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INTERNATIONAL

*Dermot
Kennedy*
No Fear in Éire

INSIDE!

*Celtic Woman, Holiday Gift Guide
Natalie MacMaster, Irish Gold, Loah
Wandering Wales, Christy Ann Conlin*



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

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

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copies of Celtic Life International to:
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Publication Mail Registration:
No. 40050439 ISSN 1918-0497

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Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

Canada

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stance of materials submitted for publication.
We do reserve the right to edit all submitted
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Fáilte!

I was listening to the delightful music of Celtic Woman recently when I began to reflect on the many Celtic women in history who endured extreme hardship to make our world a better place.

In particular, I thought of those women who, for the most part, have gone mostly unnoticed - women like Flora MacDonald of Skye, who helped Bonnie Prince Charlie escape to safety. Or Black Agnes, who defended Dunbar Castle in the time of Robert the Bruce. True champions of their time.

There have been many Celtic women who have been recognized for their bravery and leadership throughout the ages. Davis R. Ross, in his book *Women of Scotland* celebrates the fiery females who helped to shape their home country. In *A Portrait of Highland Women in Nova Scotia*, Canadian author Theresa MacIsaac details the grace and strength of the pioneer women who braved the wilds of the New World to make better lives for their children.

One story of a strong, determined woman unfolded in Port Hood, Nova Scotia in the late 1700s; Rebecca Lombard Smith is a name few will recognize, and one that has faded with time. Smith overcame untold hardship and difficulties to raise a family in isolation in the harshest of pioneer conditions. At that time, Port Hood was a fishing station during the summer months. It was also where much of the stone used to build Fortress Louisbourg was quarried by the French. Captain David Smith, a United Empire Loyalist, and his wife Rebecca settled on Port Hood Island with their 4 children around 1784. It is believed they were the first permanent Europeans to settle the area. Times were hard and without the benefit of close neighbours, survival became quite difficult.

In February of 1789, Captain Smith and three of his sons had gone out on the ice to hunt seals when a fierce winter storm blew in. The ice parted and Captain Smith became separated from his sons. He drowned while trying to swim back to his sons and safety. The boys drifted farther along the coast, coming ashore near Mabou, before making their way home to their mother two days later.

It would be devastating news for Rebecca, at home with a 2-year old girl and pregnant with another son. But she and her family survived. She was given a Loyalist grant of 500 acres where she built a house and a thriving farm, raising her young family on her own. The farm is still owned by the Smith descendants. Rebecca was a true heroine.

Women of all ages continue to champion causes and shape world events. Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish teenage environmental activist whose campaigning has gained international attention, has become renowned for the bold and blunt manner in which she recently addressed politicians about global warming. She has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and has been named one of the 100 most influential people of 2019 by Time magazine. To Thunberg - and all the women who strive to better our world, including those we have profiled in our publication over the past year - a heartfelt thank you.

The holiday season is again upon us - a time to reflect on our blessings, world poverty and our need to give. According to UNICEF, over 600 million people now live in extreme poverty. One billion children live at, or below, the poverty line. Oxfam International is a global organization working to end extreme poverty, and we can make a big difference with a small donation here; www.oxfam.ca

From the management and staff of Celtic Life International, we wish you a warm, wonderful and generous holiday season and a peaceful, prosperous New Year.

Enjoy and may God Bless!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher



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Highland Echoes

*In the final instalment
in a six-part series
on prominent women
in the Celtic community
we high-step with
Jennifer Licko*



Jennifer Licko's non-profit venture, Highland Echoes, was 30 years in the making without her even realizing it. Based in North Carolina, the organization aims to preserve and promote Scottish culture and traditions. Although Highland Echoes only officially came into existence recently, Licko says the seed was planted decades ago when she first began studying Highland dance as a youngster.

"Growing up in a dance community is such a unique cultural experience and it brings so many benefits. Not necessarily just because it is Scottish, but because you belong to something a little bit greater than you."

The importance of the cultural arts stuck with Licko as she moved through life. She studied musical education and worked as a teacher. She is also a Celtic folk singer-songwriter adept at multiple instruments, with several albums to her name.

"One of the things I notice now that I am older is that although the Highland dance community is strong, it is still something that many young children - most of whom would love the opportunity to learn about this kind of dance - simply don't know about."

At some point, Licko realized that she did not want to teach in a single classroom anymore.

*"I really wanted to reach more
students with what I had to offer."*

And she did; Licko put together workshops and programs as a cultural arts specialist, eventually visiting more than 300 schools to present on Scottish music and dance.

"Children who are exposed to more diverse cultural arts learn to reflect more on their own culture," she says, adding that it also gives them a greater desire to understand other cultures.

These school visits marked the beginning of the first of Highland Echoes' three components. The first - Scotland in the Class - aims to preserve Scottish culture through education. "We needed to bring something to the schools that would be easy for the teachers to implement and integrate with their own curriculum," says Licko. "We work hard to make sure we match Scotland in the Class with teachers and schools who are excited about it."

Another component of Highland Echoes is performance. "It is a cultural arts-based performance that we do both in schools and in communities," Licko explains. "It is basically the same show no matter where it is

performed, but with the schools we talk more with the kids and engage them in activities."

Given Licko's background in the performing arts, it was easy for her to get people on board, "especially the dancers," she says. "To have the chance to marry more traditional dancing with a modern idea and get to wear different costumes - and get to be more theatrical and more expressive with the dance - was really exciting for them."

*She describes the show as a
Scottish Highland version of Riverdance.*

"I don't actually like using this analogy," she admits, "but I don't have another one." As she puts it, the Highland Echoes show presents traditional dance and music "in a way that isn't off-the-wall modern, but comfortably modern, so it's not regimental or strict or boring."

There are a variety of dances and costumes, and songs in both Scottish Gaelic and English. In fact, all the instrumental music for the performance was written by fiddler and musical director Pat Mangan, who performed in Riverdance for 12 years. Licko herself does the vocal performances.

On top of all this, a third branch of Highland Echoes is currently in the works - a membership program. "We have a lot of Scottish organizations, throughout the United States especially, that are of an older generation and want younger people to be more involved," notes Licko. "However, they don't know how to reach out to them."

The membership program will allow Scottish organizations to join and gain access to information about communication and marketing strategies for reaching younger people. Social media templates, for example, will help board members post to Facebook or Instagram.

Licko believes that young people are still interested in learning about Scottish culture, though they aren't as involved as they could be due to a lack of exposure and opportunity. The Highland Games are fantastic, she shares, but don't do enough to engage people who aren't already invested in the culture. "To be honest, I don't think enough is being done generally."

She invites people to support Scottish culture education by donating to a school through Highland Echoes.

www.highlandechoes.com



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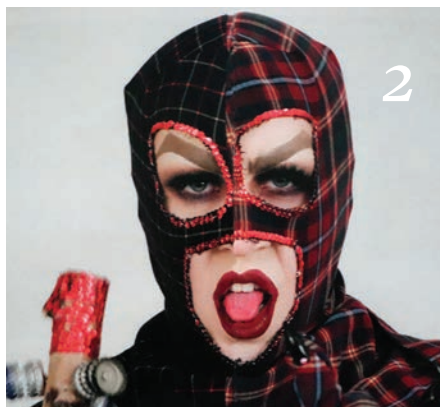
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one

Welsh Christmas

Saint Nick wasn't always a part of Wales' holiday traditions. While customs varied somewhat from region to region, Welsh Christmas and New Year celebrations generally involved communal activities which brought neighbours together. One of the most well-known of these was the Mari Lwyd (Grey Mare) - a skeletal hobby horse carried door-to-door by a man covered in a white blanket. According to an article by Swansea University professor Martin Jones, local customs declined in part due to "the Victorian emergence of a national British festive culture based around bought presents, trees, cards, Santa Claus and dinner."

two

The Queer Mummer

An artist in Corner Brook (Newfoundland / Labrador) has combined the art of drag with the region's tradition known as mummering. Mummering, which is believed to have originated in Ireland and the United Kingdom, is a Yuletide practice during which costumed community members go house-to-house in their neighbourhoods. Recently, Newfoundlander Lucas Morneau's body of work - The Queer Mummer - went on display at the Grenfell Art Gallery. As reported by CBC, Morneau previously noticed parallels between mummer and drag queen costumes. His series depicts various mummer characters, combining Newfoundland roots with pop culture references.

three

Cornish Names

The 11th edition of the most popular baby naming book in the U.K. reveals that Cornish names, much like the language itself, may be undergoing a revival. The recently released Baby Names 2020 features more than 8,000 of the latest naming trends. Cornish names such as Locryn, Trevelyan and Kerensa made the list this year, as well as Demelza. Although Demelza is the name of a hamlet in St. Wenn, Cornwall, it is speculated that its popularity is derived from Winston Graham's Poldark books, which have been adapted into a BBC television series.

four

Best Pipe Band in North America

The Dartmouth & District Pipe Band from Nova Scotia were recognized as the best in North America after earning the North American championship title at the Glengarry Highland Games in August. This was the band's first time winning the championship since 2000. The pipers and drummer impressed the judges with a march followed by a five-minute musical medley including marches, slow airs, hornpipes, jigs and reels. The Glengarry Games take place in Maxville, Ontario, welcoming more than 50 pipe bands to compete each year.

five

Eighteenth-Century "Witch" Hunt

Scottish officials are searching for the remains of a woman who died more than 300 years ago. Lilius Adie, who died in prison after being accused of witchcraft, was buried on a beach in Torryburn, Fife. Her bones were exhumed and removed from the burial site in 1852. The last known location of Adie's head was St. Andrew's University Museum in 1904, but it since went missing along with the rest of her remains. Recently, a search was launched so Adie can properly be put to rest.

six

Museum of Literature Ireland

Ireland has a new Museum of Literature at St. Stephen's Green in Dublin. A partnership between University College Dublin and the National Library of Ireland, supported by the Naughton Foundation and Fáilte Ireland, brought the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) to life. The museum "will celebrate Ireland's world-renowned literary culture and heritage from the past to the present, inspiring visitors of all ages to create, read and write." According to MoLI's website, plans for the museum began as early as 2010 and building started back in October 2017.

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

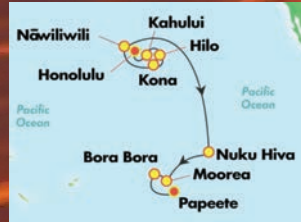
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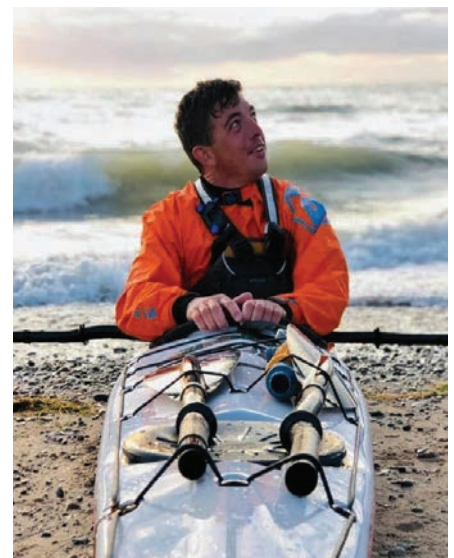
Fionn Ferreira

A recent Irish high school graduate took the top prize at this year's Google Science Fair in July. Fionn Ferreira - who works as a curator at the Schull Planetarium in Cork, Ireland - is just 18 years old, but he has come up with a method to remove microplastics from water. His winning project examined the removal of microplastics using ferrofluids (a liquid made of oil and magnetite which sticks to plastic). Once the ferrofluid latches onto the plastic, the plastic can then be removed using magnets. When Ferreira presented his project at Google international headquarters in Mountain View, California, the Fair's panel of judges said his experiment could offer a practical way to clean the world's oceans. "I discovered, to my dismay, that at present no screening or filtering for microplastics takes place in any European wastewater treatment centres, so I started looking around for a solution," said Ferreira. The Google Science Fair is just the latest accomplishment for the bright young Irishman. He has already won a dozen science fair awards, speaks three languages and is adept at playing the trumpet. Now with \$50,000 (U.S.) in prize money under his belt, who knows what he will do next.



Lenny White

Lenny White is a trained barber who goes the extra mile. The Northern Irish man travels to about 55 nursing homes in the country to provide "pop up" barbershop services to patients. White was initially inspired 20 years ago, when he worked at the Edgewater Lodge Care Home as a kitchen porter. In 2016, he received his barber training after his boxing career came to an end. Then, with the help of Alzheimer's Association, he learned how to provide "dementia-friendly" haircuts and shaves. He also draws on his previous experience as a staff member in a nursing home. White creates a relaxed atmosphere by using music at a low volume, showing the patient his tools and sometimes even holding their hand. He also often brings a barber pole along to make the room look the part. "These guys can sometimes be agitated and feeling quite low, so my job is to make them feel good, but also to make them look good. I give them a good haircut - do their eyebrows, their ears, their nose hair and have a good chat with these men to get them to open up and really enjoy the experience."



Kim Tastagh

At the end of August, Kim Tastagh spent 24 hours kayaking around the Isle of Man for charity. Tastagh, who hails from the island's village of St. John's, previously held the record for the fastest circumnavigation of the island in a kayak. He completed the lap in just over 13 hours back in 2013. This time around, the conditions were too rough for him to beat his record, but he managed to kayak for 24 hours non-stop. He set off from Fenella Beach in Peel and landed on Ballaugh Beach (near Ramsey) the following day. "I gave it my all, but the conditions weren't ideal," he told BBC News. Tastagh, 24, is no stranger to mental health struggles so he focused his efforts on raising money for a Manx charity called Isle Listen, which aims to "equip children and young people with the skills and resilience needed to navigate the challenges of 21st century life." His recent efforts raised more than £2,500 for the organization.

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The company was established in 2013 by Sommerville's father, Tom Young MBE, an esteemed master glassblower.

"He started glassblowing in this area in 1965," she shares. "He has secured his legacy by passing his skills along to me as well as several other glassmakers. This has helped to keep the skill alive and re-kindled the glassblowing business for the whisky lover or connoisseur."

Since launching, the business has grown, both in their product offerings as well as their venue and staff size.

"We started off from a small studio beside our home and now operate from a revised studio and warehouse in the same small town. We have introduced new and innovative products which have won awards in the industry. We also now sell all over the world via our online store and have many stockists worldwide who carry our range. In the U.S. we have stockists in Chicago, Kentucky and Connecticut, and in Canada our stockist is in Calgary, but you can also find our items on Amazon and we have distributors in both Australia and New Zealand."



Sommerville admits the vocation is not without its fair share of issues.

"For us, the challenges tend to be about capacity. All our glass is made by hand and we use very little automation, so our capacity is limited to what we can produce in a day. This does mean, however, that what you get is unique and special in its own way. In addition to that, training and keeping our skilled glassblowers can be quite difficult. Thankfully the ones we currently have are very committed to our vision and goals."

Still, she says, the work offers many rewards.

*"Seeing our products go all
over the world and knowing
that a product we have made
is sitting on someone's
table or in their whisky
collection is incredible."*

"It is also nice being able to keep the legend of the Angels' Share, and of my father, alive."

Angels' Share offers up a variety of handcrafted products, including whisky droppers, glasses and an assortment of accessories.

"Our best-selling product is our innovative whisky water dropper," explains Sommerville. "Like a pipette, it allows for precise dilution of a dram of whisky. Just one drop of water makes all the difference - especially with single malts - and our droppers are made to measure with complete accuracy. Our signature product is, of course, the whisky-filled Angel representing the Angels' Share that no one ever sees or gets from the barrel whilst the liquor matures."

She says that the current Celtic marketplace is strong.

"With the success of things like Outlander, Game of Thrones, Mary Queen of Scots and the like, the thirst for all things Scottish or Celtic is quite high. People love the history and the realness of our nations, and the raw passion and quality products that come from here."

"That said, I believe that there needs to be better engagement between makers and businesses here in Scotland and with those who seek to have a marketplace in locations like the U.S. or Australia. The artisan talent and quality that comes out of Scotland - whether it be food and drink or arts and crafts - is phenomenal."

Over the next few years, Sommerville hopes to expand the company's presence in North America.

"We have some brand ambassadors in the U.S. already, but plan to add more as demand increases for our products. We are still growing and hope that our fresh ideas and designs offer something for everyone. Scottish Whisky deserves Scottish Glass, right? That is our passion and - we hope - our legacy."

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Irish-Sierra Leonean

*Irish-Sierra Leonean
songstress Loah sings
from her soul*



“I have played music for as long as I have a memory,” shares Loah, an Irish-Sierra Leonean singer-songwriter, from her home in Dublin. “My parents sent me to violin and fiddle lessons as a little girl. I joined an orchestra as a youngster and later, by the age of twelve, I started piano and singing in choirs. Solo singing and songwriting came much later.”

As an adult, Loah (born Sallay-Matu Garnett) pursued a career as a pharmacist and worked in the field for several years. And while the work was steady and reliable, the twentysomething quickly knew it wasn’t for her.

“The choice to ‘go professional’ with music came from realizing that it was what I felt most drawn to of all the activities in my life, despite my pharmaceutical training. The biggest difference has been realizing that to work as an artist professionally it has to change from a hobby, or something you do in your spare time, to taking up the bulk of your days. It requires the discipline to keep at it even when you might not be in the mood. I have also had to acquire serious business acumen, something that is an ongoing challenge. All of that while constantly striving to hold my work to a higher standard than previously.”

Today, the songstress describes her sound, quite aptly, as “Artsoul.”

“It is soul music that draws on an array of influences, including rock, folk, Western African and classical. When you get down to it though, it is a blend of soul and folk songwriting styles and singing.”

She admits that her calling has not been without its challenges.

“Treating yourself and your own work as a business product can be really hard sometimes, because it is difficult to find the required emotional distance in order to do that. Not knowing what is around the corner is also challenging. Things can be very up and down.”

Still, she believes the vocation reaps many rewards.

*“I get to do what
I love every day...”*

“I was very down when I wasn’t writing regularly. The kinds of adventures - both internally and externally - that this job has taken me on, plus the people I have met and created with during the process, have been quite amazing.”

In June of 2017, Loah released her debut EP, *This Heart*. The six-song offering included a selection of the artist’s most popular singles, such as *Nothing*, as well as the title track. More recently, she teamed up with Cork-born producer Bantum (Ruairi Lynch) on a myriad of musical projects and collaborations.

“Summer of Love is our most recent single,” she explains. “We have been emailing ideas back and forth and meeting up occasionally for the last two years while we worked on a bunch of songs together. I also got my sister - an artist named Fehdah, who is an incredible producer and songwriter

herself - to record and produce my vocals. We included other great producers and players who are based in Dublin to make a few adjustments and additions. It has been a winding road, but we are very happy with the fruits of our labour, which we will be releasing steadily over the next year. People seem to respond well to Bantum and me as a duo, and we bring out the best in each other.

“My favorite track with Bantum has to be *April Brave*,” she adds. “It is the first one that we wrote together. It took forever to do and get right. I recorded vocals in five different studios. But there was an eureka moment when it was finally done, and Ellius Grace put together a gorgeous music video for it. It really sets the tone for everything that comes after.”

Although she still has a lot of work to complete on her collaborations with Bantum, Loah’s priority over the upcoming months is to get back in touch with her soul, via her songwriting.

“There is a great quote from Louis Pasteur that I like; ‘Chance favours the prepared mind.’ That definitely applies to songwriting for me. The more I am physically present at the guitar, piano or laptop, the more likely I am to receive inspiration, and the better I am at actually getting it down on the page when it does strike.”

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Ian Fontova

Ian Fontova fuses classic and contemporary Celtic melodies

Although born and bred in Spain, musician Ian Fontova never felt quite connected to his own cultural heritage. Instead, he found joy and inspiration in the magical world of Celtic music.

Drawing upon his love of travel, nature and fantasy, Fontova brings together electronic, funk and post-rock musical stylings with old and new Celtic melodies to create a unique, hybrid sound.

"I definitely go for a new, experimental fusion kind-of vibe, using traditional music as a starting point," shares the 28-year-old via email from his home in Barcelona. "I really have no desire to play only purely traditional Celtic music on its own."

Fontova picked up the guitar at the age of four. When formal lessons became too methodical, he took another approach.

"Music should be, ultimately, for and of myself," he notes. "And it is a great way for me to connect and communicate with other people. With training, it all felt too serious, and I believed then, as I do now, that music should be fun - a place of magic."

He found that magic in the ancient customs of Celtic music and culture, a lyrical genre that remains ideal for expressing his innermost thoughts and feelings.

"In particular the 'fantasy music' of the Celtic nations has been an interest of mine for a long time. It captures the soul. Over the years I have listened to many Celtic bands with great musicians and I discovered how this kind of music can create bonds between people, and how it can be an amazing channel to share both emotions and ideas."

Earning a Soundtrack Production Degree in college, Fontova's final project was an epic Celtic piece called *The Journey*. A video of the school's orchestra playing the song was shared on YouTube, bringing greater attention to the songsmith's work. From there, he created more videos for his own YouTube channel, and began working on his debut recording.

Released in September, *Foras* features eight original compositions - all of which, explains Fontova, were inspired by his travels.

"One of the tunes, *Malham Quinoa*, was the result of a wild camping trip with my sister in a place called Malham Cove in England. We were inside our tent, boiling quinoa over a campfire that took forever, when we started to play music to kill the time. Suddenly, the melody simply appeared out of nowhere."

Another song - *Take Me Back to the Woods* - was written during a solo sojourn through the woods around the French Pyrenees.

Fontova's favourite track on the new album, however, is *Eye of the Warden*, a melodic melange of post-rock and traditional Celtic sounds.

"What I like is fusion, strange rhythms, breaking the rules...especially when it is done with a Celtic flavour..."

His creative journey has not been without its challenges, he admits, including tak-

ing some criticism from traditional types.

"When traditions don't evolve with the times and with new people, they are in danger of becoming stale, irrelevant, and even extinct. Change is important and necessary. It is my duty as an artist to both reflect and betray my times."

As with most self-produced musicians, finding time and funding are major issues as well.

"Sadly, it is almost impossible to earn a proper income from it. And so, for many of us, we must make our living from something else, leaving us with little, if any, free time to do our real work - the work we were born to do."

That said, as with most creative endeavours, the rewards of the vocation far outweigh the difficulties; travel, meeting other artistic types, learning, self-exploration and expression are but a few of the intangible gifts.

"Of course, there is great personal satisfaction in seeing my ideas and my efforts come to life, and hopefully endure long after I am gone."

"Ultimately, it brings me no end of joy to think that maybe someone, somewhere is enjoying what I have done - that perhaps, as it has done for me, it will enrich someone's life in some way."

Fontova's new album *Foras* is available via most music streaming sites.

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Mera Royle

Though just 19 years of age, Manx musician Mera Royle is committed to her craft



Mera Royle makes her home in The Isle of Man, a small country with a big music scene. As she notes, the Isle - situated in the Irish Sea between Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the English county of Cumbria - is the geographic heart of the Celtic nations.

"There is a strong sense of culture and identity on the island and the music and language are very similar to the Gaelic traditions in Ireland and Scotland," shares the songstress, who was born in Manchester, U.K., but relocated to the Isle of Man with her family as a toddler. "A Manx language-speaker could be quite easily understood by Gaelic speakers in both Ireland and Scotland."

A professional harpist and violinist, Royle has been playing music for as long as she can remember. "One of my earliest memories is of my uncle teaching me how to tune a ukulele, and I recall not being able to put it down until I had learned how to do it."

She started "properly" playing instruments once she began school, where music continues to be a core of the Manx curriculum.

"I began violin when I was eight and I had this hilarious teacher who was completely bonkers, but he really changed how I thought about music. He taught me how it isn't something you do - it is something that comes from inside of you, and your instrument is just there to help you get it out. More than ten years later, I still think he is one of my biggest inspirations."

Royle was introduced to the harp by another teacher, Mike Boulton, who coordinated the school's folk music club. "Playing the harp was something that I enjoyed right away, and I was lucky because a few of my friends in the folk club were really great musicians and we would learn tunes and play them together. I performed with them in a whole range of concerts - from afternoon tea parties, to church hall events, being involved in the island's music festivals and being allowed to work with visiting musicians - plus playing at the country's main halls, like the 2,000-seat Villa Gaiaety Complex."

With the support of the Isle of Man Arts Council, Royle was selected for a monthly class with Scottish harpist Rachel Hair. This helped further hone her harp skills and overcome new musical challenges. She hopes to continue learning from Hair, even now that she is attending England's Newcastle University, where she is studying folk and traditional music.

She currently resides in the village of Maughold, a rural area in the Isle of Man's northern region. The colourful, natural atmosphere offers her endless musical ideas.

"Living in a place that is so green and beautiful is perfect for finding inspiration when it comes to composing music..."

"I named my first EP The Ballaglass Set after a glen that me and my mum used to go to after school to walk the dogs."

Last year, Royle won the BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Musician of the Year Award, which forced her to confront one of her fears - performing in front of a crowd.

"I have found there really is no better way to learn this kind of thing than on the job when you are thrown in at the deep end. I played at Cropredy Festival last year and had to perform in front of about 10,000 people, which certainly made me think a lot about my presence on stage and what I needed to do to make sure the audience was as absorbed as possible."

Those audiences range from elderly women "doing their knitting in the front row" of a small church hall, to the likes of Eliza Carthy and Mark Radcliffe.

"The older I get, the easier it is to understand that the audience is there to enjoy the music and that it is best for me to just enjoy it as well and not worry too much. However, the pressure is always on to play well whatever the occasion."

