

Suite-ness and light from Burke and Scott

Their new CD features a Burke-led string quartet

On June 9, fiddler Kevin Burke will turn 60 years of age. For 53 of those years, he has been playing the fiddle.

He's performed with London's Glenside Ceili Band, winner of the All-Ireland senior championship in 1966; Lazy Reel; Christy Moore; the Bothy Band; Bothy Band colleague Micheal O Domhnaill in a lengthy partnership; Jackie Daly; Patrick Street; Celtic Fiddle Festival; Open House; and more recently guitarist Cal Scott in a flourishing duo.

In 2002, Burke received a National Heritage Fellowship, confirming his impact as a musician in the United States since his official immigration here in 1980. He lives in Portland, Ore., where he linked up with Scott. Their debut recording together was "Across the Black River" in 2007 on Burke's own Loftus Music label.

Now the duo has issued their second Loftus Music CD, "Suite." Guesting on it are the most exciting traditional band to emerge from Ireland this century, Beoga; double bassist Dave Captein; and Portland Chamber Orchestra concertmaster and violinist Andrew Ehrlich, Oregon Symphony assistant principal violist Charles Noble, and, originally from the Bronx, Portland Cello Project co-founder and cellist Justin Kagan, who

also roasts and sells his own coffee for his own company, Badbeard's Microroastery.

That's a heady brew of musicianship for any one recording, and keeping this blend steadily percolating is Burke and Scott's impeccable taste.

"Across the Black River" had a six-reel centerpiece called "The Long Set" with a running time of 9:33. "Suite" also has a lengthy centerpiece, "The Irish Session Suite," comprising a more ambitious four jigs, a hornpipe, an air, and four reels that collectively run to 22:03. Making that suite even more distinctive is its instrumental lineup: Burke as part of a string quartet with Ehrlich, Noble, and Kagan.

Exploring a merge of Irish traditional and classical styles has been done successfully by others, including two current string quartets in Ireland, the ConTempo Quartet and the West Ocean String Quartet (the latter featuring former Buttons & Bows fiddler Seamus McGuire), as well as fiddler Liz Carroll, who collaborated with the Turtle Island String Quartet for a slip jig and the title tune on her album "Lake Effect." Also, the baroque flavor of Irish harp-composer Turlough O'Carolan's planxties has provided virtually every Irish traditional musician alive with the opportunity to delve into a quasi-classical sound. (Sadly, experiments in fusing jazz with Irish traditional music have usually foundered through dim conception and balky execution. Recall the disappointing Celtic Jazz Collective led by Irish guitarist David O'Rourke.)



Tandem of taste: fiddler Kevin Burke (left) and guitarist Cal Scott.

With his trademark silky-smooth touch on the bow, Burke is a good fit in the string quartet he's assembled for "Suite." He's unquestionably at the center of the centerpiece, but the responsiveness of the other three musicians allows him to shine. The four-movement "Irish Session Suite," as in any classical suite, bears the stamp of close organization and ordered progression. A suite is meant to be more than the sum of its parts, and Burke, Ehrlich, Noble, and Kagan succeed in delivering that overarching effect. It's jaunty, witty, haunting, and bracing in that

order, and held together with considerable skill, care, and imagination.

No less inspired was Burke's choice of the Irish traditional band Beoga to join him and Cal Scott on "The Boys of Ballisodare / The Gooseberry Bush / The Dunmore Lassies / The Galway Rambler," the longest track on the album outside of "The Irish Session Suite." Beoga enters partway through the four-reel medley, and the extra lift is palpable.

Fiddler Niamh Dunne and button accordionist Damian McKee of Beoga also appear on

"The Rabbit's Ear / The Stirabout Road / Kiss the Bride"; Dunne additionally graces "Stella's Waltz"; and Beoga button accordionist Sean Og Graham lends support on "Clancy's / Flexible Flyer." Scott's compositional proficiency is reflected in "Kiss the Bride," "Stella's Waltz," and "Clancy's / Flexible Flyer," and Burke's own tune-writing ability is evident in "The Stirabout Road."

