in studying the Celts is that they left almost no written records. From what we know, they lived around 2,500 years ago, eventually settling in Western Europe. As nomadic warrior tribes bound only by language, art and culture, they were without a specific kingdom or ruling hierarchy. However, collectively, they were actually larger in size and scope than the Roman and Greek empires. Celts today are the direct descendants of those groups, mostly of Irish, Scottish and Welsh descent. Given the prolific evolution of those cultures, and their profound patterns of emigration to all corners of the globe, it is estimated that there are close to 400 million people of Celtic origin or ties around the world at present. Today, with one-hundred generations of cultural mash-ups under the belt, they might be best referred to as ‘Cross Celtic’ or ‘Pan Celtic’. Whatever the moniker, and though it continues to be a work-in-progress, that sense of identity is stronger than ever.

## *I have heard that the term “hillbillies” can be traced back to Northern Ireland – is this true?*

~ Will Boyd, Auckland, New Zealand

Will, you are correct! After the great plantation of Scots into Northern Ireland in the early-to-mid 1600s, hundreds of families immigrated to the eastern coastal regions of the United States beginning in the late 1700s. Over the proceeding generations, tens of thousands of Ulster-Scots settled into the peaks and valleys of the Virginias, the Carolinas, Kentucky and Tennessee. Many, if not all, of these families were fiercely loyal to King William of Orange, and were known as Billy’s Boys. Due to their new geographical locale amidst the lower Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains, these folks picked up the moniker “Hill Billies”. With Scottish/Irish heritage, it also explains why those areas are now home to the finest whisky distilleries in North America, as well as some of the best fiddle



music on the planet! Interestingly, the Boyds of County Down were among the first families to populate the area. The Ulster Folk Museum in Omagh is still the best source of information with regard to the relocation of peoples from Northern Ireland into the Americas.

## *My family’s roots are in County Kerry, Ireland. I’ve gone as far as I can with online research. What’s my next step?*

~ Peggy Dunphy, Toronto, ON, Canada

Hello Peggy. Short of a trip to the Emerald Isle’s lush southwest coast to explore church and township records, your best bet is to hire a professional genealogist. Many of these historians have already done the legwork of accessing the kind of “deep” family data that is only available in person. With so much confusion about family emigration patterns from Galway to Kerry - especially during the famine years



of the mid-1800s - it is easy to overlook the particular details and context that an expert would pick up on. If you are planning a visit, there are a number of guided genealogy tours available across Eire that will steer you in the right direction. Having taken one of those tours, I can tell you that there is nothing quite like seeing the original family homesteads and farms in person – it is an experience almost beyond words. A word of advice, however; do your homework on genealogy tours and check references before going over.

**Got a question for Celtic Life? Drop us a note at [editor@celticlife.ca](mailto:editor@celticlife.ca)**



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## one

### Celtic meets Inuit

A woman with Inuk and Celtic roots is showcasing both cultures through her music. Kathleen Ivaluarjuk Merritt recently released her debut album, *Ice, Lines & Sealskin*. The album is under her Inuktitut name, Ivaluarjuk. Merritt's mother is from Nunavut, where Merritt was also born, but her father is from Cape Breton. As a result, she was inspired to combine throat singing — a type of musical performance created by the Inuit peoples — with fiddle. The rhythmic nature of the vocals allows it to pair well with just about any instrumental backdrop, including a Celtic reel.

## two

### First female-led Scotch distillery in 200 years

Toulvaddie Distillery, helmed by Heather Nelson, will be a micro whisky distillery with the capacity to produce around 30,000 liters of alcohol per year. What's more, Nelson is the first woman to found a Scotch distillery in two centuries, and the first woman ever to found one on her own. Nelson launched Toulvaddie Distillery Ltd. in November 2015, and has since received Approval in Principle from the HM Revenue and Customs for the distillation license. The distillery is slated to be built on a disused runway at a Royal Naval Air Service Base southeast of Tain, in the Scottish Highlands.

## three

### Surfing seal

People are generally discouraged from interacting with wild animals, but what happens when an animal initiates contact? A curious seal recently befriended a couple of surfers off the coast of Brittany. One of the surfers, Yves Courtel, noticed the seal as it hopped on her friend's board while they were waiting for waves. The adorable interaction lasted for about 20 minutes as the mammal alternated between Courtel and her friend's board. When her friend cautiously stroked the seal, it responded by affectionately rubbing itself into his wetsuit.

## four

### Obama's Irish Roots

Barack Obama has often spoken and written of his Kenyan background. What you may not know is the former United States president has Irish ancestry as well. Obama is the descendant of Falmouth Kearney, an Irishman from a family of shoemakers who ventured to America in 1850. Both Barack and Michelle Obama paid a visit to Ireland in 2011 — specifically, they dropped by the small village of Moneygall, where the Kearneys are from. There, Obama met his eighth cousin, Henry Healy, along with thousands of other locals.

## five

### Cornish singer wins German talent show

Cornwall's got talent. Cornish vocalist Angel Flukes won *Das Supertalent* — Germany's version of Britain's *Got Talent* — back in December. The 28-year-old is a former bar worker from the town of Saltash. This wasn't her first competition; Flukes made it to the final boot camp of the *X-Factor* in 2005. But it was her rendition of Celine Dion's "Think Twice" that really won over her German audience last year. As a result, Flukes was awarded 100,000 Euros, and a performance at a Las Vegas show. She said she planned to put some of her prize money towards her upcoming wedding.

## six

### Technology recovers fire-damaged historical documents

A 17th Century text from Northern Ireland — once unreadable due to fire damage — has been restored thanks to technology, as well as a group of archivists, conservators, imaging scientists, historians, computer scientists and digital humanities experts. The Great Parchment Book of the Honourable Irish Society was recovered through means of conserving, digitizing, 3D-reconstructing, and virtually flattening the fire-damaged, buckled parchment. This document is a major surviving historical record of the estates of the county of Londonderry. An academic paper, published in Oxford University Press' *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* journal, presents a complete overview of the project.

*Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at [editor@celticlife.com](mailto:editor@celticlife.com)*



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**Hannah Winterbourne**

People who identified within the LGBTQ community were banned from joining the British Armed Forces up until the year 2000. Hannah Winterbourne – a trans-woman – spent the beginning of her life, and her first few years in the military, identifying as a man. Originally from Cardiff, Wales, Winterbourne joined the army because she wanted to be an engineer, hoping to work on the Challenger 2 battle tank. In 2012, she “came out” as a woman and began her transition the following year. These days, she holds the title of Captain, and is the British army’s highest-ranking transgender officer, in charge of leading 100 soldiers. She also works with the army’s headquarters to make sure its policies are trans-inclusive. In 2015, Winterbourne won the honour of Ultimate Trailblazer at the Ultimate Women Awards by Cosmopolitan magazine. “It saddens me that other people have had tougher experiences, or faced more adversity than I did,” she told the publication. “But seeing letters from trans individuals who tell me they’ve finally had the ability to be themselves because of something I’ve done is incredible. It’s hard to put into words. If I’ve been a product of helping people be happy in themselves, then that’s enough for me.” Thankfully, Winterbourne’s fellow soldiers have generally been accepting of her identity – they care about her skills, not her gender. Over time, her self-acceptance has improved as well.



**Bill Dale**

Bill Dale is a journalist and environmental enthusiast from Andreas, Isle of Man, who established the Beach Buddies charity in 2006 with the goal of cleaning up the island’s coasts. The organization expanded its efforts 10 years later, thanks to a donation from the country’s Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA). The funding allowed Beach Buddies to build on its work in multiple ways, including the establishment of a “litter hotline” on social media, and a website where the public can report litter hotspots and large items washed up on beaches. The group also liaises with DEFA on litter issues, and has expanded inland with its volunteer-manned Beach Buddies bins – placing them at glens, plantations and footpaths. To date, Dale and his Beach Buddies have recruited close to 7,000 people who volunteer their time every week. “Together we have collected more than 300 tonnes of rubbish from the beaches in 2016,” he told the BBC. “That’s more than two million items including plastic bottles, fast food containers, fishing nets, tin cans and oil drums – once, we even found a set of false teeth.” Dale was recently awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the Manx marine environment.



**Gena Heraty**

Gena Heraty has been based in Kenscoff, Haiti, for almost a quarter-century, where she works as the director for the Special Needs Unit of Our Little Brothers and Sisters Orphanage. Born in Liscarney, Ireland, Heraty graduated from the University of Limerick with a degree in Business Studies in 1991, before volunteering with the Simon Community in Dublin. After meeting a fellow volunteer who had worked in Haiti, she was invited to do the same. She said yes. Our Little Brothers and Sisters was founded in 1954. Heraty saw the opportunity to develop a special needs unit for the organization, and made it happen, providing new opportunities for about 30 children and young people. “Generally, in Haiti, if you’re a child with special needs you’re abandoned at hospitals,” she said in 2015. “You’re not abandoned because your mother doesn’t love you. You’re abandoned because your mother doesn’t have the means to take care of you.” Children with epilepsy, for example, need expensive medication and physical therapy. According to a press release, Heraty developed an outreach program to provide medical and rehabilitation support for families in the community where children have severe physical and/or intellectual disabilities. She has been presented with multiple awards for her work, including, most recently, the Oireachtas Human Dignity Award.



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[www.celticstaugustine.com](http://www.celticstaugustine.com)



## Saint Patrick's Festival

**March 16-19**

Dublin, Ireland

Celebrate the "forty shades of green" the right way this year at the Saint Patrick's Festival in Dublin, Ireland. Since its inauguration in 1995, the annual gathering's goal has been to create an authentic Eire experience to be enjoyed by both "homegrown" and those "who wish they were Irish." A combination of creativity, innovation, and historical and cultural accuracy come together during this four-day event, with an assortment of local, regional, national and international artists and organizations on hand - all to preserve and promote an authentic Irish experience. Also on the agenda this year is a day-long carnival, a festival treasure hunt, and a special event titled "Young Blood - The Beat and Voices of Our Generation," which will showcase Ireland's youth culture through a variety of literary and musical acts. A full schedule, including ticket details, is available via the festival's website; [www.stpatricksfestival.ie](http://www.stpatricksfestival.ie)



## Australian Celtic Festival

**May 4-7, 2017**

Glen Innes, Australia

Ireland is being revered this year at the annual Australian Celtic Festival, a four-day "must-see" celebration of Celtic culture that is expected to attract nearly 6,000 visitors from home and abroad. Since 1992, the annual gathering has celebrated one of the seven Celtic nations through an array of performances and events. This year, the festival is being held at Australia's Standing Stones monument, and will highlight bagpipers, music, dance, food and drink, strongman competitions, children's entertainment, a fun run, and more. And, of course, no Celtic Festival would be complete without a street parade, a Kirkin' of the Tartan, and a mass piping band. Performers scheduled for the stage include The City of Brisbane Pipe Band, a fire-twirling drumming act called Fire Rose, Kings of Camelot - who showcase jousting and archery - as well as a myriad of great musical acts. Additionally, organizers promise a "few surprises." Visitors will enjoy the ambiance and beauty that is Australia's autumn season, all the while submersing themselves into this vibrant display of Celtic culture. Tickets, with information on accommodations, are available through the event's website; [www.australiancelticfestival.com](http://www.australiancelticfestival.com)



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# Highland Village

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[www.highlandvillage.novascotia.ca](http://www.highlandvillage.novascotia.ca)





# malad valley welsh festival

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We are delighted to announce that the 2017 Malad Valley Welsh Festival, on June 30 and July 1, will feature John Good, performing "Songs and Tales of Wales."

Other Festival events typically include presentations on Welsh history and culture, games, and vendors, local history presentations, quilt and photography shows, wagon tours of historic sites in Malad, family history exhibits, visits to Olive Osmond's cabin and the Blue Goose Saloon in Samaria, a community breakfast, and music performances including a concert with several choirs, piano duets, youth performers, and outdoor performances by Celtic bands.

Today, Malad Valley has the largest per capita concentration of people of Welsh ancestry outside the country of Wales itself. For that reason, many residents of the Valley wanted to reestablish their Welsh roots. In 2005, after a 90 year break, this annual cultural event, now called the Malad Valley Welsh Festival, once again became a reality.

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*A small radio station in Wales thrives on sheer perseverance*

**S**ome songs find a home in the most unlikely of orbits.

For instance, an outdated cassette tape housed three songs that had been recorded and performed by The Mick Mahoney Band, circa 1998, but languished in a glove box for years.

"I pulled it out of the compartment and stuck it into the tape player," says Christopher Ross, the band's lyricist. "The songs had held up, and the musicianship was unbelievable. I thought to myself, why not take advantage of new technology and get it out there?"

But Ross hadn't been in touch with his collaborators, Sue Clayton, and Mick Mahoney for over a decade.

"When I tracked Mick down, he was plying the Welsh waterways in a houseboat. Sue was making films in London. I asked for their blessings to market the songs on CD Baby. As Mick said to me, 'The songs deserve to be heard.'"

Next, Ross thumbed through the musicians' resource book, *The Indie Bible*. It was there that he found Celtica Radio.

"The name caught me. I have distant Celtic roots and when I saw that the station was located in Bridgend, Wales, I was hooked. We had been there recently to track down our ancestors' farm."

Soon after, Ross contacted Bill Everatt, the station's Managing Director, who delivered the good news that the three-song recording, *Innocent and True*, would find a home on Celtica Radio. Ross was jubilant.

"Truthfully, I didn't know much about the station, but I wanted to be aligned with its independent ethos."

Celtica Radio was founded by a small but steely group of broadcast men in the year 2000. Its roots, however, go back to 1979.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Everatt had broadcast on major commercial radio stations in the Middle East, the Irish Republic, and in Wales. Together with a number of enthusiastic supporters, he brought local radio to Bridgend in 1997.

According to Everatt, after two years of waiting for a commercial license came the "bloody awful disappointment of having our application to run a new radio station in Bridgend denied. It didn't make any sense; we had shown that we could run a station successfully, but unbelievably, the license went to a rival group!"

Still suffering from the "massive disappointment" of being turned down for the license, he admitted "it was needlessly humiliating, and I determined I was done with radio forever."

It took a Yorkshireman - Dave "Cooky" Cook - to turn things around.

"Cooky got the money and pushed us to give it another whirl," recalls Everatt. "We would do this thing, and we would do it right."

*Today, the station's mandate remains as it did from the beginning: "A steadily growing platform for artistes, writers and broadcasters who have been denied a chance elsewhere."*

Programming ranges from the wholly eclectic *SWORDcast*, in which Bill Bulloch and Paul Woods stress the importance of connecting to our golden childhood memories of playing with toys, to *Dave Cooks Zoo* - filled with glittering performances from musicians such as Chase Emery Davis and Dessy Dobрева, combined with finely timed one-liners delivered by "Cooky" himself.

Dave Carrington, whose "Squaring the Circle" provides a home for spoken word artists and authors of all genres, notes, "Whereas most stations in the U.K. are awash in playing two-dimensional faded wallpaper music, Celtica Radio goes for that third dimension."

Other diverse programming includes Andrew John's *New Music Radio Show*; Reverend Keith Berry-Davies' faith-based *Footsteps*; Fred Stacey's *Great Music and Chat*; Nick K.'s Netherlands-based *Darkwave Hour*; *The Shed* - a partnership with Bridgend Unitary Authority, hosted from "The Shedquarters" in Maesteg by John Gates and Steve Madden; and, of course, Bill Everatt's show *The Underground Edition*, which combines a mix of music and interviews with indie bands such as *The Small Animals* from Cyprus.

