

Festival features Irish traditional music

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hobnailed boots tapping to the tunes of local fiddlers and fiddlers in his parents' flag-floored kitchen.

"THERE WAS a lot of house dancing when people came home from the U.S. and Canada (and after the corn was threshed



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Livonia's Daniel O'Kennedy for years has worked to revive local involvement in Irish arts and sports. O'Kennedy, who hails from County Clare, was instrumental in establishing the Music Association of Ireland's Detroit branch — an organization he serves as chairman.

the singing of Irish love songs. The practice seldom failed "to reward the swain with the heart and hand of his beloved," he wrote.

For the less didactical, the Orchestra Hall event will lure listeners to a faraway state — not unlike that enjoyed in an entertainment-filled evening by an Irishman nestled next to a turf fire in his cabin.

COMHALTAS/OPERS "some of the most beautiful music and dancing of rural Ireland," says O'Kennedy, instrumental in establishing Comhaltas in Detroit. Among the selections are nuggets of Irish culture made famous by 18th-century artists, he adds.

And not all were wrought by lovesick hearts.

"They're songs about emigration, hunger and

THEIR REELS, ballads and haunting Irish airs enliven for some memories of "sequestered" back home, and impart to musical newcomers a sample of "the traditional ancient music — the real McCoy," says Brendan McKinney, who at a tender 22 years already has mastered the Highland pipes, tin whistle and concert wooden flute.

"Too many people connect Irish music to 'McNamara's Band,'" he adds.

IF ANYONE still subscribes to the theory advanced in 1831 by a certain Irish critic, they're not saying so. This unidentified fellow attributed Ireland's "great number of early marriages and consequent rapid increase of population" to at pre-combine harvests."

During such musical merrymaking in Ireland's thatch-roofed cottages, somebody was likely to say, "Round the house Kate, and mind the dresser."

After a dance, the kneading warmth of a ballad could soothe heartbroken mothers and ease the everpresent threat of an emigrant's parting.

Granted, there'll be no thatched roof atop Orchestra Hall to enthrall concert-goers. But Comhaltas gives you the real feeling of Irish culture — it's like going to Ireland," says Anna Gavin, Mick's wife and long-time Comhaltas supporter.

"And it's lots cheaper than a plane ticket," jokes McKinney.

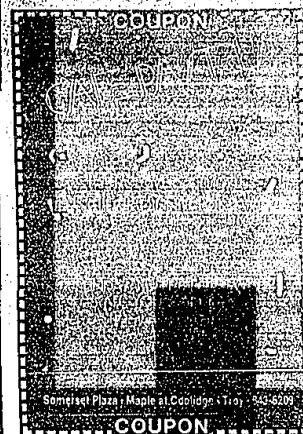
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