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# **MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL**

## **EVENTS NEWSLETTER**

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### **“Echoes of Erin” Resonates With Rome Audience**

What you will find in most concert reviews is a list of the highlights of the show, those moments which stood out. There will be little or none of that in this review of the Echoes of Erin concert, held October 15<sup>th</sup> at the Rome Free Academy Auditorium. This is not because of a lack of stellar moments; rather it's because there were so many stellar moments it would be impossible to pick one or two. The fact is that this was a night of a succession of outstanding performances, bordering on the jaw-dropping.

For those unfamiliar with the “Echoes of Erin” concert series, now in its 39<sup>th</sup> year, the tour features 12 young musicians, singers and dancers from among the very top All-Ireland champions from every corner of the country, alternating solo and ensemble numbers to put their prodigious talents on full display. Few of them are limited to just one skill. Fiddlers sing, harp players double on flute, flute players boast concertina skills – everyone on stage takes on (at least) double duty, and they excel at all of them.

After starting off the evening with Róisín Ní Riain and Pádraic Keena's vocal renditions of both the American and Irish national anthems – and isn't it sad that it takes a non-American to remind us how the Star-Spangled Banner should actually be sung? – the musicians had the appreciative audience clapping in time from the opening number, a rousing set consisting of The Rosewood and Atholl Highlanders. The set featured the entire band, which was joined midway through by dancers Mark Nestor and Clare Mc Dermott and, after enthusiastic applause, segued into a beautiful waltz-type performance by guitarist Paul McMahan and accordionist Conor Moriarty, followed by a wonderful Gaelic rendition of Raithineach a Bhean Bheag by Róisín. This set a pattern for pretty much the rest of the night. Whoever was responsible for putting this show together certainly understands the idea of pacing. Throughout the night the show followed a discernable structure, alternating between a group number, generally up-tempo, a solo performance, adding instruments until the full band has joined in, and vocal performances. Interspersed at various points would be the dancing of Mr. Nestor and Ms. McDermott, as well as the Sean Nos dance stylings of Emma O'Sullivan. (A little note for those trying to put a show like this together – exuberant Irish dancers are always a surefire crowd-pleaser, even if they're not very good; these three were very, very good.)

Despite the predictability of the structure, the show never got boring, simply because of the astonishing talent of the young musicians performing it. OK, I lied about not picking out highlights. While they were all phenomenally skilled, a few stood out even among this collection of talent. As mentioned the dancers never failed to kickstart the show when it would start to flag (get it? Kickstart? Never mind.) McMahan, in addition to providing solid backup with his DADGAD-tuned guitar, was spectacularly dazzling on accordion, his fingers hardly seeming to touch the keys as they deftly danced up and down the keyboard like the fairies the music pays tribute to, and if I've ever heard a better version of Cherish the Ladies or Paddy Fahey's I'd be hard-pressed to name when. Oisín Morrison was ever-present, providing accompaniment on harp and adding his own solo harp tunes in addition to adding flute lines. And speaking of flutes, the flautist/concertina player was nothing short of mesmerizing. (The program lists her as Breda Shannon, but I think it may have been Orlaith McAuliffe.) But again, it would be unfair to single any of them out when the others – Maura Walsh on fiddle, Pádraig Donlon on Uilleann Pipes and Rhona Lynch on Fiddle – would each have been the centerpiece in any other ensemble. I will admit I found emcee Joe Monahan's shtick to become more than a tad annoying, but the audience seemed to enjoy his well-worn jokes, and it was hardly enough to put a damper on the rest of the show.

Kudos to Craobh Dugan branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, particularly Mike and Chris Hoke, who worked tirelessly to bring this much sought-after show back to Central New York after far too long an absence. This schedule lists only 11 stops for this show on the October 9-22, 2011 tour, and those who were in the RFA auditorium on October 15 are mighty glad that Rome was one of them.

