



# Diaspora

newsletter



Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann & Irish Cultural Traditions in North America



*Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann's visionary project -Meitheal- revolves around the idea of communal contribution but focusing almost exclusively on cultural related projects in North America.*

*CCE Meitheal's goal is to fund projects and initiatives among the Irish diaspora in North America such as the teaching of traditional arts, both inside and outside Comhaltas' framework. If you would like to get in touch with Meitheal North America, please call 314-842-3906 or email [helen@slia.org](mailto:helen@slia.org)*



**Helen Gannon**  
Meitheal Chair  
Comhaltas North America



Government of Ireland  
Emigrant Support Programme



An Roinn Turasoireachta, Cultúir,  
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
Department of Tourism, Culture  
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

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## Unlocking Our Cultural Potential 2030 The Role of the Irish Diaspora in the New Comhaltas Prospectus

The latest Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann prospectus, "Unlocking Our Cultural Potential 2030," highlights the crucial role of the Irish diaspora in preserving and promoting Irish culture globally. This prospectus outlines strategic goals and initiatives to leverage the global Irish community, emphasizing their integral role in cultural, social, and economic spheres.

### BRIDGING CULTURAL GAPS

Comhaltas serves as a vital link between Irish communities worldwide and Ireland. With over 450 branches in 21 countries, the organization fosters a sense of belonging and cultural continuity among the diaspora. The prospectus emphasizes the active participation of the diaspora in cultural activities, ensuring that Irish traditions thrive globally.

### GLOBAL INFLUENCE AND EXPANSION

The international impact of Comhaltas is evident through events like Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, attracting around 500,000 visitors annually, including many from overseas. This event showcases Irish culture to a global audience, enhancing Ireland's cultural presence. Additionally, Comhaltas tours and international festivals in countries like Japan, Brazil, Argentina, and Australia further strengthen cultural ties and expand global reach.

### DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY AND COMMUNICATION

The prospectus emphasizes digital technology to connect with the diaspora, utilizing social media, newsletters, and webinars for real-time engagement. The Treoir publication, distributed to members and stakeholders worldwide, ensures continuous connection to Irish cultural roots.

### SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

By promoting twinning between Irish and overseas branches, Comhaltas encourages cultural exchange and mutual support. Collaboration with entities like the GAA and the Department of Foreign Affairs provides a holistic support system for Irish communities abroad, addressing their social, health, and cultural needs.

### EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Comhaltas aims to expand its educational programs, offering classes in music, dance, and the Irish language to all ages. These initiatives nurture cultural ambassadors, ensuring the diaspora's active engagement in Irish traditions.


*Read the New Comhaltas Prospectus*  
[www.comhaltas.ie/about-us/comhaltas-2030/](http://www.comhaltas.ie/about-us/comhaltas-2030/)

**2030**  
PROSPECTUS

Unlocking our  
cultural potential







*Brendan McAleer, Sen. Tim Kennedy,  
Ryan Murphy, Eamonn Ó hArgáin,  
Siobhán Ní Chonaráin, John Greer*

## Highlights from the 2024 North American Comhaltas Provincial Convention

The 2024 North American Provincial Convention certainly seemed to be a huge success! The organizing committee of six Northeast Region branches have been overwhelmed and elated by the positive feedback. We are all so happy that attendees enjoyed their time in Buffalo.

Our main organizational goals were to raise funds for our region and all participating branches, to create and execute a workable schedule with a good variety of activities, to employ as many instructors and performers from our Region as we could, and to further strengthen the "family" that we have among the Northeast Branches. We needed an appropriately sized hotel, not too large but with plenty of meeting spaces, and good seisiún spaces. They also needed to understand the nature of our event. We feel that the Hyatt Regency and its staff provided excellent hospitality and are to be commended so. They even reached out to us to ask if it was okay to dress in green for the weekend!

We had an extraordinary committee made up from members and leaders of our Northeast Region branches. Each branch took on an aspect of the convention and executed beautifully. There is a lot of skill out there if you ask, from logos to layouts, performances and resourcing talent, and guidance from those who have been here before as well as the energy of

those who were involved in their first convention.

