

Boston Irish

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RECALLING JUNE 16, 1904



John Shevlin as James Joyce serves a Traditional Breakfast, part of Dublin's Bloomsday Festival 2023.

Tourism Ireland photo

Boston Playwrights' Theatre hosts Bloomsday 2023 event

Boston's Bloomsday 2023, a celebration of the work of James Joyce is set for Fri., June 16, from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 pm at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, 949 Commonwealth Ave, on Boston University's West Campus. Tickets for the performance, by The Here Comes Everybody Players, are complimentary,

with a post-show reception hosted by the Irish Consulate General.

The event, directed by Steve Dooner and Cathal Stephens, will feature Ryan Barker, Katie Beckvold, John Brownlie, Brittany Daley, Steve Dooner, Donal O'Sullivan, and Cathal Stephens, with a literary introduction by the Joyce scholar

Katherine O'Callaghan and music by Linda Papatopoli (piano) and Tony Keegan (percussions).

Joyce's extraordinary and perennially controversial novel "Ulysses," now over 100 years old, follows the structure of Homer's Odyssey in recounting the fictional thoughts, words, and actions

of a number of Dubliners as they went about their business on a single day, June 16, 1904. Among them are the three main characters: Stephen Dedalus, Molly Bloom, and her husband, Leopold. The Blooms give their name to the day - Bloomsday.

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Boston Irish
HONORS
13TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON



Save the Date

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2023

11:30 AM | Seaport Boston Hotel

Boston, Massachusetts

Cops for Kids with Cancer hits \$5 million mark in gifts to youth

By ED FORRY
BOSTON IRISH PUBLISHER

Cops for Kids with Cancer came to the aid of a seven-year-old Roslindale boy with cancer this spring by presenting the boy's family with \$5,000 and a variety of other gifts.

Boston Police Commissioner Michael Cox, retired Chief Robert Faherty, retired Captain Maura Flynn, and officers joined in the event at the District E-5 station(Roslindale/West Roxbury).

"He has a smile that lights up the room, and our officers can't wait to see him again," the officers said, while feting him and his family with lunch and a tour of the house.

The organization, which was formed some two decades ago by the late BPD Captain John Dow, has over the years assisted thousands of families as they have steered their way through cancer treatments for their children.

This latest presentation marks an impressive milestone: CFKWC has raised and donated \$5 million in grants to families who have a child living with cancer.

Chief Faherty, chairman emeritus, was a longtime friend of Dow's and has served on the charity's board since its inception. In a recent interview with the *Boston Irish Magazine*, he spoke about the charity's goals.

"Well, it started basically in 2002. and we meet once a month at the Boston Police Patrolman's Union Hall," he said. "They give us a space upstairs where we can fit enough people. The board consists of about 26 members, including current and retired police officers and some civilians. "The mission of the CFKWC basically is to give support to families that have a child with cancer," Faherty said. "We know what the families have to go through; often, it's just a mother. It's amazing how many men bail out on their families when something like this happens. It's terrible. "We have a process that we go through. We ask people if you know a child with cancer, and they're having a hard time, let us know and we'll send you the forms. They're very simple and someone at the hospital can help make it out, and they get it back to us.

"We give them a \$5,000 donation, no strings attached. They can do whatever they want with it,

you know, it's their money.

"And a lot of people that have a child with cancer are really hurting because, like I say, a lot of times a lot of fathers aren't involved in it. Just the mother and she's trying to keep her family at home safe. You know, these kids, when you see them and make the donation, they break your heart. But you can't keep that all inside you."

In addition to financial support, the program has sponsored special outings for the children, and many time brought them aboard the Boston Police boat on Boston Harbor. "The only problem was with Covid, you couldn't do it," Faherty says. "And we were just getting through Covid and that police boat sank. So, the Boston Police Department's going to have to buy another one. When they get a new police boat, we'll go back doing that.

"The families really enjoyed that, going out on the ocean on a nice day, and taking the kids all around the harbor and the different islands. And we finished up at the Constitution, where the cannon would boom out. The kids used to love that. We scared them a little bit; we had to tell them they're going to shoot the cannon off.

"We give the hospitals money too, to take the kids out when there's like a circus in town, with the ones that are healthy enough to do that, you know, or take them to a movie or take them to see the Ice Capades, things like that."

How many families would he say have been helped over these years? "Oh my God, thousands," Faherty said.

"John Dow himself was a cancer survivor, right? Well, it killed him in the end. In his younger days when he was a police officer, he got throat cancer. And he survived that. That's why he always talked with a hoarse. "As a grown man going through it, he knew it was a terrible time. He couldn't imagine what it did to children going through cancer because he went through it as a grown man. He knew the pain and suffering that goes along with it. He couldn't fathom what the poor children were going through."

To make donations or seek CFKWC assistance, visit copsforkidswithcancer.org.



Retired Boston Police Chief Robert Faherty and volunteers from Cops for Kids with Cancer presented 7 year old Royal and his mother with \$5,000 and various gifts. The April 26 gifts mark \$5 million in grants made to assist families who have a child diagnosed with cancer. Below, The Cops for Kids with Cancer program was conceived by the late Boston Police Captain John Dow and his wife, Joan Dow.



Off the Bench

Meditation: About the yearning that faith keeps alive

By JAMES W. DOLAN
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Is my yearning for something better than what I see around me just an indication of my fretful human nature? Or am I being pulled by a force that draws me toward a destiny beyond my own mortality? Is

it a dream or a promise?

True contentment is unattainable here. Fulfillment is beyond our reach. Why this feeling of disquiet and discontent even when things go well? Love, money, and power never satisfy. Something is always missing. It never is quite what we hoped it would be.

Is our inability to satisfy our own needs no matter how hard we try simply our lot as human beings or is it a message? Is hope a misplaced delusion or the gateway to faith? Faith is the affirmation of hope. It propels us to a belief in the unknowable. It provides a channel for our yearning. It directs us toward that distant yet attainable union with our source.

As the salmon is drawn back to its spawning grounds, so, too, are we drawn by some force beyond our understanding to whence we sprang. Our capacity to understand what draws us back may be like that of the salmon which only knows that it should return.

If the universe was produced by the "Big Bang," what caused that cataclysmic event, what was the space in which it occurred, and what was the matter that made it possible? What caused life even in its most elemental form? Where did atoms come from?

To suggest that existence is all a huge accident – that matter, the universe, life, evolution, and mankind are coincidences – is preposterous. We may not understand the intelligent design behind it all, but to conclude it was a fluke is to suspend judgment.

The salmon does not understand the ocean in which it swims or the river in which it was hatched and to which it returns to spawn. Like salmon, we swim in a larger sea but our understanding of the why and how of it, although on a higher plain, may be comparable to that of a fish trying to understand its own environment.

Having achieved belief, many people stop. They acknowledge the existence of an intelligent life force, a supreme being, or God, but are at a loss to know what to do about it. Offended by the excesses of organized religion, some struggle in trying to establish and maintain a relationship with it.

Faith serves to define the force. In so doing, it reduces that force to human terms that we can know, understand, and worship. It is an expression of our desire to know, love, and worship that created us and maintains us in existence – to establish a relationship with our creator.

To conclude that creation, the universe, and mankind just happened without rhyme or reason, to no purpose, is a leap of faith in the opposite direction. But sometimes the cruelty, evil, and sheer madness that are so much a part of human history makes one question the existence of a benevolent creator.

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Silence shouldn't be the price of peace

Patrick Radden Keefe, a Dorchester native and the best-selling author of "Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland," was invited to offer remarks at a ceremony at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland, on April 2 during an event marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement that brought about a ceasefire and a relative peace in Northern Ireland. Following is what he said:

I'm here on behalf of an uninvited guest: the Past. The Good Friday Agreement was a diplomatic miracle. But it was a forward-looking miracle. It was about turning the page and forging a better tomorrow. So, perhaps inevitably, it did not dwell much on the past. I say inevitably, because if what to do about the past had been on the table a quarter century ago, then we wouldn't all be here this evening. Because the negotiators could never have come to an agreement.

Who should be held accountable for a shared history of violence? Who should be prosecuted? Who should receive amnesty? What do you do when the state has colluded in violence? Should we hold the army and the police to a lower standard than the paramilitary groups – or to a higher one? What do you do when you don't know who killed your loved one? Or where he's buried? Or if she suffered before she died?

There was never any Truth and Reconciliation process in the North. No mechanism for getting to the bottom of what really happened over those three decades. Again, this should not be surprising: the conflict ended in a stalemate. I once asked a former



Patrick Radden Keefe, pictured during a nationally telecast program in Ireland about the Good Friday agreement.
Screen-capture from RTE telecast

Republican prisoner why there'd never been a truth process for the Troubles like there was in South Africa, and he smiled and said, "Because in South Africa there was a winner."

Is silence the price of peace? The peace has endured now for as long as the Troubles themselves. But the peace process still feels incomplete. It's a very chilly peace. I was in Belfast last weekend and sat with a man who lost a close relative to the violence. This happened fifty years ago. Before I was born. But to him it is still as raw and agonizing as if it happened yesterday. You've got a whole generation of people who are traumatized by what they experienced, and saw, and lost. And people don't

talk about it, for the most part. I wrote a book about the Troubles. It's called "Say Nothing." And when I do events in the North, a lot of the people who come up to talk with me after are young people who grew up in peacetime. Ceasefire babies. "My parents lived through all this," they tell me. "But they never talk about it." So, there's this younger generation that should be free of these pathologies. Free to move on. They should be the beneficiaries of the Good Friday Agreement. Yet they, too, are dogged by the past.

It's not just the victims, either. It's the perpetrators, too. A lot of people who joined the IRA did so for idealistic reasons. They wanted to see a United

Ireland. Then, in the name of that political aspiration, they did terrible things. Unspeakable things. They justified the bombings and the maimings and the shootings as means to an end. But when peace came, there was no victor. The island was still divided. And this left them wondering, if this was where we were going to end up, then why did I do those unspeakable things? If you never achieve the glorious end that was supposed to justify the awful means, then where does that leave you? We tend to talk about trauma as something experienced only by the victims of violence. But the perpetrators of violence experience a special trauma of their own.

We're here to celebrate, as we should, and none of what I'm saying is meant in any way to diminish the extraordinary achievement of Good Friday. But I don't think silence should be the price of peace. Or that it can be. A history of violence doesn't go away just because you choose to ignore it. Remember that line by William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

I don't pretend to have the answer, and any concrete proposal has proven to be controversial for one constituency or another. But I firmly believe there must be some mechanism for confronting what happened during the Troubles. Because without it, the past will continue to haunt the North. It'll haunt this island. And in a subtle way, it will form a dissonant, telltale heartbeat, faint but audible, beneath the music of daily life, and the merriment of commemorations like this.

Boston Playwrights' Theatre hosts Bloomsday 2023 event

(Continued from page 1)

Based on Joyce's experience as a young adult in early 20th century Dublin, "Ulysses" weaves together humor, tragedy, storytelling, the details of daily life, many literary styles, monologue, and stream of consciousness. Most of all it demonstrates Joyce's acute sense of humanity, history, and place.

After a century, this book is still celebrated worldwide each year on June 16. If you've read "Ulysses," you'll enjoy hearing some familiar themes and perhaps some you've forgotten at this event. If you've never read it, you'll enjoy how music and drama can bring it to life!

Tickets may be reserved at tinyurl.com/5n8d27nc

Meanwhile, in Dublin ...

The city is gearing up for its annual celebration of all things Joycean with the unique Bloomsday Festival the week of June 12-June 18.

With street performances, lectures, theatre, music, readings, workshops, walking tours, and food and drink events, the festival, brings to life the characters and places made famous in the book. These include Sweny's Chemist on Lincoln Place, Glasnevin Cemetery, and Davy Byrne's Pub on Duke Street, as well as the James Joyce Martello Tower in Sandycove along the coast of south County Dublin.

The tower, which features at the start of "Ulysses," houses a museum containing letters, photographs and some of the author's personal possessions.

This year's festival also includes a comic adaptation of the novel "Blooming Ulysses," and a daring theatrical journey into the mind and heart of James



Cast members of The Here Comes Everybody Players will perform in Boston's Bloomsday celebration June 16 at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, on the campus of Boston University.

Joyce's most sensual hero, Molly Bloom, in "Yes! Reflections of Molly Bloom."

There will be music performances by Irish folk music act Hibsen and "A Celebration of Love: Joycean Poetry & Songs" will take place in St Andrew's church. In a unique event, the bellringers of Christ Church will ring the actual bells that feature in "Ulysses."

Walking tours will introduce James Joyce's Dublin and follow the path of Leopold Bloom.

The James Joyce Centre has been the organizer of the Bloomsday Festival since 1994. The centre is open year-round providing exhibitions, courses, lectures and literary walking tours of Dublin.

[Ireland.com](https://ireland.com)

Biden and the Irish exchange expressions of affection

Every year Irish politicians joke that in America St. Patrick's Day lasts at least a week. This year, it seemed closer to two months. Ireland dominated the agenda of senior American policy makers in March and April with three, weeklong events: The annual St Patrick's pilgrimage of Irish political leaders to America; a four-day visit by President Biden to Ireland; and a politically star-studded 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement conference in Belfast. The year 2023 was the culmination of decades of effective Irish diplomacy and a signal of a profound realignment of American priorities.

St Patrick's Day (Week)

Celebrations in the US were highlighted by parades, breakfasts, concerts, and dinners in Boston, New York, Chicago, and Washington DC. Politicians, power brokers, investors, philanthropists, the "great and the good" from both countries, mingled and toasted each other in Hibernian goodwill. No other country of any size monopolizes the American political establishment like Ireland does in March, every March. After years of Covid restrictions, this was especially true in 2023. The week has become an entrenched American tradition in part because Ireland is one of the only issues that unites American politicians from both parties.

Joe Biden visits Ireland

The president's trip to Ireland was his longest out-of-country visit during his tenure to date, and his host was the smallest foreign country to welcome him. What makes this extraordinary investment of time even more stunning is that there were no pressing matters to discuss. Ireland and the US are in broad agreement on all of the major issues of the day: Ukraine, climate change, and the ongoing peace process. There was no G7 or NATO meeting scheduled with a side visit to Ireland added to the itinerary. JFK's Irish visit came after his historic speech to partitioned Berlin. Obama's less-than-24-hour-stay in Ireland was en route to a four-day state visit to the UK. This time, Joe Biden's sole mission was to visit Ireland – north, south, east, and west – in a heartfelt expression of affection, admiration, and wishes for the continued flourishing of the Irish-American relationship.

Support for the Good Friday Agreement on its 25th anniversary provided a good enough reason for the timing. Northern Ireland's devolved government is currently in limbo due to a DUP boycott of Stormont, but the president had just met with all of the Irish and Northern Irish leaders in D.C. The visit was not driven by a crisis but rather by Biden himself.

This was my first time witnessing a US presidential visit to a foreign country at close range and it is nothing short of a logistical marvel to behold. The week before the president's arrival there were signs of what was to come: a Chinook helicopter and Marine One practiced above our Dublin neighborhood.



A bright rainbow framed the background at a church in Ballina, Co. Mayo, just before President Biden delivered a nationally televised address to the Irish people on April 12.

Helicopters are still a rarity here and seeing the huge double-rotor variety circling above was impressive. A few minutes later, a friend in Louth sent a video of the helicopters landing at a GAA pitch in Cooley. Bulky, suited men with short haircuts and earpieces seemed to sprout around Dublin like dandelions in the spring.

Air Force One landed in Belfast on April 11 and the president was greeted by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Northern Ireland is still his country (at least for now), and protocol demands his presence at the arrival of a foreign head of state. A cavalcade of 50 vehicles accommodated the president, the secretary of state, support teams, and the press corps. A morning address at Ulster University was followed by a short flight to Dublin, where a duplicate motorcade awaited him. Lashing rain and wind canceled the helicopter ride to Louth in favor of a motorcade to visit Carlingford and a televised speech to family members in a Dundalk pub. Back in Dublin, Biden visited Ireland's beloved 81-year-old president, Michael D. Higgins, for embraces, storytelling, ringing the peace bell, planting a tree, quoting Irish poets, and admiring Higgins's magnificent dogs. A formal meeting with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and an address to a joint sitting of the Parliament were followed by a state dinner at Dublin Castle. Live TV coverage continued.

The next day, the president flew to Mayo where he started by visiting Knock Shrine, where he had a chance encounter with Fr. Frank O'Grady, who spent most of his clerical career as a chaplain in the US military before he was reassigned to Knock two years ago. Biden immediately recognized him – he had administered last rites to Beau Biden at Walter Reed Medical Center

in 2015 – and the president's emotional reaction was another example that in Ireland, the journey from tears to joy and back again can be a short one. As Biden said more than once on his trip: "That's the Irish in it," or as Patrick Kavanagh wrote: "You are as well as to sing sorrow as to cry it. The maxim, or whatever it was, worked both ways for here the people cry joy."