Everatt continues to follow the Welsh maxim *Dyfal donc a dyr y garreg* - meaning perseverance pays in the end.

"Celtica Radio and the artists we play have much in common. For whatever reasons, we have found our avenues of personal expression blocked. We won't allow that... thus, we occupy this rather unique position."

[www.celticaradio.com](http://www.celticaradio.com)





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# Steve McCarten

*Despite his love of the visual arts, Belfast-born actor and filmmaker Steve McCarten hates seeing himself on screen*

Born to a Catholic mother and a Protestant father in Northern Ireland, Steve McCarten was raised “during the height of The Troubles.”

“So, a few hairy moments growing up, from what I’ve been told,” he shares via email from his current residence in the English seaside resort of Bournemouth, Dorset.

McCarten began his acting career starring as a cloud in his school’s nativity play. His next stint was some years later at Carshalton College - in a somewhat larger role - as the lead in *The Real Inspector Hound* by Tom Stoppard.

“I’ve always enjoyed performing but life had a habit of getting in the way,” he notes. “I actually left that dream behind around the age of 17, when my family immigrated to the United States. There was nothing near me that could suffice, as we lived way out in the sticks, and for a city boy who was used to walking 20 minutes to get into downtown Belfast, it was a hell of a culture shock.”

That dream wasn’t left behind for good, however. After a year-and-a-half in America, McCarten returned to his native Ireland. He later attended Bournemouth University in England, where a conversation with two men at the campus bar helped turn his dream into a reality.

“That was when I met my buddies Keith (Farrell) and Big Gay Al,” recalls McCarten fondly. “Keith and I have become great friends, and it was him that I have to thank for reigniting the flames for the arts and film. He was studying for his Masters in film and TV production and needed an actor to take part in a dramatic reconstruction of the English Civil War, but seen through the eyes of a nightly news program-type of affair.”

McCarten jumped at the chance, and before long he was helping out with Farrell’s productions on a regular basis, leading to an audition for a production of Tennessee Wil-

liam’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Lighthouse Theatre. He was given the role of Mitch, and remembers the ovation he and his fellow actor got following the ninth scene.

“Nicole Faraday (who played Blanche) and I had just smashed an intense and very emotional moment, and the audience erupted into a massive round of applause for the scene end - never mind the whole play. That was special.”

Since then, McCarten has spent the last dozen years involved with a variety of productions for both stage and screen. The idea of directing piqued his interest in 2010, and he began working on the production side of things. He started as a crewmember, making his way up to first assistant director and, most recently, director.

His debut film, *Faithless*, is in “pre-pre-production,” as he puts it.

“This phase is a pendulum swinging between inspiration and perspiration,” he explains.

*“The initial spark is definitely inspirational, and then there’s a steady decline into madness, fear and insanity as you realize you’re opening up a big box of whoop-ass.”*

“Then you have a period of blind panic, and once when that settles down you start putting the hard work in and getting it into a place where you can start talking to people about it.”

McCarten has few qualms about the film industry in Ireland - he believes it is in great shape, and the future is bright - however, he says that there is always room for improvement.



“There needs to be more inward investment for new and upcoming filmmakers. I also think the Irish Film Board are missing a trick when it comes to directors like myself who qualify for funding because we are Irish, but then don’t qualify because we live outside of Ireland, even though the film we want to make would involve Irish locations, actors and crew.”

While his feature film is still in its initial phase, a short film version of *Faithless* is slated to screen at the Cannes Film Festival this year, as well as at other festivals around the world. Once he is done with making the festival rounds, McCarten plans to buckle down and put the finishing touches on the *Faithless* script. He hopes to begin shooting later in the year. In addition, he is negotiating to get onboard as a line producer for two more films over the coming months; one in Toronto, and the other in Mexico.

“In the meantime, I continue to produce and shoot a whole host of commercial and corporate films to keep the wolves away from the door.”

[www.stevemccarten.com](http://www.stevemccarten.com)







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# Cormac O'Caoimh

*Irish singer-songwriter*

*Cormac O'Caoimh puts 'Music First' on his latest album Shiny Silvery Things*



As a child, Cormac O'Caoimh felt a little out of sorts around the family home.

"I was the unmusical one," remembers the Cork singer-songwriter. "My dad was in a band, my brother was in a band, and there were always musical instruments around the house. All of my siblings were involved with music in some form or another."

With a little prodding from his father, O'Caoimh began exploring his musical options.

"I went to piano lessons, but I didn't like it so I gave up. Then I went to mandolin lessons, and then tin whistle lessons, didn't like them...gave up. But gradually, when the house was empty, I picked up the guitar and messed around with it, solely with the intention of writing songs. And the hope, perhaps, that some of them might mean something to someone someday."

Over time, the "indie folky poppy jazz" singer - as he is currently called by his peers - developed a love for linking lyrics and melodies.

"Every time I learned a new chord, I wrote a song with that particular chord. Every time I learned a new technique - like finger-picking or a new rhythm - I wrote a song with that. And I still do that to this day. I have tried to write instrumental tunes, but I always end up putting lyrics to them later. I have also tried writing poetry, but end up writing music for them - funny how bad poetry can make for good lyrics."

In 2007, O'Caoimh released his debut album, *Start a Spark*. A follow up EP, *Remember We Didn't Kiss*, was released in 2012.

"When I started out - when I didn't have many chords and was not very good at the guitar - I wrote loads and loads of lyrics first. Learning the major 7th chords kept me going

for 10 years, and I still love them. My first 2 albums were probably 'lyrics first and music after' - and all of the material was based on simple strumming techniques."

Refining his skills, the songsmith's work became more experimental for his next two releases, *A New Season for Love* and *The Moon Loses its Memory*, where "the music was written first."



Both recordings received great popular and critical acclaim, with *Motto Magazine* calling O'Caoimh's songs 'acoustic gems'.

"I received great support from TV stations, radio stations and reviewers. I was delighted to be asked to endorse Godin guitars, had a great review in *Mojo* magazine - which really opened some doors - and I had some absolutely fantastic gigs."

O'Caoimh continues to hone his craft as he puts the finishing touches on his upcoming album, *Shiny Silvery Things*, which is scheduled for release in April.

"With the new recording, the music was still written first. Unlike the previous recordings, however, *Shiny Silvery Things* is not a concept album - or maybe that is the con-

cept. This is an old school record, a collection of songs. Some fast, some slow, some personal, some fictional. For me, first and foremost, it's got to be moving. You got to feel it.

*"Many are personal songs, while others are influenced by books. Others are based on fictional characters and stories and scenarios in my head."*

Parallel to his own growth as an artist, O'Caoimh sees a shift in the musical landscape of Ireland.

"A lot has changed since I started - some things are easier, some things are harder. When I started there were many more venues, so I played more gigs. Back then, recording and getting the music out there was more difficult. Now, the opposite is true, and it is tougher to get good gigs. There are a countless number of amazing Irish acts making great music right now, but they are simply not being supported as much as before."

While he will be busy over the coming months with the release of the new album and subsequent touring, O'Caoimh says he never forgets the reason he picked up the guitar in the first place.

"For me, it is all about the songs - writing a good song, although I do find writing bad songs rewarding too. A good song is a reward in itself, of course, but it is all the better when it means something to someone."

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## Neil Byrne & Ryan Kelly

**T**he Shelbourne Hotel stands majestically on the north side of St. Stephen's Green in downtown Dublin. Built in 1824, the landmark, 265-room inn has been both host and witness to generations of the city's rich history; most notably, in 1922, the drafting of the Irish Constitution in room 112.

Over the years, the Shelbourne's cozy tea room has entertained political, business, military and religious leaders, as well as an array of visual artists and literary types, including James Joyce (who referenced the hotel in *Ulysses*), Oscar Wilde, and William Butler Yeats, who often stopped in for a warm cuppa' after strolling St. Stephen's Green.

"There are no strangers here," the Sligo scribe once wrote, "only friends you haven't met yet."

The adage is apt as I sit down to chat with musicians Neil Byrne and Ryan Kelly by the facility's famed fireplace. Ironically, though we have spoken several times by both phone and email, this is our first meeting in person. Within minutes, the duo has befriended this travel-weary stranger in a strange land.

Perhaps the familiar surroundings have put the pair at ease; after endless months and miles on the road in 2016, criss-crossing North America in support of their *Echoes* album, the celebrated songsmiths have been enjoying some well-deserved downtime back home.

"It always takes a little getting used to," says Byrne of the respite. "Last year was just go-go-go all the time, and then - all of a sudden - you are home, and there is nowhere

you have to go, no place you have to be..."

"Actually, we have really been enjoying it," pipes in Kelly. "It is those little moments in between all the activity that give us the time to sit back and reflect on where we have been, where we are now, and where we are headed."

From all appearances, the prolific pair is in a good place these days; friendly, funny, with a gentle and genuine Irish warmth and wit, it is easy to understand their appeal to audiences.

"Because the *Echoes* tour was on a much smaller scale than we are used to," (the two-some double up with their day jobs as members of Irish supergroup Celtic Thunder) "the level of intimacy at shows is just that much greater," notes Byrne.

*"At times, it felt a little bit like we were performing for complete strangers in our living rooms...not that they were strangers for very long..."*

Most of those concerts were prefaced with fan "meet 'n' greet" sessions.

"We met so many amazing people of all ages," shares Byrne. "All kinds of great folks took the time to drop in and share their stories with us. And, after spending hours crammed into the van each day traveling from venue to venue, it made all the difference in the world to connect face-to-face."

One of those shows, a mid-December invite-only affair in Kansas City, Missouri,

was filmed for a live DVD, titled *Echoes: The Story*, scheduled for release on March 21.

"There were only about 30 people in the audience that night," recalls Kelly. "It was a very special evening - very warm and welcoming. Neil and I and (violinist) Nicole Hudson and (keyboard player) Cian Sweeney really had the chance to bring the songs to another level altogether. The strength and simplicity of the melodies worked really well in that kind of intimate setting."

The concert documentary film - the duo's first - not only sees the band perform the *Echoes* album in its entirety, but also highlights the story behind the album.

"We invited (director) Michael McGlinn around to the particular locations in Ireland that inspired each of the songs," says Byrne. "The footage is simply spectacular - it is a beautiful country - and I think fans are going to be blown away."

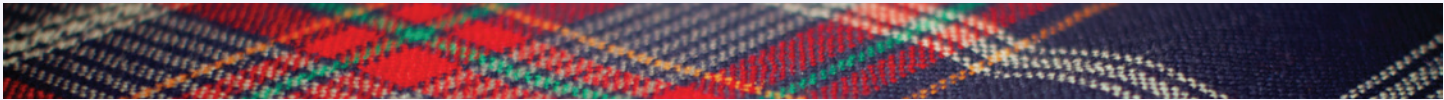
To support the new release, the pair will hit the road for select dates across North America through the spring and summer.

"It's been great having this bit of time off," smiles Kelly, "but we are really looking forward to getting back out there and making more friends." ~ Stephen Patrick Clare

[www.byrneandkelly.com](http://www.byrneandkelly.com)







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# NYC Tartan Week

*The Big Apple is going mad for plaid again this April, as Tartan Week celebrations bring together Scots from all over the world*





Against a backdrop of spiraling grey skyscrapers, the ancient call of bagpipes will lead graceful dancers, clan members and re-enactors in full regalia, thousands of plaid-clad participants, and a multitude of wee Scottish dogs for the 19th annual Tartan Day Parade in midtown Manhattan on April 8.

Something about the skirl of the pipes and the swish of the kilt stirs a sentiment in Scots, many of whose ancestors left the highlands and lowlands for a better life in the New World generations ago. Even non-Scots are apt to wistfully search their ancestral tree for a hidden Highlander.

"We want everyone in," he insists, referring to the tens of thousands who attend from the United States, Canada, Scotland, and beyond. "As is Scottish custom, we won't turn anyone away."

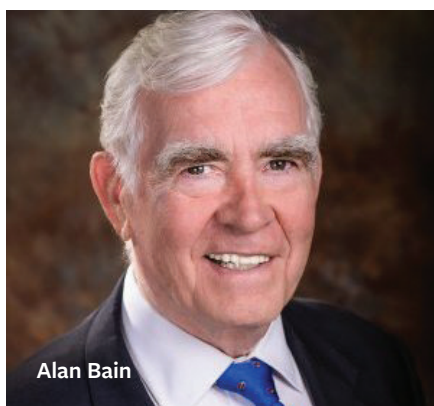
Dawson was recently in Scotland to finalize last-minute details of the parade. He notes that Tartan Week is a monumental collaboration between the Big Apple's Scottish organizations, including the St. Andrew's Society of the State of New York, the New York Caledonian Club, the American-Scottish Foundation, Clan Campbell, and most recently, Carnegie Hall.

Tartan Day was officially recognized on a permanent basis when the U.S. Senate passed Senate Resolution 155. This was followed by a companion bill, House Resolution 41, which was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on March 9, 2005. The passage of these bills was aided by the work of the National Capital Tartan Day Committee.

And while the day is now commemorated around the world, the NYC celebration is the largest of its kind on the planet.



Kyle Dawson



Alan Bain



Camilla Hellman

"People from all over the world who have ties to Scotland, whether it be for their own heritage, or a passion for this beautiful culture, love to join our celebrations in New York," says Kyle Dawson, who heads the National Tartan Day New York Committee (NTDNYC).

The week-long gathering is a key component of New York's Scottish community, notes Dawson, as it showcases many aspects of Scottish culture, including music, dance, food, drink, and - perhaps most notably - hospitality.

In the late 1990s the Scottish Coalition USA, led by longtime Chairman of the American-Scottish Foundation Alan Bain, was tasked with developing a major event to honour Tartan Day, which was established by Jean Watson of Canada in 1986 to commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320. The historic document asserted Scotland's sovereignty over English territorial claims, and was an influence on the American Declaration of Independence.

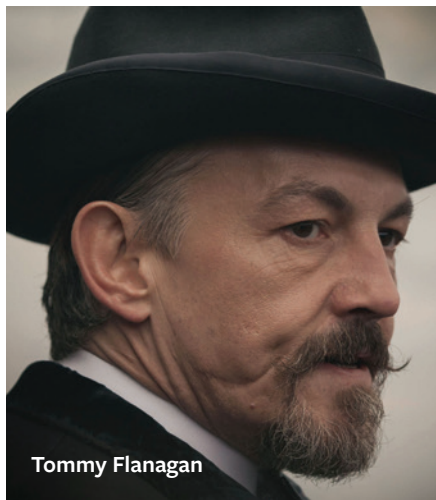
In 1998, Bain led the first "Parade" up a NYC side street. That same year, National

"If you can, we suggest being here from April 2 to 11," says Camilla Hellman, President of the American-Scottish Foundation, explaining that the original Tartan Day gathering has now evolved into more than a week of events.

The major activities, including the parade, ceilidhs, concerts, and whisky tastings, will take place from April 5 to 9.

The centerpiece of it all, of course, is the April 8 parade, which will highlight massed bands from around the world marching up Sixth Avenue, from 44th Street to 55th Street.





Tommy Flanagan

Grand Marshal for this year's parade is Scottish film and television actor Tommy Flanagan, who grew up in Glasgow.

"It is an honour to celebrate my culture," says the thespian, who broke into acting with the now-classic Scottish film, *Braveheart*, but is best known for his role as Filip "Chibs" Telford in the hit FX series *Sons of Anarchy*.

