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COMHALTAS



April

2021

Winnipeg Comhaltas Newsletter

Welcome to the April newsletter and Happy Easter to one and all!

As Spring arrives, the world of nature is starting to emerge from it's winter hibernation. Just yesterday, a chipmunk that had just emerged from it's Winter hibernation was rooting around on our porch, looking for peanuts. I couldn't help but think that Irish musicians are like chipmunks. Irish musicians are gradually emerging from the Covid quarantine but instead of rooting around for peanuts, they are playing in sessions, with peanuts and other snacks available on the coffee table. After we observed that chipmunk rooting around on our porch, we then went inside and rooted around for Irish tunes on our instruments. So you see the world of nature and Irish musicians have much in common. The next time you see a chipmunk, start thinking. You may have more in common with your furry friend than you realize. As the warmer weather approaches, and flowers start to bloom, all of us at Comhaltas Winnipeg, wish you a happy Spring!

Meet Our Members

Mark McLearn



Spring was almost starting to emerge at Oak Hammock Marsh last weekend



It all started 18 years ago when my wife, Sandy, and I started recorder lessons with Susan Hammer. As music beginners, it was the start of a fun time and the exploration of many varieties of achievable amateur music. My round-about journey towards Irish traditional music has included delightful attachments on the way. Seven years of lessons with an excellent teacher opened interesting recreational opportunities for me. Susan introduced me to the Winnipeg Early Music Society, of which she is a founding member, and exploring

Mark's Bio

Early Music became a passion. Eventually, I was able to join the *Amindra Consort*, a Renaissance- Baroque ensemble. And then joining the *Fine Companions*, the house band of the Village Green English Dancers, provided opportunities to explore historical folk dance music from the 1600's. Playing with more advanced players was initially intimidating and that certainly motivated me to practice lots to keep up! And, playing for dancers is always challenging and fun.

Although I enjoy Early Music, I was a bit envious of other students that I met at the Hammer home in Osborne Village who were learning Irish traditional instruments. A few times, when I took my baroque recorder to Tea & Tunes, I got frowned upon since my instrument was not quite Irish-enough. Meanwhile, Sandy took bodhran lessons from Susan so I felt alienated from the Irish scene. Fortunately, the yearly Irish Festivals and Folkarama were always great ways to experience the feel of the Irish rhythms.

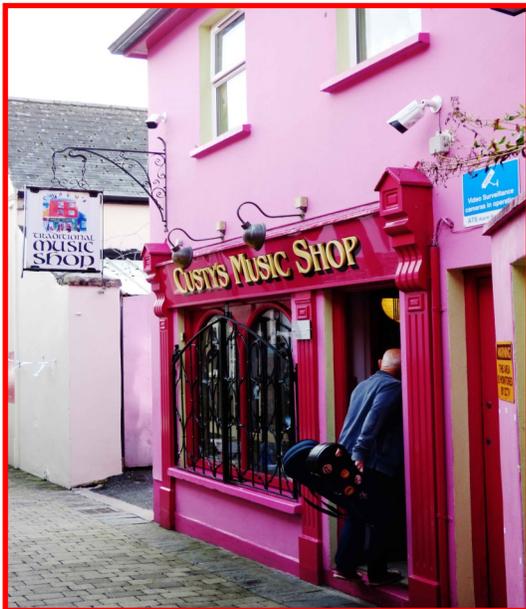
In 2011 I signed up for a beginner fiddle course that was being offered at The Bhigg House. Those first attempts at fiddle were challenging but I kept practicing every day, which helped keep the arthritis away!

When attending fiddle workshops, I had to get used to being the oldest and least experienced and feeling humbled by 10 year olds playing circles around me. In my attempt to find solutions to my slow-learning style, I took lessons from various teachers and this was helpful, as were the courses from the Online Academy of Irish Music. So more doors opened with my second instrument. Sandy and I play together and aptly named our duo *Chance 'by Golly*. (If you take a chance at learning an instrument, by golly you can have fun.) Later we joined up with another couple and formed a group *Two by Two*. We now can play Celtic and historic English folk music with harp, guitars, fiddle and bodhran, 4 part recorder, and some singing.

In 2016, I took my fiddle to Ireland where we went directly to Ennis in County Clare, which is a hub of Comhaltas activity. There was lots of choice for trad sessions in the various pubs and regarding tempo, they were all a little different. In one, the pace was almost manic. We preferred the more relaxing and enjoyable tempo (for old folks) at another, which was almost leaning towards our Slow Session. I didn't have the confidence to play with them but enjoyed the stimulation. Ennis is a beautiful historical town with warm and friendly people. And the near-by scenery is breath-taking.

I am very grateful for the opportunities of playing in the Comhaltas Slow Session at Tracy's house and the sessions at the Irish Club organized by Daniel and all the wonderful supportive music comrades. We are lucky with the constant opportunities for learning and growth with the CCE Irish Music School. It's always motivating to know that there are opportunities for playing with others, thanks to Comhaltas.

Photo Gallery courtesy of Mark McLearn: From his travels to Ireland



From Susan

Hello folks,
Well, Spring is here, at least some of the time, and it's a chance to prep for the upcoming Post-Pandemic Session Season!
Dust off those instruments and limber up those fingers if you have been taking an extended break.
Many of you have been learning new tunes, so it will be fun to share these along with the "golden oldies" when the sessions start up again - outdoors this summer will work! In the mean time, here's some ITM links to explore:
Polkas, and Slides, and more: <https://youtu.be/FYSHEFoXrbQ>
An Influential Musician: <https://www.itma.ie/blog/aggie-whyte-michael-harrison>
Delightful Concert: <https://youtu.be/JArIv678Kos>
Stay well, keep playing, and see you soon!
Susan & the Irish Music School Team



Tune of the Month

The High Jig

Taught by Martin Hayes

<https://youtu.be/OazBrSUBPwx>

