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SAN DIEGO

ROUBADOOR

Alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news



March 2008

www.sandiegotroubadour.com

Vol. 7, No. 6

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straight Outta Dublin

Gerard Nolan • Brian Baynes • David Page

...how three Irishmen came to San Diego and followed different musical paths

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To promote, encourage, and provide an alternative voice for the great local music that is generally overlooked by the mass media; namely the genres of alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass. To entertain, educate, and bring together players, writers, and lovers of these forms; to explore their foundations; and to expand the audience for these types of music.

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Email your gig date, including location, address, and time to info@sandiegotroubadour.com by the 23rd of the month prior to publication.

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The San Diego Troubadour is dedicated to the memory of **Ellen and Lyle Duplessie**, whose vision inspired the creation of this newspaper.

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First Steps on Sands

by Tim Mudd

As my wee years advance, I've started to notice that the popular music press is a double-edged sword; on the one hand it feeds me to near-capacity with the latest (and not always greatest) artists who fuel my secretly egotistical need for one-upmanship in the shallow game of progressive taste. More recently though, it appears that this obsession and my means of obtaining this coveted information are revealing their flaws in the guise of the truly great artists I've begun to discover under the radar of these traditional channels. As a marginally successful public artist for over a decade, you'd think I'd know better.

The subject of this article is a good case in point; I received a phone call from the editor asking if I'd mind writing an article on Tommy Sands for this Celtic issue of the *San Diego Troubadour*. "Who?" I responded, to which she told me (and rightly so) to do some research and let her know if I needed anything. "Well," I thought to myself, "I guess this is my job."

Typically, I let the personal dramatization of the rest of my life get in the way for a couple of weeks and procrastinated over the exploration of an artist I'd never heard of – nor necessarily cared to know – until the day of my deadline. Now I'm sitting here wishing I hadn't. As I dip my feet into the fascinating world of Tommy Sands for the first time, I'm wondering how the hell I'm going to do this incredible man and his vibrant history any justice – quite honestly I'm feeling pretty stupid. If you're familiar with Tommy Sands, feel free to extend a metaphorical hand to pat me on the head as a nod of understanding toward my youthful arrogance; I hope you'll find a new tidbit or two herein. If, however, you are, as I, a newcomer to Sands and his work, I hope you enjoy our first steps together.

Singer-songwriter Tommy Sands appears to have achieved something akin to legendary status in his own lifetime. Hailing from County Down, Northern Ireland, Sands was the prime songwriter with the Sands Family, a group he formed with his

five siblings that became one of Ireland's most influential folk groups of the '60s and '70s. Although the group has limited its touring in the past decade to an annual tour of Germany and Ireland, in their heyday they helped to expose Irish music on an international level from New York's Carnegie Hall to Moscow's Olympic Stadium. Solo Sands has continued to pave new ground as a singer-songwriter and is said to have developed into one of the most powerful and enchanting songwriters and performers in Ireland today. He is also the host of a popular radio show, "Country Ceili," broadcast weekly via Belfast's Downtown Radio since 1976.

His songwriting has drawn the admiration of Nobel Poet Laureate Seamus Heaney and the father of folk music himself, Pete Seeger. *Sing Out!* magazine regards him as "the most powerful songwriter in Ireland, if not the rest of the world," and his work has been recorded by Joan Baez, Kathy Mattea, and Dolores Keane among many others. A fact I found almost more impressive than these was that his songs have been translated into multiple languages and are currently included in the English language syllabus in German secondary schools.

Believe it or not, this is just the beginning. When he's not performing across the stages of the world, Tommy Sands is writing a different story on the vitally deeper and far more intimate level of social activism.

One notable project he endeavored upon was teaching underprivileged prisoners in Reno, Nevada, to write their own songs with which to defend themselves in court. In May 2002, he received an honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Nevada for this outstanding work as an ambassador for peace and understanding. Nevada's gratitude was extended so far as to declare May 18 Tommy Sands Day in Reno. Back home he completed a CD written with both Protestant and Catholic school children that documents their lives in the towns and villages around Northern Ireland. It would seem that Tommy Sands is a humanitarian in the purest sense of the word.

It also appears that his influence spreads into a political arena. During the historic Good Friday Agreement Talks, Sands' impromptu performance with a group of children and Lambeg drummers was described by Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon as "a defining moment in the Peace Process." The president of the Irish Republic, Mary McAleese, periodically calls upon Sands for advice on cultural matters and in December 2002, although the Northern Ireland Assembly had been stood down, Sands managed to persuade the members to return for a special Christmas musical party together. As one politician after another joined him on stage for a song, Loyalist leader David Ervine remarked, "Tommy Sands is the only man, without a private army, who can intimidate me."

Outside of his musical and political endeavors, Sands has somehow found the time to author *The Songman*, an autobiography that serves the dual purpose of documenting the recent history of his homeland, which has drawn praise from teacher and Pulitzer Prize winning author Frank McCourt.

At this point of my research, I'm more than just a little impressed and maybe even – like Ervine – a little intimidated; none of the above achievements are trivial matters, especially when you're attempting to maintain the fine balancing act, which is a successful career in music. These are not things you simply do, these are things you do if you're driven. Next, I decided it was only appropriate to investigate the formative years that would suggest influence over who he became.

Tommy Sands was born into a musical family whose farm stood in the foothills of the Mourne Mountains. His father and six uncles played the fiddle, while his mother played accordion – Sands began writing songs shortly after he himself began learning to play the fiddle in the tradition of his male role models. Although this childhood may initially sound rather idyllic, the political turmoil and sociological struggles of Northern Ireland were never too far from



Tommy Sands

his doorstep, as his family's farm was one of the few places in the region that hosted both Protestants and Catholics to join together in appreciation of music and dancing. Many of his songs would come to reflect this early exposure to the instability of his homeland, the symptoms of which would also explain his fierce crusade for unity.

Although Sands attended college to study theology and philosophy, music was in his blood and proved too great a lure. Legend has it that having dropped out of school he began the 120 mile trip back home on foot. He hadn't got very far when his siblings pulled up in a car and picked him up to perform a gig. Inspired by the Clancy Brothers, the Sands Family (Tommy, Eugene, Ben, Colum, and Ann) would become leaders of the Irish folk revival.

The Sands Family made their first transatlantic trip to the United States in 1970 after winning a concert trip to New York in a national ballad contest. Having performed at Carnegie Hall, the group met with a manager in Boston and remained in America for over six months. With the States under their belts, they returned to Europe in 1971 only to find they had acquired an enthusiastic following in Germany. Unfortunately, the Sands Family's string of success ended in 1975, when youngest brother Eugene was killed in a car accident. In the aftermath of this tragedy, Ann Sands announced her retirement from the group, which has limited subsequent tours to the three remaining brothers. Now was Tommy Sands' time to step into the solo arena.

His solo debut *Singing of the Times* was released in 1985 and included his now-classic tunes "There Were Roses" and "Daughters and Sons," which – as previously mentioned – have been covered by a wide



The Sands Family in 1976: Ben, Ann, Colum, and Tommy



Tommy Sands with daughter Moya and son Fionán

array of artists. His sophomore effort, *Down by Bendy's Lane: Irish Songs and Stories for Children*, followed three years later. Not one year had passed when his third album, *Hedges of County Down*, focused on traditional Irish material before returning to original songs in 1990 for his fourth effort, *Beyond the Shadows*. In 1995 Sands' fifth album, *The Heart's a Wonder*, included a tune, "The Music of Healing," which he co-wrote with Pete Seeger. The song was used as an anthem for a "Citizen's Assembly" that Sands organized in Belfast, in August 1996, which included many of Ulster County's top artists and literary figures. *The Heart's a Wonder* also marked the first time that Sands collaborated with Sarajevo cellist Vedran Smailovic. Sands and Smailovic in turn joined forces with Irish songstress Dolores Keane on the 1997 title track of the multi-artist album *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: The Songs of Pete Seeger*. One of his most ambitious projects reaches into the world of theatre with the stage musical, *The Shadow of O'Casey*, which he co-wrote with playwright Sean O'Casey's daughter, Shivaun.

In closing, I wish I had something more meaningful to say, some great finale that perfectly captures the essence of this man and his life, but his life has not ended and his story is still being written, which may be the most fitting final statement I could make. If you haven't already, I urge you to wander out and try a few of his records on for size, because they are all excellent. My personal recommendation would be *The Heart's a Wonder* as it is thus far my favorite. I should also probably mention that the man himself will be gracing our fair county in a performance for a San Diego Folk Heritage-sponsored concert at the San Dieguito Methodist Church in Encinitas with Moya and Fionan Sands on March 8. You may also find me there in a pew somewhere, enjoying an invaluable piece of musical history and hoping he didn't read this piece.

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THE CELTIC MUSIC SCENE

Recordially, Lou Curtiss

Irish and Celtic music has meant different things to me over the years. When I was a kid, my Dad had as part of his extensive 78 collection some Bing Crosby Irish music ("Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra" and "Did Your Mother Come from Ireland?"), some Dennis Day ("Clancy Lowered the Boom"), and Spike Jones' version of "MacNamara's Band." I think we also had a couple of Sir Harry Lauder records ("I Love a Lassie"). I heard other Irish tenors on the radio like Morton Downey and Donald Novis and every St Paddy's Day Hollywood's professional Irishmen (Pat O'Brien, Barry Fitzgerald, etc.) would appear on the radio with a routine or an "Irish Eyes Are Smiling" type song to cater to all our preconceived notions of what the Irish, and to some less extent the Scots were supposedly all about. Movies added to all these notions, such as good Father Flanagan of *Boys Town* down to the correct blend of innocence and sadism of Disney's *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*. During the 1950s, Ed Sullivan and the other TV variety shows added to the mix of what I later heard called "pig-under-the-arm Irish" by people who really knew something about Celtic music.

It was in 1959 at the Newport Folk Festival that I heard Tommy Makem and Paddy Clancy sing what was more or less real Irish music (not some Tin Pan Alley creation) and I remember being especially impressed with Tommy Makem to the extent that I bought a tin whistle and even attempted to play it for awhile. I was impressed with a couple of Tommy's songs (notably "Dick Darby, the Cobbler," which I still sing) and I talked to him a little about Irish

music. He recommended an LP recording titled *The Lark in the Morning* on the Tradition record label, which I later bought (exposing me for the first time to real traditional field recordings made in Ireland).

With the 1960s marking the revival of things folk, the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem appeared at the 1960 Newport Folk Festival, but I was already ahead of them, having discovered the Uilleann pipes and tin whistle of Seamus Ennis, an LP of great old fiddle tunes by "the glory of Old Sligo" Michael Coleman (reissued from old 78s) and a whole bunch of good Irish (Margaret Barry, Paddy Tunney, Tommy Peoples, the McPeake Family, Mrs. Sarah Makem, etc.) and Scottish musicians (Jeannie Robertson, the Stewart Family, Lizzie Higgins, etc.) on the Topic label. In 1963 at Newport I got to see the McPeake Family and Seamus Ennis perform (who Sam Hinton put on in concert at Scripps in 1962 right here in our area. I missed that concert but only recently came upon a tape of it while going through Sam's tapes as part of our Grammy digitization project — a blast from the past). Irish music started to be recorded on labels in this country like Folkways, and Folk Legacy. Jean Redpath brought her Scottish music to Newport as did Ewan MacColl. MacColl's records had been coming out on the old Riverside label even going back into the 1950s; Redpath started to record for Elektra around 1961

and appeared here in San Diego at the Sign of the Sun bookstore in 1962 (listen to a track or two from that concert on FolkArtsRareRecords.com website).

The first place I remember featuring Irish music in San Diego was run by an Italian guy in National City named Mike Dini. Naturally, he called his place McDini's and served Irish coffee, corned beef sandwiches, and other Irish stock. He had Irish music in his places, ranging from the early stuff I talked about to fairly traditional. In 1961 I tried to put an Irish group together to play at one of his places but we only lasted about half the night before Mike showed us the door (I love to listen to the stuff, but I just can't play it). Mike said, "That song about the cobbler was okay, but that other stuff don't make it." He was right.

By the time we started doing our own series of Folk Festivals, the traditional side of Celtic music was starting to become well established in this country. Jean Redpath played the second and fourth Festivals. Kenny Hall started bringing his unique pipe tune medleys on the mandolin at the third festival and lots more after that. Festival number six brought us our first Irish dance groups, the Graineog Ceilidhe Band and the All Oakland Ceili Band (I remember there was some conflict over how Ceili or Ceilidhe was spelled and the Graineog's younger members assured is that Ceilidhe was the cool traditional way. The old timers in Graineog, Kevin Keegan and Joe Murtagh, didn't seem to care much and the all Oakland group just wanted to play music, which they all did). Subsequent festivals included a fair amount of Celtic music (from all parts of the Celtic world). The Boys of the Lough, Silly Wizard, Joe and Antoinette McKenna, Sandy McIntire and Barbara McGone, and San Diego's own Dave Page and his Siamsa Gael Ceili (a band that Dave started in Ireland and revived in this country with Judy Lipnick, Ian and Wanda Law, and John Tuohy, and who still play the festivals as recently as last year).

Celtic music in San Diego is no stranger anymore. Big names in the Celtic world, such as the Chieftains, have packed them in at the big venues and there are regular Celtic music concert series, house concerts, jam sessions, and a fair amount of Irish pubs that occasionally feature Irish music. If you come down to Kadan at Adams Ave. and 30th St. for our Folk Arts Rare Records Wednesday night wingding (or hootenanny, jam session, singers' circle, or whatever you want to call it, starting at 6pm), I'll sing you a song about a cobbler I learned from Tommy Makem back in 1959 when Celtic music was

hard to find in this country.

TWO OUTSTANDING OLD TIMEY DUOS AT ROOTS THIS YEAR!

Kim and Jim Lansford from the Missouri Ozarks play a wide variety of traditional southern and mid-western traditional songs, fiddle tunes, vocal duets, and songs learned from traditional sources and field recordings. They have a website with songs from their CDs you can listen to. Check them out and then come and see them at the Roots Festival.

Fred and Cathay Zipp from Fort Collins, Colorado, likewise play in the country duet style and have been mentored by long time San Diego Folk Festival favorites Ray and Ina Patterson, although other country and bluegrass names such as the Stanleys, the Louvins, the Delmores, and the Bolicks come to mind, not to mention the Carter Family. They also have a CD and a website you can check out, but be sure and see them at the Festival.

