

Boston Irish

Vol. 1, Issue 4

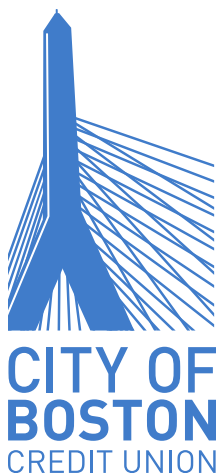
Winter 2020

BostonIrish.com



Boston Common at Christmastime.

Original painting by Vincent Crotty



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A few months into her job as its president of ICC board, Irish-born Martina Curtin continues to take stock of things

The Irish Cultural Centre of New England has elected Irish-born Martina Curtin as its new board president. She took the helm in July as the first woman to lead the agency.

She is the founder of CHCHome Care, Inc., a Boston home-care agency whose mission is to allow clients to remain in their homes while receiving skilled medical care. With the help of her husband, Craig Carlson, she has grown her business with a burgeoning group of caregivers that includes basic personal-care assistants, registered nurses, and end-of-life-care specialists. She spoke recently with the Boston Irish contributor Maureen Forry-Sorrell about her new role.

BI: First of all, congratulations on your new honor. This is really exciting to see you at the helm at the ICC.

MC: Thank you. I'm really honored and privileged to have been nominated as the first female president of the cultural centre in their 30 years of existence. I think it speaks to the ICC's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

BI: Where do you hail from in Ireland?

MC: I grew up in the west of Ireland, in Co. Clare, very close to the Cliffs of Moher and Doonan and Lisdoonvarna. I'm the oldest of 11 children and grew up on a working farm run by my parents, who are now deceased. My brother continues to run the entity. I was educated in Ireland before moving to the US almost 20 years ago and taking up work in private home care. In late 2009, I set up a private home care company called Curtin Home Care, which is located in the Back Bay at 20 Park Plaza.

BI: I can see your background in healthcare being



Martina Curtin and her husband, Craig Carlson

beneficial to your new role at the ICC.

MC: Absolutely. I'm a very good listener and I think that's an important quality no matter what organization you are involved with. And I do genuinely care about people and I think that will serve me well. My mantra is that it's important to surround yourself with good people, and I've done that at Curtin Home Care. There are some outstanding people at the Cultural Centre, so I think that bodes well for me in my tenure as president.

BI: I understand Seamus Mulligan will be staying on as president emeritus.

MC: Yes. Seamus is staying on in that role. He has dedicated and many, many years of service to the ICC and he has been a great mentor to me over the last couple of months. There's a lot of institutional knowledge that I have to apply, but slowly but surely, I'm learning as I go along.

BI: Given that the pandemic will remain an issue for some time still, can you give us a glimpse of how things have been going to date?

MC: The Cultural Centre has really been impacted by Covid, as you know, because we are all about in-person events. We held a poetry night in conjunction with the Irish Consulate, and we had our golf tournament, which was our biggest one to date. In September, we had our virtual 5K, also our biggest race to date. One of the lifesavers for us was the tents. We were able to have outdoor dining, small concerts, and food that definitely kept us relevant and connected to the community. We hope to have some indoor dining going forward, but that will be based on Covid regulations. The biggest thing for the rest of the year is our Annual Draw, scheduled for Dec. 12. This year we're doing a 50/50 raffle and we've only printed 2,000 tickets.

I do want to acknowledge the support we've received from the Consulate; the relationship between the Consulate and the Cultural Centre has never been as strong as it is today.

For more information about the Happenings at the ICC, see its ad in this edition of Boston Irish, or go to IrishCulture.org.

Publisher's Notes/Ed Forry

A family gives thanks via Zoom

The traditional gatherings for Thanksgiving were only distant memories this year, as the need for enforced isolation was cause for a certain level of melancholy. Although we could not be together on Thanksgiving Day, I was able, thanks to Zoom, to connect with my sisters, Mary, Brenda and Lois, and members of their families, three generations connected by computer screens and smart phone video across the digital divide.

My daughter Maureen set up a Zoom conference and we sent out the word to my sister in Andover, my sister-in-law in Georgia, and my cousin in Brighton, inviting them to meet online at one o'clock that day. "This way we can all get together, at least remotely, on Thanksgiving Day," I told them. "It will be a unique and interesting way to see each other and spend at least part of the holiday together."

Some other generations of the family logged on from their own homes. Lois was joined in her

Gainesville, GA, home by her two daughters, while her grandchildren checked in from Atlanta. It worked better than we had hoped; we wound up having a dozen connections with family members in Georgia, Connecticut, Newton, Brighton, Dorchester, and Andover.

And typically, we didn't arrive all at once; some were late in checking in. The session began with just two of us, and then a third logged in, and then a fourth, and one by one, as new arrivals logged on, we were seeing them as if they were just showing up at our front door, coming in to join us for a Thanksgiving reunion.

When my Atlanta niece and nephews appeared on screen and were introduced, some of these cousins were meeting each other for the first time. "It really adds so much joy to the day," said Peg Sheehan from her Connecticut home.

This strange holiday season is something we hope



we'll never have to live through again. The inability to come together and connect in person with family and friends on the holiday adds an extra strain to the almost nine months that we have been living in our own isolated versions of cocoons. But everyone seemed pleased to make this brief holiday connection, and we resolved to try it all again for Christmas.



Eire Society president Mimi McNealy Langenderfer, Rev Liam Bergin and Congressman Richie Neal at the virtual Gold Medal presentation

Eire Society honors US Rep. Neal

Congressman **Richie Neal** received the Eire Society's 2020 Gold Medal during virtual ceremonies on Sat., Oct. The chair of the House Ways & Means Committee, Rep. Neal was reelected to his seat in November. The society will host a virtual Christmas online gathering on Sat., Dec. 19 at 5:30 pm. Register at eiresociety.org.

Dorchester's **John King** achieved rock star status in Ireland last month, where CNN's election coverage captured a large audience. King has family roots in Connemara, in Doonoughan, near Ballyconeely, and not far from Clifden. See Larry Donnelly story on Page 5.

Appearing on an Irish TV talk show, Brookline

native **Conan O'Brien** told Late Late Show host Ryan Turbidity that he plans to visit Ireland someday soon. "My body immediately responds to being in Ireland because every single cell in my body says, 'Yes, there's no sun out,' and my skin says, 'Yes, you are home,'" O'Brien said.

"Let me explain to you," he added, "that I am living near the Mexican border and it's killing me. I am not meant for this environment. I have dermatologists who I see every six months and he says to me, 'Get out of this country, go back home, you are supposed to live in a bog, you idiot.'"

A Christmas Celtic Sojourn Returns!

Virtual A CHRISTMAS CELTIC SOJOURN with Brian O'Donovan

December 15th – 20th

This is one of my favorite times of year as we prepare our *Christmas Celtic Sojourn*. While we can't be with you in person this year, we hope you can join us online for one of our special broadcasts this holiday season. We have some of our singers and dancers joining us from various parts of the world including Edinburgh, Sligo, Kerry, Canada and Michigan.

This year we are gathering veterans of shows past to bring you what promises to be a unique edition of *A Christmas Celtic Sojourn*:

Seamus Egan, *Music Director, multi instrumentalist*

Maeve Gilchrist, *Assistant Music Director,
Celtic Harp and Piano*

Owen Marshall, *Bouzouki and Harmonium*

Conor Hearn, *Guitar*

Fiddlers **Jenna Moynihan,
Maura Shawn Scanlin**

Singers **Mairi Campbell, Siobhan Miller,
Hannah Rarity, Eilis Kennedy, Cathy Jordan**

Dancers **Cara Butler, Nic Gareiss**

Vocal Harmonies of **Windborne**

Singer Songwriter **Aoife O'Donovan**
and Cellist **Eric Jacobsen**

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PHOTO CREDIT: TIM RICE PHOTO



Ireland's border towns are breathing much easier; their man Biden is taking over in the White House

"So, I'll sing farewell to Carlingford
And farewell to Greenore
And I'll think of you both day and night
Until I return once more
Until I return once more"
-Tommy Makem

Every nation has a stake in US presidential elections and no country had more at risk this year than Ireland. Counties and towns along the border of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, whose fragile peace process and economy are threatened by Brexit, were the most exposed. One such town, Carlingford, Co. Louth, on the Cooley Peninsula, is the ancestral home of Joe Biden's great-grandfather, Owen Finnegan, who emigrated in 1849.

In Owen's time, many families in Louth raised a small number of pigs to sell at market. In rural Ireland, where the lives and livelihoods of tenant farmer families were precarious and money was always in short supply, pigs could generate cash to cover the lean months of the year. Ancient Gaelic expressions of the area often refer to them. In America, we would describe a winner who "has the world by the tail" or is "on top of the world," but in Louth, Monaghan, or Armagh, they might say "ar mhuin na muice," which literally means "to be on the pig's back." Biden's victory clearly put him, and all the people of Louth, on the pig's back. I will let the reader decide who the pig is.

The history of Louth is the history of Ireland

Louth, known as the "wee County" due to its diminutive size, is located on the Irish Sea, an hour's drive from both Dublin and Belfast. Carlingford is a medieval town reputed to be one of the oldest in Ireland, the location of St. Patrick's second landing in Ireland in 432 AD, the site of a 9th-century Viking settlement, and a 12th-century Norman town. Oliver Cromwell's conquest wrought destruction across Louth in 1649. Catholic churches and abbeys were torched and converted into graveyards, and vast swathes of Louth were awarded to Cromwell's foreign warlords. In 1690, the Battle of the Boyne was fought on the Louth/Meath border. Adopted Bostonian John Boyle O'Reilly was born nearby in 1844. Louth's long, rich history, which includes conquest, dispossession, landlordism, the great hunger, risings and rebellion, emigration, independence, partition, long simmering sectarian conflict, and economic stagnation tells the story of Ireland in an intense geographic microcosm.

"Meitheal" through the Troubles, and the Good Friday Agreement

According to Seamus Kirk, who served Co. Louth in elective office for 42 years (34 of them in the Dail), including as Minister for Agriculture and as Ceannt Comhairle (the equivalent of Speaker of the House) until his retirement in 2016, the rebirth of Louth and Carlingford is due mostly to "meitheal," an ancient Irish Gaelic word that denotes a cooperative labor system in Ireland. The closest English term is "teamwork" for tasks like bringing in the crops that are best accomplished with collective effort. Put another way, Seamus told me, "The community pulled itself up by its socks" achieving the "Tidy Town" recognition in 1988, winning a grant from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) in 1992 (the first border town south of the border to receive such a grant), European Heritage Town designation, and a European Destination of Excellence in 2008. In 2009, Carlingford even secured a European Habitat and Protected Species Directive as a protected habitat zone for Leprechauns!

Seamus describes the key turning points in modern Irish history that set the stage for Louth's and Ireland's flourishing: "The country secured independence from Britain in the early part of the last century. We became members of the European Economic Community in



Andrea McKevitt in Carlingford celebrating the 2020 election returns.



Seamus Kirk, Co. Louth stalwart.



Joe Biden in Carlingford in 2016 with his new friends Tadhg and Seamus.

the latter half of the same century. Our economy has benefited enormously from its membership. Foreign direct investment from the US has been a huge help in stemming the hemorrhage of emigration. In some ways we are closer to Boston than Berlin."

In recent times, the event that benefited this corner of the Island of Ireland was the Good Friday Agreement, and the outbreak of peace. As a border county, Louth endured more than its share of violence and the economic stagnation that was a consequence of an endless volley of atrocities and reprisals. Says Frances Taylor of Carlingford, who has worked in tourism in Carlingford for many years: "Before the agreement, it would have been thought unsafe to visit, but now they come in their droves."

International awards along with investments in infrastructure and cultural amenities put Carlingford on the tourism map. The Good Friday Agreement and the open border morphed the town's location from a liability into an advantage. According to Margaret Harold from the Carlingford Heritage Center, residents of both communities in the North began travelling to Carlingford in large numbers on the weekend of July 12, when annual Orange marches intensify in the North. Protestants and Catholics alike, seeking respite from the antagonism of the marches, "came to Cooley, enjoyed the peace and charm so much that they started visiting regularly." Margaret herself commuted from Carlingford to Belfast throughout the Troubles and experienced firsthand the difficulty of the cross border commute with car searches, intimidation, and anxiety created by an armed border.

Initiatives championed by activists and political leaders inspired philanthropic, corporate, government investment, and the peace after The Good Friday Agreement opened up tourism, massively transforming Carlingford into a national, and even international, tourism mecca in Ireland's northeast.

US vote coincides with key moment for Brexit

The UK remains, for the moment, in an "in-between state" like the opposite of purgatory. Purgatory is the "condition" after death where one requires further "purification" before admission to heaven. The Brexit transition period maintains the benefits of EU membership, which may look like heaven after the perpetual self-punishment of exiting the EU begins on New Year's Day.

Tory infighting, Covid-19, and gaming the US election results have left the negotiations for a new EU/UK trade deal unfinished at this, the 11th hour. Boris Johnson attempted to undermine the Northern Ireland Protocol by introducing an Internal Markets Bill in the UK to satisfy his extreme right Brexiters. Those of his own ministers with any vestigial integrity or instinct to leap from a sinking ship admitted it was breaking the law and resigned.

Boris was warned. US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Ways and Means Chairman Richie Neal, and presidential candidate Joe Biden all stated that there would be no trade deal if the Good Friday Agreement is jeopardized, but Boris the chancer and bluffer decided to see how the American election played out. Yet he was the first foreign leader to congratulate Biden on his victory. Bullies are always obsequious when the big brother of their victim appears. Like Biff from "Back to the Future," Boris is now ready to polish Mr. McFly's car. But Biden remembers Boris calling Obama a "Kenyan" and, more importantly, Joe knows Irish history and his own family's origins in Louth.

Brexit's harm to Ireland

Brexit is principally, but not exclusively, British self-harm. Even an expertly negotiated trade deal that reaffirms no hard border will have severe negative impacts for the entire island, especially in counties along the 300-mile border from Dundalk to Derry.

(Continued on page 6)

Yes, Dorchester's John King is Ireland's newest household name

WICKLOW, Ireland – One of the things that American visitors to Ireland are commonly confounded by is the extent to which people here are steeped in and informed about politics 3,000 miles away. The transatlantic ties sewn by emigration, family and, increasingly, business are largely responsible. And Irish people love their politics. Over the past four years, it has been with a mixture of disbelief and horror that they have looked on at the Trump administration.

Accordingly, they weren't about to stop watching until they knew, for sure, who would be inaugurated on Jan. 20, 2021. A man who is known throughout the US and to people across Massachusetts owing to his lengthy, stellar career at CNN, but who is especially familiar to Dorchester natives and residents because he grew up in St. Mark's Parish, thus made an extraordinary entrance onto Ireland's collective radar screen: It is no overstatement to say that John King was the most listened to and trusted individual in this country in the days after Nov. 3.

