

Post-St. Patty's show to feature Celtic fiddler

By Alaina Gallagher
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

They say everyone is Irish on March 17. This year, people can call the Emerald Isle their homeland on March 19, too — all while learning about the history and music of the people that brought us St. Patrick's Day.

Taking place Friday at Eisenhower Auditorium, the multimedia show and concert *Beyond the Bog Road* will feature Irish-American fiddler Eileen Ivers and her band *Immigrant Soul*. She'll be joined by step dance performers, including some who have performed in *Riverdance*. The 13 musicians and dancers collaborate onstage to provide an interactive history of the Irish in America through music, film and storytelling, Ivers said.

She said the show uses a wide variety of instruments, including traditional Irish fiddles, flute whistles, and Irish percussion as well as acoustic and bass guitars and African hand drums.

The performance chronicles not only the history of Irish immigration in the United States but its influence on music around the country, Ivers said.

Irish music has been integrated into a variety of North American musical styles, including French-Canadian, Appalachian and Cajun. Even country music can find traces of Irish music in its groundwork, she said.

"It covers pre-famine times, and we really bring it through to the present time ... where the music is thankfully being played all over the world and being passed down to the younger generations," Ivers said.

This year's show is very different from years past because it incorporates this storytelling aspect, Ivers said.

"It was a long time coming," she said of the show. "I was born in the Bronx of Irish parents — it's a story I have always kind of known."

The performance features narrative voiceovers, historical facts, original and traditional songs, film that documents past performances by Ivers and her band, footage from Ireland and experiences of the Irish in

"It's touching a lot of people. Even people from different backgrounds that come to the show realize how similar we all are."

Eileen Ivers
Celtic fiddler

America such as immigrants working on the railroad — all to tell the stories of the Irish experience.

While Ivers grew up with some of these stories, some of them were uncovered through her own research into the past of Irish Americans. One example includes the story of some Native Americans donating money to the Irish in the 1840s while they themselves were going through the Trail of Tears.

As with many other folk traditions, Ivers said the performance is "really intertwined with the emotions the people have gone through."

Ivers recalled the reaction of an African American student from the University of Tennessee, who was surprised to see the similarities between the African American and Irish experience in America after a performance.

"It's touching a lot of people from different age groups and ethnicities. Even people from different backgrounds that come to the show realize how similar we all are," Ivers said.

The show has even served as a historical music lesson for some of the performers, said Tommy McDonnell, lead singer of *Immigrant Soul*.

McDonnell said despite his Irish background, he always gravitated more toward the genres of blues, soul and jazz while growing up.

"To find out all this music was actually influenced by this Irish immigration is pretty astonishing," he said.

McDonnell said the relationships between performers also contribute to the quality of their performance and the feedback they receive from audiences.

"We have a great synergy with everyone," he said.

Though Ivers and her band have not previously performed at University Park, Laura Sullivan, director of marketing and communications for the Center for Performing Arts, said the center had shown interest in the show for some time.

"This performance was of particular interest because it's not just a concert. It involves dancing, and film — a full multimedia experience — so it's nice that it comes to



Courtesy of eileenivers.com

Irish-American fiddler Eileen Ivers will perform with *Immigrant Soul* as part of the *Beyond the Bog Road* concert at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Eisenhower Auditorium. The show will also feature step dancers, some of whom have performed in *Riverdance*.

us in this neatly wrapped package," Sullivan said.

An artistic viewpoint session will be held prior to the show at 6:30 p.m. in Eisenhower's conference room.

Though it is free to people who have tick-

ets, it will fill up on a first-come basis.

"It just worked out perfectly — a bonus for us is that we get to have her during St. Patrick's Day week," she said.

To e-mail reporter: aqg5087@psu.edu

If you go

What: *Beyond the Bog Road*, featuring Eileen Ivers

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday

Where: Eisenhower Auditorium

Details: Tickets are still on sale; adults: \$35, Penn State students and under 18: \$24