
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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A Touch of Class, But Continuing Education Still Needed

It's April, and the busiest month for an Irish-American has drawn to a close. Also gone is another year of trying to educate the populus – and, alas, the media – that St. Patrick's Day is not a day of excesses, leprechauns, green plastic derbies or "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" pins; that instead it is meant to be a day in which true Irishmen celebrate, with nobility and reverence, the memory and legacy of the patron saint of Ireland. While it's true that we no longer have to suffer, as our ancestors did, the indignities of "No Irish Need Apply" signs or stereotypical caricaturing, it's still a sad fact – well, let's call it a "widely-held contention" – that as long as we are presented with features in the media that promote drinking, fighting and "comical" costumes, and as long as it is appropriate to have our proposed Irish Cultural Center described as a "beer hall," and as long as there is no outcry against TV and radio promotions that feature "Lucky Charms accents," the fight is far from over.

But we are a patient lot, and as driven as we are patient. We know the education process is far from over, but we're here for the long haul, and we're perfectly willing to start changing the world one small piece at a time. As a prime example, the committee in charge of this year's Utica St. Patrick's Day Parade (let's, for the moment, separate it from the Parade Day events that happen throughout the day) placed a major emphasis on adherence to a "no alcohol" policy by anyone involved in the parade; meaning no alcohol in the setup areas, nor on the way to the setup areas, and most certainly, not on a float or marching/riding along the parade route. And without discussion or a "day in court," if you violated the policy, you were removed from the parade, with your parade future to be considered during the off-season. Now, that policy probably went unnoticed by most of the public and the media covering the event, but it's a great example of how serious the local Irish community is about changing the image of Utica's parade, and shattering the perceived nexus of Irish people and alcohol. To that end, we here at the newsletter would like to thank parade organizers Charley Thomas, Ray Durso, Matt Sullivan, Kevin Dowling and their team for taking the high road; and for the quiet but firm way they set a "family-friendly" tone for years to come. And yet, the need for education continues. Another year has passed, and once again the messages of cultural tolerance and civil integrity have been imparted. But teaching only represents half of the education process. We can only hope that the "students" have both the wisdom to comprehend the lessons, and the class to adopt them.

Utica's St. Patrick's Day Parade Draws 40,000

On March 15th, Genesee St. was the scene of what has become the 3rd largest St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York State. Matthew Sullivan, director of the Great American Irish Festival, estimated about 40,000 spectators came out in support of the event; doubling what some organizers previously estimated. "It's a nice display of our culture," said Ray Durso, director of the Genesis Group, who, with the Great American Irish Festival, put the event together. "It's great to see so much support." Leading the way down Genesee St. was the 2008 Parade Grand Marshal, Mr. James R. Kellmurray, pictured here at the Grand Marshal's Reception, held on March 10th at the Stanley Theater.



2008 Parade Winners

The Great American Irish Festival, in association with the Genesis Group, is pleased to announce the following 2008 Utica St. Patrick's Day parade winners – with a tip of the hat too to the parade judges:

Tavern Division

1. Piggy Pat's BBQ
2. Shorty's Sports Bar and Grill
3. Delmonico's Italian Steakhouse



Float

1. Goggin Family
2. ARC Oneida-Lewis Chapter
3. Pampered Pooches

Fire Dept.

1. Maynard Fire Dept.
2. Whitesboro Fire Dept.
3. Clinton Fire Dept

Dancers

1. Johnston School of Irish Dance
2. Butler-Sheehan School of Irish Dance
3. Maria Christina's School of Dance

Vehicles

1. Safety First Chimney Sweeps
2. Lions Club
3. Utica Clubbers Roller Derby

Band

1. City of Syracuse Highland Pipe Band
2. Syracuse Scottish Marching Band
3. Maloney Memorial Pipe Band

Marching Units

1. NY Army Nat. Guard 108th Infantry
2. New Hartford American Legion
3. Cornhill Neighborhood Association



AOH Hosts Mass for St. Patrick

Forty plus members of the John C. Devereux Oneida County Chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians gathered to celebrate with their family and friends the patron saint of Ireland—St. Patrick -- on March 14th, 2008 at St. Joseph/St. Patrick's Church in West Utica.

Members of this chapter are in the planning stages of building an Irish Cultural Center on the former sacred grounds of St. Patrick's Church, Utica, New York.

Irish festival uses MVCC student's artwork

The Luck of the Irish is being felt by Theresa Vassi this St. Patrick's Day as her poster design has been selected to represent the 2008 Great American Irish Festival in a variety of promotional and marketing products. Vassi was a student last spring in MVCC's Professional Practice in Graphic Design Program when the GAIF committee held a competition to select three poster designs to represent the event through 2009.

