



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

# Praise The Youth And They Will Flourish! “Mol An Óige Agus Tiocfaidh Sí”

by Liam Reidy, President, United Irish Cultural Center, (lreidy@irishcentersf.org)

THE EARLY WEEKS OF EACH New Year at the Center are the ones which have been historically quiet after normally busy Christmas and New Years celebrations in the community. That trend is now changing for the better. Covid restrictions ensured there was little happening publicly last year, but behind the scenes the Board and the nascent 2025 committee was busy orchestrating what will eventually be a major gift to Bay Area Irish American community, by way of a new Irish Center. We held our first exploratory review meeting of the existing UICC facility on a cold Wednesday evening on January 27, 2021. Now 12 months after that watershed meeting, we are looking to the future with great optimism as we finalize the building plans for the SF Planning Department.

### Activating the Building

The Center was absolutely bustling with activity during the past month, with most of the energy devoted to the major elements of our mission as a nonprofit organization. We exist to celebrate and promote the rich culture and heritage of the collective local, regional, and national culture of Ireland for future generations to enjoy and conserve.

We opened the doors of the St Francis Room to our very first museum quality exhibition ‘The Keepers of the Steps,’ which traces the history of Irish Dance in the San Francisco Bay Area over the past 150 years through documented stories from Irish

dancers, costumes, photographs, newspaper articles, books, cultural treasures, artifacts and ephemera.

While we now have five Irish step dance schools in the building teaching students during the week, we hosted the Kennelly Memorial Feis mid-month with over 200 step dancers taking to the stage, some of them for the first time, to ensure the continuation of the tradition for years to come.

### Irish Arts for Kids

What was really inspiring this month was the launch of the Irish music, drama and singing classes for the younger members of our community. Thanks to grant support from the Irish government through the Emigrant Support Program (ESP), and the generous support of those who donated to our 2021 Annual Appeal, we have 40 kids signed up to participate in banjo, fiddle, bodhrán, keyboards, drama, singing, tin whistle, Irish drums, piping, and drama classes.

Several people reached out in person and online to thank the Cultural Committee for their efforts to get this much needed youth program off the ground. The response from the community has been very favorable and can best be summed up by a parent who wrote: “My daughter is enjoying the classes ... they have become a highlight of her weekend.”

### Praise the Youth

That’s what we want to do here at the Center, to provide



a space where kids can be kids and experience all that their Irish heritage has to offer them, whether it is through the medium of music, drama, singing, or language, or through financial support with education scholarships.

The Irish Center is going well now and will be in a much larger facility in a few short years, playing a pivotal role in developing and encouraging the next generation of Irish American community leaders. The kids in your midst today will be the leaders and stewards of future Irish Center Boards; officers in local nonprofit Irish groups, clubs, and sporting teams. We hope for new Irish bands, because many of those experiencing Irish music for the first time at the Center this spring will continue to play.

As a young child growing up in Ireland we hadn’t much, but I was surrounded by loving parents and grandparents who never stopped praising and encouraging my siblings and me, in almost every thing we turned our youthful attention to be it

education, music, or sports. We all eventually found our way in life and settled into our own niches. As a parent now, it’s more important than ever to be a guiding hand for our kids; giving them gentle pushes and prompts in the right direction along the path of life. Allowing your child the chance to get involved in the youth heritage programs at the Irish Center, as my grandfather would say “...is no load.” Keeping the kids busy going forward takes effort of course but a solid investment in not only their own futures but your own!

Thanks to all the teachers who have been gracious with their time provided to the youth programming. They include: Eamonn Flynn, Darcy Noonan, Kenny Sommerville, Cormac Gannon, Michael Dillon, Kathleen Smith, Alex Lentz, and John Carlin.

The hope is to one day have our own “Youth Céilí Band” at the Center in time for the opening of the new building. With your continued help and support we will continue to foster cultural awareness through education, arts and social events.

### Keepers Success

Hats off to Anne Cassidy Carew and the Keepers of the Steps committee for producing a museum quality exhibition on the history of Irish dance in the Bay Area which was showcased during January. The exhibition gave visitors a snapshot of the types of artifacts and untold stories that are out there in the community, waiting to be

archived and curated. Many thanks to all those who loaned materials for use in the exhibition and donated materials to the UICC’s permanent library and museum collections use.

### Grand Marshal Dinner

The United Irish Societies will host the its annual Dinner at the Center on Friday, February 25th honoring Grand Marshal, Jim Byrne and Honorary Grand Marshals; Pat Ahern, James Masterson, Marie Doherty, Margaret Kearns and Charlotte Shultz. No host cocktails at 6pm followed by dinner at 7pm.

### Leo T Walsh Scholarship

Applications for our annual scholarship program open this month, for 8th Graders and High School Seniors entering the next level of their education. Completed applications are due on March 17th.

### Amateur Boxing Returns

The UICC is teaming up with Fire in the Ring Boxing to showcase a night of amateur boxing at the Center on Saturday, March 26th.

### Deceased Members Mass

We honor the memory of past UICC members at the Annual Deceased members mass on Sunday, February 6th at St Gabriel’s Church at 2559, 40th Avenue, San Francisco.

### St Patrick’s Season

The Board is preparing for what is expected to be one of the busiest St Patrick’s Day seasons in many years, with a robust schedule of events being prepared.

More on that next month; until then, Stay Safe!