## Enter the Haggis Returns to the Area

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, Toronto's Enter the Haggis returns to one of their favorite haunts, Syracuse's Westcott Theater (524 Westcott St), for an 8 PM show on the theater's unique slanted dance floor. A mainstay of the Great American Irish Festival, Enter the Haggis has built an international touring and recording career based on its unique approach to Celtic-based music and high-energy performances. The group's constant touring schedule has made them one of the biggest draws at Celtic and folk festivals throughout the world. Besides the classic ETH songs you've come to love, you can count on a healthy dose of selections from their newly-released CD, "Whitelake" (see below). The Westcott Theater – its canopy calls it simply "A theater and Performing Arts Center" -- is a 700 person capacity venue, located about two miles from Syracuse University. Debuting in September 2008, the Westcott Theater is breathing new life into what began as The Harvard Theater, one of Syracuse's first cinemas, over 80 years ago. Opening the show will be Scythian, a "...unique hodgepodge of Irish, Celtic, klezmer, and gypsy influences." Tickets for the show are \$15 in advance at Sound Garden in Armory Square, Westcott Theater box office during event hours, and the theater's [website](#) (with service charges); tickets are \$20 at the door. For more information, call (315) 299-8886.



## Enter the Haggis' "Whitelake" Makes Strong Debut



Area favorites Enter the Haggis has released its 8<sup>th</sup> album, "Whitelake," an eclectic collection of songs that proves once again that the boys are not afraid to push the limits. Eagerly awaited ever since their masterpiece "Gutter Anthems" hit in 2009 – in a "what can they possibly do next" kind of way -- the CD debuted in October, and debuted strong; topping the charts in the first week of its digital release, and rising to #1 on Amazon's Roots Rock AND Contemporary Folk charts, and #4 on the iTunes Singer/Songwriter chart. "Whitelake" (you can listen to the whole album for free by clicking [here](#)) features trademark ETH songwriting, vocals and virtuoso musicianship, on such standout songs as "The Basket Or the Blade" (an early favorite of mine ever since I heard it at their Saranac performance this summer), "Devil's Son" (the interview piece on "60

Minutes" this past week brings it home even more), the deliciously dark "Of A Murder," and nine more songs that will have you wearing out the repeat button. With "Whitelake," Enter the Haggis shows the world a band at the top of its game. If there's a downside, it's that I'm already eagerly awaiting their 9<sup>th</sup> album.

## Bua Plays "Old Songs"...

... and they play them quite well. The aptly named young quartet Bua – it means "victory" in Irish Gaelic – will be bringing their traditional musical show to the "Old Songs Concert Series" on Friday, November 4<sup>th</sup> at 8 PM. Comprised of some of America's most talented young musicians, the Chicago-based band Bua has been described by *Irish Music Magazine* as "...the essence of a superb band," and their sound as "...a throwback to the playing of the 1960s and 1970s, keeping the music down the path of tradition." The "Old Songs Concert Series" venue is located in Vooreheesville, 10 miles west of Albany at 37 South Main Street. Tickets for the show are \$20.



*Book Review:*  
**“Rockin’ The Bronx”**  
*By Mark Sisti*

As anyone who has followed Black ’47 can attest, Larry Kirwan has a lot to say. Too much, in fact, to be limited to a single artistic idiom, causing him to branch out into plays, musicals, memoirs and fiction. Now, Kirwan tells more of his story than could ever be encapsulated in a 5-min. rock song in his novel, “Rockin’ The Bronx.” One might think that if an artist can express himself, he can express himself whatever the format; this is not necessarily true. The literary demands of a novel are different – not necessarily more difficult, but different – than those of a song. For a novel to be successful, things like character development, plot structure, setting, backstory, all must be given consideration, along with the thematic exploration called for in songwriting. Fortunately for us, Kirwan understands this and tells his story brilliantly, so that we are given much more than an extended song put forth in prose.

In “The Spy Who Shagged Me,” time-traveling Austin Powers talks Felicity Shagwell out of visiting the ‘80’s with the line “There’s a gas shortage and A Flock of Seagulls. That’s about it.” Well, sorry Austin, but as Kirwan’s vibrant, colorful novel reminds us, there was much more. There was the emergence of the punk movement. There was the growing drug culture. There were hunger strikes being endured by Irish patriots in Long Kesh prison. And there was AIDS. “Rockin’ The Bronx” touches on all these subjects, some briefly, but never in way that reduces them to cameo appearances; they all play a central role in the story Kirwan tells. The plot revolves around Sean, who travels from Ireland in an attempt to bring his old girlfriend home, only to get caught up in the intoxicating – in more ways than one – atmosphere of New York in the 1980’s. Sharing a small flat with three other Irish emigrants, Sean spends his days working a back-breaking construction job, and spends his nights drinking and eventually joining forces with one of his roommates, the enigmatic Danny, to start a band that incorporates Irish roots into a modern rock setting (sound familiar?)

