



## *Comhaltas Winnipeg Newsletter*

Welcome to the November newsletter! This month without further ado we'll jump right in with a Ceil Band update from Gord Menzies. Below is Gord's article and photo of the "Garage Sessions" that took place last summer.

The Garage Sessions: by Gord Menzies



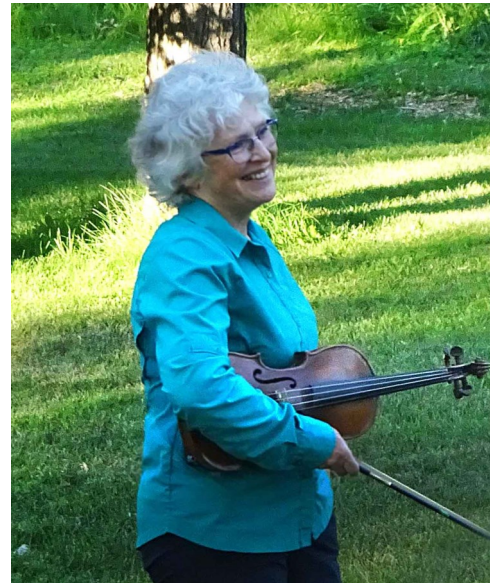
When the Covid-19 restrictions allowed for a small gathering during the summer, some of the Flatland Ceili Band, affectionately known as "A's and D's" (Al Amyot, Al Thomson, Dave Strang, Dave Clement (not to be confused with the scales we play), hosted our practice on Tuesday's, to ensure that our musical talents, not to mention our stomachs were amply nourished. Now, if you have ever heard of the Trinity Sessions by the Cowboy Junkies (maybe showing our age here folks), over the Fall, The Flatland Ceili Band had its own version, namely, the **Dave Clement Garage Sessions**. With Dave and Elizabeth's provisioning of hot tea and coffee, cookies, snacks and even a birthday cake, it was great fun learning and working up old and new tunes! In spite of the occasional smoke from a neighbour's backyard fire drifting into the space, or adoring neighbours (we think) stopping by to watch us play, we managed a session right up until a few weeks ago when the cold weather threatened frost bite to our whistle and guitar players! Those wee ceramic heaters will only go so far. We've now retreated to our caves practicing via ZOOM and welcoming back those members who were unable to attend the sessions. Thank you so much Dave and Elizabeth for your hospitality and providing the garage as a space! Very much appreciated! The Bhigg House rocks, well at least the garage does...

For those of you who may be interested, tunes we are encouraging folks to learn for general sessions include:

**Reel Set: Devaney's Goat: The Rookery: Palmer's Gate  
Miss Hamilton's** (a shout out to all of you harp players)  
**The Peacock's March  
The Kitchen Piper**

### *Meet Our Members*

Erin Burns-Flett



#### **Discovering Irish Music**

I was born in Montreal to a Scottish father, French mother in an Italian neighbourhood – good Catholic/Protestant mix. When I was 11, my brother Robin travelled to Ireland to research Thomas Darcy McGee in support of his PhD thesis. He returned with albums of Irish music by Tommy Makem and the Clancy brothers. --I loved the tunes. My best friend, Lenore, and I played guitar and sang these songs – we did everything by ear as there was no money for music or lessons. Almost all my friends were Italian and couldn't understand what we loved about this music. We expanded our collection to include the Irish Rovers

### ***Meet our members (continued)***

(starting with the 45 rpm with the Unicorn/Black Velvet Band). My guitar went everywhere with me. As I pursued my career in natural science, my guitar and these songs (along with those of Gordon Lightfoot and Pete Seeger) followed me into field camps, and on camping trips.

Moving to Winnipeg in 1978, I worked for a Geochemist named Gregg Brunskill. Besides chemistry, Gregg played fiddle, banjo, tin whistle and was president of the Winnipeg Folk Festival. His wife Sheila played guitar, hammer dulcimer and sang. A jam session at his farm in Niverville, introduced me to Susan Israel, Joe Kinsella and Alistair Dennett – such wonderful music that evening. Sadly, I was also introduced to wood ticks. I sang and played a number of Irish tunes and Joe invited me to join him at the Irish club for an evening of music. One session and I was hooked - no turning back now.