There were special guests from Head Office, Eamonn Ó hArgáin Uachtarán CCÉ, Brendan McAleer, Siobhan NiChronain, and Ena Doocey to capture it all on film. Thank you for making the trip across "the pond" to join us! Presentations from the offices of Assemblyman Patrick Burke and Governor Kathy Hochul (a daughter of Irish Immigrants and whose Father helped open the Buffalo Irish Center) were made as a welcome before the very well attended Thursday night céilí. United States Congressman Tim Kennedy spoke at the Saturday night Banquet.

The convention provided 42 workshops in language, various instruments, and dance, along with a special stage program (hosted by the Craobh Dugan O'Looney Branch) that featured presentations regarding Irish history, music, literature, and language. The presentations were very well attended and received rave reviews.

There were dance workshops each day and a céilí every night. The music was outstanding from the Drumlin Céilí Band featuring natives of Rochester and the Finger Lakes Region, the Connacht Céilí Band from Boston, and the Northern Lights Céilí Band from Toronto. The highlight was the Saturday night céilí featuring the Joanie Madden all-stars ...and what a lineup...Joanie on flute and


whistles, Kevin Crawford on Flute, John Nolan on the box, John Madden on Drums, Brendan Dolan on keyboards with Patrick Ourceau and Brian Conway on fiddles. Dancers, did we mention 25 sets? and listeners alike were thrilled.

The hotel was very welcoming to many seisiúns as well. Employees were saying that they had never seen anything like it. Not a single complaint, just utter fascination at the nature of what we do!


Now I have to add that we did not achieve the financial success we had hoped for, but we started with absolutely zero in the bank and the pre-sale of packages at the 2023 Convention fueled our efforts. I highly suggest that hosting branches or regions not focus too much on start up funds but do employ a pre-sale of packages, capturing the enthusiasm of attendees. We also want to say that we tried to postpone that eclipse to get more rooms but.... you just can't have everything!

A huge thank you to all our friends from far and near, to our extended and unrelated family who took a chance and came to our Convention. Thanks to all who worked so diligently to make the weekend a great show of the best of Traditional Irish Culture and Craic!

All the Best,  
**Bridget English and Tim Quinn**



*Set Dancing Session at CCÉ Convention 2024*



*Siobhan O'Donoghue, Ann Dillion, Mary Málloy and Chris Johnson.*



# Andy McGann CCÉ

## A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

FRANKIE GAVIN AND CATHERINE MCHUGH DAZZLE AT THE GREATER DANBURY IRISH CULTURAL CENTER

On Thursday, May 16th, the Greater Danbury Irish Cultural Center was alive with the enchanting sounds of traditional Irish music as Galway fiddler Frankie Gavin, co-founder of De Dannan, performed alongside keyboard accompanist Catherine McHugh. Sponsored and presented by the Andy McGann CCÉ branch, this concert was a memorable evening for the 74 attendees who gathered to witness the magic.

The concert was more than just a display of extraordinary talent; it was an inspirational event for local



musicians and a cultural bridge for newcomers to the Irish community. Frankie Gavin's masterful fiddling and Catherine McHugh's exquisite keyboard accompaniment set a high standard for traditional Irish music. One local musician noted, "I watched Frankie's bow hand throughout the performance!" indicating the deep impact and learning opportunity the concert provided.

For many attendees, it was their first visit to the Greater Danbury Irish Cultural Center, and the event left a lasting impression. The concert introduced them to a vibrant venue and enriched their understanding of Irish culture through music. The post-concert feedback was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting both the quality of the performance and the warmth of the community. One attendee shared, "The concert was amazing and the welcoming to us newcomers was fantastic! Thank you so much for organizing it!" Another enthused, "Frankie's talent

was not known to me, but I will follow him and go to another of his performances and bring friends. Thank you for the introduction to his music."

The evening was not only a testament to Frankie Gavin's remarkable musical gift but also to his ability to engage and entertain an audience with humor and charm. As one audience member aptly put it, "What a gift he has, not only for the music, but for his ability to hold the whole room in his hand with his humor. Thank you for making this happen!"

