

Irish festival celebrates culture with music, film

The Irish Cultural Festival will also feature arts and crafts as well as activities for participants of all ages

By **Natasha Chilingierian**
Pulse Reporter

Eugene will indulge in the joys of Irish music, dance, movies, crafts and stories at this weekend's first Irish Cultural Festival.

Festival producer Mike Meyer said the celebration's focus will be on Irish music, which has always been an essential part of social gatherings in Ireland. Today, Irish music blends centuries-old sounds of jigs, reels and hornpipes with more modern elements such as electronics. Providing the festival's soundtrack will be Celtic Fiddle Festival, The Paperboys, Tom's Kitchen, Laura Cortese and Village Green Celtic Band, among others.

"The festival will touch on contemporary areas, but also connect people with the traditional music that they long for," Meyer said.

The festival will be alcohol-free.

Dance troupes Ceili and The Comerford Dancers will accompany the Irish musicmakers and show off moves that Meyer calls "imitations of horse movements." Other distinctive aspects of Irish dance include hopping, impeccable timing between dancers and a lack of arm movements.

The festival will give an entertaining history lesson via film with showings of "The Secret of Roan Inish" and "Under the Hawthorne Tree." The former film tells a mythological tale of half-human, half-seal creatures known as "selkies" and the children who are fascinated by them. Festival steering committee member Thomas Sharkey said "The Secret of Roan Inish"



Courtesy

The Celtic Fiddle Festival, made up of Kevin Burke, Johnny Cunningham and Christian Lemaitre, are one of many groups that will bring traditional Irish music to the Eugene Irish Cultural Festival this weekend.

explores the role of myths in Irish life.

"Although (the story of the selkies) is an actual myth, most Irish myths are real history," he said.

Little-known independent film "Under the Hawthorne Tree" depicts the struggle in 1840s Ireland during the Great Potato Famine. Sharkey said during this period of famine, the Irish became like serfs to their British landlords, who took over their land and shipped all the

remaining food out of the country.

"It was one of the biggest, most terrible atrocities in Irish history," he said, adding that the term "famine" has been misconstrued and is more accurately described as "hunger" due to a lack—not exhaustion—of food supply.

The festival will host an assortment of activities that appeal to all ages. Children will learn to create Irish crafts while also learning

the history behind them.

One project is constructing St. Brigid's crosses using strands of thick grass from the Fern Ridge Reservoir. Before she was a saint, Brigid was a key goddess who symbolized spring and fertility in pre-Christian Ireland, and she became St. Brigid when the country adopted Christianity.

Family activities coordinator Peggy Hinsman said the cross is traditionally used by the Irish to welcome the coming of spring. It can also be hung on a house's front door to keep away fire and disease.

The workshop will also include the growing of several species of shamrocks (which means "young clover" in Irish). Hinsman said that three-leaved shamrocks were used by St. Patrick to explain the holy trinity to pre-Christian Ireland.

The family activity segment will wrap up with storytelling. Topics include leprechaun folklore, the history of pre-1700s Irish poets and singers known as Bards and tales of foolish Irish people. Hinsman said storytelling has been used as a vehicle to pass down morals and knowledge in Irish culture.

"Stories show children how they should behave, and they share history with them," she said. "They were also entertainment for communities. Before radio existed, people would get together to play live music and tell stories. It was community building."

The festival will take place March 12, 13 and 14 at WOW Hall, located at 291 W. Eighth Ave.; Cozzini Pizza, located at 199 W. Eighth Ave.; the Eugene Public Library, located at 100 W. 10th Ave. and The Atrium, located at 99 W. 10th Ave. For a complete listing of events, visit the festival's Web site at <http://www.eugeneirishfest.com>.

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VOID

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episode is played out for the audience in a truly incredible sequence of re-creations. When I say "re-creations," I mean it in the most literal sense. Director Kevin Macdonald and the other filmmakers pretty much just went to the mountain and did the whole damn thing over again with different climbers. It's an incredible technical achievement.

The film establishes right from the start what kind of challenge the two climbers decided to take on. Occasionally, the camera will pull back from the two men to provide some perspective on what they are doing, and it will continue to pull back until they are no longer visible. They just disappear into the landscape they are trying to ascend.

So, why doesn't this film work? The problem seems to be with the narrative, as the interviews and re-creations don't play very well off of each other. This is partly a problem with the editing, which has the interviews overlap with the re-creations when they don't need to. For example, after Simpson falls into the crevice, the actor playing him impotently pounds the ice and screams obscenities into the darkness. But the interview with the real Simpson overlaps to tell us that he felt frus-

trated and weak at this moment. This redundancy draws away from the image on the screen, while the interview also suffers, since we only hear Simpson's words but don't see his emotional reaction.

There are too many moments like this in the film, where the audience is told what the actors on screen are thinking or doing when they can figure it for themselves. The only time the combination works for any extended period is near the end when Simpson has become delirious from dehydration and blood loss. Here, the overlapping of Simpson's thoughts with the re-creation allows the audience to understand the existential state Simpson was in. No longer believing he had any chance of survival, he continued to move simply because he couldn't make himself give up. This is not an easy state for an actor to portray on his own, and hearing it from Simpson's own mouth allows the narrative to run smoothly.

But despite its flaws, "Void" is still a remarkable piece of documentary re-creation. Its technical aspects alone make it more than worth seeing. It opens Friday at the Bijou Art Cinemas, located at 492 E. 13th Ave.

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PASSION

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"Why?"

"It's unnecessary. There are better things to believe in."

"Like what?"

"Love. Peace. Joy. Those things are just as imaginary as God, and there's more to hope for," she said.

I paid for the CDs and left. Such a peaceful punk rocker, I thought. But she had a point. Not everyone needs violent gods sending themselves down to earth in human forms to be beaten and slaughtered.

There must be something else happening. Some of us need something richer and less angry. Maybe even a good joke could fill the void.

As I was driving home I saw another car, a van this time, with that same bumper sticker: "What would Jesus do?"

As I was unwrapping my CDs, the van with the bumper sticker came within inches of smashing into another car. The car that was nearly smashed had a bumper sticker that read: "Nonjudgment Day is here." Both of the men in the cars were yelling and shaking their fists in rage at each other.

As I laughed and drove around the two angry drivers, I couldn't help but think I had just seen something divine.

Contact the Pulse columnist at carlsundberg@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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