

The Freebird

Volume IV

April 2009

The Freebird is the newsletter of the Irish Fair of Minnesota, August 7-9, 2009 Harriet Island in St. Paul. Its purpose is to keep us connected, provide updates, celebrate successes and share our stories, and to support the mission of the Irish Fair by promoting and cultivating Irish culture.



SNEAK PREVIEW: 'TRANSCENDENT' SOLAS AT THE IRISH FAIR

Since its birth in 1996, Solas has been widely proclaimed as among the most popular, influential, and exciting Celtic band to ever emerge from the United States; *Boston Herald* trumpeted the quartet as "the first truly great Irish band to arise from America," and the *Irish Echo* ranked Solas among the "most exciting bands anywhere in the world."

The Solas sound today is anchored by founders Seamus Egan, who plays flute, tenor banjo, mandolin, whistle, guitar and bodhrán, and fiddler Winifred Horan. They are two of the most respected—and imitated—musicians anywhere in acoustic music. Mick McAuley from Kilkenny plays accordion and concertina; Eamon McElholm from Tyrone plays guitar and keyboards. The latest addition to the band is Máiréad Phelan. A native of County Kilkenny, Mairead was taught by the Dowling family from Castlecomer in County Kilkenny. As well as singing, she is also an accomplished instrumentalist, playing flute and tin whistle and has won the All Ireland Championships on both.



Although Solas can play full-strength traditional Irish music immaculately, they like to mix fire-tested tradition and contemporary sensibility, and do so with an ease and naturalness that is as astonishing as is their musicianship. As a result, they transcend musical genres into the realm of pure musical expression that only a relative handful of musicians attain. The internationally acclaimed supergroup has not only captured the hearts and ears of Irish music fans, but fans all around the globe with their blend of Celtic traditional, folk and country melodies, bluesy sometimes jazz-inspired improvisations and global rhythms. Solas has built a fanbase that includes the likes of Bela Fleck, Emmylou Harris and the much sought-after rap producer Timbaland who surprisingly sampled the band on his radio hit "All Yall."

Ten years and still going strong --and coming to the Irish Fair of Minnesota this summer!!!

AN GHAELGE

Is glas iad na cnoc i bhfad uainn.
Distant hills look green.

Courtesy of Gaeltacht Minnesota <http://www.gaelminn.org/index.htm>, an organization that teaches the Irish language

TWIN CITIES ROBERT EMMETS HURLING CLUB

KICK OFF 2009 SEASON

Jim Leinfelder, TCRE

Along with chirping of robins, the roar of motorcycles and the sweet smell of blossoms, the crack of ash on ash is a sure sign of spring as the Twin Cities Robert Emmets hurling club takes the pitch in preparation for the 2009 hurling season, its fourth year as a Minnesota's first and only hurling club.

Started in a very grassroots manner, Twin Cities Robert Emmets Hurling Club has been working extremely hard to educate and train new hurlers in the Twin Cities area. Club members who feel that the Gaelic game of hurling, 'the fastest game on grass', should be preserved and celebrated have found a warm welcome within the rich Irish-American community of the Twin Cities. One of the club's first formal activities was the offering of an exhibition at the 2005 Irish Fair of Minnesota. Over the past three years, the Twin Cities Robert Emmets Hurling Club has grown to include 70 members, including both players and social participants.



Hurling Exhibition at the Irish Fair of Minnesota

After a month and a half of indoor circuit training under the firm tutelage of our newly-elected treasurer, Killian Condon the Emmets will take the pitch at McMurray Field in St. Paul (at Jessamine and Lexington) starting Sunday evening, April 12 from 6-8:00 p.m. and Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00. Any and all people (men, woman, adults and youth) interested in learning hurling are encouraged to drop by to have a lash with a stick of ash. New hurlers will be taken aside for their very own introductory recitation. or, if you'd just like to come by see what this game of hurling is all about, please come by and watch. For more information, drop us an email: infotcre@gmail.com

The TCRE expect to see some of the people they met while marching in St. Paul's St. Patrick's Day parade to turn up at the pitch, as well as some of The Swarm professional LaCrosse team who hosted the Robert Emmets during halftime on their Irish night March 28. So don't be self conscious about being new to the game of hurling. Hurleys and sliotars will be provided. No special equipment is required. Just turn out in your athletic togs and a pair of trainers and you're good to go. You'll be in fine company and well looked after by our coaching and training committee.