Royle's latest EP, *Woven*, is now available on Bandcamp. It includes two tracks - *Moon at Dawn* and *Deep in the Earth* - which she composed for films, along with her favourite track, a take on Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*, and four other tunes.

"Going forward, I am committed to learning more about my craft - especially the art of composition - and to my evolution as both a player and a performer."

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A portrait of Emer Barry, an Irish singer, looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. She has long, dark hair and is wearing a light-colored top. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

Emer Barry

Irish singer

Emer Barry goes where the music takes her

Emer Barry remembers singing before she could speak.

"I used to stand up in my cot and just start making noises," she recalls via email. "Then I would stop, seemingly congratulating myself and start again, higher and louder!"

Despite her unwavering confidence in the crib, the Longford native found it difficult to find her musical footing as a child.

"I was very shy outside of the house, so my parents sent me to join choirs and drama classes and all sorts of things to bring me out of my shell. When I was seven, I took singing lessons with a nun who lived an hour away from us and I had my first solo in Longford Cathedral when I was 10. By nature, I am more of a dreamer than a doer, so if it wasn't for my dad, I don't think I would be doing this at all. He pushed me, very gently, to sing. He found the teachers and signed me up for the competitions and gave me the confidence to do what I love.

"My father was a lover of light opera, and he later sent me to study classical voice in the College of Music in Dublin," she adds. "I went on to get a Masters in Opera and studied for a year with English National Opera in London. It was after all that that I felt I really found my voice."

Her style, she notes, is heavily inspired by both her classical training and traditional tales and techniques of ancient Celtic folk.

"I never felt entirely connected to the

opera world. My voice just didn't want to commit entirely to that style. What I do now is much more me, but it is influenced by all the music I have studied and sung over the years. I am sort of halfway between Celtic and classical, and I am strongly influenced by the inherent storytelling nature of all Irish people. Honestly, I just go where the music takes me."

Currently, she performs as both a solo artist and as part of crossover group, Affiniti. In addition to touring with the renowned Celtic trio, the young songstress recently released her first full-length solo album, *Storyteller* - a project, she admits, that was not without its challenges.

"Being an independent artist, I have full creative control."

"However, it also means that much of the time I am the producer, promoter, PR person, administrator, as well as the performer. It is more than a full-time job, it's a full-time job plus four part-time jobs."

Still, she feels that the highlights far outweigh any challenges.

"I have gotten to perform in America, and I absolutely love it there. The people are so friendly and nearly everyone has a story about their Irish ancestors. My first trip to America was in 2014, and I have performed there every year since. None of it would be possible but for a chance meeting with a

very special person who has encouraged and supported myself and Affiniti over the past number of years. I was performing with Affiniti at a charity event in Dublin a while back and met Howard Crosby, who happens to be the nephew of Bing Crosby. When he heard us perform, he immediately said, 'I need to bring you girls to America!' It has just been the most amazing journey, meeting him, singing with him and gaining so many new fans across the pond."

Barry - who plans to incorporate more Irish language and history into her next album - is very pleased with the current state of Celtic music.

"I think Ireland can be so proud of its artistic output. There is something to suit everyone's tastes, from Hozier and Bono to Celtic Woman and Phil Coulter. It is amazing that such a small country can produce so many global stars. The Irish language is still taught in schools and many Irish artists use traditional instruments. I am a very proud Irish woman."

As busy as the past year has been, Barry won't be slowing down over the next 12 months.

"2020 will see the release of my brand-new album, which I am now recording. It is full steam ahead with lots of exciting plans. But, as I said, I am just going to go where the music takes me."

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Kevin Connolly

Irish author Kevin Connolly celebrates the life and work of W.B. Yeats

Kevin Connolly first discovered the work of Irish poet W.B. Yeats at the age of 16.

"A friend of mine thrust a copy of Joseph Hone's biography of Yeats into my hands and urged me to read it," recalls the author. "The book, though long since superseded by other biographies, encouraged me to dive into Yeats's writings and explore his fascinating life."

After graduating with a master's degree in Library Science, the Co. Cavan native took his first steps into Ireland's literary scene, opening two small bookshops - one in Dublin and another in Sligo.

"They were called The Winding Stair, a name taken from a book of poems by Yeats. I sold the Sligo shop in 2001 and the Dublin shop in 2006, though it continues to operate under the same name. Between 1982 and 2006 I hosted hundreds of readings, launches, exhibitions, concerts, etc., at these locations and came into contact with many exponents of writing, arts and performance during that time. The Winding Stair became a vibrant part of Dublin's cultural tapestry."

In addition to owning and operating the bookshops, Connolly has maintained a vibrant writing career through most of his adult life.

"Ireland is a wonderful environment for writers, both encouraging of the effort to write and tolerant of the outcome. Over the years I have written for newspapers, magazines, and radio, as well as for academic journals.

"I am excited by the blank page and I enjoy the challenge of putting feelings, opinions, and observations into words."

Although he writes both for his love of language and story, it was his passion for research that took precedence. Over the past decade, the scribe has dug deep into the life and work of W.B. Yeats, inspiring both his debut novel, *Yeats and Sligo* (2010), as well as his most recent offering, *Arise and Go*.

"While writing *Yeats and Sligo* I realized that Sligo was only a very small part of Yeats's world, though it remained with him throughout his life and certainly informed his poetic landscape. The more I read, the more I realized that there was a much greater world out there that Yeats occupied, and people who influenced him. O'Brien Press then commissioned me to write another book about Yeats, and I was able to apply my newly acquired research skills to the immensely enjoyable project of exploring other dimensions of Yeats's life. This took



me to London, Dublin, the West of Ireland and other places, and introduced me to a vast *dramatis personae* of characters whose lives became entwined with Yeats's on all sorts of levels."

Although the process of writing *Arise and Go* presented many challenges - organizing the book's structure, most specifically - Connolly says the experience was engaging, educational and entertaining.

"I enjoyed the process of assimilating research into prose and attempting to make it readable and not too academic. I wanted to make *Arise and Go* informative as well as accessible to the reader who had an interest in Yeats but didn't want to read an overly academic work. There are enough heavy academic works about Yeats available. A second great reward was in the manifestation of all that research and writing in the form of a beautifully designed and produced book.

"I certainly learned a lot about Yeats himself. I learned that his was a talent that he worked hard at refining. He wrote ceaselessly. I also learned that he was determined and obsessive about certain ideas, such as the Hugh Lane Gallery, the Abbey Theatre, and more. He was a courageous man and always prepared to stand up for causes in which he believed regardless of the personal consequences."

The response, he notes, has been extremely positive.

"I have received many emails, letters, and calls commenting on how 'readable' the book is. I think the most heart-warming response was from an elderly man who read it aloud to his ailing brother in his hospital bed."

Connolly is currently working on a book about Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell, a project still in its early stages.

"However, I will never stray too far from W.B. Yeats. I have also begun researching Yeats and Maud Gonne and their endlessly absorbing relationship. Ah the joys of research!"

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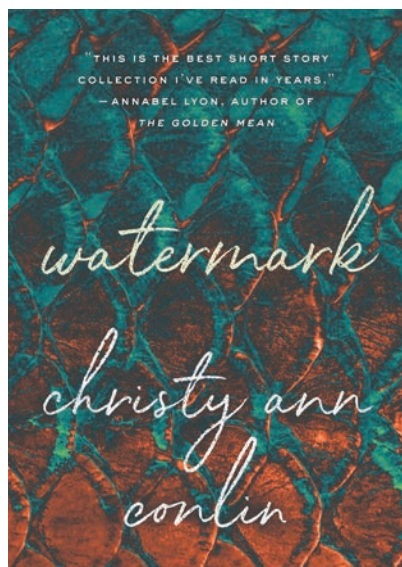
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Christy Ann Conlin

Atlantic Canadian Author Christy Ann Conlin looks for light in the darkness

Born in rural Nova Scotia near the Bay of Fundy, author Christy Ann Conlin grew up listening to the heroic and moving tales of the Celts.

"My father used to read me the poetry of William Butler Yeats, and my mother recited Robbie Burns as we skipped through the fog on the beach," she recalls. "Both sides of the family told stories of selkies and merrows, creatures from the sea."

It was the delicate intricacies of these stories, and of poetry - particularly the work of Seamus Heaney - along with the mystical lure of Celtic mythology and stage play that first inspired young Conlin to put pen to paper.

"I love how poetry evokes imagery, and how characters come to life off the page through their dialogue - not just the words but the rhythm and tone of their language and words. Today, I write also for the challenge of trying new forms, of weaving together the traditional with innovation."

Conlin has enjoyed a strong and successful career within the Atlantic Canadian literary scene and is well-renowned as the East Coast's Master of Gothic Fiction. While she is grateful for the accolades and awards, they can't compare with her real reason for writing.

"The biggest highlight for me is finishing a draft and knowing I have a complete manuscript. And then, once it is done, holding that book in my hands for the first time. From there, it is just knowing that - out there somewhere - someone is holding my book and entering the story."

"There is a remarkable union between writer and reader. Reading and writing are solitary acts, and in this solitude is a meeting of the minds."

The vocation, she admits, is not without its share of challenges.

"It is very hard to make a living from fiction, especially short stories. I am a part of the 'sandwich generation' - so I juggle young children and elderly parents and relatives. Sometimes I feel almost ripped into pieces by those responsibilities. Writing requires blocks of time and a quiet mind. It is a constant quest to find this, and a fine balance to strike - like being a tightrope walker or a plate spinner."

Over the years, Conlin has published three books; Heave, her debut, released in 2002; The Memento, her sophomore effort, published in 2016; and her most recent release, Watermark, a short story collection that hit bookstore shelves earlier this year.

"Everywhere I go, stories present themselves. And writing short stories is something that I have always done, as a story idea will come to me quite suddenly. Perhaps they reveal themselves to me as shorter pieces as so often the time in my life is often best suited to a shorter form. The stories for Watermark were written when the spirit moved me, to quote my grandmother, stories written for themselves, not for part of a bigger collection."

"But when I collected those tales, they began to change. At this point I was work-

ing with a full manuscript, closer in length to a novel but instead of chapters, there were stories. I needed much longer blocks of time to work on the manuscript then. There are small links in Watermark, that connect the stories in the same way families and communities are connected - through shared experience, landscape, and history."

The collection has already received significant critical and popular acclaim.

"I keep getting letters from readers, written late at night, who have been up reading the Watermark into the wee hours, sharing their connections. It affirms for me that - despite age and stage of life difference, geographic and cultural differences - there is a deep human connection through struggle and conflict, and the courage and hope it takes to persevere."

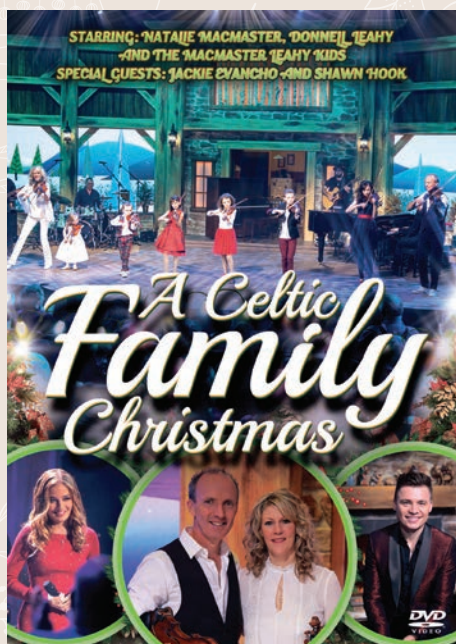
Currently, Conlin is focused on the promotion of Watermark. She also has two future projects lined up; a fourth piece of literary fiction and a memoir.

"I am not interested in the easy life - it is the inspired life which sings out. There is comedy where there is tragedy, disappointment and joy, grieving and celebration, the two faces of an experience. I love novels where everyday, unexpected people become heroes in their own lives, and discover the power behind the mundane - the mythological in the commonplace. There is such strength in the 'commonplace' meeting with 'the unforeseen.' To me, it is the light which calls to me when I write, those shimmers and gleams through the darkness."

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Natalie MacMaster

With her new solo recording, Sketches, Canadian fiddler extraordinaire Natalie MacMaster finds herself busier than ever.



American author, artist and educator Paul Laseau once said that “sketching is a continuous form of learning rather than a string of performances.” That is certainly true for fiddler Natalie MacMaster. Recently, Celtic Life International Senior Writer Chris Muise caught up with the multi award-winning musician to chat about her latest effort, *Sketches*, and the perks and perils of her profession.

Where are you and the family hanging out these days?

We are in Ontario. Just outside of Peterborough, in a little farming village called Douro.

Let's start with your roots.

I grew up in Troy, Cape Breton. My family is of Scottish ancestry - both my Mom and Dad are 4th or 5th generation Scottish, so we have been in Canada for a long time. The music that I play is originally from Scotland, but with what we call the ‘Cape Breton’ sound. It is similar to traditional, old-school Scottish fiddling - interestingly, a style of music that you don’t hear anymore in Scotland - but with a touch of both Irish and French influence. I grew up surrounded by that sound. I spent 18 years there, until I went to college. After college, I moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia for a while, before coming to Ontario in 2002.

You began playing and writing music at a very young age.

I have been playing music for 37 years now. I was given a fiddle from a relative, Uncle Charlie, who was actually my great uncle and lived in Boston. He sent a fiddle to Cape Breton for any of the MacMaster children who wanted to give it a go. I heard about the fiddle, and

I wanted to play it. It wasn’t for me specifically, but once I knew it was on its way I was like, ‘I’d like to try it!’ It was small, sort of a three-quarter size violin - just a bit smaller than a regular one. In our house, we already had a full-sized fiddle, but as a child it just didn’t fit me. I have been writing music for 37 years as well. I wrote my first tune when I was about 10 years old, and I still remember it; it is called, amazingly enough, *Uncle Charlie’s Fiddle*. I haven’t written a pile of tunes over the years - maybe a hundred or so. As I have gotten older, however, I have become more interested and involved with song writing.

You were raised in a musical milieu.

Yes, both my Mom and Dad had that musical gene. Mom step danced - that is what she was known for. And I suppose Dad was best known for being Buddy MacMaster’s brother - Buddy being probably the most famous of the Cape Breton fiddlers - though Dad didn’t play much himself. However, at our home people would just drop in at all hours and there would always be a fiddle tune playing. And we had some serious house parties - sometimes with up to a hundred people! So, there was music on the go at our place most of the time.

There were other musical influences as well.

Eileen Ivers was probably my favourite, especially during my years in Cape Breton. I first heard her play when I was a teenager. She was a big influence because I heard so many different sounds and songs come from her fiddle. Plus, she was young and played solo, so that got me thinking that I could do that also. When I was a little older, I heard Mark O’Conner and he became a major influence as well, especially in terms of how I held my fiddle. The tone that he was able to produce, especially his vibrato, I simply could not replicate with the way I was holding my fiddle. I had been holding it in the ‘correct’ manner and - up until that point - didn’t see any reason to change it. But after hearing him play, I relearned how to hold the instrument so that my hand would be in the proper position to produce a better vibrato.

What inspires you musically today?

Good music. It can be anything; jazz, pop, rock, whatever - it doesn't necessarily have to be other fiddlers. I often find inspiration in little tunes of different genres - perhaps the melody will cause me to hum other melodies around it, and then I end up writing something. Or it could be just the sheer beauty of how a melody is played that inspires how I deliver a piece of music.

You have enjoyed a brilliant career.

Many of my career highlights happened when I was in my 20s; a major record label deal with Warner Music Canada, attending the Juno Awards and winning a Juno. An incredible milestone for me was appearing on Sesame Street - that was an awesome moment, really. Recording with Alison Krauss and Malcolm McDonald were amazing experiences, as were playing at Carnegie Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. Too many to count really - I have been very fortunate.

It's been eight years since you released your last solo album. Why the gap?

I have done a lot of recording over the last eight years, but it has all been with my husband Donnell (Leahy). We had been married for about 15 years before we did our first duet album, which is crazy and ridiculous considering how long we had been together at that point. Then we did a Christmas album. Lately there has been a different focus for me and, to be honest, I find myself a little divided. At one time my only concern was for my own solo career. Today, it is about my own career, but it is also my career with my husband...our career...as a team. And, even more than that, it is now about me, my husband and our children as a team. Then, I have my role as a mom, watching over my children and their development, so I am home a lot of the time. On top of all that, we run a farming operation as well. So, I wear many different hats. I mean, even something as basic as clothing - it seems so trivial in some regards, but it is a vital component of what we do. It used to be that I only had to dress myself for the stage and for public appearances. Now, I am dressing myself, I am advising my husband, and I am dressing seven kids for performances. It is a lot of people, and a lot of things to manage. Don't get me wrong; I am not complaining, and I wouldn't trade what I have today for anything in the world. I am happy and content, but I have been busy. Does that answer the question?

When did you find time to write and record the new album?

Let me just put it this way: working on a solo project - going into the studio - was a break from life. And it was awesome! People think, 'oh, there is so much work involved preparing for a recording.' Listen - for me, it was a much-needed departure from work. Homeschooling seven kids who play five instruments - that is work. I actually started this album about five years ago, but because I have been so busy with other commitments, I had no idea how and when it would happen. But when I decided to finally do it - I suppose back in January - it meant carefully carving out a couple of hours each day, four or five days a week, just for me. No interruptions, no nothing. And that, in and of itself, was just as good as a day at the spa.

What was your creative process like for Sketches?

On my iPhone I have a voice memo list of probably 2,000 bits of my own voice, and I am always on there, recording pieces of melody ideas. Most of those were likely inspired by things that have happened over the last five years. So, I went back to those, and some of the ideas for the new album came from those moments - moments that were very organic and that I had documented. I pulled some of these bits out of the archives and found myself re-motivated. Other songs on the new recording were reworkings of these great traditional tunes that I had documented as well, combined with a few of my own ideas. And then some stuff was just me thinking, 'Oh, I need a number like this,' or, 'I need a medley that, you know, has more of a mood to it,' or 'I need a tune that's really fiery.' Sometimes that would mean digging into my own databank of tunes - hundreds, even thousands of old songs that I have learned over the years. I did most of that stuff on my own, but Tim Edey (English multi-instrumentalist and composer) came over for two days before we went into the studio and, even though he had no knowledge of what I was going to play, we somehow put it all together. I think I had 20 pieces of music that I shared with him, and I ended up keeping the best twelve.

What's next on your musical agenda?

I am always excited by the future of music. I can scarcely remember any time when I have been musically tapped-out, you know? It's just so damn exciting. I am very motivated by creating music, by listening to music, by digging up old pieces, by taking little turnarounds. So, that said, I have just finished a little run of shows here in Canada, and I have been writing a book. I guess I haven't told anyone about that yet. I'm working on it, my husband's working on it...more will be revealed. My husband is working on a solo recording as well. Our plan was to get both solo projects released this past year, but he will probably only begin recording his early in the new year. And he and I will be recording together again sometime soon as well, with the goal of having that out later in 2020. So, good times, but very busy times!

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Linda Perry Cooper & Rosemary Cooper

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We split our time between our studio in New York City and Dallas, Texas, where we both grew up. Linda tends to be in Texas more often, and I in New York City where I work as a T.C.R.G. for the Niall O'Leary School of Irish Dance and as a professional dancer and Assistant Director for the Isadora Duncan International Institute.

Linda was enchanted with sewing at a young age when she learned the craft by her grandmother's side. She immediately put those skills to use - not in clothing for herself but rather in historical designs for her dolls. She later entered the field of costume design for opera and ballet. I learned from my mother at age 9 or so and began with historic designs for living history interpretation in Dallas. That style of theatrical sewing was integral to the transition to Irish dance dress design in 2007.

The original desire to make something

by hand that was beautiful inspired us from childhood and still imbues our work today. Likewise, history and costume are somewhat eternal fonts that we will always go back to draw from.

We are taking more risks these days and pushing the envelope of the costume. We are looking deeper and deeper into the broad range of Celtic influences, iconography, history, myth and design to inform us where to go next.

Inspiration can come from such unusual places and spaces. We can be walking through a castle in Ireland and see a piece of art on the wall or watch a storm brewing over the North Sea and be completely set off on an entire new collection of dresses. To make the dresses come to life can take hundreds of hours of hand work that can only be accomplished by one person at a time.

We had considered the idea of a book for quite a while as it held so much potential

artistically. We had designed dresses for custom clients for quite a while and then decided to go further with our designs and push the bounds of convention. Fairly soon after, we said to ourselves, "Nothing like these dresses currently exist and they really have amazing stories to tell." There was no modern book of Irish dance costumes, especially how we saw them, and so we decided to take the plunge.

We didn't want to only encompass Ireland but rather the far-reaching influences on Ireland and how that has informed the history and current state of Irish dance dresses. We wanted to be able to talk about the larger, ancient Celtic world and the people who passed through it or touched it with influence. The 'Celtic Soul' is made up of these influences and can be held richly by all who wish to explore it.





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Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands goes mining for Irish Gold



Vincent Thirkettle

According to legend, Tighearnmas was the High King of Ireland who introduced the worship of idols to his kingdom during the Bronze Age. Ironically, he is said to have met his end, along with 'three-fourths' of Ireland's men, during the night of Samhain while worshipping Crom Cruach - the idol associated with child sacrifice that Tighearnmas himself had instituted. This apocalyptic event took place at Magh Slécht - the plain of prostrations - in modern day County Cavan. Unsurprisingly, the monk who retold the tale in the Annals of the Four Masters credits a biblical intervention with the slaughter at this idolatrous gathering on a night that the church would rename All Hallow's Eve and which future generations would refer to as Halloween.

If there were such a gathering - and myths are often founded on grains of truth - it must have been an impressive sight, as Tighearnmas is also credited with being the first to have gold smelted and to use colour to signify rank and status. Reputed to have reigned for seventy-seven years, he would have cut a commanding, regal figure dressed in garments of purples, blues and greens that he had assigned for the use of royalty. Dazzling jewellery created by his master goldsmith Uchadan would have completed the lavish spectacle as he led several thousand, torch-carrying followers to bow down before the golden icon of Crom Cruach surrounded by its twelve stone protectors. There, in some unspecified manner, on the very night when the veil between the world of the living and that of the dead is at its thinnest, the majority of those men met their fate. However, as Tighearnmas' life ended, the story of Ireland's gold had just begun.

Vince Thirkettle is a world-renowned gold-panner. For seven years he was President of the World Goldpanning Association, and it was he who found the largest gold nugget ever recorded in the United Kingdom. He has panned for gold all over the world - New

Zealand, Australia, Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales, California, Japan, the Pyrenees and the Yukon in Canada - and has just returned from Tankavaara in Finland where he finished ninth in the World Goldpanning Championships, an event he has won previously. His fascination with gold began when he was a young geology student and had a chance encounter with a gold prospector. For Thirkettle it was a life-changing meeting.

"I had never considered the possibility of finding gold, but in that moment, I discovered its captivating beauty and the challenges of searching for it."

Of all the countries in which he has panned for gold only Ireland has drawn him back every year - and sometimes several times a year - for forty-two years!

Thirkettles' paternal grandmother was Irish, and it is what he refers to as the 'history and mystery' of the place that captivates him.

"Gold is such a mysterious, enchanting substance and to search for it in a land that is steeped in fascinating legends woven around an exciting history makes it all the more special."

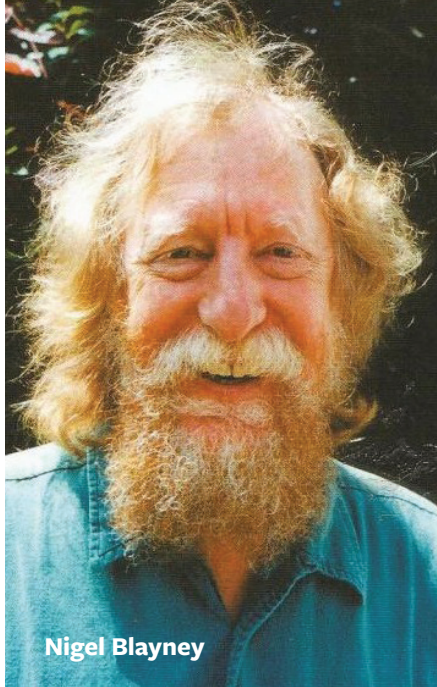
Ireland is renowned for its Bronze Age gold. There have been more hoards discovered here than anywhere else in Europe, and the National Museum in Dublin hosts an astonishing collection of gold artifacts. Irish place names such as Slieve Anore (Mountain of Gold), Glenanore (Glen of the Gold) and Tullymore (Little Hill of Gold) allude to locations where gold may have been found. For panners like Thirkettle these are important clues. Other signs are buried in ancient writings and some - such as the references to Tighearnmas'



goldsmith, Uchaden - may be more fact than myth. Uchaden is reputed to be the first person to have smelted gold in Ireland and to have done so in an area known to be part of the modern county of Wicklow. The fact that gold did exist in this area in significant quantities was borne out in 1795, when estate workers near the town of Avoca felled a large tree by the bank of a stream, its exposed roots revealing a sizeable gold nugget. Felling trees quickly gave way to searching for gold and, as more was discovered, word spread, and Ireland's gold rush began.

Although figures vary enormously it is estimated that as much as 3,500 ounces (100 kilograms) of gold were found in six weeks. Aughtinavought River was renamed Gold Mines River and is still called that today. Much of the gold was sold to jewellers in Dublin, and it would be nice to think that some struggling, peasant farmers and estate workers benefitted from the chance discovery. For Thurkettle, though, it isn't about money. His passion is in chasing it through the leads within a landscape and the stories of its people. "It is hunting without killing - it is about solving the puzzle to locate the treasure that nature has hidden."

