



THE LIVING TRADITION

Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann

Newsletter of the O'Neill Malcom Branch

April 2005

CCE Executive Board 2004

Jesse Winch
Cathaoirleach
(Chairman)
(301)622-6582

Kevin Donleavy
Leas Cathaoirleach
(Vice-Chair)
(434)984-1916

Larry Frank
Cisteoir
(Treasurer)
(703)451-1203

Suzanne Yerks
Runai
(Secretary)
(703)444-4057

Carl Henry Geschwind
Iniuchoir
(Auditor)
(703)772-5272

Theresa Farewell
Timire Damsha
(Dance Organizer)
(703)369-7132

Sean Culkin
Tosairs
(Delegate)
(301)681-3372

Patrick Murray
Ofigeach Ballraiochta
Membership Officer
(703)383-3436

Mick Mc Devitt
Ofigeach Mi
(Public Relations Off.)
(703)490-4787

Bob Hickey
Iarchathaoir Leach
(Immediate Past Chair)
(703)978-8265

Irish Big Band Ceili - An Event Like No Other

Irish Big Band Ceili/Step Dancing

Mark you calendars: Friday, April 22nd 8 to 11:30 pm

The event kicks off with a step-dancing performance by the Culkin School of Traditional Irish Dance. The performance is followed by instruction in beginning step dancing, with audience participation, by the maestro himself, Sean Culkin.

The step dancing is followed by Ceili and Set Dancing demonstrations by Branch members followed by instruction, with audience participation, led by instructor Marilyn Moore. A general Ceili will use whatever time is left. The Bog Wanderers Ceili Band will provide the music. Place: Old Town Hall, corner of Main St. and University Drive, Fairfax City.

This event is sponsored by the City of Fairfax – Spotlight on the Arts Program

This event is free and open to the public. Information: 703-978-8265

CCE Irish Feis 2005 – WE NEED YOUR HELP

The 2005 Feis will be held at Mount St Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland

Date: Sunday, May 29, 2005

Time: 8:00 am to 5 pm

Feis Chairman and CCE Treasurer - Larry Frank, needs volunteers for the event. He needs help on Sat. May 28th to put stages and dance floors. He needs help on Sunday to run the event, give out awards, registration, collect entry fees, etc. This event is a joint effort of several local dance schools and CCE. The degree of participation by CCE members will determine the percentage of the profits that retained by CCE. There are over 750 dancers entered in the competition. If you have never been to a Feis, it is something to see and it will help finance our Branch. Email Larry at lfrank2@earthlink.net or call him at 703-281-0910.

PLEASE JOIN CCE E-MAIL LIST

OK, so what is THAT all about?

Our new chairman wants to be able to communicate with the membership on a regular basis, so he asked me to set up a mail list.

The list is set up so that you can't be "spammed" – all posting to the list must be approved by a moderator and "replies" go only to the originator and not the entire group.

The good news is that many of you accepted the invitation.

Unfortunately, not all of you have so we are "adding you" to the list. Yahoo only allows us to do that 10 email addresses a day, so it will take some time. If you have not accepted the invitation please do so.

For questions, contact Larry Frank (lfrank2@earthlink.net).

WEEKLY SEISIUN

Join us to for the tunes at our weekly traditional Irish music seisiun,

Co-lead by uilleann piper Jim Wade and Betsy O'Malley,

every Sunday evening 6:00 - 8:30 PM

O'Faolain's Irish Pub and Restaurant

20921 Davenport Drive,
Sterling VA 703-444-9796

(On Rt. 7, in the Regal Center shopping plaza, less than half mile west of Rt. 637/Cascades Pkwy.)

Mid Atlantic Region Hall of Fame Inductees

By Earle Hitchner

The turnout was nothing short of awe-inspiring.

