
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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Cherish The Ladies Return to Headline 2008 Great American Irish Festival

Perhaps the saying should go, “If it ain’t broke, keep fixing it anyway.”

At least that’s the way the organizers of the Great American Irish Festival would put it. Despite the unqualified and unparalleled success of the festival, they are still tinkering with the formula as they ready for their fifth festival on July 25-27 at the Herkimer County Fairgrounds in Frankfort.



“We have never been, and will never be, content with just putting on the same show we put on the year before,” promised GAIF Director Matt Sullivan. “We aim to give people coming to our festival something different every year.”

That “something different” for 2008 includes a bagpipe competition featuring the top pipe bands in the Northeast competing and then all joining together for a spectacular massed march through the festival, and the festival’s inaugural Ranger Run 5k road race on Saturday, July 26, with entrants receiving free Saturday admission to the Great American Irish Festival.

Returning this year will be the Irish Mass to be held at 10:30 on Sunday morning. Last year’s mass was very heavily attended, so mass-goers will want to arrive early. But even with the culture and the history, for many of the festival attendees, the focus is on the music, and once again they will not be disappointed.

Bonnie Ehre, who runs Accents of Ireland, noted recently that one of her merchandise vendors said that they had been on the road doing fests since May, including the granddaddy of them all in Milwaukee, but were particularly excited about coming to the Great American Irish Festival because GAIF has, in their opinion, “the best music line-up of any show this season.”

Returning to headline this year for the first time since the inaugural festival will be the most successful and sought-after Irish-American act in Celtic music history, Cherish The Ladies, who helped catapult the Great American Irish Festival to its position as one of the preeminent Irish events in the world with their appearance in 2004. Though initially the group won recognition as the first and only all-women traditional Irish band, they soon established themselves as musicians and performers without peer and have won millions of listeners and fans of their music.

Making it a reunion of sorts will be an artist who has been called the Jimi Hendrix of the violin, Eileen Ivers, who was an original member of Cherish the Ladies, one of the highlights of a career that includes a stint with the original Riverdance Company as well as the garnering of nine All-Ireland fiddle championships, a tenth on tenor banjo and over 30 championship medals. Ivers, who performed at the 2007 GAIF, will return with her all-star band, Immigrant Soul.

In addition to these luminaries, festival-goers will also enjoy such world-class acts as The Prodigals, the most successful act ever to emerge from the thriving East Coast Irish rock scene; Enter the Haggis, recently featured on A&E Network's Emmy-nominated Breakfast With The Arts series; the Midwest's top Irish band and the undisputed hit of last year's festival, The Elders; Hair of the Dog, who has been called America's top Irish folk act; the exciting and award-winning David Munnely Band; the wildly popular Canadian family band, the Barra McNeils, and festival favorites The Glengarry Bhoys, Rathkeltair and Greenwich Meantime.

Proceeds from the annual festival will be used to help establish an Irish Cultural Center in the Mohawk Valley on the recently-purchased site of the former St. Patrick's Church in the City of Utica.

The festival will also feature Irish dance and music demonstrations and workshops, numerous sporting events, Irish history and culture seminars, and a variety of other local and regional performers, including Central New York's most popular Irish performers, The Blarney Rebel Band, Rattlin' Bog and Vince Colgan. There will also be events for children such as storytellers, rides, clowns, and games.

In addition to the non-stop music, merchandise vendors from across the U.S. and Ireland, carefully selected from a list of applicants, will be selling Irish and Celtic merchandise, and a variety of food booths will be providing a taste of the Emerald Isle for festival-goers. Campsites are also available.

The Herkimer County Fairgrounds is located just off Route 5s in Frankfort NY, just minutes from the New York State Thruway. For directions, tickets or more information, visit the festival web site at www.gaif.us.

