

# AN 'ARMCHAIR PILGRIMAGE' TO ST. PATRICK'S WORLD

Harp guitarist John Doan transports audiences during musician's final North Coast concert

By **PATRICK WEBB**  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Ask John Doan why Celtic music has endured for generations and he'll talk your ear off.

The composer and performer will offer a musical guide to that question at a matinee concert Sunday, March 10, in Astoria.

"John Doan's Celtic Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's World" takes place at the Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center. It is a benefit for the partners group seeking to preserve the PAC.

"I feel as if I am communing with something beyond time and location, with the whimsy of stories," said Doan, who will perform on the harp guitar.

Doan was in Astoria in December performing a concert of Christmas music on his historic stringed instruments, pipes and tin whistles.

At 67, the professor is retiring in May after teaching at Willamette University in Salem for 42 years. He is relocating to San Diego, Calif., to be closer to family. And unlike those rock groups who tour until they drop, Doan maintains that this really is the last time he will perform on the North Coast.

Charlene Larsen, president of Partners for the PAC, said her group has tried for two years to schedule a performance date. "John Doan has an enthusiastic following in Clatsop County," she said. "Our schedules have now come together and we look forward to this farewell concert with Doan and his harp guitar."

The concert, timed to coincide with the upcoming St. Patrick's Day, has a different flavor from the one in December, but will offer similar multimedia visual accompaniment, which Doan labels an



John Doan

**Musician and composer John Doan, a professor at Willamette University in Salem, is pictured with his distinctive harp guitar.**

"armchair pilgrimage."

## 'Thin places'

Historians note that the Romans conquered almost all of Europe, changing the culture of regions they dominated, including England. Because they stopped short of invading Ireland and Scotland, those countries better preserved their heritage and traditions.

As Roman influence waned, the fifth-century existence of St. Patrick, who became Ireland's patron saint, sparked a belief in pilgrimages and the holy properties of rel-

ics. Though Christian, early Irish people embraced a pagan concept of "thin places" — sacred locations where the distance between Heaven and Earth diminishes — and past, present and future are barely separated.

"We get this last remaining people that retained their culture of being 'present,'" he said. "This is something that's uniquely Irish. The Irish 'let their hair down,' take a break and celebrate it."

Irish who fled the Great Potato Famine of the 1840s populated the America West building railroads. Names like Kelly, Ryan, Murphy

and Doyle pervade the nation, not just in concentrations like Boston and Chicago.

National Public Radio has tapped into the regard for Irish music in the U.S. with its "This-tle and Shamrock" program and the Celtic Woman ensemble has toured during the past 10 years.

Modern popularity was sparked by 1960s band The Chieftains, which has earned multiple Grammys and whose members have collaborated with talents as diverse as Van Morrison and Luciano Pavarotti. The genre's profile was raised by the River-

## IF YOU GO

**John Doan's Celtic Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's World**

**A benefit for Partners For The PAC**

**When:** 3 p.m. Sunday, March 10

**Where:** Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center, 588 16th St., Astoria

**Admission:** Suggested \$15 donation, \$10 for seniors and children. Under 12 free if accompanied by an adult.

[www.supportthepac.org](http://www.supportthepac.org)

[www.johndoan.com](http://www.johndoan.com)

dance show, which toured the U.S. in the 1990s. The 1997 James Cameron film, "Titanic," featured a spirited dance scene of the working-class passengers below decks.

## Myth and mystery

Doan will have CDs of his Celtic music available for purchase. Two were produced during that same era, songs created following a hitchhiking trip through Ireland absorbing the ethos of poet W.B. Yeats through churchyards and fields of heather. "Eire: Isle of the Saints (A Celtic Odyssey)" was released in 1997 and "Wayfarer: Ancient Paths to Sacred Places" two years later. Both were nominated for New Age Voice awards and the earlier work won Best Celtic Album of the Year.

Doan sees broad appeal in "the myth and mystery of the Celts."

"Part of it is that people relate to it," said Doan. "They don't see it as 'other than themselves.' It is a time to celebrate their Anglo-Celtic heritage, and the friendliness of a culture, meeting in pubs, having a drink and celebrating life — that's hard to argue with!" 