Sean is content with, or at least resigned to, his chosen way of life of drifting aimlessly from one day to the next, until news stories about the Long Kesh hunger strikes and Bobby Sands have him questioning the nature of commitment. At the same time crises in each of his companions’ lives have him examining the direction in which his life is headed. In the end Kirwan pulls off a feat that is very difficult, but essential to the enjoyment of a story: we actually care what happens to his characters.

The plot, while fairly predictable, maintains our interest, but that’s not where the strength of this novel lies. It is at the same time a coming of age tale, a love story, a nostalgic look back to a turbulent time period, and an examination of a political and cultural watershed era. Kirwan’s writing combines a fierce madness with poetic lyricism to great effect, and the book becomes a feast for all the senses. We can hear the drums as a constant backdrop, we can smell the garbage in the streets, we taste the cold pints being poured down the throat (often.) The scene in the barroom on Sean’s first night in the Bronx, for example, perfectly conveys the barely controlled chaos of a crowded bar filled with drunken patrons.

This is a book that should be released with a soundtrack. Not just because of the numerous references to songs that imbue the story with the perfect sense of time and place, but because countless passages read as if they could easily be put to music without losing any of their efficacy. But make no mistake, this is not a novel written by a songwriter; this is a novel written by someone who fully understands and can exploit the craft of novel writing.

Exhilarating, poignant, profane, affectionate and, at times, very, very funny, in many ways, “Rockin’ The Bronx” put me in mind of the musical “Rent,” not so much because of the drug and AIDS references, but because of its portrayal of a subculture and an unconventional family unit that is at the very heart of the New York City experience, yet is apart from it.

This may be a difficult book to find, but it is well worth seeking out. As a special treat, you can obtain a signed copy at [www.black47.com](http://www.black47.com) under the “Shop” menu.

## Craobh Dugan “Tune of the Month” – The King of the Faeries – by Skip Mansur

The Irish poet W.B. Yeats once asked an old Irishwoman, “Do you believe in the faeries?” “No,” she replied, “but they're there...” Up until the year 1700 virtually everyone in Ireland believed in faeries - from royalty down to the rural peasants. Not even the arrival of Christianity in the fifth century could dispel this belief. Old stories were told that included faeries. It was just taken for granted that these stories were all true because it was the natural order of things that they truly were part of the real world.



Do not think the faeries are always little. Everything is capricious about them, even their size. They seem to take what size or shape pleases them. Their chief occupations are feasting, fighting, making love, and playing the most beautiful music. They have only one industrious person amongst them, the lepra-caun—the shoemaker, the most well known of Irish faeries. A close second is the Banshee. The Merrows are the sea faeries of Ireland and the Sheoques are another sociable type of faerie. Leprechauns are solitary, as are Changelings, Cluricauns, Gonconers, Fear Darrigs, Pookas, Dullahans, Leanhaun Shees, Fear Gortas, Banshees, Fear Sidhes and the Dullahan who is a headless rider on a headless horse.

Faeries, also known as the “Good People,” have three great festivals in the year—May Eve, Midsummer Eve, and November Eve. On Midsummer Eve, when the bonfires are lighted on every hill in honour of St. John, the faeries are at their gayest, and sometime steal away beautiful mortals to be their brides. When they are gay they sing. However, on November Eve or Samhain (we know it as Halloween) they are at their gloomiest, for, according to the old Gaelic reckoning, this is the first night of winter. This night they dance with the ghosts, and the pooka is abroad, and witches make their spells. After November Eve the blackberries are no longer wholesome, for the pooka has spoiled them.

Who are the faeries? The first thought is they are the Túatha Dé Dannan, the original gods of Ireland. They were defeated by the Sons of Mil thought to be the final Gael conquerors of Ireland, but the Túatha Dé Dannan were not banished from the land. They were diminished in size and told to go live among the hills, mounds and plains. They do not die of old age and are not visible to humans but they can be seen if they want to. The second thought is that they are fallen angels who were cast from Heaven. Some fell on land to live in elf mounds called Sidh. Some fell into the seas, lakes and rivers of Ireland and are bound to live there. A few fell into Hell and were taught by the devil to do ill to mankind, these are the malevolent faeries. So, although some of the faeries are cheerful, not all the faeries are a kind or welcome folk, and one would be wise to be wary of the King.