Nigel Blayney is a jeweller who can trace his family name back to the Celtic warlord Brochfael Ysgythrog of Powys in 6th century Wales - his wild, red hair and bushy beard befitting his Celtic heritage. He has been crafting Welsh gold for over twenty years and his passion for his art is admirable.



Nigel Blayney

"When I create something, I want it to reflect a sense of heritage - of belonging to a particular place that embodies the object with meaning."

It is a philosophy that attracted Thurkettle when the two men first met at a gold-panning workshop and it has soldered their friendship over the years.

Thurkettle is delighted to supply gold to someone who shares his enthusiasm for its provenance. Blayney also feels an affinity with Ireland, his name being found in a branch of the Welsh family that was granted lands in the early 17th century and founded Blayney Castle, which gave rise to the surrounding town of Castleblayney in County Monaghan. In recent years, the building was sold and renamed Hope Castle. Blayney has visited the area several times and encountered the friendliness of the people. It inspired him to explore Ireland further and he became



captivated by the same things that draw Thurkettle back year after year, "There is something that gets under your skin and you just fall in love with the place." It was that feeling of love that inspired him to create a range of jewellery specifically aimed at Irish lovers. To do so, he required Irish gold and Thurkettle gifted Blayney some of the gold he had collected on his numerous trips to Ireland. He felt it was the least he could do for a land that had given him great pleasure for so many years, "It was such a romantic idea to have lovers wearing jewellery with gold that I had collected from mountain streams and rivers across Ireland and, as it was my grandmother who had inspired me to visit Ireland in the first place, I knew she would have loved the idea."

Gold used in making jewellery is an alloy comprised of gold and other metals that give it its colour and strength. Most people are familiar with rose, yellow and white gold but Blayney wanted something special and experimented until he could create gold with a distinctive green hue. He wanted the Irish connection to be obvious when worn. "There is no-one else who makes green-gold wedding or engagement rings. I wanted it to stand out across a room - to be so obviously Irish and so different from anything else." He then incorporated elements of Celtic pattern and Irish landscape into the designs. One of his favourite pieces is a unique two-tone wedding ring with the outline of the Mountains of Mourne in green gold under a rose gold sunset. His designs include 18 and 14-carat engagement, wedding and Claddagh rings as well as heart-shaped pendants, and he sells them through his Irish Gold Company. Each piece is guaranteed to incorporate a percentage of Irish gold and is delivered in an embossed, wooden, presentation box, complete with a Certificate of Authenticity in English and Gaelic.

Uchadan may have mastered the art of creating gold jewellery but thanks to Thurkettle and Blayney, Irish gold is still being crafted today - with love!

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the Irish Famine

Author Ken McGoogan
remembers the Irish Famine



It's not all that far to Tipperary, Ireland - not if you start in Kilkenny and make for the Famine Warehouse at the eastern edge of that song-famous county. My wife Sheena and I simply drove west for about 30 km, which included a short detour as we took a wrong turn and ended up exploring a one-lane road with a ridge of grass down the middle. The Famine Warehouse is the site of an 1848 incident known as the Battle of Widow McCormack's Cabbage Patch - an episode that represented, to me, a fourth and final dimension of the Great Famine.

By this time, three weeks into our latest Irish ramble, and somewhat to my surprise, I had come face-to-face with the politics, the science, and the human suffering of the Great Hunger. I saw the Warehouse as a symbol of active response - rebellion. But I have gotten ahead of our wanderings around southeastern Ireland, an area that, during the famine years, fared relatively well. Hence my surprise.

In Dublin, we were taken with the power of the sculpted famine figures on the north bank of the River Liffey. We spent time at EPIC: The Irish Emigration Museum. And we poked around the Jeanie Johnston, the replica famine ship that I wrote about in the last issue of Celtic Life International.

But the political dimension didn't manifest until we went to the Irish Potato Famine Exhibition, mounted upstairs at the St. Stephen's Green Shopping Centre. The exhibition, which included posters, a 15-minute video, and an hour-long show of panel stills,

delivered an overview before turning to specifics. Between 1845 and 1852, approximately one million Irish people died of starvation or disease, while another two million fled the country, many of them coming to Canada.

Tens of thousands of farmers were forcibly evicted by absentee landlords spouting the free-market doctrine of "laissez-faire." One photographic image, from County Clare in the west of the country, showed the house of Mathia Magrath "after destruction by the Battering Ram."

Some scholars present slightly different numbers, saying 1.5 million died in Ireland and 1.5 million emigrated. Either way, the three million total explains why some have described the Irish Famine as the worst human disaster of the 19th century - a devastation only exceeded by the Jewish holocaust almost one hundred years later.

During the decade that followed the Great Hunger, another two million people departed from Ireland.

Today, largely as a result of all this, the Irish diaspora encompasses 70 million people around the globe. Among them we find almost five million Canadians and 35 million Americans.

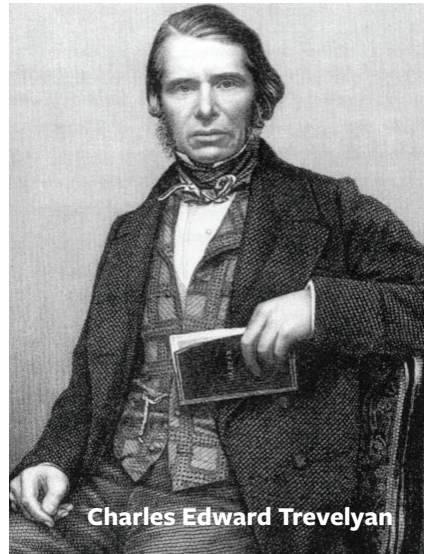
But the politics. This exhibition points a finger at the policies and attitudes of British Parliamentarians, notably Lord John Russell, prime minister from 1846 to 1852, and

Charles Trevelyan, the assistant treasury secretary who handled the Irish file. A narrator explains that Trevelyan "believed that God and market forces were on the same side" and that the Irish Famine was "a visitation of God" and a way of solving an overpopulation problem. Bigotry and convenient, self-serving myopia.

After driving due south along the coast for 155 km, we set up in the lively seaport-town of Wexford, cornerstone of Ireland's "Ancient East" and traditionally a center of resistance to British rule. At nearby Johnstown Castle, a splendid gem of gothic revival architecture, we walked along beside an ornamental lake and admired a Victorian walled garden. The surprise came when we wandered into the Irish Agricultural Museum, which is housed in refurbished farm buildings. Here we encountered another Great Famine Exhibition - this one lacking a video, though comprehensive and notable for its scientific rigor and detail.

Sailing ships from the Americas brought the potato to Europe late in the 16th century. It became a diet staple, especially in agricultural Ireland. Potato blight followed the same route and reached continental Europe in 1843. Blight is a fungal disease that attacks leaves and tubers. Spread by spores in the air, it turns up as a small dark spot on a potato leaf and wreaks havoc. Seed tubers sustain the fungus through winter and so infect a still larger crop the following spring.

The Johnstown exhibition is replete with charts and graphs illustrating and analyzing



Charles Edward Trevelyan



everything from the decline of small farm holdings to the prevalence of various Famine-related diseases, among them typhus, Asiatic cholera, and scurvy or “black leg.”

Up to 85 per cent of those who died during the Great Hunger did so not from starvation but from fever or disease.

Here, too, we read of government-sponsored workhouses, where conditions were so miserable that, by August of 1846, only 43,000 people had taken refuge within. As the Famine intensified, these penitentiary-like buildings came to accommodate hundreds of thousands of people, desperate for the three sparse meals a day they could earn by toiling on make-work projects, usually roads. When the famine ended, 40 per cent of the children who entered the workhouses had been orphaned or deserted.

By the time we reached Kilkenny, that medieval town 80 km northwest of Wexford, we thought we understood the human suffering induced by the Famine. But a visit to the sparkling MacDonough Junction Shopping Centre taught us otherwise. In 2005, developers set about creating this contemporary plaza out of a prison-like workhouse from the mid-19th century.

Today, visitors can rent headsets and take a 50-minute audio-visual tour, the Kilkenny Famine Experience, which guides them through the story of the Great Hunger as it unfolded at this location. While developing the site, excavators discovered the forgotten graves of more than 970 people who died here, mostly between 1845 and 1851, and among them 545 children.

As at other workhouses, rations at the Kilkenny site were spartan enough to inspire riots, yet few people died of starvation. Typically, disease killed them first, typhus, typhoid, diphtheria, smallpox, tuberculosis, or cholera. Bullying, amputations, death-dealing stampedes - as the potato-famine wore on, this place had them all.

The audio-visual tour culminates at a bronze sculpture that honors John and Patrick Saul, two boys abandoned by their parents at the Dublin docks. They had walked to the capital with their elders from Clonmel in County Tipperary - roughly 180 km away. The parents, a butcher and his wife, boarded a ship for Australia after first telling their sons, ages 15 and 13, they had a better chance of surviving if they turned around and made for home. The boys, increasingly hungry, walked another 130 km before calling in here at the newly-built workhouse.

Despite the odds, the Saul brothers survived and eventually made their way abroad.

Ani Mollereau, the artist who created the commemorative sculpture, describes the lower part as representing the boys' journey to Dublin. The older boy pulls the younger up from their early life onto a better pathway. The piece is shaped like the flame of a candle, she says, and so represents hope.

For we two visiting Canadians, the Kilkenny Famine Experience, taken as a whole, spoke eloquently of human suffering during the Great Hunger.

Having already encountered the politics in Dublin and the science at Johnstown Castle, I needed only the rebellion to round out my sense of the Famine years. And so, from Kilkenny, we drove west to visit the Ballingarry Warhouse, site of an episode in the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848.

By then, not surprisingly, the disease, the deaths, and the coffin ships had sparked an uprising among those who felt that the protests of Daniel O’Connell, the renowned Irish Liberator, were proving ineffectual. Some of the rebels, known collectively as Young Ireland, besieged 47 policemen from the Irish constabulary in this lonely farmhouse near Ballingarry - a house belonging to the widow Margaret McCormack. Out front, they raised the Irish tricolor for the first time. The police took five of the widow’s children hostage and used them to keep the Young Irelanders at bay. With reinforcements on the way, the rebels disbursed, but soon their leaders were arrested, tried, and transported to penal colonies in Australia.

We located the house but, having neglected to make an appointment, found it closed. And so we wandered around the yard and tried to peek in the windows but could make out none of the various exhibits. I knew they treated the rebellion, the treason trials, the banishments to Australia. I knew they situated this Irish rebellion of 1848 in the context of revolutionary events then taking place across western Europe. I would have liked to have seen the exhibits but, alas, for another time. We had arrived where the Irish tricolor flew for the first time, where that fourth and final dimension of the Great Famine manifested, and for now, that would have to suffice.

Ken McGoogan recently published his 15th book: *Flight of the Highlanders: The Making of Canada*.



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Traditions of Gratitude

Celtic Life International contributor Gerald Herter explores traditions of gratitude and hope



Gazing in the direction of Boston Common from the lofty window of my waterfront hotel room, I was not yet aware of the profound annual tradition that would take place there in the upcoming holiday season. For now, my thoughts were filled with expectations of rugged coastlands and changing fall colors. The next day would begin a cruise up the coast of New England, around Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, then into the Saint Lawrence Seaway to Quebec, before finishing at Montreal.

Two days later, as my ship cruised into the harbor at Halifax, Nova Scotia, the skyline and active shipping channels gave evidence of the robust commercial center that Halifax has become since the city's formal establishment by the British in 1749. Even so, I was soon to learn of several fatefully poignant events over the past century that revealed the truly resilient and compassionate spirit of the people of Halifax.

On April 15, 1912, the RMS Titanic hit an iceberg and sank, some 700 nautical miles off the coast of Halifax. The 706 survivors were taken to New York. However, four Canadian ships recovered the remains of over 300 bodies from the sea. Of those remains, 209 bodies were capable of being saved and were brought to Halifax. Though St. Johns, Newfoundland was closer, Halifax was better equipped to handle the bodies.

Our Halifax guide took us to Fairview Lawn Cemetery, where most of the Titanic victims were buried. As we walked the four rows of graves, he pointed out how the last row bends like the bow of the ship. He also noted a space between graves that appeared to represent where the iceberg had struck. Most of the gravestones were of plain concrete, while a few had been enhanced by relatives.

A Celtic cross adorned the tomb of an unknown child. While many graves had names attached, a number were still unidentified.

Members of our group were silent, in somber reflection of the Titanic victims, as we boarded our tour bus. However, as we traveled amidst the grandeur of the terrain and brilliant autumn foliage on route to the scenic shores of outlying Peggy's Cove, our guide filled the hour with the story of another tragedy much more horrific for the residents of Halifax. Such was the impact that their response is still felt and honored some one hundred years hence.

The morning of December 6, 1917 in Halifax harbor began quietly, but soon became the site of a terrible disaster. Two ships were speeding through a section called the Narrows, racing to make up time caused by delays the night before.

Because of the danger posed by German U-boats during the ongoing World War I, anti-submarine nets had been employed to close the harbor entrance for the night. The fueling of a Norwegian ship, the SS Imo, bound for New York to pick up relief supplies intended for Europe, took longer than planned, requiring the wait until morning. A French cargo ship, the SS Mont-Blanc, fully laden with TNT and





most well-known effort was at Gander, Newfoundland, where 38 planes and some 6,600 passengers landed. The humanitarian work of the people there was immortalized in the brilliant Broadway musical, *Come From Away*.

Lesser known, but equally heroic was the outreach of the citizens of Halifax on that fateful day.

Forty aircraft and some 8,000 passengers found themselves stranded at Halifax's Stanfield International Airport. From personal experience, our guide described the predicament. Sports facilities were immediately opened to accommodate the frightened and confused passengers. However, the arenas and gymnasiums were only able to hold about 2,000 of the unexpected guests, and soon filled up.

An appeal went out, and in no time, many of the local populace stepped forward. Our guide and his wife even picked up a family and brought them home. This spontaneous act of kindness was repeated over and over by others in the area until all 8,000, including those initially at the arenas, were welcomed into homes of the people of Halifax. For the next several days, the warmth and empathy of these generous and caring Canadians poured out upon their grateful guests.

The spirit of the 1917 Halifax disaster victims had surely been passed down to their descendants, who were only overjoyed to reach out a helping hand to others found in unplanned and untenable circumstances.

With our day in Halifax drawing to a close as the bus returned us to our ship, we had a new-found admiration for this historic city and her gracious and resilient inhabitants.



other highly explosive material, also bound for Europe, had planned to join a convoy crossing the Atlantic, but was likewise too late to depart before the harbor closed.

As the harbor reopened in the morning, both ships were moving far above the speed limit and out of their prescribed positions, in hopes of making up for lost time. Approaching each other from opposite directions, they both realized too late that they were on a collision course. Though the impact at 8:45 am did not seriously damage the *Mont Blanc*, barrels of benzol - a form of benzene - toppled, spilling on the deck, and then igniting from engine sparks as the fluid flowed into the hold.

The huge, ensuing flames intrigued Halifax citizens as they watched from the shore, oblivious to the impending danger. Then at 9:04 am, the TNT exploded in spectacular fashion, in what was the largest man-made explosion prior to the atom bomb. Ship fragments landed as far as three miles away, while a smoke plume rose to almost 12,000 feet above the destroyed harbor. Nearly 2,000 people were killed, while 9,000 suffered injuries. Many were blinded from the glass of blast-shattered windows where they were watching. Many homes were lost as well.

This is where the city of Boston comes in.

There was an outpouring of compassion and assistance from many nearby towns, provinces and states.

None was more remarkable than the efforts of the Boston community, especially the Boston Red Cross and the Massachusetts Public Safety Committee. When news reached Boston the day of the blast, a train with medical personnel, supplies, food and water was quickly arranged and sent to aid the stricken city and her suffering citizens.

As our guide told the story, the people

of Halifax were so touched by the caring outreach from the people of Boston, that the following December 1918, they found the biggest and best Christmas tree in all of Nova Scotia and sent it to Boston as an expression of gratitude. The tradition was revived in 1971, so that each year since, a similar Christmas tree is sent and erected on the Boston Common as a remembrance of the goodwill and kindness of the human spirit.

As we pondered the depth of traumatic tragedy and response arising from these two events early in the twentieth century, our bus pulled into Peggy's Cove for a welcome respite. Located on the shore of St. Margaret's Bay, about 25 miles southwest of Halifax, Peggy's Cove is a rustic fishing village whose ruggedly beautiful setting has captured the hearts of locals and tourists alike. Perched dramatically atop a large, glacially-carved outcropping of granite, Peggy's Point Lighthouse warns approaching ships of the treacherous coastline.

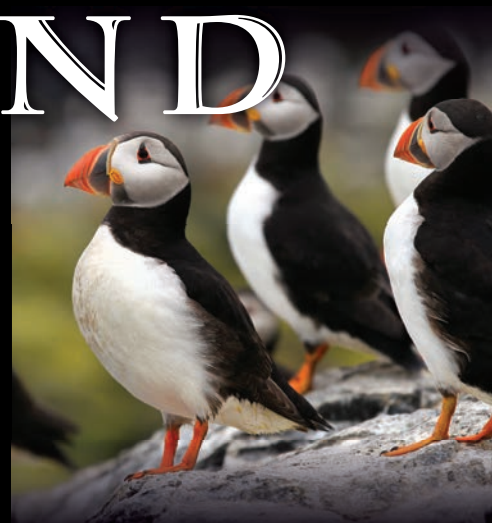
Walking the uneven rock surface amid the brisk ocean breeze and bright sunlight served to refresh our spirits. Even so, Peggy's Cove played its own part reacting to a time of calamity when SwissAir Flight 111 crashed into the bay on September 2, 1988 killing all 229 aboard. The village provided staging areas to support the search and rescue effort.

On the ride back to Halifax, our guide shared a more recent event, no less filled with incalculable tragedy than the earlier stories. But this one offered the people of Halifax the opportunity to open their arms and hearts to a vast and sudden influx of distressed visitors on September 11, 2001.

When the World Trade Center towers in New York were attacked by terrorists and destroyed, all air traffic into the United States was immediately shut down. Incoming flights had no choice but to abort their flight plans and find the nearest landing field outside the U.S. to put down.

In quick response, the Canadian Government initiated Operation Yellow Ribbon, enabling 255 aircraft to divert to 17 different airports across Canada. The

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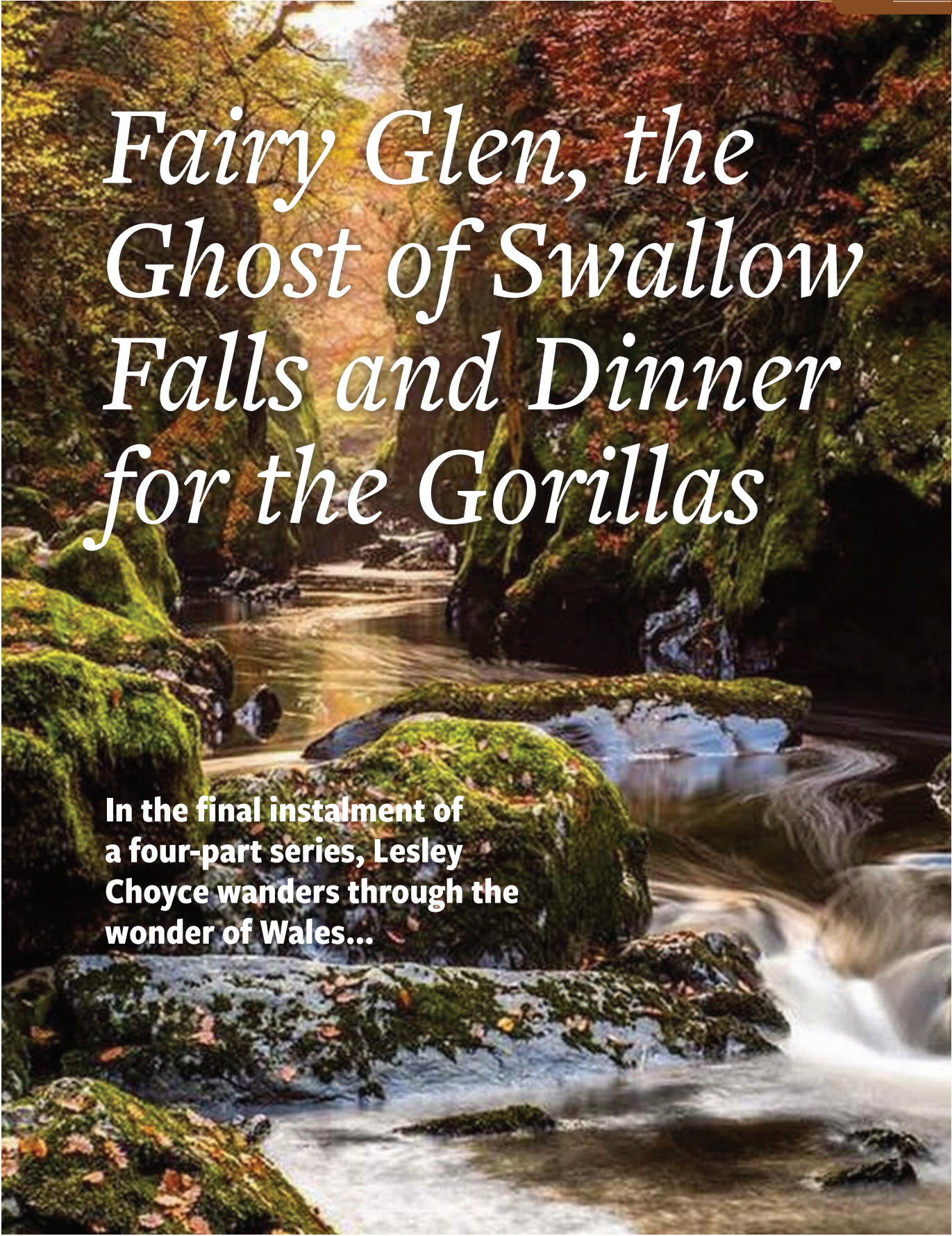
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A scenic photograph of a forest stream with mossy rocks and autumn foliage. The stream flows through a dense forest with trees displaying vibrant autumn colors of red, orange, and yellow. The water is clear, reflecting the surrounding greenery and the warm light filtering through the canopy. Large, moss-covered rocks are scattered throughout the stream, creating small cascades and pools. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and magical.

Fairy Glen, the Ghost of Swallow Falls and Dinner for the Gorillas

**In the final instalment of
a four-part series, Lesley
Choyce wanders through the
wonder of Wales...**

Penrhyn Castle



If old things are to your liking, really old things, older than castles, I would recommend a visit to the small Welsh village of Llangernyw, just down a maze of tiny zig-zag roads from the much larger town of Conwy. Here you'd find the Llangernyw Yew, a 4,000-plus-year-old tree, the oldest in the U.K. If that is not enough to lure you there, the tree has a notch that is considered to be a gateway to the world of the dead. It was once believed to deliver a prophecy each Halloween as to which local citizens would die in the year ahead. Dogs are welcome, but I would be careful to keep them on a lead and away from the tree itself. I was pleased to see a local news story that none other than Charles the Prince of Wales visited the tree before he stopped off to have his picture taken several hundred times while pulling himself his own pint of bitter at a local pub. Despite worries about pooch patrols and overzealous council members, it was still a grand thing to be in the land of princes and pubs and trees that were thousands of years old.

Like so many other places on our itinerary, we really should have lingered longer around Conwy itself and visited nearby Little Ormes Head and Great Ormes Head and sought out some interesting stories in the towns with names like Llandudno which sounded like something out of Gulliver's Travels, Book III. But instead, we ushered our pup Kelty into the backseat of the Fiat and found ourselves suddenly on motorway A55. If you were in the Midlands of England and wanted to get yourself across Wales quickly to Holyhead to catch the ferry to Ireland, this is your road. It skirts along the sea with some fantastic views but, as we raced along, I knew we were missing some interesting towns.

Penmaenmawr - meaning Head of the Great Stone, for example. Here was a stone circle built by druids, among other ancient things, but today it is a quarry town like so many other Welsh locales. There had been a devastating train crash here in 1950 with five hundred passengers aboard as the train slammed into another locomotive and thirty-one people were injured. And, in 1976, a former submarine commander murdered four people at the Red Gables Hotel before setting the place ablaze and shooting himself.

It looked like there was a good wide beach for hiking in Penmaenmawr but I was afraid to stop and walk the dog there given the town's bad luck and the potential fines that I had read about, so we just zipped on by. My wife Linda had commandeered the map book and discovered that there was yet another castle ahead near Bangor. She spotted it from the motorway as we skirted the coast and we turned off the A55 onto a leafy stretch of road that led to Penrhyn Castle. Despite the fact it was built in the early 1800s as a "mock castle" - intended to look like something much older - the National Trust still charges the usual hefty fee to walk inside.

It was the brainchild of architect Thomas Hopper, and the BBC once filmed a sitcom there called It's That Man Again. Queen Victoria had planted a tree there, but we couldn't seem to locate it as we walked around the grounds. And, of course, the castle itself was said to have ghosts. What castle doesn't, even a replica one? And there was even a ghost dog reported to roam the Ice Tower, but when we tried to enter the main edifice with Kelty, we were turned away because dogs were not allowed. Bloody hell, as the English say.



