

VOL. 31 NO. 1 | \$5.95 CDN/USA | FEBRUARY 2017 | CELTICLIFE.COM

CelticLife

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

INSIDE!

*The Celtic
Traveler*

*Alexandre
Trudeau*

*Celtic
Woman*

Celebrating **Scotland**



**EMMA DONOGHUE, RHYTHM IN THE NIGHT, STONEHENGE
WINTER FASHION, JOHN MCDERMOTT, CELTIC MAGIC**

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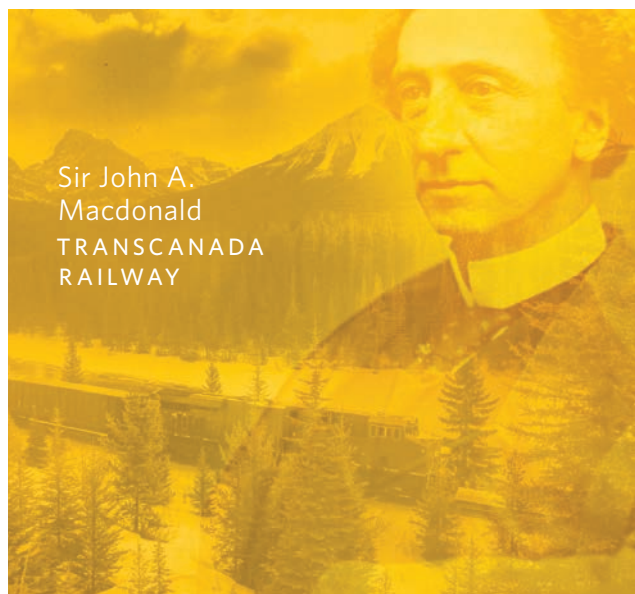
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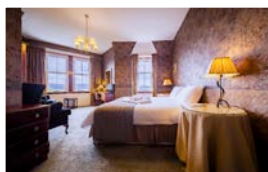
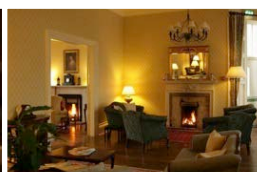
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Marie: Your guide to Scotland



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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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Please send review books and CDs to:
223 Bluewater Road, Bedford,
NS, Canada B4B 1H1

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

Publication Mail Registration:
No. 40050439 ISSN 1918-0497

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

Canada

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Fáilte!

Senator John Buchanan was Premier of Nova Scotia in 1979 when the first International Gathering of the Clans was held outside of Scotland. That year, in conjunction with that celebration, the first production of the Nova Scotia International Tattoo was performed in Halifax. Premier Buchanan and his Department of Tourism were instrumental in making it happen. Strategic planning for these events began two years prior, and with it, the birth of Celtic Life International.

In 1987, a newsletter was produced, with the support of the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and the Federation of Scottish Clans in Nova Scotia, to assist in the planning of the 1989 International Gathering. It was called The Clansman. In 2017, its successor, Celtic Life International, will celebrate its 30th anniversary.

Over those three decades, and with many editorial and technical improvements, the publication has evolved from The Clansman to Celtic Heritage to Celtic Life, and now, Celtic Life International, the latter better reflecting our global reach.

Digital publishing and social media now afford us the opportunity (and the responsibility) of reaching millions of Celts around the world each day. In an effort to better serve our growing audience, we will be introducing a number of improvements over the coming year, both in print and online.

In this issue, we have initiated several stylistic changes, including the repositioning of the Clan listings pages. Clans will soon enjoy a much stronger presence on our new website, launching over the coming months in concert with our 30th anniversary celebrations.

Thirty years have gone by too fast. As I reflect on the past twelve months, 2016 has been tumultuous in many respects, but there has been much to cheer about as well; for my wife and I, the marriage of our daughter Alison to Glenn Tindle, and the birth of another grandchild, Isabel Maria, made 2017 most memorable.

2016 was also a year of unexpected events. It is concerning to see that many matters were influenced by what is now referred to as "Fake News" - something that has quickly found its way into almost every level of global society, from politics and big business to our local communities.

In our increasingly-connected world, technology allows for speed to take precedence over truth and transparency - a false tweet can go viral within hours, even minutes. It appears that honesty is no longer a priority, so long as the information fits our narrative and desired outcome. The manipulation of facts has become a real threat to the democratic process.

In this issue, we talk with Alexandre Trudeau about his new book, *Barbarian Lost*. His refreshing perspective on the current state of global affairs demonstrates a concern for truth and transparency.

Like Trudeau, our hope is to take Celtic Life International to even greater heights of truth and transparency over the coming year. Since 1987, we have been striving to better serve our Celtic community with an ongoing commitment to entertaining, educational and engaging content. Here's hoping for another thirty years of the same.

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

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You Want it Darker

Stephen Patrick Clare
Managing Editor

PHOTO CREDIT: CELTIC LIFE

2016

has come and gone. Where did it go? Regardless, and in retrospect, it has been, in many ways, a most tumultuous twelve months.

Many of my own personal heroes - Muhammad Ali, David Bowie, Prince, Toots Thielemans, Sharon Jones, Merle Haggard, Abe Vigoda, John Glenn, and countless others - left us, having left the world a much better and greatly changed place in their wake.

Nothing could have prepared me, however, for the departing of singer-poet-ladies' man extraordinaire - and fellow Montrealer - Leonard Cohen.

A chance encounter with the "godfather of gloom" outside of Schwartz Hebrew Deli in that city's Plateau district in 1989 led to a number of warm and wonderful interviews in the years that followed. Despite his reputation as the "prince of pessimism", I found Cohen to be one of the funniest men I have ever spoken with. Quick and clever with a wry, dry wit, he was both poignant and playful at once.

Interestingly, on the day of his passing - November 7 - while in Montreal celebrating my mother's 75th birthday with family and friends, I passed by both his childhood home in Westmount, and later, his sparse, bohemian abode near Boulevard Saint-Laurent, the daunting lyrics and haunting melodies of his latest work, "You Want it Darker," wrapped around my soul.

The following day, another huge shock of sorts took place south of our border, when Donald Trump was elected as the 45th President of the United States.

It was a seismic shift in the U.S. political and cultural landscape - one that both shook and shocked the world.

I have never been one to take political sides, believing that if voting could really make a difference, it would be illegal. While some might find that position to be dark, and even desolate (blame Leonard Cohen), my issue with "democracy" is not with the idea itself, but rather with the system that it employs.

After having my eyes opened wide more than a decade ago with the documentary film "The Corporation", and more recently, with the "Zeitgeist" trilogy on Netflix, there is no way for me to ever close them again. Noam Chomsky's latest series of interviews, chronicled in "Requiem for the American Dream" (also Netflix), is also a must watch for those interested in the faulty mechanics of "democracy."

All that said, Trump's trumping of Hillary Clinton signals the end of an era in U.S. politics. Gone, for now, are the old-school elite with their privileged lives and sense of entitlement. Taking their place is...a new-school elite with their privileged lives and sense of entitlement. "Meet the new boss - he's the same as the old boss..."

I own property in South Carolina, and I have been down there several times over the last year (unless you are under twelve years of age, wintertime in Canada sucks). South Carolina, in case you missed it, is largely Trump Nation: rebel flags, country music,

NASCAR, etc. As a foreigner, I was often asked where I stood on the U.S. election. As a typical Canadian, I politely begged off the answer. Apologetically, of course.

Several friends there tried to make their case for Trump: "he stands for the average American," "he'll show the Russians, the Chinese and the Mexicans who's boss," "anyone's better than that crook Hillary," etc.

The only valid argument I heard, however, came from a close friend in New York City, who said that "America is a business, and we need a businessman with business sense to lead the country." He then added, "Plus, he has Scottish heritage on his mother's side...how bad can he really be?"

Touché, amigo, touché.

Still, the belief that any one person can "make America great again" is a farce. Make no mistake about it; America is great because *the idea of America is great.*

The fundamental principles upon which the USA were founded are sound and true. Those standards of freedom and equality are most prevalent in the daily lives of the country's people, not in their government or corporate culture. By their nature, Americans are generous, intelligent, kind and welcoming. Only time will tell if their leader reflects those higher qualities, or carries on in his usual brash, boorish, often offensive and embarrassing "self-will-run-riot" capacity.

If the latter, then I have no doubt that the citizens of the "land of the brave and the home of the free" will have something to say about it.

You want it darker? Get ready.

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My husband and I have just retired and we are looking to travel to Ireland for the first time this year. Any suggestions on where to go and what to see? ~ Patricia Lawlor, Kentucky, USA

Hi Patricia, thanks for the note. For a first visit anywhere, I always recommend an all-inclusive, week-long coach tour. While some say that these excursions might seem a bit too 'touristy' for their liking, with so much to do and see it is best to leave your first-time travels in the hands of professionals who can cover the highlights both efficiently and cost-effectively. Many guides are experts in local lore, as well, adding further colour to your overall experience. Your other option is to rent a car and self-tour, though remember that the Irish drive on the wrong side of the road! Either way, Ireland always has plenty to offer. Dublin, with its rich history and culture, is a great city for walking, and be sure to visit Galway on the west coast. From there you can choose to go south to the stunning Ring of Kerry or north to beautiful Donegal, from where you can hop over to Derry and Belfast. Happy trails!

I would like to learn more about whisky, especially single malts. Where do I start? ~ Stuart Shepperd, Winnipeg, Canada

Hi Stuart. Given the explosion in popularity of whisky in recent years, there is no shortage of resources available to get you going, especially online. As with most things, however, there is such a glut of information on the internet that it might be difficult to decipher the right from the wrong. The good news is that there are now many local whisky societies who meet regularly to host tastings and learning seminars. Not only will you enjoy sampling the fare (watch yourself though!), but you will meet and make lifelong friends who share similar interests. Keep in mind that whisky - and single malts in particular - are all about your personal preference; price, reviews, reputation in the marketplace, country of origin, years aged, etc, are less a factor than most might think. As my late father once told me, a good whisky is one you enjoy. Sláinte!



After more than two years researching my family tree, I've learned that we are descendants of the Gregors of Glenorchy. Where do I take my newfound knowledge from here? ~ Elizabeth King, Perth, Australia

Elizabeth - you are in luck; the Clan Gregor Society is one of the most active anywhere in the world, with an estimated 2,500 members globally. Like many clan organizations, its members regularly attend a variety of

Highland Games and Celtic Festivals each year, sharing information and best practices. As the group is non-profit, and run entirely by volunteers, there are plenty of opportunities for you to get involved and contribute. Your best bet is to start online; the Society's website - www.clangregor.com - is chock full of resources, with genealogical data, an online forum, a vast library of audio and visual components, and links for membership application and contact. From there, you might consider setting up your own regional gatherings - word is that there are plenty of good Scots in the land down under!

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



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one

Irish-Canadian plays Anne of Green Gables

It's no surprise that an Irish girl will play the lead in a new Anne of Green Gables series- simply titled "Anne"- slated for CBC and Netflix in 2017. A Donegal-based teen has been cast as the title character, Anne Shirley. Amybeth McNulty, age 14, tried out for the role along with nearly 2,000 other young actresses, and made the cut after auditioning online from her home. Appropriately - seeing as the story takes place on Prince Edward Island - McNulty has ties to Canada as well: her mother is Canadian.

two

Something fishy

A Cornish fisherman was in for a struggle when he caught a particularly large fish off the coast of Falmouth. One day at sea, near the end of October, Alan Wright spent three hours reeling in a 300-pound Atlantic bluefin tuna, a species that can live up to 40 years. They're classified as endangered, so Wright and his crew did the proper thing by returning the tuna to the water - but not before snapping a photo to remember it by.

three

Manx business blooms

Who knew there was a gold standard for florists? The Good Florist Guide says so, and has named a Manx business as one of the best on the British Isles. The Flower Studio - based in Tynwald Mills, St. John's - delivers all the way across the Isle of Man. It allows customers to walk in and pick their own flowers by hand, provides workshops for those who want to get pointers from the pros, and even boasts that its designers are familiar with the "language of flowers."

four

Wolf pups

The European wolf can be found in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and Western Russia. Now, a pack is making its home in Scotland for the first time in a dozen years. The six pups - Fearn, Eadha, Rose, Cora, Darach and Simon - are living at the RZSS Highland Wildlife Park, where they are free to roam in a 4,500-square-metre enclosure. The cubs were born last June, and park staff say they have been thriving in recent months. Wolves are no longer found in the wild in Scotland, as they were hunted to extinction by the mid-1700s.

five

Green Brittany

Brittany, France is being called one of the most eco-friendly tourist destinations in the world. The Sustainable Destinations Top 100 has placed it in the company of three other locations in Celtic countries, as well as such travel spots as Bali and Bhutan. Nominated regions must comply with the Sustainable Destinations' 15 core criteria to be considered. The report notes that Brittany has embraced principles of sustainability for the last 10 years. The region is applauded for its commitment to improve the quality of water in its rivers, preserve coastal lines and develop renewable energy sources.

six

Korean Welsh

Do you know how to pronounce cwttch? What about ach-y-fi? Seong-Jae Kong (or Korean Billy, as he is known on YouTube) decided to give it a try. The popular vlogger hopes to educate people about different dialects from around the world, and one of his more recent videos features phrases from Wales. Kong reminds his viewers that his Welsh English accent isn't perfect, but those dishing out the comments don't seem to mind. "As a Welsh man this is awesome! What a good selection of words," says one viewer.

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

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Paul Griffiths and Rik Jones

Two Cornish businessmen are helping local volunteers in Liskeard by doing charitable work of their own. Paul Griffiths and Rik Jones recently teamed up to make purple polo shirts for the members of the Liskeard Community Chest, a non-profit organization which redistributes donated furniture, houseware and appliances to people living on low income. The specially-designed threads will make the team easier to recognize as they go about their duties. According to the Cornish Times, the Chest was started a year ago by Wendy Julian, who launched the charity using money out of her own pocket. Unfortunately, Julian passed away from cancer not long afterwards. Her five daughters have continued running the Chest in her place, however, and - thanks to Griffiths and Jones - they and their team will be quickly spotted by people in need. Griffiths owns BS Embroidery, a company which specialises in workwear, uniforms and promotional clothing, and has been in business for more than 20 years. Jones owns and operates Tramiki Supplies Ltd. Together, they have given recognition to a group of Liskeard-based heroes - and for that, they deserve a little recognition as well.



Julie Stokes

Julie Stokes is the chair of the Manx Breast Cancer Support Group, a charity which seeks to improve breast care service on the Isle of Man. About three years ago, the group began fundraising for the creation of the Symptomatic Breast Clinic at Nobles Hospital in Douglas. Prior to that, Manx patients would often have to travel to the United Kingdom for breast reconstruction surgery. In some cases, they might have to wait for years to receive the operation. Thanks to Stokes and her team, breast cancer-related procedures, including subsequent breast reconstruction, can now take place on the island. The group raised £1.8 million to build and equip the unit, which opened in February 2016, and they haven't stopped there. In addition to medical needs, they are also striving to meet the emotional demands of patients: 'Quiet rooms' - sponsored by Manx companies - are now a part of the clinic site as well. "These rooms are extremely important when patients have been given bad news," Stokes recently told Isle of Man News. "You can be given time to get yourself together, have a cuppa' and then exit quietly via the side door without having to leave the unit through a waiting room full of patients."



Ron Jones

Ron Jones - a military veteran from Newport, Wales - is believed to be the oldest poppy seller in Britain. He's been working for the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal for the last three decades. Now, at age 99, Jones has lived a long and eventful life. He's even released a book about his experiences, titled *The Auschwitz Goalkeeper*. That name comes from his time in the forced labour camp E715, which was part of the Auschwitz complex where he was taken as a prisoner of war more than 70 years ago. Each Sunday, Jones played as the goalkeeper on a Welsh team when playing football with other captured soldiers. "It's important everyone wears a poppy to remember what other generations went through for them," Jones recently told ITV. "I love selling poppies... it's a good chance to have a natter and share a yarn with people. They love hearing our stories." Jones has since retired from selling poppies - he no longer has a car and has had to rely on others to transport him to Tesco at the Harlech Retail Park, where he once sold the flower pins - but members of the Royal British Legion continue to call him a "true hero."



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Burns Night Celebration

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The University Club,
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Salute the Scottish bard in style this year with the 22nd annual Burns Night Celebration at one of Manhattan's most prestigious venues, The University Club. The American Scottish Foundation spares no expense here, with a glamorous opening reception - including a proper whisky tasting - setting the stage for an engaging evening of entertainment. Guests are piped in for dinner, where Kenneth C. Donnelly, President of the Robert Burns Society of New York, will recite Burns' famous Address to a Haggis. A silent auction, a raffle, music and dancing are guaranteed to keep guests on the go until well after midnight. Both group and individual tickets are available, and formal dress is recommended.

www.americanscottishfoundation.com



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www.whiskylive.com

If you can't go south this winter, Manhattan is the place to be over the coming months. Here are some suggestions on taking a bite out of The Big Apple.

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Daniel GreenWolf

A rich thread of magic is woven through the tapestry of Celtic culture, rooted in the myths and legends of yore

"Magic is a great way for me to express my opinions and my heritage, which is primarily Irish, Swedish, Russian, Polish and French Canadian, while connecting with children and adults in a very childlike way," shares the Connecticut resident by email.

As with all illusionists, GreenWolf thrives on the awe that audiences experience when confronted with something they were not expecting or did not think possible.

"It gets people to think and be skeptical at the same time," he muses. "It is very paradoxical, and I love that element of what I do."

The 31-year-old performer credits his mother and father with sparking his interest in magic at a young age.

"My parents have always been storytellers, and being Wiccan - a polytheistic religion focused mainly on nature - and fantasy geeks, they always made sure we got a healthy dose of magical tales in our lives."

The youngster was also inspired watching magician Jeff McBride on television.

"He was wearing this outfit that looked like something out of Lord of the Rings, and he was doing an act with masks and cards that was unlike anything I had ever seen before."

GreenWolf's first mentor, Joe Lantiere, introduced him to the Inner Circle of Bizarre Magick, a small organization of ambitious magicians who aimed to be more than mere birthday party illusionists.

"They combined stories with unique visual artistry to create a different kind of magic. Sometimes darker, sometimes ritual-like, sometimes silly, but always magic with a meaning. I was instantly drawn to it."

