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Celtic Life INTERNATIONAL



Canada's *Celtic Community Comes of Age*

INSIDE! *Natalie MacMaster & Donnell Leahy*
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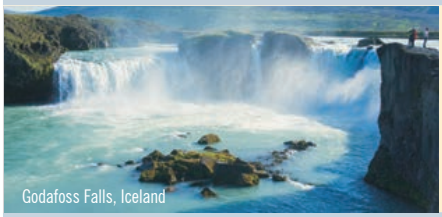
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Fáilte!

The Immigrant

Bracara offers one of the most beautiful views in all of Scotland. Once a thriving community overlooking Loch Morar, the now tiny community not far from Arisaig in the Western Highlands is where Prince Charlie first stepped ashore to signal the start of the '45 Rising.

Today Bracara welcomes you with a scattering of houses along a winding lane, where sheep populate fields once worked by Jacobite Highlanders.

It was from this small village that John Ban Gillis and his brother Angus left for the New World in the late 1700s; adventurous young men with dreams of a better life, though oblivious to the hardship and uncertainty that lay ahead. They arrived in Nova Scotia more than 70 years before Canada became a nation, when Highland families were populating the land along the province's northern coastline.

This year Canada celebrates the 150th anniversary of its Confederation. It is a time to both celebrate our freedom and to reflect and recognize the perseverance of the pioneers who made that freedom a reality. Citizens have been invited to share stories about our ancestors, and John Ban's story is no different from others who settled North America.

I have been fortunate to know of John Ban and my other forebears via the many family stories passed down through generations of oral traditions.

John Ban arrived in Nova Scotia with little more than his language, culture, traditions, and a determination to make a dream come true. Like others from the "old country", he settled in the province's north, calling his new community Arisaig in homage to his neighbouring community back home.

The risks were great, and the uncertainty even greater, but leaving his family and friends behind to "see no more" had to be overwhelming; sailing for the Americas was like a death in the family, as it was unlikely that parents would ever see their sons and daughters again. The Irish once called it the "American Wake" - a custom of mourning the departing emigrant while they were still alive.

As the Highland Scots moved eastward along the coastline, carving communities from the wilderness, they confronted native Mi'kmaq, who had occupied the land for thousands of years. Though hostilities were inevitable, the Mi'kmaq proved mostly friendly and hospitable to their new neighbours, helping them to survive the harsh winters.

Today, and as it was during John Ban's time, the immigrant life can mean months, and even years of isolation, deprivation, and hard work, with success often measured by mere survival. Yet, as my own ancestor once did, immigrants persist, with new, vital and vibrant communities now colouring the landscape from coast-to-coast-to-coast. As we celebrate Canada's 150th, let none of us forget who we are, nor where we come from.

In this issue, we debut the Ellis Island Tartan, a.k.a. the "Immigrant Tartan." Designed by the Clan Currie Society, it can be worn proudly by Americans of any origin whose ancestors found refuge in the New World via the famed New York portal.

Enjoy, and may God bless
Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

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Our August 2017 cover image was shot on location in Nova Scotia

Veronica MacIsaac Apparel / veronicamacisaac.com

Photo by Brent McCombs / AlterEgo Photography / alterego.zenfolio.com

Model / Marsalie MacKenzie

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The Internationalists



PHOTO CREDIT: CELTIC LIFE

I was born and raised in Montréal. Aside from a short stint in British Columbia, I spent the first thirty years of my life in la belle province of Quebec, before relocating to Atlantic Canada in 2000.

Growing up there during the 1970s and 1980s, I became - unknowingly - an isolationist of sorts; Quebec's drive towards independence, which included two referendums on separation, dominated our daily lives, and decisions on whom and what we were.

In addition, as an island, Montréal seemed cut-off from the "mainland" of Canada, both geographically and ideologically.

As a youngster, my suburban neighborhood included people of all nationalities; French, English, Italian, Jewish, Portuguese, Irish, African, Spanish, Scottish, Arabic, and more.

Later, moving from one downtown quartier to another, I again lived amidst an array of ethnicities. By the 1990s, I became - unknowingly - an internationalist of sorts, looking for commonalities amongst people rather than focusing upon their differences.

Ironically, it was during my initial solo trek to Ireland in 1989, that I first recognized myself identifying neither as Canadian nor Quebecois, but rather as a Montréalais.

On that same trip, I got into a minor altercation while photographing a July 12 parade in the Sandy Row district of Belfast. After some questioning to determine "whose side" I was on, I pulled out my passport. Once my citizenry was clarified (neutral), I was hauled off to the nearest pub, quizzed by my hosts as to whether or not I knew their various family members in Toronto (the answer is always 'yes, of course'), and feted for my country's ongoing commitment as global peacekeepers (more irony, given my location at that moment.)

Last year, while vacationing in South Carolina, I was asked by a group of locals as to my stance on Donald Trump's ascendancy to the presidency. My initial urge was to blurt out the truth. My truth. Instead, I politely begged off an answer, replying instead that "as a foreigner, I don't really follow American politics."

How typically Canadian of me; kind, courteous, respectful, and never one to upset the proverbial apple cart.

Interestingly, it is what I both adore and abhor most about being from this country; while it is nice to be recognized as nice, I sometimes wish we weren't so wishy-washy. Canadians should grow stronger spines, stop apologizing for everything, and take our place proudly on the global stage as citizens of the world.

Chock it up, perhaps, to immaturity; in relation to other countries, and even to our fine neighbours to the immediate south, Canada is, by all measures - even at 150 years of age - a young country.

A while back, our national media - the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation - ran a year-long series of soul-searching promotional pieces, asking us to define "Canadian." Not surprisingly, the response was both bland and befuddled. The exercise was akin to asking a teenager amidst an identity crisis to share their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, opinions, etc, and expecting something other than "I dunno" as a reply.

Residents of other countries seem to know who we are, however; our global "brand" consists of the Maple Leaf, maple syrup, ice hockey, pickup trucks, Tim Horton's coffee, snow, moose, Justins (Trudeau and Bieber), etc...Of course, these narrow stereotypes are perpetuated by our very own corporate media, who are even more clueless about who we are than the CBC.

The reality is that we are a nation of immigrants (about 9 million of whom claim Celtic ancestry), slowly finding our feet, and establishing a surer sense of self. That takes time - we are a work in progress.

Unlike the melting pot that is the USA, where immigrants (legal or otherwise) are "Americanized" into an existing and established cultural landscape, Canada is more of a mosaic, where individual threads are woven into a rich and robust tapestry. As such, we are witness to an identity being crafted right before our very eyes.

See it for yourself; take the time to explore the multicultural milieus of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, or the quaint communities of Quebec City, Ottawa and Kelowna, or the seaside cities of Halifax, St. John's and Victoria, or our many rustic, rural regions - our colours are not just autumnal, they are year-round.

Almost amazingly, it all works – most of the time; we coexist in peace, internationalists, maybe even role models for what the rest of the world can aspire to be.

Recently, while working in the Caribbean, I was asked where I was from. "Montreal," I replied automatically, before quickly adding "I am Canadian."

Stephen Patrick Clare
Managing Editor



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I am considering a trip to Northern Ireland to do some family research. Is it safe to travel there now? ~ Joseph McNiven, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Hi Joe - thanks for the note. By all means, Northern Ireland is a very safe place to visit. In fact, I'm guessing that it is safer to walk the streets of Belfast or Derry at night than Detroit. Though there continues to be some strain across the region, it is quite minimal. For the most part, the signing of the Peace Accord in 1998 has provided stability and prosperity for residents of all backgrounds. After years of isolation, you will find people there warm and welcoming to visitors. Scenically, the six counties of Ulster are among the most beautiful in all of Eire. Be sure to drive through the Glens of Antrim, travel the northern coastal route through the quaint and cozy seaside villages, tour the Giant's Causeway, visit Dunluce Castle, sample the wares at the Bushmills Distillery, and walk atop the Walls of Derry. Belfast's Titanic Museum is a fantastic trip through time, as is nearby Carrickfergus Castle. Information centers, libraries and local parishes are fully equipped to help you trace your roots, and a stop at the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh is a must for anyone interested in the historical ties between the two countries.

Why is Asturias not recognized as a Celtic nation?
~ Juan Lorenzos, Oviedo, Asturias, Spain

An excellent question Amigo, and the short answer is it should be. It is a proven fact that Celts from Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Bretagne established settlements and trading stops all over the northwest region of Spain. Although the language did not survive in either Asturias, or its neighbouring province Galicia, both regions are teeming with evidence to support the Celtic connection, including stone ruins, cooking utensils, weapons, and more. It is believed that Celts inhabited the area about 2300 BC, though only for a few generations. That said, many modern-day Asturians can trace their ancestry to those times, and new archeological technologies - including DNA testing - seem to support their claims. It begs a further question, however; who decides what is Celtic and what is not? As there is no governing body overseeing the Celtic world, there is a difference of opinion on definition as different groups and individuals have diverse criterion based on language, arts, migratory patterns, etc. Some believe that, given their genetic and cultural links, a case can also be made for places like Portugal, Turkey, Nova Scotia, Germany, Australia, Cuba, all of which have strong ties to the Celtic past. More will be revealed.







I want to start exploring Celtic music. Where do I start?
~ Jessica Lind, Hearst, Ontario, Canada

Hey Jessica - you are in luck! Never before has there been such easy access to Celtic music. Specifically, online sites like YouTube and Spotify are great places to get acquainted with the genre. Simply enter the word 'Celtic' into the search bars, and fill your boots...and ears. Once you have sampled a few styles ('trad', neo-Celtic, CeltPunk, Celtic metal, etc), refine your journey to specific artists and countries. Some of my favourite Celtic artists include Clannad, Barrule, Maggie & Cassie MacDonald, the Waterboys, Calan, Myrdhin, Chris Stout, Llan de Cubel, the Dropkick Murphys, Còig, and Milladoiro. Cross-Celtic is a big deal these days, with artists like Afro Celt Sound System and Shreem mixing and matching new technologies with traditional Celtic melodies. There are also a number of great musical artists that hail from Celtic countries that don't play Celtic music per se, but who are nonetheless worth exploring. I might recommend that you give a few of the following a quick spin also; Van Morrison, Paolo Nutini, 9Bach, Nicola Benedetti, Damien Rice, Stereophonics, and Snow Patrol. Whatever you end up listening to, it is an exciting time to delve into Celtic music, as the sonic possibilities seem almost endless.

Got a question for Celtic Life? Drop us a note at editor@celticlife.ca

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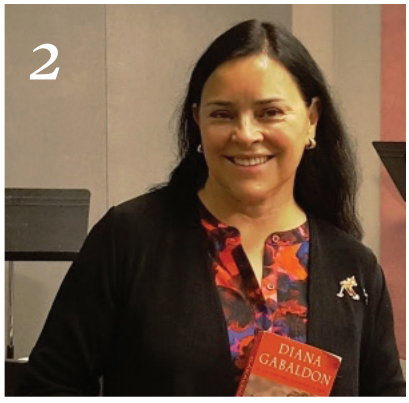
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one

Welsh Timmies

Tim Hortons - the popular Canadian coffee chain - is setting up shop in the United Kingdom. Famous for its Timbits and "double double" coffees, it remains to be seen whether it will win over java lovers across the pond. The first UK location is opening in Glasgow, Scotland, but a Welsh branch is expected to roll out within the next year. Folks are already buzzing about pumpkin spice muffins and lemon meringue pie donuts, hoping the Canadian treats will be on offer at new locations as well. They're also referring to Timbits as "little donut balls," but that will probably change once the brand sinks in.

two

Prince Edward Outlander

While visiting the province for a book signing, author Diana Gabaldon hinted at the possibility of including PEI in a future Outlander novel. Her stay in the province also included a historical tour of the area. Gabaldon believes Clan MacKenzie, which has a role in her stories, may have settled on the island. The series follows the story of a time-travelling British army nurse, Claire Randall, who ends up in 1743 Scotland. It's been adapted into an equally-popular TV series. Gabaldon says the 10th book will likely be the last in the saga.

three

Cornish -Canadian Brew

A Cornish brewery has taken a page out of its sister brewery located in Canada. The Rock-based Sharp's Brewery launched a collaboration with Vancouver's Granville Island Brewing this past winter. The companies' respective brewmasters met at a conference in Denver and came up with the idea of a recipe swap - the first of its kind for Sharp's, which had never teamed up with a brewery across the pond before. The result was a golden pale ale called Two Tides, and it marked the first limited beer release for Sharp's in 2017.

four

Canadian Media Milestone

The first female publisher of a major Canadian daily paper was an Irish immigrant. Sara Ann Maclure came to British Columbia with her mother when she was just three years old to join her father, who worked with the Royal Engineers in New Westminster. At age 28, Maclure wed John Campbell McLagan. McLagan later founded the Vancouver Daily World, but Maclure took control of the paper after his passing in 1901. She wore many hats, working as publisher, editor and writer all at once. On top of that, she became one of the founding members of the Canadian Women's Press Club.

five

Donegal Love Song

A Canadian man has shown his affection for Donegal, Ireland by penning a song about the town. Jacob Murray, a farmer and contract builder from Amherst Island in Ontario, got involved with the Tír Conaill Festival for a job. He'd built a dry stone wall for a local client who became interested in such fixtures on a visit to Ireland, and a woman named Andrea Cross took notice of his work. She wanted to launch a Stonewall festival on Amherst, so she sent Murray to Donegal as an ambassador to learn more. He overcame his fear of flying to travel there and became enamoured. He wrote the song "Donegal," now available on YouTube, to prove it.

six

Tartan Tutus

The Sole Sisters Women's Run is an annual event in Nova Scotia, as part of the Run Nova Scotia Race Series. Director Stacy Chestnutt honed in on a fun way to make the race less intimidating by including free tutus for prospective runners as part of registration. Since the tutus have since become Chestnutt's signature touch, she decided to add some Nova Scotian style to the poofy skirts. For the upcoming race this fall, runners will receive tutus with a tartan print to pay tribute to the province's roots.

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

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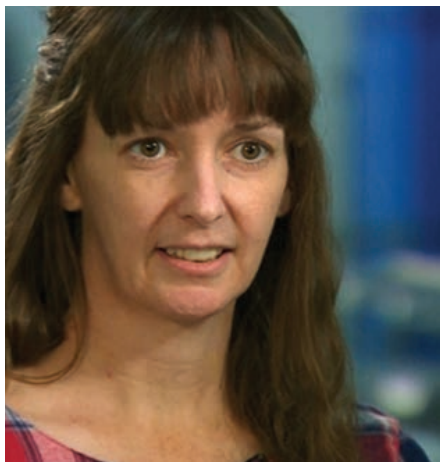
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Veritee Hall

Veritee Reed Hall is speaking out in an effort to help reduce stigma against HIV and AIDS. Hall is believed to be the only woman in Cornwall openly living with HIV, having been diagnosed 11 years ago. However, she contracted the virus from her husband about four years before that. She forgave her husband for his infidelity and the couple is still together. Even prior to becoming ill, Hall spent 30 years working on campaigns to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS. Her activism was inspired by the death of a close friend who died of AIDS in the '80s. Since her own diagnosis, she has made several television appearances, and is upfront about her situation online. As a result of her openness about her illness, Hall has lost friends and deals with feelings of isolation. "If you've got HIV, people think you're irresponsible and to blame," she recently told Cornwall Live. "Women with cancer are not stigmatized in the same way." Hall wants people to know that it doesn't matter whether one is gay or straight, or whether or not they use drugs - everyone is at risk. By sharing her story, she aims to challenge those misconceptions, and raise awareness of the need for testing.



Pauline Cafferkey

A Scottish nurse who nearly died from Ebola made plans to return to Sierra Leone in May - her first time back in the West African country since she contracted the virus. Pauline Cafferkey, 41, worked as a volunteer in Sierra Leone in 2014. She became the first person in the U.K. to be diagnosed with Ebola, being hospitalized on four occasions over the two years that followed. After facing such trauma, it would be understandable for her to never want to go back, even though the disease has since been eradicated in Sierra Leone. But Cafferkey had other ideas, taking the opportunity to raise money for Street Child - a charity which provides shelter and education for homeless children in the country. An estimated 12,000 children were orphaned due to the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone. "I had massive support from family and friends and could get medical and psychological support," she told The Guardian of her illness. "The Ebola patients in Sierra Leone didn't know what they were going home to, or who was left alive in their family. They might be going back to sheer hell." Cafferkey was honoured for her efforts at the Pride of Britain Awards in September 2015.



Christine Sinclair

Canadian soccer star Christine Sinclair is a hero on the field, but did you know she's doing important work outside of her athletics? Last year, Sinclair spoke at a fundraiser for British Columbia's branch of the MS Society of Canada. "For me it was the first time sort of stepping out of my comfort zone in terms of MS and the impact it's had on my family," Sinclair recently told The Canadian Press. "Having done that, I realized that it was something I wanted to be a part of and I felt like I could help make a difference." And so she has. Details of Sinclair's involvement in the fight against multiple sclerosis won't be released until later this year, however. Sinclair's mother, Sandi, has MS, so the issue hits close to home. The illness is an autoimmune disease which impacts the brain and spinal cord. The effects are wide-ranging - everything from lack of coordination to cognitive impairment. Although her mom is suffering physically, Sinclair says that she is mentally "as sharp as ever." Sandi is currently living in a care home, as Sinclair's father passed away in April 2016. Sinclair regularly makes the five and-a-half hour drive from Portland to Vancouver in order to visit her mother.

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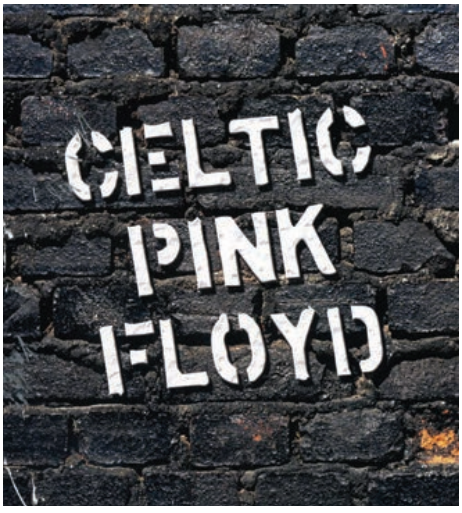
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Two American brothers team up to create one unique musical experience

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

www.celticpinkfloyd.com

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Kristyn Murphy

Kristyn Murphy brings her Celtic Journey across the pond

This summer, Kristyn Murphy will take the stage at venues across the U.K. for the first time.

The singer-songwriter describes the show - which she is calling Celtic Journey - as "a celebration of the Celtic nations, their traditions, and the international ties that unite them as one in a world of hardship, hope, and new beginnings."

It has been a busy and creative twelve months for Murphy; she says that 2016 was a year of "learning, growing and experimenting as an artist."

"I had the good fortune of collaborating with the extremely talented singer Abbie Stands, as well as some other very gifted musicians, to create a show called Lovers & Monsters," shares the native of Maine.

"That show debuted at the Metropolitan Room in New York City, and went on to tour several historical venues around the east coast and into parts of the Midwestern states of the U.S. Almost immediately following the conclusion of that production, I started putting my ideas down on paper for the Celtic Journey show."

The upcoming tour, which has been almost a year in the making, was inspired by Murphy's research into her past for a similarly-themed documentary film.

"Celtic Journey stemmed from a multi-faceted project that documents the Irish and Scottish cultures in my home state of Maine. The idea is for me to follow my own family's story across the state, into Canada, and then overseas, to tell the tale of how the Irish and Scottish influenced this part of the world and made it into what it is today. The project will also touch upon some history of the various Celtic cultures."

Welsh musical group, The Meadows, will accompany Murphy on the upcoming tour.

"I first networked with The Meadows through social media," she recalls. "I had already been following their musical journey for a few years. They are incredibly talented, and their joy and love for music is evident in both their playing and their everyday lives. We share a common love of Celtic and folk music, and a desire to keep Celtic culture alive."

The U.K. trek begins July 14 at Narberth Queens Hall in Pembs, and concludes in Settle on July 30. The hope is that the eight concerts will lay the groundwork for future tours.



"When launching a new show and tour, it is always best to test the waters near an established home base; a place that is both familiar and comfortable, where there are people and organizations that can provide the support system needed to help with all the little details that make up daily touring life. Once we get some experience mounting the production, our goal is to eventually bring it to other locations as well, including Europe, Ireland, the U.S. and Canada."

Celtic Journey has become a true passion project for Murphy, who aims to educate and inspire audiences to get better acquainted with their ancestry.

"We want Celtic Journey to explore multiple aspects of Celtic culture, including the profound influence it has had in many parts of Canada and the U.S.

> *"We are what we are because of the past - I think this is an important concept to hold on to."*

"The story of the Celtic people, particularly the ones that came to North America, is a tale of those who left their homeland through either a sense of adventure or the necessity to start a new life in a strange land. When we use the word `home' in Celtic culture, it is not so much about a particular geographical location or destination, but rather about a sense of identity.