More on Ireland's newest celebrity momentarily.

Back in East Milton, where I grew up, it's fair to say that politics was invariably to the fore in our house. My father, another Larry, was a fount of wisdom about the toughest business of them all. He grew up in and around it. I wish he had stood for office himself.

His brother Brian was a Massachusetts state representative from Dorchester who later spent seven terms in the United States House of Representatives and served as ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago while Bill Clinton was president. Their uncles, Frank and John Kelly, had been Boston city councillors, with Frank later serving as lieutenant governor and attorney general and running unsuccessfully for governor.

It's in the blood. A related bad habit I picked up from my Dad at a young age was incessantly hollering back at the television and radio when politics and current affairs were being discussed. I've frequently thought that "I know better!" and have to get my two cents in. In truth, I was jealous of those who earn a living from talking about what is my passion.

But Boston Irish lawyers with a strong interest in politics and an affiliation to the Democratic Party are more dime a dozen than diamond in the rough in the land of my birth. One of the many unexpected benefits of relocating to Ireland nearly two decades ago, however, has been realizing what has always been a dream and taking on what has morphed into a second career for me: media punditry on the politics of the two



THE EXPLAINER: John King worked with CNN's Election Central tally board during the long hours after the polls closed on Nov. 3.

places I will forever consider home.

Since 2008, it has been a privilege to analyze the results of US presidential elections as they come in on what is usually the first Tuesday in November on RTÉ, the national broadcaster. Given the time difference, it's an overnight shift. This year, the coverage was anchored by Caitríona Perry, who reported on American politics brilliantly in her tenure as the network's Washington correspondent and has written two insightful books on the election of Donald Trump and the influence of Irish America.

We were joined by numerous high profile guests from the US, such as former White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, former New York Congressman Joe Crowley, and sitting Philadelphia Congressman Brendan Boyle. Our live program wrapped up shortly after 4 a.m., Irish time, when the outcome wasn't entirely clear, but the key indicators were all pointing to a win for Joe Biden.

Then, thanks to satellite technology, a guy who was brought up in a three-decker between Ashmont and Fields Corner came into sitting rooms in every city, town, village, and rural area.

Irish people are accustomed to protracted election counts and couldn't get enough of it as John King broke down the results state by state and county by county, demonstrating a vast knowledge as he kept going on almost no sleep and buckets of coffee. The "magic wall" of the US he and others use at CNN took on a life of itself. And inevitably, the viewers had to find

out: Could they claim him? The screenwriter of the hit comedy "Derry Girls" asked if he was Irish in a tweet. King's succinct reply – "Always" – sealed the deal.

In a subsequent interview with the much beloved Miriam O'Callaghan on her Sunday morning radio show, King downplayed the multiple compliments offered by the host and her listeners. Having done his homework, he described Miriam as Ireland's Oprah.

He also spoke movingly about his family, in particular his late father Chris (who, coincidentally, was a Dorchester contemporary and pal of my Dad's) and his Connemara-born grandparents, as well as the valuable lessons learned in childhood that have remained with him. Like so many Americans before him, King is now planning a visit back "home" to Galway to reunite with his cousins and get a fuller sense of his roots.

He has said that he looks forward to a few pints in Keogh's in his ancestral village of Ballyconneely – so deep in the west of Ireland that the next stop literally is Boston. He'll have a tough time buying his own, though.

In his typically expert communication of what actually happened in Election 2020, John King won the rapt attention and sincere admiration of the Irish people. He did his family and the neighborhood that shaped him very proud.

Larry Donnelly is a Boston-born attorney, a Law Lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway and a regular Irish media contributor on politics, current affairs and law on both sides of the Atlantic. He is on Twitter @LarryPDonnelly.



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About Rian, 2020, and the J-1 Visa Program for 2021

Working as a software developer for a Manhattan company called On The Stage, Michael Downey felt that the energy of New York City was like no other – stating “it’s fast-paced and full of life ... certainly, when you compare it to the countryside in Dromore, Co. Down.”

According to Michael, “there’s too much to do in NYC and it never stops. Luckily, if you’re on an intern budget, NYC has tons of *free* events to offer, and it can be overwhelming deciding which event to go to.”

Michael set a budget plan after quickly realizing the challenge of getting by on his intern salary. He saw this as a great learning experience on how to manage your personal finances. In his work, he learned new skills, experienced new ways of working, and gained confidence in his own abilities. He said he knows this work experience will help him greatly as he returns to University to complete his studies.

Michael made the most of living in a major city in terms of sporting events, including the 2019 US Open Tennis women’s singles final (where he was thrilled to see Serena Williams play) and the PGA Golf Tour National Trust Tournament (where he was equally thrilled to see Rory McIlroy hit his shots).

He also got to watch the Brooklyn Nets vs Miami Heat when visiting the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, describing



Michael Downey high atop the basketball floor at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

an NBA game as “an awesome experience; they really know how to put on a show.”

One of Michael’s favorite things to do in New York was to sample new cuisines, an exciting weekly routine for him. Having sampled a wide range of international dishes, he has settled on his favorites being Peruvian and Japanese.

“The United States is a huge and diverse place. Every state is like its own country in terms of legislation, culture, people, and a way of life – that’s what makes the country so special!” he said. He experienced all this firsthand by travelling to a number of cities, including Miami, Marco Island, Naples, Orlando, Tampa, Houston, and Chicago.

“Overall, it seems clear that Michael had a fantastic visa experience. Much to his credit it has to be said that when providing his feedback, he focused on all the positives of his experience, despite spending the last half of his program in the Covid-19 restricted world we have all become so used to.

Key dates on permanent residence

Q. *I have an interview scheduled with US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on my application for permanent residence. Assuming the interview goes well, what happens next?*

A. In cases where the interview is successful, the USCIS officer has the authority to grant you permanent residence immediately. Your new status will begin on the very same day as the interview, and for most people it will be valid for ten years. People applying through a US citizen spouse who have been married for less than two years at the time of approval receive “conditional permanent residence,” which is valid for two years.

After the interview, the officer will order production of your permanent resident card (I-551, or “green card”). In cases where no interview is required, a notice of a favorable decision is mailed to the applicant. In both types of cases, the actual card will be sent to the mailing address on record with USCIS, so make sure to inform USCIS, not just the Post Office, right away if you change your address. The easiest way to report your change of address is online at uscis.gov.

New permanent residents should be aware of the following:

(1) “Conditional” permanent residents (those who were granted permanent residence based on marriage to a US citizen) need to petition to have the conditions removed before the two-year green card expires. The I-751 Petition to

Remove Conditions on Residence must be filed within the 90-day period preceding the expiration date. Once the petition is approved, the applicant will receive a new green card valid for 10 years.

(2) Once conditional permanent residents have their conditions removed, they are eligible to become naturalized US citizens three years after the date that their first application for permanent residence was approved. Naturalization applications may be filed as early as 90 days before the end of this three-year period.

(3) With certain exceptions (involving military service, for example), all other green card holders are eligible to become naturalized US citizens five years after the grant of permanent residence. Again, naturalization applications may be filed as early as 90 days before the five years have expired.

Remember that eligibility for US citizenship involves other criteria in addition to the length of permanent residence – good moral character, English language proficiency, and physical presence in the US.

Rian attorneys are available to provide advice on any immigration matters. Our walk-in immigration clinics have been suspended due to COVID-19, but our attorneys are providing free immigration consultations over the phone and will be happy to speak with you. Please call 617-542-7654 to schedule a phone consultation.

Ireland’s border towns are breathing much easier; their man Biden is taking over in the White House

(Continued from page 4)

In 1849, Owen Finnegan walked from Carlingford a few miles west to Newry in Co. Armagh (now in the North), boarded a ship that then sailed by Carlingford and Greenore. Prior to the GFA, during the era of the closed border, that same walk would have been much more difficult. In the 1980s, at the depth of the Troubles, Newry’s unemployment rate was 28 percent, Eamonn Connolly, the managing director of the Newry Business Improvement District, noted. A measure of how far the economy has advanced in peacetime is that in early 2020, before the Covid crisis, a revitalized Newry was approaching nearly full employment. Brexit imperils this progress. Adds Connolly: “Whatever Brexit deal is arrived at, and we believe that there will be one, will inevitably lead to more cost and time to business.” A no-deal crash-out favored by right wing Tories would lead almost inevitably to a hard border

Empathy, knowledge will accompany Biden back into to the White House

The great hunger, An Gorta Mor, killed 1 in 8 people in Ireland, even while food exports from Ireland actually increased during the potato blight. Two million others left. Joe’s interest in his Louth origins helped him to internalize Ireland’s historical suffering and the special challenges that border communities currently face. As Seamus Kirk reflected, “It is easy to understand how Joe Biden’s political philosophy and understanding of the needs of those less well off in society formed and developed with forebearers from Ireland of the great famine years.”

Cultures respond to mass suffering in different ways: a desire for revenge, a competitive victimhood,

or solidarity. Ireland is not a perfect society, but in general, Irish culture leans to solidarity (“meitheal”), as does her great-grandson, Joe Biden.

Many Americans feel relief at Biden’s win, but that solace is blended with the horror of Trump’s strong showing, refusal to concede, and Republican gains in the US House. A friend /activist/ Biden campaign worker in Pennsylvania emailed me her reaction on election day: “My chest feels hollow, caved in. Half of my country actually endorses racism, sexism, classism...2016 was *not* a fluke, after all.”

So, it’s a mixed bag for Americans: Conservatives are angry Trump lost, progressives are gutted that the Republicans will likely retain Senate control and that the election was even close after more than 260,000 Covid deaths. Even so, Biden won. Many danced in the streets and got a good night’s sleep for the first time in years.

Joe Biden’s win is a landslide – for Ireland

Vice President Biden made an official visit to Cooley in 2016. The entire region turned out and called him “Cousin Joe,” meeting at Lily Finnegan’s pub, one of the oldest pubs on the island. “Joe’s granddaughter is named Finnegan Biden” says Sheila Boyle of Carlingford “We know that when he says he loves Ireland, he means it.” His victory gives Louthians the confidence that they will have a renewed ally in the White House and, as local Fianna Fail activist Andrea McKeivitt told me:

“There is a feeling of euphoria with everyone, given these dark times. And that so many met Joe in his 2016 visit as vice president, where he met his relatives and

took the time to engage with so many, makes it all the more special. He visited ancestral graves dating from famine times, and studied old family photos, many of which he said he recognized as hanging in his own home. I think “Cousin Joe” will share Nancy Pelosi’s views on taking a hard stance on future trade deals with Boris Johnson.”

About timing: The GFA and final Brexit talks

Sometimes timing really is everything. The Good Friday Agreement was completed in 1998. Attempting it after 9/11/2001, in a world suddenly sorted into George W. Bush’s binary “with us” or “against us,” would have been impossible. Similarly, with the Brexit transition period ending at the end of this month, now is the precise moment (not 6 months ago, not 6 months from now) that Ireland needs a US president-elect who understands both the agreement and Ireland’s history of abuse by its larger neighbor.

Of all the candidates that have ever run for president, the best possible person for Ireland at this moment is Joe Biden. Cooley held its breath on election day (week really) until John King’s magic map totals reached 270 for him. Victory! The best part is that Joe does not have to do anything else. Like the sponsor at your confirmation, a reassuring hand on Ireland’s shoulder is all that’s required to change the dynamic of UK/EU negotiations. Johnson knows now that he cannot undermine the Good Friday Agreement

Congratulations on the landslide, Ireland. “Yer man Biden, as well as Ireland, Louth, Cooley, and Carlingford are all on the pig’s back now!”

Christmas for the Irish in Boston, then and now

Even in 2020, history offers holiday hope

By PETER F. STEVENS
BOSTON IRISH STAFF

The word “merry” seems out of place as this year’s Christmas season approaches at the height of the pandemic. Still, hope can be found in the imminent availability of Covid-19 vaccines.

In 1918, the first year of the Spanish Flu pandemic, Boston and its Irish population endured a similarly gloomy holiday scenario. That was not unusual for men and women with ties to the “old sod” – historically, the early arrivals from Ireland had been banned from celebrating Dec. 25 in the city.

From 1800 to 1850, the Irish could scarcely have picked a worse place than Boston to mark Christmas. The original Boston Puritans had loathed “Popish” Yuletide rituals so much that, in 1659, the Massachusetts General Court had enacted laws against honoring the day. Anyone caught toasting the occasion suffered a five-shilling fine. Above all, for the Mathers and other Puritan luminaries, Christmas celebrations symbolized “Papists” and their church.

In such a climate, Boston’s Irish celebrated the holiday in muted fashion until their political clout swelled in the late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations of feverish Puritan and Yankee imaginations, so the early Irish of Boston noted the holiday simply, with many families keeping children home from schools on Christmas later in the century.

At the Church of the Holy Cross, on Franklin Street, and later at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, in the South End, Christmas Masses were held in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, always under suspicion of the local Yankees. As German Catholic immigrants arrived

and began attending the local “Irish churches,” the newcomers introduced locals to Christmas trees and greeting cards; a thaw in the region’s traditional, Puritan-steeped Christmas notions was slowly emerging.

The Christmas season of 1887 brought a “holiday” card that inflamed Irish from Dublin to Boston. The card, issued by Angus Thomas and entitled “Ode to the Specials (police),” belittled the largely Irish crowd that had gathered at Trafalgar Square in London on Nov. 13, 1887, to protest the imprisonment of Irish MP William O’Brien. Thrown in jail for having orchestrated riots against landlords, O’Brien had become a hero to his countrymen in both Ireland and Boston not only for his stand against the rent collectors and their agents, but also for his refusal to wear prison clothing and his campaign to wrangle political prisoner status for fellow Irishmen in British cells.

On that Sunday, a throng defying Commissioner of Police Sir Charles Warren’s ban on open-air meetings assembled at Trafalgar “to demand the release of William O’Brien, MP.” Constables, foot guards, and life guards waded into the crowd to clear the square. No shots were fired, but fists, feet, and clubs killed two people. The protestors’ phrase described the tragedy, a term to chill the Irish again and again: “Bloody Sunday.”

Shortly after the melee, Angus Thomas released his vitriolic card, hardly a subject to foster “peace and goodwill to all men.” His “Christmas” theme featured not the images of St. Nick nor a Nativity scene, but a club—a police truncheon. His idea of humor was the following sarcastic line about the weapon swung against O’Brien’s supporters: “To be used with great care.”

By the time of 1887’s “Bloody Sunday,” Boston’s Irish were a genuine community, slowly amassing clout at

the ballot box and bucking Yankee strangleholds on business and the courts. If any in the Irish wards ever needed a reminder that as hard as life in Brahmin Boston could be, their countrymen overseas still faced greater obstacles, the Bloody Sunday “Christmas Card” was vivid proof.