First Competition of the season:

The TCRE will hit the ground running, both literally and figuratively, to prepare for the April hurling tournament at Gaelic Park in Chicago, April 18 where six to eight hurling clubs from around the country will gather to knock the dust off of each other and kick off the competitive hurling season. The Robert Emmets made a fine showing last year coming home undefeated and with several newly-minted referees who attended the GAA's referee seminar. But the weekend is less about notching wins than it is about having fun, exposing new players to the experience of playing on a proper, full-size hurling pitch while soaking up the atmosphere of the a national hurling event. Please join us April 20, 7 to 10p.m. at O'Donovan's Irish Pub on 1st Ave, and 9th Street in Minneapolis for a social gathering when we'll gather to watch the new Travel Channel program, Dhani Tackles the World featuring NFL player Dhani Jones who in this episode of his ongoing odyssey of trying sports of the world will try his hand at hurling (http://www.travelchannel.com/TV_Shows/Dhani_Jones). In addition there will be other hurling highlights shown to help acquaint those new to the ancient sport of hurling. Under 21s are welcome.

For more information about Twin Cities Robert Emmets Hurling Club activities and membership see <http://twincities.northamerican.gaa.ie/index.html>. To learn more about hurling in Ireland, see http://www.gaa.ie/page/all_about_hurling.html.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – WINNER OF THE PEOPLE CATEGORY

By Jamie Smith



Rollicking reels fill the tent and you can actually feel the music as you stand there watching the little dancers stomp their feet to the tune of the violin and bodhran. The girls are a blur as they execute their steps and leaps. Their colorful embroidered costumes are a lively contrast to the white backdrop of the tent. And so begins the daydream that transports me back to that beautiful sunny August day in 2007 when I, armed with my trusty Nikon D-SLR, wiled the day away at the Irish Fair on Harriet Island.

In between volunteering at the St. Paul St. Patrick's Day Association booth, catching up with friends not seen since March 17th and dropping a few coins in the Marketplace, I

made sure not to miss Rince na Chroi's performance in the dance tent. This particular school has been a favorite of mine to follow for a few years because my friend, Annie Mackey Markwardt, has a daughter, Kinzie, who performs for them. I'm also a fan because Katie Stephens, the director of Rince Na Chroi, is an inspiring entrepreneur who has accomplished much for her young age.

I missed the first few minutes of the first group of Rince Na Chroi girls and slipped into the tent while the older girls were dancing. I tried to position myself out of the way of the parents while still getting a good angle of the stage. I snapped a few photos of the older girls in their more simple purple and black costumes with shorter skirts and then I scanned the crowd. I was looking for familiar faces to say hello to after the performance. All of a sudden I felt a breeze and the light in the tent changed slightly. I turned to the left and saw one of the tent flaps swaying in the breeze. And then I looked closer at the girls gathered in a little knot at the opening. I could tell they were next to dance. They looked so earnest as they stood patiently waiting for their turn. Most of the girls in this frame are looking intently at the stage, which cannot be seen in the photo. Eventually, the older girls finished their set and the younger ones, including Kinzie, took their marks on the stage and danced. I continued shooting until the last of the littlest dancers finished.

It wasn't until I got home and downloaded the photos from my camera that I was able to take a closer and more critical look at the photos. Image number 33 immediately caught my eye. I could not believe the range of expressions I somehow captured in that 1/100th of a second. Because the vibrant reds, yellows and purples of their costumes were a bit distracting in this shot, I converted it to black and white.

Suddenly, their expressions stood out and the contrast between the bright outdoors and the inside of the tent highlighted the subtle differences in their expressions. Two girls are giving admiring glances to the stage, while the faces of the two shorter girls show a mix of awe and fear. It's almost as if you can hear the thoughts running through their minds: "Wow, I could be one of the big girls someday - performing the faster, more complicated routines, whipping the crowd into a frenzy." Or, "Wow, our turn is in three minutes. I hope I can remember all the steps." In their own way, each girl is looking to the future – whether it's years or minutes away. I love that dichotomy.