Sir John Wynn of Gwydir

At the end of the day, back in our slate cottage in Betws-y-Coed, I dipped into a book that might unlock the meaning of some of the strange-sounding Welsh words we had encountered. Thus, I discovered that the language wasn't nearly as confounding as it seemed. I learned that a llan is a church, coed is woods, a pont is a bridge but a pant is a hollow. Aber means river mouth, castell is a castle, glyn is a glen or deep valley, Y or Yr means the, and newydd is new. Betws means bead, referring to a rosary bead so Betws-y-Coed means bead house or house of prayer. Very nice indeed.

I also opened a volume called *Wild Wales* by nineteenth-century Norfolk novelist George Borrow. In his 1854 publication he had this to say of the town outside my doorstep:

"Crossed over an ancient bridge and passed through a small town and found myself in a beautiful valley with majestic hills on either side."

Mr. Borrow would probably be appalled at the commercialization that has overtaken the "small town," but the valley itself is indeed still beautiful and I can attest to the majestic hills.

To the south of us, for example, was the town of Penrhyndeudraeth, which looked somewhat desolate at first with high barren hills all about, but I knew it held some intriguing history. Later, I would dip into *The Daily Post* again, a newspaper that serves up North Wales with both the latest gossip and some solid history, to discover there had been an explosion at the local dynamite factory there in the summer of 1998. The blast was heard up to twenty miles away, reminding me of the Halifax Explosion. Some problem, it was surmised, with the "nitroglycerine mixing house." What town allows a dynamite factory to be built in their community? I wondered. Well, the dynamite was used for slate mining and slate mining has been ever so popular throughout much of Wales for at least a couple of centuries. Where you have slate, apparently, you have dynamite.

Back in New Jersey when I was still in graduate school, I had a

happy-go-lucky friend named Larry who worked on the night shift in an explosives plant. On breaks in the middle of the night he and his coworkers were in the habit of smoking marijuana – which, to my mind, even then didn't seem like a wise thing to do. So, I thought of Larry while pondering life in a dynamite and slate Welsh town like Penrhyndeudraeth. If blokes like Larry end up working in explosive plants, then it is likely that occasionally there will be accidents like the one in 1998.

I made a to-do list of things to dig deeper into when I next returned to Wales and first on the list was more research into the history of mining zinc, coal and slate. My guess is that it is not a pretty picture. In 1941, John Ford created a Hollywood blockbuster about the plight of Welsh miners called *How Green Was My Valley*. According to IMDB, "Huw Morgan (Roddy McDowall), the academically inclined youngest son in a proud family of Welsh coal miners, witnesses the tumultuous events of his young life during a period of rapid social change. At the dawn of the 20th century, a miners' strike divides the Morgans: the sons demand improvements, and the father (Donald Crisp) doesn't want to rock the boat. Meanwhile, Huw's eldest sister, Angharad (Maureen O'Hara), pines for the new village preacher, Mr. Gruffydd (Walter Pidgeon)." Who could have guessed a film set in Wales about mining and pining could be such a huge success?

Much of the devastation of Wales by mining has been erased by time and the natural healing of the land.

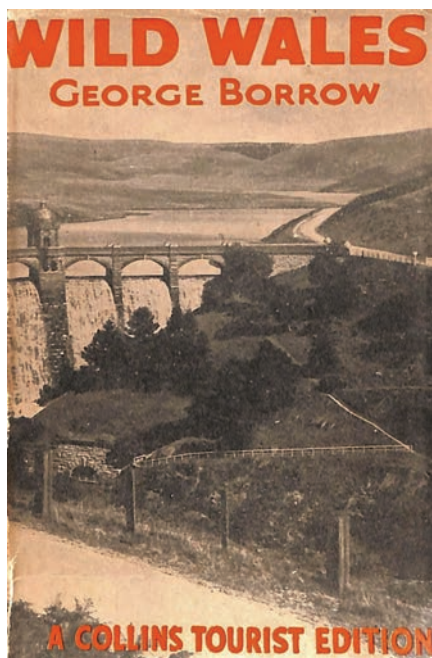
While the hard lot of the poverty-stricken Welsh has mostly disappeared from the view of travellers like us, I am sure it is not forgotten and echoes down through generations despite our current universal obsession with the here and now.

On a fine sunny Welsh morning, we set off to find a castle that allowed dogs and hoped that Dolwyddelan would do the trick. Built early in the thirteenth century, it is set in truly beautiful surroundings. We had to keep Kelty on his leash as there were sheep rambling about on our paths. It was a grand morning with dew still on the grass and the sky a striking blue. After hiking several steep dead-end paths, however, we decided that we should save our energy for the trails of Fairy Glen to the south of us in the Gwydir Forest Park.

With substantial difficulty, we found the tiny car park of Fairy Glen, deposited the requested entrance fee into a rusty money box and made our way across a field and into a dark wood that indeed looked like the perfect place for fairies. It reminded me a lot of Puck's Glen back in Scotland, and I told Linda we should seek out as many of these glens as we could until we ultimately came face-to-face

Llangernyw Yew





with some real spirits. Having the place to ourselves, it certainly felt spooky in a completely pleasant way and Kelty kept stopping to look at trees and plants as if he could see things we could not.

Like Puck's, the narrow trail dipped down to a dazzling stream at the bottom of the forested canyon where light played tricks with the water. The stones were wet and slippery - as they should be - and we danced through the dappled sunlight from stone to stone until we heard the fairies singing madrigals in our attentive ears. Fortunately for us and others like us, plans to build a hydroelectric power plant here in 2016 were thwarted by tree huggers and sprite enthusiasts alike - a good reminder that magic places of nature and spirit need protection from the coalition of profiteers and pragmatists who plague the planet.

None other than Wilhelmina Stitch once wrote a poem about the place saying that she "waits and waits to see the fairy men." I don't know why, but I had always thought of fairies being feminine or at least childlike and I am sure I would be accused of being sexist had I mentioned that to my wife. If there had been fairies about during our family visit, I believe they were genderless, but I made a point of wanting to find out more about this once-famous and now forgotten Stitch woman and later - when I did some scant research - found out this; she was born in Cambridgeshire in 1888 as Ruth Jacobs, married a Canadian lawyer, E. Akarie Cohen, and followed him to Winnipeg where she started writing for newspapers as Wilhelmina Stitch. Her prose and poetry were bubbly, full of advice and optimism and eventually

found its way into international newspapers and books. In the "The Singing Kettle" she wrote,

"Up to its neck in water, boiling water, too. Yet the kettle keeps on singing - that's what we ought to do!"

Well, for my money that stands as good advice today as it was back in her day.

And in "Begone, Dull Care" she scolds, "No! Little, whining, fretting care, you cannot come and walk with me. So lovely is the morning air I do not want your company." Once again, I agreed that her 1920s advice could still stand us in good stead on this day as we trudged back up the steep trail surrounded by the gnarled limbs of holly and sky-reaching oak trees.

Without a doubt, the Welsh countryside around Betws-y-Coed was a spirited place. We designated our final afternoon there for a trip to one of the must-see places nearby on the Llugwy River - Swallow Falls as it is known today but originally called Rhaeadr Ewynnol or "foaming waterfall," which it truly was. You pay a gentleman in a booth some money and walk through a full body turnstile that reminded me of something you might go through to get in or out of a prison. Kelty was a bit perturbed by it, so I had to carry him through the mechanism, prompting me to wonder what travellers do if their pet happens to be a Newfoundland dog.

Steps led to a viewpoint and then down to several other stages until you arrived at the lower reaches of the fall. Here was a clear pool with a great number of coins on the bottom including plenty of one-pound

coins. I thought it looked like easy pickings to reach into the water and scoop up enough money for the pizza we planned to buy later that day. As always, Linda reminded me that discretion was the better part of valour (did she really say that?) and, as I leaned over to touch the surface of the clear pool with my finger, she not so gently elbowed me in the ribs and pointed to a noisy family descending the stone steps discussing how hard it was on their knees.

Why do people throw money into pools and fountains? It turns out that this was an ancient European custom to repay the gods (whichever ones were popular at the time) for clean water. In return, the water would keep flowing and maybe the gift would bring a good crop of hops or wheat or string beans. If it was a well, it became a "wishing well" and I wondered how many lives were lost when young hooligans through various centuries tried climbing down into the well to steal the money.

In Rome, we had observed one of the most famous of the fountains where residents and tourists alike tossed coins; Trevi Fountain. In the bright city lights of evening, the floor of the fountain pool was a skittish silver of reflected light, a complete carpet of coins reflecting tourists' dreams and wishes from around the world. According to Business Insider, the equivalent of \$1.5 million U.S. gets tossed into the waters there each year. The city collects the money each night and turns it over to a Catholic charity that uses the funds to feed the poor, making at least their minimal dreams come true. Thieves often attempt to scoop up the loot late at night, but usually get caught and charged, quickly discovering that it is not the easy money they thought it might be.

As to the pool at Swallow Falls and its cache of cash, the ever vigilant and probing Daily Post reported that in 2017 a "Mr. Egan and Mr. O'Neill" were apprehended collecting the coins from the Swallow Falls pool. A nosey upright citizen named Mr. Wylde who reported them said, "One of them had a spade and the other a colander and they were taking the coins, Mr. Egan sweeping up the coins with the spade and dumping them in the colander held by Mr. O'Neill." When they saw the police coming, Egan and O'Neill started throwing the money from the colander back in the river.

I am not sure which of the men brought the colander, but I have this vision of one of their wives at home that day hoping to make spaghetti for her brood when lo and behold she can't find the damn colander and blames the fairies for hiding it. The Post did not report if the spade or the colander were com-





Kelty

mandeered and held as evidence. I personally have sympathy for the two men and am glad the judge was lenient and only charged them court costs for the petty crime.

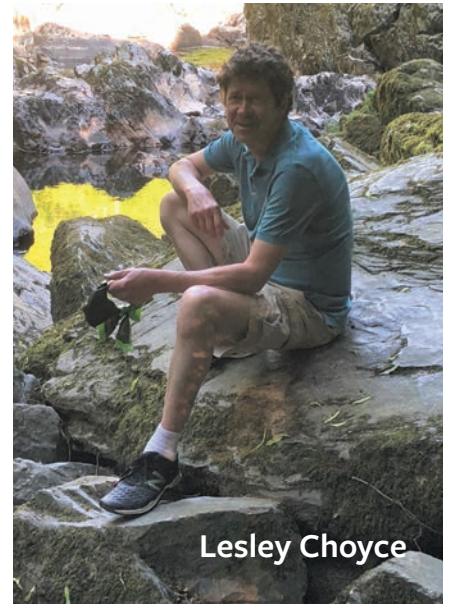
Me, I only throw pennies into fountains and pools but now we don't have pennies in Canada anymore and I might toss a nickel or two in Trevi or the fountain in the local mall, but that's it. If I want to throw away my money, I would rather spend it on pizza and beer.

It turned out that Swallow Falls also had a spirit or two rambling about. A year before the coin heist, some paranormal investigators caught, on video, the ghost of Sir John Wynn of Gwydir walking about there. Some

claim his spirit is trapped at the falls because he mistreated locals when he was alive. I presume this was John Wynn, first baronet, who lived a long and wicked life from 1553 to 1627.

During his tenure on the planet, he was as nasty to his fellow man as he could be. His hobbies included quarrelling, suing and generally being unkind to his neighbours and, at one point, he was declared a public nuisance and briefly imprisoned. Why he chose to haunt the falls in modern times is puzzling, but perhaps he too was tempted by all that glittering cash in the moonlight.

But about that pizza...Linda had read about Hangin' Pizzeria in downtown Betws-y-Coed over by the train station where all the train fanatic nutcases liked to hang out. We decided that pizza seemed like a good last supper for us in Wales since Hangin' donates a portion of their profits to two charities: Orangutans Appeal U.K. that rescues and rehabilitates orangutans in Borneo, and Ape Action Africa, which works to aid gorillas and chimps in Cameroon. There were plenty of photos of those lovable, hairy, near-human creatures on the walls for us to stare at as we waited for our gluten-free vegan pizza and shared a Death's-head Hawk-moth Stout. I read a poster on the wall that chided anyone who would use a plastic straw to drink their



Lesley Choyce

soda and it struck me as kind of preachy but, hey, here were some young tattooed health-conscious business people concerned about the fate of monkeys and great apes and I was happy to support their efforts - and so should you, if you ever find yourself mid-Wales with a healthy appetite for goat cheese, feta, olives and marinated leeks on your thin crust pizza slice.



Swallow Falls



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Dermot Kennedy

Éire's Dermot Kennedy knows no fear

Story by Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns

Though only in his late 20s, Irish singer-songwriter Dermot Kennedy has been quietly honing his craft for years. It was only recently, however - with the success of his 2018 single Power Over Me - that the young artist became a household name outside of Ireland and the U.K.

Released across several streaming platforms, Power Over Me was accompanied by a powerful and poignant video that captivated audiences with the touching tale of a young woman - living in an impoverished area with her alcoholic father and kind younger sister - who finds strength through boxing. Squeezed between scenes, Kennedy takes center stage, singing passionately amidst the environs of an aging warehouse or apartment complex.

While Power Over Me was not Kennedy's first single - both Moment Passed and Young and Free were released earlier in 2018 - it was the song that "broke" him in North America. Quickly, listeners began poring over his back catalogue, asking, "How did I not know about this guy sooner?"

Now, amongst millennials - and those in the know - Kennedy's name is brought up in the same breath as English pop star Ed Sheeran. And, with the recent release of his debut album, Without Fear - a 13-track powerhouse of pure emotion - he could go even higher.

Moments Passed

Kennedy was born and raised in Rathcoole, a small, suburban area in southwest Dublin. Growing up along the lush Irish coasts and landscapes - his family home is literally called Cois Coille, which is Irish for "beside the forest" - the young artist found much of his musical inspiration in his surroundings.


"I never really thought about it consciously, and I didn't do it intentionally, but there are all sorts of nature references in my music," Kennedy tells Celtic Life International over the phone. "I notice it more now as people keep analyzing my lyrics. They will mention it to me, and I will be like, 'Oh yeah, that is probably because I grew up where I did.'"

Despite its beauty, Rathcoole was not entirely conducive to a career in music. Kennedy didn't live near any groups or choirs and, although his family was generally musical, he was never pushed in that direction by his parents. He believes his interests in music "developed quite naturally."

"I remember watching a concert on TV that The Frames did, which was Glen Hansard's old band," he recalls. "I was completely taken by him as a performer. I was in awe of this sort of passion he had and how he delivered his music. I thought it was the most incredible thing. That was the first time that music really affected me. I bought the album the next day, and quickly realized that music was something I wanted to be a part of. As soon as I went down that path my parents and everyone around me were super supportive and never asked me to do anything else. I know that is not always the case, so I understand and appreciate how lucky I am in that regard. That was just sort of how it took shape."

"I started to write my own songs, and it just felt very natural."



A man with short hair, wearing a dark denim jacket over a bright orange t-shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is looking out over a vast, hazy landscape with rolling hills and sparse vegetation under a cloudy sky. The jacket has a small white logo on the left chest that reads "STUDIO".

In time, Kennedy began busking on busy Grafton Street in downtown Dublin, later joining a band, Shadow and Dust, in his early 20s. Inspired by singer-songwriters, including Glen Hansard, David Gray and Ray Lamontagne, he dreamed of being “an acoustic act, travelling the world and playing beautiful theatres.”

With greater exposure to an array of musical styles, those dreams were soon redefined.

“I kind of happened upon hip hop many years ago, and it became a really important part of my life and a key source of inspiration - musicians like Drake, J. Cole, and Kendrick Lamar. Artists who are at the top of that game, but still have massive amounts of credibility and integrity. That music influenced how I produce my music, how it sounds, and even how I write my songs. It was quite subtle, though, and I have never tried to be something I am not.

“I wrote a song called ‘A Closeness,’ where we put this heavy program beat on. That was really my musical crossroads. I was like, ‘I could sort of panic at the fact that I am kind of nervous about the way this sounds and sort of retreat into my safe space of just playing a guitar and singing over it, or I could chase this really exciting thing that feels quite unique.’ So, I did that. And I am still doing that.”

Chaos & Art

Things have moved quickly since Power Over Me took flight; Kennedy is currently selling out major venues, has racked up over 9 million monthly streams on Spotify, and has gained over 300k followers on Instagram. In March of 2019, he performed on the Ellen show, and has since received several “call-outs” from international pop sensation Taylor Swift.

He admits that the rush to celebrity has him rethinking his career.

“If you look at the different parameters, like in terms of the actual size of the venues and stuff like that, the reasons I play music have evolved. I have had to reassess because, as I said, my dream was to play in pretty rooms with my guitar, and I can do that now. This Christmas in Dublin I will be performing at the 3Arena, which is 25,000 people over two nights. It is basically like a giant warehouse; there are no chandeliers, no beautiful architecture - just a giant room to put thousands of people into.

*“My job is to make it feel like a small show,
to make it feel intimate and beautiful
within that environment...”*

“I know it is doable, and I certainly never want to lose sight of why I do this.”

“And then there is social media,” he continues, “which scares me because it has absolutely nothing to do with the music - nothing to do with the thing that excites me the most. But I would be shooting myself in the foot if I was off social media, because it is where I promote my gigs and merchandise. It is definitely important, but I need to be careful, too, on how I conduct myself on there. One of my favorite things to do is to share the work of an amazing photographer that I love. It is like this tiny little nudge to people that that is what I care

about. I am not just posting silly stuff. You can get a million views on a video somehow - like if you wanted to do something really silly - but then people think that is what you are and so you corner yourself. You have a whole career to think about. If you are doing a show and you have a room full of people at your show who expect you to do that silly thing you did on social media, then they couldn't care less about your songs."

He hopes that, though his music might be boxed into the "boy with guitar" category, his growing fan base can see beyond the genre.

"It is on me to be unique, and I hope that I have done that with how the music is produced, how I write, how the lyrics come across and how I perform. I want to get into my own little world. Being put into a box is boring."

Being Irish, the songsmith might very well be predisposed to lyricism. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who rely heavily on catchy earworms and easy-to-remember choruses and hooks, Kennedy's songs are a series of perfectly polished poems set to music. His work often explores duality, and how we can experience, and navigate, a myriad of emotions - often contradictory - at the same time; light and dark, love and fear, joy and sorrow.

"I write about my life and experiences. There were times in my life that were difficult and there were times that were super beautiful. That beauty and despair found its way into what I was doing."

"I am glad that the darkness is there, because that is important - for me, anyway. Sometimes I find myself recording in studios and people will ask me what the song is about, and I am like, 'Well, it is about a bunch of different things that couldn't be more different from one another, but are actually quite connected in the end.' I can find it difficult to focus on one exact thing, and I think I am better suited to write about things that are contradictory and in opposition."

Kennedy - who recently performed at both Coachella and Glastonbury, two of the world's biggest music festivals - loves every



aspect of his career, but none more so than touring.

"It is my favorite part. I get to connect with a lot of people around the world. It is intense, yes, but it is where I feel most comfortable. I've got an hour and a half where I need to be at my best, but it is also this lovely thing where I get to wake up whenever I want, go to the venue, work out. It is the closest thing to some sort of routine I can have on the road."

While the rewards are many, he admits that the vocation is not without its challenges.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say I struggle with this, but something that bothers me is that sometimes it is hard to always be present on the journey. We played the Danforth in Toronto and it was in this incredibly beautiful room and it was packed. It was one of my favorite gigs, but it was hard to let that sink in, because I had a gig somewhere else the next day. I am essentially realizing my dream every night. Obviously, another piece of my dream is for my music to reach a lot of people, and I am getting to do that now, so it is difficult to just stop sometimes and realize that I am doing what I always wanted to do. That is not to say I should rest on my laurels and think that I have 'made it' - but rather to feel it in a solid way, enjoy it in the moment, and be like, 'Hey, this is awesome.'"

Without Fear

On October 4, Kennedy released his debut album *Without Fear*. The 13-track recording showcases some of his biggest hits - including *Power Over Me* and his newest

single *Outnumbered* - as well as a handful of beautifully reproduced older gems and a few newer tunes.

The project, he notes, was years in the making.

"It's a funny thing to put a first album together because I was drawing on every song I had ever written. I have a tune on the album that I wrote when I was 17 or 18 years old. I'm happy it's on there, because it ties in well with the songs that I wrote earlier this year.

"I am proud to see that I have evolved as a person and as a performer, but also that I am still the same person, and that I still know myself."

"It was also kind of weird at times, though," he adds, referring to revisiting his older work. "Especially if the way I was feeling at that time has since changed. There were certain pieces that I had to let go of because the feelings that live in them just weren't appropriate to my life anymore. However, there are several songs that I still stand behind."

Kennedy was very deliberate in how he constructed the new recording.

"I don't want to open up too much about the album's meaning, because I don't want to narrow it down for people, or for people to feel like they have to feel a certain way when they hear it. But I do want people to understand that the track list has been put together very carefully and consciously, and it is not that the 13 songs just happened to

fall into place haphazardly. It is all quite intentional, and they are in that particular order for a very specific reason. I do hope that listeners will feel a certain way as they pass through each phase of the album, and that they will have felt as if they have been on a journey - one that is filled with a wide range of emotions."

Without Fear has already received outstanding reviews; the Irish Times called it "deeply emotional" and Her describes the album as "a powerful listen." And, just a week after its release, the recording reached the top of the charts in the U.K. - the first to do so by an Irish artist in 20 years.

"I have found a bit of peace. I am quite a perfectionist, and in this industry - especially these days - everything is about momentum and relevance, which is kind of scary. It was a really big deal for me to do the album, and for it to be the best it could be. Now that it is done, I can leave it behind me and look back with absolutely zero regrets."

Kennedy recently finished up an intimate, pre-album release tour through Ireland and the U.K., and is now taking the full-sized show on the road to major venues across Europe and North America.

While he is enjoying every moment of life on the road, he can't wait to put pen to paper again soon.

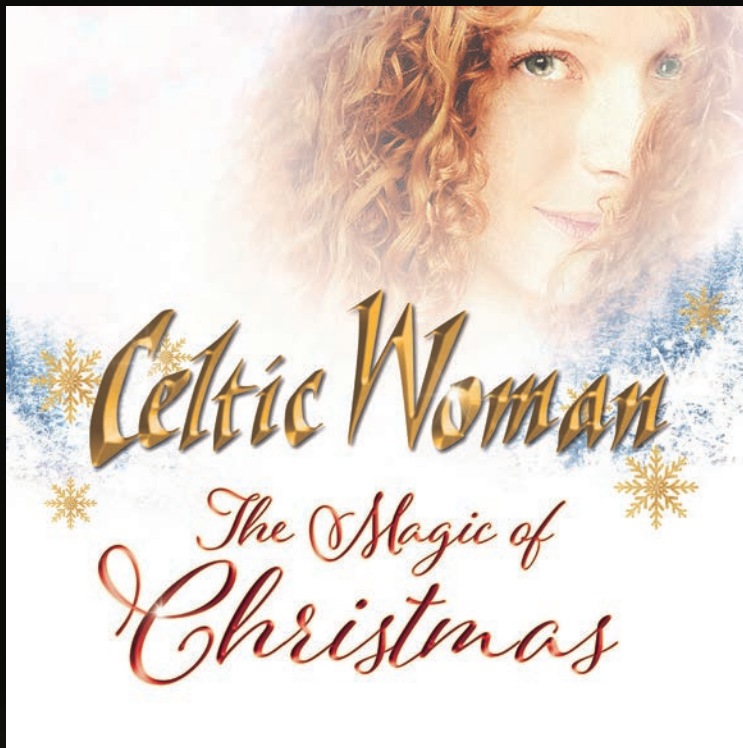
"I got home yesterday, and I was playing the piano and realized that I hadn't actually sat down with a blank page in a long time, just waiting to see if something shows up. I think that, as a songwriter, that is the most exciting thing; to just sit and to create, and to start writing new material. It's a little scary, to be sure, but I simply have to move forward without fear."

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The Magic of Christmas

Celtic Life International Senior Writer Chris Muise gets into the holiday spirit with the four lovely lasses of Celtic Woman



No matter how you choose to celebrate the holidays, a few things are probably common amongst all of us; family, friends, memories, and music. Somewhere along the line, we all likely formed foundational memories - recollections intrinsically tied to how one feels about the season - perhaps a particular Christmas jingle, or a traditional carol.

My own special Christmas memory is of my dad, my sister, and I waiting in the car of a hospital parking lot (my maternal grandfather was nearing the end of his life at the time), which was covered in soft, fluffy snow, with city lampposts adorned with white Christmas lights. The three of us just sat quietly, listening to a cassette tape of classic carols, enjoying each other's company in peace and tranquility. That is what I think of when I think of Christmas.

For many of us, Irish supergroup Celtic Woman sing the soundtrack of our holiday season.

Recently, we spoke with all four current members of the troupe - Máiréad Carlin, Éabha McMahon, Tara McNeill, and Megan Walsh - each of whom can attest to the special holiday memories made by their musical predecessors.

"We have all listened to the very early recordings of Celtic Woman," says Carlin. "The first Christmas DVD that Celtic Woman ever did was just so beautiful. The one that truly touched our hearts, however, was released just before I joined the group (Home for Christmas, 2012). Susan, Lisa Lambe, and Méav - they looked incredible; the red gowns, and the way they interacted with the audience...they were singing for the little children in attendance at that show and making everyone feel so festive."

"I was a huge fan of Susan McFadden growing up," adds Walsh, the group's newest member, who took over from McFadden when she left the band. "I loved musical theatre, so I knew of her from a very young age. I remember watching her sing It Came Upon a Midnight Clear - I think there are a couple of million views of that online, and I am probably most of them. I used to have it on repeat. Last year, when I joined the group, I found out I was singing that at Christmastime, and I nearly cried from happiness."