"As human beings, we all have a story to tell. We all have a past that has influenced who we are today. While a physical home may change or be left behind, there is always an internal `home' which connects us to a wider community. I believe that Celtic Journey will help to build those bridges between people."

www.kristynmurphy.com



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Ardú

Irish quintet Ardú brings the first-ever A Cappella festival to the Emerald Isle

Ciarán Kelly admits that he is about as Irish as one can be.

"My mum is from a small town in County Donegal and my dad grew up in Derry during The Troubles," shares the vocalist from his current home in Kildare, near Dublin. "I was born and grew up in Derry.'

Kelly has been performing for as long as he can remember.

"I think my first singing experience was in our local cathedral choir, aged five or six. I come from a musical family and my uncle Dónal looked after the choral scene in Derry, so it was only natural that I'd join in and develop some music skills. I immediately loved the thrill of performing and found the stage a natural place."

After studying at the Royal Academy of Music in Dublin, Kelly performed across Europe in various productions, including as the lead in Nicolini's Le Due Gemelle in Italy.

His current musical project, Ardú, debuted in 2014, releasing its first recording Nova in 2015, and eventually finalizing its line-up that same year. Today, the group consists of five singers; Kelly, Harry Oulton, Vicky Warwick, Leanne Fitzgerald and Tristan Caldwell.

"It took us a while to find the right combination of people," he says, "but we have a great blend and team ethic now, so we are hoping for no more changes in the near future."

The band has since refined who they are and what they aspire to be.

"It took us some time to define what 'our sound' was," notes the tenor. "We were very inspired by the likes of Pentatonix and The Swingles, but over the past couple of years we have really found our own unique voice, which we hope comes through to our audiences.

"We are Celtic contemporary A Cappella. It is different from American or European modern A Cappella in that it is less 'in -your-face' and slightly more 'polite.' It is a refreshing sound, and the music we cover still has our Irish twist, no matter where it originates."

The band has recorded and performed a wide range of songs, including Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely?"

"The definition of a good song depends on the listener," explains Kelly. "The members of Ardú have an eclectic mixture of tastes, from contemporary vocal music to baroque opera. We don't always agree on which music is best, and that is what perhaps makes it all so exciting. That said, we try to reach as many people as possible with our selections; that means finding a happy medium with our own tastes, and qualifying it with what we think our listeners will like.

> *"Hearing from audience members that we have made their day means so much; it makes you realize you have really achieved something in the relatively fickle world of music."*

This summer, Kelly and his cohorts will host the inaugural Irish International A Cappella Festival in the country's capital city from July 14 to 16.

"We performed at the London A Cappella Festival in 2016, and felt that we had to introduce an Irish version. Our event aims to bring contemporary A Cappella to new audiences, young and old. As well, we hope to give opportunities to younger groups who have limited performance experience. There will also be chances for everyone to join in with workshops on beat-boxing and harmony singing.

"This festival has the potential to be one of the world's leading vocal festivals," he continues. "Ireland has a rich tradition in song and there is no reason why the festival can't go from strength to strength. From our point of view, the Irish music scene has never been stronger. Acts like Hozier, Celtic Woman and Enya continue to take various forms of Irish music all over the world. I recently toured America with the Five Irish Tenors and it was wonderful to see how international audiences connected with our sound.

"In saying that, we also believe that there is still a lot to explore and deliver from an Irish and Celtic perspective. Irish music has no real contemporary A Cappella sound with which to define it, and we are making it our mission to change that."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There, she met fellow musician Alasdair Paul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All of us agree that it must be catchy, but not cheesy. It all comes down to how it is played and arranged, and that is why we modify our repertoire to fit our own taste and style."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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- *Gold is the golden door that is the United States and the dawning of a new day in a new world.*

A portion of the proceeds will go to Clan Currie Society for the benefit of the Save Ellis Island Foundation.



Clan Currie Society

When the Curries gather in Glasgow this summer, expect more than small talk

Get-togethers with the extended family usually take place by the barbeque or over a potluck dinner, where everyone catches up with distant cousins, aunts, and uncles.

The Currie family is taking the tradition of the family gathering up a notch this August, as they gather in Glasgow to choose their first family leader in the clan's 800-year history.

David Currie is the chaplain for the Clan Currie Society, a Scottish name society that has been working to study the history and raise the profile of the Currie family around the world. He explains that his family's history is a bit different than many Scottish clans; they were more soothsayers than soldiers.

"The name Currie comes from the Gaelic MacMhuirich, which has to do with descending from a popular Irish bard," says Currie, who adds that the family began when a prominent Irish chief left for Scotland around the year 1210. "Obviously not every Currie was a bard, but that was a defined role for us."

As bards, the Curries played a unique role in Scottish culture, as most could read and write, usually in Latin or Gaelic. Given their literary gifts, they wrote songs, poems, and prose for other clans - be they about family history or conquests in battle. Being familiar with the lineage of different clans, they were also called upon to quickly identify a fellow clan's new leader during war, should the prior leader fall in battle. Though associated with several clans, their most important patrons were the powerful Clan Donald.

The talents of these bards were so varied and impressive that some even believed they might possess mystical powers.

But the Curries were not yet themselves a clan. Clan leaders, or chiefs, often held vast swaths of land populated by their kin, who could be called upon to form an army if need be. As such, notes David Currie, his ancestors traditionally did not fit this description.

> *"We were what scholars might call 'learned kindred,' or 'learned family' - that was something to be celebrated, and something that we could do as a family."*

Through the Court of the Lord Lyon in Scotland, some traditional Scottish families that wish to reunite under a tartan banner must be able to trace their lineage and find a modern heir to the leadership of their clan, known as a Chief of the Name and Arms of Currie. The Curries, given their unique role in Scottish history, have never had such a leader.



"We have done some pretty extensive research, and we haven't found any – it appears that we have never had a chief."

In lieu of finding that clan heir, Curries from around the world will gather in Glasgow this August for a special family convention. There, candidates for the role (called 'representers') will make a case for leadership, and the family will vote to elect one of them to represent their name.

"We're doing something that happened semi-organically sometimes through more formal processes centuries ago," says Currie, who, as the Clan Currie Society chaplain, has been deemed a neutral party to organize the family convention.

With the Celtic Diaspora now spanning the globe, the selection process won't be limited to Scotland.

"I have had some initial inquiries from Australia, Scotland, New Zealand, England, South Africa and the U.S., as well as others who have indicated that they are going to participate in the family convention. We are excited that we look to have a fairly global representation."

In accordance with the rules laid out by the Court of the Lord Lyon, only those born a Currie can vote, and they must be in Glasgow in person on August 15 to do so. Also, it is the Court that will ultimately make the decision to bequeath the title to the elected candidate – the Court will listen to the family's wishes if largely unanimous, but it may choose to hold another election or leave some time open for someone to provide a counter-claim to the title if there's disagreement within the family.

David Currie wants Curries and Currie well-wishers everywhere to know that their support and participation in spirit is welcome. The family plans to move forward under this unification of name to bring their historic talents of storytelling, education, and support of Celtic culture to a modern age.

"Whoever ends up being in that role, that is certainly the vision that those who explored putting together the family convention would like to see," shares Currie, who sees this as an opportunity to bring the Currie family together with other historic Scottish clans, and hopes other families without a chief will be inspired by the Currie example this summer. "If we can do it, you may be able to do so as well."

www.facebook.com/ClanCurrieCociety

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The Kilted Yogis bare it all in the name of good fun and good health

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So many people got in touch about that vile letter," he shares. "People may not think that homophobia is an issue anymore, but unfortunately it is alive and thriving. And I will take it head on."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Neither will forget the significant message behind their popular video.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I was genuinely delighted when Ailbhe told me that she wanted to focus on improving the aesthetics of wheelchairs for her final year project," shares Isabel, who's currently a student at the National University of Ireland. "I knew that she was aware of the positive relationship that I have with my wheelchair, so I was really excited to see how she used her bucket-loads of creativity to depict this."

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

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

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

Ailbhe isn't the only person doing the designing. Izzy Wheels had its first artist collaboration collection in January. The collection, titled "Roll Models" was launched at the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) Fashion show. A portion from the sales went the IWA.

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

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

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

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

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

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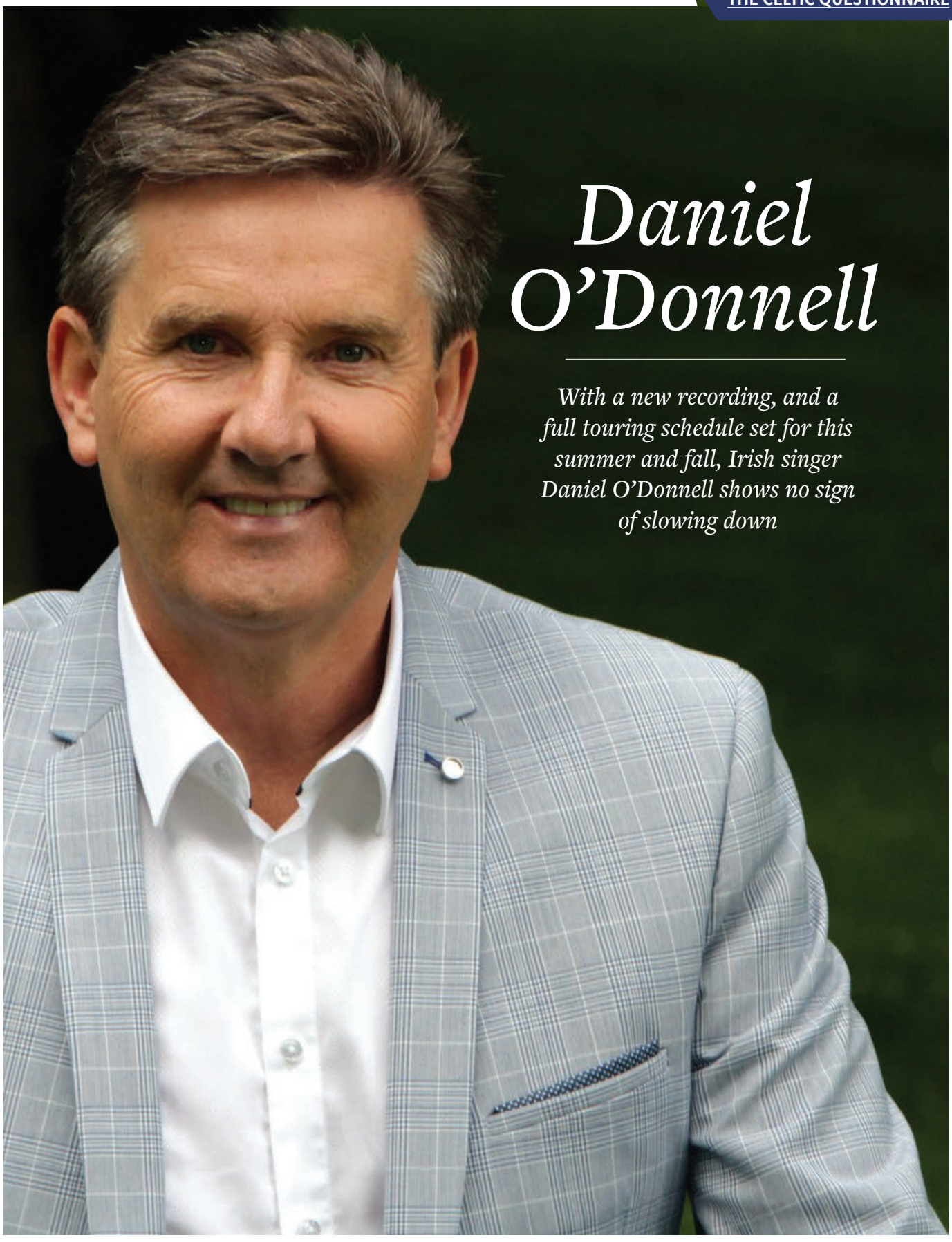
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Daniel O'Donnell

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



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

You have a lot on the go these days.
Aye, indeed I do. And I love it. In fact, I love it now more than ever.

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

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

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

Your audience has grown with you over the years.
Yes they have, and I am very fortunate that way. As you can imagine, the majority of people in the audience each night are older folks. Many of them have seen me perform on previous tours, so it is not unusual for me to see familiar faces prior to, or after the show, or even from the stage. It is quite heartwarming and inspiring actually; I love to talk with people, and to listen to them share their stories about their heritage, their travels to Ireland, and how much the music has meant to them over the years.

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

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

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



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

Are there ways to improve that?

First off, credit must be given where it is due; the Irish government, and in particular our tourism industry folks, have done an exceptional job carrying the message of who we are and what we have to offer to markets across the globe. There is always room for improvement, however, and perhaps a stronger investment in our arts sector would help. People in North America and elsewhere can make a difference by attending Irish and Celtic festivals, concerts, and so forth. Support for Irish Studies programs in the universities is another great way to preserve our heritage, as is the development of websites and mobile apps to promote the learning of the Gaelic language. Ultimately, however, I believe it is the responsibility of individual families to carry on their own unique traditions and customs within the household. Our past is akin to the roots of a tree, firmly planted in the rich terrain of history. Young people will have a better sense of who they are and where they are going when they understand where they come from.

And you are a part of that?

I like to think that I play my part in that process, yes. The Irish have a great history of storytelling, and much of our culture is based in our poetry, literature, film, and music. The songs I sing each night tell tales of our past - of who we were, what we have endured, and who we have become. I feel both honoured and humbled to be a part of that tradition.

How long do you intend to keep going?

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

www.danielodonnell.org

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Scotland's Walking Theatre Company

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands takes a stroll with Sadie Dixon-Spain and Scotland's Walking Theatre Company



Scotland's dramatic landscapes have inspired artists and writers for centuries. It is therefore of little surprise that they also inspire Sadie Dixon-Spain and The Walking Theatre Company.

Many theatre companies perform outdoors, but few take the audience on interactive, walking plays through the landscape. At the simplest level, The Walking Theatre Company aims to get people walking and exploring 'the great outdoors.' Beyond that, it uses drama to explain why places are the way they are and - in fragile, fragmented communities - it offers opportunities for dialogue and healing. To understand The Walking Theatre Company first necessitates a journey with its founder, Sadie Dixon-Spain.

I met Dixon-Spain in Glasgow for coffee. She has the Celtic traits of feminine strength, fiery red hair, and an amazing ability to tell stories. With a wicked sense of humour she took me on a three-hour whistle-stop tour of her somewhat hectic, crazy, nomadic, but inspirational life that has shaped both her and The Walking Theatre Company.

The eldest of three siblings, Dixon-Spain describes herself as an Anglo-Scot. Her mother's family roots are in Ayrshire, Scotland and her father's family are from County Durham, England. Out of a necessity to find work, her parents started their married life in London. Her father travelled for work frequently, and it was her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother who became the big influences in her life. She was born in Clapham, and her eighteen-year-old mother - determined to succeed on her own - auditioned successfully as one of Hugh Hefner's original Bunny Croupiers, quickly becoming the fastest Blackjack dealer in London.

Dixon-Spain's earliest foray into drama was as a tree in a school Christmas show. As one of the youngest children on stage, she was asked to stand still with her arms in the air. That was far too boring for the young actress, whose mother still recounts how the tree stroked every sheep that walked onto the stage.

During her formative years in Chiswick, London, she had a child minder - a transvestite known as Robert by day, and Roberta by night. She laughs raucously as she recalls,

"There were always lots of colourful costumes and clothes, and I remember spending lots of time dressing up."

When she reached the age of five, the family began moving around the U.K. for work. By the time they returned to London 11 years later they had moved no less than 16 times. It made Dixon-Spain aware of the world that lay beyond the city, "I came to appreciate how small I was in the vastness of big landscapes."

She acquired A-levels in English Literature, Classics and Religious Studies, but was determined to study drama. Her father didn't approve, instead wanting her to pursue a career in law. After studying English and Dance in Chichester, she worked in cabaret, dance, and musical theatre, starring as Viola in Twelfth Night, before moving on to study drama at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts in London. Her first role after Mountview was in Macbeth, where she starred as Lady Macbeth and the First Witch.

She also loves writing, but acknowledges that it brings specific challenges, "I'm dyslexic and I visualize things in 3D far better than any normal means of communication. My starting point with any writing is to 'hear' the characters and 'see' the setting."

After a spell writing comedy and business-training scripts, alongside repertory theatre and television work, she met her husband Charles, whose family were farmers from Norfolk.

Together, the couple dabbled in property development in London, but soon realized they both missed the wild open spaces away from the city.

Her mother had returned to her homeland of Scotland years earlier, settling on the Island of Arran. During her visits north, Dixon-Spain felt a deep affinity for Scotland, "I missed the ever-changing landscapes and longed for that feeling of wonder at what may be around the next bend, over the hill, or in the forest. I wanted to come home." In 2003, the couple bought the ruinous remains of Dunans Castle, in remote Glendaruel in Argyll and Bute, Scotland.

Immersing herself in the local community, Dixon-Spain was asked to create "something theatrical" for a press event as part of a walking festival. She scripted a short piece in which the walkers would enter Puck's Fairy Glen. "I was thirty weeks pregnant and played a very fat Titania."

She gave birth to a daughter, and thirteen months later a second daughter arrived. Over the coming years, and while renovating the castle - an ongoing project - she entertained the girls with stories that





involved exploring the landscape, "We knew that fairies lived by the stream and the black, plastic-wrapped bales of hay were dragon's poop. That necessitated fairy and dragon-hunting expeditions. You'd be amazed at how many they saw!" In a rural environment with no theatre, this was the genesis of The Walking Theatre Company.

She scripted a local heritage piece and undertook community projects before Forestry Commission Scotland approached her to come up with ideas to encourage people to use the local community woodland. This resulted in both the Wonderland Adventure and The Whisky Walk. Layers of depth were added to the writing, and she drew in additional actors. The Whisky Walk asked the audience to engage with the actors in understanding whisky as an essential, economic commodity in deprived communities, educating them about the settlements in which they lived.

In 2009, The Walking Theatre Company was granted £3,000 from the Scottish development agency Firstport as a start-up social enterprise project. In the same year, Forestry Commission Scotland - in conjunction with the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland - commissioned Dixon-Spain to write and produce a piece of drama about the long-gone Wilsontown Ironworks in Lanarkshire, which - in its heyday in the late 1700s - employed 2,000 people. Today there is little to see of a vast complex that once dominated the countryside, but the fragmented communities that still remain bear witness to its demise. The resultant walking play permitted the audience to interact with characters from the past. It drew disparate communities together and helped people understand what had happened in the area, all the while affording them opportunities to meet and engage with each other. The project was a success and the following year Forestry Commission Scotland doubled Dixon-Spain's commissions. As well, Historic Scotland commissioned three bilingual pieces in Gaelic and Scottish. With the help of two fluent Gaelic speakers she embarked upon writing plays that give the audience the opportunity to try their hand at Gaelic pronunciation.



"Moving through a landscape that once resonated with the sound of the Gaelic tongue - and trying the words first hand 'in their natural environment' - created an immediate impact. Audience members could feel a connection with their ancestors.

Since 2009 The Walking Theatre Company has seen fantastic growth with projects for the National Trust for Scotland; educational drama for schools, community drop-in shows, site-specific historical plays, and murder mystery nights across the country. It now operates across the U.K. with a core of 30 Scottish actors and 12 English actors, all adept at playing varying roles.

Dixon-Spain continues to act and write. New commissions include 'A Town We Made' - a play about the development of Inveraray as a new town in the 18th century, and 'The Resurrection' - a ghostly drama set on the banks of the Union Canal taking brave audiences back in time to meet victims of the notorious murderers William Burke and William Hare. On the environmental side 'Two Thirds Fish' explores the herring industry along the shores of Loch Fyne and its impact on the local economy.

The Walking Theatre Company plays an important role in education and in getting people to explore and understand the environment in which they live, work and play. Its unique approach to interactive and site-responsive theatre is both a product of Dixon-Spain's personal life journey and her passion for drama and Scotland.

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Celtic Kent

Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and surfer Lesley Choyce chases Celtic connections in Kent



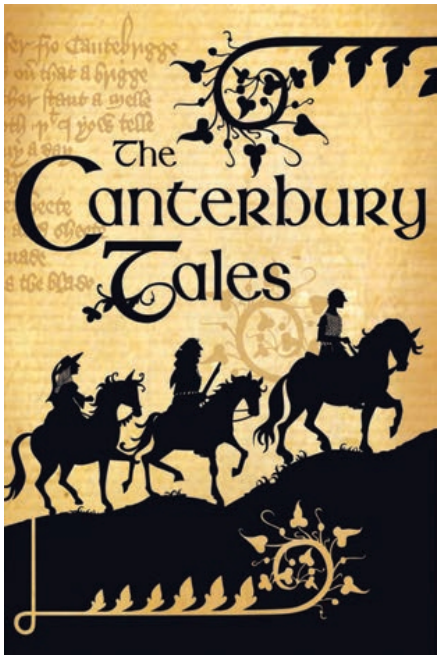
Canterbury Cathedral

I hadn't given this corner of England much thought as being Celtic, but it turns out that back in the so-called Iron Age a loosely knit Celtic tribe known as the Cantiaci or the Cantii called this corner of Southeast England their home. Their lives were rudely interrupted by the Romans in 43 AD and things were never quite the same. But this Celtic connection was enough to prompt me to explore this "Garden of England" - a region I had never had a chance to get to know.



