
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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The Elders Return to Rome

Looking for that perfect Christmas gift for your significant other, your mailman, or me? Look no further. Well, no, obviously I mean look just past this sentence. On January 28th, 2012, Central New York's favorite sons, **The Elders**, come back to the Historic Capitol Theater in Rome for a very special 7 PM show, with very special guests, **Searson**. Fronted by Ian Byrne from County Wicklow, and backed by guitarist Steve Phillips, bassist Norm Dahlor, violinist Brent Hoad, drummer Tommy Sutherland, and keyboardist Joe Miquelon, the Elders have set the American music scene on its ear, thanks to a skillful mix of amped-up roots rock, augmented with powerful vocals, blazing instrumentals and topnotch song writing; burrowing their way into the hearts of Central New Yorkers as well. Tickets for the concert – their fifth consecutive year of helping to raise funds in support of Rome's Weed and Seed program - - are available online at www.romecapitol.com, at the Rome Capitol Box Office, or at the Celtic Harp on Varick Street in Utica. General admission tickets are \$25 in advance or \$35 at the door. For more information please visit www.romeweelandseed.com or contact Kathy Stockbridge, Weed & Seed Site Coordinator at (315) 838-1713 or kstockbridge@romecitygov.com.



An Nollaig – An Irish Christmas with Eileen Ivers

Eileen Ivers is no stranger to the region, having played dozens of concerts in the area in the past few years. That said, it's been two years since she last performed a Christmas-themed show here... but that is about to change. On Sunday, December 18th, the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall presents **An Nollaig: Irish Christmas with Eileen Ivers** as part of their World Music subscription. The nine-time All-Ireland Fiddle Champion -- called a "sensation" by Billboard magazine and "the Jimi Hendrix of the violin" by The New York Times, leads an amazing crew of musicians, creating an enchanting evening that features traditional carols, holiday favorites, and dance tunes. Bring all your friends and family - what a great way to celebrate the holidays! Tickets for the 3 PM show are \$38/\$32/\$27, with students and children getting in for \$15. The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall is located at 30 2nd Street, Troy, NY.

Christmas in Irish Lore #1: The Christmas Candle

In Ireland the tradition of the Christmas candle is lovingly handed down from generation to generation. According to one belief, the candle long served as a symbol of welcome to Mary and Joseph who sought shelter in vain on that first Christmas Eve. To have a light in your window on Christmas Eve to welcome the stranger meant that you were welcoming the Holy Family too. To have no light meant that you shared the guilt of the Innkeeper at Bethlehem who said, "No Room"!

The ceremony of lighting the candle is one of simple ancient rituals during which prayers are said for the departed, and the privilege of striking the match is usually given to a daughter named Mary.

This flickering symbol also served as a signal in times past to any priest seeking shelter and protection that he was welcome in this house and that it was safe to say Mass there. The story of the abiding religious faith to which this nation has clung so strongly for centuries is reflected in the symbolism of the lighted candle in the window, which spells out the simple beauty of the Christmas story

“Whitelake” – Enter the Haggis - CD Review



When Gutter Anthems came out, it was evident that Enter the Haggis was at the top of their game, head and shoulders above anyone else in the genre. With Whitelake, they once again stake their claim at the top, even though the genre is no longer as easily categorized as it was in their past offerings. Nearly gone is the Celtic rock underpinning, and in its place is an indefinable but very Enter the Haggis collection of songs from one of the most talented and interesting bands around. And it is very, very good.

Where Gutter Anthems was the latest step in a linear progression of steady growth in songwriting, performance and production, Whitelake represents a marked departure from the proven path they had been following; a comfortable zone that has attracted hordes of loyal fans around the globe. But regardless of the genre, a good songwriter is a good songwriter, and this band has two of the best in Brian Buchanan and Trevor Lewington. The songs on this CD are not individually credited, a testament to the cohesion of the band as an inseparable unit, and part of the fun of listening to the album is trying to match a song with its composer. Although it would be a stretch to call Whitelake a “concept album,” there were more than enough noticeable threads connecting one song to the next to chalk it up to coincidence.

