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HOMEGROWN
2005
The Music of America

Traditional music and dance "homegrown" in communities across the United States

LIZ CARROLL WITH JOHN DOYLE

IRISH AMERICAN FIDDLING FROM ILLINOIS



Thursday

April 21, 2005

12 NOON - 1 PM

Coolidge Auditorium

**Ground Floor, Thomas Jefferson Building
Library of Congress**

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REF AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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IRISH AMERICAN FIDDLE FROM ILLINOIS

At the turn of the twentieth century, Chicago's General Superintendent of Police collected all the Irish tunes he could find, trying to save what he thought was a dying tradition. Chief Francis O'Neill, along with the many musicians he collected from, situated Chicago as an important place for Irish music. O'Neill (who was entitled to be called "Chief" but preferred the simpler title of "Captain") collected and published around 3,500 tunes; his songbooks are considered standards of Irish music and are referenced by many Irish musicians. His efforts placed Chicago's Irish immigrant musicians on the map of Irish music. With its many festivals, schools and pubs, Chicago remains a hotbed of Irish music to this day.

Since O'Neill's time, Chicago has produced many accomplished and dedicated Irish musicians, including Liz Carroll and the late Joe Shannon, each of whom has been honored with a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Noel Rice, founder of the Academy of Irish Music at the Irish American Heritage Center; says that many Irish people believe that if people are meant to play, they will play. On the other hand, many also believe that children have fewer opportunities to hear the music in the home or community than their parents or grandparents had. While there are many opportunities to learn and listen to Irish music, it is important to create a community that encourages and supports musicians of all skill levels. Chicago continues to support Irish musicians through countless sessions, festivals and concerts, which provide a strong and devoted community. As part of this movement, Rice himself teaches approximately 60 students.

Liz Carroll has been acknowledged as one of the world's greatest Irish fiddlers since she was a teenager; when she won the Senior All-Ireland Championship in 1975. Since then, she has been hailed as a master of Irish fiddling. In 1994, Carroll was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for her commitment to Irish music. Carroll learned to play the fiddle when she was nine, and shortly thereafter began composing her own fiddle tunes. Carroll has recorded several albums, composed over 200 tunes, and performed throughout the world. She is deeply connected to her hometown, Chicago, where she was born to Irish immigrant parents and still lives with her husband and two children.

Because travel has become relatively affordable, musicians can come together across borders more frequently. Since the 1960s, when flute-player Frank Thornton reported that Chicago had 91 Irish-born musicians, networks have grown to include musicians across continents, learning from one another and expanding their repertoires. Carroll's compositions have become part of the Irish music repertoire, and her tunes can be heard in Chicago pubs and across the ocean in Ireland's villages. Carroll is also active in the Irish music community: she teaches master classes, performs at festivals and frequently gives concerts throughout Chicago and the world.

One example of Carroll's music stretching beyond Chicago's borders is her collaboration with guitarist and singer John Doyle. Though Doyle does not live in Chicago, he and Liz Carroll play together often, and each has contributed to the other's recordings. Doyle has been playing professionally since the age of 16, and he was one of the founding members of the renowned group Solas. Doyle's first solo album established him as an accomplished singer and composer. He has devoted much of his talent on the acoustic guitar to accompanying many leading Irish musicians and contributing to more than 60 recordings.

Carroll and Doyle continue the long-standing Chicago tradition, reaching as far back as Chief Francis O'Neill in the early 1900s, of enjoying, playing and composing Irish music. Together, they create innovative and intriguing music, bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary Irish culture.

Tamara Kubacki
Director of Ethnic and Folk Arts,
Literature and Presenters Programs
Illinois Arts Council.

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival presentation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Folklife Center includes the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Check out our web site www.loc.gov/folklife