He maintains strong ties with his ancestral homeland, frequently returning to visit family and friends. "I have great pride in my heritage. I will have my daughter flying her flag forever."

Past Grand Marshals include Sir Sean Connery, Sam Heughan and Graham McTavish from the STARZ television series *Outlander*, and *Grey's Anatomy* actor Kevin McKidd.

While Dawson has a hand in many of the week's events, the parade is his favourite part of the annual festivities.

"Seeing all the people waving a Scottish saltire flag in the air, as they march up Sixth Avenue is a truly amazing thing to experience. Over the years, we have really grown, with more people coming out to take part each April.

*"The parade really brings out the best in all involved, and you can't help but smile and feel uplifted."*

The music is sure to strike the ear, but it is the colours that will strike the eye as parade-goers flaunt kilts, ties, shawls, scarves, and skirts, in all manner of tartans.

One of the day's highlights is the inclusion of close to 100 Scottish, tartan-clad canines, including perky West Highland White Terriers, and feisty black, brindle, and wheaten Scottish Terriers.

"People love seeing the dogs involved, especially the children," says Heather Quist,

Director of the American Scottish Foundation. "They have become an essential part of the occasion."

Before the parade, patrons are invited to attend a traditional Kirkin' o' the Tartan service at Brick Presbyterian Church on the city's Upper East Side. Soon after, a Pipes and Drums performance on Fountain Terrace in Bryant Park - one of a series of Tartan Week concerts held throughout the week - picks up the tempo, preparing participants for the pomp and pageantry of the parade.

Once the parade is completed, attendees are welcome to attend a number of "after party" celebrations.

"We began having an after party because the pipe bands wanted to keep playing!" laughs Dawson. "It has become such a large spectacle that we have had to change the location for space and better accessibility. It is a four-hour long concert, and we welcome everyone to enjoy the great entertainment."

*Over the years, Tartan Week has evolved into an umbrella event that includes clan gatherings, seminars, and the sampling of Scottish libations in some of Manhattan's finest watering holes.*

Nearby, on Ellis Island, Clan Currie will welcome thousands of visitors and lead them through exhibits showcasing the Scottish Diaspora in America. For those weary from walking, the National Theatre of Scotland is performing *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* at McKittrick's Hotel, which has been transformed into an intimate and spooky Scottish pub.

Hellman and Quist, both transplanted New Yorkers, were each drawn to Tartan Week for its sense of familiarity and inclusion.

"I grew up in London but we would spend time each year up in Scotland," says Hellman. "My first Tartan Day Parade was in 2002 when a group of us, all transplants, heard about this huge gathering of pipers. It was a fantastic day. I was working on various projects that involved transatlantic relations, and that was that - I became involved. I just love to see Scotland celebrated in this way each year."

Quist arrived in New York from Canada.

"I grew up in Montreal, and still have family up there, so I have always been aware of the strong ties between people in Canada and the United States and Scotland. When I came to New York many years ago I was looking for organizations that would give me a sense of community, and thus I was drawn to the American-Scottish Foundation and Tartan Week."

Alan Bain, who has spent more than a quarter century promoting America's Scottish roots, is proud of how the original Tartan Day has "expanded multifold" since it was first staged on city sidewalks almost two decades ago.

"The parade, in particular, is a beautiful spectacle. The event builds vital ties between our American-Scottish community and the Scottish people, and it strengthens our relationship with Scottish organizations in Canada and elsewhere.

"And not only is it another amazing New York experience for our visitors, but it is a celebration of a strong and proud cultural thread in the colourful fabric of American society."

[www.nyctartanweek.org](http://www.nyctartanweek.org)





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# *Scottish Seabird Centre*

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

PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS



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

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

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



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

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

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

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

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



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[www.seabird.org](http://www.seabird.org)  
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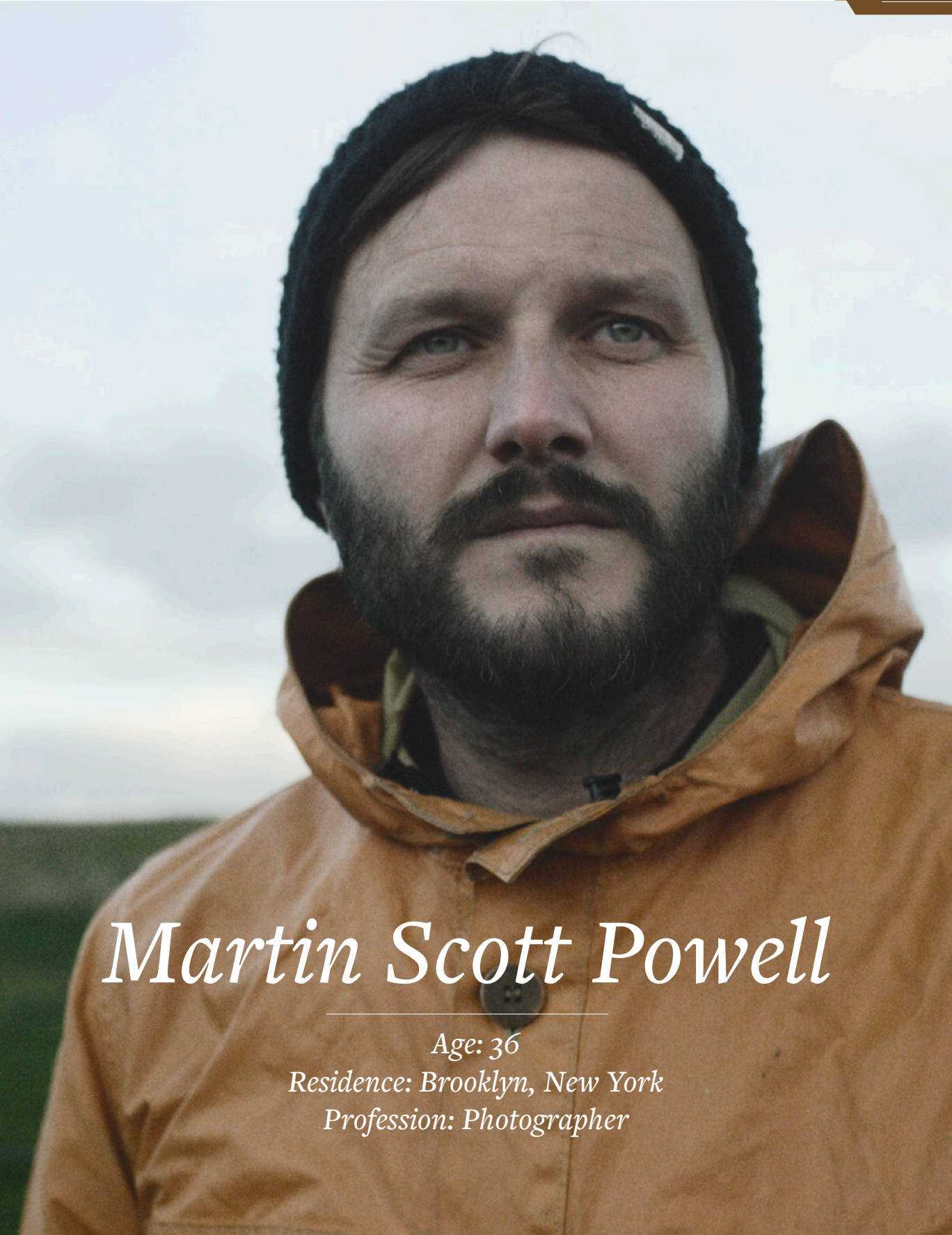
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HISTORY  
HERITAGE &  
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• 2017 •



A portrait of Martin Scott Powell, a man with a beard and a black beanie, wearing an orange jacket. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a cloudy sky.

# *Martin Scott Powell*

*Age: 36*

*Residence: Brooklyn, New York*

*Profession: Photographer*





I was born and raised in a small fishing town called Musselburgh, on the east coast of Scotland. I lived in Edinburgh until I was 28, then moved to New York with my wife.

I was given an SLR camera for my 21st birthday. When I turned 22, I left my early career as a goldsmith and took the opportunity to travel around the world. I quickly found a

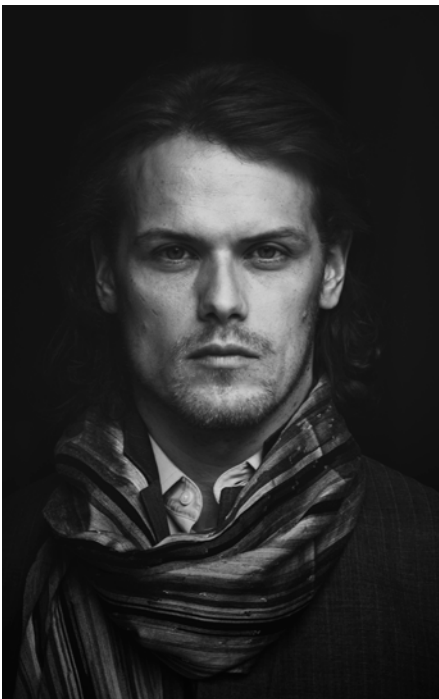
huge passion for photography, as it encouraged me to go out of my way to photograph new places and people. These moments inspired me to return to university to study the medium, with the aim of it becoming a new profession.

I think simplicity and emotion always make for a good photograph. There's not

been a job I have ever done where I've not been sweating beforehand.

Every new project is a challenge involving a combination of creative thinking and problem solving, whether it's an advertising campaign for a brand or an editorial brief from a magazine. Creating a visual narrative from rough ideas and finding the perfect lo-





cation to shoot in can be extremely challenging, especially when it has to happen in a very limited time-frame. All being said, challenges are a great thing and really keep you aiming to produce the best work you can in every situation.

I feel incredibly lucky and grateful to be working in a field that is both a passion and a

profession. This in itself is extremely rewarding. Along with meeting some truly inspiring and interesting individuals, it gives me the opportunity to explore and photograph some of the most beautiful and exciting places on earth; from the Highlands of Scotland, to the streets of Casablanca, to the forests and mountains of Antioquia, Columbia. Every

project is different and I always look forward to what's coming up next.

I'm currently working on a few exciting travel projects which will take me to Chile, France and then back to Scotland. I'm also working on a new business venture with my wife promoting a luxury travel and photographic experience of Scotland.



  
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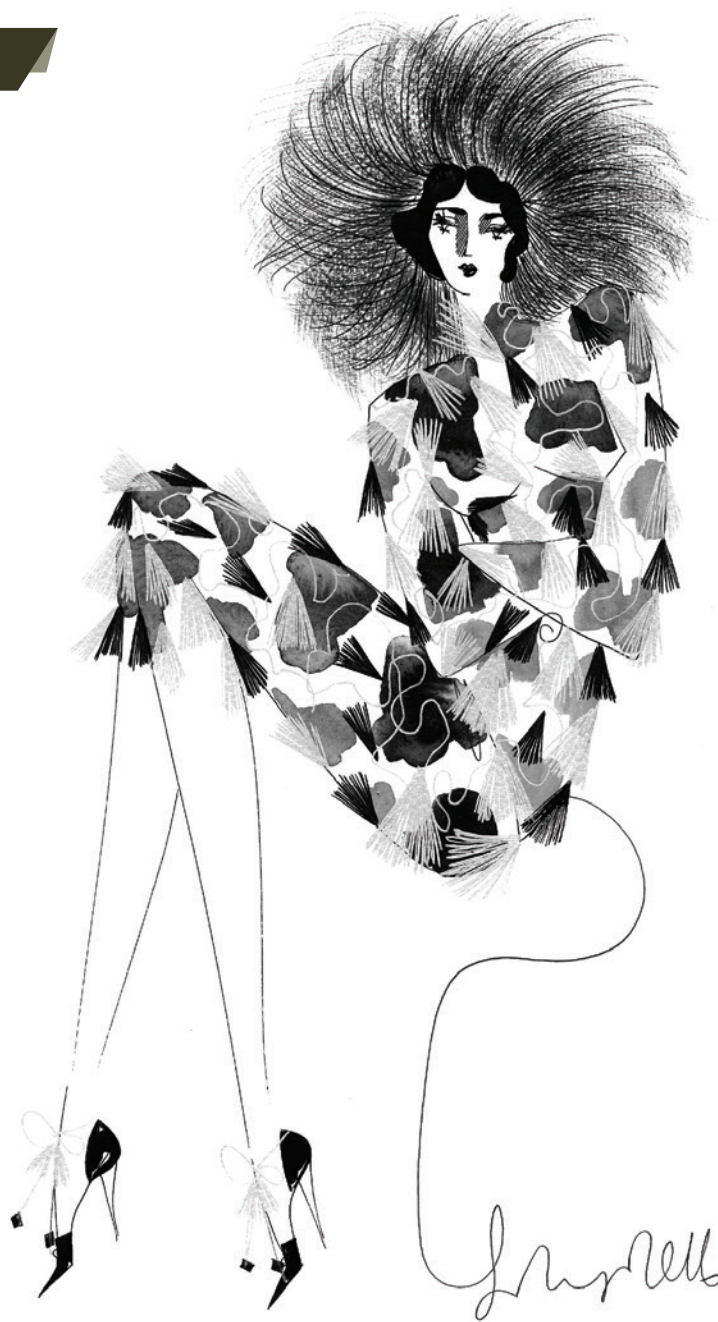




JANE  
RYAN

PROFESSION: **Fashion Illustrator**  
RESIDENCE: **Tipperary, Ireland**





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

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

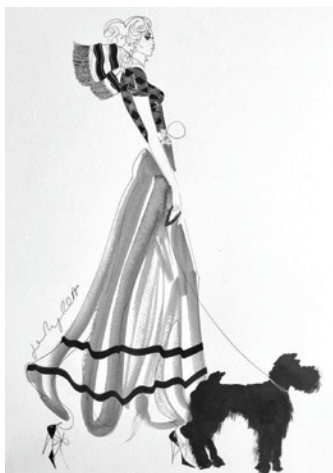
The best thing for me is to be calm and organized. I am always a bit nervous when I start a new sketchpad, but then I just get into it, and when I am relaxed the drawings have more energy and my line is better.