2008 Festival Cultural Building Programs, Displays and Entertainment

The Irish Cultural Building will offer something for anyone attending the Great American Irish Festival who may be interested in any aspect of Irish culture. The following list is what is currently scheduled for the 2008 Fest:

Cultural Building Programs and Displays

- Tin Whistle Workshops for beginners, with Pay Gaynor - bring your instrument (Saturday)
- Bodhran (Irish Drum) Workshops for beginners, w/ Kevin Mathews - bring your instrument (Saturday)
- Ceili Dance Workshops with Croabh Dugan - no prior dance experience necessary (all weekend)
- Irish Language Workshops (all weekend)
- Syracuse Seisuin, bring your instrument and join a great musical gathering (Saturday)
- The Celtic Harp, Irish music as therapy, with Mary Margaret Krukonis
- Irish Food Demonstrations with samples
- "Viking Influence, Contributions and Ancestry in Ireland" - an oral presentation (Saturday)
- "Faith of Our Fathers" - 2008 Festival Theme - Irish Church Parishes in and around the Mohawk Valley
- "The Burren" - One of Ireland's Geological Wonders
- Saranac Irish Red Ale, a new taste for the Festival and the Matt's Brewing family of beers
- GAIF Photo Contest - come in and vote for your favorite Irish-American themed photo
- Dog Breeds of Ireland

Cultural Building Stage

- Christ the King School of Irish Dance (Friday)
- Claddagh Ring Dancers, Ceili Dancing (Saturday)
- Danaher and McCloud Traditional Irish Music and Storytellers (Saturday)
- Butler-Sheehan Academy of Traditional Irish Dance (Saturday)
- Johnston School of Irish Dance (Saturday)
- Kathleen O'Donnell's Celtic Dancers (Sunday)

Schedules are subject to change.

The Great American Irish Festival to Sponsor Pipe Band Competition.

Bagpipes have the distinctive honor of being the only musical instrument ever outlawed by a country as an “Instrument of War.” The sound of the pipes has emboldened many a brave and gallant lad, while instilling absolute terror in the cold hearts of the foe. Bagpipes have the ability to bring a tear to the eye or stir the blood. Since our inception, bagpipe music has been an integral part of the Great American Irish Festival.

From melodious pipe band performances to the electrifying sounds of Neil Anderson, the sound of pipe music has drifted across the valley. We will now thunder the valley.

This year we will be taking pipe music one step further. One mighty step. The Great American Irish Festival has become a patron member of the Eastern United States Pipe Band Association and will sponsor a Grade 4 and 5 EUSPBA Sanctioned Pipe Band Competition. Invitations are going out to every pipe band in the Northeast and the NYC Metro Area; 80 pipe bands in all. Festival attendees will be able to enjoy the sounds of pipe band competitions all day on Saturday, as well as a Massed Band March and Performance on the athletic field at the conclusion of the competition. The Great American Irish Festival proudly welcomes the competition and is thrilled to be a patron member of the EUSPBA.

Ranger Run 5K scheduled for Saturday, July 26th, 10:30am

Remember in 1978 when there was the announcement of a little known road race in Utica called... “The Boilermaker”? And you thought to yourself when you read the results the next morning “Man, I bet this is going to be one of the top ten 15Ks in the United States; how cool would it have been to be able to say I ran it every year?” And then you rolled back over and went to sleep? Remember? Well, you’re older and much more rested now... and you have another chance to jump onto the ground floor of a promising new road race.



The Great American Irish Festival is pleased to announce the inaugural “Ranger Run” 5K road race which will be held on Saturday, July 26th at 10:30 AM. This run will start and end at the Herkimer County Fairgrounds in Frankfort. All of those participating in the run will receive festival admission on Saturday and a complimentary beverage. Those registered by July 11th will also receive a race t-shirt.

The run has been named in memory of Tim “the Ranger” Sullivan, father of Festival Director Matthew Sullivan. Tim passed away unexpectedly while out for a run on September 24th, 2007. He was an avid runner, outdoorsman and active committee member for the GAIF since its inception. He spent his life in service to others as a Marine Corps veteran and member of the New York State Police for 27 years. The race is dedicated to his memory and the memory of all of those who have proudly served.