The president delivered a moving nationally televised outdoor address to throngs of admirers at the foot of a church built with bricks provided by one of his Blewitt ancestors in the 1820s. Prior to the speech, a spectacular rainbow framed the scene while The Chieftains sang their last-ever concert. Then, amid the cheers, a helicopter took the President back to Air Force One and he was gone as if it had all been a dream. Joe did not want to leave. Ireland did not want to let him go. The defining trauma of Irish history, the separation and loss of emigration, was played out in dramatic pantomime: The beloved son is forced to make the dreaded departure to America, with a tear in his eye and a promise to return.

The coverage of the visit on Irish TV, radio, and newspapers was wall-to-wall. Since the visit I have tried without success to imagine any visitor to the USA (alive or dead) who could positively transfix the attention of the American public. The Queen of England? The Dalai Lama? Abraham Lincoln? Elvis? I think not. The Irish, even the leaders of Irish political parties whose debates are often acrimonious, were nearly unanimous in their one hundred thousand welcomes, and their praise for the Irish-American relationship and President Biden.

**The Good Friday Agreement:
A conference celebrates 25 years**
Before the country could catch its

breath, a three-day event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement began. It was a privilege to attend the conference hosted by Queen's University Belfast and to hear the reflections of many of the key players in Irish, Irish American, Northern Irish, British, and European public life over the last fifty years.

Space does not permit a listing of all of the distinguished speakers and panelists who attended but a short list includes Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair, both Clintons, George Mitchell, Gerry Adams, Mary Robinson, Mary McAleese, Ursula von Der Leyen, Chief Protocol Negotiator Maros Sefcovic, Marylou McDonald, Michelle O'Neill, Naomi Long, Congressman Richie Neal, Joe Kennedy III, Ambassador Claire Cronin, Mark Durkan, Micheál Martin, Leo Varadkar, Rishi Sunak, Chris Heaton Harris, and Monica McWilliams among others.

Tributes to John Hume and David Trimble, speeches, panel discussions, and other contributions were inspiring. This was most true of Senator George Mitchell, who had not appeared in public for three years due to his ongoing treatment for leukemia. Now in his 90th year, Mitchell rallied to speak and to unveil a bronze bust in his likeness on campus. Even ailing President Jimmy Carter, whose interventions in the '70s started US Presidential involvement in Northern Irish affairs, made a final contribution by staying alive. His admission into hospice care just days before Biden's visit worried organizers that his imminent death might cancel the president's visit and/or the GFA Conference but, thank God, Jimmy hung in. The central theme of the conference was "Prosperity." Pressure on the DUP to return to power sharing was also gently but consistently

(Continued on page 6)

Of blots on a tolerant society, a memorable presidential visit – and the loss of a dedicated son of Boston and Galway

As I write, the proud veterans of the “Yes Equality” group, who campaigned to introduce same-sex marriage in Ireland by popular vote in a referendum held on May 22, 2015, are celebrating the anniversary of that historic triumph. The Irish people strongly endorsed the principle that civil marriage should be available to gay and lesbian couples.

Newspaper headlines around the world heralded a seismic result. Many commentators referred to the huge margin of victory as a repudiation of the Roman Catholic Church. As has been chronicled extensively, the church had exercised strict, uncompromising authority over nearly every facet of Irish life since the foundation of the State – for far too long, frankly.

The vote for marriage equality was followed three years later by a similarly emphatic win for pro-choice advocates who persuaded approximately two-thirds of the electorate that the 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which broadly prohibited abortion, should be repealed and a new, relatively liberal legal regime regulating the practice should take its place. Abundant thought pieces have followed, juxtaposing the conservative belief systems of a substantial cohort of Irish Americans with the prevalence of more tolerant thinking in the old country.

Recent events, however, suggest that the reality is more complicated than the oft-reiterated narrative. A disturbing video shot in the environs of a school in Navan, Co. Meath was circulated widely on social media. It showed a 14-year-old boy with dyed blue hair being savagely beaten by a mob of classmates. Whether the child is a member of the LGBT community or not, it is manifest that peers pummelled this young person repeatedly for one reason: Because he is different.

In inner city Dublin, a cluster of tents – where international protection seekers had been forced to live due to a vexed housing crisis discussed in this space previously – was set on fire by a mixed crowd of locals and hard right agitators from elsewhere. Fortunately, no one was killed or injured. Again, the images shared on social media platforms depicted dozens of angry men and women shouting nasty epithets and congratulating one another for “evicting” the newcomers in their midst.

It might be comforting to dismiss what happened in Navan as an isolated incident perpetrated by a handful of misguided boys who are going to learn a lesson from it. My own suspicion is that it is not, and that there are LGBT students throughout this island who endure physical bullying and other less obvious, though no less insidious, treatment on a daily basis.

Likewise, while I know that the vast majority unreservedly condemn the actions of those who torched rudimentary dwellings and meagre possessions on Dublin’s Sandwith Street, negativity and prejudicial attitudes toward those



Family album: Above, my Uncle Brian and Aunt Ginny smile for the cameras during his unsuccessful campaign for governor of Massachusetts in 1998. At right, the cover of my book showing Uncle Brian in a once-familiar role – walking a parade route and greeting the voters.

hoping to start a new life in Ireland are rife. Protests – area residents in Co. Clare actually formed a blockade and cut off access to a disused facility being used to house protection seekers – against them are depressingly common.

In short, yes, the Ireland of 2023 is generally a welcoming, forward thinking place when compared to the past. But what lies beneath the veneer is often darker. To quote a slogan once employed to good effect by the Fianna Fáil party: “A lot done, more to do.”

Gaffes, yes, but Biden visit was a tremendous success

Leaving aside, for a second, the nitty gritty of politics and the 2024 race for the White House currently kicking off in earnest, President Joe Biden’s recent visit “home” to Ireland was a tremendous success. Undeniably, there were a few gaffes.

His off-the-cuff, incorrect remark to distant cousin and ex-rugby star Rob Kearney about “having beaten the hell out of the Black and Tans” was one picked up by unfriendly politicians and journalists in the United Kingdom. Unionists really should not have been overly aggrieved. “Uncle Joe” has been unintentionally offending for decades!

What was unmistakable throughout the four days he spent in Belfast, Dublin, and his ancestral counties, Louth and

full days of his time in the 26 counties for RTÉ, the national broadcaster, both in studio and at Dublin Castle. It was an enjoyable experience.

At the personal level, the standout moments were seeing Air Force One land at Ireland West International Airport close to Knock, Co. Mayo, and then watching the president address a massive, boisterous crowd in the picturesque town of Ballina. As all of us who have roots in the west of Ireland would attest, Joe Biden might have been “home” beforehand, but he was truly “home home” after his plane made it west of the Shannon!

RIP to my Uncle Brian

Sadly, my uncle and godfather, Brian Donnelly, a man who loved the west of Ireland, and Galway in particular, almost as much as his native Dorchester, died on the 28th of February, just prior to his 77th birthday. A three-term state representative, a Congressman for 14 years, and the US Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago during the Clinton presidency, Uncle Brian was best known for creating the Donnelly Visa, which allowed tens of thousands of Irish people a chance to live the American Dream.

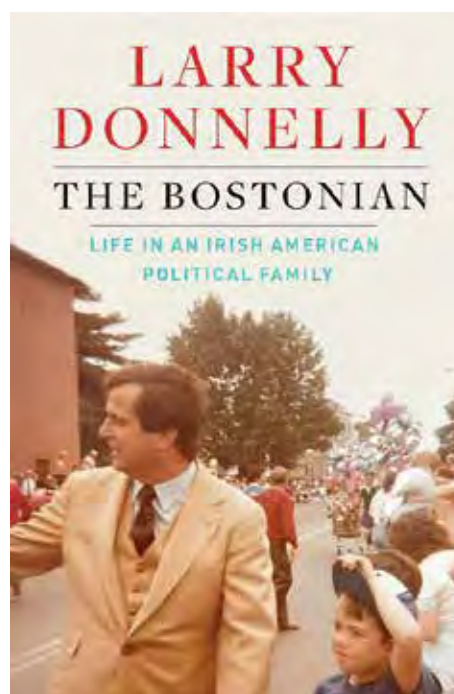
Plenty has been written and said in the media by prominent individuals on each side of the Atlantic since he passed away. The generous tributes have been a great comfort, especially to my Aunt Ginny and my cousins, Lauren and Brian. Even Howie Carr, no fan of Democratic politicians, opined in the *Boston Herald* that he “wasn’t a bad guy” – an observation I know Uncle Brian would have chuckled at wryly.

Yet what absolutely blew me away was the reaction of friends, neighbours, and acquaintances here in Wicklow Town. For weeks after the news of Uncle Brian’s death was announced, I was receiving sympathy cards and being approached on the street, after Mass, in the supermarket, at Wicklow Golf Club, and in the pub by well-wishers who wanted to convey their sympathies at the loss of a man whose extraordinary work on Ireland’s behalf they so appreciated and, in some instances, benefitted directly from.

A Donnelly Visa recipient put it best in a note to me some time ago: “Brian provided hope and a new life to many young Irish such as myself when opportunities in the economically depressed Ireland of the 1980s were very poor...perhaps you’d mention to him how thankful I am, and what an amazing gift he provided to us. I owe a wonderful life to him.”

May my Uncle Brian rest in peace.

Larry Donnelly is a Boston born and educated attorney, a Law Lecturer at the University of Galway and a media commentator on politics, current affairs and law in Ireland and the US. Twitter: @LarryPDonnelly



Mayo, was genuine mutual affection. Biden loves this place and its people and they loved him right back. It is too early to assess the significance of this trip.

Yet in time, I think, it could rank up there with JFK’s storied 1963 pilgrimage in the hearts and minds of those of us who revere the sacred bond between Ireland and the United States. Indeed, it may be sacrilege for a Massachusetts guy to say it, but Joe Biden’s commitment to, and understanding of, Irish affairs probably surpasses any of his predecessors, including President Kennedy.

I was lucky enough to have a front row seat for everything as I provided analysis on television and radio for the three

A Donnelly Visa transformed my life

By MARTIN MCGOVERN
SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH

I will always be indebted to the late Congressman Brian Donnelly. His initiative and legislative skill created a visa lottery program that helped me and around 25,000 other Irish people obtain permanent resident status in the United States followed by the option to petition for US citizenship after five years.

Prior to my Donnelly visa, for ten years, first as a student and then as a temporary resident alien (H-1 visa), I lived in immigration limbo with anxiety-inducing annual visa renewals. A deeply uncertain experience, it chipped away at my self-confidence and, at times, good judgment. Knowing that I had a secure future in America gave me a boost in confidence and direction — one that helped me make sound decisions about major life issues: marriage, career advancement, and saving for the future.

With Brian's recent death, my mind flashed back to November 1989 when I had just four months left on my final H-1 visa before it expired, which would leave me out of options for staying in the US. In a glum haze, I began deconstructing my decade-long American life while toying with a half-baked plan to make a short return to Ireland followed by a possible move to Australia to pursue a doctorate.

Amid the turmoil of that time, my mother called me from Dublin with promising news: The American Embassy had sent a notification to my



US Congressman Brian Donnelly and Irish-born US citizen Martin McGovern.

Irish address inviting me to apply for a Donnelly Visa! Instead of leaving the US at the end of February 1990 as planned, I would instead be in Dublin early that month for an appointment at the US Embassy regarding my application for an immigrant visa.

My initial reaction to this staggering turn around, however, was one of near disbelief. I kept asking my mother to re-read the information to me because success in the Donnelly Visa lottery had

stunned me.

On the one hand, I wanted to jump over the moon with joy. On the other hand, my "doubting Thomas" insecurities kept my mind racing through the next steps in the application process looking for possible bumps or obstacles.

In the run-up to the embassy appointment, one sentence in a dense two-page State Department form caught my eye: "No assurance can be given in advance that a visa will be issued."

The possibility of faltering at the final hurdle weighed heavily on me. In fact, I was a bundle of nerves, obsessively reviewing all aspects of the application — medical examination, documents, forms, duplicates, and photos.

On appointment day, however, everything went without a hitch. I arrived at the iconic circular embassy building in the Ballsbridge area of Dublin at 10 a.m. The meeting lasted less than an hour with a request that I return that afternoon to collect the approved forms guaranteeing my Donnelly Visa.

When I passed along the good news to family members, they erupted in a celebration of hugs and handshakes. The best I could do in response was ball my eyes out. With a huge weight off my shoulders, that night I slept my deepest sleep ever.

I met Congressman Donnelly twice — first at a meeting with Irish immigrants in his Quincy office, and later at Stonehill College when he received the President's Award for Excellence.

On both occasions, he was down-to-earth, unaffected, unassuming — admirable qualities and the measure of the man.

Both encounters mean a lot to me. The Stonehill one is special and not just because I worked at the college. Rather, I got to shake his hand in gratitude. He was a game changer for me. I am forever proud to be a Donnelly Visa recipient and a native-born Irishman who went on to become an American citizen.

Biden and the Irish exchange expressions of affection

(Continued from page 4)

applied. "Real leaders know when to say 'yes.'" stated Northern Ireland Secretary Heaton-Harris.

Three reasons why Ireland held the spotlight

The world is currently gripped by wars, crises, and catastrophes in Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, by economic headwinds, and by climate breakdown. Some question why tiny, peaceful, and prosperous Ireland was prioritized. There are multiple reasons. First, the Irish peace process stands out as a rare example of successful conflict resolution in recent history and shows that human beings and their governments have the capacity to make things better. After more than 20 years of war, President Biden is eager to return the USA to the role of peacemaker. Second, Brexit imperiled the peace in Ireland and the USA and EU are determined to bring prosperity to Northern Ireland to protect that peace. Third, Ireland has the largest global diaspora (80-100 million people) with 40 million Americans claiming Irish heritage. It was sound domestic politics for the president to be seen feted in Ireland before announcing his reelection bid.

The British press and political establishment were mystified and sometimes churlish over the lavish attention paid to Ireland. Like jilted lovers, some



Former US Sen. George Mitchell, who had not appeared in public for three years due to his ongoing treatment for leukemia, is now in his 90th year. He rallied to speak and to unveil a bronze bust in his likeness on the Queen's University Belfast campus.

conservative UK politicians were offended that Joe Biden chose not to attend King Charles's coronation. One DUP politician openly accused Biden of "hating the United Kingdom." In fairness to Biden, no US president has ever attended a coronation.

Special Relationship(s)?

The UK has acted as a bridge to Europe for American business leaders, policy makers, and military for generations. The "special relationship" was deepened by fighting two world wars together, but the context has shifted. Brexit has diminished the UK's economic and strategic importance. Long before Brexit, Ireland had emerged as a technology hub in Europe and a preferred destination for both US investment and strategic engagement. As the only English-speaking country in the EU, Ireland will play an ever-larger role in connecting America to Europe. At a practical level, beneath Ireland's waters lie most of the subsea fiber optic cables that link North America and Europe's economies. Russian military vessels, seen more frequently in Irish waters, are suspected of conducting reconnaissance for plans to cut the cables in a future conflict. In the age of cyberwarfare, Ireland is more strategically important and is not capable of defending these assets on its own.

Despite Ireland and the USA's economic, strategic, cultural, diplomatic and electoral importance to each other, close observers worry that radically reduced emigration to the USA will inevitably weaken links. I think the relationship will continue to evolve toward a friendship of equals and become even stronger. One example of the increasingly symbiotic relationship

is that 100,000 Americans work for Irish companies in the United States while 400,000 Irish work for American companies in Ireland. Investment goes both ways.

But there is a more fundamental reason that the bonds will long endure: love. When Joe Biden, Bruce Springsteen, Garth Brooks, George Mitchell, or Dolly Parton professes their love for Ireland, they are sincere. Irish people are less open with such emotions, but the feeling is mutual. Like all human relationships, the Irish-American friendship is complex. Each friend sees in the other qualities they wish they had in larger supply. The brash, optimistic, overconfidence of Americans and the self-effacing, fatalistic humility of the Irish are improved by each other.

Love is also accompanied by an unspoken desire for reciprocity. President Biden loves Ireland, but he also loves to be loved by Ireland. With Republican brinkmanship to the end on the debt ceiling and intransigence on gun control, who can blame him? In a similar way, the Irish value American approval: A moment of political arrival for any taoiseach is the shamrock bowl visit to the Oval Office in March, and before triumphant tours in the US turned them into stars back home, U2 was an opening act for Aslan, and the Cranberries were a little-known gig band. Maybe James Joyce had it right: "Love loves to love love."

Curley Center (aka L Street) opens doors to public for tours

By **BILL FORRY**
EDITOR

The doors of the Curley Community Center on Columbia Road in South Boston swung open to the public on June 9 for the first time in more than three years, welcoming residents eager to get their first look at the renovated beachfront amenity that has been completely modernized at a cost of \$31.2 million.

The facility will not be open for members to use until Thursday of this week, but Friday's open house featured tours led by staff members from the Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF). Boston residents can use the facility for free through September. After that, members must pay an annual fee that has not yet been set, according to city officials.

