

Cleveland Museum of Art presents Dervish, the Irish Sligo Band

by Mike Telin



“Sligo music is known as one of the finest types of Irish traditional music,” singer Cathy Jordan of the band Dervish said during a telephone conversation. “The style is fast and furious with highly ornamented reels, jigs, and hornpipes. It has a jaunt to it and it’s very rhythmic.”

On Friday, March 11 at 7:30 pm, [Dervish](#) will make a stop at the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Gartner Auditorium as part of the band’s three-week U.S. tour. The evening’s

high-energy performance will feature Brian McDonagh on mandolin, Liam Kelly on flute and whistles, Shane Mitchell on accordion, Michael Holmes on bouzouki, Cathy Jordan on vocals, and special guest Kevin Burke on fiddle. The concert is part of the Museum’s Performing Arts [Series](#).

Jordan explained that the worldwide popularity of the Sligo style can be traced back to two people. “It all started when a couple of gentlemen by the names of Michael Coleman and Paddy Killoran left County Sligo in the 1920s and ended up in New York. They were given the opportunity to record — that was the first time for this music — and those recordings caused a huge stir among people. The Sligo style became the style that everyone wanted to emulate.”

Although Dervish’s music is based in the Sligo tradition, Jordan said the style has changed a little over time. For example, in the 1960s bands began including mandolin, bouzouki, and guitar players. “It’s kind of an evolving tradition,” Jordan said. “Michael Holmes and Brian McDonagh have a very distinctive style with their arrangements, giving a modern edge to tunes that on their own sound ancient.”

When asked about the band's name, Jordan replied with a slight chuckle, "The name Dervish really does come from the Whirling Dervish. Back in 1989 Liam was watching a documentary about the Whirling Dervishes and realized that they become enraptured by music just like the traditional Irish musicians. When you're at the concerts, the music kind of carries you away to another time and another land."

Born in Scramogue, County Roscommon, Cathy Jordan is the youngest of seven children. And coming from a family of singers she said that she never wanted to do anything but sing. "It was like a destiny for me. I was always very sure of what I wanted to do — I wanted to be around music in all of its forms. Although I have a background in traditional and ballad singing, it never bothered me to be in a jazz session, or an old-time session, or a country music session. I spent a lot of time singing in musicals at school and in choirs at church. I'm lucky because I know so many of my friends are looking for that one thing in their lives that will make them happy. That was predetermined for me — so no, I never wanted to do anything else."

Dervish is celebrating its 27th year as a band. During that time they have entertained audiences around the world, including a tour to Japan in November 2015. When asked why traditional Irish music is so popular, Jordan said that it's because of the tunes and the rhythms. "The reel is in 4/4 time, which is universally recognized — that steady pulse that connects with everybody. The next thing is that there is such beauty in the music. It doesn't matter what language it's in, because it's not as much about the language as it is the feeling. The music is evocative and it touches people's minds and hearts more than any other indigenous music that has traveled around the world."

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