He also found inspiration in shock-rocker Alice Cooper, who incorporated the supernatural, theatrics and heavy metal music into his live concerts.

"And then there was Michael Flatley; his penchant for the grand spectacle - a combination of Irish dance, modern theatre and ancient Irish themes - pointed me towards the kind of experience I wanted to create for audiences."

Today, his own act - called Celtic Magic - mixes close-up, parlour and stage illusions with Celtic myths and legends built around histori-

cal themes, all set to Irish music.

"Some of the stories are taken from thousands of years ago, while others are drawn from my own experiences growing up in an Irish family. It is a real mélange of humour, sincerity and high energy."

One of his signature pieces is titled Irish Need Not Apply, which documents the difficulties of Irish immigration to the United States.

"It is very relevant, given the current climate of immigration issues here in the U.S.," he explains. "I get to shine a light on these things, and a lot of magicians won't do that. I can be very personal with my story-telling in that regard. I don't think a lot of magicians dare to bare their true selves, or their perspectives or beliefs, on stage."

The biggest challenge of his profession, he notes, is shaking people from their preconceived notions of what a magic act can be.

"I wear a kilt and I perform in face paint, so I don't fit the mold of the average magician."

"There are people who think I am just an amusement act, others who absolutely love what I do, and even those who think that I am the spawn of Satan and possess evil powers - which, for the record, I don't! And then there are those people who come up to me in tears because a performance has connected with them on some sort of deeper, visceral level."

GreenWolf continues to grow that audience, recently performing for more than 10,000 people at Six Flags New England's Fright Fest, and sharing the stage with a number of Celtic musical artists, including Enter the Haggis. His hope is to become a mainstay at Celtic festivals and Highland games.

"People in North America, particularly in the USA, have a strong connection to their heritage - in a lot of cases because we are misfits. More art, more music, more books, and more shows will definitely resonate with anyone who feels even a little connection with Celtic culture."

www.danielgreenwolf.com

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John McDermott

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, CELTIC TENOR **JOHN MCDERMOTT** SINGS OLD SONGS OF FREEDOM, LOVE AND LOSS LIKE IT'S THE FIRST TIME

On his latest tour, Scottish-Canadian singer John McDermott digs deep into his 25-album repertoire, seamlessly blending timeless classics with a selection from his most recent recording, *Raised on Songs and Stories*. The new CD is a toast to his Scottish heritage, and includes traditional takes on Leezie Lindsay, Ae Fond Kiss and the Loch Tay Boat Song. A couple of tunes, including Dublin in the Rare Ould Times, are a nod to his Irish ancestry.

"For quite a few years (musician and arranger) Eric Robertson and I toyed with the idea of recording an album with no breaks, no silence between the tracks – just one single continuous flow of music from start to finish and that's what we have on the new album," explains the 60-year-old.

McDermott's shows have been a mainstay on the Celtic calendar for decades. As always, the concerts begin without intro; just him settling into something like Flow Gently Sweet Afton, before taking charge with the more dramatic Bonnie Mary of Argyle. There is the occasional brief story or gentle joke, but mostly McDermott comes to croon.



His schedule rarely lets up; a fall tour across Atlantic Canada and Ontario was followed by a short break to spend Christmas with his wife and their two dogs on Georgian Bay. The Glasgow-born vocalist will soon be back at it, however, heading south to Florida, Texas, Arizona and Nevada to perform for audiences peppered with Canadian snowbirds.

"I've been making my living singing for 22 years now, and some mornings I still wake up and pinch myself. Imagine, getting paid to sing, night after night."

Before a show, McDermott likes to drift around the performance centre lobby, shaking hands, hugging and back-slapping familiar faces. By show's end, he makes a point of thanking the audience for keeping him and his three band members working.

"I am truly grateful for all of the support," he notes. "It is important for me to make each performance as personal as possible."

In appreciation, he has lent his voice to the aid of war veterans – a promise he made to his father, Peter, who died soon after McDermott began singing professionally.

"He came to see me in a show just after Remembrance Day. He told me, quite seriously, there was a chance I might be pretty good at this, and he made me swear that if I did well, I'd do something for veterans and give back to Canada."

McDermott began his philanthropic efforts with fundraising Christmas concerts for the veteran's unit of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto. More recently, he has created the McDermott House Canada Foundation, and is \$2.5 million into a \$3 million pledge to renovate and enhance the palliative care unit at a veteran's center.

An ambassador with Canada's Vimy Ridge 2017 commemoration project, he grew up with an appreciation of veterans; his father served as a tail gunner with the Royal Air Force, his uncle died in a prisoner of war camp, and he had cousins who died during, or as result of, the Vietnam War.

The ninth child in a family of 12, McDermott was 10 years old when his family immigrated to Toronto, where his father – also a fine tenor – worked as a glazier. There was a singing tradition within the family, but McDermott never imagined a career in music. At his parents' 50th wedding anniversary, he presented them with a recording of 13 songs – one for each of their children – and a revamped version of his signature song, Danny Boy.

The singer's career took off when his original recording of the tune found support from popular CBC Radio host Peter Gzowski.

"It was all like dominos after that. When I was asked if I could go on tour, I requested a leave of absence from work because I didn't have high expectations. When I was told that I would be touring with The Chieftains, I was more shocked than anybody.

"There was a sort of revival in appreciation for Celtic music back then, with the Rankins, the Barra MacNeils and others. Singing ballads, as I was doing, was something different, but it fit in. It was at a concert in Halifax that I made the decision to see where the music could take me, and I am still on the journey."

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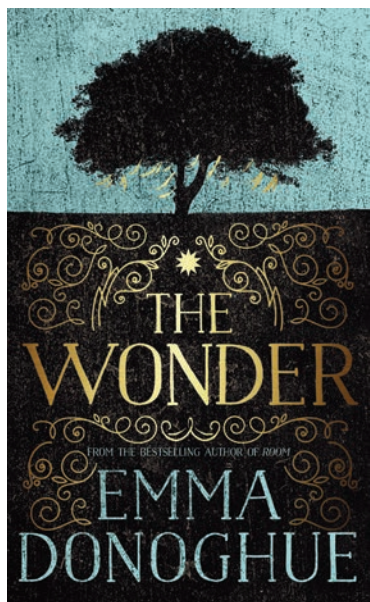
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Emma Donoghue

After the overwhelming success of Room, and with a new novel atop the bestseller list, Emma Donoghue shows no signs of slowing down...

For Irish-Canadian author Emma Donoghue, research and writing are inseparable.

"I go back and forth between them," she says over the phone from her home near London, Ontario. "The internet has made that so much easier."

Born in Dublin, Donoghue spent years commuting between Ireland, England and Canada before settling down. The 47-year-old has penned a plethora of novels, short stories, screenplays and the like, ultimately finding her voice in historical fiction. And though she has been writing professionally since she was in her 20s, it wasn't until the critical and popular acclaim of her 2010 novel, *Room* – and the Academy Award nominated film adaptation five years later – that she became a household name.

Her latest effort, *The Wonder*, is Donoghue's first full-length work since 2014's *Frog Music*. Set in 19th century Ireland, the book tells the tale of a "fasting girl" – a child who claimed to be able to survive for long periods of time without eating. There were multiple cases of these girls in the Victorian era, and Donoghue researched dozens of files for the new narrative.

"I was fascinated by the fact that these long-term fasts clearly had something to do with what is now called eating disorders," she explains. "Eventually, I decided I would write a fictional version that would draw on all the aspects of this phenomenon that I found most interesting."

These real-life cases were spread out from the 16th to 20th centuries across both Europe and North America. Donoghue chose the year 1859 for her fictional account.

"I decided that Ireland after the famine would be the perfect time and place for this story because it was so interesting to set the idea of voluntary fast against involuntary hunger."

Writing about *The Wonder*'s protagonist, 11-year-old Anna O'Donnell, proved to be a challenge.

"I knew that most of my readers would be assuming that she was a hoaxer, pathetic or deluded in some way," shares the scribe. "I wanted to give her a lot of strength...she's intelligent, she's sensitive, she's warm. Even, in some ways, an ordinary child. I tried to make her feel like a real child even though she is in this extraordinary position."

Interestingly, Donoghue notes that, for her, the central character is not O'Donnell, but rather Lib Wright, a professionally trained nurse who serves as the novel's narrator. Unlike many untrained nurses of the era, who were considered a type of domestic worker, Wright is cultured, educated, and "book smart" – qualities that cast her out of the community.

"I was taken by the idea of a nurse, who would be – who was supposed to be – a kind of objective, neutral observer, but who finds that her presence is making things worse. It is a real ethical nightmare."

The contrast between Wright and the O'Donnell family is a sharp one; the nurse is English, middle-class and schooled, while her patients are Irish peasants.

Bringing in a "crucial third element" (as

the author puts it) in the form of a reporter who records O'Donnell's perplexing situation only served to heighten the tension.

"I wanted to complicate that contrast by putting in a Dublin-based, Catholic journalist who is quite educated and worldly, but still understands the locals. All the characters start questioning themselves and changing, and moving a bit closer together."

The Wonder made the shortlist for the 2016 Giller Prize this past September, where it received high praise from the jury: "The Wonder does what we as judges yearned for – allowed us to forget we were judges, and just become readers, hooked and wowed," reads the citation on the Giller website.

And while all of the hoopla surrounding both the new book and the film adaptation of *Room* pushed Donoghue's popularity through the roof over the past year, she isn't feeling the pressure to meet or exceed past performance.

"It's amazing enough to have one big bestseller in your life, so I certainly don't feel I have to every time. It would be ridiculous to let a really happy career be, in any way, overshadowed by anxiety because of writing one bestseller."

She does, however, appreciate the accolades and attention.

"The New York Times gave *The Wonder* to Stephen King to review, and that only happens if they're taking you seriously."

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Heather O'Neill

Montreal-based author Heather O'Neill explores love and loss with her latest narrative, *The Lonely Hearts Hotel*. Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns tells us more

It has been eleven years since author Heather O'Neill released her debut novel, *Lullabies for Little Criminals*. The critically acclaimed book won both the 2007 Canada Reads Award and the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction.

Since then, the Montreal-based scribe - who is of Irish and French descent - has been as busy as she has been successful.

Two of her works - a novel, *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night*, and a short-story collection, *Daydreams of Angels* - were short-listed for several awards, including Canada's prestigious Scotiabank Giller Prize. She has also contributed to a number of national publications, and even made the Top Ten list for short films at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival for her cinematic debut, *The End of Pinky*.

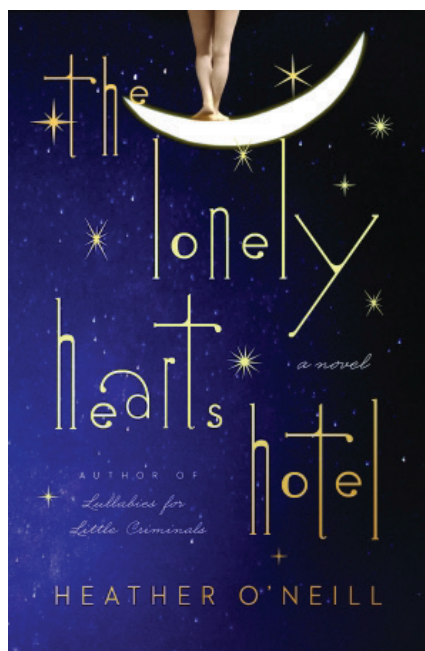
Despite all the activity, which includes raising her young daughter Arizona, O'Neill continues to create.

"I still can't believe I finished that book," she tells Celtic Life International in reference to her most recent novel, *The Lonely Hearts Hotel*. "I'm impressed with myself, I suppose. But I still can't believe it. It's like I'm trying to figure out how a magician got a dove out of their pocket...where did this book come from?"

The tale of two orphans - Pierrot, a phenomenal pianist, and Rose, a gifted comedienne and dancer - did not come to O'Neill overnight.

"I had the idea for these characters when I was very young - 22," she explains. "I decided to write a book about them. You never begin a book from scratch. It is usually based on something you have been researching for years because you are fascinated by it. So you come to the book with many wonderful facts and findings."

"I had always been interested in sad clowns, and I was interested in the 1930s in Montreal."



Woven with threads of melancholy, adorned with sex, drugs and poverty, and set in the early twentieth century, the story drew inspiration from both O'Neill's hometown and her stint in theatre there.

"I loved acting when I was at McGill University," she recalls. "Performing Commedia dell'arte on a small stage is one of my favourite artistic memories. I employed a lot of narrative techniques from the stage and other art forms in *The Lonely Hearts Hotel*, and I experimented with structure in a way that was very fulfilling."

"I think my idea of the scope of storytelling was expanded... I tried things I haven't seen in books before."

While the story and characters had been residing in her mind for some time, bringing the book to life presented certain challenges.

"The first draft was so enormous and messy. It did not seem to want to be a novel. It wouldn't behave. I couldn't tame it. Although, this happens in the process of every novel I have written."

"There was a moment when I was re-reading the manuscript on an airplane, and it all became clear to me; the story, the themes, the direction. It was thrilling. Everything was downhill from that point."

Though only just published, the work has already been embraced by critics.

"They like it a lot," acknowledges the author. "In fact, more than anything else I have ever written. But you never know what a book is until it is released into the wild."

Like her new narrative, O'Neill's creative career was shaped over many years.

"In grade five...my English teacher liked my short stories, so I thought I might have some talent in that department," she remembers. "I loved reading books. I preferred them to people. I thought it was a way into that magical world. It could get me closer to Anne Shirley (Green Gables)."

Today, she is one of the biggest and most influential names in contemporary Canadian literature.

"I have so much more confidence and wisdom and technique now. You have to be inspired and intuitive and take great leaps of faith and reason while writing. You have to force yourself to be in an inspired state all day long."

With another novel already in the works, O'Neill is looking to the future.

"I am at a point where I can't really go back. It's who I am."



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Barbarian Found

With his first book,
Barbarian Lost,
Alexandre Trudeau
returns to the Middle
Kingdom on a mission





As a child, travelling with his father - former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau - Alexander Trudeau was captivated by China's immensity, intimacy and intricacies. Recently, the documentary filmmaker-turned-author returned to the 'Sleeping Dragon', only to find it very much awake.

CL: Let's start with your family history here - you have Celtic roots do you not?

AT: Yes, both of my parents have Scottish ancestry. On my father's side there are the Elliots, and on my mother's side there are the Sinclairs.

CL: Does that heritage impact who you are today?

AT: Yes, it does, very much so, as I think it does for a lot of Canadians. The Scots are fiercely proud of their roots, and I count myself among that group. Our ancestors were really at the forefront of building this country, with their spirit of adventure and sense of bravery. My great-grandfather, on my mother's side, immigrated here with his family and became a schoolteacher. He was also, apparently, a very good storyteller.

CL: The Scots have always excelled at spinning a good yarn.

AT: Yes, that's a big part of my heritage, for sure. For a long time I thought of myself more as a story liver; however, my need to carve out a profession has turned me into a storyteller of sorts, first through filmmaking and now with the book.

CL: Let's talk about that story then. What motivated you to write *Barbarian Lost*?

AT: There were a number of motivations at play. The first was quite a simple one actually; I was asked to write a short preface to a re-edition of my father's book on China, and the publisher (Douglas & McIntyre) saw that I could write and had a lot to say about the country. So they asked me to consider putting together a full book of my own on the subject. I said yes, mostly because I was driven by my own need to make some sense out of China; I have been watching it from afar since that first trip there with my father in 1990, and I have been witness to its emergence as a dominant world power. I'm a bit of a geo-political junkie, so understanding how the world works is intricately interwoven with better understanding the complexities of China and its role on the global stage.

CL: You often use the image of a river in the book to describe China.

AT: I'm not sure that I intended to do that, but in hindsight I can appreciate the symbolism. It is important to understand that China is not a country; it is a civilization - perhaps even a way of life. And while that civilization is ancient, and has appeared almost stoic like a river for thousands of years, more and more we are seeing that it is actually quite fluid and dynamic as it flows into the sea of global influence. The other misperception we have is that there is one China; China today, or at least my China, is made up of many different peoples. Sometimes they speak in harmony, while at other times they are a mass of contradiction. And that is part of the complexity that I undertake to detail in the book. And with China, you can't travel there without coming under the spell of the ebb and flow of the Tao; the spinning of the eternal wheel that is China's story, with great periods of alternating darkness and light.

CL: The journey seemed an internal one for you, as much as it was a physical voyage.

AT: All journeys are. One travels, first and foremost, in a mental way. Travel is a frame of mind, where we can let go of what we know, and visit places that are unknown.

CL: Is that the difference between being a tourist and being a traveler?

AT: Yes, perhaps. A tourist rarely leaves their comfort zone, whereas the traveler leaves one's preconceived notions behind and doesn't look back. A tourist is packaged with a plan, and becomes alarmed when that schedule is disrupted, whereas a traveler puts oneself at the mercy of a place and a people, in a good way, where those things will dictate the agenda.

CL: It appears that you went out of your way in China to be a traveler.

AT: I wouldn't know how to be a tourist. I've never been that interested in sightseeing, unless I stumble upon something by accident. To really understand a place and people, like China, it means going beyond and behind what it is trying to show you, or what is propped up. Actual meaning is found in the nitty-gritty, the daily heartbeat, which often means going off the beaten track - like being in people's homes, and essentially being where they are.





CL: The soul of China's people, and even its landscape, reveals itself in the book.

AT: Again, I'm not sure that was intentional. It is challenging to capture something so intangible, so instead of making these grand statements about the spirit, I aimed for a collage of sorts - snapshots of individual people and places, with the hope that a bigger picture would emerge from that. Ultimately, the soul of China is the Tao; the rhythm of that ever-spinning wheel. That rhythm is not something that is easy to see sometimes; it's not always logical, and I'm not sure that the Chinese people are always aware of it because they are in the middle of it. In fact, many of them are quite surprised by what is happening to their country. However, there were small hints of it, glimmers here and there that showed themselves to me during my travels.

CL: How is writing a book different from filmmaking?

AT: From a practical perspective, filmmaking is a much smaller palette to work with; I have an hour to say what I have to say. Whereas, with the book, I had this huge, empty canvas to fill in over a much longer period. And where filmmaking invites dialogue and the participation of others, long-form writing is a solitary act. I used to think that all you needed to write a book was mental aptitude - big ideas and sheer brain power. Now I understand that it requires bravery above all else. It takes great courage and endurance to sit before a blank page each day and go to work. I have even more respect and admiration for writers after going the distance with my own book.

