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CelticLife

INTERNATIONAL

Revisiting Northern Ireland

INSIDE!

Kevin Spacey

Whiskies of the World

Michelle Monaghan

Bannockburn, the film

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*Loreena McKennitt, Summer Fashion, Kevin Ryan
Bottlenose Dolphins, Remembering George Donaldson*





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malad valley welsh festival

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Welsh pioneers were the first to settle in the Malad Valley in the 1860s. One of their many Welsh traditions was an annual cultural arts event called an eisteddfod, with roots going back 900 years. This event was held locally for many years until it was discontinued before World War 1.

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

For more info visit

www.welshfestival.com

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Fáilte!

A Literary Giant

Alistair MacLeod was a great man. The world has lost a true genius.

In the introduction to a book of essays on his writing, editor Irene Guilford observes "Alistair MacLeod's birthplace is Canadian, his emotional heartland is Cape Breton, his heritage Scottish, but his writing is of the world."

No Great Mischief is MacLeod's masterpiece; not only could I not put it down, but when I closed the back cover, I opened the front again for a re-read. Looking back, I believe I was searching for the faces of the characters I felt I knew from somewhere.

His stories are so authentic that some readers have assumed the characters and events are true. Author Alice Munroe said, "These are not true stories, but they are real stories."

Of his style, MacLeod once said most writers come out of a certain landscape and that all literature, including the Bible, is regional. "My literature is set in a specific, detailed place... we all inhabit a kind of micro culture... but in the big world we're kind of all the same."

His short-story, The Boat, resonates with a poignant recollection of my younger days. I am the son of a fisherman, and many times as a young lad I heard my mother ask "What's new in the boat today?" or "How did things go in the boat today?"

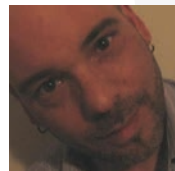
In humble, but magnificent fashion, he transformed a nondescript fishing vessel into a place of community, economics, politics, despair and death. Like a community church, the boat takes on a personality all its own. It's this unique weaving of personalities – transcending the ways of old with the future – that captures the reader's imagination.

Alistair made us proud to be Celtic. His work had universal appeal and was translated into more than 15 languages. May he rest in peace.

Our most sincere condolences go out to his wife, Anita, and their children Andrew, Alexander, Marion, Kenneth, Daniel and Lewis.

May God Bless.

~ Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher



I had the good fortune of interviewing Alistair MacLeod on a number of occasions; twice for Celtic Life International, and again for my radio show in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

I met the man only once, in late 2009, but it was a moment I will remember all of my life. I had just published my first book, for which my co-author and I had polled thousands of readers for a list of their favourite literary works from Atlantic Canada. After tallying the votes (and then reading and writing about all 100), MacLeod's No Great Mischief was declared the winner, besting Lucy Maud Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables by the slimmest of margins.

As luck would have it, MacLeod was speaking in Halifax the week the book was released, and my co-author and I were asked to introduce him at the event. He had no knowledge of his spot atop our survey, and as I handed him a copy of our book, tears streamed down his cheeks as the audience rose in standing ovation.

With typical Cape Breton composure, he approached the podium, leaned into the microphone and said, "Well, I guess it's all downhill from here."

Weeks later, he called to talk, still aglow with the acknowledgement of Atlantic Canadian readers. "I want to order 12 copies of your book," he explained. I was both surprised and deeply honoured. "May I ask what you intend to do with them?" I replied.

"They are for my grandchildren."

~ Stephen Patrick Clare, Managing Editor



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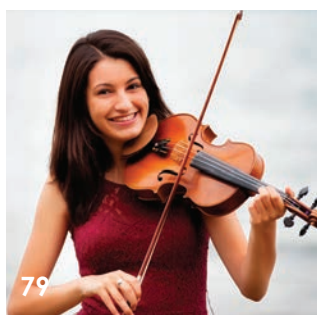
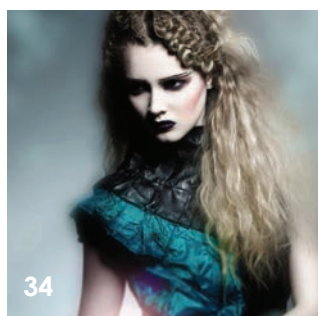
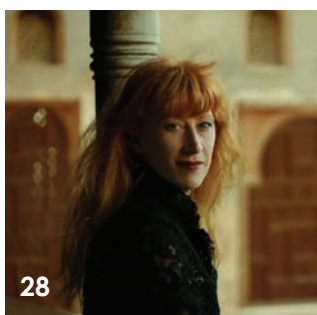
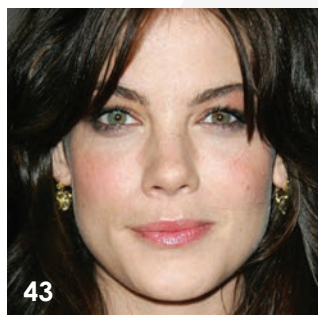
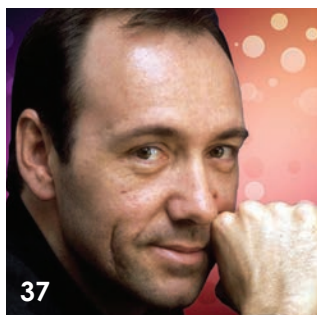
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Our June cover photo is of 'Titanica' by Irish sculptor Rowan Gillespie



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GET INVOLVED!

Cuban-Celtic musicians Luis Gutierrez and Angelica Gongora hope to visit Cape Breton, Nova Scotia this October to attend the Celtic Colours International Festival! Read our story about them in this issue, and visit our website to find out how you can help!

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DE th |a DOL



Mother of two named top Glasgow attraction

Looking for one of Glasgow's top attractions? Meet Mary Johnston, a middle-aged Scottish mother of two who lives in a terraced house in Bellahouston. The seemingly ordinary citizen briefly ranked 87th among Glasgow's top attractions – above such venues as the Glasgow concert venue The Hydro, which not too long ago featured Beyoncé – according to the popular travel website TripAdvisor. Reporting on Johnston's ranking as the 18th out of 29 museums in the city, The Scotsman newspaper noted that the woman was just two places behind Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art. The 60-year-old woman was at a loss to explain how she ended up on the site as an "attraction," and speculated that it was either a mistake or a joke. TripAdvisor has since removed Johnston from its site.

Liam Neeson's latest starring role

What do Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace, Batman Begins, Taken, and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) have in common? Answer: Liam Neeson. The blockbuster, action-film star has lent his voice to NITB's latest television advertising campaign in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Born in Ballymeana, the Hollywood star exhorts viewers "to discover the real deal." Neeson shares the campaign with some other famous faces, including Derry-Londonderry actress and singer Bronagh Gallagher, who is filmed showing the Hothouse Flowers' lead singer, Liam O Maonlai, around. "I've always maintained that Northern Ireland is the world's best-kept secret, both in the character of the people and its scenery," Neeson said.



Scotland's Viking hordes

That's not just an ordinary Scottish businessman you see going about his business. It's a Viking and he'll gladly batter you with his enormous battle axe! Well, not quite. However, a new DNA study says roughly one million Britons can claim direct descent from Vikings, according to the Scotsman newspaper. The paper said that men from Northern Scotland are most likely to show a direct match with almost a third (29.2 per cent) of the men from the Shetland Islands testing positive for Viking blood. Other areas that scored high for Viking descent were the Orkney Islands, Caithness and the Isle of Man. The study was commissioned to coincide with the launch of the new television series, Vikings.

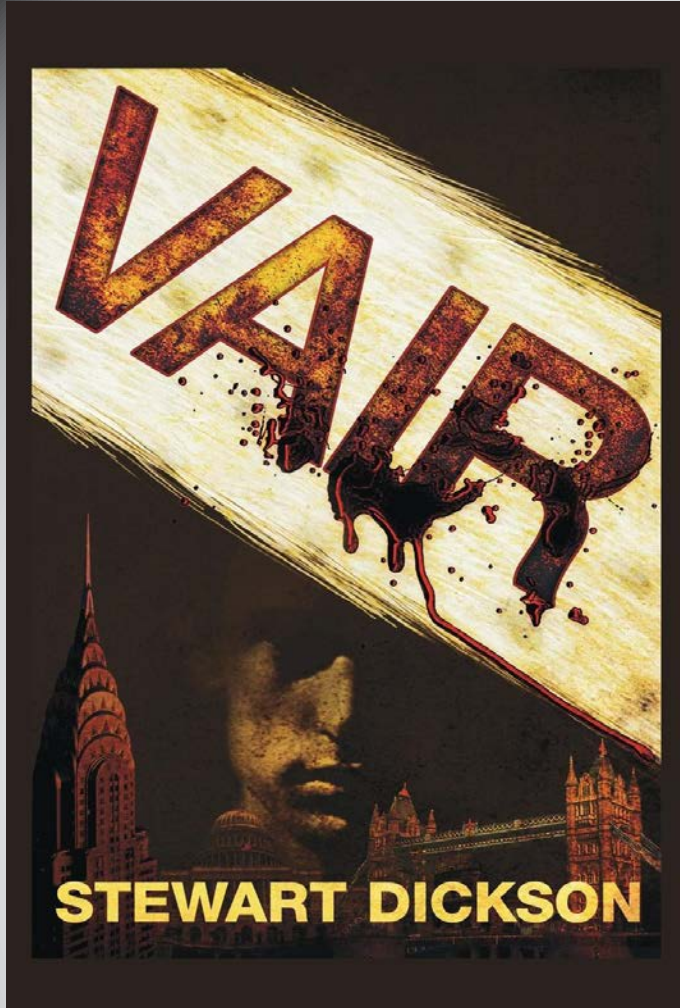
No monkey business with banana-firm merger

Here's some news that's just bananas! Dublin's Fyffes and North Carolina's Chiquita are merging, creating the world's largest banana company. The new company name will be – wait for it – ChiquitaFyffes plc, and the combined firm will be listed on the New York Stock Exchange and will be domiciled in Ireland. The combined equity value of the two is approximately \$1.07 billion, with some \$4.6 billion in annual revenues, which buys you a lot of fruit, no matter which way you look at it. Fyffes is a leading international marketer and distributor of tropical produce, while Chiquita has a global presence with operations in 70 countries. Combined, the firm sells more than 160 million boxes of bananas annually and owns or leases 24,000 hectares of productive land in Central America.



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

CAN A SEQUENCE OF BRUTAL MURDERS RE-WRITE THE SHORTHAND OF HISTORY?



DEEP IN THE SECRET ARCHIVES of the Vatican, startling 500-year-old documents are discovered. Immediately, an elite, clandestine arm of the curia is alerted. The Watch -- which they believe could change the course of history -- begins.

One year later, a series of bizarre, bloody murders occur in the U.S. The killings appear to follow the path of a Royal visit by an heir to the British throne. The murder weapons are linked to the 16th century.

As embarrassed security chiefs on both sides of the Atlantic try to cover up the hunt for the murderer, FBI agents and the Vatican uneasily join forces.

Is the killer a madman or, as the Vatican secretly believes, a human vehicle possessed by the spirit of one of history's most terrible tyrants?



Leith-born journalist Stewart Dickson covered major international news stories in his native Scotland, London's Fleet Street, and as U.S. bureau chief of a British tabloid. He lives in New York City with his wife, Gunna.

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first word with David Black



Most of my American friends fail to realise that Washington DC is, essentially, a Scottish city. It just happens, for some reason, to have been put down in the wrong place.

The case is a sound one. Take Collen Williamson, a remarkably skilled stonemason. Born in the village of Dyke, Morayshire, he proved his abilities by building Moy House for Sir Ludovick Grant, as designed by the world's leading architect, Robert Adam.

As luck would have it the newly invented United States, despite being stony-broke, was gearing up for a building boom and Collen had a well-connected cousin with a pub there. First of all he made his way to New York to seek out his opportunities but the cousin, John Suter, persuaded him to come to the newly proposed Federal City.

Johnny Suter's "Fountain Tavern" was no ordinary pub. In fact it has been called "the birthplace of the Federal City" for the simple reason it was where the city commissioners met and where all the land deals were being made – a surprising number of them by Scots.

Another Scot long-settled there was "Crusty" Davey Burnes, from Kincardineshire, whose back field was to become the site of the new "President's Mansion" (or White House, as James Fenimore Cooper later christened it) which was built by – guess who? – our old friend Collen Williamson!

The adjacent land to Crusty Davey's (which includes present-day Lafayette Square, just north of the White House) had been bought up by the wily and even crustier Scot Sam Davidson, who began digging it up for clay and set about making a fortune as a supplier of bricks to the rising Federal City. When the day came to lay the foundation stone of the White House, Collen set a brass plate into the bedding mortar prior to tapping his stone in place with his name engraved below George Washington's.

Shipmaster Andrew Munro had been visiting Maryland since 1637 and began living there in 1642. Once there, Munro re-established himself, changed the spelling of his name to Monroe (which can't have fooled anyone) and accumulated substantial landholdings in the usual Scottish-American manner. This process was furthered by his descendants, who settled at Monrovia plantation, one of whom would eventually move into Collen Williamson's handiwork at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue as one of the new nation's most successful presidents.

The Federal City's problem, at the outset, was that George Washington wanted a stone city rather than a brick one and, America being mostly a nation of timber or brick buildings, stonemasons were hard to come by. Scotland, on the other hand, had plenty of them, work was short and labour costs competitive. James Traquair was already in touch with Alexander Crawford of Shakespeare Square, Edinburgh, "a warm friend to America" and "one of the principle builders of this fine town." Crawford had already provided Traquair with masons for Philadelphia.

That was only the start. A Scottish Georgetown merchant about to leave for Edinburgh, John Laird, was asked to initiate a search, while George Walker made a special trip and contacted operative Lodge no. 8, where he recruited George Thomson, James White, Alexander Wilson, Alexander Scott, James McIntosh and Robert Brown. "No other group of workmen made as much of a mark on the dawning capital as did the Scots," writes William Seale, official historian of the White House. In due course perhaps a couple of dozen others joined them to work on both the President's Mansion (the previous one burned to its shell in the War of 1812) and the Capitol building designed by William Thornton (who, as an Edinburgh graduate, had studied Adam buildings at first hand, and during construction). Later, there were post-fire additions by Charles Bulfinch.

And so, the case is proven beyond doubt. I find support from the American historian Csisco for the theory that George Walker used the plot subdivision of Edinburgh New Town as a direct model for the American capital. There are three Edinburgh New Towns: the one laid out in 1769 by James Craig; a second and more extensive one north of Heriot Row, which was largely constructed between 1800 and 1830; and a third western New Town laid out over the Walker and Drumsheugh estates after 1830.

And now, I would submit, there happens to be a fourth Edinburgh New Town. Let's just call it Washington DC.

*David Black's book, **The Secret Scottish History of America**, is currently in preparation.*





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Eleanor McGrath
(third from right)
and Family

*If any one individual could be credited with keeping the Irish spirit alive in Canada, it may well be Eleanor McGrath. A former investment banker with RBC Dominion Securities, McGrath has devoted herself to giving a new voice to the stories she grew up hearing in order to educate others on the history of the Irish community and how members found their way to Canada. Her book, *A Story to be Told: Fifty Years of Personal Accounts of the Irish Immigrant Experience in Canada*, laid out the stories of 130 Irish newcomers to the country. Her films, *Kanata: An Irish Story*, and *Alive from the Divis Flats*, set out to accomplish the same goal.*

"My films have been my effort to share the stories of Irish Canadians and individuals I admire for their ability to leave their homeland and start anew, often with only dollars in their pockets," McGrath says, adding she tries to give voice to those who otherwise might not be heard. Her most recent projects continue in that vein. Her latest film, titled *Forgotten?*, began with her interest in preserving a Georgian building in Toronto which, between the 1870s and 1940s, housed the Fegan Home for Distribution of Boys. The film is currently undergoing its final edits. "We owe a great deal to these young people. Through their hard work, they contributed to our rural economy," the filmmaker says.

McGrath also recently completed her feature script, *An Blascaod Mor/The Great Blasket*, which revolves around the Great Blasket community during its last days in 1953. McGrath fell in love with the island off the coast of Dingle when she first visited it in 2003, and knew she had to tell the story. Irish producers currently have the film under consideration. "I live with this dream every day when *The Great Blasket* will be seen on the large cinema screen," McGrath says.

Though her most consistent involvement with the Irish community has been through art and film, she acted as the

executive director of the Ireland Fund of Canada for three years and remembers it for the wonderful new friends and links to Irish culture it gave her. Most recently, she volunteers as the director on the Ireland Canada University Foundation's board. The foundation works to raise funds and supporters in Ireland and Canada, and provides scholars the opportunity to study at chosen universities while offering academic contacts in both countries. On a more personal level, McGrath says her daughters, Alannah and Aine, keep the tradition of Irish dancing alive through their attendance at Gilchrist-Canavan School in Toronto.

McGrath traces her ancestors on her father's side back to Kerry and Limerick. Ultimately, the family arrived in New York and eventually settled in Sarnia, Ontario. Her grandparents formed a non-traditional union of Irish Catholic and Scots Presbyterian (McGrath and McLeod) which, according to McGrath, connects her to her Scottish ancestors on the Isle of Skye.

Her husband is also of Irish descent, but McGrath keeps her maiden name "like a badge of honour." She's not alone in her pride of her Celtic heritage. She relates the story around how her family name was always mispronounced and recalls being a child suggesting to her father that they might consider changing the spelling of their name to McGraw. Her father replied, "This [McGrath] is our name, this is how it is pronounced and this is how it's always been spelled." The origin of that pride, McGrath contends, has its roots in the old country. "There is something about being in Ireland which sings to one's soul, a true sense of belonging with the environment," she concludes.

*Eleanor McGrath has picked up more than a few honours for her work. Among her many awards, she received the Award of Excellence at the LA Movie Awards, and *Alive from the Divis Flats* was an official selection at both the Toronto Irish Film Festival and the Belfast Film Festival.*

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SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS

Scotland celebrates Homecoming in 2014 with a year-long calendar of cultural events, and no one knows what's going on better than VisitScotland's Ancestral Marketing Manager Natalie Summers. Here she answers our Seven Celtic Questions.



Natalie Summers

What are your own Celtic roots?

I am half Scottish, half Northern Irish, so all-in-all fully Celtic! My father's family were peat farmers in rural Northern Ireland, and my Scottish roots, which are mainly found in the central belt, are based in coal mining, nursing and steel. A number of my ancestors fought in Scottish regiments during the Second World War.

Why are those roots important to you?

Being Scottish is about much more than the place of your birth. It's an identity known the world over. Scots are recognized across the globe as pioneers and, of course, we have icons such as tartan, bagpipes, our famous Scottish larder, not to mention Scotland's claim to be one of the best places on earth to "bring in the bells" at Hogmanay. No matter where I travel in the world, people are excited to meet a Scot and hear more about Scotland. That's something to be proud of.

What does it mean to you today to be of Celtic heritage?

Celtic heritage today is about celebrating the past, and our unique traditions in a way which is relevant to today's world. Heritage events are now promoted on Twitter and many of the Scottish organizations worldwide discuss culture and events on Facebook but nothing compares to getting involved, getting your family tartan on for a ceilidh, rounding up the family for a day out at a local Highland Games or heading to a trad gig with a bunch of friends. The huge interest in ancestry worldwide means many ancestral Scots are looking at their own family roots and we are proud to welcome many hundreds of thousands "home" each year.

How are you involved with the Celtic community?

In my role as Ancestral Marketing Manager at VisitScotland, I am really lucky to be able to get involved in lots of Scottish festivals and events across the country and in North America as well as working closely with a number of events across the main areas of the Scottish Diaspora worldwide. 2014 has already been an amazing year for showcasing Celtic events in Scotland, including Big Burns Supper – the world's biggest Burns night, the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry, which sees 250 communities worldwide contributing panels sharing their connections to Scotland, and the John Muir Festival, which celebrates the life of one of the founding fathers of the National Parks in the U.S. I am also looking forward to Whisky Month in May, which includes excellent food and drink, music, song and dance, and even a whisky comedian, but the event firmly in my calendar is Bannockburn Live. There is so much to enjoy over the weekend, with Rachel Sermanni and Roddy Hart performing, a medieval village with traditional food and drink and, of course, the amazing re-enactments to look forward to - it's my pick for 2014!

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive?

Celtic culture is about communities, be that here in Scotland or in countries where expats and those with Scottish connections are getting their Scottish on in ways which are meaningful to them. The worldwide networks of St Andrew's Societies, Burns Clubs and Highland Games and festivals are testament to the enthusiasm that the Diaspora has for keeping Scottish and Celtic culture alive and forward looking.

The involvement of families and children is essential in ensuring the Celtic bug is passed on!

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

There is a lot already going on worldwide to promote Celtic culture, from our events program in Scotland offering over 800 ways to get involved in Scottish events in the homeland ensuring that the traditions of Scotland are kept alive, to the network of Scottish groups and organizations worldwide promoting Celtic culture through Burns, St Andrew's Societies, Highland Games, Piping, Highland dancing and many more. Engaging young people is the key to preserving our culture.

What can we be doing better?

Engaging young people within our Scottish heritage communities is key to ensuring traditions live on, so continuing to produce events inclusive for young people and involving the youth in decision making with Scottish groups and associations is a way to ensure that heritage events appeal to that audience too, and that organizations are keeping up with the asks of modern culture.

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They're young, talented and fiercely proud of their Celtic heritage

Kizzy Crawford

Kizzy Crawford is about as unconventional as they come. The 17-year-old singer fuses soul, jazz and full-on old-school funk with Welsh folk music and language. On her first recording, an extended play titled *Temporary Zone*, she finds inspiration in Welsh folk stories from the Mabinogion, the poetry of Welsh poets Gwyn Thomas and T.H. Parry Williams and from her love of the Welsh landscape. It's an unusual combination, a bit like the singer herself. "Unique stuff," the singer says, "I'm not really like anyone else and that's important to me. I am me, with my own identity."

Crawford's heritage is as diverse as her music. Her father's parents are from Barbados and moved to Reading, England, in the 1950s. Her mother came from southeast England. Crawford also traces back some Indian and French ancestry

as well as East End Jewish heritage. "So plenty of diversity there!" the singer exclaims, adding that she was educated in Welsh as a first language since she was four years old and identifies herself as Welsh.



It all seems to be working for her. Her music is in rotation on BBC Radio Wales, among other stations. In 2013, she won the Brwydr Y Bandiau at the National Eisteddfod as well as the Merthyr & RCT Singer-Songwriter competition, which gave her the money to record. Since putting out the CD, Crawford says she's found more confidence in her own creativity. "I'm more able to let it flow now. It works better than trying to sit down and write."

Clearly, Crawford has come a long way from when she used to sing along to Steely Dan into a toy microphone at age three – and get all the words wrong. Ultimately, she advises, "Follow your heart and don't try to write to a formula or to be like anyone else."

www.kizzymerielfcrawford.com

The Gothard Sisters

The Gothard Sisters first got their start playing at their local farmer's market in the Pacific Northwest, for five hours straight every Saturday morning. They don't have to do that anymore. Recently named as Best New Irish Artist at the Irish Music Awards, the trio have been picking up accolades everywhere they go. In fact Celtic Radio called their 2011 recording, *Story Girl*, the album of the year. Since then the three svelte, blonde sisters have recorded *Compass*, a third album, which joins their previously released *Christmas*. Greta describes their sound as "uplifting, energetic folk music, fiddle tunes and Irish dance."

To be sure, it was Irish dance along with early violin lessons that first set the women on the musical path. Willow recounts that their parents played instrumental music constantly in the house and the girls

enjoyed dancing around the living room and making up routines to perform for their parents.

Those home-made dance routines served them well; all three competed multiple times at the World Championships of Irish Dance. At the same time, the three girls learned classical violin at very young



ages and then gradually added other instruments to their repertoire. "Celtic music became a part of the show because of how it matched the Irish dancing," Solana says. "Once we added the lively and exciting fiddle energy to the show, there was no going back."

