

# SCÉAL ÉILE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COOLEY-KEEGAN BRANCH OF COMHALTAS CEOLTÓIRÍ ÉIREANN



## Chair's Message



A Chairde,

Happy New Year to you all! I hope you are out and about enjoying this glorious weather! Andy and I did a portion of the SF Crosstown Trails. We thoroughly loved it, but my calves paid for it afterwards! Great exercise to help with the dancing!

We had a successful December céilí that was well attended. Our next one is on Sunday, February 1<sup>st</sup>. It is our annual St. Brigid's Day céilí and falls on her actual feast day. Also called Imbolc or Imbolg, it marks the beginning of spring in Ireland.

Check out the article on new Irish language classes that begin on January 24<sup>th</sup>. We are working to find a larger truck for the St. Patrick's parade. Wish us luck! There will be another céilí on March 22 and a children's céilí on April 26. A possible sean nos dance class may happen in April. Lastly, the North American CCÉ Convention will be held April 9-12 in Chicago. See the article in this issue.

I want to thank all of you for being a member of our amazing extended family. The connections we strengthen on the dance floor, at weddings and funerals, and even while carpooling to an event, all help our community to thrive. I am blessed to be a part of it all.

Slán,

Susan Keith,  
Chair



FOUNDED IN 1951, COMHALTAS CEOLTÓIRÍ ÉIREANN IS IRELAND'S PREMIERE CULTURAL MOVEMENT. WHEN YOU JOIN COMHALTAS, YOU JOIN PEOPLE IN MORE THAN 400 BRANCHES WORLDWIDE IN SUPPORT OF THE TRADITIONAL IRISH ARTS OF MUSIC, DANCE AND LANGUAGE. WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS. PLEASE CONTACT THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY FOR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION OR VISIT US AT: [HTTPS://SF COOLEYKEEGANCCE.ORG](https://sfcooleykeegancce.org)



## 2026 North American Convention and Trad Irish Music



The convention, now called the Irish Music Immersion Weekend, will be held April 9-12, 2026 just outside Chicago. Hotel reservation and event registration is now open.

The Hilton is a favorite event hotel for those who have previously attended the Chicago conventions. It is close to O'Hare Airport and there is a shuttle bus that will whisk you over to the public transportation train station if you'd like to go downtown to experience the sights of The Windy City.

If you have not been to a convention, consider this one. The Chicago branch does an excellent job of providing lively entertainment and a number of workshops are held over the weekend.

For more information go to:

<https://www.ccenorthamerica.org/news-events/convention-2026/>



## St. Patrick's Day Parade Float



The St. Patrick's Day Parade is on Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, starting at 11:30 am. The theme is "Happy 250th America, You Are Great." We are working to find a longer truck than last year. If we can't find one, dancers on the float will be very limited. A number of dancers will have to be on the street, interacting with the audience and passing out information cards about our branch set dancing.

We welcome anyone to help build the float on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> in Brisbane. If you would like to help, please contact Susan Keith at [chair@sfcooleykeeganccce.org](mailto:chair@sfcooleykeeganccce.org)



## Discover Irish Language



The UICC will run an 8 week course called "Discover Irish Language." Our branch has helped fund this endeavor with a donation from the Theresa Joyce Memorial Fund.

If this first course goes well, they will start a second course.

First course: Jan 24-April 4

Second course: April 11-May 30

Classes will run on Saturday mornings.

10-11 am Kids Gaeilge

11-12 am Beginner 1

12-1 pm Beginner 2

1-2 pm Intermediate

There are 20 students per class.

The tuition is \$60 for kids and \$120 for adults for the 8 week course.

The teacher is Fiona Murphy. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley with a double major in Celtic Studies and English Literature with Honors. She studied Modern Irish at UC Berkeley as well as attending the University of Galway Summer Irish academy and studying at Oideas Gael in Donegal.

For more information, go to [https://irishcentersf.org/programs/irish\\_language\\_classes/](https://irishcentersf.org/programs/irish_language_classes/)



## Branch Meetings



CCÉ Cooley-Keegan branch meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30pm via Zoom.



## Comhaltas Céilí



Sunday, February, 1st 2026~ 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm at the United Irish Cultural Center 2700 45th Avenue, San Francisco at Sloat Blvd. Admission: Comhaltas Members \$15, non Comhaltas members \$20. Live Music.

Sunday, March 22nd 2026~ 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm at the United Irish Cultural Center 2700 45th Avenue, San Francisco at Sloat Blvd.. Admission: Comhaltas Members \$15, non Comhaltas members \$20. Live Music.

