

Eilish Byrne-Whelehan with some of the young musicians from her Feith an Cheoil Music school



Funded Through the Irish Government Emigrant Support Programme

Feith an Cheoil Music School Fund Raising Evening

Fieth an Cheoil fund raising evening On the 5th of December I had the great pleasure of attending a fundraising evening for Eilish Byrne-Whelehan's Feith an Cheoil, Enfield based music school. The music school is going from strength to strength and the Parish centre was packed with enthusiastic parents, friends and supporters. We heard some



lovely music and singing from individuals and large groups of class members young and old. The crowd



This years St.Patrick's day advisory forum is being jointly chaired by the Irish cultural centre in Hammersmith general manager, Catherina Casey and cultural officer for the London Irish centre Camden, Gary Dunne. More details as I have them

North London Fleadh All winners

On the 13th December, North London branch held its all winners concert at the London Irish Centre Camden. This event celebrates the successes of talented young musicians, at last months junior fleadh in Harringey.

were addressed by Local MP Joan Ryan, the Mayor of Enfield and Councillor Sally Mulready, and then after a magnificent buffet, Eilish continued the music and dancing into the night. Eilish has galvanised the local Irish community and receives great support from them. She also teaches full class groups in local schools, as part of the governments "Wider opportunities for music" initiative.

Comhaltas administrator John Myers have been attending regular meetings at London's City hall where arrangements are being made for this years St.Patrick's day celebrations in London. They will be held on Sunday 14th March and take the form of a parade and High profile artistes performing on a main stage in Trafalgar square. For parade entry



St.Patrick's day celebrations for London Myself, and

forms and more information see www.london.gov.uk/stpatrickscsday.



North London Music school Christmas concert.

Margaret Keaveney of the North London branch wrote to tell me;

“Pupils from the London Irish Music School had an end of term concert and party at the parish centre in Kingsbury in December. All the children had a chance to perform to their families and friends, from those who had only started in September on the tin whistle, children who have just progressed onto their second instrument and the more experienced musicians who have been playing for a number of years.

During the concert, Teacher, Colette Keaveney, took the opportunity to say goodbye and good luck to the O’Brien family (Joseph and Lucy) who were emigrating to Australia in January to start a new life in Perth. They promised to keep on playing and let us know when they joined a branch of Comhaltas in Australia”.

“One of the highlights of the concert was a chance to hear all the children who have been learning the harp with the music school. 15 children aged between 8 and 15 are receiving free weekly tuition, thanks to a successful grant application. Even though their tutor Steph West, was unable to reach the venue due to a traffic accident, the children played in small groups accompanied by Colette who is also taken up the harp!



Convention 2010

London Plans are now well underway for the Annual convention of Comhaltas in Britain 2010. The event will be held at The Holiday Inn, Borehamwood, and will take the form of a Ceili Buffet on Saturday 13th February with the AGM Starting at 10am on Sunday the 14th. We also include a concert as part of the Ceili Buffet, showcasing our talented regional musicians. Accommodation can be booked now on 08714234896. If you mention that you are attending the Comhaltas convention, you will receive a reduced rate of £69 for double room or £59 for a single

me of some events held by the Cambridge branch during December. “Cambridge Halloween monsters transformed for angelic performance at Christmas Busking Festival.

“The Comhaltas branch was invited back to open the Christmas Busking Festival in the Grand Arcade after their highly successful foray on to the streets of the city back in May.



The versatile and talented young members of Cambridge Comhaltas were transformed from the scary fancy dressed monsters of their super

Together with some of their teachers, Ethna, Paul, Lucy and Grace, plus youth officer Erin Ella they made a refreshing break from the hustle and bustle of the Christmas shopping frenzy, and even some gift laden family groups took time out to watch and listen to their polished performance. Many first and second generation Irish residents of their adopted city made a special trip into the town centre to hear the traditional songs and tunes from their homeland played in the festive atmosphere of the main shopping thoroughfare . The lively sets of jigs, reels, and polkas drew a large appreciative crowd, some of whom stayed for the complete duration of the 45 minute act. Younger



Cambridge Comhaltas branch events

Cambridge branch committee member and Midland regional PRO Marian Brown wrote to tell

Halloween party Session to mesmerising street entertainers for the Grand Christmas Lights switch on in Cambridge City centre recently”.



members of the audience were encouraged to join in on a selection of percussion instruments much to the surprise and amusement of their parents, who hadn't realized just how infectious our Irish music could be!

The song, "I'll Tell me Ma" performed by Bouzouki playing Roger Brown generated a rousing chorus and the final dancing sets by Ciera, Rachel and Helen were accompanied by lots of clapping, whooping and enthusiastic audience participation .

There were calls for an encore at the end of our allotted time, but we had to leave our fans wanting more, as we were replaced by the next busking act. People drifted off to resume their search for the ultimate Christmas gift and our happy band of Irish minstrels dispersed to find some well earned refreshment. All in all "A Grand Day Out".

We are already looking forward to the next Cambridge busking festival in June.

More pictures from the branch can be found on our website www.cambridgecomhaltas.com

Television

appearances It was nice to see some musicians with strong Comhaltas links getting TV exposure during December. East London member and current senior All Ireland champion on the Button Accordion, Darren Breslin was featured in a music program broadcast by the BBC in Northern Ireland, and as part of BBC Alba's coverage of the Scottish music awards, I spotted Adam Brown from Cambridge performing with Ruairidh McMillan, Mark Maquire from Scotland with Deaf Shepherd and Kevin O'Niel with The Treacherous Orchestra. Also, Niopha Keegan, who has strong links with the St.Albans branch, appeared on BBC on Christmas eve with the Unthanks.

