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29

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Whiskey Tastings*
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5K Race
Parade of Kilts

SUN

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30

Live Entertainment
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Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher
Stephen Patrick Clare, Managing Editor
Rosalie MacEachern, Editorial Assistant
Rebecca Dingwell, Editorial Assistant
Carol Moreira, Senior Copy Editor
Teddy Lapierre, Layout & Design

Celtic Life International Office:
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Fax: 902-835-0080
Email: info@celticlife.com
Website: www.celticlife.com

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

Advertising:
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Fax: 902-835-0080
Email: sales@celticlife.ca

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Contributors

Lesley Choyce
Andrew Ferguson
Gerald Herter
Tom Langlands
Cabrini Macquarrie
Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns
Graham Mole
Chris Muise
Valerie Porter
Simon Whaley

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Fáilte!

Pearls & Diamonds

I was a young lad, fresh out of university, when I attended my first community newspaper convention somewhere in Nova Scotia. At the time, I was a keen student of the industry, publishing a weekly community newspaper in the small Maritime community of Port Hawkesbury. I looked forward to these meetings - it was a chance to pick up much-needed pearls of wisdom and guidance from some of the region's more experienced newspaper men and women.

At one of these sessions, Vic Marchant - an older gentleman with many years in the province's publishing industry - offered me important advice that I have never forgotten.

"Young man," he said, "What is your most important asset?" Before I had the chance to reply, he answered his own question, "Your readers! Your readers are your most important asset. Every subscriber must be treated with the utmost of respect."

Many years have passed since that conversation, including three decades of publishing Celtic Life International. And though I am somewhat reluctant to "blow our own horn" (our Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare jokingly suggests that I am "hopelessly Nova Scotian" in that way), I can still hear Vic Marchant's sage advice; we are eternally indebted to our readers for giving us thirty great years.

We are a family-run business, and we have done our very best to adapt to an ever-changing industry. While technology has made it easier to do what we do, it is our subscribers who have made - and who continue to make - our business viable. They are, without a doubt, our most important asset.

What began as a modest newsletter thirty years ago has - with the encouragement of our readers, first here at home in Atlantic Canada, and then across the country, the continent and around the world - evolved into a global Celtic community.

Early on, our focus was primarily upon Scottish culture - "kings, kilts, clans and castles", as one subscriber put it back then. Over time, our audience challenged us to push the publication further, and we eventually expanded our coverage to include the seven Celtic nations and beyond.

By equal measure, our dedicated staff, our advertisers, our partners and others have all been a huge part of our narrative - strong links in an unbreakable chain.

To celebrate our 30th anniversary - which older generations know as the "pearl" anniversary, and younger generations call the "diamond" anniversary - we are launching a number of new initiatives to better serve our readers. A revamped website will offer a whole host of dynamic online opportunities, including enhanced audio and video components and a mobile-friendly experience, to further engage our growing community. And be sure to check out our 30th anniversary video, which was a joy to put together.

All of this is our way of saying thanks to our readers - our "pearls" and "diamonds" - who continue to be the jewels in our Celtic crown.

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

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the Big Idea

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Some years ago I had the good fortune of meeting Pierre Elliott Trudeau, then Prime Minister of Canada. Though our chat was brief, his words left a deep impression on me - words that still resonate to this day; "Great minds discuss ideas, average minds converse events, while small minds talk about other people..."

And while, in principle, I continue to hold this maxim to be true, the foundation upon which Celtic Life International now exists is...people.

Upon taking the magazine's helm in early 2012, I made two simple suggestions: first, we rebrand from Celtic Life to Celtic Life International to better reflect our growing global audience, and second; to subtly shift our focus towards becoming a publication about people.

My reasoning on the latter was this; in our media-rich culture, one in which we are bombarded with stories, statistics, sound bites, video clips, images, etc, on a nearly minute-by-minute basis, audiences are ultimately looking for some sort of connection with what they are absorbing.

Whether it is online, in a book, at the movies, on the radio, upon a theatre stage, through a television screen, or - in our case - via a bi-monthly print publication, people relate first and foremost with other people.

Like a mirror, contemporary media reflects our collective ideas, emotions, experiences, perspectives and opinions. To that end, we are no longer awash in Andy Warhol's world of "Pop Culture" - instead, with so many windows open to the lives of others,

we now experience the perks, and perils, of living in "Peep Culture".

That said, Celtic Life International's success and significance over the last half-decade has come from getting to the heart of the "stories behind the story." While we may publish pieces about travel, cuisine, culture and our robust Celtic heritage, ultimately our readers connect with the people involved, be it a piper, a Highland dancer, an historian, a chef, or a small business owner.

Thankfully, the vast Celtic world has no shortage of interesting people with incredible stories to tell, and I am grateful for having the opportunity to speak with them each day - in person, by phone, and via email. My life is deeply enriched by these discussions, most of which involve the sharing of ideas.

Similarly, I am blessed to be surrounded by the best crew in the business; our small staff is never short of big ideas on how to better serve our Celtic community. Their commitment to the Japanese business concept of Kaizen - the idea of continuous, daily improvements - has been central to our evolution.

Enough can't be said about our contributors, also; be they professional writers or passionate Celts, their dedication to detail makes my daily duties that much easier.

I am appreciative, as well, for the many wonderful relationships we have developed with our partners over the years; artists, advertisers, promoters, event organizers, schools, societies, organizations, and the like - each of whom work with us to help create win-win-win scenarios for the Celtic Diaspora.

That Diaspora, it should be noted, is made up of unique, hard-working individuals who make all kinds of vital and creative contributions to Celtic culture. Today, I am both proud and honoured to call some of these good folks my friends; Eleanor McGrath in Toronto, Lisa Risley in Halifax, Bob Currie in New Jersey, Sarah Nagle in California, Michael Davies and Annie Wealleans in Wales, Ken McIlroy in Northern Ireland, and too many more to mention.

And then, of course, there are the Macquarries - Marcie and Cabrini and their kids - who have been like family to me over the last five years, welcoming me into their world with open arms.

All of this leads me to our readers, without whom I would have less reason to get up each morning - especially during the long Canadian winters! Of all the rewards that come with the gig, none are greater than the feedback I receive about the magazine. While we do get the occasional brick (one woman wrote to me, complaining that our fashion pages constituted "Celtic porn"), the bouquets have been overwhelming. Recently, an email from 15-year-old Rebecca Shea of Boston reminded me why I do what I do each day.

"I never really thought about where I come from before I read your magazine," she wrote. "I love the idea that I am a part of one big Celtic family."

Stephen Patrick Clare
Managing Editor

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Hi Celtic Life! My wife and I will be attending our first Highland Games this summer. Is there a mandatory dress code? ~ Scott McLellan, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada

Hi Scott, thanks for the note. While most, if not all, Highland Games and Celtic Festivals are very relaxed about what to wear, they do encourage attendees to join in the spirit of the event with some sort of traditional article of clothing. For men, a well-hemmed kilt can go with just about anything - including tee-shirts and sandals (no socks please) for hot summer days. For formal evening events, a Bonnie Prince Charlie jacket, brogues (with tartan, argyle, diced, or dark hose), flashes or garter ties, a sporran, and sgian dubh are recommended. For the ladies, a kilt and blouse combination is always a good, light bet during the day, while traditional tartan gowns and evening dresses are options for more stylish soirées. The keyword for kids is comfort; avoid wool, keep them topped up with a cap (tartan, preferably) and lotion to guard against the sun, and be sure to pack something in case of rain. Onsite vendors carry a good array of fashionable clothing and accessory options as well.

After seeing Riverdance my six-year-old daughter has expressed an interest in Irish dance. Any suggestions on how to get her started? ~ Linda Brooks, Sydney, Australia

Hi Linda. The explosion in popularity of Riverdance, Lord of the Dance, and other high-end productions in recent years has sprouted an entire industry around the traditional Celtic art form. The good news is that there are now an abundance of great schools and teachers available to choose from - especially in your part of the world, where there is a tremendous Irish heritage - many of whom offer complimentary trial sessions. A simple Google search will help you shop around to see where your daughter feels most comfortable. Along with being an excellent source of regular exercise, Irish dance classes teach children about discipline, encourage self-esteem,



and offer them opportunities for social engagement. And while much is made of the competitiveness inherent to the “Wigs & Jigs” culture, that is the exception and not the rule. Most children, and their families, cherish the fun and friendly atmosphere of the Irish dance community. And, unlike the cost of outfitting my kids with new hockey equipment here in Canada each year, dance accessories are affordable!

Would you have any recommendations on good books about Wales? ~ Martin Roberts, Gwenford, Idaho, USA

There are two routes you can take Martin; fact and fiction. John Davies’ *A History of Wales* is generally regarded as the most complete and definitive overview (756 pages!) of that country’s rich past. For more detailed perspectives, check out the *Studies in Welsh History* series put out by the University of Chicago Press. In terms of fiction, you can’t go wrong with either



Richard Llewellyn’s 1939 classic *How Green Was My Valley*, or *Here Be Dragons*, the first in a trilogy of historical novels by Sharon Kay Penman. Other good contemporary options include *The Welsh Girl* by Peter Ho Davies, *Grits* by Niall Griffiths, and the whimsical *The Unbearable Lightness of Being in Aberystwyth* by Michael Pryce. My own personal favourites, for what it is worth here, include *Calon: A Journey to the Heart of Welsh Rugby* by Owen Sheers, *The First Prince of Wales?* by Sean Davies, *Wales Trails* by Dave Lewis, and anything by Dylan Thomas. For a deeper understanding of Wales’ finest scribe, and the homeland that inspired him, be sure to read Constantine FitzGibbon’s *The Life of Dylan Thomas*.

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



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1



2



3



4



5



6

one

Man's best friend

It was love at first sight when Dion Leonard met Gobi the dog. Leonard had travelled from his home in Edinburgh to run in a seven-day, 250-kilometre marathon through China's Gobi Desert. The dog – a stray – visited Leonard's campsite after the first day and didn't leave his side. After bonding, Leonard wanted to bring Gobi home, but it couldn't happen right away. Leonard left Gobi with friends in China while he crowdfunded for medical and quarantine fees from home. More than six months after they first met, Leonard was finally able to bring Gobi to Scotland to live with him and his wife.

two

Lennon legend

Although the former Beatle died more than 36 years ago, a Spanish-Welsh musician featured John Lennon's voice on his recently released debut album *El Dorado*. Singer-songwriter Gizmo Varillas wished to use a sample from a 1968 interview with Lennon on the track "No War" and received permission from Yoko Ono via her lawyer. Given Lennon's anti-war activism, Varillas felt it would be appropriate to use his words to help carry the song's message.

three

Galicia's Carnival

From Rio de Janeiro to Venice, cultures around the world take part in Carnival celebrations each year. If you haven't heard of the Entroido, the Galician version, you may be missing out; the festivals have been part of the region's traditions for centuries, with each city doing its thing in its own unique way. For example, one of the gathering's highlights in Laza is called A Farrapada, which involves throwing dirty cloths at other people in the city's main square. A lower-key version of Entroido takes place in the rural seaside town of Cobres.

four

Isle of Man on BBC

The Isle of Man was recently featured on BBC's *Countryfile*, a program which highlights stories and traditions of the British Isles. Hosts Ellie Harrison and Joe Crowley filmed on the island for two days, exploring Manx culture through historical spots – such as Laxey Glen Mills – as well as food. At the NOA Bakehouse, the world bonnag-baking champion – who is just 11 years old – taught Harrison to make the traditional Manx bread. Meanwhile, Crowley took a ride on the last horse-drawn tram in the world.

five

Terrific tartan

While Nova Scotia has had a provincial tartan since 1955, Colchester County is getting a tartan of its very own. When meeting with a designer in Cape Breton, the Colchester Highland Games and Gathering Society laid out what colours they wanted: red to represent the earth, green for the forest, blue for water, yellow to represent the Acadian population, and black to represent the Mi'kmaq (Nova Scotia's Indigenous peoples). Once the final design has been chosen, it will be sent to Scotland for approval and registration. The tartan will be unveiled before the inaugural Colchester Highland Games this September.

six

YouTube sensation

With the help of social media, an 18-year-old Cornish woman has caught the attention of a record label, as well as fans around the globe. Daisy Clark, who currently lives in England, recorded an acoustic rendition of "Hopelessly Devoted to You" – a song first made famous by Olivia Newton-John in the movie *Grease*. Clark posted a video of herself singing the lovelorn lyrics on YouTube, and before long, she was getting international attention. A studio version of the track can now be found on her channel featuring a professional music video, along with other home-recorded covers and original songs.

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

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Roland Monger

More than one year ago, Roland Monger was diagnosed with an incurable form of skin cancer. After being told he'd be lucky to live another year, the Cornish man was left wondering if his son, only a toddler, would grow up without any first-hand memories of him. Still, Monger pressed on – documenting his experiences with life and illness through his blog, “I Did It.” He’s also a respected music blogger, mostly reviewing musicians based in the South West of England in hopes of improving their exposure. It’s appropriate, then, that Monger decided to launch a music festival – a charity event aiming to give back to St Luke’s Hospice, a place that’s helped Monger over the last year. Monger scheduled the festival, titled One Day, to take place on March 25 – just three days after the one-year anniversary of his diagnosis. “I wanted to make this a celebration as much as anything else,” Monger wrote on his blog, “So, two fingers up to cancer, some wonderful musicians and the chance to spend the day in the pub with my nearest and dearest – not a bad way to end a crappy 12 months, eh?” Musicians such as the Ha Ha, Joanna Cooke and Paul Armer agreed to perform for free so attendees could put their cash towards donations instead.



Cairn Newton-Evans

As a teenager, Cairn Newton-Evans was the victim of a violent hate crime: assaulted simply because he was gay. Eight years later, he is a Special Constable with the Dyfed-Powys Police in Wales, focused on helping people deal with discrimination. “Being attacked gave me the push I needed to do something positive,” Newton-Evans told WalesOnline recently. “The steps we have taken have been massive: we have introduced hate crime officers, we are supporting victims, and we have launched LGBT liaison officers.” Newton-Evans’s advocacy doesn’t stop there. He also helped launch Gay Ammanford, a support network for people in his home county of Carmarthenshire. The organization offers counselling to help LGBT folks deal with issues such as domestic abuse and sexual health, while also providing a space for socializing and events. Newton-Evans is currently studying law and public services at the University of Wales Trinity St. David, dedicating upwards of 16 volunteer hours to his work with the police each week. Upon graduation, he hopes to join the force full time. He’s been nominated for the citizenship category of the St. David’s Awards, which recognize organizations and people throughout Wales.



The Northern Ireland Conflict Resolution Project

Seventeen students from Saint Mary’s University (SMU) in Halifax, Nova Scotia partnered with Peaceful Schools International (PSI) and the Conflict Resolution Society to travel to Northern Ireland in February. The students set out to facilitate peace education and conflict resolution workshops. Peaceful Schools International is a Canadian non-profit organization founded in 2001. According to its website, “PSI provides support to schools around the world that have declared a commitment to creating and maintaining a culture of peace.” It aims to “act as a catalyst and clearinghouse for innovative ideas that help to build an environment in schools where everyone feels safe, respected and valued.” The conflict resolution workshops are designed for children and teens ranging from ages six to 16. These workshops are focused on peace education in a general sense, so they can appeal to Catholic (Main-tained), Protestant (State), Irish (Medium), and Integrated schools respectively. The idea is to promote peace culture indiscriminately across Northern Ireland while also putting an emphasis on understanding and appreciating diversity. Before setting out for Belfast, the SMU students gave the very same workshops to Halifax-area schools in order to promote the idea of peace at home as well as abroad. After returning home, the students will continue to spread awareness and make presentations locally.



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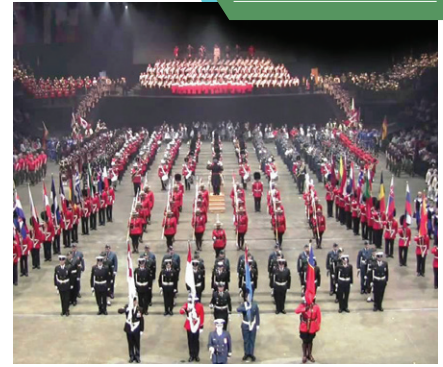
Riverdance
North America
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www.riverdance.com

Riverdance, the polished and proven Irish music and dance extravaganza, is again enchanting audiences as its 20th anniversary world tour weaves its way across North America this spring. Hot on the heels of sell-out shows through Europe and Asia, Riverdance's musicians spin their magic on a darkened stage, as row upon row of hard-shoed dancers thunder out in a shattering burst of pulsating sound and radiating colour. New, eye-catching costumes, improved lighting, and daringly creative projections complement the rich pool of talent at the core of the performance. High energy, boundless athleticism, rich sensuality and unforgettable musicality invite the audience into an evening of intrigue and intimacy. Producer Moya Doherty, who originally birthed Riverdance from a humble seven-minute interlude piece more than two decades ago, reflects that she and her crew have "turned the Irish jig into a professional art form." The show has since reached more than 300 million around the world, reinvigorating Irish dance for new generations. A triumphant telling of the struggles of the Irish people, Riverdance has added a new component for its 20th anniversary; female dancers perform an a cappella version of Anna Livia, James Joyce's ode to Dublin's River Liffey.



Festival
Bloomsday Montreal
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
June 10-16, 2017
www.bloomsdaymontreal.com

With the prose, poetry and pints in full flow, visitors to Festival Bloomsday Montreal might almost believe they have just strolled over from O'Connell Street or St. Stephen's Green near the River Liffey. Guest speakers, panelists, actors and musicians will stage a full week of activities, full of good cheer and good craic, culminating in the June 16 marking of Bloomsday - a day in the life of Leopold Bloom, the Homer-esque Jewish ad salesman in James Joyce's famous novel Ulysses. Eire's capital city may have been Joyce's playground, but his cast of working class Dubs has a striking resonance in Montreal, with its rich history of Irish immigration and Canada's longest running St. Patrick's Day parade. The festival also showcases the many and varied contributions of the Irish in Montreal, from culture to commerce. For academics, leading Joycean scholar Michael Kenneally - principal at Concordia University's School of Irish Studies - will speak on the Jewish dynamic in Ulysses. If you are aching to hear Joyce's melodic words roll magically off the tongue, be sure to see actress Kathleen Fee's reading of the Penelope chapter in Ulysses. Other readings will be performed by master storytellers and musicians, while walking tours around the city will be available in French and English. A kickoff brunch with Chef Peter Saunders has become a key component of the festival, and don't miss the chance to grab a cold pint, a smoked meat sandwich, and a few teary-eyed melodies, at one of the great selection of good Irish pubs across the city.



Royal Nova Scotia
International Tattoo
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
June 29-July 6, 2017
www.nstatattoo.ca

Exhilarating music, knife-edge military precision, breath-taking athletics and heavily costumed pageantry bring thousands to the harbour city of Halifax each summer for the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo. An ages-old military tradition is at the heart of the event, with its cast of more than 1,000 pipers, drummers, dancers, singers, gymnasts and acrobats. In the 17th century, drummers in Dutch villages summoned soldiers from the alehouses back to the barracks with a drumbeat of "doe den tap toe" or "turn off the taps," - phrasing that was eventually shortened to "tattoo." The theme of this year's gathering is From Far and Wide, with a predominantly Canadian cast celebrating the country's 150 years of nationhood. International bands and performance groups from Germany, Russia, Australia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States are jockeying to perform with the Canadians and will join in a spectacular Canada Day parade through the city. With both evening and matinee performances, the show highlights the success of Canadian soldiers at the pivotal Battle of Vimy Ridge, poignantly honoring the 10,000 Canadians who died or were wounded. Also commemorated in music is the horrific Halifax Explosion of 1917, which occurred when two munitions ships collided in the harbour, killing 1,600 instantly, injuring another 9,000, and reducing area neighborhoods to rubble. The largest annual indoor show in the world, the NS Tattoo annually showcases strikingly colourful performances by the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.



Celtic²⁰¹⁷ COLOURS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

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hundreds of community events, workshops, community meals, spectacular scenery and our renowned hospitality when the fall colours are at their peak.



Dave Bagdade



Despite having “absolutely zero Celtic background,” Dave Bagdade makes no bones about his passion for Celtic music.

“I was 16 when I heard my first Chieftains record, and that got me going,” recalls the radio host from his home in Indianapolis, Indiana. “I have also always been very keen on learning about the roots of the music I love, and - as a teenage bluegrass fan - I worked backward and discovered the music of Ireland and Scotland.”