The Festival will be held on May 3 and 4 this year and returning are Festival founders (along with me back in 1967) Kathy Larisch and Carol McComb (you can hear them on the Folk Arts Rare Record website), Trails and Rails (Walt Richards also played at the first Festival back in 67), Mimi Wright, Mary McCaslin, the New Lost Melody Boys, Robin Henkel, Tanya Rose and Her Buffalo Chip Kickers, Chris Clarke and his new group Plow, Sara Petite, Cindy Lee Berryhill, Ross Altman, Patty Hall, Anna Troy, Johnson, Bosley and Morin, the 7th Day Buskers, Los Alacranes, San Diego Cajun Playboys, Curt Bouterse, Martin Henry, Yale Strom's Klezmer group Hot Pstromi, the Hot Club Of San Diego, High Wide and Handsome, Peter Bolland and the Coyote Problem, Allen Singer, Tomcat Courtney, Mark Foxworthy's new group Last Transit, the Brombies, Nathan James and Ben Hernandez, and Jalopy. Plus we are doing a special concert as part of the Festival this year with pioneer mandolin picker David Grisman and his



Photo: Bill Richardson
Lou Curtiss

Bluegrass Band (in the Methodist Church at 2pm on Saturday). This paid ticket event can only accommodate 300, so get your reservations in early for this one!

I know there'll be some last minute additions. There always are, but we've got a couple of *Troubadours* before Festival time to give you some startling new updates. There are lots of folks I'd like to see out here but there ain't lots of money to bring them. That's the way it's always been.

U UTAH PHILLIPS

As some of you may know, our friend Bruce "U Utah" Phillips was forced this past fall to retire from a 40-year career as a travelling musician (he first appeared in San Diego at the fifth San Diego Folk Festival in 1971). Recently, he has been in a San Francisco hospital where he decided against a heart transplant. He has been keeping in touch with friends and fans via a series of podcasts that you can receive at <http://www.utahphillips.org/podcast/index.html>. Listen in and drop him a line if you can. Utah has meant a hell of a lot to a whole bunch of people in the music world. Both his songs and his thoughts have inspired us, made us laugh, and pushed a lot of us to try to do some of the things he led the way on.

Recordially,
Lou Curtiss

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Traditional Sessions Keep Irish Music Alive

by Michael Eskin

I've seen that same look many times just as they walk around the corner of the glass wall at the entrance to the pub. Most likely they just came in after a long day at work for a pint of Guinness or to catch a game on the TV, but suddenly out of nowhere they find themselves smack in the middle of a flock of fiddles, flutes, whistles, Uilleann pipes, and bodhran flying with wild abandon through endless sets of Irish jigs and reels. They often look shocked. Mostly they smile.

The look on their faces always says the same thing: "What in the world is going on here?"

What's happened is that they've just walked into the Tuesday night traditional Irish session at the Ould Sod, a pub in Normal Heights, which George Rubsamen and I have been hosting every Tuesday night for over five years. I've seen that same look hundreds of times.

So what exactly is a session? An Irish session is an informal gathering of musicians playing sets of traditional Irish dance tunes on traditional Irish instruments. These instruments most commonly include the fiddle, flute, tin whistle, concertina, button accordion, bodhran (frame drum), and Uilleann pipes (Irish bagpipes). Sometimes there might also be a guitar or eight-string bouzouki (octave mandolin) providing rhythmic backup.

The most common question I get is, "What is the name of your band?" When I explain no, we're not a band, it's an Irish session, they generally ask, "Oh, so it's a jam session? I play a little guitar, can I join in?"

Well, yes and no...

An Irish session has a structure and set of sometimes frustratingly simple rules that are more or less the same wherever

you go in the world. This structure gives an Irish session a distinct feel and sound. Unlike jam sessions in some other styles of music, players of melody instruments only play the tune melody in unison with no harmony lines. Faking through a tune one doesn't know, or extensively improvising on tunes, is generally considered poor etiquette. Also, because the chord structure to many tunes can be somewhat complicated and oftentimes ambiguous, the chances of two backup players picking the same chords is very small, and as a result many sessions (including ours) have a rule of only one backup instrument playing at a time.

In an Irish session, the tunes played in a set are generally all of the same type, most commonly jigs or reels, with the occasional hornpipe or waltz. Most commonly, each tune is played three times before moving on to another. Oftentimes, there are fixed sets of tunes that everyone in a particular session knows in a particular order. It's also as common that the tunes will be selected "on the fly," with the next tune to play being determined by someone during the last time through a tune. When this happens, everyone has to listen closely to what is played next and quickly join in. In some sessions, one person picks all the tunes, in others, like ours at the Ould Sod, any player can pick the next tune in a set, and if two people start a next tune, it's good courtesy for one person to quickly back off and let the other player take the lead.

This can go on for a long time. We've had sets of reels that have gone on for more than a half hour.

The next most common questions we get are about the instruments and what they cost.

Most people are familiar with fiddles, so we don't get many questions about them. The flutes played in traditional Irish music are quite distinct from mod-

ern silver flutes; they are based on the old wooden English flutes designed back in the mid 18th century and have anywhere from zero to eight keys. For most tunes, you don't need the keys, and keyless flutes are quite a bit less expensive than keyed flutes. A good keyless blackwood flute costs about \$1,000.

A perfectly good pennywhistles in the key of D can be bought from most music stores for less than \$10, but a whole cottage industry has sprung up to make a range of instruments out of different materials and with specific tonal qualities. Most of these whistles sell for between \$100 to \$300.

I happen to play the Uilleann pipes, which look like I've been attacked by some sort of alien octopus. The pipes are made of leather, ebony, and brass, so I get a lot of questions, usually along the lines of "Is that some sort of bagpipe?" and "How does the air get into that thing?" and often "How much does something like that cost?"

The Uilleann pipes are a bellows-driven bagpipe, with the same range as the flute, having a much quieter and sweeter sound than the big Scottish warpipes. They are used quite often in movie soundtracks and commercials to convey an Irish mood. Most people have heard them but have never seen them played, so here's how it works:

Under my right arm is a bellows that I use to pump air into a leather bag under my left arm. From the bag, the air splits in two directions, the first into the chanter, on which the melodies are played, and the second, to the mainstock, which contains the drones and regulators. The drones, much like the Scottish pipes, sound a constant D pitch in three octaves, but unlike the Scottish pipes can be turned off with a valve. The regulators, which lie on top of the drones, have keys that I can press with my right wrist



(while still playing the melody on chanter with my fingers) to provide chords under the melody lines. It's a difficult instrument to master. Every piece of the instrument is handmade, and there are only a few good builders in the world. A full set of pipes can easily sell for over \$10,000.

Sometimes Irish sessions have a reputation of being somewhat unfriendly and strict. In reality, the simple rules of etiquette are there to help make sure that the music sounds good and that everyone has a good time.

For example, there are only four simple rules at the sessions I host:

1. **Tune your instrument and try to keep it in tune during the session.** An in-tune session sounds better to everyone, and instruments drift in pitch over the course of an evening as the temperature changes.
2. **When someone starts a set of tunes, try not to speed up or slow down from the speed they originally set.** There's nothing more discouraging than a new player finally getting up the nerve to start a set of tunes, only to be blown out of the water by some insensitive who speeds things up to where the new player can no longer keep up.
3. **Play the tunes you know, don't play the tunes you don't know.** This one seems simple enough, but it can be very tempting to try and play poorly a tune you don't really know, often times distracting the person sitting next to you who does know the tune.

This particularly applies to backup players since the chord changes in the tunes aren't always straightforward.

4. **One backup player or bodhran (frame drum) at a time.** As with multiple backup players, multiple bodhran playing at the same can result in cacophony, and can often be louder than the melody players, so one at a time, please.

We are quite fortunate to have such an active Irish session scene here in San Diego, rivaling Los Angeles and San Francisco combined for the number of weekly sessions.

Here's the list:

Tuesday Nights

7-10:30pm

The Ould Sod
3373 Adams Ave.
San Diego, CA 92116
(619) 284-6594

Hosts: Michael Eskin, George Rubsamen
<http://www.theouldsod.com>

Tuesday Nights

7-10pm

Blarney Stone Pub
5617 Balboa Ave.
San Diego, CA 92111
(858) 279-2033

Host: Heike Behl

<http://www.blarneystonesandiego.com>

Thursday Nights

7:30-10:30pm

Thornton's Irish Pub
1221 Broadway
El Cajon, CA 92021
(619) 447-5665

Hosts: Elaine Thompson, Michael Eskin
<http://www.thorntonsirishpub.com>

Sunday Mornings

10am-12noon

House of Ireland
In the Houses of Pacific Relations
Balboa Park
Beginners traditional Irish music class,
with sheet music.

Sunday Nights

7-10:30pm

The Field
544 5th Ave.
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 232-9840

Hosts: The Boxy Band
<http://www.thefield.com>
Free Traditional Irish Stepdancing show
every week before the session from
5:30-7pm

Additional Web Resources:

The Session - Popular online Irish session
information and discussion site.
<http://www.thesession.org>

Chiff and Fiddle - Focused on tinwhistle,
Irish flute, and Uilleann pipes.
<http://www.chiffandfiddle.com>

TradLessons - Free online tinwhistle,
flute, and Uilleann pipe lesson videos.
<http://www.tradlessons.com>

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by Bart Mendoza

With its abundance of sun and surf, San Diego might be considered the least likely place to be a haven for Celtic music. In fact, there are numerous groups and performers that specialize in the genre and a whole network of venues that support the burgeoning scene. The most visible of the local performers is the quartet Skelpin, featuring fiddler and founder Patric Petrie, piper Tim Foley, accordionist Rowshan Dowlatabadi, and David Maldonado on guitar. Dowlatabadi is on the road for a year, so until his return, the group has been using a rotating cast of guest players.

Skelpin has built a worldwide fan base through relentless touring. Formed in 2003, the group put a slight spin on traditional Irish music, mixing in flamenco guitars and occasional Middle Eastern rhythms for a unique sound that is still distinctly Celtic.

"We started out playing very traditional Irish music," explained Petrie. "But along the way, the more we played with people outside the tradition, the more that spice rubbed off on our music and took on a life, a passion and a drive all its own."

The seeds of the current incarnation of Skelpin took hold when Petrie and Foley began playing a residency under that name in an Irish Bar in the Gaslamp Quarter, across the street from a flamenco club. "On our breaks, we'd cross the street and hang out with the Maldonado Brothers who were playing there," explained Petrie. "After that it turned into a nightly game of sitting in on each other's set and playing a musical version of 'top this.'" The jam sessions led to the melding of the two music acts, with the union thus far releasing three albums, *Whiskey Before Breakfast* (2003), *Patric's Day Holiday* (2004), and *Rua Rojo* (2005).

While the band as a whole is an exciting proposition live, with virtuoso performances across the board, the clear focus is Petrie. Originally from Dooniver, Achill Island, County Mayo, Ireland, her family first landed on the East Coast. "My Dad had a great vision of us emigrating to New Zealand, as a lot of Irish had taken that one-way trip." The family made it as far as San Diego before they discovered certain types of visas were required to become permanent residents of New Zealand. By then, the family had fallen in love with the '60s California lifestyle. "Beaches, sunshine, TVs, and indoor plumbing vs. cold, rain, and sheep – you make the call," joked Petrie.

A dynamic performer, she has a playing style that can only be described as manic. She'll do just about whatever it takes to win over a crowd, from leading a boisterous sing-along to jumping on the occasional table top. For her, Skelpin is the culmination of a lifetime of performing. A fiddler since the age of three, she blames her father for her love of music. "Even though I grew up with family that played a variety of instruments, my Dad says all hell broke loose when he took me to see a symphony orchestra perform. I was about three or four and I couldn't stay in my seat. I kept running up to the stage to watch the performers, and then my Dad would drag me back to my seat," Petrie said, laughing at the memory. Given her obvious love of music it wasn't long before the idea of learning an instrument came up. Though currently known for her fiddle playing, things could have been very different. "We had a talk and I asked him which was the hardest instrument to play. He opined either trombone or violin." Luckily for music fans, "we didn't know anyone who taught trombone and I was pretty small as a kid, so I opted for fiddle. My first one was a one sixteenth size." She took personal inspiration from her brother Neil, an accomplished musician who played the flute and piano.

Within a few months she was performing live. "My Dad used to lock me in my room until I'd practiced for at least an hour a day," she recalled. She saw time with her instrument as well spent for more than one reason. "Pretty soon I discovered some distinct advantages, as the more I practiced, the more I could get out of doing chores," she laughed. Petrie was well



Members of Skelpin

matched with her instrument. "I absolutely adore the fiddle," she said. "I think we're made for each other in every way. It's such an evocative, lyrical instrument capable of reflecting your every emotion." She still plays a fiddle given to her by her parents on her sixteenth birthday. "It's more than 100 years old and looks it. We've been together so long that I know all its sweet spots, and the way the fiddle plays has totally influenced the way I play."

Though she is best known for her Celtic music, she was originally supposed to play the classics. "My Dad decided right off that I was going to be the first one in my family to play classical music and that I would make them all proud by growing up to play in an orchestra," Petrie said. According to her, the biggest difference in learning classical versus Celtic music is fear. "In classical, you are judged by how well you do at competitions, what's your chair priority in the violin section, knowing that at any time someone can, and will, challenge you for your seat. Where's the joy in that?" She offers the contrast of a typical Irish session. "The typical session is a circle of folks of all ages getting together to share the love. The real reason for a session is to strengthen the community and to pass the tunes down from elder to younger, or vice versa depending on the age of the player, and not to judge." Her father was less than thrilled with his daughter's change in direction. "It was a real disappointment to my father when I burned out on classical music. He didn't come to see me play until I performed with the Chieftains at 4th & B in 2002," she stated. "Now he's very proud. It's like the plumber who swears his kid is going to go to college, only to discover his kid just wants to be a plumber after all," she quipped.

In the ensuing years she's played numerous other genres, including country, western swing, flamenco, Swedish/Finnish/Norwegian tunes, and was in a Cajun band that performed at the San Diego Zoo.

Petrie chalks up Skelpin's appeal to their mix of influences. "We all bring different themes to the band," she stated. "I have a freaky memory for obscure traditional tunes; meanwhile Tim must know every Johnny Cash/pop song/boy band hit known to Western civilization, plus he composes. Then David adds the Flamenco fingers of death, Yngie Malmsteen precision along with the occasional rock lick, and we go from there," she said. "With so many different musical elements and a palette of 15 to 20 instruments, don't expect it to be all green beer and leprechauns," she laughed. Indeed, the group has been known to include the likes of "Amber" by Afro-Celt Sound System, "In Your Eyes" by Peter Gabriel, "Rainy Night in Soho," by the Pogues, and "Ring of Fire," by Johnny Cash along with the usual mix of originals and folk standards.

