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Getting their Irish up

Posted by Frances Marion Platt on November 25, 2014 in Music · 0 Comments

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Hair of the Dog

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Irish music has gone through many iterations over the millennia, and in a way has come full circle with today's crop of fiery, profane purveyors of Celtic rock. Born out of a mystical tradition in which a bard armed with a harp was considered one of the most powerful classes of wizard, and honed through centuries of oppression and rebellion, starvation and celebration, bonding with the land and then being forced to forsake it, a musical form evolved that, while based in folklore, was as artistically sophisticated and technically demanding as any on the planet. But the 1950s nearly killed it – at least here in Americay, where Tin Pan Alley turned songs of battle, romance and hard partying into cheesy, sentimental pop hits rife with ethnic stereotyping.

The Folk Revival tried to pump some life back into the genre, but what was heard in the West Village in the early-to-mid '60s was mostly rather weak tea; that clean-cut quartet in identical fishermen sweaters in Inside Llewyn Davis captured pretty accurately the watered-down balladry and twee novelty songs that, sadly, became most Americans' notion of what Irish music sounds like. Fortunately, later waves of acoustic performers more grounded in the tradition, like the Chieftains, the Bothy Band and the Boys of the Lough, injected some badly needed energy into the limp mix.

But for all their undeniable instrumental chops, these bands' academic-style authenticity wasn't enough for some; still missing was a level of working-class grittiness that needed amplification to find its fullest expression in the modern music scene. Fast-forward to the '80s, when the Pogues ingeniously spliced punk attitude onto folksy roots, and a bunch of other bands both in Ireland itself and on North American shores picked up the torch: Flogging Molly, the Dropkick Murphys, Runrig, Black 47 and so on. They were loud, proud and



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confrontational, and they brought in a whole new demographic of leather-clad, purple-haired kids who would sooner die than admit to listening to folk music. And so by highly untraditional means, a deep tradition was saved.

Sadly, Black 47 just played what it says is its last-ever gig a couple of weeks ago; but its long farewell tour included a stop at Kingston's T. R. Gallo Memorial Park at the end of the summer to headline Hooley on the Hudson 2014. That same weekend, a star-studded assemblage that included local dignitaries and authors William Kennedy and Malachy McCourt welcomed Anne Anderson, Ireland's ambassador to the US, to the Rondout waterfront for the dedication of the site on which the new Irish Cultural Center of the Hudson Valley (ICCHV) is to be built. On that property once stood the headquarters of the D & H Canal Corporation, where, for decades, waves of Irish, German, Polish and Italian immigrants walked up Company Hill Path to the Paymaster's Office to collect their weekly wages.

It takes a lot of fundraising to build a three-story, 15,000-square-foot museum/classroom/performance/retail space, though. So you can bet that the folks behind ICCHV are going to be staging a lot of music-fueled events in the foreseeable future to make it happen. What sounds likely to be a very pleasurable process starts this Friday, as the Andy Murphy Midtown Neighborhood Center in Kingston hosts what's being billed as the first annual Black Friday Féile Concert. According to ICCHV president Robert Carey, "Féile (pronounced fee-lay) is an Irish Gaelic expression for 'party' or 'concert,'" though it apparently can also be translated as "festival."

However you define it, the concert will be headlined by a high-profile Celtic rock band with deep roots in the Hudson Valley: Hair of the Dog. Based mostly in the Capital District, they play regularly at the Parting Glass in Saratoga. But fiddler Larry Packer is also familiar in the Catskills as a frequent sideman to Woodstock-area musical stalwarts like Jay Ungar, his bandmate in Cat Mother and the All-Night Newsboys back in the late '60s; Packer was also in Sha Na Na. Two other members of Hair of the Dog, guitarist Brian Gibney and bassist Eric Bedrosian, have done stints in the upbeat neo-Irish band the McKrells.

Other performers in the Black Friday Féile lineup include the Ulster County Ancient Order of Hibernians Pipe and Drum Band, the Wild Irish Roses, the Ruffians and Kilrush. The music festival runs from 6 to 11 p.m. on Friday, November 28, with the doors opening at 5:30. Refreshments including hot dogs, pizza and beer will be available for sale at the Murphy Center. Your price of admission – \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door – goes toward the construction of a fantastic new cultural resource that will turn the Rondout waterfront into even more of a vibrant destination for locals and visitors alike.

To purchase advance tickets to the Black Friday Féile Concert, visit www.eventbrite.com/e/1st-annual-black-friday-feile-concert-tickets-11893019341. For more information, visit www.icchv.org or call (845) 389-4673.

Irish Cultural Center of the Hudson Valley's first annual Black Friday Feile Concert, Friday, November 28, 6-11 p.m., \$30/\$25, Andy Murphy Midtown Neighborhood Center, 467 Broadway, Kingston; (845) 389-4673, www.icchv.org, www.eventbrite.com/e/1st-annual-black-friday-feile-concert-tickets-11893019341.



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