CL: Did you accomplish what you set out to accomplish with the work?

AT: That is really for others to decide. Does the reader get a strong feeling for China? Do they become fascinated with the country? In that sense, my goal was to write something that was both light and deep at once - that was easy and accessible to read and yet carries some weight as well. Will people get a better understanding of how China works after reading it? Time will tell I suppose. I hope so. But, yes, I feel good about the book.

CL: What has the response been like from the people around you?

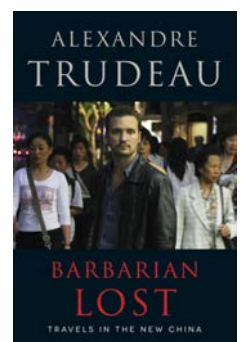
AT: I think they all appreciate it. Some of them are surprised, perhaps, by how easy it is to read, and some of the light-hearted humour. They think I am this very serious and complicated guy. And, given how private and reclusive I have been at times in the past, some were surprised at how candid I was, and how much of myself I put out there in terms of my failures, my mistakes, and so forth.

CL: Now that you have written a book, will there be others?

AT: As I said earlier, I've always considered myself a story liver. However, storytelling is a way to keep living those stories. There may have been multiple trips to China, but then there was this completely other journey that took place in my mind as I was writing the book. That process revealed many things about China that I hadn't considered while I was there. And being a man of many interests - film, geo-politics, journalism, art - I really enjoyed writing. And there is something about travel writing that is so immediate and honest and natural - I went there, I saw this, I did that - that it is very rewarding as a storyteller. So, all that said, I am revisiting some of my old travel journals looking for opportunities.

CL: You've been quite pro-active with art - have you considered politics?

AT: I'm more of an intellectual and a lone wolf than an activist. I've stood up for social justice in this country, and will continue to do so, but activism is something I mostly admire from afar. I guess that I also have a difficult relationship with political action; I feel that it gets in the way of pursuing ideas. I certainly have ideas about how the world should be, but I'd rather find that voice in my art that in any political arena. And now that I am a father myself, I need to think about how I live my life every day and what kind of example I am setting for my own children.



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Rhythm in the Night



Rhythm in the Night creator and producer, Justin Boros, has his sights fixed firmly on the future as his 'Celebration Tour' prepares for its first coast-to-coast crossing of the United States.

"We've never done a show of this size and scale before," says the 35-year-old via email from his office in Castle Rock, Colorado. "Audiences are going to be blown away."

Hot on the heels of a very busy and successful 2016, the two-hour Irish Dance Spectacular - which features 20 of the world's most skilled dancers and musicians - will perform dozens of dates across America in the coming months.

"We just finished a record-setting multi-sellout tour, our largest to date," explains Boros, who is of Greek, Italian and Irish heritage. "The show has continued to evolve and has officially become the fastest growing Irish dance spectacle in the U.S."

"It's a dream come true for me," he adds. "And it is one that keeps unfolding in new and amazing directions."

Even with one eye on the coming months, however, Boros cannot help but to look back over his shoulder to see how far that dream has come.

"Perhaps it is in my blood," he smiles of his love for Celtic dance. "My grandmother was half-Irish."

Maybe, he shares, it was a single moment.

"I was 15 years old, and living in Akron, Ohio. My brother and I played basketball on the state championship team. Up until this point, the world of sports was our entire life, and I had no exposure to any type of dance. I was flipping through the TV stations and stopped on PBS.

"All of a sudden, there was this man, dressed in a sinister costume, doing some type of masculine, dark style of dance to a genre of music I had never heard before. That exact moment forever changed my life."

He continued to watch, mesmerized, as an army of dancers took the stage in breathtaking unison, performing the 'Warriors' number from Lord of the Dance.

Boros soon convinced his family to see the show in nearby Cleveland. Inspired by that performance - and while his basketball teammates socialized after games and practices - he bought himself Colin Dunne's instructional video, Celtic Feet, and a pair of hard-soled shoes. He then spent the next 18 months teaching himself the basics of Irish dance on a 4' x 8' sheet of wood in his parents' basement.

"I wrote down, and learned, every step in Lord of the Dance," he remembers. "I then drilled myself nightly until 3 or 4 in the morning. I would sleep for two hours, before going back to school."

A family vacation to Disneyland in Florida gave Boros the opportunity to hand-deliver an audition tape to the Best of Michael Flatley's Lord of the Dance, which was then showcasing each day at the facility's famed Epcot Centre.

Almost incredibly, he was granted an in-person stage audition.

"The very next day I was offered a contract, and then spent the next 30 months with the biggest dance show in the world."

Joining Lord of the Dance taught him that, with enough hard work, anything was possible. It was a lesson he leaned on heavily through the development of Rhythm in the Night.

"The thrill of performing live and being part of something that gives off so much collective energy to the crowd, and they give it back to you, is something one must experience to understand."

"This would forever be the fuel behind my passion to continue and pursue a goal beyond Lord of the Dance and to put together my own show."



His time studying business in college gave Boros the insight into the financial logistics of developing *Rhythm in the Night*.

Inspired by the orchestral composer Hans Zimmer, he developed a narrative that called for 20 dancers performing to something more theatrical than traditional Irish melodies. Brothers Andrew and Jared DePolo of Cleveland worked with him for two years to develop an original soundtrack, which Boros suggests is a new genre of Celtic music.

"I saw a lot of elements over time in *Lord of the Dance* and other shows that audiences loved, and I perceived opportunities where that vision could be improved upon. I truly believed that the idea of an Irish dance spectacular with a medieval storyline, a big bad villain, and dramatic orchestral music, was a winning formula and would appeal to all demographics."

Right from the get-go, it was Boros' plan to play the show's villain, who is under the spell of a sorceress. He was determined that his character would have a spellbinding impact on the audience. While other shows relied on "costuming up," he decided that his character's physical presence would be enhanced naturally. He began working out, drawing on inspiration from American actor and professional wrestler, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson.

"After years of training I went from 175 lbs to 265 lbs," he details. "I'm 6'4" anyway, so when I executed the role for the first time on stage, the impact it had on the audience far exceeded my expectations. Every rep, every drop of sweat and trip to the gym was worth it."

Boros' memories of opening night in Peekskill, New York, in 2014 will be forever etched in his memory.

"We had multiple standing ovations, and several young Irish dancers ran up on the stage at the end and performed our encore with us,

hand in hand. It was an amazing night, and one I will never forget as more than a decade of hard work came to full fruition."

When the Celebration Tour kicks off in California on March 3, audiences will witness many new and intriguing elements.

"We have two new female leads that we expect to take their roles to new heights, more lighting and several choreography changes. I have the best team of dancers I could ask for. Less than one per cent of our audiences are familiar with the intricacies of Irish dance, so it is vital that we aim for great stage presence and performing ability."

Boros is always mindful that people "pay good money" to see his shows.

"They may be worried about covering their mortgage, issues at their job, or stress within their families. It is our job to bring joy and happiness to each and every patron. If they, even for a brief moment in time, can be transported to a place of joy and happiness, then we have been successful."

Boros aims to continue to inspire others the same way that Michael Flatley once inspired him.

"My goal is to keep doing this for as long as I can. My creative process is constant, and I am always thinking of ways to improve the show."

"This will be our fifth consecutive U.S. tour. Getting a production off the ground and onto a tour is a massive endeavor, especially if it is a new show. There are countless obstacles, and the fact that we continue to grow and do this year after year makes me feel like this is no accident; we have a great product, a tour model that works, and a winning team of people."

It is a formula that he hopes will also prove successful with an upcoming holiday show, *Carol of the King, The Irish Dance Christmas Spectacular*, which is scheduled to hit the road next December.

"It is just possible that my half-Irish grandmother is responsible for all of this," he laughs. "I could have a little jig in my DNA."

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ALBUM IN STORES NOW

A photograph of the Celtic Woman quartet. Four women are posed in a forest setting. From left to right: the first woman has long red hair and is playing a violin; the second has long dark hair and is wearing a strapless blue dress with a sequined bodice; the third has blonde hair and is wearing a blue dress with a low back; the fourth has brown hair and is wearing a strapless blue dress. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a lush, green forest with a path leading into the distance.

Celtic Woman

The Emerald Isle's favourite female foursome, Celtic Woman, returns with a new recording and a major North American tour. Rosalie MacEachern tells us more.

Tara McNeill

Máiréad Carlin



The tea is only fair and the potato chips are never as good as the crisps back home, but there is something about North American audiences that fills Celtic Woman's Susan McFadden's Irish heart with joy.

"They are with us from that very first note each show," she tells Celtic Life International over the phone from Dublin during a break in rehearsals. "We'll have little girls in fairy dresses and folks of all ages, all happy to be with us for an afternoon or evening. And we always have a grand time together."

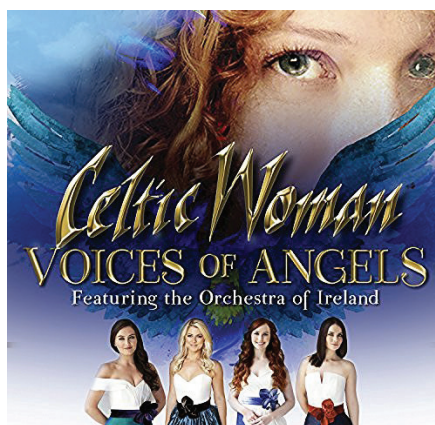
With a new recording under its wings - the aptly titled *Voices of Angels* - the internationally-acclaimed quartet is gearing up for a four-month tour that will take them to 90 cities across the United States and Canada.

Voices of Angels - which was recorded with the 72-member Orchestra of Ireland - showcases both contemporary hits, including *My Heart Will Go On*, *Time to Say Goodbye*, and *Across the World*, as well as timeless classic such as *Dúlaman* and *Ave Maria*.

The Irish-North American connection will commence March 2 in Lakeland, Florida.

"No doubt the history of immigration between our countries plays a role in making the North American audiences so special. We have connections through parents and grandparents, perhaps many generations back, and that always adds to the enjoyment on both sides."

The Dublin-born McFadden, who made a name for herself in theatrical circles in both London and the Irish capital, knows a thing or two about audiences. Since joining Celtic Woman in 2012, she has toured the world,



enjoying an array of audiences from Germany ("Generally a younger crowd and quite reserved"), to South Korea and China ("The applause after each number was quick and short, but much more enthusiastic at the end of the night.")

The upcoming tour, she says, will carry on the magic and music that has characterized Celtic Woman since its beginnings 12 years ago.

In 2004, David Downes - a former musical director of the renowned Irish musical *Riverdance* - presented five Irish women performing a repertoire of traditional and modern tunes at the Helix Theatre in Dublin.

"It was just supposed to be one night, with one recording," explains McFadden. "PBS television, and their audience, was totally engaged by it, so it has gone on and on."

Since that first performance, the group has undergone numerous personnel changes - something that McFadden believes has been a positive.

"Celtic Woman is first and foremost a showcase, and a dream job for many female Irish singers. We have always had gifted performers, but it was important to highlight the unique talents of each individual girl. We would never have been so successful if we were all clones of one another."

By way of example, she points to the troupe's current line-up; Máiréad Carlin, the first principal singer to come from Northern Ireland, is a classically trained soprano, while Éabha McMahon, of Dublin, has a more traditional background, having grown up speaking Irish and performing in Sean-nós choirs as a young girl.

"Tara McNeill, also from the North, and our newest member, is a fantastic fiddler who plays the Irish harp as well. Her first performance was in South Africa, so she will be meeting North American audiences for the first time over the coming months."

Five years ago, McFadden had just wrapped up a theatre job in London when she was contacted by Celtic Woman.

"I had been away from the Irish scene for about eight years, so I had a lot to catch up on. The more I learned about Celtic Woman, the more excited I got. The idea of being a part of something home-grown was very exciting."

Now the longest-serving member of the group, McFadden commands the stage with ease and elegance. There was, she admits, an adjustment period at first.



Susan McFadden

Éabha McMahon

"I began in stage school as a very young girl, going three times a week, and later I was involved with musical theatre, so I was quite accustomed to the stage. However, with Celtic Woman, I was performing as myself, a singer, for the first time. Fortunately, I had great support - I was brought right back into the Irish fold. And we were so well-treated on the road that I quickly fell in love with it all."

She credits musical director Gavin Murphy with reviving traditional songs with up-to-date arrangements.

"My solo on the new album is As She Moved Through the Fair, a lovely old song that is familiar to many. The phrasing is surprising, and people will not have heard it like this before."

She cites Carlin's version of Ave Maria as another striking example of bringing the past into the present.

"Again, it is very new and lovely and a perfect fit for Máiréad.

"I am always surprised when we redress an older tune like this - but I really shouldn't

be at this point; we do a new version of Danny Boy every year. Just imagine us performing Danny Boy with Spanish guitar - it is so suited to the emotion of the song."

Other examples of revamps on Voices of Angels include Across the World, Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears, and the rich, emotive Mo Ghile Mear, which features an English male choir.

Whatever the formula, it has been more than successful; since its debut, Celtic Woman has had ten chart-topping albums, eight DVDs, nine public television specials, and sales of more than 10 million albums, with platinum success in nine countries. Each of its albums, including 2016's *Destiny*, has debuted at #1 on Billboard's World Albums Chart, and they have been named Billboard Magazine's #1 World Albums Artist six times. The group has performed for more than four million fans across 23 countries and six continents.

McFadden says it is all about teamwork.

"There are about 30 of us when we go out on the road, and so many of them make life easy for the singers. Music, dancers, lights, stage crew, they are all totally dependable and we all get on very well. We are in it together, and we figure out who needs a bit of space or a cup of tea or a cuddle on any given day."

Given the lengths of the tours, some members of the company occasionally get visitors from home. When that happens, McFadden says they are welcomed by all, especially if they come bearing gifts from the Emerald Isle.

"The word is out," she laughs. "Don't even think about showing up without a box of Irish tea or a bag of Irish crisps."

www.celticwoman.com



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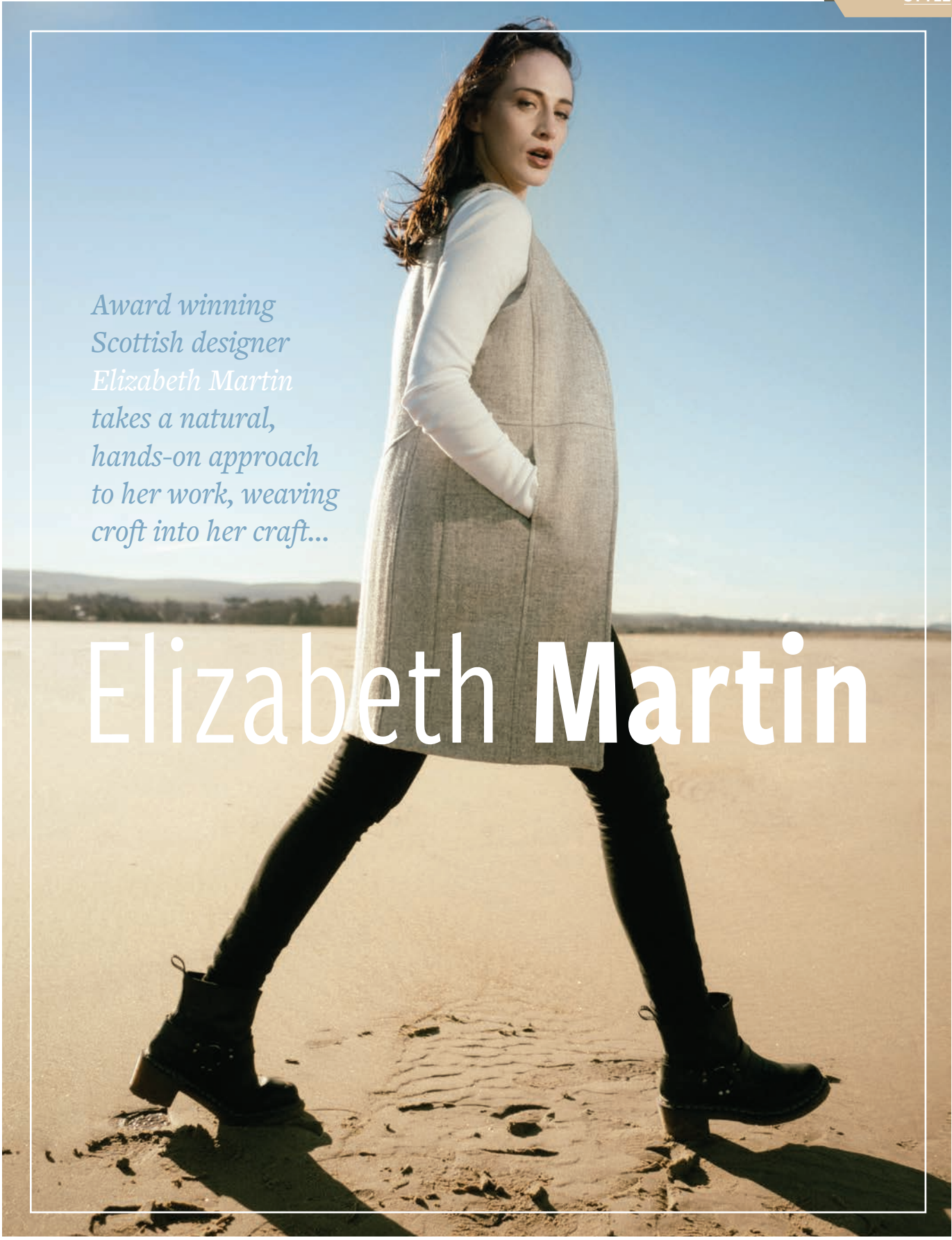
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A full-page photograph of Elizabeth Martin walking on a sandy beach. She is wearing a long, light-colored, sleeveless vest over a white long-sleeved shirt, black leggings, and black boots. She is looking back over her shoulder at the camera. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant hills.

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Elizabeth Martin



I was born in Scotland and brought up in the sleepy village of Cambuskenneth, near the famous Wallace Monument in Stirling. Today, I live in the Clyde Valley, famous for the Cotton Mill in nearby New Lanark.