With their pale, blonde hair and blue eyes, the sisters could easily be mistaken for Scandinavian. And while some of that heritage is in their family, the women are a mixture of German, Irish, Scottish and English. Laughs Greta, "Our fellow Irish dance and musician friends have often joked about us being the Viking invaders. But we definitely do have Irish heritage!" Anyone who has heard the "three amazingly talented sisters," as Lonely Planet calls them, wouldn't doubt that for a moment.

www.gothardsisters.weebly.com



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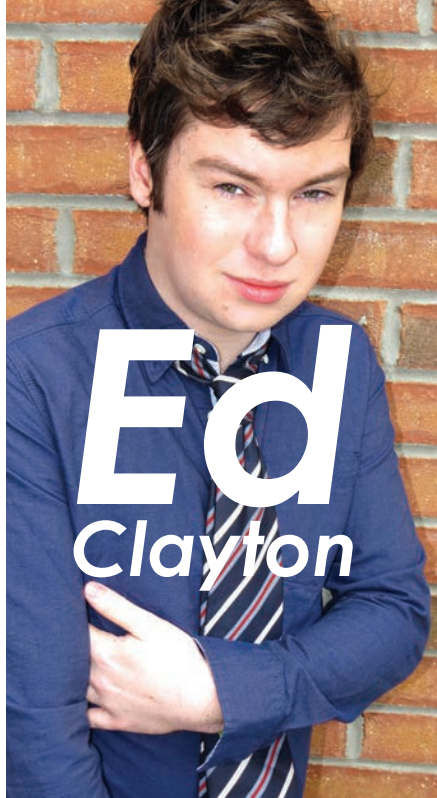
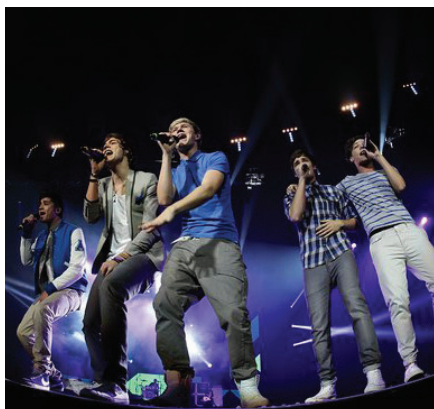


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When it comes to engineering, Ed Clayton is a Celtic whiz kid. But the 23-year-old isn't designing structures – at least not for buildings. Clayton is a sound engineer turned songwriter-producer, who's twirled the knobs for the likes of the Imagine Dragons and One Direction. Now he's arrived in Toronto, Ontario, hanging out his shingle as a songwriter and producer.

Toronto is a good leap across the pond for Clayton, who grew up in Bushmills, Ireland. Clayton originated in Leicester, England, but his mother's side has ties going back to the Upperlands and further back still to Galway, where Clayton discovered his descendants include Richard Burke and Grace O'Malley, the Irish Pirate Queen.

Clayton came to engineering after first developing an interest in recording natural sounds on his own, which he was applying to his own early attempts at traditional music. He became interested in sound manipulation, editing and the creative possibilities of audio, and was ultimately accepted into the University of West London's Music Tech course. There, he learned about pro audio.

After university, Clayton spent time mixing and recording bands, and doing post-production work, ultimately ending up at a pop-recording studio in West London, where he began engineering recordings. One day he was told a couple of guys with guitars and a singer were arriving to do a video shoot. The next thing Clayton knew, the Imagine Dragons turned up with a camera crew, lighting, make-up, and people from the label.

"There was a short time limit to get three songs done," Clayton recalls. "I had to set up everything as fast as possible. At the time of recording, they were a rising band who, less than a month later, became a worldwide success story."

On the other hand, One Direction was already a global sensation when Clayton worked with them. He participated in overseeing a couple of the writing sessions for Midnight Memories. "I didn't really know what to expect from them, having heard and read so much about them. But this was generally a more relaxed environment as they're guys my age."

So how is it Clayton ends up in Canada? "Toronto is a brilliant city for

music," he enthuses. "It's helped produce some of the world's top commercial acts, including Drake, Deadmau5 and Justin Bieber." Clayton decided he wanted to experience life in North America. Having moved there, he discovered a large Irish community in Toronto's East End, "so I don't feel too far from home."

Asked what he favours when he listens to Celtic music, Clayton cites the Irish blues guitarist Rory Gallagher, noting Gallagher had "insane improvisation skills with his soloing and was a brilliant songwriter too." Clayton also enjoys Lunasa, a traditional band that employs Uilleann pipes and fiddle in its music, the Scottish/English musician John Martyn, and both traditional acts like the Chieftains and more modern Irish-American punk bands such as The Dropkick Murphys. Of the latter, he declares, "They have all the traditional instruments, but bigger guitars!"

When it comes to engineering and producing, they're two different beasts. With the former, Clayton remains open to the needs of the artist and while he offers opinions, he generally takes a backseat and rolls with the session. On the other hand, producing he says, "is more of a collaboration between producer and the artist. Certainly every genre of music comes with its own guidelines. For example, British indie bands aren't too likely to have aggressive distorted guitars and elaborate solos. Whereas a punk band might not appreciate a choir and a string quartet. Although, that said," Clayton muses, "it might be interesting."

Ed Clayton on the current state of Celtic culture:

"People are as proud as ever to have Celtic blood and that can be seen clearly through the language, music and the arts in Ireland, and on the east coast of North America. Young North Americans seem to embrace their Celtic roots today."

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Gemma Forbes

Forres-born model and actress Gemma Forbes may live in New York City, but her heart is always with home.

I am Scottish born and bred; I grew up in the north of Scotland, in the countryside, overlooking Findhorn bay which is one of my favourite places in the world.

I've always been fascinated in photography; my best friend and I would set up these little shoots, play dress-up and take loads of pictures in different locations. It wasn't until I was 18 or 19 that I signed with my agent in Glasgow.

Modelling is more challenging than people think – yes folks, it's real work! My hope is to do more film and theatre acting in the years to come – that is my true passion.

There is great style and fashion in Scotland these days. I was recently in Edinburgh and came across this shop that made unique and beautifully tailored bespoke dresses right there in the shop.

I love Iona Crawford's work, especially her dresses which are feminine, romantic and chic – there is a playful, theatrical story to each of her pieces. I also love Johnstones of Elgin. I have a few cashmere pieces from their mill which is near to where I grew up.

Scottish people are very humble by nature; it's not their style to go shouting about their successes...maybe that is what adds to the mystique! That said, there is a wealth of talent within

Scotland, and it's wonderful to see our artists now being recognized internationally. And I love how artists from other countries explore their Scottish roots, especially someone like musician Jack White. It makes me proud to be from a place that is so rich in culture and heritage.



Louise Linton

Edinburgh-born actress Louise Linton proves that beauty and brains can walk hand in hand.

I love acting; it's the most exciting, challenging, and fascinating thing to do, just as it was when I was a child. However, my understanding of the craft has evolved over the years. As a young person, acting gave me an education, focus, and was a rubric through which I could better understand the world. I now see the critical role of the entertainment industry at large, and the incredible influence that it has.

The first film I produced, Intruder, has just been offered global distribution and will be represented at the Cannes film market. As well, I have just wrapped a role in a biopic about Howard Hughes alongside an all star cast including Warren Beatty, Annette Bening, Martin Sheen, Matthew Broderick, and others. I also have a lead role in a romantic comedy called Serial Daters Anonymous coming out this summer.

My memoir about doing voluntary work in Zambia is out to publishers this month also.

The focus of the world's youth is being fragmented by technology and media. It's hard for Celtic culture to maintain a foothold in a world so overwhelmed by the pervading digital tsunami of electronics, games, and entertainment. It's not just a phenomenon affecting Celtic culture, but is a generational shift affecting cultures everywhere. The world's youth is connected internationally online, on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram and their friendships and interests no longer start and end in their physical community. I believe that the best way for us to promote and preserve Celtic culture is to do so within the framework of social media. We need celebrities, brands, and images to carry our message online and in the forums which are relevant today.



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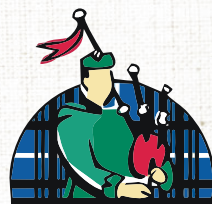
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Kevin Ryan, *the Swashbuckler*

April's Tartan Week celebrations in New York City weren't quite the same this year without Kevin Ryan. "Aye, now that was a grand weekend," grins the Irish actor, recalling his appearance at the annual Dressed To Kilt fashion show in the Big Apple two years ago. "See, it takes an Irishman to really get the party going. We always bring a bit of the craic."

While the Dublin-born thespian has toned down the revelry in recent months, having stopped smoking and drinking, he's been toning up at the gym. "I try to get there a couple of times each day," says the 29-year-old. "Or I will take the dog out for a hike in the Hollywood hills."

"Keeping fit is part of my responsibility to my roles," he adds. "Most people don't realise that acting is a very physically demanding profession, with a lot of long days preparing and shooting scenes. If you are not in great shape, then your career is not going to last very long."

Thankfully, Ryan's career appears to be in good form. "When Copper (the BBC America series) was cancelled after two seasons, I didn't let up. I got right back up on the horse and kept moving forward, staying busy and positive."

It wasn't long before he was back in front of the camera, starring in Philippe Calande's film *The Guru & The Gypsy*, which is scheduled for commercial release later this year.

More recently, he picked up the part of an Irish pirate alongside John Malkovich and Yasmine Al Massri in the NBC television series *Crossbones*, which debuts May 30. "I absolutely love the role," he says of his character, Finnigan. "The producers allowed me the freedom to develop the part as I saw fit and I was

able to create something quite unique. From what I know, this is the first Irish pirate ever presented on TV or in a film."

Based on the book *The Republic of Pirates* by Colin Woodard, and adapted for television by UK novelist and screenwriter Neil Cross (*Doctor Who*, *Luther*), *Crossbones* dramatises the life of the infamous swashbuckler Blackbeard.

"It was really quite an education as well," explains Ryan. "Again, part of my responsibility to my roles is reading up on the subject to better understand my part in portraying it. That period of history in that part of the world was filled with mystery, romance, intrigue and many larger than life characters that have become a part of our mythology. It has been, literally, a fantastic experience."

And though Tinseltown continues to welcome the award-winning actor with open arms, home will always be the Emerald Isle's capital city. "I am so busy that I don't really get homesick that often," notes Ryan. "But I love to spend as much time with my family as I possibly can. Being around my mom and dad and brothers and sisters helps keep me grounded. I did get back to Dublin for a few weeks this past Christmas and it was great to reconnect with all of them. There's nothing quite like a bit of the Irish craic."

*Ryan comes from a family of eighth-generation stonecutters. His early passions for Shakespeare and dancing led him into acting, landing a choice role on the RTE TV series *Raw*. His first short film, *Laredo*, which he starred in and produced, won four awards, including two at the Boston International Film Festival. His two other films, *The Tub* and *Songs for Amy*, were also award winners. Ryan has repeatedly been voted one of Ireland's Top 100 Sexiest Men.*

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Along with being two of Havana's finest Celtic musicians, Luis Gutierrez and Angelica Gongora might be the cutest couple in Cuba.

"Ours is a beautiful love story. Sometimes I cannot believe it."

Cuban fiddler Angelica Gongora remembers the day she met her partner in life and music, Luis Gutierrez. "It was September 2009," she smiles, mischievously. "I dropped into the Spanish Society Centre in Havana where Luis was studying the Galician bagpipes. I'm pretty sure I ruined his lesson."

Gutierrez nods with a grin. "Yes, she did. People who know me know how hard I concentrate when I study. But that day I hit a wall. I couldn't do anything except look at her."

Along with Galician roots, the young couple share a passion for Celtic culture and have been making beautiful music together since August 2011 as the duo Sean Am – Gaelic for "The Old Times."

"At that time I was a bagpiper without an instrument," remembers Gutierrez. "Angelica took me by the arm and reassured me that everything would be okay and that nothing could take away the music I loved."

He adapted by picking up the bodhran. Soon, the pair were playing on the radio, taking part in workshops promoting Celtic music, teaching at the University of Arts of Cuba, producing their own concerts, performing as guests in other musicians' shows and headlining the Music and Celtic Traditions Festival in Havana.

"Celtic music reminds us of what life is about," explains Gutierrez. "With a simple, singular sound and ornamentation, it is capable of being both very happy and deeply sad. It is also a style of music that is full of surprises; its dynamics can be a revelation to anyone who is listening or playing it."

Gongora agrees, taking it a step further, "Playing Celtic music gives us more freedom as musicians, since we are not bound by sheet music and the composer's vision for the tune. It allows us to put our soul into every note we play."

Gutierrez notes that to understand the Celtic music scene in Havana, one must understand what has happened in Cuba since Castro's revolution of the late 1950s.

"In just a few short years, we saw radical changes in our cultural identity. While we gained a stronger sense of what it means to be Cuban, we lost the memory of our Galician and Asturian Celtic roots."

He believes that, with international collaboration, the creation of a Havana-based Celtic organisation would aid artists with legal support, information, rehearsal spaces, public performance opportunities, enable exchanges with artists from other countries, develop mechanisms to promote Celtic culture in the community and better integrate Celtic culture into the country's arts institutions.

Meanwhile, the two do what they can to promote and preserve their shared heritage, finding strength in their relationship.

"Luis makes life beautiful," shares Gongora. "There is no simple or small thing that he does not turn into something profoundly wonderful. No matter what problems we have he always transforms them with a faith that knows no limits."

"I love so many things about Angelica," confides Gutierrez. "Her ability to look at things as if they were always new, and when she laughs out loud like a little girl about stuff that no one else understands. She completes me and makes me be a better person. As she said, ours is a beautiful love story."

"Ours is a beautiful love story. Sometimes I cannot believe it."

Luis and Angelica hope to visit Cape Breton this October to attend the Celtic Colours International Festival. They need support to cover travel and accommodation expenses. To find out how you can help make their dream a reality, please visit our website.

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May is Gaelic Month in Nova Scotia

Walking around the garden while learning how to speak Gaelic might sound a little odd, but that's one of the activities slated for Gaelic Awareness Month in Nova Scotia.

People will get together to take advantage of the spring weather to do some early planting and, at the same time, learn words and phrases needed for the activity. Where it really comes into focus, though, is when you understand that The Feast of Beltaine on May 1 is the date Gaels celebrate to mark the beginning of summer.

Accordingly, Gaelic Month lasts throughout May. Gaelic culture forms an important part of the Canadian province. The Gaels first arrived in Nova Scotia as part of the 18th and 19th centuries diaspora from the Scottish Highlands and islands. During that period, tens of thousands of Gaels left Scotland. Many settled primarily in Nova Scotia's eastern mainland and in Cape Breton, where they stayed together and kept alive such things as the local Gaelic dialect, oral traditions and family origins.

Lewis MacKinnon, director of Nova Scotia's Office of Gaelic Affairs, says that because entire communities were uprooted and transplanted from Scotland to Nova Scotia, it has left the two places with a shared history and kinship, and a Gaelic legacy that is uniquely North American.

"The rich oral culture of the Gaels is evident in the work of artists who have contributed significantly to the province's music sector," MacKinnon says. He cites, among others, The Rankins, Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac and Mary Jane Lamond as influential musicians who are only a generation or two removed from their Gaelic-speaking parents or grandparents.

Gaelic Awareness Month is an initiative that includes ceilidhs, storytelling gatherings, workshops, presentations, and talks on Gaelic language and cultural expression in Nova Scotia. MacKinnon adds that the month helps inform "about an unique, rich and lively Celtic language and culture in the province."

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Punia says that new technology allows pupils to study at their own leisure.

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"First, students build a foundation using essential words and phrases," explains the program's Alexandra Chernin. "Then they advance to full sentences and actual conversations, before recall exercises move the language from short-term to long-term memory. After that it's all about practice and practical application.

"It's easy and fun."

Chernin is impressed with the number of young people signing on.

"They are like little sponges," she laughs. "They absorb it so quickly.

"Traditionally it has been older folks who study languages, people with more time on their hands. That's not the case at all anymore, especially in the United States, Canada and Australia, where the expat Irish communities are working hard to preserve and promote their culture for future generations."

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Clan Currie Comes Home

When Homecoming 2014 takes place this year in Scotland, the Clan Currie plans to be there. In fact, the Clan Currie will be one of the few Clans out on the field during the re-enactment of Bannockburn, a major homecoming event that will mark the battle's famous anniversary.

According to Bob Currie, president of the Clan Currie Society, the members intend to combine that activity with their annual MacMhuirich Academic Symposium in Glasgow. The latter has hosted a veritable who's who of academics specializing in Scottish Gaelic history and culture, including such well-known professors and historians as Lewis McKinnon, Hugh Cheape, Willie Gillies and Wilson McLeod. Currie chuckles, "We'll be on the battlefield by day and back in Glasgow hosting dinner lectures at night."

The clan numbers more than 2,000, so it could have a sizeable presence at Homecoming. Currie says he's heard from clansfolk in the US, Canada and Scotland who plan to attend. For his own part, asked what he's looking forward to during the Homecoming, Currie asks "Where do I start?"

He is excited over the new visitor's centre at Bannockburn and the "break-through technology that has been deployed to help guests experience the actual battle." He's referring to the complex 3D technology the centre has created to put people right in the middle of the picture (see our story on Bannockburn, pages 30-31). But just as much, he's looking forward to meeting old friends and making new ones along the way – "especially Curries who may be experiencing Scotland for the very first time," he says. "It brings me back to that first trip I made in 1981."

The Currie name is the anglicized form of MacMhuiriach.



Currie says that it's long been believed the MacMhuiriachs came from the 13th century Irish bard, Muireadach O'Daly, who was forced to flee Scotland around 1213 following a rather nasty axe murder. Arriving in Scotland, he practiced his art for several patrons, including the Earls of Lennox. Eventually, he ended up on Islay as bard to the Lord of the Isles at Finlaggan.

After the fall of the Finlaggan lordship in the 15th century, a line of MacMhuirich bards served the MacDonalds of Clanranald on South Uist, Currie recounts. Once bards, always bards; apparently the Curries never stopped producing poetry. "Even after the Culloden and the fall of the Highland clan system, our people continue to practice their poetry," Currie says. "We have documented MacMhuirich/Currie poets writing well into the 1930s. More than a few of our active members have taken up the art form. Just incredible!"

Currie says he's been aware of his

Scottish ancestry his entire life and made his first trip "home" in 1981, which he calls a life-changing event. The visit to Scotland inspired him to learn more and trace his own Currie roots, which culminated in what he calls a "fateful" trip to the Isle of Arran several years later to see where his ancestors lived. The trip ended with a visit to Colonel William McMurdo Currie in Glasgow, who had formed the Clan Currie Society in 1959.

By this time, Bob Currie was already the Director of Piping and Drumming for the Bonnie Brae Scottish Games in New Jersey and a life member of the St. Andrew's Society for the State of New York. Colonel Currie encouraged him to build up the Clan Currie in the United States and when the colonel died in 1992, Currie took over running all the clan society activities. Currie found a natural affinity with his new role, citing the clan's "incredible history as hereditary bards. In medieval times, the bard was more than just a poet," Currie says. "He played many roles, including attorney, genealogist, and secretary of state. Having enjoyed a lifetime in communications and public affairs, it seemed as if some of that DNA had found its way into me."

To be sure, Currie has embraced his role with relish. He realized he could expand and redefine the society beyond what he calls the usual trappings of a traditional clan society. This has resulted in programming that draws in non-Curries and even non-Scots, such as the clan's annual Tartan Day on Ellis Island and its popular The Pipes of Christmas. "Clan societies are wonderful and vital family heritage groups," Currie notes.

"But we had a greater vision in Clan Currie. Clan Currie today is as much an international Scottish arts foundation as it is a clan society."



*Celtic Canadian musician
Loreena McKennitt celebrates 30
years of sonic soul-searching*

the Celtic Heart

"I am honoured to be in such esteemed company." Loreena McKennitt smiles at the idea of appearing alongside television celebrities Kevin Spacey and Michelle Monaghan in our publication.

"And I am somewhat surprised," she continues in earnest. "I'm not sure what I have done to deserve this kind of attention, but I'm not complaining!"

And neither are her fans, who number in the millions after three decades of McKennitt's bold and breathtaking Celtic melodies.

"I've had to pinch myself as of late," confides the multi-award-winning artist. "Time passes so quickly, it slips through the hands like sand. It's hard to even wrap my head around the concept of 30 years sometimes. I guess I have been too busy enjoying myself to notice."

That joy is evident on her recently released anthology, *The Journey So Far – The Best of Loreena McKennitt*, a double disc set that includes 12 classic tracks, as well as nine new live songs recorded in 2012, all handpicked by McKennitt herself.

"It was quite a process actually," she notes. "After three decades, I had a lot of material to choose from: the singles, my personal favourites, songs that perhaps best represented or reflected who I was and where I was at during certain points of my career. In the end I was very pleased and proud with the selections. They each stand on their own, yet work well alongside the others."

The same can be said for McKennitt's entire creative canon, which debuted with 1984's *Elemental*. Since then, the Stratford, Ontario, native – who was born and raised in neighbouring Morden, Manitoba – has released nine studio and five live recordings.

Along the way she found the time to release several DVDs, produce a documentary film, contribute music to a variety of cinematic and television projects, lend her voice to a number of notable causes, receive a myriad of honorary doctorates and degrees, be nominated for and win an array of awards, tour the world repeatedly, showcase at the Olympic Games, and perform for regulars and royalty alike.

"It's been quite an experience," notes the singer-songwriter. "More than that, it's been quite an education."

Driven by a lifelong love of learning, McKennitt digs deep into research as part of her creative process. "For the first couple of recordings I immersed

myself in Irish culture, travelling there for inspiration and absorbing as much information as I could through books, movies and music," she recalls. "The same process was in place for the work I did in the 1990s, and you can hear both the Spanish and Arabic influences in those albums."

Subsequent trips to Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, Hungary, Italy and other global destinations have also woven their way into her work.

"It's impossible, as an artist, not to be affected by those experiences. Our natural tendencies are to absorb what we see, smell, taste, touch and hear, process these things internally, and then

"I'm not sure what I have done to deserve this kind of attention, but I'm not complaining!"

try to recapture them in our art. What I find most fascinating is the individual interpretation of these experiences. Two artists may visit the same place, have the same meal, or meet the same people and walk away with completely unique and differing perspectives."

Given her exposure to, and her immersion into Celtic culture, McKennitt's perspective is more than authoritative – it is enlightening.

"I think at one time my ideas of what it means to be Celtic were quite defined and almost stereotypical with regard to the history and heritage. Over my career, as I have had the good fortune of travelling and connecting with people around the world, I have come to understand that Celtic culture is a living organism that has evolved naturally and organically. As people of Celtic origin continue to engage and pollinate with others of other backgrounds, an entirely new cultural

species is emerging. You might even call it Cross-Celtic."

Toss in technology, she continues, and the possibilities are staggering. "For the first time in our history, there exists the ability for Celts to connect and converge as a culture. The Celtic Diaspora is no longer confined to a specific geographical area; it now exists in cyberspace, comes in different colours and speaks many languages."

As such, McKennitt now considers herself to be a thread in the growing, global Celtic mosaic and thus, a citizen of the world. "Wherever I travel, it is the incredible and generous people I meet that make all of my creative efforts and endeavours worthwhile. I love my audience, they are a family of sorts, and they have been very good and generous to me, affording me a career that I love and the opportunity to live and grow as an artist."

- McKennitt's parents are of Irish and Scottish descent
- Growing up, she dreamed of becoming a veterinarian
- After learning the Celtic harp, she busked on the streets of Toronto to finance her first recording
- To date, she has sold more than 14-million albums worldwide
- In 1998, McKennitt founded the Cook-Rees Memorial Fund for Water Search and Safety after losing her fiancé in a tragic boating accident earlier that year. To date, more than \$3 million has been raised for education, research, training and equipment



The Journey So Far ~ The Best of Loreena McKennitt

*Unlike too many greatest-hits packages, this collection doesn't date itself. From *The Mystic's Dream* to *Down By the Sally Gardens*, *Marco Polo*, *The Lady of Shalott* and *Dante's Prayer*, McKennitt's tone, timbre and talent prove timeless. In particular, *Penelope's Song*, *The Mummer's Song* and *Full Circle* sound as powerful and poignant today as they were when first released, and as they will 30 years from now. There's something for everyone here; a strong sampling of songs for those discovering her magical melodies for the first time, as well as new live takes on older tunes that will surely satisfy longtime fans. ~ SPC*

Bannockburn, the Movie

Hatfield Farm in Hammonds Plains, a bedroom community of Halifax, Nova Scotia, is normally home to a dude ranch offering horseback riding, kids' birthday parties and weddings. But a few months ago, a visitor to the farm venturing into the back fields would have been startled to come across a medieval battle in full pitch. Men in armour on horseback charged at others, swinging swords and maces. What madness was this? Had a fabric in time somehow been torn, allowing these apparitions from the past to slip through?

In fact, Hatfield Farm was having its 15 minutes of fame, standing in for Scotland in a new historical docu-drama on the Battle of Bannockburn. The Halifax-based television production company Arcadia Entertainment is filming the show for History TV in the UK, coinciding with the 700th anniversary of the famous battle between the armies of Scotland and England. Notwithstanding, that doesn't explain how modern-day Nova Scotia came to stand in for ancient Scotland.