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

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

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

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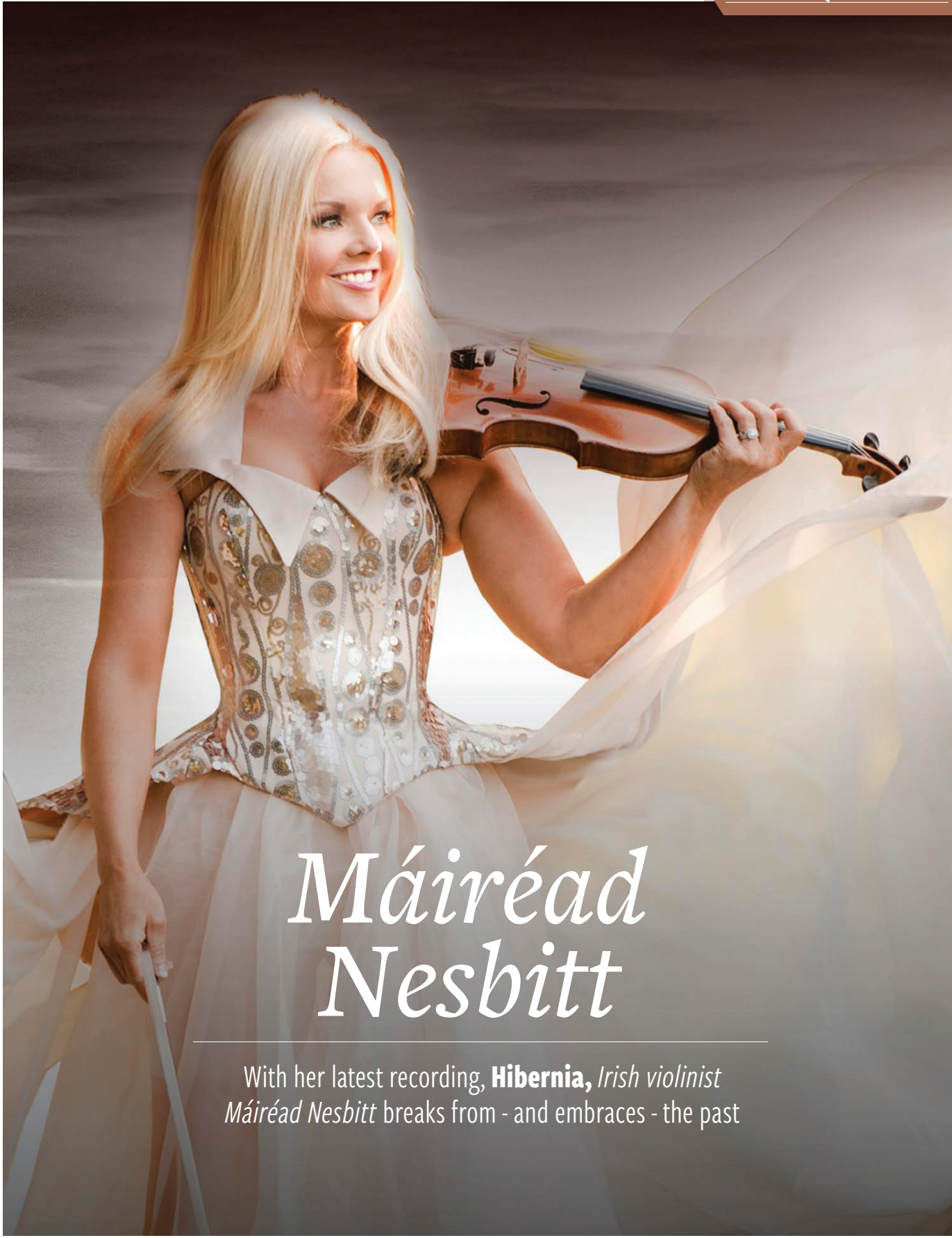
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# Máiréad Nesbitt

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



---

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



**What are your own roots?**

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

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

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

**What inspired the new recording, and why now?**

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

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

**You have some serious accompanists on *Hibernia*.**

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





### **The Orchestra of Ireland makes an appearance also.**

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

### **You are currently working on a family album as well?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **How have you evolved as an artist over time?**

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

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

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

### **Speaking of performances, when do you hit the road?**

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

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

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

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

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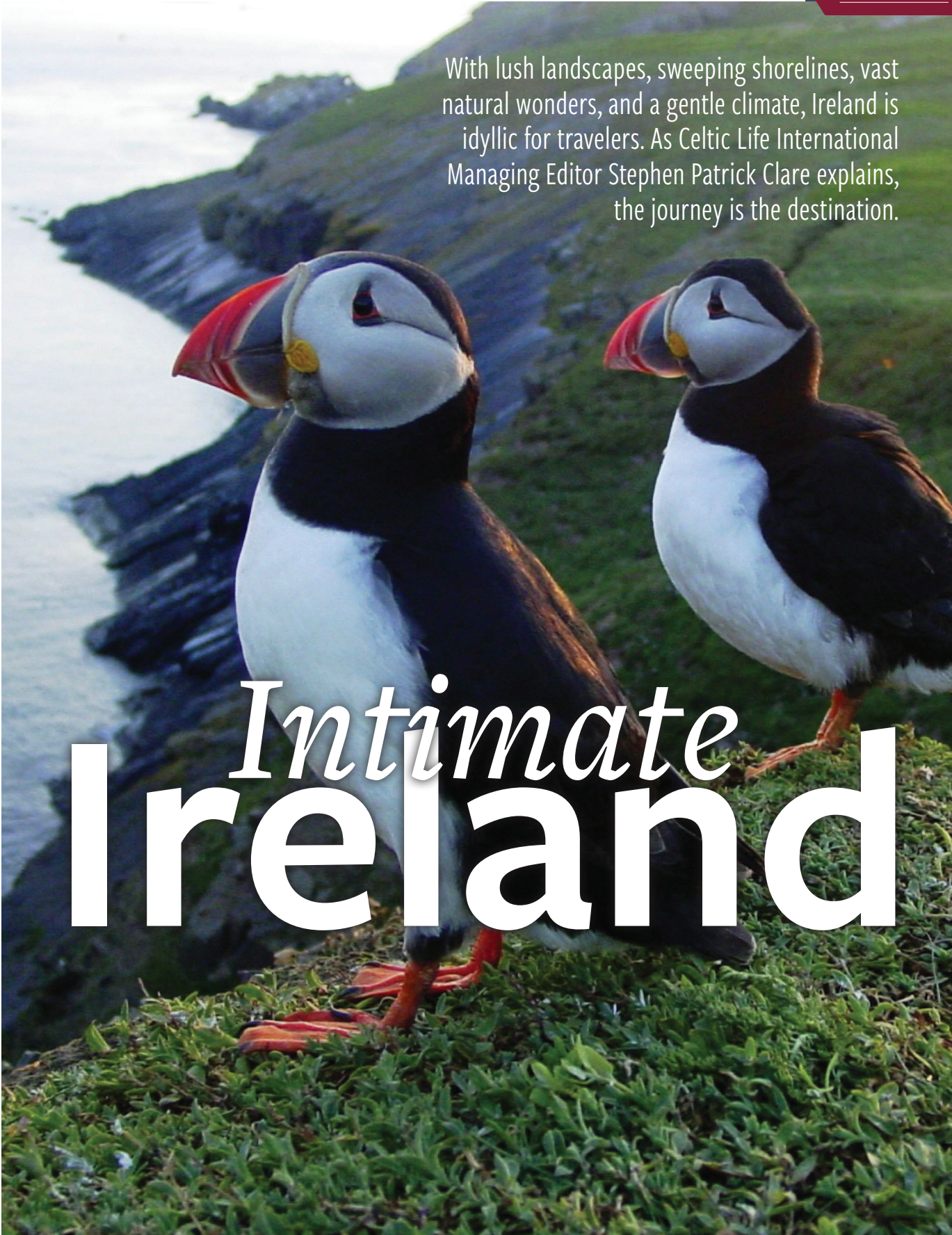
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With lush landscapes, sweeping shorelines, vast natural wonders, and a gentle climate, Ireland is idyllic for travelers. As Celtic Life International Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare explains, the journey is the destination.

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

# *Intimate* Ireland



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

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

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

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

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

## GALWAY (Gaillimh)



Sheena Dignam

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Mellow is good word for Galway," she

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

Where to Stay:

**The House Hotel**

~ [www.thehousehotel.ie](http://www.thehousehotel.ie)

Where to Eat:

**The Kai Café**

~ [www.kaicaferestaurant.com](http://www.kaicaferestaurant.com)

What to Do:

**Galway Food Tours**

~ [www.galwayfoodtours.com](http://www.galwayfoodtours.com)



## CLARE (Chláir)



Kevin Costello

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

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





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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where to Stay:  
**Royal Spa Hotel**  
~ [www.royalspahotel.com](http://www.royalspahotel.com)



Where to Eat:  
**StoneCutters Kitchen**  
~ [www.stonecutterskitchen.com](http://www.stonecutterskitchen.com)

What to Do:  
**Cliffs of Moher**  
~ [www.cliffsofmoher.ie](http://www.cliffsofmoher.ie)



## KERRY (Chiarraí)



Joe Joyce

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

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



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

"Care to discuss the details?" he asks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Here, however, we also recognize the

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

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

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

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

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

Where to Stay:

**Ballygarry House**

~ [www.ballygarryhouse.com](http://www.ballygarryhouse.com)



Where to Eat:

**The Chart House**

~ [www.thecharthousedingle.com](http://www.thecharthousedingle.com)

What to Do:

**Muckross House**

~ [www.muckross-house.ie](http://www.muckross-house.ie)

## CORK (Corcaigh)



Annie Moore

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





the region's motorways and back roads.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where to Stay:  
**Ballymaloe House**  
~ [www.ballymaloe.ie](http://www.ballymaloe.ie)

Where to Eat:  
**Café Paradiso**  
~ [www.paradiso.restaurant](http://www.paradiso.restaurant)

What to Do:  
**Cobh Heritage Centre**  
~ [www.cobhheritage.com](http://www.cobhheritage.com)





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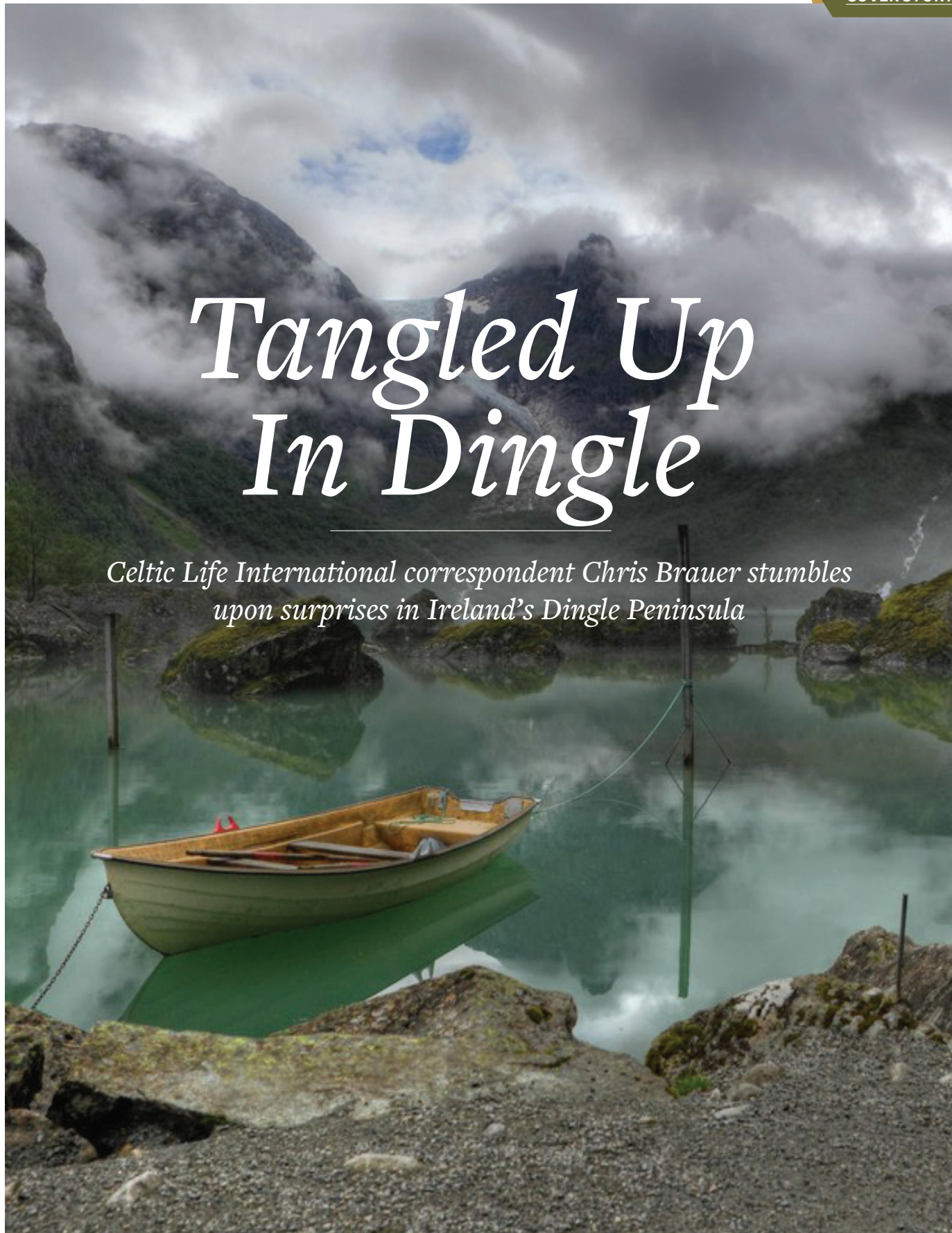
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# *Tangled Up In Dingle*

*Celtic Life International correspondent Chris Brauer stumbles  
upon surprises in Ireland's Dingle Peninsula*





It was days like this one that justified a full Irish breakfast. I had hiked up and down a mountain steeped in thousands of years of pagan and early Christian mythology, and now I was worn out. A large part of me was arguing for a mid-day nap, but after some strong sweet tea I had no choice but to continue to explore the wonders of the Dingle Peninsula. I wanted to find archeological sites beyond the half-dozen that were listed in glossy pamphlets, or pictured on grease-stained fish 'n' chip shop placemats.

While these visitor-friendly, entrance-fee sites are worth multiple visits, I knew I could cross them off eventually. For the afternoon, I wanted to stumble - gracefully or otherwise - on the lesser-known sites. The Dingle Peninsula promised to be an archeological Easter egg hunt, with over two thousand sites found to date, but this meant finding these places with only basic directions. It also meant trekking through mud and muck and possibly fighting off the occasional sheep. And, I would probably get lost along the way.

*I looked out towards the harbour where various fishing boats were bobbing up and down and fishing nets were hung to dry or be repaired.*

I randomly flipped open my guidebook. There was passing mention of some early Christian settlement somewhere in Ventry. By the sounds of it, all I had to do was park by the quarry and head up over the hill. The guidebook didn't give specific directions to the quarry or how far up the hill I needed to go, but I took off to see if I could find it.

Ventry was advertised as having one of the most attractive and safest beaches on the west coast of Ireland. I didn't find the scattered holiday caravans wrapped in tarpaulins for the winter very attractive, and I couldn't comment as to whether the beach was safer than any of the other beaches on the west coast when I parked at the shoreline, but it did seem a nice place to holiday in warmer summer months. Rather than getting out of the car, I drove back up to the main road and found the post office that doubles as the local corner store.

At this point, I could have asked for directions, but that would have been too easy and would have eliminated the element of adventure, so I continued on past the post office and up the road. I found what I thought might be a quarry. There was no signage, and to me it just looked like a big hole, but I thought I would have a look around. There was no obvious place to pull over, so I opted to park the car at an awkward angle in the mud with the back half of it hanging out into the road. It looked like the quarry was on private property, but I jumped the fence and headed up the hill anyway.

I was soon dodging gorse bush and slogging through the soft mud and muck as I slowly ascended the steep embankment. Up and up I went, keeping an eye out for any kind of early Christian settlement, but I couldn't see anything remotely matching that description. Too concerned with my footing, and hoping not to slip and slide all the way back to the car on a muddy rear-end, it was difficult to see where I was heading. I continued on and hoped for the best.

Then I got the strange feeling someone was watching me. This certainly didn't help my fragile state of mind, as I was weighed down by the soft mud and muck and wondering what possessed me to hike up







random hills in western Ireland. I imagined a local farmer's wife as she stood at her kitchen window. I'm sure I made for great entertainment – the 'eejit' tourist making his way to nowhere. She might have called her husband from the sitting room to watch me as I swore under my breath. I imagined them both doubling over with laughter when I stopped in my tracks as half a dozen large animals came running towards me.

