

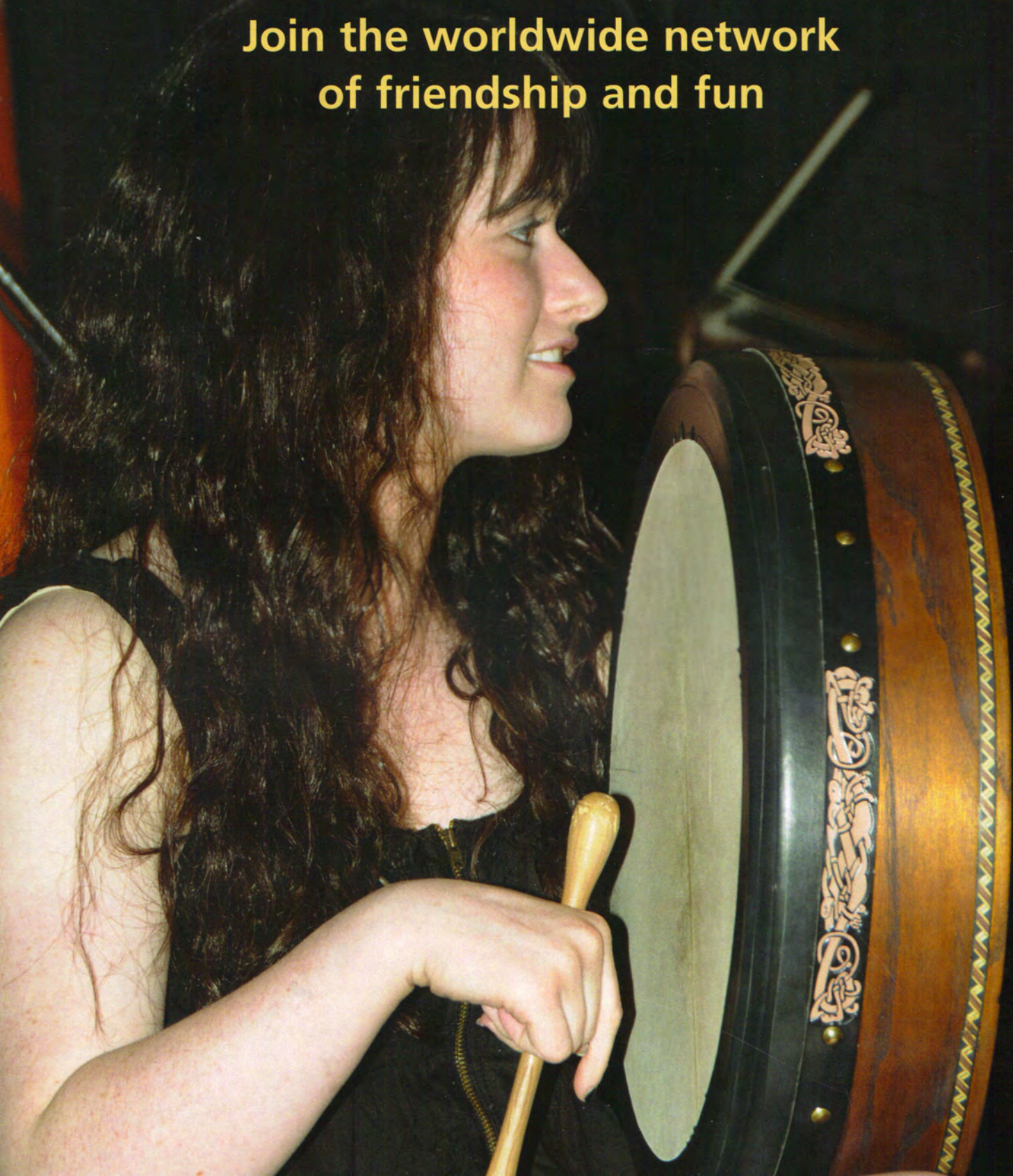
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MUSIC HIGHLIGHTS IN PARSIPPANY

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The band who played for the Céilí Mór on Saturday night, April 10, in the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in Parsippany, NJ, ranks with the best I have ever heard at a Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann North American Provincial Convention. The Pride of New York quartet of flutist Joanie Madden, fiddler Brian Conway, button accordionist Billy McComiskey, and keyboardist Brendan Dolan was joined on stage by Teada fiddler Oisín Mac Diarmada, Cherish the Ladies

piano accordionist Mirella Murray, uilleann piper Jerry O'Sullivan, piano accordionist Jimmy Keane, drummer Jimmy Kelly, and fiddlers Dylan Foley, Seán Cleland, and John Sweeney. Their music was sensational, and the set dancers who crowded onto the large, sprung, wooden floor could not get enough of it.

Running from 10pm to 2am, this Céilí Mór followed an impressive performance at the convention banquet by six members of the Pearl River, NY-based octet Girsá:

Pamela Geraghty on vocals, guitar, and button accordion, Emily McShane on keyboards, bodhrán, and vocals, Deirdre Brennan on fiddle and vocals, Bernadette Flanagan on keyboards and bodhrán, Margaret Dudasik on vocals and fiddle, and Bláithín Loughran on button accordion. Guesting with the band was Bláithín's fiddle-playing sister, Erin, who flew in from the University of Limerick.

Those seven musicians performed a crisp set of five tune medleys



alternating with four songs and demonstrated how far they've progressed in poise, repertoire, and execution as a band. Reels, the jigs 'Cúl Aodh/The Boat to Boffin,' a Beoga polka, and a medley featuring a march and the band's signature 'Box set' were played with precision and power.

Very effective in their singing for Girsá were Dudasik in an uptempo rendition of 'Go, Lassie, Go,' Geraghty in 'The Blacksmith,' and McShane in 'The King's Shilling,' a song previously popularised by Karan Casey on her 2001 album, 'The Winds Begin to Sing.'

Diverging from the traditional in Girsá's set was the song 'Irish Heartbeat,' composed by Van Morrison and sung by him with the Chieftains on their 1988 album of the same title. It was no small irony for me to hear Girsá perform that song after I just read Greil Marcus's new book, 'Listening to Van Morrison: When That Rough God Goes Riding.' In it Marcus lists 16 Van Morrison albums between 1980 and 1996 that he dismisses as disappointing and forgettable, including Irish Heartbeat.' But Marcus's harsh



judgment about that recording may reflect his own flimsy familiarity with Irish music. I grant that the song 'Irish Hearbeat' is repetitious, but it's intentionally so, with an incantatory rhythm akin to, well, a heartbeat. Deirdre Brennan sang the song with singular style, giving it fresh relevance. This CCÉ convention, after all, was partially a celebration of Morrison's lines 'Don't ever stray, stray so far/From your own

ones.' It was a joy to witness Girsá's advancing musical strength.

An added treat during Girsá's playing was the guest stepdancing of brothers Jonathan and Joshua Srouer and especially the stepdancing of 13-year-old Caitríona Furlong, a member of the Verlin School of Irish Dancing and the daughter of button accordionist Patty Furlong.