"In the nicest way possible, parts of Nova Scotia look way more like 14th century Scotland than present day Scotland does!" declares David Glover, a producer with Arcadia. Putting all joking aside, Glover says they seriously considered live-action filming in Scotland and did, in fact, shoot all the expert interviews over there. But when it came to landscape and terrain, and to match as closely as possible the battle descriptions available from the various chronicles of the time, Glover says they found the perfect locations in Nova Scotia.

While the show is about a Scottish battle and filmed in Canada, it's likely it will be seen globally. Sky Vision in the UK is distributing the show, while History TV owns the broadcast rights worldwide. While a firm date hasn't been set for the

premiere of the show, Glover says if he was a betting man he'd guess the release will be around June 23/24, coinciding with the 700th anniversary date of the battle. "We are confident that this story will be seen all over the world."

Glover says the production isn't out to tell a "definitive" story of the famous fight. "This is about the myths and legends surrounding the battle and to do



this we wanted to create a dark, messy and mysterious world similar to the feel you'd get from a graphic novel. There is no doubt that this was a brutal and violent time, but there was also love, romance, chivalry, mystery and magic."

To create what Glover is talking about, Arcadia has combined strong storytelling with large cinematic live-action moments. The goal was to come up with iconic scenes through the use of custom-built backgrounds and visual effects.

Filming got underway in September 2013 when the crew visited Scotland to gather accounts of the story of the battle from various experts. "These interviews will feature in the show and give a real unique perspective from people who not only have in depth knowledge of that period in history, but also a real passion for sharing their own take on what was one of the most fascinating events in medieval history," Glover points out.

Then it was back to Nova Scotia to film the live action and battle scenes. On some days, Arcadia had almost 100 cast and crew working on the production. The production company brought in three specialised groups to assist with the fight scenes. Each group had specific skills that were unique requirements for the show. The first group from Scotland were

the Clanranald, a non-profit trust that operates a team called Combat International. The trust dedicates its work to the creation of a medieval village in Scotland called Duncarron. The latter is essentially a living museum used to educate children and tourists about Scottish medieval life. Glover notes, "The combat team literally live and breathe medieval Scottish life on a day-to-day basis, and provided a level of authenticity to the show that simply would not exist elsewhere."

The CEO of the trust, Charlie Allan, is also the head of the combat team and was responsible for arranging and executing the fight sequences. Twelve members of the team came over along with their manager, who looked after wardrobe and props to ensure everyone was properly kitted out. Clanranald is

of European Medieval Arts. According to Glover, the men have studied the art of knights in mounted and ground combat. A medieval jousting champion, Dale Gienow, choreographed the mounted sequences, while David Cvet, founder of the academy, led the ground combat scenes. "Not only could they grind out the battle scenes with weapons, the group also contained skills in battling with horses," Glover marvelled.

Finally, the script necessitated a third group of five combat experts from the UK, who were comfortable and had experience with dialogue.

Of course, it goes without saying that Arcadia Entertainment has more than its fair share of Celtic staff. Glover himself was born and bred in Scotland. He notes that just among the small crew that



Photos by Teddy Lapierre

an unbelievable group of highly trained professional fight experts, Glover says. They've appeared in *Gladiator*, *Robin Hood*, *Eagle of the Ninth*, *Valhalla Rising* and *Game of Thrones*, among other shows. "There is no doubt that Clanranald brought a huge amount of authenticity to the battle scenes. They really do go the extra mile when it comes to knocking lumps out of each other!"

The second group participating in filming was a combined combat team from Ontario and Nova Scotia known as The Academy

went to Scotland to conduct the interviews, the group included a Chisholm (president of Arcadia), a Graham (the cinematographer), and a Daly (the sound technician). Glover says, "We visited many of the iconic sites involved in the Battle of Bannockburn and Robert the Bruce, so it was a particularly exciting trip for the crew to visit their ancestral homeland. Being based in Nova Scotia, it is pretty certain that the Celtic ties are strong throughout the company."



Halifax's Arcadia Entertainment produces content for a variety of broadcasters, including the Discovery Channel, National Geographic, Bravo, CBC and more. Its programmes have been broadcast in 140 countries in 26 languages and shows range from wildlife documentaries to historical docu-dramas and television series. www.arcadiatu.com



the bottlenose dolphins *of Moray Firth*

Story and photos by Tom Langlands

Heading north on the A9 from Inverness, I pass between the slender steel support cables of the impressive Kessock Bridge spanning high over the waters of the Beauly Firth on inner Moray Firth. To the east and in the distance, the Beauly Firth expands into the outer Moray Firth and much further, the latter merges with the North Sea. I am en route to photograph bottlenose dolphins off the coast of Scotland.

Once over the bridge, I arrive on a peninsula with the intriguing misnomer of the Black Isle. I head east with two possible destinations in mind: Avoch (pronounced “och” as in “loch”) where I can take a boat trip in search of these magnificent creatures, or Chanonry Point at Fortrose, a little further but the best place for observing these animals from the shore. I am keeping my options open when fate takes a hand revealing a door to the past and a fleeting link across two continents.

Driving into the small village of Avoch I spot a sign indicating the way to Alexander Mackenzie’s grave. Always interested in my nation’s history and its enigmatic characters, a short detour leads to the grounds of Avoch Church where, in a walled enclosure, commemorative plaques and a Canadian flag confirm I have found the final resting place of that great North American explorer immortalised in river and place names on so many maps of modern-day Canada. From my elevated position above this small fishing village I look down over the town, its small harbour and across the waters of the Beauly Firth, and I ponder Mackenzie’s relationship with this place.

Following his explorations across the North American continent he returned to the UK and in 1812 married Geddes Mackenzie (no relation), heiress of the estate of Avoch. He had an active interest in the local community and in 1814 he built a new harbour at Avoch to the design of the famous Scottish engineer Thomas Telford. The harbour benefited the local fishing fleet which, at that time, was the lifeblood of the village. Although altered and enlarged in the early 20th century, this is the harbour from which I now decide to sail in search of the bottlenose dolphins.

Only two populations of resident bottlenose dolphins exist in the waters of the UK. One comprises a pod of around 130 animals at Cardigan Bay in Wales, the other a pod of some 190 animals in the waters of Scotland’s inner Moray Firth. The group residing in the inner Moray Firth is the only remaining population in the North Sea. It is difficult to know for how long they have inhabited these waters, but there are fishermen’s tales of “Louper Dogs” (leaping dogs) going back to the 1800s and it’s believed these stories refer to the famous dolphins.

I head to a pinch point where the waters of the Firth narrow. It is defined by Chanonry point on the Black Isle side and on the south side, Fort George, constructed to suppress possible Highland insurrection after the Battle of Culloden. This is a regular place for dolphin sightings, occasioned by the restricted space through which salmon, the dolphins’ main food source, have to run. The tide is high, the water slack and it’s not long before the first of several dolphins is spotted.

A shout goes out and a dorsal fin appears above the water’s surface at a distance of about 200 metres. We head in that direction and the inquisitive nature of these highly sentient creatures kicks in. Within minutes four powerful adult dolphins are escorting our small boat. Their arching bodies, with grey glistening skin, slide effortlessly through the water. Then, in an instant, first one and then another breach, clearing the surface of the water by some three or four metres. The resulting splash sends water showering over our boat. Then they plunge towards the shoreline where a faster-flowing channel guides the salmon to their freshwater spawning grounds.

The hunt is on. Dorsal fins slice through the water creating sleek waves. They disappear below the surface, leaving a hint of a wake as if from some high-speed underwater giant. After a moment's pause, the surface erupts and a dolphin clears the water tossing a large salmon high into the air above it. A large crowd is gathered on the shingle beach and for the next 15 minutes one dolphin after another repeats this process. Several others join the hunt including a mother teaching her calf. They are now so close to the shore that the whole event appears to be part hunt and part display for the spectators.

Salmon are plentiful in the Firth but when numbers fall the dolphins eat cod, whiting, haddock, pollock, herring and mackerel. The two latter species have a high fat content and are a favourite in late autumn and winter. Squid is another important food source. The dolphins of the Moray Firth need good fat reserves to survive in their cold, northerly habitat and consequently the animals of this pod are the fattest of their kind in the world.

Dolphins are highly social animals and within the overall pod small groups and sub-groups form. These may contain as few as six dolphins or sometimes 20 or more. There is some fluidity between members of these smaller groups with individual dolphins appearing in different groups at different times. For ethical reasons none of these dolphins is tagged and all of the individuals are identified through variations in size, shape, colouration, markings and scars. Some dolphins never seem to stray far from the inner Moray Firth, but others are known to travel up to 100 miles (160 km) per day reaching as far as the Tay and Forth estuaries and possibly even beyond.

While the latest research indicates this pod has increased slightly in numbers in recent years, Danny Groves, the communications manager for Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), warns against complacency. "Such a small isolated population is extremely vulnerable. They face a broad range of threats from activities such as oil and gas exploration and production, large and numerous marina developments, chemical pollution, fishing nets and gear, and large offshore wind farms proposed in the coming years. All of these activities, individually and collectively, are putting increasing pressure on the dolphins and their environment."



The Moray Firth is a busy area and many conflicting interests exist. With dolphins living for around 50 years the impact of environmental change is not always immediately apparent. In recognition of the importance and vulnerability of this specific dolphin pod, part of the Moray Firth was designated a Special Area of Conservation in 2005.

In the last few weeks the Scottish government has granted approval for the construction of two huge wind farms in the outer Moray Firth. With 326 turbines this will be the third largest wind farm in the world. WDC was involved throughout the planning process insisting that marine-animal monitoring and mitigation procedures are put in place. Groves still sees much uncertainty. "We don't know much about what impacts these large developments might have on the dolphin, porpoise and whale populations that live in the Moray Firth."

Groves notes that the dolphins are not only subject to external pressures. Natural pressures also exist. "Of the 190 known dolphins, only around 70 are female and this presents an obvious issue." The vulnerability of the pod is further compounded by the fact that a female produces a single calf only once every three or four years. After that, she takes care of her offspring throughout that period until it becomes self-sufficient.

The Black Isle once relied upon fishing and agriculture for the survival of its communities. Now it depends upon tourism and it is evident the dolphins play a significant part in that. Groves is in no doubt. "Wildlife plays a vital part in Scotland's economy generating £65 million per year. The iconic bottlenose dolphins of the Moray Firth alone bring in £4 million."

Sailing back to Avoch I think of all the things that Mackenzie must have witnessed on his explorations of the North American continent and I wonder how often, during the building work on his little harbour at Avoch 200 years ago, he paused to watch the amazing "Louper Dogs" of the Moray Firth.

*With thanks to Danny Groves,
Communications Manager,
Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC)
www.whales.org*



DAVID HENDERSON



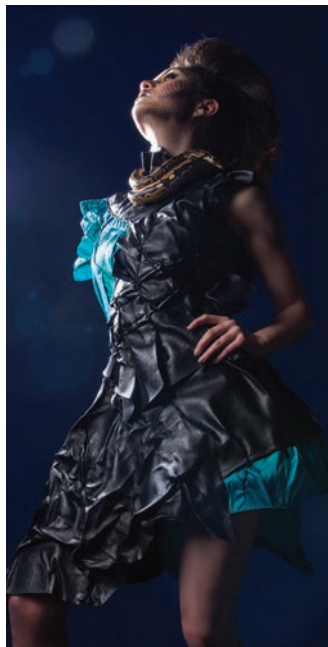
I grew up just outside of Belfast, Northern Ireland. I studied detailed drawing, illustration and print design, and it was a natural progression to move into the physical construction of garments.

I try to push the boundaries to create something new and unseen before, a garment that is a one of a kind, sculptural and elegant. Sometimes I push too far and make a piece that perhaps isn't the most practical, but they are the most fun to do.

There is a growing fashion community here and we are all quite close and know each other well. Having such a tight-knit community gives us strength to collaborate on larger events together.



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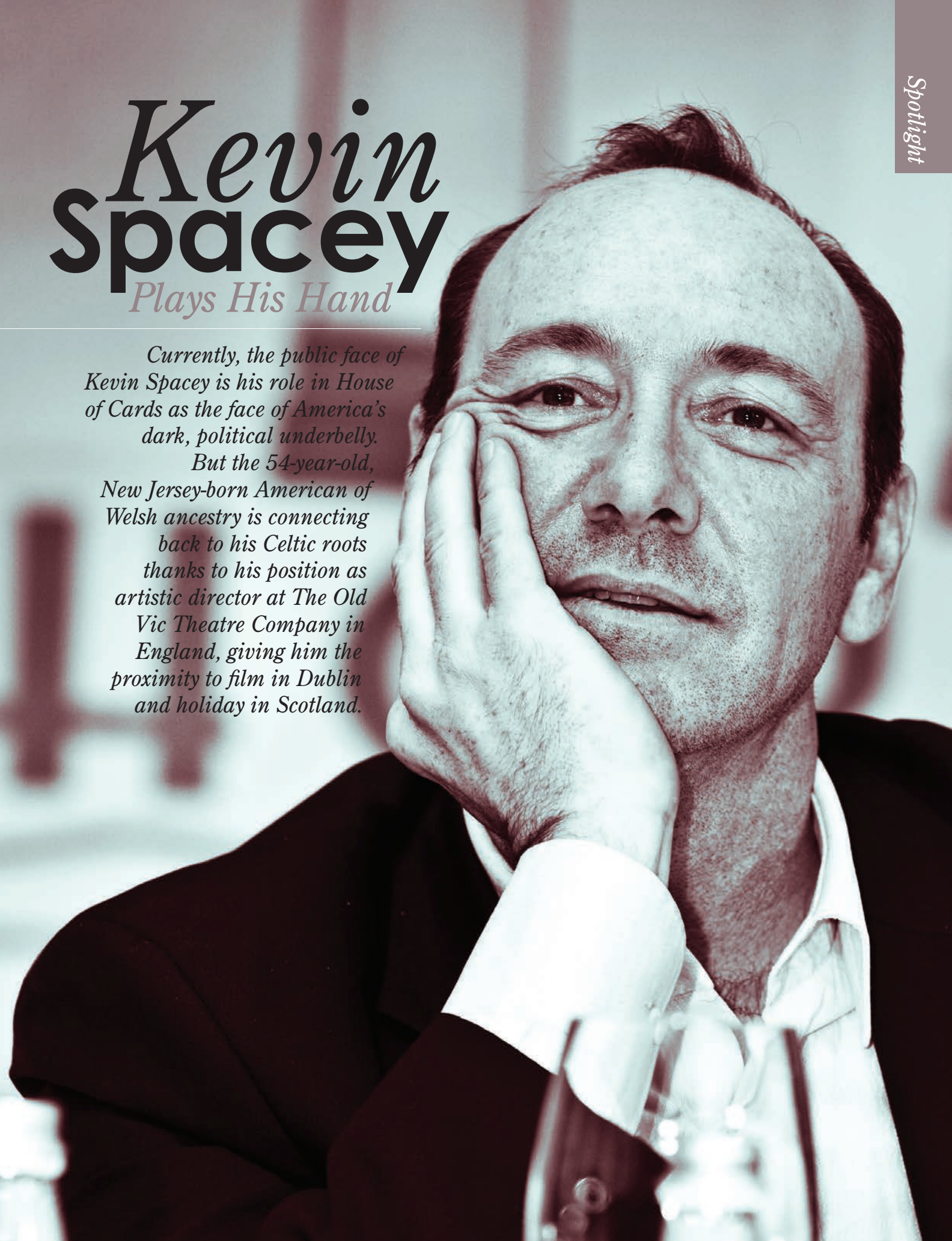
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Kevin Spacey

Plays His Hand

Currently, the public face of Kevin Spacey is his role in House of Cards as the face of America's dark, political underbelly.

But the 54-year-old, New Jersey-born American of Welsh ancestry is connecting back to his Celtic roots thanks to his position as artistic director at The Old Vic Theatre Company in England, giving him the proximity to film in Dublin and holiday in Scotland.



When a teenaged Kevin Spacey dabbled with matches in his sister's den, the resulting fire landed him a spell at military school. It's something of a well-placed reversal of trends then for the Academy Award-winning actor to discover that art imitates life, with the Hollywood star thrust into his portrayal as the deliciously Machiavellian military college graduate Frank Underwood in Netflix's *House of Cards*.

Thankfully, the actor's grappling with a military education may be where the parallels end, though young Spacey outdid his screen counterpart in being given the boot from military school for whacking a fellow pupil with a tire.

Of course, my initial fears about meeting this great man were unfounded. With a raising of the cheekbone or a subtle but notable glint of the eye, here's a true ambassador of modern filmmaking who can switch from sinister to sincere in a flash. He's fresh, philosophical, modest and yet, you sense, deeply complicated. And you quickly realise Spacey's not really of this era of film, a fact that might explain his startling absence from the box office in recent years.

"I've been busy," he exclaims, wide-eyed and disbelieving of the initial enquiry that he's intentionally stepped away from the big screen. "I think when you move out of the immediate limelight people assume you're kicking back, either on a beach somewhere or in a clinic. I can assure you I've been doing neither," he laughs.

The story stacks up. Spacey has indeed been busy, busier than at any point in his career in fact, although bringing to an end his decade as artistic director at The Old Vic Theatre Company in London may offer him some cerebral space to plot a return to the movie scene.

That he jumped at the opportunity to throw himself into theatre should not come as any surprise. Uninspired by schoolyard military parades, it was the stage that intrigued Spacey as a youngster. After a stint in stand-up comedy he enrolled into Juilliard's four-year drama program. True to form, however, he left after only two years, quipping it was only a matter of time until his expulsion.

Post Juilliard, Spacey claimed small parts on the New York stage, supplementing his early forays by working as a shoe salesman and a supervisor in his apartment building. He undertook an admin job with the Shakespeare Festival, but when director Joe Papp saw him moonlighting in an off-Broadway production he wielded the axe, something that served only to

encourage Spacey to follow his artistic dreams outside the office. I guess if there's one thing we've learned about him, it's that he knows how to make an exit.

"The abrupt conclusions of relationships are natural in life – we shouldn't be embarrassed by them," he laughs. "I've made some mistakes and there is a small amount of regret there, but I'd rather dwell on the great moves I've made!"

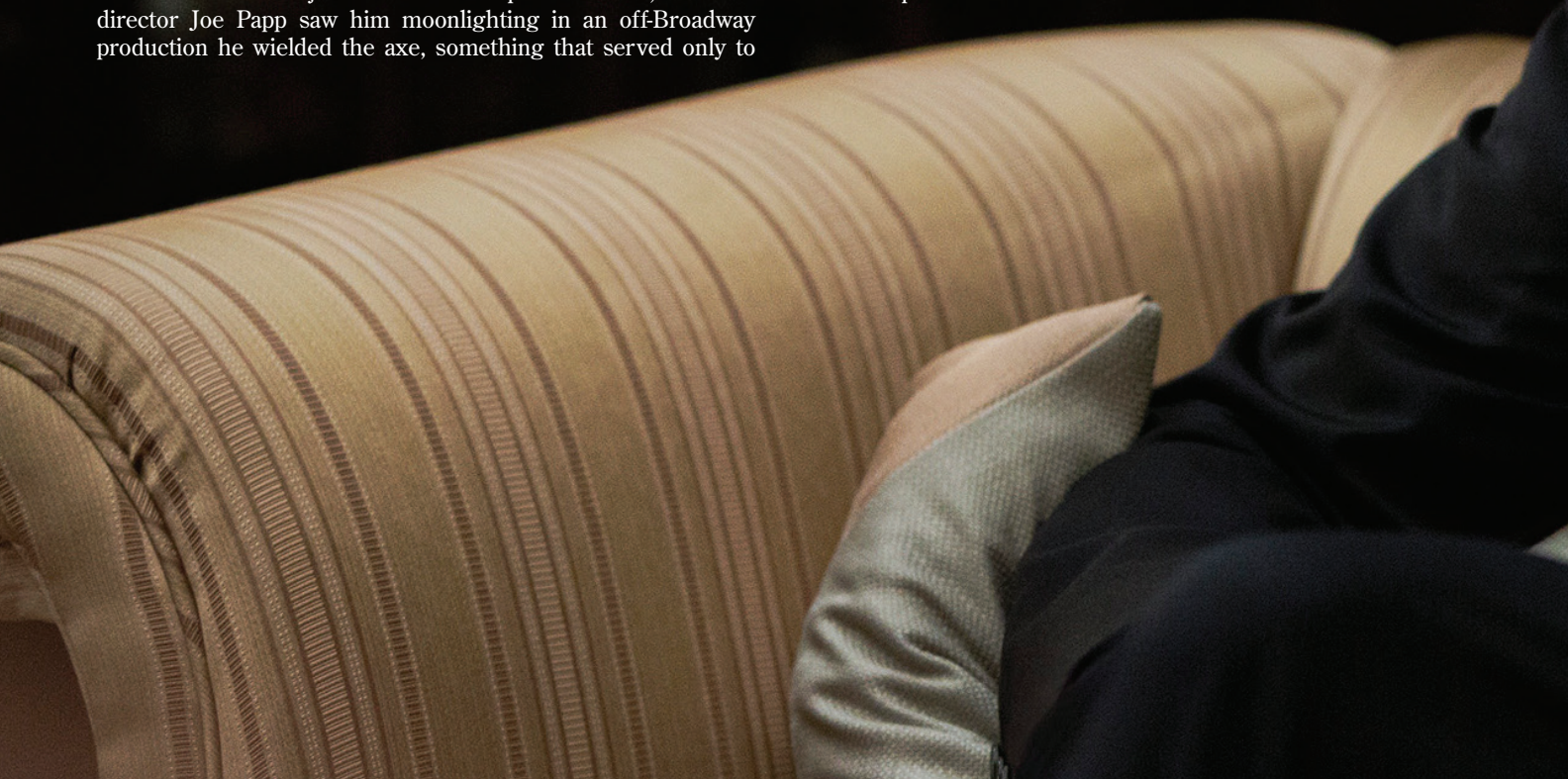
A determined Spacey built a portfolio of stage roles, and in expanding into film developed a skill for sadistic, unhealthy characters. He has notably portrayed the base John Doe in *Seven*, Roger 'Verbal' Kint in *The Usual Suspects*, and most recently the enigmatic, conniving Frank Underwood in *House of Cards*.

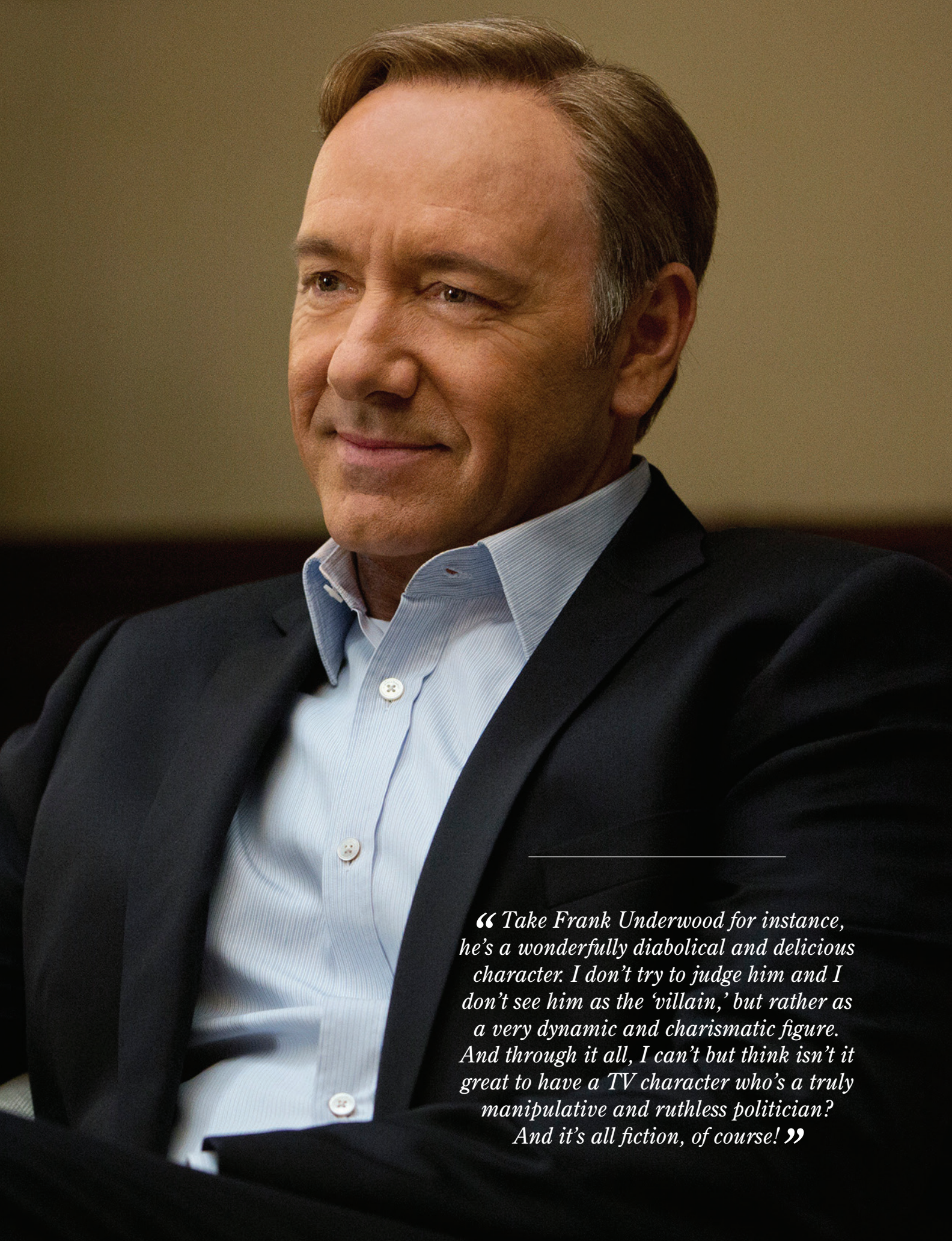
And while Spacey would often rather steer clear of any journalist waving a Dictaphone – he once famously said, "the less an audience knows about me, the better I can do my job," – he is willing to break cover when it comes to discussing *House of Cards*, the coveted series he both co-produces and stars in.