Mistletoe Cottage

Thus it was that on a mild spring day my wife Linda and I found ourselves driving the M20 away from London to a green and generous land well-suited for some good hiking, cultural exploration, literary inspiration and authentic British ale. As we arrived at our destination, a tiny village named Stelling Minnis, I envisioned the Cantiaci of ancient times living a good life in such a paradise, where this fertile land could certainly provide all you ever needed for quiet rural existence.



Mistletoe Cottage was located down a narrow single-track road through horse pastures and horse chestnut trees. It was smaller than expected, but inviting in every other way. It seemed that every plant on the premises had decided to bloom that week so that made up for the cramped quarters. It was somewhat chilly that first night and the primary source of warmth in the place seemed to be a heated towel rack in the bathroom, although the place had the most effective on-command hot propane hot water heater I'd ever seen. It was perhaps the first time in the U.K. I'd ever taken a shower without it ending in a cold drizzle.

Canterbury was just twenty minutes away and we soon made our first foray into that legendary city. I had read the full Canterbury Tales in the original Middle English in graduate school and found the author - Geoffrey Chaucer - most entertaining, mischievous and insightful. The stories in the work were told by fictitious pilgrims on their way to Canterbury in the fourteenth century. So ours was a pilgrimage to ascertain what those pilgrims were seeking.

Somewhere along the way I discovered that Geoffrey Chaucer himself probably never

once set foot in the town. On our drive into the city, however, I noted that a housing development, a regional hospital and a skateboard park bore his name, and I was pleased to see him immortalized thus.

> *In my reading of the tales during an academic year - burdened with tedious British texts obsessed with manner and custom - I had much appreciated Chaucer's wit, his wacky characters and his emphasis on love, sex and general good cheer.*

And so, why exactly were these good folk on their way to Canterbury in those days of old? Well, St. Augustine came here in 597 to bring Christianity to England. In 1170, the highly revered Thomas Beckett was murdered here after a conflict with the crown over the rights of the church. According to Eyewitness to History, "A sword's crushing blow extinguished the life of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, on a cold December evening as he struggled on the steps of his altar. The brutal event sent a tremor through Medieval Europe."And thus, years later, the pilgrims began arriving for spiritual renewal.

About 44,000 people live in Canterbury today but, upon our arrival, the old part of town was mostly overburdened with tourists as it was a weekend. So we cantered away in our rental car, and decided to visit the cathedral later that week. I chose the verb "canter" because the locals had once upon a time used the phrase "Canterbury trot" to describe the way the pilgrims would ride upon their horses as they headed to town. This phrase was later shortened to "canter" and horsey people still use it to this day.

Far from the madding crowds the next day, we sought out the backest of back roads exploring tiny villages like Stouting Common, Whatsole Street and West Braebourne on our way to Wye. Along the way we stumbled upon a hiking trail above Hastingleigh Downs and found ourselves at a look-off where the sign modestly boasted that it was "Possibly the Best View in Kent." Below us was the England of my dreams and, for the most part, the view would have been much the same as it was in the eighteenth century; hills, farms, stone houses, tiny villages, endless trees and rolling hills. The only anomaly seemed to be an array of gleaming white buildings that looked like a space station on the westerly horizon. It seemed alarmingly out of kilter and we determined to find out what it was later that week.

Wye was one of those little rural English towns that make you want to abandon North America and settle here into a quiet tranquil life of porridge breakfasts, morning tea, crossword puzzles, crustless sandwich lunches, afternoon tea with scones and an early evening pruning of your prize roses. Alas, I would not survive a day of it. But such thoughts run through my mind. Linda and I made a familiar tour of a church graveyard. The older gravestones had been "polished by time" and the names and dates were worn off by the years. I surmised that the towering chestnut trees in full blossom were not as old as most of the souls planted in the soil here. I like old graveyards immensely and grieve slightly that I'll eventually be interred in a country so (technically) young as 150 years.

On another fine day, we made a beeline for the Channel coast to hike the trails above the cliffs of Dover. My father, who had been a war veteran stationed in England, sometimes played cassette tapes with WWII music and I remember listening to Vera Lynn sing,

"There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow
Just you wait and see
I'll never forget the people I met
Braving those angry skies
I remember well as the shadows fell
The light of hope in their eyes."

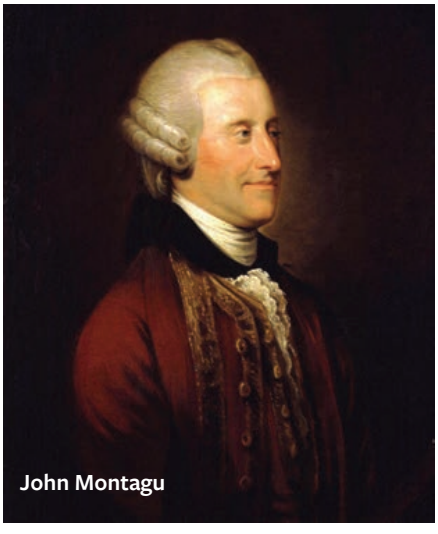


Cliffs of Dover

He'd planted images in my head of Allied bomber pilots, their planes riddled with bullets and their engines smoking, struggling to keep their planes aloft over the English Channel. They were praying out loud that the next second those stark white and oh-so-hopeful cliffs would appear in sight.

I've never been disappointed by any form of coastal hiking in the U.K., and the Dover cliffs were as good as it gets. (We skipped both the castle and the town – probably my doing.) The views were magnificent, although it was not clear enough to see the French shore. Once past the parking lot and the gift shop, the grassy fields and trails are more or less untainted despite the thousands who visit here each year. The wind was high and the hikers were mostly old folks with walking sticks that made them look like skiers without skis. We all had runny noses and reddish cheeks from the cold, salty breeze, which made it easy for us to look like locals rather than tourists from abroad.

I don't know exactly how we got somewhat lost, but we did as there were several different levels for walking. I asked some directions from another pair of hikers who turned out to be German and they sent us in the perfectly wrong direction. It could have been they misunderstood my question, but nonetheless it added an extra couple of kilometers to our jaunt so I reckon it was good for our health.


John Montagu

After we finally found our way back to our car, we headed to the seaside town of Deal but it reminded us too much of those British coastal towns like Bridlington and Brighton where inland city dwellers flock in the summer to stake out territory on crowded pebbly beaches before turning their skin beet-red in the sun. Sandwich was a fair bit more quaint and interesting. And, yes, it really is the place of origin of theubiquitous word we use today for anything involving two slices of bread - thanks go to John Montagu, the fourth Earl of Sandwich. We wandered around the shops and twisty streets until we were lost yet again. Truth is, getting lost somewhere is usually the most fun to be had in many situations. We ended up on a path beside a small river or canal (I couldn't decide which). My wife doesn't like me to ask for directions from anyone. Her belief seems to be that we should be able to find our way with our own wits. And hadn't the Germans sent us hoofing on the wrong path? But, my legs were giving out, so I asked for help from one of those know-it-all old British coots who must have been dragging himself home from an afternoon at the pub.

He looked me up and down as if he thought I was a terrorist, or at least a Russian spy.

"Where are you trying to go?" he asked.

I explained we were trying to get to the car park near the quay - though I had pronounced quay as "kay." His response was that the word was "key" not "kay" and that we were walking in the wrong direction. Then he added, "You couldn't possibly be further away from your destination." This made it sound like I was a buffoon and hopelessly lost. He pointed in three possible directions we could take to the "key" as Linda elbowed me, so I thanked him and we just kept walkingin the direction we had been going in, only to discover the car park was a mere eight minute walk away.

My wife has a device on her cellphone that tells you how many steps you've walked in a day, what the total distance is and how high up or down you've gone. By the time we'd finished with Dover and Sandwich, we had logged many thousands of steps, 10.5 kilometres and gone up (and down) 30 stories.

"We slept soundly that night and woke to sunlight and singing birds the next morning - something straight out of a Romantic poet's sonnet.


Leeds Castle

Our landlady had given us free tickets to Leeds Castle so I decided to drive the backroads there rather than the M20. This, however, took us first through Ashford, where my wife purposely conspired to lead us to the Ashford Designer Outlet shopping centre. This turned out to be that very strange and otherworldly set of buildings I'd spotted from the look-out over the Downs. It is a somewhat hideous North American styled collection of, well, outlet stores for every brand name of fashion or gobbledegook you've ever heard of. Ashford is probably the poster-child city for why someone would NOT want to go to England.

However, we were here and we made the rounds. The place was mobbed with what I assumed to be British families whose dream it was to live in places like Teeneck, New Jersey or Columbus, Ohio. The Gap was doing a brisk business, as was Tommy Huffinger or whatever his name is. People were almost frantically grabbing for goods. I checked the price tags of various items while my wife inspected some rather torturous looking shoes. As far as I could tell, the sales game was thus: first print a price tag with a sum three times what the item is worth. Then take a marker and mark it down not once but twice until the "sale" price (40-50% off) is only 10- 20% more than what the item could possibly be worth. And then wait for the hordes to descend and purchase.

The London Daily Express states that England has been invaded 73 times since 1066. Many of those invasions took place here in Kent. Clearly the Outlet Store Invasion was the most recent. We had a not-so-bad lunch at a Chinese restaurant, and I drove as fast as the backroads would allow towards Shadoxhurst, Woodchurch, past the South of England Rare Breeds Centre and on to bucolic Tenterden, known for its steam railway. I should note that it also made national news in August of 2013 when it announced that it was the first town in the U.K. to put up its Christmas lights.

There was a crisis underway in the carpark and I walked right into it as I went to get my ticket at the pay station. Two gentlemen were cursing the machine and a woman was wringing her hands. It appeared that the machine was not working. I wondered how I could help.

The most elderly of us suggested it was "bloody awful" and that we should all just leave angry notes on our windscreens about the faulty machine and the blight of politicians. But no one seemed to have a pen. No one but me, that is. I am a writer, after all, and dread the times when inspiration will burst upon my cranium like a solar flare and I find

myself with no writing instrument. Now I'd saved the day. We all wrote our notes, although mine had no political commentary. And that was bloody that.

I don't remember much else about the town except for a very lovely church called St. Mildred's. St. Mildred, in case you didn't know, was an eighth century abbess from Kent whose remains ended up in Canterbury.

Then it was on to Leeds Castle, which was once the home of Catherine of Aragon in the sixteenth century.

> *The grounds were exquisite and the castle was opulent, a reminder of what people might do if they have a prodigious amount of wealth and unlimited manpower.*

The two things I found most interesting, however, was the maze and the dog collar museum. The maze was a series of high hedges. The man outside said it would take us twenty minutes. After twenty minutes of taking all the wrong paths, however, we were no closer to finding out way out. I had mistakenly thought we could leave the way we came in but I couldn't locate our entrance. Finally, I asked some visiting Belgian students if they could help us and they led us to a small Disney-like cave underground that was the key to freedom.

And yes, there really was a dog collar museum on the property at Leeds Castle. It had never occurred to me that nearly everything under the sun, even dog collars, probably has a museum somewhere on the planet. Suffice it to say, the collars were fascinating and bizarre, all of them far more elaborate and complex than the one we use on our little Westie at home,

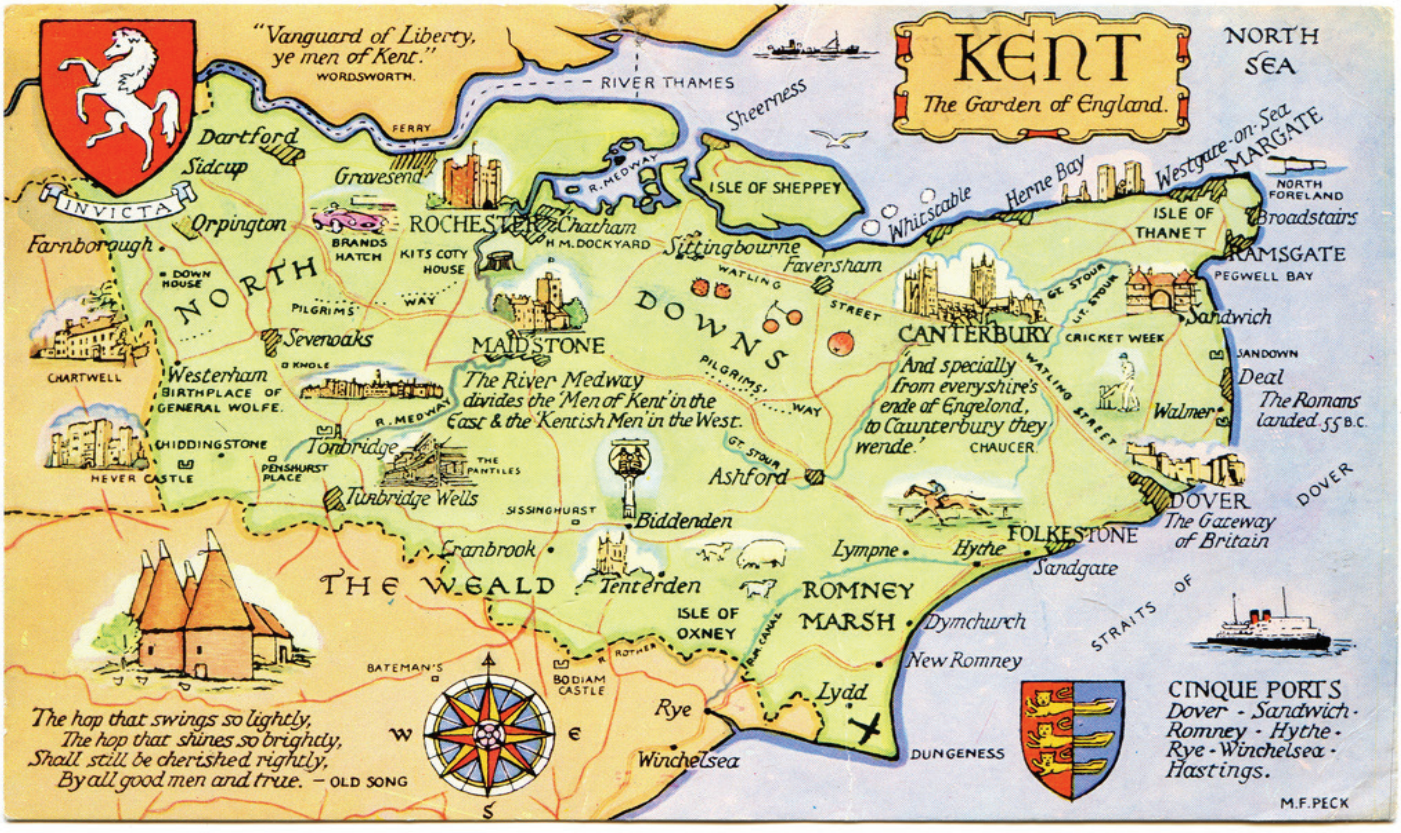
On our final outing, we headed to the coast to the north, the wide mouth of the Thames. We hit Hearne Bay and Whitstable, both a tad too Brighton-like for our liking, before retreating south for our final pilgrimage to Canterbury on a sunny afternoon. There were Belgian and French students milling about as we entered the Cathedral and lit a candle in honour of our much loved deceased parents. Whatever your religion, a cathedral invokes a feeling of spiritual depth, and this one certainly did the job.

It was built between 1070 and 1180 and more construction happened from 1379- 1503. Obviously it was an inter-generational project. An earlier version of the cathedral was "burned and rebuilt" on a number of occasions. There are tombs inside with the remains of Henry IV and someone known as the Black Prince (possibly a Harry Potter character?). The Germans used the cathedral for target practice several times in WWII.

The bombing of historically significant buildings later became known as the Baedeker Bombings. It would appear that, at more than one point in the war, both sides started bombing monuments as well as historical and sacred buildings. How that can help win any war is beyond my scope of understanding. But then again, so is much of history.

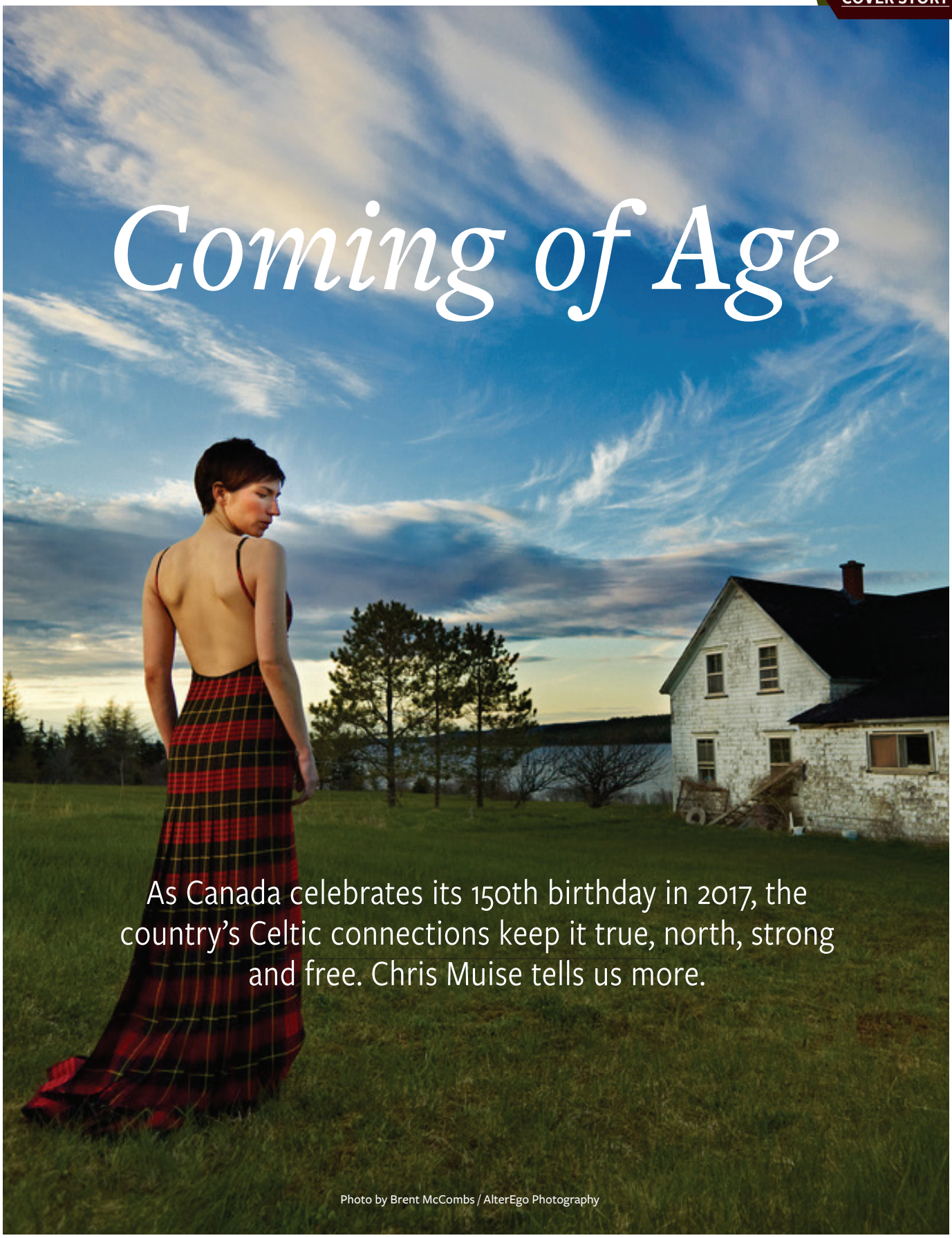
Search as I did, I couldn't find a significant remnant of Cantiaci culture in rural or urban Kent. These people who had this wonderful patch of earth to themselves for so many ancient years were invaded, conquered, and beaten, but eventually melded into the ethnic fabric of Kent and mostly lost to the proverbial mists of time. But I'm fairly certain I could feel the spirit of these ancient ones, as I shared the vision looking out over the Downs and sitting in pews above the stone floor of Canterbury Cathedral.

And since Chaucer had drawn us here, perhaps he should have the final say (translated to modern English). As a surfer, I've quoted him many times: "Time and tide wait for no man." I'm sure you've heard that before as well. But he also wrote, "Women desire six things: they want their husbands to be brave, wise, rich, generous, obedient to wife, and lively in bed." Listen up, gents – it is the wisdom of the ages.




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Coming of Age



As Canada celebrates its 150th birthday in 2017, the country's Celtic connections keep it true, north, strong and free. Chris Muise tells us more.

Photo by Brent McCombs / AlterEgo Photography

Canada's history reaches further back through time than the centennial and a half milestone the country is celebrating this year, and the histories of the Celtic nations and its people reach back further still. But we likely wouldn't be celebrating this milestone at all if these two histories did not intersect at various points along the way.