The album, the band’s 9th, is rife with themes and allusions already familiar to ETH fans: of floods (real and metaphorical); of social commentary and the call to make a difference; and of coping with a life going by too fast. In the first cut, Lewington and Buchanan voice their observations on dealing with the speed of life; offering the antipodal advice “...slow down...”/“...we can’t slow down...” in a masterfully stitched collaboration called “Headlights I & II.” “The Basket and the Blade” follows, a clever song in which the singer asks on which side of a defining moment will he find his lover, friend or society: “...if I should lose my head/Would I be losing you or will you shelter me.../...Are you the basket or the blade.”

“The Devil’s Son” is Lewington’s spin on Mark Madoff’s decision to turn in his father, Bernie Madoff, and then, unable to cope with the shame any longer, his decision to take his own life. The next song, “Whistleblower,” is an imaginary account from the point of view of an ex-soldier coming home. What makes this song more poignant, however, is that it was inspired by actual events in the Congo, where children -- systematically kidnapped by rebel forces -- are sent to the front lines, armed only with whistles to make enough noise to scare attackers... but who in reality serve primarily to receive the first round of bullets (for more information, including how you can help, visit www.fallingwhistles.com).

On one level, “The Flood” serves as a metaphor for surviving the rising tide and keeping one’s head above water, but again, the inspiration for the song was drawn from real life. In March 2010, while staying in the Boston area, the band awoke to rampant and damaging floodwaters; the result of the second of two rainstorms in scant weeks dumping more than 10 inches of rain on Boston over a 72-hour period. Written in two hours as a flood relief fundraiser, The Flood is a beautiful piece that could have come straight out of the Simon and Garfunkel songbook.

“Getaway Car” is either a metaphor for running away from the problems life brings... or maybe “you’ve locked your keys in the getaway car” is a Woody Allen sight gag waiting to be filmed. “Pseumoustophy” (“it’s a made-up word,” says Buchanan) is a sardonic look at the shallow world of bad politics. “Follow” has the band following “a sweet tide,” and features Brian on electric guitar; one of many instrumentation surprises on the album. “Of a Murder” is a delicious song that oozes noir, and “The Hunter and the Phantom Limb” likens the still-present feelings for a lost love to the phenomenon of an amputee’s ability to feel sensations where a limb used to be. “Let Me Go” is a rousing song with a New Orleans feel that has instantly become a crowd favorite at live performances. And wrapping up Whitelake is “White Squall;” a song from Canadian folk legend Stan Rogers, about a drowning death at the hands of the sudden and violent weather change on the Great Lakes, meteorologically known as a “white squall.” (Coincidentally, Brian Buchanan himself nearly drowned on White Lake when he was out trying to come up with lyrics and his canoe tipped over; perhaps the motivation for his “Paul is Dead” back-to-the-camera pose on the CD’s cover?)

To be sure, Whitelake will have its detractors; so too did “Rubber Soul” when the Beatles dared to break the formulaic mold that already had them miles above every other artist on the scene. And while there is a certain comfort in knowing that a new CD from a favorite band has more of the same music you have come to expect, I am quite comfortable knowing that I will never again know what to expect from the next Enter the Haggis album.

Book Review:
“Bloodstorm”
By Mark Sisti

As has been noted in these reviews, the best books in the genre known commonly as *noir* or “hard-boiled fiction” are no longer coming out of gritty U.S. cities, but from the Emerald Isle. Writers like Ken Bruen, Declan Hughes, Stuart Neville, Adrian McKinty and the Dublin-born John Connolly have firmly established Ireland as the center for this particular brand of mystery story. So when I see five-star reviews for “Bloodstorm,” the first in a series by a Belfast author named Sam Millar, I sit up and take notice. Unfortunately, “Bloodstorm,” while not without its good points, is more of a case of an emperor wearing no clothes.