Aided by Oscar-nominated director David Fincher and with Spacey at the helm, the show has become an international sensation gaining a cult following for its examination of high-stakes political behaviour.

"It's the beginning of a new golden age in series programming," Spacey tells us, rather unapologetically. "*House of Cards* marks an important new era in drama. Now you can have characters that are very complex, that are not perhaps the sorts of winning characters you used to see on TV. Why? Well, because for many years television executives did everything they could to make all the characters on a TV show likeable. But we don't want that anymore. Now, audiences are expecting character-driven series, with sinister overtones, dark humour, and where the lead character can be an anti-hero. All of this seems to me the groundwork that was laid for us to be able to create a show long before we even knew we were going to do it."

A certain pride must come with spearheading a turn in the television stakes, too. After all, the Netflix project is unique – an entire series ready for consumption in one almighty mouthful. There are no waits between episodes, no misplaced cliff-hangers, no leaked storylines. In a move away from the traditional TV box, and onto a streaming content platform, we are talking about one-hit consumption.





“Take Frank Underwood for instance, he’s a wonderfully diabolical and delicious character. I don’t try to judge him and I don’t see him as the ‘villain,’ but rather as a very dynamic and charismatic figure. And through it all, I can’t but think isn’t it great to have a TV character who’s a truly manipulative and ruthless politician? And it’s all fiction, of course!”



"Netflix was the only place that really believed in us and what we wanted to do," he reveals. "I think it's marvellous that series like *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* are revenging against a lot of those massive studio tent-pole films which cost hundreds of millions and have choked off the kinds of intelligent films that used to get made in the \$40- to \$50-million range. TV series are now doing the sorts of stories that movies used to do in the 1960s and 1970s, and that's why you're seeing more and more actors who only worked in movies before gravitating from film to TV, simply because you get to do much more interesting work."

Content streaming is far from Spacey's only avenue, however. Taking up the post at the legendary Old Vic theatre back in 2003 meant reaffirming links with the

British Isles. He's called the move "the best decision of his life," and there is not a hint of disingenuousness in that statement.

"It was a remarkable thing for me to do at that point in my career because I was in demand in Hollywood and I could call my own shots. But theatre had always been the core of my experience as an actor and becoming a theatre director was always a dream of mine."

"And it was an honour to be given the chance to save and rejuvenate the Old Vic and restore its reputation as one of the principal and urgent venues for theatre," he continues. "I was able to help raise money to be able to do the kind of important and daring productions we needed to put on in order to compete against the West End, whilst also developing a realistic economic model that would ensure our survival. I'm

very happy with what we've been able to achieve and I hope I've added to the legacy of a 200-year-old Victorian theatre."

Being in the UK has also enabled the actor to delve deeper into some of the unmistakably Celtic elements that pattern his career. He spent some memorable time filming in Dublin and Cork for *Ordinary Decent Criminal* and says he struck up an instant bond with the Irish. "There are some people you just 'get' and for me the Irish have been so likeable," Spacey declares.

"I've always had a good time in Ireland and there is something unique about the people and their philosophy on life. Ambition is central to who they are, but not in the same way as ambitious people in London or New York or Los Angeles. There's a different class to them."

Spacey was well-tipped last year to trump his Irish experience by taking the lead role of imprisoned rags to riches tycoon Sean Quinn, in another film which producer mastermind James Mitchell oversaw.

But it's for Scotland that Spacey really yearns – after all, he has an elder sister who resides north of the border. And he's been known to holiday in Saltcoats, a small town approximately 40 miles southwest of Glasgow. "I love open space, a bracing wind, the time to think. The roles I've had, either in front of the camera or behind the stage curtain, have always required a clear mind.

"Take Frank Underwood for instance," he says, bringing the conversation back round to *House of Cards*. "He's a wonderfully diabolical and delicious character. I don't try to judge him and I don't see him as the 'villain,' but rather as a very dynamic and charismatic figure. And through it all, I can't but think isn't it great to have a TV character who's a truly manipulative and ruthless politician? And it's all fiction, of course!"

He may have played out the political stakes on screen, but Spacey couldn't see himself getting into the business himself. "No. I like to get things done. I want to have a goal. I want to do this thing and then achieve it. That's how I've always managed my career. I think it would be impossible to get anything done in politics. You almost have to be a Machiavellian son of a bitch to get anything done."

And while Spacey may excel at playing the Machiavellian, it's certainly not the extent of his acting ability. Has he plans to return to the big screen once the series and his stage tenure are up?

"It depends on how many more years *House of Cards* will continue for. It's an enormous investment of time and I've never been an actor in a movie that shot as many days as I'm shooting on this series. I'm looking forward to eventually directing some projects as well as acting in more films down the road. All I know is that I will have a lot more time on my hands to think about what I want to do as much as actually being able to do it. It's an exciting time for me."

by Camilla Davies



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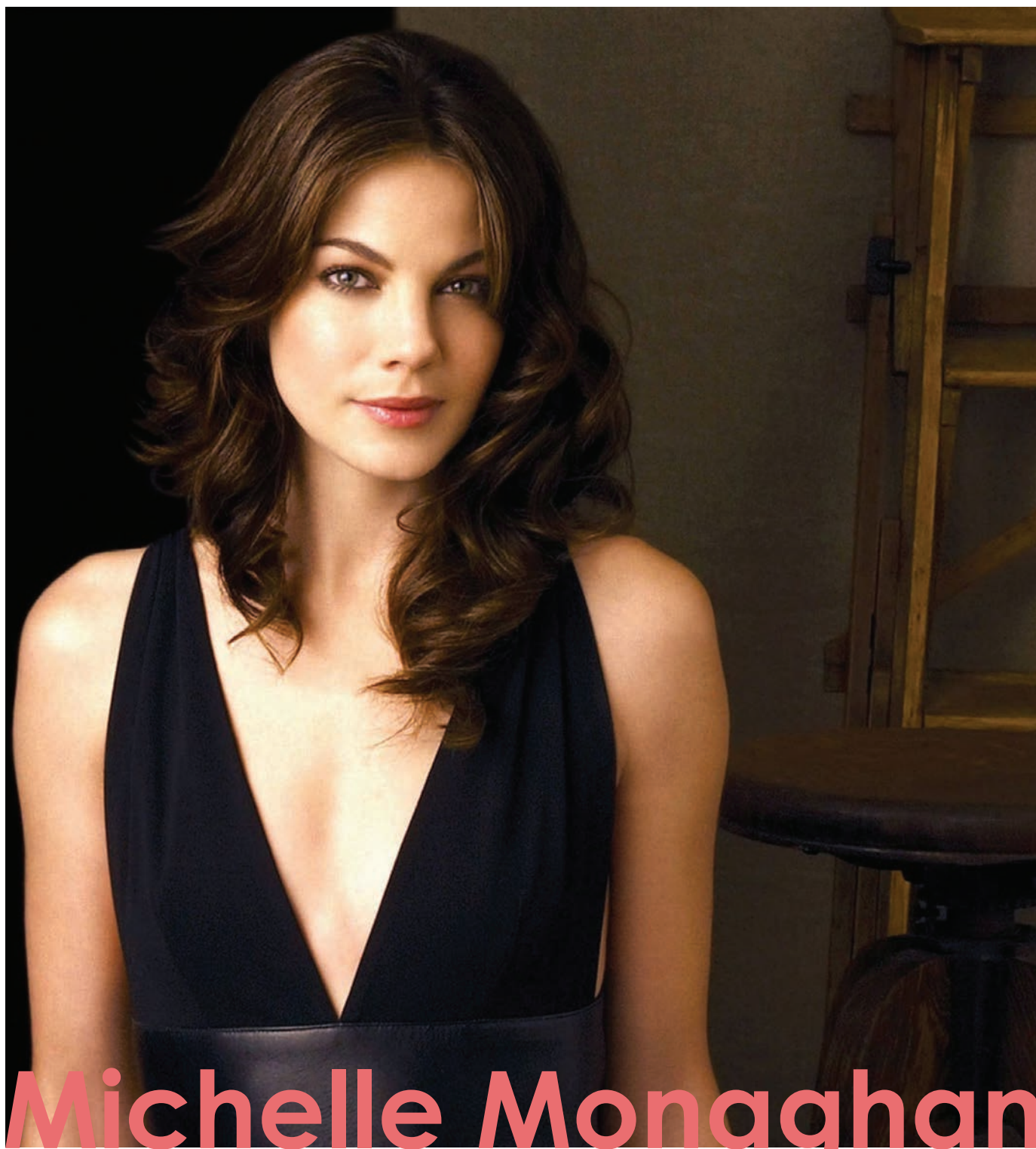
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Michelle Monaghan

The True Monaghan

With True Detective, Irish-American Michelle Monaghan makes a name for herself. She talks to Celtic Life International about her latest role across from another renowned Celtic actor, Matthew McConaughey.

The extremely popular, hard-boiled television sensation, *True Detective*, may be set in the United States, but it may well be one of the most Celtic TV shows out there at the moment. Monaghan, who is of course of Irish descent, stars across from the Scottish-Irish-American actor, Matthew McConaughey. Maybe the show should be renamed *True Celtic Detective*.

True Detective centres upon a reopened inquiry into a grizzly 1995 ritual killing. The detectives who solved the original investigation, Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson), are questioned again 17 years after the initial case, and find themselves drawn back into a world they'd attempted to leave behind. Monaghan plays Maggie Hart, the resolute wife of protagonist Martin Hart. The couple's domestic troubles aid the unfolding narrative and it's a role that Monaghan is taking seriously.

In some ways the gritty series is diametrically opposed to the real life of the 38-year-old mother of two. In no way is she anxious to leave her small town roots behind, but rather still pines for the Iowa township she hails from – not to mention for her ancestral home.

Hailing from Winthrop, an Iowa township of just 700 people, Michelle Monaghan's regional familiarity is twofold. For those of an Irish disposition, her name is as recognisable as her face, in that her family originally hails from the town of Monaghan in County Monaghan, Ireland. With such prominent Celtic roots, she has a history of being vocal about her ancestry, "I'm proud to be Irish and I'm proud we kept the 'g' in our surname. I know quite a few Monaghans that got off the boat and dropped it right away. My family didn't."

Preserving the "g" may have kept her in line with Irish audiences, but that's not to say a Celtic following wouldn't have known the actress from her screen performances. Monaghan's roles as Angie Gennaro in *Gone Baby Gone* and Christina Warren in *Source Code* received nods from high places and she's become known for mediating between high intensity dramas and lighter rom-com roles. Obviously, *True Detective* is one of the former.

With the season now aired and enjoying real success, the actress and her young family are based in the depths of LA. But the lights of tinsel town can seem a little removed from her Midwest home town – not to mention the ancestral County Monaghan.

"I love the sun and warm weather out here and even though I really didn't enjoy the very cold and snowy conditions in Iowa, you do get nostalgic for the fall. The blue skies out in the Midwest

are the most beautiful thing on Earth. I still have these intense memories of watching sunsets out over the wheat fields."

She may be wistful for the wheat fields of Winthrop, but what's next on the agenda for Michelle? We hold out hope that she'll hop onto a boat and shoot an Irish film. After all, she's been eager in the past.

"To be given that kind of opportunity and acting challenge – I would probably cower in the corner a little bit and then I would come out swinging. I would love that opportunity. Ireland still means so much to me – it's a magical place and when you have ancestry that takes you back to a place, it offers such fantastic emotions. It's like you can touch the ground and feel a bit of your history."

Monaghan rose through the ranks to become a respected face in Hollywood. Unafraid of taking chances, she left university just months before graduating with a degree in journalism, pursuing instead her ambitions in modelling in New York City. A younger Monaghan graced the pages of clothing catalogues before securing small-screen roles.

Since then she's gone on to star across from Tom Cruise in a couple of the *Mission Impossible* films, among other movies. But she says *True Detective* is the best project she's been involved with to date. "It's so well written and directed that every scene takes on a deeper meaning than you expect. It's always great when you feel you're part of a project that is pushing the envelope when it comes to storytelling."

And when it comes to her co-stars, she's not complaining either. "Matthew McConaughey's a very easy-going guy. He's someone who has his own very enthusiastic approach to life and he loves being in the moment, enjoying whatever he happens to be doing. I come from a very small

town and I felt I could share that kind of sensibility with him."

Woody Harrelson has a different kind of personality. He's more boyish and soft-spoken. But it felt strange working with him and having all this tension between our characters. We've been friends for a long time and we've always had this wonderful rapport together. Then we have to do these very harsh and tense scenes and afterwards we're looking at each other like, 'I didn't know you can get so angry.'"

When it comes to Monaghan's own character, however, the show has faced some criticism concerning the development of the series' female counterparts. But the actress is fast to defend Maggie. "Maggie is the most emotionally developed character between the three and she serves as a bridge between Rust and





“The way we worked felt like we were making a very long movie....”

Marty. She understands what has been going on with the two men while they have no idea about how capable and strong she really is. Maggie also has to deal with the huge gulf that separates both men.”

As the series progresses, different strands to her character are unveiled and the men of the show are seen to have underestimated Maggie. All this culminates in a rather steamy sex scene, described by Michelle as “not Maggie’s finest moment.” Was getting up close with Matthew McConaughey really so bad?

“Not really!” she laughs. “I think that when you do those scenes you should just stop thinking and get on with it. So we just went for it and tried to bring this raw energy and explosiveness to it. We shot the scene for the best part of the day and in the end you just look at each other and kind of laugh!”

True Detective, along with House of Cards and Breaking Bad, is playing its part in rerouting the direction of mainstream television of late. However, what makes the series so distinctly different from the rest is its parallels with Hollywood crime films and 1940s film noir. This sentiment is clearly shared by the leading actress.

“The way we worked felt like we were making a very long movie. Director Cary Fukunaga has mainly worked on films and he brought a complete vision to the series as opposed to having several different directors which is the case with many episodic series.”

Of course, being modest, Michelle is fast to praise the cast and writers too, citing writer and creator Nic Pizzolatto as an inspiration. “He wrote every episode, which is unusual, and also helped give the narrative so many more overlapping layers.”

The production of True Detective was remarkable in another way for the actress. Two months into filming, Michelle found out she was expecting her second child. “I didn’t say anything to anyone on the show because I felt it would be a distraction from

the work, which was so intense.”

She explains, “We wrapped the show when I was at the end of five months, and it never became an issue because I didn’t have morning sickness. The only person I told was the costume designer because towards the fifth month your clothes need to be a little looser!”

Rather, the talented actress took the extra few pounds her pregnancy afforded in her stride. “What was funny is that because the narrative of the series spans 17 years, it was actually a good thing that I gained weight because we shot the past scenes first and then went to the present. So it made perfect sense that when you see Maggie in the present, she’s 50, and she’s 10 pounds heavier. It was perfect method acting!”

Method acting it may resemble, but pregnancy can be hard at the best of times. Were there ever any moments on the set when the baby bump made its way into a scene? “Only a few times towards the end. That’s the funny thing, because around five months you start to feel the movement of the baby. There was this really intense, emotional scene that I was doing with Woody, and the baby kicked me, but it was the first time I felt it.

“When I went to the camera monitor and looked at the close-up, I saw that my eyes dilated when that happened; it totally took me out of the scene. It took everything in my power not to have this big grin on my face because for five months you’re thinking, ‘Is this thing real?’ And then it actually lives, and you’re like, ‘Aww, here you are.’”

And where Monaghan is today isn’t a bad spot at all: A Celtic inspiration at the top of her career, balancing work and family, heritage and contemporary life – a role model for many.

By Camilla Davies



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Revisiting Northern Ireland

Twenty-five years since last setting his soles upon Ulster soil, Celtic Life International managing editor Stephen Patrick Clare returns to find a changed cultural, economic and political landscape.



BELFAST

July, 1989

After a short and scenic train ride up from Dublin – which included being strip-searched at the border (no extra cost) – I am in Belfast. The gentle mist and soft rain is a bizarre backdrop to the Troubles; soldiers and armoured vehicles roam the streets, military helicopters drone overhead, and sirens wail as local residents pass through a maze of gated checkpoints across the city core. The mood is tense, taxing, and everyone seems on edge.

March, 2014

The 25 minute drive from Belfast International Airport into Northern Ireland's capital city is a revelation; it has been 25 years since my last visit here and – except for the gentle mist and soft rain – it is a changed country.

My first journal entry from that trip north (above) seems surreal now; gone are the guns, the soldiers, the armoured vehicles. There are no roadside checkpoints, nor blockades, nor buzz of black helicopters.

Instead, the road into town is a sea of shiny, silver SUVs, BMWs, and Mercedes. Yellow construction cranes abound, with new residential and commercial sales booming. Older homes and buildings are surrounded by red scaffolding, undergoing extensive and expensive renovations.

Pulling into Belfast, the rain is heavier, and I lurch to get my luggage into the luxurious Malmaison, one of the city's many new high-end hotels.

Soon after, umbrella in hand, I am exploring the city, astonished by what I discover; stylish boutiques and nouveau cuisine aside refurbished pubs and churches; the boister-

ous Cathedral Quarter, brimming with fashionable night-clubs, just steps from the ancient Albert Memorial Clock; an array of foreign accents and financial institutions; smart phones and tablets lighting up the night.

Most impressive, perhaps, is the revamped waterfront. Once the industrial heart of global shipbuilding, and the lifeblood of the local economy, the dockyards are now home to Belfast's booming tourism, high-tech and film industries. The magnificent, towering Titanic Museum invites visitors to peruse the past in a very present place.

As the city savours the make-over, its residents are enjoying a faith lift; the mood is light, spirited, and everyone seems energized.

The next morning, my driver picks me up. Billy Scott has lived in Belfast all of his life, and testifies to the transformation.

"I'm waiting for the other shoe to fall," he jokes, displaying dry Irish wit. "Seriously, though, peace has brought prosperity to almost everyone here."

As if on cue, we wind our way through a myriad of well-manicured middle-class suburbs, replete with new schools, community centers and sporting facilities.

"The standard of living has gone up significantly in a very short time," shares Scott. "Unfortunately, so have the housing prices."

"It's been mostly Catholic money," he continues, quick to add that he has never taken sides. "In truth, they were the ones who stood to benefit the most from the Good Friday Accord, only because they had nowhere to go but up."

And while the majority of Belfast's neighbourhoods are now mixed and non-sectarian, shadows of the city's past still lurk.



TRIVIA: Perhaps interestingly, Northern Ireland is a place without official designation. Some call it a country, while others might use the terms province or region.

POPULATION: A recent census shows that 1,837,938 people currently reside in Northern Ireland, an increase of 7 per cent from 2001. Over half are under the age of 35.

Scott steers us up past the Sandy Row, around the Crumlin Road, towards Shankill, a longstanding Protestant holdout.

"There are always a few idiots about in places like this," he notes, "hardliners who won't let the past go."

The contrast is striking; drab and decaying homes are coloured-over with massive murals and Union Jacks.

"There's no money here anymore," he continues. "This neighbourhood was built on the backs of shipbuilders and mill workers. For generations, there was no need for an education, because you were guaranteed a job if your dad and granddad had one. But that work is gone now."

Just a few blocks over, in the Catholic Falls Road district, the story is similar; pro-democracy propaganda is pasted over old, broken down buildings, and barbed wire sits atop crumbling walls.

An open-top excursion bus drives by, filled with curious onlookers snapping shots.

"Political tourism," explains Scott. "Tens of thousands of visitors now come through these communities each year. Some have roots here, others have a historical interest. Whatever the reason, it's been good for business."

Rebranding the Troubles has been part of the country's efforts to reconcile its recent past.

There are still small sectarian flare-ups, however, including a skirmish the previous evening between a handful of Loyalists and Nationalists in front of City Hall as part of ongoing "flag protests." Interestingly, though law enforcement officials were on hand, the scuffle was self-policed.

"Blame it on the booze - the bars had just let out," laughs Scott. "But it just goes to show you that people here will step in to stop that kind of nonsense now. They aren't willing to let anything muck with their good luck."

GOING NORTH

July, 1989

Hitchhiking north to the coast, I catch a lift with George McGuinness, who delivers bread each day to villages between Belfast and Derry. I ask him, given the Troubles, why he continues to live here. He does not reply. He doesn't need to. Over the coming hours, my eyes take in the breathtaking beauty of his homeland.

March, 2014

I lucked out with Ken McElroy. An author, playwright, poet, philosopher, humourist and sporting aficionado, my driver and guide for the next few days was recently awarded an



MBE for his contributions to tourism. The experience is sure to be engaging, entertaining and educational.

Ken's warmth, wit and wisdom are welcome as we weave our way through the tender Glens of Antrim. He points to this and that, regaling me with tidbits of history. The grassy knolls are peppered with small farms and streams. It is an outdoorsman's dream, he tells me, ideal for fly fishing.

Later, we hug the ocean on the Causeway Coastal Route, named one of the world's top five road trips. It's easy to see why; the seaside settings are picturesque, with a stirring view of Rathlin Island, just six miles north. Look a little farther, and the southernmost tip of Scotland's Kintyre Peninsula comes into focus.

The rugged Ballintoy Harbour is our first stop, one of several location sites for HBO's hit series *Game of Thrones*. The parking lot is teeming with tour buses, so I sniff the salty air and take a few quick photos before we move on.

Not surprisingly, just a couple of miles west, the Giant's Causeway is equally busy. We escape the visitor center, strolling a few hundred yards down the bluff towards the awe-inspiring seascape of hexagonal basalt columns.

As the surf pounds the shore, Ken tells me about the "Wreckers," locals of years past who would use luring lights to deliberately steer passing ships into the rocks before looting them. The waters off Northern Ireland, he says, are among the world's largest ocean graveyards.

An hour later, my trusted guide again brings history to life at Dunluce Castle, a now-ruined 13th century stone structure overlooking the sea. Fact is as engaging as fiction here, with stories of ghosts, Earls, Kings, Queens, Spanish sailors and two now-infamous battles between the McQuilans and the MacDonalds offering valuable insight into the region's fascinating past.

In the town of Bushmills, home of the world famous Whiskey distillery, local residents watch travelers come and go. The four-star, 400 year-old Bushmills Inn is bustling, mostly with golfers itching to improve their handicap at the nearby 36-hole Royal Portrush Golf Club, ranked one of the top courses on the planet.

Ken theorizes on the region's exploding popularity. "For a long time, the only news that came out of Northern Ireland was bad news, and many people have told me they were simply too afraid to come here because of the conflict."

Later, over excellent fish 'n' chips and Guinness in Portballintrae, I ask him why, given the Troubles, he continued to live here. He does not reply. He doesn't need to.



DERRY

July, 1989

Rough day in a rough part of the region. First, I am given the boots when I try to cross the street during an Orange Day Parade. Later, I am mugged by thugs in the Bogside, who walk off with my wallet and camera. Are these the trials of traveling, or merely the tribulations of not using my head? I have no one to blame but myself for the bruised body and wounded pride.

March, 2014

Ken laughs when I read him my journal entry from a quarter-century ago.

"Ah, so you didn't use your head?" he smirks. "Well, they certainly did."