Burke on fiddle and Scott on guitar power the album's concluding track, "Dan O'Keefe's / If I had a Wife / Leave Well Alone." The sharp Kerry curry in this medley of traditional tunes is unmistakable and irresistible.

One of the world's most popular and respected Irish traditional fiddlers has now issued four albums on his own imprint. (Celtic Fiddle Festival's "Equinox" and Patrick Street's "On the Fly" are the other two CD's on Loftus Music.) In these challenging, transitional times for making and marketing music, Kevin Burke is forging ahead with his own very small company. That's a bold move, but with four albums of estimable quality so far, it has not been an aesthetic risk.

"Suite" is pure listening pleasure. The album (cat. no. LM004) is available at www.loftusmusic.com.



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Fleadh finishers

Congratulations to the following musicians who excelled at the recent Mid-Atlantic Fleadh Cheoil held in Pearl River, N.Y.:

FIDDLE: over age 18, (1) Armand Aromin; (2) Joshua Srour; (3) Rebecca Grube; ages 15-18, (1) Ceilidh Briscoe, (2) Samantha Suplee, (3) Adam Cole-Mullen; ages 12-15, (1) Sarah Buteux, (2) Matthew Furlong, (3) Niamh O'Donoghue; under age 12, (1) Haley Richardson, (2) Jayne Pomplas, (3) Alexander Weir.
BUTTON ACCORDION: over 18, Sinead Farrelly; 15-18, (1) Kieran Brennan, (2) Sinead Ni Laithbhirtigh, (3) Kate Lee; 12-15, (1) Seagda Coyle, (2) Teresa Murphy, (3) Torin DiSalvo; under 12, (1) Ronan Mulligan, (2) Kiera McShane, (3) Stephen Hastings.
CONCERT FLUTE: over 18, (1) George Grasso, (2) Brendan Bell, (3) Cushla Srour; 15-18, (1) Matt Saunders, (2) Owen Meehan, (3) Patrick Armstrong; 12-15, (1) Roisin Ni Laithbhirtigh, (2) Mary Kate Carolan, (3) Alison Hayes; under 12, (1) Anya DiSalvo, (2) Chloe Curley, (3) Jade Keough.
TIN WHISTLE: over 18, (1) Sinead Farrelly, (2) Kathleen Mahon, (3) George Grasso; 15-18, (1) Dylan Foley, (2) Andrew Furlong, (3) Owen Meehan; 12-15, (1) Aoife Lee, (2) Torin DiSalvo, (3) Roisin Ni Laithbhirtigh; under 12, (1) Kenny Vesey, (2) Kevin Fee, (3) Anya DiSalvo.
PIANO ACCORDION: over 18, John Morgan; 15-18, Kathleen Coleman; 12-15, (1) Johnny Tannian, (2) James Breen, (3) Jake Feerick; under 12, (1) Liam Butler, (2) Lauren Rodican, (3) Caroline Allen.
CONCERTINA: 15-18, Kerry Dolan; 12-15, (1) Claire Shirey, (2) Aislinn Messina, (3) Ciara Rodican; under 12, (1) Kathleen Parnow, (2) Alanna Messley.
UILLEANN PIPES: over 18, (1) John Abarta, (3) Steafan Hannigan; 15-18, (1) Michael Stribling, (2) Torrin Ryan, (3) Patrick Armstrong.
HARP: over 18, Chris Rodriguez; 15-18, (1) Caroline Kemper, (2) Katie Ely, (3) Katy Brittenham; 12-15, (1) Theresa Phoenix, (2) Abigail Gillespie; under 12, (1) Emily Saffo, (2) Kaileen McGeever, (3) Megan Heffernan. **SEE MORE WINNERS, PAGE 19 . . .**

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