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 are some new and growing events, 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). It's still not too late to join the fun!

Submissions Sought for GAIF Photo Display Contest

What's a picture worth? Well, if it's that picture of your dad marching in a St. Patrick's Day Parade or your family at the Cliffs of Moher during your trip to Ireland or maybe that photo of grandma with the shillelagh in her hand, it could be worth \$100.

The Great American Irish Festival is looking for submissions of photographs with an Irish-American theme for its **2008 Photo Display Contest**. To enter your Irish-themed photograph, submit it to: Great American Irish Festival Photo Display Contest, P.O. Box 584, Marcy, NY 13403. Include your name, address, phone number and a description of the photograph. All photographs that are submitted for this Festival event will be displayed, and ten photographs will be chosen by the members of the GAIF committee as the semi-finalists. Those ten will each receive 5 weekend passes to the Great American Irish Festival, scheduled for July 25-27, 2008. The ten selected photographs will be featured in a display during the festival in the Cultural Building, and festival goers will choose the overall winner, who will receive a first prize of \$100.

All submitted photos must be of an "Irish" event, Irish individuals or an Irish location. Use your imagination, but keep whatever you do "Irish-American." All photographs must be at least 8 inches by 10 inches, and not larger than 11 inches by 14 inches. Photographs may be mounted or matted, but pictures must not be framed. Please send copies of picture entries, since no photographs submitted to the GAIF will be returned. All submitted photographs will become the property of the Great American Irish Festival.

GAIF Manning Booth at Boilermaker Expo

If you're participating in the Boilermaker Road Race, stop by the GAIF booth at the Expo on the grounds of the Masonic Home July 11th and 12th. We'll have plenty of information about our inaugural 5k race, the Ranger Run; to be held Saturday, July 26th at 10:30 AM (beginning and ending at the fairgrounds). If you register for the run on Friday, July 11th, you are guaranteed a commemorative T-shirt, so stop by early!

LAOH to Man... Woman Booth at GAIF

The Ladies of the Ancient Order of the Hibernians (LAOH) Division 17 Oneida County, Our Lady of Knock chapter, will have a booth again this year at the GAIF. They are offering a variety of scones along with hot and cold coffee. They will also have membership information for interested women who are Irish or of Irish descent, or whose husbands belong to the AOH. The LAOH meets once a month from September to June at the Seton Center at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Their programs reflect an interest in history and traditions of Ireland and Irish people and promoting Irish culture. LAOH President Amollia Grossman invites all to stop by and visit with them, saying "We look forward to visiting with old friends and making new ones."

GAIF Web Site Has Something For Everyone

If you haven't been to the Great American Irish Festival web site in a while... well, first of all, shame on you. Really. Did you know you can download and print the 2008 program? Did you know that there is, for the first time, a printable map of the fairgrounds, so you won't lose any time getting to whatever event or act you want to catch? Did you know you can get tickets there as well? Did you know the URL is www.gaif.us?

Finally, as you enjoy yourself at this year's festival, please make a special point to give a tip o' the derby to anyone wearing a Festival Committee shirt and lanyard. They'll be easy to spot; they'll be the ones with the broad grins and crossed fingers. They've literally been working their butts off since the close of last year's festival to bring in new features, performers and events, and to make whatever changes needed to be made that really have made the Great American Irish Festival one of the preeminent festivals in the United States.

Irish Balladeer Colgan Releases First CD

The liner notes of John Gilligan's 2005 CD "Green Plastic Derby" carry a thank you to "the man who inspired me to play Irish music –Vince Colgan." Not coincidentally, Vince's new CD pays a similar debt to two sources for inspiration, Tommy Sands and the late Tommy Makem. I say "not coincidentally" because it illustrates the fact that, perhaps more than any other kind of music, traditional Irish music is an unbroken thread, with songs being passed from one singer to the next, from one generation to the next.