Mike Preston, Mike Rafferty, Mary Rafferty, Mick Moloney, Mattie Connolly, Joe Madden, Joanie Madden, Felix Dolan, Martin Mulhaire, Brian Conway, Dáithí Sproule, Pete Kelly, Willie Kelly, Bernadette Fee, Myron Bretholz, Dominick Murray, Dave Abe, Jesse Winch, Athena O'Lochlainn, Seán Quinn, Michael Fee, Pat Keogh, Eileen Goodman, Laura Byrne, Patty Furlong, Rose Conway Flanagan, Peter Fitzgerald, Don Meade, and Dan Milner were just some of the musicians who filled the Knights of Columbus Hall in Ridgefield Park, N.J., for the Feb. 5 induction of Billy McComiskey and the late Joe "Banjo" Burke into Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann's Mid-Atlantic Region Hall of Fame. "This is the epicenter of the scene," a beaming Mick Moloney said to me amid the overcapacity crowd. I had the privilege of emceeding the event, which included a céilí in literal full swing on the hardwood floor. The "Caledonian Set," "High-Cauled Cap," "South Galway Reel Set," "Skibbereen Set," "Kilfenora Plain Set," and a sprinkling of waltzes were some of the dances energetically undertaken by the throng. The band playing for them on stage rotated personnel at times but never dipped in quality or intensity. It was a sight to behold and a great tribute to the musicianship and enduring impact of McComiskey and Burke. In the presence of her children Siobhan, Rory, and Finbarr, Bridget Burke spoke movingly of her husband, a Kilkenny-born singer and banjoist who died of Parkinson's disease in Dec. 2003 at age 57. Then Bridget's brother, Pat Kane, sang a song written by Joe "Banjo" Burke in praise of the musicians (Andy McGann, Jack Coen, Johnny Cronin, and others) whom he befriended and who befriended him in New York.

Button accordionist Billy McComiskey, born in Brooklyn and a longtime resident of Baltimore, also brought along his family. His wife Annie, his sons Patrick, Seán, and Michael, and his 80-year-old mother Mae joined his two sisters (one flew in from Poland), brother (he flew in from Texas), uncle, and several more relatives. Small wonder the nearby Hilton Hotel was dubbed "Chez McComiskey" this night. "You can't beat family," Billy McComiskey said, quoting a favorite expression of his mother.

There were signs of that everywhere, not only those standing behind the microphone with Billy but also those sitting at the tables along the perimeter and standing out in the foyer. A large, extended family of East Coast musicians, dancers, and traditional music enthusiasts had come out to honor the 28th and 29th inductees into CCE's Mid-Atlantic Region Hall of Fame.

Also making this night special was the presence of Loughrea-born Maura McGlynn, widow of Tynagh-born button accordionist Seán McGlynn (1937-1983), who had an early, indelible influence on McComiskey's style of box playing. And Dominick Murray presented McComiskey with a framed proclamation touting his musical contributions to Baltimore from its mayor, Martin O'Malley. Cheers to Mid-Atlantic Region Chair Mike McLaughlin, Hall of Fame Committee Chair Teresa Rafferty, and their volunteer staff for organizing an unforgettable evening. Kudos again to Burke and McComiskey for musical achievements of inextinguishable value.

CEILI MOR AND STEP-DANCING EXTRAVAGANZA

Featuring
**THE ALL-STAR
WASHINGTON CEILI BAND**
and
**THE CULKIN SCHOOL
OF TRADITIONAL IRISH DANCE**

YOUR FAVORITE CEILI AND SET DANCES
PLUS
AN EXCITING EXHIBITION OF IRISH STEP-DANCING
BY THE TALENTED MEMBERS OF THE CULKIN SCHOOL

**SATURDAY, MAY 21ST 2005
8PM-12 MIDNIGHT**

**HUGHES MEMORIAL CHURCH AUDITORIUM
10700 GEORGIA AVE
[PLYERS MILL ROAD AND GEORGIA AVE]
SILVER SPRING, MD**

FREE PARKING!
COMPLIMENTARY TEA AND SODA BREAD

DONATION REQUESTED: \$15 - CHILDREN UNDER 12 FREE!

This event is a benefit for the O'Neill-Malcom Branch
of *Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann* and The Culkin School

FOR MORE INFO: 301-622-6582

Library of Congress Irish Music Archives

By Kevin Donleavy

In the spring of 2006 the Library of Congress will open a six-month-long exhibition of Irish and Irish American music. It will be mounted in the immense and impressive Jefferson Hall, and will highlight the library's wealth of holdings: recordings, books, song sheets, and items pertaining to performance of the music/dancing/singing that has occurred in Irish communities in the U.S. at house parties, parades, pubs, festivals, and dance halls over many decades.