The beach along L Street, as the facility is often called, remains closed to the public through at least August. While members can sit outside on benches, fencing has been installed to protect birds known as piping plovers, which started nesting in the sand during the three-year period when the building was closed for construction. Because the species is considered a "threatened" population, city officials are waiting on state-level permits needed to reopen the facility, which first opened in 1931 as a bathhouse named for many-termed Boston Mayor James Michael Curley.

The most recent overhaul includes a fitness studio, a yoga and dance studio, space set aside for children, steam and sauna areas for men and women, separate areas for teens and seniors, a strength training area, and multi-purposes offices.

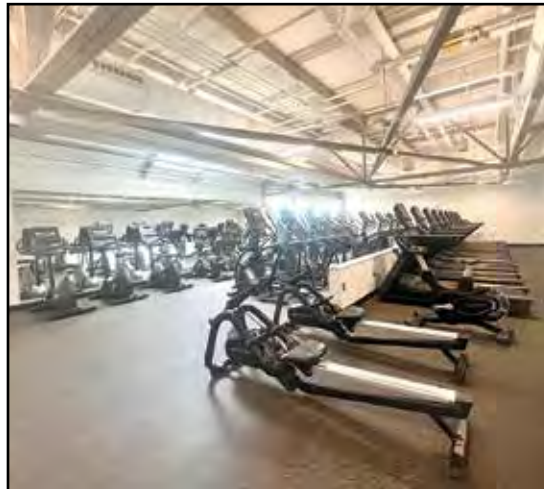
New windows that include airy, two-story skylights in the building's three main lobby areas have transformed the bunker-like old bathhouse into a bright and open space with spectacular views of Dorchester Bay, the JFK Library, and the Harbor Islands.

Edward McGuire, director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, and José Masso, the city's Chief of Human Services, were on hand on Friday to walk visitors through the facility, along with other BCYF staff.

McGuire, a South Boston resident, emphasized that although the facility is located in Southie, it's a citywide asset



The public was allowed its first glimpse into the renovated Curley Community Center on Columbia Road, above, on Friday, June 9. Below, inside features at the center. *Bill Forry photos*



that welcomes Bostonians from all 23 neighborhoods.

"We wanted to give people an opportunity to walk through the facility and check it out," McGuire said. "It's definitely drastically different from what it previously was. In the old building it was obviously, you know, segregated by sex. You couldn't walk continuously from one end to the other. And if it's your first time here, it's a little overwhelming. So, we thought that it would probably be best to just get people the opportunity to walk through because they've been looking at it for the last three years from the outside."

Masso said that the open house was also something of a celebration for residents.

"Folks have been waiting for this space, so to welcome people in at this moment in time in which they're able to see it for the first time and, and it takes everybody's breath away... It's been transformational. So, we want people to get a chance to not only get acclimated, but also to be able to celebrate."

One of the residents on hand for a first-look was Claire Lyons, who was accompanied by her granddaughter Madden, who will work with kids at the center this summer.

Lyons, a retired nurse who works with seniors to keep their blood pressure monitored, called the renovated building "a dream come true." Not having access to the Curley for three-plus years has "been tough," she said. "I'm working in senior housing doing blood pressure checks now and there's a woman in one of my buildings that's an actual L Street Brownie and she still swims. She cannot wait to get back in here. There's such a community here."

As for the finished project, Lyons said: "Oh, it's a hundred times more than I could ever have imagined."

The fitness center will offer instructor-led classes starting on June 20. There are facilities and dedicated rooms for children and teens inside, but it is not a "drop-off" facility. Parents and guardians must accompany minors.

Free tours will continue until June 14. On weekdays, the tours will be available once an hour, from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. Weekend tours will run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more info, see Boston.gov/BCYF-Curley.

Charitable Irish, Eire Society present awards



The Charitable Irish Society expressed their appreciation to Ireland’s Consul General Laoise Moore at the society’s annual St Patrick’s Day reception. Dr. Moore is scheduled soon to complete her term serving the Irish Dept of Foreign Affairs in Boston, and is expected to return to Ireland in August.



Pictured in the photos: Charitable Irish president Kathleen M. Williams with Consul General Moore; and (l-r): Mary Sugrue, Irish American Partnership; Hon. Maura Healey, Massachusetts Governor; Jim Brett, president, New England Council; and Msgr Liam Bergin, St. Brigid parish, South Boston.
Photos courtesy Bill McCormack



Kevin Cullen of Hingham was the honored recipient of the 2023 Gold Medal award from the Eire Society of Boston in an April 22 ceremony at Boston’s Seaport Hotel. Gold medalist Cullen was the Boston Globe’s Dublin bureau chief covering Northern Ireland for more than a quarter century and was the only full-time reporter for an American newspaper based in Ireland during the peace process that culminated in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. He is pictured with his wife Martha Cullen (photo at left) and with Eire Society president Ann Connolly Tolkoff (photo at right).
Photos courtesy Bill Brett



Eire Society’s Ann Connolly Tolkoff is re-elected to president’s chair

Ann Connolly Tolkoff was re-elected president of the Eire Society of Boston at its annual meeting on Sun., June 4, at Aisling Gallery in Hingham. Others re-elected as officers are Paul Doyle, vice president and Cathleen McGrail, recording secretary

Three new members were elected to the board: John Sulli-

van, Donal O’Sullivan, and Frank Waldron-Lynch. Re-elected as board members were Patrick Butler, Thomas Carty, Christian DuPont, Barbara Fitzgerald, Margaret Flagg, Brian Frykenberg, Mimi McNealy Langenderfer, Tadhg Malone, Paul Moran, Ronan Noone, Catherine Shannon, William J. Smith, and Margaret Stapleton.

**Regular updates every week
at bostonirish.com
Watch for the next print edition
of Boston Irish Magazine
on Monday, September 25**



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Dorchester’s Fiona Weir to represent Boston and New England at Ireland’s Rose of Tralee

BY UENDI BIBA
SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH

Fiona Weir, a nurse at Boston Medical Center and a resident of Dorchester was presented as the 2023 Rose of Tralee for Boston and New England at the Irish Cultural Centre of Boston on May 13. She was selected for the honor from a pool of 14 candidates by a panel of judges and will represent the Irish community in her home city and across the six-state region at the esteemed Rose of Tralee International Festival in Ireland’s County Kerry in late summer.

One of the three judges of the event summarized their deliberations this way: “We were impressed by every woman we spoke with today, and every one of them would have been a fabulous representative of Boston and New England in Ireland this summer. Our stand-out contestant was Fiona, whose connection to Ireland, commitment to compassionate care through her nursing job at BMC, and touching relationship with her grandmother won us over. She will be an outstanding contestant

at the International Festival, and we’ll be eagerly watching and hoping for her to bring the crown home.”

The 23-year-old Weir will travel to her grandparents’ home in August for the week-long festival, which is billed as a “global celebration of Irish culture.” Her participation in one of Ireland’s most celebrated events will feature her showcasing her Irish heritage through step dancing and sharing stories passed down to her by her grandmother, Roseleen Weir, who serves as her granddaughter’s biggest inspiration.

“I am so honored and excited to be able to represent the Boston Irish community in Tralee this summer,” Weir told the *Reporter*. “I have always wanted to join the Rose of Tralee [community], and after years of reading about the inspirational women who take part in the festivities, I decided it was something I, too, wanted to be a part of.”

Weir’s sense of her Irishness has a clearly drawn significance in her life. Her grandmother emigrated from Ireland’s Co. Leitrim and faced various

challenges upon arriving in Boston that she has shared with her granddaughter. Those deep roots drove Weir’s interests from a young age. She dedicated herself to fiddle lessons and Irish dancing that stirred her passion for Irish music, dance, and a sense of community over the years, which included time as a student at Boston Collegiate Charter School.

Her nursing responsibilities at BMC are focused on providing healthcare to the city’s homeless population, a segment of the city’s population that she knows well. During her high school years, she served for four years on former Mayor Martin Walsh’s Boston Youth Council.

Weir calls the backing of her neighbors in Adams Corner overwhelming. “My Dorchester community has shown an outpouring of support through positive messages, words of encouragement, and luck that makes me so excited to represent them,” she said. “From phone calls to taking pictures with neighbors, I know that heading over to Tralee in



Fiona Weir, right, with her grandmother Roseleen, who is a native of Co. Leitrim, Ireland.

Photo courtesy Weir family

the summer, I will have the best group of people rooting for me from just over 3,000 miles away.”

Her father, Sean Weir, describes the Rose of Tralee contest as a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” for someone like his daughter to represent Boston and New England.

“I sincerely hope that they have a truly enjoyable experience. I also hope that the overwhelming pressures that seem to exist these days, where everyone feels the weight of expectations and obligations, do not overshadow their ability to fully embrace this unique moment in their lives. This is a one-time opportunity. Enjoy it while you are present in it,” said Weir, who also expressed his gratitude to Dermot and Cindy Quinn from Greenhills Bakery for their support of Fiona’s quest.

For her part, Fiona hopes her experience will inspire women everywhere to seize their own opportunities. “You won’t know until you try, so just go for it!”

“Leading up to, and following, my time in Tralee, I hope to continue giving back to the Irish community by attending local benefit dances and participating in parades and other summer festivals. I aim to raise awareness and recognition for the Rose not only in Boston and New England, but also at a national level,” she said.



From left: Greenhills co-owner Dermot Quinn, Fiona Weir, and Sean Weir.

Photo courtesy Weir family



This year’s Boston Rose, Fiona Weir, and, at right, Tanya Stanley, 2019’s Boston Rose (pre-pandemic), surrounded by the 2023 candidates.



The Visa Waiver Program – an explanation

Q. A family member of mine in Ireland wants to come to the US for a short visit under the Visa Waiver Program. What does that mean?

A. Any person traveling to the United States must present proof that they are able to enter the country. For the purpose described above, a B-2 tourist visa would be the most appropriate method to enter the country. There is, however, another option for certain nationals that enables them to travel to the US for up to 90 days for tourist or business purposes without needing a visa: the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

For Irish citizens to qualify for the VWP, they must meet the following criteria. First, the person must be planning to pursue travel activities

permitted on a Visitor Visa (tourism, visiting family and friends, medical treatment, business conferences, contract negotiations, etc.). Second, the travel must possess valid authorization through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to departure.

If you have a valid ESTA, which lasts for two years, but get a new passport, change your name and/or your gender, and/or change your country of citizenship, then you must update your ESTA. Third, you need to have an e-passport – a passport with an embedded electronic chip for additional security – that expires at least six months after your intended departure from the U.S.

Although ESTA allows travel to a US port-of-entry, such as an international airport, this authorization does not guarantee admission. The individual will still need to be inspected and admitted by a Customs and Border Patrol officer.

There are two major differences between VWP and the common B-2 Visitor Visa: the ability to extend one's stay and to change one's status. Under VWP, a traveler *must* depart before 90 days and there is no way to prolong the trip. Similarly, a person cannot change status from VWP to another type of immigration status, e.g., student, while in the United States. That individual would need to leave the US, obtain the other status while abroad, and then

enter again under that new status.

Any qualified person can apply for ESTA online at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta>. The cost of the application is \$21. If a traveler would prefer to go through the US embassy to solicit a Visitor Visa instead of VWP, they are able to do so. More information about obtaining a visa from the US embassy in Ireland can be found at ie.usembassy.gov/visas/.

Disclaimer: These articles are published to inform the general public, not to advise in individual cases. All law, including immigration law, is always subject to change. If you seek legal advice you can contact Rian's immigration legal staff at 617-984-6542.

Only a few months into her visa, Aoife Corcoran describes her Rian J-1 experience as 'invaluable'



Aoife Corcoran wants to learn more about herself while away from home for the first time.

When Aoife Corcoran spoke to Rian staff about her time in the United States, she was only a couple months into her J-1 year. She was off to a great start and building the foundation for a fruitful year in the US.

Aoife's primary goal for her time in the United States is to build her independence. She sees this as her time to travel and learn more about herself while being away from her family and home for the first time. Of course, she is also looking to get hands-on work experience in her area of study.

Aoife is completing her third-year university placement in Providence, RI, working with a construction company. As a University of Limerick student studying construction management and engineering, the placement has already impacted what she plans to do for her career. Day to day, Aoife is in the office from 8-5, working as a professional and building connections

with coworkers while also experiencing cultural exchange.

When she spoke to Rian staff, it was getting dark around 5 p.m., her usual after-work time to relax, which she does by watching Netflix or hitting the gym. She traveled to the US with another University of Limerick student and is living with her friend and other students in a shared house, learning to live with others in a way she hasn't before.

At her internship, Aoife assists project managers on different job sites and conducts health and safety inspections on sites, an experience that has given her insight into health and safety regulations. The company she is interning at focuses on electrical engineering, and Aoife said that while it has been a valuable experience so far, it has shown her that her interest may lie outside of that field. But she knows that from a project management perspective, her internship will be invaluable.

Aoife has been getting settled into Providence. She loves how the city has so much to do in walking distance – along the river and past all of the murals downtown. She lives in a "very picturesque" neighborhood, which she loves and is looking forward to summer time in the state's capital city, especially the Waterfire event downtown.

Aoife is also planning a trip to New York and Niagara Falls with a few friends. She enjoyed going to the Boston University hockey game planned by Rian staff. And after a bit of homesickness her first couple of months, she's looking forward to enjoying the rest of her time in the States.

As she looks forward to her return home to Ireland, Aoife will be applying her work experience to her final year in university. She thinks she will stay in Ireland after her final year and looks forward to contributing to the engineering field back home.

Gov. Healey taps Ronnie Millar, former head of Rian, for key post with state's Refugees and Immigrants office

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey, Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, and Health and Human Services Secretary Kate Walsh recently announced three key leadership appointments for the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI). Ronnie Millar, former executive director of the Rian Immigrant Center, joined ORI on May 22 as Director of Strategic Initiatives. Cristina Aguilera Sandoval, who is currently executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative, will become executive director of ORI, effective June 16, becoming the chief advocate for immigrants and refugees in Massachusetts. Susan Church, an immigration attorney who has spent more than 25 years advocating for



Ronny Millar looks forward to working together across the state. immigrant rights, joined ORI as chief operating officer on, May 23.

"Massachusetts's immigrant and refugee communities make our state stronger. Cristina, Ronnie, and Susan are uniquely qualified to lead an office

that celebrates the contributions of immigrants and refugees and connects them with the resources and services they need to thrive here," said Healey.

"Their leadership is particularly important in this moment as we prepare for the implementation of the Work and Family Mobility Act and continue the challenging work of connecting families with safe and secure housing amidst our housing crisis."

Said Driscoll: "ORI plays an increasingly important role in serving the refugee and immigrant communities in Massachusetts, as well as those who are arriving here to build their futures."

"Together with our partners across state government and

community-based organizations, this team will help ensure that all immigrants and refugees in Massachusetts have access to safe shelter, food, health care, education, cultural and linguistic needs, and more."

"Cristina will serve as the chief advocate for refugees and immigrants in Massachusetts and ensure that new arrivals to our state are met not only with the right supports and services, but with dignity and compassion," said Secretary Walsh. "Ronnie's expertise will help us bring together key supports like legal assistance, housing, employment, and health care so that new arrivals are set up for long-term success in Massachusetts. Susan will apply her relentless work toward

immigrant rights to drive policy and program initiatives to achieve ORI's mission: full participation of refugees and immigrants as self-sufficient individuals and families in the economic, social, and civic life of Massachusetts."

Said Millar: "I am very honored to serve the Commonwealth and our immigrant and refugee communities. We are obligated from both a legal and humanitarian perspective to welcome newcomers and to assist them on their path to safety and well-being. It's going to take a collective effort and good will from all of us to mitigate the difficulties we are facing at this time. I look forward to working together across the state on these challenges and opportunities."

Courtney O'Connor tells of her vision for the Lyric Stage Company of Boston

BY R. J. DONOVAN
SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH

Courtney O'Connor has a solid history in the Boston theater community as a director, educator and arts administrator. Having directed several shows at the Lyric Stage Company of Boston over the years, she joined the full-time staff at Lyric in 2018 and was named artistic director in 2020. (She partners with Executive Director Matt Chapman in operating the theater.)

Her past productions at Lyric include "Stones in His Pockets," "Red Hot Patriot," "The Cake," "The Book of Will" and "Preludes." This month, she directs "Rooted," an offbeat comedy about two sisters who accidentally start a cult.

Among her honors, she has received an Elliot Norton Award for her work as associate director of the Lyric's spectacular, two-part production of "The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby."

The Pennsylvania native originally came to Boston to study for her master's degree at Emerson College. She fell in love with the city, stayed, and has been a member of the faculty at Emerson since 2002.

Lyric has just announced its upcoming 2023-2024 season. The schedule includes: Stephen Sondheim's "Assassins;" Ken Ludwig's "The Game's Afoot: Holmes For The Holidays;" "Trouble In Mind;" Ronan Noone's "Thirst;" "The Drowsy Chaperone;" and David Henry Hwang's "Yellow Face."

