

## Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

Well, hopefully by the time you read this, we'll all be seeing those definitive signs of spring pushing their way towards the sun. Who would have thought a few months ago that the area would be experiencing the coldest, nastiest winter in about forty years. Hopefully it's about all behind us now and within weeks we can rid ourselves of those heavy parkas and contemplate music under the stars. In the meantime, St. Patrick's Day and March is a wonderful month to celebrate all things green, musically speaking that is!

I guess it's impossible to write an article about Irish music without mentioning that great performance by **Dervish** at the Great Aunt Stella Center that kicked off the "green month" in style. The nearly two hour show celebrated twenty-one years as a group and was the kick-off of the American leg of the tour. When you combine the manic rhythm section of Brian McDonagh's mandola and Michael Holmes's bouzouki with Tom Morrow's fiddle licks and Liam Kelly's amazing flute playing and throw in Cathy Jordon's soaring vocals, you have a most infectious combination. Initially I missed Shane Mitchell's accordion work, but the piper did such a tremendous job this was a non-issue after just a couple of songs. I go back a long ways in attending shows at the Stella and I must say it was an exhilarating feeling absorbing the energy of the crowd as they stood, stomped, and clapped for the two-song encore. As the evening progressed, it was absolutely obvious why **Dervish** is considered one of the premier ambassadors of traditional Irish music. If these guys come through North

Carolina and you missed this show, do yourself a favor and catch this band live – you'll be glad you did! I guess I should also throw in the fact that every member of the group turned out to be simply a delight to work with – a class act!

Fortunately as fate would have it, you don't have to wait that long for some live **Dervish**, as their new disc **21 Years from Stage to Stage** should be released soon. This CD captures **Dervish** at their best at two different festivals and even throws in a DVD of yet another live performance. Special guests **Mike Marshall** and the Swedish group **Vasen** add to the festivities just when you think it can't get any better. If you missed **Dervish** at the Stella, this is definitely the next best thing! Also, if you think you want to hear it before it's available at stores, just find a friend that went to the show and bought one from the band. I'll bet they will be playing it as we speak! ([www.dervish.ie](http://www.dervish.ie))

OK, I admit this is a diversion, so bear with me. One thing I love about this exploration of folk music is how following one pathway will lead to new discoveries and new pathways. In a conversation revolving around favorite music, the Dervish folks recommended my checking out the Swedish folk band **Vasen** and let me tell you, I'm glad I did! Evidently the two bands cross paths quite a bit at European festivals and they have become good "jam mates" through the last

few years. Well, folks, temptation got the best of me and I downloaded their latest, appropriately entitled **Vasen Street**. Their unique music tends to remind one of a combination of traditional minor keyed Swedish traditional folk music and classical chamber music. This one has, as it turns out, been nominated for a Swedish Grammy and is highly recommended if you want to hear something very different. ([www.vasen.se](http://www.vasen.se))

Back to Irish music now! **John Doyle and Karan Casey**, both

founding members of Irish super group **Solas**, have reunited for an amazing CD of Irish, Scottish, and English tunes that should satisfy the most discriminating of folk music listeners. **Exiles Return**, produced by the great **Dirk Powell**, should simply be a part of any folk music collection! The combination of Karan Casey's incredible voice and John

Doyle's powerful guitar work move me as much or more today as it did back in the glory days of **Solas**. For me, an added bonus is Dirk's infectious playing on both banjo and double bass. This is yet another example of why Dirk Powell is a living folk music legend – as he does it all. ([www.karancasey.com](http://www.karancasey.com)) Both John and Karan will be gigging through North Carolina this spring, so do try to catch them when they come!

As fate would have it, there is a just-released disc from **Solas** that I also enjoy very much. Much like bluegrass's **Seldom Scene**, the vibe and the quality of the music has survived the coming and going of various band members through the years. Where both the **Dervish** and Karan Casey/John Doyle discs are pure unadulterated traditional Irish,



"Cuz" and Little Bit

**Solas** has always leaned toward a more contemporary sound and ***The Rising Tide*** is no exception. I do think the key to the **Solas** sound is the fact that although they bite off contemporary material, their reverence for traditional Irish music is always there. Artists covered here include Richard Thompson, Josh Ritter, and Bruce Springsteen. The cover of the Boss's **Ghost of Tom Joad** is absolutely wonderful. On the other hand, when **Solas** gets into one of those wild Irish romps, they do it as well as anybody. John Doyle and Karan Casey may have left the band to pursue solo careers, but founder **Seamus Egan** has more than kept this train on the track. ([www.solasmusic.com](http://www.solasmusic.com))

Don't forget that on March 13th, the **14<sup>th</sup> Annual Charlotte Goes Green Festival** happens on South Tryon Street between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets. In addition to the St. Patrick's Day parade, which starts at 11 AM, there will be Irish music, Irish dancing, bagpipers, food, and drink. I have been told by various friends that this is a really fun family event and a great way to bring in that spring weather we have been waiting for these last three cold, dank months. That's it for this month, so as always, try to get out of hibernation and catch some live music. I think the absolute no-miss concert for the month is the **Black Banjo Gathering Reunion Concert** coming up on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March. Please read the article on this event and I hope to see you there! I hope each and every one of you will have a wonderful "green month" and we'll have this conversation again next month!

Cuz

***To share with Cuz about your favorite music, contact him at 704-532-8846 or [dcmfrost@mindspring.com](mailto:dcmfrost@mindspring.com).***