### King Of The Faeries

Em Hornpipe, Long Dance

Em G Bm G Em D Bm Em G Bm D7 Em C Em  
Em G C Em D Bm Em Bm C Em G D Em  
C D Em G D Em D G Em Em C Em G Em

The King of the Faeries is a Set dance, played as a hornpipe, AABB. One tale attached to the tune has it that “The King of the Faeries” is a summoning tune, and if played three times in a row during a festivity, the King must appear. Once summoned, however, the King assesses the situation, and if the gathering is to his liking he may join in; if however, he does not find it to his liking he may cause great mischief... so it may be well advised to have some good draughts, good music or good dance to welcome him!

## RANDOM RAMBLINGS

☘ **“Nuacht as Craobh Dugan”---news from the Dugan Branch** Chris Hoke of Craobh Dugan reports: “Craobh Dugan held their Annual General Meeting on October 21<sup>st</sup> with 30 people in attendance. The following officers were elected for the 2011-2012 year: Chairperson -- Chris Hoke; Vice-Chair and Irish Language Officer --Tom Malley; Treasurer -- Mike Hoke; Secretary -- Linda Mullin; Public Relations Officer -- Ed Campbell; Auditor --Mike Carroll; and Convention Delegates -- Mike and Chris Hoke.” I also recall her once saying, in enough words to make this a full page, “Anyone interested in joining our local Comhaltas branch can contact any of the officers or check out our website: [www.uticairish.org](http://www.uticairish.org). Our musicians get together weekly to play and share tunes...new musicians are always welcome! Craobh Dugan now hosts two monthly music sessions. The 1st Tuesday of the month a session is held at the Nail Creek Pub on Varick St. in Utica. Another session is held on the 3rd Wednesday at The Mill on Dominick St in Rome. Both sessions begin at 7:30...come to play with us or just to listen. It is a great taste of Ireland right here at home! We also offer weekly ceili dance classes. These are held on Friday evenings at the Seton Center at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Utica. Classes start at 7:00...it is a lot of fun and great exercise. It costs nothing, you do not need special shoes and you do not need a partner! So you have no excuse for not joining us on Fridays.”

☘ **...and in a related note** The Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Northeast Regional Meeting and Hall of Fame Inductions will be held in Buffalo on November 5<sup>th</sup>, where the late Jack Pendergast will be inducted into the Comhaltas Hall of Fame. Jack was a Clinton resident who was a member of Craobh Dugan for over 10 years before moving to Maryland. He was very active in Comhaltas here and was Regional Chairman as well as Provincial Secretary for many years. Jack died in 2009 but is fondly remembered in Comhaltas in North America as well as in Ireland With his induction, Jack joins Craobh Dugan colleagues Tom Carville (2000), Kate (McDonough) Hill (2003), Jim O’Looney (2006), Mike and Chris Hoke (2007), Kevin Kearney (2008) and Tom Malley (2010) in the Hall. This is a well-deserved honor for Jack, and we would like to offer our most sincere congratulations to Jack (oh, you don’t know Jack if you think he doesn’t know we’re talking about him!), his wife Vicky and his family.

☘ **Everybody Comes To Rick’s...** ...reception. You know Rick Bedrosian as the frenetic bassist for the Capitol Region’s favorite band, Hair of the Dog. But did you know he’s also an accomplished photographer, and that he’s hosting an opening day reception for his latest photo show, “Iconic Images”? Oh, you did? Well aren’t you just too smart. For the rest of you, here’s the scoop in Rick’s own words: “Hi Everybody - The reception for my upcoming photo show is Friday, November 4th from 5-8 PM at McGreevy ProLab, 376 Broadway, Albany, NY 12207 (518-426-1039). I will be presenting, for the first time, some very cool photos from Paris, San Francisco, New York and this past summer’s Paul McCartney concert at Yankee Stadium in Da Bronx. There will be plenty of complimentary cocktails (wine, beer, Guinness, Jameson) as well as soft drinks and snacks. This reception would be a dynamite way to begin a night out in the Capital District or a very affordable opportunity to do something fun and still get home early. There will be dozens of framed photographs of all sizes available with one night only mark-downs of 20% - 75%. Please tell everyone you think might be interested. Thanks and I hope to see you there.” Rick’s work can be seen at <http://www.rickbedrosian.com>.