Now 52, Bagdade emcees a weekly radio show called Kitchen Party Ceilidh on WICR in his hometown, where there is strong interest in Celtic music that is not currently being served by mainstream radio stations.

“I wanted to share my own personal Celtic music collection, and to increase exposure for the artists who have moved me over the years through airplay, interviews, and social media activities. I have also had the chance to meet and speak with a number of artists who have influenced me, and it has been gratifying to repay them for that influence by helping them to promote their CDs, shows, and other activities.”

He adds that the Sunday evening program is more than engaging and entertaining - it is also educational, and not just for his listeners.

“I considered myself fairly knowledgeable about Celtic music before I started the show, but working on it each week has allowed me to learn even more about the genre and its players. This, in turn, has had a hugely positive impact on my own growth as a player and performing artist.”

A long-time fan of Cape Breton’s annual Celtic Colours International Festival, Bagdade says that broadcasting has afforded him the opportunity to connect with the gathering’s organizers, and even emcee shows at the event.

Musician and radio host Dave Bagdade brings a kitchen party to audiences around the world each week



“I love what they do up there in Nova Scotia. To be honest, I almost built the program entirely just to showcase the incredible music of Cape Breton.”

Variety, he notes, is the key to keeping listeners - and him - coming back each week.

“Virtually every show is based entirely on music I have not played before. And I try to always include at least one artist each show that I haven’t showcased previously.”

Kitchen Party Ceilidh has several regular segments, including Closet Classic, New to You and Local Focus - all pretty self-explanatory, says Bagdade. In addition, there is Theme Third Sunday, which happens on the third Sunday of each month, and where the host might feature a little-known subgenre of Celtic music, a particular artist, or unique instrument.

“I try to keep the talking to a minimum as well, as I prefer to make it less about me and more about the music. Every hour-long show features about 50 minutes of musical content...the rest is me doling out information about the artists and the songs, and being sure to mention our very supportive sponsors.”

Bagdade takes the show’s tagline - “Celtic music from across the globe and across town” - quite literally, playing music from Ireland and Scotland, as well as tunes from other countries that fit the bill, including Canada and the United States. He now enjoys a global audience, as the show is both streamed live online via the station’s website, and is available as a free podcast.

“It is really something special to be contacted by listeners from all over the world who share the same love of Celtic culture that I do,” he shares. “It’s like we are all working together to create some sort of world-wide Celtic community.”

In addition to his stint on radio, Bagdade also teaches mandolin, banjo and guitar for the Irish Arts Academy of Indianapolis, and holds the title of co-chair of the Scotty Grant Irish Music Club as well.

This year, he is putting the finishing touches on his second Celtic music album, and he will be also celebrating a couple of milestones for Kitchen Party Ceilidh: in May, the show is scheduled to air its 200th broadcast, while July will mark its four-year anniversary.

“In the meantime, I will keep doing my best to present the very best programs I can. It has been one of the most rewarding things that I have ever done.”

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Dan Robertson

Born in the quiet Nova Scotia community of New Glasgow and raised in nearby Trenton, Dan Robertson set his sights on the provincial capital of Halifax to attend St. Mary's University at the age of 18.

By 1999, he had established himself in local and regional sports broadcasting, first calling Atlantic University games, and then as the play-by-play television announcer for the Halifax Mooseheads of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

"Nova Scotia will always be home," he tells Celtic Life International by phone. "My mother still lives in Trenton, and my family home is in New Glasgow. And, to be honest, although I have been surrounded by the province's rich Scottish culture all of my life - even covering the Highland games in Antigonish and so forth - it wasn't until I left Nova Scotia that I realized how beautiful a place it is, and how proud I am of being from there."

Robertson's Scottish roots would appear to lend well to his profession.

"I hadn't thought of that angle," he muses. "But it might explain it. My father, who passed away last year, was a great raconteur, so it might be in my blood."

"Calling a hockey game is very much like telling a story in some regards, with a narrative and a cast of characters."

In 2014, he was hired by TSN690 to be the English radio voice of the Montreal Canadiens.

"I live in Montreal during the regular season," he notes. "It's tough being away from my kids for extended periods. I get home for a few days here and there, and we are in touch regularly no matter where I am, but it isn't easy. And I do miss the slower pace of life in Nova Scotia."

"Don't get me wrong," he continues, "I love Montreal - it's a beautiful city, with fantastic culture and great restaurants. And for hockey, there's no other place like it in the world; the tradition and history of such a storied and successful franchise is almost unparalleled in sports...maybe only the New York Yankees in baseball, or a few of the European soccer teams can compare...it's almost like religion here, and the fans are

very passionate and knowledgeable about the game.

"And Montreal Canadiens fans are everywhere," he adds. "Whether we are covering away games in Vancouver or Los Angeles or Dallas or Florida - or even Toronto or Ottawa - I am always amazed to see so many Habs jerseys in the crowd. Even though the team has had its ups and downs over the past twenty years, their followers might be the most brand-loyal in sports."

Those fans might well be rewarded for that loyalty this season.

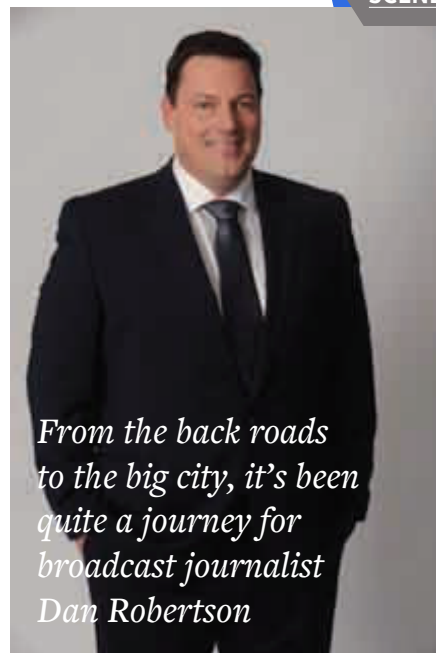
"This could be the strongest that I have seen the team since I have been here," says Robertson. "They have some key pieces in place - Price, Pacioretty, Weber, Radulov, Gallagher, Galchenyuk, Markov - and strong support in players like Shaw, Lehkonen, Plekanec and Danault. Marc (Bergevin, General Manager) did a good job at the trade deadline, picking up some size and making the team much tougher to play against."

How deep the Canadiens go in this year's playoffs will mostly depend on the performance of all-star goaltender Carey Price.

"There is no doubt that he is the best in the world," Robertson shares. "When he is on his game he is almost unbeatable. If he has a good run, then they could be on their way to a 25th Stanley Cup championship."

Over time, and a pleasant perk of the job, Robertson has come to know a number of the players.

"They are all extremely nice guys - very personable and warm. They are all true professionals as well, highly competitive and always looking for that winning edge. I don't



know if people realize how hard these guys work to keep themselves in peak physical shape, training every day, even in the off-season. Unlike years past, when players would often have second jobs to supplement their income, being a professional athlete today is a full-time gig."

Like those athletes, and despite the challenges of traveling and being away from home, Robertson is more passionate than ever about his profession.

"I love it. There is nothing that I would rather be doing. Who knows where this journey will take me - at some point down the road I might look at doing some television work again - but for now I am quite content to be on the radio."

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Paul Byrom

Irish tenor Paul Byrom gears up for his Summer from Dublin tour across North America. Celtic Life International contributor Valerie Porter tells us more...

Paul Byrom, Irish tenor and original member of Emerald Isle super-group Celtic Thunder, is prepping to embark on his Summer from Dublin tour, visiting 11 cities in the United States. As he rehearses for the road, he pauses to reflect on what has been part of his life for as long as he can remember - music.

Melodies, it would appear, run in the family bloodline; his mother is a classical pianist and his father played guitar. Byrom began his own musical training in his hometown of Dublin when he was just seven years old. Although the focus of his studies at that time was classical music, he remembers listening to everything "ranging from Mozart to Buddy Holly and The Eagles."

By the time the boy soprano was 14, he had already recorded his first album, *The Golden Voice*. Other solo recordings followed, earning him spots on Irish and Billboard charts.

In 2007, a huge break cast Byrom in the newly formed Celtic Thunder, a group which would soon earn six #1 World Billboard album spots and perform for dignitaries from Japan, Ireland and the United States.

Since leaving the all-boy band in 2010, Byrom has enjoyed a successful solo career, recording, travelling the world, and even hosting his own television special.

His upcoming tour launches in Yonkers, New York on May 21, and continues through to the end of June. He may be a long way from home, but says that he loves America, having lived there at one time for four years.

"We Irish have a very strong bond with the States due to our traumatic past. Many left for the New World in search of a better life."

"Americans have always been very friendly and welcoming to me."

Make no mistake, however; Byrom insists that he is still "Dublin through and through" - he still lives in Eire's capital city, as do his family and many of his childhood friends.

"It's a unique place," he notes, "small, but with a huge amount to offer; fantastic restaurants and bars, as well as many historic sites and tours. It is the home of Guinness, great poets and a long line of musicians. I'm very proud of this city. It has gone from being very poor and struggling, to one of the leading cities in Europe in many fields."

Byrom says that as much as he loves touring, it's difficult to leave Ireland for long periods of time. He misses his wife Dominique (daughter of world-renowned musician/songwriter/record producer Phil Coulter), and his dog Bradley. In particular, he misses his 98-year-old grandmother, with whom he has a very special relationship.

Still, as with most musicians, when the road calls, he must answer. His Summer from Dublin tour will include a mix of many genres, including Irish tunes, musical theatre, and songs with a crossover flair.

Some of his favorite moments on the road are the 'Meet 'n' Greet' sessions, held just prior to the concerts, which afford him

the opportunity to connect with audiences in person.

"Anyone who knows me, knows that I love to chat!" he laughs. "I have met so many great people, and indeed have become friends with many of them."

Over the coming months Byrom will be performing in cities that he hasn't been to in years, and others that he has never visited, including Chattanooga, Tennessee. One special stop will see him sing the National Anthem for the Irish rugby team when they play Team USA on June 10 in New Jersey.

By the time he returns home, he will likely be suffering "serious jetlag," as he puts it, "which can often take a good week to get over." Thankfully, he will have plenty of time to recover before joining the Celtic Thunder 10th Anniversary Cruise, scheduled for November 5 to 11 from Miami to Mexico. More solo recording and touring will follow into 2018.

As he gets slightly older, however, Byrom says that his dreams and priorities have changed.

"It's less about winning a Grammy and more about family, happiness and stress-free living. My aim, both as a person and as a musician, is to continue to be better each and every day."

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Orla Fallon

*Ireland's Orla Fallon
sings from the heart,
be it bruised or
bursting with joy*

Orla Fallon's latest recording, *The Sweet By and By*, was a true labour of love and loss.

"I had three false starts with it," shares the Irish singer-harpist from her home in Leighlinbridge, County Carlow. "I cancelled the recording three times. My head just wasn't in the right place."

An original member of Celtic Woman - the Irish, all-female super-group that conquered the world - Fallon's plans for a new solo album were put on hold as she struggled to deal with the loss of her father.

"I was still really missing my dad and was quite lost."

By the time she was ready to move forward, she chose a song that he loved for the album's title.

"I sang it at his funeral. It is a wonderful melody that means so much to me and my family."

All the tracks on the album, including *Love Me Tender*, *Remember Me*, *Feet of a Dancer*, and *Hard Times Come Again No More*, carried a particularly special message for Fallon.

"I started playing some of the songs with the band in August, and it all felt really right. We recorded the album with a very live feel - I sang right along with the band as we recorded."

As with her previous release, *Lullaby Time*, all of Fallon's emotional struggles were channeled into her music on *The Sweet By and By*. Audiences took note.

"I have never had such a reaction to an album. People are genuinely moved by it and have been very emotional talking about different tracks."

Fallon grew up just south of Dublin, in the village of Knockananna amidst the rolling hills of Wicklow. Her father worked in the meat business, and her mother was a school teacher.

"My mom came from County Kerry and spoke Gaelic as a child growing up," recalls the artist. "She instilled a great love of the Irish language and heritage in all of us."

Fallon started singing as a youngster, learning the harp at boarding school in Dublin so she could accompany herself.

"For a long time I used to hide behind my harp and sing, but Celtic Woman got me out on stage at the front, singing without the harp and with a big band and orchestra."

Like her mother, she taught school for five years before pursuing a full-time musical career. In 2004, she joined Celtic Woman, following her bliss, and touring with the band for four years before announcing her plans to pursue a solo career in 2008.

Increasingly, her success became tinged with sadness as she and her husband yearned to start a family, the pain growing as time ticked by and their efforts at international adoption floundered in the face of policy changes.

Ironically, it did not go unnoticed that Fallon's ethereal vocals were ideally suited to lullabies. However, it was not until she was finally resigned to the idea of being childless that she could bear to begin a project of that sort. As the arrangements for the recording that would become *Lullaby Time* got underway early in 2011, Fallon was astounded to discover that she was pregnant. Carrying a photographic scan of her baby, and a prayer to St. Gerard - the patron saint of pregnant women - she flew to the United States to finish the sessions, putting everything she had into singing all 15 songs for the child she was carrying.

"Our lovely little boy (Freddie) is now almost five years old and full of life and chat. He is the centre of our world and we feel truly blessed to have him. I dearly wish my dad was here to see him grow up."

The self-professed "home bird" - who once sang for American presidents and full houses at Carnegie Hall and Radio City Music Hall - admits that having a child has changed her approach to music, and has all but anchored her in Ireland. And while she still performs at home, Fallon no longer tours as she cannot bear the time away from home.

"Now I savour every moment on stage, and sing every song celebrating in my heart the great blessing we have in our lives."

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International Celtic Art Day

Social media forum designates June 9 to celebrate and promote Celtic art



June 9 has been designated as International Celtic Art Day. The announcement comes from a group of contemporary Celtic artists, scholars, traders, and Celtic art lovers that have been exchanging ideas online since June 9, 2000. The group is comprised of many of the leaders of the current Renaissance of Celtic art, including Michael Carroll, Ruth Black, Aidan Breen, Courtney Davis and Stephen Walker.

"The choice of the ninth of June to celebrate Celtic art seems almost obvious," explains Walker, a Celtic jeweler in upstate New York who serves as the group's moderator. "The Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow - both great medieval masterpieces of Celtic art - are associated with the Irish Saint Columba. June 9 is his feast day."

Columba is also an excellent example of the international nature of Celtic art. In the year 563 AD, he left Ireland over a controversy regarding the copying of a book and took up residence on the Scottish Isle of Iona. From there, he traveled to Pictland, in northeastern Scotland, to preach the Gospel. Columba's network of churches and monasteries expanded far beyond these regions in the generations that followed. The style of Celtic art that spread across Northern Europe from the 6th to the 10th centuries was a direct result of the network of contacts begun by Saint Columba.

While most people think of modern Celtic art as something copied from the past, Walker says the creativity and original designs that come from the imaginations of today's Celtic artists are evidence that the style is constantly evolving.

"Celtic art is the style and tradition that has been passed down from early medieval Scotland and Ireland. The knots, interlace,



spirals and key patterns have become emblematic of a sense of ethnic identity and heritage. This is often done by copying designs and images from the past, but the most authentic expressions come from a mastery of the art form so that new and original art is created.

"Celtic art is popular because it is beautiful and mysterious, and it connects people to a sense of their past and heritage."

Chicago visual artist Michael Carroll, whose grandparents emigrated from Ireland in the early 1900s, believes that the Celtic art movement is as relevant to the times as the Cubists were to theirs.

"This resurgence of Celtic art has been primarily fueled by the proliferation of the internet, and social media. Where once people of Celtic heritage were scattered and isolated, they have now come together to form a professional community - and so have their artists."

That creative community, which currently connects on Facebook, will host a number of cultural events on June 9 - both

online and in person - showcasing contemporary Celtic artists, including calligraphers, illuminators, painters, sculptors, digital designers, woodcarvers, jewelers, tattoo artists, and more.

Fiber artist Ruth Black of Inverness was an early supporter of the concept, and is excited about promoting the celebration in Scotland.

"I will be holding an 'Open Studio' day at my workshop and inviting people to come in and learn felt-making skills. They can also get an education in Celtic knot-work designs by assisting me in making a large wall panel to decorate my studio. I also hope to get other artists to try out Celtic designs in their own particular practices."

The first actual event to be scheduled for International Celtic Art Day is an Open Studio exhibit by artist Angelique Moorman in the Netherlands. The concept has also seen support expressed from forum members in Spain, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

Going forward, Walker is confident that those who call themselves Celtic artists will continue to share ideas and encourage each other.

"This year, being the first, will be largely experimental. We will see what works and build on those efforts that get traction."

Carroll concurs.

"We hope that International Celtic Art Day will become an annual tradition, one that will reflect and promote the continuing public interest in the art. The aim is to raise public awareness of our Celtic heritage, celebrating not only ancient masterpieces like the Book of Kells, but also the new ones being produced by living artists today."

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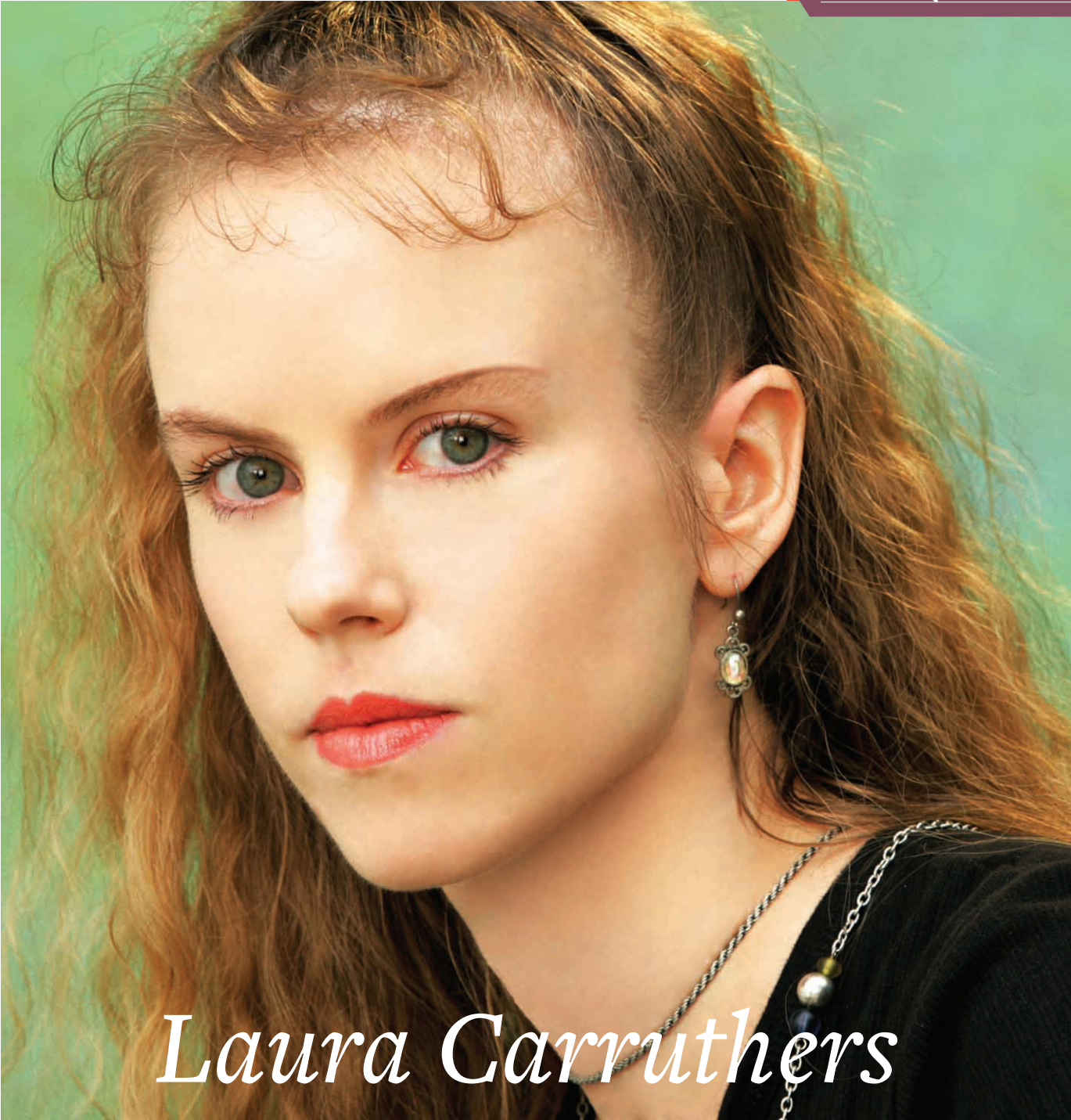


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A close-up portrait of Laura Carruthers, a young woman with long, wavy, light brown hair and green eyes. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a soft expression. She is wearing a black top, a silver chain necklace with a large pearl, and a small earring. The background is a solid green color.