"This assignment provided a unique opportunity for [the students] to compete for the honor of having [their] design printed," said Robert Clarke, professor in MVCC's Art Department. Last year's festival design was created by Jaime Shepard, a 1998 Rome Free Academy graduate. In the past, the GAIF committee has sought the help of MVCC's graphic design students in creating a recognizable image for the festival. "MVCC's students have been very helpful," said Matthew T. Sullivan, GAIF Director. "There are a lot of very talented people in the Mohawk Valley and we felt that it was only appropriate we should ask for their help. ... We were very, very impressed with the work done by the students." Vassi's design was unveiled during the Passing of the Shillelagh ceremony at the Stanley Theater



in Utica on Monday, March 10. The design will be used on posters promoting the event along with appearing on the GAIF website, on t-shirts, signage and banners displayed throughout the Mohawk Valley. The 2008 Great American Irish Festival will take place from July 25-27 at the Herkimer County Fairgrounds in Frankfort.

Butler-Sheehan Academy of Irish Dance to Hold Annual Fundraiser

On Saturday April 12, the Butler-Sheehan Academy of Irish Dance will be holding their annual Pub Night fundraiser. This year, the event will feature live Irish music by The Blarney Rebel Band and performances by The Butler-Sheehan Academy Irish Dancers. The admission price, which includes beer, soda, pizza, munchies, music, raffles and dancing, is \$15 for adults, and \$10 for those 65 and over, or 15 and under. No family will pay more than \$30. The event, which runs from 7 – 11 PM, takes place at the Polish Community Home at 915 Park Ave in Syracuse, NY. For discount advance sale tickets, call school director Kathy Egloff at (315) 454-0029, or [click here](#) to send her a message. For complete details, visit their website at (<http://www.butlerdancers.com>) and follow the links to Pub Night.



Traditional Music Fills the Air

Chances are, if you went to the right places on St. Patrick’s Day, at one point or another you heard the unmistakable strains of traditional Irish music being played, either in person or from a recording. No doubt you stopped what you were doing and said “My! What a delightful little ditty!” Then, after picking yourself up off the floor, you said – no, you thought to yourself – “Gosh, I wish there was somewhere I could go to hear some more!” Well, fear not... traditional music is alive and well in central New York, and it comes in a form all its own: The Session.

What is a session? Well, it may be easier to describe what a session isn’t. A session is not a performance where an entertainer sets up his or her sound system, rounds up his or her band and plays a preordained set of music in front of a rapt audience. In a traditional session there is no sound system, no set list and, for all intents and purposes, no audience. In a typical session, the musicians will set up shop at a table or in a booth and perform there, for each other. Other tavern patrons are welcome to listen or not, as they choose. For some it is a centerpiece of the evening; for others, background. The result is a more spontaneous, more natural and more traditional presentation of music than the most spirited stage performance.

While a session in the immediate area may be a little difficult to track down, just a little ways to the west in the city of Syracuse there is a burgeoning session scene. The Syracuse Irish Session, an assemblage of musicians schooled in Irish “trad” or traditional music, meets on the first Sunday of every month at Nibsy’s Pub on Tipperary Hill from 4-7, every third Sunday at Johnston’s Bally Bay Pub from 4-7 and every second and fourth Saturday at Kitty Hoyne’s Restaurant and Pub in Armory Square, from 2:30 to 5. “It’s a nice pub feel. It’s like being across the pond, and it’s a very community kind of thing,” says Harvey Nusbaum, who plays acoustic guitar in the Syracuse Irish Session.

Closer to home, but just as rooted in the traditional culture of instrumental performance, the local Irish group Craobh Dugan -- the Central NY branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann – hold a traditional Irish session once a month at Café Domenico, 2011 Genesee Street in Utica; with this month’s session taking place on April 24th from 7:30 – 10 PM. Craobh Dugan member Ed Campbell notes “We play traditional Irish music and often perform with our Ceili dancers.” For more information on that session, or Comhaltas in general,

contact Ed at 738-149, or email him at ecampbell15@juno.com. Finally, a little bit further down the road, The Parting Glass in Saratoga Springs hosts a Celtic Session on the first and third Wednesday of every month, from 7 PM “till whenever.” As they say, “Bring your instruments or just yourself, all welcome!!!!”

Of course, there is nothing quite like observing a genuine trad session in a pub in Ireland, with the full and unique character of the musicians and the partisans alike, and the historic and simple ambiance of the locale; and mostly, the music, the music, the music. In all, it is a completely encompassing sensory experience unlike any other. Ahhh... but I guess there’s no way to possibly experience such magic. Or... is there??

Tour the Emerald Isle with the Great American Irish Festival!