Musically, it's clear the band is onto something. While Celtic sounds are not the sort of thing that normally attracts much of a media spotlight, the band has managed to capture its share of attention. Among other accolades, Petrie won the Julian Fiddle and Banjo Contest in 2000 while Skelpin has been nomi-

Skelpin's Irish Fusion Gets Audiences Movin' and Groovin'

nated for the San Diego Music Awards' Best in the World Music category in 2004, 2005, and 2006. They've been regulars on the Southern California festival circuit and have made appearances on every local television show that features music. They've also made inroads into the Far East, including a three-month run at TokyoSea, a Disney theme park in Japan, and the surrounding area under their belts in 2006. They also headlined the Tokyo Irish Music Festival over St. Patrick's Day weekend in 2007. "Playing at TokyoSea was the bomb," Petrie said. "It was hard work at times. For example, it was monsoon season and we sometimes played on top a building 30 feet off the ground in the rain. Sometimes the language barrier was a challenge as well, but the fans were incredible! People lined up on the street for an hour before every outdoor show, whereas some fans came every night, five days a week, to the indoor shows."

"As the band gets better known we can expect a flood of bootleg DVDs. My strangest memory is that I know there are hours and hours of videos of each one of us somewhere in Japan, because some folks came every day for three months and set up their cameras in the same spot to film us."

In fact, the biggest difficulty in touring has been simple logistics. "It's harder other countries to get your gear around," Petrie noted. "In the U.S., it's really no problem once you load up, but in Japan we were always climbing stairs, using buses, taxis, and subways." She sees a plus to the situation. "You get in great shape climbing subway stairs, level after level, toting fiddles, guitars, and everything else." Though Petrie enjoys playing stages big or small, her clear favorite is the outdoor stage. "Big events mean there's more room to run around on the stage, since I use a wireless pack." On the other hand, "more intimate events mean we can actually see people," she said diplomatically.

The group has made inroads into the



Patric Petrie

movie world as well. In 2003, Foley spent eight months in Rosarito, Mexico, where he was the featured piper in the Russell Crowe film *Master and Commander: Far Side of the World*. A little closer to home, the group contributed to the soundtrack of a 2005 documentary on the tall ship, the *Star of India's* annual sail around the bay. Meanwhile, Newfoundland TV uses one of their musical interludes as its station's theme.

Among their upcoming projects are a new album and more touring, with performances already booked through winter 2009. Some of the bigger events ahead include a headlining slot at the Los Angeles County Irish Festival this month, a Celtic Music Cruise in November and December, followed by the Celtic Christmas Festival at SOKA University in Irvine on December 7. In addition, Petrie has begun to be more visible on the local scene in a solo capacity. Recently she's begun to collaborate and perform with Matt Hensley of Flogging Molly at his Flying Elephant Pub and Grill in Carlsbad. She'll also contribute to

Anna Troy's upcoming new album

Though purists may quibble about the group's mixing of influences, there is no disputing that Skelpin's sound has become a crowd pleasing favorite in Southland venues. For her part Petrie is simply happy to be making music. "I went through a bad period of stage fright, but there's nothing that gets me smiling more than playing in front of people, playing for myself, for them, and for the guys in the band," she said. "If you can't enjoy your own music, what can you do?"



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A Short History of Irish Music

by Paul Hornick

The music of Ireland permeates much of the music of America. You can hear it in the strains of country and folk music. It's definitely there in bluegrass and the music of Appalachia. And it's served as the inspiration and basis for American classical composers such as Aaron Copeland. Any appreciation of American music, therefore, should include an understanding of Irish music.

The music of Ireland plays such an important role in our music because the Irish themselves are such an important part of our history. Throughout the 1800s and into the early twentieth century generous waves of Irish immigrants came to this country. So much so that a very large percentage of Americans, a little over 12 percent today, trace their heritage back to the Emerald Isle. And when the Irish immigrated here, they brought their traditions, customs, and, of course, their music.

Now there are some twists and turns to this history, and with the Irish playing a part in the tale, there may be a bit of blarney thrown in for good measure. The first part of the history of Irish music goes back to around 2,000 years before anybody said "Danny Boy" or Bono sang with U2, to the Roman Empire. The Romans had received much of their musical understanding from the Greeks, who had developed the modal understanding of music. For our purposes here, without going all Doctor Music Theory on everybody, this is where Do Re Mi and the basis for western music, from Verdi's operas to Miles Davis, comes from.

In the meantime, the Romans never got around to conquering Ireland. They must have thought it was too far away and a little too cold and wet, so the musical modalities of the Greeks and Romans didn't make it there. Despite Saint Patrick and the Christianization of the island, the Roman musical stamp that influenced the rest of Europe had not really taken hold in Ireland. How this sets Irish music apart is that a great deal of traditional Irish music does not use the chord changes that we're used to hearing. Thus, they have a droning quality, one basic underlying tone or note throughout the entire song or jig.

If you hear a traditional Irish melody, chances are that it goes back to the 1700s or 1800s. Before 1700 there is little known of what the Irish people listened and

danced to. Thereafter it seems that the desire to dance, and find new and interesting dances, led to what we think of as Irish dance music. And, possibly to the chagrin of the Irish, all of it coming from other places besides Ireland. (This happens in other aspects of Irish history. Remember that the person most closely associated with Ireland, Saint Patrick, wasn't Irish. He was Italian.)

What we think of as the most quintessential of Irish dances – the jig – may have

well as outdoors, well suited to go wherever people wanted to dance. That makes the fiddle an ideal instrument for this kind of music. As a matter of fact, the fiddle is so closely associated with Irish music that the *Fiddler's Fakebook*, the compendium of tunes that all fiddlers are expected to be familiar with, are almost all jigs, reels, and polkas from Ireland. The melodies for this music are simple and short, and the fiddler adds and varies ornamentation to the tune each time it is repeated. It's not like jazz, in which the soloist departs from the melody; the melody is there each time it is repeated. The ornamentation gives the performance the zest and liveliness that is one of the key characteristics of Irish music.

There is no single tradition of Irish fiddling, with many of the regions having their own distinctive styles, and even the styles' ability to be broken down into sub-styles of the regions. At 32,600 square miles, Ireland is just slightly larger than South Carolina. With our interstate driving, modern mass communication mindset, it may be difficult to imagine an island of that size containing regional differences. But these traditions developed during a time when foot travel was the principal way of getting from point A to point B. Most people stayed put in their village or town. A village eight miles distant was a full day's journey away.

Light yet fast, Sligo is one of the more well known fiddling styles of Ireland, because of the great number of immigrants who came to this country from there. The frenzied, almost aggressive, style of playing centers in Donnegal, way up on the northwest coast of the Emerald Isle. Maybe they need the energy to keep warm against the winds and storms of the North Sea. Derry, in Northern Ireland, is slower, though not by much, and shows the influence of the Scots who emigrated to this area, particularly in the hornpipe tunes called strathspeys.

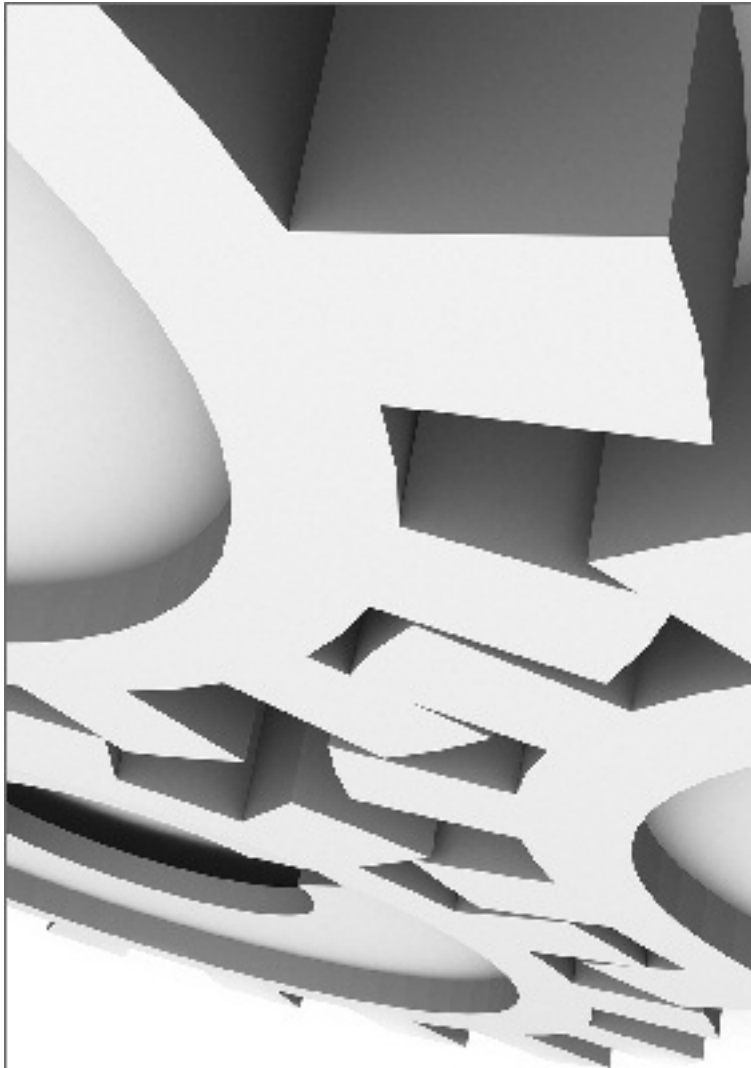
The music of Galway is known for its wistfulness and slower tempos. There is more ornamentation in the music of Galway than in other Irish music. The fiddling of County Clare is similarly slow and wistful but has a lighter nature. Around Cork the music blends many of these styles, containing the sweetness of the music of Clare and the speed that you might find in Donegal.



come to Ireland from England as early as the 1600s, although some scholarship suggests that it was picked up through more direct contact with Italy. Similarly, the hornpipe came to Ireland from England. Some people claim that the reel is indigenous to Ireland, but there is much evidence showing that it was introduced by the Scots. Most of the reels played in Ireland are Scottish compositions.

The best documentation of the introduction of a dance to Ireland is that of the polka. As with the rest of Europe and the U.S., Ireland fell under the spell of Jenny Lind, the opera singer known as the Swedish Nightingale, during the 1850s. Lind loved the polka and popularized the Polish dance music on her tours and concerts. The polka still makes up a fair amount of the dance music of Ireland today.

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by Allen Singer

Heloise Love: Spiritual Singer of Celtic and American Folk Music

As the lights slowly come down and you watch her standing behind the mike and tuning her guitar, you notice that Heloise Love seems to have glow about her. When she begins to sing, you sense a hint of vulnerability, a tenderness supported by her immersion in the song and belief in her music. Heloise is a singular soloist and a solidifying member of the group Highland Way, a band that plays Scottish, Irish, and Celtic music. In addition to performing the music of the seven Celtic nations and songs rooted in Elizabethan balladry as well as American folk music, she is fond of country songs, especially those by Emmylou Harris.

Heloise's mother was born and raised in Paris. Her father has a Welsh and Scottish background. Her childhood home was always a musical place where she and her

older sisters loved to sing three-part harmony and share such instruments as auto-harps, classical guitars, trumpets, ukuleles, and whatever else they could find around the house to make music. Heloise's father played many diverse records at home ranging from bagpipe music, the Irish Rovers, and Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. He secretly recorded the family singing at home and then played them at work. According to

Heloise, her sisters were horrified when they found about this! Heloise played trumpet until her first semester at SDSU. A transformational moment in her life occurred when she decided to seriously pursue her interest in guitar by taking guitar lessons. In the 1990s, she started attending Slo Jam, a musical get together created by Walt Richards.

Heloise told me, "Walt Richards and Paula Strong asked me if I would be interested in getting together to play with them and Walt began to teach me guitar. They worked out a lot of harmonies with me and they were incredibly generous. After just a few gigs with Walt and Paula in the group Bow Willow, I was under a lot of pressure from being self-employed as a land-use consultant and the sudden loss of my father. I stepped out of the tiny bit of the music world that I had entered and re-grouped. By this time, all the bagpipes and Irish Rover music in my head awoke from a long, long slumber and I became a bit obsessed with Scottish and Irish music. Then, my pals and I also discovered the Scottish Highland Games and Festivals where we discovered some very inspiring musicians and became big fans. Also at this time, in 1995, the movie *Braveheart* was released. It was at these festivals we could hear Erik Rigler, (the world's most recorded piper), Alasdair Fraser (master Scottish fiddler), Alex Beaton (Scotland's very famous folk singer), and Men of Worth." These were all musicians with whom Heloise would later appear and perform.

Heloise continued her musical story by describing what happened later on. "After a while I missed playing guitar so I began again. One night I decided to be very brave and attend a North County Folk Song Society Song Circle. While I was singing a Celtic tune, a young man named Brian Caldwell from Glasgow, Scotland, joined the circle. When Brian's turn came, he sang a favorite of mine called 'Glencoe.' We both decided that our voices would blend and

eventually, along with my best friend's incredibly talented bass player Richard Gordon Heinz, formed Highland Way. Then we had the good fortune to add stringed instrument magician, Paul Castellanos on viola and Highland Way was born!" Highland Way has released three CDs to date and even re-recorded the first one.

Heloise continues, "The influence these artists had on me was profound. Over the years I have had the great honor of sharing a stage with Alasdair Fraser, Men of Worth, Alex Beaton, and Ed Miller. Dick Jay and Tim Day, chairfolks of San Diego Folk Heritage, have been incredibly helpful in my solo musical career and also with my group Highland Way. Tim Day, the promotional and booking board member of San Diego Folk Heritage, suggested I record a solo CD with a guy named Randy Sterling with whom I went on to produce a solo album called *Song for the Mira* in 2005. He is a fine musician and former musical director for Neil Diamond. I called Randy and found him to be so understanding and knowledgeable, so I went for it. Randy was incredibly helpful and I owe him a lot for all he has done for me."

"David Morgan owns the studio where Randy records and is the amazing guitar/dobro player on the CD. Between David and Randy, they played most of the backup for me," she explains. "I am mostly a rhythm guitar player and percussionist. Randy played mandolin, banjo, and guitar on the CD. Maury Richmond, a Celtic fiddler pal of mine of 10 years told me years ago that if I ever recorded my own CD, he wanted to be the fiddler so he joined us on the CD."

Tim Day says, "Heloise is one of the most versatile, talented, and dedicated musicians I've ever worked with. She explores the music, listens, learns, and never stops trying to be a consummate performer and entertainer."

Among her other accomplishments, Heloise is also a children's book illustrator,



Heloise Love



Heloise Love with Highland Way

having recently published two books she co-wrote with June Heinz titled *Shane and the Fir Darrigs* and *The Dragon and the Fir Darrigs*. The two books are also available on CD, recorded and narrated by Brian Caldwell of Highland Way. They are available at Amazon.com and www.heloiselove.com.

Heloise is a heartfelt performer and a transformational singer and musician. Whether she's singing balladry or creating the haunting atmospheric setting for her Celtic tunes, Heloise touches her audience. Appearing as a soloist or in Highland Way, she is always out there, waiting to touch you through the music she performs, especially with the spiritual and mysterious ways of the Celtic song. As the lights come on at the end of a Heloise Love concert, the audience is already on its feet clapping. They have bonded with Heloise during the time they spent together in a shared musical journey.