At that time, the sessions at the Irish club were the first Tuesday of every month. I attended regularly – Susan and Alistair were also regular attendees, along with Gord Menzies, Tom Naughten, and Martin and Nan College. As a vocalist, I joined with Susan, Alistair, Gord, Joe, Tom and Dave Ediger to play different gigs including Irish Fest, and St. Patrick's day celebrations. The instrumental pieces were so wonderful, with beautiful rhythms and complex ornamentation. The vocals seemed to be such a different instrument. Time passed, children arrived and priorities changed. My daughter Caroline played violin with the Suzuki program along with Roslyn and Isaac Dennett. We all went to the occasional session at the Irish club, fiddles, voice and guitar in hand. Soon, there was little time for personal music playing. Kids grown, I picked up Caroline's full size fiddle and pursued classical violin. After 3 years, seeking a break over the summer, I started fiddle lessons with Miriam Neuman. We focused on Irish tunes, some I remembered from the early days at the Irish Club. My repertoire leaped! Classical playing was put on the back burner. A slow players session started at Traicy Robertson's home – I was ecstatic to meet and play with other musicians. The tunes, all the different instruments, and such wonderful people - I was over the moon.

The Hammers started their School of Irish Music and I started yet another level of appreciation for Irish music. At the school, I further developed my ability to play by ear and play with other musicians in a beginner Ceili band – the art of listening. Cathy Rayner, my current fiddle teacher, is helping me focus on my rhythm and expression and the art of playing. Cathy has helped me explore new tunes and discover new fiddle players. Her home is a welcoming place for music and friendship and as is usual with Irish music, there are many moments of shared stories.

I have never been to Ireland, but the music and the people here in Winnipeg feel like home. I feel very fortunate to be part of this eclectic family. Looking forward to more music....*Erin Burns Flett*



***Submitted by Susan Hammer***

### ***CCE Wpg Irish Music School***

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well. Here's a link to some great Irish music videos to enjoy.

[https://www.youtube.com/results?](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=hammersmith+irish+cultural+centre)

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(thank you Valerie for introducing this organization to us)

Pandemic Tune Learning Project: info and pdf here:

<http://www.comhaltaswinnipeg.ca/music/traditional-irish-music-classes/>

If you haven't checked this out yet, lots of excellent resources:

<https://www.itma.ie/digital-library>

Learn more about Irish Accordion here:

<https://blog.mcneelamusic.com/2020/04/03/three-legends-of-the-irish-b-c-button-accordion/>

***Stay safe, well, and enjoying Irish music!***

***-Susan***

## ***More Adventures in Ireland***

When Susan and I visited Ireland last year we stayed in the town of Miltown Malbay. A few miles away, along the highway called The Wild Atlantic Way, is the very lovely town of Ennistymon. Ennistymon is interesting because of its modern, forward-looking shops such as health food stores, bookstores and other trendy businesses. Yet the town also retains its historic feel, due to the many lovely old buildings that are maintained in excellent condition. I mention Ennistymon because it was there that I took part in a fiddle retreat taught by Yvonne Casey.

Susan and I had been listening to Yvonne Casey's playing for several years, and in particular we liked a CD called *The Celli Bandits*, featuring Yvonne as the lead fiddler. So when I found out that Yvonne was offering a fiddle retreat during the time of our visit, I signed up. The introduction/ orientation to the retreat took place in a French-style cafe called Ooh La La Café on Friday night. The participants sat around and introduced ourselves, then took turns starting tunes, for a short session, where Yvonne was joined by her musical partner, Dermot Burn, an amazing box player. The classes commenced the following morning with a few minutes of meditation. Yvonne's theme for the weekend was "Relaxation and Focus". She emphasized striving for a full, warm tone. Part of our work involved playing one single note, striving for the best tone we could achieve, as we walked around the room playing long, slow bow strokes, all the while listening to our sound. Throughout the day we worked on tone production, and we also started learning some interesting, hauntingly beautiful tunes that Yvonne had composed.

At the end of the weekend we all convened back at Ooh La La Café for a great session. Yvonne invited some of the local musicians to join us, and a good time was had by all.

I learned so much from the fiddle retreat, and I will carry the memories of meditating and learning Yvonne's beautiful tunes forever. Yvonne is one of Ireland's finest fiddlers, with a unique, melodic style, all her own. Her playing is characterized by somewhat slower tempos with an emphasis on melody, rather than ornamentation.

She is also an encouraging, insightful teacher. If you ever get a chance to attend one of her workshops, I highly recommend it.

So if you ever see me walking slowly around the room at a session, while listening to myself play drone notes, you'll know I was taught this behaviour by Yvonne Casey.

***-Paul***

### **Searching for tone**