Childrens Céilí on Sunday, April 26, 2026 - 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm at the United Irish Cultural Center, 2700 45th Avenue, San Francisco at Sloat Blvd..



## Song and Storytelling



Celtic singing sessions are on the first Friday of each month. They are held in people's homes around the Bay Area. Some months there is an option to join via Zoom. Start time is usually 8pm, and sessions typically go until 11pm or later.

For questions, to host, or to be added to the email list contact Patrick McEvoy: [swagman@swagman.com](mailto:swagman@swagman.com)

February 6 - Máirtín Mac An Ghoill, Menlo Park  
March 6 - Michael Jones, San Carlos

April 3 - Susan Keith, Mountain View  
May 1 - Betsy Moore, Sunnyvale



## Community Events



The following set dance classes listed in this new section are being offered by individuals and groups and we are listing them as a public service. Please note that these classes/events are not sponsored/organized by the San Francisco Cooley-Keegan Comhaltas Branch.

Patronage at the venues are most appreciated. Alhambra Pub serves food and drinks. The Plough & Stars Pub and Shannon Arms Pub serve just drinks. Shannon Arms Pub is a cash-only establishment.



## Plough and Stars Dancing



There is set dancing at the Plough & Stars Pub on Clement Street on Thursday nights.

First Thursday will be from 8:00 pm to 11:00pm and every other Thursday 8:30 pm to 10:30 pm. There is a \$10 charge.

Contact Michael Murphy at  
[irishboogiemanager67@yahoo.com](mailto:irishboogiemanager67@yahoo.com) or  
415-999-6062 for more information



## Set Dancing Lessons



Lessons are on Wednesdays:  
Location: Ireland's 32,  
3920 Geary Blvd., San Francisco  
Time: 8:00-10:00 pm  
Cost is \$10.00.

For more info contact Michael Murphy



## Winter Céilí



Shannon Arms Pub Valentine's Winter Céilí  
Date: Saturday, February 14, 2026  
Time: 7-10pm  
Address: 915 Taraval Street in San Francisco  
Live Music!  
Admission: \$15.00 per dancer  
Dances: Set Dancing; Céilí-Style; Two-Hands



## Community Events



### San Anselmo Dancing



Lead by Mícheál Minihane and occasional guest teachers

We meet the 2nd and 4th Fridays of MOST months from 7 to 9 pm. Spring dates are January 9 & 23, February 13 & 27, March 13 & 27, April 10 & 24, May 8 & 22, June 12 & 26.

Join our email list by writing to [sonomarinirish@gmail.com](mailto:sonomarinirish@gmail.com) so that you can be assured of the dates. Additional information about our group can be found at [sonomarinirish.weebly.com](http://sonomarinirish.weebly.com)

Beginners welcome  
No Partner Necessary  
\$10/person requested

167 Tunstead Avenue, San Anselmo

We want to thank all of those who have been coming to our classes over the years, especially those who battle great distance (and great traffic). We appreciate your efforts—it's so much easier for us to forge ahead when we know we have devoted attendees who appreciate our efforts as well.



### Marin Céilí



There will be a céilí in Marin on February 21, 2026 hosted by the Brosnan School of Irish Dance.

Sets and céilí dances will be danced to the music of Darcy Noonan and friends.

Location: 167 Tunstead Avenue,  
San Anselmo  
(same location as the San Anselmo classes)

Time: 6 - 9 pm  
\$5 - 10 donation requested – it will go to the band.

Questions can be directed to [sonomarinirish@gmail.com](mailto:sonomarinirish@gmail.com).



### Set Dancing in Berkeley



Mike Riemer is teaching set dance classes in Berkeley on the 3rd Friday of each month, from 7:00 to 9:00pm. (May expand to twice each month in 2026).

The focus is on footwork and style in addition to the patterns of the individual sets. Class is held in the Commons Room of University Terrace, which is on Jefferson, between Addison and Allston in Berkeley.

Email [riemer@ce.berkeley.edu](mailto:riemer@ce.berkeley.edu) to get on the mailing list, ask questions or get directions.

Winter dates are  
January 16<sup>th</sup>,  
February 20<sup>th</sup>,  
March 20<sup>th</sup>, and  
April 17<sup>th</sup>.

Beginners Welcome, No Partner Necessary,  
\$5 donation requested



### Alhambra House Céilís



Michael Murphy organizes a céilí at Alhambra House in Redwood City.