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by Annie Dru

Gerard Nolan

The Army Band

We'll start with my newest acquaintance of the bunch, and the youngest, Gerard Nolan. I met Gerard about five years ago, while contributing to the album of local fiddler and composer Beverley Heising, in a band called Zepher. We had just about completed tracking when her producer suggested she add a bit of saxophone; she agreed, and they called in Gerard. In just a couple of hours, several tracks of more or less traditional sounding jigs and reels were transformed into something resembling a folk/jazz fusion masterpiece. We were all delighted, and not a little bit infatuated with the talent of this Dublin transplant.

In light of that experience, and over several more years of acquaintance and collaboration, I came to perceive Gerard as shy and reticent to engage in any conversation naming himself as the primary topic, so I was completely charmed if somewhat surprised to hear him recount his story leisurely and animatedly over coffee.

I had recently heard him perform in a Celtic setting when his band Cashel performed a very traditional Irish set at a local Irish pub called the Field. I was only familiar with Gerard's playing within a jazz-like context, so it was amazing to hear him on pennywhistle and bodhran, and singing all the familiar pub songs. I asked him if he felt that he was as much of an expert on traditional Irish music as he was on jazz, and he responded that it was a very different thing to be studied in something as opposed to knowing it on a cellular level.

"As far as the whole Irish thing goes, you were saying a lot of the Irish guys here are playing American music. I didn't play a lot of Irish music in Ireland but always heard it, because you grow up with it; it's your music. It's in you. I always tell people, you never feel as nationalistic or patriotic as when you're not in your own country. I really feel Irish here, because I sound different, am different, everybody knows I'm different. It's like you have a hypersensitivity to your own country, because you're not in it, and you're reaching back for it. So that's when I really started to get into Irish music. If I was in Ireland, I wouldn't be playing Irish music, I'd be playing jazz."

Gerard's musical training did not begin in school, as funding constraints didn't allow for Dublin's public schools to provide for a dedicated program. He details his earliest musical experience, like that of many other Dublin boys (including a young Larry Mullins Jr. of later U2 fame), as being the nationally recognized Artane Boys Band. Apparently, at one time the school served as a sort of Oliver Twist-like home for the destitute and displaced but later became more of a trade school run by the Christian Brothers, the crowning achievement of which was a much sought-after band. According to Gerard, any local young man under the age of 16 could participate for the price of a bus ride and a nominal monthly fee. The band was then, and is still, famous for many public and televised appearances. It was playing clarinet in this band that the earliest seeds of his musicianship and discipline were sown.

From first recollection, Gerard was determined to be a soldier. Enamored of GI Joe from a wee lad, yet lacking any real understanding of the meaning and purpose of the Army, his eventual entrance into and nearly decade-long career in that institution seems somehow divinely guided. Just one year before the end of his Artane tenure, a fellow student confided that he was about to apply to the Irish Army School of Music. Only ten young men were to be taken, and Gerard, risking the odds, decided to apply as well. Much to his family's delight, and his buddy's dismay (he wasn't accepted), at only 15, Gerard became the band's second youngest member.

Eventually stationed in the western command in Alton, nine years of study, Army discipline, and constant touring honed his talent but left him hungry for more music and greater challenge. Wednesdays off duty would find him hopping the train back to Dublin to study jazz, a discovery of his late teen and early twenties, and to hang out with guys who "...knew more than I did."

The Army Band was considered a career position, and the expectation was that a musician, once accepted, would be in for life awaiting pension. Musically, however, it was limited. "Guys got to a certain level of musicianship, and that was it then, it was a job. They knew the material; you showed up, did your gigs. But I just had this desire to know more," Gerard explained.

An issue of *Downbeat* magazine advertising American universities offering music majors in jazz, was about to open up a whole new world to Gerard. "I knew I wanted to end up in New York, because I had always known that's where the jazz was, so I applied to a handful of schools there. I could barely blow my nose; I was a full time clarinet player, and I had only just started taking up the saxophone. But that's what I wanted to play, so that's what I made my audition with."

He was ultimately accepted at the New School, a progressive university with a jazz and contemporary music division, located in Greenwich Village. "Very expensive; I got a part scholarship, but boy it was expensive! I think it was something like \$26,000 a semester or something. But the thing was, I didn't have a clue. If I knew then what I know now as far as how the system went, I could have gone to community college ... just to get over here, then figure it out."

At that point he asked for a four-year leave of absence to study music, something he had heard some of the other guys had done. It required jumping through some hoops, but determined, he was eventually granted his leave, obtained his four-year student visa, and in 1995, at 24, arrived in New York City.

All the years of saving his income allowed for the first year's tuition, but soon it became apparent that, regardless of the quality of education he was receiving, it was just too expensive to continue there. "That school was awesome. In fact, you'd be walking down the hall and just see all these famous people that you'd be listening to on their CD, like, 'Holy cow! That's freakin' so and so, and that's so and so... he played with Coltrane... he played with so and so... It was a real 'who's who' in



the jazz world. It was a great school. It was like getting dropped into the deep end."

Broke, but inspired, Gerard left school and began taking private lessons, working odd jobs, and saving money. He eventually returned for one last semester, but finally decided that it just wasn't financially feasible. "New York is tough, man. I was broke. I remember walking around with no money. Not only that, most of the players I knew were in the same boat as well. These great players I knew, with like, holes in their shoes... playing in places like this... for tips."

At that point he made the decision to do something else. "I considered going back home or going to England. I wanted to continue to study music, but I knew there was no way I could keep going there. My buddy in L.A., Frank Fontaine, said 'Why don't you come out here? I know some people in colleges, and I might be able to get you hooked up.'"

"So I came out to L.A. It was a gas, you know, I think I arrived on July 15, 1997. We went to a few colleges and eventually ended up at this place called Citrus College. It was a community college, and all I was interested in was staying here, keeping my student visa, you know. We went in, and sat down with the head guy. Frank was talking me up like 'this guy's from New York, great player, you gotta hear him... gotta get him in here.' So he says, 'All right, let's hear him.' So Frank sits down, starts playing the piano; I start playing the saxophone... he says, 'Okay, you're in.' I got a free ride there. So they paid for everything, you know, which was fantastic."

Gerard found LA a very different experience. "I liked LA. It was totally different from New York, and I started working a lot. I was playing Salsa. I got in with the Johnny Polanco Band; they're still on the go, actually. I was playing with those guys every night; sometimes two, three times a day we had gigs. It was busy. We'd go up to San Francisco, come back to L.A. We toured to New York... all that kind of stuff. And salsa was a gas, because people were like 'what's an Irish guy doin' in a salsa band?' you know. So that was great. I started having a bit of a life. I could buy a car, started having

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Straight Out

**Gerard Nolan****Brian Baynes**

If you fancy an Irish brogue, and honestly, what red-blooded American gal doesn't, you will understand my delight at receiving the assignment for this month's cover story. I was given the enviable job of interviewing three very handsome gentlemen musicians from Dublin, filling two sides of a cassette tape each, which translates into roughly 227 minutes of fascinating conversation. With the conversations conducted in three separate installments in my neighborhood coffee shop, there was more than a little good-natured curiosity on the part of the locals, who understandably couldn't resist a bit of discreet eavesdropping.

With the St. Patrick's Day month upon us, it seemed appropriate to feature local musicians who legitimately lay claim to their Irish status, as they actually hail from the Emerald Isle, unlike those

of us who can fake a jig, wear green, and find our way around a pint of Guinness.

The Irish are known for many things, nothing so notably as their love of music, many hundreds of years of history, most important, evolving at sessions, nationally touring traditional bands, and now household name of Riverdance. Irish music in all its permutations is so influential.

I found it interesting then, to interview, after having grown up entwined in the warp and weave of

Brian Baynes

Girls

I began my next interview by asking what it was that initially inspired our subject in a musical direction. The answer came back to me in true Brian Baynes form: girls. I had to pause the tape long enough to stop laughing so that he could continue.

I met Brian while working on the Zepher album I mentioned earlier; he was producing and engineering it in his beautiful Spring Valley studio. I remember a lot of great music being made during those sessions, but what really stands out, was the hilarious, side-splitting banter that went on between takes. This is an Irishman who takes his humor as seriously as he does his music.

Piano lessons at six or seven is where it actually began for this Dublin lad. I asked him if he'd liked it. "No, because I had to do it; music was just one more subject that you had to — of all the do's and don'ts, it was just one more thing. And then all my family played; it was just something you did. My music teacher would hit my knuckles with a pencil when I played a wrong note. At one point she threw my music out the window down into the street; then she called my father and said, 'One thing your son will never be is a musician.'"

"When I was eleven or twelve, my mother got a bunch of guitars for a charity event she was working on really cheap, I mean the cheapest guitars you could possibly make — just a piece of wood with some strings. The action was like, yea high, you know? She had them in the living room, and I begged her to let me have one. I thought this was really cool. It was like three pounds, but man, I just broke my fingers on that thing. I found Jimmy Hendrix and Eric Clapton, and that was it. I remember thinking there's nothing else in the world... that's it... that thing, that lead guitar thing... that sound. I thought it was the sweetest, coolest, most spiritual thing I'd ever heard in my life. Then you get this realization

that some girl that never looked at you before suddenly thinks this is cool, and you think this thing just gets better; now they like it too. So there's no going back then... no going back to the point where there was nothing else I wanted to do. I didn't care about school or anything. I knew there was nothing that was ever going to get close to that. It took me years to figure out that it had something to do with the music lessons I'd had earlier."

I asked Brian how much he thought he'd been influenced by Irish traditional music as a young guitar player. "I didn't realize that I was being influenced by it every day until I came to the States. I didn't realize that it was everywhere. A lot of the friends and musicians I used to play with ended up in shows like *Riverdance*. People like Davy Spalane — we used to play music on the beach and have a few beers. There'd be all things; there'd be blues, there'd be traditional, because we didn't care... we didn't have any rules, you know? At that time, everybody mixed everything. It was wide open... it was like a mad revolution."

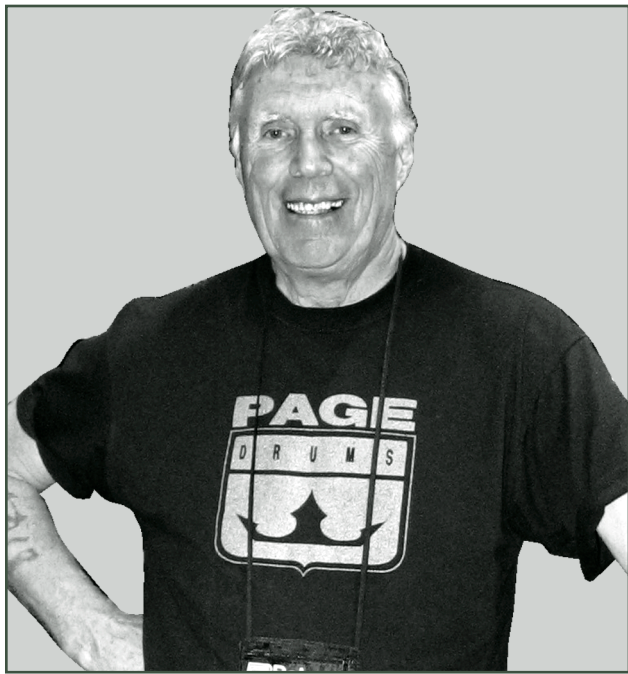
Like our first subject, Brian was also drawn to America for inspiration as a young musician. "America was a natural place to look. America then was looked at as the place where all the cool music came from. It certainly looked great, anyway, from the other side of the Atlantic... that whole '60s and '70s thing. The Eagles, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, and all that, that's the stuff that I thought was really cool... James Taylor; all that slick L.A. stuff looked cool to me."

"Then, in the middle of all that, I found blues people, and I wanted to know where they'd got it from — like, this guy got it from Eric Clapton, and Eric Clapton got it from some old American blues guy Muddy Waters, and then I'd want to find out more about that. And that's why Europe, even to this day, loves real American roots music."

Brian hails from the seaside town of Bray outside of Dublin. "The coolest, artistic town, maybe the size of La Jolla; people started their careers there... U2, everyone; it was the local gig. There's a major movie studio there;



ntta Dublin



David Page

en on the appropriate day, and
ness.
y wonderful things but perhaps
f and affinity for music. With
y still alive, thriving, and, perhaps
ons, folk festivals, through inter-
s, and, of course, re-born in the
ce, it' s no great wonder that
universally affected by the Celtic
discover that all of the Irishmen I
o in three separate generations,
of pennywhistle, fiddle, jig, and

reel, would have been so profoundly influenced and ultimately
seduced by American music.
These gentlemen were by no means strangers to me, having
worked with them all in various capacities for many years, but I
was surprised to find out how little I actually knew of what initially
brought them across the pond and maybe, more important, what it
is about America and its music that has compelled them to stay.
So, sit back and relax, perhaps with glass in hand, cozy up
next to the fire, and take a trip with me to Ireland and back again
via the fascinating stories of these three Irishmen.



any major movie that was made in Ireland was made
there. So we were always seeing big stars down in our
pub; it was a small town. Everyone who came out of
that scene went on to do different things. Everyone was
an artist — a sculptor or a writer — or a musician. There
was a kind of a revolution there; *Riverdance* came out
of that.
The irony of the fact that Brian had a greater affinity
for, and familiarity with, American music than that of his
homeland came to the fore when he was hired on as
part of a band that was to travel to Miami to entertain
tourists from England, Ireland, and Scotland. The travel
agency' s idea was to bring the wives over for shopping
and sight-seeing, while the husbands would be made to
feel that they' d never left their local pub back home.
The only fly in the ointment was that no one in the band
knew a traditional Irish tune to save their lives. " We
learned our first song on the plane on the way over;
somebody got a book of Irish songs," Brian remem-
bered.
I asked him how this was possible. " I didn' t realize
until then, that all of that [music] was there. It' s like hav-
ing money in the bank; an Irish music account. You' re
so steeped in it; you' re around these people, who later

became big names in the Irish music world, and then
you' d go home to have your dinner and you' d turn on
the radio, and there was so much Irish music. When I
was a kid, in the middle of the day you' d go home
from school, and there was an Irish music program
every single day on the radio; so I got an hour of that, I
had friends who played it... it was just everywhere; it was
in the air."
I allowed the topic to wander in that direction for a
moment longer and asked him about the pub scene in
Ireland when he was a young man. " There was always a
guy in the corner who' d start a tune on a whistle, and
somebody would take out another whistle; literally,
they' d just go out to the car and get the fiddle, you
know, and there' d be a session. But sessions happened
spontaneously, they weren' t organized things; like here
you have an organized session... it' s at a certain time,
and everybody sits in the same seat and they all have
their assignments; almost like a little mini orchestra. It' s
just different; there are no rules in an Irish session.
Someone could get up and sing a Beatles song, and
they' d give them the same respect as if they were
doing anything else, even someone who couldn' t sing
very well. There was great respect for someone trying to
do something creative or artistic. It' s amazing; people
could be in the middle of an argument or a discussion,
or trying to order a drink, and everything would stop. You
came away thinking music was spiritual, almost like a
church; something very deep."
So here he is on his way to America for the first time,
on his way to play Irish music in a Miami hotel.
" Somebody figures out the words on the plane... they
were simple songs. We almost looked down on some of
these songs... pub songs, because they were simple,
and we thought we were better musicians or whatever, I
don' t know. So we were just kind of thought, ' that' s
easy.' "

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David Page

Another Army Band

Oddly enough, like Gerard Nolan, our next subject also
began his professional music career in the army, albeit
a very different one: the Queen' s Guard. How this
Dublin native came to serve in the English Army is truly
worthy of a Hollywood script.
I met David Page Jr. six years ago when we per-
formed as members of an Irish-American band called
Kitchenfire. I was very much a novice, and I remember
Dave being a source of much to emulate in the way of
professionalism. With a ready smile, a warm personality,
and a droll wit, he was also a comforting and encourag-
ing presence on stage. We became fast friends and over
the course of our Kitchenfire tenure, I came to under-
stand the decades of experience that his seasoned per-
formance style owed its genesis.