Many Celts found a new home in the New World after horrific tragedies like the Highland Clearances, the Great Famine of Ireland, and the defeat of the Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden forced them from their ancestral lands. A great deal of those Celts favoured Canada, thanks to the burgeoning fur trade pioneered by Scottish explorers like Alexander Mackenzie, whose travels expanded to the continent's westernmost frontiers before even Lewis and Clarke.

From there, Celtic peoples proliferated throughout the growing nation, and today you will find their names memorialized across the country for their great deeds that, to a large degree, defined the country.

James Douglas helped to bring British Columbia into confederation, connecting the two ends of the country together via railway. George Brown brought journalism to Canada when he founded the country's first national newspaper. McGills were pivotal to the education and banking systems; James, the founder and namesake of the prestigious McGill University, and Peter, who served as president of the Bank of Montreal. Without John A. Macdonald, who graces the $10 note and was instrumental in Confederation, there simply would be no Canada.

And that's just the famous names you will see on street signs and as names for parks, rivers, and forests. More than nine million Canadians claim some Celtic heritage, and their great, great grandparents were the masons, engineers, artists, bakers, fishermen, and everyday people who built this nation with their own two hands.

> *"No matter where you enter the history of Canada, through exploration, politics, business, education, or literature, you find Celts and their descendants playing a leading role," ~ Ken McGoogan*

To celebrate this auspicious anniversary, both for the country and the Celtic people who laid its groundwork, Celtic Life International went coast-to-coast-to-coast to explore Canada's Celtic connections.

Nova Scotia – The Fight to Revive the Language

There are seven recognized Celtic nations in the world, so distinguished for featuring peoples who still celebrate the culture, and speak and pass down the Celtic languages – Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Brittany, and Galicia. Unofficially, one could consider Nova Scotia (literally, "New Scotland") to be an eighth Celtic nation, since the tongue of the Scottish Gaels is still spoken here to this day.



Besides the fact that Celtic Life International is published here, it seems almost obvious that we would start in Nova Scotia, where there is so much Celtic culture in the provincial identity that one can hardly take two steps without tripping over some aspect of it.

While Nova Scotia is known for its piping, its tartan, or the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, the roots of every culture begin in its language, and the tight-knit community of the province's Gaels very nearly lost theirs.

"There's an old saying - 'A culture without a language is a culture without a soul,'" says Rodney MacDonald. MacDonald was once Nova Scotia's premier, and now serves as the CEO of Colaisde na Gàidhlig / The Gaelic College, which was established in 1938 along the Cabot Trail in Baddeck.

"We focus on the language, the music, the dance, the craft, and the culture of those that came here to settle in Nova Scotia," explains MacDonald, who notes that many of the communities in and around Cape Breton Island - found in the northern part of the province, including his home county of Inverness - were settled by those who came from the Scottish Highlands. "A key to that is the Gaelic language...those that were Gaelic speakers had a huge influence throughout Cape Breton Island."

MacDonald believes that Gaelic culture thrived in Nova Scotia in part because Cape Breton was an isolated island, accessible only by ferry, up until the 1950s. Gaels, Scots, and other Celtic peoples would settle there in order to maintain their culture, their religion, and their language.

"They held onto the culture to a greater degree."

Nova Scotia is a rare segment of Canada where native Gaelic speakers - those whose


Rodney MacDonald



Griffintown

first language was Gaelic - are part of the living memory. David Rankin, director of school operations at The Gaelic College, grew up surrounded by family who spoke the language.

"I have an aunt and uncle that still speak it, and it was my grandfather's first language," shares Rankin. "It is something that has been in my family for generations."

Rankin remembers his grandfather, who was the last native-speaking member of his family, telling him stories about how speaking Gaelic was once frowned upon in an increasingly English-speaking province.

"It wasn't the language of business and commerce, so it was definitely discouraged in extreme ways. He was actually punished in school for speaking Gaelic."

"There are stories of people getting the strap for speaking their language," adds MacDonald. "It was taken."

Rankin's parents, and many of their generation, grew up as the first in a long lineage of Nova Scotia Gaels whose first language wasn't Gaelic. Thanks to conservation efforts that started taking root in the last decade or so, however, the children of Rankin's generation should bring that tradition back.

During his tenure as premier, MacDonald set up the Office of Gaelic Affairs, which strives to maintain the culture, and connect Gaelic communities fractured by time, distance, and loss of language. One of the biggest successes of this office has been the encouragement of young people to revitalize the ancient tongue.

"There has been a real resurgence of young people taking up the language. It is offered in our schools, and hundreds of students are now learning Gaelic around the province."

Rankin, 26, is young enough to have been among those given the chance to study Gaelic in school starting at the secondary level.

"I chose to go into Gaelic," says Rankin, who now creates programming to teach others the language, in the conversational Gàidlhig aig Baile teaching style. "To let it fall out of my family - my generation - I feel that it would be a shame to lose it."

Rankin says friends his age have already started having wee tots of their own, and he's excited to see the next generation of native Gaelic speakers off to such a promising start.

"Native Gaelic speakers these days are either over 70 or under seven."

Quebec – The Celts of Griffintown

As a province known predominantly for its French Canadian culture, you could be forgiven for looking past Quebec as Celtic hot spot.



Scott MacLeod

Forgiven, maybe, but still wrong. Quebec has its own share of Celtic history, and artist and filmmaker G. Scott MacLeod plied all his many crafts to produce a series of short films about one such Celtic corner of the province, Griffintown.

MacLeod grew up in the care of a Dublin couple after his parents died, and played Celtic music in Montreal pubs for "extra dosh." He knows first-hand that there's a thriving Celtic underbelly deep in the heart of the city, and says evidence of Montreal's Celtic vestiges is everywhere, if you look carefully.

"The ghosts are there," says MacLeod, who points to the Irish shamrock and St. George's cross adorning the Montreal flag and the city's long-running St. Patrick's Day parade as just a few easy examples.

"The fabric is here...however sometimes you just have to dig a little deeper to find it."

Griffintown is the true hidden gem of la belle province's Celtic heritage. Combining animation, illustrations, photographs, and live-action footage set to the narration of local historian Dr. Matthew Barlow, MacLeod's short films tell the tale of a small borough close to the Port of Montreal, built to home the Irish settlers who dug much of the city's waterways.

"They were the labour force for the construction of the Lachine Canal, which would basically create Canada as the gateway for industry," explains MacLeod, who adds that the British hired French and Irish masons and bricklayers as cheap workers. "That area of the city really is the core of the heartbeat of Irish Montreal."

Griffintown has changed since the 19th century, when it would have been a bustling industrial community, and MacLeod's films attest to that. Many of the Irish communities that remained after the canal was built would congregate around churches.

But these Irish communities aren't gone, nor are they ghosts - many French Canadians claim a portion of Celtic ancestry, according to MacLeod, and the Irish community in Montreal even paid for the Francophone subtitles for his films. French may continue to be the dominant culture in Quebec, but there's plenty of reminders around the province of the Celtic peoples that, quite literally, helped lay the foundation of this country.

"If it is not on the map, or if it is not in the small towns, it is certainly in the architecture left behind, and the family names and clans that contributed to the building of this nation. They really did mark their place in this country."

Ontario – The Celtic Vein of the Ottawa Valley

Much like in Quebec, Irish immigrants made up the bulk of the work force that constructed Ontario's Rideau Canal. Beginning in 1826, the waterway was conceived as a way to protect the nation's capital in the event of an invasion from the United States.


Ellen MacIsaac

"At that time, the war of 1812 was still fresh in people's minds," says Ellen MacIsaac, a music faculty associate with Ottawa University, and the founder and director of the Ottawa Celtic Choir. "Many people from the Celtic nations would make their homes in the region.

"The people in this area were primarily Scots then," she continues, "mostly architects, masons, things like that. There were


Glengarry Highland Games

also Welsh masons, Welsh stone layers, with many of them working for the Royal engineers. The Irish immigrants then came over looking for work, and by the 1840s - with the advent of the Great Famine - they were coming in droves."

"In time, the area between Ottawa and Montreal would become known as Canada's Celtic corridor.

"The biggest pocket is down in the valley in the Peterborough and Kingston areas," she notes. "In fact, we saw an Irish-speaking group start up in Kingston in 2007."

Other areas, like Maxville - home to the world-renowned Glengarry Highland Games - are noteworthy for their preservation and promotion of the Celtic languages.

"In fact, this part of the world is one of the few spots in Canada where Scot's Gaelic is still spoken as a native tongue."

Being home to the nation's capital, Celtic culture across the region has had a profound influence on what Canadian governance would look and feel like; Parliament Hill in Ottawa was constructed in the style Welsh and Scottish would have been familiar with, and Remembrance Day ceremonies there are observed annually with pipe music honouring the fallen. Celtic figures, both historical and contemporary, loom large on the city's political stage, including the country's leaders; of Canada's 23 prime ministers, 14 have Scottish roots, including current PM Justin Trudeau.

Ottawa remains a popular immigration destination in Canada, both for Celtic peoples and others, which makes the area something of a melting pot. But unlike other major population centers, the city's strong Celtic roots stand out.

"We are not so big that we have lost our history," says MacIsaac. "We haven't become bloated the way Toronto has. Toronto has tradition, yes, but it is so huge now, and there are so many different societies, so many different cultures from all over the world that it all kinds of blends into one big generic piece of geography. Ottawa, and the surrounding region, doesn't really have that. There is still quite a bit of Celtic culture drifting around."

Vancouver – Blending to Thrive

The distance from Ottawa to Vancouver is vast - 3540 kilometers, or 2200 miles - but hearty travelers would be hard-pressed to pass through the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta without coming upon some sort of Celtic connection; from the Winnipeg Irish Festival to the Ceilidh Surprise storefront in Regina to Edmonton's large Welsh contingent - and even in the Inuit/Celtic fusion music found in the country's cold northern territories - it is quite something to connect Canada's Celtic dots on the map.

Vancouver, British Columbia, is one of those major metropolitan melting pots MacIsaac described, where Celtic culture has to compete for attention.


Mike Chisholm

Originally from Antigonish, Nova Scotia, piper Mike Chisholm has seen his fair share of Highland games. He has lived in British Columbia for the last 20 years, recently taking a leading role with the B.C. Highland Games & Scottish Festival.

"There seemed to have been a waning of interest in the games, and I found myself with an opportunity to become involved," says Chisholm, who is now the event's chairman.

He describes the highland games he knew back home in Antigonish as "organic" - the whole town came out to participate and celebrate their heritage. Things are different out west, however, where he knew he had his work cut out for him.

"I go into it with my eyes wide open, knowing that we are living in an area that has a very large Scottish community, but it is scattered all over a region that has about 2-million people in it. There are lots of other competing cultures. We need to ensure that ours is just as sturdy, and continues to be a strong culture within this environment."

The B.C. festival will still have all the tent-pole features of traditional Highland games - including pipes, drums, dancing, and athletics - but it will also incorporate broader events and attractions, in order to appeal to members of the community without a vested interest in Scottish or Celtic culture.

"Highland games need to be adaptable to the modern times. We must open our arms up and welcome other cultures. We need to realize that its not just for us anymore."

Chisholm has his critics who worry that inclusion might dilute the region's Celtic culture, but he believes the community is strong enough to survive some new blood, and even needs it in order to remain relevant in an enormously multicultural world.

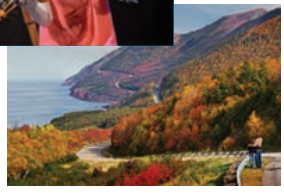
"Our job is to make sure that our culture - and the core elements of what we do, including the language, the music, the dance, the athletics - will survive and thrive for future generations. We can best do that by inviting the whole world to participate."



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Veronica MacIsaac

the Queen of Celtic couture

Story by Rosalie MacEachern

All photos by Brent McCombs
AlterEgo Photography | alterego.zenfolio.com



Veronica MacIsaac might be the busiest seamstress on the Atlantic Canadian seaboard: ears always attuned to music, toes tapping dance steps, elbows ever deep in ancestral tartans - all the while designing and launching new fashion collections, filling custom orders, and even taking time to present her weekly Tartan Tuesday talks on social media.

"I design for everyone who loves tartan," explains the Halifax, Nova Scotia-based fashionista. "It may be a flowing tartan gown, or something with tartan details or trim. The backbone of my business is heritage-based, so many of my designs are for Scottish and Celtic events."

For the last nine years, her business - Veronica MacIsaac Apparel - has been creating eye-catching pieces for a growing number of both Celtic, and non-Celtic, occasions; everyday wear, Highland competitions, weddings, or any style of social gatherings, both at home and abroad.

"I have been saying that I offer modern styles in traditional fabrics, but we are increasingly getting authentic tartans available in lightweight silks and poly viscose so the possibilities are growing."

Her latest collection - launched just weeks ago at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax - includes casual tartan-trimmed cropped jackets, halter dresses, flowing gowns and skirts in all lengths, as well as accessories from necklaces to clutches.

Amidst bolts of tartan - the subdued Black and White Menzies, the bold blue Ramsay, the Black Watch of military fame, a range of MacDonalds, and a personal favourite, the Blue MacKay - MacIsaac moves from ideas to sketches, and sketches to patterns.

"I like to think my designs are a welcome change from the traditional skirt and lacy blouse that persisted at Celtic gatherings for decades."

"I know very few people who actually prefer the mid-calf length skirt and fluffy, lacy blouse in their daily life, so I think people have been eager to start adopting their personal style into their heritage wear."

MacIsaac comes by her own heritage honestly; her bloodline goes back directly to the Scottish Highlands. Her family, a mix of Cape Breton MacKenzies and MacDonalds and Prince Edward Island MacIsaacs, have all proudly retained their Celtic customs over generations. As she sketches, cuts and sews alone in her studio, her history is never far from her mind.

"People may assume that because I am under 40, I just like using tartan because of how colourful it is. The truth, however, is that I have been in the tartan world all my life, and I know a fair bit about its history. I don't use these fabrics willy-nilly - I think I am actually designing new ways to carry tradition forward."

MacIsaac's great-grandfather, Black Jack MacDonald, piped his way onto the battlefields of Europe in the First World War, his Cape Breton regiment marching behind him.

"My uncles on my Mom's side were all pipers, and all of my cousins on that side highland danced or played the pipes, including my brother and me."

A premier highland dancer herself, MacIsaac still serves on the management team of the Canadian Highland Dance Team (Canadiana Celtic), which performs worldwide. Her parents, Mac and Rosemary, run a kilt-making business - MacIsaac Kiltmakers - in the picturesque community of St. Peter's on Cape Breton Island.

"I can't remember a time when I wasn't interested in fashion..."

"My mother taught me to sew when I was four, and I was always welcome to be creative with bits of fabric. The design part of the business I figured out as I went along, so I am entirely self-taught."

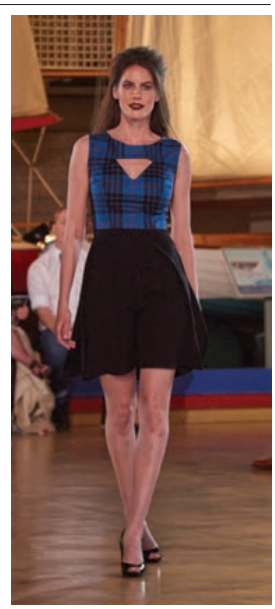
She credits that early exposure to tartan with allowing her to see it as more than "just kilt fabric." In time, she would see the career possibilities.

"I remember my mother and I making ourselves tartan sheath dresses for a festival, and then people constantly commenting on them. That's the first time it ever occurred to me there could be a demand for tartan clothing."

She urged her mother to branch out into more than kilts.

"I told her that I would sketch the designs and make the samples, but she argued that she already had her hands full with the kilt business."







As the popularity of tartan grew in the 2000s, MacIsaac again pushed her mother to consider a wider line of homegrown products.

"We had that conversation many times until finally, in exasperation at me badgering her, she asked me why not consider doing it myself. Honestly, the thought had never occurred to me, so I didn't have an answer."

Frustrated with her professional life, and looking to do something with the potential to be both successful and significant, she contemplated her future over drinks with a close friend.

"She simply asked what made me happy, and I started to think about it."

Inspired by possibility, she organized a fashion show to help raise funds for a group of dancers going to Scotland.

"I brought my own clothes, some of my mother's, some kilts, and some borrowed pieces. A bar owner gave us some space, and the response to the show was much better than I expected."

With that fall's Atlantic Fashion Week on the horizon, MacIsaac put her name forward to present a tartan collection.

"When they replied that they would love to have tartan, I knew I had to do it. That was my first fully thought-out collection."

Again, the positive response encouraged her to continue.

"For the first 18 months I had to keep another job to pay the bills, but I was always designing in my head and sewing whenever I could."

Her big break came in 2011 with the unveiling of her work - including one of her signature pieces, a backless deep-pleated gown in bold MacQueen tartan - on a New York City runway.

"It was so exciting - a New York fashion show with celebrity models wearing my designs. That dress is still one of my favourites. I had been dreaming of it for a while, picturing it first in Black Watch. I knew it could be a game changer, and it was."

That dress, and others in her collections, have brought international attention. However, as MacIsaac is quick to point out, any designer is only as good as his/her last collection.

"A collection can be anywhere from 25 to 40 pieces, representing a variety of styles. It is a good six months of work, with very busy days and nights before the first show."

Highlighting her latest offerings is a daring dress that combines old Celtic elements with a new edge. Called The Ghillie Brogue, it features a laced bodice, reminiscent of the man's kilt shoe from which it takes its name.

"It is not for everyone," she acknowledges, "but that is why I also have a conservative, full-length dress with a tartan belt and a long kick pleat that creates drama in the back of the dress. In each collection, I try to include formal, casual and 'just for fun' styles."

She has also discovered a strong market for tartan accessories.

"I sew headbands, scrunchies, and lots of small items for Highland dancers. Fascinators with a spark of tartan are fun. Tartan cuffs, or an accent belt can dramatically change the look of a black dress and really make it a stand-out."

MacIsaac notes that tartans, from ancients to moderns, are never out of fashion or style - so the possibilities going forward are exciting and endless.

"My next big dream is to present a fabulous tartan show for a huge audience at Celtic Connections in Glasgow."

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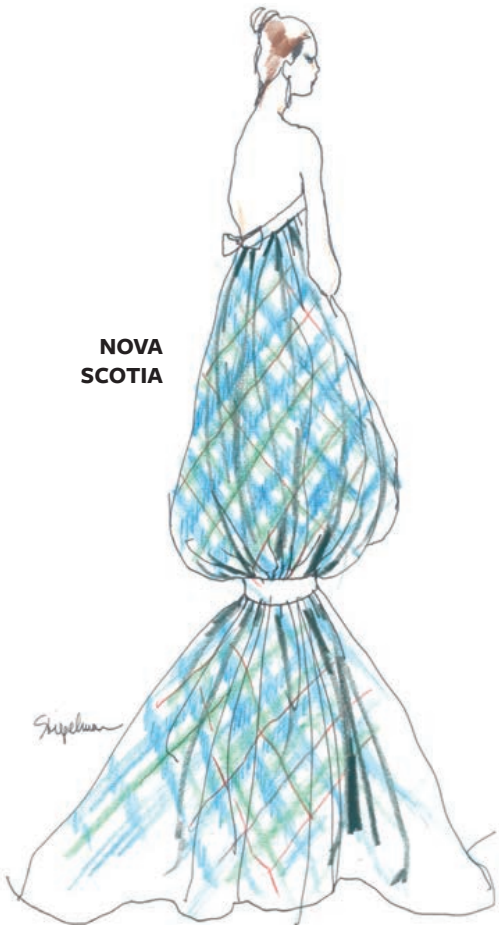


Michael Kaye

Michael Kaye was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, a proud Canadian of Celtic descent. He moved to New York City over 20 years ago to pursue a career in design. Today, he works almost exclusively with tartan "because I love the endless opportunities that come with the mix of colours and lines. And Tartan is never out of fashion."

In celebration of Canada's 150th birthday, Kaye has designed a commemorative collection that represents and utilizes the individual tartans from each Canadian Province and Territory.