Ha.

While my scars have since faded, my memories have not, and as we pull into the historic city of Derry – officially Londonderry – the recollections come rushing back.

Perhaps more than Belfast, Derry has come to terms with its long and difficult past, even embracing it as a vital part of its identity. History is alive and well here, carefully woven into the fabric of everyday life.

The city was a flashpoint for the Troubles, starting in 1968 with the formation of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association, which sought - peacefully - to improve the quality of life for area Catholics. Instead, what followed were thirty years of senseless sectarian violence and bloodshed.

There was fighting in the streets long before that, however, and Ken details the 1609 Plantation of Ulster, the Irish Rebellion of 1641, the 1649 Scottish Presbyterian blockade, and the Siege of 1689.

A quick visit to the multi-media Tower Museum affirms the accounts, as does a tour of the Guildhall, home of Derry's city council and Mayor. Opened in 1890, the spectacular structure has since survived fire (1908) and two bombings (1972).

It is on the streets, however, where the past most permeates the present; the old cobblestone roads, stone mason buildings, and grand Cathedrals are all in use, as are the stoic Walls of Derry.

Built between 1614 and 1619, the historic monument is almost perfectly preserved today, providing a panoramic perspective of city. From there, I look out over the Bogside, the once impoverished community of my mother's ancestors (Dunphys from Kerry, many of whom who came north during the famine and married local Dohertys).

Like parts of Belfast, "the Bog" has kept its murals and monuments intact, looking to prosper from political tourism. And, also like Ulster's capital

city, there are still a few hardliners here, though they are now the minority.

Tellingly, the old Sinn Féin/IRA headquarters at the heart of the quarter is now an upscale Inn with a bustling bar and restaurant.

Also visible from my vantage point is the newly constructed Peace Bridge, which connects the mostly Catholic city core with the Protestant Waterside community across the River Foyle. It is a powerful image - the link is packed with pedestrians and bikers going to and fro.

Another poignant symbol, the bronze statue Hands Across The Divide by local artist Maurice Harron, stands by the

bridge.

"Peace has done wonders for this place," notes Ken. "It might seem as familiar as always, but you wouldn't recognize it now if you tried."

My wise guide speaks truthfully, the difference being most notable with residents, who walk with calm and confidence.

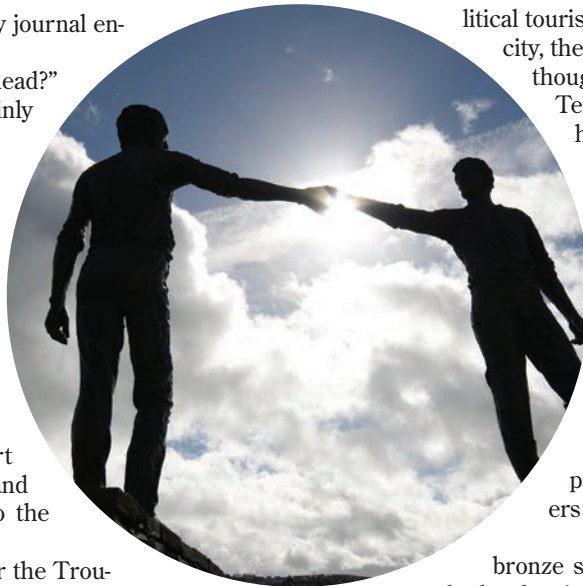
"We've become an international municipality," says Mayor Martin Reilly. "Over seventy different languages can now be heard here on any given day, and we have one of the U.K.'s most thriving arts scenes."

Named an International City of Culture in 2013, Derry is picking up where it left off last year; the list of festivals, concerts, exhibits and events scheduled for 2014 is impressive.

"There is a youthful enthusiasm here today that I have never felt before," continues Reilly. "It is as if we have awoken from the deepest slumber - a nightmare really. And it is the young people - the artists, the entrepreneurs, the dreamers and doers - who are driving the growth."

The numbers support the Mayor's claim; over 71 per cent of the local population is under the age of 50, with more than a third below the age of 25.

"A lot of them are simply too young to have a full recall or understanding of the Troubles," he adds. "Gratefully, they don't have to live our history to learn it. And not only are they embracing our past, they are building upon it in their own manner. The scars will fade with each generation, but the memories will not."



GOVERNMENT: The Northern Ireland Assembly has the power to legislate in a wide range of areas that are not explicitly reserved to the U.K. Parliament, and to appoint the Northern Ireland Executive, which sits at Stormont in Belfast. The assembly is one of two mutually interdependent institutions, the other being the North/South Ministerial Council with the Republic of Ireland.

BORDERLANDS

July, 1989

An amazing day spent traveling through the towns of Strabane, Omagh, Enniskillen, Portadown, Armagh and Newry. The Ulster countryside is like no other, and there is as much raw physical beauty in the six counties of Northern Ireland as in the twenty-six south of the border. Hard to believe this is 'bandit country' – like a thorn on a rose.

March, 2014

From Derry, we head south. The sun appears and dissolves the morning mist, exposing vast pastures of farmland, rivers, and, all around us, rolling hills.

The Donegal border is less than a mile to the west. Twice we are forced to cross over into the Republic, as police and traffic block the main highway. Going over the border is a non-issue now; there are no patrols, checkpoints, or even a single sign post indicating that we have entered another country.

"Maybe there's been an incident," muses Ken each time.

His hesitancy is understandable. While things have changed drastically in Northern Ireland over the last 15 years, caution is common, especially among older citizens.

En route to Enniskillen, he lists off the region's history of horrors - bombings, shootings, knifings and kneecappings - pointing out particular locations as we pass. It is almost impossible to fathom that a land of such splendor could have known such terror.

I recall author Leon Uris once calling this land 'A Terrible Beauty,' and perhaps nowhere is this adage more apt than in County Fermanagh, home to the lovely Lough Erne and its 154 islands. With waterways that wind more than 100 miles, including a sizable stretch west to the Atlantic Ocean, the region is ripe with visitors year-round. Summer is especially busy, as boaters bring a boom to the local economy.

Enniskillen was also the scene of a savage IRA attack. On November 8, 1987, 11 people were killed and another 63 injured when a massive bomb detonated during the town's Remembrance Day ceremonies. The ensuing outrage from all sides was so severe that many see the incident as a turning point in the Troubles.

A simple memorial stands in honour of those who fell.

"I don't know anyone that wasn't touched by the tragedy," says Anne, who wished to remain anonymous for this story. "We were there that day. My husband and I helped carry bodies out of the rubble."

It time, the community came together to heal.

"I was putting the laundry out to dry one morning – this was about five years after the bombing - and I started talking to my neighbor through the fence. Even though we

were from different backgrounds, we quickly realized how much we shared in common."

Within weeks the pair had set up a support group for survivors.

"It was important - no, it was essential and necessary - for us to share our thoughts and feelings about what had happened. Wounds fester in the dark, but they evaporate when exposed to the light."

While she has not forgotten the terrible event, Anne says that she has forgiven those behind it.

"I'm not one to carry that weight around with me," she shares softly. "After the anger fell away, the hurt set in. And then the hurt fell away."

On the ride back to Belfast, knowing that we are soon to part ways, I ask Ken what it will take for Northern Ireland to keep the peace and prosperity.

"Time and talk," he says thoughtfully, echoing Anne's sentiments.

"It's a matter of trust," he continues. "Trust in ourselves, trust in one another, and trust in the process. Trust takes time."

"As for the talking, well that's not a problem; after all, we're known to have the gift of the gab."

Ironically, we sit in silence the rest of the way, each to our own thoughts. Back in Belfast, we bid our adieus and promise to keep in touch. And we have.

The next morning, on the ride to the airport, I pull out my journal from 1989 and read the final entry from my previous visit here.

This most beautiful country of land and hills, lakes, sea, and sky, these most beautiful people, warm and wise, rugged, resourceful and resilient; you are in my thoughts and prayers, my head and heart, now and always. The past, present and future are yours. Choose wisely. And if, perhaps, you never change, please know that you have changed me forever. And if, perhaps, you evolve and finally find peace, please know that we have done so together. I, and the world, will be watching.

~Stephen Patrick Clare



The Brief History of Northern Ireland

7,000 BC – Mountsandel Fort in County Londonderry is known as the oldest settlement in Northern Ireland. Dating back at least 9,000 years, it was the home of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers.

700 BC – Sources vary on when the Celts arrived in Ireland; some even state they did not arrive until AD. It's thought the Cruithin were some of the earliest Celtic settlers of Northern Ireland.



1st century BC – The Ulaid or Ulaidh, who the province of Ulster gets its name from, were a legendary people of early Ireland. (Two-thirds of what was historic Ulster is modern-day Northern Ireland). The Ulster Cycle is a series of mythological tales about the Ulaid, set during the 1st century BC.

432 – Saint Patrick arrived in Ireland and built Ireland's first Christian church in Saul, County Down.

811 – Especially during the 9th century, Vikings raided various parts of Ireland. During an invasion of 811, a group from Ulster defeated the formidable Norsemen.



1177 – Ulster's chieftains were described as "the bravest of the Irish" by poets Francisque Michel, Thomas Wright and Morice Regan for fending off the Anglo-Normans. Subsequently, much of east Ulster was conquered in 1177.

1609 – Drove of Scottish and English settlers began colonising lands confiscated from Gaelic chieftains in what became known as The Plantation of Ulster.



1690 – King William of Orange's Protestant army defeated King James' Catholic troops in The Battle of the Boyne, taking the crown of England, Scotland and Ireland away from King James, and assuring Protestant ascendancy in Ireland.

1845-1849 – Many areas in Ulster province were affected by the Irish Potato Famine, dramatically increasing emigration across the Atlantic.

1862 – Harland and Wolff was founded in Belfast. The company is perhaps most well-known for building the RMS Titanic. In fact, the company built more than 70 White Star Line ships and was the biggest employer in Belfast from 1900 to 1930.

1919-1921 – The Anglo-Irish War (Irish War of Independence) was fought between the Irish Republican Army and British forces. It concluded with the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which established the Irish Free State. Northern Ireland opted out, as was its right under the Treaty.

1949 – The 26 southern Counties of Ireland officially declared themselves a republic, while Northern Ireland remained a part of Britain.

1968 – The dawn of the civil rights movement; Catholics protested for equal voting and housing rights.

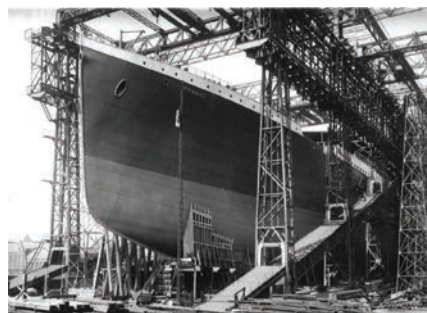
1969 – The beginning of "The Troubles," which consisted of such events as the Battle of Bogside and the formation of the Provisional IRA.

1972 – "Bloody Sunday." On January 30, British soldiers in Londonderry kill 13 unarmed Catholic civil-rights protesters.

1998 – The Good Friday Agreement was signed, marking a major milestone in Northern Ireland's peace process.

2007 – Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley and former IRA leader Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness are sworn in as first and deputy first ministers of Northern Ireland, to form a joint Catholic-Protestant leadership.

2011 – The Peace Bridge in Derry-Londonderry officially opened on June 25



2012 – The Titanic Belfast visitor experience opened, marking the 100th anniversary of the ship's maiden voyage.

2013 – Belfast hosted the G8 Summit and the World Police & Fire Games. Derry-Londonderry was the first official UK City of Culture.

2014 – In June, Belfast will host the 8th International Conference of the European Forum for Restorative Justice.

Sources varied.

Good Souls

The people of Northern Ireland are resilient and resourceful, and a big reason why the country is enjoying a renaissance. Here we meet a few of Ulster's must-know folks.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir

The 58th Lord Mayor of Belfast, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, might be one of the busiest men in Northern Ireland. When he isn't hosting a bevy of non-partisan events at City Hall, the popular Irish Sinn Féin politician and businessman keeps himself active with an array of literary projects, including an engaging and entertaining tome on the collective histories of the country's visual arts called *Tears In Rain*. Fluent in Irish Gaelic, Ó Muilleoir has championed the language's revival among young people. Of the city's recent revitalisation, he says "Peace has been very good for Belfast; it's amazing what can be accomplished when common sense kicks in." Though his mayoral term is up this June, the Queen's University graduate plans to stay involved with municipal affairs.

www.belfastcity.gov.uk



Martin Reilly

Also committed to a one-year term, Reilly was elected Mayor of Derry last summer. The young and energetic Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) councillor represents the interests of a city in transition, driving his economic and educational agenda to the forefront of municipal politics. "The past is the past," he says. "The future is ours for the taking, and I believe it is squarely in the hands of our young people." To that end, his philosophy of transparency and "open-doors" government has enamoured him with local residents. Reilly's take on immigration is popular also. "Today there are more than 70 different languages spoken in Derry. That speaks volumes to me about Irish hospitality and our willingness to be a part of the global community."

www.derrycity.gov.uk

Ken McElroy

Author, poet, playwright, rugby expert and tour guide extraordinaire, Ken McElroy is the man you will want by your side as you wind your way around Northern Ireland. The life-long Gilford, County Down resident holds his own on any number of topics pertaining to the country; history, nature, literature, music, culture, sports, religion – the MBE-awarded McElroy is a virtual, and very amiable, encyclopedia of Ulster matters big and small.

Be sure to ask him about "The Troubles" – his unique and personal perspective, often accented with a wee bit of poetry, is better than any book you will ever read on the subject.

And while political tourism might be his forte, no one will give you a more informed opinion on the country's spectacular sporting scene.

www.kmtgs.co.uk



Walter McFarlane

Warm, witty and wise, McFarlane will walk and talk your socks off as you tour around the Ulster American Folk Park near Omagh in County Tyrone. Weaving fact and fiction, the seemingly ageless guide spins as good a yarn as you will find, regaling visitors with tales of times past as they explore original thatched-roof homes, warm themselves by an authentic peat fire and learn about the impact of the famine and Irish emigration to the United States, Canada and elsewhere. With generations of family roots in the region, his personal history is equally fascinating. A retired financial analyst, he is quick to share his invaluable insight into the country's economic issues as well. McFarlane is much in demand, so be sure to call ahead.

www.nmni.com

Northern *Ireland*

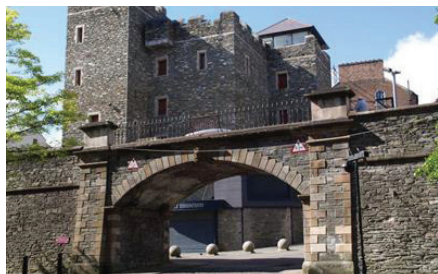
Whether you visit for a day, a week, a month, or longer, Northern Ireland has something to offer any time of the year.



Titanic Belfast

By July 2013, just 16 months after opening, Titanic Belfast had attracted one million visitors from 145 different countries. Outside, visitors are treated to an architectural marvel: projections jut from the complex, as tall as the Titanic, to symbolize the ship's bow. Downtown Abbey creator, Titanic miniseries writer Julian Fellowes described the inside as "not a museum—it's an active, interactive adventure," adding that it strikes an ideal balance between Belfast's rich shipbuilding heritage with honouring those who lost their lives. The complex's nine galleries provide an "interactive adventure," including such highlights as an "electronic dark ride" that immerses you in the sights, sounds and smells of shipbuilding; and Titanic Beneath, a glass floor showcasing footage of the actual wreckage.

www.titanicbelfast.com



Historic Walls of Derry

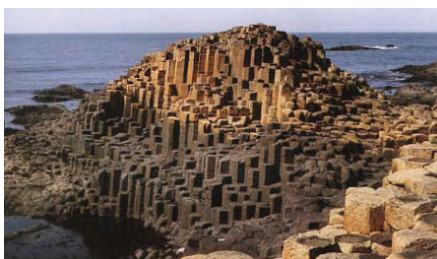
Derry-Londonderry boasts one of Europe's finest, surviving, intact walled cities. The 1.5 km perimeter built 400 years ago has never been breached, even

during attacks, including the Siege of Derry. Strolling along the Renaissance streetscape inside, you encounter such noteworthy attractions as the Apprentice

Boys Memorial Hall, the stunning Corinthian architecture of First Derry Presbyterian Church, and Austins, the oldest independent department store in the world. A short walk outside the walls takes you to the Peace Bridge, which symbolically and physically joins the Waterside and Cityside.

www.visitderry.com

www.derrywalls.com



Giant's Causeway

This UNESCO World Heritage Site along County Antrim's northern coastline oozes with ecological, geological and mythical allure. Giant's Causeway's jutting hexagonal prisms are the remarkable outcome of a 60-million-year-old volcanic eruption. However rock formations dubbed The Organ, The Camel and Chimney Tops, among others, do bring credence to the legend that the giant Finn McCool was the site's actual creator. Enjoy views of the waves crashing against the basalt columns and the vibrant population of seabirds, go on a self-guided hike or arrange for an interpretive tour. Marvel at 360 degree views of the coastline from the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, rated 'excellent' by BREEAM for its sustainable design. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway

www.causewaycoastandglens.com



Ulster American Folk Park

The Ulster American Folk Park in County Tyrone offers a truly creative portrayal of Northern Ireland's emigration history. The 40-acre open air museum includes real-life depictions of the "Old World" and the "New World," the latter representing the arrival in America. Buildings—some original transported from local areas and across the Atlantic, others replicated—are laid out as rural and urban landscapes and animated by costumed interpretive staff. Those interested in genealogy can make use of the onsite Centre for Migration Studies' Irish Emigration Database and Library.

www.nmni.com/uafp



Florence Court

Located in County Fermanagh, Florence Court is one of Northern Ireland's most noteworthy Georgian houses. The 18th century home belonged to the Earls of Enniskillen. Visitors can participate in entertaining guided tours of the mansion, ornamented by distinguished furniture and rococo plasterwork, to learn about what life was like there during the early 20th century. Outside is a feast for the eyes as forests and green space surround

nd Attractions

the house. They include the Pleasure Grounds and an enchanting walled garden, inviting you to roam.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/florence-court



The Old Bushmills Distillery

The Old Bushmills Distillery, granted its first whiskey-making license in 1608, is known as the world's oldest operating distillery.

"...why not experience it yourself and be transported into a world that hasn't changed much since we first opened our doors way back," says Bushmills' website, welcoming visitors. Over 100,000 people per year come to take a guided tour through their entire whiskey making process, from the mash house to the bottling hall. Additionally, the onsite gift shop is the only place in the world you can buy their 12 year-old Distillery Reserve Single Malt.

www.bushmills.com



Beaghmore Stone Circles

Ancient stone circles are quite common in Ireland, but Beaghmore boasts the largest concentration. The Beaghmore Stone Circles in County Tyrone date back to at least 1,500 BC. (Tools and hearths, from the Neolithic period have also been discovered there.) One popular theory is that the stone designs were created as a part of rituals to restore soil fertility. But while peering down from the look-off to

get a bird's eye view of the seven circles and cairns, or exploring them one by one, the imagination awakens, pondering their ancient symbolism.

www.cookstown.gov.uk



Game of Thrones self-drive tours

Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast and Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast and Glens' one-of-a-kind landscapes have been the backdrop for many scenes for the hit TV series Game of Thrones.

The area's tourist board has developed several self-drive tour itineraries, allowing travellers to explore these prime locales while enjoying one of the world's most famous scenic routes. Among the numerous stops are the Cushendun caves—the scene where Davos Seaworth witnessed sorceress Melisandre giving birth was filmed there; and The Dark Hedges, the location for Arya Stark's escape from King's Landing.

www.causewaycoastandglens.com

[/Game-of-Thrones-Itinerary.T1163.aspx](http://Game-of-Thrones-Itinerary.T1163.aspx)

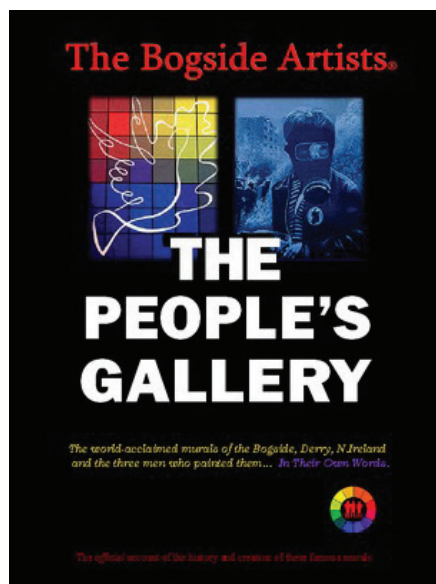


Saint Patrick's Trail

As part of the Saint Patrick and Christian Heritage Signature Project, the Saint Patrick's Trail was officially launched on March 14, 2011. The 92-mile drive takes

travellers throughout Counties Down and Armagh to 15 sites linked to the Patron Saint. Examples include the ruins of Grey Abbey and its traditional herb garden; the holy wells at Struell, where apparently Saint Patrick stayed up all night singing psalms in the nude; and Down Cathedral, his final resting place. Additionally, the town of Armagh has two impressive Cathedrals named after the Saint.

www.discovernorthernireland.com/stpatrick/patricksTrail.aspx



The People's Gallery

The People's Gallery is a world-renowned collection of 12 outdoor murals in the Bogside area of Derry-Londonderry. The Bogside Artists—Tom Kelly, William Kelly, and Kevin Hanson—began their project in 1993. "Our murals bear living witness to a prolonged period of social conflict that will be remembered always," states The Bogside Artists website. Among the collection is the mural that the Dalai Lama officially unveiled. Called "Death of Innocence," it commemorates Annette McGavigan, the first child victim of The Troubles. Thousands visit The People's Gallery each year and tours led by the artists themselves can be arranged.

www.bogsideartists.com



Paul Killeen

Paul Killeen is a 33-year-old photographer from Belfast.



I first became interested in photography as a teenager. Throughout my school years I had a keen interest in art and this was the one subject I excelled in.

Shooting landscapes at the right time of day can make a photograph look beautiful because of the light. In landscape photography light is everything – it is what paints the land.

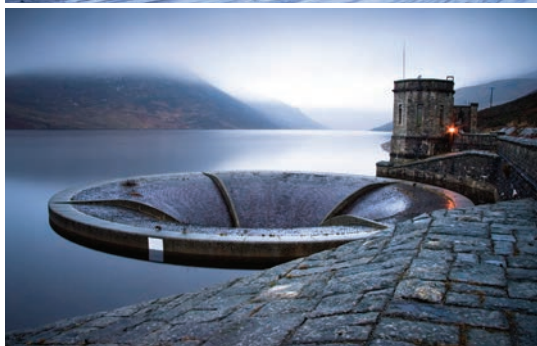
In Northern Ireland we are not always blessed with ideal weather so shooting landscape photography can be tricky.

A photograph has to provoke some sort of feeling or mood within the viewer – a connection with the location or simply because it reminds them of a certain time in their life.

Website: www.paulkilleenphotography.com

Facebook: Paul Killeen Photography

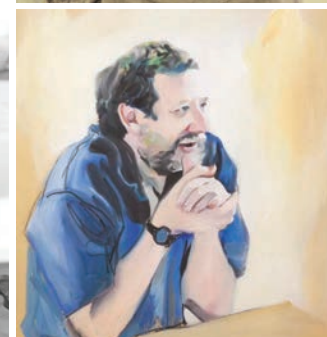
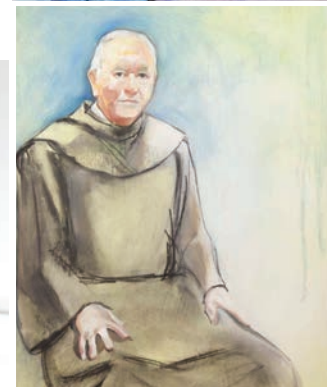
Twitter: @PKilleenPhoto





Susan Hughes

Ulster artist Susan Hughes recently exhibited The Quiet Peacemakers – a collection of portraits of individuals involved with the Northern Ireland Peace Process – at the Long Gallery in the Belfast Parliament Buildings.



I am a child of Northern Irish peace. Growing up at the top of the Ormeau Road with parents of a mixed, cross-border marriage, ecumenism was a given for me and we were not exposed to the brutality and pain of the Troubles.

I began the project by focusing on the Quiet Peacemakers of the Peace Process. But as one person led me to another, I found myself on a journey of discovery bringing me right up to the present – and future – of peacemaking and community relations on my doorstep.

My mother suggested that I paint some of the individuals who were, and are, continually committed to working quietly and steadily in the background to facilitate peace and reconciliation, justice, recognition, and communication. I found that beneath the radar of the big events of the Peace Process are networks of ordinary people moving mountains in courageous and imaginative ways.

