

Irish Dancers Rock

By Kristy Pipher
Staff Writer

By now most of us have seen Michael Flatley's Riverdance and Lord of the Dance, but it's a special treat to enjoy live Irish step dancing in the midst of the St. Patrick's Day celebration.

On Tuesday, March 16, Colleen Coyle Kelly, director of Coyle School of Irish Dance, presented a lecture and demonstration in the Gallery Lounge at Penn State Harrisburg. Kelly has been involved in Irish dancing all of her life. She currently teaches in the Central Pennsylvania area including Carlisle, Hanover, Harrisburg, Hershey, and York.

Barbara Roy, a Penn State Harrisburg student and two-year veteran of the Coyle School of Irish Dance, was responsible for the organizing the event, sponsored by the Subcommittee on Diversity and Educational Equity and Office of Student Affairs.

The demonstration included two types of dancing: Ceili and step dancing. Ceili in Irish means party or social. In the group or Ceili dance, the arms are used in different movements to go around the floor while the dancers use the basic footsteps to get where they need to go. Ceili dances normally done in groups of 4, 8 and 16. If there is an extra person, a different dance can be choreographed.

The second part of Irish dancing is step dancing, in which the dancer does intricate footwork with arms are by her sides.

Coyle gave a detailed lecture on Irish step dancing history while Barbara Roy, her daughter Liana Roy, Carol Thomas, and Nancy Knoche performed demonstrations of Ceili and step dancing.

Coyle explained that the real history of Irish dancing is unknown. Its origins are believed to go back to the early Christian times in Ireland when dancing was a major part of celebration. Recorded history of the dancing be-

gan in the 16th century.

Master teachers traveled through Ireland and taught in the houses of the students so it could be kept a secret. The phrase "we'll take the door down for you" originated from this time. The students would literally take the door off the hinges and put it down on the floor so the instructor would have a wooden base to dance on. This was the only way for them to get the right sound.

On Tuesday, the three adult women presented a demonstration of the traditional Irish jig. The jig comes from the Italian word for Jiga, an Italian instrument.

Coyle admitted that she gets a lot of calls



Liana and Barb Roy Photo by Kim Glass

to learn steps from Riverdance and Lord of the Dance. She stressed that it is important that students must learn the basics before learning the intricate footwork.

"At first, it is a little hard to coordinate your feet in these intricate dance steps," said Roy.

"Besides learning catchy moves, you need to train your body in some basics, like pointing your toes."

Coyle explained that the Kelly shield is blue and yellow so the dancers use blue in their costumes. At competitions or festivals, you can tell what school the dancers attend by the colors of their costumes. The dresses can get very expensive, upwards of \$1,000.00.

Coyle said that England had a great influence on Irish dancing. The Reel dance came to Ireland by way of Scotland. To reel means to twirl or spin about. Reel music is much livelier and more fast paced than the jig.

Coyle is the only certified instructor in Central Pennsylvania. To become certified, one needs to take examination in Ireland. Coyle took exam six years ago and has been a certified instructor ever since.

The test itself involved knowing 32 Ceili dances. It requires that complete details be written out for every part of each dance. The certification also requires teaching in front of the panel of experts from Ireland, performing individual dances in front of the panel, and taking a music test.

Liosta Oifigiuil is a book containing all of the certified dance teachers in the world. "You'd be surprised where some of the teachers are from," said Coyle. "New Zealand, Australia. It's a wonderful organization to be involved with and a world within itself."

Many Irish dancers, including the Roy and Thomas, perform with their children on many occasions. Roy and her daughter Liana performed a lively reel for the crowd.

"My favorite part is when I finally know a dance and can just move to the music," admitted Roy. "That is a lovely feeling. The music always makes me feel happy and like dancing. I think the kids would say the same. I love being able to dance with them."

"The most common question I am asked," said Coyle, "is the ages of my students." Coyle's daughter Kiera is one of youngest at two, while her oldest student is 67.

Coyle also noted that most students retire around the age of 21 or 22.

The Slip Jig is primarily a dance for the females, which is a very ladylike and graceful dance. Roy, Thomas, and Knoche all performed for the audience very gracefully.

Coyle explained what is normal in respect to Irish dancing competitions. The judges look for the basic elements of dancing during the competitions. The dancer needs to be up on their toes and balls of their feet, their arms need to be relaxed at sides with hands in fists, and their toes need to be pointed in an arc. Timing is also especially critical in the competition.