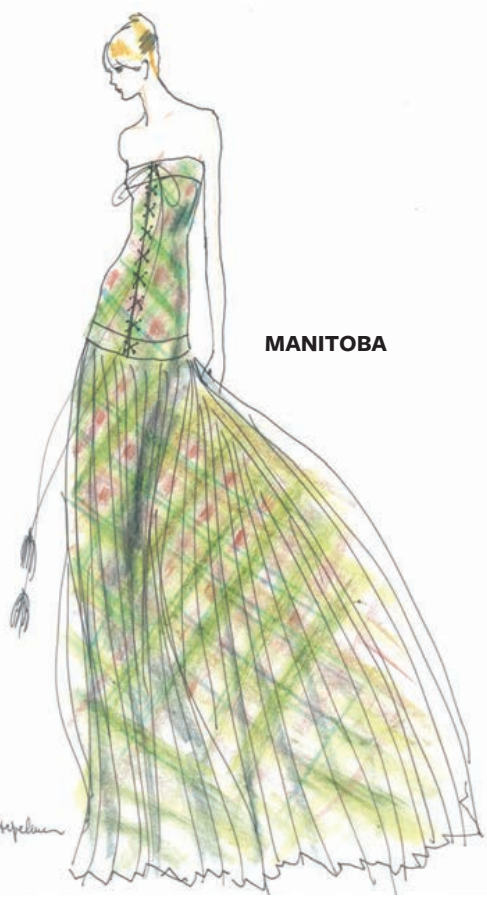
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Greenbridge Celtic Folk Fest

Canada's Celtic couple brings the music home



To commemorate Canada's 150th birthday, Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy are launching the inaugural Greenbridge Celtic Folk Fest. The two-day event will take place August 25 and 26 in their Ontario hometown, showcasing music from Cape Breton, Ireland, and beyond. Recently we spoke with the couple about what attendees can expect to experience.

What inspired you to organize this event?

The inspiration came from having performed at festivals for most of our lives, and from wanting to bring a great quality event to our own part of the world, tailor-made to our specifications. It was sort of a dream that we talked about years ago. It came from Donnell's mind, but we couldn't have imagined having the guts and the energy to go through with it and taking that kind of a chance. But as time went on we thought more and more about making it a possibility. We love the idea of being a part of something great and significant. We have learned a lot over the years about what works on stage - proper set up, vibe, etc - and we really feel that we have something to offer. When Donnell first mentioned having a festival here, I got very excited about providing audiences with the same sort of cultural experiences that I grew up with in Cape Breton.

Why now, and why this particular location?

It is just one of those things that we finally got around to. With little ones coming along it wasn't until now that there was a little bit of room for it in our lives. As for the location, the idea struck when we had a private party on our farm last year with a live stage, trying out some ideas. At first, we were going to have the event on the farm, but a very good friend offered to do it on his property, and we thought it was the perfect location, close to our home. We love the spot, so that started the conversation about making it an annual event, doing it up properly, and opening it up to the public.

What are the challenges involved?

The challenges are in the details - specifically the regulations and legal requirements. It takes a lot of resources and a great team, because it really is a huge undertaking - dealing with artists, food, health, safety, permits and licenses, staging and lighting, internet and hydro. It's a little like building a small, temporary village. As touring artists, we are familiar with some of the process, but we are quickly seeing it from a different viewpoint – that of a promoter. There is also the challenge of trying to anticipate the outcome; ticket sales, attendance, etc. That said, we are very confident that it will all come together in the end.

What can attendees expect?

First and foremost, they can expect great music in an awesome setting. It is going to be a unique musical experience that will include many of our friends and people we admire, all celebrating the heritage of Cape Breton, Ireland, and the other Celtic nations. We have a clear vision of what we are trying to create, and our goal is to attract music lovers of all ages.

So this will be a yearly gathering?

Yes, we hope it will develop into an annual event, and we are already fielding inquiries from artists for next year.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture generally?

No, and that is one of the reasons why we are hosting this festival. Events like this will help to pass Celtic culture down to future generations. In today's world, those customs can sometimes get lost in all of the noise out there. We can never have enough of a push to keep our traditions alive, and we can never get too comfortable with where it is at; we must continue to have programs in place that foster the continuation of these ancient ways.

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Alex MacLean

Alex MacLean brings his small town brand to the big time

If you have spent any time travelling through Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, or Prince Edward Island over the last while then you have likely seen someone with East Coast Lifestyle proudly emblazoned across their shirt.

The East Coast Lifestyle apparel brand has exploded in Atlantic Canada - and beyond - since creator Alex MacLean launched the product almost four years ago.

"I was told to create an invention in a course called Venture Creation," says MacLean, 25, then a student at Acadia University in Nova Scotia. "I discovered that there was no clothing line locally, at all, in this part of the world. So why not try to brand the East Coast, and make people proud of where they're from?

"We're kind of the underdog of Canada," he continues, referring to Maritimers. "People often don't think they can stay here for work, and leave to get jobs elsewhere in Canada. Sometimes we don't always appreciate who we are, where we live, and what we have here."

Seizing the opportunity to stoke local pride, MacLean borrowed a scant $800 from his father for an initial investment of 30 hoodies - adorned with a design of nautical rope and an anchor - which he sold to friends and classmates who wore them around campus. He invested the profits back into the business to produce more hoodies, which his classmates were starting to gobble up.

Fast forward to today, and MacLean has 32 employees working on the brand, selling East Coast Lifestyle apparel and gear in 82 stores across Canada and the U.S., and servicing even more distant markets through an online storefront.

"I kept rolling it off that $800 loan," he says. "There have been no investors, or any other partners come in at anytime."

MacLean, whose mother hails from Celtic country on Cape Breton Island, has definitely helped improve the region's image in recent years. But what exactly is "East Coast Lifestyle?"

For starters, it means sailing and surfing to MacLean.

"It is different for everyone," he shares.

> *"For me, 'East Coast Lifestyle' is being proud of where you are from, and having the ocean as your hobby."*

But MacLean knows that there are a lot of lifestyles on the East Coast, so his company tries to appeal to all of them, often through limited-edition designs and regional exclusives.

"We break it down with tartans and landmarks from each of the different provinces. For example, we cater to Cape Breton with individual designs that are Cape Breton tartans, or we have the Cape Breton flag design. We have also done a logo with the Cape Breton Island behind our circle."



As much as he loves seeing his fellow Maritimers sporting the swag, MacLean likes it most when East Coast Lifestyle products travel offshore, and then hearing stories of how his brand has connected people abroad.

"One person from Cape Breton was working in the Edmonton Mall. He saw a girl wearing an East Coast Lifestyle t-shirt - one with a Cape Breton logo - and asked her about what part of the region she was from. It turns out that she was from Inverness, and he was from Sydney."

The couple later married in Jamaica, with the entire wedding party wearing East Coast Lifestyle apparel.

"It's very, very humbling, very powerful," says MacLean. "People are not only meeting new people because of the logo, but they are getting married too? Wow."

He notes that the East Coast Lifestyle isn't just designed for Atlantic Canadians. It may have started that way, but there are lots of east coasts around the world, and he's begun seeing people elsewhere using his merchandise to express their own regional pride.

"We see customers from Japan that are proud to be from Tokyo," says MacLean, who has trademarked the brand globally. "It's all about being proud of where you are from. Wear it when you travel around the world and watch what happens.

"I hope that the Celtic community can embrace the apparel and connect with others that might be of similar heritage. As we have already seen, the logo brings people together."

www.eastcoastlifestyle.com


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Carmel Mikol

Carmel Mikol evokes Cape Breton soul on her latest release

With the opening drones of a century-year-old pipe organ, Carmel Mikol sets an intense tone on the title track of her new album, Daughter of a Working Man.

Rock, folk, and a hint of Celtic grit come together as the music builds and reverberates, bouncing off surfaces and shimmying into corners. Then, like a taut wire, the vibrancy of her voice cuts through.

"The new album is much more sonically plush and textured than the last, but it's still folk," says the Nova Scotia singer-songwriter, whose earliest musical memories are of her father playing a 12-string Martin guitar around the house.

Like the finest folk songs of the past - Mikol lists the work of Bob Dylan, Janis Ian and Buffy Sainte Marie as influences - the new 10-track tapestry is woven with narratives of common experience and social justice.

"Folk is timeless and genre-less... it isn't trying to prove anything, it just is what it is."

A seasoned artisan, she chooses her words with precision, a practice that won her the grand prize in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest a few years go for 'Twenty Something Girl.'

The title song of her latest effort was written a decade ago, and slowly polished to perfection. Although she struggled to record it, Mikol describes the process as "one of the most rewarding and illuminating experiences I have ever had in a studio.

"It began with a sustained G minor chord, and I sang free form over the drone of the organ. There was no percussion or other melody to follow. I wanted to sing it the way I heard a cantor sing in a synagogue once - the voice thoroughly vulnerable but unbreakable. We then layered all the other instruments around the vocal track."

The most personal piece on the album, 'Daughter of a Working Man' references the historical position of women in patriarchal societies.



"Had I been born in another generation, I would have had to go from my father's house directly to my husband's home. Outside of those spaces, I would not be able to define myself, except perhaps as a widow. I think a lot about what it means to exist as a woman now and back then, and about the strange set of rules society still places on womanhood."

Mikol is intrigued by the human tendency to divide and "wall-off" people - the inspiration for the album's second song, 'Hold', which she composed while spearheading a creative project for Celtic Colours International Festival in 2012.

"Over time, that piece has taken on a sort of anthemic quality," she explains, "and the video we made for it really highlights that aspect. Generally, the song is about the danger of protectionism and the importance of community. From a less idealistic perspective, it is about the frustration that results from having to fight the same battles over and over again for basic human rights."

Since her last recording - 2011's critically acclaimed Creature - Mikol has toured the North American folk festival circuit non-stop, performing alongside the likes of Garnet Rogers, Amelia Curran and Matt Anderson. She credits the travel and exposure for helping her songwriting and maturing her voice. Though the new album took three years to record in four different studios, it finally came to fruition after she and producer Jon Landry pared the list of song possibilities from 16 to 10.

"There is a full band, and a host of guest vocalists and musicians. Jon translated my ideas to the engineers, played a lot of the instruments himself, told me when I was wrong, and pushed me to be braver and more confident in my vocals."

The song '1969' was also written years ago, originally for acoustic guitar, but she sings and plays piano on it for the new album.

"We sent that track to David Langstroth from (Halifax-based) Rhapsody Quintet," she notes. "He arranged the strings and horns around exactly what I played."

Once she was satisfied with a piece, Mikol then had to interpret it sonically.

"A lot of vintage gear was used, and it was mixed to tape, but we also used electronic plug-ins and plenty of effects. I don't have any hang-ups about that kind of stuff – I'm not a purist by any means. I want the sounds that best serve each song."

www.carmelmikol.com

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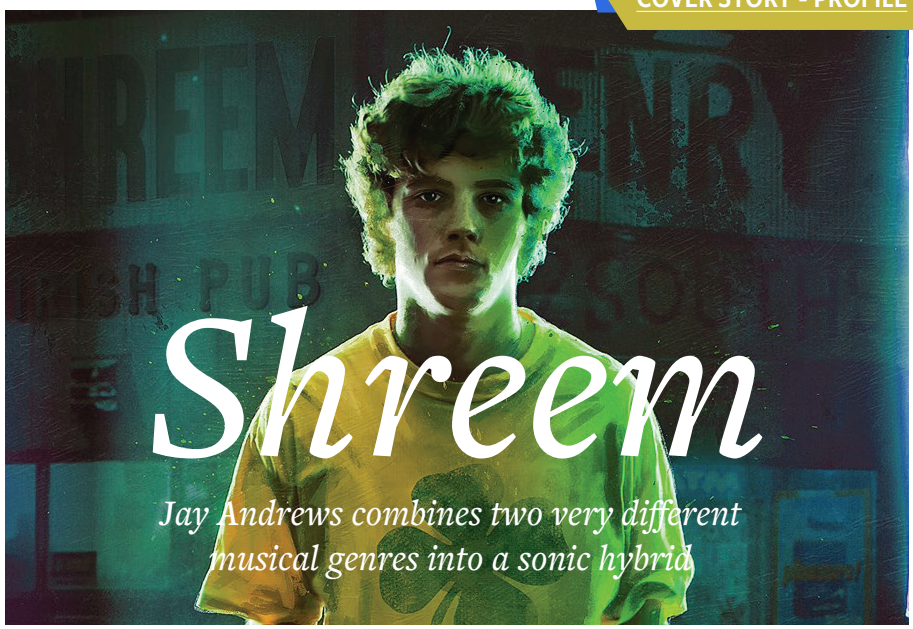
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Shreem

Jay Andrews combines two very different musical genres into a sonic hybrid

"I think one of the biggest challenges is that sometimes Celtic music and electronic music just don't work together," shares Jay Andrews via e-mail. "For this new sound, I have really had to look everywhere I can for inspiration, and it comes from the oddest places."

"This new sound" is Andrews' latest music project: Shreem - Celtic Remixing.

A percussionist currently based in Toronto, Andrews has performed both as a solo artist and in collaboration with other musicians across Canada. His musical ventures started in his hometown of Halifax at the age of 7, drumming in local and area pipe bands. Within a few years, he was composing his own drum scores, soon after trying his hand at the turntables.

"When I started DJing at 17 I really took an interest in doing my own music and projects," he says. "I began producing mashup music for another show I performed called 'Sticks', and then I started making my own beats and productions."

Andrews' interest in "mashups" came from a love of blending two musical genres together. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that his recent effort is a blend of two worlds that don't, at least on first consideration, necessarily line up.

"When I was growing up, my Celtic music CDs were right beside my hip-hop and pop CDs.

"I have always been drawn to a really good 'trad' tune, and I enjoy making contemporary electronic music, so thought I would try it."

Rawlins Cross, The Rankin Family, Natalie MacMaster are just a few of the East Coast artists he grew up listening to. Even as his sonic horizons expanded to reggae, hip hop and dance, the love of Celtic music never left him.

"I started mixing old recordings with electronic music, and then began playing electronic drums, beat boxing, and cajon with different fiddlers on the east coast. I would play a Celtic gig from 8pm-10:30pm, hop in my car, and DJ a club from 11pm-3:30am. After a while something had to give, so I began writing my own Celtic remixes."

Andrews was fortunate to collaborate with one of his biggest influences, Cape Breton musician Ashley MacIsaac, producing the fiddler's latest recording, FDLR, and touring with him across North America. He's come full circle, he says, blending all his past musical experience together.

"My goal has always been to bridge the gap between traditional Celtic music and current electronic music trends and sounds," he continues. "I want to take the traditional Celtic songs from my childhood and create a soundscape around them which covers a much larger sonic spectrum than is normally heard in that particular genre."

He keeps an open mind during his creative process, seeing challenges as opportunities. There aren't many other people dabbling in Celtic fusion - perhaps only Afro Celt Sound system and Martyn Bennett - so Andrews allows the ideas to flow freely, with limitless possibilities. The results are powerful; big, low-end drums and synthesizers contrast against traditional Celtic melodies, showcasing Andrews' vocal percussion as well as his drumming.

"I've always felt a lot of emotion when listening to traditional Celtic music, and I want to magnify that experience and create something bigger from it."

He also hopes to better connect Celtic and contemporary music lovers. If public response is any indication, he has succeeded, with positive feedback coming from listeners, young and old – including everyone from rappers to fiddlers - and even those who aren't familiar with Celtic music.

"It's awesome to see people really taking an interest in a new project that's so close to my heart...something I created. It blows my mind!"

In the coming months, Andrews will continue to promote Shreem and raise awareness of Celtic remix music across the country, showcasing the album through concerts akin to a "non-stop Celtic music party" with a stage full of live fiddles, step-dancing, beat boxing and electronic looping.

www.shreemmusic.com



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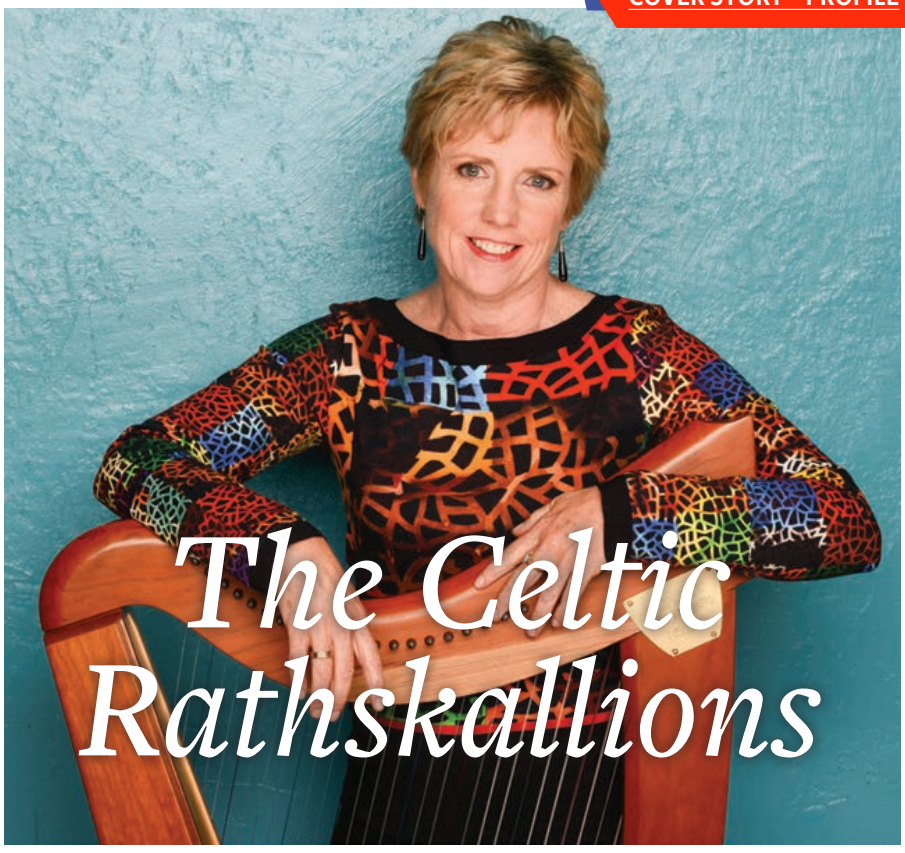
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A deeply dedicated group of musicians, The Celtic Rathskallions are committed to bringing "Celtic-rooted music, song, dance, drama, stories and culture to audiences of all ages."

Wendy Moore, leader of the Ontario-based educational music group, formed the band in 1998 after graduating with a teaching degree from Queen's University in Kingston.

"After school, I performed in the Kingston Symphony for 10 years and taught private music lessons," says Moore, who is of Scottish and Irish descent. "I wanted to create my own show that incorporated teaching, performing and the multi-arts of music, storytelling, step-dancing and drama. Celtic music and its traditions are both close to my heart - and they are very lively and engaging for children - so I created the Celtic Rathskallions."

For the past two decades, Moore - and her fellow Rathskallions Paul Mills and Scotland-born Arthur McGregor - have taken the stage both at home and abroad.

"The show just grew in popularity from the Kingston and Ottawa areas to internationally," she notes. "We now average over 100 performances a year for kids and their families in schools, libraries, theatres and other venues around the world."

The hour-long concert runs the gamut of childlike fun, with acts ranging from storytelling to step-dancing. The heart of the experience, however, is the energetic musical numbers, with 15 instruments played between the three band members.

"The show is engaging, entertaining and educational...it is essentially a piece of musical theatre. Our primary focus is on learning in a fun environment."

"We find the variety of traditional musical instruments to be of most interest to children - the powerful Celtic rhythms entice them to sing and clap along."

The band combines traditional Canadian music, including 'I's the B'y' and 'Lukey's Boat', classic Irish and Scottish songs like 'The Jolly Beggarman' and 'Mary Mac', and a number of original compositions to create a cohesive and inclusive experience.

"I have written and published two short stories: Maddie's Moon, and A Tune For Maddie," shares Moore. "They are musical--themed tales, based in Ireland. In one book, Maddie plays the whistle, and in the other she plays the harp. These stories are 12 minutes long when told, and we usually present one of them narrated, dramatized and scored to original Celtic-themed music as part of our show. We also include comedy pieces, and keep the pace quick, to better keep the children's attention."

Interest in the past is particularly strong in their home country.

"It is good for younger generations to be aware of their history and in the settling of Canada - and Celtic heritage is indeed one of the primary cultural roots. Students here are captivated by the energy of the music we present...and they are intrigued as well, as it is not music that they might hear every day."

Children in other countries are quick to catch on also.

"They are captivated wherever we go," says Moore. "Recently, one young girl told us that our show was the 'best ever! Better than tacos!' And kids often approach us after a concert to proudly tell us of their Celtic roots."

Response to the performances has been especially strong in Atlantic Canada, where the Scots and Irish first settled in the 1700s and 1800s.

"I would say that the Maritimes are the most supportive in terms of exposing children to music and the arts. Other provinces do as well, though it sometimes depends on both funding and who is at the helm of bringing groups such as ours into the schools."

While The Celtic Rathskallions will continue to expand their international horizons, Moore says that the future of Celtic culture in Canada will remain at the forefront of what they do.

"There are a good number of celebrations - Scottish Highland festivals, ceilidhs, and Celtic gatherings - throughout the country each year. We recognize their importance in preserving and promoting Celtic music and culture in Canada, and we have had the good fortune of performing at some of these events. I like to think that we play our part in keeping that culture alive for future generations with music, stories, a wee bit of comedy and pure joy."

www.celticrathskallions.ca

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Ken McGoogan



Prolific, profound, witty, and opinionated, Canadian author Ken McGoogan made waves recently when he suggested that Canada adopt Scotland as a new territory. Celtic Life International recently spoke with the scribe about his Celtic connections.

What are your own roots?