In collaboration with the Greater Danbury Irish Cultural Center & Foundation, this event was a shining example of community spirit and cultural celebration. It was a night that will be remembered by all who attended, and it set the stage for future events that continue to bring people together through the power of music.

## St. Louis Irish Arts Summer Camp

The St. Louis Irish Arts Summer Camp is a lively haven for music, song, dance in the St. Louis area. From June 10<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, participants immersed themselves in the vibrant world of Irish culture, learning traditional tunes, perfecting dance steps, honing their vocal skills and trying new musical instruments.

With a perfect blend of structured classes and exciting activities, the camp fosters creativity, teamwork, and lasting friendships. Míle Buíochas to DFA & Meitheal NA for sponsoring SLIA's Summer Camp 2024.







# CELEBRATING IRISH TRADITION

## The 2024 Midwest Fleadh Cheoil

The Midwest Fleadh Cheoil (pronounced 'flah'), the premier regional traditional Irish music competition, was hosted by the Murphy Roche branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann at the Crowne Plaza Chicago-Northbrook, Illinois, from April 26-28, 2024. This annual event gathered Irish musicians from across the Midwest, offering an exceptional opportunity for participants to hone their skills, receive valuable feedback from experienced judges, and connect with a vibrant community of fellow enthusiasts.



Rio Navarro and Katie Greenan

Throughout the weekend, the atmosphere at the Fleadh was electric, filled with the sounds of fiddles, flutes, and tin whistles. Musicians of all ages competed in various categories, with the top two performers in each



"The Broken Pledge" Senior Céilí Band Champions

category earning the prestigious chance to represent North America at the All Ireland competition in Ireland come August. This made the event not just a regional highlight, but a stepping stone to international acclaim for many talented musicians.

A notable addition to this year's Fleadh was the "Blazing a Trail: Lives and Legends of Irish Diaspora Women" exhibit. Sponsored by the Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago Educational and Cultural Foundation, this exhibit celebrated the contributions of Irish American women throughout history. Attendees expressed their gratitude to the Irish Fellowship for bringing this important narrative to the event, adding a rich cultural dimension to the weekend's proceedings.

One of the highlights of the 2024 Midwest Fleadh Cheoil was the Chicago Midwest Fleadh Irish Singing Session, held on the evening of Friday, April 26. Hosted by Alberta Lathan and Kathy Cowan, the session was an

informal gathering that welcomed singers of all ages and abilities. Participants and spectators alike gathered at the Crown Plaza Hotel to share traditional Irish songs, creating a warm and inclusive environment. Alberta and Kathy invited each singer to share their favorite tunes, ensuring that everyone who wished to sing had the opportunity to do so. The session, which ran from 8 to 10 pm, was an unforgettable experience for all involved, fostering a sense of community and shared heritage.

The Fleadh Cheoil was more than just a competition; it was a celebration of Irish culture. Alongside the competitive events, various workshops and exhibitions were held, promoting Irish



U18 Grúpa Ceoil Champions from St. Paul, MN

music, dance, and history. The event reinforced the importance of community, tradition, and the shared joy of music, ensuring that the spirit of the Fleadh will continue to thrive in the Midwest for years to come.

### Murphy Roche's Aírs Archives Project

On May 5, 2024, the Aírs Archives Project will edit and prepare archival material for publication. From May 2-5, our team will record legendary musicians performing aírs—slow, emotive melodies that are among the most challenging in traditional Irish music—and discussing their techniques, inspiration, and development process. These recordings will be edited and made accessible through The Aírs Project archives website, funded by The Gadfly Project.

The project's objective is to preserve and promote the art of playing aírs, providing valuable resources for research and learning. Musicians and the public will gain unique insights from master musicians, who have generously shared their most treasured aírs. This project fills a significant gap in the availability of credible sources on traditional Irish aírs, benefiting Comhaltas members and enhancing their appreciation and understanding of this beautiful genre. By capturing the essence of aírs, the project ensures the legacy of Irish musical heritage continues to inspire future generations.







