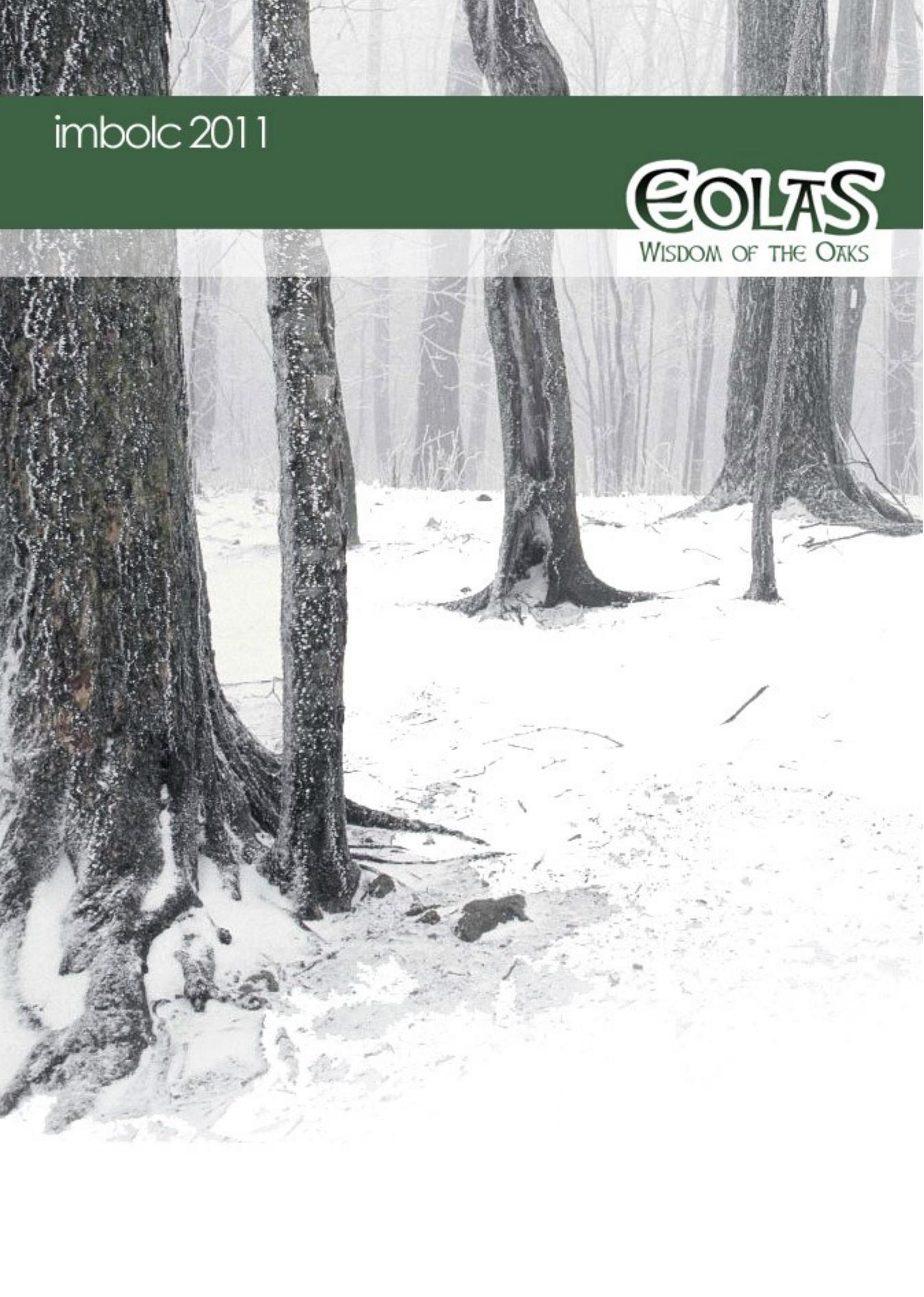


imbolc 2011

eOLAS
WISDOM OF THE OAKS



EOLAS

WISDOM OF THE OAKS

Welcome to EOLAS

Dear Editor

If you'd like to comment on any of the articles,
discuss issues or make announcements of interest
feel free to drop us a line at
EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org

We look forward to hearing from you!

