

Perspectives

Irish song and dance

Emerald Isle festival comes to campus

By Emily Brewer
Senior Reporter

When he was a very young child growing up just south of Boston, Patrick McDonough, '97, often went to the pubs on Saturday afternoons with his family to hear his uncle's band, The Irish Volunteers.

"More than sixteen years later, I still know the words and the music. Each song had its own kind of demeanor in the crowd — the rousing drinking songs, the fighting songs about the British, or the sad songs about the separation of the country. It is a very vivid oral tradition. Where I grew up in an American household, the music taught me about my Irish heritage and the history of the Irish people," McDonough said.

The university will have a chance to explore the music, film, poetry and cultural traditions of Ireland March 16-21 with the University Press-sponsored Irish Festival.

With a recitation competition, live Irish

music and reel dancing, Irish food and a prayer vigil for peace in Northern Ireland, the festival promises shamrockin' fun.

"With Seamus Heaney's recent Nobel Prize, and the great work of publishing Irish poetry being done by our own Wake Forest University Press, it may not be hugely amiss to think about a second Irish Renaissance," said Ralph Black, a visiting instructor of English and the festival poetry coordinator.

Certainly many a fine writer has been spawned from the Emerald Isle; among them are Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Who can deny the influence and intrigue of Irish dance, popularized by the River Dance phenomenon touring the world?

There is something mystical about the enchanting stories and folk tales

the Celtic tradition, the perseverance of a downtrodden people in Ireland's turbulent history, the verdant countryside and ethereal Ring of Kerry that all blend together to produce some of the world's most gifted and imaginative writers and artisans.

"Irish culture is important to us because the Irish have had a long love affair with words, and by partaking of that love-affair, we are made richer," said Candide Jones, the manager of the University

Press and director of the festival.

Black believes the Irish have interlaced their lives with their culture in way that Americans have not. "Walk into any pub just off St. Steven's Green or O'Connell Street (in Dublin) and someone will be happy to recite a Yeats or Kavanagh or Heaney poem for you — especially if you offer to buy them a pint," Black added with a laugh.

"We've lost some of that in our culture," he said. "The festival is an opportunity for the university community not only to sing the praises of Irish music and poetry and film, but to think about how we might interweave our own cultural traditions more fundamentally into our lives."

Several students have said that they plan to attend the festival. Freshman Loren Viggs said, "I am absolutely interested in attending."

Senior Matt Porio said that he has not yet made plans for St. Patrick's Day, but that some of the festival activities may appeal to him.

Jones said that one major goal of the festival was to get faculty and students together outside of the classroom, working on a common project. "This is something that we can all work on together in no hierarchical fashion," she said. "And we wanted to commemorate St. Patrick's Day week, to have fun, and to raise awareness to the Press. But the festival is not just about celebrating the fun stuff," Jones said.

A candlelight prayer vigil will be held at 5:30 p.m. March 17 on the steps of Wait Chapel.

"While it's Saint Patrick's Day and green beer is flowing all over the country, I think it is important for us just to take a moment and think about all of the tensions in Ireland right now," she said.

A number of students, faculty and staff have been working together throughout the semester on a grassroots level to plan the week of events, which they hope will inspire greater awareness and appreciation of the rich literary and artistic traditions of Ireland.



The legend of St. Patrick

So who was this Saint Patrick and why does the western world celebrate his saint day every March 17?

St. Patrick was born in Scotland and was kidnapped and sold in Ireland as a slave. He became fluent in the Irish language before making his escape to the European continent.

Eventually he was ordained as a deacon, then priest and finally as a bishop of the Catholic Church. Saint Celestine then sent him back to Ireland to preach the gospel.

He is traditionally credited with having

driven the snakes from Ireland. There are no snakes in Ireland, but chances are that there never have been since the time the island was separated from the rest of the continent at the end of the Ice Age.

While he was not the first to bring Christianity to Ireland, it was Patrick who encountered the Druids at Tara and abolished their pagan rites. He converted the warrior chiefs and princes, baptizing them and thousands of their subjects in the Holy Wells that still bear that name.

He died in A.D. 493.

Irish poetry makes its mark on campus

University emerges as the major publisher of Irish poetry in North America

By Emily Brewer
Senior Reporter

It's just a little room squeezed up on the third floor of Carswell Hall, but the Wake Forest University Press has international renown for its dedication to publishing Irish poets. It is, indeed, the major publisher of Irish poetry in North America.

Established in 1975, the Press publishes an average of five to six books a

year, bringing to the limelight poets such as Ciaran Carson, John Montague, Paul Muldoon, Michael Longley and Eilean Ni Chuilleanain — more than a dozen in all.