How would you like to join Great American Irish Festival group as they tour Ireland from Nov 5-13, 2008? That’s right, members of the GAIF committee have contracted with Celia Antonik of JRP Travel for a 10-day coast-to-coast tour of the homeland... and they want you to join them. You’ll see such sights as Blarney Castle, Guinness Storehouse, Jameson’s Distillery, Dingle, the Cliffs of Moher, the Book of Kells, the Cobh of Cork and lots more. This isn’t just a survey to see if there’s enough interest; it’s booked, and it’s happening for sure. That said, space is limited and going fast, so if you are interested, contact JRP Travel at (315) 796-8671 or email celia@jrptravel.com as soon as possible for more information. You’ve always said you wanted to get to Ireland someday... so why not now? Join us for a trip you’ll remember forever!

Book Reviews:

“Cheating At Canasta” and “The Deportees”

Submitted by Mark Sisti

What a glorious time to be a fan of the Irish short story, with two of Ireland’s greatest writers having recently released short story collections, William Trevor with “Cheating at Canasta” and Roddy Doyle with “The Deportees.”

The short story format is a deceptively difficult idiom to master, simply because there is no room for anything extraneous. It is akin to a cook reducing a sauce, boiling away all that is unnecessary and condensing it to arrive at its essence. It would be difficult to find two more divergent practitioners of the art. While Trevor is an avowed master of the form, this is Doyle’s first collection of short stories, and their styles are as disparate as their history. Trevor writes with an elegance and perfection that seems even more pronounced when contrasted with Doyle’s more free-spirited, earthy, and, occasionally, coarse dialogue and narrative. Not surprisingly, both writers succeed brilliantly in their own way with these recent releases. All the stories are good, most are very good, and some are dazzling.

William Trevor has often been called the greatest living writer in the English language and while there are certainly many other claimants to that title, “Cheating At Canasta” demonstrates clearly that this is no idle compliment. This 12-story anthology shows Trevor to be at the absolute peak of his form – at 80 years of age no less! While any anthology of Irish short stories is bound to be compared with “Dubliners,” in this case the comparison is an apt one, as seemingly ordinary situations are transformed into life-alerting moments, not by cataclysmic events, but by other everyday occurrences. Unlike many writers, there is always a point to his stories, and his exquisite pacing allows that point to emerge unobtrusively.

The collection opens with “The Dressmaker’s Daughter,” in which a young mechanic’s seemingly predestined life takes an unexpected turn after he strikes the title character while driving on a darkened road at night, and Trevor takes us from there to a youthful night on the town that ends in deadly violence for no reason and no purpose; an old woman’s gradual decline when her children sell off the family’s woodlands for the construction of a golf course; a young woman who is able to break all ties with her older lover, but not with the apartment they shared; a betrayed wife who lives for decades with knowledge of the affair and keeps track of her husband by steaming open letters from his mistress. The danger here would be in reading the sparse outline and deciding that

this story or that one doesn't sound interesting, since the writing is always more compelling than the plot. With Trevor, there is always the feeling that there is more going on under the surface of the words he chooses, and he is, more than anything, a penetrating and insightful explorer of human nature, a master at creating a fully-drawn character in one declarative sentence.

The entire collection is a master class in the art of the short story, and the difficulty comes in singling out any story for praise, but there were two that, for me, really stand out. In the title story, Trevor explores the nature of love and the different ways it can be expressed, whether by fulfilling a deathbed promise to dine at the couple's favorite restaurant in Venice or by cheating at cards to allow a spouse suffering from Alzheimer's to win. In "Men of Ireland," Donal Prunty, a beggar down on his luck, comes back to the village where he grew up to confront the elderly priest under whom he served as an altar boy. Donal hints at abuse at the hands of the priest and clumsily tries to blackmail the cleric, who vehemently and steadfastly denies that anything ever happened. One is convinced that Prunty, a pathological liar, is not telling the truth, but the old priest does give him some money, leaving the reader to wonder whether the old man has suppressed memories of the event, whether he is paying Donal to go away, or whether he is paying for the sins of those who did in fact abuse children. As always, when Trevor appears to give the reader answers, all he really does is create more questions.

In Roddy Doyle's collection, he strives to come to terms with the new Ireland, with its influx of different cultures and ethnicities. Each of the eight stories in "The Deportees" involves, in some way, interaction between the traditional Irish and recent arrivals to Ireland, and it raises the questions of who exactly are the Irish in this new age. It is certainly significant that, in the story of a young man who develops a test to measure Irishness, the average Irishman scores 57%. The first story, "Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner," takes on the theme of the film of nearly the same name when Larry Linnane's daughter brings home an African acquaintance, but the difference in the title is not accidental or an attempt to avoid copyright infringement. The film title suggests a one-time event, while Doyle's title implies a more permanent joining; a sort of "Guess Who's Becoming Part of Everything."