Imbolc – Herald of Springtime

J Craig Melia

Despite Winter having not yet let go her hold on the landscape there is a change in the air. Across the moorland no ewes have yet lambed, yet the air is filled with expectation, the stillness of the early morning mists hold a calm before the coming spring and the awaiting birth and rebirth the season brings.

Imbolc is one of the four cross-quarter days referred to in Irish mythology. In the modern calendar it is dated as February 2nd. It is also called Oimeig which is thought to mean 'first milking', and is linked to the spring lactation of ewes. Sheep milk in early spring made a welcome supplement to their diet after the harshness of winter. Folklorists have collected a great deal of information as to practices linked to Imbolc throughout Ireland, Scotland and Wales, particularly rituals, both those centered on the community, and those focused on the family and the home.

To the Celts, being an agrarian peoples, knowledge of the changing seasons could mean the difference between life and death. In the Irish tradition it is the festival of Brigid, in Wales it is Gwyl Fair y Canhwyllau (The Candle Festival of Mary) from the Christianized interpretation of the festival, Candlemass. The ceremonies performed at these festivals all deal with fertility and protection of crops and livestock. Feasts, cleansings and offerings all took place.

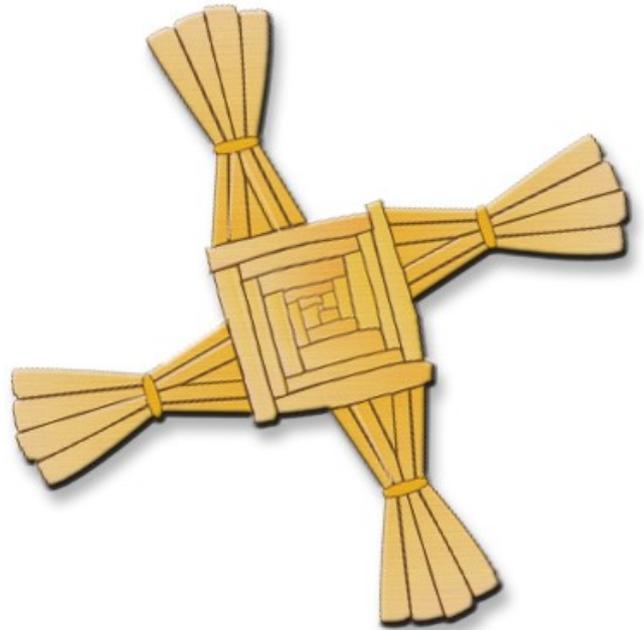
In Christian times the date continued as the feast day of St Bride. Many of the customs and folklore associated with her would appear to stem from the pre-Christian pagan traditions of the goddess Brigid. Processions, carrying a decorated doll called the Bride Og, would be led throughout the village. Brigid's Crosses, an equal armed solar cross which are plaited from rushes, were carried sunwise three times around each home.

These crosses can still be found throughout Ireland, hanging over door thresholds and stables. Candles, linking to the modern Christian festival of Candlemas, were placed in the window.

'Early on Bride's morn, the serpent will come from the hollow; I will not molest the serpent, nor will the serpent molest me.'

An alternative version involves a peat effigy of a snake, and links the snake to Bride. 'Early on Bride's morn, the Queen shall come from the mound, I will not touch the Queen nor will the Queen touch me'. Actually, all native British and Irish Reptiles hibernate until March and early April, so perhaps this is more to do with symbolism, the serpent shedding its skin to begin anew, just as the spring heralds a new year and the rebirth of the land.

It is debatable whether the saint was a Christianised version of the goddess, or an actual person who assumed much of the cult of her namesake.



Daithi O'hOgain, in 'The Sacred Isle' states :-

'That her cult from an early date took on the nurturing aspect of a mother-goddess is clear from the tribute paid to her in the earliest references which we have. In that reference, from about the year 600, 'the truly pious Brigeoit' is described as 'another Mary'. This is the nearest thing a Christian writer could go to assigning divine status to her.'

Agricultural activities that were part of the customs of the goddess, became attached to the Saint who bore her name. It is highly probable that a symbolic first ploughing took place. It is also possible that a mini 'baby boom' took place, as Imbolc lies nine months distant from the rites of Beltaine, when, until recent times, young couples would take themselves off to the woods. Brigid, besides her role as the Goddess of the Poets, Ironworkers, and various agricultural practices, was called upon by women in childbirth.