"It's hard for people to believe that in some places Wake Forest is not best known for last year's college basketball team," said Candide Jones, the Press manager. "If you go to London, Dublin, Paris or even New York, people say, 'Oh, the Wake Forest Press.'"

Dillon Johnston, a professor of English on sabbatical this semester, started the press when he found a need in the United States for a good publisher of contemporary Irish poets.

"Dillon was upset because so many books had been allowed to go out of print. He thought that was a crime that so many poets were lost that way. And because of the problems with Northern Ireland in the '70s, there was a sort of renaissance that came out in poetry and you couldn't find their books, Jones said.

Together with poetry enthusiast and then-Provost Ed Wilson, Johnston submitted a proposal for the press to then-President Ralph Scales.

A few revisions later, the press was approved and came into being. Johnston calls Wilson the "founder of the university press."

The small size of the university press and its tightly defined focus is unusual for a university press. It publishes only Irish poets and some French poets. Irish poet Paul Muldoon published his first book, *Why Brownlee Left*, at the young age of 21 through the press.

"He has gone on from being a remarkable prodigy to a leading poet," Jones said. "I would submit that it is partially because of the exposure he got from the university press that he became such the Irish poet superstar."

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Candide Jones
Wake Forest University Press manager

Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill is a poet who writes her poetry in Gaelic. The press publishes her work in both Gaelic and English, side by side.

Not every poet in Ireland can be published by the Press. The standards are extremely high, Jones said, and for that reason, the list of their published poets is strong.

"It is really the best Irish poetry written," she said. "And if they are the best poets of Ireland, then, by extension, they are among the great poets in the world."

SCHEDULE

MAIN EVENTS

Irish Film Festival

At 7 p.m. each night, March 16-20, the Philomathesian Society will show an Irish film in the Annenberg Forum of Carswell Hall. All films are free and will be followed by a discussion.

The Crying Game. An IRA member guards and befriends a kidnapped prisoner — this is a story of politics, friendship, and love with intelligence, style and a big secret.
When: March 16.

Hear My Song. Loosely based on a true story, this is a whimsical tale about wandering into another world. The score, which is full of soul and humor, swings with big-band breeziness.
When: March 17.

My Left Foot. This is an intelligent, beautifully acted screen biography of handicapped Irish writer-artist Christy Brown, who was born with cerebral palsy. It is perhaps Daniel Day-Lewis' finest performance.
When: March 18.

The Dead. John Huston's last film, this is a brilliant adaptation of James Joyce's story "The Dead" from *The Dubliners*.
When: March 19.

The Commitments. This movie is an "exuberant valentine to American soul music and the impoverished Dublin teenagers who think of it as magic" (New York Times), with a score that's hard not to jump up and dance to.
When: March 20.

St. Patrick's Day

Poetry Reading. Professors and students will read selections from noted Irish poets and perform Irish music.
When: 11 a.m.-noon
Where: Green Room in Reynolda Hall
Info: Open to the public

Irish Lunch. The Magnolia Room will serve an Irish lunch. Fare includes Irish stew, potatoes and cabbage.
When: 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
Where: Reynolda Hall

Candlelight Vigil for Peace in Northern Ireland.
When: 5:30 p.m.-6 p.m.
Where: The steps of Wait Chapel

Irish Dance Demonstration and Lesson

Participants can learn how to do an authentic Irish reel. Learn to dance "The Walls of Limerick," and other steps.
When: 11 a.m.-noon March 19.
Where: Benson Center, 3rd Floor Lounge

Irish Poetry Reading and Recitation Competition

Professors and students will read selections from noted Irish poets and perform Irish music. The reading will include a "recitation competition," and students, faculty and staff are invited to memorize and recite their favorite Irish poem. A panel of judges will award various prizes.
When: 3 p.m.-4:30 p.m. March 19.
Where: Green Room in Reynolda Hall.
Info: Open to the public.

O'Shorty's Celebration

The weeklong festival will conclude with an evening at "O'Shorty's." Shorty's, the university pub, will be transformed into an Irish pub. World renowned Irish dancer Daniel Tighe, from Fred Lail's Irish Band, will provide the music and singing.
When: 7 p.m.-7:30 p.m. March 21.
Where: Benson University Center.
Info: Open to the public.

EXHIBITS

Irish Flag. A flag from the Irish Embassy in Washington will wave from the Z. Smith Reynolds Library.

Photographs of Donegal, Ireland. Photos by Rachel Geise will hang on the walls of the Benson University Center.

Irish poetry on display. Exhibits of Wake Forest University Press Irish poetry can be found on display in the library and in the University Bookstore throughout the week.

Irish Festival Poster. A specially designed poetry poster commemorating the Festival will be on sale.