My roots are Scottish, Irish, and French Canadian. In Scotland, DNA research led me to meeting Jim McGugan, a long-lost "cousin" who lives in Arbroath; and from there to the island of Gigha in Kintyre, where our earliest ancestor is buried. In Ireland, I have tracked my ancestor Michael Byrnes to New Ross, County Wexford, where he was a contemporary of Patrick Kennedy, a forebear of American president John F. Kennedy.

Why are those roots important to you?

Tracking my roots drove me to scrambling around on Cruach MhicGougain in Kintyre, and to having many other fun adventures. The process not only gave me a whole new sense of self, but inspired two books: How the Scots Invented Canada and Celtic Lightning: How the Scots and the Irish Created a Canadian Nation. Unearthing my own roots inspired me to conceive of what I call "cultural genealogy." Canadian intellectuals hunker down with geographers and sociologists. That's a mistake. We assume geography's limitations and cease investigating our collective past at the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean. Instead, like genealogists, we should keep sleuthing. This nation's history crosses the Atlantic. And, given that nine million Canadians trace their roots to Scotland and Ireland, it does so more often to those two countries than to anywhere else.

What inspired you to become a writer?

My father was an amateur movie-maker. He wrote scripts and starred as a Humphrey Bogart-type character in several black-and-white films that aired to an audience of family and friends. Beyond that, I think a sense of being different had something to do with it. In Celtic Lightning, I describe growing up first-language-English in a French-speaking resort town north of Montreal. As a teenager, I resented being called "Anglais" when I was Scottish, Irish, and French. Being misunderstood made me want to set the record straight. I began writing and discovered that, hey, nothing is more fun than telling stories and giving people a piece of your mind.

Are they the same reasons you do it today?

To tell the truth, I love everything about the creative process. I love doing research - in the archives, certainly, but also "on the ground." I love wrestling with languages, making words say what I want them to say. I love the back-and-forth that happens between the conscious and the unconscious, and the calling forth of something out of nothingness.

What are the challenges of the profession?

First, you have to master the craft. Malcolm Gladwell wasn't far off when he suggested that any competency begins after 10,000 hours of focused practice. Apart from that, the main challenge is financial. Making a living as a writer has never been easy. These days, it is harder than ever.

What are the rewards?

Any craftsperson knows the pleasure of creating something that works. To bring a book into existence is thrilling. To publish one that changes the way people think, that makes a difference, is enormously satisfying.

From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges facing Celtic Canadians today?

I see Celtic culture in Canada as egalitarian, pluralistic, and progressive. So I worry about the emergence onto the world stage of a powerful right-wing partnership led by Theresa May and Donald Trump, or the Tories of Little England and the Republicans of the 'Wild Wild West.' I worry that, together, they might create some great libertarian beast and set it slouching towards Canada.

Are Celtic Canadians doing enough to preserve and promote their heritage?

Not really. In my own small world, that of books and authors, we have regressed. Once upon a time, Canada and Scotland shared a writers-in-residence program. One year, a Scottish writer would come to Canada for three months. The next, a Canadian writer would spend three months in Scotland. One of the founders of that program told me recently that we Canadians were the ones who dropped the ball. We should be fostering closer relations with Scotland and Ireland, creating linkages of all kinds - cultural, economic, and political - not watching excellent initiatives wither and die.

What can be done to change this?

We could start by waking up to the great wide world. Obviously, we face domestic challenges. But the current leadership of the country next door, backed by tens of millions of citizens, wants to create a society in which everyone carries a gun and only the wealthy can afford education or health care. Celtic Canadians should smell the coffee and start casting about for stronger alliances elsewhere - beginning with Scotland and Ireland.

www.kenmcgoogan.blogspot.ca



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Brush up on your Gaelic at the Féis an Eilein. A Féis is a community-based festival aiming to promote the Gaelic language and culture of the area. Cape Breton's Christmas Island is the first place to hold a Féis outside of Scotland. The first festival was held in 1991, and it has since spread to four other Cape Breton communities. The 27th Annual Féis An Eilein offers a variety of workshops in Gaelic language, song, milling and story-telling. The Féis draws about 2,500 people every year: Friends, relatives, and visitors from near and far come to the Féis each year and we invite you to join in the celebrations! The 19th Annual Gaelic Concert Series: Bu Deònach Leam Tilleadh ("I would willingly return"), takes place Tuesdays in July and August. Emerging talent joins Cape Breton's finest musicians onstage at the Christmas Island Fire Hall. On top of that, students young and old can participate in fiddle, piano, step-dancing, and Gaelic lessons during July and August.



New Brunswick Highland Games Festival

July 28-30
Fredericton, New Brunswick
www.highlandgames.ca

The New Brunswick Highland Games can be traced to a modest 1980 Scots' Picnic held at Mactaquac's Centennial Park. There were no competitions at the first picnic; dancers and pipe bands gave demonstrations only. From being held at the Fredericton Raceway in 1981 to Queen's Square and UNB's College Field in 1983 and Oromocto in 1984, the games have undergone many transformations. However, it has found a home and stayed at Government House since 1991. From the beginning, organizers and partners have fostered an exceptional festival promoting and celebrating the Celtic Arts in New Brunswick. This year's festival welcomes the NB Irish Association and the NB Welsh Association to accompany the Scottish Associations in Clan Alley, boosting the Celtic factor beyond just Scottish. The festival offers something for the whole family including; clan tents, whisky and beer-tasting, various competitions from heavy events to piping, drumming and highland dancing, Celtic crafts and Celtic entertainment. This year, the evening entertainment features Paul McKenna of Scotland, the hard driving roots-rock music of Pogey, and JP Cormier and Dave Gunning, who have a combined 23 East Coast music awards between them. The festival prides itself on bringing the sights, sounds and tastes of Scotland for the past 36 years.



United Irish of Dayton Celtic Fest

July 28-30
Dayton, Ohio
www.daytoncelticfestival.com

Dayton, Ohio's largest downtown festival lights up the city with the sights and sounds of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Put on your running shoes for the 5k run and walk or the Celtic Bike Ride. Authentic Irish beverages are on offer throughout the three-day festival, featuring tastings of wine, beer and whiskey. Show your Scottish pride during the kilt parade, which is exactly what it sounds like—a procession of flagbearers and bagpipers will lead participants throughout the festival grounds. The Celtic Breakfast will be held Sunday at the Top of the Morn'n Café: The perfect way to start the morning before celebrating Sunday mass, presented in both English and Gaelic, featuring Irish dancers and pipers. As a Celtic festival would be incomplete without music, and Dayton presents multiple headlining bands, promising plenty of time to dance. Gaelic Storm, a fan favourite from the 2015 and 2016 festivals, are returning for the third year in a row. The critically-acclaimed Skipper's Alley and the award-winning We Banjo 3 will also be saturating the audience in sound, along with their fellow headliners and regional acts. Plenty of activities will be slated for the wee ones as well, with the Rainbow End Children's Area set up just for them.

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A musical extravaganza awaits at the Okanagan Military Tattoo, with more than 600 musicians and dancers from all over the continent slated for the summer weekend. The 2016 show reached outside North America to welcome performers from Korea. This annual festival in British Columbia is putting a special focus on youth in honour of Canada's sesquicentennial year: "In addition to fostering relationships, we hope to inspire future generations of musicians and dancers to keep our arts alive into the future." The Calgary Round-up Band—a performance group made up of more than 160 junior high school students—is one of the featured musical acts set to rock the Kal Tire Place for the two-hour event. The group is hailed as Canada's premier marching and performing arts ensemble. Other musicians include the Celtic Lasses, six pipe bands including the "E" Division RCMP Pipe Band, The NADEN Band of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Vernon Community Band. Vernon, BC is home to a Department of National Defence facility, which has trained tens of thousands of military personnel and cadets over the past century. Many of those veterans have retired in the Okanagan, continuing the military traditions of drumming and piping. The Tattoo allows audiences to take in the arts and traditions that make up BC's heritage, as well as honouring the military's significance to the city.



Glengarry Highland Games

August 4-5
Maxville, Ontario
www.glengarryhighlandgames.com

Since the first games were held back in 1948, Glengarry has welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors to its annual Highland Games. It was the brainchild of a small group of businessmen who wanted to preserve and promote Scottish traditions, keeping them alive for the younger generations. For the past 50 years, the games gave succeeded, showering attendees with Celtic culture. A Tartan Ball kicks off the weekend with dinner and dancing before the games begin. The Glengarry Games are home to the North American Pipe Band Championships, during which more than 50 pipe bands compete. Bands have travelled from every province in Canada, most of the United States, as well as Scotland and New Zealand. On top of that, solo piping and drumming competitions take place, offering spots for musicians rated at grades 1-5 as well as professionals. Dancing and heavyweight competitions are also on schedule, for those with talent of a different sort. Fiddle and harp workshops are available for the budding musicians, and there will be plenty of chances to show off your dancing thanks to the various Celtic entertainers along with the Fiddlers' Ceilidh on Saturday.



St. Andrew's Society of Detroit Highland Games

August 4-5
Livonia, Michigan
www.highlandgames.com

This year, the St. Andrew's Society of Detroit is presenting its 168th Annual Highland Games, a highlight of the summer festival season for visitors from the northeastern United States and across the Canadian border. The festival kicks off with a ceilidh in Greenmead Park, and the following day is given over to the celebration of the pipes, drums, fiddles and dances of the Highlands. Heavy athletic events will be performed for both prizes and equally-important bragging rights. These heavy events were once the means by which Highland warriors maintained their strength between battles. One of the most popular involves contestants hurling a 56 lb. weight over a fence, with the rail set at increasingly high heights. Considerably less prowess and experience is required for the hilarious Haggis Toss Challenge. A Clan Row will be set up near the competition field, and visitors are welcome to drop by and learn a bit of the history their forefathers may have shared. The games, which date back to 1849, will open and close with massed pipe band performances, with bands coming from as far as Florida and Ontario. The gathering attracts more than 10,000 on average each year.

An Ri Ra 2017

Montana Irish Festival

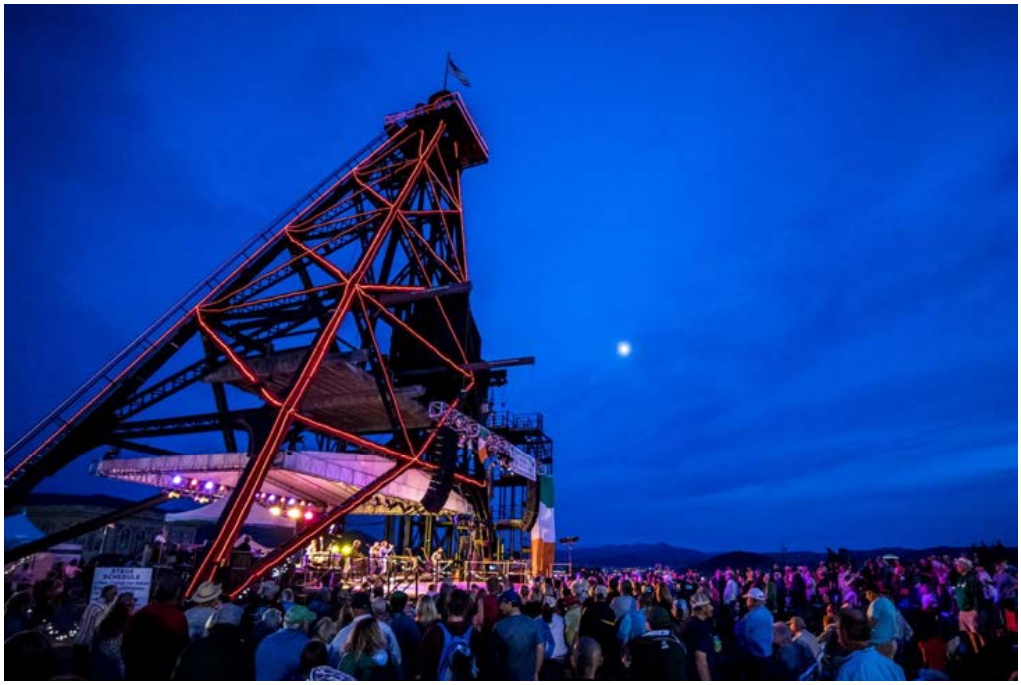


Photo Courtesy of Hazer Live

The Original Mine Butte, Montana
August 11, 12 & 13, 2017

Free Admission

This Years Entertainment Includes

The Prodigals
Teada
Doherty & Evans
Tom Sweeney
Mad 4 Trad
Dublin Gulch
Tiernan Irish Dancers
Trinty Irish Dancers
Food
Arts & Crafts
Fun For the Whole Family
Multiple Raffles With The Chance
To Win Great Prizes



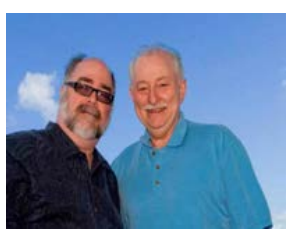
The Prodigals



Mad 4 Trad



Teada



Doherty & Evans



Trinty Irish Dancers



Butte's Own Dublin Gulch



Tiernan Irish Dancers



The An Rí Rá Montana Irish Festival

August 11-13
Butte, Montana
www.mtgaelic.org

The An Rí Rá Montana Irish Festival draws Celts of all sorts from across the state, other regions of the country, as well as from around the world. The annual three-day gathering has earned its reputation as a world-class event - and one of the best Irish festivals in North America - thanks to its ongoing commitment to growing Celtic culture in the northwest. The festival is run by The Montana Gaelic Cultural Society, which has been sponsoring Irish language and dance classes, as well as music and drama presentations, for twenty years. Along with the group's Irish immersion weekend, An Rí Rá remains the MGCS' signature event. This year's festival offers another myriad of musical performers, including The Prodigals, Teaga, Evans and Doherty with Tom Sweeney, Mad 4 Trad, and popular local band Dublin Gulch. Dance is also on display, with the Tiernan Irish Dancers and the Trinity Irish Dancers showcasing new takes on old cultural customs. As always, arts, crafts and food vendors will ensure there's plenty to see and snack on. The full schedule of events is still being added to daily, so be sure to keep a close eye on the festival's website for updates.



Festival Celtique de Québec

August 17-20
Québec City, Québec
www.festivalceltique.com

Parlez-vous français? Language is never an issue at "le plus grand Festival Celtique Francophone en Amérique du Nord." Celts of all backgrounds will again be welcomed warmly at the 12th annual Festival Celtique de Quebec this August 17-20, which brings even more fun to an already festive region. Perhaps surprising to some, Quebec's Celtic roots run deep, and the inclusive gathering celebrates the diverse heritage of its varied ancestors ad founders, including Irish, Scottish and Britton. Dare to wear your kilt in historic Old Quebec, as well as in Domaine de Maizeret, a huge and luscious park located in the city's downtown core. Be sure to check out Le Village Mythique - a fantasy land "where mythological characters welcome visitors to take part in quests, crafts, and archery." Are you a sports person? You will be thrilled by the festival's Highland Games, Gaelic football and hurling championships. Maybe more of a music lover? Let the rhythms of our local Celtic bands surround you! Family activities will also be held, so come one, come all! Urban, festive, lively; words are simply not enough to describe your next destination ~ the Quebec Celtic Festival is waiting for you! For more information check out the event's website or Facebook page!



Milwaukee Irish Fest

August 17-20
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
www.irishfest.com

The countdown is on to North America's largest celebration of Irish music and culture. With more than 100 entertainment acts at this four-day, 17-stage event, the musical line-up includes everything from traditional Irish tunes to Celtic rock. Dublin folk singer-songwriter Aoife Scott is taking the Milwaukee festival stage for the first time this year and as the festival website reads, "her sublime voice is a thing of beauty that stops people in their tracks." Traditional performers Rory Makem and Donal Clancy are also new to the festival, along with Celtic-Canadian trio The East Pointers. Dozens of other new and returning songsmiths are on schedule as well. For the foodie in all of us, the Celtic Kitchen is the perfect event. Local and international chefs will show how Irish cuisine is about more than potatoes, and they'll share both traditional and modern Celtic and Irish recipes. Speaking of food, Milwaukee Irish Fest features more than 45 food vendors throughout the grounds. Irish and Irish themed dishes are a-plenty, but there are a variety of options to choose from. Other family-friendly activities, such as the parade, are great for those with kids in tow. Adults can kick back in the Jameson lounge, where they can sample some of Ireland's finest whiskey.

35 Pipe Bands
from U.S. & Canada in Massive Daily Grandstand Show

•

3rd Marine Aircraft Wing Band
and
L.A. Scots Pipe Band
Intermixed Performance at Grandstand Show...

•

43rd U.S. Invitational Heavy Events

•

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6 Stages of Continuous Entertainment

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Special Guest



Graham McTavish
Dougal Mackenzie in the popular Starz TV series
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152ND
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2017

Alameda County Fairgrounds in Northern Caifornia

PLEASANTON

September 2 & 3

9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.



22 Events & Attractions.....

- GLEN OF THE CLANS
- IRISH STEP DANCING
- SOCCER, RUGBY & SHINTY
- CHILDREN'S GLEN
- SHEEP DOG TRIALS
- DART TOURNAMENT
- KILTED MILE RUN
- BIRDS OF PREY - FALCONRY
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www.TheScottishGames.com



Canmore Highland Games

September 2-3
Canmore, Alberta
www.canmorehighlandgames.ca

Witness Celtic culture at its best in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains. A full slate of events comprises the Canmore Highland Games, including a pancake breakfast, clan tents, Celtic vendors, Scotch tasting and more. Rain or shine, the show must go on. The Highland dance competition runs all day, so audiences can watch the event unfold whenever they please. The individual piping and drumming competition runs during the morning at various stations throughout the Centennial Park. Early afternoon brings the drum major contest, followed by the band competitions. Heavy athletics and tug of war contests are also running all day until completion (kilted attire is preferred for competitors)! The Taste of the Highlands event delivers exactly what it promises: attendees may gather at the Big Rock festival tent on Saturday evening for a tasting experience like no other. More than 90 local and international wines and scotches from some of the world's most celebrated producers (including micro-breweries) are available to sample. Experts will be standing by to share their knowledge as you taste your way from booth to booth. If you're feeling peckish, appetizers from some of Canmore's finest restaurants are on offer as well. And don't miss the Sunday evening ceilidh!



Scottish Highland Gathering & Games

September 2-3
Pleasanton, California
www.thescottishgames.com

Pleasanton's Scottish Gathering and Games is celebrating its 152nd annual event in September. Even after so many years, festival organizers are still finding new and exciting things to add to the schedule. This year, special guest Graham McTavish (star of Outlander and The Hobbit) will be part of the festivities. Attendees can try their hand at archery - a recent event inspired by the popularity of the film Brave in 2012. The dart tournament is new, in which 20 teams compete for a prize of more than $5,000. Heavy athletics will also be on-site of course, with all the staple events, including Caber toss, the "putting of the stone," weight for distance, weight for height and the Scottish hammer. Piping and drumming as well as Highland dancing competitions are also slated to take place. Be sure to take in the sounds of 40 pipe bands from the U.S. and Canada. For those who want to pay a visit to some furry friends, the farm animals on show are popular with attendees of all ages. In addition to the annual sheep dog trials; Clydesdales, Highland cattle and belted Galloways will be at the festival all weekend. You can also interact with history through the living history exhibition, in which multiple guilds and societies provide wonderful interactive theatre and an exhibition for all the family to enjoy.



Columbus Scottish Festival

September 9-10
Columbus, Indiana
www.scottishfestival.org

The Columbus Scottish Festival is a weekend packed with Scottish entertainment, competition, history and more. Heavy athletics are a major part of just about any Scottish festival, and of course the Columbus-based event is no different. Visitors can take their pick to see demonstrations of speed, skill and strength. On top of that, there's the Highland Hustle 5K race—tartans, kilt and other Scottish regalia are encouraged. Animal-lovers are sure to be excited for the sheepdog demonstrations and the Scottish cattle, as well as the Utopia Wildlife Rehabilitators. Kathy Hersey will give presentations on wildlife and the work of the organization. She will also bring animals or birds for exhibit. The festival entertainment lineup includes the Mud Men, the Sprigs, Dublin O'Shea and Finnegan's Men. Even more entertainment comes in the form of dance and pipe and drum competition. With so much happening, you're likely to get hungry. Fortunately, there's no shortage of food and drink to try. Attendees can also eat their fill, chowing down on everything from hot dogs to Celtic-inspired dishes. Fish n' chips, haggis, Scotch eggs and European pastries will be on offer. There's also a whisky tasting, as well as a beer garden on-site.