Thankfully, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, Boston’s Irish could celebrate Christmas as openly as they wanted, with family parties and dinners, church socials, and midnight Mass turning the Yuletide season into a genuine holiday. As Thomas H. O’Connor writes in “Boston Catholics” – “They participated in a perpetual calendar of familiar religious devotions that...bound them more firmly together as members of their own distinctive parishes.”

During the period of Advent in late November and early December, for example, persons of all ages prepared for the coming of the Christmas season by attending daily Mass. They then enjoyed the celebration of midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, often followed by festive and early morning breakfasts with friends and relatives.

Those scenes would have been unthinkable for Boston’s earliest Irish immigrants living in the city where Puritans banned the holiday and punished transgressors with fines or the stocks. Some 270 years later, through religion, reflection and revelry, Boston’s Irish could finally celebrate Christmas in “grand fashion.”

Today, even though a somber, scaled-down holiday beckons, rarely have the seasonal themes of hope and giving—marked in 2020 by masks, social-distancing, and hygienic common sense—loomed so large. Those practices, as in 1918, are the greatest gift we can give to family, friends, and the community at large.

It’s Our Responsibility to Give Back to the Community



Feeney Brothers Utility Services has donated a large supply of N95 masks and protective supplies to several medical facilities around the city of Boston, as word comes that hospitals, nursing homes and health care facilities are urgently in need of these items during the COVID-9 outbreak.

Our COVID-19 Task Force is working with our customers, municipalities, and other stakeholders to ensure our crews continue to complete their work safely and focusing on maintaining the health of our team and community. Because we’re all in this together, we’ve donated almost 2,000 N95 masks and other protective supplies to various medical facilities around Boston in response to the shortage of these items nationwide.



“We have been doing business here for years and we consider that it is part of our responsibility to give back to the community when we can. We usually place an order once a year for the masks, and they had arrived recently. So we kept enough for what we need in the coming weeks, and were able to donate about 1600 masks to help fill the immediate public health needs.”

Brendan and Greg Feeney

Feeney Brothers Utility Services

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A new low for Trump and his enablers

Sedition. That is the legal word for the crime against democracy that Donald Trump and his knock-kneed co-conspirators in Congress appear willing to stage in a desperate grasp at keeping control of the White House.

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were duly elected last month, as were most Republicans who sought re-election to Congress. But, Trump insists — with no evidence — that the presidential balloting was a fraud and that “illegal” votes must be discarded. The president is engaged in behavior that is beyond reckless and preposterous. It’s dangerous and, if it persists, it is treasonous.

Some — but not enough — high-profile Republicans understand the gravity of the situation. Mitt Romney, the Utah senator who once governed our state, said shortly after the voting that Trump “is wrong to say the election was rigged, corrupt and stolen.” Persisting in such misinformation, Romney said, “damages the cause of freedom here and around the world ... and recklessly inflames destructive and dangerous passions.”

We were pleased to see our current governor, Charlie Baker, make it clear that he, too, is “disgusted” by the president and his cronies’ “baseless claims” of voter fraud. Baker called Trump’s obstinance “wildly inappropriate.”

He added: “I can’t think of a worse time to stall a transition than amid a deadly pandemic that the federal government continues to own primary responsibility for responding to. Orderly transitions of power are good for the country, they’re good for the American people, and there’s simply no question on this. And every campaign season, we hear a lot about doing what’s best for the country. And what this president is doing at this point in time is not in the best interest of this country.”

Even Chris Christie, the former New Jersey governor who caught Covid-19 at the White House while running Trump through debate prep in October, chimed in: “He’s been a friend of mine for 20 years — but friendship doesn’t mean that you’re blind. Friendship means that you’ll listen to somebody,



THE WINNERS: President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-president elect Kamala Harris.

give them their opportunity, and if they don’t come forward with the proof, then it’s time to move on.”

It would be a fitting coda to this farce of a presidency if these handful of Republican leaders were in command of their own party apparatus. Far from it. With precious few exceptions, there is now nothing left of the so-called GOP, the party of Lincoln. It’s gone.

It has been taken down, choked out, disembodied, and re-animated in a familiar, but very different form. The “party” is now nothing more than a subsidiary of Trump, Inc. If by some miracle, the country avoids further harm in the coming weeks, it will be in spite of the majority of Republican leaders, who either cower, or worse, amplify the ravings of Trump and his family. Witness Mike Pompeo, our nation’s top diplomat, sneering at the voters of America as he pledged that “there will be a smooth transition to a

second Trump administration.”

Count us among those who genuinely want the nation to come together and heal — to “see each other again” as President-elect Biden said in his magnanimous speech to the nation on Nov. 7. But Trump and his extremist allies have shown us who they truly are too many times for us not to believe their intent. It would be folly to dismiss their public statements and actions as anything other than a concerted effort to dismantle our republic’s foundational stone: the will of the electorate.

This is not mere denial by a pack of sore losers. It represents a revolt, that if it persists, is the gravest threat to our democracy since secessionist slavers attempted to destroy the Union — and nearly did — in 1861. We must be prepared to confront it for what it is: a criminal conspiracy.

—Bill Forry

Press group honors Ed Forry for career in community journalism

BY REPORTER STAFF

The New England Newspaper & Press Association (NENPA) has selected Edward W. Forry, who, with his wife, the late Mary Casey Forry, founded the *Dorchester Reporter* in 1983 and the *Boston Irish Reporter* ten years later, as its 2020 honoree in the field of community journalism.

Named after Bob Wallack, a longtime New England journalist and former New England Press Association executive director, the award annually recognizes an individual who has displayed an exceptional record of commitment to community journalism. Past award recipients faithfully served their community and played an active, constructive role in contributing to its quality of life.

Forry received his award during the organization’s annual conference, which was held virtually last month. US Sen. Edward Markey, a longtime friend, offered his congratulations during a pre-taped video.

“Over the last 37 years, you have not only reported history in the Reporter, you have laid a legacy for years to come,” Markey said. “You have set the gold standard in news and created a new generation of award-winning reporters and never lost touch with your Dorchester roots.... Our Commonwealth owes you a debt of gratitude.

In accepting the honor, Forry said: “The great speaker of US House, Tip O’Neill, once said in his profession ‘all politics is local.’ Well, I believe the same

is true for our profession. Community journalism is about staying in close touch with the local community and reporting on the events, the activities, and the news that has a direct impact on our neighbors, on the neighborhood, and on the city of Boston.”

The selectors took notice of Ed Forry’s active and meaningful work over the last 37 years doing street-level, urban newspapering in Dorchester, Boston’s largest and most diverse neighborhood in giving him the award. For many who know him and his work, the honoree is a latter-day equivalent of the small-town newspaper editor memorialized in so many movies and histories. Most recently, Ed led the transition of the monthly *Boston Irish Reporter* into the current version, *Boston Irish*, a quarterly publication with a robust online presence.

In its award statement, NENPA said: “Ed Forry is always looking ahead. Like those small-town newspaper proprietors, he and his son William have nurtured the future of serious local journalism year after year by providing on-the-beat opportunities for young reporters and writers and interns on the make. Graduates of the Reporter’s newsroom continue to move on to regional and national publications and other news and feature outlets.

It concluded: “His continuing zeal for telling stories that count for his neighborhood has been edifying; now in his mid-70s, he likes to think that the next story will be his newsroom’s best yet.”



Ed Forry speaking after receiving his award.

BOSTON IRISH

is published quarterly by:
Boston Neighborhood News, Inc.,
 150 Mt. Vernon St., Suite 120, Dorchester, MA 02125
 newsroom@bostonirish.com www.bostonirish.com

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Every day at BostonIrish.com
Date of Next Edition: Spring/St. Patrick’s 2021
Deadline for Next Issue: Tues., Feb. 23, 2021 at noon

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The Pharaoh's Millennial Daughter

BY THOMAS O'GRADY
SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH

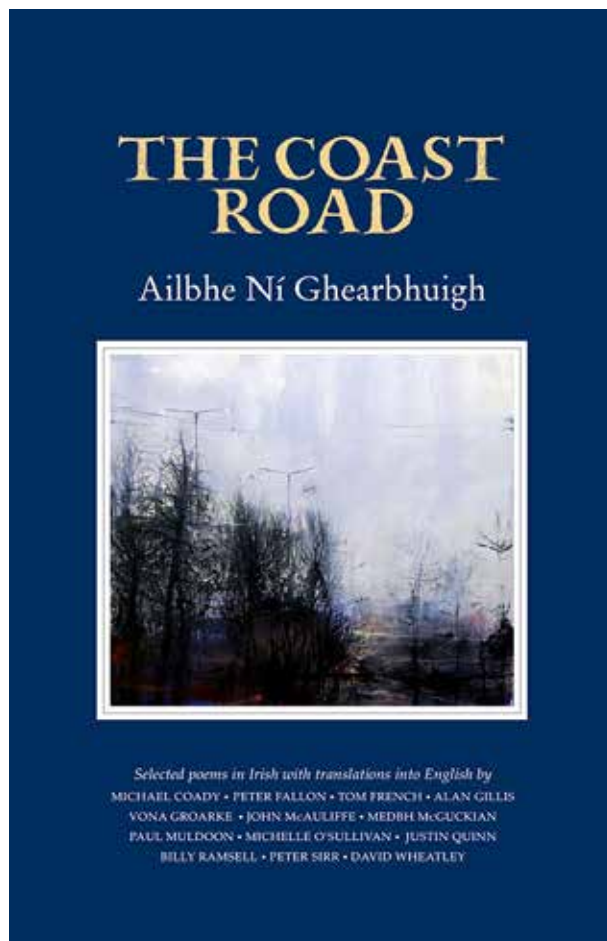
Browsing my bookshelves a few weeks ago, I paused and pulled down "The Coast Road," a dual-language volume by the Irish-language poet Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh that I first read shortly after its publication by Gallery Books in December of 2016. Comprising translations from thirteen Irish poets, each with her/his distinctive poetic signature in English, it is an engaging gathering from start to finish, and the forty-six poems included in the volume (forty-eight in English, as two of them are translated twice, one of those twice by the same translator) constitute a rich fabric expressing the sensibility of a "millennial" woman poet writing *as Gaeilge*. (Ní Ghearbhuigh was born into an Irish-speaking family in Tralee, County Kerry in 1984.)

Revisiting the book almost four years later, I was reminded of how the facing-page translations of Ní Ghearbhuigh's poems actively invite even a non-*Gaeilgeoir* like myself to pay notice to the poems as they were originally written. One in particular caught my attention by way of translator Justin Quinn's handling of a specific line. The poem is titled "Filleadh ar an gCathair," which Quinn translates as "Back to the City." Fair enough: my *foclóir* (dictionary) confirms that *filleadh* translates literally as "return" and *cathair* as "city." I was perplexed, though, by Quinn's decision to translate the phrase "Faoiseamh a gheobhadsa" in the final stanza not literally ("Relief I will take") but as a highly conspicuous literary borrowing: "And peace comes dropping slow." Obviously, this phrase is lifted directly from the first line of the second stanza of William Butler Yeats's iconic poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree": "And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow."

Asking myself by what sort of license a translator would do that, I was pleased to discover the answer in Ní Ghearbhuigh's own translation of the poem she executed when it was named Ireland's European Union Presidency Poem in 2013. (It was also shortlisted in 2015 for RTE's "A Poem for Ireland" competition.) In her version in English, which differs line by line from Quinn's anyway, she actually leaves "Faoiseamh a gheobhadsa" *untranslated* . . . a decision that led me to learn that the exact phrase is the title, and the first line, of a poem by celebrated mid-twentieth-century Irish-language poet Máirtín Ó Direáin. Translated into English most recently by Frank Sewell, Ó Direáin's poem appears to be a simple lyric expressing the longing for home of an Aran Islander unhappily transplanted to Dublin:

Peace I'll find
For a short while
Among my people
On a sea island,
Walking the shore
Morning and evening
Monday to Saturday
Home in the West.

But is Ní Ghearbhuigh's interpolation of Ó Direáin's line into her poem as simple as it seems? A quarter-century ago, the Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill explained in an essay published in the New York Times Book Review the richness of the linguistic medium she works in: "Irish is a language of enormous elasticity and emotional sensitivity; of quick and hilarious banter and a welter of references both historical and mythological; it is an instrument of imaginative depth and scope, which has been tempered by the community for generations until it can pick up and sing out every hint of emotional modulation that can occur between people." Indeed, just as Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh herself "references" Ó Direáin's poem, translator Quinn recognizes that Ó



Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh

Direáin is probably referencing Yeats's poem.

In fact, the thematic sensibility of Ó Direáin's poem aligns very neatly with Yeats's. In his "Autobiographies," Yeats, who had been "very homesick in London," recalls how his poem was prompted in 1890 when "walking through Fleet Street . . . I heard a tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem *Innisfree*. . . ." A half-century later, Ó Direáin evidently feels just as lost in Dublin, and his poem "Faoiseamh a gheobhadsa," whose title Sewell translates simply as "Peace," seems to involve on Ó Direáin's part a conscious dovetailing with "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." (Celtic Studies scholar Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith has written about the deep cultural implications of this nexus in a fine article published

in the journal *Scottish Studies*.)

Thus directing readers not only to Ó Direáin's poem, where the speaker imagines the comforting familiarity of his community on Inis Mór (the largest of the Aran Islands) but also to Yeats's poem, written deep in the London suburb of Bedford Park where the speaker finds solace in memories from his teen years of an idyllic setting in County Sligo's Lough Gill, Ní Ghearbhuigh's speaker, far from the madding crowd that Ó Direáin and Yeats both long to escape, actually misses desperately, and projects her return to, the vitality to be found in the heart of a city. The poem opens this way in Quinn's translation:

Tonight I'm coming back.
I taste the city's sweat around me,
And it tastes good.

The whole thing's present tense,
And heat throbs from its walls
In the late afternoon.

Apparently the city in question is Bordeaux in France, where Ní Ghearbhuigh spent meaningful time betwixt and between her studies. How millennial is that?

And how telling about the state of contemporary poetry written in Irish is her "talking back" to the sentiment of poems by such eminent precursors as Yeats and Ó Direáin? Titling her New York Times Book Review essay "Why I Choose to Write in Irish, The Corpse That Sits Up and Talks Back," Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill concluded by quoting in its entirety her best-known poem, "Ceist Na Teangan" — literally "the language question" but translated deftly by Paul Muldoon as "The Language Issue." Valuing the distinct spirit expressible only by the Irish language, the poet inscribes her desperate hope for the future of that spirit in terms of the Old Testament story of the infant Moses abandoned in a basket "amidst / the sedge / and bulrushes by the edge / of a river": poetry in Irish, she suggests, is the basket that, having been "borne hither and thither," may eventually end up "in the lap . . . / of some Pharaoh's daughter." Indisputably, Ní Dhomhnaill was (and continues to be) such a daughter.

