

Beautiful Blarney: The Celtic Angels and Knights

by [Geoffrey Clarfield](#) (August 2025)



The Top of the Tide (Jack Butler Yeats, 1955)

One of the many meanings of the Irish word “blarney,” now a common word in the English language, is “delightful and flattering persuasion.”

And that is the feeling I got both during and after I saw the Irish American extravaganza of the Celtic Angels (female singers and dancers) and the Celtic Knights (male dancers and

singers) who came to a concert hall in the town of Newton, North Carolina this afternoon where I am visiting my younger son. I was delightfully persuaded and flattered.

This is a performance in the full sense of the word. It has a beginning, it has an end, it has ups and downs and ins and outs, it is perfectly choreographed, and every singer has been splendidly coached. There are many costume changes, a first rate back up band and a screen which projects stills and moving shots of the colorful Irish landscapes which are evoked in the songs.

For readers who are deeply immersed in traditional Irish dance and singing traditions this is not what they call a “seshun,” an Irish word for a get together of a group of tradition minded Irish style musicians, who often face each other in the corner of an Irish pub and perform songs and instrumentals in seated circles where each participating instrumentalist and singer performs a piece and then defers to the person sitting adjacent.

No, this is a full-out Broadway-like spectacle, or the kind of entertainment I imagine might be given on the deck of those refurbished paddle wheelers that take well-paying customers up and down the Mississippi River to recapture the spirit of Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer, and Huckleberry Finn.

It goes without saying that the performers are young. The men are handsome, and the women dancers are pretty. None are overweight. On the contrary, this mix of Irish and American performers are in their peak and the dancing and choreography feats could only have been carried out by men and women who have the equivalent training of professional athletes. To watch their Irish-inspired clog dancing is breathtaking. The coordination and precision are perfect.

But, if you are or were expecting the singing to be done in a variety of Irish accents, be prepared for something completely

different, in informal musical terms, something more “homegrown” and more typical of Broadway.

All the singers sang beautiful Irish classics like Danny Boy and the more recent Fields of Athenry (about the expulsion of starving Irish farmers who “stole” potatoes from absent English landlords, during the 19th century famine that brought over a million Irish to the USA). The songs are sung in middle American accents with the added a Capella vibrato that is taught in so many of the nation’s singing schools and conservatories.

The audience just loved everything about this performance and these performers so, the accent thing must be a thought-out strategy (since every other aspect of this performance has been designed with the precision of a NASA space mission).

Simply put, the accents reflect most people in the audience and who obviously do not mind or even prefer the singers to sing in “middle American English.” And the audience in Newton, which was mostly local, it being St. Patrick’s Day here in Newton, North Carolinians loved it.

Yet during intermission, as I overheard local patrons speaking to each other, I detected the musical accents of the south with terms like “Oh are you looking for Miss Parsons, well she’s over yonder!” And so, ladies and gentlemen, we should note that the people in the audience were speaking and listening to the songs on stage through the lens of their evolved Scots Irish accents, which their kin brought from Ireland to Appalachia in the 18th century, and which have evolved into the multiple and oh so expressive accents of this culturally diverse state.

And so I would suggest that people in Appalachia are “preadapted” to like Irish music, as so much of their own traditional dances and songs are descended from Irish, English, and Scottish prototypes and ballads that have

survived and have evolved here for centuries.

Decades ago, the British folklorist Frances James Child came here to collect ballads in Appalachia that had died out in Ireland and Britian. Later folklorists and performers like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were able to jumpstart their careers as "American" folksingers, by performing Child Ballads in newfangled ways, just like these Irish and American Knights and Angels who put on such a good show this afternoon.

Add to that the fact over 50 million Americans claim some degree of descent from Ireland and you have got yourself as they say, "One heckuva an audience."

I enjoyed this afternoon's very sentimental evocation of the Emerald Isle, yet there is also a not so hidden and specifically American/Irish dimension to it. It is the kind of thing that the great American impresario of Broadway days, George Cohan, would have designed or approved of if he were alive today.

Cohan wrote the now-world-famous tune Yankee Doodle Dandy and was a pillar of the pre-WWII New York Broadway scene. He was of Irish descent and his parents Anglicized their name from O Cadhain to the American Cohan. And so, we should not be surprised then that this Irish-designed and American implemented nostalgic evocation of the "old country," should find favor in the eyes and ears of an American audience.

This is not a show for Irish folk music purists and aficionados or reading fans of James Joyce, that modern Irish literary giant, who explored the torments of the modernizing Irish soul in the early 20th century.

On the contrary, this show allows you to admire great singers and dancers and to be carried away by nostalgia for old Ireland, its beauty and poetry and to be oh so persuaded by the pure blarney of it all, as to even question just why it

was that your Irish ancestors decided to come to America after all, as they left so much beauty behind them.

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