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Not quite Irish: Progressive Celtic music at Dal

BY NATHAN HILL

In 1994, a group of four Dalhousie University students formed a Celtic band that would slowly become a well-known act around campus. Adopting the name Not Quite Irish, the group has become recognizable for their blend of folk and traditional styles, and has attracted fans of many different musical preferences.

Not Quite Irish got their first break from the Dalhousie Psychology Society when they headlined a Psych Jam Night in support of UNICEF in early 1995. From this show the band was booked to open for Celtic guitar and piano sensations Dave MacIsaac and Tracey Dares at the Grawood in March, 1995.

Not Quite Irish — currently a three-piece band — consist of Jarnail "Martin" Singh, Andrew Younger, and Sean Murphy. Singh and Younger are original members with Murphy joining the group in January of 1995. NQI will be back to full strength in April when Matt Fitzgerald, who played with Not Quite Irish at a show last Christmas, will rejoin the band.

One is pleasantly surprised at a Not Quite Irish show to see that the band members are not limited to one instrument each — they all switch between a couple of instruments, giving the band a unique sound worth listening to.

At one of NQI's most recent shows, I wondered about the absence of a drummer in the band.

"It is something we have flirted with now and again, and may add in the future," said Martin (primarily the accordion and bass player).

One thing that has struck me each time I have heard Not Quite Irish is their musical diversity. It seems to include a little bit of everything, with a Celtic-folk flavour.

"Marty, Sean and myself all have diverse musical backgrounds and influences...in Not Quite Irish

we try to combine at least some of these," said Andrew (primarily the guitar player and vocalist).

The band has been described in a variety of ways because of this diversity. John Cullen defined them in the Gazette as "Indigo Girls meets Halifax traditional with an accordion." Others have described them as a cross between Great Big Sea and Highland Heights.

"They are just what New Scotland needs — a progressive Celtic band," said Lola Doucet, president of the History Society.

Whatever you call them, they play their music well and are more than worth catching live.

Given the substantial following Not Quite Irish has developed, I asked the band why they continue to play the occasional Open Mike Night at the Grawood. Sean (primarily mandolin and bass) told me that this allows the band to try out new material as well as maintain a loyal fan base by allowing people to hear them for free. This strategy must be working — the first run of t-shirts sporting the Not Quite Irish logo sold out quickly, and at a recent show their stickers were gone before the night was half over.

As for future plans, the band has been again asked to play for a History Society function this semester. Andrew said that they would like to move slowly and secure spots opening for performers such as Great Big Sea, and play at both Dal and other locales.

Having seen Not Quite Irish live, I have no doubt that the band's reputation and support will continue to grow. If you are lucky, you may be able to catch them at an Open Mike Night, but don't be surprised to see them not only opening, but headlining shows around town before too long. Their unique, progressive, Celtic-folk blend will surely continue to be a hit at both Dalhousie and around Halifax for some time to come.

New Dance Festival continues

...cont'd from page 8: "MODERN"

Local performer George Stamos followed with the premiere of his piece *Low*. Stamos has an incredible ability to make his body movements look fluid and effortless. His blue hair very much matched the mood of this dance, which changed from electrifying one moment to sad and depressing the next.

After intermission *Diligent Dilettante*, by Marise Vachon in collaboration with theatre artist Michelle Horacek, was performed. Based upon the writings of Anais Nin, this piece

had so much going on in it that I often found myself lost trying to figure out what to look at next. Between the dance, the film, the voice overs, and the nude people walking around behind a linen screen, I was experiencing sensory overload. Later, after hearing about the works of Anais Nin, I felt that I better understood a lot of what went on.

The final piece of the showcase was Lois Brown's *Queen of Swords*. Performed by five women, this piece was described in the program as "a kaleidoscope of images and archetypes of women in buckets of water." Despite the lack

of dance, the visual effect of these women dousing themselves with water was very powerful, especially with the music that accompanied it. The five appeared to be cleansing themselves of their sins and I could sense the hostility and aggression in their movements.

Despite being physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of the night, I felt somewhat more cultured and a deeper appreciation for the local contemporary dance community.

The Local Currents Atlantic New Dance Festival continues this weekend at the Dunn Theatre with performances by Gwen Noah and the Jest In Time Theatre.

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