I was expecting sheep. I had seen enough sheep during my walks in Ireland to know that sheep were usually docile creatures. We had an understanding: they kept to their business and I kept to mine. But these weren't sheep. I couldn't really make out what these were in my adrenaline-fuelled panic, but they didn't move like sheep. They were a lot larger and a lot faster. As they sped up and came thundering towards me, I realized they were actually wild ponies. Maybe they weren't wild in the sense of undomesticated, but certainly they were wild in the sense of covered in mud.

I didn't know whether to run or continue to stand there, so I chose the latter and hoped for the best. "Please don't trample me," I whispered. "It'll be ages before anyone finds my broken body."

They continued running towards me and I continued to stand there dumbly, doing nothing. I was bracing for impact when, luckily for me, the ponies slowed down when they discovered I wasn't their owner and hadn't come to feed them. They stood there just as confused as I was. Then they all snorted and walked away. Relieved to find myself un-trampled, I made my way further up the hill.

I hiked and hiked and couldn't find a damned thing. I should have come across something – some wedge tomb or fairy fort or Ogham stone – but all I found was gorse bush and soft mud and muck, followed by more of the same. I looked down towards the road and wondered whether I was cut out for random wanderings. With a heavy sigh, I decided to end my fruitless quest. I was tired and cold.

I turned around to take in the view. It was breathtaking.

The setting sun, in purest amber, lit up the farmers' fields in an array of golden greens. The late afternoon light bounced off the wet rocks, and even the muddy ponies had a mythical glow. It was a gentle pastoral scene and, as I felt the wind blow in from the ocean, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace.

I also spied a circular stone enclosure in the middle of a farmer's field down below.

It could have been a Stone Age fort or an early Christian settlement – it didn't really matter. Whatever it was, it was something more than gorse bush and mud and muck and wild ponies. And it warranted a quick peek – if carefully making my way back to the car, driving further down the narrow country road, finding some sort of parking, jumping a fence, and running across a field where all sorts of wild animals may be waiting could be considered a 'quick peek'. But something pulled me towards it. I was still thirsty for adventure. And this looked relatively easy to find. History, I thought as I tenderly made my way back down, is about stumbling. Stumbling is about discovery, and it is discovery that makes history truly come alive.





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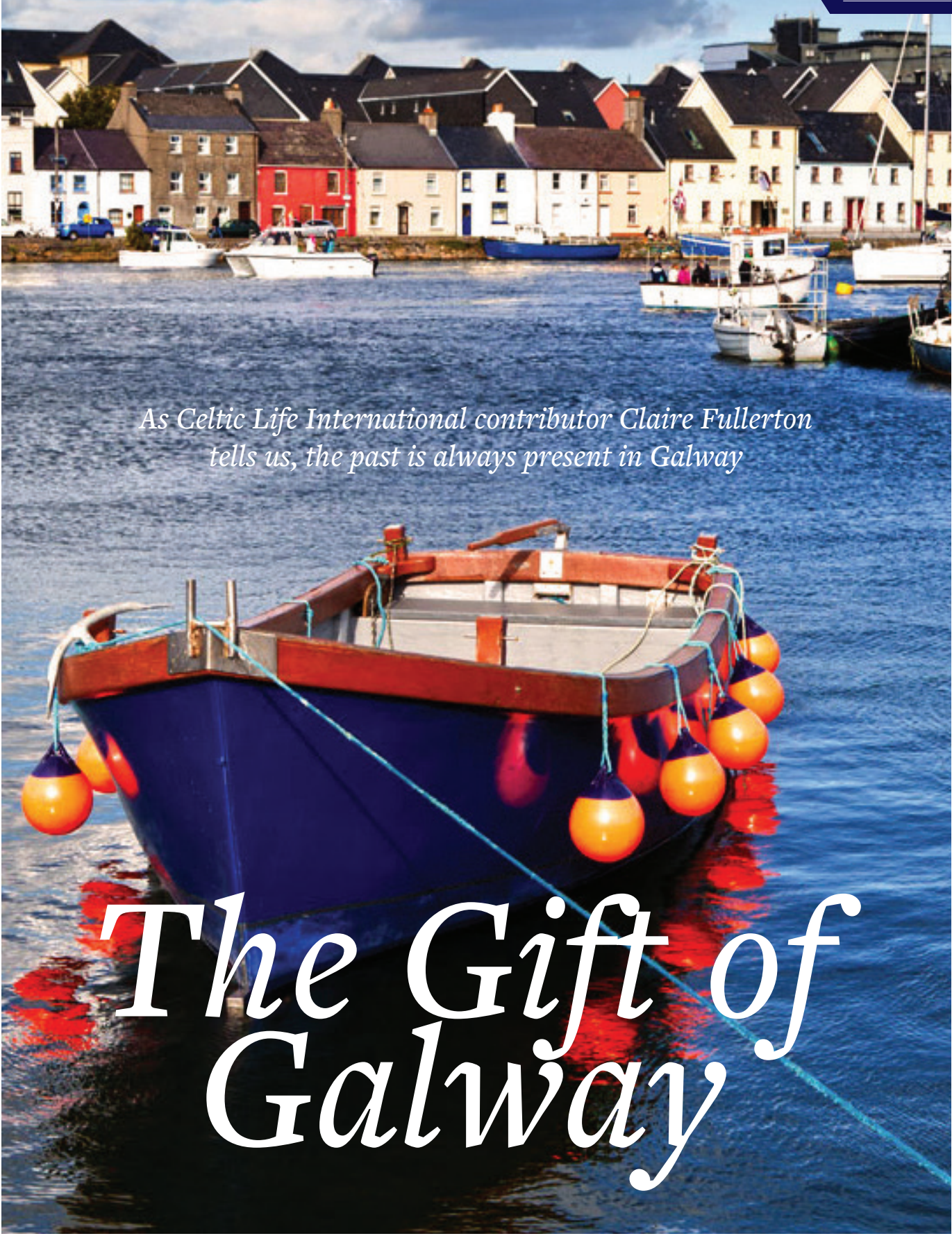
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*As Celtic Life International contributor Claire Fullerton  
tells us, the past is always present in Galway*

# *The Gift of Galway*





Even on the best of days, when the weather is temperate and the soft sky is cloudless, Galway City has a worn, secondhand feel to it: an historic, pensive, erudite quality that is present everywhere you roam down its serpentine streets.

But there's also an energetic undercurrent to Galway that seems to thrive on the idea of opposites, which lends the atmosphere a certain air of unpredictability. In many ways, Galway seems like a lively college town, bordered on one side by the dark gray patina of Galway Cathedral, and the ever turbulent River Corrib on the other, which flows straight to Galway Bay on its way through the Claddagh. It's an indefinable, mood-setting, soul-stirring town with a split personality; it is vividly animated by its youthful culture, yet deeply haunted by its storied past.

To Debra Wallace, who was born and reared in Letterfrack, 50 miles north in rural Connemara, Galway was the pinnacle of urban grandeur. At the age of 27, she'd blown into town carrying her dreams and her guitar to set up house in a two-story rental, on the edge of lower Galway's Henry Street. She was an accomplished musician with a whiskey-edged singing voice, and her dreams involved joining Galway's vibrant music scene.

The second I met her, I thought she embodied everything it meant to be Irish: she was big eyed, russet-haired, quick-witted, nobody's fool, howlingly funny, and spiritually attuned. She gave our friendship no probation period when we first met at The Galway Music Centre, for there was nothing suspicious or cynical about her, though she was disarmingly shrewd. Upon learning that I am an American, she put her

hand on her hip, narrowed her eyes to a slit, and give me the once over. Then she set her guitar case down and invited me to call out to her house for a cup of tea.

I had no idea what to expect as I made my way to Debra's blue-painted door. It rose up from the sidewalk, sandwiched in a row of matching gray structures, each with a pitched roof emitting turf smoke that permeated the residential area in an aroma so redolent it made my eyes water. I rapped thrice on the door, and it swung wide immediately.

Stepping onto the uneven cobbled brick floor, it took a minute for my eyes to adjust in the shadowy room, for it had only one window and it seemed the haphazardly arranged turf in the fireplace had reached its crescendo and now glowed in a burnt orange aftermath. The heat in the small room was stifling. I took off my raincoat and made to set it aside on the folded futon against the wall, just as I brought the four chairs before it into focus, where three figures looked up at me expectantly. Debra lowered herself onto the fourth chair and motioned for me to take the futon as a voice disrupted the damp air.

"Well, you weren't telling a tale about that blonde hair of hers, God bless it; must have taken ages to grow," the voice said.

"Claire, this is my mother; Da sits there, and this is my sister Brenda," Debra introduced, handing me a cup of tea.

"Nice to meet you," I said. It was then I recognized where Debra had acquired her penchant for the once over, for all three Wallace's studied me head to foot.

"You're an American," Mr. Wallace stated. He was short and stout and leaned forward in his chair, with his hands on his knees and his





steady stare beaming beneath his tweed flat cap.

"Yes, I'm from Memphis, Tennessee," I confirmed.

"Ah, Elvis and all that," Mrs. Wallace said, who looked to be, in tandem with her husband, the second installment of a pair of square, blue-eyed bookends.

*"That's right," I said, searching for a way to escape their scrutiny. I knew I could turn the tables if I could use the standard Irish conversational stand-by. "It looks like it'll rain any minute."*

"It does, yah," replied Mr. Wallace. "We brought the weather with us all the way from Letterfrack, so we did. If you haven't been there, you should come see us. It's God's country up there; not much chance for the young ones to run the streets."

"That's why I moved here," Debra said with a wink.

"Speaking of streets, we should get going," Breda said. "We've only come to town for the one day."

We all stood simultaneously, making our farewells, and after Debra closed the door behind her family, she asked me if I wanted to accompany her to the epicenter of Galway City - an area known as Eyre Square.

"There's a card reader up there, her name is Harriet," she said. "As long as you're one of us now, I think you should see her."

"Don't you have to make an appointment?" I asked.

"For what?" Debra said. "Don't be so American. Let's just walk up the road and call out."

What could have been a 10-minute walk up Shop Street took 45 minutes, for such is the nature of Galway. There is no way to set out from point A to point B within the confines of scheduled time because there are too many people milling around, everybody knows everybody, and it is a crime against Irish society not to stop and chat to the point of exhaustion. I stood idly by as Debra engaged in Irish banter time and again, which is to say that each exchange felt like joining a running joke that had been going on for a while, and we had simply stumbled into its midst. It is a game of wit-topping one-upmanship, this business of Irish banter, and as we made our way to Eyre Square, I was starting to catch the rhythm.

Two heavy wooden doors led the way into the back of an atrium on the north side of Eyre Square. Debra heaved the doors apart and ushered me inside to where a canvas marquee had a chalkboard before it, which read, "Readings with Harriet: 12 Euros."

What happened next is another story.

But the thing about that day is that it was exemplary of the spirit of Galway, where and when anything can and does happen. This wasn't the first or last time that I'd slid into the day here, thinking it would go one way only to discover it had segued into quite another; there's an energy to Galway that will catch the unsuspecting unaware. It emanates from the dichotomy of its nature, its marriage of opposites, its union of past and present, and at its foundation are the fluid Irish people, who know a thing or two about embracing the flow.





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# Cavan Burren Park

*As Celtic Life International contributor Melanie Ward tells us, time stands still at Cavan Burren Park in Eire's northern midlands*





**H**ere in the borderland of West Cavan, on a limestone plateau facing Cuilcagh Mountain, stand a number of pre-historic monuments that were constructed by the first inhabitants of the area thousands of years ago.

From this place, the view is almost limitless - at the highest point seven counties are visible; Cavan, Fermanagh, Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Roscommon and Monaghan. On a good day, it's even possible to see as far as Armagh.

To the west, across Lough MacNea and beyond Sligo's twin peaks of Ben Bulbin and Ox Mountain, lies the Atlantic coast of Ireland. From the Burren, the eye may trace the route by which the first settlers to the area made their way here from the ocean and along the Lough.

In the midst of all this space, the panoramic views of the border counties, the breathtaking scenery of mountains and lakes, one can feel quite alone and far removed from the hustle and bustle of everyday life - you won't see a car or a highway, however you may notice a solitary farmstead, and a few cattle or grazing sheep.

Though quickly becoming recognized as one of the most archaeologically significant sites in Ireland due to the number and variety of its prehistoric monuments, Cavan Burren Park remains a relatively undiscovered gem. Here the sustainable tourism ethos 'take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints' reigns supreme.

There are no coach parks here, no long queues to view the monuments, and no overpriced cafeterias. There is a picnic area, and an unmanned interpretive centre that tells the story of the Burren from its formation during the Ice Age. It is left to the visitor to experience the Burren first hand and close up through a series of marked trails that lead through breathtaking scenery, past enigmatic monuments constructed before recorded history commenced and signposts that draw attention to its key features.

The story of the Burren begins millions of years ago, during the Carboniferous period, when this remote corner of Ireland lay closer to the equator and formed part of a shallow tropical sea - some of the monuments bear traces of fossilized coral and marine life.

Around 13,000 years ago, following the last Ice Age, a number of huge sandstone boulders were left on the Burren as the glaciers melted

and the water receded. Known as 'glacial erratics', these stones and rocks differ in size and type from the local bedrock, and were to be used by the earliest inhabitants to construct tombs and monuments.

Humans are relatively recent to the Burren, with the first settlers arriving some 5,000 years ago. It is likely that they arrived via the Atlantic, travelling along the lake systems to settle in this upland area, which at that time was rich in hazel, juniper and that most valuable of prehistoric materials, karst.

It is thought that these first settlers were fisher-gatherers, subsisting on hazelnuts and berries that they foraged, and salmon that they fished from nearby rivers. Karst is a type of flint, and would have been useful for fashioning tools with which to break stones, chop wood, and hunt animals, whose skin they would have then used for clothing and constructing shelters and boats.

The glacial erratics that stud the landscape of the Burren probably had massive significance to the early settlers, who would have had a religious or spiritual feel for natural phenomena. It is likely that they modified these huge stones to construct prototype tombs, and the Boulder Grave at the Burren is the first one of its kind found in Ireland. It is considered to be of international significance, as it demonstrates a historical transition between natural monuments (the glacial erratics) and the built monuments of the megalithic period.

It is hard to imagine now, but in prehistoric times the Burren would have been a thriving industrial area. Karst quarries enabled the development of a new form of technology, tools used to clear forestry and enable agriculture - the cultivation of crops and husbandry of animals - to begin. Over hundreds of years, prehistoric society began to change in light of these technological advances, and this is reflected in the changing nature of the tombs people constructed to honour their dead.

No longer content to modify the natural features of the landscape around them, prehistoric people sought to leave their mark on the landscape with a variety of constructed monuments.

Cavan Burren Park contains a number of these shrines, which can be found by following the walking trails throughout the park.





### The Tullygobban Wedge Tomb

Tullygobban is named after the Gobán Saor - the Master Craftsman of Irish Mythology. The Gobán Saor is said to have arranged the glacial erratics in this area and built all of the tombs. His wife is buried in the wedge tomb on Tullygobban Hill (the Lady's Grave) while their child is buried in the nearby cairn (the Child's Grave). Close to here is Tullygobban Lough, which - according to local folklore - is the home of a magical water horse. The fairies (or 'little people') were believed to ride this horse, which was able to travel on land and over and under water.