## Kennelly Memorial Feis Photo Gallery

OVER 200 IRISH STEP dancers took part in the John and Maureen Kennelly Memorial Feis at the UICC over two days on the weekend of January 15th and 16th. It was great to see the Center so busy with young dancers, some of whom were participating in their first Feis, from early morning until the late afternoon each day. Here are some of the First Feis attendees and Champion dancers.



Maeve Mitchelshon (U-6) and Maeve Storm (U7) from the Kennelly School.



Siblings, Sheena Baird (U-5) and First Feis for Ewan Baird from the Kennelly School.



Paola and Champion dancer Sofia O’Riordan (Whelan Academy).



Daniel and Christine Martinez from San Jose.



From the Greene Academy: Lia Sorich, Brighid Beckham, Alice Beeson, Isabel Martinez and Fionnian Beckham.



Three generations of Cassidy’s: Maureen, Lucy, Elana and Breda Cassidy.



Julia And Emma Kelley from the Healy School.



Rian Spillane and Aidan Pecko.



U-15 Open Championship; Katie Doherty (Keenan), Aoi-bhínn Reidy (O’Connor-Kennedy), and Paige McGrath (Kennelly).



Dempsey McCormack, Abigail Langley, Aislynn McCormack and Emily Sheedy (Keenan School Petaluma).



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# Keepers Of The Steps Exhibition Enthralls Attendees

By Liam Reidy

THE KEEPERS OF THE STEPS (KOTS) Irish dance exhibition proved to be a wonderful museum quality installation for the three week run during January in the St Francis room. The exhibition traced the history of traditional Irish step dancing in the Bay Area during the past 150 years through personal stories, Irish dance school histories, music, newspaper articles, historical photographs, ephemera, competition dresses, and cultural treasures like the trophies and medals handed out over the years to Champion dancers.

The exhibition was officially opened at the Center on January 13th by Vice-Consul of Ireland Doireann O'Brien. In her opening speech, O'Brien recalled that: "Dance, like language, keeps people together, which is important for a diaspora that lost track of friends and family as they made their way across the Atlantic escaping from the famine and traveling in adverse conditions. Creating cultural spaces where music was played, and jigs and reels danced lessened the blow of exile and may also have helped immigrants reunite with loved

ones."

She continued to state that: "A key part of our Irish Government's Diaspora strategy, launched in 2020, is a continued and increased focus on youth engagement. There is no doubt that Irish dancing has played, and will continue to play, a key part in this. It's a chance for young people abroad, both of Irish descent and not, to connect in and celebrate Irish heritage and culture—and to have great fun while doing so. I know that the tradition is alive and well in Bay Area."

Former Irish step dancer and KOTS committee member Eileen Mize who was an integral part of the development of the physical installations and displays said: "Working to bring this exhibit to life has been an absolute passion project and a beautiful walk down memory lane. I'll be sad to see it come to an end, but excited about future possibilities! As we have told many people who have visited, we have just scratched the surface ... this is just the beginning!"

Cultural Programming Director Anne Cassidy-Carew

said: "It has been very rewarding to see the reactions from the visitors when they experience the exhibit. Irish dancing has such a rich history here in the San Francisco Bay Area and to see it on display and read the colorful stories is such a joy. It makes you proud to be a part of it. In particular, the wall with the banner that honors the founding dancing schools in the Bay Area has been a big hit. To be able to see the lineage of dancing talent makes for an impressive display."

The "hidden stories and artifacts" that were uncovered during the process of putting the exhibition together—many of which were loaned and in some cases donated to the Irish Center's permanent collections—will come to light again in the new building in the Museum.

The job of curating, digitizing, and archiving what has been delivered to the Center in January as part of the showcase has already begun. We look forward to seeing all the material in the new building soon!

These photos are courtesy of Kemily Visuals.

# Youth Music, Drama And Singing Classes In Full Swing

THE HALLS OF THE IRISH Center are alive with the sound of music, and song on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Young members of the community are receiving instruction in banjo, fiddle, bodhrán, keyboards, drama, singing, tin whistle, Irish drums, and piping classes.

The classes have been possible by generous support of all those who donated to our 2021 Annual Appeal.

The classes will continue right through the spring. Some of the participants will take part in the Dublinesque show with Eamonn Flynn on Saturday, February 26th.



Irish piper Alex Lentz giving instruction to Julian George. Also present is Tanner Manning, Fintan Reidy (hidden), Tommy Harvey and Driscoll Farrah (Photo by Kemily Visuals).



Drum instructor Kathleen Smith teaching Roisín Reidy how to drum.



Jeff Rodman provided the piano music during the Opening Night of the KOTS exhibition.



Opening Night, January 13th. Jennifer Drennan, Doireann O'Brien (Vice-Consul of San Francisco), Liam Reidy (UICC President), Anne Cassidy Carew (Cultural Programming Director), and Elizabeth Creely.



Kathleen McKeon, Anne Tobin Petersen, and Paula Tobin Martin.



Missy Keehan, Rosie Falvey, and Lisa Raskin.



Noreen Boyle, Patricia Feeny Conefrey, Doireann O'Brien, Kathleen Smith, Mary Jo Murphy, and Ellen O'Connor.

THE UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER & FIRE IN THE RING BOXING present

BOXING

Special Appearance by Pro Boxers Charlie Sheehy & Callum Walsh

Amateur FIGHT NIGHT

March 26, 2022 6-10 pm

United Irish Cultural Center St. Patrick's Room

TICKETS FEB 1: [www.IrishCenterSF.org](http://www.IrishCenterSF.org)