No one understands that more than Vincent Colgan, who has inspired, literally, anyone playing Irish music in upstate New York and who has finally (after much prodding and cajoling) released his first CD, called appropriately enough, "The Irish Balladeer." I recall my brother and I stoning Vincent at a function several years ago to record, and he showed no interest whatsoever; playing live was enough for him. Similar pleas from other friends and fans left him similarly unmoved. So why the change of heart?

"You know, I've been playing for 50 years, and people have been asking me for years about recording," said Vincent. Finally, his wife Ann played the ultimate trump card. "Annie says – I think she thought I was dying or something – you know, when you're gone the kids'll have nothing to remember your singing."

That did it. Vince brought his daughter Nora Colgan Franklin and Ann's nephew, violinist Zachary Remis into Castle Studio on Genesee Street in Utica and began recording. The resulting 14-song CD is a treat for fans of Vincent's music, of whom there are many. There are no studio tricks here, no multitracking, no sampling, no keyboard beds. What you get is what you would see at a Colgan show, and that's more than enough, as he uses his mellifluous voice and sparse and subtle guitar accompaniment to create a musical environment as comfortable as being barefoot in a field of green. What makes the CD work is, of course, Vince's singing and guitar playing, which never intrude on the song being played but always make the song the centerpiece. Daughter Nora, who often joins him on stage at live performances, is in particularly good voice throughout as well. The one notable addition from the live shows is the contribution of Remis on fiddle, adding the perfect counterpoint to Vincent and Nora's singing and the rhythm guitar. Remis displays his classical chops on his lovely solo version of Henry Eccles's "Sonata in G Minor" and, while his playing sometimes sounds more violin than fiddle, it is tasteful and unobtrusive throughout.

"Zachary, who's a wonderful violinist, and I used to play together all the time at family gatherings," notes Vince. "He's been at me for a while to do this. He plays beautifully, but it wasn't until he went to Ireland that he realized he could play Irish music."

The CD art reflects the themes of family and the full circle from one generation to the next. The front cover is a photo of the house in Ireland where Vincent was born, while the back cover is a picture taken from the family homestead in Waterville.

The songs are carefully chosen from favorites tunes of various family members and include a number of songs from the two songwriters mentioned in his liner notes, as well as a couple of non-Irish tunes. Still, with a repertoire built over a half-century of performing, Vincent is aware that there will be songs that longtime fans will be disappointed to find missing (for me, it was "Peter Kagan and the Wind.")

"My next one's going to be 'Songs I didn't record on the first one'," laughs Vincent.

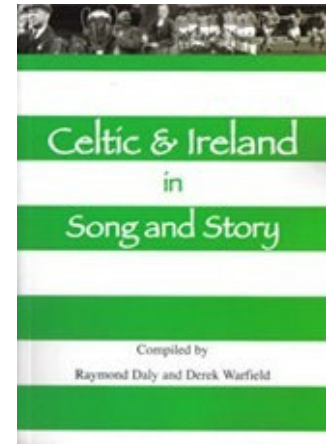
The CD can be purchased at Accents of Ireland in the New Hartford Shopping Center, but in typical fashion, he's not all that concerned with making money off the recording. For his part, Vincent Colgan is satisfied to do his best to repay what he sees as a debt to those who inspired him, in particular his friend of four decades, Tommy Makem. "I'm really happy I did it," says Vincent. "I'm not even all that interested in selling it. I just give them all away. It makes the perfect gift," he says with a laugh.

The gift is to all of us, Vincent. And thank you.

Book Review:
“Celtic & Ireland in Song and Story”
By Mark Sisti

I’m going to assume that, if you’re reading this newsletter, you have at least a passing interest in (more likely a passion for) Irish songs. If so, you’ve probably wondered about the stories behind your favorite traditional ballads and songs. Well, wonder no more.

