

Review**Apollo's Fire Countryside Concerts:
"My Father was a Matchmaker," June 6**

by Alexandra A. Vago



From glen to glen, the bagpipes shepherded guests to the Baroque Barn in Hunting Valley on Thursday, June 6, for the first of several performances of Apollo's Fire's charmingly rustic program, "My Father was a Matchmaker: Tunes & Tales of Love from Old Ireland" with Irish storyteller Tomásean Foley. The weather, as if on cue from Mother Nature, was misty, cloudy, and a wee bit chilly – but the perfect setting for tunes and tales of love from Old Ireland.

While one might have longed for a pint of Guinness and a warm hearth, William Coulter (guitar/guest musical director) masterfully led the musicians and audience to a remote parish in Ireland, where we met a true Irish culture-bearer, Tomásean Foley. The evening was an intimate glimpse into the **Céilí**, an informal social gathering that includes song, dance, poetry and storytelling.

Mr. Foley regaled us with tales of Tade, one of his father's matchmaking subjects, and a sentimental love story of W. B. Yeats and Maud Gonne. The program was woven together as skillfully as the most intricate, interlaced Celtic knot. In true communal fashion, the ensemble was the star of the show. Each person was able to garner a few moments in the spotlight, but the real gem was the collective group – they musically embodied the symbolism of the Claddagh ring – love, loyalty, and friendship.

Although the **Céilí** is an informal gathering, a few awkward moments intruded into some of the sets. At the beginning of the second half, 21st Century livestock interrupted our gathering – someone's car alarm was triggered. The tenacious troupe tried to keep going, but to no avail. When they restarted the piece, Tina Bergmann (dulcimer), without dropping a hammer asked, "Have you heard this before?" And at times, the musicians, while wanting to segue seamlessly into the next tune, were interrupted by a very appreciative audience!

Edwin Huizinga (fiddle) developed an excellent melodic camaraderie with Tina Bergmann (dulcimer) and Brian Bigley (uilleann pipes, flute) throughout the evening. His playing seemed effortless and skillfully simple. The only difficulty in hearing the instruments was during the Irish dancing. It is interesting that Irish dancing seems to generate

as many decibels as in indoor bagpiper — you don't realize how loud it really is until you are up close and personal.

Ross Hauck (tenor) demonstrated breadth of character as the jaunty limerick raconteur one moment and then drew us in close for his fatherly perspective on “Danny Boy.” I could almost envision Mr. Seamus Ennis smiling while Brian Bigley played the uilleann pipes, and his Irish dancing was clearly world class. William Coulter (guitar), the rhythmic and harmonic rock of the ensemble, emerged beautifully from the group in the Irish lament, “Si Bheag Si Mhor.” While Mr. Hauck told a few more limericks, Mr. Coulter fetched his bodhrán and began tuning it. When he grabbed the tipper to begin playing, he challenged Mr. Bigley to a friendly dance/drum competition – I'm fairly certain it was a tie.

As the Irish might say, “May the roof above you never fall in, and those gathered beneath it never fall out.” So, as it is with traditions, it seems that summer has not begun until you hear the widely popular Countryside Concerts presented by Apollo's Fire. At the beginning of the program, Kristen Linfante, the acting general manager, graciously welcomed us and ebulliently shared some highlights from the upcoming 2013-2014 season. While we eagerly await the return of “Come to the River” as a newly fashioned sequel, “Oh Shenandoah! – A Return to the River” in June 2014, we can indulge ourselves in “My Father was a Matchmaker.”

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