Born to a musical family, and raised in Dublin, son of
four-time Irish champion Uilleann piper, David Page Sr.,
young Dave grew up playing accordion in his dad' s
band, but in 1954, at the age of 15, the family relocated
to London. " It was such bad times in Ireland. My dad
was out of work, and the opportunities were in London.
At that time the Irish were streaming into England,
because that' s where there were jobs. But then I was
conscripted, meaning I got my draft papers."

Hoping to play drums in the Royal Air Force Band
(deeming the accordion a " sissy instrument"), teenage
Dave went down to Scotland Yard. Not able to find the
recruiting office, he asked directions of an officer in
another building. The gentleman detected his Irish
accent, and said, " Have you ever thought of joining the
Queen' s Guard?" The man turned out to be the
recruiter for the Irish division of the Guard and quickly
convinced a 17-year-old Dave that, being Irish, it would be
only right that he represent his country, assuring him
that he could play drums in the Guard Band just as easi-
ly as in the Air Force as soon as he finished his basic
training, of course.

After spending the first 30 days in Caterham Barracks,
new recruits were offered a one-time opportunity to
leave the Guard, but if they chose to stay, it meant
seven years of service; three of active duty, four in the
reserve, all beginning with 12 weeks of " hell." " Miserable
place; it had been a prison once. You were marched
everywhere, even to the bathroom, in quick time. It was
just terrible, but it did teach you discipline," Dave
explained.

At the outset of his service a crisis in the Middle East
found Dave training as a parachuting marksman rather
than a drummer, and it wasn' t until tensions eased and
he returned to England that he was afforded the oppor-
tunity to finally study music. " My mum and dad bought
me a drum set for 40 pounds; a little four-piece set —
not that good, but good for me, you know. Sometimes
when I look back, that money... at that time... again,
y' know moms and dads, they' ll do anything for their
kids. They must have suffered to buy me that drum set.
I didn' t play jazz or rock and roll in the army; rather,
more like marches, and selections from *The King and I*
and *Oklahoma*, but it was good training."

In his official capacity with the Guard, Dave toured
with the Queen wherever she went. " Most of our tours
were with her — when she went to Australia, India,
Sweden, or Germany. After every tour, we' d get into our
concert hall, and she' d come out and thank everybody
and this and that and the other. You' re not allowed to
talk to her unless she talks to you, but she was really
good, because she' d make sure to walk amongst us
and thank everyone."

Upon asking him whether he ever saw any actual
action, he said, " The biggest scare I ever had — because
I wouldn' t hurt a fly — was on duty in Wellington
Barracks in London, which means that you' re just there
to blow the bugle; it' s a traditional thing right?
Nonetheless, you had your gun in the guard room. There
was a sniper in Trafalgar Square, which was about a
mile from the barracks, taking pot shots at people; so
they sent down to Wellington for a marksman to come
and pick him off, you know? The sergeant comes in and
says, ' You gotta get your gun, because you may have
to take someone out.' I almost got sick. I didn' t want
to be the one to, you know... but luckily enough, by the
time we got there, somebody had talked him off. That' s
the closest I ever came to being really scared."

Then stationed in London, Dave made his way down
to the West End to see a big band play. Befriending the
drummer, he told him, " I' m in the Queen' s Guard and
know nothing about swing whatsoever. Could you give
me a few lessons? He said sure, and I took lessons with
him for about six months. Then some guys in the
Queen' s Guard Band formed a band outside."

" When I got out of the service, I joined the union and
then just started going around, sitting in with bands and
giving them my telephone number. I got my first big
break when I heard through the grapevine that Tom
Jones was starting a band. Now, at this time, we didn' t
know who Tom Jones was, but we heard he was a guy
from Wales, and he was going to call it the Jones Boys,
and that was the whole beginning of that. It wasn' t long
before he sort of shot up, did a TV show, a variety show
[Ed Sullivan], and the girls were going nuts for him. But
the guys in the band didn' t get any recognition; we were
always in the background, and he was always the star.
The same with Englebert Humperdink; he didn' t even
know who was playing with him."



Page with Evelyn Glenny

Dave played with Tom Jones for about two years, and
recorded on the now infamous *What' s New Pussycat?*
album in 1969. I mentioned the magnitude of that
recording and asked if Dave if he was ever duly com-
pensated for his contribution to it. " We just got the fee
for the recording. When I was in the Queen' s Guard —
this is amazing — we made lots of albums, you know,
and they got awards and so on. On one of the albums
there was a tune called " Liberty Bell," which was used
for Monty Python at the beginning and the end of the
show. We just got paid a recording fee for the album,
and that' s it. " We don' t owe you a penny now; the
album' s done." Now, I figured, it' s still being played
maybe five or six times a day all over the world and get-
ting maybe \$25 dollars every time [as a residual if we' d
have been paid] and I underestimated purposely. So I
figured, okay, if this is 1970 whatever it was, between that
and now, there' s 30 years of residuals, played five
times a day, that' s 35 times a week, that' s like whatev-
er, 200 times a month... they would owe me four million
dollars!"

I asked him why his royalties were not protected. " We
were just soldiers. Same with all the movie scores we
did; we did numerous movie scores. We did music for
Bridge on the River Kwai for example. That still remains
the most famous movie ever. The director said, ' I' d like
maybe 15, 20 whistlers... people who can' t whistle prop-
erly.' I said, ' I can' t whistle at all.' He said, ' Go ahead,
you' re in.' So we did all that whistling, but we didn' t get
paid for it again, so we' d had a double whammy there!"

I asked him about other movie scores he did outside
of the Queens Guard. " Yeah, we got paid, but still no
residuals. *A Bridge Too Far*, *The Island in the Sun* with
Harry Belafonte. There was another one called *The Circus*
of Horrors and the only reason I got that is because I
was playing with the circus at that time. The circus is
great training for drummers, because you play so loud
and you never stop playing... same with the Fern Street
Circus; I do that every year; it' s great for energy."

In 1969 Dave went to Chicago and hooked up with a
group called the Arbors, out of which came the favorite
ensemble of his career. " We got together through work-
ing shows like Sinatra and Barbara Streisand, George
Benson, Lou Rawls, and Glen Campbell, which are all high
pressure shows. We suddenly realized that the three of
us had a good rapport, you know, relaxed. The piano
player' s name was Randy Waldman, who plays with
Barbara Streisand right now. The bass player was a guy
named Kim Darigan, and I think he' s with Tina Turner. No

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Bluegrass CORNER

by Dwight Worden

The San Diego Bluegrass Society has just completed a major survey of its membership. The surveys were mailed to all members, along with their ballots to vote for the Board of Directors. Here are some of the more interesting results of the member survey, giving you a feel for the state of bluegrass in San Diego:

- The Summergrass bluegrass festival, co-produced by the San Diego Bluegrass Society and the North San Diego County Bluegrass and Folk Club every August, received the highest priority ranking with 438 points.
- The Special Concerts produced by SDBS, featuring prominent traveling bands, received the second highest ranking with 331 points.
- SDBS's every Second Tuesday jam and get-together at Fuddrucker's in La Mesa received the third highest ranking with 321 points



Emma's Gut Bucket Band

- Next in order were (4) Emma's Gut Bucket Band and its SDBS-sponsored school outreach program with 296 points; (5) SDBS's Fourth Tuesday's featured band night at Boll Weevil, 290 points; (6) SDBS's instrument donation program, giving instruments to worthy causes, 288 points; (7) SDBS's Third Tuesday at Fuddrucker's in Chula Vista, 233 points; (8) band scrambles, 227 points; (9) social get-togethers, 211 points; (10) campouts, 210 points; and (11) workshops, 209 points



SDBS donates instruments to injured vets

- The recent special concerts produced by SDBS, which included the Gospel Program at St. Marks, Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, the Gospel Program at the First Baptist Church of Pacific Beach, the Saline Fiddlers, the James King Band, and David Parmley and Continental Divide, were all well attended, with the St. Mark's Gospel Program garnering the most responses and the David Parmley and Continental Divide concert coming in second.
- The members' ratings for the second, third, and fourth Tuesday regular events, produced by SDBS, were overwhelmingly high, with the vast majority being in the categories of "Great! Keep it up!" or "good" with a few rating the events as "poor" or "very bad."
- There were many suggestions offered as to how to make things better, which the SDBS Board is reviewing, and some changes are expected in response.

THE INFAMOUS STRINGDUSTERS IN SAN DIEGO

The Infamous Stringdusters, will be making a special San Diego appearance on Friday, March 21, at the Del Mar Powerhouse. There will be two concerts, one at 7pm and one at 9pm. The concerts are co-sponsored by the SDBS and the Del Mar Foundation. Tickets are \$20. To buy tickets online, go to



The Infamous Stringdusters

www.summergrass.net and click on "Infamous Stringdusters 3/21 tickets." Or, call Betty at (858) 205-3834.

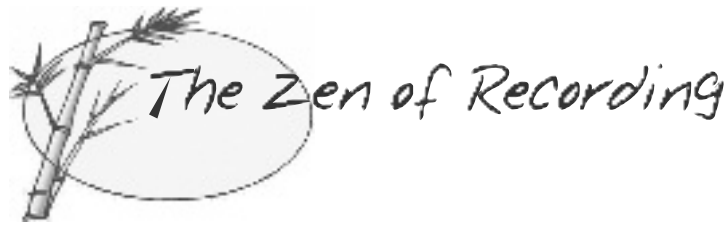
The Infamous Stringdusters are the reigning holders of the IBMA award for Album of the Year, Song of the Year, and Emerging Artist of the Year. Comprised of Chris Pandolfi on banjo, Jeremy Garret on fiddle, Andy Hall on Dobro, Travis Book on bass, and Andy Falco on guitar (recently replacing Chris Eldridge who moved on to Chris Thile's new band, the Punch Brothers), this group of hot young players is guaranteed to light your fire. They dazzled the crowds at Summergrass 2006 and will be back again this August at Summergrass 2008. This concert in the Powerhouse will be your chance to see and hear them up close and personal in a venue that seats only 100 or so.

Get involved in local bluegrass. I promise you won't regret it! Visit the SDBS online calendar to see what is happening at www.socalbluegrass.org, or visit Wayne Rice's KSON Bluegrass Bulletin Board at www.waynerice.com/kson/bgevents.htm, which also has a complete listing of bluegrass-related events.

SAD FAREWELLS

It is with sadness that we note the passing of three long-time members of the San Diego bluegrass community. First, we lost Clay Wolfe, a quiet gentleman who supported local bluegrass and old time music for decades in San Diego and whose presence will be sorely missed. Then, we lost Don Nelson who died in his 50s after valiantly struggling with cancer for many years. Don was a true inspiration to those who knew him, playing music up until the end. Finally, we lost Les Preston to an unexpected aneurism at age 58. Les and his wife Lou Ann were prominent members of the San Diego bluegrass community, performing in North Forty, the Les and Lou Ann Band, and in the Soledad Mountain Band. Les was also an SDBS board member, and with wife Lou Ann, produced the annual Bluegrass Day at the Fair for the SDBS.

We salute all three and send our best wishes to their many friends and loved ones.



by Sven-Erik Seaholm

Now "EAR" THIS:

Sometimes you hear yourself say something, and it causes you to pause and think about the subject at hand with a renewed perspective, almost as if it wasn't you who said it at all. You hear the words coming out of your mouth, but they might just as well be the utterances of some phantom third party. We're not talking about the kinds of things that you blurt out without thinking through and then write an album's worth of songs dedicated to clarifying what we actually meant or, worse yet, attempting to repair whatever damage our language has inflicted upon a relationship. It's more like you suddenly see things from a slightly different perspective.

For example, just yesterday I answered someone's routine query with the statement, "Yeah, but we don't make records that way anymore."

Something about that proclamation made me stop what I was doing and reflect for a few moments on the implications of that sentence. What did I really mean by that anyway? Was I saying that everyone makes recordings (or should) with a strict adherence to a circumscribed set of rules?

Frequent readers of this column would probably attest to the fact that I believe there are many paths to making a great recording, all of them valid. Some are obviously easier to justify than others, but the road to innovation nearly always bends with an unorthodox detour or two along the way.

In light of this, it's often easier to forge one's way through the thick tangle of wires and waveforms with a broader, gentler overview to guide us, rather than a specific set of hard and fast conventions. For myself, there are a couple of good examples of these that adequately illustrate what I mean by this.

The first is that how a record makes someone feel is much more important than how it sounds. We are making music (most of the time) after all, which is a medium of expression. We want to be sure that the sum total of our efforts represents the artist's intent. A great sounding recording, while very important, is still only part of that equation.

The second is that accurately capturing what you're hearing in the studio is a crucial first step in the recording process. That one can be a bit more tricky.

We use microphones as our electronic "ears" in an effort to capture what our own ears are hearing. But almost all microphones, by design or accident, hear things in slightly, sometimes drastically different ways.

Enter the **Shure KSM 137** (\$575 list, \$299.99 Street), a small diaphragm condenser microphone that excels at capturing all of the sparkling transients of the most complex sources, as well as their inherent warmth.

Boasting Class A circuitry, gold-plated internal and external connectors, and a tightly focused cardioid pickup pattern, this little dynamo proved its usefulness in a wide variety of situations.

My first and subsequent favorite use for it was on acoustic guitar. Placing it about 18 inches away and pointed toward the instrument's lower bout provided a clear and articulate top end, with none of the "boomy-ness" that can so often plague other mics in this application. Most notable was the welcome bit of throatiness to the tone, a husky quality in the low mids that gave the guitar a punchy swagger.

