
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

Volume 5, Issue 8

August 2008

Rain Can't Dampen Spirits at 2008 Great American Irish Festival

Well, the Great American Irish Festival managed to do it again. As the festival has every year of its five-year existence, the event shattered attendance records over the July 25-27 weekend. The 2008 Great American Irish Festival cemented its reputation as the fastest growing event of its kind in the world and staked a strong claim on being the best Irish festival in the Northeast, if not the country.



Huge crowds took advantage of beautiful weather throughout the first night of the Great American Irish Festival, as Friday's turnout easily broke all records for attendance. Festival Treasurer Linda Voce reported an increase of nearly 80% over Friday night revenue last year, and Richard Elthorp of the Herkimer County Fair Association, who estimated Friday's crowd at 20,000, said it was by far the largest crowd on the grounds at one time in the 50 year history of the fairgrounds.

From the opening sets of the duo of Donal O'Shaughnessy and Brian Hyland and Philadelphia's Barleyjuice (who quickly became the talk of the festival) to the electrifying closing sets of Eileen Ivers and Enter the Haggis, the level of world-class entertainment never let up.

Saturday started off brilliantly with the inaugural 5k Ranger Run, which drew a field of close to 250, unheard of for a first year run. Despite frequent intervals of rain, including some heavy downpours and lightning strikes that caused short stoppages, the entertainment once again kept the audience screaming throughout the day, highlighted by a pair of sets by the most successful Irish American act in history, Cherish The Ladies, as well as brilliant sets from festival favorites Rathkeltair, the Prodigals and the Glengarry Bhoys. Unfortunately, finally even the Great American Irish Festival had to take a back seat to Mother Nature, as forecasts of 80-mph winds and golf-ball size hail forced the closing of the festival just before the last scheduled sets of the evening. "We were following this particular storm as it caused power outages in every town it passed through," noted GAIF director Matt Sullivan. "We could deal with the heavy rain and the lightning, but with the prospect of thousands of people trying to get out of the fairgrounds in total darkness, we just didn't think we could take that chance."

Still, other than the early closing, the storms didn't seem to bother anyone. The bagpipe competition carried on throughout the rain and the massed march suffered only a change in its route to avoid muddy roads. The only thing louder than the thunder during the Glengarry Bhoys' set was the audience response following each thunderclap, and anyone who would doubt whether people can still have fun in the rain need only to check out the videos of the GAIF mudslides on YouTube.

The Great American Irish Festival volunteers – singled out by many of the performers as the best they had ever seen at any event – once again proved their mettle, as sawdust, squeegees and brooms left little trace of the tremendous storms as Sunday opened. The 10:30 mass again proved to be hugely successful, with the

music provided brilliantly by Pat Kane (who was omnipresent at the GAIF, singing the Irish and American national anthems before the race, running a dance workshop, performing on the regional stage and picking up an extra set for another performer who couldn't make it.) As in 2007, the previous two days had done nothing to diminish the Sunday crowd's energy, as the Elders and Enter the Haggis once again had the contemporary stage crowd jumping and first-time festival attendees the Barra McNeils brought the traditional stage to a rousing close.

After the festival ended and cleanup was complete, the weekend closed with a party just for the 700-plus volunteers with music provided, appropriately enough, by the Elders, who at one point had a group of as many as 50 volunteers on stage dancing with them. Remember, this closing party was for volunteers only, so if you don't want to miss out next year, mark your calendars now for the last weekend in July, 2009, to volunteer for the 2009 Great American Irish Festival.

Winners announced for inaugural GAIF Ranger Run 5k

David Putney and Michelle Nizzi were the top male and female finishers in the Great American Irish Festival's first ever Ranger Run 5k road race. Over two hundred runners participated in the Inaugural Ranger Run 5 K on Saturday, July 26. The run, named in memory of festival director Matt Sullivan's father, Tim, started and finished on the festival grounds and traveled through the village of Frankfort.

Dr. Daniel Murphy got the runners charged up with his bagpipes after very moving renditions of the US and Irish National Anthems by Pat Kane. Utica P.D. and F.D. Chaplain from Our Lady of Lourdes, Fr. Joseph Salerno sent the runners off with a prayer (which may have been the only thing that got some of them through!)