Last Sunday of each month  
Dates: FEB 22; MAR 29; APR 26  
Time: 5-8pm  
Address: 831 Main Street in Redwood City  
Live Music: Provided by Western Shore  
Admission: \$10 per dancer/attendee for FEB 22; \$15 per dancer/attendee starting March 29 and onward  
Dances: Mostly set dancing with some long céilí, céilí-figure, and two-hand dances



### Advanced Set Dancing Workshop



Date: Saturday, February 28  
Time: 2:30-5:30pm  
Venue: Ireland's 32 Pub (upstairs)  
Address: 3920 Geary Boulevard  
Dances: Newport Set and Claddagh Set  
Admission: \$20 per dancer

RSVP Requested to Michael Murphy



## Wren Boys



Hello Irish culture enthusiasts, dancers, singers, musicians, and supporters,

Heartfelt thanks goes out to all the Wren Boys 2025 participants who helped spread Holiday joy and Celtic-quality group spirit in our yearly visits to the welcoming houses and pubs along our St. Stephen's evening journey on December 26. This year marked 40 years (!) of carrying on this fun custom in San Francisco. And I'll give you a wee little guess as to which Irish Culture nerd of us has participated in every single one. Don't strain your noodle too hard on that one! Ha!

The "Captain of the Wren" and Cooley-Keegan Branch of Comhaltas would like to thank our destination hosts: Seamus and Maureen Lundy & Family; Kinsley Binard; Brendan O'Brien & Staff at O'Brien's Pub; and of course, our "local" The Plough and the Stars (starring our "Thursday lady" Laura Masterson) for their gracious hospitality and devotional support of such a worthy tradition. And let's not forget our stunningly stalwart meeting venue hostess/long-time treasurer, Maureen Murphy.

Much appreciation also goes out to our traveling troupe of musicians: Chris Dillingham, Jason Courtney and Michael La Guardia for their great music and determination to keep the music afloat and flowing when two other musicians suddenly could not show up. One highlight I will share is singer Mary Hill's wonderful performance of "The Star of County Down" at O'Brien's. Let's see if we can get even more singers for O'Brien's next year!

In lieu of providing more highlights of 2025 "burial" of the Wren and in light of the fact that we've been celebrating it for 40 years, let's go back in time and honor our beloved members, supporters and Wren participants who've sadly passed away the past two years:

- Mary McDonagh (dancer and instructor who had many Wren Boys under her belt)
- Lew Milligan (fiddler who was a star due to his roots of Co. Down)
- Ralph Mihan (dancer and proud "class clown" who delighted us with his own brand of humor; showed up as a "judge" one time in powdered wig and robe)
- Margaret McAuliffe (wife of Dan)
- Julia Howard (an annual guest at Lundy's house)
- Katherine Scanlon (always the final destination with her goodies ready for the hungry, thirsty Wrenners. The dancing outside on the front sidewalk is duly missed)
- Barb Southworth (musician who actually toted her large keyboard from place to place one year. What dedication!)
- Al Clavelli (husband of Roseann)
- Theresa Joyce (long-time participant since the early 90's)
- Theresa Hallinan (whose daughter, Mary Powers, thoughtfully requested that the "Captain of the Wren" be present at Theresa's 90th birthday)
- Jenny Valcov (a friend of mine since 1998 and wife of Jonathan Coxhead participated in many a Wren joyfully)

and most recently:

- Martin Howard (husband of Julia who delighted us every year at the Lundy's house playing reels on his Jews Harp)

Without the above participants and supporters of the Wren Boy tradition it would still be an enjoyable and successful tradition, but not as much so. I'm sure we can all agree on that.

We'll see you all on St. Stephen's Day 2026 freeing the Wren who was "caught in the furzz!"

Slán,  
Your humble "Captain of the Wren"



## Condolences



We are sorry to report that one of our loyal dancers, Jenny Valcov, passed away on 10/11/25 at age 63. She leaves her husband (Jonathan Coxhead), her parents, many friends, and two much loved kitties to mourn her loss.

Jenny was born on 3/29/62 in Columbus, Ohio, to parents Allen and Eileen, who were graduate students at the time. When she was six months old the little family spent a year in the Bay Area and loved it so much they resolved to return when their Ph.D. studies were concluded. In 1968 they moved to San Mateo and then to Belmont, where they still reside.

Jenny graduated from Carlmont HS then earned a BS in biology from San Francisco State University. She held various roles in companies doing research in biological fields. In 2007 Jenny married her perfect partner, Jonathan, an Englishman working here in the tech field.

Together they formed a wonderful life filled with many friends in the folk dance and music community. They gave fabulous parties when friends would come to play their fiddles, and all would dance. On one memorable occasion they had so many guests they ended up dancing in the street of their cul-de-sac, inviting all their neighbors to join in. They also hosted sing-alongs, game nights, and literary evenings reading excerpts from Beowulf or other obscure compositions. Those who suffered through it all were rewarded with one of Jenny's fabulous desserts.