Those of us who are fascinated by music and dance will have a field day, for the recordings in the Library's Archive of Folk culture are rich. Stretching back to the 1940's, there are reel-to-reel tapes of songs in

Continued on page 5

Donncha O'Muineachain Remembered

As many list-subscribers saw, Paul Keating recently circulated the sad news that Donncha O'Muineachain, the great Irish dancer from Cork had passed away. Paul pointed out that "Donncha played a very large part in spurring the growth of CCE in North America first through his exciting dancing on so many early CCE tours from Ireland and then the innumerable set and ceili workshops he did over here at our Conventions and other workshop tours. He was a real gentleman as well."

After reading this, it occurred to me that many of the set dancers in the Washington metro area are probably unaware of the role Donncha played in introducing set dancing to Baltimore and Washington through the efforts of Mike Denney. I contacted Mike and asked him to write a brief history/reminiscence of how this came about. Below is Mike's account of discovering set dancing.>

Regarding the history, I am a bit foggy, but here goes:

You have to remember that the first night I was ever in Ireland, 1979, I went down to Cork to meet Michelle O'Connor (whose people are from that area) at Scully's Pub in New Market. Late that night, about a half hour before the pub was scheduled to close, 4 ancient couples (all had to be in their late 70s or early 80s) moved the tables back and danced a set, battering the floor in rhythmic counterpoint to Johnny O'Leary's accordion!!! I had never seen anything like it, it was like seeing Irish dancing for the very first time, and was determined from that moment on to find out as much as I could about "the sets." I left Cork and was roaming around the country, hitchhiking and taking the bus from place to place, spending my free time, i.e. when I wasn't in some pub listening to a session or at a ceili, tracking down books and articles on the history of Irish dancing in general, and set dancing in particular. At a bookbinding shop in Limerick, I met the nephew of Brendan Breathnach (as you know, Ireland is the land of coincidence and serendipity) who told me that his uncle knew loads about dancing and music, so he gave me Brendan's address and phone number outside of Dublin, in Blackrock I think. I called him up and told him what I was after, and he immediately invited me for supper. I of course knew of Brendan and his stature in the world of Irish music and culture, so in preparation I re-read his book, Folk Music and Dances of Ireland, on the train (which he later autographed). It was without a doubt, one of the most memorable visits -- including dinner and lots of stout -- of my life. I have this vivid memory of these dark circles on his fingertips which he explained came from playing the pipes for so many years.

Brendan suggested that I might find some useful info in the archives at the Comhaltas headquarters in Monkstown, which was, in retrospect, pretty amazing because he had no great love for that organization. Anyway, in Monkstown I told the receptionist what I was looking for and she directed me to the archives where I found a number of interesting articles (in Treoir, Clare Champion, etc.) regarding the origin of the sets, and the fact that they fell out of favor after the creation of the Dance Commission which deemed them French in origin (after the Set of Quadrilles) and therefore, non-Irish, but the sets remained fiercely popular in the countryside, nonetheless.

As I was leaving I was introduced to Donncha, who just happened to be there that day, who on the spot agreed to teach me the North Kerry Set. Can you imagine -- no hesitation -- and me just a traveling tourist from the States. Wow, what a humble, self-effacing person, incredible dancer, and what a teacher! I told him that I taught a few ceili dance classes back in Baltimore and that I wanted to incorporate the Kerry Set into the classes. I asked him if any of the sets had been written down so I could teach them but he said not to his knowledge (remember, this was years before the set dancing craze hit in Ireland) However, he suggested that I meet him at the Fleadh Cheoil, which I think was in Bunrana, Co. Donegal, that year, and if so, he would write down the figures and give them to me there.

Well, I did indeed meet him there and got the polka, slide and hornpipe figures for the North Kerry Set. I bet I still have those pages hidden away somewhere. Anyway, I left Ireland determined to teach the North Kerry Set as part of my ceili dance classes back in Baltimore, where it quickly became part of the repertoire, thanks in large measure to you and the other members of Celtic Thunder who loved playing polkas and slides, and who promoted it wherever you played, but especially on Friday nights at the Gandy Dancer in West Baltimore, and at the monthly Emerald Isle Ceili. And, as they say, the rest is history. Those were certainly some halcyon days!