Laura Carruthers

A six-time national champion and world-ranked Scottish Highland dancer, a former member of Ballet Arizona, and an honors graduate of Arizona State University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Laura Carruthers brings motion and emotion together in her latest film project Grace Fury.



You were born in California correct?

Yes, although I currently live in Arizona where I have my base of operations, I still have lots of family in California, and I do most of my work in the Los Angeles area. In terms of my heritage, I have Scottish roots on my father's side.

When and why did you get involved with dance?

It's interesting - my mother is a cellist, and I have other family members that were involved with music, but no one was a dancer. I suppose, simply put, I was born a dancer, and many of my earliest memories were of dancing. It's how I expressed myself as a child. Even as young as the age of three, I would put on dance concerts with my dolls and stuffed animals in my bedroom. I got involved with Scottish dance because my father was a Scottish Highland athlete and we attended games and festivals regularly when I was growing up. I started formal lessons in Highland dance at the age of seven and it just took off from there with competitions and performances and so forth.

Are they the same reasons that you continue to be involved?

Yes, essentially I didn't choose dance, it chose me. Perhaps the biggest difference today is the role that music plays in my profession. Specifically, I am fascinated by how music and choreography work together to create a complete form of expression. Capturing that experience in theatrical form, or on film, has been artistically rewarding.

Is that creative process more one of inspiration or perspiration?

In terms of choreography, it is most often a mix of both elements. Sometimes the spark will come from hearing a great piece of music - there is a connection there, I can hear where the composer is going with the work and I want to step into that conversation. As I get older, however, I'm more inclined to think things through, looking at the work with a broader vision, and perhaps taking other elements into consideration - where I'm at, what's on my mind, what's going on in the world, etc.

Does the same reasoning apply to your other disciplines?

It does, certainly. It's interesting, however; as I have become more immersed in a variety of mediums - dance, music, theatre, film - I see myself as more of a craftsperson, an engineer, or an architect. I take these different pieces and bring them together in some sort of solid form or structure, not unlike building a chair or a table. Choreography is still the core of what I do, though; it is at the heart of who I am, and it is the engine that drives the other disciplines.

Some call that being a Renaissance person.

Yes, although a lot of people would say that in this day and age we are not moving in that direction. Now, everything seems to be shrinking down to the idea of specialization. And while I understand the argument that it is important to focus on one thing at a time, I find the narrowness of that perspective quite frustrating and challenging. I was very fortunate to have grown up in a home where we were encouraged to have different interests. My father was passionate about many things - science, arts, books, etc - and that seems to have rubbed off on me.

And that is reflected in your work.

Absolutely. I love the idea of connecting the dots, and of forming new and unique relationships between things. Art, like life, is not a linear experience - it is an organic process of exploration, discovery and expression. It isn't always pretty, but it can be beautiful. I believe that artists have a responsibility to bring those different perspectives to their audience. In fact, artists need to do that regardless of whether or not they have an audience. One of the major issues with creative people today is that, because art has become so marginalized in our society, they are afraid to take chances with their work if it is not profitable or propped-up by some sort of corporate entity. When we start to muck with the true meaning and mandate of artistic expression, which is a form of collective reflection upon who we are and where we fit into the scheme of life, then we are in danger of losing our real sense of self and identity.



Is that true of the Celtic arts as well?

I think the popularity of Riverdance over the last twenty years has really inspired people to rediscover, or re-examine, their identity, which is a good thing. Certainly that is the case with the Irish Diaspora here in the United States. My own experience being involved with Scottish dance and attending Highland games over the years would attest to that as well with American Scots. That said, there is still so much more that

can be done to help preserve our heritage, particularly where it comes to language.

From your perspective, are young people today still interested in that heritage?

Yes, I believe they are. The number of young people getting involved with Scottish and Irish dance these days is encouraging, and there are now schools and competitions all over North America and around the world. However, the Scottish community here

in the U.S. needs to find new and better ways to connect with coming generations. Reinventing our traditions, and redesigning them for the future, is not going to be easy though - there is a lot of resistance to change and growth amongst the older Scots.

Is that part of what inspired your new film?

Perhaps, but maybe not consciously. Grace Fury is a project that I put together for myself mostly, and captures and conveys twenty years of my own experiences and emotions. If it finds an audience among younger people, and inspires them to follow their dreams, their bliss, then even better. It's been a massive project - five years in the making, culminating in the filming of several performances in Glendale, California. The stage character, Grace, was created to chronicle my own evolution as both an artist and as a person. However, I also believe that part of her role is to reflect the times she lives in, and perhaps even to betray them. We are living in a very bizarre period in our history. Things have become very messy, especially here in America, so perhaps there is an added sense of resonance and urgency with the timing of the film.

What's next on your creative agenda?

I always have something stirring inside of me that needs to take expression, so I have a few ideas on the go, but nothing I am ready to talk about just yet. I still have to get Grace Fury out the door. And, to be honest, I have mixed emotions about it at this point; part of me is thrilled and excited to see it released, while another part of me is ready to move onto a new project. Stay tuned!

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Trans-Celtic

As more individuals embrace their true selves, the Celtic nations undergo a transition in identity. Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns explains.



Sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) can be dated back to the early 20th century, with gender transitioning reaching even further into the past. Denmark native Lili Elbe - the inspiration for David Ebershoff's international bestselling novel, and subsequent film, *The Danish Girl* - was the first SRS recipient on record, undergoing the procedure in 1930.

However, and despite all of the recent media attention, the term "transgender" still remains a mystery to most.

"The majority of people haven't encountered a transgender person," explains Irish social worker, and creative nonfiction writer, Declan Henry. "This will change in the years to come, as more and more people are coming out as Trans than ever before - and some are even now coming out early in their teenage years."

Henry, who was born in the small village of Ballymote, County Sligo, spent two years researching and writing his recent book, *Trans Voices: Becoming Who You Are*. His website describes the work as "a sensitive exploration of life for transgender people in today's world."

"Up until two years ago, I'd never met a transgender person - or certainly not knowingly so," admits the author. "I wanted to speak with people who were transgender and hear their stories. I wanted to demystify the wrongful image that the media has portrayed of some people having 'sex change' operations on a whim - and to clear up several other misconceptions that society have about Trans people."

Attitudes toward the transgender community - who make up the T in LGBT - have become universally polarized.

And while efforts have been made to create a safer world for Trans individuals over the last decade, there is still ample work to be done. Just this year, President Trump revoked the Obama transgender bathroom guidelines - a system in public schools that allows transitioning teens to use the bathroom of their choice.

In 2004, the U.K. passed the Gender Recognition Act, allowing transitioning men and women to legally identify with their preferred gender after receiving the opinion of two medical professionals. Ireland passed similar legislation in 2015.

"The Gender Recognition Act allows Trans people to gain legal recognition without seeing a doctor or needing medical treatment," explains Henry. "Although the Act was seen as a positive step forward for transgender rights in Ireland, it faced criticism for having exclusions within the Trans community itself. At the moment, the Act fully excludes Trans people under 16, and disallows people who are non-binary (i.e. those who may not want an 'M' or 'F' on their birth certificate) to be legally recognized. It will be reviewed in September."

David Beattie, better known as Layla Talks via his social media channels, is an Irish journalist and author who is currently undergoing a gender transition.

"The beginning was quite intimidating," explains the Killiney-born writer. "There's an awful lot to do and unfortunately, in Ireland, there's not that much information available on how to go about transitioning. The hardest part has been the indignity of the process in Ireland; I had to be diagnosed twice, and I have had to go through all sorts of obstacles in order to transition. I really struggle with the idea that I'm not trusted to make my own decisions."

Though just 19 years of age, Beattie has already published two books, cultivated a healthy following through social media, and





created his own podcast, Tangerine Dreams. In his books, titled *Who Cares* and *Just Sayin*, Beattie covers a range of subjects, including accounts of his own transition.

"I think it's varied", says Beattie, describing the attitude in Ireland toward Trans people. "Most people have a 'live and let live' approach, but they also don't really want to hear about your transition. Others are very encouraging, recognizing that there's a huge need for support in the community. Then there are some who take a nastier approach. Luckily, I don't seem to encounter many of them in Dublin."

He adds that the best way to change attitudes is through education.

"People need to experience a loved one going through this. Exposure also helps; people telling their stories in the media, in art, and in conversations will get the public thinking about transgender issues."

"For me, the best part has been slowly becoming more comfortable in my own skin, and feeling better about myself every day."

Attitudes toward the transgender community of Ireland are similar to those in the neighbouring U.K., with a mix of praise and criticism.

In January, Sandra MacDougall, an ex-Royal Scots soldier who recently underwent SRS, told the *Daily Record* that she regretted ever having the procedure - the heckling and name-calling she endured in its wake was, to her, more painful than living in "the wrong body."

In North Wales, the BBC reported that a transgender employee of Bodnant Welsh Foods was allegedly referred to as "it" by her manager - who was also said to be considering terminating her employment.

Still, both Ireland and the U.K. are considered to be some of the safest places in the world for Trans people to reside.



TRANS VOICES

Becoming Who You Are
Declan Henry



"Up until a few decades ago, life here was firmly under the rule of the Catholic Church, and the rights of LGBT people were practically zero," notes Declan Henry. "Thankfully, the opposite is true now. It is a clear demonstration that the Irish value and accept people from all walks of life - a much-welcomed liberation from the shackles of the past, which kept the LGBT community in Ireland silent and disempowered."

Governments in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the U.K. have been progressive in regard to Trans rights, and there are more resources and organizations available to Trans men



and women than in years past. In Scotland, the Scottish Transgender Alliance aims to educate both the public and those going through transition. In Wales and the rest of the U.K., the Beaumont Society offers support for Trans people and their families. In Ireland, the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) has worked tirelessly to promote and preserve the rights of Trans individuals.

"I think the role of TENI, and organizations like us, is to stand up and give a voice to our community," says Torny Glavin, the group's Administrative Officer. "It's important that Trans people have representatives who can speak for them in many different arenas. We hope to continue to strive and help Ireland's Trans community fulfill their fullest potential."

While all agree that it is essential to keep the political wheels moving forward on Trans-related issues, the emphasis must remain on those who are in transition, and those who are struggling with their own gender identity.

Trans individuals must be reminded that, at the end of the day, they are in control of their own lives and their choices, and that - ultimately - they must do what is best for them.

"Listen to yourself," advises Beattie. "As much as it is vital to have support, this is a journey that must be taken on one's own. Take the time to figure out your unique preferences and identity, and don't let anyone persuade you away from your own truth. People's opinions and observations about your life are irrelevant. Never do something because you think it's what you 'should do.' Stand up against norms and challenge everyday rhetoric if you need to."



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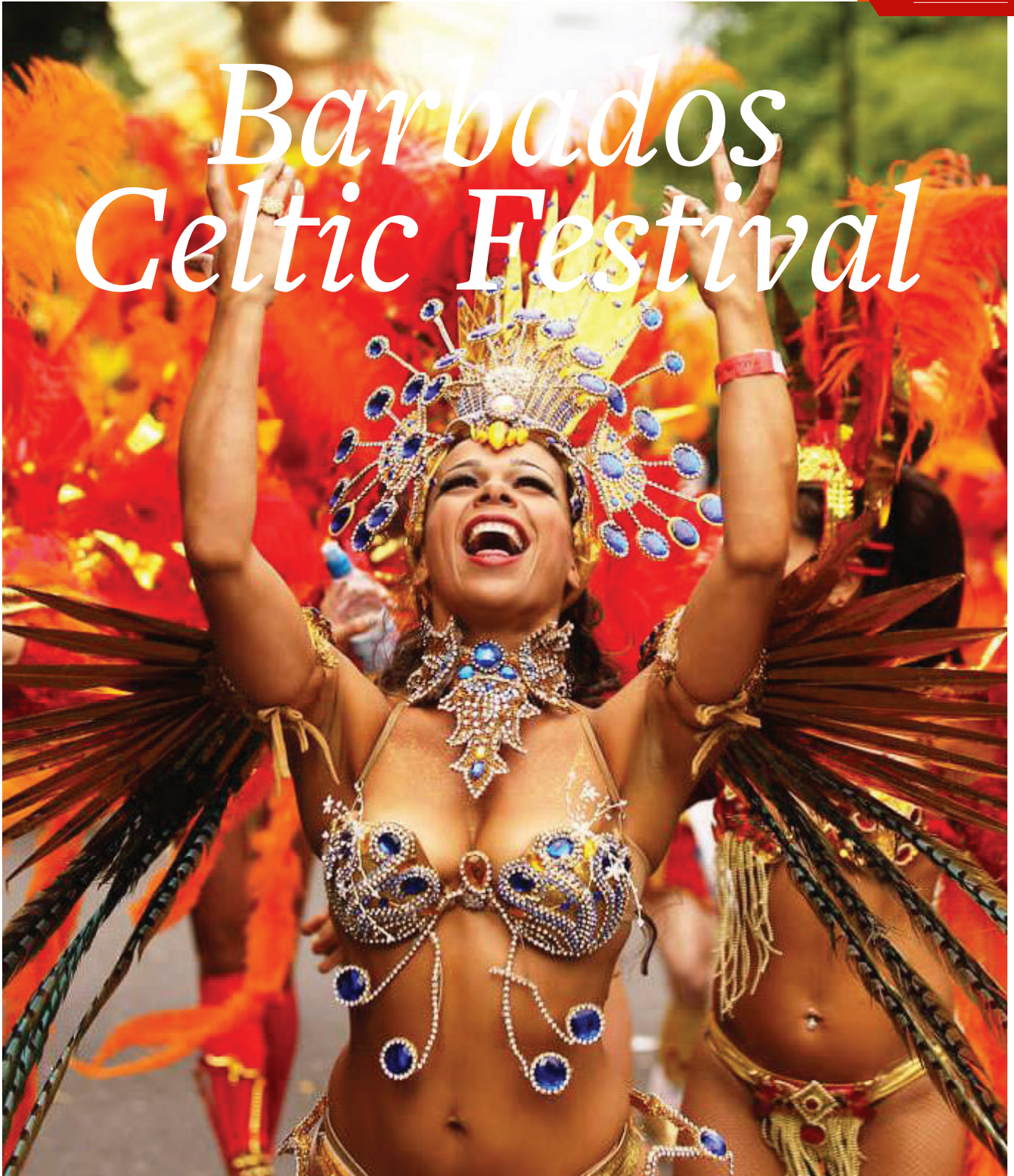
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Barbados Celtic Festival



*As Celtic Life International contributor Chris Muise tells us,
Barbados has become the heart of the Celtic Caribbean...*



Since taking on the role of festival director in 2011, Carol Anderson has worked hard to elevate the Barbados Celtic Festival beyond its meagre origins in the 1990s, and transform it - year over year - into an event that reconnects Bajans with their Celtic roots.

"Back then, a Welsh lady brought her father's Welsh choir into the island for a concert," recalls Anderson from her office in Scotland. "What we're doing slightly differently from the past - apart from bringing in Celtic musicians from Scotland, Ireland and other parts of the world, including Canada - is that we are now working much more closely with the island's musicians."

Regular readers of Celtic Life International may be aware that Celtic culture has spanned the globe over the centuries, and Barbados is no different. In the 16th century, after Oliver Cromwell purged the Scots from Scotland, a number of them found themselves living on the island as indentured servants. As well, during the heyday of the Royal Navy, many sailors with Celtic backgrounds settled there of their own accord, likely for the better weather.

"For much of the time that the Royal Navy was really, really dominant," explains Pat Melanson, director of The Pipers Guild in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. "Say, from the year 1600 until 1900, or even until the end of the Second World War, 30 to 40 per cent of all the sailors in the Royal Navy were either Irish or Scottish. Some of them would arrive at a port like that and say, 'it's a good night for a swim - I think I'll go ashore and not come back.'"

It might come as a surprise that Barbadian culture has all sorts of hints pointing to its Celtic heritage, with traditional symbols everywhere.

The cross of St. Andrews - Scotland's patron saint - appears on the emblem of Barbados, which in turn means it shows up all over the island, including on their dollar coin. Reggae drum beats, it was discov-

ered, originated from Scottish military drums, and not African drums as had long been believed.

"There are still descendants of those Scots living in Barbados," says Anderson. "It has this unique link to Scotland and Ireland, which is in the blood of many people on the island today. They tell me that maybe their granddaddy or their great granddaddy was a Scot."

And yet, Celtic culture in Barbados - unlike in the United Kingdom or many parts of Canada - is still something of a hidden gem among Bajans, many of whom have no familiarity with their Celtic roots.

"People here asked me what it means to be Celtic," notes Anderson. "They didn't understand the word...until we brought our musicians in and we played. The festival is one way to really strengthen those links to the past."

Over the years, Anderson has brought in Celtic artists and artisans from around the world to be part of the Barbados Celtic Festival. She's set up a visit from a famous Edinburgh chef, who created Caribbean Haggis from local ingredients, and has invited dancers and fiddlers to teach local and area residents.

"I found that some people were really surprised," says Michelle MacKenzie, the founder of the MacKenzie School of Dance in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, who brought her troupe to Barbados in 2012 to share the art of Celtic and Highland dancing. "And many of those people, though it wasn't even of their own heritage, were really interested in learning more."

One of last year's highlights was a performance of Celtic/Barbadian musical fusion, which had Orkney Island fiddlers teaming up with a local Spouge band.

"What I want to see as my legacy is a fusion of the cultures, particularly the music," muses Anderson. "I want to preserve the links that we have together, and the history that we share."

Despite the connection to Celtic heritage, and Anderson's efforts to reignite the embers of that heritage on the island, one Celtic tradition that is still scarce in Barbados is piping.



“There are no pipers in Barbados, bizarrely. You’d expect there might be, but I know they are not on the island, because we’ve hunted and hunted.”

In an effort to fix that, this year’s Barbados Celtic Festival will feature an event called Pipefest, which will bring hordes of bagpipers together from different parts of the world.

“In the past, I’ve had about two or three pipers, maybe four,” continues Anderson. “This year, we’re taking 100 pipers with us. We are working on having them play together with local musicians from the Barbados Defence Band.”

She’s hoping the piping talent will rub off on a few local musicians, and that the tradition of cultural fusion there will continue. “We’re actually talking about teaching some of these Barbadians to play the pipes, which has never been done before. I’m very excited about that.”

Melanson, a former educator and a life-long piper who runs a business connecting Nova Scotian pipers with potential clients across the province, thinks the 100 piper plan is a great idea, both from an educational and a cultural standpoint.

“Children who are exposed to music have more and more success with things like math, logical thinking, working in patterns, you name it. A student who has been in a musical system is a better thinker.

“Conflict mostly comes from ignorance - not ignorance as in being rude - but the true meaning of ignorance, as in lacking knowledge. By studying your ancestry, and studying the roots of any culture, you make yourself a better human being.”

MacKenzie, too, loves the idea. While her troupe doesn’t have any pipers, she encourages those who do play the pipes to participate to help spread the Celtic culture.

“Don’t miss the opportunity. We don’t want it to be a dying art. The more people that can get out there and promote it - and show people how to do it, and how it sounds and what it’s all about - the better.”

“Wouldn’t I love it, if they called me and asked me if I’d go - I’d go

in a heartbeat,” adds Melanson. “Even as you’re speaking, I’m thinking of at least two pipe bands I’ll be contacting about this.”

“If any pipers want to come and join us, they should have a look at the website,” says Anderson. “We’re more than happy to have more pipers involved.”

Whether you are interested in participating as a piper, or just want to check out the music and food on offer under the warm, Caribbean sun, the festival runs from May 26-29.

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The Utopia of Iberia

It is a fisherman's dream; hundreds of rivers hosting thousands of fish. Celtic Life International contributor Graham Mole reflects on his time in a Spanish paradise



Given the chance to create Utopia, I would start, like any game fisherman, by making the perfect river for trout and salmon.