I have a passion for natural fibres and fabrics, particularly Scottish fabrics with a rich heritage. I use hand-woven the Harris Tweed from the Outer Hebrides, which I purchase from the Harris Tweed Hebrides mill. They have a wonderful provenance and story, with one croft, one loom and one weaver to produce an exquisite piece of cloth.

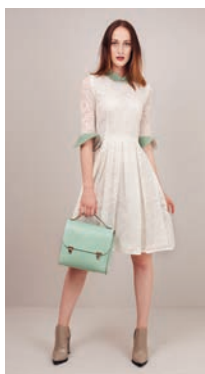
I also use Egyptian cotton lace, sourced from the only mill in the world producing lace on original Nottingham lace looms: the Morton, Young and Borland mill in

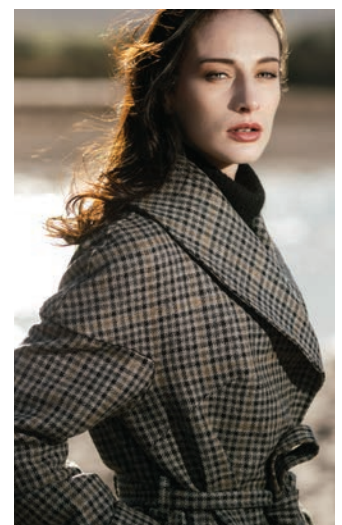
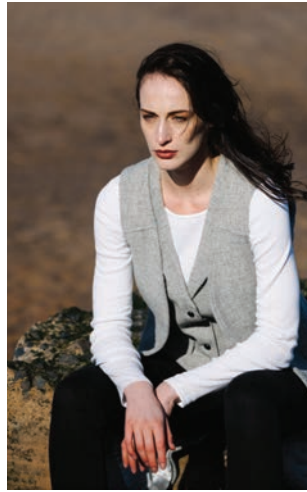


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Celebrating Scotland

With thousands of things to see and do during Scotland's year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, Celtic Life International senior writer Rebecca Dingwell highlights the highlights...



Chelsea Charles

If the allure of Scotland's breathtaking natural beauty isn't enough to prompt a visit, then perhaps the promise of Vikings, a great roman bake-off, and a wide range of festivals might entice.

Since 2009, the country's official tourism bureau - VisitScotland - has worked to develop specific "themed years" to attract visitors from around the world to experience and celebrate all things Scottish. Past themes have included homecoming, creativity, as well as food and drink.

"The objective of themed years is about celebrating the very best of Scotland," explains Chelsea Charles of VisitScotland. "It is really about shining a spotlight on Scotland's brilliant product, our location, and all the things one can see and do here."

According to a 2015 visitor's survey, nearly 32 per cent of tourists said that "history and culture" were key motivators for their trip. This was second only to "scenery and landscape," which was cited by 49 percent of visitors.

This year's theme of History, Heritage and Archaeology focuses on both the tangible and the intangible, notes Charles. On the one hand, there is the "built heritage" of fortresses, monuments and the like, while on the other hand there is the "natural heritage" - a reference to the country's lush landscapes and the stories that go with them.

And while those myths, tales and legends might not be brick and mortar, they are as vital and valuable to Scotland's heritage as castles and Kings.

"It is pretty much our bread and butter," says Charles.

For 2017, VisitScotland has created a number of signature experiences that will run alongside, or in conjunction with, annual events and festivals like the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

Fittingly, this year also marks Edinburgh's 70th anniversary of being named a World Leading Festival City.

"The key thing is to entice people to simply come to Scotland, whether they have been here before or not," adds Charles. "It's really about inviting them to delve into the past and discover our fascinating stories."

Just Dig It

For Dr. Jeff Sanders, History, Heritage and Archeology are intrinsically linked by the human need for "uncovering, and then telling stories of the past."

Sanders is the project manager for 2017's Dig It! events, an initiative of both Glasgow Museums and the Hunterian Museum.

"They saw an opportunity to raise the profile of Scotland's heritage through archaeology by promoting all of the events happening across the country as a coherent program," he explains. "They also wanted to reach out to people who thought that archaeology wasn't 'for them', and to encourage non-heritage organizations to get involved."

Two Scottish charities - the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and Archaeology Scotland - teamed up to take on the first Dig It! project in 2015. Two years later, the groups will oversee more than 1,000 events during the year-long celebration.

"Whether you want to get stuck into a dig or learn how to cook like the Celts, there's something for everybody," says Saunders.

Cross-country happenings will highlight both Scotland's iconic sites as well as its hidden gems. The "Scotland Six" events, for instance, will shine a light on its half-dozen World Heritage Sites: The Heart of Neolithic Orkney, New Lanark, Edinburgh Old and New Towns, the Antonine Wall, St Kilda and The Forth Bridge. Appropriately, all that will take place on April 18 - World Heritage Day.

And then, of course, there is the actual digging.

"The Wilkhous (TighnaFaochaig) Excavation in Brora will be unearthing an 18th century inn in May and June and they're inviting you to grab a trowel and join the hunt," notes Sanders.

"Who doesn't want to step off the beaten track, get mucky on a dig, and experience the thrill of discovery?"

He adds that while digging is an important part of archaeology, metal-detecting, researching records, and skeletal analysis are key elements in the academic equation as well.

Dr. Jeff Sanders





“We can also tell those stories in a variety of ways; books, talks, maps, trails...and pretty much anything else you could imagine. We’ll be seeing more of this diverse approach emerging throughout 2017.”

Thankfully, Sanders and his peers have a number of partner organizations helping out.

“The Caithness Broch Project, for example, is hoping to build a replica broch (an Iron Age structure) using traditional methods, and the Scottish Crannog Centre in Perthshire will be running experimental archaeology sessions throughout the year. The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland will be publishing a book on underwater archaeology, and a variety of re-enactments will be taking place at both Caerlaverock Castle and Linlithgow Palace.”

For those willing to travel to attend Dig it!, Sanders recommends checking out nearby festivals that will give you “the most bang for your buck.” In his opinion, September is the perfect time to visit: the East Lothian Archaeology and Local History Fortnight, Borders Heritage Festival, and the Highland Archaeology Festival are all scheduled to help celebrate Scottish Archaeology Month.

“The archaeologists are happy to share their enthusiasm and train any newcomers. We will also be emphasizing accessible tourism, and helping to push activities for 16 to 24-year-olds. Events such as Disabled Access Day, and Brick City at New Lanark, make it easier to get out there and try something new. We also promote gatherings from a range of organizations, whether they are a national museum or a small local heritage society.”

Most happenings are either free or affordable in an effort to make them even more available.

For those unable to visit Scotland in 2017, there are a number of ways to take part online. Sanders recommends Canmore - “The online catalogue to Scotland’s archaeology, buildings, industrial and maritime heritage” - as a great digital resource.

Furthermore, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland uploads all of their lectures publicly.

“You can learn about everything from ‘Propaganda in the Wars of the Rough Wooings’ to ‘Crowdsourcing Scottish Underwater Archaeology’ from the comfort of your own home.”

Dig It! Also has its own YouTube channel, allowing viewers to access “the sites, objects and people that form Scotland’s past.”

“When we say that ‘archaeology is for everyone,’ we really mean it,” smiles Sanders.

TradFest

Like Scotland’s capital Edinburgh, the city’s signature cultural event - TradFest - is “Rooted in the Past. Resonating in the Present.”

In 2012, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS) launched a pilot project for TradFest. TRACS director, Donald Smith, has been with the festival since its humble beginnings.

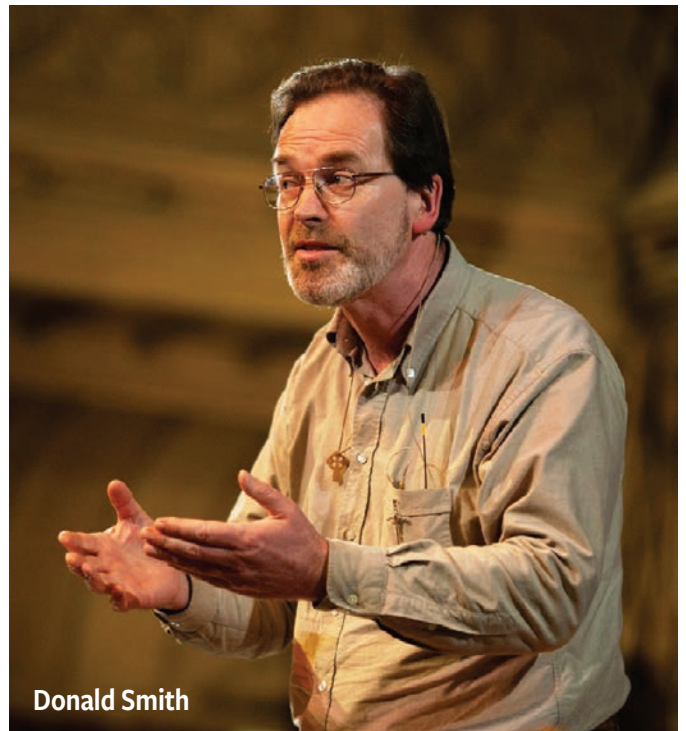
“It’s not about big headline acts,” he shares via video call. “It’s very much about the different networks and traditions and groups and cultures associated with the city - and, of course, the international guests.”

Storytelling, music, theatre and film are all on the TradFest agenda again this year, from April 26 to May 7.

The timing of the festival is significant, notes Smith: in Gaelic tradition, the Beltane (or May Day) celebration takes place in early May, marking the start of the summer.

“Our thinking was that this would be an ideal time, as there are already all kinds of traditions and celebrations going on during that period. So we pulled this together and made those elements part of the core of this new festival. It has really worked.”

It works so well, in fact, that about 30 per cent of TradFest’s audience is international. Granted, some of those folks just happen to be in the city at the time.



Donald Smith

“Edinburgh is that kind of place,” says Smith. “People are always visiting.”

He adds that a growing number of people schedule their trip to Scotland around TradFest. “It is a real fun festival, with the dance and the folk drama and the music and the outdoor spectacle...there is a lot of stuff going on.”

New for 2017 - specifically to coincide with the country’s Year of History, Heritage and Archeology - is a strand of events called the People’s Heritage, which puts an emphasis on unusual aspects of the city’s history, including things that often get overlooked.



“People are starting to understand that heritage is not just about castles and stately mansions. Today, they want a flavour of the culture, of the community.”

With this in mind, People’s Heritage is presenting traditional customs within the milieu of popular culture. In some cases, familiar location or sites are used. Edinburgh Castle is one example, where the focus will not be on the building itself, but rather on the facility’s “Witches’ Well” - where it is believed that more than 300 women were burned after being accused of witchcraft.

“We will have a pop-up performance there, which will tell some of the background story of that monument,” says Smith

Another installation will happen in Holyrood Park, where the miners’ galas used to take place.

“What we are looking at there is the background, heritage and memories of people who took part in those big rallies. The miners’ union doesn’t exist any longer, there are no coal pits in Scotland, but those rallies were a huge cultural experience.”

Smith feels that it is important for Scottish people to study their history as “it belongs to them.” And, he adds, residents have a strong desire to participate, including young people.

“I love all aspects of arts and culture, but one of the distinctive things that folk arts bring is this issue of: whose culture is it? Who owns it? It should be a matter of debate, with different traditions being expressed and celebrated. So, that’s what the traditional arts bring to the table, and it’s very rich.”

From storytelling and knitting to theatre and concerts, Smith says that there are many creative resources for people to tap into their past.

“We don’t want a uniform, boring world.”

Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites

There are over 450 museums and galleries in Scotland, many of which will be taking part in the Festival of Museums from May 19 to 21.

The opportunity to dive into the country’s archives goes well beyond that weekend, however.

Scotland’s National Museum is the most visited museum in the United Kingdom outside of London, and this year, the Edinburgh site

has something special planned: from June 23 to November 12, it will host an exhibition depicting the rise and fall of the Jacobites.

“The name ‘Jacobite’ comes from Jacobus, the Latin form of James,” explains Bruce Blacklaw, Communications Officer for National Museums Scotland. “It refers to those who supported the claim of James VII and II and his exiled Stuart descendants to the British throne. James had been deposed and exiled in 1688, and replaced by his daughter Mary and her Protestant husband, William of Orange.”

That period, Blacklaw continues, was characterized by five Jacobite challenges, which took place both before and after the 1707 Act of Union between the Scottish and English parliaments. Charles Edward Stuart, better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, landed on the Isle of Eriskay in the summer of 1745. He was the last hope the Jacobites had to regain the English, Scottish and Irish thrones. That same year, Charlie led the final challenge, which ultimately failed.

“All the while, the Jacobites functioned as a court in exile,” adds Blacklaw, “first in France and then later in Rome. In addition to the dramatic events that took place here in Scotland, this is something we will really bring out in the exhibition.”

The heightened interest in the history of the Jacobites can, in part, be attributed to the stunning success of Diana Gabaldon’s Outlander book series and subsequent television show. But the “romantic myths and embellishments” of those years came long before popular culture took interest. The fiction of Sir Walter Scott and the poetry of Robert Burns, for example, also depicted the period of Jacobitism.

“It is a pivotal period in Scottish history, and indeed British history. It is, at times, quite complicated, but it is also very exciting.”

The upcoming exhibit is being devised and produced by, and for, the National Museum of Scotland. Curators are drawing upon their own material from the period, before combining them with loaned items from other collections in the United Kingdom and overseas.



National Museum of Scotland



The Jacobite showcase is a sequel of sorts to the museum's popular 2015 "Mary Queen of Scots" exhibit, which was well-received by both critics and the general public. "Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites" will pick up the story of the Stuart dynasty where it left off, in hopes that it will draw just as much interest.

Blacklaw believes that the new display will turn out to be the most significant exhibition on Jacobites in more than 70 years.

"Highlights from National Museums of Scotland's own collections will include the travelling canteen of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, a Highland targe (shield) and broadsword which also belonged to the Prince, and a spectacular tartan suit made for John Hyde Cotton, a leading English Jacobite."

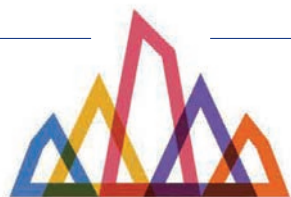
Visitor surveys suggest that the National Museum of Scotland welcomes almost half of its audience from outside the country annually, including about 30 per cent from North America.

"We have unrivalled depth with respect to Scottish history, as well as a remarkable breadth of collection subject areas. So, in addition to the national story, there is natural science, world cultures, science and technology, and art, design and fashion from all over the world.

"It also helps to be in the historic heart of Scotland's hugely popular capital city."

There are plenty of opportunities to learn outside the museum's doors over the coming months as well, including at actual sites where significant events took place during the Jacobite period. As part of the museum's work around the exhibition, it is partnering with the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland and the Royal Collections Trust in detailing the Jacobites' story.

"There will be activities, resources, and a trail to follow around the country to see some of these locations, many of which happen to be located in spots of outstanding natural beauty."



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For more information on Scotland's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, be sure to check out the following links!

Scotland ~ www.scotland.org	National Museums Scotland
VisitScotland ~ www.visitscotland.com	~ www.nms.ac.uk
Dig It! ~ www.digit2017.com	More ~ www.eventscotland.org
TradFest ~ www.tracscotland.org	www.historicenvironment.scot

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Aberdeenshire and Beyond

*Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and
surfer Lesley Choyce revisits Scotland's stunning northeast*



Nearly twenty years ago I had the good fortune of being writer in residence at the Aberdeen International School - a posh, well-appointed facility near Aberdeen for kids from all over the world. Aside from my pleasant, daily duties of talking with students about creativity and writing, I had enough leisure time to hike along a local canal path, go bike-riding through the back roads, and generally ramble around the most agreeable countryside my shoe leather had ever encountered.

My teacher-host, fellow Nova Scotian Andy Field, even took me surfing. At first, we ventured just south of Aberdeen, where the water was surprisingly warm (as it turned out, the sewage plant emptied into the ocean thereabouts.) Later, we sported wetsuits on a pebbly beach right in downtown Stonehaven, dropping in on small North Sea waves before the backdrop of a bustling village that dates back centuries. Fortified with a couple of pints of Guinness, we even stole onto one of Scotland's famous public golf courses just as the sun dipped. Luckily, I was able to blame my poor performance of the "gentleman's game" on the diminishing light.

When my residency ended, I promised myself that I would return to explore this northeast corner of Scotland, with its sumptuous land and historical riches. Thus, my wife Linda and I recently enjoyed a few adventures in that part of the world, renting a small stone cottage in the tiny village of Pitmedden. It was a converted one-room schoolhouse really, made of solid blocks of granite, and conveniently located in the

front yard of a newer house owned by a professional self-help guru who drove the shiniest BMW that I had ever seen.

We seek connections in this world, wherever we go, and there was another thread that brought us here, albeit a sad one; a friend of nearly thirty years, Jim Lotz, had recently passed away from pancreatic cancer. Jim was a brilliant independent thinker, an activist and author, and a feisty, good-natured Brit who had immigrated to Canada to roam the arctic, fight for social justice, and dole-out advice to younger writers like me: "Don't ever listen to the bastards who say you can't do it. Just get on with it and bugger all."

I had helped edit Jim's autobiography, *Sharing the Journey*, and the book had been at the printer as he lay dying. He had grown up in Liverpool, and watched as his neighbourhood was bombed by the Nazis before he was shipped off to the safer environs of Aberdeenshire, near the town of Oldmeldrum. Of the Scottish countryside, he had this to say:

"This hard, barren land touched some deep, responsive chord in my nature. I enjoyed roaming through glens and over moors, happy in my own company, delighting in the scenery and the romantic history of the Highlands, while coping with atrocious weather."



Our own explorations of the area actually took us farther afield from Aberdeen and into a broader expanse of coast and mountains sometimes labelled the Grampian region, although this appears to be a label of political jurisdiction slapped onto this part of northeast Scotland sometime between 1975 and 1996. The name comes from the bold and somewhat bald mountains of the region (8,700 square kilometres of them), and - as Jim Lotz pointed out - it is one lovely and evocative piece of geography.

I dutifully delivered a copy of Jim's book to a state-of-the-art library outside of Oldmeldrum, though the librarian didn't quite know what to make of it (or me.) If anyone is out and about there, however, do me a solid and check to see that it is at least catalogued and on the shelves.

As the name implies, Oldmeldrum really is quite old. The Meldrum family built a castle here around 1236. The third Earl of Buchan reportedly found shelter for his soldiers here around Christmas of 1307, before being defeated by Robert the Bruce in a nearby battle not long after that.