### The Calf House Dolmen

This impressive neolithic monument is a fine example of a portal tomb. Originally three standing tombs topped with a larger horizontal capstone, at some point in time it partially collapsed, giving the Dolmen a triangular shape. It was then used as an animal shelter (hence the name!) by more recent farmers. The word Dolmen derives from the Breton word meaning stone table, and in the past Dolmens were considered to be Druid's Altars, and perhaps - many thousands of years ago - Druidical rites were performed here. In the twenty-first century we can only marvel at the ability of prehistoric builders to raise the massive capstones without the aid of machinery.



### Fionn's Fist

Close to the Calf House is a glacial erratic boulder. Fist-shaped, the stone takes its name from the legendary giant of Ulster, Fionn MacCool.



### Giant's Grave

Standing on a spectacular site facing Cuilcagh Mountain, the Giant's Grave is a fine example of a wedge tomb that probably dates back to the Bronze Age (2000-3000 BC). Called wedge tombs because of the way in which the main chamber decreases in height and width from the front (thus forming a wedge), the Giant's Grave contains two chambers - a Portico and a Gallery (or main chamber). Local folklore tells of two giants - Lug and Lag - who were competing for the affections of a female. They undertook various acts of bravado to impress her, culminating in a leap across a nearby valley. They did this easily, and Lag thought he might impress the lady further by leaping across backwards, sadly falling to his death in the attempt. It is Lag who is said to be buried here - what happened to Lug and the lady is a mystery. The area in which the contest took place is still known as the Giant's Leap.



### Promontory Fort

Thirty metres at its widest point and sub-rectangular in shape, the fort probably dates back to the Iron Age (500BC - 400AD). Its elevated position and views across the surrounding countryside would have offered its inhabitants protection from attack, while keeping their ancestral tombs in view.

### The Boulder Grave

Situated on a sheet of rock that looks towards the fort, the Boulder Grave is a glacial erratic that was modified by our neolithic ancestors, who carved out a part of its pedestal to create

a chamber underneath. This sacred space is fully illuminated by the rising sun at the summer and winter solstices. The Boulder Grave is decorated with Atlantic Rock Art - curious 'cup and ring' markings which may allude to some form of sun worship, found in many Celtic regions along the Atlantic seaboard.



These are just a few of the many remarkable monuments that Cavan Burren Park is home to. In the mid twentieth century the area was planted with forestry, which made access to the monuments difficult. Ironically, this lack of access may have ensured their preservation. Now that the area is gradually being cleared of forestry, the Park is slowly revealing more of its secrets and mysteries. In the summer of 2016, fragments of human bone were discovered which were found to be over 4000 years old. Who knows what else may lie within this bewitching landscape, waiting to be discovered?

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# *Ulster Bound*

Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and surfer  
Lesley Choyce revisits Northern Ireland's stunning six counties





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**M**y first visit to Northern Ireland was back in the 1980s. It was a foolish North American's notion of an all-too-quick circuitous tour of the island: get off the ferry from Wales in Dun Laoghaire, drive south and west to the Ring of Kerry, then north to Galway and Sligo and into Ulster to Enniskillen and Londonderry, and then off the island at Larne on to Scotland.

I was stopped and questioned by English soldiers with machine guns while crossing from the south into the north. They looked to be pimply teenagers with guns and they smiled a lot and commented on my "funny" accent. But there was nothing fun or funny about what Northern Ireland was going through in those days.

I remember green, green hills alongside inhospitable-looking towns, with barbed-wire fences around the police stations, phone companies and public buildings. There was such a stark contrast be-

*The dark skies of the past were mostly gone. What I saw was a sunny, friendly part of the world, well worth the trip.*

I noticed not long ago that a fellow traveller had asked TripAdvisor if it was still a (political) problem to wear green, yellow or orange while visiting there. The consensus reply was decidedly no, with one writer suggesting, "Might be a risk of being laughed at in public if your outfit contains all 3, maybe."

My wife, Linda, and I were less concerned with our wardrobe, and more keen on hiking the green hills and mossy forest gullies, finding some rental wetsuits (black, of course) for boogie boarding on the north coast, and toasting to our lucky lives in a friendly pub or two



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tween the idyllic countryside and the impoverished sections of Londonderry that I wondered how such a thing could possibly be...until I remembered what I knew of the long strife-ridden history of this unlucky place.

However, when I returned to Northern Ireland in 2011, it was a completely transformed place. Remnants of the Troubles still existed here and there, including a billboard promoting reuniting the North with Ireland, and random political graffiti on the brick walls in towns. But most of what we saw was very different from the old days.

along the way. And I am pleased to report that, on the drive north from Dublin, I kept looking for some sign to tell us when we were entering the North. But I never saw it.

I keep a keen eye out for such things, and usually have a habit of saying something foolish and obvious like, "So, we're now in Northern Ireland." But I never got my chance. Either I missed it or it wasn't there – and neither was the British military guarding the invisible border. We were well past Newry, and on our way to Banbridge, before I realized we had left the Republic of Ireland.



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We had rented a small cottage in the village of Breen, not far from Ballycastle, and had some serious exploring to do. A 514-metre-high mountain named Knocklayd, with its head planted firmly in the clouds, presented itself across the road beyond a pasture of sheep that looked like they had been mud wrestling. I found the sheep and the mountain most welcoming as we settled into our cottage, lighting the first peat fire of the stay.

*The sweet pungent smell of the burning turf added just the right ambience to our arrival.*

Our goal was to explore as much of the northern coast here as possible, so the next day we set out on the B 15 towards Ballintoy. Along the way was the famous Carrick-a-rede rope bridge. Some time in the

ing sea, she decided to let him be her guardian angel on the bouncy trip back as well. Later, it occurred to us that her encounter with such a kind and helpful young immigrant from a once-ravaged land was a good omen for the future of the (then) hopeful European Union.

After a hike on the big beach at White Park Bay in Ballintoy, we continued west, inevitably finding ourselves pulling into the parking lot at the world-famous Bushmills Distillery. The tour busses had apparently discovered the place before us and - with some of my typical trepidation about such places - we ambled into the gift shop and cafeteria to split some fish and chips and Guinness Pie. I found myself thinking, how clever of the Irish to come up with a way to have a pint while eating and not even have to sip from a glass. If you want to try this at home, campers, note the advice from the website, [epicurious.com](http://epicurious.com), that states, "Irish stouts produce a thick head when poured, so



eighteenth century, locals built the original version of this bridge over the deep chasm that separates Carrick Island from the mainland. The modern-day walkway is still narrow and scary for anyone afraid of heights, as it sways and wobbles from the wind and the tromping of others on the narrow wood planking.

Linda found it daunting and decided to hang back while I bounded across to the island. When she saw me waving from the other side, however, she allowed one of the on-site guides, a young Polish man named Adam, to "talk" her across. After we walked around the craggy rocks and peered down from the heights at the jagged cliffs and surg-

chill the can or bottle well before measuring to reduce the foam."

I was anxious to get back to nature and away from the hungry (and thirsty) hordes of the cafeteria, so I didn't allow us to dawdle in the gift shop with its seemingly infinite supply of whiskey bottles and trinkets. And not being a real whiskey aficionado, I couldn't help but wonder, what really could be the difference between a 15 Euro bottle of the regular Irish whiskey and an 80 Euro bottle that looked exactly the same? But that's just me.

Well fortified by the beer pie, we made our way to Portrush, a prime Northern Ireland surfing destination. Sure enough there were



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waves and surfers and we planned to return to get wet and banged around by the waves before the week was out.

I recall that we ended a number of our travel days in Armoy, not far from our den in Breen, at a little pub named McClafferty's Bar. We liked it very much because there was a very friendly, but high-strung, little dog there that would greet us nervously as we entered and kept us company in our booth as we deconstructed our day. McClafferty's is much like many local pubs, we observed. Nothing special or fancy about it: old 1960s-style luan-wood panelling on the walls, and a scuffed linoleum floor with a bar that looked like you might find in your uncle's basement. It made me ponder the irony that so many "authentic" North American Irish pubs look nothing like this at all. Instead they are all so classic looking in the way that we in Canada or the USA think an Irish pub should look like. Nonetheless, McClafferty's allowed dogs, the Guinness was on tap, and it didn't have the air of snootiness I had detected in the more famous and touristy pubs of Ballycastle. So it was our pub for the week.

The town of Armoy began as a monastery founded by none other than Saint Patrick in the fifth century.

*Based on my limited knowledge of Irish history, and various travels around Ireland to locations where St. Pat started one thing or another, I'd say that he was a very busy man in his relatively short tenure on the Emerald Isle.*

And thanks to a garrulous patron in McClafferty's, who mistakenly thought we were Americans, it turns out the St. Patrick's Day - an annual event that at least once got me into some trouble - commemorates the day Patrick died, since no one knows on what day he was born.

A rainy day meant a road trip to Derry and a walk around the top of the city walls built between 1613 and 1618. Obviously the city has spread well beyond those seventeenth century walls, but it seems that here was the "last remaining walled city in Ireland." And the rainy walk was pretty grand I admit, and well worth the journey to what was once called Londonderry. It was a great way to view the architecture from a height and ponder the gloomy past of this place. As we left through

one of the old city gates, we found ourselves wandering out and into a vast modern indoor shopping mall, where all the stores sold much-too-familiar brand names. It looked so much like the shopping malls of New Jersey that I started looking for an exit within minutes.

A guidebook had exhorted that we have lunch at a place called Badgers. Stuthediver on TripAdvisor reports thus: "Just been to Derry with 30 other blokes and basically camped in the Badgers," intimating that he much liked the place and recommended it. We didn't choose to camp there, but did have a lunch of leek and potato soup, smoked haddock and blackened salmon.

We got lost trying to find our way out of the city and had a chance to see some of the seedier parts of town, with the graffiti reminding us that there were still some pretty hard grudges hanging around town and that some fragments of the dark days were still alive in Derry. Stopping to ask for directions, we came across a monument that turned out to be The Bloody Sunday Memorial, which Lonely Planet describes as, "a simple granite obelisk that commemorates the 14 civilians who were shot dead by the British Army on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972." The lyrics from the U2 song suddenly rushed into my head. "How long must we sing this song?" I silently sang as we got back in the car and headed out of town.

The next day, we booted it back to Whiterocks Beach outside Portrush to rent boogie boards and damp wetsuits from a guy named Declan in a van who said we should give him our car keys while we hit the waves.

*The wetsuits were a bit leaky, the boards a bit battered, and the water was damn cold, but we had a fine time bouncing around on the waves clearing the cobwebs from our heads.*

Our car was still there when we returned, and Declan claimed he had taken it out for a spin to get coffee while we were gone, but I think he was just having us on.

The Giant's Causeway was on our route home so we joined the throngs for a walk out onto the really cool basalt columns, unlike any geological formation I'd ever seen. The Causeway was the result of







volcanic activity some fifty million years ago and, today is a world heritage site.

Legend is often more interesting than science, so if you prefer, the origin of the causeway was this; Finn MacCool was an Irish giant who was challenged to a fight by a Scottish giant named Benandonner. (Presumably this is what giants did in the old days for fun.) Finn took up the challenge and built the rocky road to Scotland so the two could have a good bout. What we have left today is a remnant of the bridge.

It was certainly crowded, but everyone, young and old, seemed cheerful as they wandered about tripping over chunks of jutting basalt. Children from many different nations could be seen climbing out onto the most challenging ledges, as their parents screamed at them in various languages, urging them not to fall into the beckoning blue-green sea below.

We chased around a number of backroads looking for a place called The Dark Hedges, a beautiful and spooky formation of beech trees that forms a canopy over Bregagh Road.

Apparently this is one of the most photographed locations in Northern Ireland, and sometime after our visit it was featured in *Game of Thrones*. We missed the proper turn-off several times, as there were no signs anywhere guiding us -both indications that this was a worthy destination. We were not disappointed when we finally found it and enjoyed wandering beneath the giant trees, first planted by James Stuart in the eighteenth century to impress visitors wending their way to his estate. There are reports of a grey lady ghost wandering around the neighbourhood but she did not present herself on the sunny afternoon when we made our visit.

*We often base our travels abroad around sea and sky, involving both coastal and mountain hikes.*

We failed to find our way to the top of Knocklayd, as there seems to be no public path, and our final attempt only led us to an abandoned quarry with a big “No Trespassing” sign, the only one I saw on our trip. So instead, we drove east along a charming backroad from Ballyvoy to

Cushendun. It was more of a paved footpath really, lending itself to some most creative driving when passing an oncoming car. It took us through some of the finest countryside in the Celtic world, leading us to Torr Head with its spectacular views from the headland there looking off toward Scotland’s Mull of Kintyre.

South of Cushendun is Glenariff Forest Park, with some wonderful hiking trails and luxurious fern undergrowth - a true ‘Irish Spring’ type place. Upon returning to our roost in Breen, we realized we had ranged far and wide but failed to spend much time in our immediate neighbourhood. Why is it that when we travel, sometimes, we miss some of the best things that are nearly under our noses in favour of trekking off to distant sites?

Certainly, there were more sheep than people in Breen, which is not a bad thing in my book, but we had met no neighbours to point us towards any local highlights. So we drove slowly around the immediate countryside looking for clues as to what we should explore. I finally spotted the sign for Breen Oakwood Nature Reserve, which proved to be an amazing find.

Here was a classic Irish gully, filled with ferns and mosses and pure clean water oozing out of rocks. As [discovernorthernireland.com](http://discovernorthernireland.com) observes, “In spring and summer the boggy pools and damp gullies are a heaven for newts and dragonflies, and bluebells and wood anemones are among the woodland flowers.” And it was, to our great luck, spring.

If you do, in fact, have a hankering to be with newts, dragonflies and bluebells, Breen is where you want to be. More than that, hiking through that gully made me feel the presence of something profound that probably can’t be encountered in the Bushmills Distillery, a Ballycastle pub, or at the famous Badger’s in Derry. Here was a quiet green sanctuary of peace and tranquility, with a soundtrack of soft breezes in the oak and birch trees. Water trickles from miniature waterfalls, and tiny birds flit from rowan to hazel to hawthorn. And, when a dragonfly the size of a model airplane chooses to hover in front of your face to inspect you and dips a nod of approval, you realize that you have discovered one of the many small, unsung sacred places within Ulster’s stunning six counties.



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# Dublin Lawyer

**F**resh lobster baked with cream and Irish whiskey, Dublin Lawyer is a decadent and delectable dish which is thought to be at least two centuries old. Though no one is certain where the name originates, locals still insist that it's probably as solicitors in Eire's capital city were wealthy and full of whiskey! Though fit for the elite, the meal can be enjoyed by all as it remains simple, quick and easy to make. For best results, make sure the seafood is fresh, and remember to keep both halves of the shell for serving.



## Ingredients

2 fresh lobsters,  
cut in two, lengthwise,  
down the center

1 cup cream

6 heaped tbsp. butter

½ cup Irish whiskey

Salt and pepper

2 tsp. lemon juice

## Instructions

Remove the meat from the tail and claws of the lobster, and cut into chunks. Heat the butter, but do not let it brown. Toss the lobster meat in the hot butter over medium heat for a few minutes until cooked. Take care that the butter does not burn. Pour whiskey into the corner of the pan, heat briefly, and ignite, shaking the pan gently until the flames subside. Blend in cream, lemon juice, seasonings, pan juices, and let it heat gently - do not let it boil. Put back in the half shells and serve hot on a platter topped with watercress or a green.