Switching the mic's pad to -15dB and placing it three inches away from a loud electric guitar amp, I was bowled over by the ballsy tone it



Sven-Erik Seaholm

imparted. It was incredibly full-ranged, never harsh and again, nicely rounded at the bottom end without any trace of tubbiness. In the event that you might want even less low end, a three position roll-off switch makes things easy.

The mic was a perfect match on congas as well, where the previously mentioned lower midrange creaminess and exceptional transient response yielded a mix-ready tone that required no additional eq or compression.

An unusual test was when I switched the mic's pad again to -25dB, and put it in front of the bottom rotor of a blaring Leslie cabinet for a Hammond B3 organ track. I was hoping to get that sound without the low end smear that can make the instrument tough to place in a mix and I got what I was looking for, though the lack of bass would have made it less suitable in a more sparse musical situation. In fact, bass, kick drum, and other instruments that take up the lower-most frequency ranges benefited a bit less from this mic.

However, when placed over a snare played with brushes, the resulting sound seemed absolutely three-dimensional; as if you could actually hear around the sound. I mean, we're using one mic here, and it sounds like a hologram!

This is how this mic came to be nicknamed "The Ear" around my studio, because wherever you put it is just like sticking an ear there.

When you add to that the fact that it can capture the most delicate of signals all the way up to a crushing 164 SPL (a jet engine is roughly 140 SPL), I'd say there's very little this mic can't do.

Sven-Erik Seaholm is an award-winning independent record producer, singer and songwriter. His impressive discography can be found on his websites: www.kaspro.com and www.svensongs.com

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Hosing Down

by José Sinatra

SHAKEN AND STIRRED

Last night at around 3am, taking the Adams Avenue exit off of the 805, I was clobbered once again by the only sight capable of turning me into a horrified, trembling mass of helpless organic matter. Celebrity organic matter certainly — smoothly groomed, immaculately attired — now instantly bereft of artistic purpose, awareness of my need for sleep, even the ability to scream. Swerving my car to avoid the slightest contact with it, I nearly froze stiff as its hating eyes met mine, its snarl seeming to rasp, "Just try it, you freak. I'm walkin' here. Oh, by the way: Boo!"



José Sinatra

That last line was serious overkill. Ever since I approached my teen years (see Sandurg: *The Hoses: The Prairie Years*), nothing has caused me more fear than possums. I'm aware that it seems ridiculous, but that doesn't help a bit; the simple physical presence of a possum within my sight has the same effect on me as I imagine a taser would, but without the laughs. I've learned empathy through this terror — you won't find me scoffing at someone who admits to a fear of snakes or walking under ladders or Pat Robertson. Sure, I might laugh at their idiocy in private, but my outward demeanor will always be one of compassion and concern.

After awhile I was able to gain the necessary composure to complete my journey home, where my sleep was repeatedly punctured with nightmares about possums. Which is why I'm so cranky today — just the sort of mood conducive to collating a few pervasive complaints I've felt during the last month or so, and putting them down on paper in hopes that they'll scurry away. How pleasant it is to peacefully dream. . . .

About six years ago in this column, I laid out my hatred of the word "cool" and my fervent wish that it be supplanted by something — anything — else. Here, six years later, the word's grip on our society has grown monstrous. For God's sake, even the *Reader* is now touting itself as the "Cool Paper"! It's become the nearly automatic choice for a positive adjective, a perfect no-brainer descriptive for even those who still seem at times to possess something of a brain, and its tragic consequences are building up secretly somewhere, awaiting their cataclysmic release. I foresee that future explosion, the awe-inspiring effects of which will be witnessed by the startled millions staring wide-eyed, stunned, unable to verbally assess the scene any other way than to unanimously sigh in unison, "Cool."

Also, way back then (if six years can really be considered "way back"), I noted the vapid encroachment of the word "amongst" into territory previously usurped and held by "among." And, like "cool," "amongst" just continues to breed

like cloned bunnies. Reputable daily newspapers, myself, a few friends and family members seem to be the final holdouts. When I hear it in conversation (and after I gain control of myself), I begin to address the speakers with a lot of thees and thous, hadsts and couldsts, and they look at me like I'm crazy. Maybe they know something I don't. Like idiotic affectation, as opposed to the studied kind, at which we crazy people have always been so adept.

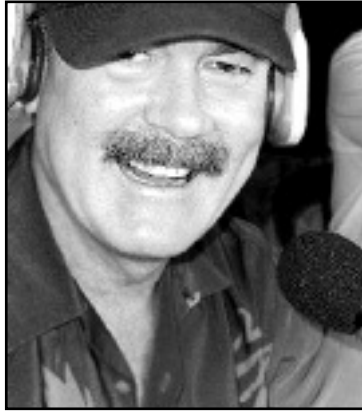
I nearly did need a straight jacket after reading a recent report from the Associated Press. The FCC, it seems, is set to go against 52 ABC owned/affiliated TV stations to the tune of 1.4 million dollars. You see, back in 2003, a particular episode (what? not nearly all?) of *NYPD Blue* portrayed "multiple, close-up views" of a woman's "naked buttocks." The valiantly insane FCC insists that this violates its rule against portraying or depicting "sexual or excretory activities." I've seen the episode and can truthfully (if sadly) state that those nude buttocks were not involved with either exercise. Will somebody please tell these imbeciles that although there is a crack problem in the United States, it's inarguably not centered between a pair of naked female cheeks?

To me, the only dangerous cheeks in the entire world are those on the face of Paris Hilton, and this is entirely a personal matter; they bookend a physiognomy that seems more marsupial than human. And, of course, that's my own problem, but it's stickin' with me until it scares me to death.

Hope to see you at the big Java Joe reunion on March 1 at the Handlery Hotel. Don't play possum; go out and enjoy a memorable night. Among similar musical showcases, this one looks sublimely neat, no butts about it.



RADIO DAZE



Jim McInnes

by Jim McInnes

JOHNNY ACE LIVES!

...not the rockabilly singer Johnny Ace, who died playing Russian Roulette in 1958, though. This Johnny Ace is the *nom du musique* of San Diego singer-songwriter John Acord, as well as the title of his self-released CD. I had played his stuff under his real name back when I hosted KGB's "Homegrown" show.

A few months ago he sent me a recording at KFMB, where I am a newsmen. I reminded him that I no longer had a rock radio show where I could play local musicians. He said he was aware of that and just wanted my opinion. As I often do when people give me CDs, I put it aside, thinking that some day I'd check it out.

That day came a few weeks later when I was in a particularly down mood. I was driving up the 15 when I remembered his CD was in my glove box. I put it in and after the first minute, my mood brightened! It was the tonic I needed.

The first track, "Little Angel," begins like a combination of Pink Floyd's "Shine on You Crazy Diamond" and "One of These Days," with an electric guitar style very much like Mark Knopfler's laid over the top. The vocal is very closely miked and multi-tracked to great effect, reminding me of Leonard Cohen on an *up* day. Strummed acoustic guitars, bass, and a conga drum round out the backing track. As the track fades out I'm reminded of 10cc's multi-layered vocal drone on "I'm Not in Love." This is an eight-minute head trip, dude.

"Mexico" has a long spicy Spanish-flavored intro before Ace's distinctive low vocal enters to tell the story of regretting never having moved to our Southern neighbor. "Streets" has a fine soulful vocal about getting away — a theme that runs throughout this album — with a fine laid-back guitar break that really breathes. This guy is a tasteful, economical player with excellent taste. He knows what to *not* play on the guitar.

"Rockaway" is a gentle, yet mysterious-sounding, ode to opening your heart and letting it sing. "Helpme," a *faux* live track, sounds like Knopfler singing, backed by the Eagles and Procol Harum (*great* organ solo), yet its derivativeness doesn't bother me. Johnny Ace obviously reveres his musical influences. "Hit&Run" is John Mellencamp meets Dire Straits. It's great, too. "Made It Home" could have been written by John Fogerty. Again, the theme is about getting away.

You hear all of Acord's influences: Pink Floyd, Dire Straits, Fogerty, etc. (That's just what I hear, although Mr. Ace may disagree!) But, hell, there's nothing wrong with that if you do it well. Johnny (Ace) Acord does it *extremely* well.

I wholeheartedly recommend *Johnny Ace* to *San Diego Troubadour* readers!

Oh, and beware the *Ides of March*. They've regrouped and are on tour again!



Philosophy, Art, Culture, & Music STAGES

by Peter Bolland

CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

As CD sales continue to crash through the floor, as record labels and retailers continue to vanish from the face of the earth, as recording artists agonize about how to record and distribute their music, two things are clear: nothing is ever going to be the same, and no one knows what's coming next.

When rock and roll was born in the late '50s and early '60s, fans had one source for new music — their AM radios. When they liked what they heard, they ran down to the local record store and bought the single or, if they were feeling especially adventurous, the album. A single was a small vinyl record with one song on one side and another song on the other side. Sometimes the second song was crap. Sometimes it was great. The B side of Elvis' "Hound Dog" was a little ditty called "Don't Be Cruel." Not bad. The B side of "Hey Jude" was "Revolution." Can you say "defining moment"?

Albums gave you an opportunity to deepen your experience of your favorite artists. You loved them so much, you were dying to hear what else they were up to, even if it wasn't getting played on the radio. You brought the album home, pulled the vinyl LP out of its inner sleeve, placed it on the turntable, then sat back and stared at the album art while soaking in every note of every song, lost in the dizzying discovery of a new world. Three weeks later after dozens of spins you knew all the songs by heart. You knew the sequence. And because you listened to the entire album all the way through every time, the songs *between* your favorite songs opened up and became your favorites too. You gave the music a chance to work its magic on you — and it did.

Lori and I finally joined the modern world and got our first iPod for Christmas. We had the same problem everybody else had — a thousand CDs scattered around the house (and boxes of vinyl in the garage) and no simple way of enjoying any of it. All those great songs buried on mediocre albums, the inelegance and impracticality of tracking down the right disk, opening the jewel case, calling up, say, track ten, listening to it, then getting up and searching the house for the next CD. It makes you crazy to the point where you just don't bother. It's like sitting on a gold mine and not owning a shovel. The iPod changed everything.

In the days after Christmas I gathered together all the scattered CDs — some in the kitchen, some in the band room, some in our offices at work, some in the den, some in senseless stacks around the living room stereo and some, oddly enough, in the CD cabinet. As the gathering progressed, the stacks on the dining room table grew taller. When I was certain I had them all, the sorting began. Local stuff in one pile. Classical and instrumental in another. And the main pile of all the rock, folk, and country stuff. I arranged each pile alphabetically by artist. Then the real work began.

Ten at a time I carried them into the den where the computer sat waiting. One by one I placed the shiny silver disks onto the outstretched tongue of my PC like a priest handing out communion wafers. As each disk slid out of sight, iTunes sucked it dry of every drop of data. Then onto the next one. Three or four grueling days later (I lost track of time) our entire CD collection was copied into iTunes. I plugged the iPod into one of the USB ports and it synched itself up. For a computer Neanderthal like me, this was all fairly painless. After another day of trial and error, with occasional forays into the online manual, I learned how to make play lists. That's when the magic happened.

The bottom line: iTunes and its portable component the iPod liberated my music from the prison to which it had been sentenced. No longer languishing in a dusty archival stack of long forgotten, isolated, disconnected data-storage devices (physical CDs), the music once again became a living, breathing force. iTunes and the iPod rendered all of my music into one seamless, flawlessly interconnected and highly navigable stream.

The two best things about the iPod: play lists and shuffle. I've created a number of play lists. Then I listen to the play list on "shuffle." I'm rediscovering lost jewels that have been hidden in

plain sight for years. I've never loved music more than I do right now. I have created the greatest radio station on earth. No commercials, no asinine sound effects, no FCC regulations, no DJ chatter, just a miraculous sequence of the best songs ever made. Each song like a gift you didn't expect. And then another. Unforeseen and unforeseeable juxtapositions. Perfect pairings. Song cycles that take your breath away. Familiar, almost tired songs made new by the whimsy of serendipitous segues. Who knew that digital could be whimsical? I have come to know my music collection in a far deeper, more intimate way than I ever have before. I feel like I'm at a reunion. I'm embracing long lost friends and rekindling old flames.

iTunes and iPods have their detractors. Many of the criticisms are valid. The sound quality is overly compressed and, compared to high end audio systems, relatively lo fi. iTunes has forever altered the music distribution industry. And perhaps more significantly, it has forever changed the way people listen to music. You don't have to listen to entire albums anymore, so you aren't exposed to new and unfamiliar music as systematically as you used to be. It's all about individual songs now. Something has indeed been lost. But I think it's naive to pout about the change. We should say yes to it and embrace it. The album format is not dead, but it is evolving. I think there's still a need for "albums" of work, small collections of songs, an hour or so long. It's a comfortable format. It'll be around for a while. I still like hearing new music. I like being challenged and stretched beyond the "hits." I make sure to put lots of songs on my play lists that are not familiar favorites.

I don't know what's going to happen next. I only know that music is alive and well. The medium of conveyance changes with the tide, but the waves and waves of mysterious, beautiful, glorious music rise forever from the limitless and inexhaustible source. Our challenge is only to make sure the medium never hinders the flow, but enhances it. In that sense, I think the iPod is a miracle. Despite what has been lost.

Peter Bolland is a professor of philosophy and humanities at Southwestern College and singer-songwriter-guitarist of the Coyote Problem. You can complain to him about what you read here at peterbolland@cox.net. www.thecoyoteproblem.com is the ethereal home of the Coyote Problem.

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Gerard Nolan, cont. from page 10

money, you know what I mean... it was good."

Working pretty much constantly with Johnny Polanco, he somehow managed to get another year of school under his belt before circumstances moved him down to San Diego. The band was playing at Cafe Seville when Gerard met his future wife, Jennifer. "She was about to have knee surgery and was out on the town to dance one last time before she'd be off her feet for six months. I went up to the bar to get a drink at the break; we started talking, exchanged phone numbers, and that was it."

That brings us to December of 1999. With Y2K looming on the horizon, Gerard's passport and visa expired. Thinking he would go home to Ireland to sort it all out and come directly back, it came as an unhappy surprise when he wasn't allowed back into the States. "I went to the embassy to try and get back, but they turned me down. They said I'd overstayed my visa, because I'd been in America for five years. I'd only been in school for three years, so they were like 'that's a bad boy' and gave me an automatic ten year denial access to America, right? And I had a life here; I had a girlfriend, a car, an apartment I was renting, so I just went to the airport anyway and tried to just get on the plane. They didn't let me on. They stamped something like 'bad boy' on my passport, but I was gonna try."