Putney cross the finish line in 17:30 while hometown runner Nizzi was clocked at 19:40 (barely edging out Great American Irish Festival Treasurer Linda Voce, who finished, well, sometime that same day.) For a list of the top finishers in each age/sex category, check out <http://www.gaif.us/5k/>.



Mohawk Valley Frasers Take Both Divisions at GAIF Bagpipe Competition

The Mohawk Valley Frasers finished first in both the Grade 5 and Grade 4 Divisions at the Great American Irish Festival's first EUSPBA Bagpipe Competition. The hometown Frasers took the Grade 5 competition, followed by the Albany Police Pipe Band in second place and Galloway Gaelic in third. Syracuse Scottish was the runner-up in Grade 4. By all accounts, the inaugural GAIF EUSPBA Competition was a rousing success, as even the driving rain couldn't stop the mass march. One EUSPBA judge said, "The GAIF was one of – if not the most – organized, efficient, and friendly organizations with which I have carried out judging duties," and one pipe major commented, "All your efforts paid off very nicely from the pipe bands' point of view. I heard only positive comments from bands, judges and officials. They were all pleased to be treated so well. Hope this bodes well for future years."

...And there's more

While we do plan a 2nd installment of GAIF recaps next month, here's your chance to chime in as well. Do you have a favorite story or festival memory you want to share? Comments about a particular band? Maybe you took some great pictures with one of your idols? If you have anything you want to share with the committee – including suggestions or even criticisms (hey, it could happen) -- feel free to send them to Mark Sisti (marksisti@adelphia.net) or Beth Loftis (bloftis@verizon.net) and they'll be sure to pass them on.

Book Review:
“The Dead Yard”
By Mark Sisti

Michael Forsythe is back. The hero of Adrian McKinty’s 2003 debut “Dead I Well May Be” returns in “The Dead Yard,” and readers will find it was well worth the wait.

Michael Forsythe is a wonderfully multifaceted character masquerading as a simple one. As noted in this newsletter’s review of “Dead I Well May Be” (August, 2006. Go ahead. I’ll wait.) he is not without moral conscience, as he might seem at times, but operates by his own complex moral and ethical code. That code has as its core “survive.” Michael is, above all else, a survivor. Like its predecessor, “The Dead Yard” is rough and violent, and the main narrative of the novel is written in such lyrical language, bordering on the poetic, that the scenes of violence are even more jarring in juxtaposition.

Michael, now in hiding under the witness protection program as a result of his part in bringing down Darkie White’s criminal enterprise, gets caught in the middle of a football riot in the Canary Islands and finds himself facing extradition back to a Mexican prison (remember his little escape in “Dead I Well May Be?” Well, it seems the Mexican authorities remember it too.) But a British Intelligence agent offers him a way out and tells him he can avoid going back to Mexico if he infiltrates an Irish terrorist sleeper cell in the U.S. At the time it seems an easy choice, Mexican jail or a few weeks gathering information. But with Michael nothing is ever easy. Things just seem to happen around him. McKinty writes, as the riots are unfolding, of people who go through life without the tumult that seems to follow Forsythe: *“They create no stir, cause no fuss, leave no trace. When they’re gone people speak well of them, sigh, shrug their shoulders and shed a tear. They avoid chaos and it avoids them. Perhaps most people are like this. But not me... Trouble followed me like sharks trailing a slave ship.”* When he agrees to what seems a straightforward, if potentially dangerous, transaction, Michael has no concept of the carnage and horror he would leave in his wake.

The bizarre plan to infiltrate the cell is somehow successful (it is fitting that in the first stage of the plan, everything goes wrong and it is only Michael’s resourcefulness that keeps the whole mission from falling apart) and Michael (Sean to his new partners) works to earn the trust of those at the center of the small organization, in particular, the cell’s resident psychopath, “Touched.” Touched is initially amusing in a Sopranos sort of way, but Michael (and the reader) comes to the realization very quickly that there is nothing at all funny about him. As each successive plot hatched by the terrorists is botched, Touched goes farther and farther over the edge and, once the full depth of his evil nature is revealed, Michael sets himself on a collision course that can only end in the death of one of them. The passage in which Michael vows to kill Touched is powerful, beautiful and chilling, and the nonstop action and tension as the story heads inexorably to its bloody conclusion is almost unbearable.