Crab is excellent served the same way, but it must be cooked first. All shellfish should be cooked in cold sea water, or salted water, brought to a boil. The fish becomes faint and does not struggle, resulting in a more tender meat. Try it alongside a crisp salad and freshly baked bread or rolls.

*Ith do shàth! Cabrini* P.S: I would like to invite all readers to send me their favourite recipes, and their favourite memories that go with them. Please send to: [cabrini@celticlife.ca](mailto:cabrini@celticlife.ca)





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# Recognizing Royal Brackla



with **Andrew Ferguson**



Obscured by trees and hedgerows, almost hidden in the verdant farmland to the east of Inverness, Royal Brackla is a distillery that even the most veteran of whisky connoisseurs are likely not to be familiar with.

Curious, as the vast majority of whisky produced there goes into Dewars and other mainstream blends. The distiller's owners, Bacardi, have had a ten-year-old single malt on the market since 2004, but I don't recall ever seeing it. Even independent bottlings of the whisky were rare. It was only in 2015 that the Royal Brackla was finally given its due by Bacardi: Brackla was rolled out alongside Craigellachie, Aberfeldy, Aultmore and Macduff (The Deveron), as part of the "Last Great Malts of Scotland" promotion.

Brackla is among the oldest distilleries in Scotland, founded in 1812 by Captain William Fraser of Brackla House on the Cawdor Castle Estate. King William IV of Britain selected the whisky for his court and bestowed the facility with the honour "The Royal" in 1833. It was the first of only three distilleries to ever be given such an honour.

The distillery operated under a number of owners until it fell beneath the umbrella of Scottish Malt Distillers in 1943. An airstrip, portions of which survive in the neighbouring field to this day, was built next to the distillery in 1940 to "provide a landing ground for operational training and aerial gunnery." Between 1943 and 1945, the distillery was closed due to the rationing of grain for the war effort.

Between 1964 and 1966, Royal Brackla was closed again to undergo major refurbishments. The open still-house is similar to that of many that were built or rebuilt in the 1960s, at the beginning of the second major Scotch whisky boom. The floor maltings were closed, and the distillery switched from direct firing of the stills with coal to steam-generated internal heating. The capacity was also doubled with the addition of two new stills. Royal Brackla carried on until 1985 when the boom faded.

Brackla slowly came back to life in 1991 as demand for whisky began to pick up again. It underwent further refurbishment in 1997, modernizing the distillery's production. That same year, Grand Metropolitan and Guinness merged to form Diageo, the world's largest drinks company. Diageo soon controlled nearly half of all whisky production in Scotland, and the anti-trust authorities were not impressed. Diageo was forced to put John Dewar & Sons - which consisted of four of the five aforementioned distilleries - up for sale. More than twenty firms bid on the purchase, and Bacardi came out on top in 1998 with a bid of £1.15 billion!

I visited Royal Brackla for the first time in 2016: though I was aware of it, the distillery really wasn't on my radar until the "Last Great Malts of Scotland" promotion. From a vantage on the cooling pond in front of the still house on a sunny day, I discovered Brackla to be one of the most beautiful distilleries in Scotland. Framed by bucolic fields on the left, and the last remaining old-stone buildings on its right, it left an impression on me, and the new whiskies have not disappointed.

**Royal Brackla 12 Year** Finished in Oloroso sherry casks, the whisky is creamy and oily with chocolate orange and vanilla cream. **\$100**

**Royal Brackla 16 Year** Finished in Oloroso sherry casks, the whisky is spicy, herbaceous and sweet with loads of honey and a faint touch of smoke. **\$148**

**Royal Brackla 21 Year** It has not yet arrived in North America, but it is worth seeking out. The whisky was matured predominantly in sherry casks, and is oily with notes of cold tea, berry fruits and chocolate. **£150UK**

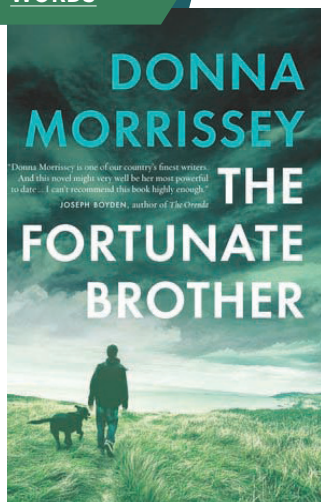
## If you go...

The fertile farmland to the east of Inverness is full of attractions - perhaps none finer than the visitor center at Culloden Battle Field. On April 16, 1746, the final Jacobite rebellion came to an abrupt and brutal end on Culloden Moor, six miles outside of Inverness. The famed Highland charge had won the Jacobites a string of upsets against the Red Coats during the preceding two years. But, on the open moorland of Culloden against the superior firepower of the English forces, the Highlanders were cut to pieces. An estimated 2,000 Scots fell dead or wounded on that day, to the government's loss of around 300. It would be the last pitched battle fought on British soil.

Eight miles further east of the Culloden Battle Field is Cawdor Castle, another popular area attraction. Though linked by Shakespeare to Macbeth, the tower house around which the castle was built dates from the 15th century, three hundred years after the rule of the historic King. The rest of the castle was built in stages over the following centuries. Today it is mainly famed for its gardens.

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## The Fortunate Brother

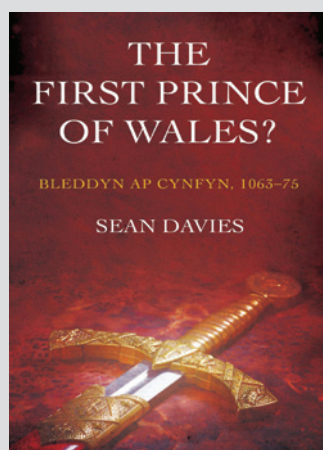
By Donna Morrissey  
Random House / 272 pp / \$24.95

One of Canada's finest writers, Donna Morrissey, returns with her sixth full-length narrative *The Fortunate Brother*. Though she now resides and works in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Morrissey draws upon her rural Newfoundland roots yet again for this tempestuous tale of one family's tragic loss of their son and sibling, and suspicion surrounding the brutal murder of a local thug on their property. Set in the 1980s, alcohol, illness, and guilt all take leading roles in this dark drama, which will surely do more than merely entertain and engage readers. A teacher by trade and by nature, the acclaimed author succeeds at shedding light on a people and a place that remain suspended, away from the Canadian mainland and mainstream, where time and life stand still. ~ SPC

## The First Prince of Wales?

By Sean Davies  
University of Wales Press  
/ 176 pp / £14.99

Historian and former BBC journalist Sean Davies brings the past to present with this fresh perspective on one of Wales' most brilliant leaders, Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, king of Gwynedd and Powys. Through six chapters, the author argues that his subject was more involved with events in England in the years prior to, and following, the Norman invasion of 1066, than was first believed. Through detailed research, and citing new sources, Davies paints the portrait of a master-tactician who skillfully maneuvered his enemies and allies in an effort to restore the Kingdom of Wales. An academic by trade, the scribe does well to keep the narrative fluid with maps and other images, providing readers with a more holistic understanding of a powerful man in dangerous times. ~ SPC



## Where the Rivers Meet

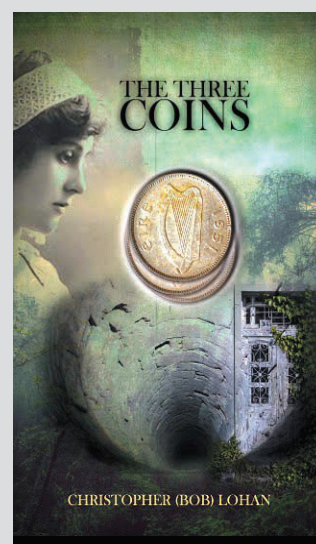
By Danny Gillis  
MacIntyre Purcell Publishing  
/ 276 pp / \$19.95

With the likes of Frank MacDonald and Ian Colford praising his work, Nova Scotia journalist, editor and author Danny Gillis is well on his way to establishing himself as a master storyteller and a strong regional voice. Set in a fictional Cape Breton community, *Where the Rivers Meet* is a powerful, poignant tale of one man's struggle with religious and racial conflict. Credit the author for capturing local dialect and nuance, bringing a quirky cast of characters to life, and setting a climactic stage with a soaring narrative arc. Like renowned New Brunswick wordsmith David Adams Richards, Gillis skillfully weaves threads of moral dilemma into a fine fabric of intrigue and injustice, allowing the story to tell itself without crossing the fine line of over-dramatization. ~ SPC

## The Three Coins

By Christopher Lohan  
Friesen Press / 162 pp / \$18.99

Every once in a while, a little book will move me in ways that most do not. Forty years in the making, *The Three Coins* is one man's love letter to his ancestral homeland. Born in Dublin in 1930, author Christopher (Bob) Lohan moved to Canada at the age of 21. His first work, published at age 86, is a warm, witty tale of two men whose paths cross upon returning to their native Ireland to solve a twenty-year-old mystery. An impressive debut, the scribe spins a simple yarn that speaks to both human nature and to the rugged past of two countries. More than that, the work is a moving legacy for a father of five, grandfather of eleven, and great-grandfather of ten. ~ SPC







## Dropkick Murphys

### *11 Short Stories of Pain & Glory*

The boys from Beantown are back with a bang. *11 Short Stories of Pain & Glory* finds the fearless sextet in fine form on their 9th studio recording, as they rip-roar through almost a dozen incendiary tracks. From the lonesome opening notes of *The Boatman*, through the rollicking *First Class Loser* and the rocking guitars of *I Had A Hat*, to the closing chorus of *Until Next Time*, the crafty Celt-Punk-Rock veterans sound as vital and vibrant as they did in their Quincy, Massachusetts garage over two decades ago. This is anthemic, ass-whoopin' music that works best at the highest possible volume - perfect for a late night piss-up with family, friends and foes at the local watering hole, waiting on a sure-fire, old-school donnybrook. ~ SPC

## Cassie & Maggie MacDonald

### *The Willow Collection*

Nova Scotia siblings Cassie and Maggie MacDonald hit all the right notes with *The Willow Collection*, an eclectic eleven song collection of classic and contemporary jigs, reels, standards and surprises. As gifted musically as they are gorgeous, the sisters strike sonic gold with *Hangman*, *Strip the Willow Set*, and *Nobleman's Wedding*. *The Willow Lullaby*, *Down in the Willow Garden* and *Turn Me Gentle When I'm Dying* are softer touches, drawing upon both the pair's rural Canadian roots and their passion for fine and folksy American hooks. Many years of writing, practicing, recording and performing together have forged the dynamic duo into one of the finest Celtic music acts on this side of the Atlantic. Be sure to catch them in concert over the coming months. ~ SPC



## Alana & Leigh Cline

### *Alana & Leigh Cline*

Keeping with the family theme, father-daughter duo Leigh and Alana Cline team up for their first full-length, self-titled recording, and the results are sure and sonically satisfying. A melodic mélange of old-style jigs and reels, mixed with a sprinkling of softer ballads, make these ten terrific tracks ideal for all occasions; from laid-back, easy listening to an all-out Cape Breton kitchen party. Standout songs here include *The Black Mill*, *Huntington Castle Set*, *Pigeon on the Gate*, *Drowsy Maggie Variations*, and *Mason's Apron*, each featuring Alana's fine fiddling and Leigh's limber guitar work. It is easy to understand why the Toronto-based twosome is in such high demand on the summer festival circuit; it is virtually impossible not to grin from ear-to-ear while listening to these songs. ~ SPC

## Various Artists

### *Celtic Colours Vol. 4*

Every year, the fine folks at Celtic Colours International Festival send me their latest volume of live recordings from the previous year's gathering, and each time I am reminded why it is the best annual Celtic music event in the world. Showcasing the likes of Liz Carroll, Dougie MacLean, Liz Doherty, Andrea Beaton, The Once, and many more, this thirteen-tune time capsule succeeds at capturing and conveying the soul and spirit of both the artists and their diverse musical offerings. In particular, the album's opening track from *Le Vent du Nord* pays homage to the area's indigenous roots. And the appearance of several Acadian performers well-represents the region's Francophone influence. If you have yet to attend CCIF, then let this be your call to action. ~ SPC





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*Michael Gray combines classic and contemporary piping  
to create a sound and style all his own*

**“I** have always loved the sound of the pipes,” says Michael Gray from his home in Dundas, Ontario. “The moment I first recall hearing them is among my earliest memories.”

Though his father was born in Scotland and is of Irish descent, it was not until the age of 13 - when his family relocated to Toronto from Sherbrooke, Quebec - that Gray picked up the pipes.

“When you are not immersed in piping culture it is not always easy to find a teacher,” he explains. “It wasn’t until my mum heard a public service advertisement on a British brass band’s radio show that I ended up with lessons...good teaching in a group dedicated to fellowship and music.”

During the 1970s, Gray studied under George Walker, soon debuting in his first group, the Downsview Junior Pipe Band. Later, he had the good fortune of learning from a number of renowned pipers, including John Wilson, Bill Livingstone, John Walsh and Captain John MacLellan.

“I’ve been lucky to have had the very best teachers. The people who have directed me through my piping life have also been the source of many of the highlights.”

Today, Gray is well established within the piping world; his resume includes several solo compositions, six published books of music, and appearances and awards at an array of major piping concerts and competitions.

“Winning the World Pipe Band Championships remains unforgettable,” he remembers, “as was the show at Glasgow’s Royal

Concert Hall last January that reprised the now-pretty-famous 1987 Ballymena concert recording of the 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Band. It’s interesting to reflect and see that it is the band, or team, accomplishments that stand out more than any individual victory.”

With Piobaireachd, Canntaireachd, and dance club tracks (at 130 beats-per-minute!) in his current repertoire, Gray now covers a myriad of melodies.

*“What is traditional? There are so many nuanced subsets in piping these days when it comes to style and sound.”*

“I’m very open-minded about all aspects of piping; I respect all the long-held elements of the music, while always trying to avoid the parochial or the slavish following of imagined correctness.”

While he acknowledges that it is vital to honour the history of the pipes, Gray notes that it is equally essential for current generations to connect with the instrument.

“Piping offers a great deal for young people. There is so much science now that tells us that music helps intellectual development and slows aging. And when you throw in the pipes as the music maker, well, it’s gold. From a purely educational perspective I think piping helps bring focus, and thus increased attention spans for kids. With so many distractions, this is surely needed more than ever.

“I know that wherever good piping programs are introduced anywhere, kids are genuinely attracted to the music of the pipes. And they stick with it; there are more pipers in the world now than ever before in history.”

Though that growth has been steady on an international scale, Gray believes that more can be done to preserve and promote the instrument at home in Canada.

“Think about it: from coast to coast the sound of the pipes is never far from a public event or important social occasion – many of these where participants have traces of Scottish, or Celtic, blood.

“We need leading exponents and enthusiasts to come together in a stronger lobby, one with a very clear focus. I think people like me need to do more – beyond just making music. It doesn’t take a highly paid PR person to come up with a case for the bagpipes and the culture associated with it. They almost speak for themselves - and loudly.”

Gray’s present focus is on his participation in piping performances – including the recent “Live in Ireland ‘87” concert that was set in Belfast’s Waterfront Hall on February 25. When not on the road or on stage, he continues to manage his production and publishing company, Dunaber Music.

“I would say the intrinsic beauty of the instrument, and the music it creates, keeps me to it.”