In addition to being a great cook and wonderful hostess, Jenny was a caring, loving person, always there to lend a hand, and a constant source of care and attention to her aging parents, whose hearts are broken by the unexpected loss of their only child.



## Condolences



Jenny Valcov was a treasure in our branch for many years and will be remembered for her kind and caring ways. We will miss her and send thoughts of peace and comfort to her husband, Jonathan, and her mother and father.

The following is the story of Jenny and Jonathan in their own words. They shared this with us in the 2022 CCE San Francisco Convention Program...a story that was enjoyed by all. May Jenny rest in peace.

### **Joannie O'Leary**

#### **The Three Murphys by Jenny Valcov & Jonathan Coxhead**

There were three Murphys involved in our meeting: Michael Murphy's set dancing class, Scruffy Murphy's pub and Murphy Ave in Sunnyvale where the pub is located. Jenny started going to Scruffy's after finding out about it from fellow students at Valerie Deam's step dancing class at the YWCA in Palo Alto. She decided that set dancing and pints of Guinness were more fun than the rigors of step dancing and she became a regular at Scruffy's.

Meanwhile, Jonathan was still in England, going to set dancing run by Sinead Engel at The Man in the Moon Irish pub in Cambridge. Sinead's dad Stan taught Jonathan the reel step in that very pub, thus beginning Jonathan's love of set dancing. When Stan learned that Jonathan was moving to Sunnyvale, he contacted a friend, Amy Warr, and she was the one to tell Jonathan about Scruffy's. Jonathan and Jenny started actually dating in 2001 after spending the weekend at Kasey Curtin's house in Petaluma. A bunch of set dancers were staying at Kasey's in order to go to the Sebastopol Celtic festival. It was a lovely weekend and the first time J&J had spent time together outside the pub.

After dating for a while, Jonathan surprised Jenny by proposing to her on top of Glastonbury Tor on Winter Solstice 2005. They were married on 9-8-7, September 8, 2007, celebrating with a party featuring a whole lot of set dancing. And, by the way, the two people responsible for Jonathan discovering Scruffy's — Amy War and Stan Engel — are also married now and living in Sunnyvale.



## Condolences



Two things I will always remember about Jenny are her smile and her presence when speaking to me. In my mind, I "see" Jenny smiling that sweet quiet smile. And I admire the way she greeted me or talked to me because she was always present, as if we were the only two in the room. Jenny, you are with us still in our hearts.

### **Morgan Kulla**

We will remember Jenny for her gentleness, her shy smile, and her outstanding hospitality. She was a quiet soul, but a good listener who could give sound advice. Her love for Jonathan and his for her were always on display, which was so heart-warming to see. As a hostess, she spent the first hour of a party in the kitchen, whipping up hearty meals and out-of-this world desserts. We will miss Jenny's friendship and her soothing presence. May you rest among the stars, dear Jenny.

### **Susan Keith and Andy Doerr**

Jenny was a beautiful, generous person. I feel as though a bright light has been prematurely extinguished. She will be sorely missed.

### **Miriam Kaplan**



## Condolences



The same words echo again when remembering Jenny... Her quiet, thoughtful, caring presence is what I remember most through the years.... Her many kindnesses to myself and others.... Jenny and Jonathan, together, enjoying all sorts of dancing and joviality..... Their loving wedding and life together. Jonathan, my heart goes out to you and Jenny's parents. We will always remember Jenny.

### **Moe Murphy**

I will always remember Jenny's soft-voiced kindness and enthusiastic socializing she displayed when at dancing and her generous hospitality at the Holiday parties that she and Jonathan put on brilliantly for their guests.

Of all the weddings that I've attended, Jenny and Jonathan's in 2007 was among the best in terms of the reception. Everything clicked in place: the dancing where the Clare Lancers Set we did was among the most memorable; the brilliant traditional and energetic sounds from Topsy House's music; and the bouncy ebullience emanating from all the dancing guests!

### **Michael Murphy**

We still mourn the unexpected passing of our friend and fellow CCÉ member, Jenny Valcov, who passed this past October. I met Jenny and Jonathan on the dance floor at Scruffy Murphys, Sunnyvale, a few years after I moved to California. I have enjoyed many fun weekends away at music festivals, days of beer or wine tasting, dinners, dancing, and laughter with them both. Jenny was a gentle, kind, loving, welcoming person, easy to get along with. She and Jonathan hosted wonderful gatherings in their home, filling it to capacity with Jenny always so attentive to her guests. She was never one for the spotlight though sharing her talents was something she did freely – she was an excellent cook and baker, and we never left their home hungry!

