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The Poor Clares - 20 years at the Jazz Fest

Authored by: Sharon Armstrong Submitted: Fri, 04/22/2011 - 9:47am Tag(s): Live event

Get ready New Orleans; the Poor Clares will soon all be back in town to celebrate their 20th year anniversary playing at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival as one of the premium Irish bands to come out of the Crescent City.

The Poor Clares are Betsy McGovern, along with Patrick O'Flaherty, Justin Murphy and Beth Patterson. For anyone in NOLA with a love of Celtic music, the name of the Poor Clares and that of O'Flaherty's Irish Channel Pub will no doubt bring back happy, fuzzy and intertwined memories. It was in O'Flaherty's Pub in the heart of the French Quarter, well known for the quality of its live Irish music scene that the four musicians formed a band named after a branch of Franciscan nuns founded by Saint Clare of Assisi in 1212 - and so was born the Poor Clares.



Betsy McGovern and the Poor Clares. Photo courtesy of Betsy McGovern



Justin Murphy, Betsy McGovern and Patrick O'Flaherty. photo courtesy of Betsy McGovern

Since their debut at the New Orleans Jazz Fest in 1992, the Poor Clares have brought the music of Ireland to the Crescent City and far beyond, in a style that could be said to mix County Down with Deep Down South, playing at the biggest Irish Festivals both here in the USA and abroad. As a band they released three Poor Clare albums - Change of Habit, Songs for Midwinter and Resurrected Lover - all of which were well received by the international traditional community - and each member has also released a number of solo releases.



Beth Patterson - bouzouki player extraordinaire. Photo courtesy of Beth Patterson

Today the Clares are somewhat scattered. Before Katrina Patrick O'Flaherty and Justin Murphy both moved north to pursue other interests; Patrick opened his own Irish Bar in West Virginia, and Justin moved first to Alexandria, VA and then Orlando, FL where he currently performs as a solo artist. Betsy McGovern still performs when not teaching full-time here in the city, and Beth Patterson is a well-known performer in New Orleans.

"It's great to get back to New Orleans, which I really miss a lot," said Patrick O' Flaherty, talking about his upcoming visit. "I would like to move back here, that is what I would really like to do. It's full of good music, and it doesn't matter what kind of music that is."

According to Patrick when he opened his own music bar in West Virginia it wasn't just his home country of Ireland that he brought with him, but also his adopted home for over 15 years - New Orleans. He is also under strict orders, he joked, to bring back with him to Lewisburg as much of New Orleans as he can carry.

"Over 15 years, you know? That's a long time," he said. "Every time I go to New Orleans I come back laden with food. We have a lot of Louisiana food at the Pub, and it took a year and a half but we got the beer! We are even converting people here to be Saints fans. There are people who used to be Pittsburgh fans, and Washington Redskin fans, and now they are all watching what the Saints do."

"The Jazz Fest is very prestigious... and has stayed with us for twenty years," he went

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on. "The Poor Clares have been playing there constantly in some form. I play, and then I can go and eat, and listen to wonderful music. One year we were playing after Willie Nelson, and I LIKE Willie!"

Beth Patterson, fellow Clare and bouzouki player extraordinaire is also no stranger to Jazz Fest as a solo artist. Her latest solo release 'On Better Paths' was nominated for a Grammy, and she is currently enjoying living back in New Orleans after a brief sojourn to Baltimore.

"It's cyclical," she told WWOZ. "There is a time to create things, and there is a time to sit back and absorb influences. I have been living in New Orleans longer than I have lived anywhere else in my life, definitely longer than I lived in my native Lafayette. I am loving it. It is like the first day of spring, and stepping out into social sunshine...like reconnecting with an old friend and realizing that you still have everything in common."

Betsy McGovern and the Poor Clares will perform at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans, 2903 Jefferson Avenue at 8pm on Saturday, May 7, and the New Orleans Jazz Fest on Sunday, May 8.

Further information is available at:

<http://www.irishusa.com/begleys/poorclares.htm>

<http://www.nojazzfest.com/events/2011/05/08>

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