

NEWS > OPINION

A lot of foot stomping going on

By Janell Bradley, Editor

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Pictured from left- Tim Hickey, 35; Henry Cronin, 27 and Taedhg Buckley (I didn't get his age.)

Not long after we'd arrived in Ireland, the first venue for our travel hosts, the Irish roots band, Switchback, was to play in a pub in Killarney. Traveling abroad with musicians is icing on the cake of what is already a great itinerary. Around 8 p.m., our group walked a couple of blocks from our hotel to O'Connor's, to get good seats. We ordered our pints of Guinness and soon our feet were tapping to Brian's mandolin and Marty's bass guitar as they performed some of the songs they've written, such as "Mayfly Dance," and the "The Miser."

Around 9 p.m., three musicians who were obviously the regulars to this pub, entered the front door clutching their instruments, which included a bouzouki (similar to a mandolin), a violin, and a Uilleann, or elbow pipe. After a couple more songs by Switchback, our American guys left the makeshift stage to allow for the double bill of entertainment on this night – a real bonus.

The unnamed band, performed in exchange for the favor of a Guinness or two. We enjoyed listening to the strains of the elbow pipes, which look something like Scottish bagpipes. However it was vocalist Tim Hickey's rendition of the traditional Irish song, "The Cobbler," sung 'Sean-nos' or acapella, that had us all listening carefully. The first verse of the song goes like this:

Oh me name is Dick Darby, I'm a cobbler

I served me time at the old camp

Some call me an old agitator

But now I'm resolved to repent

There are a number of verses ... and a very odd chorus that sounds like gibberish, as it refers to an intwing of an ingthing of an Ido and a roo boo boo roo boo boo randy. At the end of the song, the Cobbler drowns his wife in the river ... having something to do with the fact that her mouth always goes "clickety-clack."

During a brief intermission, I couldn't resist interviewing the young men, who were full of blarney.

When I told Tim he reminded Anne Durscher and I of the young men in the Heying family back home around Hawkeye, (Anne said he looked like Steve, and I thought he looked like Kenny) -- Tim replied, "They are movie stars, right?"

Most of the time, I wasn't sure if the three Irishmen were jesting or telling the truth, but one thing is certain: the Irish hold their traditions close to their hearts and unabashedly share their talents in public settings like the pubs. Upstairs in O'Connor's, young girls of about 17-20 were listening to a poet/storyteller relate dramatic tales. When we inquired, we learned "shenanigans" were also to be part of the program. Because we couldn't be both upstairs and down at the same time, we missed what that might be, but we heard a lot of foot stomping going on.

Overall, we just couldn't imagine similar scenarios back home in the U.S. While live music in restaurants and bars is popular, it's not nearly to the extent that it is in Ireland, in that groups just walk into a place and start playing on any week night. Dance groups can be found dancing to accordion music, and young people mix with the older generations quite easily.

For lack of space, I'm including a couple of other photos, about which I don't have space to write a great lot.

The pipe organ is seen in the upper level of Guild Hall, in Londonderry as known by the Loyalists, or Derry, as it's called by others. (Street signs actually have the 'London' spray painted over in some areas.) More than 3,000 pipes make up this magnificent piece - and anyone visiting can play it. Of course I couldn't help but think of Steve Story

The market photo was taken in Galway, by friends Scott and Anne Durscher. Love the sign advertising, "Washed Roosters."