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Trenton Scottish Irish Festival

September 9-10
Trenton, Ontario
www.trentonscottishirish.com

Gather your clan and get your kilts ready for the 27th annual Trenton Scottish Irish Festival (TSIF) in Quinte West, Ontario. This two-day celebration of all things Celtic launches into the weekend with a ton of exciting events including live music at the Amphitheatre. "Residents and visitors can expect to find all the fun-filled activities they have come to love about the event," reads a press release. "A parade showcasing Canada's finest pipes and drum bands/brass and reed bands, Celtic food, vendors, Highland dancing, music from local and nationally-renowned performers, and a Celtic heritage tent." In past years, musicians such as Alan Doyle have rocked the stage, and special guests such as Graham McTavish of Outlander have paid a visit. What more could a Canadian Celt ask for? Art, jewelry, clothing and costumes abound at the vendors village, featuring businesses such as Flight of Life Aromatherapy Lockets. In addition, there's something brand new on schedule: Last year, TSIF won the bid to host the 2017 Canadian Scottish Athletic Federation Women's Heavy Event Championship. Come September, Centennial Park will be welcoming the country's top female heavy event athletes. Another fun activity is the Kiwanis Children's Glen.



Charleston Scottish Games & Highland Gathering

September 14-17
Charleston, South Carolina
www.charlestonscots.org

Wake up the Scot within you in preparation for South Carolina's Scottish games. The annual event is put on by the Scottish Society of Charleston, which was incorporated in 1973 with the goal of keeping Scottish heritage and customs alive in the low country of the southeastern state. If this festival is any indication, they've succeeded. Start things off with a Scotch whisky tasting on Thursday, then get fancy for the Tartan Ball on Friday (a black tie event). The fun really begins on Saturday, welcoming the American/Canadian Celtic ensemble known as the American Rogues. More music awaits throughout the day: According to the event website, the Charleston Games is home to one of the largest piping and drumming competitions in the Southeast. Then, the heavy athletics are performed by both professional and amateur athletes duking it out at the sheaf toss, the stone and strength and the caber toss. Both Scottish Country dancing and Highland dancing are also part of the festivities, along with Scottish merchandise vendors and more. The day will wind down with an after party at My Father's Moustache eatery and pub. The weekend is capped off on Sunday with a Kirkin o' the Tartan.



New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival

September 15-17
Lincoln, New Hampshire
www.nhscot.org

Culture, competition and music await at the New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival presented by NHSCOT. The seed of the Games were planted by Captain John D. Murray, Evelyn Murray and Tom Lenthall, who organized a Clan Picnic held at Loon Mountain in August 1975. Following the picnic's success, the New Hampshire Highland Games were founded in 1976. Over the last four decades, the event, still held at Loon Mountain, has continued to grow. Watch top athletes from the United States, Canada, Iceland, Scotland and across Europe compete in the Scottish Heavy Athletics. Caber toss, hammer throw, weight over bar and stone carry are among the competition's activities. There's also the New England Disabled Heavy Athletics to accommodate folks with disabilities. Competition of a different sort comes in the form of musical face-offs, during which pipe and drum bands, fiddlers, harpists and Highland dancers perform their hearts out. Other festival happenings include a kilted race, sheep dog trials and ticketed events such as whisky and beers tastings. Attendees can take a step back in time through the living history exhibit, featuring historical re-enactors showing what it was like to live during various periods of Scottish and American history. More than 60 clans will be represented in the 'clan village', where visitors can trace their Scottish roots. The onstage musical performances are sure to please as well, with the 2017 festival welcoming the likes of Albannach and self-proclaimed Scottish "bagrockers" the Red Hot Chilli Pipers. The Loon Mountain dining areas will feature some popular Scottish dishes, as well as traditional festival fare.

FÈIS AN EILEIN
EILEAN NA NOLLAIG

"Thigibh dha 'n chéilidh!"

"Come to the Ceilidh!"

Commun Féis an Eilein

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19th Annual Gaelic Concert Series

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Daily Events -August 15 - 19

A Féis is a community-based festival for people of all ages, designed to promote Gaelic culture and heritage. Join us for our Opening Concert, Milling Frolic, Children's Concert, or Family Square Dance, as well as our popular day-long classes and workshops.

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Wednesdays 7-9pm July 5 – Aug 2

Beginner / Advanced Beginner students will learn to speak Gaelic through the "Total Immersion Plus" (TIP) method.

Summer Music Program

Weekdays – July 04 - August 11

We offer individual and group lessons in beginner to intermediate fiddle, piano, guitar and step-dance.

For More Info Visit:
www.feisaneilein.ca

Events take place at the Christmas Island Fire Hall
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Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

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Classic Canadian Pancakes & Maple Syrup

The quintessential Canadian treat is maple syrup, and the maple leaf became a Canadian symbol of national pride as early as 1700. The First Nations peoples of this country recognized the value of this nectar long before the arrival of our ancestors, collecting and processing the sweet sap of the maple tree, and then generously sharing their knowledge. As legend has it, an Iroquois chief yanked his hatchet out of a maple tree before setting off for a day of hunting. He didn't notice the deep gash his blade had left in the tree, and all day a colourless liquid trickled from the gash, collecting in a birchbark bowl that was leaning against the maple tree. His wife noticed the full bowl and, thinking it was water, used the liquid to cook a venison stew. The resulting sweet stew was a happy accident, beginning the culinary tradition of maple-cured meats. By watching the Indigenous peoples, the first settlers to the New World - including many Celts - learned how to tap maple trees and boil the sap down to make syrup. Later, instead of gashing the bark, they drilled holes in the tree, pushing wooden spiles into the holes. They hung buckets from nails below the spiles to protect the buckets from strong winds or animals. Generations later, and as all Canadians know, the best way to enjoy maple syrup is drizzled over pancakes.



Ingredients

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons sugar

1 tablespoon baking powder

3/4 teaspoon salt

1 1/4 cups milk

1 large egg

4 tablespoons butter, melted, plus more for skillet

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Instructions

Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl. Warm milk in microwave or on top of stove until lukewarm. Whisk milk, egg, melted butter and the vanilla extract until combined. Heat a large skillet over medium heat. The pan is ready when you splatter a little water onto the pan surface, the water dances around the pan and eventually evaporates. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture, pour milk mixture into the well and use a fork to stir until you no longer see clumps of flour. It is okay if the batter has small lumps, in fact you want that – it is important not to over-mix the batter. Lightly brush skillet with melted butter. Use a 1/4-cup measuring cup to spoon batter onto skillet. Gently spread the batter into a 4-inch circle. When edges look dry and bubbles start to appear and pop on the top surfaces of the pancake, turn over. This takes about 2 minutes. Once flipped, cook another 1 to 2 minutes or until lightly browned and cooked in the middle. Serve immediately with warm syrup, butter, whipped cream and/or berries. Makes 8 pancakes.

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

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The **Kensington Wine Market** is marking a major milestone in 2017. Over the course of the year we will be releasing special **25th Anniversary** bottlings to celebrate.

The first bottlings are in, a ***1992 Vintage Port***, a ***20 Year Old Tawny*** blended by Taylor Fladgate, a rare Cask Strength batch of ***Glenfarclas 25 Year*** and a ***1992*** Armagnac from ***Castarede***!

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Canada's 150TH



with **Andrew Ferguson**



For Canada's 150th Anniversary, we are raising a glass to Canadian whisky, a spirit that unfairly resides in the shadow of Scotch, American and Irish whiskies.

Over the course of the 20th Century most production coalesced into the hand of a few large multinationals, but the Craft Whisky Movement seems set to rock that boat, and the future for Canadian whisky looks very bright, with a greater diversity of styles, selection and higher standards. So let's hoist our flag, raise a glass and shine a light on Canadian whisky!

While any Canadian whisky can be called a "Rye Whisky", it may come as a surprise to our countrymen that Rye whisky in Canada need not contain any rye grain whatsoever! Rye is a colloquial term used to mean Canadian whisky in Canada. In the US, a rye whisky must be made from a mashbill containing at least 51% rye grain (the rest can be a mixture of corn, barley and wheat.) In Canada you can legally produce a whisky from 100% corn and call it Rye, why is that?

It all begins with the forefathers of the Canadian whisky industry. In addition to the Scots-Irish, it included immigrants from Germany and the Netherlands, where it was common to distill rye. Rye is an easy grain for pre-industrial societies to work with as it is hardy, thrives in poor soil conditions, and is easy to harvest by hand. The first Canadian whisky makers crafted their product primarily with wheat, but many added a generous proportion of rye. Over time, "Rye" became synonymous with Canadian Whisky. Today, even wheat has fallen out of favour with large distillers, with corn having become the dominant grain as it is cheaper, easier to work with, and has a much higher sugar yield.

Most of the big brands you see on the shelf today, like Crown Royal and Canadian Club, are produced primarily with corn. Both brands have rye-heavy versions, like Crown Royal Northern Harvest Rye and Canadian Club 100% Rye. Both have darker, spicier profiles than their regular incarnations, and can be sipped neat. A good example of a Rye whisky that doesn't contain any rye at all comes from Highwood Distillery in High River, Alberta. It produces a 100% corn whisky called Ninety-20, labelled, as it legally can be, as 100% Rye.

Just up the road in Calgary, Alberta Distillers produces whisky from a 100% Rye mashbill - an anomaly in Canada. The distillery uses a mix of both malted and unmalted rye grains, producing a young, inexpensive, but highly respected whisky Alberta Premium. The distillery is the source of a number of "American" Rye Whiskies, like Whistle Pig 10 Year, Pendleton Rye, and Masterson's 10 Year; all well-regarded. There are a couple of 100% rye whiskies produced in Ontario; the best known and most respected is Lot 40, a bold and spicy, but balanced whisky.

> *Craft distilling in Canada is just starting to catch its stride, and many of these new distilleries now compete with the big multinationals for shelf space.*

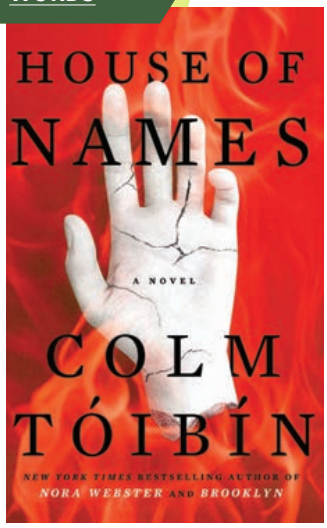
Some of these start-up distilleries have opted to make Scottish style single malts, like Glenora Distillery in Cape Breton, which was well ahead of the trend, founded in 1989. Its Glen Breton Single Malt took a few years to take root, but in the last half-decade we've seen some excellent releases from them. There are now single malt whiskies being produced in nearly every province of Canada, and even the Yukon Territory.

Twelve years after opening the Yukon Brewery, its founders launched the Two Brewers Distillery in 2009. To date they have released 5 different, limited edition single malts. Two Brewers Yukon Single Malt Release 5 - the most recent - has been produced from a sour mash - creamy, decadent and fruity. Over on Vancouver Island, the Shelter Point Distillery is getting ready to bottle its second release of Shelter Point Single Malt Whisky - produced from barley grown on the distillery's farm, making it a "Farm to Bottle" whisky. Nearly a dozen BC Craft distilleries have just released, or are about to release, whiskies as well. In Alberta, Eau Claire Distillery is but the first of at least half a dozen craft distilleries making whisky. Its first whisky may be bottled as early as autumn, 2017.

At least 16 craft distilleries are operating in Ontario, the first being Still Waters located just north of Toronto, which makes a range of whiskies under the Stalk & Barrel label including Single Malt, Rye and a more traditional Blended Canadian Whisky. Dillon's Distillery in Niagara is making Rye Whisky in addition to other spirits. For now, those aged whiskies are only available in Ontario.

As Canada marks its sesquicentennial there is ever increasing selection and diversity of style when it comes to home-grown whisky. We've only just scratched the surface of what is out there, and what is still to come. Cheers to another 150 years!

www.fergusonwhiskytours.com



House of Names

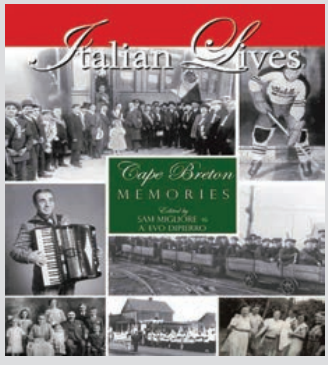
By Colm Tóibín
Simon & Shuster / 288 pp / $26

Country Wexford writer Colm Tóibín's latest effort, House of Names, signals a departure of sorts from his previous, bestselling works Nora Webster and Brooklyn. A contemporary retelling of the Greek tragedy of Clytemnestra and her children, the new book is burning up bestseller lists around the world. And while both the idea for the story and its execution are strong in the hands of the Irish scribe, something simply doesn't translate from the days of yore. Perhaps it is the thematic overplay of murder, jealousy, revenge and betrayal - or maybe it is the remote and cool nature of the characters. Likely, it is both. As a result, the four-part narrative never quite develops the same level of intimacy found in his past novels. Disappointing. ~ SPC

Italian Lives, Cape Breton Memories

By Sam Migliore
and A. Evo Dipierro
CBU Press / 475 pp / $27.95

First published in 1999 to strong regional acclaim, Italian Lives, Cape Breton Memories has been updated and re-released for a new generation of readers. Much has been documented about Nova Scotia's strong Celtic roots, particularly the history of Scottish and Irish settlements across the province over the past 250 years. Lesser known is the impact that Italian immigrants have had upon Atlantic Canada, particularly in Cape Breton where they were, and remain, a vital and vibrant voice on the region's cultural landscape. Spanning 150 years, seasoned with personal tales - equally tragic and triumphant - and spiced with poignant family photographs, the coffee table tome is both a powerful portrait of a people and province in transition, and an important chronicle of Canada's immigrant experience. ~ SPC





A Short History of Irish Traditional Music

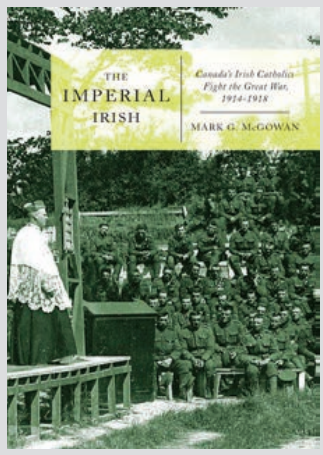
By Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin
O'Brien Press / 208 pp / €8.99

Those with a passion, or even a passing interest, in Celtic music will want to pick up this pocket-sized portal into the popular genre's past. Drawing upon a solid selection of sources - including musicologists, folklorists, historians, and homespun heritage - Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin does well to connect a diversity of notes into a simple, sonic symphony. Along the way, the author details the origins of various instruments and their impact upon the creative palate of both the Emerald Isle and the world - from early settlers gathered round the hearth fires to the global sensation that is Riverdance. More than a mere lesson in Irish musical history, however, the work succeeds in showcasing the country's political and sociological influence on its melodies, and vice-versa. ~ SPC

The Imperial Irish

By Mark G. McGowan
McGill-Queen's University Press
429 pp / $39.95

A professor of history at the University of Toronto, and Principal Emeritus at nearby St. Michael's College, Mark McGowan is a powerhouse in Canadian academic circles. His third full-length work, The Imperial Irish; Canada's Irish Catholics Fight the Great War, 1914-1918, is by turns scholarly and accessible to everyday readers. Extensively researched, and peppered with graphs and detailed end-notes, the hefty tome examines the role played by Irish Catholic Canadians in WWI, both at home and abroad. While there is little doubting the work's historical and sociological significance, the book's true buoyancy is found in the personal stories of the individuals involved, and the impact that the early 20th century conflict had upon their lives, those of their families, and the Canadian identity as a whole. ~ SPC





Calan
Solomon

Who knew that traditional Welsh folk-rock could sound so damned...sexy? I am tempted to leave the review at that, and leave the rest to readers' imaginations. Now that I have your attention, however...Fronted by vocalist Bethan Rhiannon, who sings in both English and her native language, and featuring an all-star lineup of players, Calan absolutely kill it with their fourth studio recording, Solomon. Stellar sound production, and a few special guest appearances - including noted Welsh poet Nigel Jenkins - take these twelve terrific tunes to new heights, and make for a stirring and stunning sonic journey through Wales' rugged and robust musical landscape. It is no wonder that critics and fans (me, on both counts) are quick with kudos for this quintessential Celtic quintet. ~ SPC

Còig
Rove



Cape Breton Celtic ubergroup Còig realize their sonic potential with their third full-length release Rove, a twelve-track treasure trove that will wash over you like the sea upon Nova Scotia shores. Featuring the fiery fiddling duo of Chrissy Crowley and Rachel Davis, the playful piano of Jason Roach, and the musical musings of multi-instrumentalist Darren McMullen, Rove takes listeners back to simpler, gentler times, when Saturday night ceilidhs brought communities together to sing, dance, drink and celebrate their rustic roots. Jigs, reels, ballads - and a brilliant cover of Peter Gabriel's Solsbury Hill - showcase both the quartet's strong chemistry, and the region's rich musical history. Còig are the real deal, folks, and they just might inspire you to set sail for Atlantic Canada. ~ SPC



Matt Earhart
Matt Earhart

Also hailing from the sea-swept shores of Cape Breton, Glace Bay fiddler Matt Earhart goes old school with this eleven-song selection of classic Celtic melodies. From the opening notes of 'Morrison's Jig' to the closing chorus of 'The Parting Glass', the up-and-coming Caper shines a spotlight on his Scottish/Irish roots with some fine finger work on the frets, and equally vibrant vocals. Highlights here include a laid-back take on The Waterboys' 'Fisherman's Blues', the homegrown homage of 'Farewell to Nova Scotia', and a rousing rendition of 'The Star of the County Down.' By turns mellow and muscular, and seasoned with sprinklings of traditional jaunts, jigs and reels, this self-titled release is ideal for both Saturday night stargazing and/or lazy Sunday afternoons under the summer sun. ~ SPC

U2
The Joshua Tree (Box Set)



Has it really been 30 years since Bono, The Edge, Larry and Adam broke into the big leagues with one of the greatest rock records ever made? Although this 7 LP anthology might seem a bit excessive with its abundance of live versions, studio outtakes, b-sides and rarities - not to mention a grab-bag of other goodies - it does well to capture a band at the absolute peak of its musical prowess. Nostalgia aside, and with the quartet now touring in support of the original album, it is a reminder that The Joshua Tree did more than cement U2's status as a stadium act; it put Irish music back in the global spotlight, paving the way for countless artists to emerge from the Emerald Isle. ~ SPC

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Bill Livingstone

Bill Livingstone was handed his first chanter 70 years ago, and the Scottish bagpipes still have a hold on him

Pipe major of the famed 78th Fraser Highlanders for 29 years, Bill Livingstone now performs with the Toronto Police Band where his experience and knowledge of pipe music have been instrumental in growing the group.

A living legend amongst the piping community, Livingstone still has his father's 1935 Lawrie bagpipes and a 1925 set of Henderson pipes, both of which have netted him a wealth of prizes over the years.

"My teachers, after my dad, included four of the greatest players of a previous generation," he points out over the phone from his home in Whitby, Ontario. "And so I was steeped in traditional piping."

His father, who immigrated to Canada from Ayreshire, Scotland, gave Livingstone his first chance to play when he was just four years old.

"The family story is that my father was at the kitchen table teaching my brother, who was seven years older, and I wouldn't give them any peace. I was rolling around on the floor under the table, punching them in the nether regions until they could not take it anymore."

The child's chanter had been in the family for decades.

"It belonged to my father's sister, who had been a piper until she died in childbirth. Seeing my father and brother having a great time playing together motivated me to be a part of it, and I seemed to take to it very easily."

Raised in Copper Cliff, Ontario, Livingstone joined the festival pipe band circuit with his father. At a competition in Sault Ste. Marie, he was singled out by piping judge John Wilson.

"All the pipers were gathered in the sergeants' mess and I was with my father when I was asked to play something. Being young and fearless I played as fast as I could."