O'Connor recently spoke with *Boston Irish* about life at the Lyric. Here's an edited look at our conversation.

Q: Tell me about the scope of your duties as artistic director for Lyric Stage?

A: I am in charge of the artistic vision of the theater — through the plays that we choose, through the artists that we work with, through all of the materials that we put out. What are we, as a theater company, trying to say? . . .

What are the ideas that we want to put forth and share with people . . . Making sure that everything is adhering to the values and the missions of the Lyric Stage Company of Boston, of which a large part is creating a gathering place for people to speak, to be challenged, to be heard. And supporting the voices and the growth of Boston area artists in all facets — actors, designers, arts administrators, technicians, musicians . . . to try to enhance and allow them to develop, to deepen, and to explore their voices as artists and ultimately as human beings.

Q: What's your process when planning a new theater season. Each show has to be unique, but they all need to fit together artistically to create a compelling package. When do you begin planning?

A: We're always in season planning. We just announced the '23-'24 season, but I'm already looking at season '24-'25 and '25-'26 . . . You're looking for a variety. You want shows that people know, you want shows that people aren't as familiar with. You want shows that challenge people's point of view. You want shows that will just make people laugh. We want shows that will make people think. And so, you're looking to sort of cover, within six titles, a variety of different voices, of different genres, of different experiences.

Q: The theater world is still coming back from being decimated during the pandemic. It's great that audiences have returned in an enthusiastic way, but have you found ticket buying habits have changed at all? I recall when national tours coming to Boston would announce and place tickets on sale a full year in advance.

A: We are seeing people buy tickets more last minute, something that has definitely shifted. Interestingly enough, I remember hearing an anecdote from someone working from the TKTS Booth in New York that the same thing happened after 9-11. They noted that people

were waiting to buy tickets until the day of, or the day before a performance. And that's certainly something that we're noticing now. Post 9-11, it eventually faded away and people went back to previous purchasing-in-advance habits, and I'm wondering if that will happen here or if this is something that will linger longer . . . To be determined.

Q: Looking at next season's shows, is there one that stands out as something special, something that you're really anxious to share with Boston audiences?

A: Gosh, I'm excited about all of them. I'm really excited about "Trouble in Mind," which opens in January. It was written by Alice Childress in the 1950s and couldn't be put on because the producers wanted her to change the ending. They felt it was too harsh for the time period. It's dealing with race.

[In the play], an actress, Wileta, has played all the expected characters for a black actress of her age of that generation. And now it's finally her chance to be in a Broadway play — to play the lead in a play about a lynching. And it was written by a white man and it's terrible, but [Wileta feels] "So What!" It's her chance to be a lead on Broadway, and she's anxious to help the younger black cast members understand how they need to behave, quote-unquote, in order to make everything a success. Until the moment where she realizes that perhaps she can't. When she realizes that perhaps she can't behave. When she realizes that perhaps what's being asked of her is too much. And the way she's being treated isn't right.

"Trouble In Mind" couldn't be produced in its time because it was seen as too much, as too revolutionary. So it wasn't produced on Broadway until about two years ago when the theaters started reopening in the fall of '21.

Q: And how did this play, specifically, pop up on your radar?

A: We had some subscribers who are



Courtney O'Connor: "We want shows that will make people think."

very good friends of the theater who saw another production of it. I swear they weren't even out of the building when they called me from California and said, "This is a Lyric Stage play. You need to bring this story to the Lyric." So that's one that I was really, really excited to be able to program, because I love it when our subscribers know us so well. When our friends know us so well . . . They know what plays we identify with and what stories we want to tell so strongly that they can walk out of another theater and say, "That belongs at the Lyric. You need to do that."

Q: Speaking of your subscribers, I've seen how enthusiastic they are. They proudly take ownership of their seats and they appear to take ownership of the company and the theater itself.

A: In many ways that's what we want for everybody. We want everyone who comes to see our shows, whether they come to see 100 shows at the Lyric or if it's their first show, we want them to feel like this is their theater. That they have a voice, that they have an agency in being part of who we are. Because if we are Boston's theater, and it's right in our title, then we need to belong to everyone. We need everyone to feel that they are welcome, and that they are part of our Lyric Stage family.

For more information, visit Lyric-Stage.com.

Lexington library hosts Aine Minogue June 20

Tipperary-born harpist/vocalist Aine Minogue will mark the season as well, with a concert on June 20 (the day before the solstice) in Lexington's Cary Memorial Library. Minogue's work is marked by a serene, meditative sound, with elements of new age and world music blended with those of Irish and other Celtic traditions, and an abiding interest in the spirituality and mythology found in the ancient Celtic world and its traditions and rituals — as demonstrated in albums such as the holiday-themed "To Warm the Winter's Night" and "The Spirit of Christmas," and "Circle of the Sun," a collection of songs and tunes that mark the passage of seasons. She's also recorded "Eve," an album of all-original music that explores the "many definitions and varied manifestations" of Eve, from the Bible to pop culture.

For tickets, see Minogue's website at aineminogue.com



Professing Seamus Heaney

BY THOMAS O'GRADY
SPECIAL TO THE BOSTON IRISH

During my long and rich teaching career (1984-2019) at UMass Boston, I had the rare good fortune of being able to offer, multiple times — both as a graduate seminar and as an undergraduate senior seminar — a course centered on Irish Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney. As the tenth anniversary of his death, on August 30th of 2013, looms large, I've been thinking about the various iterations of that course. Heaney was only 74 years old when he passed away, but he made a lasting mark not just on the Irish literary landscape but also globally — a mark that I tried to take the expanding measure of with my students each semester that I offered the course.

In at least one respect the course description remained the same from the first time I offered it (shortly before Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995) until the final time a year or so after his passing. At the heart of our reading his body of work was a question that Heaney himself asked relatively early in his career, in the Foreword to *Preoccupations*, his first volume of selected prose writings, published in 1978: "[H]ow should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to his own place, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?"

Needless to say, Heaney continued to write and to publish prolifically during the two decades I taught the course, so his own implicit engagement with that question continued not just to evolve but to morph from his early cultural "excavations" (his word) famously projected in "Digging," the opening poem in his first volume of poems, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966): "Between my finger and my thumb / the squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it." Following the chronology of his life and his career, the course inevitably tracked the trajectory of Heaney's writing through the tumultuous years of "The Troubles" in his native Northern Ireland — his grappling as a writer with the implications for his art of living in a country divided and subdivided unto itself — and then proceeded to investigate his inclination in his later volumes toward a more personally lyric engagement with the world: "waiting until I was nearly fifty / To credit marvels," as he put it. As his output increased exponentially over the decades, I assigned three different volumes of his "selected poems," the final one being *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*. He published three more standalone volumes after that — *Electric Light* (2001), *District and Circle* (2006), and *Human Chain* (2010) — which I incorporated into the syllabus as they appeared.

If I were still in teaching harness, I would probably assign the two-volume set of *Selected Poems* (1966-1987 and 1988-2013) published in paperback in 2014. But nowadays when anyone asks me about getting a handhold on Heaney, I usually recommend a single volume, titled *100 Poems*, published in 2018. Curated by his family — his wife, Marie, and their three children — this book includes the essentials, starting (of course) with "Digging." In a "Family Note" at the front of the book, daughter Catherine explains that "the notion of a 'trim' selection" appealed to her father but acknowledges that the compilation decided on by her and her mother and her two brothers comprises not just his preferences but some of theirs as well: "It includes many of his best-loved and most celebrated poems, as well as others that were among his favourites to read and which conjure up that much-missed voice. However, we made some choices that have special resonance for us individually: evocations of departed friends; remembered moments from a long-ago holiday; familiar objects from our family home."

Although the selections appear chronologically, they are not identified by specific volumes. In a sense this is liberating for both newcomers to Heaney's work and seasoned readers alike: while several of Heaney's individual volumes of poems are organized around an obvious thematic center, *100 Poems* invites the reader to engage with the poems one by one and not even necessarily in the order in which they appear — the

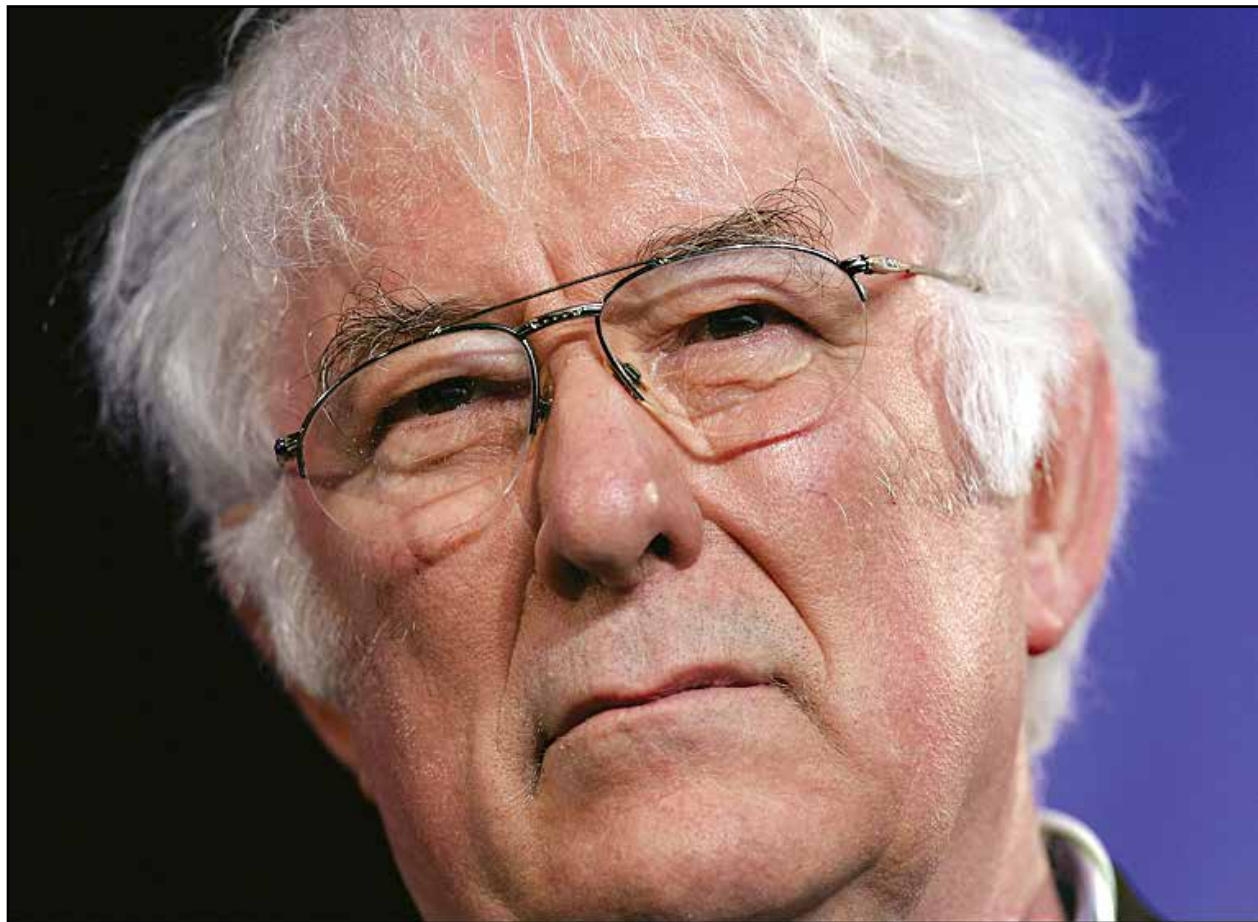


Photo courtesy Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana

effect will be cumulative . . . but there will be no final exam at the end! In fact, reading around in *100 Poems* can produce a sort of connect-the-dots effect: the "picture" of Heaney that emerges may be that much more personal for each reader.

Probably, however, most readers will recognize that certain poems add conspicuous shading to that picture. An early poem like "Personal Helicon," for example, translates a childhood fixation with literal murky wells into a metaphor for the poet's grown-up commitment to his art: "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing." Likewise, the sensuous final line of "Bogland" — "The wet centre is bottomless" — inscribes the promise of poems that Heaney elaborates on in his seminal essay "Feeling Into Words": "poetry as . . . a dig for finds that end up being plants." And that, in turn prepares the reader for the implications of "The Tollund Man," which introduces Heaney's fascination with the recently exhumed bodies sacrificed to a territorial "Mother Goddess" in Iron-Age Denmark: those bodies would become, in his volume *North* (1975), "befitting emblems" for trying to comprehend the essence of the sectarian violence devastating contemporary Northern Ireland. Describing "The famous // Northern reticence, the tight gag of place / And times," another poem from that volume yielded what has become a household expression: "Whatever you say say nothing."

But poems like those and the thematic weight they carry are leavened throughout *100 Poems* by lyrics like the simply titled "Song," that closes with the much-quoted phrase "the music of what happens," and "domestic" poems like "The Otter," in which the poet admires his wife dripping wet after a swim — "Heavy and frisky in your freshened pelt" — and "The Skunk," in which a nighttime visitation outside his window during a sojourn in California reminds him of her "head-down-tail-up hunt in a bottom drawer / For the black plunge-line nightdress." A different sort of intimacy is shared in his sonnet remembering how, in his mother's final moments, he recalled peeling potatoes with her in their farmhouse kitchen: "I remembered her head bent towards my head, / Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives — / Never closer the whole rest of our lives."

Another sonnet (Heaney was a master of that

fourteen-line form), titled "The Skylight," celebrates how "when the slates came off, extravagant / Sky entered and held surprise wide open." A similar spirit of wonder infuses a twelve-liner recounting the tale of how a crewman from a sailing ship appearing in the air above the ancient monastic settlement at Clonmacnoise, after receiving assistance from the monks to free the ship's anchor hooked into the altar rails, ultimately "climbed back / Out of the marvelous as he had known it." Ditto for the prevailing spirit of "St Kevin and the Blackbird," set at the monastic settlement of Glendalough: "And since the whole thing's imagined anyhow / Imagine being Kevin."

100 Poems also includes "Postscript," which many of Heaney's readers and admirers turned to when news of his death broke in 2013, finding uplift in its invitation to be pervious to the "big soft buffetings," felt by the poet on a windy drive in the west of Ireland, that can "catch the heart off guard and blow it open." (My personal go-to poem at the time was "The Harvest Bow.") The book includes "The Gravel Walks," too: two years after his death, a phrase from the closing stanza of that poem would be incised on Heaney's permanent gravestone in St. Mary's cemetery in Bellaghy in south County Derry: "walk on air against your better judgement."

Thumbing recently through *100 Poems*, I paused about a dozen pages from the end over a three-poem sequence titled "Chanson d'Aventure." Included in his final volume, *Human Chain*, the sequence opens with a description of the immediate aftermath of a stroke Heaney suffered in 2006: "Strapped on, wheeled out, forklifted, locked / In position for the drive . . ." In one respect this can be read readily as the poet's intimation of his mortality. But both in addressing his wife directly in the poem and in directing her — and the reader — up the page to the poem's epigraph, two lines from "The Ecstasy," a poem by 17th-century British poet John Donne, Heaney allows that not only his love for Marie but also his abundant output of poems may endure: "Love's mysteries in souls do grow, / But yet the body is his book."

Thomas O'Grady was Director of Irish Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston from 1984 to 2019. He is currently Scholar-in-Residence at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana.

Screenwriter Michael JP Reilly, co-writers craft ‘a weapon for good’ in the film ‘Till’

By PETER F. STEVENS
BOSTON IRISH STAFF

This past February, the movie “Till” was screened at the White House for President Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, and their guests. Among the team that brought the powerful true story of Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, to the president’s home that evening was the 42-year-old screenwriter and producer Michael JP Reilly, formerly of Massachusetts and the son of local Boston Irish luminary William “Bill” Reilly.

Michael Reilly co-penned the script with Chinonye Chukwu, the film’s acclaimed director, and Keith Beauchamp, whose tireless research of the case over 27 years led not only to a deep friendship with Mamie Till-Mobley, but also to the reopening of the Till murder investigation by the US Justice Department in 2004. Emmett Till’s late cousin, Simeon Wright, an eyewitness to the tragic events, served as a consultant to the film.

Reilly credits his producing partners Barbara Broccoli (the James Bond franchise), Whoopi Goldberg (“The Color Purple” and “Sister Act”), Frederick Zollo (“Mississippi Burning” and “Ghosts of Mississippi”), and the bold leadership of Alana Mayo of Orion Studios, as being instrumental in getting “Till” made.

The movie presents the infamous kidnapping and murder of 14-year-old Chicagoan Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955 after a white woman falsely claimed he had accosted her. Rather than present the events in their gruesome detail from multiple viewpoints, the script tells the story through the eyes and emotions of Mamie Till-Mobley. The writers and director deftly and seamlessly reveals Mamie’s journey from shattered parent to Civil Rights activist. The scene in the funeral home where seeing her son’s

disfigured body evokes guttural screams and moans followed by her decision to force America to see photos of him in an open coffin is as memorable as anything audiences will ever experience.