Of all the photos I've taken at Irish cultural events, this is my favorite. Each time I look at it, I see something different in the expressions or the light. When I heard that entries were being accepted for the 2008 Irish Fair Amateur Photo Contest, I knew I had to submit this one. I was so flattered that Barry Hendrickson chose this as the winner in the People category. I am happy that he, too, saw something special in this 1/100th of a second.

I also want to acknowledge the work that goes into this type of cultural endeavor. Thank you to Will Harrison for his time, energy and talents organizing all the entries and answering any questions patiently. And a special thank you to Barry Hendrickson for supporting the efforts of new photographers and for inspiring us with his own hauntingly beautiful work.

Jamie Smith is a native of St. Paul, MN and spends her free time writing, taking photos and dreaming of the day she can track down her maternal ancestors in County Tyrone, Ireland. She can be reached at jamiesmithc@gmail.com.

\$5 Irish Raffle \$5

Those of you who were out and about celebrating St Patrick's Day may have noticed a cute scooter surrounded by raffle tickets. That would be the *Buddy Scooter* from Scooterville, and its among the great prizes you can win by entering the Irish Fair Raffle. Where can I get tickets, you ask? Tickets available at Irish Indeed, Irish on Grand and from many, many Irish organizations throughout the Twin Cities. Besides supporting our own great summer family festival of St. Paul the raffle tickets sales ALSO supports other Irish groups as we are partnering with Irish organizations to share revenues from tickets sold before the Fair 50/50 with the selling group. Other prizes besides the Buddy Scooter include:

- ♣ Airfare for Two to Ireland -Compliments of AGT
- ♣ 7 Days Car & Lodging Ireland Tour Package- Compliments of Terry Flynn Tours
- ♣ Large Framed Print-Compliments of Ireland in Black and White
- ♣ Fabulous John Hanely Mohair Throw- Compliments of IRISH on GRAND
- ♣ 2 Limited Edition Belleek Vases-Compliments of Irish Indeed

Drawing will be held at the Irish Fair on August 9, 2009 at 6PM

Proceeds benefit the Irish Fair, Children's Program of Northern Ireland, Legacy Fund and other organizations.



Win this Buddy Scooter !

"We hope the addition of the scooter will generate additional revenue to both support the Fair and Irish organizations during this tough fundraising times" says Maria Flynn Conway, Director of the Irish Fair Board. Proceeds go to keeping the Fair the *free* family event as has been its tradition. We thank all of the individuals and organization who contributed raffle items and who are partnering on ticket sales."

Don't forget to wear a helmet!

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



The Great Northern Irish Pipers' Club (GNIPC) is presenting a concert of bagpiping and bagpipes from across the globe at 7:30 pm, April 18th in the 3M Auditorium (in the Owens Science Building) at the College of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN. The evening is a fund-raising event with proceeds to benefit the goals and programs of GNIPC.

Guest artists include members of the Brian Boru Irish Pipe Band (featuring Irish tunes on the Highland Pipes), Tim Britton (uilleann pipes), Dick Hensold (on Northumbrian pipes and other European bagpipes), Laura MacKenzie (Scottish Border Pipes, and other European bagpipes), Kim Sobbe (Leicestershire smallpipes) as well as members and friends of the **Great Northern Irish Pipers' Club** (uilleann pipes). Tickets are \$15.00 and are available via the GNIPC web site (www.gnipc.org), or by phone at 651.227.3367 as well as at the door. Seating is limited so advance tickets are highly recommended. GNIPC is now, officially, a 501c3 charitable cultural organization! This marks a major milestone for the club; donations to the club are now tax deductible! Ladies and gentlemen: start your checkbooks!

Two Tap Trio

Two Tap Trio, a great Irish music band, –Upcoming appearances April 8th and April 15th 9:30pm see [The Dubliner Pub](#) and <http://www.twotaptrio.com/>



Hunger April 10-26 the Walker Art Center **8\$** The first feature film from Turner Prize-winning visual artist Steve McQueen is an unflinching examination of the last six weeks in the life of Bobby Sands, a member of the Irish Republican Army who engaged in a hunger strike in Northern Ireland's Maze Prison in 1981. <http://filmvideo.walkerart.org/detail.wac?id=4936> >
"Positively riveting. An artistic masterpiece. A harrowing, poetic film."
 —*Washington Post*