By the evidence of "The Coast Road," Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh is too, a status and a stature affirmed by Ní Dhomhnaill herself in 2017 when she presented to Ní Ghearbhuigh the so-called "Parnell Stick" that Seamus Heaney had presented to her in 1998. (Cut in Avondale Wood by Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1889 or 1890, this ferruled whitethorn walking stick at some point came into the hands of novelist Brinsley MacNamara, who at some point passed it on to poet W. R. Rodgers who relayed it to politician and historian Conor Cruise O'Brien who presented it to Heaney. Someday Ní Ghearbhuigh will recognize another writer in turn by passing that baton, as it were, of honor.) Clearly, Ní Dhomhnaill saw and heard in Ní Ghearbhuigh's millennial poems that vibrant spirit — that *élan vital*, perhaps — expressed in "Filleadh ar an gCathair" / "Back to the City":

But neon signs
light up the strangest corners
of my heart.

And peace comes dropping slow
on the moonlit window ledge,
my ear lulled to the traffic's song.

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.

Celebrate Christmas with Irish fare

Wherever you'll be spending Christmas this year, you can enjoy scrumptious Irish food and drink delivered right to your door.

Christmas is a time for a little indulgence and what better way to indulge than with top-notch food and drink from the island of Ireland.

Whether you're treating yourself or spoiling your friends and family, Irish artisan food makes the perfect ingredient for the Yuletide celebrations.

Chocolate lovers will relish the decadent confectionery of Ireland's acclaimed chocolatiers, Butlers Chocolates and the novel flavours of Neary Nôgs, Northern Ireland's first bean to bar craft chocolate makers. Their bars are infused with delicate lavender or seaweed or more intense Irish whiskey and orange bitters.

Christmas cheeseboards will be enhanced with creamy Cashel cheese and full-flavoured Ballylisk Triple Rose from County Armagh. Serve with Ballylisk's spiced pear chutney for a piquant pairing.

With the island of Ireland forging a reputation for excellent craft spirits, this year's Christmas cheer should include some of the recent arrivals.

Capture the flavour of Ireland's Wild Atlantic

Way in a glass of Skellig Six18 Gin, handcrafted on the coast of County Kerry. With ten botanicals, its defining aromatics include locally foraged yarrow, fresh Douglas fir needles and birch sap.

Or sip Boatyard Distillery's aromatic double gin organically produced on the banks of Lough Erne using Sweet Gale from the family bogland.

Why not sample Ireland's traditional spirit in the award-winning Bán Poitín, produced from potatoes, malted barley and sugar beet in County Down, or enjoy 'Christmas in a glass' with a tippie of Aqua Vitae, recreated from a 700-year-old Kilkenny recipe.

A Christmas hamper packed with gastronomic goodies is the ultimate Yuletide treat.

Ireland's Artisan Pantry, the first Irish regional food subscription box with a worldwide reach, offers a variety of hampers stuffed with mouth-watering delicacies. Its Merry Christmas Everyone hamper has a unique selection of small batch artisan Irish goodies including biscuits, sweets, teas, coffees, cakes and jams.

The renowned Burren Smokehouse in County Clare is also offering a selection of hampers to gift a taste of Ireland this Christmas. Its Wild Atlantic hamper includes Cold Smoked Irish Organic Salmon with



Seaweed, Gubbeen Cheese and Achill Island Smoked Sea Salt.

Or embrace extravagance with its luxury hamper which showcases a multitude of products from the Burren region and includes a bottle of champagne, Galway Crystal champagne flutes and whiskey tumblers, and a bottle of The Banner Blend whiskey.

Condé Nast Traveller magazine's readers rate Galway, Dublin as Europe's friendliest

Galway and Dublin top the list of the 'top ten friendliest cities in Europe' in the annual reader survey of Condé Nast Traveller, a major travel magazine. Galway is in first position, Dublin in second.

Every year, the magazine asks its readers to decide on their favorite cities around the globe in its Readers' Choice Awards survey. The magazine recently unveiled the results of its 2020 survey – taken by hundreds of thousands of its readers – including its list of Europe's friendliest cities.

Welcoming the news, Niall Gibbons, CEO of Tourism Ireland, said: "I am delighted to see that two of our cities feature in the prestigious Condé Nast Traveller Awards 2020. It is another well-deserved accolade for Galway and Dublin. In what has been a


devastating year for travel and tourism, this is some good news – reminding people everywhere that, when the time is right, the island of Ireland is a great choice for a holiday.

"Once this crisis is past and Ireland is open again to international visitors, we in Tourism Ireland will be ready to roll out an extensive recovery kick-start program and play our part in delivering a sustainable recovery for the long-term future of our industry."

The top ten friendliest cities in Europe, according to the survey, are Galway; Dublin; Valletta, Malta; Oporto, Portugal; Lisbon, Portugal; Bologna, Italy; Edinburgh, UK; Reykjavik, Iceland; Athens, Greece; Helsinki, Finland.



"Friendly" works in Galway"



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“A Christmas Celtic Sojourn” for an interesting year will bring holiday traditions straight into audience’s homes

Creative minds, talent, technology triumph over space and time

BY SEAN SMITH
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Right from the beginning, the idea behind “A Christmas Celtic Sojourn” was to make audiences feel as if they were enjoying the Celtic-flavored celebration of the holiday season in the comfort of their own home – even if they were sitting inside a theater, such as the Cutler Majestic in Boston.

This year, audiences can literally stay at home and see the show, from Dec. 15-20, as if it were in a theatrical setting. Like so many other live events of the past several months, the annual offering of music, dance, and storytelling from Irish, Scottish, and other Celtic, and occasionally non-Celtic, traditions has switched to a virtual format for this year. But thanks to a whole lot of planning, creative thinking, and technological prowess, “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” 2020 might well seem to defy time and space.

WGBH-FM broadcaster Brian O’Donovan, the “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” creator, host, narrator, and occasional performer, will be joined by an ensemble led by multi-instrumentalist Seamus Egan and harpist/pianist Maeve Gilchrist – the show’s music director and assistant music director, respectively – that will serve as accompanists for song and dance segments and take the lead on instrumental numbers: Jenna Moynihan (fiddle), Owen Marshall (bouzouki, harmonium), Maura Shawn Scanlin (fiddle, vocals), Conor Hearn (guitar, vocals), and Chico Huff (bass).

Also part of the proceedings will be special guests contributing performances from remote locations: singers Cathy Jordan, Eilis Kennedy, Mairi Campbell, Siobhan Miller, Hannah Rarity, the quartet Windborne, as well as O’Donovan’s daughter Aoife and her husband Eric Jacobsen; and dancers Cara Butler and Nic Gareiss.

“Christmas Celtic Sojourn” has cultivated a movable-feast persona over the years, touring elsewhere in Massachusetts and other parts of New England before finishing up at the Cutler Majestic. And that aspect will hold true this year, in both real and symbolic ways that are equally meaningful. Each performance will be presented in collaboration with a “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” partner venue: the VETS in Providence (Dec. 15), the Hanover Theatre in Worcester (Dec. 16), the Zeiterion in New Bedford (Dec. 17), the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport – where the 2020 production was recorded – (Dec. 18) and the Cutler Majestic (Dec. 19); all shows will be streamed beginning at 7:30 p.m. The final performance will take place at WGBH, which has provided extensive support for “Christmas Celtic Sojourn,” on Dec. 20 at 4 p.m.

A portion of every ticket purchased – they are available at christmasceltic.com – will go to support a partner venue. Each show will be in real time, and available on demand from Dec. 21 until Jan. 2, especially for those who buy tickets.

For each night of the show’s run, O’Donovan will start off with an introduction that evokes one of these partner venues. “It might be something like ‘Well, here we are at the Zeiterion in New Bedford, which has been a beacon of light for so many,’” he explained. “There’ll be local history or local color of some kind mentioned, as if we were indeed right there in that city. Why do this? Because these theaters are all sitting dark, and we want to let them know we’re thinking of them. It’s our way of saying, ‘Here is your Christmas show.’”

As always, “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” will have its share of both new and familiar faces among the cast. The ensemble will have a distinct Boston/New England character: Owen Marshall is a member of the Maine-based quartet The Press Gang and has



Jenna Moynihan, left, and Maura Shawn Scanlin, with Owen Marshall (foreground), during preparations for “A Christmas Celtic Sojourn.”



The Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport proved an inspiring setting in which to produce this year’s “A Christmas Celtic Sojourn,” which will take place in virtual format December 15-20.

frequently appeared in many Boston-area musical collaborations; Jenna Moynihan, a member of Laura Cortese & the Dance Cards and in a duo with harpist Mairi Chaimbeul, has been in Boston for more than a decade; Maura Shawn Scanlin and Conor Hearn, also locals, perform as Irish/Scottish/Americana-influenced Rakish and as part of the band Pumpkin Bread.

As for the guest performers, Cathy Jordan will be familiar to many as the lead singer of the popular Irish band Dervish and the “Atlantic Fringe” trio The Unwanted. Others have all appeared in “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” before – notably Aoife O’Donovan, who along with her mother Lindsay brought a true family dynamic to the show. Eilis Kennedy is a former LiveIreland.com Female Vocal Album of the Year winner; Hannah Rarity made her solo American debut with the show in 2018, the year she won Young Scottish Traditional Musician of the Year honors; Mairi Campbell has earned acclaim as both a singer and musician (her rendition of “Auld Lang Syne” was featured in an episode of “Sex and the City”);

Siobhan Miller, lead singer in last year’s production, has won the Scots Trad Music “Best Singer” award three times; four-part harmony a cappella group Windborne’s members are veterans of the Boston and New England folk music scene.

Cara Butler, who has toured regularly with The Chieftains and appeared in the show “Dancing on Dangerous Ground,” and Nic Gareiss – known for his unique footwork and *joie de vivre* – also have been part of “Christmas Celtic Sojourn.”

O’Donovan can remember very well when he had the first inkling this year’s “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” was going to have to be reconceived: Appropriately enough, it was after the performance of the “St. Patrick’s Day Celtic Sojourn” at the Shalin Liu on March 11 – the only show he and the cast ended up doing.

“It really was ‘the night before the world closed down,’” he recalled. “The situation was getting very concerning, of course, but we were able to get in that one show. And that’s when it began to hit me that this

(Continued on page 19)



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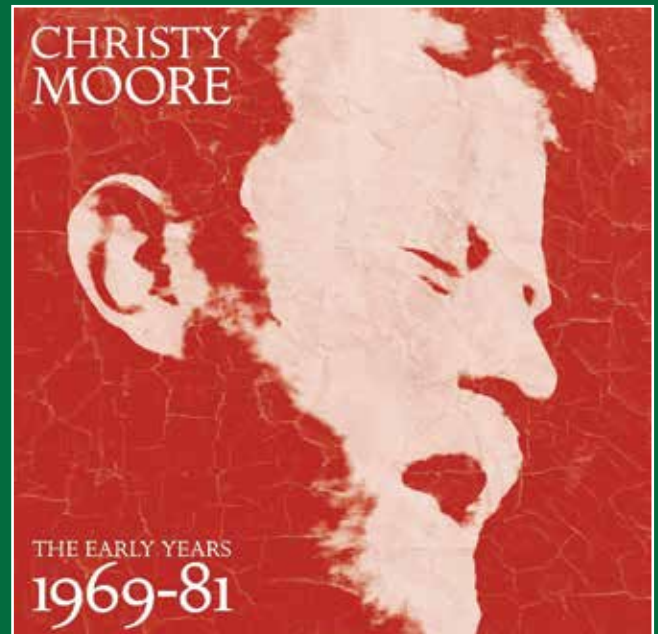


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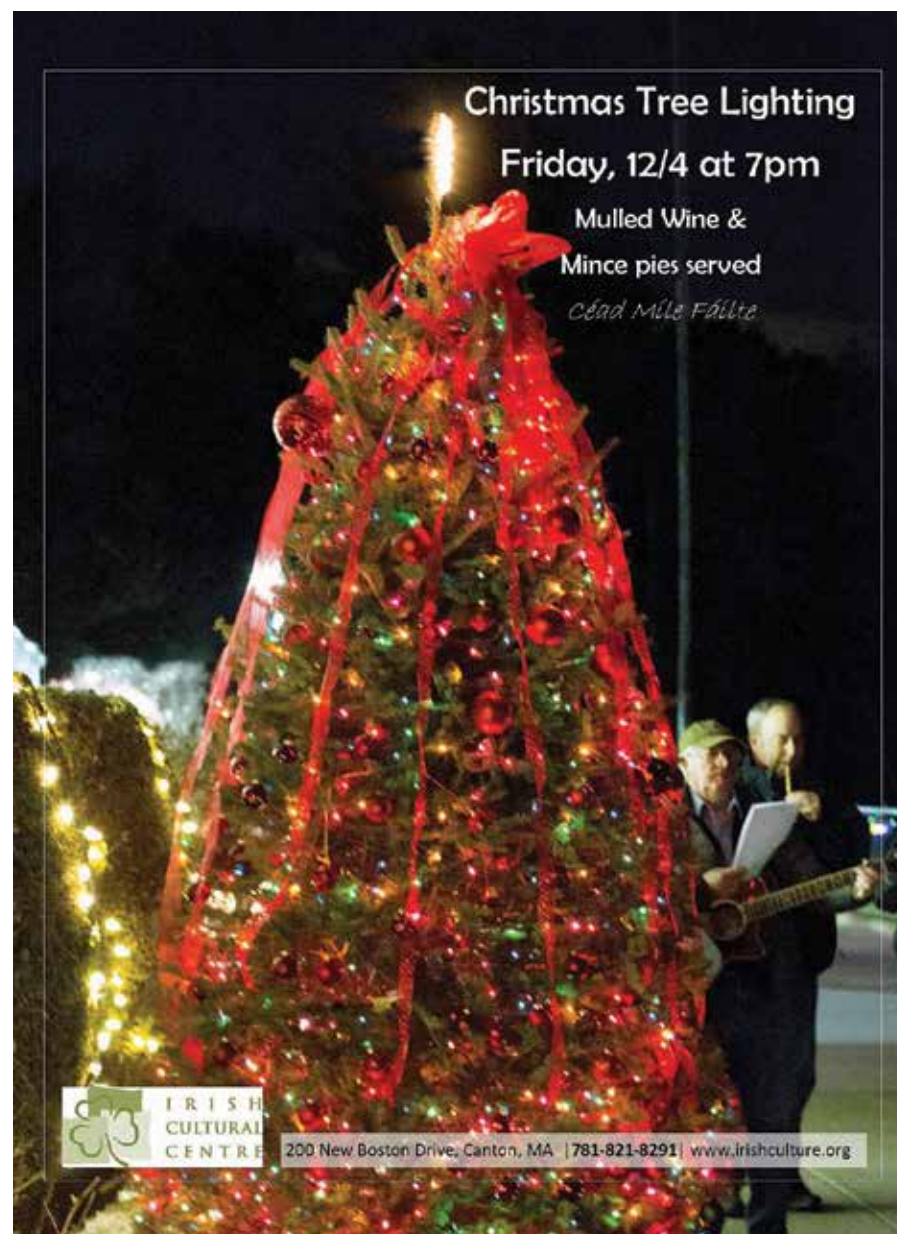


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For the Boston Harbor Bhoys, it's all pretty simple: 'The music goes right to the heart as well as the head'

By SEAN SMITH
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Michael Maloney likes to describe his Irish/Celtic band the Boston Harbor Bhoys as "a Venn diagram." As Maloney explains, he and his band mates – Eddie Biggins and son Ryan – each tend to favor a specific subset of Irish music: For Maloney, it's the brand of folk-rock by, say, Dublin singer-songwriter Glen Hansard (star of the hit film "Once"); rock-and-roller Ryan Biggins is keen on the "Celtic metal" sound of The Dropkick Murphys and Flogging Molly; and Eddie Biggins gravitates to the great ballad bands like The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, The Dubliners, and Dublin City Ramblers.