In the story that perhaps crystallizes Doyle's theme best, "Home to Harlem," Declan is a black Irishman who has come to study in New York to prove in his thesis that the Harlem Renaissance was a direct influence on the best Irish writing of the 20th century. In quintessential Doyle style, passionate and humorous, he follows Declan's journey to come to grips with his place in the new Ireland.

In the title story, a sequel of sorts to "The Commitments," Jimmy Rabbitte brings together people of various nationalities to form his new band, which reflects the ethnic makeup of modern Dublin. It is perhaps a view of Doyle's hope for the future that, while at first the experiment isn't working – Doyle writes, "The dynamic was different; they were older, foreign..." – and audiences are initially resistant to the new music, gradually the various musical styles meld and the audiences are won over.

Other gems in the collections are "Black Hoodie," a hilarious yet insightful exploration of stereotypes; "New Boy," which tracks a refugee child's attempts to fit in and adapt to the new jungle of the schoolyard, and "The Pram," a chilling story in which a beleaguered Polish nanny terrifies two of her charges with the story of a child catcher, an old lady who lives in a forest and steals babies - and little girls precisely the ages of her charges - for their skin. It is in these stories that Doyle gives a hint of the true range of his genius. While "Home to Harlem" and "The Deportees" give us the delightful Doyle style we have come to know and expect, the narrative language in the stories noted is wholly different from anything we've encountered from the author before.

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

☘ **Rattlin' Bog Performs at Coffee House** Rattlin' Bog will perform with special guest James Kincaid at 8 PM Saturday April 5th, at the Park Coffee House in Holland Patent Presbyterian Church. Rick Kincaid and Joe Rowlands make up the other members of the band. The band's repertoire includes folk, old-time gospel, a cappella, sea shanties and Celtic and Irish songs. Admission is \$10.

✿ **Calling all Volunteers** Claudette Johnson, Great American Irish Festival Volunteer Coordinator, needs your help. With the Great American Irish Festival now covering three days, she needs even more volunteers than last year, in a variety of areas. In addition to the “usual areas,” there have been some new events added this year, including a Gaelic Mass, the CW Teen Zone and the GAIF Irish Food Booth. If you would like to step up and help in any of these areas, or if you have a particular skill or specialty that might benefit the organization, she'd love to hear from you. Volunteers get free admission to the festival and a Staff shirt, and with the extended length of the festival, satisfying a minimum total commitment of 6-8 hours still allows you plenty of time to enjoy the rest of the festival. If you are interested in helping, it is important that you submit your information to the volunteer page on the GAIF web site (www.gaif.us). Important note: Even if you volunteered last year, she would still like to you go to the web site and enter the information anew.

✿ **Interested in becoming a GAIF Sponsor?** If so, there's still time to climb on board “the fastest growing Irish festival in the country.” For more information on how you or your company can get involved, and the benefits that your sponsorship can derive, contact Festival Director Matt Sullivan at Director@gaif.us.

Celtic Club Calendar Finally, here's the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for April.

Apr 4	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Apr 4	Old Friends	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Apr 5	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Apr 5	Rattlin' Bog	Park Coffee House	Holland Patent	8 PM	\$10
Apr 5	Craobh Dugan	World Cuisine Fest, HCCC	Herkimer	7 PM	Free
Apr 6	Syracuse Irish Session	Nibsy's Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 6	Pat Kane	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 11	The Frank Wakefield Band	The Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$15, res. suggested
Apr 12	Butler School “Pub Night” w/Blarney Rebel Band	Polish Community Home	Syracuse	7-11 PM	\$15 adults, \$10 65+ or under 16
Apr 12	Traditional Irish Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Apr 12	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Apr 12-13	Mid Atlantic Fleadh (more)	Pearl River High School	Pearl River NY	TBD	Small Fee
Apr 13	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 16	Gaelic Storm (info...)	Tarrytown Music Hall	Tarrytown NY	8 PM	\$24-32
Apr 16	Celtic Session	The Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	7 PM	Free
Apr 18	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Apr 18	Cherish the Ladies (for more information click here)	Buffalo State Performing Arts Center	Buffalo NY	8 PM	\$32 (some discounts)
Apr 18	Padraig Allen	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Apr 19	The McKrells	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	noon	Free
Apr 20	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 20	Cliudan	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 24	Craobh Dugan Open Session	Café Domenico	Utica	7:30-10 PM	Free
Apr 25	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Apr 25-26	Neil Emberg	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Apr 26	Traditional Irish Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Apr 26	Maura O'Connell (info...)	Night Eagle Café	Binghamton	8 PM	\$30, \$25 if on-line
Apr 27	Flyin' Column	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free

That wraps it up for this month. If you have anything you want to add to this newsletter, feel free to contact us at sistia@adelphia.net, bloftis@verizon.net or marksisti@adelphia.net.