Cool, clear water would gush from snow-capped mountains, tumble in torrents through rocky gorges, then slide serenely through wild flower meadows. It would be stuffed with fish hungry for my flies.

Optional extras would include a perfect climate, fabulous food and fine wine, and a comfortable fishing pub with a knowledgeable and helpful landlord.

Then I would wake up, cursing that it could not possibly be true. But it is a reality. I know, because I have been there; the Celtic corner of northwest Spain - glorious Galicia, known as The Land of a Thousand Rivers, and Asturias, a veritable fishing Valhalla.

But even Paradise is not bereft of problems; the fishing in Spain is governed by a myriad of rules. Just obtaining a proper permit can be a nightmare: first, you must visit a government office to get the licence, before going to a bank to pay for it, then returning to the first office to finish the procedure. To date, I have done it four times.

Thankfully, there are now a number of guide services - including the wonderfully titled Gourmet Fly - which take care of these little inconveniences, along with booking hotels, suggesting meals, and providing the right fishing tackle.

These services are particularly useful for a first trip, as first glances of government literature can be confusing. One year, English pamphlets read "Trout from the first Sunday in March to the 15th of August." The locally-issued Spanish leaflet countered with "No trout fishing until May 11." The truth was that you could fish the river Narcea for trout from April onwards, providing it was by spinning a dead minnow.

The Narcea is a prime salmon river, and the ban on fly fishing until May protects the just-hatched salmon.

It is a legacy of Franco, a passionate salmon angler himself, that entire rivers can be rested so as to stay pristine and host larger fish. Angling is restricted on some river sections known as "cotos" - sign-posted as "Coto de Pesca" - to ensure they are not overfished. Only three anglers a day are allowed, allocated by a local "sorteo," or lottery.

The crucial question for a visiting sportsman is how to fish. The best answer is to adopt local methods.

Area residents use artificial flies, but unlike our single dry fly, they attach five to a plastic sphere called a "boya" or "buldo" - from the French "bulle d'eau," meaning "water bubble."

Like Galicia, rivers in the neighbouring province of Asturias are idyllic, the stuff of dreams.

In the river Sella, there are game fish; brown trout, sea trout and salmon. Brown trout populate the rivers Puron, Bedon and Pilo-na, while the stunning Deva river hosts mostly sea trout and salmon.

There is a good spring run of salmon, sparkingly clean 55 centimetre fish that average 12lbs. Trout are smaller at 25 centimetres on average, while their sea-faring cousins are usually closer to 35 centimetres.

On one of my first trips there I stayed at La Fuente Inn at Cornellana, near Oviedo. The fishing was superb and incredibly affordable. Nobody ever did as well as the hotel's landlady, however, who would appear before each breakfast with a freshly-caught basketful of trout.

She never did divulge her angling secrets, nor did she tell me about a quaint local - and potentially lethal - custom. I had waded thigh-deep into the middle of a nearby river when, suddenly, a handful of locals began screaming frantically "Abre Embalse!!!" Apparently, a huge dam had been opened upstream and the water was rising fast. I waddled in my waders as quickly as I could back to shore.



In nearby Llanes, owner of the Montemar hotel Jose Alberto Concha took me to fish a river high up in the Picos de Europa Mountains. After a white-knuckle drive - we were often just inches from dropping hundreds of feet down the cliff side - we arrived in Campo de Caso, where the river Nalon winds its way through gorges and, in one case, actually weaves through the inside of a mountain.

Southwest from there, the place to go is up the 100-odd hairpin turns to the river Najerilla. At first, white water crashes down the crags, then glides through the rocks, surging through the limestone walls of a gorge, urgently seeking the plain. Thirty kilometres downstream it reaches the Rioja wine capital, Logrono.

It was in Logrono that I met the river's saviour, 70-year-old Theodore Sabras, who - after 25 years of dogged determination and diplomacy - had saved the waterway so it could be enjoyed by avid fishermen from around the world.

"I wanted to create a brotherhood of fishermen, people who think as I do. Those who care for rivers will always be welcome here."

For centuries the valley's trout had been fished ruthlessly by the locals. The fish were a lifeline, a larder to be abused. When hotels in Logrono demanded more trout for a growing number of hungry tourists, poaching became a way of life. Sabras foresaw the future, disgusted by the vision. "I had to repay nature for the favours she has showered on us," he explained. "She gave us such beauty. We could not just throw it away."

So, using his influence as president of the local fishing society, the organization was awarded a ten-year contract to manage just over 13 miles of river in the valley on behalf of the State.

Today, the river is flourishing, though the fishing is, admittedly, quite challenging; early activity means you need to be out on the water by 7 a.m., before the sun rises into the valley. Following a brief flurry of flies that gets the fish feeding around lunchtime, an afternoon siesta after a glass or three of Rioja is recommended. There is little point in trying your luck again until early evening, when you can cast your lines until dark. By then, you will have worked up a proper appetite for a four

or five course dinner around 10.30 p.m.

Not that much further on is the river Irati, which flows down from the Pyrenees to Pamplona, and was a favourite haunt of Ernest Hemingway. The nearby Cafe Iruna still serves up the great American writer's favourite dish, trout bleu.

Hemingway fished the river with a worm, but locals employ a metal spinner. Using an artificial fly on the end of my line, I found it a huge challenge, as the river is rapid and the fish even quicker.

Back in Asturias and Galicia, though the main season finishes at the end of August, fishing is allowed through September so long as the catch is not taken home. This is called "sin muerte" or "without death." This time of year is ideal for tourists and travellers, as the rivers are barely used at all by locals. Unfortunately, poachers still work the waters through the autumn.

My September trip proved to be a reconnaissance mission of sorts, and I am already planning a late-spring or early-summer trip for this year. Spain, especially the northwest Celtic corner of Galicia and Asturias, is an angler's paradise.



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A man with grey hair, smiling, wearing a white cap and a red jacket over a blue hoodie. He is wearing a white apron with the text "ORIGINAL SMOKIES Iain R. Spink FROM ARBROATH" on it. He is holding two large, smoked fish (smokies) in his hands. The background shows an outdoor market setting with striped awnings and other people.

The Arbroath Smokie

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands sinks his teeth into some of Scotland's classic culinary culture



Strolling through the old fishing village of Auchmithie - perched on the high, red-sandstone cliffs of Scotland's east coast - I passed by the vernacular, stone-built cottages that once housed the community's many fishing families. Where the buildings end, the cliff top vista opens up to provide spectacular views over Auchmithie Bay. Here was the starting point in my quest to better understand and appreciate the world-famous delicacy that is smoked haddock - or more specifically - the Arbroath Smokie.

Breathing in the fresh, salt-laden air blowing off the North Sea, I headed down the centuries-old track that links the village with the now-dilapidated harbour in the bay below. At the end of the 18th century, Auchmithie had a population of 180 and a fishing fleet of 6 boats. Today, an old, wooden boat dragged up on the foreshore is the only reminder of the community's fishing industry that peaked at the end of the 19th century, and which boasted over 30 boats sustaining a population of 400 persons. While many of these boats operated inshore, seeking out lobsters and crabs, several larger vessels would venture into more dangerous waters in search of haddock, cod and herring. Historically, salt was used to preserve foodstuff, but in Auchmithie there was a unique tradition of cooking and preserving fish by smoking them in wooden half-barrels sunk into the ground and covered with damp hessian sacking.

Norse invaders, who arrived in their longboats, settled in the area around Auchmithie Bay in the 11th century, and tradition has it that they brought the hot-smoking technique with them. To this day, there

are similar smoking techniques carried out in parts of Scandinavia. If Auchmithie was the birthplace of the Smokie, I was still at a loss to understand why it became synonymous with Arbroath, and so I headed three miles south to that little fishing town, famous in Scottish history as the place where the Declaration of Arbroath - often referred to as the Declaration of Independence - was signed in 1320.

Arbroath harbour is big and bustling. Large areas are given over to modern marina moorings with small cabin cruisers and yachts, but I sought out the working parts of the harbour where the lobster creels were stacked on the quayside and the fishing boats were unloading their catches. In conversation with the local fishermen, I discovered that during the 19th century, Arbroath harbour had expanded into an important trading port, with ships sailing to and from Scandinavia, northern Europe, and as far afield as North America.

Auchmithie had always been the prime fishing port in the area. However, as Arbroath expanded with improved harbour facilities, greater opportunities for trade and better housing, many residents relocated there. They brought with them the skills for smoking fish that, by now, had been perfected over several centuries. With the ability to sell their wares to a wider market, buyers associated the product with Arbroath rather than Auchmithie, and so it became known as the Arbroath Smokie.

Wandering through the streets away from the harbour, I found a couple of smokehouses that served up smoked fish of varying species.



These were more commercial ventures with big, brick smoking-sheds and tall chimneys, and seemed a far cry from the traditional methods of wooden half-barrels and damp hessian sackcloth.

Nonetheless, I had lunch in a restaurant overlooking the harbour and ordered an Arbroath Smokie. It was golden-brown and perfectly palatable, but I had no idea how it stacked up against those cooked and prepared in the ancient ways of Auchmithie. Thus, my search for the holy grail of Arbroath Smokies continued, and it wasn't long before I met Iain Spink.

Spink is a fifth generation producer of Arbroath Smokies, and I caught up with him at Dunfermline Farmers' Market on a wet Saturday morning. I had no difficulty in finding him; the smoke signals rose periodically over his stall, and the delicate aroma of smoke-cooked fish hung in the air. There were at least a dozen customers waiting to be served and I must have passed the same number walking through the market eating their hot Smokies from the paper they were served in. I introduced myself as he lifted the damp sackcloth from his wooden half-barrel, sprinkled on some water, and sent another aroma-laden cloud of smoke over the market.

Lifting a specially-shaped wooden stick onto the barrel over which pairs of haddock were hung, Spink explained the process and its history, "Although historically haddock were landed at Auchmithie, most fish are now landed and purchased at the fishing port of Peterhead in the north-east of Scotland. They are then transported by road in refrigerated containers. I only buy the best quality haddock that has been gutted at sea as soon as it has been caught."

Back in Arbroath, he prepares the haddock by removing the heads, cleaning out the belly cavities and laying them on a layer of salt. A further layer of salt is then placed over the fish and they are left between two to twenty-four hours. Typically, around six hours is the norm, but it depends upon the size and moisture content of the fish, as well as environmental conditions at the time. They are then sized in pairs and tied by the tails with traditional jute string before being dipped in cold water to drain off excess salt. A fire is then lit inside the wooden barrel, but that too must meet certain requirements. "Only hardwood logs can be used to generate the necessary aromas and flavours. Softwood



produces too much resin that taints the fish." The pairs of fish are then hung over wooden sticks placed across the barrel before being covered in damp hessian. As with many parts of the process, it is experience that determines how long the fish is cooked. Typically, it is around forty minutes, but the sackcloth is occasionally wetted and removed for a quick inspection with a sprinkling of water thrown over the fish if necessary.

Spink can trace his fishing family roots back to the early 1700s, when his grandfather's side of the family lived in Auchmithie. His father, Robert (Bob) Spink, was instrumental in securing 'Protected Geographical Indication' (PGI) status for the Arbroath Smokie in 2004. PGI status determines that only haddock smoked according to traditional methods and within an eight-kilometre radius of Arbroath can be described as Arbroath Smokies. And while Spink is regarded as an ambassador for the delicacy, his life almost took a different direction. Having worked in the family fish business in Arbroath after leaving school in the 1970s, he headed for Inverness when the business was sold in 2001.

There, he embarked on a career change that saw him graduate with a degree in Applied Environmental Science. With his skills at preparing Smokies, he would occasionally take a break from his studies and sell his wares 'direct from the barrel' at Highland games. His reputation for the quality of the product grew, and soon he was in demand at various markets across Scotland.

Although there are several unrelated Spink families producing Smokies in Arbroath, Iain Spink - and his father and grandfather before him - have spent years mastering the art of creating the Arbroath Smokie. Smoking haddock is a process that Spink acknowledges has changed over the years. "Centuries ago it was a much tougher process, aimed principally at preserving the fish for longer periods. The result was a harder, saltier and smokier process than current buyers would choose.

"The Arbroath Smokie of today is a process of ongoing evolution. It shares the same processes and skills as in the good old days, but it has been refined to produce a more delicate and finely balanced flavour that is sought after by some of the nation's top chefs."

My Smokie was served on paper, straight from the barrel. Spink deboned it in an instant and its piping-hot flesh broke away easily in my fingers from the golden-brown skin. It had the texture of velvety, soft flesh that crumbled in the mouth with flavours of woodsmoke and the sea. This was seafood at its best - prepared with decades of experience, and garnished with centuries of culture and history.

www.arbroathsmokies.net
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Fishguard's Female Fighters

*Simon Whaley explains how a cunning Celtic woman
thwarted the last French invasion of Britain*





Gazing out across the calm Irish Sea from this stunning Celtic coastline in Wales, it's difficult to imagine a French invasion force landing here, with plans to incite a British revolution.

Thirty metres below me the waves lap gently against the rocky shoreline. A light, salty breeze caresses my face, and the sky screeches to the piercing calls of herring gulls. Both left and right, the Pembrokeshire coastline stretches far into the distance, a sentinel to potential invaders. Behind me, fields and hedges top the luscious landscape, with only a handful of cottages and dwellings punctuating Britain's only coastal national park.

I lean against the small stone monument erected to commemorate what happened here, 220 years ago on 22nd February 1797, and imagine what it must have been like for those French soldiers clambering up the rocky cliffs to this viewpoint. Little of this landscape has changed since Carregwastad Point, a few miles from Fishguard, became the spot where the last invasion of Britain took place.

It was the idea of Irish-American Colonel William Tate, whose hatred of the British found him support from an 18th century French government, which was still in the midst of its own revolution. Tate, along with his French counterpart Jean Joseph Castagnier, departed France by sea on the 16th of February in 1797, with 1400 men, and planned to sail up the Severn Estuary to land at Bristol. There, they would take the

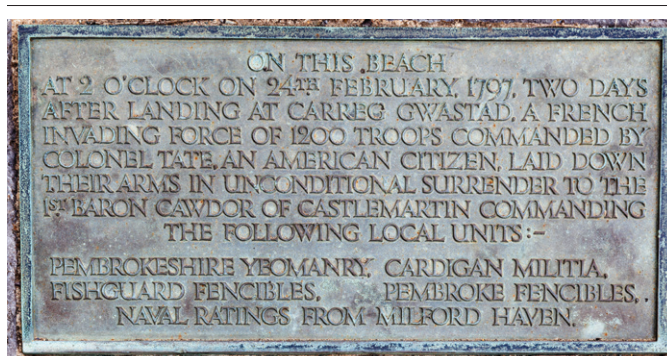
city and encourage locals to rebel against the British Establishment, creating a British revolution.

But it was an ill-wind, or rather an easterly one, that blew them - and thus history - off course. Plan B was to incite a Celtic uprising in West Wales, hoping it would spread across Britain. So Tate's French ships sailed around the West Wales coast, and dropped anchor in the Irish Sea.

I peer over the cliff top, to the white water gently eroding the coastline below. It's not a safe place to land an invasion force. Yet seventeen boatloads of French soldiers were forced to clamber onto the rocks here, as they were shuttled from their ships in small rowing boats. Despite flying British flags, locals had spotted the French ships, and raised the alarm. But while they waited for armed forces to arrive, the locals had to fend for themselves.

Rather than bring their own supplies, the French soldiers were encouraged to live off the land, which meant ransacking isolated cottages and farmsteads for food and supplies. Soldiers took anything they could, from livestock to pantry stores. They even binged on a bounty of wine many locals had salvaged when a Spanish ship carrying this alcoholic cargo was wrecked on the coastal rocks a few weeks before.

News quickly spread of these Celtic homesteads being pillaged and ransacked, and this incited Fishguard cobbler, Jemima Nicholas,





armed with just a pitchfork, to hike the couple of miles and teach the French a lesson. At Pen Caer she stumbled across a party of 12 French soldiers, rounded them up, marched them all the way back to Fishguard, where she locked them up in St Mary's Church. Then she went back, looking for more.

Undeterred, more French soldiers set up camp at Garnwnda, near Llanwnda Church, and raised the tricolour. From this site they had an excellent viewpoint towards Fishguard, something Jemima was later able to use to her advantage.

On February 23rd, local Welsh soldiers from across the region gathered round the outskirts of Fishguard, unsure how many French they were up against. However, their numbers were woefully short. Lieutenant-Colonel Knox commanded a volunteer force called the Fishguard Fencibles. However, despite calling up every one of his volunteers, he could only enlist 150 men. Forced to send 30 of them to Fishguard Fort to man the cannon in case of further attack from the sea, he realized he had too few men to repel the French. More British troops were on their way from Pembroke, Milford Haven and Newport, and by late afternoon on the 23rd, Lord Cawdor - who was Commander in Chief of all British forces in the area - still had fewer than 600 soldiers. Now armed with the knowledge gained from fleeing locals that the French contingency amounted to more than twice this figure, his only option was containment, rather than attack.

Despite the numerical French advantage, Colonel Tate was also having problems. Many of his men were still intoxicated from all the wine they'd consumed during their ransacking and pillaging, and were, therefore, in no fit

state to fight. Some of these soldiers had been recruited from French jails, which meant they weren't regular troops, but petty criminals of various nationalities, who believed they were bound for a better life in the West Indies. They hadn't signed up to fight the British. Tate sent two French soldiers into Fishguard, under the cover of darkness, on the evening of February 23rd, to meet with Lieutenant-Colonel Knox and Lord Cawdor in the Royal Oak pub. Their instructions were to offer a French surrender on condition that all French troops were returned to France at the expense of the British Government.

Lord Cawdor, realising events were turning to his advantage, refused and called for an unconditional surrender. He emphasised that more British troops were arriving in Fishguard every hour, and demanded a decision from the French the following day. If they failed to surrender, the French would feel the full force of the British Army.

This is where Jemima Nicholas' cunning came into play. During the first hours of daylight on February 24th, she drafted some 400 Celtic women from Fishguard to wear their traditional costume. This comprised a dark red cloak worn with two straps cutting across the chest diagonally to hold it in place. They also wore tall black hats, and black skirts. From a distance, the red and black looked like the uniforms of the British Militia. In particular, the chest straps were reminiscent of a soldier's bandoliers, where they kept their rifle ammunition.

On the outskirts of Fishguard stands Bigney Hill, a small, rounded hill, visible from the French encampment at Garnwnda, two miles away, on the opposite side of the valley. Nicholas instructed her troops to march continuously around the hill, knowing they would be watched by the French. The illusion worked. To the French this looked like tens of thousands of British troops arriving in Fishguard, ready to do battle.

Word was sent of the French surrender and at two o'clock that day, the French soldiers camped at Garnwnda marched down to Goodwick Sands where they were met by the remaining French soldiers from the ships offshore. Together they trooped into Fishguard where they laid down their arms. The last invasion of Britain was over.

Some historians are cynical of Nicholas' actions, but records from the event, including two letters written three days later, and an account written by one of the Fishguard Fencible soldiers, reference the stunning sight of these 400 Celtic women who, from a distance, looked like soldiers. The British Government clearly thought Nicholas' actions were key to the success of the French surrender, and

granted her an annual pension of £50.

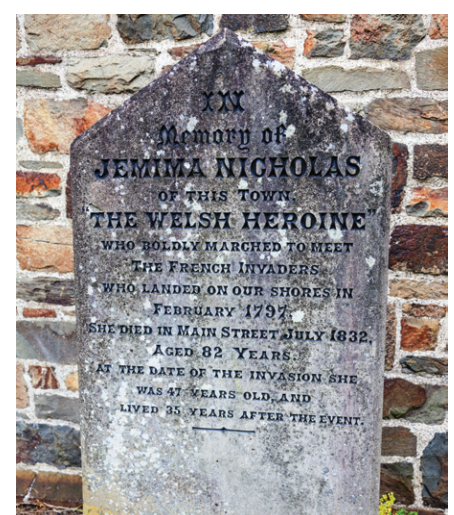
The most famous French invasion of Britain took place in 1066, when William the Conqueror defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings. The French even went as far as creating a visual account of the historic battle in the form of the Bayeux Tapestry. While Nicholas' actions proved that Celtic women are a force to be reckoned with, today's Celtic women also have a sense of humour as well as pride in their historic counterpart.

