

Irish Accordion Player Makes Maine Debut

For those lovers of Celtic music, there's an untapped vein of music that is a rollicking, enthusiastic sound: it's the Irish American music of the roaring 1920's blended with that of the West of Ireland, and there's one man who's bound and determined to bring it back with a performance that has to be heard to be believed



He's David Munnelly and he and his band are coming to Maine to perform at the Unity Centre for the Performing Arts at 8:00 p.m. Saturday.

Munnelly, who was voted Composer of the Year in 2003 and the 2005 Best Artist of the Year by both LiveIreland.com and the Irish American News in Chicago, discussed his music, his current album ("By Heck") and the tour that's bringing him to the UCPA in central Maine from his home in Co. Mayo, Ireland.

"It's the first tour of the states for the band," he said. "I've been over with different musicians. We've never come to Maine, like Danu and other groups, but it'll be (my band's) first time in Maine, yes."

Munnelly ran through the line-up and what each musician plays. "There are five of us," he said, "On the July trip it'll be myself, my brother Kieran on bodhran and flute, Gavin Ralston our guitar player, and Andrew Murray, a singer from Inisbofin, County Galway, and Fergal Scahill on fiddle. My usual fiddle player, Daire Bracken, can't make the trip, so Fergal is filling in."

When it comes to button box players, Munnelly is to the instrument as Steve Vai or Eddie Van Halen is to the electric guitar. He's one of the fastest players around.

"But its not actually so fast, it must be lively," he said. "I know a lot of people who can play faster but out-of-control fast. Like the old musicians back in the past, like the Flanagan Brothers or Dan O'Sullivan, there's a way to play lively. They didn't lose control of the time; they had a great sense of rhythm and drive.

He feels that, unfortunately, in recent years a lot of the music played has lost its flair and its exuberance. "People just aren't capable of the finger work that the old boys had back in the 1920's. They were playing lesser instruments than we are now but would get so much more out of them. That's where my influences come from," Munnelly said.

"Listen to the music for what music is. Don't go to music thinking it's politics or it's cool, or it's this or it's that. Music was never supposed to be cool or hip: just go to the music for the music's sake, not for anything else," he said.