“Celtic & Ireland in Song and Story,” compiled by Raymond Daly and Derek Warfield (yes, that Derek Warfield) is a fascinating look at how many of the most popular ballads and songs came to be written and at the historical events to which the songs relate. The collection is a longtime and meticulously researched project, some would say a lifelong obsession, for Daly, but the work took on a life of its own when Daly came into contact with Warfield, one of the founders of the legendary Wolfetones, who was working on a similar project. A decision was made to collaborate and combine their efforts, and this book is the result.



Some of the stories here are fairly well known. Many are familiar, for example, with the heartrending story behind the writing of “Grace,” telling the tale of 1916 Easter Rising leader Joseph Plunkett and his childhood sweetheart, Grace, who, at Plunkett’s last request, were married in Kilmainham Gaol on the eve of his execution. It is impossible not to feel the young bride’s pain when one reads the line from the book, “It is said that as Grace was being led from the prison she heard the shots that killed her husband.” But the authors do more than merely retell that part of the story, as moving as it is. We are also given brief biographical sketches of both Joseph and Grace that add further layers of poignancy to the tragedy.

Similarly, few are unfamiliar with the story of 18-year old Kevin Barry, the first IRA man to be executed in the War for Independence. After reading the story of Barry’s all-too-short life and his bravery in the face of impending death, however, Kevin Barry becomes more than just “another martyr for Old Ireland;” we come to know him as a well-liked and noble human being whose death deeply affects us.

Some of the stories and anecdotal notes are not as well known. The story which accompanies the popular ballad Spencil Hill, for example, is nothing short of delightful, and I won’t ruin it for you by retelling it here.

“Celtic & Ireland” is more than just a presentation of the background stories for well-known traditional tunes. The authors select the featured songs largely to reflect the backgrounds and interests of Irish immigrant communities in Scotland, specifically the supporters of the storied Celtic Football Club, and interspersed amongst the other, largely patriotic, songs in this book are songs sung (“loudly and proudly,” we are told) by Celtic supporters at games. Although a Scottish club, Celtic (pronounced with a soft “c”, thank you) has historically had a close association with the people of Ireland and Scots of Irish extraction, and most of their songs are of Irish origin. While these may not be of as much universal interest as the more well-known ballads, one can’t help but be captivated by the mythic, almost Ruthian, tales of “Big Jock Stein,” “John Thomson” or “Charlie Tully, Celtic’s Favorite Bhoys.”

This is not to say this is a perfect book. For all its charm, there are typos, sentence fragments and other printing errors that are an inexcusable distraction and break up the flow of the book. In addition, while a decision to keep all the lyrics in one section is understandable too, it would have been helpful to have the story page noted on the lyric page to save the readers the trouble of constantly going back to the table of contents. Still, such quibbles don’t change the fact that this book is a welcome and thoroughly enjoyable addition to anyone’s Irish music library.

From the Irish Kitchen (*recipes suitable for clipping*)

This month's recipe... Irish Bbq Flanque Steaque

Presented for your culinary pleasure is proof positive that everything Irish isn't boiled. This grilled flank steak recipe is a great make ahead meal item. You can marinade it overnight and have it ready for dinner the next day.

INGREDIENTS :

¾ cup Unsweetened applesauce
½ cup Soy sauce
2 Jiggers Bushmills irish whiskey
3 Tablespoons cider vinegar
5 Garlic cloves
3 tbl Chopped green onion
2 lb Flank steak (or, if you're into ostentatious spelling, "flanque steaque")
Spice Islands Beau Monde Seasoning, (only while grilling the steak)

METHOD:

Mix applesauce, soy sauce, whiskey, vinegar, garlic and onion in a bowl. Puncture the meat all over (I think that means "all over the meat," not "in the kitchen, garden shed, etc.") with a fork and then place the meat in a plastic zip-lock bag and pour in the marinade. Leave meat in the fridge overnight and turn the bag occasionally.