Millar’s dark – make that “very dark” – Belfast crime tale introduces a down-on-his luck private investigator Karl Kane. (If PI’s are always down on their luck, why do so many people insist in entering that field?) Kane is approached to take on the seemingly simple job of obtaining information about a body that has been found. From this straightforward (but well-paying) assignment, Kane is carried through a string of brutal murders, apparently unconnected but (as they usually are in this breed of novel) all tied together, both with the present and the past. Kane, with a brutal past of his own, is a very human main character, flawed and often unlikable but with a central core of decency that makes it inevitable that (spoiler alert) he’ll follow the trail through to its conclusion. The novel has moments of dark humor that relieve the otherwise unrelenting dark tone and a brisk pace is well-maintained throughout.

Millar himself has a fascinating and dark history, having spent over a decade in Long Kesh prison before emigrating to New York and masterminding the famous \$7.2 million Brinks robbery in Rochester, ultimately gaining a pardon from Bill Clinton. Perhaps that colorful past (captured in his memoir “Into the Brinks”) has made reviewers kinder to this book than they might otherwise have been.

The majority of complaints about the book deal with the level of violence, but for those used to Connolly, Bruen or Neville, “Bloodstorm” is almost tame in comparison (if you can call a book that starts with the victim of gang rape being eaten by wild dogs and ends with a brawl at a murder victim’s funeral to be tame.). To Millar’s credit, the violence is never gratuitous, but is always central to the plot and is not the kind of over-the-top graphic gore that makes so many modern horror movies inferior to their predecessors. My problems with this book are of a different sort. Anyone unable to solve the actual “mystery” (or mysteries) here should turn in their junior detective badges. There are no clever twists, no shocking last-minute revelations, no “aha” moments (although one gets the impression that the author thinks those elements are present.) The only parts of the solution that would take anyone by surprise are ones that have been so poorly set up they seem to come totally out of left field, and are so tangential to the story that they add little or nothing.

More important, the crucial element that makes hard-boiled detective fiction work, from Hammett and Chandler to the modern masters, is the sharp dialogue, and in that regard this novel falls short. When Philip Marlowe or Jack Taylor responds with a cutting one-liner, it works because, in short, it’s a funny line. When Kane makes a similar riposte, it’s simply not funny, it’s either an old line recycled into dialogue or it comes off as someone trying and failing to be a smart-aleck.

Part of what makes this flaw apparent is the juxtaposition of this occasional stilted dialogue with the rest of the writing, which is, at times, very good. Millar’s style is crisp and to the point, with very little aimless meandering, and the side trips he does take us on are often more interesting than the main journey. The prologue, for example, which many have criticized for its violence, is extremely well written; in fact, it’s at times like this, when Millar allows himself to engage in explorations of pure evil, that he is at his most effective, and those portions, along with some of the more lyrical passages, give us a good idea of what Millar is capable of. I certainly wouldn’t call this a bad book; it’s a solid PI novel competently told. I just don’t think it’s as good as the other reviewers think it is. It’s like comparing a movie studio’s standard black and white 1940’s detective film to “The Maltese Falcon.” It’s entertaining, but it’s not up there with the best in the genre. Maybe his next one will be; the potential is certainly there. Right now, however, it’s just a naked emperor.

Craobh Dugan “Tune of the Month” – Piper In The Meadow Straying— by Skip Mansur

‘Nollaig Shona Duit’ (pronounced as ‘null-ig hun-a dit’) – That is the Gaelic greeting for ‘Merry Christmas.’ It is almost that time of the year once again... driving at night now, many houses are already lit with many colored lights. With as many megawatts of brilliant displays (ok, maybe only kilowatts since most are probably using the new LED lights now...) that some houses have in their yards with Santa and his entire crew of reindeer approaching the roof complete with a lighted landing strip, it is comforting to see homes scattered here and there that have a simple light or two in the windows, and to remember the tradition behind them. A lighted candle in the window stems from the custom to help light the way of a stranger out after dark and perhaps welcome them in should they need assistance. It goes back to most ancient times, when the laws of hospitality were stronger and not abused. To have a light in your window on Christmas Eve to welcome the stranger meant that you were also welcoming the Holy Family - Mary and Joseph as they traveled looking for shelter. The candle also indicated a safe place for priests to perform mass as, during darker times, this was not allowed.