In Oldmeldrum, I dutifully sampled the wares at the famous Garioch Distillery, but declined to purchase the more expensive vintage whiskeys with price tags in the range of \$400 - \$500 US. Linda and I did find refreshment at a downtown pub with a nautical theme. It was a wonderfully cramped and convivial establishment in one of the many grey stone buildings of the town.

Our favourite pub, however, was the more contemporary BrewDog

brewery in Ellon to the east. This is one of Scotland's new breed of craft brewers, whose motto appears to be "Equity for Punks." No one was quite able to explain to us what that meant, but they had a great line of hoppy beers and good hospitality. The business was founded way back in 2007 by two guys named James and Martin. James had this to say about the origins: "Martin and I were bored of the industrially brewed lagers and stuffy ales that dominated the U.K. Beer Market." And, as they say, the rest was history. In actuality, what - on the surface - appeared to be an indie-business run by some highly creative counter-cultural young brewmeisters was actually on its way to becoming a very lucrative multinational corporation.

Like James and Martin, I too was weary of stuffy ales, and BrewDog's Punk IPA (my personal favourite) was proving to the quaffing masses that the new brew in town was taking over.

Hiking mountains and getting wet in salt water are always on our agenda if possible when we travel. We found our first waves for boogie-boarding in the waters of Fraserburgh Bay to the north, well insulated by wetsuits of course. It was a sandy haven of hikers, surfers and kite-surfers, where everyone was friendly and kind. If you are in that neck of the woods, the dunes alone are worth the excursion.

Fraserburgh itself is a major bustling fishing port. We had read reports of heavy drug use among young bored fishermen who would return from the sea with money in their pockets and a craving to get dangerously high, but alas we found nothing but good vibes among the



locals, both young and old. In town, we discovered a house known as Maggie's Hoosie, a traditional fishing cottage preserved for tourists. The spinster Maggie Duthie lived there until she died in 1950 with an earthen floor, no heat or electricity, and a lifestyle not unlike that lived by her ancestors two hundred years ago.

With a good map you can find curiously named towns in this part of Scotland that are almost always worth a visit.

In particular, I was curious about a place called Udny Green, which turned out to have a beautiful town commons and an upscale restaurant named Eat on the Green. After much deliberation, the maitre'd took pity on us and gave us a small corner table if we promised not to stay longer than an hour. On the wall were photos of the Queen, Pierce Brosnan and Sean Connery. It was that kind of place. We polished off the pricey meal and headed off to check out Pettymuick, Tillygreig, Whiterashes, Port Elphinstone, Balhagard and Inverurie. Then, while taking a break in Burnhervie, I spied - on a map - a symbol for a nearby ancient monument called The Maiden Stone.

The Maiden Stone was a bit hard to find - located in a field with no fanfare, south of Pitcaple, off a back road, and west of a town called Chapel of Garioch. The road itself was one of those interesting rural avenues; a single lane about the width of a sidewalk, but most perfectly paved - as if designed for elves driving miniature automobiles.

Since there was no one else on the road but us, our tires straddled the path as we made several wrong turns until we found the sought-after Maiden Stone. When approaching the stone, we met a rather excited English tourist who was snapping photographs from every possible angle. Happy to see us, and eager to share his enthusiasm for what appeared to be an upright lichen-covered pink granite rock with a notch cut out of it, he told us that it dated back to the 8th century when the Picts lived hereabouts. According to legend, the daughter of a laird made some crazy bet with a man who turned out to be the devil. The impetuous young lass, on her wedding day no less, bet the stranger that she could finish her baking task quicker than he could build a road to the top of a local mountain. If he lost, then she would marry him instead of her betrothed. I queried the informative Englishman why someone would make such a bet, especially on her wedding day, but he had no clear explanation, and seemed miffed that I would even ask.

At any rate, the devil being the devil, built that mountain road in

a jiffy and came to claim his young bride. The laird's daughter made a run for it and swore she'd rather turn to stone before marrying the likes of Satan. And thus, she got her wish.

The tallest mountain we chose to climb had the curious name of Mither Tap, and we arrived just as a bus of school kids were embarking on the hike through the well-marked forest trail that led to the base of the mountain. Standing a mere 1,279 feet above sea level, Mither Tap has a commanding granite summit looking out over the other Bennachie mountains. As the trail became steeper we huffed and puffed our way to the glorious summit as giggling Scottish schoolboys kicked pebbles down on us from above. Their harried and embarrassed schoolmistress begged them to stop, shouting down apologies to us below. Despite the pelting of stones, the view from the top was well worth it on a clear day like this when you could see for miles.

Although I am occasionally of the opinion that "if you've seen one castle, you've seen them all", Linda persuaded me that we should at least take-in Castle Fraser down around Moneymusk and Craigeearn.

I drove past Castle Fraser once, pretending not to see it and thought I might get away with it, but unfortunately there was a big sign at the next crossroads pointing back to the estate. I parked, and grudgingly paid for admission. (It is probably unreasonable of me, but I feel that castles, ruins and ancient monuments should be free and open to the public, like The Maiden Stone in her grassy remote field.)

But if you are going to pick one castle in the Grampian region, Fraser is probably as good a pick as you will get. The grounds are beautiful, and it is considered one of the "most elaborate of Z-plan castles in Scotland." Most castles have stories, and if those stories are intriguing enough then most of us don't really care if they are true or not. At Castle Fraser, it is said that once upon a time a young princess was murdered (why, we do not know) and as she was carried down the stairs, her blood stained the steps so badly that they had to be covered over with wood. Today, I am sure, professionals with the right tools and detergents could have solved the problem - but who are we to judge?

And, yes, it was a pretty darn good castle as far as castles go. As we walked back to the parking lot where a pair of swans from the castle pond seemed to be studying our rental car, I wondered out loud exactly how and why that murder happened - if it happened at all - and





why such stories seem to linger on for centuries, while undoubtedly countless good deeds by generations of the Frasers go unremembered.

Interestingly, awhile later while falling asleep in front of the TV watching Helen Mirren in *The Queen*, I thought the location in the movie looked familiar, and sure enough, Castle Fraser it was.

Before heading home, I longed for one more foray to the sea and I noted a nature reserve named Forvie just north of Newburgh which would allow us another visit to the BrewDog in Ellon on our way home. On the way to Forvie, we passed what seemed to be miles of coastland that had been privatized and developed into a golf course. I wondered how the people of Scotland had allowed such pristine coastal land that had remained unbothered for centuries to be bought up and developed this way. Later I would learn that none other than Donald Trump had bought up the coastline in 2014, investing \$290 million US to create the Trump International Golf Links, and in the process decimating what were once legally protected sand dunes. Suffice it to say, Mr. Trump and his links did piss off a fair portion of the population of the region.

The beach and waters at Forvie, however, were providentially protected. Linda and I hiked out to the sea along the beautiful Ythan Estuary, home of “the largest breeding colony of little terns on the east coast of Scotland.” The water was blue, the sky was cloudless.

Helicopters transporting workers to and from the North Sea oil rigs did nothing to detract from the beauty and sanctity of the place. The sand felt glorious under our bare feet. The terns swooped and swirled above and, at the mouth of the estuary, we began to hear an other-worldly chorus of low moaning voices drifting towards us in the wind. As we continued to walk, the sound grew louder. Soon enough, we saw a dark, undulating mass of something on the shores across the river mouth from us.

When we reached the sea, we realized that it was a large community of seals - perhaps a hundred - lounging on the sands across from us. Their voices were loud now, drowning out everything else, and their song stirred something within me. Young seals dove from the shoreline into the clear blue water, swam and played, and then hopped back up on the sandy shoreline. That farther shore was an empty, flawless expanse of coastal wilderness, where the terns, seals, gulls and other creatures of the wind and sea would be free and safe. For a while at least.

As we turned and headed back to civilization, sand sifting through our toes, we felt blessed by the birds and beasts and privileged to have encountered this pocket of pristine wilderness, here in a land where human habitation goes backover 14,000 years.





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Dundas Castle

Our award winning photojournalist Tom Langlands steps back in time with a visit to Scotland's stunning Dundas Castle...

PHOTO CREDIT: RANKINE PHOTOGRAPHY

Standing by the entrance of the 'Auld Keep' of Dundas Castle, situated on the south side of the Firth of Forth, I ran my hands over the thick, stone walls and embraced 600 years of history. I was near to the site of an old dungeon and an underground escape passage believed to have once linked the tower with the Carmelite Priory in nearby South Queensferry. Stepping inside, I found myself in the impressive, medieval Stag Chamber with its long wooden dining tables, over which hung a magnificent antlered stag's head.

Moving on, I climbed the old stone staircase to enter the Great Hall with its high, stone-vaulted ceiling. This atmospheric foyer is used for weddings and can accommodate 100 guests, with relay by video link to another fifty-two. I continued my ascent, exploring other spaces en route, until finally I emerged on the roof of the Keep with its old castellated ramparts. The views were stunning and the strategic importance of the tower and its location was immediately apparent.

The name Dundas is derived from the Gaelic 'dun deas' - or south fort - and the Keep is the oldest part of the present castle, dating back to 1416 when the effective ruler of Scotland at that time, the Duke of Albany, granted James Dundas a licence to build.

through the use of tall, elegant windows and a myriad of slender chimneys and towers.

Back down on the lush lawns of the 400 acre Dundas Castle Estate, I felt protected from the hustle and bustle of modern life. Surrounded by woodland it was hard to imagine that Dundas Castle is only fifteen minutes from Edinburgh Airport and thirty minutes from Edinburgh City Centre. It is also but a short distance from excellent road links connected to many of Scotland's wonderful sites, including the Kingdom of Fife with its Royal Burgh of Culross, the picturesque fishing villages of the East Neuk of Fife and St. Andrews - the home of golf.

First and foremost, Dundas Castle is a family home. After completion of the works by Burn, the project had diminished the Dundas family coffers to the extent that they had to sell the estate. It was purchased by William Russell before being sold again in 1899 to Stewart Clark - the great-grandfather of the current owner, Sir Jack Stewart-Clark. Clark was one of five brothers who had taken over the family sewing thread business in Paisley, turning it into one of the UK's most profitable Victorian textile industries. Following the death of his mother in 1995, the Dundas Castle Estate passed to Sir Jack Stewart-Clark whose



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

These were dark and dangerous times, and for the previous two hundred years the Dundas family had been amassing large tracts of land stretching west from Edinburgh. They were a powerful family, and powerful families needed protection. In times of trouble the Keep was a place of refuge for the family and its loyal supporters, but it was also a vantage point and a defensive stronghold. It was one of several Keeps that ran along both the north and south sides of the River Forth, and by way of beacons that were lit when under threat, Keeps formed part of the area's early warning system.

From my rooftop vantage the only towers I could see today were the columns and spires of the iconic bridges over the River Forth a few miles to the north. To the east lay Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, and to the west were the remains of Linlithgow Palace, birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots. I looked down onto the rooftops of the more modern Dundas Castle. Dating from 1818, it was designed by one of Scotland's great architects, William Burn, a pioneer of the Scottish Baronial style. Contemplating the mastery of the design I noted how the more modern castle paid homage to the Auld Keep, allowing it to dominate the skyline, while emulating its corner turrets and castellated walls. Extending linearly into the landscape, it retains an intimacy of scale

background embraces twenty-seven years in industry, including the family thread-making business, and also as Managing Director of various companies including the renowned Philips Electrical Limited. He was also a Member of the European Parliament from 1979 until 1999.

Dundas Castle's Sales Manager, Kara ter Morsche, greeted me at the main entrance and led me into the spacious hallway with its dark panelled wood, stained glass windows and fluted plasterwork. The slight ecclesiastical feel was unsurprising given that Burn had undertaken several church projects during his career. Ter Morsche showed me into the library. The wood-panelled walls were exquisite and I could have spent hours browsing the leather-bound books. Casting an eye around my surroundings I sank into a comfortable couch in front of the roaring log fire. I observed numerous framed photographs, paintings, delicate soft furnishings and the huge windows with their drapes. Reading my thoughts, ter Morsche remarked, "It may be a castle but it is first a family home." I felt that was an important distinction.

Sir Jack Stewart-Clark joined us and we chatted about the history of the place. He acknowledged that by the time he inherited Dundas Castle it had suffered years of neglect and was in a poor state of repair: "The Auld Keep lay uninhabited for three hundred years and the main



PHOTO CREDIT: RANKINE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO CREDIT: BEN



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

castle had numerous leaks accompanied by an outbreak of dry-rot.” He admits he thought long and hard about the future of Dundas Castle.

“It wasn’t really a project that I could afford to undertake but I also came to realize that given the family connection with the castle for over one hundred years it was also a project that I couldn’t afford not to undertake.”

And so the restoration of Dundas Castle went ahead, backed by a business plan that would see it retained as the Stewart-Clark family home, but also one of the country’s premier 5-Star Exclusive Use Venues.

Today, the flexibility of the spaces offered throughout Dundas Castle, the Auld Keep and a separate pavilion in the grounds, renders it an outstanding venue for weddings, special family gatherings, corporate team-building events and product launches. Its Baronial style architecture and stunning interiors have been used for film productions and photo-shoots.

Exiting the library, ter Morsche led the way to the drawing room with its gathered blue drapes and ornately plastered ceiling, followed by the Croquet Room with its stunning, eclectic collection of paintings. This large space often serves as a dining room but can be used for conferences or as a large meeting room. Heading to some of the seventeen exclusive-use guest bedrooms, ter Morsche pointed out that Sir Jack Stewart-Clark’s wife, Lady Stewart-Clark - an accomplished interior designer - was responsible for the redecoration of all the interiors of the castle following the restoration works: “From the muted, pastel

blues and greens of the Spring Bedroom to the warm reds, pinks and lilacs of the Peoni Bedroom, each of the rooms has its own unique sense of season and nature.” She was right, and with the late afternoon light flooding through the large windows, the effect complemented the architecture of the interior spaces bringing the rooms to life. The period style en-suite bathrooms were equally sumptuous, and I could imagine myself after a hard round of golf sinking into the bubbles of a warm bath with a glass of malt in hand.

Ter Morsche was keen to point out that as an exclusive-use venue, all types of special events can be arranged upon request, “We have even hosted a murder mystery event, and a Downton Abbey experience for our guests.” The estate also has a 4 x 4 driving track, as well as squash and tennis courts. Golf and sailing can be arranged in the surrounding area also. To cater for guests who seek top-quality luxury in a stunning location, without taking exclusive-use of the castle, the estate offers a limited number of ‘glamping cottages’ in the grounds, and a boathouse by the edge of Dundas Loch where I was to spend the night.

I thanked ter Morsche for her tour of the castle, and also for the insight into how this property had evolved over the centuries from an ancient keep into a stunning family home and a 5-Star Exclusive Use castle. I enjoyed the walk back from the castle to Dundas Loch. Passing a field of llamas, and spotting a deer bounding through the trees, I reached the warmth of the boathouse with its quaint, romantic atmosphere and wooden balcony cantilevered over the water. It is the perfect place for newlyweds to spend their first night, or in my case, just to sit outside with a glass of whisky and watch the ducks swim lazily by as the sun set over this truly historic and wonderful location.

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Stonehenge

As Celtic Life International correspondent Gerald Herter explains, the ancient site of Stonehenge still evokes Celtic mystery and mystique

Times had changed in the forty years since my wife, Lori, and I had last viewed Stonehenge firsthand. Back then, a pilgrim could wander in and around the huge stone monoliths, touching and leaning against the cold silent columns, while contemplating the mystery of how they came to be and why.

We were not alone back then, but the number of fellow travelers paled in comparison to the multitudes we found ourselves among on our recent return to this ancient manmade wonder. Rather than complaining, however, we breathed a sigh of relief when we discovered just how close we had come to competing for space with a much greater horde of enthusiasts. Only through some quick, last minute maneuvering were we able to avoid inadvertently arriving at Stonehenge on the day of the summer solstice, when the sun rises directly over the site's strategically placed "Heel Stone." While holding profound meaning for the tens of thousands that

Walking outside the visitor center, near the realistic recreation of a Stonehenge era village, we noticed the first direct tie to Celtic lands. Specimens on display of Stonehenge boulders represented the two rock types that formed the monument. The larger sarsen stones, composed of sandstone and weighing up to 50 tons, originate from the Marlborough Downs area 20 miles away. However, the smaller, four-ton bluestones, long considered to have originated in the Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire, Wales, about 150 miles away, have given rise to a recently renewed controversy over their origin and how they got here, freshly stoking an age-old mystery.

Scientists first theorized the Welsh origin of the bluestones about a hundred years ago.

Since then, further studies have led to general acceptance of that theory. Then in December, 2015, archeologists - completing a multiple



descend on the monument for that unique experience, for us just the usual crowds on a non-solstice day were challenge enough to contend with.

The routine masses were now kept in check, first by requiring an orderly queue at the relatively new visitor center, followed by a short shuttle bus ride to the actual site. There, a safe distance is maintained several yards away from the multi-ton stones by a rope cordon.

To be fair, the National Trust has done a commendable job in crowd control while providing attractive educational opportunities to learn all about the world heritage site.

A highlight of the visitor center is the 360 degree "Stand in the Stones" experience which gives the sense of being within the stone circle, while taking the viewer through a progressive visual chronology of how the site may have looked down through time, as well as during the winter and summer solstice.

year dig - claimed to have found the specific quarry at Craig Rhos-y-felin in Pembrokeshire, pinpointing the source of the bluestones. That claim has been disputed in recent months by another group of scientists, who contend that the quarry-like features at Craig Rhos-y-felin are in fact natural occurrences, with no evidence of man-made intervention. These scientists furthermore renewed another long-contended theory that glacial action brought the bluestones to the Salisbury Plain, and not the colossal efforts of the early people.

A stone harder than granite, bluestones had also given rise to old folk tales that attributed magical healing qualities to them, perhaps justifying their transport from such a long distance. Even this theory is disputed by those who contend that there was no such use found at Welsh sites, and the stones appear to have arrived at Stonehenge too early in time to even be associated with this idea. Another view, how-

ever, poses a connection to an ancestral identity that Welsh settlers wanted to bring with them, possibly joining it with the local tradition.