I hope this exhibition will affirm and celebrate them, and perhaps challenge a new generation of Quiet Peacemakers.

www.susanhughesartist.com
www.shudesigns.com



Belhaven Black

The smoky notes of Belhaven Black call for a whisky from Islay. The lighter bodied malts like younger Laphroaig or Bowmore work perfectly with their hints of salty smoke.



Scottish Ale

This rich, malty beer contrasts beautifully with a light dram that also has barley at its heart like The Glenrothes or the whisky from our most local distillery, Glenkinchie.

The Scots: master brewers, master distillers, master alchemists.

Belhaven beer and classic malt whisky share three essential ingredients – finest Scottish barley, soft Scottish water and centuries of traditional craftsmanship to create a uniquely Scottish experience. No wonder then that they go so well together.

Choose your own combination and create some alchemy of your own. Slàinte!



Twisted Thistle IPA

This bold, juicy hop flavour matches up to a rich, full-bodied whisky. It plays off the sweet smoke and citrus character of an island malt such as Highland Park or Talisker.



Wee Heavy

Our Wee Heavy is full of deep, rich dried fruit flavour and matches wonderfully well with full-bodied sherry-cask whisky like older expressions of The Macallan.

To find your nearest Belhaven stockist, visit www.belukus.net/locator.asp



Good SPIRITS

James Bond drinks it. So does Mad Men's Don Draper. Nucky Thompson of Boardwalk Empire made a fortune with it, and House of Cards' Frank Underwood fuelled his presidential fire with it.

Whiskey. Or, whisky if you prefer.

Scotch, Irish, Canadian, Single Malt, Blended, Bourbon - straight up or on the rocks, whiskey is enjoying a spirited renaissance.

The Brief History of Whisky and Whiskey



The exact origins of whisky and whiskey — combining a cooked grain mash with yeast, distilling it to spirit form and ageing it to palatable perfection — may never be known. It is not certain whether the Irish, Scots or another people were the first to distil the “water of life,” hence our timeline will reveal some clashing dates at times. What is certain is that both Ireland and Scotland became masters of the craft and trade, and pioneers for future distillers in Canada, the United States and beyond. Their industries also triumphed over numerous adversities from severe taxation, prohibition and war, to struggling over the meaning of whisky.



2000 BC and earlier - Numerous accounts recount that ancient Egyptian, Chinese and Mesopotamian populations practised distillation to create perfumes, medicines and/or embalming agents.

1st to 2nd century

100 - Greek alchemists in Alexandria developed the ambix, possibly the first invented alembic for distillation.

5th to 6th century

Varied theories describe how the technology of distillation travelled from Egypt to Europe:



432 - Native Scot Saint Patrick went to Ireland where he not only introduced Christianity, but also distillation.

5th century - Some recount that the 5th century Huns were the first to make whisky.

600 or 700 - Others describe how Irish monks returned home from travelling around the Middle East where they learned how to distil perfumes. Back home the technology was adapted to create whisky or “uisce beatha,” the Irish Gaelic for “water of life.” (The Scots also called whisky “water of life,” or “uisge beatha” in Scottish Gaelic.)



11th to 12th century

Some historical records state that whisky-making did not occur in the British Isles until the 11th century or even later. During this period monasteries were the main sites where the alcoholic spirit was produced.

15th century

1405 - The Annals of Clonmasnoise contains the first written record of whisky. It describes a Christmas in Ireland when the chieftain of Moyntyreolas died from drinking an excessive amount of “aqua vitae,” Latin for “water of vitality.”



1494 - The first written account describing whisky production is credited to The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, where a 1494 listing read, "Eight bolls of malt to Friar John Cor wherewith to make aquavita."

Kevin R. Rosar, author of *Whiskey: A Global History*, stated in a Library Congress presentation that Scotland "gets the prize" as being the first to distil whisky.

16th century

1506 - King James IV of Scotland, having a great fondness for whisky, purchased a large volume from the Guild of Surgeon Barbers in Dundee, which had been granted the whisky production monopoly the previous year.

1541 - Queen Elizabeth I was a fan specifically of Irish whisky, and ordered large quantities to be delivered to her court.

17th century

1608 - Bushmills Distillery in Co. Antrim in Northern Ireland was granted a distilling licence, although it is believed whisky had been produced there for several hundred years prior. Today, Bushmills is known as the world's oldest licensed whiskey distillery.

1644 & 1661 - Whisky production was so widespread, a tax on the "water of life" was imposed in Scotland in 1644 and Ireland in 1661. Both scenarios gave rise to a flurry of illegal whisky production.

18th century

1707 - The Acts of Union merging England and Scotland resulted in a series of tax hikes on whisky distillation in Scotland. This increased the number of underground distillers, as well as their cunning methods to outsmart the excisemen. For example, some distilled at night giving rise to the term "moonshine."

1775 - Glenturret, known as Scotland's oldest whisky distillery and for its Famous Grouse, was formally established in 1775. Prior to its official founding, it is said the "Hosh" was run by illicit distillers.

1780 - John Jameson & Son (Jameson Irish Whiskey) acquired the distillery on Bow Street in Dublin. By the end of the 18th century, Ireland, with approximately 1,100 licensed distilleries and 8,000 or so illegal operations, supplied the majority of the world's whisky consumption.



19th century

1823 - The Excise Act was passed in the UK which made it financially reasonable to legally distil whisky. In 1824, the Glenlivet Distillery became Scotland's first distillery licensed under the Excise Act.

1826 - Scots distiller Robert Stein invented the continuous still, also called the column still, inspired by Sir Anthony Perrier of Cork's invention. As its name suggests, it allowed for continuous distillation which revolutionised the whisky industry. Aeneas Coffey, a former exciseman from Ireland ironically, enhanced the design to create the Coffey still. It was actually embraced much faster in Scotland than Ireland.

1853 - Andrew Usher II of Edinburgh created the first successfully commercial blended whisky, known as Old Vatted Glenlivet.



1879 - Four Dublin distillers published a book called *Truths About Whisky* because of their disdain for the Scottish practice of blending whiskies and embracing the new Coffey still. To differentiate their products from Scotland's, Irish distillers began using the spelling "whiskey" with an "e."

1880s - When the French brandy industry was devastated by the phylloxera pest infestation, whisky became the primary liquor of choice for many consumers.

20th century

1909 - The Royal Commission on Whisky and other Potable Spirits declared that blended whiskies made from patent or Coffey stills were true whiskies provided they were aged appropriately.

1920-1933 - By the time of the American Prohibition, whisky production was already flowing north and south of the border. (By the 1840s, Canada boasted more than 200 distilleries. Jim Beam's bourbon roots date back to Kentucky, 1795; and in 1799, George Washington's famous Mount Vernon distillery had produced nearly 11,000 gallons of whiskey.) Dramatic tales come out of the prohibition era (1920-1933) characterized by the taste Americans had already gleefully acquired for the "water of life." Varying accounts describe smuggling booms for Canadian and/or Scottish whisky. Other sources describe these as legends, perhaps embellished by the bootleggers themselves who may have attached phony labels to the bottles they sold "underground."

1948 - Ireland's whiskey industry was severely affected by the Commission's ruling, the US Prohibition and World War II. So by 1948, there were only six distilleries in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland combined, compared to more than 160 distilleries representing 400 brands during the previous century.

1966 - John Jameson & Son, The Cork Distilleries Company and John Power & Son combined to form the Irish Distillers Group. In 1988, the Group joined Pernod Ricard.

1996 - Jameson was becoming the fastest-growing spirit brand worldwide, representing Irish whiskey's comeback.

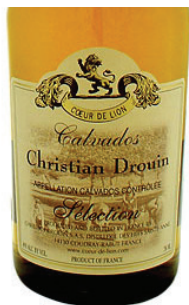
Present day - Both Scottish and Irish whisky/whiskey brands are strong household names today. The Scottish government determined whisky exports rose from £2.3 billion in 2002 to £4.3 billion in 2012. And Irish whiskey is entering a new golden age. In November 2013, The Irish Times reported that consumers bought 6.5 million cases of whiskey in 2012 compared to four million cases in 2008.

Sources varied.



Spirits of the Celtic Regions

Spanning about 1,200 miles from Scotland to Spain along western Europe's Atlantic coast, the areas of Asturias, Brittany, Cornwall, Galicia, Ireland, Isle of Man, Scotland, and Wales offer whiskies, wines, beers and spirits as different and unique as each region. Ray Pearson weighs in on the best the region has to offer.



Brittany: Apple Brandy

Brittany produces fine beer, cider, wine, and even a single malt whisky. An apple brandy called Calvados is closely linked to the region, although it originated in adjacent Normandy. Affectionately known as "the drink of the Celts," Calvados is made using dozens of varieties of apples from northwestern France's abundant orchards. Try Coeur de Leon Calvados.

Isle of Man: ManX Spirit

Perhaps the most unusual spirit of today's Celtic regions is ManX Spirit, described as "an intense spirit drink distilled from oak-aged single malt whiskey." It comes in two variations; a red label re-distillation of existing blended whiskies, aged at least five years, and a blue label, which is a re-distillation of existing pure malt whisky, also aged at least five years. Try ManX Red.



Cornwall: Mead

Mead is a fermented drink made with honey and water. Arguably one of the oldest alcoholic beverages in existence, mead is sometimes referred to as honey wine. Mead is mentioned throughout English history, including in the Old English heroic epic poem Beowulf and Arthurian literature. Try Chaucer's Mead.

Scotland:

Beer and Scotch Whisky

Scotland has brewed beer for more than 3,000 years and legally distilled spirits for a little over 500. Popular brands of beer include Belhaven, McEwan's and Tennent's. Scotch whisky is bottled primarily in two ways – as single malt as the product of one single distillery, or as a blend, consisting of small amounts of dozens of single malts and a larger proportion of grain whisky blended together. Try Glenmorangie single malt.



Galicia: Wine

The wettest area of Spain is Galicia, in the extreme northwest corner of the country. Home of the Rias Baixas, the most well-known of the Galician wine regions, Albariño grapes thrive in this cold, drizzly climate. The region's white wines are crisp and zesty with citrus tones. Other wine-producing provinces of Galicia include Ourense, Lugo, A Coruña, and Pontevedra. Try Spanish Quarter Galician wine.

Wales: Beer, Wine and Whisky

Wales is well-suited to producing wines, beers and distilled spirits because of the abundance of water and grain. Dozens of Welsh breweries exist, with S. A. Brain in Cardiff being the largest. Penarth Vineyards produces fine Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. Penderyn Distillery offers a complete portfolio of spirits, including vodka, gin, Welsh Cream Liqueur and a single malt whisky, which has been aged in used Bourbon barrels from Kentucky. Try Penderyn Single Malt Whisky.



Ireland: Irish Beer and Whiskey

In 1759 Arthur Guinness began combining roasted Irish barley, hops, brewer's yeast and pure spring water to make his namesake beer. Today, 10 million glasses of "the black stuff" are consumed around the world each day. Irish whiskey is made at four distilleries – Bushmill's, Cooley, Jameson, and Midleton. The aroma and flavour profiles are light and smooth because the whiskeys are triple distilled and most are not peated. Try Guinness, Harp and Smithwick's beers and Bushmill's whiskey.



Ray Pearson
writes about
whisky, travel and food.
www.whiskytastings.com





My Whisky Journey

Blair Bowman

As a freshman at university in Scotland I co-founded a whisky society, and my whisky journey began there.

Whisky obsessed me and I wanted to learn as much as possible. Our society made trips to distilleries a couple of times each semester. I attended whisky industry events, such as festivals and tastings. Since I enjoyed networking, I quickly amassed a cardboard box full of business cards of whisky industry connections.

By the time I graduated university, the whisky society attracted dozens of distilleries eager to come and give tastings. They were enthusiastic about talking to a crowd of young whisky fanatics. Distilleries would ask what the last distillery had brought. If it was a 15-year-old-whisky, then the next one would bring a 20-year-old whisky.

During my first year at Aberdeen University, I spent a month in Shanghai studying Chinese. I attended a Scottish government reception and met a few members of the Shanghai Malt Whisky Society while there. Returning to Shanghai for four months in 2010, I became a regular at their events.

In my second year of university I continued to network and build up industry contacts for the whisky society in order to attract more distilleries into visiting us. At the same time I began judging at various whisky competitions from Speyside to Chicago.

While working in Shanghai, I got to know the organiser of Taipei WhiskyLIVE and was invited to help out at the show

that year. One day on Twitter #WorldGinDay became a global trending topic. Curious, I wanted to know more, but Google turned up nothing. While searching, I happened to discover the domain name www.worldwhiskyday.com was available, so I immediately purchased it and then set up a Twitter and Facebook page. Within days, thousands of people said they would attend a World Whisky Day celebration.

From then on, the day turned into something bigger than I could have imagined. The first World Whisky Day in 2012 made the front page of the BBC News website and the hashtag for the event became a trending topic on Twitter. More than 20,000 people attended over 200 events in over 40 countries. Every continent except Antarctica held events.

The day is a celebration for everyone and all types of whisky – whether it's Scotch whisky, Irish Whiskey or bourbon or any other kind of whiskey/whisky. It's an opportunity for everyone to celebrate the wonderful tippie.

The day provides an opportunity to try the beverage and an inroad to find out more about the drink.

Anyone can host an event for World Whisky Day on Saturday May 17. They only need register the event at www.worldwhisky-day.com. The whole point is to make whisky accessible.

By Blair Bowman



• *World Whisky Day officially takes place on the third Saturday in May each year. VisitScotland, the Scotch Whisky Experience, Scotland Food and Drink and the Scottish Government support World Whisky Day.*

- *World Whisky Day strongly encourages responsible drinking.*
- *World Whisky Day: Saturday May 17, 2014*

Five Bars Worth a Dram!

Naturally, the Celtic Nations boast some of the world's best Whisky bars. Here, our senior writer Michelle Brunet looks at five of the finest.



The Pot Still

Glasgow, Scotland

The Pot Still has been referred to as the best bar in Glasgow and Scotland's top whisky pub, and was named the world's Best Bar/Restaurant on at least two occasions by Whisky Magazine. In 2007 the magazine wrote, "The perfect example of what a whisky bar should be, understated and unassuming until you look up behind the bar...." Behind the bar are around 400 bottles of single malt whisky! The establishment serves up traditional pub fare — not fine dining by any means — but last year, the Daily Record reported that TripAdvisor submissions collectively ranked the bar as the best place to eat in Glasgow. www.thepotstill.co.uk

The White House

Peel, Isle of Man

The White House was awarded Pub of the Year for 2013 by the Isle of Man's CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) branch, making it the sixth time they were bestowed with the title. With up to nine ales on tap at a time — they've served at least 1,700 different guest ales from across the British Isles — the Peel establishment certainly whets the palates of the beer-thirsty clientele. However, whisky connoisseurs have even more choices — more than 140 single malt whiskies! The White House is also a social hub with pool, darts, local music and other events. www.thewhitehousepeel.com



The Trengilly Wartha Inn

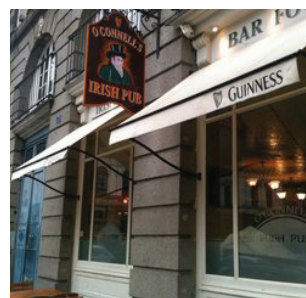
Constantine, Cornwall, UK

At The Trengilly Wartha Inn, visitors sleep overnight in 11 country guest rooms, take a walk around the inn's tranquil gardens, delight in locally-sourced, chef-crafted meals and partake in weekly social activities such as instrumental jams. The on-site bar is also a treat for overnight guests, locals or patrons passing through. It has been awarded second place for CAMRA's Pub of the Year category and won Westcountry Family Pub of the Year. Along with an impressive wine and real-ale menu, the bar has 60 different types of whiskies. www.trengilly.co.uk

O'Connell's Irish Pub

Rennes, Brittany, France

Naturally, a number of Dublin's Temple Bar District establishments are worthy of mention, such as The Palace Bar, a favourite of the late Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, and Temple Bar itself, the home of Ireland's largest collection of whiskies. You can imbibe and experience a similar vibe in Galicia's capital at O'Connell's Irish Pub. It describes itself as a "piece of Temple Bar teleported right on Place du Parlement in Rennes." Authors Dominique Auzias and Jean-Paul Labourdette included O'Connell's in their book, *Guide de l'amateur de whisky*, noting the pub's friendly atmosphere highlighted by traditional Irish performances, as well as rugby matches on the big screen. While beer reigns supreme, the authors state that its whisky selection and "snake bite" mixtures are also standouts. www.oconnellspub.fr



Bittles Bar

Belfast, Northern Ireland

Bittles Bar's distinctiveness begins with its narrow, flat-iron shape. Inside the triangular pub, a range of artwork adorns the walls, including tributes to Yeats and Wilde, and local works portraying Northern Ireland scenes. Bittles has an extensive array of local and international beers, as well as ciders. Its impressive collection of whiskies, jam-packed on shelf after shelf, does the moniker "Bittles Famous Whiskey Bar" justice. A mixed crowd of patrons, friendly staff and generous pub fare add to the pub's addictive atmosphere. www.facebook.com/pages/Bittles-Bar/109710919141801

Top Five Whisky Distilleries Around the World



Glenfiddich

Dufftown, Banffshire, Scotland

William Grant founded Glenfiddich in 1887 with the help of his seven sons and two daughters. Today, the Dufftown spirit producer is part of a family of distilleries, fittingly run by the company William Grant & Sons. Since 2000, Glenfiddich's range has won more single malt scotch prizes than any other distiller as part of the International Wine & Spirit Competition and the International Spirits Challenge. In May/June 2012, DEPARTURES magazine stated Glenfiddich offered one of the "world's best distillery tours," where guests are treated to 12-, 15- and 18-year-old whisky tastings.

www.glenfiddich.com • www.williamgrant.com



Midleton Distillery

Midleton, Cork, Ireland

The Midleton Distillery is emblematic of the revival of Irish whiskey. In 1966, John Jameson & Son, The Cork Distilleries Company and John Power & Son joined forces to form the Irish Distillers Group. In 1975, the Group built a new distillery in Midleton which today produces such renowned brands as Powers, Redbreast and Jameson — all have recently been heralded by Jim Murray's Whisky Bible (2014), among other authorities. In 2012 - 2013, the distillery underwent a €100-million expansion to meet the ever-increasing demand of its Jameson label. The new Midleton factory is situated next to the older, circa 1825 distillery, which now offers interactive tours called the "Jameson Experience."

www.irishdistillers.ie
www.jamesonwhiskey.com

The whisky industry is booming, with makers popping up in all four corners of the globe over the last decade. Here, Michelle Brunet looks at a few of the finest distilleries.



Balcones Distillery

Waco, Texas, United States

Under a bridge in Waco, Texas, Chip Tate and his team transformed an old welding shop into something quite extraordinary. They built a distillery completely by hand to create the first Texan and first Blue Corn whiskies ever made, the Texas Single Malt and the "cornographic" True Blue. In just around five years since the distillery's fruition, its craft whiskey line has been winning heaps of prizes, including Icons of Whisky, Wizards of Whisky, World Wine and Spirits, and World Whiskies Awards.

www.balconesdistilling.com

Honourable Mention

The Penderyn Distillery (Penderyn, Wales) launched its single malt whisky on St. David's Day 2004, making it the first Welsh malt whisky to be produced in more than a century. Since then the distillery has won numerous international awards for its whiskies and spirits.

www.welsh-whisky.co.uk



Nikka Whisky

Distilleries in Yoichi & Miyagikyo Japan

Masataka Taketsuru (1894-1979) is known as the father of Japan's whisky industry. In 1918, he travelled to Scotland where he studied chemistry at the University of Glasgow and apprenticed under local distillers, making him the first Japanese man to study the whisky-making process. Back in Japan, Taketsuru founded his own distilling business in 1934, now known as Nikka Whisky. The company's Taketsuru 17 Years Old was recently named World's Best Blended Malt Whisky as part of the 2014 World Whiskies Awards. Nikka's distilleries produce a line of single cask, blended and malt whiskies.

www.nikka.com/eng



Sullivans Cove

Cambridge, Tasmania, Australia

Sullivans Cove made history when it became the first Australian distillery to create the "World's Best Single Malt Whisky," as named in Whisky Magazine's World Whiskies Awards. Its winning French Oak Cask, described by judge Ed Bates as "Tunnock's Caramel wafers...with a touch of smoke," was the first single malt outside Scotland and Japan to earn the prestigious title since the awards began. The Tasmanian distillery prides itself on its boutique style of production. Sullivans Cove director Patrick Maguire described their modus operandi to ABC News as, "...when we are running the still, they are not automatic systems, we actually run it from the heart if you like."

www.sullivanscovewhisky.com



Whisky, Words & Wisdom

May 2- May 25:

Wigtown & Bladnoch

Wigtown and Bladnoch Distillery present a cornucopia of readings, music performances and ceilidhs, markets and food fests, crafts, games and tours, as part of Whisky, Words & Wisdom. Much of the literary, epicurean and cultural events hosted by "Scotland's National Book Town"—Wigtown has 14 bookshops—and "The Spirit of the Lowlands" pay special homage to uisge beatha with such happenings as scotch-themed dinners, cooking with whisky lessons, tastings, folklore revelations, storytelling, town walking tours with hot toddies in hand, and more. The eclectic itinerary appeals to a range of ages and tastes.

www.wigtown-booktown.co.uk
www.bladnoch.co.uk



Create: Eat: Whisky

May 14-20: Leith (Edinburgh)

Jelly & Gin is embracing the challenge to transform an old Leith milk factory, in just two days, to create a weeklong, experiential "whisky adventure." Attendees will immerse their senses to discover how whisky is made "from grain to glass." In the transformed space amplified with lighting, sound, scent and projected effects, guests' palates will be treated to Jura Whisky's single malts, coupled with locally-sourced bites focusing on smooth and sweet, rich and spicy, light and delicate and smoky and peaty flavour profiles.

www.jellyandgin.com

Whisky Month

MAY 2014

The Year of Homecoming is honouring Scotland's national drink throughout May. The "dram fine month of events" is expected to attract 70,000 visitors who will partake in festivals, distillery tours, tastings and fairs that showcase the deep-rooted connection between uisge beatha with Scotland's musical, literary, culinary, and recreational traditions and modern-day passions. Whisky Month includes 19 official events taking place across the country, and numerous other organizers are also adopting the "water of life" theme. Some Year of Homecoming whisky highlights include...



World Whisky Day

May 17: Leith

(Edinburgh) and beyond!

Throughout May, the Scotch Malt Whisky Society is organising numerous happenings highlighting their whiskies, the world's most varied selection of single cask, single malts. Among these is World Whisky Day's signature event, a date that has at least 16 different countries hosting activities as well. On May 17th, some of Scotland's best food and drink will be paired with some rare whiskies from the Society's very own collection. Beer from Inverlmond Brewery, award-winning haggis from Findalys, cuts and prepped products from The Buffalo Farm, cheese from I J Mellis, whisky sausages from Crombies and gin from Caorunn will be among the palette pleasures showcased at The Vaults.

www.smws.co.uk



Islay Festival of Malt and Music

May 23-31:

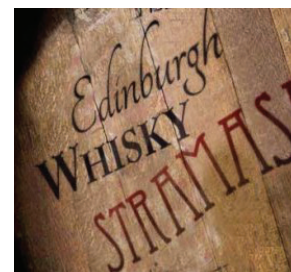
Isle of Islay

The Isle of Islay is celebrating its 30th Festival of Malt and Music this year. The Fèis Ìle will once again feature open days and other festivities at ten distilleries on Islay Island and neighbouring Jura.

Fly fishing, golf and bowling are also featured among the extensive itinerary.

Celtic culture will complement the island's rich malt mores, as participants have a wide selection of concerts and ceilidhs to stomp their feet and fling to during the fest. Gaelic language and song classes are also on tap.

www.islayfestival.com



Whisky Stramash

May 24 & 25:

Edinburgh

Entering its third year, this Whisky Month headliner is known by its hilarity, mystery and "madcap pioneering." According to the event's website, "The Whisky Stramash is a whisky event aimed at challenging stuffy perceptions of Scotch and other worldly whiskies," and is tailored to uisge beatha virgins as well as long-time dram drinkers. The all-inclusive ticket price allows Stramashers, which is what organizers call their guests, to sample over 200 spirits from around the world as well as participate in some outrageous and experiential scenarios certain to entertain.

www.thewhiskystramash.com

For more information on Whisky Month, visit: www.homecomingscotland.com/whiskymonth

ten Whiskey drinkers

Loved around the world, the Celts' famous drink, variously spelled whisky or whiskey, has inspired much fun, creativity and mayhem. Melanie Furlong introduces 10 well-known imbibers...