“You’re not just my boy anymore,” she whispers to him at the open-casket funeral.

The stellar cast is led by Danielle Deadwyler, whose stunning turn as Mamie drives the film. Jalya Hall shines as Emmett Till, as does Whoopi Goldberg, a key figure in getting the project to the screen, as Emmett’s grandmother.

In “Till,” Chukwu, Beauchamp, and Reilly have created a searing and intimate portrait of tragedy, grief, and triumph through the eyes of Mamie Till-Mobley. The fact that Danielle Deadwyler’s magnificent portrayal of Mamie did not earn an Oscar nomination is in itself disturbing.

Michael Reilly spoke recently via phone with *Boston Irish Magazine*.

BIM. In many ways, the metamorphosis in the movie seems to owe much to Keith Beauchamp’s efforts over decades.

Reilly: Keith is the foremost authority on Emmett Till. He spent nearly 30 years researching every aspect of the murder case and became a dear friend of Mamie Till-Mobley. She urged him to “Get mine and my son’s story on screen.”

BIM. Bringing actual history to the screen can be daunting. One misstep or too much creative license can spark criticism.”

Reilly: Indeed. Most of the film relates the actual history, the actual case. However, to punctuate critical themes for the majority of the audience who are not completely familiar with the Till case, there are a few scenes of necessary dramatic invention, such as the riverbank scene with Mamie and Moses Wright and the visit by Mamie to the town of Money, Mississippi. That said, the film is an extremely accurate work.

BIM: How would you describe the career arc that brought you to “Till”?

Reilly: In becoming a screenwriter, my trajectory at first was doing anything but. I worked in production for a few years, but I always loved the art of telling a story. Eventually, I decided it was time to get started writing. That took courage and some seven years to develop from an intermediate to a professional.”

BIM: What screenplays/films do you believe have impacted, and in some way shaped, your own work?

Reilly: “Network” and Spike Lee’s “X” come immediately to mind. I’ve always gravitated toward drama and political themes. Oliver Stone’s “JFK” was hugely influential for me.

BIM: What do you believe that viewers will take away from “Till”?

Reilly: One of the most important goals of the film was to rip off the mask of racial hatred. I view the film as a weapon for good.

Michael JP Reilly is currently on strike with the Writers Guild of America (WGA) against film, television, and streaming studios in pursuit of a fair and equitable contract.



Michael JP Reilly



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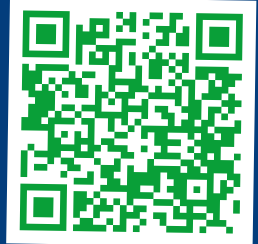
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UPDATES FROM THE PASTORAL CENTRE

Deer Island Famine Memorial Mass



The IPC Mass of Remembrance at the Deer Island Famine Memorial.

POSTPONED

Saturday, June 17th at 4PM



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MA Driver's License Information Session

Hosted by Rian Immigrant Center, Irish Pastoral Centre and Consulate General of Ireland



On July 1st, the Massachusetts Work and Family Mobility Act becomes law. Following our recent information session, packets are now available with regard to:

- Documents Required
- The Application Process
- Avoiding Pitfalls & Scams

Sign up for 1:1 confidential consultation with our Immigration Attorneys!

Information Packs Available at the IPC

The Irish Pastoral Center,
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On-site parking Available in Main Car Park. Ground Floor Facility



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Thank You to the Boston Irish Community!

We were delighted to welcome Brid Doherty to the IPC for the final count of funds raised from the Darkness into Light walk for Pieta House on May 6th. Thank you, Brid, for all your help and effort in organizing this event. It was a brilliant turnout, and amazing to see the Boston Irish Community show up for a great cause. Between online and cash donations, a total of **\$3,290 was raised directly for Pieta House!** Thank you to everyone who walked with us!



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ANSCO LE CHEILE -
HERE TOGETHER

Boston's theater scene heats up for summertime

By R.J. DONOVAN
SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH



"Jagged Little Pill"
Through June 25,
Citizens Bank Opera House
Inspired by the 1995 rock album of the same name by seven-time Grammy Award winner Alanis Morissette, the Tony Award-winning "Jagged Little Pill" tells a compelling story of pain, healing, and empowerment. Directed by Diane Paulus, the show played a record-breaking sold-out run at American Repertory Theater in Cambridge in 2018 before heading to Broadway. Heidi Blickenstaff reprises her role from the Broadway company as Mary Jane Healy. BroadwayInBoston.com



"Clue"
Through June 25, Greater Boston Stage Company
"Clue" is a comical mystery of murder and madness. We're at a remote mansion. Six guests assemble for a dinner party. Mayhem and blackmail are on the menu. When the host turns up dead, they all become suspects. Meanwhile, the body count is rising in this madcap whodunnit. greaterbostonstage.org

"Rooted"
Through June 25, Lyric Stage
In her claustrophobic world, Emery Harris lives alone in a treehouse surrounded by the plants she researches, names, and talks to. Her overbearing sister is her only connection to reality, along with her YouTube channel where she documents her studies which have subsequently garnered several thousand followers. When her calm and quiet is disrupted by an entourage of devotees who see her as their botanical, new-age messiah, she is forced to look down from the branches and face the outside world. lyricstage.com

"Oklahoma!"
June 23 - July 2,
Reagle Music Theatre
"Oklahoma!" was the first musical from the prolific team of Rodgers & Hammerstein. This landmark show would change the look and sound of musicals forever. Set in 1906, "Oklahoma!" tells the story of Laurey,



a fiercely independent farm girl; Curly, a charming cowboy; and Jud Fry, a sinister, brooding farmhand. With a score featuring "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'," "Surrey With The Fringe On Top" and "People Will Say We're in Love," you'll be doin' fine with "Oklahoma!" reaglemusictheatre.org

"The Normal Heart"
June 21- July 9, New Repertory Theatre

Larry Kramer's Tony Award-winning autobiographical drama, "The Normal Heart," is set during the AIDS epidemic in New York in the early 1980s. This passionate and controversial play was the first to treat seriously the poignant and devastating subject of AIDS. The story traces Ned Weeks, a gay activist writer, through his fight for visibility and justice for the gay community. newrep.org



"Evita"
Through July 30, American Repertory Theatre

How do we judge a legacy? Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's Tony Award-winning rock opera follows the adored (and reviled) Eva Perón in her meteoric rise from impoverished child to ruthless First Lady of Argentina. She died at just 31 but lives on to this day as a charismatic legend. The vibrant score includes such memorable hits as "Buenos Aires" and "Don't Cry for Me Argentina." americanrepertorytheater.org

"A Man of No Importance"
July 6 - Aug. 5, Cape Rep Theatre

This beautifully woven tale of love, friendship, and coming to terms with who we are was written by the Tony Award-winning team of Terrence McNally, Lynn Ahrens, and Stephen Flaherty, creators of "Ragtime." Alfie Byrne, a bus driver in 1964 Dublin, holds secrets that he can't share with anyone but his imagined confidante, Oscar Wilde. When he attempts to put on an amateur production of Wilde's



"Salome" in the local church hall, he confronts the ire of church authorities, revealing the redemptive power of theater and true friendship. caperep.org



"The Lehman Trilogy"
Through July 16,
The Huntington Theatre

"The Lehman Trilogy" is the timely and epic tale of family, ambition, and risk, sprawling across 163 years of history, shining a calculating spotlight on the spectacular rise and fall of the Lehman brothers. Performed entirely by three actors, the story follows the original three Lehman brothers, then their sons and grandsons, as they journey from rags to riches to ruin. This extraordinary drama is both an intimate saga about family and a monumental exposé of unbridled capitalism. huntingtontheatre.org



"Oppenheimer"
July 21 - 27,
Coolidge Corner Theatre

This all-star film achievement reveals the story of American scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer and his role in the development of the atomic bomb. Audiences

are thrust into the pulse-pounding paradox of the enigmatic man who must risk destroying the world in order to save it. Cillian Murphy stars as Oppenheimer with Emily Blunt as his wife, Katherine "Kitty" Oppenheimer. This engagement is unique in that the film will be presented in the dynamic 70mm format, with frames larger in size and wider in aspect ratio than the standard 35mm film, delivering a remarkably crisper and more vibrant image. coolidge.org



"Once"
Aug. 3 - 19, Priscilla Beach Theatre

In the streets of Dublin, an Irish musician and a Czech immigrant are drawn together by their shared love of music. Over the course of one fateful week, an unexpected friendship and collaboration quickly evolves into a powerful but complicated love story, underscored by emotionally charged music. Featuring all the magical songs from the critically acclaimed film, including the Oscar-winning "Falling Slowly," this uplifting show speaks to the power of music to connect us all. pbtheatre.org

"Come From Away"
Aug. 8 - 13,
Citizens Bank Opera House

"Come From Away" shares the remarkable and true story of 7,000 stranded airline passengers and the small town in Newfoundland that welcomed them on September 11. Cultures clashed and nerves ran high, but uneasiness turned into trust, and gratitude grew into lasting friendships. BroadwayInBoston.com



Jimmy Buffett's
"Escape to Margaritaville"
Aug. 15 - 27, North Shore Music Theatre

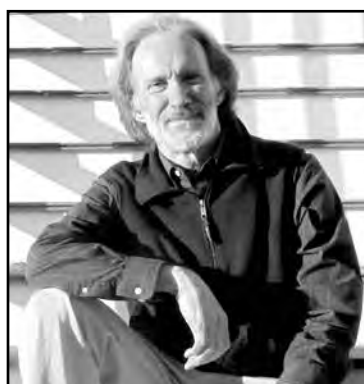
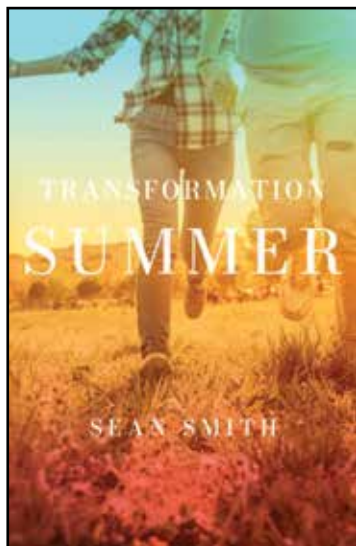
Parrot Heads unite! Be transported to a tropical island getaway. This colorful and energetic musical tells of a part-time bartender, part-time singer, and full-time charmer named Tully who thinks he's got life all figured out — until a beautiful tourist steals his heart and makes him question everything. Still searchin' for that lost shaker of salt? Look no further than Margaritaville. nsmt.org

Book Launch: ‘Transformation Summer’ – a novel by Boston Irish contributor Sean Smith

Readers of *Boston Irish Magazine* and bostonirish.com are well-versed in the work of Sean Smith, whose finely wrought writings and reviews of the work of performers in the Celtic arts of music and dance, in particular local and regional standouts, have graced our pages and internet files for many years now.

This month, Sean launched his new novel, “Transformation Summer,” and it drew positive attention from pre-launch reviewers.

“Transformation Summer” is a work in the coming-of-age, biographical, and interpersonal drama subgenres,” wrote K.C. Finn of Readers’ Favorite. “It is best suited to the general adult reading audience and is penned by Sean Smith. In this insightful and emotive work of self-exploration, perception, and past memories, we explore the world of our central character, Seth, as a sixteen-year-old being dragged along to the Transformation personal-growth camp with his mother and in the years following this brief but life-altering experience. Shifting between perspectives of then and now, we learn about the people and bonds that Seth made at such a formative age and the unexpectedly disturbing moments at Transformation that have stayed with him for a



Boston Irish contributor Sean Smith with the cover of his new novel. His question: Can a memory keep us from moving on, moving forward, even as it constantly enriches us?

long time afterward.

Added Literary Titan in a posting:

“Sean Smith has crafted an intimate portrayal of psychology, memory, emotions, and self-exploration that lures us into a much deeper and more meaningful story than it may first appear. The charm is in the creation of Seth himself, an incredibly endearing protagonist and one we want to know more about, especially when his conflict in adulthood is so painfully evident and ripe for exploration. I loved the storytelling style and the way lines were sometimes clear between past and present, then sometimes, as the influences of hindsight, time, and life expe-

rience blurred, changed what we thought we knew. Overall, “Transformation Summer” is a work filled with these bold and well-penned insights. I would not hesitate to recommend it to anyone seeking intelligent, deeply emotive, coming-of-age fiction.

Following is a conversation between Boston Irish Magazine and the author:

Q. Please tell us a few things about yourself.

A. My parents were intelligent, extremely well-read people – both college professors, though my mom quit teaching at 60 and worked for NGOs in places like Somalia and Afghanistan – and helped inculcate in me an appreciation

for books. But I have to admit I spent several years as a kid immersed in Marvel Comics; I even wrote and illustrated my own versions of Spider-Man, Daredevil, Iron Man, etc., just for fun. I suppose I had a good foundation with which to become a writer, because I always did well in spelling and grammar in elementary school – though my handwriting was atrocious.

It took a while for me to latch onto journalism as my career path, but it felt spot-on right from the start: I did an internship at the now-defunct *Belmont Citizen*, spent two years at a weekly in Central Massachusetts, then three-and-a-half years at a suburban-Boston lifestyle/features weekly. After that paper folded, academia seemed a good fit and it was, so I’ve been an editor/writer at Boston College for the past three-plus decades.

I never put “publish a novel” on my to-do list. After a few attempts at fiction over the years, somewhere in the early 2010s I just found a groove, and this culminated in the genesis of “Transformation Summer.”

Q. Given the first-person point of view, is it fair to say that “Transformation Summer” had a gestation period extending back to your boyhood days?

A. There’s a certain autobi-

ographical dimension, but I feel you can say that about a lot of novels: Hey, write about what you know, right? Coming up with the basic outline of the story, I took the concept of “intentional communities” – collective households, communes, housing cooperatives and so on – and stretched the definition to encompass the idea of people who, rather than live together, instead gather at regular intervals out of common beliefs, interests or purpose.

Q. For all the detail that Seth gives about that one-time summer idyll, is he in the end being square with readers as to why as an adult he trekked cross-country to stand in a dilapidated camp site?

A. My editor at Atmosphere Press really liked the book, but he felt the conclusion as I’d written it was lacking something. So I took another approach and had Seth confront, in very stark terms, the impact of his investing so much in the memory of that summer. It asks the question: Can a memory become an end in itself, ultimately even more important than the actual people, places or events it evokes? Can a memory keep us from moving on, moving forward, even as it constantly enriches us?

It’s Celtic music and dance day and night at Summer BCMFest on July 2 at Passim



The Carroll Sisters, above, and Shannon and Matt Heaton, at right, will be among the performers at this year’s Summer BCMFest.

A full day and evening of Celtic music is in store at the annual Summer BCMFest, which takes place July 2 at Club Passim in Harvard Square.

This year’s festival includes free outdoor concerts and participatory ceilidh outside Passim in Palmer Street, and a ticketed evening performance

in the club.

The event is tailored after the winter BCMFest (Boston Celtic Music Fest), held each January to celebrate Greater Boston’s richness of music, song, and dance from the Irish, Scottish, Cape Breton, and other Celtic traditions. Like its winter counterpart, Summer BCMFest showcases

the diversity of sounds and styles found in Boston’s Celtic music community.

This edition of the festival will begin with a “Live Music Brunch” from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. featuring an Irish music and song session led by Kat Wallace and Jimmy Kelly.

At 3 p.m., the Palmer Street outdoor show kicks off with



an Irish/roots music set from multi-instrumentalist Elias Cardoso and friends. They will be followed by Ailsa McFadyen & The Ginger Ales, who will perform songs from Irish, Scottish and other traditions.

BCMFest’s popular Boston Urban Ceilidh dance event will run from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. The “Ceilidh in the Alley” will encompass social dances from Ireland, Scotland, and Cape Breton and will be open to all regardless of experience level. Summer McCall will call the

dances, with a Boston Urban Ceilidh band of Elizabeth Anderson and Leland Martin (fiddle), Adam Hendey (guitar), and Rachel Reeds (piano).

Summer BCMFest shifts indoors to Club Passim for a 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. concert of Irish music with Matt and Shannon Heaton, Scottish tunes played by the Carroll Sisters with Adam Hendey, and the Quebecois duo of Yann Falquet and Eric Boodman.

For tickets and other details, see passim.org/bcmfest.

Her new album out, the time is bright for fiddler Hanneke Cassel

By SEAN SMITH

BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Emerging from the COVID-19 pause, Boston-area Celtic fiddler Hanneke Cassel felt she had a lot of unfinished business – musical and personal.

Going into 2020, she'd had plans to work on a new album featuring tunes she'd written since her 2017 release, "Trip to Walden Pond," a period during which she and husband Mike Block welcomed their daughter, Eilidh – an event that has, not surprisingly, provided inspiration for more compositions.