Whether these or other theories prove true, a walk around the path circling the magnificent monument reinforces the notion that the bluestones must have displayed uniquely special qualities to justify their transport from such great a distance so long ago. Viewing them today, the size and presence of the bluestones pale in comparison to the towering sarsen stones, which - at over 20 feet tall - stand more than twice as high as the bluestones. Though originally 80 bluestones formed an inner circle and horseshoe within the more prominent sarsen outer circle, many have been removed or broken over the ages, leaving the remaining specimens to appear in a less orderly pattern.

With heads filled with wonder and immense respect for the ancient ones who erected Stonehenge, we retreated to nearby Troutbeck

Quarried nearby, the stones range up to forty tons or more in weight and rise ten to eighteen feet high.

A distinct advantage when walking these circles is the freedom to touch and experience the immense stones up close.

Other than loosely forming the shape of a circle, the Avebury stones do not appear to display the sophisticated workings or design of Stonehenge.

While strolling the pathway, we encountered two Bobbies on patrol. They were cordial but looked a little out of place. We asked for directions and what they were expecting. "With the coming solstice,



Guest House in East Chisenbury for a time of quiet reflection. Sitting on the back deck of our room in the rural setting, we sipped on wine while watching a family of swans leisurely float by on the River Avon, a mere twenty feet away. The Avon also winds its way near Stonehenge, a possible means of transport for the bluestones, as well as for the dead being carried from neighboring prehistoric sites.

The next day we walked around another mysterious stone circle complex, this time in Avebury, about 20 miles north of Stonehenge, in the Marlborough Downs region mentioned above. While not as striking as Stonehenge, the Avebury stone circles are surrounded by a circular earthen berm, a thousand yards in circumference, encompassing a large portion of the village of Avebury. An outer stone circle with a thousand-foot diameter encloses two inner circles. In total, there were originally thought to be over one hundred stones in the complex.

the stone circle draws crowds," one replied. "But with the overcast skies and rain threatening, the enthusiasts appear to be holding off."

A little further along, we found a dozen solstice devotees gathered near a standing stone, making ready to celebrate the dawn of summer. One curious group member, seeing us reading from a brochure, approached with a somewhat confused look on his face. "Do you know what this is all about?" he queried. Unsure of his intent, we offered him our brochure, which he perused. Thanking us, he returned to the group, still appearing oblivious, but resigned to carry on. A friend had most likely talked him into joining the fun without belaboring the details.

Later, when we had settled into the aptly named Covenstead B & B in nearby Glastonbury, our hostess, an aficionado of all things occult, explained that the group we met at Avebury was most likely enacting a

pagan or druid ritual related to the solstice. A little nervous about the occult-themed nature of our accommodation, we opted that night for the Handfasting Honeymoon Suite, hoping that any untoward spirits would prefer less uplifting rooms. Handfasting was an old Celtic tradition where the newly wed couple's hands were literally bound together, symbolizing their commitment to stay together eternally.

Waking refreshed the next morning, and having experienced no strange occurrences during the night, we were treated to a sumptuous breakfast by our hostess, who proceeded to describe another mystery connecting Stonehenge, Glastonbury and Avebury to the Celtic world. The locations of Glastonbury and Avebury put them directly on the St. Michael Ley Line. Furthermore, Stonehenge, through a geometric, geographic correlation, though not situated physically on that Ley Line, has an indirect connection.

Since I had never previously heard of a "ley line," Lori gave me a quick lesson. According to Wikipedia ley lines "are apparent alignments of places of significance in the geography or culture of an area, often including man-made structures. They are, in the older sense, ancient, straight trackways in the British landscape, or in the newer sense, spiritual and mystical alignments of land forms."

The term originated from British archeologist Alfred Watkins, who in 1921 noticed what appeared to be alignments of ancient monuments and geographical features across Britain. He concluded at the time that they were early trackways, as described in his book, *The Old Straight Track*. Though Watkins drew no spiritual significance to the lines, in recent times such theories have created renewed interest in them.

While there are various theories as to the origins and meaning of ley lines, solid evidence is hard to come by. Some draw a religious purpose, possibly of guides that led ancient ones to sacred places or burial chambers. Others try to connect them with the earth's magnetic field.

The St. Michael Ley Line is considered astronomical, since it follows the route the sun takes on the spring festival of St. Michael, the 8th of May each year. The geometric theory comes into play with Stonehenge, as the St. Michael Ley Line through Glastonbury and Avebury forms a perfect right triangle with the location of Stonehenge.

Skeptics contend that with the proliferation of ancient monuments and geographic features in the British Isles and greater Europe, ley lines can be conjured up by drawing lines in just about any direction. Irrespective of the veracity of the ley line theories, Stonehenge has been identified as the hub of several ley lines, even a circular one. The relationship to the St. Michael Ley Line provided the second tie-in to the Celtic world that Lori and I noted. Heading in a southwesterly direction after passing through.

Avebury and Glastonbury, the line proceeds like an arrow across Cornwall all the way to St. Michael's Mount at the tip of the protruding peninsula. That was reason enough for us to explore the picturesque Cornish Celtic countryside en route to the line's namesake origin.

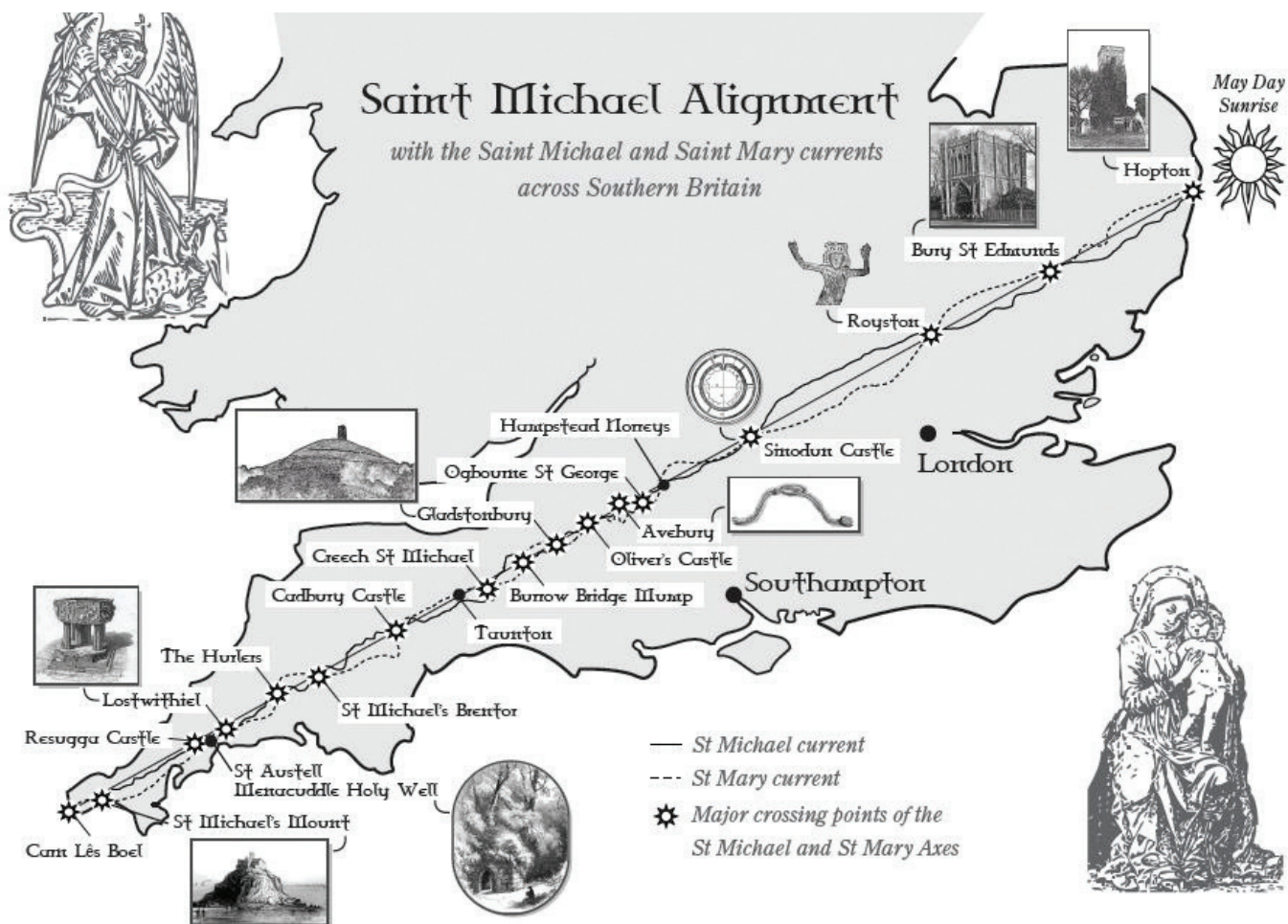
The next day, navigating our way through Cornwall, we decided on the picture-postcard fishing village of Port Isaac as our base of operations. Port Isaac is on the northern coast of Cornwall, about two-thirds of the way from Glastonbury to St. Michael's Mount. Fans of the British television series, *Doc Martin*, will recognize the village as Port Wenn, the setting for the medical comedy drama. In fact, our lodging was the old schoolhouse from the show, which has been converted into



The Old Schoolhouse Hotel. The dramatic view from our second-floor bedroom windows took in the village and seafront to the left, and Doc Martin's home and surgery directly across the harbor.

Though we could have sat for hours absorbing the idyllic scene from that historic perch, our immediate objective the following day was St. Michael's Mount, a couple of hours further south. Nearing the western tip of Cornwall, the road turned toward the southerly coast approaching Mount Bay, near the entrance to the English Channel. To our front, rising majestically 250 feet from the sea, stood the regal form of the St. Michael's Mount castle and chapel, separated from the mainland by a narrow sand causeway, about a half mile in length.

Legend has it that in the fifth century St. Michael the Archangel first touched down on earth at the peak of the isle. We were surprised that this sacred figure was so closely associated with what for some is a rather fantastical, metaphysical concept of the ley line. St. Michael, after all, is known as a condemner of paganism and heresy, and is a patron saint of Cornwall. Nevertheless, the St. Michael Ley Line got its



name from the number of religious structures the line passes through, such as churches bearing St. Michael's name on Brent Tor in Brentor, Wales, and on Glastonbury Tor.

King Arthur also comes into play along the ley line. He is said to have battled one of the giants that folklore maintains built the isle of St. Michael's Mount. The purported grave of King Arthur and his queen, Guinevere, can be observed today amidst the Glastonbury Abbey ruins. He even may have used the route of the ley line as a hunting path.

Fortunate to arrive at St. Michael's Mount during low tide, we gingerly walked the quarter mile cobblestone way from the mainland beach out to the isle. Passing through the village-like setting of shops, gardens, and restaurants, we continued up the path to the castle. Along the way, we spotted a small stone heart set amidst the cobblestones. From another legend of giant killers, the heart is all that remains of a vicious giant, Comoran, who terrorized the island inhabitants during King Arthur's time. However, the giant killer this time was a lad named Jack. He dug a pit, then covered it over, so that when Comoran passed, he fell in, with just his head sticking out. Jack slayed him, becoming the hero, Jack the giant killer.

The trek to the castle was steep and the stones uneven, but we finally made it. On this gorgeous sunny day, we were captivated by the panoramic view - stretching for miles out to sea and inland, far beyond the bayside resort town of Marazion.

While early history is sketchy at times, in 1080 CE the Earl of Cornwall - a half-brother of William the Conqueror - granted ownership of St. Michael's Mount to its larger counterpart, the Mont-St-Michel in France. While under French control, the church was completed in

the twelfth century. Henry V took back dominion for Britain in 1414. Then in 1659, Colonel John St Aubyn acquired the property, beginning an unbroken tenure of over 350 years, which continues today with the twelfth-generation family of James St Aubyn, who still resides in the castle. Though they turned most of the island over to the National Trust in 1954, the St Aubyn's retain a 999-year lease to live in the castle and run the visitor business.

As our time delving into Celtic mysteries was drawing to a close, a final coincidental connection came to our attention. In the year 1275 a powerful earthquake simultaneously destroyed the churches on St. Michael's Mount and Glastonbury Tor.

Digging further, we discovered a 2003 book, *Ley Lines and the Earth's Energies, An Extraordinary Journey Into the Earth's Natural Energy System*, by David Cowan and Chris Arnold, that describes a line of earthquake epicenters that coincide with the St. Michael Ley Line.

Though people at the time may not have grasped the possible scientific explanation for the phenomenon, mystical religious connotations were readily and fearfully envisioned. In 1755 on November 1, All Saints Day, a similar, yet even more destructive earthquake struck. Known as the Great Lisbon earthquake, the magnitude 8.5-9 tremor caused such massive devastation that many feared that the wrath of God had invoked divine judgment.

The diverse scientific, religious and superstitious theories of the Celtic past are certain to perplex visitors and locals alike for a long time to come. Even so, the opportunity to experience these people and places first-hand is sure to enrich the journey.



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Jump into
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As Celtic Life International correspondent Melanie Ward explains, the waters of Lough Erne near Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, are a treasure trove of history, heritage and more...

The Islands of Lough Erne

For thousands of years the Erne was a major waterway, providing a route from the Atlantic Ocean to inland Ireland, a border between the ancient Kingdoms of Connaught and Ulster, and a gateway to the pilgrimage site of Lough Derg.

Its waters brought the first Neolithic people to settle on its banks, carried Christian missionaries to its shores to preach Gospels, and later Viking invaders to raid and plunder.

A series of lake systems studded with islands, the Erne was named for the Ermai, an ancient tribe who were defeated in battle and submerged by its waters. Rising in County Longford, it flows through Counties Cavan and Fermanagh before meeting the Atlantic in County Donegal.

Along its course are over a hundred islands, each with a story to tell.

Boa Island

Four miles long and a mile wide, Boa Island (named after the Celtic war goddess, Badhbha) is connected to the town of Fermanagh by two causeways. The earthworks of ancient raths - circular farmsteads built by the earliest inhabitants of the island - rise in its fields.

On the island's southern shore is an incomplete stone circle, ritually significant during the Bronze Age. Here also is Caldragh, an unconsecrated graveyard, home to two mysterious and enigmatic figures - the Boa Island statue and the Lustymore figure.

The Boa Island statue depicts two figures, back-to-back, and many claim to have experienced an eerie, tingling sensation from touching them. A source of mystery to scholars and historians, it is unclear what the figures are meant to represent. Some suggest that they portray the ancient gods of Boa Island, male and female, carved to ensure the fertility of crops, animals and people, and to guarantee the success of the tribe in battle. Others muse that the figures were carved in the early Christian period to represent holy men or local saints.

The Lustymore figure was moved to Caldragh from a nearby island in the early twentieth century and now sits alongside the Boa Island statue. Originally two-sided, one side has long since been defaced. Its remaining face depicts a crouching figure which appears to be holding something, and its stance suggests it could well be an early Sheela-na-gig - a pre-Christian fertility figure. Perhaps it was carved to represent Badhbha herself.

White Island

Another Sheela-na-gig is to be found a few miles south of Boa, on White Island. The carving stands alongside seven other statues, part of one of the first Christian churches built here. Who created them, and why, is not known.

A figure holding two griffins is said to represent the dual nature of Christ, while a partner stone depicting a man armed with a sword and shield is thought to portray Christ the warrior. One of the curious stones depicts a man holding a book, perhaps signifying an evangelist who spread the Gospel. And another figure is seen holding a bag at his waist, possibly representing the biblical David, the underdog who against all odds defeated a giant with the five stones he carried in a pouch.

One of the most intriguing figures carries a bell and crozier, suggesting an abbot or bishop. However, this figure wears a hood and appears female. Perhaps it portrays one of the local saints, Febor, who established a religious community in Fermanagh. It might also be Fancha, a chieftain's daughter who was one of the first Christian converts.





The final figure is incomplete and shows only the faint outline of a face which failed to emerge from the stone; its creation possibly interrupted by a Viking raid, one of many which took place on Lough Erne in the first millennium.

Devenish Island

Of all the islands in Lough Erne, Devenish is the most significant. Here the remains of one of the earliest Christian communities in Ireland stand in emerald meadows that slope down into the opal waters of the Erne.

Legend tells that St Molaise came here in the sixth century to spread the word of Christianity. This angered the druids, who urged King Conall Derg to banish Molaise and his monks. The King gathered his warriors and they rode out on horseback to confront Molaise. As the war band approached him, Molaise raised his arms and the King and his warriors were rooted to the spot, unable to advance or retreat.

"What is it you want?" asked the king.

"The right to remain here and worship," Molaise replied.

The king agreed to the Saint's demand, he and his warriors were released, and Molaise and his monks remained on the island. Under Molaise's guidance the island community flourished, providing a refuge for the sick and the weak, a place of learning where sacred manuscripts were transcribed, and a site of worship where Christians gathered to praise God.

Molaise was renowned for his wisdom and often negotiated treaties between the warring tribes of the Erne, with Devenish becoming known as the Isle of the Assemblies. After his death, Devenish continued to thrive and was described by the poet Cuimin in 650 as 'a place of hospitality for everyone in Ireland.'

The Annals of Ulster record that in 836 "all the churches of Loch Erne, together with Clones and Devenish, were destroyed by the gentiles."

The ruins that remain on the Island are thought to date from the medieval period and after. These include St Molaise's House, a small oratory which would have been the first Christian Church on the island, and Tempeall Mor ('Great Church'). Within its ruined walls is St Molaise's coffin, a stone box thought to have been the final resting place of Devenish's founder, and said to grant wishes to those able to turn around in it. Also there is the mausoleum of the Maguires, one of Fermanagh's pre-eminent tribes.

The Round Tower of Devenish, standing over eighty feet high, is one of the finest in Ireland. Built as a bell tower to call the faithful to prayer, it also served as a lookout in times of war and a place of safety for the monks and their treasures. Made of local sandstone, four windows look out from the top of the tower, with faces - possibly representing biblical figures or early saints - carved above each one.

Further up the hill, in the graveyard of St Mary's Priory, stands a High Cross. Carved along its sides are scenes from the Crucifixion, vines, grapes and intricate rope work. It may have been intended as a spiritual defence against invaders, or to draw the attention of pilgrims en route to Lough Derg.

A Latin inscription on a wall of the Priory tells us that "Matthew O'Doogan made this for Bartholomew O'Flanagan, Prior of Devenish, 1449." Its ruined grandeur still has the power to invoke awe centuries later. Romanesque archways, the spiral staircase leading up to the choir loft whose walls once resounded to Matins, Evensong and Benediction, the rectangular courtyard where the community of monks went about their daily lives - all conspire to prompt the visitor to reflect on its former glory and the men and women who worked and worshipped here in times gone by.