The space where their tastes intertwine and play off one another is where the Medford-based Boston Harbor Bhoys dwell.

Which is not to say that Maloney, or either of the Bigginses, view their trio purely in terms of a mathematical or philosophical construct. For them, playing as "the Bhoys" these past six years has been a means to affirm and celebrate their Irish heritage and, most importantly, relish the bonds of family and friendship. The place the band occupies in their lives is perfectly situated (or at least it was before the pandemic), something more than a hobby but not quite a vocation.

"We've kept it to a few gigs a month," says Eddie. "We could probably have done more, but we don't want it to be a slog – it should be fun, because it is fun."

The trio has shared its brand of fun at places like The Lansdowne Pub in Boston, Fiddler's Green in Worcester, Waxy O'Connor's in Lexington, The Irish Cultural Centre of New England in Canton, Boston Celtic Music Fest, and at their launchpoint, The Old-Timer in Clinton. Whether a band, Irish/Celtic or otherwise, plays the music more for personal enjoyment than for bread and butter, it still has to do enough things right to earn its bookings.

In the case of the Boston Harbor Bhoys, audiences have appreciated their three-part harmony vocals, accompanied by Eddie's guitar, bass and percussion, Ryan's fiddle and mandolin, and Maloney's keyboards and harmonica, on Irish classics like "The Parting Glass," "Wild Mountain Thyme," "The Auld Triangle" and "Whiskey in the Jar," which unfailingly inspire singalongs.

But one feature of the Bhoys is their propensity to lark about with their material ("I have a history of messing with lyrics or doing fun stuff on the keyboard," notes Maloney), and go beyond the Irish/Celtic domain: a "Boston medley" pairing The Standells' "Dirty Water" with "Shipping Up to Boston," the Woody Guthrie original that The Dropkick Murphys turned into an anthem; turning Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" into a waltz; or covering other pop/rock favorites, from The Band's "The Weight" to Toto's "Africa."

"A lot of Irish bands might do country as their 'other' genre," says Eddie. "We tend to go with pop from the 1960s, '70s, '80s – just feels natural to us."

There's a lot about music that feels natural to the Bigginses and Maloney, because all three embraced it – as opposed to being dragged kicking and screaming to it – early in life. Eddie, who grew up in Waltham, "always sang" as a kid, and jokes that he produced his first single at age four: a rendition of "Puff the Magic Dragon" in a make-your-own-record booth at a fair. He took up guitar at nine, played in his high school's jazz ensemble, and went on to the Berklee College of Music, where he studied composition and songwriting, and wound up involved in musical theater – even wrote a couple of musicals, including one ("Featured Attraction") that actually made it on stage.

"The thing about musical theater, though, is it takes years to write something, and years before someone



The Boston Harbor Bhoys (L-R) Eddie Biggins, Ryan Biggins, Michael Maloney. *Lana Woyda photo*

puts it on – and then you realize it doesn't work," says Eddie, who pursued a career in medical billing (he retired earlier this year). "So I went back to playing what interested me, like The Beatles, and writing songs for myself."

Though he never graduated from Berklee, Biggins felt he benefited by being exposed to many different kinds of music. On the practical side, he notes, "I developed a legitimate singing voice. I also learned how to breathe properly, so as to protect your voice – that came in very handy later on for doing those three-hour pub gigs."

Ryan, not surprisingly, feels he "was pre-destined" to be active in music, since his mother as well as his father always sang, and he would often watch Eddie play at open mikes. He began taking violin lessons in fourth grade and, he recalls, "got the hang of it pretty quickly," so he continued all the way into high school, where he met Maloney, who was a year ahead of him.

For Maloney, who started piano lessons at age eight and sang in a children's choir, music was not just a pastime or activity, but an emotional and spiritual salve for a nagging hip problem. As he grew older, he did solo performances at nursing homes and senior citizen clubs and began writing his own material, which he found to be "cathartic."

The prelude to the Boston Harbor Bhoys came in 2007, when Eddie, whose musical theater background enabled him to work part-time running sound for events, got a call from a client whose father needed a guitarist for his Irish band. So began Eddie's stint in Jug of Punch, which had a regular gig at The Old-Timer – and his immersion in his ancestral music.

"My family had come from Ireland some generations back, and Dad had always listened to lots of Irish music, like the Irish Rovers, John McCormack; my aunt was very interested in it, too. I hadn't paid much attention to it, but when I began playing with Jug of Punch it felt right."

Meanwhile, Ryan – who started taking guitar lessons and experimenting with other instruments – and Maloney embarked on a musical partnership as well as a friendship, playing Beatles and other classic rock covers at coffeehouses and open mikes. Even as they went off to college, they kept in touch and worked together when they could, such as when Ryan did the artwork for a children's album that Maloney recorded.

As time went on, the ranks of Jug of Punch began thinning, and Eddie called upon Ryan to sit in with the band. He didn't need much persuading. "I was always interested in Dad's music, and had listened to him with Jug of Punch. I ended up liking a lot of the Irish stuff – it made me feel connected to that side of my heritage – so I began to listen to other Irish music and trying out fiddle styles to see how it would work."

Finally, in 2014, the last of the original Jug of Punch members decided to hang it up. But Eddie wanted

to keep the band going with Ryan, so they invited Maloney to join them. Maloney, too, had a strong Irish family legacy, which somewhat influenced his musical interests: "My folks would always have WROL's 'Irish Hit Parade' on the weekends, so I picked up some of the music there," says Maloney, a past winner of WROL's "Irish Idol" contest.

It was evident to the three early on that they had a good thing going ("We had a passing-the-torch moment at The Old-Timer," says Ryan) so they decided to take a band name that reflected their own identity. Eddie explains that they originally came up with "The Harbor Bhoys" – "bhoys" being an Irish affectation – but "we found out there was another band with that name, only they had it as 'Boys' without the 'h,' so we added the 'Boston' for even more local flavor."

The three continued to explore Irish and Celtic music and build on their store of knowledge. Maloney spent some time in Ireland during the winter of 2015, where he bought a guitar and made the rounds of sessions in Dublin and Galway, developing a stronger love for the music.

"The band really started morphing into what we wanted it to be," he says.

Adds Eddie, "Some things were pretty easy to pick up and start playing. But there also were times when we'd wing it, try something new out. I loved that we could do that and have it come out decent. The music goes right to the heart as well as the head."

The Bhoys had all those foundational band experiences, from hours-long marathons on St. Patrick's Day to nights when they played to a crowd that barely outnumbered them. They also understood, as Eddie puts it, "that the audience isn't necessarily there to listen to you," but you give them a good time anyway, such as doing familiar singalongs or taking requests.

But the band has a store of material more suited to concert-type events where people do listen, Eddie notes: "The Children of '16" by Declan O'Rourke, "a ballad that nobody knows"; "Salonika," a satirical Cork street-song with a complicated history behind it; and "The Irish Girl," a traditional song collected in Maine and recorded by fiddler-vocalist and one-time Boston resident Lissa Schneckenburger.

Along the way, they've all become closer. Among the band's best gigs, as far as Maloney is concerned, are two weddings they played – one for his sister, the other for Eddie's brother. "I became an 'unofficial Biggins,'" he says with a laugh of the latter event.

The past several months, obviously, have been an unwanted intermission for the Bhoys – not only in terms of gigs but, due to health concerns, also simply gathering together as a trio. Finally, in September, "we agreed it would be good for our souls to reconnect – even just to have dinner," says Maloney. A week later, they did a livestream on Facebook, which Ryan says enabled them to expand their audience in ways they hadn't previously; they hope to do more in the near future.

"We've talked about a twice-a-month thing," says Eddie. "Maybe we'll do a 'no-requests' show – 'We're gonna play some songs we think you'll like.' But it'll be pretty informal: 'We've gotten together in the living room and you're invited.'"

Adds Ryan, "We've had gigs where maybe the audience wasn't all that interested in what we were doing, or else there was hardly any audience at all. But the main thing for us is just getting together and playing music, because we always have a blast. Our feeling is, if we can at least entertain ourselves, we've had a good gig."

For more about the Boston Harbor Bhoys, including a link to their recordings on Bandcamp, go to thebostonharborbhoys.com.



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For Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy, their new album 'Golden' comes nicely wrapped in a silver lining

By SEAN SMITH
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

The New England traditional folk music duo Keith Murphy and Becky Tracy managed a nice bit of symmetry earlier this year: They released their new album, "Golden," right around their silver wedding anniversary.

Of course, Tracy acknowledges, that's not how they actually planned it. If things had gone a little differently, "Golden" – their first full-fledged recording as a duo in nearly three decades of playing together – might well have been out in time for their 20th anniversary, perhaps even earlier. But that's how it is when you are an extremely busy, in-demand musical couple with a full slate of commitments – from New England contra dances to Celtic events, among others – that often pull you in separate directions.

For 18 years, the Brattleboro-based Tracy and Murphy were two-thirds of Nightingale, a ground-breaking trio known for its intricate arrangements and driving rhythmic groove in performing Irish, Quebecois, American, and other traditional folk music. But even after the band rang down the curtain in 2011, there was plenty to keep them busy. The fiddle-playing Tracy is a long-time member of the contra dance and concert band Wild Asparagus and frequently appears at the annual Massachusetts Fiddle Hell festival west of Boston, for example, while Murphy – a stellar guitarist, pianist, mandolinist, and singer – has had numerous collaborations and pursuits, including the annual "A St. Patrick's Day Celtic Sojourn" production in the Boston area.

"We started work on 'Golden' several years ago around when we were putting our home studio together," says Tracy, whose sources of inspiration include Irish musicians like Tommy Peoples, Brendan Mulvihill, and Eugene O'Donnell. "We would block off a week, and we would spend most of the time making the studio right for the sounds we wanted, then figuring out how best to record together. And then suddenly the week would be up, and we'd go off on our individual jobs. So it always seemed to be a case of 'Where exactly are we with this, anyway?'"

Still, the experience of making "Golden," however protracted, was an enjoyable and fulfilling one, says Tracy. In doing so, she and Murphy carved out sufficient time and space to affirm their identity as a duo – they've performed locally at Summer BCMFest and the New Bedford Folk Festival in recent years – and "Golden" demonstrates a significant evolution in the partnership, where they've turned increasingly to composing tunes based on the traditions that fueled their musicality – not only Irish, Scottish, and Quebecois, but Scandinavian and French, to name a few.

"We've been growing as a duo, and it was just a natural place for our own tunes," says Tracy, who grew up in a family active in folk dance and began playing traditional music in her teens. "Keith has been extra prolific in his composing during the past decade or so: He always seemed to be saying, 'Hey, Beck, will you learn this one?' We felt more and more inspired to write our own tunes, yet staying connected to the music we've been playing for so long."

Among the highlights of "Golden" is the title tune, a reel composed by Tracy with a definite French-Canadian flavor that leads to a traditional Quebecois tune, "Grande Gigue Simple," animated by Murphy's ringing mandolin and podorythmie, or foot percussion. Murphy's distinctive, pulsating, resonating guitar kicks off a powerful three-reel set – two traditional Irish tunes, "Corner House" and "Siobhan O'Donnell's," sandwiching his "Northwest Reel." The duo's knack for crafting exquisite arrangements is particularly

evident on a track beginning with a march, "Pratt Hall," that leads to the alternating minor-major key "Spratt Hall Jig" and then into the exotically stirring "St. Croix Jig."

Another standout is a medley of reels that begins with Murphy's "Turlutte" – the word refers to what might be the French equivalent of Irish lilting, i.e. vocalizing a melody phonetically – with groove-laden guitar and podorythmie to match, while Tracy plays a shifting counter-melody; if you think it might sound a little like jazz scat-singing, you're not alone. Tracy takes the lead for the second part of the set with the haunting "Black Rock," which she composed on an island in Nova Scotia.

There are serene, relaxed passages on "Golden" as well, including "Last Snow," written by Murphy in tribute to son Aidan, "an indefatigable skier," and his "Eliza," on which his piano skills figure prominently.

Joining Murphy and Tracy on several occasions are Boston-area performer Shannon Heaton (flute, whistle), Mark Roberts (five-string banjo), and Mark Hellenberg (percussion). Among other tracks, Heaton's flute enriches a trio of elegant Murphy reels, "Inspector Smith/French Shore/Treaty of Paris" as well as the "Spratt/St. Croix" set and – along with Roberts and Hellenberg – adds a kick to the "Corner House" medley.

Murphy's singing is front and center on three tracks, and taken together they represent something of a departure: Instead of dipping into his vast collection of songs from the Irish, English, Quebecois and Canadian Maritime traditions, he holds forth on two veritable contemporary folk classics, Stan Rogers' "Northwest Passage" and Walt Aldrich's "Ain't No Ash Will Burn." But Murphy being Murphy, that's hardly cause for complaint.

As originally recorded by Rogers, "Northwest Passage" has always had a sea chanteur feel – sung *a cappella* with zest (and, ideally, a tankard or bottle in hand) – but Murphy tones things down, imbuing it with a tenderness and contemplativeness befitting a song about the human inclination to undertake quests likely to fail. "Ain't No Ash Will Burn" is an irresistibly mellow, amiably philosophical slice of Americana, and Murphy eases it along with just the right pace and tone. As on "Northwest Passage," Tracy's fiddle accompaniment is pitch-perfect, and here she also lends her voice on the chorus.

