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# The Center for Irish Music

October 2006

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## Class Notes:

It's been a busy Fall so far. I believe most of you are in to the "swing" of your classes and are enjoying furthering or starting your study of Irish music. It's a thing that will bring you life-long joy and can create instant friendships anywhere in the world. Isn't music wonderful?

I have heard that some of our newer students are adjusting to the traditional method of learning by ear. This can be difficult, especially if you have been accustomed to playing from sheet music all your life. Knowing how to read sheet music is a valuable tool, but you can't depend on it entirely. I know this may pose additional challenges to the learning of Irish music, but I think that you'll find that you will play the music so much better once you step away from the notes and learn by ear. To paraphrase what Sean Egan said in our adult ensemble class last week: "If you can read the notes to play a tune, you don't really need to KNOW the music – you can just play the notes. Learning the music by ear forces you to KNOW the music on a different level – it goes beyond the mere notes." The more you learn by ear, the more you will truly understand the music and be able to grow with the music. In order to assist you in learning by ear, we are drastically expanding our **Music Download** area on the website. This is a student-only area. You will find tunes here from your instructors that you may be working on in class as well as others to try out. We will keep this area as up to date as possible – though please understand it takes some coordination to record the tunes, transfer them digitally to files and then upload them and format them into the website. To access this area, the user-name is *students* and the password is *JigsAndReels* (case sensitive) See the website [www.centerforirishmusic.org](http://www.centerforirishmusic.org) for more tunes!

## Fintan Vallely – Concert, Song Workshop, and Flute and Tin Whistle Masterclass



- Traditional Irish Song Concert, Oct 29, 7:30pm, \$10  
@ St Paul Conservatory of Music
- Comic Song Workshop, Oct 30, 7:30pm, \$10  
@ Private MPLS residence – call for details
- Flute / Whistle Masterclass, Nov 1, 6:30pm, \$30  
@ St Paul Conservatory of Music

The Traditional Singers Club, in conjunction with The Center for Irish Music and through a grant from Irish Fair Minnesota, is bringing the highly regarded singer, composer, flute player and scholar Fintan Vallely to the Twin Cities in late October. The Singers Club will present an evening concert of traditional Irish song featuring Vallely on Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup> in the Saint Paul Conservatory of Music recital hall at 7:30 PM. A native of County Armagh, Vallely is a prolific composer of comic and topical songs in the Irish traditional style. Also performing will be Singers Club resident singers Charlie Heymann, Erin Hart, Sherry Minnick and others. Admission is \$10 at the door.

In addition to the concert on the 29<sup>th</sup>, Vallely and the Traditional Singers Club will present a workshop on comic song and song writing in the traditional style on Monday, October 30<sup>th</sup>. The workshop starts at 7:30 and will be held at a private residence in South Minneapolis. For directions e-mail [singersclub@gmail.com](mailto:singersclub@gmail.com) or call Brian Miller at 651-245-3719. The cost for the Singers Club workshop is \$10. As Fintan is also an excellent traditional flute player, the Center for Irish Music has arranged a flute/whistle master class with him from 6:30-8:30 at the St. Paul Conservatory of Music on Wednesday, November 1<sup>st</sup>. The fee for the master class is \$30.

Fintan Vallely comes from North County Armagh close to the town of Moy on the Tyrone border. Growing up on 'the dark Loanen' - a mile-long narrow lane where the thorn hedges once met at the top - in an environment of apples and turnips and in an atmosphere of céilí bands, he took up the tin whistle at the beginning of the 1960s for no particular reason. He absorbed a lot from the radio and the odd record and in collusion with cousins Brian and Dara (the latter of Armagh Rhymers fame) formed the Armagh Piper's Club. He took up the flute in 1965 and went on to the uilleann pipes, in all this period playing endlessly mostly at sessions in Counties Armagh and Tyrone. He has a distinctive style in which he ornaments by subtle rolling and undercutting, pounding out the rhythm using diaphragm, and articulating notes with a

tongued 'ch' and at the back of the throat. His repertoire takes in the spectrum of traditional tunes - hornpipes, marches, jigs, reels, slides, polkas and Carolan tunes, with a penchant for the slow air, favouring a Sligo style to the playing.