Piping Today article
 I had the privilege of being featured in an article that was published in the December issue of Piping today. The magazine is published by the world piping centre in Glasgow and focuses primarily on Highland Piping. The article came about after a meeting with Bedford based Whistle player and Journalist Alex Monaghan. The article gave me an opportunity to explain my work as a development officer and also to reach a readership outside of Comhaltas and traditional Irish music circles. It is a lengthy three page article and I thank Alex for making it happen. For anyone interested in getting a copy, its issue number 43 and available by contacting the National piping centre in Glasgow 0141 353 0220

By Alex Monaghan

Finding elbow room for Irish pipers in England

John Devine — piper, teacher and Irish music development officer

JOHNS DEVINE: piper, teacher, and Irish music development officer for the London area, but a keen guy and a family figure at music events all over England. We asked a range of other work, and showed I asked him what he normally does and why, and how his work affects the piping community. This is what he told me.

"I've been struggling with the question 'How do I live the life of a musician, and keep that on the table?' for most of my adult life. In 1999 I took the bull by the horns, finally jettisoned my day job, took an acting performance work, motivated as a music teacher and did out a full career for myself in music. With teaching, performing, and development work for Comhaltas/Cairdeas Éireann, I've now been a full-time musician for 10 years, and my wife and kids haven't minded." He must achieve for anyone who doesn't get the big time, and is traditional music that means nearly everything.

So why did John choose the life of a traditional musician? "I've been active as a musician in a wide variety of genres all my life. I played traditional Irish music as a kid and have played all kinds of music in all sorts of bands since then. My interest in Irish music was rekindled in 1997 after a particularly memorable road trip around the Emerald Isle. I started playing the Uilleann pipes in 2001, and taught my Dave Williams fell on in 2006. I was lucky in as much as I already had a reputation of some, and I'm still in the process of developing the techniques required to play these pipes. I like to think of myself as a professional musician, performing, writing, recording, teaching, but as most musicians will tell you, it's not always easy to make much money, and you have to be flexible. Musicians make music. Banks and accountants make money." Or as he put it best: "The when I was offered this as a development officer for Comhaltas/Cairdeas Éireann in November 2007, I jumped at it."



"I am one of a team of four full time workers Comhaltas employs in the UK. It's an ideal job for someone like me: I work in a creative music based environment, I get lots of opportunities to perform, and I'm passionate about the continuation of the tradition"

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Comhaltas is the Irish national organisation to promote traditional music. Although based in Dublin, it has branches throughout the UK, US and elsewhere, and a large network of teachers, classes, festivals and competitions which all work to the regional, national and global level. It's an ideal job for someone like me, I work in a creative music based environment, and I'm passionate about the continuation of the tradition. I am one of a team of four full time workers Comhaltas employs in the UK. We have one in Scotland, one in the North of England, one in the Midlands, and I work with eight branches in London and the South, from Slough to Cambridge.

"It's my job to promote and raise awareness of the organisation, and work with these branches to help them broaden the range of their activities, develop projects and identify funding. Last year I helped identify in excess of £30,000 in projects in my region that included the annual national convention, a nationwide music festival, training for a large teacher and the establishment of the St Albans Comhaltas pipe band. Many of the organisational projects funded in the UK come through the Irish government's Enterprise Support Programme."

So for the programme based here, one hand has Ireland's changing economic circumstances, but there are restrictions of their own. There are also organisational constraints. For example, it's not possible to hold visits to Ireland by non-Irish nationals, so we pay travel for teachers and performers when they are based in Ireland.

In Albans pipe band is a major new initiative from John. Based on the success of pipe bands in Dublin, Slough, and even English cities such as London and Manchester, the new club in St Albans exists to promote Irish piping and to give local pipers a focal point. "The pipe band is particularly close to my heart, being a pipe maker," and John. In 2006 I managed to raise the money to form a practice set and a half set made by Bedford based Uilleann pipe maker Andy Balton. With these sets, and my old practice set, I established the club and found plenty of people eager to become pipers and attend classes. We also received some funding from the Irish government to cover the cost of maintaining the pipes, hiring a room and getting a teacher to sit on site after sessions.

There are 12 regular attendees and the club has attracted people with an interest in piping from as far afield as Milton Keynes and London.



From Slough, Rita Farrell from London, and Cambridge progresses Gino Lottini.

"I've met several other pipers in traditional Irish sessions my area. I regularly attend a session in the Henchell Arms in Slough, and there is often more than one pipe. There are several pipe bands in the UK that offer sessions, one pipe to some extent and hold regular annual events, and I'm in the process of looking for a new pipe, or a new, you probably don't have to look as the access might come from there. Also, advances in technology have greatly improved the tuning of instruments, stronger metals and plastics, have all meant that there are more, better quality instruments available. Organisations like the National Uilleann Pipe Society in Dublin have also been instrumental in the promotion and development of Uilleann piping. The MPU website is a fantastic source of information and an invaluable resource for anyone interested in learning the pipes. Another great source of information is the American site www.uilleannpipers.com."

"I've not just in Ireland and the UK, Uilleann piping has a global appeal and I am in regular contact with pipers in Germany, Italy and Canada. There are also more pipe piping initiatives on offer in the northern area. One of the most well known is the William Kennedy International Piping Festival, run by the Armagh Pipers Club each November, which is

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