

Irish Music, Dance & Culture right here in Tualatin...

BY SHAWNA REPERT

The driving spirit behind S and A Irish Entertainment and Events is revealed in the name of one of their concert series: Community Concerts Off the Commons. For Sam Keator and his wife Anne Doherty, it's all about community. They organize events to get people out of their isolated houses and away from their lonely television and computers and bring them together to share culture and good craic. (An Irish term that means conviviality, good conversation, and shared fun.) The concerts are reasonably priced to make them affordable to a wide audience. Sam brings in a wide range of local, national and even international talent. I know I'm not the only one who has shown up at one of their concerts having never heard of the performer before but with absolute faith that they will be worth hearing. I've never been disappointed.

In addition to the Community Concert Series at the Winona Grange, they host occasional house concerts in an enclosed porch they call the Wee Ceili Room. This intimate setting makes you feel like you've travelled back to a lost time before TV or even radio when sitting around with friends and sharing centuries-old tunes is just what people did for entertainment. No matter how technically perfect a recording is, it will never match the joy of sharing music live with a group of like-minded people, knowing that each moment is a unique experience that will never happen exactly like that again.

Although Sam has gifted Tualatin with amazing concerts for nine years and counting, he is even more strongly associated with Irish

dance, most particularly with a form of social dance called ceili. The word 'ceili' literally means a party; used separately as a noun it usually refers to a social gathering with live Irish music and a caller. (When strangers ask me to explain ceili, I usually describe it as 'something like square dancing, but with prettier steps and better music.) It's great exercise and a lot of fun.) Sam was certified to teach Irish dance in Dublin,

Ireland. Dance classes at Winona Grange on Thursday nights run from seven to nine PM and cost just five dollars a class on a drop-in basis, no commitment and no prior registration needed. The three basic rules are 'smile, move, have fun'. No partner or prior experience needed.

You will find dancers of all experience and fitness levels, with the more seasoned dancers helping the newbies. (We were all new dancers once. Besides, the more people who learn, the more people we have to dance with!) Sam does his best to make sure that everyone who shows up feels welcome, learns something, and above all, has a good time!

First Fridays from October through May, S and A Irish Entertainment hosts a Ceili Mor ('big party') with live music. There is a mini-lesson from 7:30 to 8:00 PM, with dancing from 8:00 to 11-ish. Again, no partner or experience is necessary, and each dance has a walk-through first. Be prepared to have a great time and leave thoroughly exhausted.



In keeping with the goal of community-building, all S and A events, be they dances or concerts, feature a 'tea break', a social period where we eat goodies folks have brought to share, talk, and, yes, drink tea. You will find a lot of people who seem to have known each other forever, but a lot of first-timers, too, and a lot of mingling and conversation.

Because Sam and Anne are serious about supporting all of the local community, not just those who come out to dance and share music, S and A sponsors an annual December food drive. During all December events, dancers and concert-goers are encouraged to bring food to donate to the Oregon Food Bank. Last year, the drive brought in a total of 460 pounds of food.

I found Sam and Anne through concerts and the occasional ceili. Basically, Sam kept shoving flyers and business cards at me until I decided to show up for a class to see what it was all about. (Sam can be pushy, but in a good way.) I thought I'd take a class or three so I didn't step on quite as many toes when I did show up for a dance. No one warned me it was addictive.

I was recently divorced back then, and the classes, concerts, and ceilis gave me a safe environment to rebuild my social circle. I made some casual friends, had some nice chats with folks who drifted in and out of the scene, and formed



some lifelong bonds with folks who are now as close to me as family. I've also seen the concerts and dances provide couples with a nice night out together, and give parents something they could do with their teen-agers.

So if you like music, dance, Irish culture, and spending time with folks in real time and space, come drop in sometime. I think you'll have fun.

Visit www.sandairishentertainment.com for more details on upcoming fun you might want to get in on or www.shawna-repert.com/2014/07/29/cool-stuff-series-the-wee-ceili-room for my blog post with more details about the Wee Ceili Room in particular.

Shawna Reppert is an award-winning local author of fantasy and steampunk who keeps her readers up all night and makes them miss work deadlines. Her urban fantasy Ravensblood series is set in an alternate-universe version of the Pacific Northwest. Often, her love of music shows in her writing, as evidenced by her recently-released high fantasy novel *Where Light Meets Shadow*.



You can find her work on Amazon and follow her blog on her website (www.Shawna-Reppert.com). Friend her on Facebook and follow her on Twitter, where she posts an amazing array of geekery.