Those plans did not work out, although she did wind up recording two "unplanned" albums that were done remotely, "Over the Sea to Skye" (in which she revisited traditional Scottish and Cape Breton tunes from early in her fiddling career) and the Christmas-themed "O Come Emmanuel."

But an unfulfilled album project was only part of what weighed on Cassel's mind.

"I had three very close friends pass away in a short time," she explains. "Their passing, mixed with the pandemic and all the different kinds of losses many of us went through – of missing family, community and celebration – was a lot to take. So I started writing tunes as a way to process what I was feeling and experiencing."

"There was a time, earlier in my life – like in my 20s – when I might write some tunes that were kind of angsty, maybe because I was upset about a relationship, for instance. But this period from 2020 through 2021 in particular felt like a different kind of sadness, of loss. It's not angsty, but more existential: There's still a joy in what you're doing, but it's also complicated and hard to understand at times."

The fruit of all these labors is Cassel's newly released seventh album, "Infinite Brightness," which she spotlighted at two concerts last month, one at the Second Fridays Concerts series at First Church of Belmont, the other at the Cultural Center of Cape Cod in Yarmouth.

Don't get the idea that "Infinite Brightness" is a moribund affair. As Cassel notes, some of its tracks contain tunes she wrote as commissions for weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, grandchildren "and love." In other words, pretty much the full spectrum of human experience – and when it comes to expressing this musically, Cassel is as good as it gets. For more than two decades, she's infused her fiddle music – whether interpreting from Scottish, Cape Breton or other traditions, playing her own material or covering other contemporary fiddle tunes – with a singular passion as well as technical brilliance, from soulful slow airs to boisterous strathspeys to exuberant reels.

Rather than a changing cast of guest stars as on some of her past albums, Cassel has a defined ensemble accompanying her on "Infinite Brightness," with Jenna Moynihan on five-string fiddle, Tristan Clarridge on cello, and Keith Murphy – who co-produced the album with Cassel – on guitar and harmonium; Yann Falquet plays guitar on two tracks. "It's the first time in a long while I've had a consistent band for a recording," says Cassel, who will be joined by Moynihan and Murphy at the Belmont and Yarmouth concerts.

The reel "Evacuation Day" is an appropriate opener for the album in a few ways. For one, Cassel wrote it on March 17, 2020 ("when we thought the world was ending"), as COVID truly began asserting itself – certainly in the Celtic music community with so many St. Patrick's Day-related gigs gone, which proved to be the prelude to months of little to no work. (That said, Cassel notes that the tune title was prompted by her husband's rather humorous unfamiliarity with the Suffolk County holiday.)

But there's a stoicism and hopefulness to the tune, with Murphy's trademark pulsating guitar setting tempo and rhythm at the outset before Cassel enters,



Hanneke Cassel has concerts in Belmont and Yarmouth this month, and will appear at Club Passim's Memorial Day Weekend Campfire Festival.

moving quickly and effortlessly between high notes and low. Moynihan trades off between melody and harmony, and Clarridge's entrance about halfway through brings a solid, bassy foundation. He and Cassel play variations on the tune, sometimes both at once, suggestive perhaps of chaos and uncertainty – but then everything aligns at the end with some gorgeous strokes. (The official "Evacuation Day" video, shot in the Burren Backroom, depicts Cassel and various friends and collaborators in an increasingly festive, and whimsical, celebration. Watch it at [youtube.com/watch?v=2HiAjzzxOzk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HiAjzzxOzk).)

Compelling backstories lurk behind some of the other tracks. One begins with "Raise Your Glass," in which Cassel evokes the classic, jaggedly enchanting Cape Breton strathspey. The three-part reel that follows, "DFC," is Cassel's tribute to fiddler Graham DeZarn, who along with Cassel was a member of Boston-based fiddle ensemble Childsplay, which gave its final performance in late 2019; DeZarn died in July of last year at the age of 38. "I didn't want to write something slow and sad, but fiery," she says. "It wasn't just sadness I was feeling, it was anger: 'How could this have happened?' So I ended up drawing from the overall vibe and experience of being in Childsplay all those years: I took a riff I'd written for a Childsplay arrangement and made a B part and then a C part."

Another track has a nostalgic dimension for Cassel, as she ventures into the Irish tradition for a go at "The Long Note" (a source of some contention in the Irish music community as to whether it's "Jenny's Welcome to Charlie" in disguise or a jig that's been repurposed as a reel), which Cassel learned as a teenager from Athena Tergis. The interplay with Moynihan and Clarridge is particularly striking here – that fifth string on Moynihan's fiddle makes for quite some versatility in her accompaniment.

Then Cassel and company ease their way into "Wood's No. 1" by Iain MacLeod, a founding member of the mighty "acid-croft" Scottish band Shooglenifty, and weave some fascinating riffs and rhythmic patterns around the melody – Clarridge at one point does a bluegrass-style solo that eventually forms the backdrop for a reprise of the tune by Cassel.

"The whole set is really kind of a blast from my 1990s," she laughs.

Cassel's life has always had a prodigious spiritual aspect, which she has often expressed in her music – the album's title is taken from a line in Thomas á Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. She closes out the album with an instrumental version of the Carl Boberg hymn "How Great Thou Art," displaying her not-to-be-overlooked skills as a pianist, and segues into the gentle "Cali's Jig," written in remembrance of Cali McKasson Kavin, a much-loved mainstay of the American Scottish music community.

Along with everything else that's gone on, for Cassel, these past few years also have been a period for redefining her musical identity. "For the longest time, I wanted to be known as a 'Scottish/Cape Breton fiddler,'" she explains. "But at the end of the day, I'm not actually Scottish, or from Cape Breton, so what do I want to embrace? Of course, Scottish and Cape Breton are my favorites, and I play in those styles a lot and incorporate them into writing my tunes. But I also like Texas-style fiddling, which is what I started out playing in my teens, and hung around with Americana and bluegrass musicians, so those influences are definitely there, too."

"I started feeling more excited about that 'Scottish American' style, which includes Scottish and Cape Breton – and Irish – but has a very American accent to it. I still love playing the traditional tunes, playing for a traditional Scottish country dance. Or sitting down like a Cape Breton pianist and playing a bunch of Buddy MacMaster tunes. It seems I really connect with my audience the most, though, when I'm doing a combination of things – not just the trad stuff. I used to spend a lot of time trying to sound as 'traditional' as I could, but now I'm totally OK about having a Texas-style vibe in my music, or that 'chopping' style which I started doing when I was 18 or 19 years old."

"That's all part of my style and, I guess, my heritage," she says, flashing her characteristically radiant smile, "So I'm going to go with it."

For more about Hanneke Cassel's music and concert appearances, see [hannekecassel.com](https://www.hannekecassel.com)

Revival at the Irish Cultural Centre: ‘Sounds of Summer’ on June 17

BY SEAN SMITH

BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Reviving a tradition of summertime musical extravaganzas, the Irish Cultural Centre of Greater Boston in Canton will present “Sounds of Summer” on June 17, with several hours of entertainment from three acts that have longstanding ties with the center:

- Nathan Carter, one of Ireland’s most prominent Irish folk and country singers.

- Chloë Agnew, formerly of Celtic Woman, in her new collaboration with singer-songwriter Brian McGrane as The Brave Collide.

- Boston-based band Devri, with a crowd-pleasing multi-genre repertoire and stage presence.

Gates open at 3:30 p.m. for the outdoor event, which also will feature an onsite bar and concession areas, as well as plenty of room for dancing.

The ICC campus has an extensive history of major warm-weather Irish music happenings, going back to 2004 when it became the site for the three-day Irish festival formerly held at Stonehill College. Over the years, the event underwent several incarnations and formats – including as the ICONS Festival and the Boston Irish Festival – but always included a mix of local acts alongside others from Ireland and elsewhere. As was the case well beyond Canton, the pandemic put a halt to the festival.

Organizers see “Sounds of Summer” as the ideal way to restart engines and rebuild momentum for a big community summer event.

“The center, what with its nice green, open spaces and great facilities, has always been a place people love to come to for entertainment and socializing,” says ICC Cultural and Marketing Manager Aoife Griffin. “‘Sounds of Summer’ will offer all that as it features two internationally renowned artists in Nathan and Chloë who have both formed a deep connection with the ICC and its audience; in fact, this will be Nathan’s only Boston-area appearance this year.

“But the ICC has always been committed to local musicians, and supporting those who have supported us all along, so we’re delighted to have Devri perform at ‘Sounds of Summer’ as well.”

Carter, born in Liverpool to parents from Newry, started out playing with the Liverpool Ceili Band as a pianist and accordionist and became an All-Ireland accordion and singing champion. But thanks in part to his grandmother’s fondness for records by the likes of Willie Nelson, Patsy Cline, and Buck Owens, among others, Carter found himself becoming more interested in singing country. He has gone on to record seven No. 1 albums in Ireland, and his 2012 cover of “Wagon Wheel” won the RTÉ Irish Country Music Award for Ireland’s All-Time Favourite



Chloë Agnew, formerly of Celtic Woman, released an original track in 2021 with Brian McGrane entitled “Somebody Just Like You.”



Nathan Carter has recorded seven No. 1 albums in Ireland, and his 2012 cover of “Wagon Wheel” won the RTÉ Irish Country Music Award for Ireland’s All-Time Favourite Country Song (he also won Live Act of the Year honors).



Country Song (he also won Live Act of the Year honors).

Carter has hosted his own TV series on RTÉ, been featured on a PBS special, and has four live DVDs to his credit. Late last year, he released his latest album, “The Morning After,” which sees him continuing to pen his own compositions, among them the title track (the video of which guest stars country artist Philomena Begley); the recording also includes duets with Claudia Buckley and the band Ceol, a cover of Robbie O’Connell’s “Keg of Brandy,” a live version of “How Great Thou Art,” and a Conway Twitty medley.

He also has frequently collaborated with Agnew, including for some of their Boston-area appearances.

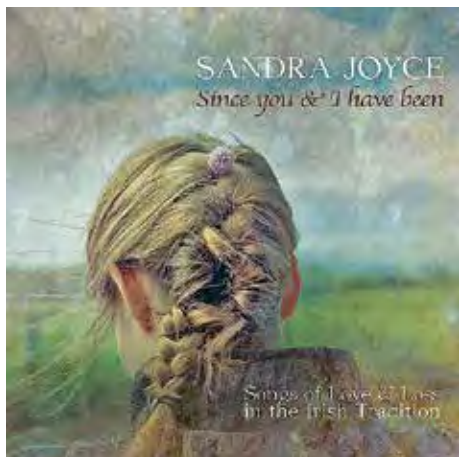
Agnew had already released two recordings – and helped raise money for the Afghan Children’s Charity Fund by participating in the “This Holy Christmas Night” album project – when she joined Celtic Woman at age 14. Even while performing with the ensemble, she recorded two more albums and earned Female Vocalist of the Year honors at the 2012 Irish Music Awards. In recent years, Agnew has turned to songwriting, and in 2018 issued a five-track EP, “The Thing About You,” which included four original songs.

In 2017, she began working with Brian McGrane, who had been pianist and backing vocalist for Celtic Woman. Like Agnew, McGrane was active in music at an early age, leading his church choir at age seven and starting his own rock band at age 12; in addition, he has worked on the production as well as the performance side. Agnew and McGrane released a series of covers of popular songs on YouTube, notably Coldplay’s “Everglow,” that were well received, and in 2021 they released an original track, “Somebody Just Like You.”

Devri (Declan Houton, vocals, guitar, mandolin; Larry Flint, vocals, bass, guitar; Chuck Parrish, guitar; Steve O’Callaghan, drums, percussion) plays plenty of Irish classics and covers of The Pogues, Dubliners, and Wolfe Tones, but is equally fond of crossing over to the likes of The Beatles, Johnny Cash, and Snow Patrol, among others. Devri also has a long history of supporting charitable causes, notably Lucy’s Love Bus, an organization providing support for children with cancer and life-threatening illnesses and their families. Their many gigs have included a tribute to Mary Walsh, the mother of now-former Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, in support of the Irish Pastoral Centre.

For more about “Sounds of Summer” and other Irish Cultural Centre of Greater Boston events and activities, see irishculture.org

At left, Devri, above, is scheduled to display its multi-genre repertoire. Below, Brian McGrane, partner with Chloë Agnew on “Somebody Just Like You.”



No shortage of excellent new instrumental albums over the past several months – which I promise we’ll get to, eventually – but for now here are a couple of quite striking all-vocal releases that have leapt to the fore.

• **Sandra Joyce: “Since You and I Have Been: Songs of Love and Loss in the Irish Tradition”** – Joyce has a very impressive day job: She’s the executive dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Limerick, where she previously directed its pioneering Irish World Academy of Music and Dance. She also happens to be one fine singer, as this album – her debut – demonstrates in thoroughly delightful fashion. Her voice is bright, clear and engaging, with superb diction and ornamentation that feels entirely natural and assured. Importantly, Joyce is adept at conveying a song’s emotional character with simplicity and directness; there’s no clasping of pearls, dabbling at the eye or nudging with the elbow.

And what a glorious selection of songs there are on “Since You and I Have Been,” from sources (which Joyce cites in the informative liner notes) that include Sarah Makem, Dolores Keane, Paddy Tunney, Eithne Ni Uallachain, Tom Lenihan, even Joan Baez. Some will certainly be familiar (“Barbara Allen,” “The Parting Glass,” “The Cherry Tree Carol”); others, while not exactly languishing in obscurity, nonetheless get a most welcome exposure (“Craigie Hill,” “One Morning in May,” “The Bonny Boy”).

Dónal Lunny, meanwhile, demonstrates his ever-skillful touch as producer, arranger, and accompanist on “Since You and I Have Been,” giving Joyce and the songs plenty of room while he (on bouzouki), daughter Cora Venus Lunny (violin), Ernestine Healy (concertina), and Niall Keegan (flute) lend congenial backing in various configurations.

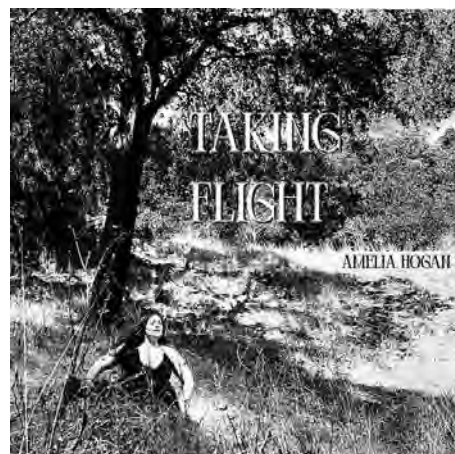
All such elements converge with absolute splendor straight from the opening track, “Craigie Hill,” as Joyce’s exuberant vocals crest along on a steady, flowing tide provided by the Lunnys – Donal’s bouzouki even evokes a bluesy rock vibe at times. Although the song, for which Joyce cites Dolores Keane and Paddy Tunney as sources, concerns the imminent departure of a lover from his beloved (to seek his fortune in America – where else?), its subtext about repression at home versus freedom abroad give “Craigie Hill” a tint of defiant optimism amidst the gloom.

Most everyone has heard at least one version of “Barbara Allen,” about

the “hard-hearted” young woman who comes to regret rejecting her lover, but Joyce’s rendition – from the singing of Armagh’s Sarah Makem – is especially poignant and sorrowful, yet not tear-stricken to the extreme. On “The Cherry Tree Carol” (from Joan Baez), she conveys a sincerity of ingenuous wonder, with Keegan’s gorgeous flute serving as practically a second voice. “Blackwater Side,” like “Craigie Hill,” is in the lovers’-goodbye genre – from Limerick’s Peter Dundon via renowned Donegal singer Rita Gallagher – and Joyce zeroes in on the couple’s trust and hopefulness even as the verses relate the obstacles ahead, all to a reverent concertina and bouzouki.

One could easily make the case for “One Morning in May” as the album’s highlight. Joyce – crediting Eithne Ni Uallachain and her recording with Gerry O’Connor, “Lá Lugh,” as the source via the repertoire of Antrim’s Len Graham – sings it unaccompanied, allowing for full attention to the unusual, almost eerie melody and the equally curious lyrics. She notes its origin as being in the “hedge-school tradition,” typified by a marked sophistication of language and literary references, and vestiges of 17th and 18th-century Gaelic poetry.

Such is the high quality of the singing throughout “Since You and I Have Been” that Joyce’s album-ending take on that favorite hail-and-farewell ditty, “The Parting Glass,” feels as fresh and vibrant as the nine tracks preceding it – a most eloquent goodbye. sandrajoycemusic.com



• **Amelia Hogan: “Taking Flight”** – Hogan is a northern Californian with diverse singing interests, notably Irish sean-nos, Scottish Gaelic, and Americana, and contemporary as well as traditional folk. Whatever a song’s origins, it’s impeccably delivered by her with both a subtlety and lilt, and a voice that tends toward the lower register – in the realm of a June Tabor or the late Helen Schneyer. Hogan has been a member of the bands Sheltering Sky and Molly’s Revenge, and previously released a solo album, “Transplants: From the Old World to the New,” that explores the theme of immigration and ancestry through American, Irish, and Scottish songs (e.g. “Wild Mountain Thyme,” “The Praties They Grow Small,” “Sixteen Tons”).