The current roster of Celtic Woman has just released a new Christmas album, The Magic of Christmas, 15 terrific takes on classic and contemporary Yuletide tunes.

"We chose songs that really represented the magic of Christmas," notes Walsh. "We have the classics, like O Holy Night, but there are also a few more modern pieces in there, and some Irish songs as well."

"It is a heavily orchestral album, and our hope was to bring back that warm feeling of Christmas."

Before they were musical megastars, the ladies of Celtic Woman grew up like the rest of us, and they have their own memories of the holidays. As such, we asked them about their best musical memories of the holidays, and how that may have influenced The Magic of Christmas.

"I am really just a big kid, as everybody knows," begins McNeill, who grew up in Antrim, Northern Ireland. "So, Christmas was all about the magic and the mystery. I remember being woken up really early in the morning by my brothers to peek at the presents. We had an alarm on the house, so it was a big treasure trail, trying to get up to the living room without being seen. We had to crawl under the piano to make sure that the alarm didn't see us and set off. It was this sort of adventure on Christmas morning - trying to get to the presents. It was such a fun thing to do with my siblings. Even now, my brothers still wake me up early in the morning and we still have our little routine of crawling around the house."

Despite the cheekiness of her Christmas morning treasure treks, McNeill cites the soft, dulcet tones of Silent Night as her favourite track.

"Silent Night is very simple and peaceful - and this is what Christmas is all about to me - peace and family and time at home enjoying each other's company."

Walsh echoes the sentiment.

"In 2010 here in Ireland, we had really,



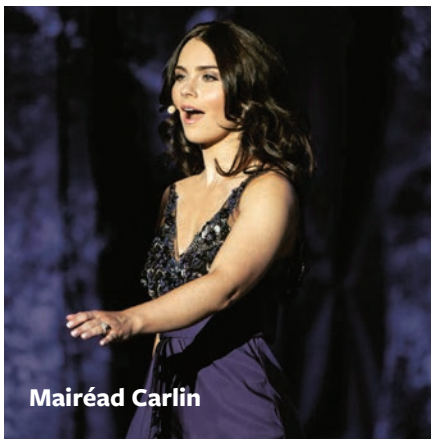
Éabha McMahon

really bad snow," says the 22-year-old. "I remember being off school for, like, two weeks. And in those two weeks leading up to Christmas, we would walk to the shop every day, which took about 40 minutes. We would rent a movie, we would get sweets, and we would all walk home. We'd close the curtains, and we spread blankets and pillows everywhere. The whole family would get really comfy and spend the whole day watching Christmas movies."

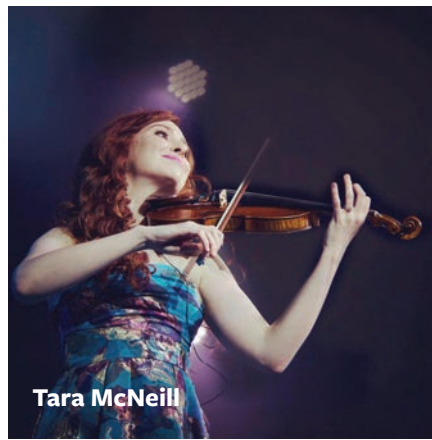
"I have six brothers and sisters - seven kids in total - and Christmas is the only time of year when we are all together," she continues. "My dad actually makes us all pick one song that we all have to perform together, every Christmas Day - normally, it is O Holy Night. Some of us would sing and some of us would play instruments, but it always really set the moment. So, my favourite song on the new album is definitely O Holy Night."

"I come from a place in Northern Ireland called Derry," says Carlin, chiming in next. "And in Derry, we are big family people. My favourite song that I always remember,

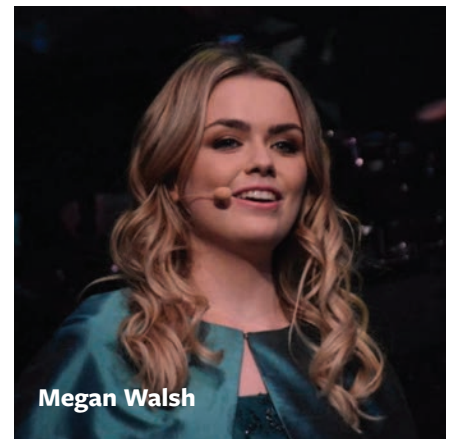




Mairéad Carlin



Tara McNeill



Megan Walsh

listening to Celtic Woman and being so inspired in the early days of Celtic Woman, was the song Carol of the Bells. It was one of the first songs I ever sang with Celtic Woman. The reaction that that song gets every single night - and how we feel on stage while we are performing it - is really magical. And it is really fun to sing."

Carlin is also quick to point out, however, that not every feeling related to the holiday season is positive, and it is important to reflect on and embrace those emotions also.

"Christmas isn't necessarily always a very happy time..."

"A lot of people go through some pretty heavy stuff during the holidays. I like to think that is perhaps why some of them feel so connected to our music - maybe we can help to bring them out of that dark place. Music has the power to lift people up.

"As a child, it was always about banding together for me and my family. After my dad passed away a few years ago, we have had to rediscover Christmas. The big question this year is where is mum is going to be for the holidays? She was with my sister in Cornwall last year, so this year it looks like she will be with us in Dublin, making new memories. It is good to be nostalgic, yes, but also that it's important that there is life beyond those times, and you can still make happy memories."

McMahon's best Christmas memory, she admits, might a little different from most people's holiday experience.

"Growing up, my mom spoke to us in the Irish language," she explains. "We never listened to the usual Christmas carols. I didn't know what the typical Christmas carols were - and I still don't, really. On Christmas day, we would play traditional music, and sing traditional songs. I think my biggest memory is, after dinner, everybody picking up some sort of musical instrument - even if you couldn't really play - and singing

along to traditional Irish songs that weren't even necessarily about Christmas."

McMahon, who hails from Dublin, sings one song on the new recording - Dia Do Bheatha - in her native tongue.

"It was such a privilege to have been able to do that. It is an older, traditional song, and it brings up distinct memories of being with my family during the holidays."

She adds that her favourite track on The Magic of Christmas is the first single, a cover of Enya's Amid the Falling Snow, chosen in part due to the immense respect the group has for the world-renowned Irish songstress.

"It is a quiet and simple song and it offers the listener a chance to reflect upon the true meaning of Christmas; sharing with family and friends, perhaps pausing to look back on the year with gratitude, and maybe looking forward to the new year with hope and anticipation."

In support of the new album, Celtic Woman will be touring across the U.S. in November and December.

"It has become a wonderful tradition for us to spend Christmas together as a family," shares McNeill. "We are four sisters when we are on the road, and we really get into the spirit of the season, especially when we decorate the bus! It is also amazing to see so many people coming back to our Christmas shows each year, creating their own holiday tradition with their families. To be a part of something like that is quite humbling for all of us."

The group knows how important their bit of Christmas spirit can be in today's world.

"We have toured all over the globe," says McMahon. "Wherever we go, there are different politics going on. When people come to the show, it is two-and-a-half hours that they don't have to think about politics, or their day-to-day affairs. They get a break from the world. And in that time, it doesn't matter who you are sitting next to - it could be someone from a different part of the world that has completely different views

from yours - but for those two-and-a-half hours, we are all the same. We are united.

"That's the beautiful thing about music; it doesn't have any boundaries."

"Being from Northern Ireland, I know a little bit about how politics can push people apart," Carlin says. "Add in the stress and pressures and the expectations of the holidays, and people need relief. Our hope is that we can bring some sense of peace to them at that time of the year, even if it is just for a few hours."

Celtic Woman recognizes how their music has become a part of people's Christmas canon and tradition. And, on the eve of the group's 15th anniversary in 2020, they are aware that - like them - some of those same people might someday become the next members of Celtic Woman, or pursue a musical career.

"I think that the main thing I can say to someone is to stay true to yourself," says Walsh. "Sing what you want to sing. Play the music you want to play. Sing with honesty and integrity. And don't let anyone else tell you what you should be singing, because you know in your heart what you should sing."

"Some might think that when they get the opportunity to audition for Celtic Woman, they have to be like the girl that came before them," adds Carlin. "The awesome thing about Celtic Woman is that they want you to be who you are. They look for people who are unique and different, and who have their own special quality."

"There is an amazing quote from Judy Garland that I love; 'Don't try and be like anyone else because everyone else is already taken.' If you just try to be who you are and sing from your heart - at whatever you do - then the rest of the world will believe in what you do and who you are."

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A portrait of Gary Maclean, a Scottish celebrity chef. He is a bald man with a full, well-groomed red beard and mustache. He is wearing black-rimmed glasses and a dark brown tweed jacket over a red and white checkered shirt. He is smiling and has his arms crossed. The background is dark and out of focus.

A Culinary Celtic Christmas

Scottish celebrity chef Gary Maclean shares his top ten tips for entertaining this holiday season, along with a few classic recipes to enjoy with family and friends...

Top Ten Tips

for Entertaining this Holiday Season!

My thoughts on home entertaining have changed over the years. I once thought it was all about the food; showcasing skills and providing restaurant-style, quality meals - which is almost impossible at home. Today, for me, it is all about the people. I have learned much more by doing it wrong than doing it right. So, here are a few ideas on how to survive big food occasions, like Christmas, and enjoy the art of entertaining at home.

1 Plan, plan and plan again. I know it's boring, but it is vital. Plan what you are going to serve, plan when you are going to prepare it, and plan how you are going to deliver it.

2 Do not serve food on individual plates. This one is just as important as planning. Serve it on platters, bowls or large plates instead, which you can place on the dining table. There are two reasons for this. First, if you serve in bulk it is much easier to deliver food hot and in perfect condition. Second, your guests can help themselves. This not only saves you a lot of stress but also makes for a much more pleasant dining experience for your guests. They won't feel obliged to eat the full plate that you have provided them, and they can pick and choose what they want to eat. I also find kids eat better and more this way. They may start off a little apprehensive, but before long they are back up for seconds. This style of serving food is rightly enough called "Family Service."

3 Cook for your actual guests and style the food accordingly - by which I mean, think about the age group, personalities and the occasion itself. Ask yourself what you would expect if you were going to this event. An event with young family is very different from a crowd of your closest friends.

4 Think about the equipment you have in your kitchen and design your menu accordingly. Have a good mix of food coming from every area of the kitchen - some things from the oven, some done in the pressure cooker if you have one, some from the stove. Also, ensure that you have cold food on your menu as this makes good use of that vital bit of kit - the fridge. Don't have too much food coming from the same place.

5 Recruit assistants, even if you are a kitchen maverick who always cooks alone. Sorting the table, setting cutlery and glasses - this kind of help can be a real time saver. Even if your assistants haven't got a clue about what needs to be done in the kitchen, they can surely sort out tableware!

6 Work within your capabilities and don't be over-ambitious. Don't create a whole dinner entirely with new recipes - always have a couple of dishes that you know inside-out. This will give you the headspace and time to try something different. It also ensures your guests have something edible to eat if the new stuff doesn't work out!

7 Minimum work and maximum impact. Think of what you can purchase beforehand that involves very little work but provides a serious "wow" factor. The big flavours of smoked products are brilliant crowd-pleasers; hot and cold smoked salmon, duck breast or smoked chicken all take little work to make your own. Cured meats, pickled vegetables and olives make impactful intermediate courses.

8 Practice if you can, especially if you want to try something different. Chefs always practice new dishes long before they attempt to serve them to the public.

9 Taste, taste and taste again. It is vital to taste food when you cook. For most chefs this is pure instinct. It is akin to driving a car: to change gears you press the clutch without any thought, but when you are first learning you really need to focus on it each and every time. Seasoning is the same: the more you do it the more instinctive it becomes. And, when tasting, never forget the golden rule; never, ever double dip!

10 Chill out, relax and enjoy the company. This is my most important tip and I have left it to last. Remember, it is just a plate of food - the worst that can happen is you have to dish-out a different plate of food.



**Win a copy of Chef Gary Maclean's
"Kitchen Essentials" - drop us a note to qualify;
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Whole Roast Turkey

For me, a juicy well-cooked roast turkey is a real crowd-pleaser. In this recipe I'm a wee bit less conventional: I'm going to embrace common sense cookery. I'll ask you to cook your turkey upside down; yes, upside down. Normally, gravity draws all the moisture and juices down into the cavity of the bird as it cooks and then we carve the meat off, take the legs off and throw away the carcass that's left with all the flavour in it. So, if you cook the bird upside down the juice and the flavour from the carcass is drawn into the breast meat. Don't worry about missing out on the golden crisp skin: we finish the bird off the right way up to create that lovely golden finish.



Ingredients

1 whole turkey (*high welfare preferred*)
1 onion, *roughly chopped*
1 carrot, *roughly chopped*
3 sticks celery, *roughly chopped*
1 bulb garlic, *cut in half through the circumference*
2 sprigs thyme
2 sprigs rosemary
40cm butchers string
30ml sunflower oil
Salt and cracked black pepper

Instructions

1. Preheat your oven to 200°C.
2. Whether you choose a standard turkey, free range or organic is your personal choice, but if possible, go for the best you can afford. 2.5kg-3kg will feed 4 to 6 people 3.5-4kg 7 to 9 people
3. Once all your vegetables are prepared place them into a deep roasting tray. This will provide a barrier between the hot tray and the turkey and will help any juices not to evaporate. The vegetables and juices can then be used to make your roast gravy.
4. Now to your turkey. You will probably find that your turkey has been trussed with an elastic band. This serves a very important job; it pulls the bird together so that the legs are pulled in tight against the lower thinner part of the breast. This helps the bird cook more evenly as the legs protect the breast meat.
5. You need to remove the band for now. Have a look inside the bird's cavity and you might find a little bag of innards. If so, open it up, remove the liver and pop everything else in the tray with the chopped vegetables. You can pan fry the liver separately later.
6. Now get the turkey ready for the oven. With a generous pinch of salt season the inside of the cavity and the outside of the bird. Stuff the cavity with half the bulb of garlic and the herbs. Then rub some oil into the turkey skin.
7. Next, replace the elastic band back around the bird. If you don't have an elastic band, use the butcher's string.
8. Place the bird on the tray breast side down and pop into the oven. The time needed depends on the weight of the bird.
9. Calculate your total time in the oven, then cook the turkey upside down for three-quarters of that time. Next carefully turn the bird the right side up and finish the cooking.
10. The turkey must be thoroughly cooked before serving, without any pink meat. Pierce the thickest part of the thigh with a skewer and let the juices run out. If they are clear, then it is cooked, but if they still look pink, return it to the oven for 15 minutes, then test again. If you have a meat thermometer, push the probe into the thickest part of the thigh. The temperature should be 75°C before serving.
11. The next stage is vital: rest the bird before carving. This should be done for at least 15 minutes. Resting allows the meat to settle, and it is much moister as a result.
12. Now carve the bird. Remove the legs by popping them off their ball and socket joint at the pelvic bone; each leg can be cut into two joints - the thigh and the drumstick - giving four pieces of brown meat.
13. Next, use a carving knife to slice the breast meat into thin slices until you reach the carcass. Do this on both sides until you have recovered all the meat.
14. Finally, make sure you keep the remaining carcass as it makes the most amazing roast gravy.

Venison Wellington



Ingredients

500g loin of venison
1 sheet butter puff pastry
1pkt chestnut mushrooms
1 banana shallot
2 cloves garlic
3 sprigs thyme, *picked*
¼ savoy cabbage
12 baby carrots
500g new potatoes
3 eggs
100g plain flour
50ml milk

Instructions

1. Season the loin of venison.
2. Heat the oil in a frying pan and sear the meat until you have achieved good colour on every surface of the meat.
3. Next, get started on your mushroom mix - this is known as a duxelle. Melt the butter and soften the shallot and garlic.
4. Add the chopped mushrooms, herbs and seasoning, and cook until you have a paste-like mixture. The time this takes depends on the moisture of the mushrooms. Leave to cool.
5. Next blanch and refresh the cabbage leaves.
6. Your next task is to make a couple of French crepes; take two eggs, a splash of milk and a drop of oil and whisk together in flour until you get a thin batter consistency.
7. In a hot frying pan with a little oil, pour a thin layer of the batter mix and swirl the pan until the mix creates a thin layer.
8. Cook the crepe in the pan and turn it over, repeat until you have two pancakes. For some reason, the first one you make is never that good - the second one is always better.
9. Overlap 2-3 sheets of cling film on a clean surface and lay the two crepes, slightly overlapping each one.
10. Take some of your blanched cabbage leaves, dry them off using kitchen paper. Lay the cabbage onto the crepes.
11. Spread the cooled mushroom mixture all over the cabbage leaves, creating a thin, even layer.
12. Place the venison in the centre of the mushroom mixture. Using the edge of the cling film, carefully wrap the crepe, cabbage and mushroom mix around the fillet.
13. Roll into a sausage shape, twisting the ends of the cling film one side clockwise and the other anticlockwise to form a tight log. Chill in the fridge for 30 mins to firm up.
14. Meanwhile, cook your potatoes and baby carrots.
15. On a lightly floured surface, place the pre-rolled puff pastry.
16. Unwrap your venison log and lay it in the middle of the pastry.
17. Fold over the bottom half of the pastry. Lightly brush the rest of the sheet with beaten egg.
18. Roll the whole thing around the meat to encase. Neatly trim the edges to create a parcel.
19. Transfer to a baking sheet and brush the pastry all over with beaten egg yolk.
20. Chill for at least 30 minutes.
21. Pre-heat your oven to 200°C
22. Using the back of a knife, mark the pastry, being careful not to cut all the way through.
23. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes.
24. Remove from oven and rest for 20 minutes.
25. Serve with your potatoes and vegetables.

Salmon and Quail Kedgerree



Ingredients

200g hot smoked salmon
300g mussels, fresh
200ml white wine
1 bay leaf
12 quails eggs
Sm bunch flat parsley, shredded
Sm bunch coriander, shredded
Few sprigs dill
25ml vegetable oil
2 banana shallots, chopped
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground turmeric
2 tsp curry powder
250g long grain rice

Instructions

1. The first job is to clean the mussels, wash them under cold running water. Using a table knife, scrape away any barnacles. You must also pull out the 'beards' that protrude from between the closed shells.
2. If you find any mussels that are open, give them a short little tap on the side of the sink - this should encourage them to close. If they don't close, then they should be thrown away as they are most likely dead.
3. For this dish you will need a large pan with a tight-fitting lid.
4. Cook the mussels very quickly - to do this place the cleaned mussels into a bowl and then add the chopped shallots, butter, salt, pepper and wine.
5. Once the mussels are cooked, strain the cooking liquors and pick the meat from the shells.
6. For the rice, heat the oil in a large, lidded pan, add the onion, then gently fry for 5 mins until softened but not coloured.
7. Add the spices, season with salt, then continue to fry until the mix starts to go brown and fragrant - about 3 minutes.
8. Add the rice and stir in well.
9. Add 1200ml of water and the mussel cooking liquid, stir, and bring to the boil.
10. Reduce to a simmer and cover for 10 mins.
11. Meanwhile, place the quail eggs in a pan of boiling water and cook for 2.5 minutes if you would like runny egg yolk - if not, then cook for a little longer.
12. Take off the heat and leave to stand, covered, for 10-15 minutes more.
13. The rice will be perfectly cooked if you do not lift the lid before the end of the cooking.
14. Fold through the salmon, mussels and fresh herbs.
15. Finish with ¼ quails eggs and a few sprigs of dill.

Smoked Trout Salad



Ingredients

300g cold smoked trout/or salmon
100g French beans
100g snap peas
300g frozen peas
1pkt mixed leaves
50g butter (unsalted)
50g flaked almonds (toasted)
1 lemon (zest and juice)
100ml olive oil, or cold-pressed rape seed oil
¼ pkt dill
¼ pkt chives (chopped)
4 slices dry cured ham (dried out in a low oven)

Instructions

1. The first thing you need to do is to make the pea puree. This will form a great flavour base to the dish and help hold the whole thing together. Blanch the peas in a pan of boiling salted water.

2. This should only take a few minutes, as soon as the water comes back to the boil remove the peas and blend in the food processor with the 50g of butter. Taste and season.

3. Then, blanch and refresh the green beans and snap peas. Blanching and refreshing is vital as it ensures the vibrant green colour of the vegetables comes out and stays lovely and green. To do this you need to bring a pan of salted water to the boil, put in a teaspoon of salt - the salt helps to bring out the colour of the vegetables. Once it is boiling, add the beans and you will instantly see the colour change. As soon as you see the change remove the vegetables and put straight into ice water, this will "shock" the vegetables and help retain the colour.

4. With the lemon, oil and chives make your lemon dressing; zest the lemon, then put it into the microwave for 10 seconds as this helps extract all the juice. Add the zest to the juice and then slowly add the oil. Taste and adjust the seasoning, finish with the chopped chives.

5. You are now ready to assemble the dish - using a little of the dressing, dress the blanched beans.

6. Spread a spoonful of pea puree onto the bottom of the plate, then place some of the smoked trout onto the plate with the beans, dill, almonds and dried ham. Do the same again, building up as you go. This method of adding a little bit of all ingredients in layers guarantees that every fork full is full of flavour and texture.

Cullen Skink



Ingredients

1 large potato, peeled and cut into 1cm cubes
25g butter, unsalted
1 onion, finely diced
125g pale smoked haddock fillet
1 bay leaf
375 ml milk
25 ml double cream
Salt and pepper

Instructions

1. Melt a knob of butter in a saucepan big enough to accommodate the fish.
2. Cook the onion on a medium heat for a few minutes without colouring, until soft.
3. Sit the smoked haddock in the pan along with the bay leaf. Pour in some of the milk, just topping the fish.
4. Bring to a simmer and cook for 4-6 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fish.
5. Remove the fish from the pan and keep to one side.
6. Add the chopped potato, leek and the remaining milk. Leave to cook for 15-20 minutes, until the potato is tender. While this is cooking, remove the skin and any bones from the haddock and flake.
7. When the soup is ready, remove the bay leaf.
8. Add the double cream and season with salt and pepper.
9. Add the flaked haddock and bring back to a warm temperature.

Proper Roast Gravy



Ingredients

- 1 tray natural juices and stuck bits from your roast, lamb, chicken or beef
- 1 glass red wine
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 25g tomato puree
- 1.5ltr brown stock (the pouch ones work well for this)
- 1 carrot, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 onion, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 sticks celery, roughly chopped
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 2 sprigs rosemary

Instructions

1. Start off by getting your roasting tray onto the heat; add the chopped vegetables and herbs.
2. Caramelize the vegetables and lift the flavour off the bottom of the roasting tray, making use of what was left from your roast.
3. Add the garlic and about half of the wine - use the wine to help unstick what is at the bottom of the tray.
4. Add the tomato puree, mix, and then add the flour and work into the mixture. This might start to clump together but don't worry.
5. Add the rest of the wine and bring the whole lot to the boil.
6. Add the brown stock and whisk the whole lot together.
7. Transfer the mixture into a thick bottomed pan and reduce the sauce until you have the required flavour. The more you reduce the sauce, the stronger the flavour will be and the thicker it will become.

Apple and Cinnamon Scones



Ingredients

- 375g self-raising flour
- 65g unsalted butter, diced and fridge cold
- 65g caster sugar
- ½ Braeburn apple
- 150ml milk, with a squeeze of lemon juice

Instructions

1. The first thing is to sour the milk with the lemon juice to help the chemical reaction with the baking powder in the flour, giving a better lift and thus a lighter scone.
2. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C.
3. Grate the ½ apple, including the skin.
4. Sift the flour and the cinnamon together into a large bowl.
5. Carefully rub in the cold diced butter.
6. Add the sugar and the grated apple.
7. Add the soured milk to the mixture and knead lightly.
8. Tip out onto a floured surface and roll to a thickness of 4 to 5 cm.
9. Use a crinkled cutter and cut the scones to size, then place on a non-stick baking sheet. If you bunch them relatively close together you will get a better lift.
10. Brush with milk and cook for about 10 to 16 minutes depending on size.

Chocolate and Orange Mousse with Candy Peel

Mousse - Ingredients

- 100g granulated sugar
- 100g water
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 grated orange zest
- 175g dark chocolate (53 per cent cocoa or above)
- 1 x 11cm gelatine sheets, soaked in ice cold water
- 250g double cream, semi whipped

Instructions

1. Boil the sugar and water to make a stock syrup - you will need 65g of syrup for this recipe
2. Place the yolks into the bowl of a food mixer and whisk until light and almost white.
3. Pour over 65g of the boiling sugar syrup and continue to whisk until thick.
4. Add the zest.
5. Remove from the mixer.
6. Meanwhile, melt the chocolate in a bowl over some warm water.
7. Add the melted chocolate into the egg yolk and sugar mix and fold in quickly.
8. Drain the gelatine, melt it in the microwave and fold it into the chocolate sabayon mixture.
9. Carefully fold in the whipped cream.
10. Place the mixture into prepared glasses and top with fresh orange and candy peel.

Candy Peel - Ingredients

- 2 oranges
- 150g granulated sugar
- 100g water
- 100g caster sugar



Instructions

1. Give the oranges a good wash.
2. Using a potato peeler, peel the skin from top to bottom from the orange.
3. Remove any white pith.
4. Cut the orange skin into thin strips.
5. Pop the strips of peel in a pan and cover with cold water.
6. Bring to a boil. Drain the water from the peels and repeat this process twice more.
7. Meanwhile, peel and segment the oranges and put the segments to one side until needed.
8. Next, in a small pot add the sugar and the water and bring to a simmer. Let the mixture cook for 7-8 minutes at a constant simmer.
9. Add the peel and cook until they are translucent, adjusting heat as necessary so as not to overheat the sugar.
10. Avoid stirring; use a small pastry brush to brush down any sugar that starts to form around the pan as this will help prevent crystallization.
11. Once the peels are translucent remove from the syrup and drain, pop them into a bowl with your caster sugar and coat each strand with the sugar.
12. Remove the peels and spread them out on a drying rack and leave to dry for 4-5 hours.



