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## Storytelling thrives at Irish Music Festival

By Angelo Bruscas  
North Coast News

Starting its second decade as one of the most eclectic music festivals in the Northwest, the 11th annual Galway Bay Irish Music Festival is not just about the music.

It is as much a cultural celebration, rich in oral history with modern interpretations, while many of the tunes, lyrics, dances and traditions trace back through generations.

In addition to the 30 assembled musical performers appearing for this year's festival, Irish author David McDonnell will be telling stories as part of a book tour with the theme, "Get in touch with your Irish Roots."

"Storytelling is an old Celtic custom. It was certainly a major focus on festivals and celebrations when a story teller would come to a village and weave different tales. For a thousand years, it was how people learned of their past and their heroes and history," McDonnell said in an interview on Friday. "I think that's a reason why there are such wonderful, wonderful Irish writers."

The jovial Irishman in his 60s tries to do his part, he says, by just "getting in front of people and telling a story."

During this week's festival, McDonnell will be telling stories from his new book, "ClanDonnell: A Storied History of Ireland," which has received three recent national book awards and accolades from readers and reviewers. The book is a collection of stories of an Irish clan, which McDonnell began to research from his home in northern Michigan, eventually leading him to travels through Ireland.

"I had always collected stories of the clan, and it turned out that I had a book here. The more I researched one story, that led me to another and then another," he said.



The book, with photos of the sites, follows Celtic Ireland's McDonnell clan and their descendants into the 20th century: "Because the first McDonnells were mercenaries often called to service in all corners of Ireland, the clan's history is intertwined with the history of the entire island.

"Descendants of these McDonnell mercenaries included nobles and farmers, landlords and peasants, soldiers and poets, coffin ship victims and survivors, Protestants and Catholics, constables and revolutionaries. Some immigrated to North America and others fought in foreign armies. Many were killed or had land confiscated by the English. Still others adapted well to British Ireland. Collectively, the stories of these McDonnells during critical periods in Irish history tell the story of Ireland."

You can see excerpts from ClanDonnell at the website, [www.clandonnell.net](http://www.clandonnell.net)

"What hit me is that one clan is illustrative of many others," he said of how the book project started. "It's about one particular clan that tells the whole history of the island in many respects."

McDonnell enjoys the idea of performing stories from the book at the music festival.

"I'm really looking forward to it," McDonnell said of his first trip out to Galway Bay and Ocean Shores.

McDonnell believes Irish music festivals have grown in popularity over the past decade or so because of changes in the generations. A story he will tell at the festival is about the Red Hand of Ulster, one of the great tales of Irish mythology, which he said has a surprise ending.

McDonnell plans to be just as much of a fan as a participant this weekend, saying he has met some of the performers before, such as Derek Warfield and The Young Wolfe Tones. His favorite song they perform is "Fields of Athenry," which tells the tale of a man imprisoned and sent to Australia for stealing food for his family during the Great Irish Famine.

"The song is about the husband saying goodbye to his wife and the wife saying goodbye to the husband," McDonnell explains. "He's being sentenced to Botany Bay for stealing food. If you don't know the context, you might not catch the nuances of the lyrics."

Irish music in general is grounded in oral history, and McDonnell helps explain some of the references. He's not surprised the music is growing in popularity, just like the festivals started at Galway Bay by Liam Gibbons more than a decade ago.

"I think back to my parents and their generation," McDonnell said, "your ethnicity was something you didn't focus on. You were an American. You were not an Irish man. I think it was my generation a bit and even the generation that is younger than me that is taking a look at their heritage, whatever it may be. Music has kept the Irish culture in America alive a great deal, but I have seen a big resurgence in dance, too."

**Festival information:** visit online at [galwaybayirishpub.com](http://galwaybayirishpub.com). There are over 30 bands on 10 stages Wednesday through Sunday at three locations: Galway Bay Irish Restaurant, Pub & Gifts, the Ocean Shores Convention Center, and the 8th Street Ale House in Hoquiam.

Headliners are Derek Warfield and The Young Wolfe Tones, and the band Celtica Pipes Rock, from Vienna, Austria.

Festival ticket passes available for daily entry or for the entire festival.

There will be a shuttle from the Convention Center to Galway Bay from Friday to Sunday starting at noon and running every half hour.