“Taking Flight” carries not so much a theme as a motif: birds as a common feature of our landscapes as well as the various symbols they represent in history, literature, and folklore – loss and sorrow but also hope and healing “and

the ability to find beauty in the midst of hardship,” points out Hogan in her notes. Those songs on the album without an overt avian reference are perhaps best regarded as journeys between states of mind, she says, “like a bird taking flight.”

However one wants to characterize the album’s content, Hogan has done an admirable job in amassing material from a wide range of sources – songs from just about every Celtic-related nation there is, including the Isle of Man and Cornwall, and songwriters that include Anais Mitchell, Jez Lowe, Robert Burns (who was pretty good at poetry, too), and the Dublin band Lankum – and making it all fit together. There’s quite the range of tonality, too: the empathetic, dignified American hymn “The Old Churchyard”; Sir Samuel Ferguson’s winsome, bittersweet “Lark in the Clear Air”; the fiery Scottish Jacobite song “Oran Eile Don Phrionnsa”; and Laurie Lewis’ cautionary “Wood Thrush’s Song.”

While Hogan certainly has a grasp of theatricality, she employs it wisely and not overly much, eschewing (thankfully) the fake-accent approach for the non-American material. There’s a snap and crack to her delivery in approximation of a Scottish burr on the centuries-old ballad “Twa Corbies” (set to a Breton tune which title translates as “The Swan”), and you can practically see the smile on her face as she relates the comically intricate verses in the true-romance memoir “The King of Ballyhooley” (with one of the best closing lines in Irish trad: “The family has increased in store now, 15 daughters all unruly; and bonny Jane she is me queen and I’m the king of Ballyhooley”). The rich emotive quality with which she invests “The Manx Lullaby,” meanwhile, is entirely appropriate – practically mandated – given the fledgling/child metaphor: “Fold thy wing and seek thy nest now/Oh shine the berry on the bright tree/The bird is home from the mountain and valley.”

Praise is in order for Hogan and co-producer Ray Frank for a judicious approach to arrangements, using a generally sparse amount of accompaniment that puts Hogan squarely in the forefront (and no excessive reverb

to provide “atmosphere”). Credit to the guest musicians as well, especially Frank and Richard Mandel for their agile guitar-playing on various tracks (Mandel’s on “What Will We Do When We Have No Money” in particular) and harpist Maureen Brennan.

One particular trio of successive tracks accentuates the shades of mood and tone on the album. First is Burns’ “Westlin Winds”: Well-travelled, yes, but just a damn good song when you get down to it – especially with its juxtaposition of nature’s beauty and man’s callousness – and Hogan does plenty of justice to those classic Burns verses. Then comes the devastating, ultra-bleak “Hunting the Wren,” written by Lankum’s Ian Lynch with Lisa O’Neill and inspired by the Wrens of Curragh, a 19th-century community of women on the margins of society; the song uses imagery of Ireland’s Wren Day as a metaphor for the Wrens of Curragh’s mistreatment by the authorities and townspeople. It’s meant to chill as well as outrage – Ireland has only lately begun to come to terms with similar injustices in its history, such as Magdalene laundries and mother-baby homes – and, with a bare-bones, elegiac guitar and fiddle (Rebecca Richman) behind her, Hogan almost out-Lankums Lankum.

Which leads us to the title track, a mellifluous, resolute call for solidarity – written by Hogan and sung a cappella in four-part harmony with Frank, Marla Fibish, and Christa Burch – that suggests how we might take an example or two from our feathered friends: “The struggles before us/are small when compared/to birds all together/taking flight ‘til we’re there.”

If that isn’t uplifting enough, closing out the album is Scots-born Canadian singer-songwriter David Francey’s “Red-Winged Blackbird,” which speaks to the resilience we can find through migratory birds traveling great distances to escape winter and finding their way back home. The infectious chorus might be a good one to have in mind during those dark January days when spring seems like it’ll never come – the titular character knows better. ameliahogan.com

Music Fest, fireworks set for June 24, 25 on Milton Hill

A two-day festival of music at Governor Hutchinson’s Field atop Milton Hill on Adams Street overlooking the beautiful Neponset River basin, will return next weekend, Sat., June 24, and Sun., June 25.

The Saturday line-up includes four hours of non-stop music starting at 5 p.m. with a large, open-air dance floor. The Typhoon Generals and Fat City Band will perform, and kids can enjoy a massive sandbox, giant slide, and rock wall. Parents may enjoy the food and drink options, including, pizza, homemade lobster rolls, fresh kettle corn, and a beer garden stocked with cold draft beers, sangria, and assorted wines.

A fireworks display is scheduled for 9:45 p.m. Do not forget to bring your lawn chairs, blankets, and bug spray.

The June 25 “Celtic Sunday” schedule

begins at 1 p.m. featuring many of Boston’s best Irish bands, musicians, and vocalists. This year’s performers include The Fenian Sons, Erin’s Melody, Curragh’s Fancy, Strawberry Hill band, The Dooley Brothers as well as other featured Irish musicians. As an added treat we will also feature a second performance on the main stage by The Typhoon Generals.

There will also be an Acoustic stage/tent, which will have its very own Milton Music Fest Irish Pub attached, featuring Guinness and the best in cold draft beer. Traditional artists are also welcome at 3 p.m.

For more information on this free event, including details on free parking and complimentary shuttle service, visit miltonmusicfest.org.

Lamey's glad he has never taken his music for granted

By SEAN SMITH

BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

It wasn't just a concert/album launch, it was a homecoming.

Fiddler Doug Lamey, a Boston-area native and a denizen of its Celtic music and dance community – particularly that of Cape Breton – for a number of years, came to the Burren Backroom in Somerville last month to officially mark the release of his second recording, “True North.”

He's been living in Cape Breton for a dozen years now, with his wife Kaitlin and their four kids, but – in an interview a few weeks before the event – expressed delight at the prospect of returning to the place where he grew up. At the Burren concert, he was accompanied by pianist Janine Randall, with guest appearances by dancer (and former bandmate) Christine Morrison and cameos by his daughter Mary and niece Sarah Ann.

“Coming back down to Massachusetts, and to be in and around Boston, is always exciting,” said Lamey. “The Burren is such a great venue – I spent so much time there when I was in my early and mid-20s, and I got to be around incredible musicians like Tommy Peoples and Frankie Gavin. And there were some very special people, like Brian O'Donovan, who were a big influence on me when I was just starting out. Lots of wonderful memories.”

Those reminiscences also include the many hours spent at the Canadian American Club in Watertown, the locus for Cape Breton music, dance and general bonhomie. But Lamey's activities were by no means confined to the club; his local appearances also included BCMFest, Club Passim, the ICONS Festival at the Irish Cultural Center of New England, New England Cable News and WGBH's “Celtic Sojourn.”

“As a Cape Breton fiddler in Boston, you were a big fish in a small pond. There weren't too many of us around. So I'd get called on for a lot of events – not just concerts or festivals but dances, weddings, social occasions.

“Now, living in Cape Breton,” he said with a smile, “I feel like a small fish in a large sea of really good fiddlers.”

Boston may have been home for much of Lamey's life, but Cape Breton was always a close second, given his family connections there, among them his grandfather Bill, a legendary fiddler who after moving to Boston in 1953 became a central figure in the city's Cape Breton community and its ties with the local Irish; Bill's wife Sally was fluent in Scots Gaelic and the daughter of a Gaelic songwriter. Bill – who later retired to Cape Breton – died when Doug was a child just starting out on fiddle, but his grandfather has always remained an inspiration and an influence. Lamey's first album, “A Step Back in Time,” underscored this legacy by interspersing audio excerpts of Bill's reminiscences on Cape Breton life and music. (Lamey also recorded an album as a member of the group Trí in 2009, two years before “A Step Back in Time.”)



Doug Lamey returns to his native Boston on May 14, with a concert at the Burren Backroom to launch his new album, “True North.”

Where “A Step Back in Time” featured several other musicians, including Kaitlin on piano, Lamey's cousins Sandy and Johnny MacDonald on guitar and piano, respectively, Gaelic singer Jeff MacDonald and cellist Natalie Haas, on “True North” things are far more pure-drop basic: Lamey with piano accompaniment from Sarah MacInnis on 12 of the 14 tracks, Mac Morin on the other two. It's the archetypal Cape Breton dynamic: a driving, energetic fiddle aligned with the piano's syncopated rhythms, walking bass lines, and perfectly lovely harmonies – or perhaps a soulful slow air or sweet-toned waltz, with a rich, empathetic piano backing to match.

Lamey covers quite a lot of ground, repertoire-wise, on “True North.” He pays homage to his grandfather on “Bill's 78 Records,” with a medley of selections from Bill's catalog of tunes, and to another Cape Breton music giant, Buddy MacMaster – MacInnis' grandfather – on “Buddy Jigs.” There are numerous tunes on the album that, while originating in Scottish tradition, have over time acquired a Cape Breton essence: “Dr. Shaw's Strathspey” and “Carnie's Canter” (by the renowned James Scott Skinner); “The Pitnacree Ferryman”; Nathaniel Gow's “The Fairy Dance”; “Nine Pint Coggie”; and Simon Fraser's “Inverness Lasses.”

A pair of tracks reference some foundational tune collections that have been important resources for Lamey: “Skye Tunes,” featuring “The Marquis of Huntley's Farewell” (by William Marshall), “Glen Grant,” “Miss Robertson” and “The Marquis of Tullybardine”; and “An Athole Set,” with “North of the

Grampians,” “Welcome to Your Feet Again,” “Braes of Auchtertyre,” “Cabar Féidh,” “Marquis of Queensbury” and “Mrs. Dundas of Arnistan.”

The album first took root some eight years ago, said Lamey, when he recorded the sets with Morin at Lakewind Sound (“It has a beautiful grand piano,” he says), but those tracks lay fallow because “life just got busy.” Then last spring, the Lameys moved to Baddeck, which was much closer to Lakewind, and Lamey – with Kaitlin's blessing (on the album's sleeve notes, he offers a dedication to her as “my True North”) – decided it was time to resuscitate the project. The turning point came in the fall, when Lamey played a series of gigs with different pianists, among them MacInnis. As studio time had finally become available, he ended up asking her to accompany him.

“This was Sarah's first time in a studio, but she was a natural at it, and we recorded 12 tracks in two four-hour sessions. What with those gigs I'd been playing, I was really liking the sound of fiddle and piano – an *actual* piano, not a ‘keyboard’ – and I didn't want to cover it up with any other instruments; it was just a nice authentic presentation of Cape Breton fiddle music.

“It was also interesting to have two different piano styles on the one album. Mac's playing is really elaborate and amazing; Sarah has a lot of feeling and a very nice groove to her playing. She was doing these little bass runs that I would hear in my grandfather's recordings – when I listened to our tracks, it almost seemed like we had a bass player with us.

“I just felt like I wanted to get an

album out, because it had been so long – it seemed like something that needed to get done.”

To put it mildly, a lot's changed for Lamey between “A Step Back in Time” and “True North.” He's had to balance music with family life and full-time work, of course, but he also feels he's grown as a musician.

“I feel much stronger, exponentially better than when I first came to Cape Breton,” he said. “At one point I went through a burst of writing, where I wrote about 70 pieces, but I wasn't comfortable enough to meld them into what I was doing. I've kept listening to and learning from my grandfather's recordings, but also really going into the Skye and Athole collections, as well as books by Paul Cranford, who did one on Brenda Stubbert and another on Winston ‘Scotty’ Fitzgerald [two other highly respected Cape Breton fiddlers].

“It's been a constant learning process – however much you progress, there's always more to learn. Having a family makes life different, of course. I was drawn to be home with Kaitlin and the kids, and it felt to me that this was the most important thing. But even then, music has never been completely on the back burner. It's been such a significant, positive part of my life and still is. Now, that might mean playing in the Burren Backroom or at a session up here – or I might have the house to myself before work, and if I pick up the fiddle and play just for myself, that might be the nicest little part of my day.

“I'm grateful that I've never taken it for granted.”

Doug Lamey's website is doug lamey.com.



Burren owners Tommy McCarthy and Louise Costello (at center) assembled a band for the occasion that included Jimmy and Seamus Noonan (at left), Robert Elliott (second from right), and Peadar Giles.

Supporters pitch in at Burren concert to help Hillaryann Gray

The Burren held a benefit concert on April 30 in support of Hilary Ann Gray, a former employee who has been dealing with severe health-related issues, that featured numerous performers from the Greater Boston area and special guests. The event raised about \$10,000 at the door, with an additional \$25,000 as of mid-May coming via a GoFundMe page organizers set up for Gray and her husband.



Kathleen Conneely had multiple duties at the concert: co-organizer, performer, and emcee.



A full house was on hand as Matt and Shannon Heaton kicked off the concert.



The audience made room for students from the O'Shea-Chaplin Academy of Irish Dance.



From left, James Kelly, Aoife Griffin, and Brid and Katie O'Donnell were among the many musicians who participated in the concert.

Sean Smith photos

June 24 & 25
Governor Hutchinson's Field

MILTON MUSIC FESTIVAL



FIREWORKS

SATURDAY AT 5:00PM

Typhoon Generals
Fat City Band

Fireworks at 9:45PM

CELTIC SUNDAY AT 2:00PM

DJ/MC:
Bob Brooks

BANDS:
Erin's Melody
Curragh's Fancy
The Fenian Sons
The Dooley Brothers
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Former Bay Stater Natalya Kay is thriving in the eye of Gaelic Storm

BY SEAN SMITH

BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Understand: It's not as if Massachusetts native Natalya Kay pined and prepared for years to be the fiddler for Gaelic Storm.

The 27-year-old Kay, who grew up in Lowell and spent time in Boston before moving to Nashville, joined the popular Celtic rock group a year ago, becoming the newest member of "that band from 'Titanic'" – the cameo appearance in the 1997 blockbuster a particularly notable chapter in their 26-year story.

But the offer to join Gaelic Storm came out of the blue, spurred by a recommendation from a fellow performer in a show in which Kay appeared during late 2020. Kay wasn't familiar with the band's repertoire and for that matter, hadn't even contemplated becoming a full-time touring musician.

"I knew the name 'Gaelic Storm,' but I didn't know what they looked like, what their music was all about," she says. "I didn't even know anything about them being in 'Titanic.'"

A year later, though, Kay – a former student of Greater Boston traditional fiddler Laurel Martin and a two-time qualifier for the All-Ireland Fleadh – is settling in just fine: She has gotten used to tour schedules and the traveling that goes with them, and to a type of performance that's quite different from that in traditional Irish circles, with rock-n-roll-type stylings that help amp up the crowd.

"At concerts featuring traditional music, you often see some people close their eyes while they listen, very focused on following every note or the sound of an instrument," she says. "For us, we'd think it would be weird if anyone was sitting with their eyes closed at one of our shows. Gaelic Storm concerts are all about being interactive, call-and-response, and dancing around."

This past St. Patrick's Day weekend found Kay back on home turf, as Gaelic Storm played a concert in a dual bill with The High Kings at Medford's Chevalier Theatre, and she reflected on a career turn that may have been unexpected – and came in the wake of some personal upheaval which led to her relocating to Nashville – but is proving to be a growth experience. More to the point, it's fun, and the kind of thing you can perhaps take in stride more easily at this point in your life. So why not?

"I was able to tip-toe into it," she says, explaining that for her first several shows with the band she shared fiddling duties with her predecessor, Katie Grennan. "I was nervous getting ready to do my first show on my own, without Katie. But when I walked out there with the band, I was just in the moment; you can't be on stage playing and at the same time freaking out that you can't do it. The guys [Patrick Murphy, Steve Twigger, Ryan Lacey, and Peter Purvis] have been great to me. They've been touring for so long and have a lot of the



Natalya Kay, who left Boston for Nashville four years ago, knew little or nothing about Gaelic Storm when they invited her to join them – but she's fit right in. "We can most definitely call her one of the family," says bandmate Steve Twigger. Sean Smith photo

same songs and routines; I was able to plug myself into that 'system.' Gaelic Storm is a really well-oiled machine, and everyone has their role.

"Sometimes, if it's a really big audience, or if we're doing some new material, I might feel 'stomach nervous.' But then I'll get out there, and the audiences are so happy, so friendly and giving, and they just want to have fun. Sure, sometimes we might hit a wrong note or forget lyrics in a song, but everything can be turned into a funny joke, so it's just a very comfortable place to be. It's not about making every note perfect, it's about the energy of the night."

"Natalya has breathed new life into songs and tunes that we have played a thousand times, reminding us of the joy we had creating them and performing them for the first time," says Twigger, who co-founded the band. "She has a precise and articulate playing style and a visual presence that enhances the music. There are no preconceived 'moves' or 'tricks of the trade': She lets the energy of the songs and the audience dictate her movements. It's a true pleasure to see her perform and our crowds can feel the enjoyment she brings every night."