Twenty years ago, to mark the 200th anniversary of the last invasion, 77 local embroiderers used 178 different shades of wool to create a British Last Invasion Tapestry, an embroidered account of the three-day invasion, which has exactly the same dimensions as the Bayeux Tapestry (30.4 metres long by 53 cm tall). Unlike the French Bayeux Tapestry, the Fishguard Tapestry depicts a British victory. Some might prefer to call it a Celtic victory.

Housed in Fishguard's Town Hall, it recounts the events in a series of scenes, including one of Nicholas, in her red shawl and black hat with her pitchfork. It's a tapestry to be savoured. Scrutinize the detail to see chickens attacking soldiers, and green-faced soldiers being apprehended by Nicholas herself.

Opposite the Town Hall stands St Mary's Church, where Jemima's prisoners were kept, and where visitors will find a proud memorial stone, commemorating the life of this Celtic heroine, who passed away in July 1832, at the age of 82.

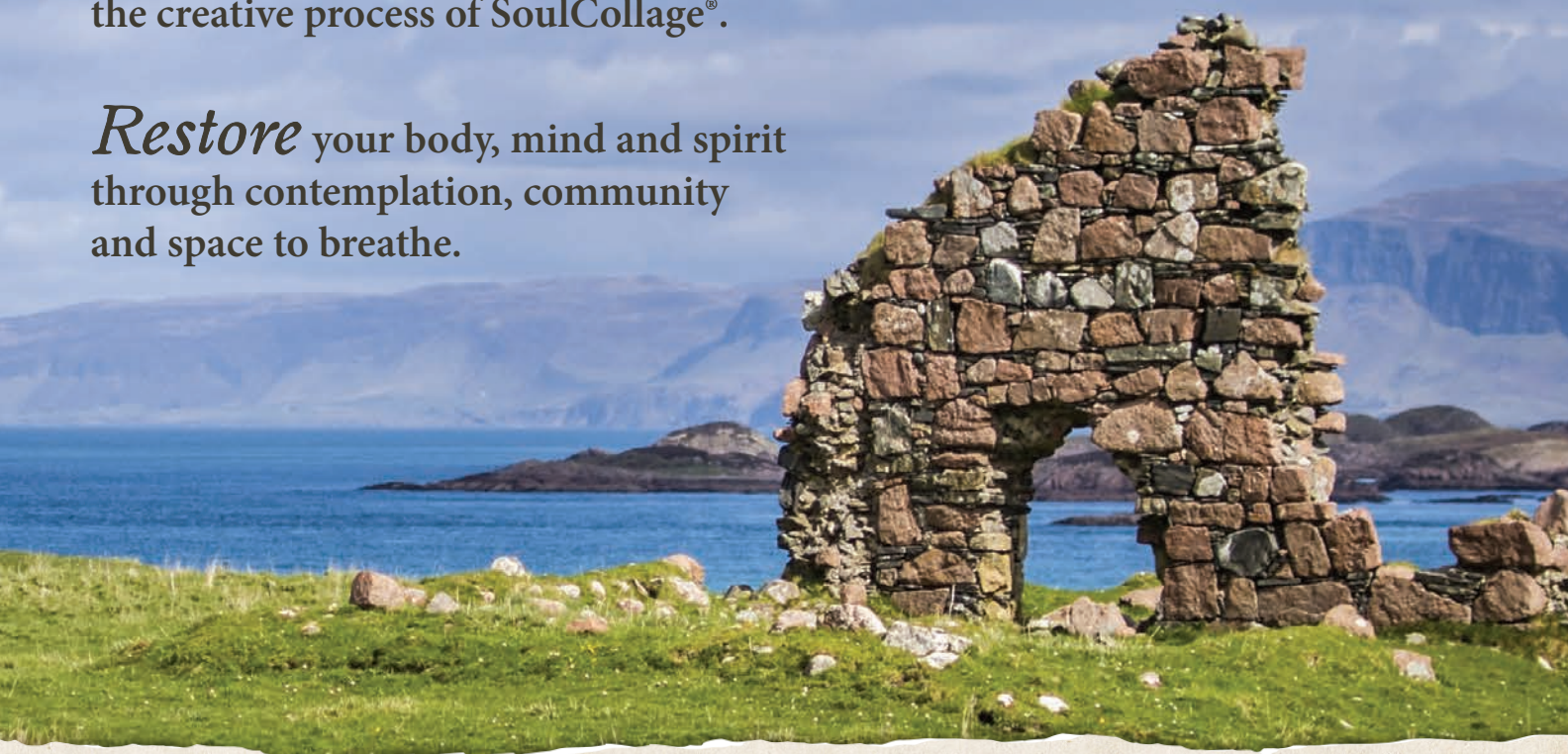
Far out to sea, just on the horizon, I spot a ferry approaching Fishguard. Today's invaders come in peace, and from the fellow Celtic-land of Ireland, on this twice-daily crossing. I rise to my feet, and begin my journey back along the coastal path to Fishguard, keeping watch for any Celtic women - especially those carrying pitchforks.



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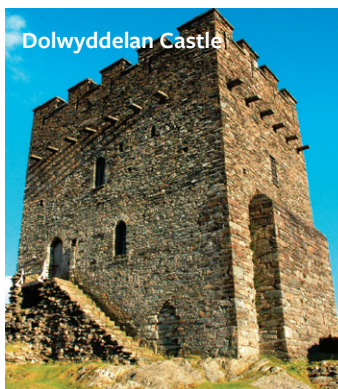
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Hidden Gems of Llywelyn the Great's Snowdonia

*As Celtic Life International correspondent
Gerald Herter explains, Wales' Snowdonia region
is a treasure trove of history...*



Dolwyddelan Castle



Taliesin monument



Tŷ Hyll



Llewelyn



Gerry and Lori Herter

Driving the narrow, twisty lane out of Trefriw in Northern Wales, I doubted that the quality of the crude track had improved much in eight hundred years. Llywelyn the Great, Lord of Snowdonia, traversed up this wooded hill in the twelfth century when visiting Llanrhychwyn Church, since then known as Llywelyn's Church. Founded in the 6th century by Welsh Prince Rhychwyn, nothing remains of the earliest structure. But with parts of the current building dating to the early twelfth century, the church is considered the oldest in Wales still offering services to this day.

My wife, Lori, and I were exploring historic, but out-of-the-way places in the vicinity of the popular Snowdonia village of Betws-y-Coed. The affable Bernard Owen, local villager and owner of Snowdonia Safaris, was our guide for the day. Having chanced upon Owen during a previous visit to the Capel Gorman monolithic portal tomb, we were impressed by his breadth of knowledge of the area's ancient sites.

Owen had picked us up at our local accommodation, the charming Tan-y-foel Country House Bed & Breakfast, set in the serenely scenic hills of the Conwy River Valley, a couple miles above the quaint community of Llanrwst. After tea and conversation with our gracious hosts, Ria Smith and Chris Dossi, we were ready to set out. By the end of the day, this part of Wales would hold new meaning for us, as we gained a brief glimpse into the distant past, where Llywelyn the Great and others from his House of Aberffraw flourished for a time.

Towards the close of the twelfth century, Prince Llywelyn became ruler of the principality of Gwynedd, the successor state to the Roman Empire covering Northern Wales.

Having sustained a reign of more than 40 years marked by numerous armed conflicts, Llywelyn was subsequently given the name "Great" by Welsh historians.

While in residence at his hunting lodge in Trefriw, Llywelyn was said to have built the Llanrhychwyn church for his wife, Joan, daughter of England's King John. The straight, rectangular lines of the structure and curved wooden beams supporting the ceiling are consistent with architecture of that time.

When we entered the small church on a rainy summer Sunday afternoon, two parishioners were preparing for the service scheduled to begin. They graciously shared revered centuries-old highlights, such as the square stone baptismal font, aged oak door hung low with wooden hinges, coffin bier hanging on the back wall, and stained glass windows dating back to the fifteenth century. They pointed to one window portraying a somber God peering over Christ on the cross, where upon close examination, God's hand could be seen holding up the cross.

Sensing that Owen had several more storied locales to show us, we knew we couldn't stay for the church service. So we bid farewell to our friendly hosts and pushed onward to a nearby marker, memorializing the sixth century literary figure, Taliesin.

Approaching the site, we passed by Llyn Gerririonydd, which our learned guide called a hidden lake, because of its remote nature. Situated high above Trefriw, the lake tranquilly shimmered alongside the forested slopes of Mynydd Deulyn (Mountain of the Two Lakes). Though maintained as part of Gwydyr Forest Park by the Welsh Government, the

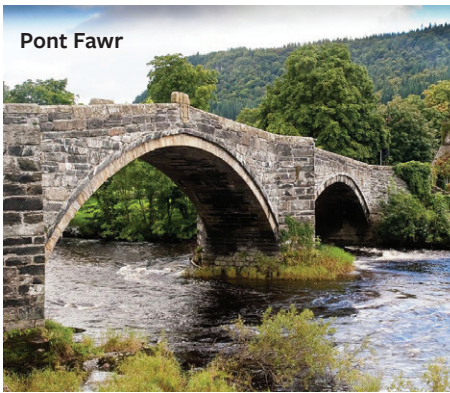
lake appeared to be a well-kept secret of the local residents.

On the far side of the lake we spotted the Taliesin monument, just up from the shore on a grassy green knoll. As Abel Heywood described in his 1869 *Tourists' Guide to North Wales*, the lake "is renowned as having had on its margin the abode of Taliesin, 'the chief of the bards.' He is said to have been found when a babe on the shores of the lake by Gwyddno Garanhir in the sixth century." As Heywood reported a century and a half ago, Taliesin was "cherished by the Welsh people" even then. He shared that a prophecy of Taliesin's "relating to the Ancient Britons, is still extant, and has been remarkably verified; it is as follows: - 'Their God they shall worship; their language they shall retain; their land they shall lose, except wild Wales.'"

However, the location for the monument was disputed even back in the nineteenth century. As Joseph Hemingway reported in his 1842 book, *Panorama of the Beauties, Curiosities, and Antiquities of North Wales*, "Lord Willoughby d'Eresby has lately erected a monument which his lordship intended should identify the spot where the poet resided; but unfortunately his lordship has mistaken the site, and placed the column at the west end of the lake, when it is very well known that Taliesin was addressed at Llidiard Coed y Blawd, at the east side of the lake."

For we modern travelers, either end of this enchanting lake could be equally appreciated for the inspiring quality that the revered poet found here. Lori and I had first encountered Taliesin when visiting the Welsh architect Frank Lloyd Wright's winter home, Taliesin West, in far off Arizona. Wright admired the poet and sensed that architecture developed and evolved from folk legend and myth, much like Taliesin's work.

From the hidden lake, we retraced our steps and headed toward a hidden valley south of Betws-y-Coed. On the way however, we stopped at the not so hidden, but still fascinating Tŷ Hyll, the Ugly House. Along the



Pont Fawr



Fairy Glen



Llanrhychwyn Church

main road between Betws-y-Coed and Capel Curig, the Ugly House appeared as an odd structure whose sides and chimney bulged with misshaped rocks and boulders. Legend has it that a couple of nefarious characters from the fifteenth century invoked an old tradition which stated that if a house was built in a day, the dwelling and surrounding land became the property of the builders. The four foot thick walls, crudely thrown together using moss instead of mortar, gave credence to the incredible story.

Preserved nowadays by the Snowdonia society, the Ugly House has been transformed into an invitingly cozy tea room and visitor center. Taking note of that, Lori and I returned later for a traditional lunch of Welsh rarebit. The Society has transformed the second floor into an informative exhibit of their local honeybee breeding program, established to support the threatened species. As the exhibit points out, the importance of honey goes back thousands of years. In the tenth through twelfth centuries, the Old Laws of Hywel Dda demanded fines for honey theft. Hywel Dda was a Welsh king from the House of Dinefwr, which competed with the House of Aberffraw for dominance in Wales.

Back on the road, we proceeded to remote Cwn Penamnen valley, near the village of Dolwyddelan. Here, what remains of Tai Penamnen reminded us of American Indian ruins that are prevalent in the western United States. All that is left of this fifteenth century community are piles of stones outlining the pattern of the original dwellings. At some time in the past, a landslide had swept over the buildings, leaving them hidden from sight.

Owen walked us through the archeological excavation site, which early on was the residence of Maredudd ab Ieuan, a later successor to Llewelyn the Great through the House of Aberffraw. Maredudd was also founder of the Wynn family of Gwydir.

Beginning as a single dwelling, Tai Penamnen was expanded over the centuries by a variety of owners, including a poet and

musician, Angharad James, until finally being abandoned early in the twentieth century. Owen pointed out a well and bee boles in the remains of the wall. Bee boles were the ancient predecessors of the modern bee hives, such as those described at the Ugly House.

Nearby we spotted the square, three story gray tower of Dolwyddelan Castle, looming from the top of a prominent hill. Guarding a main route, the castle was thought to be built by Llewelyn the Great in the 13th century.

Known to have captured a number of castles during his rule, Llewelyn was considered, from a practical standpoint, to be the first Prince of Wales.

And though he never claimed that title, he was instrumental in the effort that forced his father-in-law, King John, to sign the Magna Carta in 1215.

Dolwyddelan Castle came into play for the House of Aberffraw again in the 15th century when Maredudd ab Ieuan acquired and upgraded the fading bastion for his residence, prior to moving to Tai Penamnen. In between times, the armies of England's King Edward I had controlled the castle for a while when Wales was conquered in the late 13th century.

Even Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, mentioned above in connection with Taliesin's monument, had a role restoring Dolwyddelan Castle in the 19th century. As it turns out, Willoughby became owner resulting from his standing as a descendant of the Wynn family of Gwydir.

Squeezing in one final stop before returning to Tan-y-foel, Owen paused the car for a moment by picturesque Pont Fawr, a narrow three-arch stone bridge over the River Conwy in Llanwrst. The bridge was built in 1636 by Sir Richard Wynn, yet another descendant of the House of Aberffraw. Llanwrst, like Tre-frw, was known in earlier times for the wool

trade. Nowadays, tourism is a bigger draw. The pretty little town afforded a fitting end for our journey, given that the parish church there was the final resting place of Llewelyn the Great.

With our foray to out-of-the-way spots now finished, Lori and I marveled at the rich history that accompanied the seemingly obscure hidden gems that Owen had shared with us. So much so, that the next day we returned to another of the lost treasures that we had originally found with Owen. Fairy Glen is an enchanting little gorge accessible by a popular walk from Betws-y-Coed. Owen described a legend that claimed if you went there on the night of a full moon in summer and sat on a rock in the glen, a fairy would tap you on the shoulder and talk with you.

Fairy Glen, while beautifully scenic, exuded an eerie quality that was spooky enough that we decided against tempting the legend at night. Instead, in the afternoon we located the unique place along the glen that eluded all but the most thoroughgoing visitor.

Looking down on Fairy Glen through thick trees and ferns from an old stone bridge crossing the Machno River, another much more ancient bridge could be seen. Dating to the 14th century, now overgrown with hanging greenery, the narrow bridge had served drovers of that era tending their cattle and sheep. We could only imagine if any of the characters from our visit to the other sites had placed foot on this bridge so long ago.

The following morning, our sojourn at Tan-y-foel drew to a close. Over one final sumptuous breakfast, we entertained our hosts, Ria and Chris, with tales of wonder gleaned from the nearby hallowed settings, whose historic events and people we had but glimpsed from afar. Grateful for the information, Ria then asked, "Have you been to the slate mines? They're full of history." "No," I said, "but that gives us an excuse to return someday."

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Cruising the Cornish Coastline



Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and surfer Lesley Choyce catches a few waves in Cornwall

I first noticed photographs of monstrous waves crashing into the seawalls of Sennen Cove in the far, southwest corner of England while surfing the internet a few years back.

These behemoth sea monsters - spawned by massive North Atlantic storms - not only slammed into the rocks, but sent geysers of salt-water up and over the two-and three-story buildings along the coastline. Waves like that speak to my deep subconscious, luring me with their danger, their power, and their majesty.

My wife Linda and I had already explored a fair chunk of the Celtic world - including during prior travels to Cornwall - but we had never ventured this far down to the toe of that geographical boot. And, with images of those winter waves haunting me, we planned to see what magic Sennen Cove and its environs had to offer.

It is an easy overnight flight from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Heathrow Airport, but one never really gets enough sleep. Thus, the next morning found me in a familiar rental car with an equally familiar groggy, befuddled state of mind. Anyone listening in would have heard me stating out loud to myself, "Stay on the left," as we entered the multitude of busy roundabouts around Heathrow, strategically situated to challenge and confound sleep-deprived North Americans.

There was just enough mediocre coffee, and even more mediocre hamburgers, from the Roadchef restaurants on the M class highways to sustain us as we fled the London suburban traffic, heading toward the wilds of Cornwall. Wisely, we didn't do the drive all in one day, but spent the night at an old lopsided inn near Buckfastleigh with the

nearby, babbling Dart river singing us to sleep in the most cozy accommodations from a previous century.

The next day, we made our way onward to our rental home a few miles inland from Sennen Cove, a converted stone barn on an estate situated beneath some very large trees that hosted the largest population of crows I'd seen anywhere on the planet.

Alarm clocks were not needed here, as the crows provided a cacophonous wake-up call at the break of dawn.

Breakfast was in the upstairs kitchen which, according to the notes provided by the owners, was once a hayloft in bucolic days gone by. It was my first breakfast in a hayloft as far as memory serves me.

We set out in the wrong direction the next morning, anxious to leave the squawking of blackbirds in search of coastal peace, so we ended up going south and east until the road ended at Porthcurno, where there was a busy parking lot at an outdoor theatre hanging on the edge of a cliff.

Minack Theatre, looking decidedly more ancient Greek than modern English, was created by a wealthy theatre enthusiast in the early 1930s, hosting innumerable Shakespeare plays ever thereafter. The grounds were filled with a multitude of beautiful flowers and their attending butterflies. We ventured around the cliff tops and hiked our



first patch of the 630-mile-long South West Coast Path. The British are to be commended for their hiking paths, and this one is a gem. It stretches from Exmoor National Park in the north to Poole in the south, and has some of the most dramatic scenery in the world by my estimation. Sure, I'd never hike the whole thing in this lifetime, but I'd pick away at a fair stretch any time I could find myself in the neighbourhood.

Mousehole (pronounced "mowsull") was not far up the shore from here, and it remains a great little seaport with narrow streets, stone buildings and old men who can offer up genuine sea stories from rugged days gone by. At a local pub, something straight out of an old pirate movie, we ate some deeply fried fish and green pea soup - thick enough that the spoon could stand upright in the middle of the bowl. Though it was touted as a soup, my suspicion was that it was yesterday's leftover mushy peas, a dish that bewilders even the most seasoned Anglophile.

I think my wife wanted to forge on to Penzance, but I was pretty certain it was not my kind of place - urban, touristy, and the setting for a Gilbert and Sullivan musical. Instead, we headed home, picking up rations of food (hake, rice and Brussels sprouts - a feast for kings!), and beer (Hobgoblin, Cornish Knocker and Devon Dumpy) along the way.

During our time in Cornwall, we hit the aforementioned South West Coast Path at several junctures, including Cribba Head, Porthcurno Sands, Logan Rock and Gwennap Head to name a few. The trail was

always good, the weather always windy, and the look-offs dizzying and beautiful. The hikers all seemed cheerful and self-satisfied with their ruddy cheeks, rucksacks, telescoping hiking sticks and drippy noses. I don't mean to suggest they were snobbish; salt air does that, you see.

Knowing way too much about the history of British colonialism, I kept thinking, too bad their ancestors hadn't just stayed home and decided to go out for a good long walk instead of wanting to conquer the world. But then again, hindsight is often 20/20.

Long before the British set their ambitions on making sure the sun would never set on their empire, this part of Cornwall was settled by the Cornovii, a Celtic group of people who lived here during the Iron Age.

They seemed to have had this wonderful rugged land all to themselves until the Roman armies bullied their way north.

Linda and I waited for the right wave conditions to don our wetsuits and go boogie boarding at Sennen Cove. Those killer winter waves had long-since subsided, and the beach adjacent to the town boasted sparkling blue water, pristine waves and hard packed white sand. The lifeguards hassled us a bit to stay in the swimming area rather than the surfing area and this rankled my wife, who wanted to surf the more powerful waves down the beach. Nonetheless, the sea was kind to us that day as we smashed about in the North Atlantic until our arms were limp and our spirits revived.

