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## IRISH VOICE

### Irish Jersey Group Keeps Music Playing

By Paul Keating

IN rural Ireland there were certain homes that were known as "houses for music" either because the family passed down traditional music or the occupants had the fervor to welcome it in when the occasion called for it.



It was a lovely custom that has been successfully transferred over here and practiced in residences or even Irish organizational facilities that see the propagation of Irish culture as an important criterion without regard to profit.

This came to mind as I witness the evolution of a blossoming musical scene out in Northern Jersey at the Clubhouse of the Irish American Association of Northwest Jersey (IAANJ) which is opening its doors wider to embrace traditional music inside. With fewer commercial pubs willing to do so in the greater New York area, this is both a welcome and necessary role to assume if we are to keep passing on the music.

Last year Iris Nevins, a guitar player who has been involved in Irish music for three decades or more as a musician and with Shanachie Records, was looking for more places to encourage sessions in North Jersey. The connection was made to the popular Clubhouse of the IAANJ through drummer Rich Sutton, who is a board member there in Rockaway, New Jersey where a monthly ceili was held and also the annual sponsorship of the Waterloo Feis.

The association was established in 1974 and had been very active over the years in Irish events but was looking for a way to draw in more people to their accommodating facility there on Richard Mine Road near where Routes 80 and 15 meet.

In October they had their first session which thanks to a local grant allowed them to offer free admission as they sought out a popular recognized musician who would be the guest leader of the session each month.

Linda Hickman, John Nolan, Willie Kelly, Mike and Mary Rafferty, Tom Dunne, Larry McCullough and Jerry O'Sullivan (last Friday night, May 5) have graced the center chair and the concept has proved most popular, delighting both the membership and visitors who spill over to the parking lot across the road.

The real focal point is on the tunes in the repertoire of the special guest and their inclination to pass them on to a ready, willing and able

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assemblage of musicians that number 25 or more.

In a novel approach six sessions have been recorded and made available for a fee (\$15 per CD or \$12 to members) to those who wanted to take away the live experience and the tunes that were shared on each occasion, making them both a historic and educational tool.

The funds gathered have helped to encourage even more activity at the non-profit center, and the next phase will be hosting a house concert or that smaller more intimate setting where an artist can perform without more formal trappings of a concert stage and clock. The house concerts would charge a fee (\$15 or so) to ensure a reasonable honorarium for the guest performer(s) and would likely evolve into an evening-ending session.

Increasingly artists on the road look for help on the "underground railroad" where they can pull in and do smaller performances that can offset the expenses of traveling away from home. In addition local musicians of note will also be touted here when situations develop.

"We want to give musicians an opportunity to have somewhere on route to come out and have a good time and make a good night's pay," Nevins told me by phone.

Sympathetic venues where the hosts adore the music go a long way towards supporting these musicians both financially and artistically with their efforts. If these events can also help sustain a cultural center like the IAANJ with some funding for upkeep all the better with a win-win scenario.

The Irish community is well served when its facilities are open to artistic endeavors like the sessions, classes and concerts that speak proudly of its cultural heritage, and it looks like the IAANJ and Nevins have a very good thing going. For more information on the sessions, house concerts and recordings contact Iris Nevins at [irisnevins@verizon.net](mailto:irisnevins@verizon.net).

The first house concert will feature the sublime fiddler Willie Kelly, a member and NWJ resident in Boonton on Saturday, May 27. More details at [www.iaanj.com](http://www.iaanj.com)

Speaking of Willie Kelly, he and the venerable Mike Rafferty will be filling the gap created by the late visa processing for the Mayo flute player Emer Mayock who is unable to travel to the U.S. at this time and fulfill her gigs at Glucksman Ireland House on May 12 and Saturday, May 13 for the Shamrock Irish Traditional Music Society.

The New Jersey residents Rafferty and Kelly are very much kindred spirits who make beautiful music together as they share their devotion to the music of East Galway and Clare. The intimate parlor space at Glucksman Ireland House (One Washington Mews on Fifth Avenue north of Washington Square) will have the warmth and feel of an evening alongside a Galwegian hearth as the pair has developed a real appreciation for one another in playing together over 15 years at different occasions.

Though the senior Rafferty from the Ballinakill area of East Galway is twice the age of the Bronx-born Kelly who studied with the late Martin Mulvihill, they like to play in that unhurried fashion that is bred for the

long haul rather than the fast finish. As usual the sets begin at 9 p.m. More information can be found at [www.blarneystar.com](http://www.blarneystar.com).

### Concert Happenings

THERE is another wonderful pairing down in Philadelphia on Friday, May 19 down at the Commodore Barry Irish Center (Carpenter Lane and Emlen Street) starting at 8 p.m.

New York fiddler extraordinaire Tony Demarco will be joined by Dublin piper Ivan Goff with Terry Kane, who sings in Irish and English, as an opening act.

Demarco is one of the finest Irish fiddlers in the country whose new CD Bye for Now is due for release soon (and hopefully in time for the Catskills Irish Arts Week where he will be teaching once again) and will feature many guest artists as well.

Ivan Goff, who came to New York originally with Riverdance on Broadway, toured with Eileen Ivers and now is doing a PhD in Musicology at New York University. Contact 215-248-0502 or [www](http://www.philadelphiaceiligroup.org).

[Philadelphiaceiligroup.org](http://Philadelphiaceiligroup.org) . . .

THE Irish American Cultural Institute's Artist in Residence Andrew Duggan, a visual/media artist has teamed up with two Siamsa Tire dancers, Jonathan Kelliher and Joanne Barry for a collaborative project at Location One (26 Greene Street) on Thursday, May 18, between 6:30-8:30 p.m. Video street performances and live dance at 7 and 8 p.m. in a program called Echo by the trio of Irish artists. For more contact Location One (212-334-3347 or view [www.location1.org](http://www.location1.org)).

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