Kay started out as a classical violinist, but her grandfather – from a Scottish background – started giving her fiddle lessons on her seventh birthday. She continued with classical, although her teacher taught her some elements of Irish music, until it became apparent that she was best suited to focus on Irish. Fiddle legend Seamus Connolly was living in Lowell at the time, and though he wasn't teaching anymore he put her in touch with Martin, his protégé, and Kay studied under her for five years; in 2010, Martin received a Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council to support her teaching of Kay, and the

two performed together.

In her teens, Kay expanded her musical involvement as well as her circle of musical friends and acquaintances, performing in the quartet Skylark with three other students of Martin (they appeared at BCMFest), making the rounds of sessions in Lowell and elsewhere, and taking a trip to Ireland – a sojourn that included performing in Tulla with students of Mary MacNamara. In 2012, she competed for the first time in the Mid-Atlantic Fleadh Cheoil, her second-place finish earning her an invitation to the All-Irelands in Cavan; she also attended the Scoil Éigse, a series of classes and workshops held as part of the Fleadh Cheoil.

"I really felt like I had the 'impostor syndrome' when I went to the All-Irelands; I was so in my head," she recalls. "I was very nervous and didn't play my best, but it was definitely worthwhile to go there."

Kay won her Mid-Atlantic Fleadh category the following year, but instead went to the Catskills Irish Arts Week, and appeared as a special guest at the week's kick-off concert. It was at the Catskills where she made the acquaintance of fiddler Patrick Ourceau, and finding his iteration of the Clare/East Galway style appealing, began taking lessons from him via Skype. She won consecutive first-place ribbons in the Lowell Fiddle and Banjo Contest and started anchoring a weekly session in downtown Lowell.

Outside of music, Kay went to college and then ventured into the workplace. She wound up doing a "kitchen sink-type job" for a start-up, and during 2019 she entered into an existential crisis. "The trouble was, I didn't know how to say 'No' – I've gotten better at that – and my job kept expanding to all these different functions, and I got so burnt out. I was good about saving up

my money, and I really didn't want to let a career make me give up on myself: You know, where between the work and the commuting and the stress, you don't eat right or get enough rest, and your physical and mental health just declines. So I finally left and took some time off."

The time off ended when a friend in Nashville persuaded her to come down and care for a woman who needed daily-living assistance for herself and her mother while undergoing medical treatment. "I lived with Elena for a month. She was this sweet woman who was always happy, didn't complain; we'd go shopping, go out to eat and I'd take her to her appointments, help her mom. It was like being in rehab. I just felt rejuvenated.

"I decided that this opportunity must have come for a reason, so I packed up my stuff in Boston and moved to Nashville. A few months later came Covid, and I remember thinking that if I'd been in Boston when the lockdown came, I would've given up on hopes and dreams and just 'settled.'"

As it happened, just before the lockdown she also met Jay, a Chicago native who'd been living in Nashville for about a decade, and he became yet another reason why her decision to uproot seemed a smart one.

The thing that was missing, however, was music. "Playing was a big part of my social life in Boston," says Kay, and while there is an Irish/Celtic scene in Nashville, she found it simply isn't as extensive as what she was used to in Boston. On St. Patrick's Day last year, Kay recalls thinking, "Wow, Irish music used to be such a big part of me, my identity – 'I play Irish fiddle!' – and yet I'm hardly playing it anymore."

She had, however, appeared in the "Christmas with the Celts" production in late 2020, at the invitation of Ric Blair, a member of the Irish Americana-styled band Nashville Celts. Although she enjoyed it, when he invited her again the following year, she declined: She was working and studying business management and felt taking time to be in the show would be too much of a distraction. But shortly thereafter, fiddler-vocalist Luisa Marion, another "Christmas with the Celts" performer, wound up recommending her to Gaelic Storm as they searched for a successor to Grennan.

And so, one April day, Kay got the call. It flummoxed her. On the one hand, here was an interesting musical opportunity, Kay says, but she hadn't been playing much at all and felt she might get in over her head.

"I hadn't had this kind of experience before. I didn't know their music, I had some questions about the financial end of things – I just had trouble putting it together in my head," she recalls, "So I tried to talk their manager out of his interest in me. Jay was there while I was on the phone, and afterwards he said, 'What did you do that for?' Two weeks

Natalya Kay thrives in the eye of Gaelic Storm

went by, and I didn't hear back, and Jay said, 'You totally blew it.' But then they reached out again, and they were still interested."

So, Kay went on a Gaelic Storm binge, learned a few of their songs and auditioned for them in Chicago.

"She was not the most seasoned of the players we auditioned, she didn't have the greatest depth or breadth of musical knowledge," says Twigger, "but she brought a wonderful honesty and natural, spirited approach. She had prepared well and played the audition material with life and precision at the blistering speed we required. I would say she 'nailed it.'"

"And they called me the next day," says Kay, "and I kind of said 'Yes,' even though inside I was saying 'Agh! What am I doing?'"

What she was doing was joining an outfit that had grown from a California pub band to an immensely popular group known for a loyal nationwide following and an ambitious work

schedule that often saw them rack up some 200 days of travel a year – not to mention regular appearances at the top of the Billboard World Music albums chart and on the same bill with such acts as the Zac Brown Band, the Goo Goo Dolls, Emmylou Harris, and Lyle Lovett. (Kay notes that, since three of the band members have families now, they're on the road less, playing "only" 110 shows a year.)

"It's always difficult to judge whether a new player will fit into the team and touring lifestyle," says Twigger. "The stage is just a small part of the life of a professional touring player, but in the short chat we had afterwards with Natalya, it was clear that she was a warm and thoughtful person who would bring new enjoyment to some of the touring elements that us road-weary veterans have become jaded with. It's proven to be refreshing and invigorating to once again experience the music, the venues, towns, cities, sights, the restaurants, bars, museums, and the enthusiastic

fans through fresh eyes."

Kay had to learn almost two dozen songs and tune sets for her first tour with the band. She has taken delight in, for example, "Johnny Jump Up" and "Faithful Land," a slower, soulful number penned by Twigger, Murphy, and former member Steve Wehmeyer – "I really like the moment of stillness it brings to our mostly high-energy, free-spirited, rockin' show," she noted in a post for the band's blog – as well as a perennial crowd favorite, "The Night Pat Murphy Died." "The Salt Lick," which features her in duet with piper-whistle player Purvis, is a slow jig-and-reels set that brings Kay's fiddle to the forefront.

She also got used to constantly being around four veteran rockers. "After a few weeks, I said, 'Gee, you guys are pretty chill,'" she laughs. "And they said, 'Yeah, we're just trying to behave for a little while until you get used to us.' But they're great guys, and everyone gets along really well."

Kay also acknowledges becoming

something of a fashion plate: between make-up, hair, and wardrobe, it can take her as much as an hour to get ready for a show – a far cry from the come-as-you-are look in the trad world. "I don't really *have* to do all this," she says with a sly smile, modeling a mirror-ball dress. "But hey, I'm the only woman on this tour, so I just decided I get to do extra glitz and glam if I want to. And you know what? It's really fun, and also a kind of self-care – just a way of feeling good – for when you're in a new hotel every night."

"My favorite part of wearing this," she adds, "is there are almost always some little girls who come to the show, and they'll yell 'I love your dress!' at me. It's so cute."

"She is a team player and a popular addition on and off stage, and we can most definitely call her one of the family," says Twigger. "Can't wait to see what the future brings."

Gaelic Storm will appear at Plymouth Memorial Hall on June 15. Go to memorialhall.com for tickets and details.



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Prof. Richard Finnegan; led Stonehill's Irish Studies program

Noted professor in Irish Studies and political science Richard B. Finnegan died at the age of 80 on May 20, at Massachusetts General Hospital, his wife Joanne "Scotti" Finnegan at his bedside.

Mr. Finnegan was born in Boston and attended BC High and Stonehill College, where he earned his bachelor of arts. Masters degrees followed from Boston College and Harvard University and a PhD from Florida State University.

As a young professor,

he returned to Stonehill, where he spent a long and distinguished career as one of the college's most prolific and respected Professors.

He served as chair of the Political Science and International Studies departments and as director of Irish Studies program while helping to compile the largest collection of Irish government documents in the United States.

Stonehill awarded him the honors of distinguished alumnus as well

as distinguished scholar and on his retirement, endowed an International Studies Chair in his honor.

In addition to his wife, Mr. Finnegan leaves Scotti, his three sons, Rich, Scott, and Jesse, daughter-in-law Sheila and grandchildren Shannon, Liam, Riley and Kate; a brother, Neal; nieces and nephew, Neal and Wayne Finnegan, Terry Lynch and Lynn Judge.

A gathering of family and friends will be held to share food, drink and stories of the quintes-



Richard B. Finnegan
A political scientist who maintained an abiding interest in Irish Studies.

His professional and personal life well lived at the Martin Institute at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts on June 4.

Boston Irish fixture and football standout Jim O'Brien; at 84

Longtime Irish Boston community leader Jim O'Brien, of Lowell, formerly of Scituate, died on March 1. He was 84. A native of New Haven, CT, he attended Boston College on a full football scholarship. He had a brief professional career with the Detroit Lions and the Buffalo Bills that was cut short due to injury. In the late 1960s he founded the class ring and diploma company, O'Brien and Johnson.

After many trips to Ireland, he had an idea to bring American football to the Emerald Isle. His dream was realized in 1988 when he brought thousands of Americans to Dublin to watch "The Match" between Army and Boston College. This was known as the Emerald Isle Classic. He was later inducted into BC's Athletic Hall of Fame. During his life, he worked with many organizations, including the *Boston Irish Reporter*, the Irish Chamber of Commerce USA (IC-CUSA), and the Special Olympics.

Loving father of Kevin B. O'Brien and his wife, Michele, of Sandwich,



Jim O'Brien
He fulfilled his dream: BC vs Army in Dublin.

and Tracy Foulsham and her husband, Paul, of Weymouth. Longtime partner of Nicola "Niki" Tsongas of Lowell. Former husband of Millicent "Penny" O'Brien of Hull. Brother of the late Joyce Sheehan. Papa of Kelsey, Julia, Michael, Kyle, and Molly. Jim-Jim to Declan, Nina, Niko, Callum, and Mae. Also survived by several nieces and nephews. Funeral services were celebrated on March 8, with burial in Middletown, CT. Memorial donations may be made to Special Olympics Massachusetts, 512 Forest Street, Marlborough,

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JUNE NOTEBOOK Boston's Irish Consulate

The Irish Consulate marched alongside the Rian Immigrant Center at this year's Boston Pride Parade on June 10, under the banner "Irish for Pride." We are also very pleased to celebrate Pride with a special screening of the 2020 film "Dating Amber" on June 29 at 5:30 p.m. "Dating Amber" is a coming-of-age story set in 1990s Ireland at a distinctive moment in Irish LGBTQIA+ history. It's about two closeted Irish teens who start a pretend straight relationship to fit in with their peers.

Reserve your spot today to view this hilarious and heart-warming film at tinyurl.com/2zef5mjd. In Ireland, this film is rated 15A as it may not be suitable for audiences under the age of 15.

To mark Bloomsday on June 16 the Irish Consulate is collaborating with the Here Comes Everybody Players on a special performance at The Boston Playwrights Theatre beginning at 7 p.m. We hope you will save the date! More details available on the Consulate's twitter, @IrelandBoston, and at dfa.ie/boston.

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With summer just around the corner, the Consulate General would like to share the evergreen reminder that Irish citizens should make sure their passport is in date before booking any travel. The fastest and most convenient way to apply is with Passport Online via dfa.ie/passportonline.

Wicklow's Powerscourt Estate blazes sustainability trail

Multi-award-winning Powerscourt Estate and Gardens in County Wicklow has received a significant sustainable tourism accolade in light of the many sustainability initiatives which have been implemented on the Estate in recent years.

The stunning Palladian mansion, set in 1,000 acres, which include 47 acres of landscaped gardens, is the first major visitor attraction on the island to achieve the certification, which uses criteria that are recognised by the UN-mandated Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Over the last few years, it has put in place a number of sustainability measures, including an integrated energy management system, a waste reduction plan, biodiversity rewilding initiatives such as wildflower meadows, a tree planting programme, and a bee sanctuary at the walled gardens.

A pioneering spirit has always existed for environmental and nature protection on Powerscourt Estate as it was originally purchased to create hydroelectric power at its waterfall, the highest one in Ireland.

The overarching mission at Powerscourt Estate is for it to be recognized on a global stage for its sustainability initiatives, and to be net zero by 2025.

Powerscourt is just one of many sustainable destinations that County Wicklow offers the eco-conscious traveller.

At Avondale Forest Park, a treetop walk stretching for 1.3km offers wonderful views over the Vale of Avoca, the Wicklow Mountains, and beyond.



Premier attraction Powerscourt Estate has been certified by Sustainable Travel Ireland as meeting globally accepted standards for sustainable tourism.

Rising to 23m at its highest point and with interpretive points along the way describing the flora and fauna, Beyond the Trees Avondale is an immersive experience. Sustainability is central to the experience with locally sourced Douglas fir and larch used for the treetop walk and viewing tower.

County Wicklow is also home to the nature haven of Glendalough, famous

for the important monastic settlement founded there in the sixth century. The remains of the site include an impressive round tower, churches and a graveyard sitting within a spectacular backdrop of mountains and shimmering lakes.

The stunning Wicklow Mountains National Park offers scenic drives and numerous hiking trails through a gorgeous landscape. Visitors are

encouraged to leave no trace to help preserve the biodiversity and pristine beauty of the area.

You can also enjoy a tour and tasting visit to Wicklow Way Wines to discover how their Moinéir wines are made sustainably from the pure juice of Irish berries.

IRELAND.com

Ten immersive museums to visit on the island of Ireland

1 National Museum of Ireland - Archaeology, Dublin

Explore 9,000 years of history through fascinating archaeological artefacts that include Irish bog bodies, the Ardagh Chalice, the 'Tara' Brooch and the famous Derrynaflan Hoard. The museum is housed in a beautiful Palladian-style building that is a Dublin landmark. Throughout May, free guided tours of the museum's highlights are on offer.

2 Ulster Museum, Belfast

There is something for every interest in this award-winning museum with collections of art, natural science and history. Delve into the history of Northern Ireland, see Ireland's only dinosaur bones, admire the many pieces of applied art and view the special collections of work by female artists and the LGBT+ community.

3 Waterford Treasures

In Ireland's oldest city you get not one museum but a whole quarter with four world-class museums - the Medieval Museum, the Irish Silver Museum, the Irish Museum of Time and the Bishops Palace - within minutes of each other. Bookable on one ticket, they take you back to Waterford's Viking roots, through the treasures of the medieval age and into Georgian and Victorian times.

4 Galway City Museum

In this modern museum you can browse a fascinating collection of cultural heritage objects related to the city of Galway and its people. The oldest known



Scene from the Mellon Homestead at the Ulster American Folk Park.

Claddagh ring, war memorabilia, sports souvenirs and medieval gun money are just some of the wide variety of items on display.

5 Titanic Belfast

Belfast's multi-award-winning visitor attraction, which tells the story of the tragic liner and the city that built her, recently reopened with four new galleries and a superb replica model of the ship. It also displays a number of extremely rare artefacts which are of great historical significance including the world-famous violin belonging to the ship's hero musician.

6 National Famine Museum, Roscommon

Featuring a world-class multimedia exhibition, the museum tells the story of Ireland's Great Famine through the personal tragedies of the tenants and landlords on the Strokestown Estate. It explains the events that led to the forced emigration of 1,490 people from the estate in 1847 and is also the starting point for the National Famine Way, a walking and cycling trail from Roscommon to Dublin.

7 Ulster American Folk Park, Tyrone

The Ulster American Folk Park tells the story of Ulster people's emigration

to North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this part outdoor, part indoor museum, you'll learn about life in rural Ireland, the hardships endured on the journey across the Atlantic and how migrants built new lives in a new land.

8 National Museum of Country Life, Mayo

Step back into daily life in rural Ireland in days gone by at the National Museum of Country Life. With exhibitions of household objects, trades and crafts, bicycles and more, you'll discover how people lived, worked, celebrated and how their traditions sustained them.

9 Hunt Museum, Limerick

Housing over 2,000 works of art and antiquities from the estate of John and Gertrude Hunt, this museum exhibits ancient treasures, as well as paintings by Picasso, Renoir and Jack B Yeats. The collection spills into the outdoors continuing in the Museum in a Garden, where some of the museum's key artefacts are reproduced at large scale.

10 Tower Museum, Londonderry

With two permanent exhibitions - *The Story of Derry* and *An Armada Shipwreck - La Trinidad Valencera* - and frequently updated temporary exhibitions, the Tower Museum in the walled city of Derry~Londonderry is a top visitor attraction. The museum also boasts an open-air viewing facility with panoramic views of the city and River Foyle.

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