Anyway, that's the story as I remember it. I'd run into Donnacha from time to time, usually when he on a CCE tour, and we'd chat. What a talent, what a gentleman, what a loss.

Mike Denney
Washington, DC
January 2005

The Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program (NVTRP)

The branch is sponsoring a Ceili/Concert to raise money to purchase a truck and a horse trailer the Riding Program needs to put on events. Horse riding has been found to be very beneficial to children and adults who suffer from mental and physical disabilities.

The Ceili/Concert will take place on Sunday, June 5th 2-6 pm at O'Faolain's Irish Pub 20921 Davenport Dr., Sterling, Va. (703-444-9796).

O'Faolain's is located in the Regal Shopping Center, exactly three miles west of the intersection of Rte. 7 and the Fairfax County Parkway, on the right had side of the road. The Bog Wanderers Ceili Band and local musicians will be playing for the event.

Admission: \$15 which includes a ticket for 6 door prizes donated by Ellen Jones % The Irish Collection, Occoquan, Va. All proceeds go to NVTRP Info: 703-978-8265

The NOVA Irish "Seisiun"

The NOVA Irish Seisiun is a slow seisiun intended to help new and intermediate players build the repertoire and skills need to play in a traditional pub session. E-mail: Steve Mallis – smallis1@msn.com

The Seisiun meets on the first and third Saturday of each month at the Green Acre Center 4401 Sideburn Rd. Fairfax, City – 10 am to noon. The Seisiun also meets the 2nd and 4th Saturdays at Ned Devine's Irish Pub, corner of North St. and Chain Bridge Rd. (Rte. 123) Fairfax City 12 noon to 2 pm. (Ned Devine's will be closed for alterations on Sat. April 23rd). Any questions , call Steve at 703-438-7111

Website: <http://www.geocities.com/novairishsession>

CCE Singers' Circle

The CCE Irish Singers' Circle is scheduled to meet on Saturday June 18th 7:00 pm at Kate Kane's home at 10114 Glenmere Rd., Fairfax, Virginia 703-978-8265

Singers take turns singing traditional songs, usually Sean Nos but certainly can be accompanied by an instrument. The assembled singers join in on the chorus. Call Kate if you intend to come and if you have any questions. 703-978-8265

CCE Dance Lessons

Set and Ceili Dance lessons are now in progress at the Green Acre Center 4401 Sideburn Rd. Fairfax City. Saturday mornings. Beginners 9:45am to 11am; Intermediate 11am to 12:15pm
Call Larry Frank regarding reduced fees as the classes have started. 703-281-0910

Library of Congress Irish Music Archives - continued

English and in Irish in Montana and Pennsylvania. And there are recordings, from the 1940's to the 1970's, of musicians and singers tapes in their native countries and in Ireland itself. They include the fairly well known: Seamus Ennis, Elizabeth Cronin, Paddy Tunney, Dolores Keane, fiddlers John Kelly and Junior Crehan, pipers Sean Reid and Pat Mitchell. But they also include the fairly obscure: such musical families as the Canavans, the Flahertys, and the Mc Donaghs.

Various singers perform such pieces as "The Rocks of Bawn" and "The First Cork Brigade" and "Dews of Love" and "Shores of America." Among the tunes from fiddlers, accordionists, fluters and others are "Sean Quinn's Hornpipe" and "Repeal of the Union" and "The Ebb Tide" and "Green Glens of Araglin." Again, both common and obscure pieces.

In future newsletters, we'll talk about the official advisors to this project, more details as they develop, and especially the role that our CCE Branch can play in the important event.



**CCE Convention – Ottawa 2005 – O’Neill-Malcom Branch Attendees
(County Mayo Dance Master, Pat Murphy is at left)**

Send any articles for the newsletter to the Editor – Bob Hickey at rjhickeyjr@erols.com



**O’NEILL-MALCOM-BRANCH
30 THOMAS DRIVE
SILVER SPRING, MD. 20904**