"Doing the vocal harmonies was quite satisfying," she says, "I had sung sometimes with Nightingale, but with a duet sound, that was a big marker for me."

On the trad side of the ledger is "Brave Marin," a French song in which a soldier returning home finds his wife has remarried – and takes it all quite well. You don't have to know French to enjoy the sweetly buoyant *chanson*, Heaton's multi-tracked, harmonized whistles lilting around Murphy's graceful mandolin. ("It was fun to have Shannon come in on that; her playing added a real sparkle," says Tracy.)

A fiddler's education

Although the Connecticut-born Tracy started out playing classical violin, her family's involvement in folk dance made it all but impossible for her to avoid exploring folk/traditional fiddle. Her grandparents were part of the New England Folk Festival Association, or NEFFA, one of the longest-running annual folk music and dance festivals in the country (it marked its 75th anniversary in 2019); in fact, Tracy's grandparents played a key role in moving the festival to Natick, which eventually became its location for 33 years. Tracy also recalls listening to the many 78s that her father used to provide music for community contra and square dances that he organized and called



Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy performing at the 2019 Summer BCMFest in Club Passim. "We've been growing as a duo, and it was just a natural place for our own tunes," says Tracy of the duo's new album, "Golden."

Sean Smith photo

– including fiddlers like Canada's Don Messer, Cape Breton's Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, and Hartford resident Will Welling.

While in junior high, Tracy once came upon a book of tunes compiled by Messer and out of curiosity tried to play one that she'd heard on a 78. It was not an auspicious beginning: "I left the room in a huff and said, 'No way I can play like that.'" But she kept at it, and at 16, she got to sit in on a dance gig with Welling and his partner Bill Walach. "That was a revelation. From there on, I got the sense of how to 'sink into' a tune, and to play by ear. I thought, 'Hmm, there's something going on here.'"

Tracy went off to Dartmouth to study math and continued with classical violin, then worked as a math teacher for several years. But she didn't abandon her growing infatuation with fiddle: While at Dartmouth, she joined a bluegrass band and played at contra dances in the area, and when she moved to Portland, Me., for a teaching job, she found herself in "the epicenter of good Irish music in Maine." She fondly recalls "getting dragged to sessions all the time, and having tons of music thrown my way," like The Bothy Band and De Danaan, but also Brendan Mulvihill – from a storied fiddling family – who eventually became a regular tutor; and Eugene O'Donnell, a Derry-born master of slow, emotive airs ("He could just slather his feelings all over his fiddle," says Tracy, quoting another eminent fiddler's characterization of O'Donnell: "He's the person who can make me cry.")

While Tracy gravitated to the "rolling sound" of the Clare fiddle style, à la Martin Hayes, she also spent a lot of time listening to Donegal fiddler Tommy Peoples. She had the chance to play with him at a session during her first trip to Ireland, and he left a favorable impression for more than the obvious reasons: He managed to fix her fiddle's broken tailpiece with some old string ("I kept it like that for a while," she adds).

As exciting as the immersion into Irish music was, Tracy kept a wider perspective. She certainly appreciated the music for its own sake, but being a contra dance musician – which requires a familiarity with different genres and traditions – she also tended to zero in on those Irish tunes that would work best in that context. She points to a 1986 album by fiddler Frankie Gavin, accordionist Paul Brock, and pianist Charlie Lennon paying tribute to Galway accordionist Joe Cooley – featuring tunes such as "Wise Maid," "Templehouse Reel" and "Ships Are Sailing" – as providing useful examples of contra-ready Irish music.

"Things get more athletic in contra dance," she says. "I thought that album had the kind of sound which was well suited for contra."

(Continued on page 20)

BY SEAN SMITH
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

The Sifiddlers, "Sifiddlers" • If you like lots of Irish fiddle – and fiddle only, with no other melody instrument and nary a guitar, bouzouki, piano, or any such accompaniment about – then put this album on your must-listen list. And if you like Donegal fiddling, well, you should move it to the top of said list.



The Sifiddlers is an ensemble of 13 female fiddlers from dear old Dún na nGall, including well-established, renowned performers like Altan co-founder Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh, Liz Doherty, and Brid Harper, and the vanguard of more recent generations such as Claire Friel (of The Friel Sisters), Aisling Drost-Byrne, and Eimear McColgan; also in the ranks are Tara Connaghan, Theresa Kavanagh, Claire Gallagher, Melanie Houton, Roisin McGrory, Clodagh Warnock, and Denise Boyle. They originally came together at a festival in 2018 – their set climaxing with 40-strong female fiddlers in all – and, more recently, for the broadcast from this year's virtual-format Fleadh Cheoil.

The raison d'être for The Sifiddlers is straightforward but compelling: Donegal has a time-honored, exalted fiddle tradition, producing luminaries like Tommy Peoples, Paddy Glackin, and James Byrne (father of Aisling), but it's only in recent decades that female fiddlers – whether from Donegal or anywhere in Ireland, for that matter – have been recognized and celebrated with any consistency. The multi-generational aspect of the ensemble clearly demonstrates how deep-rooted and sustained a presence women have in this music.

Listeners may or may not appreciate the distinguishing characteristics of Donegal fiddle, such as its commonalities with Scottish tradition, especially in terms of repertoire – strathspeys, Highlands, mazurkas – and frequent use of bowed triplets, derived from the influence of the highland bagpipes. But in any case, the Sifiddlers sound is exuberant and enthralling, whether they're playing as a full ensemble (in unison, which is not as easy as it seems) or in smaller combinations.

The Donegal fiddle tune canon is well-represented here, such as with reels "Jackson's/The Oak Tree"; mazurkas "Francie Mooney's/Vincent Campbell's"; a gloriously rendered hop jig, "The Silver Slipper," paired with "The Rannafast Jig"; and a climactic trio of festive reels starting – appropriately enough – with "Paddy's Trip to Scotland," the title and character of which underscores the Donegal-Scottish connection.

Easily among the most powerful tracks is the penultimate one, with Ni Mhaonaigh soloing on one of her signature pieces, "Tune for Frankie" – written for her late husband and Altan co-founder Frankie Kennedy – a slow, somber but not sorrowful G-minorish jig, with a gentle drone behind her; the ensemble then takes up another Ni Mhaonaigh original, "The Red Crow," a dusky reel that toggles between a lower-end A part and a B part that elevates to the higher register.

Incidentally, there is a wonderful story behind the

ensemble's name, which according to Claire Friel comes via the late Kitty Sean Cunningham, a pioneering fiddler, dancer, singer, and storyteller from Teelin (one of the album's tracks includes a barn dance associated with and named for her). The Gaelic word "sí" (sometimes given as "sidhe"), pronounced "she," refers to supernatural beings and spirits of varying temperament, appearance, and behaviors, including the much-dreaded banshee. When Kitty Sean was a child, Friel explains, she was admonished for her intent to learn the fiddle; if she did so, she was warned, she would surely be known as a "she-fiddler."

"So we've taken what was a derogatory term and we are using it differently," says Friel. "It doesn't have that connotation anymore, because society doesn't think the same way anymore."

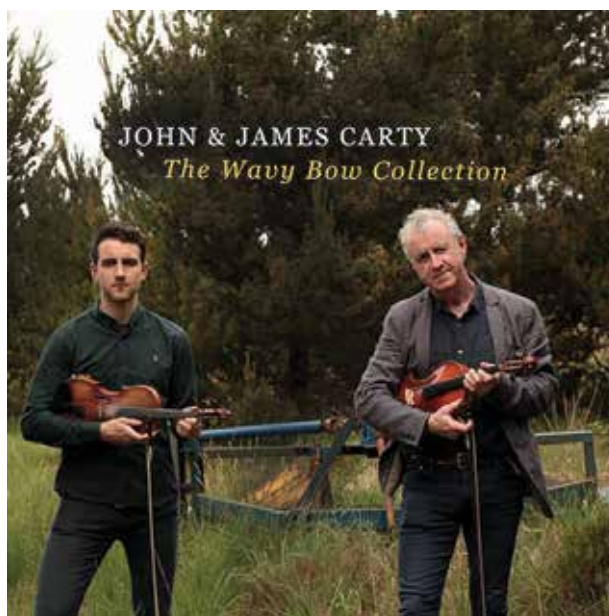
And somewhere, Kitty Sean Cunningham must be smiling. [sifiddlers.com]

John and James Carty, "The Wavy Bow Collection" • Can we all just pause sometime and offer a thought in appreciation of John Carty? It's not that he hasn't received acknowledgement before – he is a former TG4 "Traditional Musician of the Year" after all. But my goodness, you look (and listen) to his body of work, and he's played with so many notable musicians – Arty McGlynn, Andy Irvine, Kevin Burke, Alec Finn, Matt Molloy, The Chieftains, De Dannan, to name a few – and has an equally impressive recording portfolio: solo releases as well as an assortment of collaborations (including the irresistible *At the Racket*) of varied sounds and settings. He was even on the soundtrack for the 2015 Saoirse Ronan film "Brooklyn."

With Carty, Irish music is definitely a family affair: His father was a member of a famous London ceili band, and his daughter Maggie is an accomplished musician – in fact, Carty's previous recording was with her – as his son James (he has a solo album, "Hiding Daylight in Dark Corners"), as is quite evident here on "The Wavy Bow Collection." And as with so much of Carty's other work, the albums show a pleasing diversity in arrangements, mood, and repertoire, due in no small way to John's talent on fiddle, banjo, tenor guitar, and mandolin, and James on fiddle.

The duo are aided by some stalwart accompanists, many of whom have been with John Carty for years: Brian McGrath (piano, organ), Shane McGowan (guitar, bass), Michael McCague (bouzouki), James Fromseier (guitar, bouzouki), Matt Griffin (guitar), James Blennerhasset (double bass), and a fellow named Mike McGoldrick on snare drum, rumored to be a pretty good flutist. A special guest is Carty's brother, James Sr., who plays flute on two tracks: "Corkscrew Hill," three tunes from Clare flutist Michael Hynes – including the titular jig at the beginning – and "The Hearty Boys Set," a brisk pair of jigs that includes "Hearty Boys of Ballymote" from the playing of venerable Sligo fiddler James Morrison.

A couple of tracks have the crisply rhythmic vibe of the classic ceili band or 1920s-era vintage Irish orchestra: the "Toss the Feathers" set ("Toss the Feath-



A livestreaming delight from Cara Dillon and Sam Lakeman



Not an album, but certainly a musical endeavor worth noting: A few months ago, I wrote about the concert Irish singer **Cara Dillon** and her husband **Sam Lakeman** livestreamed via YouTube and Facebook. Evidently, the reaction was so positive that the couple decided to have another go, and on Oct. 15, they presented "**Live at Cooper Hall 2.**"

Once again, Dillon and Lakeman have put together a masterful performance. Dillon, possessed of a voice of marvelous clarity, supported by Lakeman's prodigiously empathetic guitar and piano accompaniment, shows a command of the new and old: songs from the heart of tradition – including "Verdant Braes of Screen" (with one of the best melodies around) as well as "The Shores of Lough Bran," "As I Roved Out," "The Maid of Culmore," and (from America) "Bright Morning Star" – and from contemporary sources, like Dougie MacLean's "Garden Valley" and Shaun Davey's "Dubhdara," part of his innovative "Granuaile" suite.

Both concerts are available on demand via YouTube, and can be accessed via her website, cara-dillon.co.uk. Donations are, of course, welcome.

ers/Green Mountain/Plough in the Stars") and the "Drummer Boy" medley of flings – the latter has an infectious, finger-snapping bounce to it, John's banjo perfectly arrayed with James' fiddle. Other tracks display a contemporarily curated feel: John leads the quirky, haunting "March of the Crows" (John credits Kevin Burke, who in turn cited Jackie Daly) on banjo, McCague and McGowan softly layering in the accompaniment and tension until James bursts in with "The Cran Man Jig," with McGrath's piano propelling things along.

Another set begins with Andy Statman's klezmer composition "The Flatbush Waltz," famously covered by De Danann some years ago and lovingly rendered here by John on tenor guitar and mandolin, followed by a pair of reels, "Colonel McBain" (traced to Scottish fiddler Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald) and another by the late Tommy Peoples, "Joe Cassidy's," all of which showcase John's superb touch on tenor guitar for playing melody.

Equally pleasing are the tracks with a sparer, more intimate quality, including a father-son fiddle duet along with McGowan that starts with the impassioned "Lord Galway's Lamentation" (James' harmony is outstanding) and concludes with that D-dorian masterpiece "Jenny's Welcome to Charlie." The Carty-Carty-McGowan combo also is at the helm on "O'Carolan's Dream," with John on tenor guitar; the first pass through, with McGowan's elegant backing, almost sounds like a harpsichord.

Not so incidentally, "The Wavy Bow Collection" continues Carty's penchant for off-beat, clever, whimsical, or just plain interesting album titles (e.g. "Settle Out of Court," "I Will If I Can," "Yeh, That's All It Is"). In this case, the title comes from a quote by legendary fiddler Michael Coleman, who upon seeing waves gently lapping along the shoreline of New York was heard to say "That's how I like my bow hand to be" – in other words, effortlessly guiding his bow to crisscross the strings, AKA the wavy bow. Carty's got an ear for words as well as music. [johncarty.com]

Ministry of Folk Wintery Weekend scheduled virtual style for Dec. 4-6

Matt and Shannon Heaton, Hanneke Cassel, Natalie Haas, and Katie McNally, long-time performers in the Boston-area Irish/Celtic music scene, will be among the artists at the inaugural Wintery Weekend Festival, which will be held in virtual format Dec. 4-6.

The event, which features 10 workshops, 5 online sessions, and 2 concerts, is being organized by the Ministry of Folk [ministryoffolk.com], a Boston-based online initiative launched earlier this year to aid folk and traditional musicians in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other acts in the Wintery Weekend Festival lineup with Boston ties include Eamon Sefton, Louise Bichan, Galen Fraser, Calum Bell, Alex Cumming, Jenna Moynihan, Mairi Chaimbeul, Eric McDonald, Casey Murray, Maura Shawn Scanlin, and Conor Hearn, as well as Ministry of Folk co-founder Sarah Collins. They will be joined by notable artists from elsewhere in the US and abroad, among them Brian Ó hAirt, Iona Fyfe, Sam Sweeney, and Andrew Finn Magill.

Festival events begin at 10 a.m. each day and run into the evening. Friday's schedule includes "Tunes for Healing," a workshop featuring McNally, Chaimbeul and Moynihan; a "Burren Irish Session" with Collins, Sefton, Hearn and Scanlin; and "Fine Winter's Night," a concert - presented in collaboration with Club Passim - of traditional and original music by the Heatons to celebrate the Christmas season.