Whisky and water in a highball glass was *Winston Churchill's* drink of choice. Considered one of the greatest British leaders of all time, Churchill's habit started when he travelled to Africa and found the water unbearable. He said, "The water was not fit to drink. To make it palatable, we had to add whisky. By diligent effort, I learned to like it."

Françoise Sagan, the French novelist, most famous for her 1952 teenage debut, *Hello Sadness*, was famed for her love of whisky and other methods of escape. One of her most famous quotes is, "Whisky, gambling and Ferraris are better than housework."

Best known for his novel *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Hunter S. Thompson* drank everything. But whisky was his lifelong love. He once described himself as "a lazy drunken hillbilly with a heart full of hate who has found a way to live out where the real winds blow, to sleep late, have fun, get wild, drink whiskey, and drive fast on empty streets with nothing in mind except falling in love and not getting arrested."



During a concert in Ireland, singer *Lady Gaga* dedicated a song to "my longtime boyfriend Jameson," who was "always there for me when I need him." She was referring to her favourite drink, Jameson Irish Whiskey. "I have made so much of my music with Jameson. I'm not being paid a cent to

advertise the whiskey... I should be. The whiskey has made my new songs," said *Gaga* swigging from a bottle of the whiskey on stage.

Mark Twain, the American author of classic tales such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* proclaimed his love for whisky by saying, "Too much of anything is bad, but too much of good whisky is barely enough." Another of his more famous lines is, "Whisky is for drinking; water is for fighting over."



Clark Gable, one of the most noted American actors of all time, was well-known for his love of whiskey. He was an early celebrity endorser of Jim Beam whiskey in the mid-1970s and also famous for on-set pranks where he would substitute non-alcoholic drinks with whiskey, much to the surprise of his fellow actors.



Senior Ministry of Defence officials revealed that royal playboy *Prince Harry* was banned from drinking whisky shots while flying his Apache helicopter. Top brass told the partying Royal to curb his in-flight Glenfiddich addiction on the Apache pilot course or risk being dropped.

Popular Japanese novelist *Haruki Murakami* best known for *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and End of the World* said, "Whiskey, like a beautiful woman, demands appreciation. You gaze first, then it's time to drink." An empty box of Cutty Sark serves as a plot device in his novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.



Actress *Amanda Seyfried* told *Dave Letterman*, "I have to go on record saying I've never done a live television show - after noon - without some kind of liquid courage. I'm a big fan of whiskey. *Russell Crowe* gave me some Midleton for my birthday and I had some of that before I got here. And then your lovely colleagues had some Jameson waiting for me [backstage]." In an interview with *ABC News*, Seyfried said she uses whisky, honey and lemon to cure colds.

Rockstar *Kid Rock* likes whiskey so much he is partnering with Jim Beam Bourbon Whiskey to find a fan to work as his personal tour bartender this summer. The fan will win \$10,000, be trained by a professional Jim Beam mixologist and go on tour with Rock.

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with Andrew Ferguson

If you're a fan of The Macallan single malt, you may have noticed something different about the distillery's range. Macallan has withdrawn all its age-statement whiskies from the Canadian market, and replaced them with a new line called the 1824 Series, a nod to the distillery's date of establishment. The whiskies of the 1824 Series – Gold, Amber, Sienna and Ruby – are named for their natural colours, which get progressively darker as the price points in the range increase.

The Macallan is a victim of its own success; the brand has grown so quickly that it simply cannot keep up with demand. Keep in mind that to refer to a whisky as a 12-year-old, all the whisky in the bottle must be at least 12 years of age. Macallan has dramatically increased its production over the last decade, and has plans to do so yet again. But it will be years and decades before this production will be ready for bottling. Macallan, faced with two unpalatable choices – raise prices to cool demand, or start rationing its product – instead chose a bold third path, to do away with age statements.

Scotch whisky buyers the world over have been taught to believe that older is better; one very large brand even promotes the concept that: "age matters." But does it? As with many things in life the answer is not black and white. Whisky does improve with age while maturing in the cask, but only to a point. Further, the quality and depth of maturation will depend on the quality of the cask and the number of times it has previously been used. Every cask of maturing spirit has to be judged on its own merits. Does age matter? It's all relative.

The owners of The Macallan believe that they can continue to supply demand and bottle premium whisky if they are relieved of the constraints of age statements. They want the flexibility to use casks which have reached maturity at a younger age, than might otherwise have been possible in their 12, 18 or 25 Year expressions. Cynics will suggest that Macallan is trying to foist young whisky on unsuspecting consumers, and that this is a form of selling out – some of them without having even tried the whisky. To be sure it is an enormous gamble for one of the world's largest whisky brands, and only time will tell if it pays off. Having sampled all of the whiskies in the 1824 Series, and all of the previous age identified core expressions too, I believe the new line lives up to Macallan's standards and reputation.

Macallan Gold

Honeyed and malty, the citrus makes a big impact in this entry-level expression before the darker sherry notes start to emerge.

\$63.99

Macallan Amber

Dark chocolate, leather and juicy orange with browning white fruits, Demerara sugars and some sweet honeyed oak.

\$83.99

Macallan Sienna

Rich, nutty and syrupy with candied fruit, marzipan and smooth leather. Both classic Macallan and sherry cask whisky.

\$159.99

Macallan Ruby

Deep, dark and very fruity with layers of Christmas cake, dark chocolate, leather and tobacco.

Not quite the old 25, but much more than the old 18!

\$264.99

Macallan M

Also bottled without an age statement, and an eye-watering price tag, the "M" is the 1824 Series' penultimate bottling. This is what a fine old whisky should be: mind bogglingly layered, complex and multifaceted.

\$3,799.99



Macallan is not the first Scotch whisky brand to release NAS or no age statement whiskies. Auchentoshan's Three Wood and Aberlour's A'Bunadh have both been available since the 1990s, and many others exist besides. Three decades ago the Scotch whisky industry was on its knees, a third of its distilleries closed (many of which would never reopen). It wasn't until the 1990s and early 2000s that production recovered. I encourage you to try them for yourself and make up your own mind. Does age really matter?

www.fergusonwhisky tours.com





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Whether you fancy a pint of ale, a dram of the good stuff, a hearty meal or great conversation, these three spots will bring you back for the Craic!

The Blacksmith Irish Pub *Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain*

For anyone questioning Galicia's long and vibrant Celtic history and heritage, the Blacksmith Irish Pub in Pontevedra has all the answers; along with an array of good Irish ales and stouts (Murphy's, Beamish, Guinness), the impressive stock of whiskies (Bushmills, Tullamore Dew, Clontarf) will whet your whistle any time of day, especially during happy hour when the place is packed with both locals and tourists. Authentic pub grub is available courtesy of ex pat Conor Cleary (Galway), including wholesome and hearty bangers 'n' mash, fish 'n' chips, corn beef and cabbage, and the finest lamb stew available south of Cork. Classic Spanish cuisine is also on



the menu, with a scrumptious selection of tapas, including Paella, Chorizo, Morcilla and a variety of first-rate seafood dishes. A late breakfast is the thing here, and be sure to sample the eatery's Blood Crepes. The traditional pub-front and décor are not out of place in this small town, which enjoys as much an Irish back story as any in the Celtic Diaspora. A number of historical artifacts are on display inside, with plaques outlining the area's connections to the Emerald Isle. Afterwards, take a walk (or stumble) on the gorgeous Monterreal Avenue along the scenic waterfront.

www.facebook.com/theblacksmithirishpub

Le Cheval Blanc Hotel Plancoët *Plancoët, Brittany, France*

An old-world, family owned and operated hotel with Celtic roots, this seven-bedroom lodge in the Cotes d'Armor welcomes weary travellers with the gentle scent of peat burning in the foyer's hearth-fire. More welcoming still are the Friday and Saturday night traditional music sessions at the facility's Irish pub, which feature a variety of local and visiting players year-round. Master



classes and Irish set dancing are also part of the experience. Sessions are known to carry on until the wee hours, as are the bar's beer taps which flow freely with Guinness, Smithwick's, Harp, and a sampling from the region's fine microbreweries. The

whiskey offerings might be limited to Bushmills, Jameson and Kilbeggan, but the quality holds up well considering the frequent changes in Brittany's temperamental climate. Wines are always a solid option in France, and many of the area's reds actually pair very well with the pub's menu, which includes a petite medley of meats, potatoes, fish, vegetables and superb broths from the hotel kitchen. A maze of nearby walking trails, along with a few above-par golf courses make for an exquisite visit. Non-francophones needn't worry about language barriers, and a few free pints are likely if you speak Gaelic.

www.breizhms.com

Sloop Inn *St. Ives, Cornwall, UK*

St. Ives is arguably one of the best and most popular vacation spots in the British Isles, evidenced by the tens of thousands of visitors that swarm the picturesque community from May to September each year. Suffice to say that the area's hotels and restaurants are busy catering to hungry tourists, and the Sloop Inn is no different. The hotel's lovely pub is packed day and night, mostly because of its superior menu, which features made-to-order sandwiches, freshly-baked baguettes, and a solid range of starters and light bites (try the Sloop Smokies, Arbroath Haddock in Mornay Sauce). The more adventurous can dine on a sizzling



steak (with a myriad of topping options), but the sure bet is the seafood, including locally caught mackerel, Cornish Cod and Whitefish – all seasoned to perfection. Wash it all down with an outstanding assortment of local and imported beers (Hooch, Rekordalig, Becks Blue), whiskey (Grouse, Makers), or ask the sommelier about the small but strong wine-stock (Italy, Chile, Australia, California). Enjoy live music most nights, and be sure to scour the gorgeous beach at low tide. If possible, wax up your board for the best coastal surfing in the Celtic nations.

www.sloop-inn.co.uk

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Almond Rhubarb Coffee Cake

Recently, I received a wonderful note from one of our readers, Russ Knight:

"My wife, Sandi, and I used to run a small hobby farm in Ontario. On that farm we raised chickens, ducks, turkeys and pygmy goats. We even tried breeding rabbits.

"One night I came home from work and went out to feed the extended family. I noticed our female [goat] 'Cream' looked quite a bit smaller than she had in the morning. That's when I heard a muted bleating coming from under a platform the goats played on. I knelt down and pulled the little guy out. I was immediately rewarded with a headbutt under the chin. The poor little guy was hungry!"

"Cream, for whatever reason, had decided not to nurse him. There was no way I could convince her to start, so I picked the little guy up and was promptly headbutted again. I carried him into the house and called to Sandi. 'We have a new baby Hon,' I said. 'His name is Bump.'

"Baby goats are like human babies in that they need to be fed every few hours. Thus started my first experience with two and four o'clock feedings. Bump quickly wormed his way into our hearts. He was a tough little guy and responded well to feeding from a bottle.

"As time went on, Bump became one of the family. He fit right in with our dogs. In fact he really thought he was a dog. He

wagged his tail like a dog, and walked on a leash better than our actual dogs. He would even pee on puppy training mats when we were away.

"The only problem was that Bump was still a goat. Goats like to eat things and rip things up. I came home one day just in time to save my 4 Seasons Celtic cookbook. I lost the cover and several pages, but was still able to use the book. We knew the time had come for Bump to join the others when he started eating the drywall I had just installed. It was truly a bad day for me, but I cherish the memories."

This one is for Bump so he can enjoy the taste of Spring:

INGREDIENTS

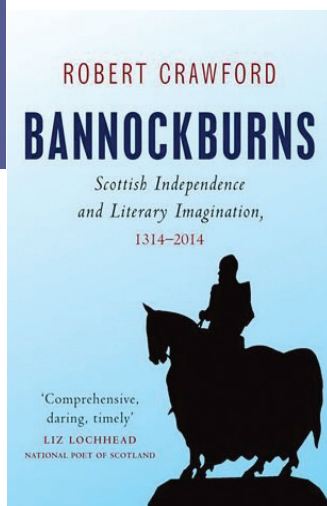
Preheat oven to 350 degrees

*1 1/2 cups packed brown sugar
2/3 cup vegetable oil
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 1/2 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup milk
1 1/2 cups rhubarb chopped
1/2 cup sliced almonds
1/3 cup white sugar
1 tablespoon melted butter
1/4 cup sliced almonds*

PREPARATION

- Grease two 9 inch round pans.
- In a large bowl, beat brown sugar, oil, eggs and vanilla together until smooth. Combine flour, salt and baking soda; add to the sugar mixture alternately with milk. Beat until smooth. Stir in rhubarb and 1/2 cup almonds. Pour into prepared pans.
- In a small bowl, combine white sugar and butter. Stir in 1/2 cup almonds. Sprinkle topping over batter.
- Bake for 30-35 minutes until cake is done.

P.S: I would like to invite all readers to send me their favourite recipes, and their favourite memories that go with it to cabrini@celticlife.ca

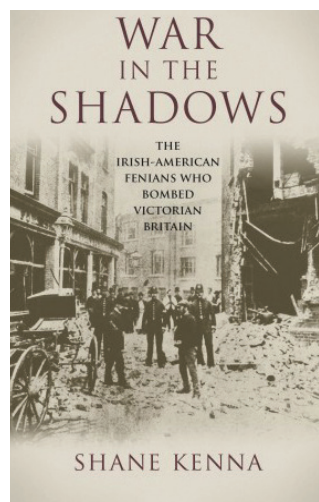


Bannockburns
By Robert Crawford
Edinburgh University Press /
288pp / £19.99

With Scotland's referendum on independence only months away, opinions and perspectives are pouring in from all four corners of the globe. Robert Crawford, Professor of Modern Scottish Literature, University of St. Andrews, comes out with a unique look – and a resounding NO – in his latest work, the thought-provoking *Bannockburns*. From the infamous battle of 1314, through the medieval, romantic and industrial ages to today, the author examines the interpretations of the conflict via the pens of poets, novelists and dramatists. Arguing that Scottish scribes have often idealised independence, and thus created a false sense of hope in the collective consciousness of their people, the scholar concludes that a YES vote this September will have a negative impact on Scotland's economic and cultural landscape. ~ SPC

Lessons From the Northern Ireland Peace Process
Edited by Timothy J. White
University of Wisconsin Press / 264pp / \$26.95

Just as the history of Ulster is complex, so was the process of bringing peace to the war-torn region. Thankfully, Professor of Political Science at Xavier University, Timothy J. White, sums it up with simplicity in his latest effort *Lessons From the Northern Ireland Peace Process*. Drawing upon an assortment of sources, the author approaches the matter holistically, offering unique – and sometimes differing – opinions on both issues and procedures. Readers not so familiar with the myriad of concessions and back-room deals will find fascination with the socio-political manoeuvres, while others with knowledge of the events will enjoy the inside perspective from those who were involved with the negotiations. An excellent and important read, and essential for better understanding the “terrible beauty” that is Northern Ireland. ~ SPC

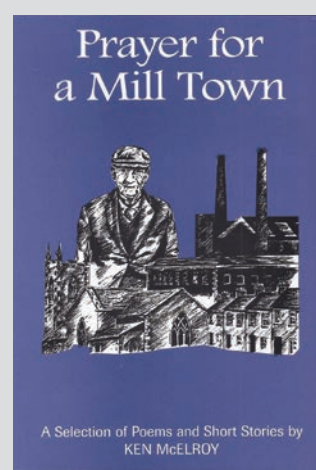


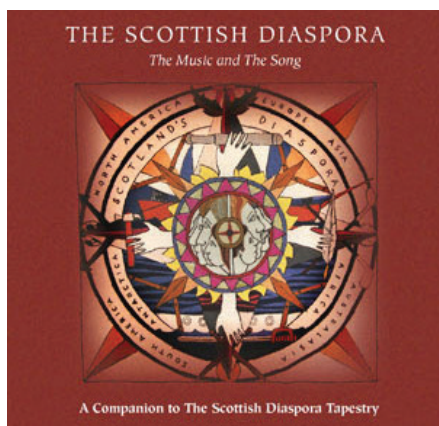
War in the Shadows
By Shane Kenna
Merrion Press / 432pp /
£17.99

Almost 100 years before Northern Ireland exploded in violence, the Emerald Isle's forefathers were wreaking havoc elsewhere. In the 1880s, Irish-American Fenians – known as the Dynamitards – launched a five-year bombing campaign upon London. A doctor of modern history, author Shane Kenna takes a detailed look back at the operations, arguing that the advanced methodology of madness laid much of the groundwork for today's terrorist activities. Kudos to Kenna for covering both the conspiracy and the counter-conspiracy, with chapters devoted to the evolution and response of the British Secret Service and its network of spies, agent-provocateurs and informers. Engaging and enlightening, *War in the Shadows* both evokes and suggests the spirit of the times, proving again that truth is always more amazing than fiction. ~ SPC

Prayer For a Mill Town
By Ken McElroy
Blue Blossom Press /
68pp / £4.99

A bittersweet selection of poems and short stories from one of Ulster's finest scribes, Ken McElroy, *Prayer For a Mill Town* is a warm, witty and wise series of snapshots chronicling daily life in Gilford, Co. Down. The author's gentle reflections on linen mills, childhood, family, friends, and 'The Troubles,' paint a poignant, poised, and sometimes pained portrait from one man's memories of times past and present. Balladic in style, simple in structure, lyrical in tone, and ripe with nostalgia, this charming collection captures and conveys the heart, mind and soul of a land and her people. Like his other works, including the brilliant two-man theatrical production *The Rare 'Oul Times*, the work finds its truest voice in the spaces and silence between the words. ~ SPC





The Scottish Diaspora

Various Artists

There are over 50 million people of Scottish ancestry around the world, with most in Canada, the United States and Australia. Accordingly, this 39-song, two-CD collection reflects those emigration patterns, with an emphasis on contemporary North American artists, including strong selections from the likes of Natalie MacMaster, Alan Mills and Stan Rogers. Still, both long-time listeners and those new to the genre will enjoy this moving and melodic mélange of traditional tunes. Standout tracks include North-West Passage by The McCalmans, Indigo Blue by Robin Laing, Siobhan Miller's River of Steel, and a stirring version of Maggie's Pancakes by Salsa Celtica – each will be sure to bring both a twinkle and a tear to the eyes of expats looking for a sweet sonic slice of home. ~ SPC

Emerald – Musical Gems

Celtic Woman

It is testament to Celtic Woman's mammoth popularity that their latest recording Emerald was available for mass download via various torrent sites within hours of its release. The appeal is understandable; the Irish quartet is easy on both the eyes and ears, and weaves a winning formula of soft, flowing melodies and soaring vocal harmonies. The group's trademark of turning a trick on traditional tunes is at play again here; Mo Ghile Mear, Dulaman and Nil Se n La will tug at heart strings, as will Danny Boy, You Raise Me Up and the irresistible The Parting Glass. While it may be a case of plus-ca-change plus c'est la meme chose, this one adheres to the age-old adage that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. ~ SPC



Little Sway

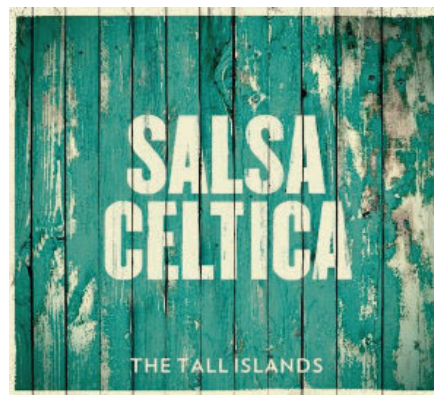
Crissi Cochrane

Originally from small-town Nova Scotia, twenty-something singer/songwriter Crissi Cochrane recently relocated to Windsor, Ontario. The new proximity to Detroit has influenced her third recording; hints of soul, r'n'b, bossa nova, jazz and gospel weave their way like musical threads through a foundation of folk-inspired melodies. The result is a smooth and satisfying selection of songs that solidify her status alongside fellow Canadian songstress Jill Barber. Highlights include And Still We Move, Pretty Words and the gentle touch of Nobody's Bird, each of which showcase strong songwriting paired with authoritative arrangement and accompaniment. Little Sway is an excellent effort by an emerging artist with a very bright future, and a perfect fit for a soiree of whisky-sours or a late night Bailey's over ice. ~ SPC

The Tall Islands

Salsa Celtica

Listeners looking to spice up their playlist palate will love this one; a unique hybrid of Latin and traditional Celtic music, The Tall Islands is the sixth release from Scottish-South American dancehall divas Salsa Celtica. The customs-crossing collective gets down and dirty with 12 terrific tunes that will have hips swayin' and shoulders shakin' from the opening salvo to the closing chorus. Tracks like Primavera, Descarga Gaelicia, and An Danns Elegua caress the soul, while the sexy Rumba Del Mar and Yo Me Voy II bring the body-heat. More than a collection of up-tempo numbers, however, this is a powerful example of the contemporary Celtic Diaspora, where collisions in culture leave a wake of musical possibilities; 17 musicians from five countries make for one rollicking recording. ~ SPC



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Grant MacLeod

Grant MacLeod is a “Munro bagger” with a difference. He’s not just attempting to climb all 282 of the Munros, the Scottish mountains higher than 3,000 feet, but he’s doing it with a set of bagpipes. When MacLeod reaches the summit of each mountain, he plays. “I try to play something different on each summit,” MacLeod recently told Celtic Life International. “Something apt for the area or the day. For example, on a misty day I played The Mist Covered Mountains and on Ben Lomond, of course I played Loch Lomond.”

Beautiful, yes, even inspiring, but why? is the question. MacLeod, 27, explains that his grandmother provided the original motivation for the challenge. The day before she died, MacLeod came up with the idea deciding he would raise money in her memory for Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland. And when one of his friends passed away from cancer in January, MacLeod also decided to raise funds for The Friends of Beatson in Glasgow in his memory.

To date, some 5,000 people have bagged, or climbed all of the Munros, so named for Hugh Munro, who made the first complete list of the mountains. Whether anyone has previously scaled them all with a set of pipes is doubtful. The highest of the peaks is Ben Nevis at 4,409 feet. But it’s not just the sheer number and height of the mountains that makes ascending them tricky; it’s the danger, too.

The Wikipedia entry on the Munros says while the Scottish mountains may be modest in height, walking and climbing in them can be “treacherous” because of the Atlantic and Arctic weather systems that buffet them. The entry reports, “Even in summer, conditions can be atrocious; thick fog, strong winds, driving rain and freezing summit temperatures are not unusual. Some walkers are unprepared for extreme weather on the exposed tops and fatalities are recorded every year, often resulting from slips on wet rock or ice.”

To be sure, MacLeod has already had his own encounters with the weather. On his recent attempt of Ben More, the Glaswegian sports therapist ended up in a controlled slide down an open part of the mountain. He recorded the moment by building a snowman, adorning it with a kilt and then photographing it along with the pipes.

A more serious moment ensued the first time he encountered snow on Beinn Dorrain. “I was very unprepared, wearing unsuitable footwear, but I carried on. That experience was an eye-opener for me. There were no issues, but I felt very vulnerable and it was a great lesson for the dangers of the hills.”

What with the inherent perils of climbing the Munros, you would think hauling bagpipes along for the trip would be inconvenient to say the least. However, MacLeod says while they are bulky, the pipes only weigh about six kilos and he’s able to break them down and pack them in his rucksack. “It’s always funny to see people watching me take them out of my bag and start playing. Some love it, others don’t quite know what to say or do!” he laughs.

MacLeod first began playing the chanter in school. “Pipers got 30 minutes out of class every week, so I jumped at the chance to get away from my maths,” MacLeod recalls. “I found out when I got home that day, that my great-grandfather was a fantastic piper. It really pleased the family, particularly my granny, that I was going to follow in his footsteps.” Now in his second year of climbing and with some 27 Munros done, MacLeod still has a long way to go; suffice to say though, on any given day if he’s not at least on top of the world, then you can bet he’s on top of a Munro.

“It’s always funny to see people watching me take them out of my bag and start playing. Some love it, others don’t quite know what to say or do!”

Grant MacLeod originally comes from Gleneig in northwest Scotland. To train for climbing the Munros, he developed his leg and ankle strength to cope with the uneven terrain. He believes nutrition is one of the key elements of his preparation and uses meal replacement products, which can be mixed with water and which he says provide a full quota of nutrients on the hills.