He has performed all over Britain, in Europe, the US, Australia and has even brought badly needed Irish music to Indonesia. Always a dabbler with verse in the 1980s, the state of the nation - and in particular the beliefs, and disbeliefs, of its various flocks - drove Fintan into the arena of satirical song writing wherein he manages to flog an all-inclusive selection of sacred and secular cows. Christy Moore sang and recorded one of his more popular songs (The Man From RTÉ) and included it in his 2000 biography.

Fintan Vallely has been for many years a regular teacher at Ireland's unofficial university of Traditional music - the Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare, and hosts Flute workshops. In 1986 he produced the first tutor for the wooden Concert Flute (*Timber - the Flute Tutor*) this re-issued in a new edition in autumn 2001 as *The Irish Flute Tutor*. His 1979 **Shanachie** LP is re-issued on CD as *The Dark Loanen* (WHN 003), and the 1992, *The Starry Lane to Monaghan* (with guitarist Mark Simos) is also on CD (WHN 004). *Big Guns and Hairy Drums* is an album of satirical song with Tim Lyons. He also writes on Traditional music, with a weekly column in *The Sunday Tribune*. His books include *The Blooming Meadows* (with Charlie Piggott and photographer Nutan), the edited, A-Z *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (1999), and *The Guide to Irish Traditional Music* (2001).

### Minnesota Feis – Music Competition Winners!



Congratulations to the Center for Irish Music students who competed in the Minnesota Feis on September 23. The Minnesota Feis is our local Irish dance competition that also hosts music competitions. And the winners are:

- Amanda Hogan – 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Flute, Under 18
- Colleen White – 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Tin Whistle, Under 18
- Tony Comeau – 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Fiddle, Under 18
- Mattie Ernst – 2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Fiddle, Under 18
- Ceallach Gibbons – 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Fiddle Under 12
- Rebecca Garrigan – 2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Tin Whistle, Under 18

The student ensemble also did a great job performing at 7:30 AM as entertainment during the registration hour. So many people stopped to listen – and were quite surprised to hear that it was a group of such young, talented musicians.

### The CIM Ensemble trip to Chicago Celtic Fest



**Intrepid explorers:** Bonnie Hogan (tin whistle), Rebecca Garrigan (tin whistle/flute), Meagan White (fiddle), Tony Comeau (fiddle), Amanda Hogan (flute/tin whistle), Mattie Ernst (harp/fiddle)

participated in the home-stays had even more fun making new friends and experiencing Chicago on a different level. All in all, it was a fantastic trip. The students gained more performing experience and they were truly appreciated in Chicago. They were so good, in fact, that they've been invited to attend next year too. Thanks to all the parents who made this possible: the Costello-Jung family, the Ernst family, the Garrigan family, the Gibbons family, the Hogan family, the White family and to Kate's parents and sisters who opened their homes to students: the Wade family. – Kate

**The Center for Irish Music at The Saint Paul Conservatory of Music**  
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The Center for Irish Music student ensemble did St. Paul proud by their performances in Galena, IL and at the Chicago Celtic Fest, September 15-17. We had quite a fun trip including 8 students (ages 10-17) and five brave parents. The students played on Friday in Frank O'Dowd's Irish Pub in Galena – a fun little place in a beautiful section of Mississippi River bluff country. Saturday and Sunday the students played in Grant park at the Chicago Celtic Fest. Getting in to Chicago was a bit hairy – bad traffic and all – but the students put on a great show. The CIM Ensemble performed at the “Next Generation” stage along with their peers from the Chicago area such as the Academy of Irish Music and the Irish Music School of Chicago. It was a particularly meaningful trip for Kate to have the students perform in her home town in front of many old friends and, most importantly, in front of her teacher, Noel Rice. The sound system was great – the tuning was good – we even borrowed a local bodhran player to

help back up the rhythm since our bodhran player couldn't make it. Some of the students stayed in homes with local musicians their age rather than staying in a hotel. The students who