Saturday will see an "Emmets Scottish Session" co-led by Bichan and Bell, a "Boston Tea Party" with Cassel, Haas, McNally, and Shannon Heaton, and a "Wintery Songs" showcase, including McDonald and Moynihan.

Haas, McDonald, Hearn, Sefton, and Scanlin will present a "Chord Talk" workshop on Sunday, and the festival concludes with all of the artists participating in an epic finale concert that evening at 7 p.m.

The \$50 weekend pass offers access to all festival events. For tickets and other details, go to ministryoffolk.com/wintery-weekend.



Matt and Shannon Heaton will perform "A Fine Winter's Night," concert of traditional and original music to celebrate the Christmas season, as part of the Ministry of Folk Wintery Weekend Festival December 4-6.

The Ministry of Folk maintains a directory for performers/teachers and a calendar of virtual concert or workshop events originating in Greater Boston and elsewhere that feature folk and traditional music. In addition, the website offers links to resources such

as financial assistance campaigns for musicians and information related to teaching and performing online. The Ministry's Facebook page and Instagram, linked from the website, augment its outreach.

—SEAN SMITH

CCE Boston music school goes Zoom

By SEAN SMITH
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

It has been a year of adjustment and adaptation for the Irish/Celtic scene in Boston, and elsewhere, as musicians, organizations and venues cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those seeking to move forward is the music school for Boston's Reynolds-Hanafin-Cooley branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which earlier this month began offering lessons via Zoom.

The school, which opened in 1997 and has held weekly classes at Boston College, Harvard University, Saint Columbkille Partnership School, and, most recently, St. Joseph's Preparatory School in Brighton, provides instruction for instruments such as fiddle, accordion, flute, whistle, bodhran, and guitar, as well as for sean-nos dance and traditional singing (Irish and English).

Other offerings have included ensemble classes for students interested in playing and performing music together, and free teacher-led sessions for enrolled students. School activities take place over 10-week periods in the fall and spring.

After the pandemic cut short the spring 2020 semester, the school had hoped to resume in-person classes this fall, but when that proved impossible, the CCÉ Boston and school leadership began discussions with school faculty and surveyed students and branch members on alternatives.

"We felt very strongly that it was important to

keep going somehow," says CCÉ Chairperson Tara Lynch. "If you stop playing music, especially if you're a beginner, it can be tough to find the momentum again. There also were people who wanted to build on what they know, or try something new. We didn't want anyone to feel stuck in place."

Besides classes via Zoom, the options proposed were to have teachers record their lessons on video, or to hold private, one-on-one sessions with pupils. The former arrangement wasn't desirable because it had no capacity for teacher-student interaction, explained Lynch, while the latter was problematic because of varying costs involved as well as the challenge of scheduling numerous individual appointments.

"Our goal was to have the feel of a class," she said. "Not only do you have the connection with the teacher, but also with other students: It's a shared experience you can enjoy together - you can follow up with someone else in the class, like 'How do you play that phrase?' or 'Do you want to try it together?' - and through which you can build relationships."

Still, going to Zoom was not a decision made lightly, noted Lynch: Some teachers and students were unused to the format, and patience was required to work through the differences in audio and visual quality among the computers in use. Some classes simply couldn't be converted for Zoom, such as beginning-level flute, which typically requires detailed instruction and assistance to help students master embouchure for the instrument.

Nonetheless, there was plenty of enthusiasm for giving Zoom classes a try - some of it originating from unexpected locales, Lynch said: While in the past the school has drawn students from far-flung areas in Eastern or Central Massachusetts, or even parts of Rhode Island and New Hampshire, its online incarnation attracted musicians in Connecticut and New York.

The school will be keeping a close watch on the Zoom classes while formulating plans for the spring session, said Lynch, who adds that the CCÉ leadership will seek to use a similar kind of outreach to the branch membership: "It's been tough these past several months not being able to hold our regular events and programs; we want to keep everyone connected."

While it's too soon to tell one way or another, Lynch said there's a possibility Zoom lessons could become a regular feature of the music school even after in-person classes resume.

"I'm a firm believer that the best method of teaching and learning music is live and in person, sitting next to someone," she said. "I also believe that is the overwhelming preference of our teachers and students. But the pandemic has forced us all to look at things differently, and I'm sure we'll do a lot of thinking and talking about what happens over the next few months."

For more about the CCÉ Boston Music School, see bostonirishmusicschool.com.

You haven't been to Northern Ireland? Well, it deserves a place on your bucket list

By JUDY ENRIGHT

SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH

If you have traveled through Ireland but haven't been to Northern Ireland, you are missing a lot. Your next trip should definitely include a tour up to the North, which is absolutely beautiful, with rugged mountains, picturesque harbors, fascinating tourist attractions, lively cities, and comfortable accommodations ranging from B&Bs to cottages, castles, and classic hotels.

Northern Ireland is part of the UK, so the currency there is pounds sterling rather than the euro. But, don't fear – credit cards are accepted everywhere in case you should happen to get stuck without proper currency – and, of course, there are ATM machines there as well.

THE CITIES

Belfast, a major port on the River Lagan, is the largest city in Northern Ireland as well as that country's capital. The city was known over the centuries for linen production, rope making, and tobacco processing. But Belfast is perhaps best known by this generation as the home of the Harland and Wolff shipyard where RMS Titanic was built.

The city is served by two airports and today is a magnet for tourists largely because of Titanic Belfast, an attraction that opened in 2012 and has since won numerous awards and annually drawn as many as 800,000 visitors. The exhibit, a series of galleries, function rooms, and facilities on its six stories with 130,000 square feet of floor space, tells the story of



Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland is a popular tourist destination.

Judy Enright photo

the Titanic that hit an iceberg and sank in 1912 during its maiden voyage. Also highlighted there are the Titanic's sister ships, RMS Olympic and HMHS Britannic.

As with all exhibits and attractions in this age of Covid, be sure to check before visiting since many are closed by order of the government – and that goes for attractions in Northern Ireland as well as the Republic.

And, if you plan to visit this exhibit when it's safe to do so, plan to go first thing in the morn-

ing if you can. Titanic Belfast is so popular that by noon the day we went, people were six deep in front of wall plaques with photos and information about the history of the city and shipbuilding. It was not easy to get the full Titanic experience because of the crowds.

LONDONDERRY

Some call the second largest city in Northern Ireland by its official name of Londonderry while others refer to it as Derry. We read that this old walled city was granted a royal charter by

King James I and gained the "London" prefix to reflect the funding of its construction by London's guilds.

The city straddles the banks of the River Foyle and is accessed by two road bridges and a footbridge. The district is administered by Derry City and Strabane District Council and includes the Londonderry Port (now known as Foyle Port) and the regional City of Derry airport.

Because the city is close to the Co. Donegal border, the two

have been closely linked for many centuries. In 2013, Derry was the inaugural UK City of Culture, having won that title in 2010.

Both Derry and Belfast are well worth a visit when you're in the North. Both have great shopping, excellent restaurants, fascinating attractions, music/art, and comfortable accommodation

Before we leave the North, we want to be sure to remind our readers to travel along the coastline to take in the many splendors there, including the Giant's Causeway, Dunluce Castle, Ballintoy Harbor, Carnlough Bay, and many other scenic spots.

Legend about Dunluce Castle says part of the kitchen collapsed into the sea during a storm but a kitchen boy, who was sitting in a corner of that room, survived. What a lucky lad!

If you have the opportunity when you are next in Ireland, be sure to visit the North. You will not be disappointed.

TRAVELS

No matter when you visit Ireland, there is always something new and interesting to see and do. If you've been before, then you no doubt have favorite spots that were fun and are well worth another visit.

Enjoy Ireland whenever and wherever you go. For more information on events, accommodations, attractions and more visit: Ireland.com and northernireland.com.

“A Christmas Celtic Sojourn” for an interesting year will bring holiday traditions straight into audience's homes

(Continued from page 11)

pandemic was going to last a long time. I was hoping I was wrong, but within a week or two it was clear we would have to do something different.”

This prompted a series of conversations between O'Donovan and his circle of musicians, staff, and other “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” cohorts on live-performance alternatives. As the ideas began to accumulate, they believed they could put together something that would include all the show's familiar elements, from songs and dances to O'Donovan's readings and musings as well as his on-stage conversations with the artists.

So, earlier this fall, O'Donovan and the core ensemble and technical crew “bubbled up” for two weeks in Rockport – spending the days in the Shalin Liu working on the production and staying the nights at nearby generously donated residences.

“We followed all the protocols,” said O'Donovan. “We were tested multiple times, we wore masks and stayed socially distanced as needed. My wife Lindsay

would leave food for us on the porch.”

One of the more challenging facets of the production was incorporating the special guests, since they were scattered far and wide: Jordan and Kennedy in Ireland; Campbell, Miller, and Rarity in Scotland; Butler in Canada; Gareiss in Michigan; Windborne in Vermont; and Aoife O'Donovan and Jacobsen in New York City. But they were able to record their individual parts and send these to the technical crew, who synched them up with the ensemble track, creating a seamless final product.

“Again, as much as we would've loved to have all these performers with us and on stage, doing it this way made for something very special,” said O'Donovan, who lauds the audio and visual technicians for their handiwork. “Cathy Jordan will be singing ‘O Come Ye Emmanuel’ from a cathedral in Sligo, for example, while Eilis Kennedy will offer a beautiful song in Irish from her family pub in Dingle, Co. Kerry. So you get all these different settings, atmospheres and moods, which adds a lot.”

O'Donovan will be eager as anyone to get back to a live “Christmas Celtic Sojourn,” but the experience of creating a virtual version has been a revelation. “The pandemic has forced us to make decisions we wouldn't have otherwise, and, of course, some of these were unfortunate – not being able to tour and present the show in our partner venues. But lemonade from lemons: The technology we used gave us great opportunities for collaborations, enabling us to bring in people who could never have been able to participate otherwise, and we were able to move in new directions to create art.

“I really see us incorporating the lessons learned this year in future ‘Christmas Celtic Sojourns’ – which we hope and trust will be back on stage.”

The “A Christmas Celtic Sojourn” website, christmas-celtic.com, contains links to this year's performers. It also includes the “A Christmas Miscellany” section, which invites viewers to become patrons for the show; those who do will have access to exclusive show-related video and audio content, and even holiday-related recipes and crafts.

The SSgt. Joseph W. Beard case file: His family and the US Army connect

The following letter is in response to two articles published recently by the Dorchester Reporter (Sept. 9, Oct. 15) about the missing remains of US Army Staff Sgt. Joseph W. Beard, a native of Dorchester who died in the Philippines in the early days of US involvement in World War II after he was taken off the Bataan "Death March" and brought back to a captured US fort in Manila where he died in June 1942.

To: Tom Mulvoy

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to thank you for writing your article, "Have they found Sgt. Joseph W. Beard?" in the Sept. 9 Dorchester Reporter. I am SSG Beard's great nephew and I grew up in Hyde Park, MA. I came upon the article seemingly by chance and frankly was awestruck when I read it. My father, Joseph M. Beard (Joseph W's nephew), grew up on Everdean Street in Dorchester; he died last February. While he was sick, he gave me SSG Beard's Purple Heart Medal to keep safe along with a Memorial book, dedicated in memory of my Great Uncle.

When I showed your article to my brother Tom, he sent me a text back saying that it was my father taking care of unfinished business upstairs. My uncle, Phil Beard, remarkably sent almost the same text to me after I sent your article to him. Needless to say, every time I think of those texts and my father, I want to cry.

Finding your article, started a flurry of conversation and activity across connections on Facebook. My Aunt Lauren and my Uncles Mike and Phil, along with countless cousins and



Certifiable figures concerning the Japanese march of American and Filipino POWs on Bataan in April 1942 are hard to come by, as is extensive photographic evidence. Consensus estimates are that of the 75,000 or so POWs forced to traverse the 65-mile route, about 54,000 survived. This Associated Press photo by way of the US Marine Corps was reportedly stolen from the Japanese during their three years of occupation of the Philippines during World War II.

friends, were connecting again over this story. The fact that an 80-year-old tragedy/mystery could someday be solved is really an amazing thing. We are a family of veterans from Boston, and the thought that someday one of our lost could come home after all of these years is extremely overwhelming and joyous.

Since I read your article, some activity has taken place. I reached out directly to SFC Sean Everette at Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Public Affairs Office (this lead came from your article!!!!). SFC Everette put me in touch with some other

folks at the agency who deal with the cases directly. Yesterday, I spoke for a second time with a wonderful and kind member of the organization. She sent me a copy of SSG Beard's MIA file, which included copies of a handwritten letter from my great grandmother; likely this is something no one outside of the federal government has ever seen.

I have registered with the agency to give a DNA sample, and additional samples will now be given by other family members in the coming weeks and months. The hope is that someday in the future, likely years from now,



SSgt. Joseph W. Beard in pre-war days.

through some luck and some hard work by the folks at Defense POW / MIA Accounting Agency, they will be able to identify our uncle's remains and bring him home at last.

Without this article, I can't imagine that we would have heard anything about SSG Beard's case for many years, if ever. Please send my thanks to Earl Taylor of the Dorchester Historical Society and Jim Opolony of Bataanproject.org for their part in passing this message along to you.

My sincerest thanks go to you for writing this article. It came to us out of the blue, but given the passing of my old man, and all the emotion that goes with that, this was a real blessing. If for whatever reason, you ever find doubt in what you do, or feel as though people aren't listening (or even writers' block), just know that this story made a difference in the lives of a local family with deep Dorchester roots.

Respectfully,
Joe Beard
Pembroke, MA

For Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy, their album 'Golden' comes nicely wrapped in a silver lining

(Continued from page 16)

Nightingale and now

At some point, Tracy came to realize that music occupied an increasingly larger chunk of her life. "It got to where I felt I couldn't teach and play music in the way I wanted to, for either thing." So she gave up teaching, moved back to Connecticut, and became a full-time musician. This led to a period "where I would play with anyone at just about any distance from me," she says, and it was during this phase where she first met Murphy, a native of Newfoundland, which had its own thriving folk music and dance scene, and his musical partner, accordionist Jeremiah McLane. First impressions being favorable all around, when the two invited her to join them for a gig, Tracy happily accepted.

"They played brilliantly," she says. "Jeremiah and I would just get synched into the tunes, and Keith had this incredible rhythmic ability."

The beginning of what would become Nightingale was tricky from a geographical standpoint: At the time, Tracy was in Connecticut, McLane in Vermont, and Murphy in Toronto. They would have to schedule a time to gather for a block of daylong rehearsals. None of them seemed to mind – certainly not Tracy.

"I had no idea how amazing it would be," she says. "I think each of us sparked the other two, and just

made us all better."