## In Profile: Eileen Gannon

Music has always been at the heart of my life, shaping my journey and connecting me to my roots. Growing up in St. Louis, I was blessed to be immersed in the rich traditions of Irish music, thanks to my parents, Helen and P.J. Gannon. They founded St. Louis Irish Arts (SLIA) in the 1970s, and as I tried different instruments, my mom decided I should play the harp. As they say, "mother knows best," and in this case, she did! I will forever be thankful for her nudge towards becoming a harpist. Mom and Dad created a vibrant cultural hub that attracted some of the best Irish musicians to St. Louis, nurturing my love for music from an early age.

Some of my earliest memories with my mom are getting picked up from school and jumping in the car to head off to a nursing home, school, or concert hall. We were always heading off to do a performance somewhere. I even remember being 2 or 3, just holding her hand and dancing in some place that I can't remember, but it's burnt into my memory. Always playing, singing, dancing, and going to music lessons were such important parts of my life,

and I'm really grateful for that. It has opened up countless doors, and I love it very much now, even though there might have been a little bit of pushing involved in the early years to get me to practice.

My musical journey began with classical harp studies under the guidance of Laura Hearne. However, it was the summers I spent in Ireland learning from various harp masters, such as Tracy Flemming and Maire Ni Cathasaigh, that truly honed my craft. Winning the Senior Harp title at the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the World Irish Music Championships, was a milestone that affirmed my dedication and passion for the Irish harp.

Education has always been a cornerstone of my musical journey. I earned a bachelor's degree in Music Performance from St. Louis University and later pursued a master's degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Limerick. My time in Ireland was transformative, allowing me to teach at the Limerick Municipal School of Music and perform at historic venues like Dromoland and Bunratty Castles.

*"Growing up in St. Louis I was blessed to be immersed in Irish music thanks to my parents, Helen and P.J. Gannon"*

The harp, big and awkward as she might be for traveling, has taken me around the globe. I've had the privilege of performing at international festivals such as the Catskills Irish Arts Week and Scoil

Éigse, and representing Ireland at World Expos in Shanghai and Milan. Releasing my debut solo CD, "The Glory Days Are Over" in 2017 was literally a dream come true—the title was something I amusingly uttered in my sleep! The album is a reflection of my journey and emotions.

Teaching at SLIA has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. As head of music education, I've had the honor of nurturing a new generation of musicians. Many of my students have gone on to win All-Ireland titles themselves, a testament to their hard work and our shared commitment to preserving the tradition.

My mom has created quite the legacy with SLIA, over 50 years now, which is an amazing feat. She has grown it from absolutely nothing and reached so many people with her outreach of performances and teaching. Comhaltas has been instrumental on helping all of that happen. I have some very big shoes to fill as I step into her role, but I certainly hope she sticks around and helps me out because she has many strengths that I can only hope to have by the time I am 80 years old.

To me, music is more than a career; it's a conversation, a way to share my life experiences and cultural heritage with others. Each note I play is infused with warmth, humor, and insight, reflecting who I am. My journey has been one of passion, dedication, struggle, success, and cultural pride. Through my music, teaching, and performances, I aim to keep the tradition of the Irish harp alive and increase its popularity in America. Whether you're a lover of traditional music or simply appreciate the beauty of the harp, my work is a story I'm excited to share with you.







## Brendan McAleer: CCÉ's New Diaspora Officer

A Chairde,  
I'd like to  
introduce  
myself to you as

the new Diaspora Officer working with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. I am very excited to be taking a leading role within such an important area of our movement. I have been working for Comhaltas since 2006, managing the Dún Uladh Comhaltas Regional Resource Centre in Omagh and delivering the development strategy for the organisation in Northern Ireland.

I want to thank Patrick Morrison for his work in developing the diaspora branches and I want to also join you all in wishing him well in his new role. Siobhán Ní Chonaráin, who many of you will know through your interaction with Comhaltas, will continue to deal with the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) which is funded through the Department of

Foreign Affairs Irish Abroad Unit. The last few weeks have been both exciting and informative as I have learnt about the people and operations of our branches across the globe. I can already see the passion and dedication of people who want to impact their local communities through Irish Culture. I look forward to now working with you all to leverage new opportunities which can develop and grow Comhaltas across the globe.

