

# THE PANTAGRAPH

## At crossroads of Celtic, Americana

- Dan Craft [dcraft@pantagraph.com](mailto:dcraft@pantagraph.com)
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Switchback keeps coming back for a good reason: We like them, we really like them.

For the Chicago-based duo's fourth B-N visit in as many years (at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts), the relative intimacy of past performances is being broadened in scope.

"It's kind of cool, and quite different this year," promises guitarist Martin McCormack, as he compares what we'll see/hear this time versus what we've seen/heard before.

The latter includes two *al fresco* summer-of-'14 appearances (via ISU Concerts on the Quad and the B-N Jaycees' Bruegala), followed by an inside BCPA show two Marches ago, under the auspices of their good friend, the late Tina Salamone ("she was a fan of ours before she ever booked the show, and she understood what we are all about in terms of America roots music based on our Celtic heritage ... she used our talents wonderfully").

All of those performances were centered on Switchback proper, meaning McCormack (the one with the flowing locks) and mandolin man Brian FitzGerald (the one with the shorter hair who handles the mandolin like a rock player).

Also part of the mix is crowd-pleasing fan favorite Takeshi Horiuchi, who handles the Irish drum (*bodhran*), never mind his Japanese roots.

"So we've decided to reach out and bring in some of your own groups from Central Illinois to give the show a little more sense of the community here," says McCormack.

Joining Switchback on stage at various points will be four different step-dance troupes from the area: B-N's own McNulty School of Irish Step-Dancing (a branch of the Chicago-based school), Peoria's Flynn School of Irish Dancers and two from Springfield, Central Illinois Step-Dancers and Scottish Dance of Springfield.

On the vocal front, a choir from St. Joseph the Worker Church in Chatham will join in on an all-singing, all-dancing finale.

"What's cool about it all is that the dance choreographer and I have been communicating online with each other for awhile now and on the last number of the show, an encore with all the groups on stage together ... the dancers, the chorus and us," says McCormack.

None of them will physically cross paths until Thursday night, which is OK.

"We live in a world now of Skype rehearsals," notes McCormack.

One thing that still holds true for Switchback is its standing at the crossroads where Americana and Celtic intersect.

Their musical explorations, notes FitzGerald, take them back and forth through those Celtic and Americana traditions, with demarcation lines blurred along the way.

"We're known as an Americana band and Celtic group. Sometimes people want Americana, sometimes they just want Irish ... and sometimes they want both."

The latter is what we're being promised for the group's fourth time through, with the show expected to be divided into around half-and-half.

As McCormack adds, "Americana is descended from Celtic music, so a lot of the artists we consider uniquely American, like Johnny Cash, John Prine, Ricky Skaggs and Steve Earle, have drawn upon Irish and Celtic music, either in the past or they're still involved in it today."

And not only Americana shares that Celtic bloodline, but also bluegrass, country and rock.

McCormack calls it Celtic music's "tribal connection" to American roots music and its various evolutionary offshoots.

"We've blended and mixed the music and cultures that have given us our American sound, which a lot of people in Europe find very attractive," says McCormack.

In short, "Everybody can claim a sense of ownership with Celtic music ... a sense of identity with the heritage of American music."