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Tionól celebrates 26 years of bringing the best traditional Irish music to St. Louis

ST. LOUIS, Feb. 27—The weekend of April 18-21 will see a gathering of some of the world's best traditional Irish musicians for the [Saint Louis Tionól](http://www.tionol.org). This year marks the 26 year that brings musicians, dancers and singers from all over North America to take part in a four-day musical celebration that includes a ceili (dance), music, dance and ballad workshops, as well as two concerts, at the Focal Point in Maplewood and the Sheldon Concert Hall.

Pronounced “chun-awl,” *tionól* is the Irish word for a gathering and it describes the coming together from all over North America and Ireland of musicians intent on sharing their interest in the traditional music of the Celtic regions—music that came to North America with the first settlers and has grown into native genres such as old-time and bluegrass.

For a quarter century, St. Louis has boasted one of the largest such gatherings in the United States.

“When it comes to Irish music events in North America, St Louis is definitely not flyover country,” said Andrew O’Brien, a Dublin-born fiddler and attorney who now lives in St. Louis. “It is an action-packed weekend of concerts, classes and sessions—informal Irish music jams—where the finest exponents of the art form are brought to St. Louis to play, teach and share. For one great weekend every year, St. Louis becomes a premium Irish culture hub and a place to be.”

Liz Knowles, an internationally recognized traditional Irish fiddle player and member of several bands, described it as an “in-between: a meeting place where people and music collide, bringing their collective knowledge and love of the instrument and their experience”. She went on to describe a weekend of concerts, workshops and sessions as all being part of a shared and interactive experience that makes the music come alive.

The St. Louis Tionól was born out of a meeting between Judy Stein, of the Focal Point, and musicians Michael “Piper” Cooney and Mike Mullins in 1997. The first year was a rousing success and the weekend has grown as people have become interested in their roots and had their hearts and minds captured by productions such as Riverdance.

“By bringing together world class performers and teachers and hosting workshops, concerts and jam sessions, the St. Louis Tionól provides a much-needed link and pathway to pass along a tradition that many want to claim,” Mullins said. “With a total attendance of well over 3,000 since its inception, the St. Louis Tionól has become the event in the Midwest for lovers of traditional Irish music and is acknowledged as one of the events of the year for those interested in the music”.

The highlight of the St. Louis Tionól will be a concert at the Sheldon Concert Hall on April 20, which will showcase our teachers who hail from Ireland and across North America. The Saturday concert begins at 7:30 pm. Tickets are available [through the Sheldon](#) or at the door. Children 12 and under are free.

The weekend actually starts on Thursday, April 18 with a ceili and sessions at Pat Connolly’s Pub at Tamm and Oakland avenues. A ceili is lively social dance guaranteed to please. Jackie O’Riley will be teaching the dances as the evening progresses and music will be provided by our own ceili band. A session will take place that evening as well. More information is available [at tionol.org](http://at.tionol.org)

Workshops will be held Saturday, April 20th at St. Louis University High School. Both morning and afternoon workshops provide an excellent opportunity to learn new tunes, songs, and dances, not to mention techniques for all the instruments common to Irish music from master musicians. Newcomers are welcome; no experience is necessary to enjoy the dance or ballad workshops or learn a tune on the tin whistle or bodhrán (Irish drum).

This year’s roster of teachers includes Liz Carroll, a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts’ National Heritage Fellowship Award and a Grammy Award nominee. And Liz Knowles, of the band Open the Door for Three, will be here along with Pat Broaders, who will teach ballads, and Kieran O’Hare on pipes.

A central part of the weekend will be the iconic “sound of Ireland”, the uilleann (pronounced “illín”) bagpipes which have recently been placed on the [Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity](#) by UNESCO. Guest pipers will include pre-eminent piper & winner of the coveted Gradam Ceoil Musician of the Year award for 2023, Mick O’Brien. We’re also thrilled to have Louise Mulcahy, a piper and flute player who’s won numerous awards and accolades as a musician and promotion of women pipers. Piper Ivan Goff, a native of Dublin and now living in New York will be joining us for the first time as well as piper Joey Abarta.

The other instrument long associated with Ireland is the harp. This year, we’re very fortunate to have Máire Ní Chathasaigh who has been called the “doyenne of Irish harp players” (Scotland

on Sunday) and “an absolute legend” (The Irish Echo). And in 2001 she was awarded the traditional musician of the year Gradam Ceoil TG4 accolade. She’ll be joined by guitarist Chris Newman who’s been described by BBC2 Radio as “one of the UK’s greatest guitarists.”

John Skelton, a longtime Tionól favorite and raconteur supreme, John Skelton will be teaching flute and we’ll have two of the finest whistle players in this part of the world, Kathleen Conneely and Frank Claudy, doing the honors in the whistle classes. We’re also delighted to have Kathleen’s sister, Pauline Ronan, joining us to teach tenor banjo.

Liam O’Brien, from a great musical family in Clare will be coming in to teach concertina. And of course, there will be classes in Bodhrán with Chris Weddle. The Tionól includes several other workshops, all of which can be seen on tionol.org.

More information, including a schedule of all events, online workshop registration, and concert tickets can be found at tionol.org.

For additional information, or to schedule an interview with Tionól musicians, please contact Mike Mullins at mmullins@tionol.org or 314-578-1333.