## Failte Minnesota Green Tie Fundraiser Event – November 18

Failte (*fall-tcha*) means “welcome” in Irish. Failte Minnesota is a non-profit organization that is committed to establishing an Irish Community Center in Minnesota. The Green Tie Event, which is co-hosted by the Irish Music and Dance Association, will help raise funds to build a home for our local Irish heritage. Doon Ceili Band will be performing as well as The Center for Irish Music Student Ensemble. Saturday, November 18 from 6:30-11pm at St Paul College. Cost is \$100 per person. For more information visit: [www.failteminnesota.org](http://www.failteminnesota.org)

## We need your expertise for the Young Irish Musicians Weekend, June 22–24, 2007

Plans are moving along quickly for the Young Irish Musicians Weekend. Much of the program is planned, locations chosen, etc., but now we need your HELP to get it all done! If you have any expertise or just a desire to help out a non-profit, please give Kate a call or send an email. We need people to help on the following committees:

- Finance
- Hospitality
- Marketing/Advertising
- Programming
- Facilities

We are very honored that international artists James Kelly, Paddy O'Brien, Daithi Sproule and Fintan Vallely will be making such a meaningful impact on our first attempt at the Young Irish Musicians Weekend in 2007. We heartily thank the *Irish Fair of Minnesota* for their generous grant that is enabling us to go forward and make this dream a reality. The Center for Irish Music intends to make this an annual event in St. Paul.

## Instructor Spot Light: Laura MacKenzie

Laura has learned from many noted tradition bearers on both sides of the Atlantic, and has herself been recognized as a Master Folk Artist (Minnesota State Arts Board). Of Scottish heritage (through Rankins and MacKenzies), her people came to the United States by way of Nova Scotia and Northern Ireland. In St. Paul, Minnesota, Laura learned to play traditional music at ceilis (dances or social gatherings) within the local Irish-American community and soon became immersed in both the music and dance.

Laura and her colleagues played a major role in the revival of Irish music and dance in the Upper Midwest as the Northern Star Ceili Band, steaming up dance halls for seven years. During this time, Laura was also a founding member of a dance performance ensemble, the Mooncoin Ceili Dancers, and studied Irish step dancing heartily. Along the way there was a good measure of formal study in anthropology and music, but her best education has been with her comrades and favorite "teachers" -- the players of traditional music -- in kitchens, pubs, folk schools and dance halls across Ireland, Scotland and the United States. Laura has enjoyed vast and varied experience in the world of music while developing as a performing artist. She has been a production assistant for "A Prairie Home Companion", partnered a rare music import business, worked for a folk instrument-building business, struggled as a teaching assistant in ethnomusicology and toiled happily in the archives of traditional music at the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. Eventually, the role of performer won out.

In performance, Laura has worked with many ensembles, from Boiled in Lead (world beat rock 'n reel), Walking On Air (British Isles folk), and Macha Tri (Celtic trio) to Lorie Line's Pop Chamber Orchestra, with whom she toured nationally from 1997-2005. Laura has been privileged to perform with some of the great names in Irish music, including Daithi Sproule, Paddy O'Brien, Liz Carroll, Martin Hayes and Katie McMahon. She has also been honored to share the stage with heroes of Scottish and English piping, Hamish Moore, Jon Swayne and Julian Goodacre. Her love for the music of various piping traditions and passion for playing these instruments has lead her more recently to the music of Central France and Northern Spain, all of which she encompasses in performance.