Nightingale went on to release four albums and established a following in both the contra dance circuit and folk music concert scene – their sophisticated sound worked equally well in either one (for that matter, you could go to one of their contra dances and be perfectly happy just sitting there listening). But other too-good-to-pass-up musical opportunities kept coming along for the trio's members.

"It wasn't that we didn't want to keep going," says Tracy, who in 2001 released an album, "Evergreen," with support from Murphy, McLane, and other frequent collaborators. "But we had more and more difficulty creating time for Nightingale. When you can't meet the standards you set for yourself – and ours were high – you really have to decide whether it might be best to move on."

As Tracy and Murphy were to find out, their schedules – joint or individual – didn't necessarily get any lighter post-Nightingale. Much of what they originally recorded for their duo album wound up being re-recorded, as they continued to work on their home studio and to refine or tinker with the sets and songs they'd put together.

"Finally, I think I just said, 'Keith, what will it take to get this recording done?'" says Tracy. "And he said, 'We need a deadline.' So we worked backwards from

that, and things fell into place."

Although unable to perform in public the last several months due to COVID restrictions, Tracy and Murphy have done some livestream concerts via Facebook or other platforms, and while these were "initially daunting," says Tracy, she and Murphy felt it important to make the effort.

"People need their community, whether it's folk music or contra dance or something else. And part of the livestream experience is connecting with that community, so we all know we're hanging in there."

Meanwhile, Tracy is enthusiastic about a musical partnership of hers, Eloise & Co., she formed a few years ago with accordionist Rachel Bell that sometimes includes guest guitarists such as one-time Boston-area resident Bethany Waickman. Bell recently moved to Brattleboro, although the relocation coincided with the pandemic, but the two have been able to get together occasionally as an "outside pod," explains Tracy: rehearsing on porches, farms – even in a graveyard.

"It's been fun working up the material," she says. "Rachel has a big fondness for French folk music, so this is a new trajectory. Hopefully, things will get back to some degree of normal, and we'll see where it goes."

For more about Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy's music, see blackislemusic.com.

A book that takes a reader nearly around the world and back again

"Athenry: An odyssey of sacrifice, survival, and love," by Cathal Dunne was inspired by one of Ireland's best-known folk songs, The Fields of Athenry. In this novel, besides the husband and wife relationship, 'love' also refers to family, friends, and culture. 'Survival' refers to several things: famine, oppression, extreme injustice, imprisonment, long, dangerous voyages, and more.

Desperate Irishmen were torn apart from their families, some, because they stole their landlord's food trying to feed their starving families, and sentenced to the British penal colonies in Australia. The main character in this novel, Liam O'Donoghue, is determined to escape his fate. To say much more, though, would be giving away a great story. Meanwhile, his wife and their son

still had to survive, somehow, during the worst years of the Great Hunger. Dunne's characters become stronger and smarter, and despite oppression, even more compassionate as they begin to see more shared humanity.

This novel has believable characters, conflicts and plots, and the characters can be recognized as human with real obstacles to overcome. Dunne went beyond the standard novel formula of classic good vs. evil, hero and villain; even his villains have surprising complexity.

The book is a reminder that our common humanity and needs as humans should be more important than our differences, and that all people deserve fair justice, compassion, and opportunities.

From a review by Cecelia Fabos-Becker. "Athenry" is available on Amazon/Kindle for \$8.99.

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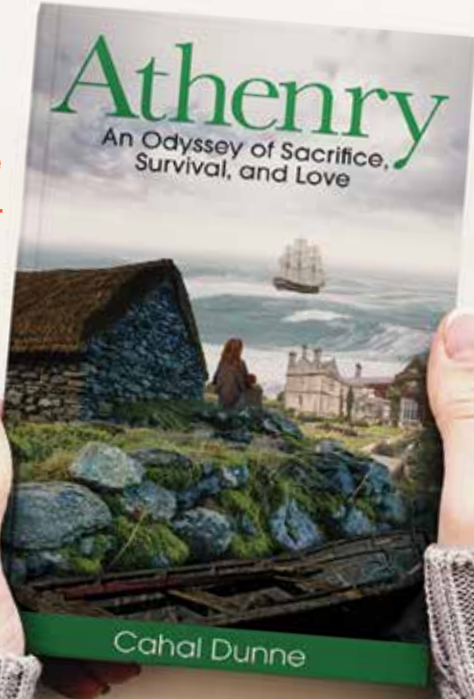
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My summer double as a teen: Dutch Factory and Nordic Farm

BY MARTIN MCGOVERN
SPECIAL TO BOSTON IRISH

Two summer experiences in my late teens opened my eyes to a wider world. After my first year at University College Dublin, I spent August 1974 in Diemen, a town outside of Amsterdam where

I worked for Luycks bottling pickles while living in an unused barn near the factory with Irish friends from secondary school. We ate and showered at work but slept in the barn, each of us in his own cow stall.

At night, we played soccer with other foreign workers and listened to a Euro pop station on a little transistor radio. "Radar Love" by Golden Earring was popular at time and, when I hear it now, my mind goes



straight to that barn.

My job at Luycks wasn't hard, just repe-

titious - guiding pickles onto a conveyor belt of endless jars with one

arm that, by end of shift, ached. Occasionally, pickle fights across the assembly lines broke the routine. Highlight of the day? Being tasked to power hose the plant floor clean!

While factory work was monotonous, the Netherlands was anything but. In contrast to Ireland's then conservatism and sameness, Dutch society proved to be vibrant and liberal. Given the puritanical streak in our upbringing, cannabis "coffee shops" and window prostitution had our eyes popping.

Amsterdam's Vondel Park had a raffish hippie scene and, while the chaos there was too much for my ordered disposition, it had a compelling anti-authoritarian energy, a contrast to staidness at home.

In the city's Chinatown, I encountered ethnic and racial diversity for the first time. Similarly, I had never seen gay people holding hands before or looked in on distinctly gay bars. At the cinema, I saw movies like *Clockwork Orange* that were banned in Ireland.

Emboldened by that Dutch foray, in summer 1975, I traveled to a small island in a Norwegian fjord.

On Halsnøy, I worked and lived with a farm family, good, kind people. Twice a day, I milked their cows, yep, back to another barn. I also rotated the fencing around the animals to allow new grass to grow for them and helped with basic chores.

Although I came from a then-rural Ireland, I was a city boy and milking initially proved to be a stretch for me. Thankfully, farmer Jan patiently explained that impure milk sold for less and my approach had to be efficiently clean to ensure quality product and top Krone.

Respecting the cows' space and being soothingly calm to them was key to my improved milking skills. When I discovered that a little light music helped the cause, I played soft classical in the background and the rapport between boy and beasts improved immensely as did the milk quality.

Unlike Amsterdam, where I had my friends, I was solo in Norway and my ten weeks there were

more centered around the family's routine. They even trusted me to keep things ticking when they visited London.

If they went out night fishing or visited their holiday cabin, they included me. Through their children, I picked up some Norwegian - basic words and commands but they were multilingual, speaking English to me and German to tourists not to mention having a grasp of Danish and Swedish.

The thing about the fjords is that they are stunning, and, in summer, the days are spectacularly long, bright, and clear. Farm work means constant lifting and movement. I was in rude good health, and after the day's chores, I flopped into bed contentedly exhausted.

Being outdoors in great weather and having time to sort myself out, especially about my university studies, proved to be a needed tonic, an affirmation of self, not that I understood it in those terms at the time.

In two unknown situations abroad, I didn't buckle or falter, I held my own. I didn't know then, but four years away, a bigger unknown awaited me, America.

From Dublin, Martin McGovern lives in Mashpee and is the director of communications at Stonehill College in Easton. An earlier version of this piece appeared last August in the Southport Village Voices newsletter.

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JFK to step out from behind the trees on the State House lawn

BY SAM DORAN
STATE HOUSE
NEWS SERVICE

The bronze statue of President John Kennedy on a little-used corner of the State House lawn will soon take a stroll back into the limelight.

Portrayed in mid-stride with one hand at his jacket pocket, Kennedy has stood since 1990 on the plaza in front of the State House's West Wing entrance. But that entrance was closed after the 2001 terrorist attacks, and with the gate locked and trees branching out along the walkway, passing tourists who might hope to see some memento of Camelot have been moving along Beacon Street without being able to glimpse the 35th president.

The agency that administers state office buildings is now preparing to move the Kennedy statue closer to the street, to the lawn on the left of a disused entrance gate, according to a spokesman.

Former state Rep. James Brett, currently president and CEO of The New England Council, served on the 1985-1990 special commission to build the memorial and applauded the recent decision to return it to public view.

Brett has heard from visitors who want to seek out the statue. "And I'd have to tell them where

it was but they wouldn't be able to locate it, and if they did, it was so far in the back there that they really couldn't get a picture or anything of it," he said.

In recent years, a park ranger has sometimes been stationed nearby to offer limited viewing hours, but tourists must navigate the confusing network of corridors under the Golden Dome to locate the right door. Since the State House was closed to the public in March 2020, access has been totally cut off.

Moving Kennedy is part of a broader project on the plaza in front of the State House's West Wing that involves a "waterproofing system" including new drainage systems, storm drain repairs, and manhole replacements, according to an Executive Office of Administration and Finance spokesman.

Work started in September and will also involve removal and reinstallation of soil and irrigation systems, pavers, balustrades, and granite steps.

A replica of the Liberty Bell will also get a new home.

The 2,080-pound bell is currently on the portico at the top of the front steps, where it is likewise inaccessible to the public. A new location hasn't been finalized, but possibilities

include Ashburton Park or the interior of the State House. The bell was originally displayed in Doric Hall.

As for the replica of John Kennedy, there is significance to seeing the president cast in bronze on the side of Beacon Street. Former Boston Herald columnist Peter Lucas, who attended the statue's original unveiling, told the News Service this week that it's appropriate for Kennedy to be depicted on a site just around the corner from the Bowdoin Street apartment where he established district residency before running for Congress in 1946.

Lucas penned several Herald columns in the 1980s and '90s about the quest for a Kennedy memorial. Ahead of the 1990 unveiling, he wrote that it took 27 years and "several commissions" to finally get one built.

The panel that commissioned the memorial used private funds in what Brett called a "grassroots campaign" and an "example of a project that didn't cost anything of taxpayers' money." Brett recalled that Don Dowd of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company had the idea to engage children across Massachusetts in collecting pennies and nickels for the cause.

"It's a beautiful statue. But it was always hidden.



The statue of President John Kennedy in front of a locked State House entryway was sculpted by Isabel McIlvain and unveiled in 1990. Sam Doran/SHNS photo

And I understand [the security concerns after 9/11, but in some respects it was sort of a waste because it's a beauty, a nice addition and attraction to the State House. So moving it makes an awful lot of sense and hopefully people on the Freedom Trail or going by the State House will be able to see it," Brett said.

The bronze statuette collection on the State House grounds – including U.S. Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, US Secretary of State Daniel Webster, and Quaker martyr Mary Dyer – is regularly washed and waxed by a conservator. During routine maintenance in September, the conservator treated Kennedy with an extra coat of wax to protect the bronze when it is moved, said State House art curator Susan Greendyke Lachevre, who noted that the sculptor, Isabel

McIlvain, designed the eight-foot-tall figure to stand on a low pedestal that keeps Kennedy from looming too high over passersby, which means he will be placed closer to the sidewalk than the other bronze statues on the lawn.

"So when he is moved, when you look at him now from the street or the sidewalk, he will not be looming above in motion, he will be fairly close to the ground still," Greendyke Lachevre said. "...It will almost look like he's walking on the lawn."

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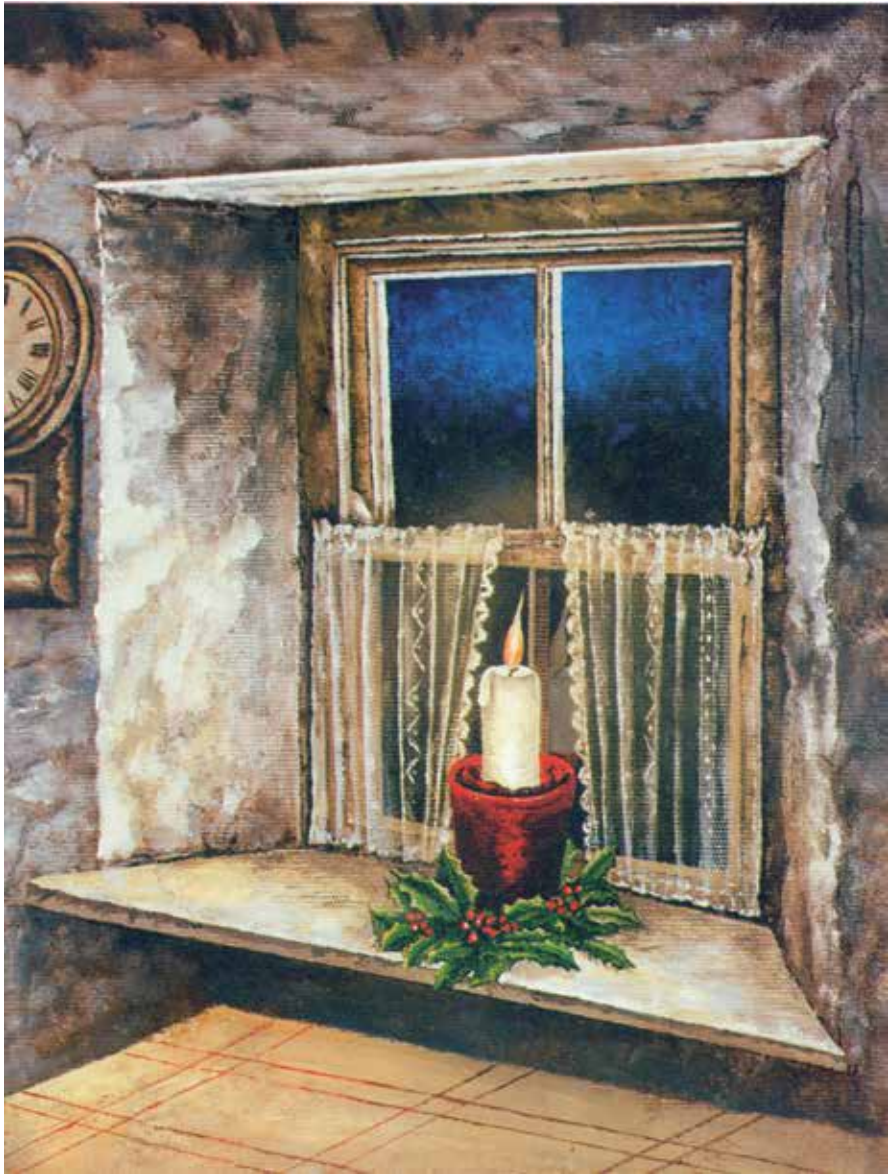
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