The Michael we encounter in this novel is not the one we met in the beginning of the previous book. He is clearly harder, and he has a much better understanding of the world and of his place in it. There is no self-delusion with Michael Forsythe. While he can commit acts of horrific violence, without regret and without conscience, they are never without reason or purpose. Alliances are made and broken, trusts are betrayed, and no one will come out unscathed.

As Michael has grown since his first foray into the literary world, so has his creator. McKinty’s narrative voice is sharp, his dialogue is crisp, brutal or funny as the situation calls for, and his descriptive powers are formidable. A paragraph describing the island of Tenerife during the riot that sets in motion everything that follows manages to stimulate all the senses, set the proper scene, and create a sense of foreboding all at the same time: *“The streets of Play de las Americas were flowing with beer and black sewage and blood. Smoke hung above the seashore and the smell was of desolation, decay, the burning of tires and fuel oil. The noise of birds, diesel engines, a dirgelike siren, a helicopter, voices in Spanish over a loudspeaker – all of it more than enough hint of the breakdown of the fragile rules of social contract.”*

One of the great joys of discovering an exciting new writer is to see where he’ll go next. It looks like Adrian McKinty is going very far, very fast.

Cortland Celtic Festival to Take Place from Aug 22-24

Cortland Celtic Festival

Mark your calendars now for the 8th annual Cortland Celtic Festival, taking place from August 22-24 in Cortland, NY. This fun filled family event offers something for everyone from toddlers who will enjoy seeing all the Celtic breeds of dogs, and Alpacas, to grandparents who will enjoy hearing the traditional music of their childhood. There's a 5K Celtic Run on Sunday at 9 am, sponsored by the Cortland YMCA. The festival boasts a strong lineup of artists, including The Town Pants, Traonach, Causeway Giants, the Syracuse Irish Session, and area favorites Hair of the Dog. For a complete listing, visit the official Celtic Fest web site at www.cortlandcelticfestival.org. While you're on the site, why not buy your tickets and save time and money! The Cortland Celtic Festival is sponsored by the Cortland Celtic Cultural Association, the City and County of Cortland, Price Chopper and Guinness beer.

Hunter Mountain "International Celtic Festival" set for August 16-17

From August 16-17, Hunter Mountain (Hunter, NY) hosts the annual "International Celtic Festival." The International Celtic Festival brings you the sights and sounds of the Emerald Isles. World-class musicians from Ireland and North America perform on three stages, with plenty of variety to suit any taste.



Providing the musical entertainment will be Hothouse Flowers, The Elders, Andy Cooney, The Barley Boys, MacTalla Mor, Calley McGrane and Exile, dancers, pipers and much more. On Sunday, dozens of bagpipe bands take part in a pipe band competition. The highlight of the weekend is the Massed March, as hundreds of pipers and drummers march down the mountain in unison. Tickets for the festival are \$12 for adults, with children 12 and under being free. Hunter Mountain is located just over 2 hours north of New York City in the northern Catskill Mountains; a convenient half-hour ride from New York State Thruway exits 20 or 21. For more information, check out their [web site](#).

27th Annual Buffalo Irish Festival to be held

The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds is the site of the 27th annual Buffalo Irish Festival, to be held on August 22-24. Heading up the impressive lineup are The Saw Doctors, Seven Nations, The Prodigals and Andy Cooney, to name a few. New this year is a Traditional Music Tent with guitarist John Doyle and fiddler Liz Carroll, Chicago's Bua, and Blackwater, as well as workshops and a Ceili. Rounding out the lineup will be Irish dancers, Pipe bands, an Irish mass, and much more. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$7 for kids 4-12 and seniors over 60. Tickets are available at the Shannon Pub, Tara Gift Shoppe, Buffalo Brewpub and at the Dublin House. For more information, check out <http://www.buffaloirish.com/>, or call (716) 743-9348. The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds is located at 5600 McKinley Parkway, in Hamburg, NY.



CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival

The Central New York Scottish Games committee invites you to attend the CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival at Long Branch Park in Liverpool, NY for an experience you will never forget! Come join us in the wee morning hours Saturday, August 9th, and allow us to bring Scotland to you. The aroma of Scottish and American Food, the skirl of pipes, the cadence of the drums, the awe of massed bands, the beauty and form of the dancers, the strength of the athletes and the feeling of clanship all contribute to hours of nostalgia and pure enjoyment! Performing this year are Dicey Riley and Fieldstone. Schedule is 9:00 to 6:00 on Saturday the 9th. [from <http://www.cnyscots.com/frame.html>]

"Dancing for a Friend" On Friday, August 29th, Pat McCann from Piggy Pat's in Washington Mills presents a very special Irish Happy Hour. The Irish dancing world champion Girls from Syracuse will be "Dancing for a Friend." One of their friends, Chelsea Hurley -- a 23 year old mother -- has lymphoma and leukemia. After dancing, the girls will "pass the hat," with all proceeds going to the Lymphoma and Leukemia Society in Chelsea's name. Rumor has it that tightwad Pat McCann will even make a small donation, of course only with his cardiologist's permission. Bonnie Ehre from Accents of Ireland will donate an item to be raffled off. House favorites The Blarney Rebel Band will provide the entertainment along with the dancers, and there will be plenty of cold beer, Piggy Pat's Famous Smoked Corned Beef, Charley Thomas with his ever embarrassing camera and sundry Irish people and things. Pat says "it's a great way to wrap up the summer!"

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

Aug 6	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Papa Pardi's Pizza Pub	New York Mills	7-10 PM	Free
Aug 8	Vince Colgan	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Aug 9	CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival	Long Branch Park	Liverpool, NY	9 AM - 6 PM	Adult: \$10, Seniors: \$7 Kids 5-12: \$4; under 5 free
Aug 9	Traditional Irish Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Aug 9	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Aug 10	Saw Doctors	Revolution Hall	Troy, NY	7:00 PM	\$18 (adv); \$20 Day of Show
Aug 10	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 11	Searson w/openers Eileen McSweeney and The McKrells - Monday Nights in the Park concert series	Washington Park Lakehouse	Albany, NY	6 PM- 9 PM	Free
Aug 12	Leahy - "Tuesday in the Park at ArtPark"	Artpark Outdoor Amphitheater	Buffalo	6:30 PM	Free
Aug 14	Prodigals w/opener "Brother"	Alive at Five	Albany Riverfront Park	5-8 PM	Free
Aug 15	The Elders	Proctor's Theater	Schenectady	7:30 PM	\$16.50
Aug 15	Great Big Sea - "Buffalo Place Summer Concert Series"	Erie Canal Harbor	Buffalo	Doors open at 5 PM	\$10
Aug 15	The Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Aug 16	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Aug 16-17	International Celtic Festival	Hunter Mountain	Hunter, NY	12-11PM Sat; 9 AM - 9 PM Sun	\$12, 12 & under free
Aug 17	Pat Kane	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 17	Hothouse Flowers - "Music Haven Concert Series"	Central Park	Schenectady	7pm	Free
Aug 17	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 22-24	Cortland Celtic Festival	Cortland County Fairgrounds	Cortland NY	Check web site	Check web site
Aug 22-24	Buffalo Irish Festival	The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds	Hamburg, NY	Fri 5-11; Sat 12-11; Sun 12-9	\$10 (Adults); \$7 (4-12 and 60+)
Aug 23	Traditional Irish Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Aug 25	The Irish Tenors Show	Artpark Mainstage Theater	Buffalo	8 PM	\$37.50, \$46.50, \$55
Aug 26	Hair of the Dog	Leak Amphitheater for the Arts	Colonie, NY	6:30 PM	Free
Aug 29	"Dancing for a Friend" w/The Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Aug 29	Searson	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	9:30pm	TBD
Aug 31	Hooley on the Hudson	T.R. Gallo Park	Kingston, NY	11:30 - 9 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.