☘ **Celtic Thunder’s Fall 2011 Tour** Get ready for all the fun, excitement and entertainment of Celtic Thunder LIVE, coming this Fall! Celtic Thunder is hitting the road again and embarking on a North American Tour, beginning September 8, 2011. Be sure to clear your schedule for the concert event of the year, and secure your tickets to a show in a city near you! Some of the dates that come fairly close are: Nov 26th at the Palace Theatre in Albany (tickets on sale thru [Ticketmaster](http://Ticketmaster) (pre-sale password is “Dublin”), Nov 27<sup>th</sup> at the Hershey Theatre in Hershey, PA ([Ticketmaster](http://Ticketmaster)), Nov 29<sup>th</sup> at Symphony Hall in Springfield, MA ([Ticketmaster](http://Ticketmaster)), Nov 30<sup>th</sup> at the [Capitol Center for the Arts](http://Capitol Center for the Arts) in Concord, NH and on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> at the newly-remodeled Landmark Theatre in Syracuse (check the theater [website](http://website) or [Ticketmaster](http://Ticketmaster)).

**Celtic Club Calendar** Finally, here's the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for November:

Nov 3	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">Marcellus Legion Hall</a>	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 4	Donal O'Shaughnessey	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Nov 4	Bua	<a href="#">Old Songs</a>	Voorheesville	8 PM	\$20
Nov 4	"Mostly Irish" Monthly Jam	Irish American Club	Amsterdam NY	7:30 PM	Free
Nov 4-5	Neil Emberg	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Nov 5	Seamus Kennedy & Farrell School of Irish Dance	<a href="#">Albany Irish-American Center, 375 Ontario St.</a>	Albany	8 PM	\$20
Nov 5	<a href="#">Syracuse Irish Session</a>	<a href="#">J. Ryan's Pub</a>	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 6	Donal O'Shaughnessey & Bryan Hyland	<a href="#">Coleman's Irish Pub</a>	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 7	Trad Irish Music Session	<a href="#">The Susquehanna Café</a>	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Nov 10	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">Marcellus Legion Hall</a>	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 12	Hair of the Dog	<a href="#">Parting Glass</a>	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13, res'v rec.
Nov 13	Two Feet Short	<a href="#">Coleman's Irish Pub</a>	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 14	Trad Irish Music Session	<a href="#">The Susquehanna Café</a>	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Nov 16	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">The Mill</a>	Rome, NY	7:30 PM	Free
Nov 16	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">Marcellus Legion Hall</a>	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 18	Blarney Rebel Band	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Nov 18	Enter the Haggis w/Scythian	<a href="#">Westcott Theater</a>	Syracuse	8 PM	\$15 adv; \$20 door
Nov 18-19	The Fighting 86s	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Nov 19	Leahy	<a href="#">Nazareth College Arts Ctr</a>	Rochester	8 PM	\$30-\$60
Nov 20	<a href="#">Syracuse Irish Session</a>	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 20	Kitchen Party	<a href="#">Coleman's Irish Pub</a>	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 21	Trad Irish Music Session	<a href="#">The Susquehanna Café</a>	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Nov 24	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">Marcellus Legion Hall</a>	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 26	Celtic Thunder	<a href="#">Palace Theater</a>	Albany	7:30 PM	\$30-\$60
Nov 25	Blarney Rebel Band	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Nov 26	Hair of the Dog	<a href="#">Parting Glass</a>	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13, res'v rec.
Nov 27	Flyin' Column	<a href="#">Coleman's Irish Pub</a>	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Nov 28	Trad Irish Music Session	<a href="#">The Susquehanna Café</a>	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free

If you have anything you want to share with us, feel free to send it to us ([sistia@roadrunner.com](mailto:sistia@roadrunner.com), [bloftis@ymail.com](mailto:bloftis@ymail.com) or [marksisti@roadrunner.com](mailto:marksisti@roadrunner.com)), and we'll be happy to include it. As always, while we try to get things – prices, places, genders, etc. -- as accurate as we can, sometimes we make mistakes. It always makes sense to call ahead to confirm some of these further-out trips. Oh yeah, don't forget to set your clocks back on November 6<sup>th</sup>, make your voice heard on Election Day, have a great Thanksgiving, and finally, and I believe, most importantly, be sure to remember that November 11<sup>th</sup> is Veterans' Day... the day we pay tribute to the brave men and women who fought, and in many cases died, to preserve, defend and advance the rights that America's founders carved out for all of us. We may have vastly different ideological notions about the causes of, or even need for, wars... but whatever our views, we must never, ever forget those brave souls who risked everything for the freedom we ALL enjoy.