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# Gerry O'Connor

AS GERRY O'CONNOR EXPLAINS,  
FIDDLING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

**“M**y mother, Rose O'Connor, was taught to play the instrument by her father, John O'Brien,” explains fiddler Gerry O'Connor from his home on the Emerald Isle. “My older brothers had started learning, and - being the youngest sibling - I wanted to play too.”

Music was a big part of the family home in Dundalk, in Ireland's lush County Lough. The fun it brought to the household inspired O'Connor to make a career of fiddling - both as a violin-maker and as an in-demand player who still tours Europe and North America, most recently with the legendary Irish Rovers.

“For us it was like being part of a youth club,” he recalls. “I played in Céili bands from the age of eight, and we won the All Ireland band competition for under-18 three years in a row. This meant travelling and staying in farmhouses with our friends on weekends during the school holidays. We had a ball.”

Interestingly, O'Connor studied the instrument at a time when traditional music was giving way to modern sounds in many parts of Ireland. “Trad” still flourished in rural areas, however, thanks to the likes of his mother who believed in honouring Irish heritage.

In his early twenties, he spent three years studying violin-making and played his own homemade instrument for a number of years. His prowess as a young fiddler meant he was often playing in the company of much older musicians.

“When I was in my early teens I played with John Joe Gardiner, a contemporary and friend of the famous Michael Coleman. I played with ‘The Boss’ - as John Joe was affectionately called - for four years and absorbed much of his style.”

Though without a record player while growing up, he learned by listening to Armagh fiddler Brendan McGlinchey and County Clare's Seamus Connolly, as well as while attending area music festivals.

“A local player, Peter McArdle, was also a huge influence. He was the resident musician in a well-known pub, Mark's Bar, and when he died I took his place for a couple of years.”

With Dundalk situated between Dublin and Belfast, O'Connor was able to meet and play with many of the celebrated musicians of the 1970s.

*“Travelling and meeting new friends is a big attraction to the music. Being in the company of musicians is a wonderful experience. Older musicians have a wealth of stories and experience. Most are wonderful company to travel with, and there is always so much to learn.”*

He has written a few of his own tunes, but considers himself more of an interpretive artist.

“I prefer to find an old tune and bring it back to life again. I am currently editing a collection of dance music from my area, having recorded over 50 tunes from this collection of nearly 300 melodies.”

A number of his peers credit him with preserving many older melodies that might have been lost to time. A huge career highlight includes playing for then-U.S. President Bill Clinton in Dundalk.

“I was asked to perform in front of 10,000 of my hometown neighbours. It was an honour, and it is a memory I relish.”

In 1996, *Brigid's Kiss* - a session recorded with his late wife, Eithne Ni Uallachain - was named album of the year by Irish Music Magazine. And, in 2011 - just weeks before being elected president of Ireland - Michael D. Higgins launched *Jig Away the Donkey*, a rollicking collection of South Ulster songs that O'Connor recorded with Martin Quinn and Gabriel McArdle.

Most exciting, he says, is watching the popularity of Irish fiddling soar to new heights these days amongst players and fans of all ages.

“I see young kids with amazing talent out there - and they play just for the love of the music and socializing. At the other end, I see young bands being mentored and given opportunities to take to the stage.”

In keeping with family tradition, O'Connor will perform with his own four fiddling children this summer.

[www.gerryoconnor.net](http://www.gerryoconnor.net)





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# Beth Greene

*Nova Scotia dance teacher Beth Greene grew up in a working class neighborhood on Dublin's north side, surrounded by history and a hope to carry her culture forward*



Beth Greene's family name is Ring, and its political overtones were clear to the youngster growing up in Dublin in the 1950s.

"My paternal grandfather Christopher Ring, and four of his brothers, were members of the Irish Citizen Army who fought for freedom in the General Post Office in 1916," she shares via email.

Four of the Rings were carpenters who were dispatched by a rebel commander to burrow passageways through buildings. Her great-uncle Liam, who worked in the Irish legislature, translated A Soldier's Song - the stirring Irish anthem - into the ancient language in 1926.

"Nationalism and patriotism run deep in the Ring family, and the younger generations were encouraged to keep the Irish culture alive through activities such as music, dance and the arts. I chose dance."

Greene was sent off to National School at the tender age of four "with a six penny piece to pay for a half hour of Irish dance lessons from the renowned Cora Caldwell." Her older sister was a dancer, and the younger siblings were to follow briskly in her footsteps.

Long before the acclaimed Irish musical Riverdance brought world-renown to Irish dancing, Greene remembers traveling with her mother and her sister on the #20 bus to Henry Street every Saturday and Monday afternoon, come rain or shine.

"From there we walked through the city to Parnell Square where the dance school was located. Fast forward to 2017, 60 years later, and I am still dancing but maybe not as light on my feet as I was in my youth," she jokes.

Through her years as a young dancer she accumulated medals, trophies and team awards. Every Easter weekend, from age six to 16, she danced at an inner city Feis, and she was a regular at the All Ireland Championships.

*"I danced for the love of it, the camaraderie at competitions, friends in class and the social life we shared outside dance."*

"There might have been a girl who won more trophies and medals than me, who had a solo costume whereas I didn't, but she was my friend and material things didn't matter back then. Not in my world."



Days after marrying in Dublin in 1974, she and her husband Bob were bound for Halifax.

"We had two locations to choose from; Edmonton, Alberta, or Halifax, Nova Scotia. Not knowing much about either city we got out the atlas and decided on Nova Scotia, partly because it was the closest destination to Ireland, and partly because it was surrounded by water."

Greene was pleasantly surprised to discover Irish patriotism extended across the Atlantic.

"I soon got involved with the Irish Society of Nova Scotia, and was known to do a step or two at the ceilidh."

In 1989, she opened the Greene School of Irish Dance.

"What we call the rise and grind, what I learned 60 years ago, is exactly the same as we teach our beginner dancers to this very day," she says, noting that the basics must be mastered before new steps are introduced.

Greene's passion for dance has been passed down to her daughter Sinead, who began teaching alongside her as a teenager, later earning her certification. She is now the school's principal teacher, director and choreographer. Greene proudly points out her seven-year-old granddaughter Brielle is already dancing competitively.

"Her sister Clara, aged four, just joined and dances weekly at our studio. In fact, three of the five dancers in that class are children of former pupils of the Greene School."

Greene's dancers are part of the Royal International Nova Scotia Dancers, and have appeared alongside the likes of the Chieftains, Cirque du Soleil and the Barra MacNeils. They have also toured Switzerland, and will be performing and competing across Eastern Canada and in Montreal, Boston, Ottawa, Toronto and Tampa in the coming months.

Decades after leaving Ireland, Greene is still happy to call Nova Scotia home, where the Halifax Charitable Irish Society, An Cumann, and St. Mary's University Chair of Irish Studies all continue to promote Irish culture, and where there is no shortage of local Irish pubs.

[www.greeneschool.ca](http://www.greeneschool.ca)





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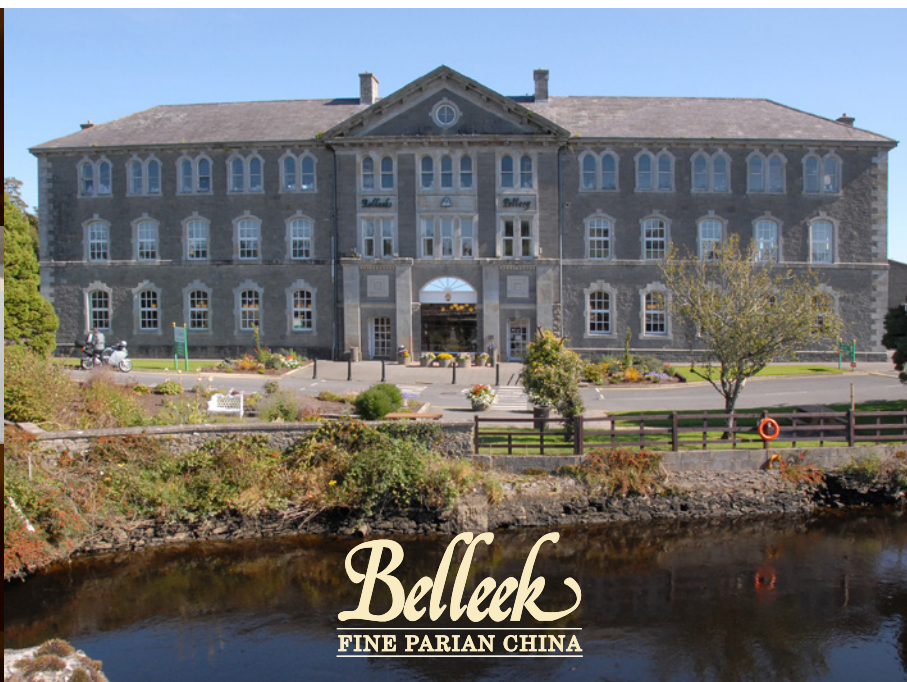


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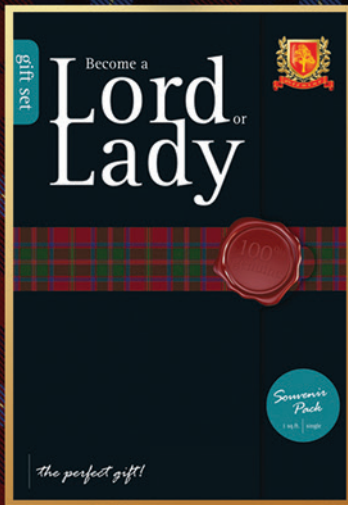


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*Author Gunna Dickson is a New York based writer, editor and translator. Illustrator and fine artist Jon McIntosh lives and works in Key West.*

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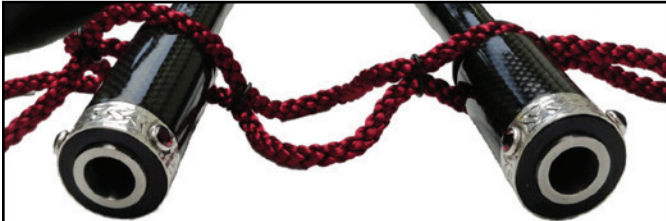




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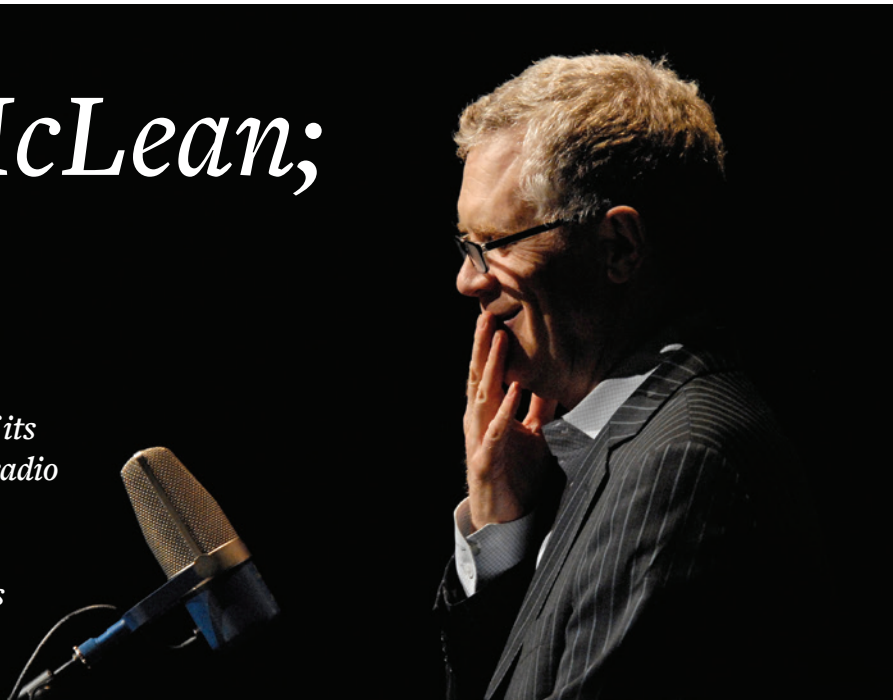


# Stuart McLean;

## 1948-2017

By Stephen Patrick Clare

*Canada said goodbye to one of its finest storytellers recently, as radio host, author, and humourist Stuart McLean passed away after a lengthy and courageous battle with cancer.*



Born Andrew Stuart McLean, the eldest of three siblings, he was raised in Montreal West, attended Lower Canada College, and later graduated from Sir George Williams University.

McLean's radio career began in the mid-1970s, creating current affairs programming for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. By the 1980s he was a regular on CBC television as well.

Around that time, he began dabbling with ideas that would eventually evolve into The Vinyl Café.

Launched to radio in 1994, The Vinyl Café was an instant hit with listeners. The weekly, hour-long shows featured wholesome and heartfelt short stories about a Toronto-based family; Dave, his wife Morley, their two children Sam and Stephanie, assorted neighbours and friends, and the much-loved Galway the cat.

Over the next two decades, McLean would publish several Vinyl Café books, and tour to sold-out audiences both here at home and around the world. And though he enjoyed great success in print and on stage, it was on radio where he most felt at home, and where he best captivated listeners of all ages for a generation.

I first heard The Vinyl Café over Sunday brunch at my mother's house in Montreal. I became a fan, tuning in each week, and seeing him perform several times. In time, I would share his stories with my own children.

Later, I would be blessed to know Stuart personally. In fact, it was my first assignment

for Celtic Life that connected us, as I interviewed him for a cover story in mid-2010.

"I have come to accept the fact that the writing will always be something that I struggle with," he confided then. "It's not the inspirational part that I find difficult. There is always something to write about. In fact, many of the ideas for Dave, Morley, Sam and the other Vinyl Café characters come from the observations of my own everyday experiences. However, it is another thing altogether to take these experiences and put them to paper. It isn't uncommon for me to get all tangled up in sentences and paragraphs while I'm trying to piece together a story in a way that is both cohesive and entertaining both to readers and listeners. There are plenty of times when I'm ready to just toss the damn keyboard into the garbage can."

We spoke again the following year as he toured Atlantic Canada. While in Halifax, he agreed to appear on my own weekly radio show.

"I couldn't tell you what they look like," he admitted that day of his Vinyl Café creations.

He furthered the point in our 2015 interview, noting that maybe his characters are better left to audience's imaginations.

"I recall someone once asking me what I would do if I knew that Dave was in the next room. How would I react? At first I thought that I would run right over and introduce myself. But then I thought what if I don't like the guy? What if it is this huge disappointment?"

"The beauty of radio, books, and the

shows, is that they give readers and listeners the chance to fill in the blanks in their own individual way. And that is part of what makes it so special and personal to people - they feel involved, engaged, like it is all taking place right next door."

Our relationship grew when we were both diagnosed with cancer soon after.

"It's not the end of the road," he shared hopefully via email. "It's only a bump in the road."

While that has been true in my case, it sadly was not for Stuart, and over the last 16 months our correspondences became fewer and further in-between. Tellingly, as I awaited response to my recent queries into his well-being, there were none forthcoming.

In recent days, as tributes for Stuart poured in from coast-to-coast-to-coast and beyond, I reflected on both our relationship and upon his contributions to Canadian culture. Like all Canadians, I will grieve the loss of - and celebrate the life of - a man, a friend, of great warmth, wit and wisdom.

"Storytelling brings people together. Whether it is around a campfire, a kitchen table, a theatre, or a concert hall, it is a shared experience. And so long as readers and listeners continue to enjoy that experience, and those of Dave, Morley, Sam, Stephanie and the other characters, then I will just keep on keeping on."

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