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Mary Harney | CA, USA

Use the code 'CelticLife10' for 10% off your first order at My Irish Jeweler until Christmas 2019

Holiday Gift Guide

Looking for that special something for that special someone this holiday season? We've got you covered with our annual Holiday Gift Guide!





Window to the Soul Pendant

Keith Jack

www.keithjack.com

Scotland-born, Vancouver-based artist and designer Keith Jack remains world-renowned as a master craftsman of Celtic jewelry. After the birth of his children, Jack was inspired to create lasting, legacy pieces - of modern design and ancient meaning - which could be passed on for generations, creating new family traditions while retaining Celtic legend. One of those masterworks - the Window to the Soul Pendant - embodies that Celtic mythology, crossing the thin veils between the physical and faerie realms, and symbolizing the eternal soul. A contemporary take on a classic design, this stunning piece spins the stirring soul of Scotland into pure sterling silver, gilded in 22k yellow gold, and placed on a sturdy Italian Spiga chain. Transcending time, the talisman is a perfect and poignant gift for that special someone this holiday season.



Sketches

Natalie MacMaster

www.linusentertainment.com

It has been eight years since Canadian fiddler extraordinaire Natalie MacMaster released a solo recording. It has been well worth the wait, however. Without a single sung or spoken word through the album's 12 terrific tracks, Sketches captures and conveys just about every emotion under the sun through the sweet and sure tones of the fiddle - often within the span of a single piece. By turns bold, bouncy and beautiful, the work succeeds at showcasing both the multi award-winner's tremendous talent, and her downhome Cape Breton roots. Suffice to say that few instrumentalists of her caliber, or of her genre, can sway both body and soul with such spirit. Order online now and receive a limited-edition signed copy. And be sure to check out our feature story on MacMaster in this issue, where she discusses her latest release, as well as the perks and perils of her profession.



A Celtic Family Christmas

The MacMaster-Leahy Family

www.linusentertainment.com

While Natalie MacMaster's solo career might have been on hiatus for the last eight years, she has kept herself busy both on the professional and personal fronts. Here, alongside her husband Donnell Leahy and their seven (!) talented children, the master fiddler rings in the holidays by putting on a pulse-pounding yuletide concert extravaganza, filmed before a live studio audience, and featuring special guests Jackie Evencho and Shawn Hook. Much like a warm winter's gathering at the homes of family and friends - and not unlike a classic, old-school kitchen party like the ones found back home in Celtic Cape Breton - the MacMaster-Leahy family serve up a feast of engaging entertainment with this truly unforgettable evening of music, dance, and storytelling. Available in both CD and DVD formats, the concert is sure to become a Christmas tradition for audiences of all ages.



Sterling Silver Ogham Pendant and Cufflinks

My Irish Jeweler

www.myirishjeweler.com

This Christmas delight your loved one with a handcrafted, future family heirloom from My Irish Jeweler. With over 50 years experience in fine jewelry, My Irish Jeweler are passionate about connecting people to their Celtic roots. Designed, made and hallmarked in Ireland from the finest gold and sterling silver, My Irish Jeweler pieces are an expression of Celtic and Gaelic culture, with iconic symbols like the Tree of Life, The Celtic Knot, or the Claddagh. You can personalize pieces from their Ogham range with your own message, hand engraved in the earliest script of the Gaelic language. Pieces like this Ogham pendant or Ogham cufflinks make a striking and personal gift that will be treasured for a lifetime. And each piece is express shipped in a luxury gift box, complete with a booklet explaining the ancient meaning and history of the design. Visit their website to discover designs to suit the modern Celtic man, woman, or child.



Celtic Tree of Life Deluxe Gift Set

Celtic Knot Works

www.celticknotworks.com

American Artist Bob Heiney has been crafting jewelry and other accessories inspired by the Celtic Knot for a decade. His original designs have become very popular over that time, and this Christmas he is bringing his classic bestsellers together into one gift set, combining the Celtic Knot and the Tree of Life. This gorgeous creation represents the intersection of eternal love and eternal life and features four core pieces, including a keychain, a pendant, a matchbox cover and a pin. You can share them amongst your loved ones or keep them together as a single gift. There might be no more exquisite way to show your family members your eternal love for them, how your lives will always be interconnected, and pride in your Celtic heritage than by giving them each their own Celtic Tree of Life. You could even keep one for yourself. All items are handcrafted in the United States and are made from stainless steel and fine pewter.



Whisky Tasting Set

Scottish Creations

www.scottishcreations.com

We all have a special someone in our life who enjoys a wee dram of "the good stuff" - especially during the holiday season. Recently, the good folks at Angels' Share Glass created a stunning and stirring Whisky Tasting Set for spirit lovers. Both decorative and functional, the item includes a personalized Glencairn glass, a sturdy water jug and an award-winning whisky-diluting dropper. The droppers are hand-blown in Scotland by master-craftsman Tom Young and are specifically designed to dole out a perfect proportion of H₂O with every dram, every time. There are three different options for the glass pipette; a burnished pot still, a gorgeous thistle, and the whisky angel - all of which are lustered in gold and displayed on oak from a vintage whisky barrel.



Custom Arran Hooded Capes

Heather Knight

www.heatherknight.ca

Nova Scotia native Heather Knight has been hand-crafting her unique line of clothing and gifts since 1992. Her wares are regularly found under Christmas trees each holiday season, both at home and abroad. Finding the perfect gift is easy with Heather's holiday gift ideas, including tartan Christmas ornaments and decorations, home decor, and fabulous, regionally-inspired fashion for the whole family. "Nova Scotia is my business and my life," she says. "Our products evolved here, and they are so greatly influenced by this part of the world that even when they are purchased by people outside of the region, it is largely because they are from Nova Scotia." This Christmas, treat a loved one - or yourself - to one of Heather's stunning Arran Hooded Capes. These one-of-a-kind capes feature a large druid-style hood, Celtic embroidery, and hand-crafted porcelain buttons. They can be made to custom order, reflecting the personal taste and personality of the wearer, so your special someone can showcase their Celtic pride.



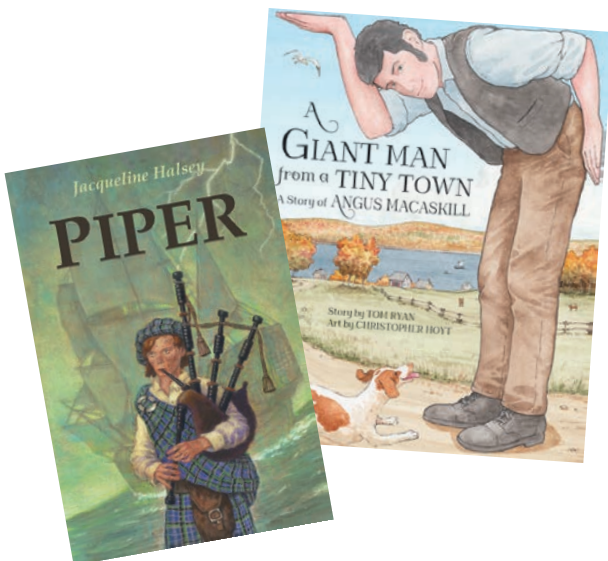
The Mimosa Collection

- Hand-Crafted Scottish Sheepskin

Skyeskyns

www.skyeskyns.co.uk

Curling up by a roaring fire, lounging in a soft, sheepskin wool rug might be the textbook definition of "cozy" during the cold winter months. This holiday season do cozy the right way with a homespun rug or throw from The Mimosa Collection by Skyeskyns. Named for the type of tree bark used in their tanning process, the Mimosa Collection features hand-made items crafted from authentic Scottish sheepskin in small, limited edition batches. Their tannery, located on the Isle of Skye, employs only the most skilled craftsmen and women, ensuring a truly velvety experience for the end-user. In addition, as the item's materials are sourced from eco-friendly Scottish farms, they are environmentally sustainable. "We are proud to be working with nature in such a low impact and beautiful way. The skins we tan here at Skyeskyns all come from either our own homebred sheep or from other Scottish sheep farms, minimizing travel."



Piper / A Giant Man from a Tiny Town

Nimbus Publishing

www.nimbus.ca

This holiday season give the gift of Celtic history and culture to the children in your life. Nimbus Publishing of Halifax, Nova Scotia, offers two wonderful stories for young readers this Christmas. Tom Ryan's *A Giant Man from a Tiny Town* is a true tall tale of the famous Cape Breton Giant, Angus MacAskill. Beautifully illustrated by well-known visual artist Christopher Hoyt, younger children will adore this classic story of a man who travels the world but longs for home. Older readers will enjoy Jacqueline Halsey's *Piper* - a middle-grade adventure tale that recounts the story of Dougal Cameron and his family as they sail from Scotland to Nova Scotia in the eighteenth century. During the voyage, Dougal is captivated by the sounds of the bagpipes, but must fulfill his responsibilities instead of dreaming the boat ride away. Both works have received popular and critical acclaim, and *Piper* has been short-listed for the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People.



The Tree of Life

Blue Frogs Company

www.bluefrogscompany.com

An elegant Tree of Life wood carving is a thoughtful and inspired gift that pays homage to generations past, while professing great hope for the future. Inspired by the traditions of the seven Celtic nations, this graceful hand carving is also a universal symbol of many spiritual and mythological practices in various cultures world-wide, whether known as the Tree of Knowledge, the World Tree or the Sacred Tree. With its intricate, interwoven pattern, its painstaking design speaks of wisdom, protection, strength, beauty, bounty and redemption. In Nordic tradition the tree is believed to connect the three worlds: Asgard - the realm of the gods; Midgard - the world of man, and Hel and Niflheim - the kingdom of the frost giant. In other traditions it represents life everlasting, without beginning or end. Specializing in Celtic and Viking carvings, which strive to capture ancestral traditions, Blue Frogs Company of Aspen, Colorado, carves its pieces one at a time, each beginning with an original hand drawing. Great attention to detail carries through to the hand carving, painting and finishing right down to the French paste wax which brings a rich luster to the wood grain.

TRACING YOUR IRISH ANCESTORS

5TH EDITION



Tracing Your Irish Ancestors (5th edition, hardcover)

Genealogical.com

www.genealogical.com

Diligent readers of Celtic Life International will recall our cover story on tracking one's Celtic ancestry from earlier this year. If you would like to surprise that someone special in your life this holiday season, the gift of ancestry will look great under the Christmas Tree. Specifically, Tracing Your Irish Ancestors by author John Grenham is an excellent way to encourage a family member or friend to start digging through their roots. The author provides detailed instructions and tips on how to track one's Irish bloodlines through records and research tools. Irish ancestry records being what they are - often dependent upon meticulous, regional paper records - this guide is indispensable as a roadmap to one's family history and heritage. Updated with the most currently available information, including the latest list of the ever-growing online databases, the book guarantees to get you going in the right direction, and will likely inspire a trip to the land of your ancestors.



Wedding and Engagement Jewellery

The Irish Gold Co.

www.irishgoldshop.com

The Irish Gold Co. Ltd. is the only company in the world to produce wedding rings containing pure Irish Gold. With a unique "Irish Green" hue and a little bit of the old country, they are the perfect choice for your special wedding day. Every piece of jewellery is made by hands with 50 years' experience, making each piece unique from one another and with special care taken to make them just right. All Irish Gold Co. wedding rings come with their Shamrock stamp inside, or as a large feature mark on the outside of the rings. Priced from \$880 in 18ct. To complement these rings, the company also makes a uniquely stunning Celtic Irish engagement ring with a choice of diamonds, or the beautiful Mountains of Mourne rings with the green gold mountains under rose gold sunset. The range is completed with the Claddagh, Shamrock and Celtic Tree of Life pendant collections priced from \$629.



Raven Sash Pin

Nagle Forge & Foundry

www.nagleforge.com

Family owned and operated, California-based Nagle Forge & Foundry has been creating historically-inspired, one-of-a-kind jewelry and accessories for generations. Their timeless brooches are world-renowned and have long been worn and heralded by members of the Scottish, Irish and Welsh communities. The company's more recent offerings, including this stunning Raven Sash Pin - masterfully crafted from lead-free pewter - are ideal for Celts looking to leave a lasting impression. With engraved thistles and an intricate raven design, this piece showcases individually carved wings and feathers. A traditional symbol of freedom and individuality, the bird-noir transcends earth and sky to soar in the netherworld. Ravens also represent prophecy and wisdom in Celtic mythology. Both classic and contemporary at once, the pin's convenient two-inch sizing allows for seamless blending into any Clan sash. As a holiday gift, it is an ideal way to start, or pass along, family customs to future generations. Standing by their longstanding commitment to excellence and quality, Nagle Forge repairs or replaces any damaged items at no charge.



Logan the Irish Piper

Paddy Pals

www.paddypals.com

Owned and operated by Denis Kelly and Andrew Cosgrove of County Down-based online retailer Urban Pup, Paddy Pals is a series of adorable Teddy Bears who live deep in the region's plush Mountains of Mourne. Each Paddy Pal is a loving and loyal companion - stuffed with hugs, smiles, fun and laughter - and all have their own unique and individual gifts. Logan the Irish Piper entertains his Paddy Pals with stirring Celtic melodies. He sports silky brown fur, a welcoming smile, and a deep emerald green jacket adorned with golden buttons and a lace ruffle around the neck. A matching Tam O'Shanter cap and saffron kilt complete his outfit. Other Paddy Pals include a farmer, a fisherman, a dancer, a weaver, a poet and a classic "Colleen." Filled to the brim with the luck of the Irish, Logan and his pals will surely make a warm and wonderful gift for the wee ones this Christmas!



The Laird by Niffi Ecosse

Outdoor Knitwear

www.outdoorknitwear.com

This winter, wrap yourself or a loved one in a warm and wonderful wool cardigan from Outdoor Knitwear. This classically-designed fishermen's stitch cardigan is masterfully crafted with both traditional production methods and over 90 years of experience. Made with soft, high-quality wool from Welsh mountain sheep, the gorgeous sweater is highlighted with Harris Tweed shoulder patches and pocket tops, and authentic leather buttons. The cardigan is now available in three classic colours; natural coloured Light Grey Welsh, finished with Brown Mix Herringbone Harris Tweed patches; Derby Tweed, featuring a traditional blend of beautiful earthy colours and finished with rich Tartan Green Mix Harris Tweed patches; and a Charcoal melange, finished with Dark Grey Tartan Mix Harris Tweed patches. Sizes range from XS to 3XL. As a special holiday season promotion, visit the company's website to receive a 15% discount, using the code CELTICGIFT15.

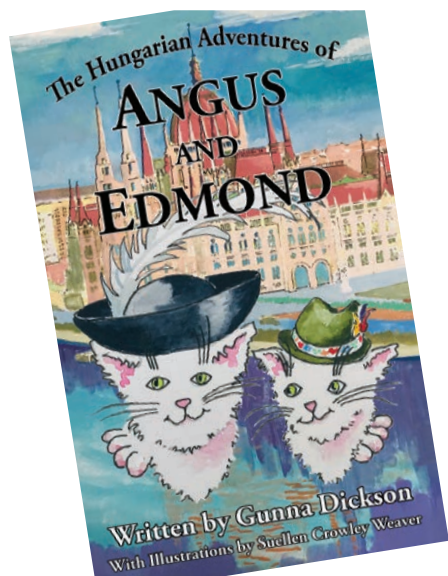


Celtic Chakra Jewellery

Black Dragon Crafts

www.blackdragon.co.uk

The human body has seven Chakras - or energy wheels - and each of the genuine gemstones used in this Celtic Chakra jewellery from Black Dragon Crafts relates to one of those power centers. Combined with the magic of the ancient Celts, and threaded with Hematite to give you courage, these unique and original pieces should help keep you balanced and energized. Choose from fine or chunky Celtic Chakra earrings, pendants, bracelets or necklaces. There are even Little Chakra bracelets for the wee ones. Each item is individually handmade and features Celtic beads, crafted in lead-free pewter by Annie Wealleans - a.k.a. the Black Dragon herself. It's a hot, dusty, dirty, complicated and time-consuming process but she casts, files, cleans, tumbles and hand finishes all the beads in her "Beadoir" on a green Welsh hillside. Annie is passionate about her work and has created more than thirty bead designs, each one decorated with an intricate and original Celtic knot pattern. She threads them into several ranges of timeless jewellery, all of which are sensibly priced and beautifully packaged, making an ideal gift for family and friends this holiday season, or anytime of the year. Beware of imitations!



The Hungarian Adventures of Angus and Edmond

Gunna Dickson and Suellen Crowley Weaver

www.amazon.co.uk / www.amazon.com

Back again for another amazing adventure are Angus and Edmond, the dynamic feline duo created by author Gunna Dickson. Readers of this hilarious and heartfelt saga have watched these two curious cats find themselves in a myriad of predicaments as they travelled through Scotland, Key West, Italy, Spain and beyond. This year, the purring pair are at it again, landing themselves - quite unexpectedly - in Hungary. There, Angus and Edmond are introduced to the Hungarian way of life, as they tour through Budapest, immersing themselves in the capital city's distinct and luxurious culture. As is the norm with these two, however, trouble is not far away, and things take a rather surprising turn. The Angus and Edmond adventures are warm reminders to slow down, enjoy the world and not take things too seriously. Wonderfully illustrated by Suellen Crowley Weaver, it is the perfect gift for both the child in your life and for the child in your heart.



Castle Tours

Sheenco Travel

www.sheencotravel.com

Memories are a gift that last a lifetime. And nothing makes memories better than adventures in travel, especially when it involves authentic and historic castles. With offices in both the U.S. and Ireland, Sheenco Travel makes it memorable with a series of Irish and Scottish Castle Tours that seamlessly bring together classic Celtic culture with contemporary luxury. These unique and exclusive excursions offer options for independent or guided travel, highlighting history, heritage, exceptional cuisine and comfortable accommodations. The Ireland Tour takes in several stunning locales, including Fitzpatrick Castle in Co. Dublin, Ashford Castle in Co. Mayo and Barberstown Castle in Co. Kildare. The Scotland Tour includes stops at Crossbasket Castle in East Kilbride, Inverlochry Castle in Fort William and Carberry Tower in East Lothian. Both tours offer additional bespoke options to best meet any additional needs or wants. Engaging, educational and entertaining, these Castle Tours are a wonderful way to treat the Kings and Queens in your family this holiday season!



ClanAran Product Line

Aran Sweater Market

www.aransweatermarket.com

Inspired by Irish folklore and history, the ClanAran product range by The Aran Sweater Market is the perfect gift for that person on your list who cherishes Celtic fashion and lore. Historically, the Aran symbol is considered the foremost Clan symbol, with its history reaching back to ancient Irish times. Today, the sweaters are more popular than ever, in part because they are passed down as family heirlooms, and partly due to their timeless style and clean lines. The Aran Sweater Market offers up a fine selection of gorgeous sweaters, throws, scarves, as well as a Clan Aran Historical display - all of which are accented with the same stitching, symbolic of the specific Irish clan and location and/or the customer's name. All Aran Sweater Market products are fashioned from the finest authentic Irish wool. The range includes well over 200 registered Clans and names, ensuring all customers can find what it is they are looking for to keep them cozy year-round.

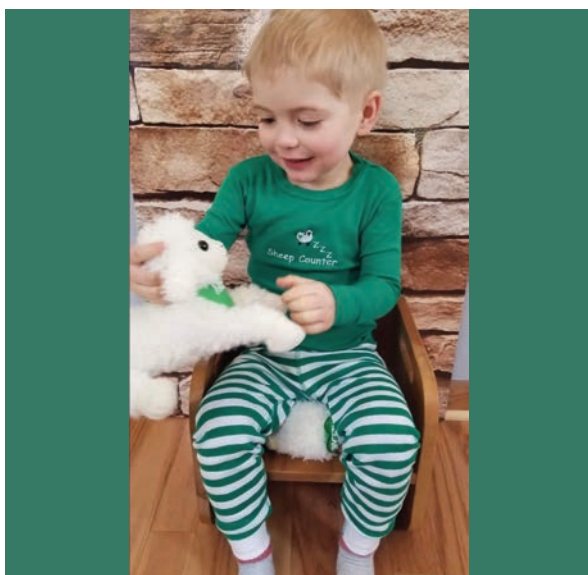


Teatime in Ireland

Margaret M. Johnson

www.irishcook.com

Tea lovers will rejoice this holiday season with Teatime in Ireland, a terrific tribute to the delightful ritual of "taking tea" - both formal and informal. Culinary journalist Margaret Johnson invites readers on a tasting tour of the Emerald Isle, where tea-drinking is a symbol of hospitality, friendship, and pleasure. From her first visit in 1984, Johnson has forged an indelible bond with Eire and its food, and she shares that ongoing passion in her latest cookbook devoted to the special relationship that the Irish people have with tea. Readers will learn a bit of Irish tea history - not even the Easter Rising could keep the ladies of Dublin from their tea and cakes - and discover a treasure trove of recipes for hosting special afternoon occasions. From country castles to Dublin drawing rooms, this colorful collection offers more than seventy recipes that will take readers seamlessly from a morning cuppa to an afternoon tea party. This Christmas order a special signed copy via Johnson's website for that true tea connoisseur in your life.

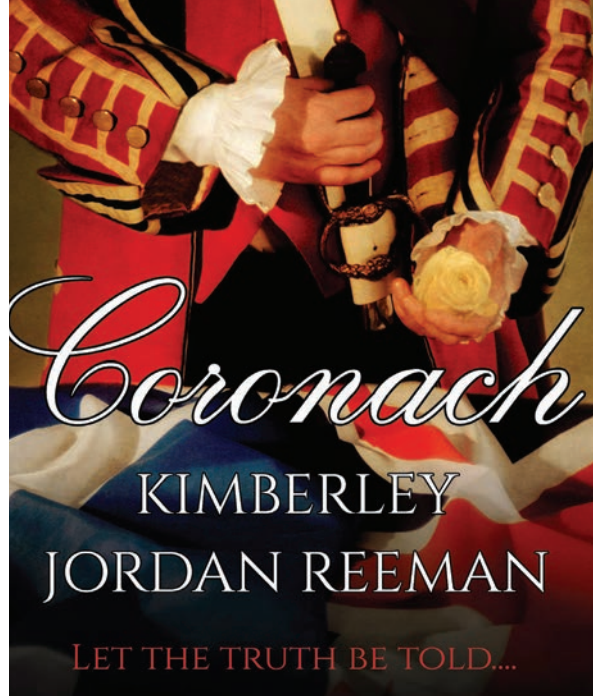


Embroidered Children's Pajamas

Faith and Begorra

www.faithandbegorra.com

Keep your wee ones as snug as a bug in a rug this winter with these warm and wonderful embroidered pajamas from Faith and Begorra. Based in Denville, New Jersey, the Irish Catholic company brings together style, comfort and tradition to keep the kids cozy through the colder months. Soft as can be, these jammies are 100 per cent cotton and coloured true Emerald Isle green. With cuffed, striped bottoms and a matching long sleeve top, the two-piece sleepwear set showcases a 'Sheep Counter' design with a line of finely embroidered Z's and an adorable fluffy sheep emblazoned on the front. In addition, every pair has a shamrock embroidered on the rear for an extra flair of Irish fashion - even the sheep has one! Crafted with quality, affordable, and ideal for all the little lambs in the family from 6 months to 5 years of age, these pajamas will make for a perfect Christmas gift.



Coronach

Kimberley Jordan Reeman

www.douglasreeman.com

Hailed by readers and critics as “soaring, sweeping, epic,” “a powerful saga,” and “enthraling...a classic contrast between love and war, and a mighty read,”

Kimberley Jordan Reeman’s *Coronach* is the stirring story of love and loss in Scotland in July of 1746. War ravages the Scottish Highlands as an army of occupation commits horrendous atrocities with consequences that will reverberate for generations. From this bloody cataclysm, a battle-hardened English officer saves an infant who will become his heiress and his obsession, and a traumatized Franco-Scottish laird offers refuge to a boy damaged by unspeakable horror. These four lives, bound by fate, unfold against the turbulence of the 18th century, in a magnificent and uncompromising novel of love and the human cost of war. An ideal gift for those with a passion for history, this terrific tale will keep readers engaged and entertained through the holiday season and well into the new year. *Coronach* is available both in paperback and also in e-book format from Amazon.



Highland Wear, Musical Instruments, Pipe Band Accessories

Musik de Razi

www.musikrazi.com

Everyone has that one special Scot in their lives - the one that celebrates their history and heritage in style. This holiday season, Musik de Razi is your one stop shop for Scots. The renowned firm has been firmly outfitting Scots since 2004, with an exceptional selection of Highland wear, musical instruments and pipe band accessories, including bagpipes, chanters, valves, reeds, cords, drumskins, Prince Charlie jackets, traditional tartan kilts, utility kilts, kilt belts, kilt pins, brooches, waist belts, semi dress sporrans, daywear sporrans, boy’s sporrans, horse hair sporrans, pipe band doublets, Glengarry caps, Balmorals caps, pipe and drummer insignias, and more. In-house manufacturing ensures the company’s commitment to craftsmanship and excellence, and to producing only the highest quality products. Affordable and convenient, Musik de Razi is a great place to gear-up that special someone in your life this Christmas.