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Matt Molloy's **Westport, Ireland**

You won't find a better or more authentic live music experience on the Emerald Isle than at Matt Molloy's in Westport, Co. Mayo. Curl up with a pint of 'the black stuff' and scrumptious fish 'n' chips in one of the inn's many cozy, quaint nooks and crannies, and let the traditional Irish melodies transport you back in time. A mainstay for serious musicians, and a hotspot for local and international celebrities, the pub is world-renowned for its spontaneous, supersonic seisiúns.

The William Wallace **Stirling, Scotland**

Located just 250 yards from its namesake monument, The William Wallace pub is steeped in Scotland's rich history and tradition. And while the food menu might be limited, there is no shortage of excellent Scotch, whisky and regional ales available at the bar. The inn has built its reputation, however, upon the warmth, wit, wisdom and welcome of both its staff and clientele - you won't find a friendlier or more helpful bunch in the U.K., even during football season when patrons are glued to the facility's big screen TVs.

Ty Coch Inn **Porthdinllaen, Wales**

Quietly situated in the tiny fishing village of Porthdinllaen on the lush north coast of the Llyn peninsula, and with spectacular views across the Irish Sea, the Ty Coch Inn has consistently punched well above its weight since the 1820s. Enjoy traditional Welsh fare either in a cozy pub setting or outside along the waterfront, before working off your meal with a swim on the beautiful beach at the tavern's doorstep. And don't dare leave without sampling their superb home crafted cider.



St. Tudy Inn **Bodmin, Cornwall**

You simply will not find a finer dining experience in the seven Celtic nations than at the St. Tudy Inn in Bodmin; the fare is first class - with simple and seasonal seafood, lamb, quail and puddings to whet the whistle - and the bar is beyond stocked with a sensational selection of excellent wines and creative cocktails alongside local and regional beers. Both the pub and restaurant décor and ambiance are exceptional and inviting, with an open fireplace to keep the cockles warm on cooler Cornish evenings.

The Thirsty Pigeon **Douglas, Isle of Man**

While this petite, one room pub might not be the biggest on the Isle of Man it may very well be the most interesting. Aged 18-80, area patrons squeeze in to enjoy regional meals, including traditional pies and Manx cider. If you are lucky enough to find a spot, you will likely learn more about local lore and legend in a few hours than you could imagine in a lifetime. Along with its reputation for excellent service, the inn is renowned for drawing a quirky cast of characters.

Fox and Friends Pub **Rennes, France**

No visit to Bretagne would be replete without a visit to Rennes and a quick stop at its best watering hole, the Fox and Friends Pub. More than a hub for the region's proud and passionate Celtic community, the two-tiered, post-trad tavern attracts young sporting types who are more apt to throw their support behind Irish and Scottish football clubs than their own national team. Live music and an array of themed events throughout the year keep things lively at all hours.

Borriquita de Belém **Santiago de Compostela, Spain**

Like Galicia itself, Borriquita de Belém is a crossroads of culture. Though primarily a jazz venue, the pub hosts a myriad of melodies through the week, including flamenco, folk, reggae, rock, blues and traditional Celtic music. With the best stocked bar in northwest Spain - including wines, whiskies, ciders, stouts, and the strongest sangria you will ever savour - you won't mind the miniscule menu offerings. In fact, when the joint is jumping, as it is most nights, all you will want to sample are the spirits.

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Brenda Anderson

Name: **Brenda Anderson**

Residence: **Glasgow, Scotland**

Occupation: **Director, Tasting Scotland.**

World Food Travel Association Ambassador for Scotland.

The Company

Tasting Scotland specializes in showcasing the best of the country's food, drink and regional cuisine specialties through a range of luxury, expert guided tours, self-drive trips, and tasting events.

The Vocation

"I create new partnerships with the best chefs, restaurateurs, artisan producers, whisky companies and luxury accommodation providers in the country to develop exceptional itineraries for our clients. My four loves are food, conviviality, travel and my country. I am never happier than when I am out on a day trip or a multi-day trip of a lifetime with fellow foodies from across the globe. I love creating unforgettable taste memories."

The Marketplace

"People want authenticity. They want to meet the farmer who creates the best Aberdeen Angus steak in Scotland - the place of its origin; they want to cook with ingredients that are respected the world over and hear anecdotes from the chef over lunch; they want to taste a range of whiskies they wouldn't normally get access to. I can do that."

The Cuisine

"The shift back to our culinary heritage, and the eating of traditional dishes that use cheaper cuts of meat, was the start of a contemporary revival. For most, working in harmony with the seasons and having a new found interest in what exactly they are eating is having a positive impact on our choices. Chefs and locals are back to growing their own often heritage vegetables in their 'Kailyards' (kitchen garden). Scottish cuisine is quite simply evolving the way our lives demand of it. We are seeking quality food that is vibrant - yet comforting, different - yet delicious."

www.tastingscotland.com



Ian Duffy

Name: **Ian Duffy**

Residence: **Richmond Hill, Ontario**

Occupation: **Owner, Royal Irish Tours**

The Company

Royal Irish Tours offers authentic, hand-crafted vacation experiences across Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales.

The Product

"We started in 2001 and very quickly became very popular in the Ireland market. People kept asking us about other destinations and it became clear to us that we needed to expand. We now offer a large program to Scotland, and have enhanced it further by adding England and Wales. Our current mandate is to offer the best touring experience to our valued customers, whether it is a first class coach tour, a mini-sightseeing tour, a driving holiday, or a rail tour."

The Market

"Our core customers are Canadians, and of those we have two types of clientele; those over 50 who are looking for a relaxing coach tour, and those between 30 and 50 who are looking for a driving holiday experience. We have expert staff on hand to help design the ultimate driving holiday, whether it includes a simple B&B or a stay in a luxurious 5 star castle."

The Rewards

"We run a weekly coach tour program, sometime even 3 or 4 of them a week, and it gives me great pleasure when I am over in Ireland and I see one of our coaches with the Royal Irish Tours logo on it, full with happy customers. Another reward is the hundreds of letters and emails we get from delighted customers commenting on how their trip to Ireland was brilliant. It is really nice when they say they will recommend us to all their friends and family. They certainly must do it, as we have a huge repeat clientele and we continue to receive thousands of referrals."

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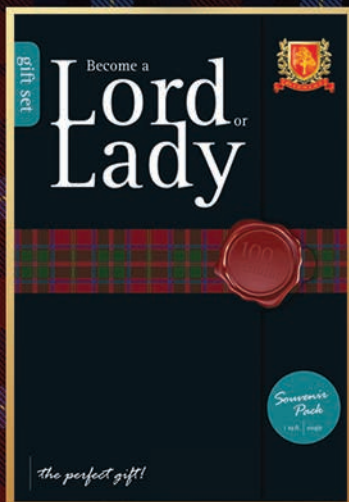


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Shepherd's Pie



When I was in my 20s, I secured my first teaching position in Labrador, Newfoundland. The winter evenings were long and dark and I turned to cooking as a means of entertainment. That Christmas, my Vice-Principal gave me a book entitled Mrs. Beeton's Simple Cookery in Colour. It was packed with straightforward recipes, and I still use it as a reference to this day.

Cottage pie (made with minced beef), or shepherd's pie (made with minced lamb), is a layered dish consisting of ground lamb or beef, carrots, celery, peas, salt, pepper, beef stock and Worcestershire sauce - all topped with mashed potato. The dish was a means of using leftover roasted meat of any kind, and we all know that our Celtic ancestors did not waste a morsel! The name "cottage" was applied to this kind of meat pie around the time potatoes were being introduced in Ireland. Potatoes were a staple for the peasants, who lived in cottages - a "modest dwelling" for the rural workers, our ancestors. In recent years, I added a few ingredients of my own to Mrs. Beeton's original formula.

Ingredients

- 1 lb of ground beef
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 stalk of celery, diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 tbsp of Worcestershire sauce
- 2 cloves of garlic, diced
- 2 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp of all purpose flour
- 2 tbsp of tomato paste
- ½ cup of red wine
- 1 cup of beef stock
- ½ cup of frozen defrosted peas
- 1 tsp of fresh rosemary, finely minced

For the mashed potato topping

- 2 lbs of potatoes
- ½ cup of skim milk
- ½ cup of half-and-half or cream
- 3 tbsp of unsalted butter
- 1 egg yolk
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions

In a large non-stick skillet over medium high heat, add the olive oil and let it get nice and hot. Add the ground beef and break it up with a wooden spoon; cook for about 4 to 5 minutes or until it's pretty much fully cooked through. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon and set aside. In the same pan, add the chopped onions, carrots, celery and season lightly with salt and pepper. Allow the veggies to cook for about 7 to 9 minutes or until they have developed some color and started to cook down a bit. Add the garlic and cook an additional 30 seconds. Add the ground beef back into the skillet and toss everything together. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly for about 30 seconds. Add the tomato paste and stir it in well allowing it to cool for just a few seconds. Add the wine and cook it for about a minute or until it has cooked down a bit and reduced slightly. Add the beef stock, Worcestershire sauce and rosemary and let it come to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and let it simmer for about 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, add in your frozen peas and cook for an additional 3 minutes.

For the mashed potato topping

Cook the potatoes in some boiling water until cooked through and tender; drain and place in a large bowl. Mash the potatoes either with a potato masher or a potato ricer; set aside for a few minutes. In a small saucepan, heat together the milk, cream and butter so it's nice and hot. Add the warm milk and stock mixture to the mashed potatoes along with the egg yolk. Mix everything well and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Lightly brush about 1 tsp of olive oil in the bottom and sides of a large casserole dish. Add the meat mixture and then top it with the mashed potatoes. Spread it evenly and place it in the oven and let it cook for about 15 minutes or until the top is golden brown. For a variation, sprinkle with shredded cheese and bake until brown.

Serves 6. Prep time: 10 minutes.

Cook time: 45 minutes

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



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all about Aberfeldy



with **Andrew Ferguson**



In 2014, Bacardi finally decided to get on the single malt bandwagon. Of the five single malts it produced, only Aberfeldy was well known to single malt drinkers. The famous rum company - which owns five distilleries in Scotland - then re-launched and re-branded Aberfeldy, alongside Aultmore, Craigellachie, Macduff (The Deveron) and Royal Brackla, as The Last Great Malts of Scotland.

Aberfeldy distillery was founded in 1896 in the Perthshire town of the same name. The distillery was built by brothers John Alexander and Tommy Dewar, whose family had been in the blended whisky business since 1846. The distillery was constructed near the ruins of an earlier site, Pitilie (1825-1867), in an effort to produce single malt whisky for the Dewars White Label blend. The first production took place in November of 1898 at the height of a major boom in Scotch whisky production. The distillery survived the Pattison Whisky Crash, which devastated the industry just two years later, and operated through most of the Great War.

In 1925, the distillery - and the Dewars blends - was acquired by Distillers Company Ltd. (DCL), a forerunner of Diageo, which is today the largest drinks and whisky company in the world.

Aberfeldy underwent a major upgrade and modernization in 1972,

at the beginning of a new boom cycle in the Scotch whisky industry. While modern facilities were created for production, including a new still house and tun room, the beautiful old stone maltings were preserved. More recently these have been converted into an informative visitor center, a lovely gift shop and a good cafe.

In 1998, Diageo - who at the time owned nearly half of the active distilling capacity in Scotland - was compelled by competition authorities to divest itself of some of its distilleries and brands. As part of its downsizing, it spun off John Dewar & Sons to Bacardi. Thus, Aberfeldy, along with its four sister distilleries and the Dewar's brands, were sold to Bacardi.

Only an hour's drive north of Glasgow and Edinburgh, Aberfeldy distillery is very accessible. Just 10 minutes off the A9 highway, down a scenic mountain road, it is also near scenic Loch Tay and the tourist town of Pitlochry. The distillery's visitor center has a terrific exhibit detailing the history of the Dewar's brand, and a lab where you can practice your own blending skills. Whisky pilgrims could make a day of it, combining a visit to Aberfeldy with one of a number of other nearby distilleries, including Edradour, Glenturret and Tullibardine.

Aberfeldy 12 Year

— Young but balanced, the malty tones are complemented by soft vanilla, cracked nuts and dried apricots. \$64

Aberfeldy 16 Year

— Darker and fruitier than the 12 year, with a creamy base and prominent sherry notes: dried fruits, fennel, coffee grounds, juicy orange and chocolate. \$96

Aberfeldy 18 Year

— This Duty Free release is similar to the 16-year-old, with both American and European oak notes, but with a few more years on it. £86.49 UK Duty Free

Aberfeldy 21 Year

— Possibly the best value 21-year-old whisky on the market right now, and the highlight of the range. It is creamy, rich and very smooth with layers of tropical fruit and decadent spices. \$115

Aberfeldy 28 Year

— Another Duty Free exclusive release, it is creamy with white fruits, ginger snaps, crisp orange and tingling spice. \$360 Duty Free Canada

www.fergusonwhiskytours.com
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Celtic Tales

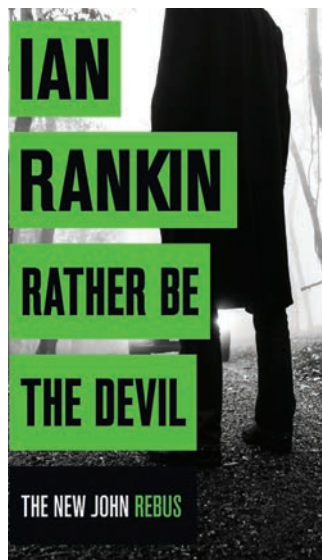
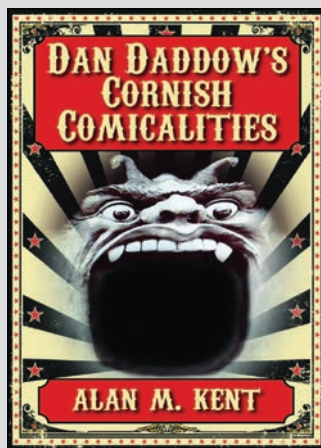
By Kate Forrester
Chronicle Books
176pp / \$22.95

Illustrator Kate Forrester has done a fantastic job of condensing and conveying these classic Celtic fairy tales and stories of enchantment for readers of all ages. Born of Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Brittany, the 16 ancient yarns are broken down into four core sections; Tricksters, The Sea, Quests, and Romance. Beautifully translated and told, the vignettes coalesce into a collage of mythology over the arc of the work, revealing the deep aural and oral customs of our ancestors. More than a blast from the past, however, the anecdotes set the stage for our contemporary storytelling traditions. Animated and accessible, and an ideal bedtime read for those looking to promote and preserve Celtic culture with their children, the book will ignite the imagination of younger generations. ~SPC

Dan Daddow's Cornish Comicalities

By Alan M. Kent
Ryelands Publishing
496pp / £12.99

Set in the seedy, steamy underbelly of 19th century Cornwall, Dan Daddow's Cornish Comicalities is the curious account of an impresario's efforts to thwart off his competition by assembling a rag-tag troupe of has-been performers to bring about greater glories. The results are - as with all great theatre - both comic and tragic, as the clumsy cast of quirky characters find themselves embroiled with the shadowy and sinister side of Victorian-era Europe. A master storyteller, Alan M. Kent brings so many twists and turns to this often-morbid, over-the-top narrative that readers may find themselves doubling back for clarity. Part-Goth, part-Steam punk - and all Broadway Danny Rose - the work is a must read for anyone with an abiding passion for the performing arts. ~SPC



Rather Be the Devil

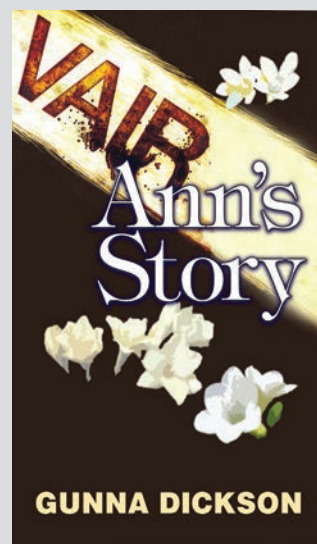
By Ian Rankin
Orion Books
384pp / £12.99

I have always wanted to interview Scottish scribe Ian Rankin, if only to uncover how he manages the mélange of complexity and simplicity in his work. Case in point; his latest Inspector John Rebus thriller *Rather Be the Devil*. On the surface, the straight-up story of an ages-old murder, abuse of power, organized crime and deception makes for an easy and effortless read. Swirling below, though, is a mix of multifarious mental and emotional states, each a murky mass of mood. Perhaps this is at the core of the author's enduring appeal; by tapping into the dark heart of the psyche, Rankin reveals our shadow self. Like Rebus, we are characters of huge contradictions. Unlike us, however, Rebus embraces, and even welcomes, his many inconsistencies. ~ SPC

VAIR: Ann's Story

By Gunna Dickson
Virtual Bookworm
294pp / \$14.95

When Scottish-American journalist and author Stewart Dickson passed away in 2011 he left a lasting literary legacy with his first, and only, full length work of fiction. A tale of love, loss and political conspiracy, VAIR screamed out for a sequel. Bravely, the author's wife gives the narrative - and its many bold, brash characters - a second life with her debut novel. Blond actress Ann Powell, jaded FBI agent John Taylor, beautiful Cuban special agent Emelina Calderon and other familiar figures from VAIR find themselves reweven like threads into the fabric of international intrigue. Dickson does more than pay homage to her late husband here, however; with *Ann's Story* she establishes her own voice, making a place for herself as a great American storyteller. ~SPC





9Bach *Anian*

How this recording managed to slip through my fingers last year remains a mystery; everyone knows I am a sucker for a pretty face with a prettier voice. More than a Welsh version of Enya, Kate Bush or Bjork, singer-songwriter Lisa Jen pushes her six-piece band to the brink of Celtic alt-folk with stirring, soulful vocals. *Anian* - the Brythonic word for nature - does well to express the spirit and soul of a hearty people, their lush landscape and their ancient language, in hushed and haunting tones. Beautiful and breathtaking, these 11 superb soundscapes caught the ear of Peter Gabriel and his Real World Records, a feather in the cap for any artist, let alone a little-known group with big things on the horizon. ~SPC