Aiding the surly Sennen Cove lifeguards back in 2005 was Bilbo, a Newfoundland dog who had been enlisted to help watch over swim-



mers and surfers alike. He was retired in 2007 when the town imposed strict regulations preventing dogs from being on the beach in the summer. This angered many locals, and there was a public outcry to bring the dog back to his beach, but Bilbo was never reinstated.

Back at our hayloft one evening, we discovered we had neighbours. An elderly couple from London was renting another cottage on the property for a few days and they invited us up for gin and biscuits. I was fearful at first it might be one of those boring British social occasions that you see in old BBC programs, but thankfully I was wrong.

William and Beth had already begun the party before we arrived, and we deduced they had partaken more of the gin than the biscuits. Like most British folks who discovered we were from Canada, they asked if we knew their cousin in Toronto. No we did not. But they were cheerful and full of fun and we swapped travel stories and laughed until the sun settled itself and the crows began their evening festivities, bragging and gossiping about their accomplishments of the day. At this point it was time to retire to the hayloft for some salmon, potatoes, rocket salad, and a bottle of brew called The Parson's Nose.

On one of our driving days, we headed to St. Michael's Mount while listening to John Prine, Van Morrison and Lenny Gallant. As we were wending our way through one of the insidious roundabouts just outside Penzance (I knew it was an evil, decadent town), I must have been driving too slow because a local woman in a silver Mercedes convertible nearly rear-ended us and, as we came out of the roundabout, she hammered on her horn and sped past me on the narrow roadway, lifting a finger in the air to indicate she was not appreciative of my more casual driving style. I blamed it on the inbreeding of wealthy aristocrats and thought no more about it as we drove on to Marazion.

The castle and gardens at St. Michael's were glorious. It's one of those places you can only walk to at low tide - and if there is one thing I know - it is that tide and time wait for no man.

So we had timed it just right. At high tide, a boat is provided for ill-prepared tourists who have not studied their tide charts. The island is a kind of twin of Mont St. Michel across the water along the coast of France. St. Michael's Mount is on a ley line and said to be a place of miracles that once was a destination for pilgrims. Visions of St. Michael himself were said to occur here, and the island has had more than its share of famous visitors over the years. Even Queen Victoria and Prince Albert showed up unannounced in 1846. The owners, the St. Aubyn family, were not at home, so a housekeeper kept them entertained until they sailed off on the royal yacht.

Back in Sennen Cove I rented a surfboard, took to the sea with some locals, and was humbled as I usually am the first day surfing in unfamiliar waters. While young punks gracefully slipped into long green walls and kicked their boards high into the air on the close-outs, I dutifully did my routine. I would paddle hard, stand, hear the laughter of the wave as it drove the nose of my board into the water and tap me on the head ever so gently before flipping me head-over-heels mercilessly into the watery trough beneath. I would then come up spitting sand and sea, and proceed to repeat the performance until I felt that I had grown appropriately intimate with the waters of Whitesand Bay.

Of course you don't travel to this part of the world without going

St. Michael's Mount





to Land's End. I had been warned by Lonely Planet that it had been "developed" with shops and a theme park, so I was braced for the shopping mall atmosphere of the developed part. But it is one hell of a fine location. I like places on the margins, and I couldn't help but like Land's End. Once you walked ten minutes beyond the tourists at the cluster of stores, museums and restaurants, it was back to the South West Coast Path at its best, high up above the sea with craggy cliffs in both directions. The wide-open, rugged landscape is starkly beautiful wherever you look, and the endless deep narrow coves are my kind of places. Tiny purple brilliant flowers dot the ground, and once again, everyone you meet has a drippy nose and a smile on their face.

When you think about the U.K. you don't usually think about rugged beauty, but this place has a ton of it.

You could probably walk the entirety of the coastline of this large island on trails established by forward-thinking men and women who understood the value of a good walk on a windy day.

From Land's End, if you had the proper boat, you could sail east to the Netherlands (rounding Gwenapp Head, of course) south to France (perhaps landing at Mont St. Michel), southwest to Brazil (or onward to Antarctica) northwest to Iceland and Greenland (arcing around Ireland where necessary) or west to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia (with not a darn thing in the way). And for many English sailors of centuries past, Land's End was often the last bit of England they would see before sailing off the horizon headed towards foreign lands.

For me, standing there on a high cliff, looking out past the besieged Longships Lighthouse on its tiny island of rock, I knew we had only scratched the surface in our discovery of this welcoming ancient corner of the Celtic world and would return again to see whatever we had missed.





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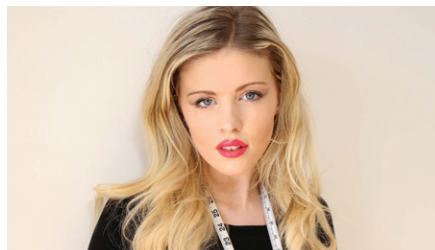
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I was born and raised in The Black Isle in the Highlands of Scotland. My Highland roots and Clan Mackenzie heritage have been the foundations of the inspiration behind my brand and all it stands for.

My great grandmother was a professional seamstress and her father was a tailor. I used to watch her sew the most beautiful sequin patterns onto the plainest of sweaters and transform them into statement pieces - her style



was iconic. As a child, I would always sketch clothes and I decided at ten years old that I would be a fashion designer.

I began to sew at thirteen years old and left the Highlands at seventeen to embark upon my Fashion Design degree. I've been extremely head-strong and focused in what I want to do from a young age, and I have never looked back or even questioned my career path. I was born to do this.

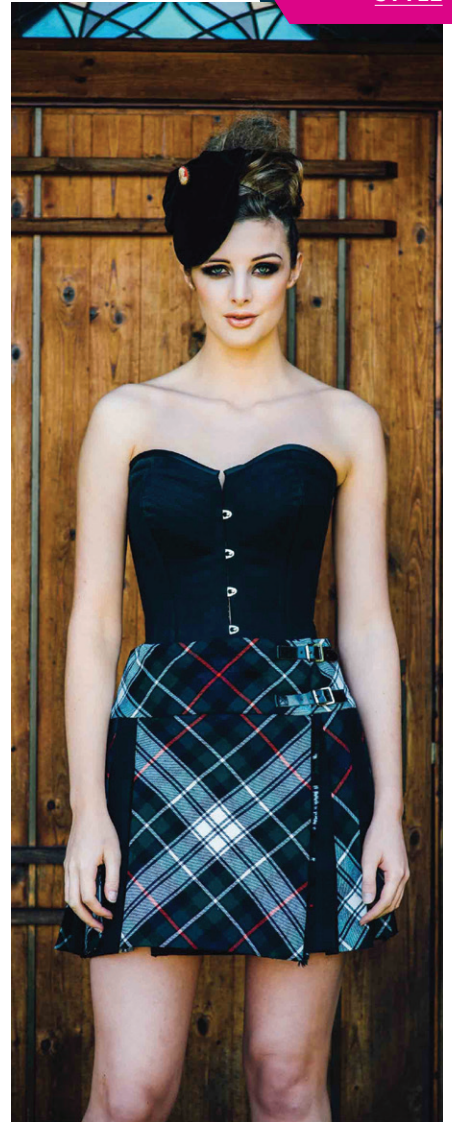
I started my company at the age of 21 and have sold my pieces all over the world - I won Best New Scottish Designer in 2016, which was a great milestone. My collections are authentically unique - I was trained by Scotland's largest

kilt-maker in traditional whilst I was a student. Combining my knowledge with pioneering design and my Highland inspiration, I have transformed Scotland's most famous garment from traditional staple to cutting-edge fashion.

From the fabric to the stitching to the design, a good quality garment is an investment which will last. Producing in Scotland, we work in contrast to the fast-fashion industry. Customers get behind our brands because they understand that buying one quality piece instead of ten cheap throwaway items makes all the difference.

www.siohanmackenzie.com





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CelticLife

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

Celebrating 30 Years

Celtic Life International celebrates three decades of preserving
and promoting a living, breathing culture...



It started in Halifax, Nova Scotia, quickly branching out across four Atlantic Canadian provinces. Within a short while, it wove its way through Quebec and Ontario, en route to Alberta and British Columbia. Then, like all good Canadian snowbirds, it trekked south along the eastern seaboard through Maryland, the Virginias, the Carolinas and Florida, before heading west to Texas and California, north to the state of Washington, and back east via Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Massachusetts.

In recent years, it has made its way to more exotic locales, including Australia, New Zealand, Cuba, Brazil, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Israel and South Africa.

And, of course, it has found its way home to the motherlands of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Brittany and Galicia.

Today, it connects the Celtic dots all around the world, reconnecting people with their history and heritage, and creating a vision for the future of a global community.

As Celtic Life International celebrates its 30th anniversary, founder and publisher Angus M. (Marcie) Macquarrie reflects on his publication's rich and rewarding journey.

"Interest in Celtic culture has always been what has driven us to do what we do," he says. "It is an innate curiosity about what we share, and who we share it with."

"As with others before us, we are merely doing our part to preserve it and pass it down to future generations."

Like the Macquarrie family themselves, the magazine found its footing with honest, hardworking and humble roots.

Celtic Life International first published in 1987 as a simple newsletter - a small vehicle of communication for Nova Scotia's International Gathering of the Clans.

"I had some experience publishing a weekly community newspaper (Scotia Sun of Port Hawkesbury, NS)," explains Macquarrie, "and I was invited to generate some extra publicity for the event. The newsletter we put out at that time proved so popular that when the gathering was over the interest remained and we were encouraged to continue doing it."

He recalls St. FX (university, Antigonish, NS) sociology professor Dan MacInnes insisting that the newsletter, and Celtic culture, belonged on a bigger stage, perhaps even serving an international market.

"I was piqued by what he said, but I knew all too well the costly limitations of print and distribution. His words, impossible though they seemed at the time, stayed with me."

With a small team of support, and limited funding, Macquarrie nonetheless committed to putting out a quarterly publication. And though he no longer recollects who bought the first subscription, "I remember it was \$20 cash that somebody handed to me in a restaurant."

The seeds of Celtic Life International were sown years earlier during Macquarrie's boyhood in northern Nova Scotia, where hardwood stands give way to farm fields that roll down to the sea. The Arisaig area was settled by families from the western highlands and islands of Scotland between 1791 and the early 1800s. Most of these Highlanders had family on the losing side at the historic Battle of Culloden.

"The Macquarries came from the Isle of Eigg, and the Gillis clan - on my mother's side - arrived from Morar. My bloodline also contains MacLeods, MacLeans, Chisholms, MacDonnells, MacDonalds and Robertsons."

Born into a Gaelic-speaking household where traditions were held high, he savoured the stories recounted by older generations, and took piping lessons as a youngster.

"My Macquarrie grandfather, who was born in 1862, travelled to Scotland for a year in 1889. From his correspondences, it was evident that he proudly considered himself a supporter of the Jacobite cause."



From an early age I was exposed to storytelling, piping, fiddle music and step dancing.

"I am defined by the blood that runs through my veins."

That heritage, notes Celtic Life International's Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare, makes Macquarrie a natural seanchai.

"Story-telling and Celtic culture are synonymous with one another and Marcie is fascinated with stories of human beings, especially those of Celtic heritage."

Macquarrie and his partner in Celtic Life and family life, Cabrini MacIsaac Macquarrie, were raised within 20 minutes of each other. She shares his west coast Scottish roots on her father's side, and her mother was Newfoundland Irish.

"We met at a dance at the 4 Valleys Fire Hall, not far from where we each grew up," she remembers with a smile. "We both liked the old-time music, and there was a band playing there that night."

"Cabrini is my beautiful bride," beams Marcie. "And her involvement with the magazine has been essential from the get-go. It would not have survived without her input, skills, and endless support."

Before long, as part of a Nova Scotia tourism delegation, Macquarrie carried copies of his fledgling magazine - now called The Clansman - on a trade mission to Baltimore.

"I think it was somebody in the department of tourism who'd actually named it The Clansman, and we quickly realized that the title of the publication wasn't going to go over well in the deep American south, so we changed it to Celtic Heritage - a more fitting name, as the content had evolved to a more inclusive cultural publication.

"In the beginning, I was thinking only in terms of Scottish heritage. But slowly, over

time, we began to wake up to the rest of the Celtic world."

The refocus expanded the publication's audience from Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada, to eastern Ontario and the eastern United States.

Alison Macquarrie-Tindle, one of the Macquarries' four grown children, came of age with the magazine, watching it evolve from a small publication to a global voice.

"Both my parents have worked extremely hard to grow the business and they never gave up," she says. "They always found interesting topics, new music and books to review, fresh ways to write innovative features...and of course, Mom's cookbook (Cabrini's Celtic Kitchen) has been fun for all of us."

The publication's evolution was aided via a series of well-timed, well-placed pla-teaus.

"Early on, the technology was a nightmare," recalls Macquarrie, "although at the time we didn't realize it. Our circulation numbers were low, and it was costly to promote to new subscribers. As a result it took a lot longer to reach new people."

Within just a few short years, however, advances in technology made it simpler, and more affordable, to reach a wider audience.

"With increasing computer capacity, we were able to develop a database of subscribers much more efficiently. At that point we could reach more people at less cost, and new methods of production and printing made publishing easier."

By the mid-1990s, the magazine had re-branded as "Celtic Life" under then-editor Alexa Thompson, emphasizing lifestyle and Celtic culture as a "living, breathing" entity.

"Alexa did an excellent job keeping us relevant for a long time," continues Macquarrie. "Her focus on contemporary Celtic culture helped us to define, and to some degree refine, what it means to be Celtic today."

Clare says that was a turning point for the publication.

"Alexa recognized that there were people of Celtic heritage all over the world. She jumped on board the globalization train, and our numbers grew quite quickly."

By the time Clare took the reins in 2012, immediately renaming the magazine Celtic Life International to better reflect its ever-expanding readership, the publication was ready to reach even further heights.

"I had worked in print journalism for a long time," shares the native Montrealer, who is of Irish heritage. "And while I saw, first-hand, the toll that the internet was taking on newspapers and magazines, I also saw the tremendous online opportunities for Celtic Life."





Organizing committee for Nova Scotia's International Gathering of the Clans
(Marcie top row, 3rd from right)

"Stephen is a very smart, experienced and ethical journalist," says Macquarrie. "He is incredibly tech savvy and capable, and he understands the power of digital platforms to grow our reach to an almost limitless audience."

Today, between the bi-monthly print and digital editions, a recently revamped website, and strong social media channels, Celtic Life International reaches almost 2.5 million readers in 71 countries, making it the largest community of its kind in the world.

"We have also partnered with the biggest Celtic-themed events in the world," continues Clare, "including the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, NYC Tartan Week, Festival Interceltique de Lorient, Celtic Colours International Festival, The Pipes of Christmas, and countless Highland Games."

While he acknowledges the magazine's dramatic rise, Clare is quick to reiterate that it remains a family-run endeavor.

"It started as a grassroots family publication and, despite the massive growth, has maintained those family roots and values."



With former
First Minister of
Scotland Jack McConnell

"I mean, this is literally an actual family; a mom and dad and four kids, who - together with a few employees - have reached out to all four corners of the planet."

For the Macquarries, those Celtic customs are shared in blood as well as ink; music has been an ever-present soundtrack in the family home; son Hector has won local and international piping competitions, and Alison, along with her younger sibling Sheena, plays the piano, as does the youngest daughter, Meaghan, who has recently taken up the fiddle.

In addition, Alison was a Highland dancer.

"I danced for years, beginning as a small child and continuing into my twenties - Highland dance, step dance and Irish dance. Mom and Dad always encouraged my development, and never hesitated to take me to competitions and summer camps at the Gaelic College to further my abilities.

"Both my parents are proud of their heritage, family, and Celtic culture," she continues "They taught us the importance of knowing who we are, and where we come from. The ability to connect with our past has been important to them, and it is a beautiful value they taught all of their children."



With second
cousin Jack White

By turns, as Marcie and Cabrini have passed along Celtic customs to their own children, Celtic Life International is an extension of their commitment to the global Celtic family.

"The passion Marcie has for it has kept it going when others, God knows there must have been many, couldn't make a go of things," says Halifax businessman Denis Ryan, who grew up in Tipperary, Ireland. "He's always had a fierce determination to find a way, to get it done. Look at it today, every issue getting better and better, always informative, and the presentation is first class."

Dr. Breesha Maddrell, director of Culture Vanin on the Isle of Man, suggests the bi-monthly is a "bright and modern way" of connecting Celts from around the world.

"Being one of the smaller Celtic countries, we - maybe more than anyone, perhaps - know the importance of sharing ideas, of belonging to a continuum - a seamless cloth - whether for the language, music and dance or culture, generally."

Alan Bain, president of the American Scottish Foundation, has been instrumental in establishing Tartan Week in NYC and co-chairs the annual Scottish North American Leadership Conference.

"I always find the magazine of great interest, and it is through sharing information that we strengthen our various organizations. Teaming up with other Celtic peoples creates additional opportunities for all of us."

Bob Currie, president of Clan Currie worldwide and founder of both The Pipes of Christmas and Tartan Day on Ellis Island, looks to the publication for inspiration.

"I've been with Celtic Life International since it was Celtic Heritage, printed on dingy newsprint. I love its new energy and social media presence. It has been a great teacher



With Victor Spence
- founder of the World Peace Tartan



With Welsh actor Ioan Gruffudd

in how to use social media to promote the culture. Keeping in touch can be as simple as a poignant photo or a bagpipe joke."

Tartan Day founder Jean MacKaracher Watson of Halifax, NS, a warrior for Celtic culture, says that Celtic Life International's evolution has been nothing short of triumphant.

"There were years when promoting our culture took very hard work, so it is encouraging to see how far we have come. I still love the local stories, but isn't it a wonderful thing that a little magazine from Nova Scotia has become so well known and read in places like Toronto, the U.S., and in Scotland, itself?"

Catherine McArthur, whose Scottish family history moves back and forth across the Quebec-Ontario border, put her daughters into highland dancing at a young age. Today she has a daughter who plays the pipes, a grandson who pipes, and another grandson who is a fiddler. She also purchases five subscriptions each year to Celtic Life International.

"I received it first as a gift, and after reading a few editions I started giving it as a gift. I read most everything, but I certainly enjoy the recipes."

Many transplanted Celts, including history buff Andy Thomson of Antigonish, NS - who recently had his DNA analyzed to see if there was anything he did not yet know about his Scottish heritage - turn to the magazine to stay in touch with their roots.

"I grew up in Glasgow and came to Canada in 1965. Growing up, I think we Scots felt a connection to our homelands, as many of us had a grandparent or two come from there, but we didn't have any sense of Celts around the world. I find it quite amazing to read stories of Celts in such far-flung places."

Long-time reader, Ron "D.D." McDonald - also of Antigonish - sees Celtic Life International as a window to the world.

"You almost believe that you can make your way to Ireland right through the pages themselves," he

says, referring to a recent cover story. "Every issue is a journey to places I may not have been, or may not even have thought to go."

Clare loves the analogy.

"I like to think that we take you somewhere with each issue...and not necessarily with any particular destination in mind."

"If anything, the journey is the destination - with a beginning, middle, and an end...similar, perhaps, to a fine meal with an entrée, a main course, and a delicious dessert. When done, we want our readers to feel fulfilled, and that their lives have been enriched."

To that end, he says, it is all about the quality of content.

"In our 'surf and scan' world of macro and micro media, the Celtic life International experience - both in print and online - has to be entertaining, educational, and, perhaps most of all, engaging.

"Preserving and promoting cultural identity, especially to the younger generations, is a huge responsibility," he adds. "It's not enough for us to be successful; we must continue to be significant to our readers and to our community."

Macquarrie agrees.

"As it has been since we put out that little newsletter 30 years ago, and as it remains to this very day, our readers are the most important part of Celtic Life International. They are the reason that we do what we do, and they are why we are looking forward to doing it for another 30 years."





Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival & Games

May 20-21

www.smokymountaingames.org

One of the oldest Scottish celebrations in America, the Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival & Games was founded in 1981, and has since been helping locals and visitors alike enjoy the best in down-home Celtic culture. Taking place in the event's new home - on the grounds of historic Maryville College - the gathering showcases the rich history of the Scottish, Irish, and Celtic settlers of the region, and the many customs they brought with them from the homelands. Start the weekend off right at the Friday Night Gala at the Clayton Centre for the Arts, with a soiree of fine dining and haggis, kilts and tartan gowns. The rest of the weekend is rife with music, song, and dance, as well as a dog parade, a play area for children, and scotch tasting seminars for adults. Pipers and drummers will sound off in band competitions, and solo players will fill the air with the sounds of "ye' olde country" throughout the weekend as well. Highland Reign, a Scottish-American folk band from Indianapolis, will perform as the festival's feature entertainers, with the Ed Miller Trio, Singing Pilgrims, and many others offering live performances also.



Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games

June 10-11

www.blairsvillescottishfestival.com

Those in Oregon looking to get reacquainted with their Scottish heritage will want to make haste to the Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games this June. Take in the traditional athletics of the Highland Games, with mainstay events including the Open Stone, the Sheaf and Caber Tosses, as well as four different competition levels of the Heavy Hammer. Music also plays a big part of the gathering, with drums and pipes sharing the stage alongside contemporary Celtic artists. If you have a passion for exploring Scottish heritage, an array of historic reenactments and weapon demonstrations will take place on site, and genealogists will be available to help you dig through your roots. And, of course, as the celebration prides itself on being a family-friendly affair, there are plenty of fun activities for the kids to enjoy, including junior athletic competitions, a Passport to the Clans event, introductory games of golf, train rides, face painting, and a bouncy castle to help them blow off some steam while mom and dad grab a cold pint of ale, or shop through one of the many colorful vendor stalls. More information on scheduling and accommodations can be found on the festival's website.



Taste of Scotland Festival

June 15-18

www.tasteofscotlandfestival.org

Celebrate the best in Celtic heritage in Franklin, North Carolina this June, as the Taste of Scotland Festival will tee-off a weekend of activities with a Thursday evening golf tournament. Over the following 48 hours, the gathering will live up to its succulent billing as attendees are invited to sample traditional Scottish cuisine at an old-school Clan dinner, or via one of the many excellent food vendors set up on Itola St. Festival-goers can also get their fill of Celtic culture with music, dance, highland games events, as well as live entertainment, which is scheduled to run from dawn to dusk each day. History buffs looking to learn more about North Carolina's connection to Celtic culture - especially the region's strong ties to both Scotland and Northern Ireland - are sure to enjoy the engaging and entertaining Montgomery Tour. A parade, sword fighting exhibitions, Clan row, a kids play zone, border collie demonstrations, fashion, classes in crafting, a Kirkin' of the Tartan, and an old-fashioned Friday night ceilidh are also part of an exciting and enriching weekend agenda.



Chicago Scottish Festival & Highland Games

June 16-17

www.scottishfestivalchicago.org

The mandate of the Chicago Scots - through their parent organization, The Illinois Saint Andrew Society - is "to nourish Scottish identity through service, fellowship and celebration of Scottish culture." The Chicago Scottish Festival & Highland Games is one way that the Chicago Scots fulfill that mandate, assembling the largest assortment of traditional Scottish food, games, and music in the Midwest for two days of fun and festivities each June. Mainstay events include piping, drumming, clachneart, hammer throw, sheaf toss, weight throws, caber toss, rugby games, Highland dancing, a "Men in Kilts" match, a haggis eating competition, and even a haggis hurling contest, where participants lob a solid, frozen pound of the stuff as far as they can. Another popular attraction is the Dogs of Scotland exhibition, where attendees can learn about the different breeds of Celtic canines and their ages-old hunting and herding techniques. A genealogist will be onsite to help dig through the past, and kids will enjoy the mini-golf and tug-o-war. The gathering also serves to raise funds and awareness for two local Scottish charities; The Scottish Home and the Caledonian House, two long-standing assisted living facilities.



San Diego Scottish Highland Games

June 24-25

www.sdhhighlandgames.org

Comic Con isn't the only reason to visit the San Diego area this summer. You can still enjoy fun, food, music - and even a bit of cosplay with kilts, tartans, swords, etc - at the San Diego Scottish Highland Games in June. Inspired by the traditional trans-clan pastime of the Highlands, the "tainchel" - or "the great hunt" - pits competitors against one another in friendly games of skill and strength. As always, an array of traditional activities are on the two-day agenda, including pipe and drum bands, Highland dance competitions, heavy athletics, and much more. Even man's best friend will be in on the action, as the very popular Sheepdog Trials take the field. Clan row is expected to be jam-packed during the weekend, where both members and non-members are encouraged to explore their rich family history and heritage. One of the festival's biggest draws is the Celtic Marketplace, where dozens of vendors set up shop, side-by-side, to showcase the latest in Celtic jewelry, clothing, accessories and souvenirs. Musical headliners this year include Mari Black, Highland Way, and the Wicked Tinkers. You don't have to be Scottish, or even Celtic, to attend - all are welcome!



Malad Valley Welsh Festival

June 30-July 2

www.welshfestival.com

Welsh pioneers were the first to populate Idaho's gorgeous Malad Valley in the mid-1860s. As per Welsh tradition, those early settlers celebrated their rich heritage each summer with an eisteddfod - a cultural festival featuring music, literature, dance, crafts, cuisine and more. After a 90-year absence, the gathering was revived in 2004 as the Malad Valley Welsh Festival, and has grown in both content and attendance each year since. This year, the three-day event again offers both locals and those from afar the opportunity to rediscover their Welsh roots via a number of engaging, entertaining and educational activities, such as heritage games, wagon tours of historic sites - including the Oneida County Pioneer Museum - and a traditional quilt show. Visitors will also be treated to Welsh poetry readings by renowned cultural historian Lucie Washburn. On Friday night, music lovers of all ages will enjoy an evening concert featuring choirs, piano duets, performances by youth groups, and "Songs and Tales of Wales" by featured guest artist, multi-instrumentalist John Good. Vendors of all sorts will be on site all weekend long also, so there is ample chance to pick up one of those cool Red Dragon tee-shirts!

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TasteofScotlandFestival.org

Spring Egg Soufflé

My youngest daughter never tires of asking me to tell her stories of my upbringing and what it was like growing up on a small mixed farm in northern Nova Scotia.

As my Dad passed away before she was born, she never had the opportunity to meet her grandfather. Dad was known as “The Egg Man,” as he had 2000 hens, and delivered fresh eggs to the local housewives (for \$.50 per dozen!) each Saturday in-and-around Antigonish.

My mother would often bake a soufflé on the weekend. A soufflé is a baked, egg-based dish which originated in early eighteenth century France. It is made with egg yolks and beaten egg whites, combined with various other ingredients. My mother, however, made a fluffy,

plain soufflé. My daughter would ask if we ever ran out of eggs. I assured her that we received all the cracked eggs we needed (the ones we couldn't sell), and put them to good use.

The egg is full of promise and new life. It symbolises the rebirth of nature, the fertility of the Earth and all creation. In many traditions, the egg is the symbol of the whole universe. The cosmic egg contains a balance of male and female, light and dark in the egg white and the egg yoke. The golden orb of the yoke represents the Sun God surrounded by the white goddess in perfect balance.

Welcome Back Spring!



Ingredients

2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
 ½ tsp. salt
 Pinch of pepper
 ¾ cup of milk
 2 egg whites
 4 eggs
 ¼ tsp. cream of tartar

Instructions

- Melt butter in medium saucepan over low heat. Stir in flour, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture is smooth and bubbly. Stir in milk all at once. Continue stirring until mixture boils and is smooth and thickened.
- Separate eggs. Beat yolks well and add 1/4 cup of warm sauce mixture to egg yolks. (Never add egg yolks to a hot sauce all at once as they may begin to coagulate too rapidly and form lumps)
- Combine yolk mixture with remaining sauce, blending thoroughly. If desired, add finely chopped filling ingredients, stirring into white sauce until blended. Set sauce aside to cool slightly.
- Beat egg whites and cream of tartar in large bowl, until stiff but not dry. Fold some of the egg whites into sauce to make it lighter, then gently but thoroughly fold the sauce into the remaining egg whites.
- Carefully pour into 4-cup soufflé or casserole dish.
- Bake in preheated 375° F oven until puffed and lightly browned, 20 to 25 minutes or until done. Serve immediately.

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

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Crafting Craigellachie



with **Andrew Ferguson**



It is probably true to say that Canada may not have become the country it is today without the Canadian Pacific Railway. The promise of the railway was a condition of British Columbia's accession to Canada in 1871. It nearly wasn't completed; there were a series of natural disasters, financial crises and threats of secession by the new province, not to mention the North-West Rebellion. But, in the end, Canada was linked by a ribbon of steel formally completed on the morning of November 7, 1885. The "last spike" was driven into the Canadian Pacific Railway at a site named Craigellachie, in honour of the CPR's first President, Sir George Stephen.

Sir George Stephen was from the town of Craigellachie in the Speyside region of Scotland. At a critical moment in the railway's construction, Stephen had returned to the U.K. to raise capital for the project. When successful, he is said to have telegraphed colleagues at the firm the Grant clan motto: "Stand fast, Craigellachie!" Today the ceremonial station at Craigellachie, British Columbia, is little more than a roadside attraction on the Trans-Canada Highway. Craigellachie in Scotland, however, sits at the heart of a booming Scotch whisky industry, an important crossroads on the Speyside Whisky Trail.

The Craigellachie Distillery was not built until 1890, during the first major boom of the Scotch whisky industry. Perched above the River Spey, both the distillery and the town for which it is named play an important role in the region, especially for whisky pilgrims. More than 20 distilleries can be found within a 15-kilometer radius of the town, including Macallan, Glenfarclas, Aberlour, Glenfiddich, Balvenie and BenRiach.

Unlike the aforementioned, Craigellachie Distillery is not open to the public, though it is hard to miss as you take the A941 en route to Dufftown. The reason for the concentration of distilleries in the region is partly historic, but mostly due to their proximity to vital natural resources: the granite Cairngorm Mountains to the south of Speyside ensures that a plentiful supply of pure clean water flows down into rolling fields - perfect for the growing of barley. Most distilleries would have started as farms, eventually making the switch to producing more profitable whisky.

Craigellachie was never a farm; it was built to produce malt whisky for the exploding blended Scotch whisky industry of the 1890s - principally the Dewar's blends - and it has continued to do so for the last 126 years. The distillery is not without its fans, but single malt bottlings - even from independent bottlers - have been few and far between. In 2014, the facility's owners - Bacardi - made the decision to start promoting Craigellachie as a single malt. A core range of 13, 17 and 23-year-old expressions was released, finding their way to Canada in 2016. The following year, both 19 and 31-year-old expressions were launched for the Duty Free market. Admirably, for a large multi-national corporation, Bacardi had the courage to bottle the range at 46% without chill-filtering or added colouring - a very good decision!

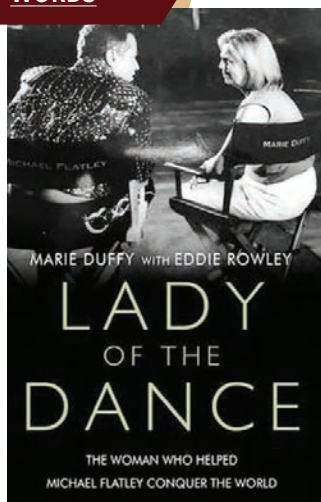
Craigellachie 13 Year: Superb value for an entry-level malt, the whisky is very fruity and floral with a meaty undertone. While the worm tubs have left a touch of sulphur, there are no rough edges. **\$75 CDN**

Craigellachie 17 Year: The extra years have added more vanilla, allowing the flowers and fruits to blossom. The meaty, sulphur tones are still there but have mellowed considerably. **\$173 CDN**

Craigellachie 23 Year: Spicier, with a hint of peat and loads of dried fruits, the 23 shows much more depth than its younger siblings. Medium bodied, it is creamier than younger expressions with ripe tropical fruits. **\$450 CDN**

Craigellachie 31 Year: The oldest official bottling yet is said to be thick and waxy with notes of BBQ pineapple and syrupy tones. I can't say for certain though, as I am still waiting to try it... hint, hint, hint! **\$750 USD**

www.fergusonwhiskytours.com
www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



Lady of the Dance

By Marie Duffy

O'Brien Press / 272 pp / €19.99

Those with a passion for Irish dance will inhale Marie Duffy's inspiring and informative biography. As fleet with her prose as she is with her feet, the renowned choreographer recounts her rise through the ranks, from the back room recital halls to the world's biggest stages. En route, she trains a number of world champions and Riverdance cast members, eventually finding employment with Michael Flatley himself, as he pieced together his lavish Lord of the Dance production. More than a memoir, the book does well to shine a light on both the resurgence of Irish dance as an art form, and the revival of the Celtic culture in which it is rooted. Warm, witty and wise, the work will resonate with readers of all ages. ~ SPC

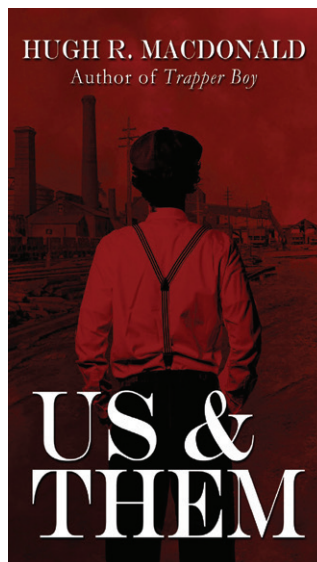
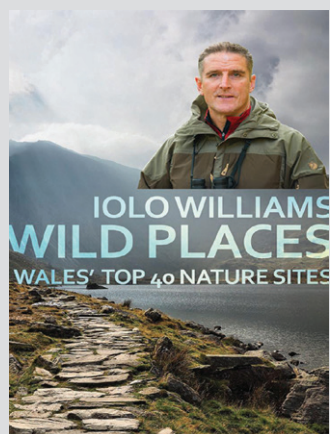
Wild Places: Wales' Top 40 Nature Sites

By Iolo Williams

Seren Books / 192 pp / £19.99

Wales is the hidden gem of the seven Celtic nations, and the country's western coastline might be the most beautiful landscape in all of Europe. Welsh naturalist and television host Iolo Williams has the inside track on where to go and what to see while you are there. Alongside stunning, hi-res photographs of Cemlyn on Anglesey, the Newport Wetlands, Stackpole, the Dee Estuary, Skomer Island and more, the author offers up geographical data, including details on local wildlife, flora and fauna. History and tidbits of trivia are also on account, as are his concerns for ever-present environmental issues. Thankfully, Williams doesn't overdo the science here, keeping a clean and clear aesthetic for everyday audiences, leaving just enough to the reader's imagination to inspire a visit.

~ SPC



Us and Them

By Hugh R. MacDonald

Cape Breton University Press / 160 pp / \$11.99

Though a mere 160 pages, Hugh R. MacDonald's terrific tale of one young man coming of age in the coal mines of 1920s Cape Breton punches well above its weight. Following a fatal mine accident, 16-year-old JW Donaldson begins questioning both his company's practices and the industry's impossible working conditions. Before long, he recruits the help of a local union man in an effort to effect change. And while resistance from the public and private sectors proves strong, as is the concern from his family and friends, Donaldson prevails. Though listed as a novel for Young Adults, *Us and Them* is a vital read for anyone interested in Nova Scotia's long and troubled labour history, and the power of the individual to make a difference. ~ SPC

Before the Dawn

By Gerry Adams

O'Brien Press / 352 pp / €19.99

Originally published in 1996, Adams' autobiography has been recently revised to include both a new introduction and updated epilogue to chronicle the massive changes that have taken place in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday Peace Accord in 1998. Given this year's surprising election results in Ulster, and the fallout from last year's Brexit vote, the work might be more relevant than ever, especially as Adams prepares to reposition himself in the region's political puzzle. Born in West Belfast, the author details his years of social community activism. Most compelling, however, is his perspective on the region's divisive culture and ensuing Troubles, and what it will take today to heal the wounds of the past, and keep the peace for the future.

~ SPC





Imelda May

Life. Love. Flesh. Blood

Conjuring up the ghosts of Patsy Cline, Etta James - and even Amy Winehouse - Imelda May digs deep with her fifth studio recording *Life. Love. Flesh. Blood*. Stepping away from the swagger of her rockabilly roots, the Dublin singer smoothly wades into Blue Eyed Soul waters on the debut single, *Call Me*. Later, she ups the ante with *How Bad Can a Good Girl Be*, before bringing the house down in grand style with *When It's My Time*, *Leave Me Lonely* and *Game Changer*. *The Girl I Used To Be* is a gorgeous and gentle jaunt down memory lane, while *Black Tears* lives up to its name. Although not without its flaws, this recording has far more hits than misses. Do yourself the favour. ~ SPC

Sharon Shannon

Sacred Earth

With her tenth studio recording, and her first new release in three years, Irish accordion aficionado Sharon Shannon high-steps with confidence into new sonic territory. While still rooted in traditional scales and melodies from the Emerald Isle, the enigmatic artist incorporates African and Middle Eastern styles into *Sacred Earth* - thanks in part to the influence of producer (and Robert Plant guitarist) Justin Adams - creating a refreshingly unique musical hybrid. Listen closely and you will hear hints of Acadian and Zydeco as well. Standout tracks include *The Machine*, *Bas Pelles*, *The Merry Widow*, and *Let's Go*, which is tinged with a touch of torch and twang. Fun and festive, the album makes the perfect soundtrack for an old-school, Friday night kitchen party or ceilidh. ~ SPC



Orla Fallon

Sweet By and By

Irish singer and harpist Orla Fallon stays true to form with *Sweet By and By* - a strong and soothing selection of classic and contemporary mid-tempo tunes and ballads. Easy on the ears, the dozen down-home ditties showcase both Fallon's penchant for a good melody and her unmistakable gifts as a musician and arranger. Backed only by bass, violin and two side-vocalists, the Dublin-based singer is wise to let the songs stand by themselves and shine through of their own accord. Highlights here include *Five Hundred Miles*, *Remember Me*, *Sunny*, and the soulful *Hard Times Come Again No More*. Fans of *Celtic Woman* (of which Fallon was a founding member), *Clannad* and *Enya* will enjoy putting their feet up to this album at day's end. ~ SPC

Flatfoot 56

Odd Boat

Chicago's finest Celt-Punk band Flatfoot 56 roars out of the gate on their latest release *Odd Boat*, rarely relenting over twelve terrific tunes. From the opening salvos of *Ty Cobb*, to the closing chorus of *A Voice*, the high-octane quintet only let up once with a lovely lilt called *KPM*. The foot is to the floor everywhere else however, with the searing *Stutter*, *Curtains*, and *The Trap* sure to test the limits of all sizes of speakers. The title track might be the best thing the group has ever done, putting them on par with their peers *The Dropkick Murphys* and *Flogging Molly*. These guys cut their teeth gigging the Windy City's rough 'n' tumble Irish pub circuit, so you know they're the real deal. ~ SPC



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José Ángel Hevia Velasco

*A true hybrid,
piper José Ángel
Hevia Velasco
fuses tradition and
innovation into a
sound all his own...*

José Ángel Hevia Velasco – known simply to his fans as Hevia – has been playing the pipes since he was a boy growing up in the small Spanish town of Villaviciosa.

The Asturian musician – who currently resides in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic – was raised in a musically inclined family: his maternal grandfather was a miner who sang in tonada (a traditional folk music style of Asturias and other Spanish regions), and the family regularly attended local and area festivals where melodies flowed.

Velasco became enthralled with the bagpipes at the age of four, after hearing a player at one of these gatherings. He says that not much has changed since he first picked up the pipes as an 11-year-old.

“Today the bagpipes might be my full-time profession, but the occasions when I truly enjoy the instrument are those in which I feel the same as I did almost 40 years ago. A cool summer afternoon in Asturias, with the family, a few bottles of cider, a couple of songs with my sister on drums...that is what I was looking for in the bagpipes when I was little, and it is what still makes me happy today.”

His sister, Maria José, would play an important part in his musical life for years, accompanying him on percussion. At the start of their career, the pair won the National Contest of the Spanish Ministry of Culture for young traditional music performers. As a result, they recorded Hevia’s first album in 1991. Later, they won the first prize for duets in the Festival of Saint Chartier in France.

“We still have many fine moments today where we play bagpipes and drums in the traditional way of Asturias.”

Despite the duo’s drive to keep their cultural heritage alive and well, Velasco doesn’t see a conflict between tradition and innovation in music. In 1994, he teamed up with engineer Alberto Arias and computer specialist Miguel Dopico to invent electronic bagpipes, which he describes as “a device that allows us to communicate with the computer to play the internal sounds of it with the fingering of a bagpiper.” The trio call their creation e-bagpipes, or MIDI pipes.