They eventually decided to have Jennifer fly to Dublin, so that they could be married there and sort it out that way. Gerard was just waiting on the final paperwork to go through when 9/11 happened. "I thought oh no, I'm screwed now, you know?" But November 11 of 2001 saw Gerard, green card in hand, on his way back to San Diego, and he's been here ever since. "So, I came back, then I went

back to school at San Diego State and finished off my degree in jazz studies. Since then, I've just been working around town, and I teach."

And lucky students they are. From my own limited experience, Gerard Nolan is one of the very most talented, professional, and versatile musicians I have ever had the good fortune to work with. He is as much sought after for his creative, precise, and quick studio work as he is for his gorgeous performances and easy likability on stage. He has appeared with the O' Jays, Gilbert O' Sullivan, and Lewis Stewart, and performs regularly with his band Cashel, an Irish/jazz/funk/groove ensemble as well as the Gerard Nolan Jazz Quartet, which are set to record their second album in the coming months.

He also founded a production company called Cashel Entertainment; which offers professional quality Irish as well as other genres of music here in Southern California. Cashel recently saw its second annual performance of A Celtic Christmas Celebration at UCSD's Mandeville Auditorium, produced and directed by Gerard himself.

The arrival of baby number two last November now finds Gerard double booked, along with the role of daddy. The baby's due date happened to coincide with the release party for the film debut album; his lovely wife was kind enough to

Brian Baynes, cont. from page 11

After a year of a very comfortable living in Miami, recreating an Irish atmosphere for shuffleboard playing retirees, Brian was bored. "All I wanted to do was something creative. Here was this great gig... everything paid for, but at that age I wasn't interested in survival. I thought LA's where it's happening, so I got on a Greyhound bus with two expensive guitars and a pocketful of cash; it was the dumbest thing."

Having met a couple from LA. on the beach in Miami who offered to put Brian up in a house they owned on the West Coast (if ever he should make his way there), he looked them up upon arriving in California. They set him up with a couple of other guys from Miami in a house in Riverside, with the only stipulation being that they take care of the place and, oh yes, play in a band that they would front the money for.

It didn't take long for him to realize that all the money was coming from illegal activities and that the band was actually a tax shelter. "The next thing, we find ourselves at Gold Star Studios in Hollywood; Herb Albert's trumpets on the wall... the Supremes recorded their hits there. They made us sound like a big famous band so that they could lose a lot of money. When the album was nearly finished and I got wind of what was going on, I started demanding the money they had promised, and everything went downhill. I had no means to support myself, so I was out on the streets in Hollywood with a hundred dollars and a guitar. It was a weird existence for a while."

Employing some very creative and ingenious methods, Brian and his girlfriend survived the crisis until a friend of his in San Diego encouraged him to join the very warm and welcoming Irish community down here. "The Irish community here is full of really nice people. It wasn't like that in LA. They helped us; we had a moving truck, and it seemed like half the bar (at the Barney Stone in Clairemont) came out to move us... great community spirit. I ended up playing the Irish bars down here and got a job right away. I thought I'd do that for a while. I was probably one of the highest paid entertainers in San Diego at one time; the pub scene is like a booking agency. But ultimately, it's a trap. I ended up doing that a lot longer than I had ever intended."

I sympathized with Brian, knowing from

my limited time in the pub scene that it can be a wonderful way to hone your chops and grow as a musician and entertainer; the people are wonderful, the money is consistent, and it can be a lot of fun. But at a certain point you stop growing and start to lose inspiration. Eventually Brian burned out. "I remember being on stage and not caring whether or not my guitar was in tune. I went way past the point of diminishing returns. I should have done that for two years, maybe three years, but I did it... I don't know, 12 or 15 while trying really hard to be creative."

Later on, he advised a young pub band that he was producing. "They said they'd just do the Irish pub thing at night, and I said, 'Good luck, it cannot be done; make

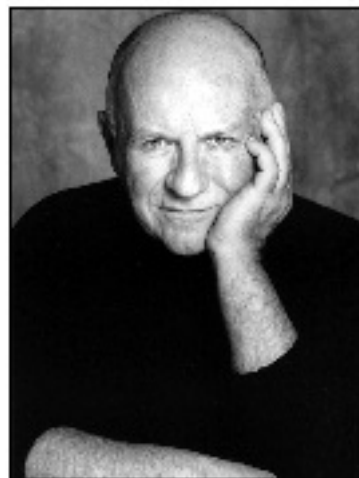
your money at night, and then expect to be creative during the day.' The perfect scenario is to write songs during the day and do my creative thing, and then go out and make money at night. But it doesn't work, because it's a lifestyle." I couldn't agree with him more.

On the up side, it dawned on Brian at a certain point that he had become an Irish guitar player. "What I loved about lead guitar was that it could be so passionate and wail all these long notes, but when you think about it, that's the Uilleann pipes; all these long, sad notes, but that's what attracted me about the sustain of the gui-

continued on page 16

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Transatlantic Tea Time with Beoga

by Steve Thorn

Beoga (translation: lively) is an innovative five-piece Irish group consisting of Liam Bradley (keyboards, vocals), Niamh Dunne (fiddle, vocals), Eamon Murray (percussion, vocals), and the dueling accordions of Damian McKee (vocals) and Sean Og Graham (vocals). If their YouTube tour diary videos are any indication, the title of the group's current CD, *Mischief*, is appropriate.

"I guess *Mischief* is a reference to the music more so than anything else," said Dunne during an Internet chat with the *San Diego Troubadour* from Ireland. "We really enjoy playing and arranging our music, especially our own compositions, and in a sense it's about translating that sense of fun through the tunes and songs. I think *Mischief* really reflects what Beoga are all about, although to be fair it could be said that we certainly get up to our fair share of devilment on the road, too!"

The fun comes from hearing Beoga's diverse sound. "All the members of the band are fans of good music, regardless of genre," said Dunne. "I suppose it's a case of playing something a bit different, not just to keep our audience interested, but to excite us, too, to keep it interesting. Our music is definitely rooted in traditional Irish, but most of our tunes are self-composed, so it gives



a sense of freedom to play around with ideas and push the boundaries."

The boundaries *are* pushed, indeed. How many traditional Irish groups do a cover version ("Dirty Work") by Steely Dan?

"Steely Dan are heroes! Their music is so clever and distinctive," said Murray. "We were hunting around for another song to put on the album when our co-producer and good friend Shaun 'Mudd' Wallace said, 'What about 'Dirty Work'?' Niamh, our singer, took a listen and loved the song from the word go, which we were delighted about. It was a bit bold covering such a song but so few bands in Irish music take a leap of faith, so we thought, why not? Thankfully the reviews have been all positive...alleluia!"

Another splendid musical leap on *Mischief* is "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone," a classic from the Great American Songbook that was recorded by Sinatra, Lady Ella, Lady Day, and many others.

"I first came across the song while listening to the wonderful Willie Nelson," said Murray. "He does a great version and I thought it would be perfect for both Niamh's voice and for the

band to put a spin on. It's one of those songs that everybody has heard sung at some stage by someone. For example, I heard a new version of it last week while in town. I've no idea who the artist was and later that day I watched Jamie Cullum do another cover on TV! Two totally different versions of the same song. It's a great tune, really catchy and fun, the way songs in the '20s and '30s were. We enjoyed putting the Beoga stamp on it and we love playing it live, too."

As the band once again prepares to leave the old sod and tour "the colonies," Murray reflected on the international popularity of Beoga.

"It has been amazing. We have been touring a lot throughout Europe in the



Members of the Irish music group Beoga

last few years and more recently in the U.S. and the reaction is unbelievable. People seem to enjoy what we are doing with the music and get into it from the word 'go.' It's great to see that young people are once again enjoying folk music and it's even better that they enjoy our brand of music. Most of our gigs are abroad and we love it that way. All our crowds are really appreciative and long may it continue. Once they start to throw rotten or tinned toma-

toes, we'll call it a day!"

Don't count on that occurring in the foreseeable future.

Beoga performs Sunday night, March 2, at 7:30 in the parish hall of Holy Trinity Church, 2083 Sunset Cliffs Blvd., Ocean Beach. Tickets are \$20 in advance or \$22 at the door. Phone 858-689-2266 for ticket reservations or visit www.holytrinity-ob.com

Tour of Ireland Will Highlight Concert Season



by Steve Thorn

Since 1997, Father Larry Bausch and his dedicated staff of volunteers at the Holy Trinity Church have brought some of Ireland's finest musicians to perform in the parish hall of the Ocean Beach church. For many in the audience, the sounds of a fiddle or the Uilleann pipes have been the closest they've come to setting foot on the Emerald Isle.

But this concert season, Bausch has provided a solution. During two weeks in the summer, the Anglican priest will serve as tour guide on a journey that includes famous historical sites of Ireland by day and the opportunity to hear traditional Irish music by night. Through an arrangement with Connoisseurs Tours of Savannah, Georgia, Bausch will lead a tour package called "An Anglican Heritage Tour Exploring the Character of Ireland."

"The island of Ireland, the western edge of Europe, expresses stunning natural beauty," said Bausch. "It has also been inhabited for more than 5,000 years, becoming home to many peoples whose various cultures have contributed to its rich historical deposit. During the tour, we will visit several of the many remarkable places, both coastal and inland. Most of our destinations will be to important historical sites, ranging from Newgrange, a neolithic tomb built in 3,200 B.C., to modern, thriving Dublin. Our particular focus will be on Ireland's rich

Christian heritage and will include unique monastic sites well over 1,000 years old and splendid medieval churches."

Other famous sites will include the Dingle Peninsula, familiar to film buffs around the world from the movie *Ryan's Daughter*, and the beauty of the Skellig Islands.

Bausch said that in order "to provide a comprehensive view of Irish history, we will also visit sites that illuminate the past 500 years and address such issues as the relationship between England and Ireland, rural life, and emigration. These visits will be augmented by opportunities to enjoy traditional Irish music, which has sustained and uplifted the people throughout their history. Music sessions will be available at pubs in Dublin, Galway and Killarney during the tour."

To appreciate traditional Irish music, Bausch recommends viewing the DVD *Inné Amárach* ("Yesterday Tomorrow"), a superb documentary of the five-man group, Teada, and the legendary musicians who come from the band's home base, County Sligo, in Northeastern Ireland. The disc also explores the Irish emigration to North America following the devastating potato famine of the nineteenth century and the international following that traditional Irish music enjoys today, particularly in China and Japan! Visit the Compass Records website at <http://compassrecords.com/teada> for further information on Teada and the DVD.

Closer to home, Bausch and Holy Trinity concert coordinator Susan Batt are launching the new concert season. Last year witnessed memorable performances by Scottish songwriter Jim Malcolm, Irish singer Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh, and Irish Uilleann piper Paddy Keenan. Holy Trinity departed from their strictly Celtic format by hosting contemporary California singer/songwriter Kat Parsons for a noteworthy concert one evening last summer.

This year's season starts with a Sunday evening show on March 2, featuring Beoga (see accompanying article), an Irish group renowned for their live concerts and their penchant for musical unpredictability.

"The Holy Trinity Concert Series is still confirming the lineup for the remainder of 2008, but we promise a hearty mix of audience favorites, plus some up-and-coming newer artists, all in the Celtic tradition," said Batt. "It will be well worth the wait to have a solid lineup later this year. Many of the best Celtic artists play festivals in Europe over the summer."

Connoisseurs Tours (phone: 1-800-856-1045) is currently accepting reservations for the Ireland tour, scheduled for August 15-27. Celtic music lovers are invited to join the Holy Trinity mailing list by visiting www.holytrinity-ob.com.



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Brian Baynes, cont. from page 14

tar. I thought well, if I'm going to have to make a living making this music, I'll make it interesting and try to make the arrangements interesting. That's when I got into open tunings before it was cool. I thought I can be a lead guitar player and get paid playing Irish music. I can have it both ways; I can be a good musician and still play Irish music."

That last statement made me laugh, but Brian pointed out to me that there really hadn't been a history of guitar played as a lead instrument in Irish music. Up until that time, it had been pretty much used only for rhythm. "People thought it was dumb, but I thought well, why can't it be a lead instrument? If I can play blues on it, why not Irish music? Now it's kind of popular and people do it, but it wasn't that way a dozen years ago."

These days find Brian mostly in his studio, producing and recording albums for a wide variety of local and visiting artists, both Irish and from a wide variety of other genres. He can still be seen performing locally, most notably with the San Diego Symphony with which he has performed selections from his album *Celtic Guitar* (featuring fiddler Martin Hayes), including his own original compositions, along with drummer David Page (featured in this article). He had a role in the blockbuster movie *Titanic* and will be performing this summer with Canadian fiddler Eileen Ivers and Uilleann piper Eric Rigler at the Summer Pops Series on July 31.

I expect that we will be seeing more of this talented and versatile musician in the coming year, as he tells me he's getting the itch to perform again. It's a very good thing for those of us who appreciate listening to great music while we lift our pints in honor of the gift of song they so graciously bestow upon us. Slainte, Brian!



David Page, cont. from page 11

matter what we later went on to do, the times we spent as a trio are the happiest memories for all three of us." The gigs like Sinatra were lucrative, but according to Dave, the price was high in stress. "You'd think... okay, this is going to be over in an hour, then I get my check; I don't have to work for two months now if I don't want to, but you paid for it as well, a lot of pressure."

Knowing that he'd done a brief stint in the New York production of *Riverdance* in 2002 (they were using Page custom drums), I wondered if Dave had had much opportunity earlier in his career to play Irish music beyond his stint on accordion with his dad. "At that time, it was hokey Irish music, not like *Riverdance*, but like 'diddily uppity diggity diggity' on snare drum; I hate the bodhran. Well, I don't hate it, but there are other instruments like djembe, which a lot of people don't realize is older than the bodhran. People say, 'Oh, but the bodhran is a traditional Irish instrument,' and it is, but it's not the original, you know. The djembe got over to Ireland before the bodhran; the bodhran's not that old. That's the problem with a lot of people: they'll just go back so far, and that's their idea of traditional." Dave expressed a high regard for what *Riverdance* has done to bring Irish music into the "now," especially world beat rhythms fused with traditional Celtic melodies. "It was so refreshing to me, because it's the one thing I would have wanted to happen to Irish music. It's a great show."

In 1997, Dave and his wife, Sandy, settled in San Diego to retire; about five years ago he made the decision to get off the road to play local gigs and run his drum business. It was in the process of selecting musicians for *The Dalli Show*, a tribute to Dave Sr., he produced at the Speckles Theater, that he really began connecting with the local Irish community. "Somebody said, 'Go into the Blarney Stone,' so I went in there and met Brian Baynes and heard his band. I thought 'this is the sort of thing I'm looking for.' So that was it, we got together." Then at a

gig at Dublin Square Dave met Gerard Nolan. "Another friend said, 'Do you know Gerard? He's from Dublin... great player.' Once again, that was it; we started playing together."