It is an incredible honour for me to take on this role and to serve you as our ambassadors across the global Irish community. Working with Comhaltas over the years, I have personally saw how the movement impacts on groups and individuals, but there are so many more people who we can now engage with through the increased use of online technology such as Zoom. This is also a very exciting time to

be taking on this role, as this year's Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Mullingar, will be dedicated to the diaspora. It will celebrate the vital contribution by those who have shared and shaped our Irish culture across the globe. I look forward to meeting some of you there.

I believe the next few years will be very exciting as we seek to grow our contribution to culture globally. I look forward to meeting, talking with and listening to you all either in-person or virtually through Zoom. I am here to learn from you and to support your work from Comhaltas Head Office. I will finish for now by thanking you all for your passion and dedication to delivering our culture across the globe.

*Brendan McAleer*  
**Brendan McAleer**  
CCÉ Diaspora Officer

## Can You Hear the Drums?

### Hamilton Irish Arts Beats to the Rhythm of the Bodhrán

On June 1, 2024, Hamilton Irish Arts (Ontario, Canada) organized a successful Bodhrán Workshop to equip new and seasoned players with essential skills and etiquette for Irish Traditional Sessions.

Participants learned how to handle and play the bodhrán, recognize rhythms, and appreciate this

traditional instrument. Led by Les Starkey, the workshop also explored the bodhrán's craftsmanship and history, promoting Irish heritage. By teaching proper session etiquette, the event ensured that attendees can confidently join Comhaltas sessions worldwide, enriching the global Irish musical community.





# → HONORING LEGENDS: ←

## 2024 Mid-Atlantic Hall of Fame Banquet & Céilí

On May 11, 2024, the Mid Atlantic Region hosted its prestigious Hall of Fame Banquet and Céilí at the Hilton Parsippany during the Mid-Atlantic Fleadh 2024. The event gathered around 300 attendees to celebrate the induction of four distinguished members of Comhaltas, including one posthumously. Established in 1990 by former Region Chairman Jack Whelan, this event honors individuals who have significantly contributed to the promotion of Irish traditional music and dance.

The 2024 inductees were Dawn Doherty, Siobhán Kelly, Niall Mulligan, and Kathleen Collins RIP, with Garr Disalvo receiving a Service Award. The evening

included a full céilí to promote traditional céilí and set dancing, with live music provided by members of the judging panel, ensuring a vibrant and engaging atmosphere.

The Hall of Fame has been a cornerstone event in the New York area, inspiring similar celebrations across North America. It continues to strengthen the sense of community and camaraderie among Irish musicians, dancers, and enthusiasts while showcasing the vibrant heritage of Irish culture.

The event also serves as an important fundraiser, helping to sustain the region's activities and



supporting the mission of CCÉ. By celebrating the achievements of these individuals, the Mid Atlantic Region's Hall of Fame underscores the enduring importance of Irish music and dance, promoting a deeper appreciation for Irish heritage.



*Dawn Doherty*



*Siobhán Kelly*



*Niall Mulligan*



*Kathleen Collins RIP*

## Weekend of Irish Language and Culture

### Harp of Tara CCÉ, Kingston, Ontario

On Friday, April 26, 2024, the Harp of Tara CCE from Kingston, Ontario, organized a "Weekend of Irish Language and Culture."

Following the success of last year's event, this weekend aimed to integrate the Irish language into a variety of cultural activities. The event featured workshops in Irish music, set dance, sean nós dance, Celtic art, the history of Irish whisky, and Irish film, along with instruction in the Irish language.



Additionally, three social events were held: a siamsa, a banquet, and a céilí, featuring live music by The Seventh Town Céilí Band.

The event sought to maintain and promote Irish heritage and identity. Regular weekly sessions in set dance, instrumental music, and language were complemented by this special weekend. Participants engaged in a Celtic art workshop to design their own Celtic crosses, while Helen Finn led a workshop on the history and tasting of Irish whisky. Other workshops included sean nós and set dance by Julie Bowes and Stephen Rayner, Gaelic singing by Eithne Dunbar, and Irish language classes at four levels.