“When I moved to Madrid I learned to record and process the sounds of bagpipes in a professional studio. Soon the MIDI pipes became a very powerful tool in my creative process; I could play in any key, with the sound of any pipes found around the world – Asturian bagpipes, Highland bagpipes, uilleann pipes, biníou, and others. And I could also include the MIDI pipes in electronic contexts, which would have been very difficult to do with acoustic pipes.”

On Hevia’s albums, his new and unique pipes coexist with other contemporary electronic instruments; bass guitars, drums, keyboards and more.

“Still,” he insists, “that does not stop me from playing the pipes in the traditional way when I want.”

In recent years, Velasco and his band

have toured dozens of countries, including Israel and Japan. Having performed worldwide, he is always amazed to see that music with such a specific origin is so universally well-received.

“Celtic music is a genre with a specialized audience in many parts of the world.”

And while that audience response is always positive, he notes that it can look different depending on the place. “In Japan, for example, the public listens to your performance with an attitude of respect, almost in reverence. They do not change their expression or move a single hand. But when the concert is over, they can stand and clap for ten minutes.”

In the coming year, Hevia will continue touring, as he prepares for a new recording that will blend Celtic and Latin music into a fresh sonic hybrid. For him, it has been exciting to follow the trail of innovative musicians that came before him.

“Salsa, merengue, bachata, son, tango – these are all genres that might seem somewhat strange for a piper. However, the old emigrant pipers in Buenos Aires, Mexico and Havana continued to play their instruments there, interpreting not only the music they brought from Asturias, but also incorporating the living repertoires of where they live.”

www.hevia.es



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Jeanne Freeman

Jeanne Freeman first picked up the violin as a child, but it wasn't until later that she began playing Irish fiddle style...

Jeanne Freeman's interest in the fiddle was first piqued during an Irish music session led by Donegal-born fiddler P.V. O'Donnell, who was then living in Connecticut.

Freeman already had years of experience in classical music, and had some early American fiddle in her repertoire. Still, she realized "that to understand the style and nuances" of the Irish fiddle, she "needed more intensive instruction." She began studying with O'Donnell soon after.

"It's harder than you might think to make the transition from classical to Irish," she shares via email. "I learned so much from him about bowing, phrasing, rhythm, the music in general. It was all taught by ear, tune by tune, and that was a new and welcome experience for me."

Though O'Donnell passed away six years ago, Freeman says her late mentor often crosses her mind. Over hundreds of sessions together, the two made many memories and became close friends.

"He taught me so much and I am forever grateful for the gift of music he shared."

Freeman shifted from student to teacher, hosting a weekly traditional Irish music session in Hartford. She also founded the Connecticut Academy of Irish Music in 2013, where she is still acting director.

"As I got further into Irish music, I often wished I'd had a chance to find it when I was younger."

Growing up in New Jersey, there was little, if any, traditional Irish music presence.

"I began wondering how young people here in Hartford would find it. Also, I noticed some years ago that most sessions involved few, if any, young players and I wondered who would be playing the music and leading the sessions in 20, 30, or 40 years. It seemed important to cultivate a younger generation."

Larger metropolitan areas such as Boston or New York weren't lacking music communities and schools, but Freeman saw the need for such a thing in Connecticut. She spoke with fellow musician John Whelan about the idea, and he jumped at the opportunity. So far, the response to the academy has been excellent.

"The hope is especially to welcome and foster younger players so they can discover their own love of Irish music, make connections with other young people, have fun, and carry the tradition forward," says Freeman.

She adds, however, that the school teaches students of all ages and skill levels, both through group or private lessons. The key, she continues, is to teach players "how to practice."

"I believe the teacher doesn't make you better, that you make yourself better by practicing properly - but it's the teacher's job to point you in the right direction."

"It's easy to tell someone they are out of tune, or their rolls or triplets are off, but unless you show them how to correct it and what to listen for in their own practice, you haven't really helped them. A lot of it involves breaking everything down into the smallest parts and tackling each one separately. I teach almost entirely by ear, although reading music is an important skill, so I help with that if needed."

Freeman also hones in on the basic mechanics of playing the fiddle, and spends a lot of time helping students with their bow techniques. This includes "bow placement, pressure, length of the bow stroke, where and how to attack a note, add slurs, and create good rhythm."

When it comes to playing airs — a type of melodic composition — bow technique is particularly important.

"One of my most rewarding moments as a teacher came last summer when a student qualified for, and competed in, the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil on slow airs — a lot goes into playing them well and I was very proud of her."

However, there is something that she believes is even more important than technique: the psychological component to teaching. Every student brings something different to their playing, and recognizing that is crucial.

"You need to try to understand where are they in their playing and in their life, why are they doing this, what fiddle habits have they fallen into that are working against them, and how do you help them improve."

"You get to know each as an individual and it becomes a privilege to be on their musical journey with them."

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Branislav Milojković

For Serbian Branislav Milojković, Irish dancing began as an intense, solitary pursuit

“I remember that, at first, performing in public was completely out of the question,” shares Irish dancer and teacher Branislav Milojković from his home in Belgrade, adding that he is, by nature, an introvert. “I wanted to learn dancing only for my own pleasure and enjoyment.”

First introduced to Irish dance via television, the 29-year-old was later inspired by Riverdance and Lord of the Dance. Irish dancing, however, was not exactly mainstream entertainment in his small central Serbian town, and it was not until he moved to the country’s capital city eight years ago that he had the opportunity to pursue his passion.

Milojković immediately joined Belgrade’s Erin’s Fiddle, a school of Irish dance where he now teaches. It wasn’t long before he began to emerge from his shell.

“As time went by, and I started to go to feiseanna and as we performed for audiences in Serbia, I began to appreciate the connection with the audience much more.”

Initially, all the dancers at Erin’s Fiddle were self-taught. Eventually, the group learned their competitive dance technique and steps from Harald and Ursula Habermayer of the Irish Dance Centre in Vienna.

Milojković also credits dancer Shane McAvinchey, a Riverdance veteran who operates a dance school in Germany, with influencing his technique and execution.

“Another big influence was my brother, Aleksandar, who basically dragged me into improvising, which opened me up to making my own steps and ultimately finding my own sense of expression.”

It was British dancer Colin Dunne’s style and execution, however, which appealed to Milojković the most. He notes that it was the show - Dunne’s Dancing on Dangerous Ground - that changed his overall perception of how the traditional art should be properly performed.

Over time, the career highlights started to pile up.

“Competing in the Mainland European Championships in 2015 and 2016, and performing solo parts in my school’s productions in Belgrade were definitely some of the most challenging and rewarding things I have done,” he explains.

A favourite moment came in performing a version of Thunderstorm from Riverdance at the 2016 Mainland European Oireachtas, alongside 13 other dancers from around Europe - a presentation conceived and produced by Harald Habermayer.

Milojkovic feels his approach to dance is fairly traditional, but allows that more contemporary elements now seep in, thanks to the growing popularity of modern Irish music in Belgrade.

“During the 1990s a local band called Orthodox Celts gained a lot of popularity and that is probably the main connection people here have with Irish and Celtic culture. The Celts were different from anything people here would normally hear, and there was just an amazing positive energy in their sound that resonated with audiences.”

Belgrade hosts a two-week long Irish festival each year, during which Irish films are screened and there are performances by Irish musicians and dancers. Jean Butler of Riverdance fame once danced and conducted a workshop at the event.

“Serbia doesn’t really have an Irish Diaspora so dance is perceived mostly as an exotic pastime by the general public.”

Erin’s Fiddle, he notes, was born of a love for Irish dance.

“The first teachers wanted a place where they could learn and perform, as well as teach it openly to anyone who was interested. When I first came, it was their warmth and friendliness that really drew me in.”

Today the school attracts young children and adults, many of whom already have a passion for dance.

“A lot of people here don’t really know what Irish dance is, and what it is like to practice. It is amazing to see their energy at class.”

The school adds a social component by hosting themed evenings and staging performances in different cities.

“We are always going to feiseanna and workshops so we travel abroad. It is a lot of fun.”

Milojkovic continues to keep an eye on Irish dance activities across other parts of Europe, monitoring new opportunities for his own students.

“The younger dancers, especially, want to catch up to the dancers from Ireland so badly, and it is just great to witness that.”

Competition and performance aside, dancing for his own enjoyment still appeals to Milojkovic who works tirelessly at choreography.

“Making the movement and the beat flow naturally with the music is probably the most fulfilling part of my entire dancing life. Right now, I’m interested in using different kinds of percussion on stage, and combining that with Irish dancing steps.”

www.erinsfiddle.com





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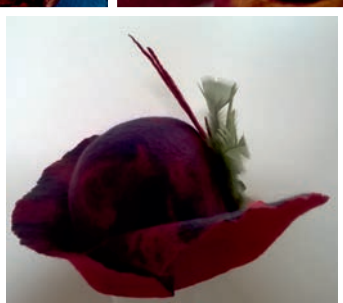
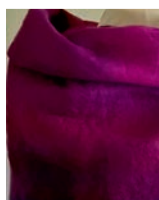
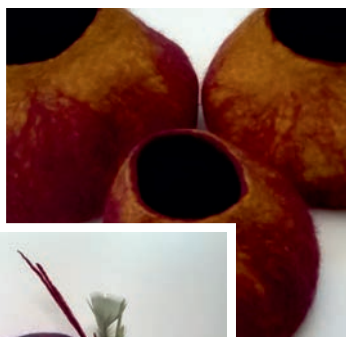
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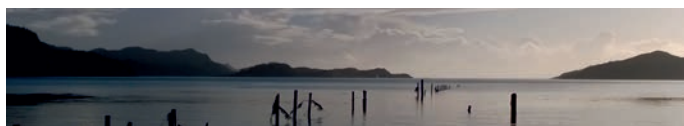
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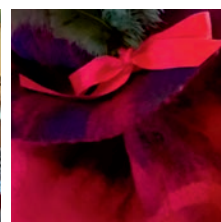
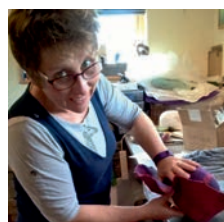
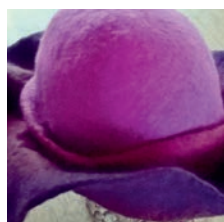
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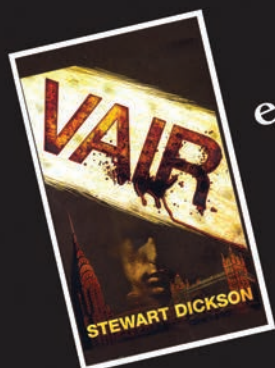
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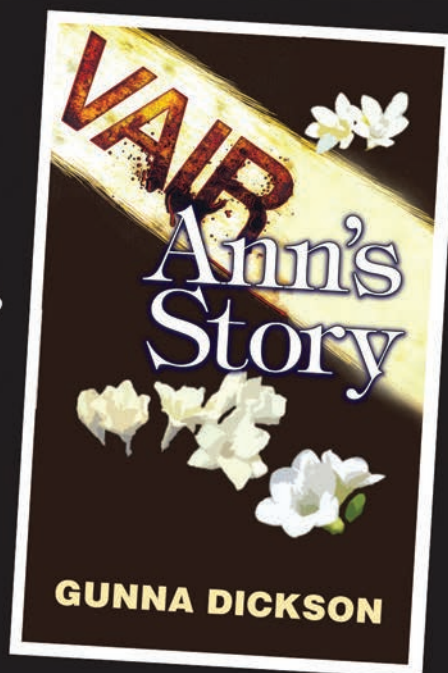
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Author Gunna Dickson is a New York based writer, editor and translator. Illustrator and fine artist Jon McIntosh lives and works in Key West.

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Chief of Name and Arms of Currie



- Call for Representatives -

**Family Convention to be held at the Trades Hall of
Glasgow, Scotland on 15 August 2017 at 2:00 PM**

The Clan Currie Society seeks to facilitate the formal recognition of a Chief of Name and Arms of Currie by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. Having an armigerous Chief, Currie would then be constituted and regarded as a learned family in its own right.

The Convention will be held under the supervision of Liam Devlin, Unicorn Pursuivant, as the appointed Supervising Officer and representative of the Lord Lyon.

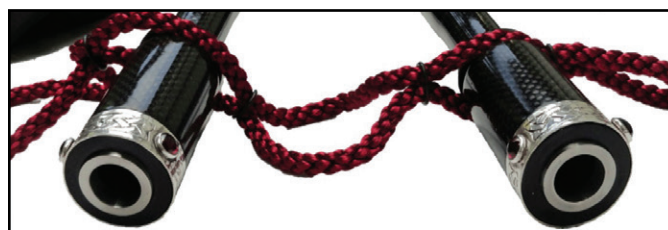
Those wishing to be considered as interim Commander, chosen at a Family Convention as above, should request fuller information from the Chaplain of the Clan Currie Society, the Revd. Dr. David A. Currie: currieconvention@gmail.com



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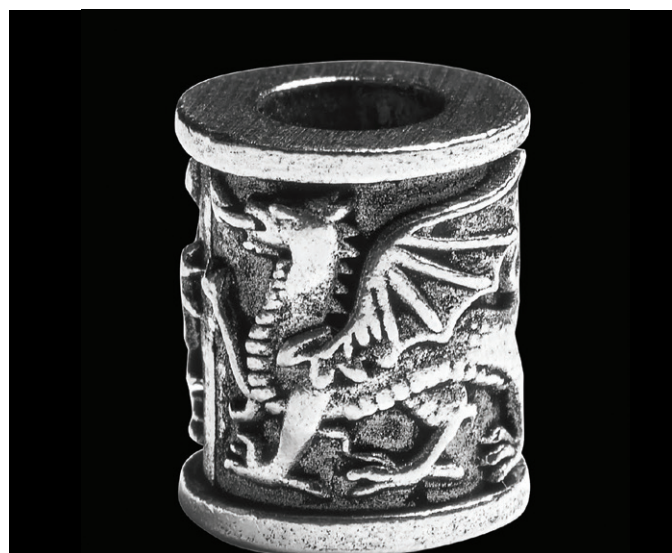


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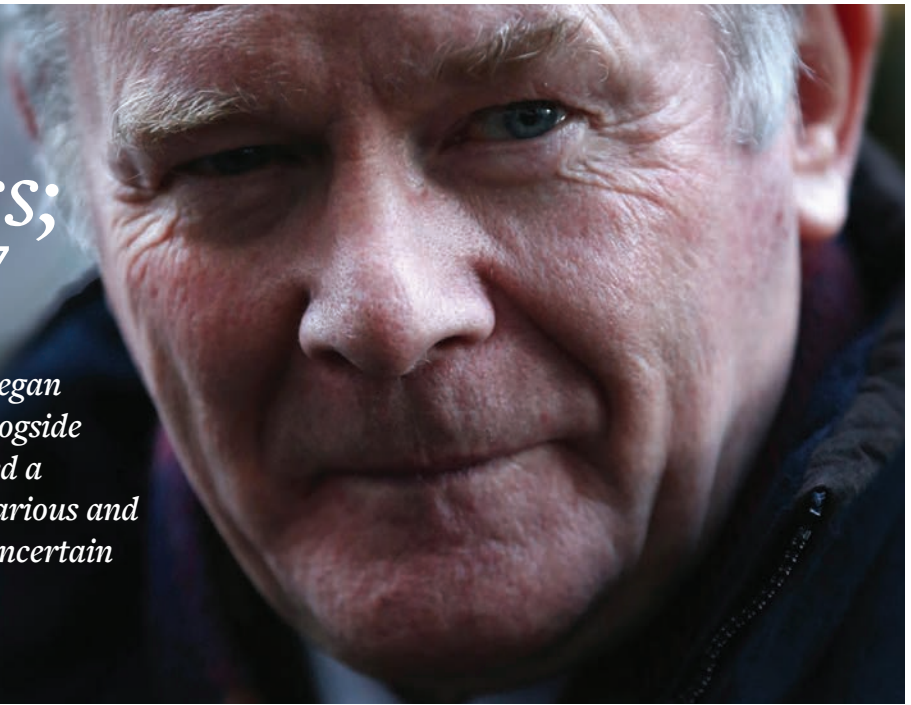
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Martin McGuinness; 1950-2017

Derry's Martin McGuinness began and ended his journey in his Bogside neighborhood, where he walked a political tightrope across precarious and uncharted ground to win an uncertain peace for Northern Ireland.



A former IRA chief who resigned just months ago as the country's deputy First Minister, McGuinness, 66, was a master risk-taker who is being remembered as the lynchpin in his country's peace process and subsequent power-sharing government. A husband, father, grandfather and avid church-goer, he loved to play chess and fly fish.

As a teenager, McGuinness was apprenticed to a butcher before manning barricades in his Catholic neighborhood, quickly rising to the top ranks of the Irish Republican Army. At 22, he was part of a small IRA delegation flown secretly to London for unsuccessful political negotiations. A year later he was jailed, having been stopped in a car carrying explosives and ammunition.

Perhaps no one in the North seemed less likely to befriend the firebrand Democratic Unionist Party head and Protestant preacher, Ian Paisley, who once called Catholics "vermin," and decried the pope as being "the anti-Christ." Nor was anyone less predisposed to shake the hand of the reigning British sovereign when she came to Belfast. Yet, McGuinness managed to do both with strikingly good grace.

In the case of Paisley, IrishCentral.com claimed only McGuinness had the skill "to cross such a massive political divide." As for shaking Queen Elizabeth's hand, Fintan O'Toole, a veteran editor with the Irish Times, called it a moment of historic significance, once unimaginable.

"It was a pointed, deliberate and symbolic way of offering the hand of friendship to Unionists through the person of Queen Elizabeth, for whom many Unionists have a great affinity."

David Trimble, a former First Minister who acknowledged that Northern Ireland was "a cold house for Catholics," wrote a last letter to McGuinness crediting him with reaching out to the Unionist community "in a way that some of them were reluctant to reach out to you."

When McGuinness died in March of a rare heart ailment, Martin O'Muilleoir - a Sinn Féin MP and former Lord Mayor of Belfast - referred to him as "our North Star."

"We admired him as a comrade and a leader, but that wasn't even the half of it. We loved him. In turn, he believed that love would conquer all. Indeed, he went on to prove that as the pre-eminent peacemaker of his time, befriending, in particular, opponents who knew what it was like to have been in the trenches."

Former US senator George Mitchell, who brokered the agonizingly difficult peace process, remembered McGuinness as a courageous leader.

"Martin took his people from conflict to peace, from violence to democratic means... resolving differences through ballots, not bullets."

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams, who walked shoulder to shoulder with McGuinness since first meeting him behind the Derry barricades, said that his longtime friend and colleague worked for a united Ireland, and freedom, respect and equality for all. He also defended him as an IRA soldier, pointing out, "He didn't go to war, it came to him."

Referring to McGuinness' IRA past, Ian Paisley Jr., a DUP MP, suggested "it is not how a person's journey begins, but how it ends that counts most."

Another former DUP leader who maintained a close relationship, Peter Robinson, noted that McGuinness' commitment to peace was genuine, and not merely strategic.

"Yet, while I knew his past and he knew mine, we never doubted or gave up our shared commitment to create a new and better era in Northern Ireland politics."

The Irish Times' O'Toole believed McGuinness' past was critical to the success of the peace accord.

"If he were not a ruthless and unrepentant exponent of violence, he would never have become such a key figure in bringing violence to an end."

Some were not as forgiving. British Lord Norman Tebbit - whose wife was paralyzed in an IRA bombing in 1984 - had no kind words for McGuinness, wishing only that, "he be parked in a particularly unpleasant corner of hell."

Belfast Telegraph columnist Eoghan Harris condemned the "canonization" of McGuinness, calling the coverage of his death "an orgy of nationalist necrophilia." Similarly, Daily Mail columnist Ruth Dudley Edwards denounced "the butcher of Bogside" as a "mass murdering thug" who entered into the peace process only to save himself from prosecution for murder.

Despite the division, twenty-five thousand people lined the streets of Derry on March 23, as McGuinness' coffin - draped in the Irish tri-colour - was carried first to St. Columba's Church, and then onward to a Republican cemetery. En route, a lone piper captured hopes for both the man and the city he loved so dearly with a heartfelt *Hard Times Come Again No More*.



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