Page Drums came into being after making a set of drums for the famous deaf Scottish drummer, Evelyn Glenny in 1980. His revolutionary snare drum design is now being played by Larry Mullins Jr. of U2, and demand for his parade drum is growing at a phenomenal rate in Ireland and Scotland where there are literally hundreds of pipe bands. In fact, Dave and his wife are on their way back across the pond tomorrow morning to confirm sponsorship at the World Champion Pipe Band Competition in August in Glasgow.

The U2 story is an article unto itself, reading almost like a scene from one of the 007 movies Dave contributed to the soundtrack of, and perhaps will find its way into a future edition of this newspaper. I was held completely captive in total fascination as he described his initial meeting at the U2 Headquarters, and I can hardly wait to de-brief him upon his return on the first of March.

My time with Dave, both in pursuit of this interview, as well as the time I've spent on stage with him, has been a complete joy and delight; he's a talented musician with an illustrious and very colorful career history and, just as important, a lovely man and an asset to every community he's a part of, both musically and otherwise.

He's known by many locals as "Uncle Dave" inasmuch as his sister Moy (a talented musician in her own right, having once toured with the Beatles as part of a band called the Beat Chicks) is mother to one of our favorite local singer/songwriters: Gregory Page. That makes three generations of Pages that have contributed so richly to the music and culture of our community.

In Closing

Well, I don't know about you, gentle reader, but I have greatly enjoyed spending time with these three fascinating Irish musicians, and when St. Patrick's Day



Gerard Nolan and David Page with their bandmates in the band Cashel

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Terence Blanchard A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)

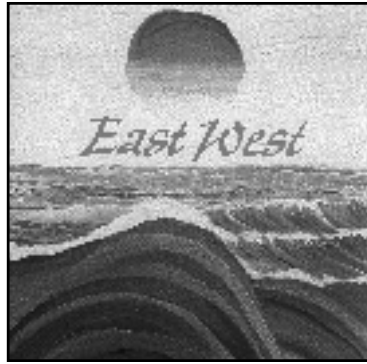
by Mike Alvarez

The first time I gave this CD a spin was while in the car. I hadn't yet looked at the song titles or liner notes, so I had no preconceived notions of what to expect. It starts with "Ghosts of Congo Square," a percussion-driven chant underscored by a manic acoustic bassline and wild trumpet soloing. The following track, "Levees," is a somber orchestral jazz piece that is at once mournful and exquisitely beautiful. At this point, what attention I didn't need for driving was immediately riveted to the sound coming out of my speakers. I couldn't wait to get home to give this a proper audition. While I have never been to New Orleans, I knew, somehow, that the storm-ravaged southern city was the well-spring from which this music flowed. The imagery it evokes is so vivid that this conclusion is unmistakable.

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard's jazz quintet makes up the core ensemble of players. Each is a highly accomplished musician, capable of providing the deftest subtleties as well as the most spectacular fireworks. There is a singleness of purpose here that is served well by their incredible technique and sense of taste. Blanchard in particular proves to be a master of his craft, wringing every drop of emotion out of each horn note. Augmenting their performance is the Northwest Sinfonia, a 40-piece string orchestra that lends a cinematic vastness and emotional gravity to the music. The one defining characteristic that runs throughout is a sense of the bittersweet. While there is a lament over what was lost, there is also a celebration of those things that can never be taken away. Sadness goes hand in hand with resilience and hope. Dissonance gives way to beauty. The chords and melodies are startling, unexpected, and inspired. The music is precise and tight when it needs to be, but it also swings with abandon when the occasion calls for it.

This is a deep listening experience, not to be undertaken lightly. There are layers upon layers of meaning and emotion to be gleaned from this work. While Blanchard is the primary composer and leader of the quintet, other members contributed pieces for the group. It is a startlingly cohesive effort, showing that these musicians are very much in tune with each other. As such, it's difficult to pick certain pieces above others. If pressed, I would select the achingly beautiful "Ashe," the triumphant "Over There," and the mournfully dignified "Funeral Dirge" as the ones with early staying power. However, I strongly urge that that one listen to this album from start to finish. Each selection is an important

continued adjacent



East West

by Chuck Schiele

I'm always a big fan when somebody tries something new instead of doing all the cool things somebody else already did. I'm a big fan of the artistic risk involved with sticking your neck out. There's a commitment there that's pure, raw, and magnetic.

Having said that, I dig it, too, when any artist refers to a certain tradition with their own music, and gets it "right."

Interestingly, music always changes when one style, genre, or "thing" influences another. And the yin and yang of it all is what makes sense in the new result. Motown met Memphis, and boom! God gave us rock and roll. East West strikes me as being about this notion.

Take your standard jazz band comprised of the traditional instrumentation of drums, bass, guitars, winds, some piano.... Then take a sound that pays respectful homage to forms like the blues, and Mendes-like basses, with flutes offering a smooth edge to it.

What's so different about that? Nothing.

Now, imagine the koto player busting out into a jazz solo, or surdos, castanets, and flamenco shoes spicing things up a bit. Amazingly, over the course of 10 great tracks, the five band members — along with five sit-ins — manage to weave the musical equivalent to sunshine played on about 17 different instruments. And this proves to be a lot of fun.

No slouches in this band either; they all excel in their respective duties. I like this CD very much, pretty much from head to toe, although I must admit that I did pop a groaner with the gorgeously orchestrated translation of George Gershwin's "Summertime." It's a great job. Again, it sports a beautifully played koto, which in itself is interesting. But when I think of that song, what it really means and where it came from — a certain sense of raw sorrow should be present to keep the tradition right. This particular take is too perfect, actually, coming off more like a polished mimosa. I've heard a lot of those.

However, the risk that the band took in doing it this "way" had me listening to it three times in a row. (And, further, my opinion has nothing to do with the artistic successes of their unique take.)

It's definitely a worthy addition to your jazz collection.

www.eastwestjazz.com

continued from previous column

part of a greater whole.

Later research revealed that *A Tale of God's Will* is the soundtrack for Spike Lee's 2006 HBO documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, but it stands up very well on its own as a fully realized musical composition. It even won a 2008 Grammy award for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album. Rare is the composition that will leave me in a silently contemplative mood long after its conclusion. That's exactly what this one did. It's that good.



Jorge Espinoza Un Minuto

by Mike Alvarez (with Felimon Alvarez)

It would be so easy to dismiss this CD as just another collection of Spanish guitar ballads with overwrought, sentimental lyrics. That was my first impression, but something made me want to give it a chance. That something was its similarity to a lot of music I heard my dad play on his own guitar while I was growing up. Being Filipino, we share a huge Spanish influence with most Latin cultures, so the sound is very familiar and comfortable. My dad is no musical lightweight; in fact, he has a very discriminating ear for a lot of great music so I ran this by him.

He loved it! *Un Minuto's* mostly minor key chords and melodies were right up his alley, as were the skillfully played guitars. The arrangements are sparse, mostly rhythm and lead guitars with some subtle keyboard backing and occasional light percussion. The intent is to showcase Espinoza's gentle vocals as well as the immaculate guitar playing by Ernesto Javier, and that's precisely the effect that is achieved. Lyrically, it is very much in tune with the romantic traditions of Latin-derived cultures. It's only when he switches to English, as in the songs "Por Que Sera?" and "No Sabia Amar," that the words sound a bit on the syrupy side. When sung in their native tongue, they work like gangbusters! As a friend of mine once said, "There are some things you just can't say in English."

In all honesty, I'd have to characterize Espinoza's voice as merely adequate to the task. He has a nice, warm presence and stays in a comfortable range that works well for him. There were times when I felt that sentiments such as these called for a more impassioned and expressive delivery. Also, when the melodies get complex, he sometimes wanders a shade off pitch. Not enough to detract too much from the listening experience, but it sometimes is noticeable and must be mentioned.

Because there are just a few instruments and voices employed in this recording, there is a lot of space in the arrangements. Every part is clearly audible and placed well in the audio field. Yet there is a missing quality to the sound that makes me suspect it was not recorded, mixed, or mastered in a professional studio. Regardless, they present the music intelligently. The person who mixed this has a great ear because there is a good balance and separation between the various instruments and voices.

I don't know that *Un Minuto* would have much crossover appeal, but those with an appreciation for this kind of music would undoubtedly enjoy it very much. Because my dad gave it a thumbs up, I can say this with great confidence.



Zen Boy & Karma Girl Who They Are and How They Came to Be!

by Craig Yerkes

According to their CD sleeve and their website, Zen Boy and Karma Girl are intergalactic superheroes who've been stranded here on earth and have chosen to be folk singers in order to keep a low profile. Clearly, these space travelers are smarter than the Coneheads, whose only cover was that they were from France. On their new CD, *Who They Are and How They Came to Be*, the duo shows they are quite adaptive alien life forms, managing to imitate a cool, quirky folk duo. There's one thing, though...aliens don't seem to have the same marketing consistency that humans demonstrate; the CD cover art shows four wildly different artistic renderings of the superheroes. These E.T.s are fairly cynical about what they see here on earth. Disillusionment and resignation reign supreme in the lyrics, but you might miss that darkness if you focus on the whimsical music as opposed to the words. "Love, Love, Love" has a title and a sugary melody that might suggest it's yet another folk song extolling the virtues of caring for your fellow man, but this depressing take on the absence of love in everyday life might even make Nietzsche say, "dang!" "There Won't Be" also uses upbeat folk hooks (really, really good ones, I might add) to deliver a fairly depressing message. Oh, and for those of you who are tempted to wonder if this music is meant for kids, the "F-Bomb" on the first tune should put that idea right out of your head. Some might find the darker lyrics a bit much, but I think it's cool and authentic. On a purely musical level, this stuff is actually quite good, if you're into this retro-hippie "new folk" (think "New Slang" by the Shins for a reference point). Much of it reminded me of soundtrack music I am starting to hear in many of the recent teen-centric movies like *Juno*. The vocals are exactly as you would expect them to be (think minimalistic) and there are great instrumental touches that reminded me of Brian Wilson's studio tinkering. "Yeah Yeah" and "There Won't Be" will easily become cemented in your brain due to their memorably catchy, sing-along choruses. "Life of the Party" walks a fine line between playful moping and serious heartbreak as it tells the tale of the obligatory long-suffering male forced to cope with a female whose status as a social butterfly leaves him lonely, high, and dry.

If Zen Boy and Karma Girl really want to get off this planet, they should make sure the soundtrack music moguls in Hollywood hear their stuff. Their music, for this niche genre, is as good as you will find and might make them enough royalty money to get their spacecraft fixed.



Dayna Carroll Yesterday, Today Forever...

by Paul Hormick

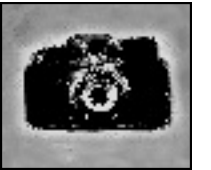
Culled from Tin Pan Alley, Broadway musicals, and standard jazz performance, Dayna Carroll has put together ten classics from the Great American Songbook in her new CD *Yesterday, Today Forever...* Carroll has a soft voice and delivery, sort of like Blossom Dearie in her less rambunctious phases or Billie Holiday in the latter part of her career. Like Dearie and Holiday, Carroll's forte is not in belting out the big notes and shaking the rafters but in her great sense of time and phrasing. Propelled less by dynamics and melody, Carroll works at intimately evoking the meaning and emotion of the lyrics. It gives the listener a chance to hear these chestnuts in a new way and hear the joy, wistfulness, heartbreak, and humor that these songs have always contained. All of Carroll's vocals are backed by spare arrangements, most of the time only the piano of Sue Palmer or Lin Cook. Bass, guitar, and drums, provided by Sharon Shufelt and Pete Harrison, are added to some of the tunes.

For the older tunes, Carroll includes the full introductions. For those of you younger folks who don't know what these are, it's when singers came onto a Vaudeville or minstrel show stage, they sang the intros, often in free time and having reflective lyrics, to set the musical mood for a tune. It's nice to hear them again.

Opening the disk is Bill Barnes' "Something Cool," a tune that isn't often heard these days. Most singers avoid this one, having difficulty in interpreting the song's theme, which is that seduction can work cool, and maybe a bit tawdry, as well as hot. This is a welcome reworking. Musical genius Scott Paulson backs up the song with a pristine and beautiful oboe. And speaking of seduction, "Lost It at the Astor," filled with boisterous double entendre, is the naughty and funny song of the disk.

"Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" one of the great songs that came out of the Depression Era — about the Depression — and one of the greatest songs ever written, is a tune that Carroll heard when she was growing up in the hills of West Virginia. Carroll's heartbreaking interpretation conveys the feeling of a pride that has been irrevocably betrayed and broken by the unremitting hard times.

Also included on this disk is "As Time Goes By," which Carroll had covered on Sue Palmer's CD *Sophisticated Ladies*. When I reviewed that disk, I said that Carroll performed the best version of this tune ever. After a few months of reconsidering, I still stand by what I said. This is the best. This song perfectly captures the notion that love commands us all, through all of its joy, hate, and jealousy. And no other version captures this as well.



O BERKLEY, WHERE HART THOU?



Photo: Liz Abbott
Jeff Berkley & Calman Hart



Photo: Liz Abbott
The 7th Day Buskers



Photo: Liz Abbott
Jeff Berkley, Cathryn Beeks, Jim Soldi



Photo: Liz Abbott
Robin Adler & the 7th Day Buskers



Photo: Liz Abbott
Eve Selis & son, Barbara Nesbitt, Robin Adler



Photo: Liz Abbott
Calman Hart w/ daughter Miranda



Photo: Liz Abbott
Gregory Page & Phil Harmonic



Photo: Liz Abbott
Robin Henkel & Lisa Sanders



Photo: Liz Abbott
The Smart Brothers play in the lobby

ELSEWHERE AROUND TOWN



Photo: John Hancock
Citizen Band @ Amnesty Int'l Fundraiser



Photo: Steve Covault
John Batdorf @ Canyonfolk



Photo: Liz Abbott
Chris Dale w/ Podunk Nowhere @ Handlery Hotel



Photo: John Hancock
Josh Damigo



Photo: Dennis Andersen
Sarah Lee Guthrie & Johnny Irion @ Belly Up



Photo: Steve Covault
Jack Tempchin @ Calypso Cafe



Photo: John Hancock
Rob Deez



Photo: Steve Covault
Jimmy Webb @ Acoustic Music S.D.



Photo: Steve Covault
Kelly McGrath @ Lestat's

THE BRO SHOW IN LITTLE ITALY



Photo: Steve Covault
The Blonde Brothers



Photo: Liz Abbott
Simeon & Nat Flick (Matthew Stewart on drums)



Photo: Steve Covault
Regina Dawn @ Lestat's



Photo: Dennis Andersen
Sara Petite & Chris Clarke @ Templar's Hall



Photo: Steve Covault
The Silvia Brothers



Photo: Steve Covault
Isaac & Ivan Cheong team up w/ the Smart Brothers



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