The dancers try to get an authentic Irish look by curling their hair for the competition. Some of the girls put close to 200 curlers in their hair to get the desired look. Liana Roy, looking like an Irish Shirley Temple, demonstrated this point beautifully.

The National championships this year will be held in Chicago.

It normally takes one year before students are permitted to learn the hard shoe dancing. Hard shoe dancing shoes have a fiberglass heel and toe to make the desired sound on the floor. "When I was younger, we purchased our shoes in Ireland and they just had a wooden base," Coyle explained. "We had to take them to the local Italian cobbler and he hammered about 200 nails in the bottom of our shoes to get the sound."

The group of dancers also performed the Horn Pipe dance that came to Ireland by way of England through English sailors and pirates. Coyle explained that this kind of dance could be seen in Popeye cartoons.

After Coyle had finished the Irish step dancing lecture, answered all questions, and the dancers finished had their final performance, she asked for volunteers from audience to learn one of the group dances.

Coyle took six brave volunteers from the audience while the others looked on. They learned six of the basic steps of the Ceili dance. After about 20 minutes of practice, the newcomers joined the seasoned performers in a Ceili dance that concluded the program.

"Cameron" a smash

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learned a lot about working from scratch," admits Ian Colegrove McLaughlin. "In December of last year there was a mesh of words.

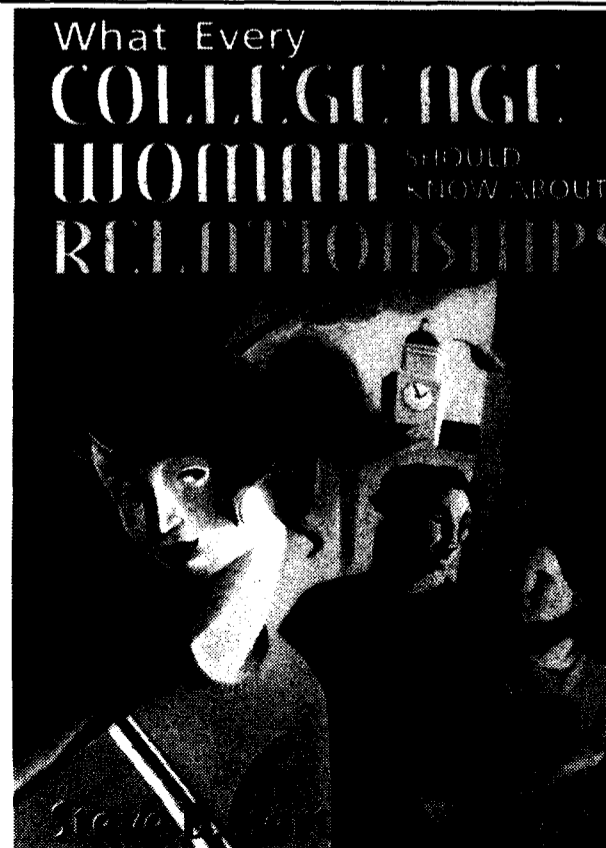
Jesse and Churchill took that mesh of words and formed them. Then fourteen people came around that mesh of words and molded it into a performance that last night was exhilarating, something that we weren't even expecting."

Actors, Theron R. Holmes and Doug Grove found their leading roles challenging. Holmes, who plays Cameron, says he has always flourished in supporting roles. "This is the first time I have had a role like this with such a large line load." But you wouldn't have known he struggled from his strong performance on stage. "I watched a lot of the Batman shows that had the character Joker in them. I needed to create a character with a playful sadistic side." Holmes also shaved his head and used body paint to enhance the evilness in Cameron.

Grove also felt the weight of the line lode playing the character Gilbert. He compensated by taking his script to work with him and practicing his lines with coworkers. Grove discovered that he and Gilbert shared some similarities, which helped him create a strong character. "Parts of me are like him—when I was in junior high, I was sort of a social outcast like Gilbert. I tried to remember back to those days to see what it felt like."

Everyone from the actors to the house manager have been working long hours. "I have lived here for the last seven weeks," says stage manager Suzanne Rossi. "We have been here every night, seven days a week, and we have usually worked past midnight."

Was all the hard work worth it? Absolutely! Cameron brought life, laughter, energy, and a sense of community to a campus that becomes eerily still after the sun sets. Hopefully, Cameron is an outstanding beginning to a long line of successful productions performed here at Penn State Harrisburg.



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