In addition to candles in the windows, the placing of a ring of Holly on doors originated in Ireland as Holly was one of the main plants that flourished at Christmas time and which gave the poor ample means with which to decorate their homes.

So it is time to begin “decking the halls with boughs of holly” (and perhaps relax after with a tune or two). “*The Piper In The Meadow Straying*” is a set or long dance (note the A part with 8 bars and the B part with 12 bars), played as a hornpipe. And if you do so, it may remind you a bit of decking the halls – close enough to make a fine tune at Christmas time, but not so precisely the same that you could only play it at a Christmas session. As *The Fiddler’s Companion* notes, the melody appears in O’Farrell’s c. 1800 publications *Collection of National Music for the Union Pipes* and *Pocket Companion for the Irish or Union Pipes* (c. 1808; and see also our October 2011 newsletter Tune of the Month), and a bit later in Colclough’s pipe tutor. A verse (printed in *Charms of Melody*, Dublin, c. 1795-1810; see <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4847435>) begins:

*A piper on the meadows straying,
Met a simple maid a-maying.*

Piper in the Meadow Straying

G Set dance

Christmas in Irish Lore #2: Holly

In the old days, children were usually charged with the responsibility of gathering the Yule-tide decorations and finding a holly bush loaded with berries was considered very lucky. Holly is a symbol commonly associated with Christmas and has been used in Yule-tide celebrations for almost two thousand years.

To the Druids, it was holly’s evergreen nature that made it special. They believed that it remained green to help keep the earth beautiful when the other trees shed their leaves. It was also their custom to wear it in their hair when they ventured into the forests to watch the priests collecting mistletoe. Holly was also once used for protection, and in ancient times, people would decorate doors and windows with it, in hopes that it would capture, or at least dissuade, any evil spirits before they could enter the house.

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

- ☘ **“Nuacht as Craobh Dugan”---news from the Dugan Branch** Chris Hoke of Craobh Dugan reports: The Northeast Regional Annual Meeting was held in early November. Mike Hoke was elected Regional Treasurer and Tom Malley was re-elected Regional Language Officer. Congratulations to both!!...Have you checked out the Craobh Dugan website lately? Ed Campbell does a great job keeping it up to date. Thanks, Ed! The site is www.uticairish.org Check it out!! I believe there is a link to the Northeast Website and to the other Northeast branches. This is a great way to see what our fellow Comhaltas branches are up to...especially if you are traveling to the areas that have branches.”
- ☘ **A Chairde, Goidé mar atá tú... Conas atá tú... Cé chaoi bhfuil tú** That’s “Friends, How are you,” in Ulster, Munster and Commacht dialects. Didn’t know that and wish you did? Read the following from our resident Gaelic language expert, Tomás Maol O’Meallaigh...or Tom Malley in English dialect: “A question for all who have taken the Basic Irish courses at HCCC and MVCC, and anyone who has some Irish and would like to learn more. The possibility has been raised to have an Irish II course, if there is enough interest. If you are interested please contact me, indicating whether you would go to HCCC, MVCC or either, and which evenings you prefer. I can be reached at tommaol@localnet.com.
- ☘ **Celtic Thunder Christmas** Celtic Thunder, the hugely popular quintet from Ireland, is currently on Tour and will be performing “Heritage” favorites, as well as some newly recorded tracks from Celtic Thunder “Voyage.” And in keeping with the season, you can also enjoy Celtic Thunder Christmas favorites with some newly added Christmas tracks and staging to get your holiday cheer into full swing! Join Celtic Thunder live on Dec 2nd at the newly-remodeled Landmark Theatre in Syracuse (check the theater [website](#) or [Ticketmaster](#)). Tickets for the 7:30 PM show range from \$30-\$68.
- ☘ **The Brigadoons Appear in Cooperstown** On Saturday, December 3 at 7:30 PM, Cooperstown Central School welcomes “The Brigadoons” as part of the Cooperstown Concert Series. Hailing from Glengarry, Ontario, The Brigadoons bring a brand of music that ranges from quick tempo reels and jigs to traditional Strathspeys and airs. From original compositions to favorite standards, The Brigadoons is a band not to be mist...uh, missed. Cooperstown Central School is located at 39 Linden Avenue, Cooperstown.
- ☘ **Have Yourself a Cherry Valley Christmas** Enjoy holiday shopping at its finest at Cherry Valley’s annual Holiday Open House Weekend. Local merchants will be open from 10 AM to 5 PM on Saturday and Sunday, December 3rd and 4th, for special holiday shopping. Enjoy horsedrawn wagon rides (weather permitting), Santa at the Museum, refreshments, door prizes and more, all throughout the village.