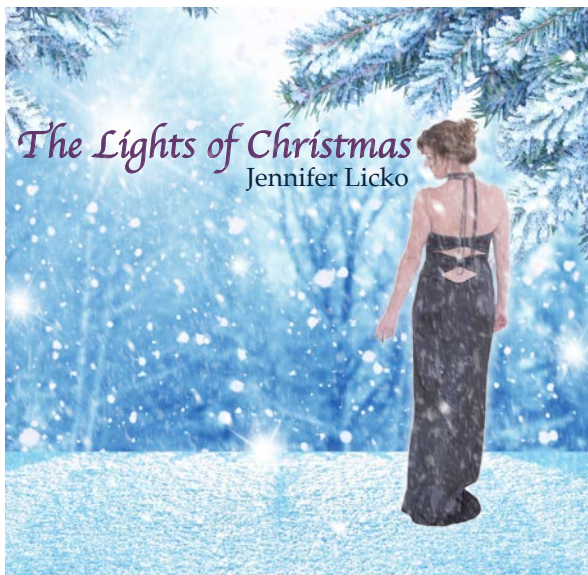


Killarney Tours

Killarney Tour and Taxi

www.killarneytaxi.com

Choose your own adventure with Killarney Tour and Taxi. Customizable and convenient, these unique travel experiences encourage exploration and freedom in lieu of rigid schedules and overly packed, out-of-control tour buses. From individual visitors to a maximum of eight people, these bespoke excursions offer the opportunity for spontaneous stops anywhere on the tour - on or off the beaten path - in and around some of Ireland’s most spectacular locales, including the Ring of Kerry, Dingle and Slea Head, the Beara Peninsula, Blarney Castle and Cork City, the Cliffs of Moher and more. Along the Ring of Kerry, travelers can explore the town of Kilorglin - famous for one of the Emerald Isle’s most traditional and esteemed events, the Puck Fair - visit the traditional Red Fox Inn & Old Bog Village, walk through replica villages from the 1840s, and shuttle exclusively to stunning Valentia Island via ferry. Personable and professional, Killarney Tour and Taxi also provides both golf excursions and legacy tours involving the whole family.

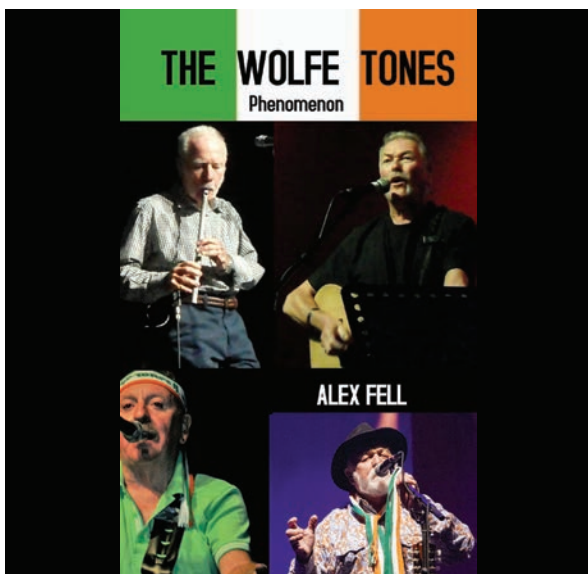


The Lights of Christmas

Jennifer Licko

www.celticchristmascd.com

The Lights of Christmas is the stirring and spirited debut seasonal release from multi award-winning Irish American singer/songwriter Jennifer Licko. Featuring 11 classic and contemporary takes on traditional Christmas melodies, including The First Noel, Soilse na Nollag, Silver Bells and O Little Town of Bethlehem/ Hark The Herald Angels Sing - and backed by a star-studded cast of players, including fiddler Patrick Mangan, guitarist Patsy O'Brien, producer/arranger and keyboardist Bob Noble, and Grammy award-winning sound engineer Mauricio Cajueiro - The Lights of Christmas captures and conveys the true spirit of the holiday season in grand Celtic style. Filled with stories of hope, home, family and friendship, the album is a warm and wonderful companion piece to Licko's annual Celtic Christmas Tour, and makes for perfect and easy listening by the fireplace, while trimming the tree, or while savouring a scrumptious Christmas dinner with loved ones. A great stocking stuffer!



The Wolfe Tones Phenomenon

Alex Fell

www.choicepublishing.ie / www.amazon.com

The Wolfe Tones are widely acknowledged as the leading Irish Nationalist band, as well as traditionally-trained folk music exponents. They have influenced many younger bands, as well as established artists like Rod Stewart - whose version of "Grace" followed a visit to Glasgow Celtic Football Club, where longtime fans of the band are renowned for singing The Wolfe Tones' songs at matches. The band is going into its 56th year of continuous touring with the same line-up - a music industry record - and still spend time each year in North America and wherever else the Irish Diaspora is found. Alex Fell recaps all the highlights with this terrific tome, including the band's twenty-two "Top 20" hits, the fastest-selling single ever on the Emerald Isle, the "best single ever" as voted in the BBC World Service poll, the double-platinum and gold albums, the civic awards of keys to both New York and Los Angeles, and the numerous proclamations attesting to their devotion to the ideal of a peaceful and united Ireland. With a soaring narrative arc, a recorded repertoire of the band, and peppered with historical facts and contemporary colour photographs, the work is a must-read for true music lovers and all with an interest in Irish history and culture.



Highland Title

Scottish Lands

www.scottishlands.com

The ultimate gift for "the person who has everything": make them a Lord or Lady this Christmas! Scottish Lands offers a unique opportunity to purchase a plot of land in the Glencoe Wood in the Highlands of Scotland. Thanks to Scottish landowner laws, purchasing a Highland Estate gives you the legal right to call yourself a Laird, Lord or Lady. Scottish Lands offer estates of various sizes and prices. The document pack comes with a legal Certificate of Sale, information and directions to enable you to locate and visit your land, and a Master Title Deed to comply with the legalities of changing your name on your driving license and credit cards. The purchase also helps preserve the environment; as the company states on its website, "by splitting the woodland into the ownership of hundreds of different people it ensures that no developer can ever acquire it and use it for their own gain, to the detriment of the area...the woodland is home to many species of Scottish flora and fauna, and it can be enjoyed by people as an area of peace, quiet, and tranquillity."



Cashmere Wrap

Sound of Iona

www.ionatartan.com

Iona is a small island off the coast of Scotland, running just 3 miles long and 1.5 miles wide. It is also known as one of the most sacred places on earth. Founded in 2014, Sound of Iona Tartan is a family run business whose roots on the tiny island go back to the 1700s. Generations of craftsmanship go into every one of their gorgeous items, including bedroom and living room throws, cushions, placemats, mugs, bowls, ceramics, ties, scarves, brooches, jewellery, handbags, wallets and more. Their signature piece, however, is a stunning Cashmere Wrap. Quality made with 100 per cent cashmere, the 50cm (w) x 155cm (l) wrap features the company's own unique tartan. Composed of light blue, white and pink pastels, and designed to mirror the lush landscape and lyrical seas of Iona, this warm and wonderful wrap will make an exquisite and elegant gift for that someone special this holiday season, or anytime of the year.



Book of Kells & Dublin Castle Tour

LetzGo City Tours

www.letzgocitytours.com

Rich and robust in history and heritage, Dublin is one of the world's great capital cities. Ideal for walking any time of the year, it is highly recommended to hire a guide when stepping out to see the sights. LetzGo City Tours gives both first-time and return visitors the opportunity to 'skip the line' to experience what has been called "the most precious object in the Western world" - the Book of Kells at Trinity College Dublin. Written between the 7th and 10th centuries (A.D.) in regional monasteries, the illuminated manuscript contains the four Gospels of the New Testament together with various prefatory texts and tables. After exploring the Book of Kells, the two-and-a-half-hour tour takes travellers across town, first to the 13th century Dublin Castle and Gardens, then to Ireland's only official statue of Molly Malone, before making stops at both the oldest shopping center in Europe, and Powerscourt Center. The tour runs daily during the winter months, and the company's 'skip the line' Guinness and whiskey tours also take place from Thursdays to Sundays throughout the season.



The Saga of the Latter-Day Celts

Liam O'Shiel

www.amazon.com

Books make wonderful gifts anytime of the year! This holiday season spoil the readers in your life with the Saga of the Latter-Day Celts series by Liam O'Shiel. At the dawn of the 30th Century, the Age of Machines sinks into ruin. Amongst the shattered remains in the British Isles, five Gaelic-speaking nations arise and band together, united by a common language and shared Celtic culture. These unique nations thrive in harmony for nine centuries...until a new Ice Age overspreads Europe, bringing on a Europe-wide struggle for food and arable land. In Eirelan, the Province of the Twenty Clans in Ireland celebrates its millennial year, joins Cornwall and Brittany in defeating Spanish sea pirates, and then mourns the death of thousands on the killing field of Mhisteala. In the Bleak Midwinter tells of all five Celtic Nations uniting to fight a new and dangerous Germanic enemy, a story to be concluded in The Blood Upon the Rose (2020). The Saga of the Latter-Day Celts is an epic tale of war and music, danger and poetry, combat on the high seas and quiet meals in pubs, and above all, of a noble people fighting for the right to live in harmony with the Earth.



The Ballyshannon Cross

McHarp; Crosses With Meaning
www.mcharpcrosses.com

The town of Ballyshannon is located on the western sea at the mouth of the River Erne in stunning Co. Donegal. Perhaps the most magical and mythical area of Eire, families of wild swans still live on the sheltered estuaries. Many ancient Irish legends and sagas have taken place across the region through the centuries, and it is thought that this is where the Celts and the Catholic Church first made contact. This gorgeous cross design is several centuries old and was first discovered near Ballyshannon. At the center is the sacred heart of Jesus, surrounded by rays of light, while the outer ring is believed to represent heaven. In the Ballyshannon Cross, the Christ heart represents our own hearts and the rays of light are symbolic of Christ's existence within our hearts, as he is the light of the world that shines through us. A thoughtful and timeless gift for family and friends of faith this Christmas.



Bilge Frames

Whisky Frames
www.whiskyframes.com

Ask anyone who loves a wee dram and they will tell you that there is something special and distinct about an aged whisky cask. Crafted from reclaimed Scotch Whisky barrels, Bilge Frames - from Edinburgh-based Whisky Frames - are a beautiful and unique gift idea for family and friends this holiday season. With a charred brewing lining on the back, the item's front is framed with antique, naturally weathered steel hoops from the barrel. The freestanding, front loading frame features a window for 4 x 6 landscape or portrait photos. Each picture is held in place with copper screws, and the product comes with wall-mounting hardware on the rear. Frames are individually numbered as part of an origin archive; simply enter the number into the archive and it will display which distillery or cooperage the barrel originated from. Bilge Frames can also be personalized with monogrammed rivets, laser engraved messages on the side of the frame, photo printing, or with an individual Clan Tartan as a background. A one-of-a-kind gift for that one-of-a-kind spirit lover in your life!



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Shepherds and Wise Men Medley



The holidays are almost upon us, and soon our thoughts will turn to planning for the fun and festivities.

Each Christmas, I think about the shepherds and the wise men. Both groups experienced a divine intervention - a revelation. The Shepherds were visited by an angelic host announcing the birth of the Savior. The wise men saw a star which became their guiding light and led them to the Christ child. Shepherds were an unkempt group; dirty and living in isolated poverty. Even so, God saw them as worthy of receiving the biggest news in the history of humanity. Though they may not have been the most influential men of Bethlehem, they understood how valuable they were to God. On the other hand, the Wise Men were educated, cultured and had travelled a great distance in search of truth. After following the star, they found the King they were

looking for and their lives were forever changed.

Both the Shepherds and Wise Men took these divine signs seriously and, in each case, that required an act of great faith. Similarly, we must all have faith to act on our own individual callings. The holiday season is a wonderful time of year to reflect upon, and perhaps reclaim, our purpose. How might we best serve the people in our life, and the world? Sometimes it can be as simple as preparing a fine meal to share with family and friends.

I created this recipe this summer due to a plethora of zucchini and tomatoes in our garden. I call it Shepherds & Wise Men Medley, and it was an instant hit! I wouldn't want to hazard a guess as to how many times it has graced our table since then, and I thought it would make a lovely Christmas dish with its festive reds and greens.

Ingredients

3 cups zucchini
3 cups tomatoes
2 large onions
2 tbsp. olive oil
2 tbsp. chicken broth powder
½ tsp. thyme
½ tsp. oregano
½ tsp. garlic powder

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a small bowl, combine thyme, oregano, garlic powder and chicken broth powder. Cut zucchini, tomatoes and onion into large bite-sized pieces. Mix spices with vegetables and drizzle with olive oil. Place into a flan pan and place in oven. Bake until tender, about 25 minutes. Then broil for 2-3 minutes, or until crisp and golden brown. Serve immediately, garnished with parsley, if desired.

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The Glory of Glenlassaugh



with **Andrew Ferguson**



When most people think of Scotland, I would expect that surfing is not among the first things that come to mind. However, on a recent visit to the Glenlassaugh Distillery that is exactly what we witnessed. Before us, on the beach, a trio of surfers was catching North Sea swells on Sandend Bay.

Geographically this area is roughly parallel with the southern tip of Norway and Churchill, Manitoba. And, although it was well into autumn, the temperatures are still in the low double digits, and the waters are warm.

Glenlassaugh Distillery was built during the Victorian Whisky Boom of the late 1800s to supply the explosion in demand for Blended Scotch Whisky. The facility was established at the eastern end of Sandend Bay, where the barley fields of the coastal belt meet the sea. As with many of the distilleries founded in this era, Glenlassaugh has been closed far more often than it has been open. Co-founded in 1875 by businessman Col. James Moir, and a local coppersmith, Thomas Wilson, Glenlassaugh operated for 18 years before a collapse in the industry forced them to sell. The new owners, Highland Distillers, kept the stills running until 1907, but owing to a collapse in demand and a glut of maturing stocks, the business closed, and would remain so for the next 53 years. Though there were a few years of intermittent production in the 1930s, it would take another whisky boom to revive Glenlassaugh's fortunes.

That boom started to percolate in the late 1950s, and by the 1960s the industry was humming along again. Many of the distilleries

that had managed to eke out a meagre existence in the intervening years were upgraded. Several other, long-closed distilleries - like Glenlassaugh and BenRiach - were brought back to life and modernized. In the case of Glenlassaugh, almost everything, save for a few cottages and the warehouses, had to be rebuilt. The distillery quickly earned a reputation for the quality of its spirit, becoming an important component in a number of blends. The post-war whisky boom continued until the late 1970s when it too, as in the Victorian era, turned to bust.

There were fewer distilleries at the end of the 1970s than at the end of the 19th century, but nevertheless the knife fell on many.

In all, 17 distilleries closed between 1983 and 1986, and Glenlassaugh was one of the last to be shuttered. In 2008, many whisky lovers - myself included - were taken aback when the Russian-backed Scaent Group purchased the Glenlassaugh Distillery, with plans to reopen it. Of all the distilleries that had closed, this was one of the least likely to reopen. Heading the group was a former William Grant & Sons distillery manager, Stuart Nickerson. The distillery was purchased for a not-insignificant sum, including about 400 casks of whisky, all pre-dating its closure in 1986. When they launched their first core range in 2008, it consisted of 21, 30, and 40-year-old whiskies.

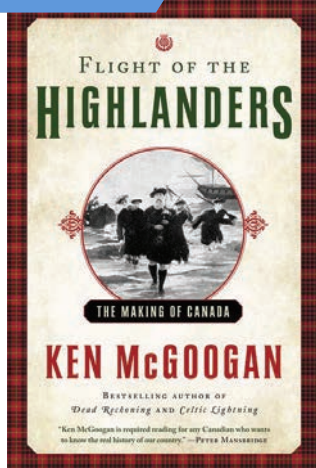
Glenlassaugh was acquired in 2013 by the BenRiach Distillery Co., headed by Billy Walker, which was itself acquired by Brown Forman in 2017. Billy put his own twist on the new make, lengthening fermentations and slowing distillations to enhance the fruit notes in the spirit - much as he had done at BenRiach, GlenDronach and now GlenAlachie. Still, most of the credit for the post-2008 whiskies being bottled must still go to Stuart Nickerson.

While the distillery still offers some excellent older whiskies - 30, 40 and 51-year-olds - they also have some lovely younger bottlings too - distilled after the reopening in 2008 - including Revival, Evolution and the peated Torfa. Significantly, as it has now been more than 11 years since Revival came to market, some of the post-2008 stocks are now more than a decade old. There is a lot of excitement around future bottlings from this distillery. All the whiskies, both young and old, are still in very capable hands. In 2017, 28-year industry veteran, Master Blender Rachel Barrie, took the reins. She is sure to put her mark on the whiskies also.

Glenlassaugh Distillery is located on the scenic coastal route A98, about 40 minutes from Elgin and an hour and a half from Aberdeen. The distillery is open for tours Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm. Tours and spacing are limited, so it is best to book ahead. I also recommend pairing a tour with a stop in the picturesque nearby town of Cullen, home of the namesake Cullen Skink soup!

www.glenlassaugh.com

www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



Flight of the Highlanders; The Making of Canada

By Ken McGoogan
Harper Collins
368pp / \$32.99

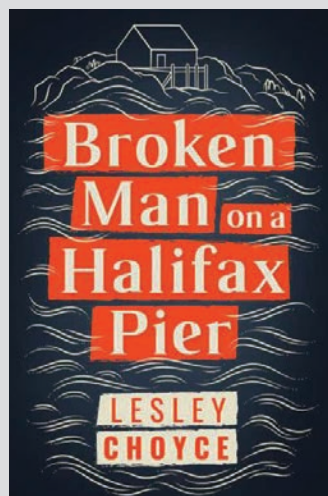
Bestselling author, and regular Celtic Life International contributor Ken McGoogan, deep dives into the historical horror of Scottish Highlanders in this terrific and timely tome. Spanning over a century, the scribe chronicles the terrible injustices brought on to families and communities by the British following the 1746

Battle of Culloden. While the cultural genocide of the Clearances showed the Brits at their worst, it brought out the best in the Scots, with tens of thousands of them setting sail for the New World and settling into new lives. More than a mere lesson in history, Flight of the Highlanders showcases the spirit of a people who sacrificed everything to preserve their culture and who were at the very core of constructing a new national identity. ~ SPC

Broken Man on a Halifax Pier

By Lesley Choyce
Dundurn
320pp / \$21.99

Fellow Celtic Life International contributor Lesley Choyce might well be the most prolific author in Canadian history - and perhaps in all literary history - having written almost 100 books across a variety of genres. His latest effort, Broken Man on a Halifax Pier takes its title from Stan Rogers' epic song Barrett's Privateers, and is equally moving and melodic in both its sweep and scope. The story of a chance encounter between a down-and-out middle-aged man and a younger, wise-beyond-her-years woman, the Nova Scotia-based narrative takes a number of interesting twists and turns as the pair revisit his small hometown. Introspective and revealing, the novel is reminiscent of Hesse's seminal work Steppenwolf in both its medium and message. A poignant, powerful perspective on life. ~ SPC



As Time Goes By

By Alice Taylor
O'Brien
240pp / €19.99

When Irish author Alice Taylor turned 80 this past January, she marked the occasion with a series of personal and profound musings and reflections. The resulting effort, As Time Goes By, is a selection of sweet and savoury short stories that succeed at capturing and conveying the mixed emotions that come with approaching one's twilight years. Warm, witty and wise, the work is more than a journal or personal diary; instead, the scribe details the world around her - particularly the people that populate her tiny home village of Inishannon - and, in the process, paints a stirring portrait of life in the Emerald Isle's quant countryside. Though Taylor shows no signs of slowing down, the book could close her career with a convincing coda. ~ SPC

Noel Cunningham's Guide to Modern Irish Manners

By Noel Cunningham
O'Brien Press
208pp / \$29.99

I love quirky books, and I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the good folks at O'Brien Press for a.) having the wherewithal to publish this tome and b.) making it magically appear in my mailbox. Renowned hotelier, media darling, and Donegal native Noel Cunningham brings manners to the masses with this modern-day take on etiquette. Subtitled 'Navigate Irish Life with Style' - though fitting for folks from all walks of life - this guiling guide covers everything from what to wear for all occasions, proper protocol for travel, popping the question, at-home hospitality, multicultural customs and more. True to form, the author does so in fine style, with grace, dignity, and a homespun humour that will keep readers smiling from Éire to ear. ~ SPC





Van Morrison

Three Chords and the Truth

The Bard of Belfast is back with his best work since, well, I wrote those exact same words about a year ago. The 74-year-old, multi award-winning musical master-craftsman has enjoyed a profound and prolific late-life run, releasing seven stunning albums in the last four years alone. Picking up where he left off with 2018's *The Prophet Speaks*, "Van the Man" shows both swagger and soul on all 14 songs, with guitars, keyboards, horns, and a 60s-style rhythm section laying a solid foundation for his familiar, easy-going vocals. With too many standout songs to list - and at a time when so many of his peers are pulling out - credit Morrison for not just staying in the game but playing at the top of it. ~ SPC

Rawlins Cross

Flying Colours

In celebration of their 30th anniversary, Atlantic Canadian Celtic crossovers Rawlins Cross have reconnected for a regional reunion tour in support of their new 7-song release *Flying Colours*. Not content to rest on their musical laurels - the band's 1993 smash hit *Reel 'n' Roll* is a Maritime mainstay at pubs, kitchen parties and hockey arenas - the sonic sextet brings new tunes to the table - the catchy and playful *Love Comes Around the Corner*, the gentle, countryish *Been a Long Time*, the brooding *Course Correction* and the brilliant, Wilco-esque *I Wonder* - all of which showcase the group's tremendous talent on an array of instruments, including guitars, keyboards, pipes, whistles, the bodhran, and salty vocals that tell tall tales from Canada's east coast. ~ SPC



Evans & Doherty

Here's to Song; A Christmas Collection

Call me a "homer," but this terrific 12-track selection of seasonal songs from Halifax-based duo Kevin Evans and Brian Doherty is destined to become an "instant classic" and a musical mainstay in many homes over the holidays. Lightly seasoned with spoken word, and heavily flavoured with soaring vocal harmonies and acoustic instruments, the album's gentle Celtic-country character is ideal for sitting by the fireplace with a glass of rum-infused eggnog, enjoying a Yuletide feast with family and friends, or simply singing along to while star-gazing on Christmas Eve. Highlights here include the jovial Christmas Medley, a glorious Gaelic *Silent Night*, a stirring live version of The Pogues' classic *Fairytale of New York*, and the clever, amusing *A Box of Candy* and *a Piece of Fruit*. ~ SPC

The Best of The Pipes of Christmas; Volume 2

Various Artists

Perhaps the most spirited Yuletide event in the northeast U.S. each holiday season, The Pipes of Christmas has entertained audiences in New York and New Jersey for over two decades. In recent years, viewers outside of the region have been able to enjoy the annual concert on television and online as well. After the resounding success of Volume 1, popular demand has pushed for a follow-up and Volume 2 delivers in grand style. A collection of live recordings from past shows, all mixed and mastered for exceptional sonic quality, the 15 works showcase an excellent ensemble of musical talent, and a collage of sounds and styles - all rooted in true Celtic tradition. Kudos to the Clan Currie; our ancient customs have never sounded better. ~ SPC



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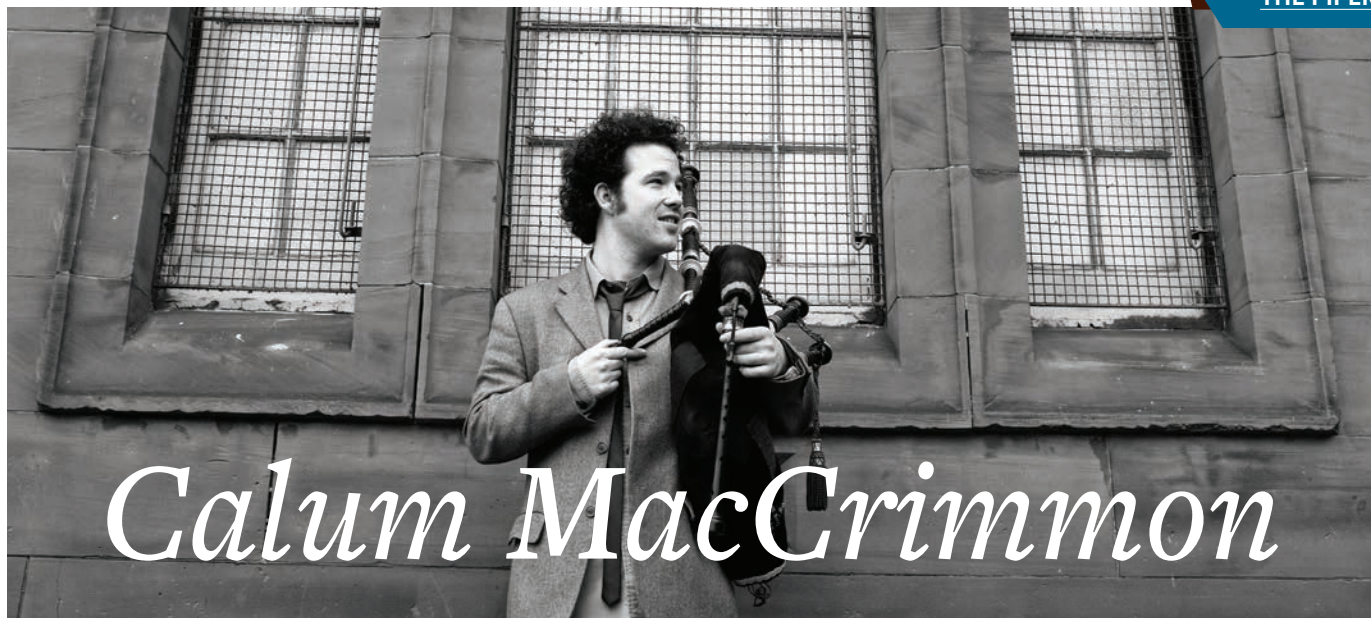
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Calum MacCrimmon

Calum MacCrimmon shares his passion for the pipes

Even before his family relocated to Scotland, Calum MacCrimmon was immersed in Scottish culture.