Celtic Woman *Voices of Angels*

Give credit where credit is due; the lovely lasses of Celtic Woman play to their strengths, and listener's heartstrings, with this 16 song selection of classic and contemporary melodies. As always, each member of the all-girl group is afforded the opportunity to showcase their individual talents. However, the quartet is at its best when three and four part harmonies take hold - the whole being stronger than the sum of its parts. Highlights here include *Mo Ghile Mear*, *Dúlaman*, and *Téir Abhaile Riú*, where the troupe taps into their traditional Irish roots with passion and precision. And kudos are due to the production team for allowing these *Voices of Angels* to soar over the roar of pipes, percussion, fiddles, whistles, harps, horns, guitars, and more. ~SPC

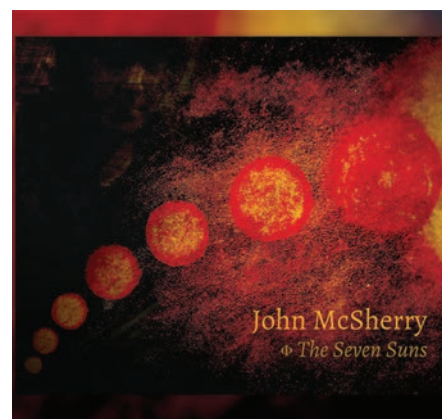


Rant Maggie Rant *Latitude*

Over a year in the making, the third full-length release from this Ontario-based sextet was well worth the wait. Riddled with fiddles, recorder, accordion, bouzouki and a host of other traditional Celtic instruments, *Latitude* highlights the exceptional vocals of Lindsay Schindler. Aided and abetted by a great gust of guests, including renowned Canadian singers Emm Gryner and Dayna Manning, Rant Maggie Rant is making a case for themselves as one of the finest Celtic Canuck bands in the country. And, with these twelve tunes, the band successfully captures the energy of its well-reputed live show in a studio environment. Among many, standout songs include *Paper Boats*, *Lemur's Femur*, *On the Wings of a Skorie*, and a stirring ode to Canada's First Nations people, *Mi'kmaq Enigma*. ~SPC

John McSherry *The Seven Suns*

Belfast-born uilleann piper John McSherry revitalizes the instrument, and - to some degree - the soundtrack of Ireland's rich heritage, with this terrific ten track offering. An established composer and arranger, whose previous release *Soma* was hailed by critics and music fans alike, McSherry calls upon the talents of friends Sean Óg Graham, Mike McGoldrick and Niamh Dunne to examine and express the Emerald Isle's current home in the global musical canon. Both traditional and cutting-edge at once, the compilation captures and conveys a country at a musical crossroads, where past and present collide, perhaps forging a soundtrack for the future. Whatever the case, there is no denying McSherry's great gift for song, giving listeners much to look forward to in the years to come. ~SPC



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Archy Jay

- aka The Snake Charmer

In a milieu dominated by big burly men, one petite young woman from New Delhi is grabbing all the headlines...



Archy Jay - aka The Snake Charmer, as she is known on social media channels - is getting rave reviews for her piping skills, particularly her unique takes on popular music, including songs from the *Gladiator* and *The Walking Dead* soundtracks.

The daughter of a middle class family, the attractive 25-year-old was a well-known vocalist and an accomplished acoustic guitar player before the bagpipes captured her fancy.

"What completely inspired me and caught my attention was watching the folk-metal band Eluveitie on YouTube," she shares via email. "They had a bagpiper - I had never seen or heard anything quite like it before."

Determined to be "as cool as" that group's piper, Jay gave up fast-tracking a career in international e-commerce and financing to teach herself to play the chanter in late 2012. Within two years, she had a handle on the instrument.

"Learning to play without a teacher was no joke, and I knew I had to put in more effort and time than anyone else; practicing

twice or thrice a week was simply not going to cut it for me."

She credits strangers who responded to her e-mails and messages with guiding her through the early days of learning, when she often felt overwhelmed. Five days of instruction from Finlay MacDonald at Scotland's National Piping Centre put polish on her basic mechanics, and she returned home ready to take the next steps.

"I was told that Mr. Finlay would be the right instructor for me, as he employs a lot of unconventional styles of playing. He understood what I wanted to do with my piping, and taught me the appropriate techniques. I have utmost respect for him."

Currently, Jay plays a semi-electronic bagpipe called Redpipes - an instrument suggested to her by champion Canadian piper Jim McGillivray on a visit to Canada in 2013.

Her method, she acknowledges, is anything but traditional.

"I mostly play the chromatic style, but since I have already broken some of the traditional playing rules I might as well go all out and experiment with everything and see how it works on the bagpipes."

She is aware that there may be those who are not sold on what she does.

"I find the bagpipes beautiful and unlike any other instrument out there. It is only a matter of presenting them in the right way by blending them with different genres or styles of music. That's what I am heading for, and I am sure people are going to love it."

"Love it" might be an understatement; her YouTube channel has already racked up more than one million views, and she is counting on the popularity of those videos - where she appears as both a solo artist and with a number of musical collaborators - to warm up audiences at home.

"Bagpipes are very new to India, and my hope is to start pulling people here toward this new sound."

Recognition outside of her home country has been building steadily since her video version of AC/DC's *Thunderstruck* went viral, grabbing global attention, and inviting interviews by BBC Radio Scotland and the *Daily Express*.

"To be recognized like that by the foreign media was quite a pleasant surprise and gave me my first sense of real achievement," she notes, adding the American metal band Lamb of God also publicly shared her version of one of their songs.

In addition, California-based composer Bear McCreary - whose credits include the soundtracks for *Outlander*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *The Walking Dead* - recently acknowledged her work on the pipes in several of his compositions.

Jay admits that being raised in India means that she is not as well-versed in Celtic music as many pipers, but she is impressed with the Celtic music she has been exposed to in recent years. She considers the late Piper Duncan Gordon, of Pitlochry, Scotland, a particular inspiration.

"Also, initially, I did not know the importance and relevance of the kilt to piping and to Celtic culture, and wore it just because it looked so damn good! And people here in India are really fascinated with it as well."

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Pierrick Lemou

BRETON FIDDLER **PIERRICK LEMOU** REFLECTS HIS ROOTS AND VALUES IN HIS MUSIC

“There is a feeling of belonging to Brittany that I try to cultivate in my daily life,” says fiddler Pierrick Lemou from his home on France’s lush western coast. “Breton society has been open-minded for a very long time. I try to perpetuate that value of humanism, and my music is the reflection of my convictions.”

Both sides of Lemou’s family have lived and worked in Brittany for generations. He explains that he first became attuned to his cultural identity as an adolescent.

“Breton music was both a revelation and a means of emancipation,” he says, adding that the folk movement of the mid-Seventies and - in particular - a gathering of Breton fiddlers, first spurred his interest in the instrument. He began to play with a variety of local and area groups, including La Mirlitantouille, Djiboudjep, Cabestan, Echo, Gwenva, Arche-type and La Godinette.

“Since then, I have experimented with Breton music - the sounds that are closest to my heart.”

Indeed, the prevailing question of *what if* sat at the core of his early Irish, Cajun and French-Canadian projects, pushing new melodic ideas and limits whenever possible.

“My first solo disc, *Kalon Koat*, was an effort to crystallize all these grand musical ambitions and personal experiences into one recording.”

Over time, both Lemou and his music evolved into a sort of minimalism.

“Today, I prefer to play in a duo than in a large group, perhaps tweaking the performance of a melody rather than trying to sublimate it through the arrangements.”

As such, he frequently appears with well-known Breton accordion player, Yann Fanch Perroches, and Irish uilleann piper, Peter Merbet - just two of hundreds of artists that have had an impact on his sound.

“I listen to violinists of all musical styles, including jazz, classical, and world music. I am often delighted with their music, sensibilities, swing, and virtuosities.”

He points to Irish musicians Paddy Glackin and Tommy Peoples, praising their timbre, technique and musicality, and calling them “masters of the matter.”

“I also admire my friend, and fellow Breton, Jacky Molard, who truly excels

in composition, arrangements and sheer virtuosity.”

Pop, rock, reggae, and fusion are also of interest to him, but he draws the line at rap, saying it simply “makes no sense” to his ears.

To continue earning a living as a musician can still be challenging at times. However, Lemou is quick to note that it is more important for him to be significant than merely successful.

“In this period of growing globalization, minority cultures are the first thing that liberal politics and the world of finance stifle,” he suggests, adding it requires conviction to keep Celtic culture vital and vibrant.

Despite his words of caution, Lemou speaks confidently of the future of Celtic music, crediting young players with blending creativity and technique.

“They play with an overflowing energy like rockers - they are very inventive with an ease and confidence on their instruments.”

Moving forward, Lemou will be busy with two projects in the coming months, the first of which traces fiddle music through the centuries.

“We are exploring the history of the fiddle and its distant ancestors, the crwth, rebec and medieval fiddle. The repertoire consists of music between the 10th and 13th centuries. It will include music relating to Britain, two Renaissance suites for the baroque violin, and then traditional music in Irish, Scottish and Breton suites.”

He is also working on a show based on the medieval manuscript *Le Roman de Renart*, which involves collaborating with a storyteller and another musician.

“Our aim is to interpret the tunes of the Middle Ages on reproductions of ancient instruments.”

Along with writing, recording and performing, Lemou also teaches courses and participates in internships. He urges young fiddlers to take every opportunity to play in duos, trios or sessions - places where “music gains movement and colour” - where it is better to play simple tunes with expression and sensitivity, than to give a mediocre performance of difficult compositions.

“Music is above all about sharing; there is no need to put pressure on virtuoso musicians - just play by putting your heart and soul into it.”

www.pierricklemou.com

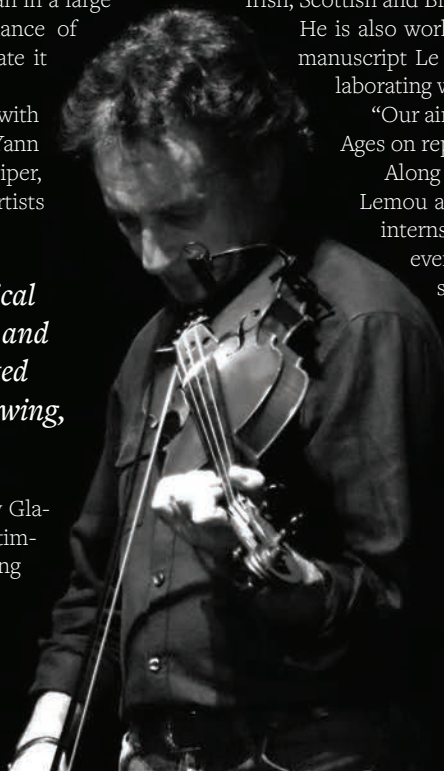


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Catriona Newcombe

DANCE INSTRUCTOR **CATRIONA NEWCOMBE** SEES HER YOUNGER SELF IN THE FACES OF HER STUDENTS

Whether in Singapore or Hong Kong, where she runs branches of her Echoes of Erin dance school, Catriona Newcombe sees the eagerness and curiosity of her young students and is reminded of her own childhood in Northern Ireland.

"I was eight years old when The Chieftains and Michael Flatley came to Ballycastle in County Antrim to perform in our town hall," she recalls fondly by email. "Being a very small town, we had never seen anything like it. I was simply in awe of the spectacle, and I remember going backstage afterwards to get Flatley's autograph. I knew right then and there what I wanted to be when I grew up."

As grand as the performance was, it wasn't Newcombe's first exposure to the ancient Irish art form.

"I started dancing at two and one-half years old. From when I can remember, I watched my older sisters practice steps for hours on end. I couldn't wait to get started."

Today, at 42, she has made it both her passion and profession.

"I have worked most weeks, seven days a week - and I have loved every minute. To be able to share my love for Irish dancing with the world brings me an amazing sense of accomplishment."

"It's not only about teaching Irish dance though - at times I feel like an ambassador for Irish music and language."

Her claim carries weight; Newcombe has danced and taught in Ireland, Scotland, England, France, America, Dubai and Taiwan, as well as in Hong Kong and Singapore.

At first, traditional Irish dance was all that was available to her.

"I went on to study performing arts and dance as part of my honors degree, and based my dissertation/thesis on the history and development of Irish dancing since the 12th century. I shadowed Riverdance, which had only just formed, and I was hooked."

She points out she was trained as an Irish festival dancer, like lead dancer Lauren Smyth of Riverdance fame.

"It is a style that most people have never heard of, and I was even



told it wasn't 'real' Irish dancing many times. It has been great to see someone like Lauren showcase this style so brilliantly, a true emissary for festival dancing."

Highlights of Newcombe's own career include being named a champion festival dancer, a European champion, and a runner-up in the world championships. It was only natural that she would transition into teaching, first in Florida and California, and then opening her own dance school in the United Kingdom. Later, she founded the very first Irish dancing troupe in Asia, the Celtic Bauhinia.

"We have performed alongside Brian Kennedy, Davy Spillane, The Chieftains, Cara Butler, and more recently with Máiréad Nesbitt (Celtic Woman, Lord of the Dance) and Stephen Scarriff in Hong Kong."

"I love to reach out to the local kids as much as possible. I now teach a large range of multicultural children, and to witness them becoming so interested and involved is more than rewarding - it is empowering."

Newcombe notes that interest in Irish dancing and culture is much more widespread than when she was a youngster.

"It is increasingly popular in Asia, for sure. This year, our Hong Kong feis welcomed dancers from Japan, China, New Zealand, Russia and beyond. And Singapore recently hosted its first feis."

"I am also encouraged to see that kids are really drawn to the actual performance side of it. They realize that it isn't all about competition, rules, big wigs and fake tans."

She explains that - as school standards are very high in Asia and students work exceptionally hard on their studies both in the classroom and at home - dance offers them a healthy outlet.

"What we do is about trying to take the stress away from the kids and help them find a balance between school and leisure. However, that doesn't mean the standard of our performance is any lower."

Newcombe says she enjoyed great support from both the Hong Kong Irish community and the St. Patrick's Society. And though she now resides in Singapore, she returns to Hong Kong every few weeks to work with the instructors at her dance school.

"I am very new to Singapore, but am confident that the community here will take us under its wings in the near future."

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Angus R. Grant

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AN UNCONVENTIONAL MAN “WHO LIVED ON THE BREEZE,” ANGUS R. GRANT MADE THE FIDDLE COOL AGAIN FOR A NEW GENERATION OF SCOTS

PHOTO CREDIT: UNKNOWN

Long-haired, shaggy-bearded and chock full of rock ‘n’ roll swagger, Angus R. Grant was the fiddler and front man for “acid-croft” band Shooglenifty, the world-renowned Edinburgh sextet that fused modern-edge, global dance groove with traditional Scottish music.

Grant picked up the fiddle at the age of five and took to the instrument immediately. His father, the renowned left-handed fiddler Aonghas Grant of Lochaber, was his first teacher. As a teenager, and under the spell of punk rock, Grant switched to the electric guitar.

“In those days, playing the fiddle was decidedly uncool,” states Shooglenifty’s webpage homage to their bandmate. “Ironically, something Angus did much to change in the next 30 years or so.”

Grant picked up his fiddle again to play in the small pubs along the west coast of the Scottish Highlands and in Edinburgh, before busking across Europe. It was a stop in Spain that inspired one of his best-known tunes, Two Fifty to Vigo. On his return to Scotland in the late 1980s, he joined friends in the punk/bluegrass combo Swamptrash. By 1990, the band had dissolved and Grant was beginning to embrace the tradition of his father’s music, soon infusing it with more contemporary influences.

Shooglenifty arose from local pub sessions with drummer James Mackintosh, guitarist Malcolm Crosbie, bassist Conrad Molleson, Iain Macleod on mandolin, and banjo player Garry Finlayson.

“They were a rock band, with a fiddle player as a front man,” notes the band’s website, adding that their first album, *Venus* in

Tweeds, “took the folk world by the scruff of the neck and they’ve kept shaking ever since.”

Reviewers struggled to categorize their sound, calling it “dub ceilidh”, “druidic funk”, and “acid croft.”

“For over 25 years Shooglenifty, with Angus as their quiet and unassuming front man, has led an exhilarating dance with their combination of trad jigs, reels and airs with deep driving grooves and haunting atmospheres,” says Neil McFadyen on the website www.folkradio.co.uk. “Along the way, they inspired a new generation of musicians and earned a devoted following.”

Scotland’s *The Herald* described the band’s first album’s impact on the Scottish folk scene as “earth-shattering.”

“They also drew young people, especially but not exclusively in the highlands and islands, into traditional music - and Grant’s soaring, keening fiddle and his tunesmithery were a major part of the attraction.”

David Francis of Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland agreed that Shooglenifty brought something fresh to the folk scene.

“Instantly recognizable, Angus was at the very centre of all that. With an unarguable fiddling pedigree, he brought a high level of musicianship and a sense of cultural rootedness which he never felt as a restriction. He was a free spirit, a great musician and his loss will be keenly felt.”

Grant composed some of Shooglenifty’s most memorable tunes, including *She’s in the Attic*, *Nordal Rhumba*, *Glenfinnan Dawn* and *Fitzroy Crossing*, the haunting closing track on the band’s most recent album.

Jim Gilchrist, writing for *The Scotsman*, noted the group entranced audiences from Glasgow to Australia and South Africa to Japan.

“However, Grant remained as happy playing in a pub session in Glenuig as he was in a rain forest festival in Borneo. Highland fiddle music was in his blood.”

Drummer James Mackintosh, Grant’s friend since childhood, told *The Scotsman* that his bandmate was a private man.

“He didn’t use a mobile phone or any modern technology. He just did his thing. He loved the west coast and he’d spend as much time up there as possible. He would just love to go and play a tune in Arisaig or Glenuig, or go out to Eigg. For Angus, everyone who played in the band just became family to him.”

Grant himself once described his bandmates as brothers, “Or worse - wives.”

“The Shoogle front man was a flighty and mercurial figure,” adds the band’s website. “He lived on the breeze, loving to disappear on walkabout - or, more often, hitchabout - in the Highlands, to pop up into far flung bars and drop by for random visits with much loved friends. He lived without ties or responsibility, but was devoted to his music, his family and his fellow musicians.”

In tribute, Shooglenifty and special guests will perform *A Night for Angus* at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on January 21 as part of this year’s Celtic Connections festival.

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