Laura has been a featured performer for the National Flute Association and for public radio, including appearances on "A Prairie Home Companion". She has performed on stage in theatrical productions at the Guthrie Theater and with Pulitzer Prize winning Irish author Frank McCourt (of "Angela's Ashes"). Solo and with bands, Laura has performed at



folk festivals across the United States, including the Milwaukee Irish Fest, North Texas Irish Festival, Champlain Valley Folk Festival, the Great River Festival, Dublin Irish Festival and the Winnipeg Folk Festival in Canada.

A number of honors have been awarded to Laura over the years for her participation and dedication in this realm of music. She was selected to perform in the original "Cherish the Ladies" concert series in New York, featuring noted women in Irish music in America. She placed in traditional singing at the Chicago Fleadh Cheoil, which meant the privilege of singing at the annual Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (in Ireland). Laura has won Minnesota Music Academy Awards in both Celtic vocal and Celtic instrumental music and has been recognized as a Master Folk Artist by the Minnesota State Arts Board. Through a program supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, she was selected for the culturally diverse "American Traditions" roster in 2000. As a solo artist, Laura was awarded a McKnight Foundation Performing Arts Fellowship and a Jerome Foundation grant.

Laura currently performs solo and with several ensembles including Laura and The Lads, Aura, Piper's Crow, the Doon Ceili Band and the Katie McMahon Band. In St. Paul, she teaches students of Irish and Scottish music on whistle and flute, and is working on her next recordings. Today, Laura fills life with performance, private teaching, studio projects, show production and the imagining of pine forests. She is the proud mother the amazing Dugan MacKenzie Magraw.

### **HEAR LAURA LIVE!**

Laura MacKenzie - "Celtic Harvest"

Celebrating All Hallows' Eve, Samhain (Celtic New Year) and Harvest. Spooky tunes and songs, harvest themes and autumn moods, on flutes, whistles, concertina, pipes and voice.

Saturday October 28, 7:30 PM

Hobgoblin/Stoney End Harps (Music Loft Series)

920 State Hwy 19, Red Wing, MN 55066

(877-866-3936)

[www.stoneyend.com](http://www.stoneyend.com)

### **"Ireland in America" : Doon Ceili Band in October Issue of Irish Music Magazine!**



The October issue of [Irish Music Magazine](http://mag.irish-music.net/) has a lengthy article on the *Doon Ceili Band* and their debut recording, *Around the World for Sport*. The article "Ireland in America" was written by Tom Clancy. Six Center for Irish Music instructors are part of the Doon Ceili Band: Django Amerson, Jode and Kate Dowling, Sean Egan, Laura MacKenzie and Brian Miller. It's been a bit tricky to get this magazine in the United States. You can order copies through their website: <http://mag.irish-music.net/>. I can't quote the entire article here, but to give you a taste, this is how it ends:

*"(Paddy) O'Brien has lived and worked in the Far North for many years now, up among the Lutherans and Scandinavians. And, if I can borrow a favourite phrase from Garrison*

*Keillor, that great chronicler of Minnesota life on the radio show A Prairie Home Companion, give a listen to the Doon Ceili Band where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking and all the tunes are above average."*

If you don't already have a copy of *Around the World For Sport*, stop by Irish on Grand or order through the *Doon Ceili Band's* website: [www.doonceili.com](http://www.doonceili.com).

### **Family Sessions**

The First Family Session of the Fall Semester will be Tuesday, October 3, 6:30-8pm in the recital hall. Django Amerson will be our guest musician. The next session is Tuesday, November 7 also from 6:30-8pm.

### **Webpage**

Don't forget – we have a new website! Keep yourself up-to-date at [www.centerforirishmusic.org](http://www.centerforirishmusic.org)

### **As always ....**

Please contact us if you have any questions about anything! Kate & Jode Dowling 651-493-2022 and [irish.music@comcast.net](mailto:irish.music@comcast.net)

**The Center for Irish Music at The Saint Paul Conservatory of Music**

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