"I was born in Regina, Saskatchewan but grew up mainly in Edmonton, Alberta until I was about 9 years old," shares the 37-year-old via email from his home in Glasgow. "I have been based in Scotland since 1991 when my family moved over from Edmonton."

"My dad and grandpa both played the pipes," he continues. "I was surrounded by piping and pipe bands from an early age. I started piping in Canada, and my first lessons were with a local Pipe Major - and family friend - Arnie Stone in Edmonton. After moving to Scotland, I started taking lessons through the City of Dundee Pipe Band."

MacCrimmon drew inspiration from the traditional sounds of his surroundings, and still pays homage to those roots by using his late grandfather Malcolm's set of pipes to this day. He is not beholden to the letter of tradition, however, allowing himself to draw upon other, more contemporary sources.

"I am not sure if the greater piping community would see me as a traditionalist or some sort of outsider," he admits. "Perhaps I am a bit of both. I certainly enjoy the classic Scottish repertoire as well as sourcing rarer tunes from the old collections."

"In stark contrast to this, I find great fulfillment writing and singing funk and country songs in a band called Man's Ruin. I am always looking for new influences to incorporate into my own playing. Jamming along to a steady groove is still quite unique in pip-

ing and is now found mostly in the folk music scene. Playing alongside the guitar and bass for years has allowed me to feel more comfortable with this kind of approach."

"I guess that I am a bit of a mixed bag...Mixed Bag! There's the title for my next solo piping album!"

Like all artists, MacCrimmon - today a proud core member of world-renowned Scottish folk troupe Breabach - finds joy in creating something new from scratch. But even more so, he appreciates the way those creations can bring him closer with others.

"I love the social aspect of a musical lifestyle - this is probably why I have prioritized performing for so long. It started with pipe bands before I migrated to the folk scene, and I have been playing in folk bands professionally for about 15 years now."

"It is also very rewarding to play the pipes for an important event, and marking an occasion with music. These experiences always remind me that the pipes are a highly emotional instrument, and that people can be quite moved when a tune is being performed at a wedding, a funeral, or some other significant gathering."

Even his career highlights are less about the personal achievements of his professional craft, and more about the experiences

that he has had with his bands along the way.

"There have been so many wonderful tours, energized festivals and charming gigs over the years. Perhaps a general highlight for me has been being able to visit different parts of the world. Over the last half-decade, especially, we have performed in Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Qatar, Norway, Sweden and many other amazing places. Quite often, we are invited to take part in a folk music event which allows us to meet new friends as well as experiencing authentic traditional music and culture from these countries."

MacCrimmon is optimistic about the future of piping, believing that it has never been in a better place generally.

"I am proud to see how well supported it is today from many angles, including the competitive piping scene, the teaching institutions, the avenues of folk music, education and, of course, all of the great parents," he says, adding, "thanks Mom and Dad!"

As for the future, he jokes "2020 sounds like a date out of some post-apocalyptic, dystopian novel. Having said that, I am hoping to buy a house next year with my wife, work on a second solo album - possibly of songs rather than pipe tunes - and I am confident that Breabach will be stirring up some sort of new project or album next year, so keep your ears to the ground!"

www.calummacrimmon.co.uk

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Haley Richardson

Haley Richardson is changing the future of the Irish fiddle

Music was destined to be a part of Irish fiddler Haley Richardson's life.

"My parents always had music of different genres playing around the house when I was young," she recalls via email. "My brothers and I were home-schooled, and my mom invited each of us to choose an instrument to learn. I picked the violin at two-and-a-half years old and I started learning classical violin through the Suzuki method at three years of age."

Richardson's love of traditional Irish music came a few years later, and almost completely by accident.

"My mom saw a poster in our library for a Kevin Burke concert when I was about five. She thought I might like to hear a different genre of music on the instrument I was learning. I fell in love with the music imme-

diately and remember telling her, 'I want to play like that.'"

Today, the 17-year-old musician - who resides in New Bern, North Carolina when she is not on the road - considers her style to be a mix of classical violin and Irish fiddle.

"I think I have a traditional sound, but I try to add a little of my own style and personality into my music. Some of my biggest influences have been my teacher, Brian Conway, who introduced me to the fiddlers of the past. I love listening to Michael Coleman and Andy McGann, and Liz Carroll's creativity in composing is inspiring."

"A good song has basic elements of familiarity and repetition, but also a few surprising twists and turns to keep things interesting."

Richardson - who plays a Barry Dudley 5-string fiddle - notes that her own creative process is a mix of inspiration and perspiration.

"When I am composing, I generally try to stray away from sitting down and forcing myself to begin writing a tune. Once I start composing, melodies come naturally, and phrases will pop into my head. Then, if I like the way they are coming together, I will work to compose the rest of the phrases to bring a tune together."

Though still quite young, she has already enjoyed an extremely fruitful career.

"One of the biggest highlights so far has been fiddling with Riverdance this past summer in Dublin. I have also won both the Junior (2015) and Senior (2018) Fiddler of Dooney competitions, as well as several All Ireland championships.

"I have three recordings out," she continues. "The first, Heart on a String, was done with my brother, Dylan, when I was twelve.

Then I produced a charity CD to raise money for an orphanage - The Mercy Centre, in Bangkok, Thailand

- called Music for Mercy, which includes tracks donated by a number of my young musician friends. Most recently, I teamed up with Canadian multi-instrumentalist Quinn Bachand for an album called When the Wind Blows High and Clear, which I am very happy with. All of this has been so rewarding, and I especially love all of the travel I get to experience and the people I meet and perform with along the way."

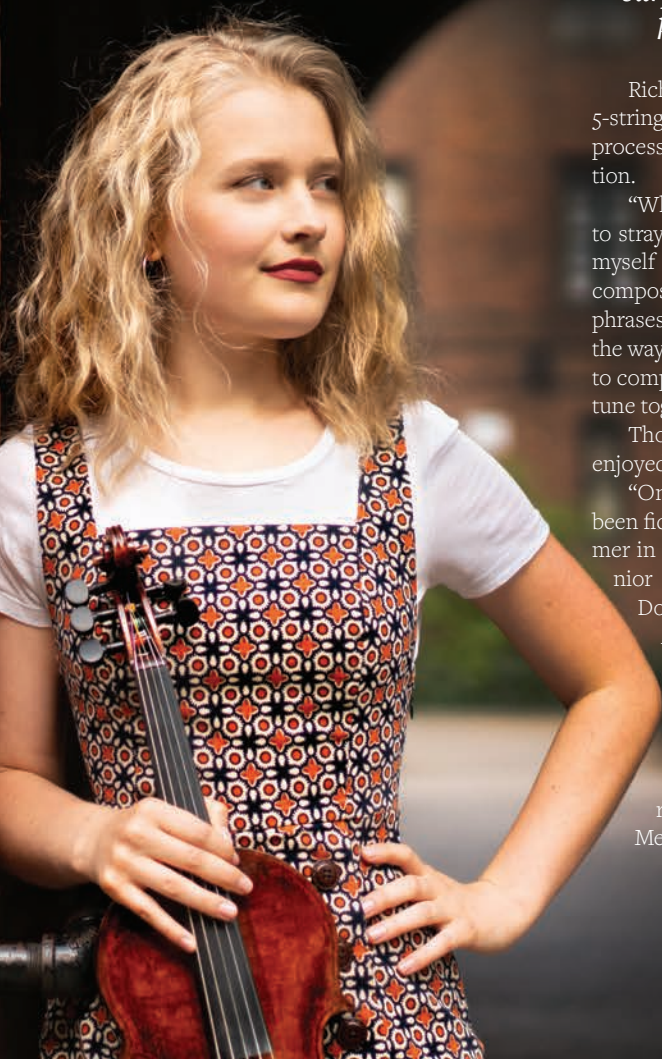
In addition to playing music, Richardson is extremely passionate about the promotion and preservation of Celtic culture and music amongst younger generations.

"A lot of young people are still interested in fiddling. If you attend any Fleadh Cheoil, there are many great young players competing and playing in sessions. I do think that attendance at live music events is an issue, though. The crowd at performances tends to be older, and parents should make a better effort to take their children to more events and expose them to live music. There is a lot being done, but much of it is word of mouth or learned about through those already involved in the community, especially here in the United States. You have to be involved in the community to a certain extent in order to be aware of all the available opportunities."

She believes that the key to success is education and exposure.

"There are a number of things that can be done, including encouraging younger generations to be more involved by getting them out to events like dances and concerts and making those who are learning about the culture - be it language, music, etc. - feel more welcome and included. Also, it would help if those who are already involved in Irish culture better understand aspects that they are not directly involved in; those in Irish dancing should know about Irish music and vice versa and everyone should support one another."

www.haleyrichardsonmusic.com



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Lowri Jones

Lowri Jones promotes and preserves the art of Welsh dance

Growing up in a Welsh-speaking home on the island of Anglesey in north-west Wales, dancer Lowri Jones can't remember a time when she wasn't immersed in the country's culture.

"My mother danced with the local team and taught Welsh folk dancing," recalls the 29-year-old via email. "I was lucky that my childhood summer holidays revolved around dance trips, and it has been a recent revelation that this was not the norm for my peers."

Jones sometimes struggled to explain the art to her friends, especially with regard to the costume - usually a shawl, a dress and an apron. However, she stuck with it, and eventually followed in her mother's footsteps, joining the local dance team.

"This was also the year I began to learn Welsh clog dancing and that added another dimension of fun to the practice.

"As a young person, I find that there are many other young dancers, but we are often the children of dancers. It is slightly harder to attract young adults who are new to dancing. However, one aspect that completely defies this trend is Welsh clog dancing, which is hugely popular these days, with many looking for lessons for their children."

Although Jones left Wales for university, she returned after her studies and now resides in the town of Caernarfon. She has enjoyed several opportunities to travel outside of the country for dance since then and remembers the "buzz" she felt performing in Poland.

"I was part of a 30-strong team performing a heavy, 45-minute program at the huge Beskid Highlander Week of Culture. I had never seen a crowd like it - and they were all watching us!"

In 2009, she performed with the clogging squad for Y Glerorfa (Welsh Folk Orchestra) at Le Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Brittany.



"More recently, I am still recovering from another trip to France with the group. Although the stages were smaller, it is always so wonderful to experience other countries, their culture and their food."

Jones has also taken the stage closer to home, competing at the Millennium Centre in Cardiff.

"Dancing is a social activity, and I enjoy the chance to connect with so many people, of all ages, that I may not see otherwise."

"This applies to both weekly rehearsals, where my team has had dancers spanning in age from 16 to 80-something, as well as national events."

Along with her personal dancing ventures, Jones is a member of the Welsh Folk Dance Society (WFDS), a decades-old organization "which supports, maintains and extends Welsh traditional dancing throughout Wales and the world." The society has hundreds of members and recently celebrated its 70th anniversary.

The WFDS hosts two major events in Wales annually; the National Urdd Eisteddfod (for young people up to age 25) and the National Eisteddfod. Both are week-long travelling events.

"Welsh folk dance has a place in the Eisteddfod with annual competitions for solo and group folk dancers and clog dancers," says Jones, noting that National Eisteddfod

boasts 150,000 attendees over the course of the festival. In addition to dance, there are competitions spanning everything from folk singing, recitation and cerdd dant, which she describes as "a unique form of Welsh singing to the accompaniment of a harp, where the singer and the harp have different tunes."

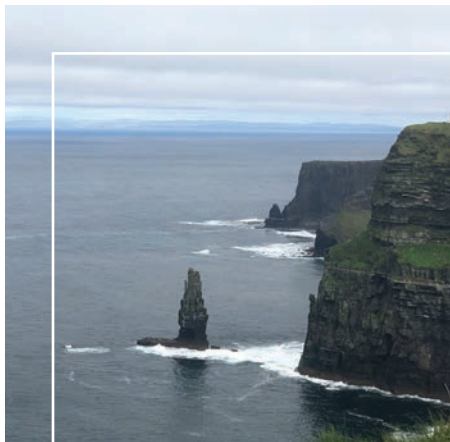
"The Welsh Folk Dance Society is an important focal point for Welsh folk dance activity. It sets standards for competitions and competition adjudicators, and promotes learning about folk dance in Wales - encouraging research into old folk dances, folk costume and folk-dance music."

She adds that the Welsh folk dance scene has a welcoming, family-like feel. And, although the challenge can be motivating oneself to practice - especially when there isn't a specific event for which to rehearse - the payoffs are connection, companionship and adventures.

In the future, Jones would like to see greater support for dance, and traditional Welsh culture in general.

"Folk dance is a great way to bridge the language divide, and a way to bridge the generations also. More needs to be done to encourage larger numbers of young people to use the language daily and to help them further explore the country's rich cultural traditions."

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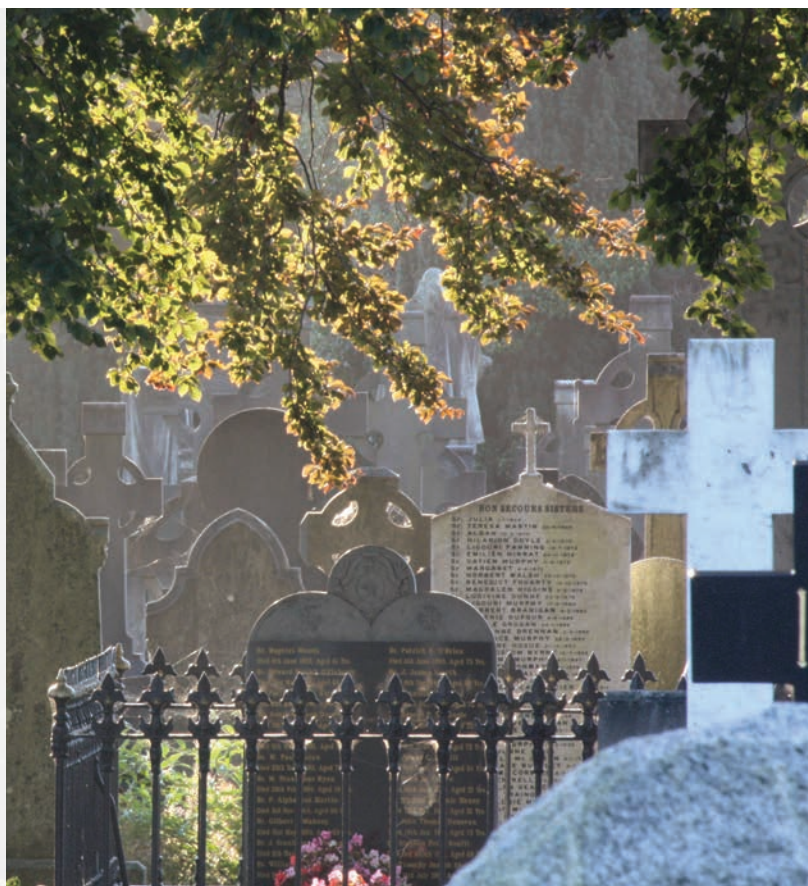
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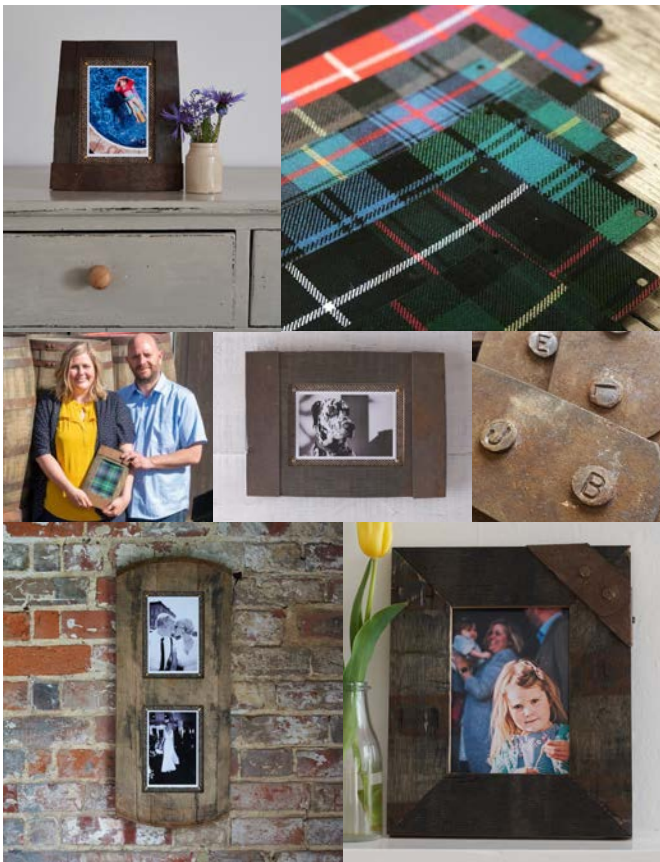
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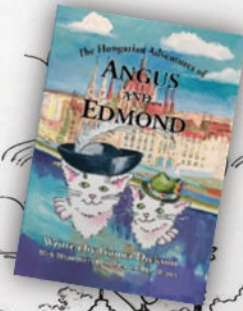
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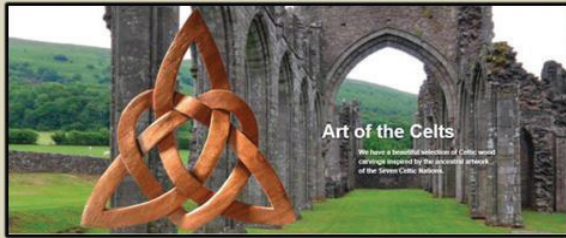


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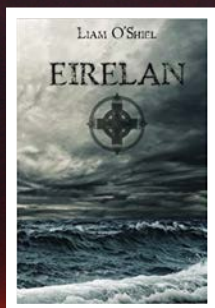


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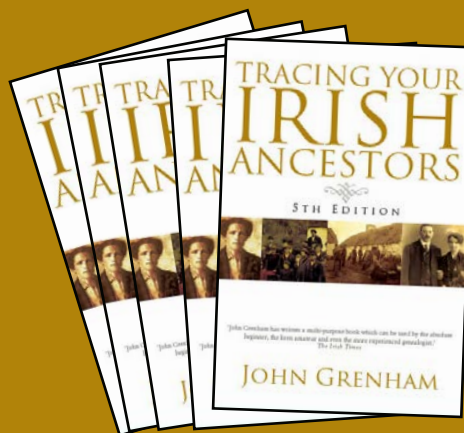
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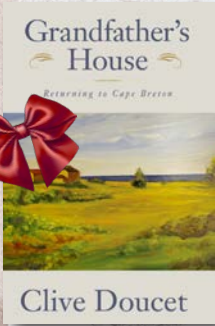
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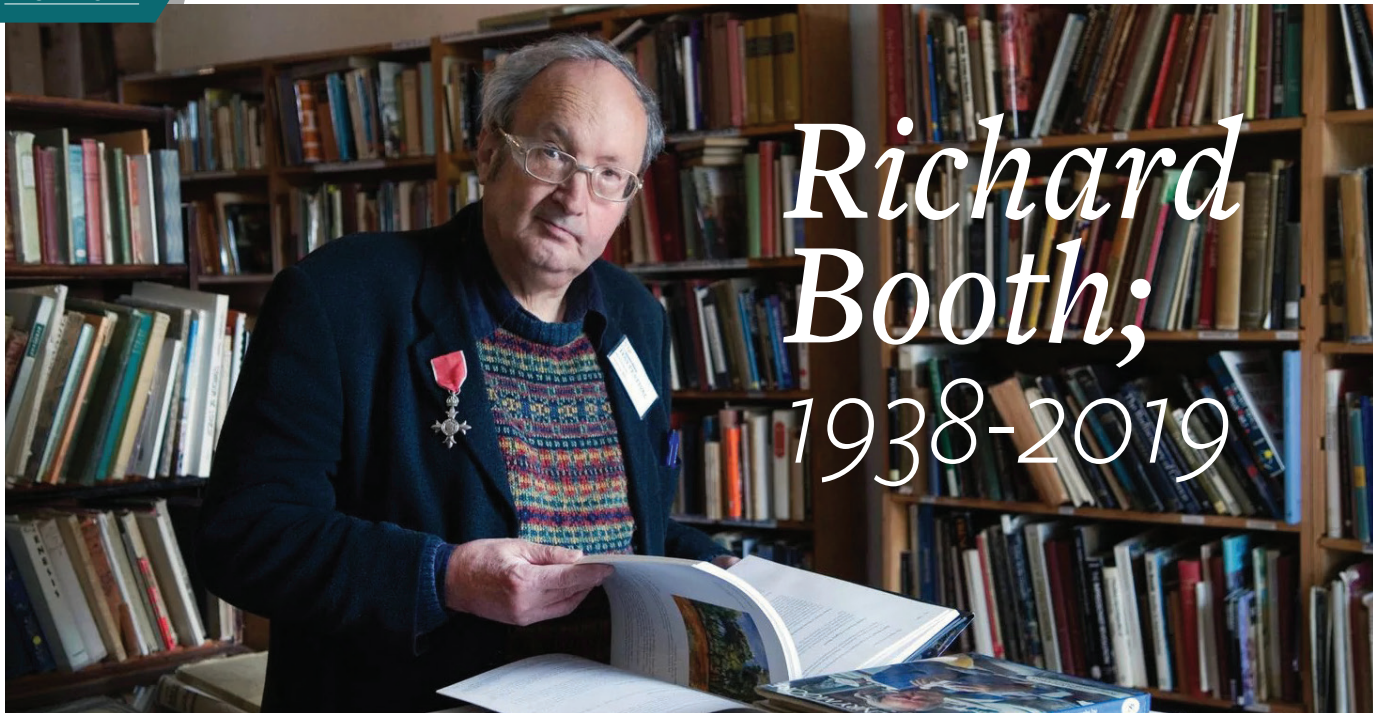
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The self-proclaimed “King of Hay,” Richard Booth of Hay-on-Wye, Wales, passed away recently at the age of 80.

A world-renowned bookseller, Booth was an eccentric man who gained the attention of media and others through his many unique and thought-provoking stunts.

One example of his unconventional-ity took place on April Fools’ Day in 1977; upset with red-tape democracy in Hay-on-Wye, Booth proclaimed himself King of his hometown, proclaiming it, henceforth, as an independent kingdom. Follow up stunts included naming his horse Prime Minister, knighting crowd members at his inauguration, developing a secret service known as the C.I.Hay, and issuing his own passports. At that time, his quirky idea put the little town of less than 2,000 people on the map.

Accordingly, the Welsh government was forced to respond, ensuring area residents that Hay was not, in fact, an autonomous realm. Locals rejoiced in the response, as it only served to make the ordeal all-the-more enjoyable for Booth, who was notorious in his disdain of both bureaucracy and big business.

His dissatisfaction with government was only topped by his love for books, a life-long passion that found firm footing while studying history at Oxford.

Booth opened his first bookstore in 1961, stocking his shelves with new and used titles found at failing literary facilities in the U.S. and elsewhere. In time, his locale in Hay be-

came a safe haven for readers, writers, and for those with a passion for discussing and debating ideas.

Booth believed that “booktowns” - a term he coined himself - could be a sustainable way to revive local economies in rural areas.

By the early 1980s, the town boasted upwards of 30 bookstores, six of which belonged to Booth, including Richard Booth’s Bookshop, which was once the world’s largest secondhand bookstore. The location is still standing today and has been run by Elizabeth Haycox since 2007. Eventually, Booth opened another, similar shop - The King of Hay - which he owned and operated until his death.

Because of his penchant for the printed page - and his desire to support writers and their wares by luring readers from big-ticket booksellers such as Barnes & Noble, Chapters, Waterstones, Amazon and others - Hay became known around the world as “the Mecca of Books.”

For his efforts, which led to more than half-a-million visiting Hay each year, Booth was awarded the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 2004.

His work was recognized internationally as well, earning him an honorary lifetime

position as President of the International Organization of Booktowns. Booktowns across the world also recognized that they owed their existence and continued success to him.

“Representatives of every booktown around the world spoke his name in reverent tones, keenly aware that without him the entire network would probably never have been established,” said Alex Johnson from Fine Books Magazine.

Booth’s love of letters eventually resulted in the creation of the Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts, an annual event that former U.S. President Bill Clinton called “the Woodstock of the mind.” And while Booth did not develop the event himself, it would not have existed without him.

His own personal collection of novels was so dear to him that it is believed that when his modest home caught fire, Booth had to be restrained by firefighters (tied to a tree!) to prevent him from re-entering the inferno to retrieve his priceless tomes.

His passing hit home with those in his hometown, all of whom knew him well.

“When we heard the news everyone was very low,” said bookseller Anne Brichto “It was a bit like when Princess Di died. There won’t be a person like him again.”

Booth’s funeral service, and subsequent tributes and gatherings, were attended by thousands of literary lovers from around the world.



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