Remove the meat from the marinade, scraping excess away. Place the marinade in a pot and bring to a boil, continue heating until liquid is reduced by one-third. Cook flank steak over hot coals until rare to medium rare. Slice the steak across the grain into thin strips. Arrange meat on plate and pour the reduced marinade sauce over the steak strips. Serves 4-6.

If you try this recipe, feel free to share your experience with all of us; and of course, if you have a recipe you'd like to share, please contact Beth Loftis at bloftis@verizon.net.

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

✪ **Blarney Rebel Band to Hold CD Release Party** On Friday, July 18th, The Blarney Rebel Band will be debuting their newest CD, "Buy My Soul," at Piggy Pat's Irish Happy Hour in Washington Mills. "Buy My Soul," the band's second release, features seven of Mark Sisti's original compositions, and four time-honored traditional classics. Comprised of a balance of silly to serious, raucous to beautiful, and of stories both experienced and imagined, there is sure to be something for the most discerning listener. There will be a plentiful quantity of the reasonably-priced CDs on hand, which also features the photographic artistry of Sharon Kane Zohne; and many of the songs will be performed for the first time anywhere.



✪ **The Catskill Hills are Alive with Irish Music in July** Every July the Irish American hamlet of East Durham, New York becomes the Mecca of traditional Irish Music and Dance in North America for the **Catskills Irish Arts Week**. In its 14th year, the prestigious summer school, which runs from July 13-19 and features over 60 classes in traditional music, song, dance and Celtic crafts, has become the premier event this side of the Atlantic; attracting students from all around the United States and Canada. The Catskills Irish Arts Week is organized by the Michael J. Quill Irish Cultural & Sports Centre, a not for profit organization dedicated to Keeping the Tradition Alive in East Durham. For more info, call 1-800-434-3378 or 518-634-2286 or go to <http://www.east-durham.org/irishartsweek/index.htm>.

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

July 5	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
July 5	Kevin & Katie McKrell w/"Something Fierce"	Night Eagle Cafe	Binghamton	8 PM	\$20, \$15 on-line
July 6	Cliudan	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
July 6	Syracuse Irish Session	Nibsy's Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
July 6	Maura O'Connell	Agnes Macdonald Music Haven Stage	Schenectady	7 PM	Free
July 8	Hair of the Dog	Schodack Town Park	Schodack NY	6-8 PM	Free
July 12	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
July 13-19	Catskills Irish Arts Week	Michael J. Quill Irish Cultural & Sports Centre	East Durham	Varies	Check site for tuition
July 13	Pat Kane	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
July 16	"Rockin' on the River" Irish Night w/Glengarry Bhoys	Hedley District riverfront, River Street	Troy	5-8	Free
July 18	Blarney Rebel Band CD Release Party	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
July 18, 19	Neil Emberg	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
July 19	Connie Moynihan	Salem Village Park - Gazebo	Salem NY	11 AM - 1 PM	Free
July 20	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
July 20	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
July 25-27	Great American Irish Festival	Herkimer County Fairgrounds	Frankfort	5 - 11 Fri; 11 - 11 Sat; 10:30-5 Sun	\$10 Fri, \$12 Sat, \$10 Sun; \$20 for weekend
July 26	Siochan	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
July 27	Flyin' Column	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free

That wraps it up for this month. Be sure to have a happy and safe Fourth of July. 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. By the way, we're sure that all 730 of you are dying to know the answer to last month's trivia question ("Where is the only place the American flag is never lowered?"). Inasmuch as we had no correct answers – actually, no answers at all – we'll give it to you here. Where is the only place the America flag is never lowered? The Moon, of course! And thus -- with a whimper, not a bang -- we close out the newest feature of our newsletter, Trivia Question of the Month. Whoda think that idea would've bombed so badly? (no, that is not a trivia question) Fear not, we've got other ideas up our... sleeves, and we'll try them out in the months to come. In the meantime, we'll see you at the Great American Irish Festival!