



THE KENNEDY CENTER

Performing Arts Series

ARTS-BASED PROGRAMMING VIA SATELLITE/WEB

presented in cooperation with PRINCE WILLIAM NETWORK

Arts from Ireland: Music

Friday, March 16, 2001

Grades 7 - 12

When viewing *Arts from Ireland: Music* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following National Standards for Music will be addressed: 6, 9.

Background Information

The small European country of Ireland boasts a vibrant musical tradition. According to award winning Irish musician and educator Mick Moloney, Irish traditional music is currently experiencing "the most extraordinary renaissance... which has spread, literally, across the world." Irish traditional music is a combination of music of the past and contemporary compositions. Irish music is largely an oral tradition, shared more through practice, performance, and memory than through writing and print. The Irish enjoy their music in homes, in public houses, and at celebrations. As its popularity increases around the world, Irish music can be heard in formal concerts, and the number of professional Irish musicians is growing.

About the Program The Musicians and Their Instruments

An ensemble of five Irish musicians will perform musical selections that feature the unique instruments associated with Irish traditional music. Together with moderator Mick Moloney, they will discuss their instruments, music, and thoughts on the growing interest in their art form and the arts of Ireland.

Rónán Browne plays the Uilleann Pipes. Uilleann (ILL-in) translates as "elbow," in Ireland's native language, Gaelic. The Uilleann pipes have a "bag" that is filled with air by a bellow pumped by the piper's elbow. The Uilleann pipes have five main components: the bag and bellow, the melody providing chanter, regulators for chords, and drones which produce a continuous deep 'drone' sound. The beginning of *Titanic's* Celine

Dion song, "My Heart Will Go On," is played by Uilleann pipes. Kevin Glackin plays the Irish Fiddle. The Irish Fiddle is exactly the same as a violin; "fiddle" is simply the term used in traditional music. Musicians from various regions of Ireland play the fiddle differently. Near the northern town of Donegal, the fiddle style is traditionally aggressive and powerful, whereas in the west, near Galway, the style is slower-paced and wistful. In the south of Ireland fiddling expresses a wide range of musical emotions from joy to sadness. The modern ease of travel and communication has contributed to new and merged fiddle playing styles.

Conal Ó'Gráda plays the Irish flute, a black wooden instrument with large holes bored into its tube. The playing style is influenced by the strong Irish piping tradition. Skilled Irish flute players practice for years to master fast fingering, breath control, and sound quality.

What to Look and Listen For in Percussion Music

- Observe Rónán Browne's complicated arm and hand positions as he operates all five parts of the Uilleann pipe.
- Since breathing is an important aspect of playing any flute, watch Conal Ó'Gráda as he plays the Irish flute and notice when and how he breathes.
- Listen for the different emotions (joy, sorrow, excitement, fear) Kevin Glackin conveys with his fiddle
- During solos of the Uilleann pipe, the fiddle, and the flute, Tommy Hayes plays the Bodhrán. His instrument enhances the overall sound and feel of the solos. Notice how Hayes's playing of the Bodhrán does not distract from the featured soloist.
- Listen to the words that tell the stories in Mary Greene's songs. Why do you think the term "flowery ornamentation" is sometimes used to describe the lyrics?

The Irish flute player aims for a full, rich, mellow sound.

Tommy "Spoons" Hayes plays the Bodhrán (BOW-rawn), the Irish frame drum. Holding the Bodhrán vertically beside the body, the Bodhrán player brushes the drum's skin with a bent wrist or a double-ended stick, called a tipper, as if strumming a guitar. To create different pitches and sounds, the Bodhrán player, may place the other hand in various spots behind the drum. Hayes also plays the spoons and bones, instruments borrowed from America's folk tradition.

Mary Greene is the vocalist. There are two types of Irish traditional vocal music: folk singing and *sean-nós* (SHWAN-nos). Folk singing is accompanied by instruments, while *sean-nós* or "old-time singing" is sung *a cappella*. The *sean-nós* song, usually sung in Gaelic, tells a melancholy narrative of love or life. Greene also plays the guitar.



Instructional Activity Write a *Sean-nós*

A *sean-nós* is an expressive song in which the story of the song is more important than the music. The Irish *sean-nós* is similar to American Blues music; it is an expression of sad or difficult times. When she writes songs, singer Mary Greene takes inspiration from events that happened to her or to people she knows. Be a part of the living tradition of Irish music by writing the words of a *sean-nós* song. Remember that *sean-nós* lyrics are decorative, exaggerated, and embellished, so be descriptive about your song's setting and feelings.

Resources

On the Web:

kennedy-center.org/pwttv

Print:

Massie, Sonja. [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Irish History and Culture](#). NY: MacMillan, 1999.

Vallely, Fintan. [Blooming Meadows: The World of Irish Traditional Music](#). Dublin, Ireland: Robers Rinehart Publishers, 1998.

Recordings:

[The Best of The Chieftains](#) (Columbia Records)

[Uncommon Bonds with Mick Moloney & Eugene O'Donnell](#) (Green Linnet)