Christmas in Irish Lore #3: Mistletoe

While Mistletoe isn't very prevalent in Ireland, it can be found, and it was held in very high regard by our ancestors. In the Celtic language, Mistletoe means “All Heal.” It was believed to have all sorts of miraculous qualities including the power of healing diseases, banning evil spirits, bringing good luck and bestowing great blessings. In fact, even enemies who happened to meet beneath a Mistletoe in the forest would lay down their arms, exchange a friendly greeting, and keep a truce until the following day. From this old custom grew the practice of suspending Mistletoe over a doorway or in a room as a token of good will and peace to all.

Celtic Club Calendar Finally, here’s the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for December:

Dec 1	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 2	Celtic Thunder Christmas	Landmark Theater	Syracuse	7:30 PM	\$30-\$68
Dec 2	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Dec 2	"Mostly Irish" Monthly Jam	Irish American Club	Amsterdam NY	7:30 PM	Free
Dec 3	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Dec 3	Syracuse Irish Session	J. Ryan's Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 3	The Brigadoons	Cooperstown Central School	Cooperstown	7:30 PM	\$20 adults, \$15 srs, \$5 students
Dec 4	Blarney Rebel Band	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	5-8 PM	Free
Dec 5	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Dec 6	Nail Creek Sessions	Nail Creek Pub	Utica	7:30 PM	Free
Dec 8	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 9	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Dec 10	Hair of the Dog	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13, res'v rec.
Dec 10	Barrage – a Winter's Tale	Chenango Cty Council of the Arts Theater	Norwich	7 PM	\$10-\$25
Dec 11	Donal O'Shaughnessy & Bryan Hyland	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 12	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Dec 15	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 16-17	Neil Emberg	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Dec 18	An Irish Christmas with Eileen Ivers	Troy Savings Bank Music Hall	Troy	3 PM	\$15-\$38
Dec 18	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 18	Flyin' Column	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 19	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Dec 21	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Dec 21	Traditional Irish Session	The Mill	Rome, NY	7:30 PM	Free
Dec 22	McKrells' Christmas Show	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	7 PM	\$10
Dec 23	A Blarney Rebel Christmas	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Dec 23	McKrells' Christmas Show	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$10
Dec 26	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Dec 29	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free

If you have anything you want to share with us, feel free to send it to us (sistia@roadrunner.com, bloftis@ymail.com or 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. In the meantime, Mark, Beth and I would like to wish you all a very happy, healthy and peaceful Christmas and holiday season. As our colleague Tom Malley would say (as would we, if we could pronounce it):

Beannachtaí na Nollaig díbh go léir
"The blessings of Christmas to you all"