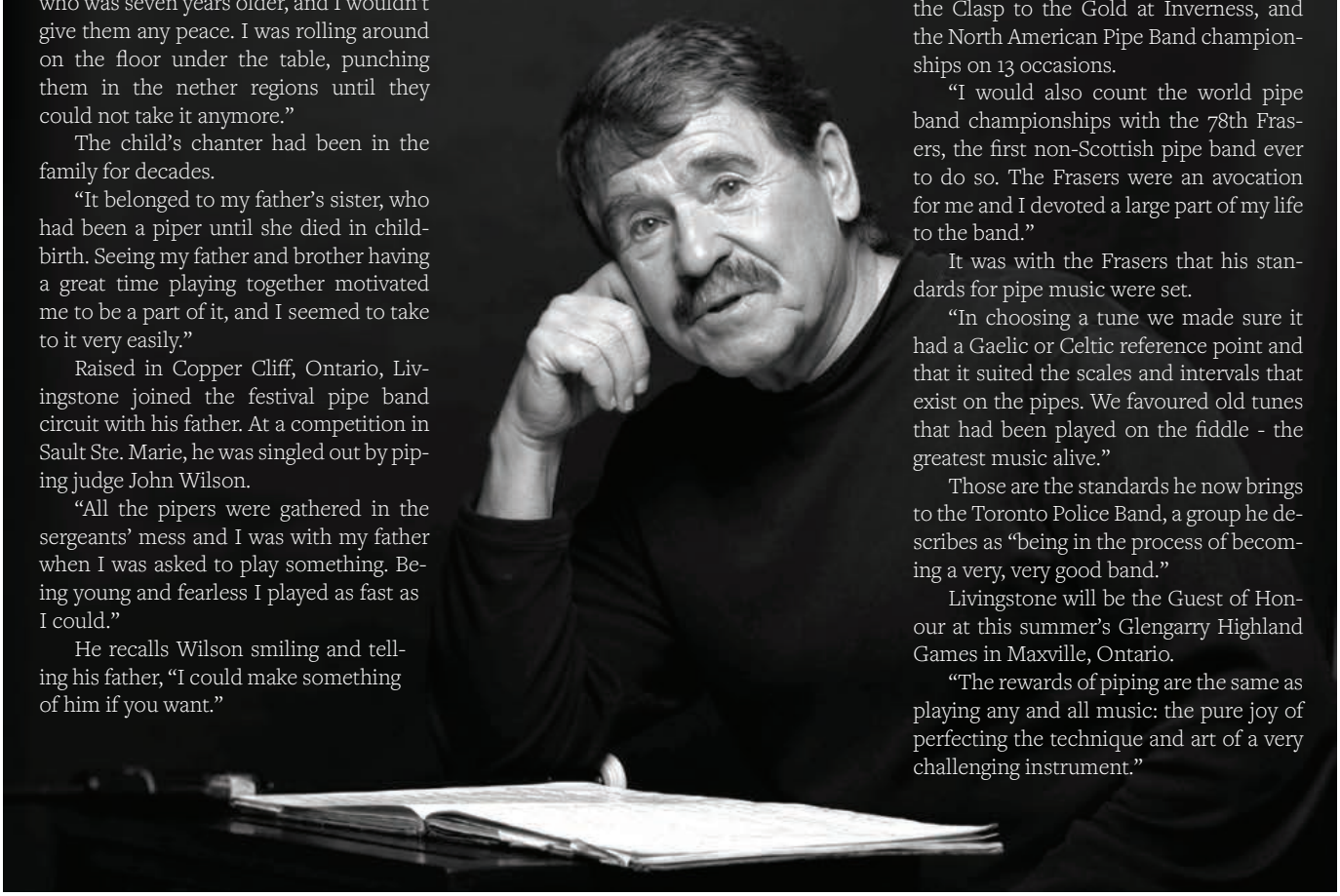
He recalls Wilson smiling and telling his father, "I could make something of him if you want."

Livingstone was soon in Toronto, living with an elderly couple so he could take lessons with Wilson, who had been an outstanding boy piper in Edinburgh until an unfortunate accident cost him a thumb and two fingers.

"He was a very successful, prize-winning piper in the thirties and forties. He immigrated to Canada and was the greatest technician of the pipes I have ever seen. "

The lessons ended abruptly when Livingstone's parents paid a visit and found his living arrangements unsuitable, a funny account of which is contained in Preposterous: Tales to Follow, a memoir which Livingstone will release this summer along with a series of CDs, a continuation of his 'A Piobaireach Diary.'

In his later teens, Livingstone set aside the pipes in favour of learning piano and playing in his own rock and blues band in Sudbury bars and clubs.



"There was so much other music happening in the Sixties, and I suppose bagpipes were not cool - and they are still not terribly cool - though there are more people playing them today than ever before."

By the time he returned to the pipes 10 years later, he had a law degree and a "better half" by his side.

"My wife and I were at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto and we heard the 48th Highlanders playing. I was immediately drawn like a moth to a flame."

He resumed lessons with Wilson, quickly excelling at solo competitions.

In time, Livingstone would rack up a roomful of awards, including winning all the light music at Oban and Inverness, the Clasp to the Gold at Inverness, and the North American Pipe Band championships on 13 occasions.

"I would also count the world pipe band championships with the 78th Frasers, the first non-Scottish pipe band ever to do so. The Frasers were an avocation for me and I devoted a large part of my life to the band."

It was with the Frasers that his standards for pipe music were set.

"In choosing a tune we made sure it had a Gaelic or Celtic reference point and that it suited the scales and intervals that exist on the pipes. We favoured old tunes that had been played on the fiddle - the greatest music alive."

Those are the standards he now brings to the Toronto Police Band, a group he describes as "being in the process of becoming a very, very good band."

Livingstone will be the Guest of Honour at this summer's Glengarry Highland Games in Maxville, Ontario.

"The rewards of piping are the same as playing any and all music: the pure joy of perfecting the technique and art of a very challenging instrument."

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April Verch

Canadian musician April Verch is helping to redefine traditional fiddling

April Verch began her foray into fiddling as a youngster.

"I actually started step dancing lessons in the Ottawa Valley at the age of three," remembers the native of Pembroke, Ontario. "I really wanted to fiddle then as well, but my parents figured that it might be best not to do too much at once. I kept bugging them though. My first little fiddle was my sixth birthday present!"

It was her parents, and their love for traditional and local music scenes, that motivated Verch to play.

"I grew up around it... attending dances, jamborees and such," she explains. "My Dad had a classic country band that played locally for dances. I listened to them practice and saw his love of music.

"We were surrounded by fiddle music when we were dancing as well. Partly, it was the instrument and the tunes that I loved, but I think I was equally inspired because of the great community it meant I would be a part of. Even at an early age, I realized that everyone was having a great time every time there was a fiddle around!"

Since then, Verch has made the most of her passion; writing, recording and touring for nearly two decades. Her most recent album, The April Verch Anthology, was released earlier this year.

"I feel so lucky to still be doing what I love, with a band that I love."

"It can get pretty difficult, even when you love it, to make everything work out," she admits. "However, with seventeen years of full time touring under my belt, it feels like my entire career has been one big highlight. I have already achieved my dreams in so many ways, including being a part of the opening ceremonies for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver as part of special fiddle segment. That experience was amazing!"

Influenced by the likes of John Hartford, Verch emphasizes simplicity when writing songs.

"It doesn't have to be complicated. It has to sing by itself and be memorable, and it has to leave plenty of room for grooving. Sometimes a tune can "try too hard" - either with melody or chord structure - and that just turns me off."

Verch's current fiddle of choice is a Kate Rickenbacker model that she has nicknamed Orvil. While she considers herself a traditional fiddler, she is not quick to adhere to the standard - and questionably antiquated - use of the term.

"There are people who believe that in order to be a traditional fiddler you have to stick to one style - and to preferably be a native of that style. I don't really believe that. I feel like there are many definitions for a traditional musician, and I count myself as one because, although I like a lot of different genres, they are all traditional or roots-based forms. I have a great respect for those roots and styles when I attempt to play them, even if I didn't grow up with them.

"I also don't really modernize traditional tunes or songs, just because it's not my cup of tea. I feel like that keeps me somewhat traditional as well, which is just my own personal preference.

"I hope that by the end of a performance, audiences stop trying to pinpoint what we are or what we play, and just enjoy a great musical journey with quick stops in a few different directions. I want them to think that we just sound like "us". That's not always the easiest thing to achieve, but it's a great aspiration and it keeps me focused on just being my best and using my strengths for the good of the music."

Today, with touring plans already set for the coming year, that connection she felt with Celtic music as a young girl is stronger than ever.

"I still adore and treasure the community that comes from being a part of music, or dance, or certain genres. It's something quite special, and it feeds the music and my soul. And I think too that, over the years, I've garnered even more reasons to play; I've seen how doing what I love can really impact and touch people, and how important it is to keep those musical traditions healthy and pass them along."

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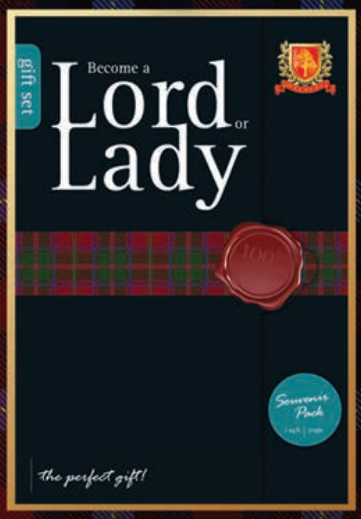
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Meghan Pike

"I can't imagine what else I would do if I weren't dancing."

Meghan Pike has been a dancer all her life, starting at the tender age of three with Highland dance.

"Originally, I wanted to learn to play the bagpipes," she recalls by email from her home in Surrey, British Columbia. "However, my parents weren't so keen on listening to a three-year-old drown the house in screeching, off-tune renditions on the pipes. So, sticking with the Scottish genre, they started me in Highland dancing."

As a youngster, Pike tried jazz, ballet, modern and hip-hop, eventually returning to Highland dance exclusively. Now 24, she is a full member of the Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance (SDTA), ScotDance Canada and ScotDance British Columbia. She also teaches for multiple dance schools in the greater Vancouver area.

"I continue to dance today because my love and passion for Highland continues to grow each year."

"I dance for my own enjoyment, but I also dance for my students. I want to lead by example - showing the dedication, the sportsmanship it takes, and assuring my students that even though I am their teacher, I do know what it feels like to put in hours of practice, get up on stage, and be in competition. I do waver about retiring my dance career, yet each year I find myself back to it, entered in more competitions."

Pike vies in the premier class at competitions, travelling throughout the Pacific Northwest and overseas. Some of her competitive dancing highlights include winning Best Canadian Dancer 2011 at the Bellingham Highland Games, and 5th Runner up for the Western Canadian and BC Open and Closed Championships in 2015 and 2016.

In addition to her solo ventures, Pike is a member of the International Highland Performance group known as Shot of Scotch. In October of last year, the group took Paris by storm at the International Body Music Festival (IBMF).

"The IBMF is an unusual music festival because it focuses on sounds that are made only through the actions of the body – no external music," she explains. "We taught workshops and performed an original choreography focusing on the sounds that Highland dancing makes."

Nothing is more rewarding, she notes, than the relationships she has with each of her students. Her biggest influences include her mother – who has never missed a competition or performance – as well as her teacher and mentor, Lorraine Graf.

"I hope to be as big of an influence to my dancers as my mom and Miss Lorraine are to me.

"Miss Lorraine had her own extremely successful studio in Surrey for over 55 years. She has guided and mentored me to reach goals and a level of dancing I wouldn't have thought possible, returning to Highland so late as a teen. She helped me place high in championships, dancing at Canadian and World championships, then helped me to discover that teaching and owning a studio is what I wanted to do."

Pike realized a typical 9-5 career wouldn't be her cup of tea. While she dreamed of having her own studio, she thought it was a far-fetched goal.

"That's when I learned how creative and entrepreneurial I could be.

"I want to have a successful studio for the rest of my teaching career, and to pass my passion for dance on to future generations."

That desire to make a difference continues to push her forward. These days, she runs Thistlebrook Academy of Highland Dance and teaches children, as well as younger and older adults. Her classes, she says, are like families.

"I put all my effort into ensuring each dancer reaches their fullest potential and personal bests, and instilling important qualities such as drive, determination, goal setting, loyalty, respect, sportsmanship, and the value of hard work. My studio motto is: 'Building confidence and community through dance.'"

Over the coming while, Pike hopes to improve her business and latch on to more performance opportunities for the studio, expanding and welcoming a larger influx of dancers. She plans on having a few students compete in championships, and there is the possibility of taking them to California for the Disneyland Highland dance performance and competition as well.

"I always want to keep sharing and learning, and growing as a dancer and a teacher, not only to better myself – but also my students."

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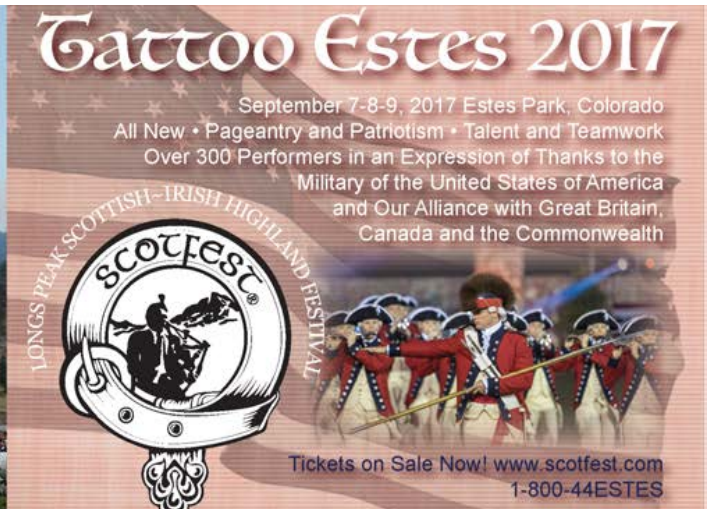
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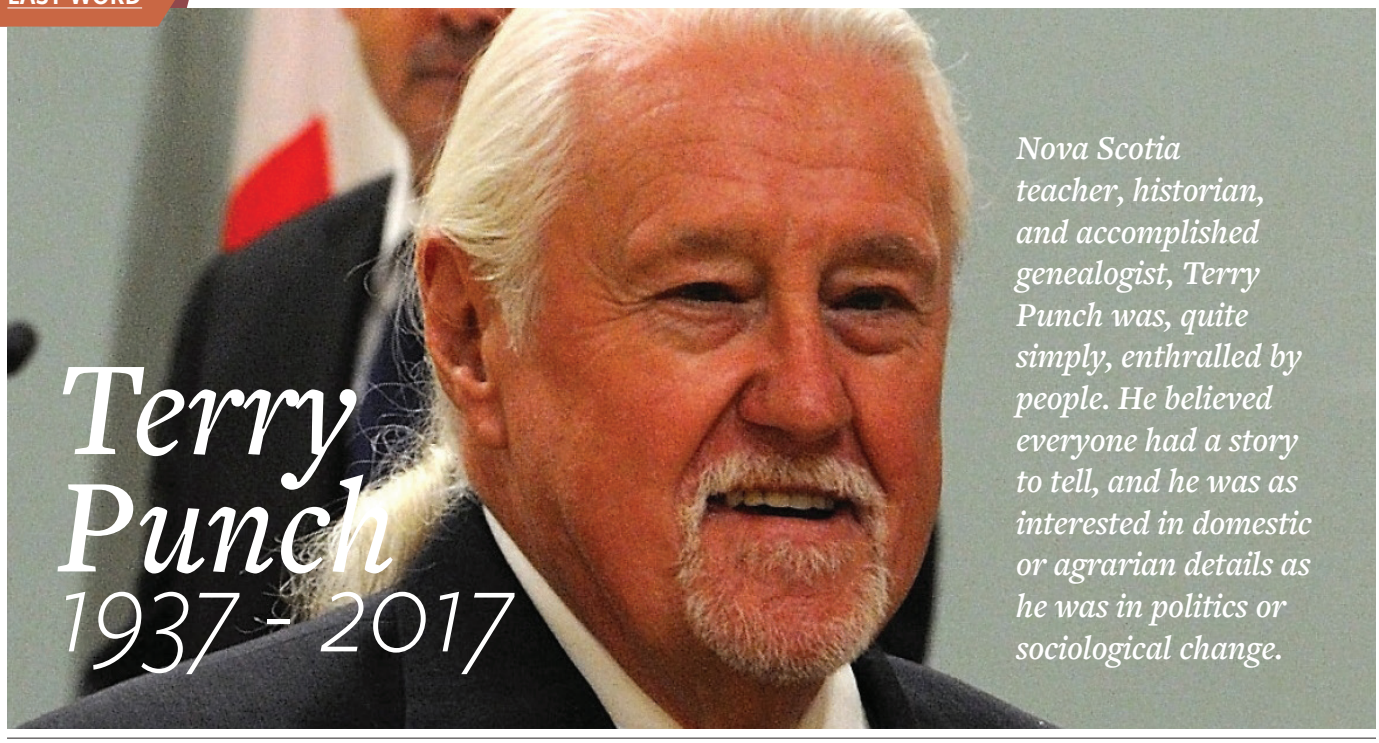
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Terry Punch
1937 - 2017

Nova Scotia teacher, historian, and accomplished genealogist, Terry Punch was, quite simply, enthralled by people. He believed everyone had a story to tell, and he was as interested in domestic or agrarian details as he was in politics or sociological change.

A pony-tailed Harley-Davidson rider, Punch's curiousity was boundless, his knowledge seemingly without limit. For close to half a century he studied the events of history with particular attention to the people caught up in them. A generous man with a keen, questioning intellect, he passed away recently at the age of 80.

Internationally known in genealogical and historical societies, he became a household name in Atlantic Canada for his regular visits to CBC Radio, where he offered advice and opinions to callers researching their history. A single piece of information was often enough to lead him to identify ethnic, etymological and geographic origins of any surname. But for Punch, that was just the beginning, as he probed callers about oral traditions within their families, then directing them to ships' passenger lists, census or church records, property information or written accounts of local history.

"If you can find out a little bit about the people behind the names and dates it is so much more fun," he told interviewer Norma Lee MacLeod in his last CBC interview.

Punch was genuinely delighted to set people on the first steps of their genealogical journey, confident they would be enriched by their poking around. However, his detective skills were at their peak when speaking to a seasoned searcher. Busy as he was, he found it difficult to steer himself away from the challenge of any brick wall.

Radio listeners, and those who encountered him at historical events or genealogical workshops, remember him as a gentleman, always anxious to share something in return for information given. Never did he show more sensitivity than when trying to steer novice researchers away from unlikely myths about being descended from royalty or nobility.

Punch was a fellow of both the Nova Scotia Historical Society and the Royal Society of Antiquarians in Ireland. He was also an executive member of many historical and cultural organizations, including the Halifax Charitable Irish Society and the Genealogical Institute of the Maritimes.

A member of the Order of Canada, he lived long enough "to see genealogy come of age" - content that people of his profession were no longer "thought of as a nut or at least a little bit eccentric."

"I think Alex Haley's Roots drew a whole lot of people to genealogy. I think they felt, if a family who have been enslaved can find their family like that, so can everyone else."

A man who had spent innumerable hours plowing through paper copies of records and brain-numbing microfilm, Punch credited the computer revolution and the Internet with making it possible for people to do their armchair detecting from home.

"That led people into it more deeply. It banded together people of similar interests - across the province, across the region and around the world - who can help each other out. That's wonderful, because it shows the unity of humanity."

Punch frequently told the story of how an affront to his ethnicity led him to begin a serious search of his own family background.

"I was sort of insulted so I got my dander up," he admitted.

Impressed by the intricacies of family relationships, he continued searching, and over time became an expert, particularly on surnames and immigration patterns.

John Macleod, an archivist with the Nova Scotia Archives, wrote that Punch might be considered a product of a mixed marriage, the son of a Catholic father and a Protestant mother.

"Terry the social scientist would accept the fact of this. Terry the teacher would ask why would it matter? Terry the genealogist would remind you that culture is complicated and sometimes deceiving: his Catholic grandfather would often provide the white horse for the Orange parade."

Punch was a great believer in context, and likened ancestral searches to decorating a Christmas tree.

"You find the right branch to hang the ornaments on. Here is where this person fits into the story of this group of people."

With his long vision of history, he was deeply touched by immigrant experiences, whether Scottish, Irish, Loyalist, Black, Asian or Middle Eastern, and he spoke strongly against discrimination.

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Cruise around Cuba from the 16th century architecture of Havana to historic Cienfuegos and Santiago de Cuba. Then visit Montego Bay and Port Antonio in Jamaica before sailing east to the Leeward Islands of St. Kitts, St. Barts and the nautical Antigua. It includes non-stop flights from Toronto with Air Canada.



Vietnam, Cambodia & Mekong River Cruise

16 Days - January 30, 2018

There can be no tapestry of river life as fascinating and varied as the Mekong river. What a striking cultural contrast between bustling Vietnam and the tranquility of Cambodia. It includes hotel stays in Saigon, Hanoi and Siem Reap and an overnight cruise in Ha Long Bay.

European Land & Cruise/Tours Including The Canadian Arctic In 2018



From Amsterdam To Berlin & Warsaw

A 16-Day package with a 12-day river cruise/tour of northern Holland & Germany and a 3-night post cruise hotel stay in Warsaw, Poland.

April 24 – May 9, 2018
July 11 – 26, 2018



The Lapland Tour Finland & Norway

A 16-Day first class land tour of Finland & Norway including a 6-day Arctic circle Norwegian coastal cruise sailing southbound from Kirkenes to Bergen.

May 25 – June 9, 2018



Canadian High Arctic & Greenland

A 17-Day expedition to Greenland invites you on a journey of untouched scenery, majestic fjords, and exceptional wildlife. Venture north in search of the elusive Polar Bear.

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An 18-Day package with a 9-day tour of Ireland and a 6-day cruise of the Scottish Highlands with 2-nights in Edinburgh & an overnight in Glasgow.

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- Iceland, Norway & United Kingdom from London - 15 Days — *May 25 & Sept. 3*, 2018 ♦ Balcony from $4,695* per person*
- Scandinavian Capitals & Russia from Copenhagen - 10 Days — *June 7*, July 13 & Sept. 5 ♦ Balcony from $2,850* per person*
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