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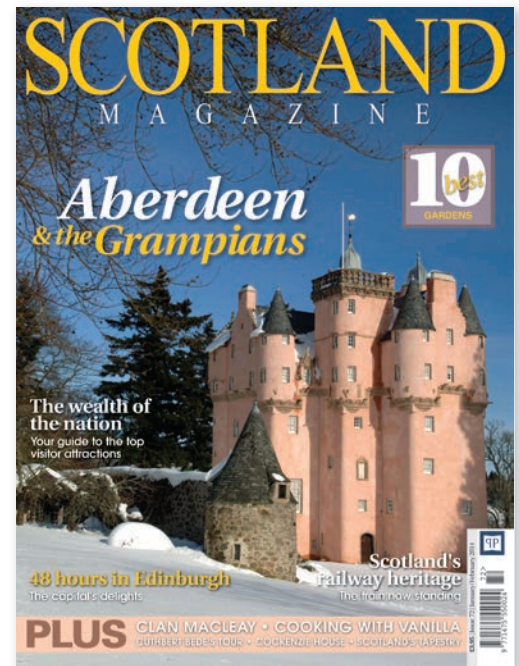
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Jocelyn Petitt

The West Coast is a long way from the East Coast of Canada, but somehow the Cape Breton fiddling style has found its way to the coastal mountains of British Columbia.

There, 19-year-old Jocelyn Petitt is swiftly making a name for herself as an adept fiddler who plays not only Cape Breton style, but Scottish, Irish, Galician, Breton, Québécois and what she refers to as an evolving style of her own.

Petitt already has one recording out and is working on a second. She's received two Canadian Folk Music Award nominations for World Artist of the Year and Young Performer of the Year, as well as a nomination for songwriting competitions in the United States and France. Petitt played at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Victory Medal ceremony, and performed with the Chieftains during their 50th Anniversary World Tour.

Her first exposure to the fiddle, and the East Coast style of playing, came at age four at the Salmon Arm Roots and Blues Festival. Natalie McMaster performed. "I was four years old at the time," Petitt recalls, "and that performance had such a powerful impact on me. The energy and drive of the Cape Breton music was so much fun! A spark went off. I thought, I want to do that, too."

Seeing McMaster also triggered her love of the Cape Breton style of fiddling. Petitt says on hearing McMaster a note was struck somewhere inside of her. "I was drawn to the rhythmic energy and pulse of the music and felt – and still do – an irresistible urge to get up and dance."

It helped that she grew up in a family both Celtic and musical. Petitt's heritage is Irish, French and Malaysian. Her great-great-grandparents emigrated from Ireland, while her great-grandfather was a dance caller, who teamed up with a fiddler for community events and celebrations. Her mother plays the piano and fiddle, her father the bodhrán and guitar and when Petitt

took up fiddle at the age of eight, playing music with her parents became a regular activity.

Petitt says Celtic music forms the foundation of her fiddling and that she loves learning the different styles of fiddle playing. "I'm fascinated to explore music from the Celtic nations, from both traditional and contemporary composers. I've often thought it would be great to have a time machine, to be able to just stop the clock and enjoy learning and writing more music!"

Everywhere she goes in British Columbia, Petitt says she encounters interest and enthusiasm for Celtic music. She points to such events as CelticFest in Vancouver, which has become one of the West Coast city's largest events and draws 200,000 people to its annual parade. The BC Highlands Games has also been going on since 1932. Beyond that, Petitt notes lots of other regional cultural events and music festivals also feature Celtic music and fiddling as well as community ceilis and ceilidhs.

In terms of her own compositions, Petitt strives to create engaging and memorable melodies. She wants them to connect in some way with people. Writing is an evolution, Petitt says, whereby an initial melody or motif develops into a full piece over time. "I like to take a number of writing sessions to adjust notes and play with how to put all my thoughts together."

Petitt loves performing and sharing the joy of what she does with others. Her goal, she says, is to create a memorable show of the highest possible quality. Over the next few months she has shows lined up in BC, Ontario, France and Ireland. "I'm so happy and grateful to be making music my profession, travelling the world doing what I love and meeting so many wonderful and supportive people along the way."

Jocelyn Petitt says her musical influences are numerous. Among them she counts Natalie McMaster, Loreena McKennitt, Hanneke Cassel, Leahy, Lunasa, Andrew Bird, Sarah McLachlan and U2.

Ciara Sexton

When you're one of the leading dancers in what is currently one of the hottest stage shows on the planet, by default you become one of the hottest dancers globally. That's the position Ciara Sexton finds herself in after accepting a principal dance role in Heartbeat of Home.

From the creators of the long-running smash-hit Riverdance, Heartbeat of Home had its world premiere in Dublin in October 2013 and is now touring to great critical acclaim. The stage production brings together a multicultural fusion of Irish, Latin and Afro-Cuban dance with spectacular backdrops using high-definition screens and digitally projected imagery.

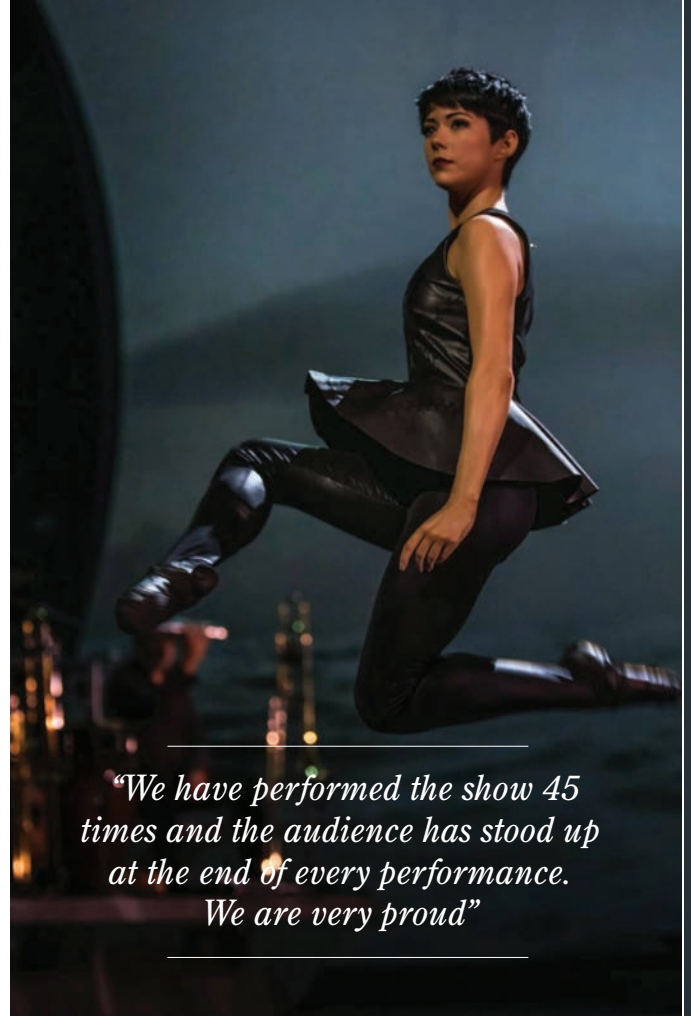
The press reviews have been uniformly positive. The Toronto Star called the show “a stage-thumping success,” while The Irish Mail on Sunday raved that it was an “extraordinary show.” For its part, The Chicago Sun-Times cited the “ensemble of high-flying, scissor-legged step dancers led by Ciara Sexton (who springs into the air and just seems to sit there).”

Speaking to Celtic Life, Sexton takes it in her stride. “We have performed the show 45 times and the audience has stood up at the end of every performance. We are very proud,” the dancer says, noting that her involvement in Heartbeat of Home is very special for her. “It is exactly what I had been searching for – the chance to be a part of something from the very start. Being involved in the creative process and touring with it is the highlight of my career so far.”

That career so far has been pretty illustrious in its own right. Born and raised in Coventry, England, Sexton is second-generation Irish; her mother comes from Westport, her father from Ferbane. At the age of three she began taking Irish dance lessons at the Marion Turley Academy and was instantly hooked. “Having two older sisters who also danced was the main reason I wanted to attend lessons – fear of missing out!” she laughs.

By the time Sexton was 14, she realised she was in love with dance, especially performing. It was certainly evident that Sexton wasn't lacking in talent. She won numerous competitions including five World and All-Ireland Championships. “I relished the time I spent on stage at nationwide dance competitions,” Sexton declares. “I realize how lucky I am to be performing for a living.”

Sexton began her professional dance career with the lead role of Morrighan in Michael Flatley's Lord of the Dance. When Flatley did his return world tour in 2011, she appeared alongside



“We have performed the show 45 times and the audience has stood up at the end of every performance. We are very proud”

him. Sexton also does choreography regularly for her hometown dance troupe, Celtic Feet, most recently touring with them in 2012 in their production of Excalibur – A Celtic Rock Opera. She also appeared again with Flatley in the 3D film version of Lord of the Dance.

In 2012, Sexton's involvement with Heartbeat of Home began when Padric Moyles – the lead in Riverdance and current dance director for Heartbeat – contacted her. According to Sexton, Moyles explained the vision for a new show from the creators of Riverdance and then asked about her availability to participate in a three-week workshop. Sexton says she loves the show because “Heartbeat of Home is about celebrating the similarities in the cultures of the world, instead of highlighting the differences.”

Currently, Sexton continues to tour with Heartbeat of Home, but is also working on a Zumba-inspired application that she says will bring Irish dance to gyms around the world. Summing up, Sexton adds, “The world of Irish dance experienced a boom of interest when Riverdance hit the screens 20 years ago. I met so many dancers around the globe who were inspired to start dancing lessons after seeing Riverdance. We hope that with Heartbeat of Home, we can inspire the next generation.”

On the Heartbeat of Home website, Ciara Sexton maintains a blog titled Diary of a Jiggaholic, on which she puts questions to other dancers such as what inspired them, and asks how they feel when they dance. Sexton also recalls her own bedroom wall used to be a who's who of Irish dancing, with posters ranging from show stars to world champions in the dance world.

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Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games

May 16-18, 2014 - Tennessee, USA

Kick up the feet, pour a wee dram and watch the flowers bloom in the East Tennessee Highlands this month, as the region's biggest and best Celtic event heads to the hills for three days of fun and festivities for the whole family. This year's gathering features athletic competitions, pipes and drums, Scottish foods, Scotch seminars, stuff for the kids, a dog show and parade, dances, live musical entertainment each evening, and a Gala Soiree on opening night. Bill Coburn will put his award-winning Sheepdog Border Collies through the paces again this year, and the Clan Challenge – including a kilted mile run, a battle axe throw, a ladies' haggis toss, a triathlon and a “bonniest knees” contest – is sure to bring out the smiles.

www.smokymountaingames.org

Burns An' A' That

May 20-23, 2014 - Ayrshire, Scotland

It may be months after Robbie Burns Day, but the good folks of Ayrshire are known to celebrate the Scottish Bard year-round. This four-day festival includes musical concerts, comedy performances, theatre productions, art exhibits, workshops, seminars, afternoon teas and activities for children. The highlight, however, has to be the historical walking tours of Burns' birthplace and nearby cottage, where expert guides educate and entertain visitors with tidbits of poetry and prose. More than a mere lesson in Scottish literature, the story of Burns' life reflects his times and surroundings, and this trip through time is an essential glimpse into the country's past. As if all this wasn't enough, the nearby town of Darvel also has an array of activities on for travellers of all ages. www.burnsfestival.com



National Celtic Festival

Portarlington, Australia - June 6-9, 2014

Nobody parties like Australians (it must be the Celtic blood), and the National Celtic Festival is a great reason to get down while being down-under. Concerts, ceilidhs, dances, sessions, seminars, vendors, workshops and the National Golden Fiddle Awards are all a part of this year's program. And, as always, the pipes and drums will be front and centre. In truth, games-goers couldn't ask for a better locale; the township of Portarlington is nestled between some of the continent's finest vineyards and the oceanfront of the beautiful Bellarine Peninsula. That slice of paradise, paired with locals who are among the most warm and welcoming in the world, means that weary travellers won't ever want to go home. Be sure to put this party on the bucket-list. www.nationalcelticfestival.com

Scottish Festival and Highland Games

June 20, 21, 2014 - Chicago, USA

The Windy City is world-renowned for its historic Irish community, but the Scots are a vital and vibrant piece of Chicago's cultural landscape also. And there's simply no better opportunity to experience “ye ould’ countrie” than at Hamilton Lakes in nearby Itasca this June. Piping and drumming competitions, heavy athletics, rugby exhibitions, youth soccer games, genealogy and cultural exhibits, traditional cuisine, a Parade of Clans, a Celtic Marketplace, Highland dancing, whisky tasting, a kilted mile fun run/walk, Haggis hurling, a “knobby knees” contest, a Friday Night Fling, a British car show and the crowning of the Heather Queen and Court are just a few of the many activities on tap. The two-day festival culminates with over 1,000 pipers and drummers in the Massed Band Show. www.chicagoscots.org

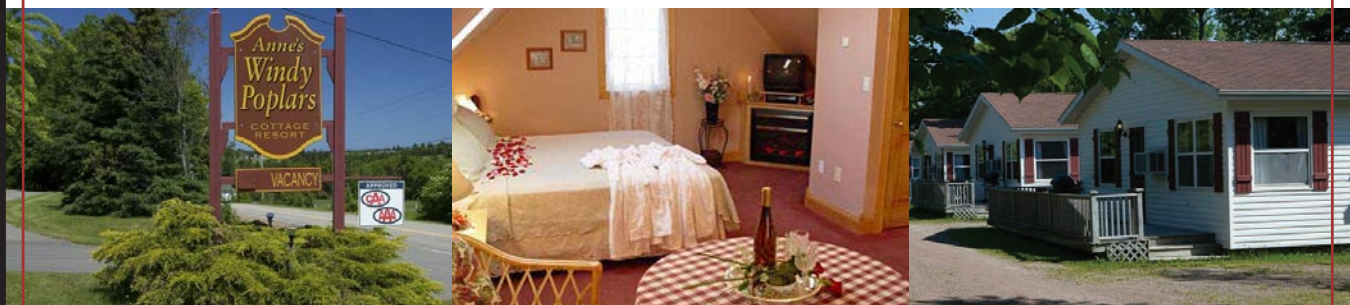


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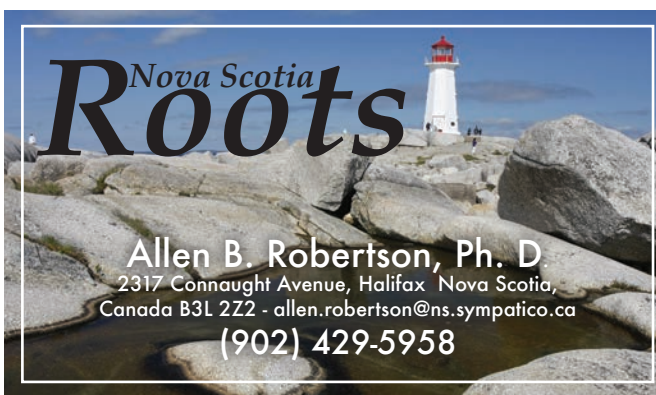


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Clan Durie

In June 2014, the Durie family will gather together for the first time. The Duries (and all variations on the name such as Duree, DuRy etc.) will meet and discover the family's roots through visits to Durie-related places. MacDonald & Rees, who provide made-to-measure trips and who specialise in in-depth genealogy research, are co-ordinating the trip.



According to Andrew Durie, the trip will take in (among other places) Dunfermline, where the Durie family first grew to prominence and Robert the Bruce lies. It will visit the Abbey, Abbot House and Rossend Castle, the latter a home of the Duries in the 1500s. In Edinburgh, the tour will extend to places with Durie connections such as Holyrood Palace. After that, the family will attend Bannockburn for the 700th anniversary, where a re-enactment of the 1314 battle will take place.

The Durie family dates back to the 1260s when Gilbert, a younger son of the Earl of Strathearn, was granted lands in Fife already called Durie; Gilbert became the Duke of Durie. The Durie family includes, over time, abbots and a bishop, soldiers, traders, administrators, doctors, lawyers and teachers.

Today, about 60 members are actively involved in the family. According to Andrew Durie, only a handful have undergone DNA testing. "And it isn't straightforward in the Durie branches, as there have been several examples of Durie heiresses marrying husbands, who then took the Durie name.

We're still on the search for the 'Dinosaur Durie' who represents the original Y-DNA line."

Beyond that, members are found around the world. "We spread like a virus in the 19th and 18th centuries," jokes

Andrew. "The Durie name is particularly well-represented in Western Australia." These days the family can be found through its Facebook page and through its website.



Clan Hope

As a child, Marty Hope grew up as a member of the Clan Hope of Craighall Society. His grandfather was president of the clan and Hope donned his first kilt at age 10. But the society went defunct in the late 1950s and Hope didn't give much thought to it again until he was 60 years of age.



Then, one day, while chatting with some people about genealogy and family origins, Hope happened to mention he was about as Scottish as one could get. Someone commented that Hope wasn't even a Scottish name.

"Wrong thing to say to a son of a tartan!" Hope laughs. He decided to restart the Clan Hope of Craighall Society. Told to get the blessings of Sir John Hope, the recognised clan chief, Hope, his wife and sister "leapt upon the great silver bird and headed for a meeting with our chief. We returned home with his blessings and instructions on what he did and did not want us to do as a society."

The first mention of the Hope name dates back to that of John de (h)op listed on the Ragman Rolls of 1292, according to Hope. Several lines of prominent and not-so-prominent Hopes exist in Scotland, he adds. Some include the first Solicitor General of Scotland, the first Governor General of Australia and Hopes who developed some of the more prominent banks in Scotland and Europe.

Today, the clan numbers about 110 members in 34 states and seven countries. They've hosted a clan tent at seven Highland games with more scheduled to take place. And the group produces regular newsletters as well as participating in several different Burns' Night and Tartan Day Celebrations. Many members are actively involved in the Hope Surname DNA Project. Hope sums up, "For a small group, we are rather active."





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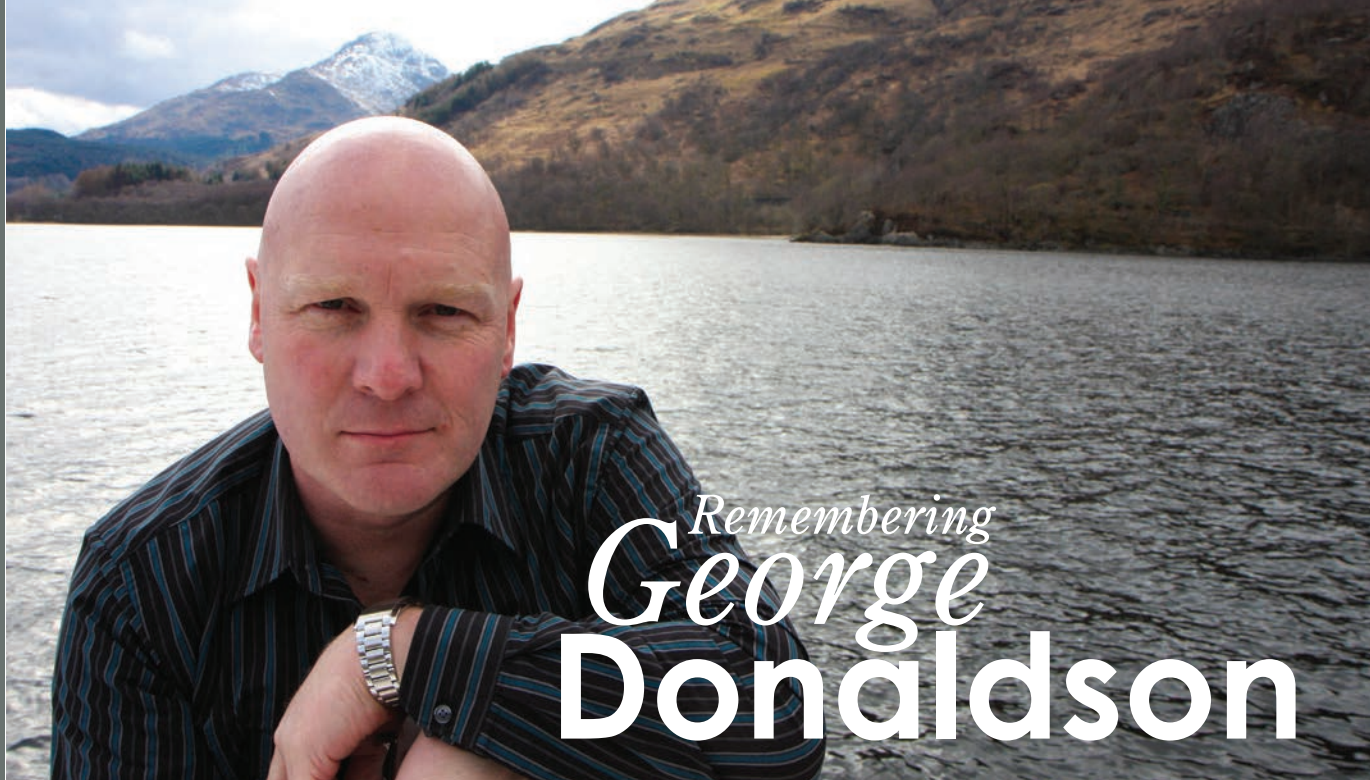
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*One of the best-selling books in history, about an Andalusian shepherd who travels to Egypt in search of his fortune, led a Scottish bus builder to boldly chuck in his career in favour of auditioning for a part in an Irish singing group. It sounds like a multicultural joke but *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho – a book which has sold 65 million copies in 56 different languages – inspired George Donaldson to audition for the popular group and stage show *Celtic Thunder*.*

“That is my favourite book and one of the things in that book is you’re never too old to do anything,” Donaldson told Australia’s *Newcastle Herald* in an interview in 2013. “If I hadn’t read that book I don’t know whether I would have just accepted my lot and just thought, ‘Don’t take a risk in life.’” But that risk led Donaldson to a rich life full of music, fame and joy.

The father figure and singer died suddenly on March 12 from a massive heart attack at the age of 46. He leaves his wife, Carolyn, and their 13-year-old daughter, Sarah. His sudden death shocked everyone, not least his fellow performers who mourn their colleague and friend.

Donaldson was the steadfast one in *Celtic Thunder*, cast as the “mature, dependable man” in the Irish singing group and stage show. It was an inspired bit of casting on the part of the show’s producer, Sharon Browne. Donaldson loved the physicality of his bus-building work, but music was even more special to him. He was the only married family man in the group and he missed his wife when the group toured. “I learned that George Donaldson was the embodiment of such a man; a kind, loving, gentle giant, George was affectionate as he was professional,” Browne recalled.

Born and raised in Scotland, Donaldson was a self-taught musician. He mastered guitar and flute, and was working on how to play the fiddle. His love of Celtic music came from his Glasgow childhood where his father, Bernard, had a love and appreciation of all kinds of music, which he passed along to his son. One of

Donaldson’s greatest thrills came when he performed for his father – and 65,000 other fans – at the Glasgow Celtics’ opening match of the 2000 season at Celtic Park in Glasgow.

Music always attracted Donaldson. As influences he cited folk singers Harry Chapin and Jim Croce, and the Scottish band The Proclaimers. “The first time I saw a guy playing in a bar, I was in Spain on holiday,” he recalled on the *Celtic Thunder* website. “I said as a kid, ‘That’s what I want to do.’ There was always a guitar at home when I was growing up and I remember getting an instruction out of the library because I didn’t have enough money to buy it, and I taught myself to play with that.”

Donaldson joined *Celtic Thunder* in 2007 after auditioning for Browne. He appeared in all nine *Celtic Thunder* television specials on PBS and on all the band’s CDs and DVDs released to date. Alongside

the other soloists in the group, he performed at St. Patrick’s Day parades in New York, Boston and Chicago, and at the White House for President Obama. In 2011 he released a solo album, *The White Rose*, and the next year *The World in My Mind*.

“From the first day I met him at the audition for *Celtic Thunder* in 2007, we became thick as thieves,” recollected fellow singer Ryan Kelly. “I know he’s looking down now on the two most important people in his life – Carolyn and Sarah – and on the rest of us holding them up for him, with his guitar strapped around his neck and a pint in his hand, with that big smile of his.”



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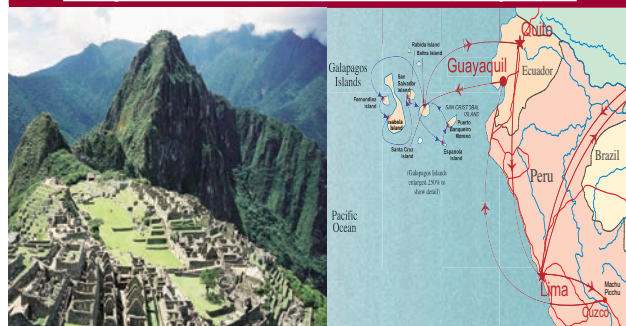
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