This project significantly benefited Comhaltas and its members. It helped consolidate knowledge, fostered in-person interactions,



and attracted people from a wide area. The céilí drew young participants and community members, enhancing awareness of Irish culture and Comhaltas. Involvement in planning and managing the event was high, with awards given to long-time instructors, and efforts made to attract new members and instructors, ultimately expanding membership and engagement within the organization.



## CLADDAGH BRANCH SPRING CÉILÍ 2024

On March 1, 2024, the Claddagh Branch, Saskatoon, CCE, successfully hosted the Claddagh Branch Spring Céilí. This family-friendly event featured traditional Irish music and dance, encouraging audience participation and sparking interest in Irish culture. The céilí showcased volunteer musicians and local Irish dance schools, fostering a spirit of community. The event aimed to promote an atmosphere of generosity, joy, and welcome to all at a time of year when spirits tend to be lowest in this part of the country. Crucially, it generated essential funds to sustain the Branch's core activities, ensuring the continuation of their cultural mission.



## Story and Song with Máirtín de Cógáin

On Saturday, March 23, 2024, Craobh Barry Cogan CCE organized "Story and Song with Máirtín de Cógáin" at the Templars Hall in Poway, CA. This evening featured a 1-2 hour performance by the two-time All-Ireland Storytelling champion, Máirtín de Cógáin. The event aimed to introduce a new generation to the rich storytelling culture of Ireland and the activities of the San Diego County Comhaltas branch.

The performance focused on Irish heritage and identity, highlighting the traditions of Cork through Máirtín's stories and songs. This event not only sparked interest in Irish culture among younger audiences but also increased the branch's presence in the San Diego County area.



## Winter Céilí In Florida

On Sunday, December 10, 2023, Tír na mBláth CCE from South East Florida hosted its inaugural Winter Céilí, the branch's first céilí event. Members of the recently disbanded Irish American Céilí Club were welcomed to encourage participation in branch events and future céilí dances. Held in an Irish pub, the event aimed to promote Irish heritage through cultural dancing, music, and language. It featured live session musicians and céilí dancers, with a set dance tutor for newcomers. The Winter Céilí helped Comhaltas by promoting music and dance, exciting members about future events, and enhancing the branch's cultural activities.



## IRISH LITERARY SERIES BY O'NEILL MALCOM CCÉ

On Saturday, April 27, 2024, O'Neill Malcom CCE organized the Irish Literary Series, featuring renowned Irish-American authors Alice McDermott and Terrence Winch. Alice McDermott, a New York Times bestselling author, discussed her latest novel, "Absolution," which explores the social politics of American wives during the Vietnam War. Terrence Winch, known for his collection "Irish Musicians/American Friends," moderated a panel of Irish American writers on themes of identity, culture, and music. The event celebrated Irish heritage by highlighting themes such as immigration, loss, music, and family. It also promoted Comhaltas activities, encouraged membership enrolment, and provided opportunities for social engagement and donations to support future branch activities.



## FÉILE PORTLAND: A GAELIC REVIVAL

From February 16 to 18, 2024, the Mícheál Ó Domhnaill Branch of Oregon hosted Féile Portland, celebrating Irish language and culture. The weekend included Irish language tuition, music workshops, and local events like the 3rd Friday An Céilí Beag. Three Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant program instructors and another instructor led singing and dancing workshops, offering up to eight hours of instruction. Féile Portland aimed to raise awareness of the Irish language in Portland, enhancing community learning efforts and cultivating new instructors. By integrating song and poetry, the event bridged the gap between Irish language and music communities. The event promoted Irish heritage by showcasing Ireland's linguistic traditions. It reinforced the commitment of the local Irish language community and encouraged new participants to connect with their heritage. Collaboration with Fulbright, the Irish Consulate, and local organizations highlighted the branch's importance, increasing visibility and potential new memberships for Comhaltas.



FÉILE  
PORTLAND