Her love for Jonathan, her parents, her cats and her friends was so evident in all her actions. Jenny, you are missed.

### **Deidre McNamara**



## Condolences



Farewell to Martin Howard.....

Martin was a long time supporter of CCÉ and many other Irish activities through the years. He especially enjoyed the Traditional music at our Céilís and elsewhere. I think the fondest memory of Martin, for many of us, happened on Wren boy night each year at the Lundys. He and wife, Julia, sitting on benches around the room sharing food & company until it was time for everyone to do their "party piece". Martin's quiet demeanor betrayed his talent. What was that sound? It was none other than Martin playing, in the old style Irish tradition, tunes on the old Jews Harp! Unforgettable!

From all here at CCÉ, we wish to extend our heartfelt sympathies to Maureen, Siobhan, Aine and their families. God Bless Martin and Julia.



# SF Cooley-Keegan Comhaltas Membership 2026



## TIME TO RENEW YOUR 2026 CCÉ – SF COOLEY-KEEGAN MEMBERSHIP

Please renew your membership NOW.

The Membership list is our way of advising you of information on upcoming events & sending you the Treoir magazine 3 times a year.

Membership is effective January 1st to December 31st.

If you receive the Scéal Eile by email link from Josephine Brogan, please renew now by visiting our website:  
[https://www.sfcooleykeegancce.org/misc/join\\_cceck.html](https://www.sfcooleykeegancce.org/misc/join_cceck.html)



Please be sure to complete the on-line form so we can match it with your PayPal payment. If you do not use PayPal, but do renew on-line, please forward a check to our \*PO Box shown below.

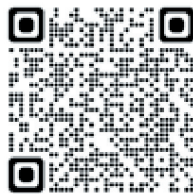
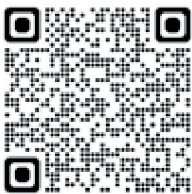
If you receive the Scéal Eile by U.S. mail, a renewal form with your name is included in this September/October/ November/ December Scéal Eile. Please make any necessary changes and mail it along with your check to our PO Box shown below. (Please note we do not bill.)

Single Membership: \$40.00 Multi-Membership: \$50.00 (2 or more in household or family)  
If you have any questions, please contact Joannie at 415-664-6579 or [membership@sfcooleykeegancce.org](mailto:membership@sfcooleykeegancce.org) Thank you for your support. CCÉ Membership, Attn: Joannie O'Leary, PO Box 16244, San Francisco, CA 94116

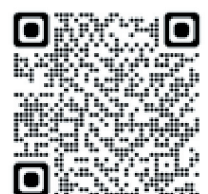
You will also receive an email reminder from Josephine Brogan to renew.



## Social Media



*Instagram*



*Irish Culture Bay Area*

Use the QR code above or the link below:

- <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064373092151>
- <https://www.instagram.com/sfcooleykeegan?igsh=MTIya>
- <https://www.meetup.com/irishdance/>
- <https://irishculturebayarea.com/>



## Set Dancing



### **Mondays:**

- Starry Plough in Berkeley: Céilí dancing on Mondays. Lessons from 7-9pm live music from 9-11pm.  
Contact: Danny Botello mr.dannyb@gmail.com or Michael Rael michaelbpr@gmail.com

### **Wednesdays:**

- Ireland's 32 for lessons. Contact: Michael Murphy at irishboogieman67@yahoo.com or 415-999-6062

**1<sup>st</sup> Thursday:** Plough and Stars in San Francisco at 8pm.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> through last Thursdays:**

- Plough and Stars in San Francisco at 8:30pm.  
Contact: Michael Murphy at irishboogieman67@yahoo.com or 415-999-6062

### **2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Fridays:**

- 167 Tunstead Ave, San Anselmo: From 7-9pm.  
Contact: Nellie at sonomarinirish@gmail.com

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Friday:**

- Berkeley: From 7-9pm.  
Contact: riemer@ce.berkeley.edu to get on the mailing list, ask questions or get directions.

### **Last Sunday:**

- Alhambra House in Redwood City  
Contact: Michael Murphy at irishboogieman67@yahoo.com or 415-999-6062



## Seisiún



**Song and Storytelling Seisiún:** Held on the first Friday of each month,  
See **Song and Storytelling** section for details.

COOLEY-KEEGAN BRANCH OF  
COMHALTAS CEOLTÓIRÍ ÉIREANN  
P.O. Box 16244  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94116