During the Vatican II modernisation program it was decreed that there was not enough proof of Brigid's sanctity nor of her historical existence, and so she was de-canonized. But not even this could extinguish her flame from the hearts of the Gael, and she remains, along with St Patrick the most beloved of the Irish saints.

Of the four Celtic festivals, Imbolc is doubtlessly seen as the most 'feminine'. It is a time to honour the Great Mother, Goddess of the Land, Fertility Goddess, Mother of the Tribe. Offerings of food were placed around an image of the Goddess, which would have formed a central feature of the days feasting. A special feast was held by maidens, and it was not until the men had asked permission to pay homage to the Goddess that they were admitted to the festivities.

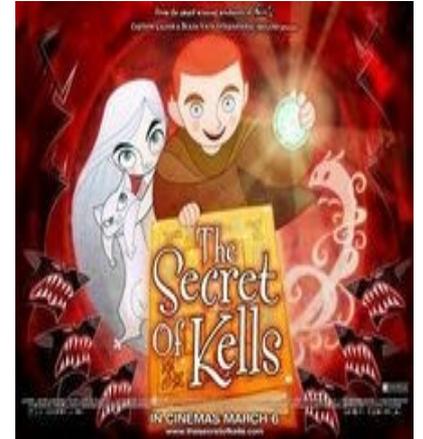
Due to the time of year the feasting would have taken place indoors, the family gathered about the hearth, the sacred fire of the Mother. This flame is central to the gift of the Goddess. It is the hearth of the home, the flame of the forge that creates the plough, the fire of poetic inspiration. It is the flickering of the candle in the window, inviting the Great Mother into our homes.

A Stunning Visual Interpretation for the Creation of the Book of Kells

By Caerwyn Llewellyn

In short, the Secret of Kells is an eye-opening and inspiring film that pulls at the heart through its visual genius and stimulates the soul through its symbiotic spiritual narrative.

First time filmmaker, Tomm Moore, who is the co-founder, illustrator, and comic artist for the Kilkenny based animation studio and production company Cartoon Saloon, has brought us a wonderful piece of art that fuses many elements together in a weave that materializes as almost sheer perfection.



The story takes us on a journey through the eyes of Brendan; a youth, full of curiosity, who lives at Kells Abby under the tutelage of his uncle, Abbot Cellach; presumably during early middle period of the Viking raids on Ireland. During the story, Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne, who is known in the film as St. Aidan of Iona, comes to Kells as a refugee of the Viking raids on Iona, bringing with him the Book of Iona, which is the precursor to the Book of Kells (or in history the Book of Kells). However, unknowingly to Aidan, the Vikings are close on the heels of Aidan, bringing of course the inevitable attack on Kells Abby.

The beauty of the story, is the way that Brendan sees the world; which is innocent and open to the possibilities. While his uncle, Cellach, is determined for material protection from the Vikings through the building of a great wall around the Abby. Both are at opposite ends of the spectrum, and through Brendan we are able to see the all-consuming power of fear. And though Brendan does indeed deal with his own troubles that cause him great fear, he deals with it far differently than his uncle. Even when dealing with the supernatural.

Brandan has grown up sheltered form the outside world, but when Aidan comes to Kells, he is inspired about what might lie outside the Abby walls, and during his trip out side the walls he is confronted by Aisling, who, much like the “aisling” of poetic inspiration during 18th century Ireland, is in many ways the spirit of Ireland (perhaps the last protagonist spirit of Ireland), who appears in the nature of a wispy, slightly ethereal young girl. During his adventures with Aisling, he encounters the tomb of the ancient Crom Cruach, which is of course the infamous deity of the cult that St. Patrick destroyed with the smashing power of a sledgehammer upon an alter. However, through seeking out Crom Cruach, Brendan is able to battle Crom, and cut from him the last Eye of Crom, which becomes the great tool through which, after the Vikings destroy Kells, Brendan is able to produce the masterwork inspiration, the Book of Kells.

Though not historically accurate, it does hit close on many points according to current contentions from the modern archaeological community. Which, in its self is a promising note for the promotion of this film alone. But combined with its amazing artwork, wonderful writing, and ultimately its homage to a religion long forgotten by many and the same religion persecuted by the very group of people that honor the Book of Kells as a sacred relic, Secret of Kells is my top pick for 2010 in the categories of “Children’s Film” and “Religious Film”.

Secret of Kells is a true treasure, just like the Book it honors.

A World of Druids: Interviews with Druids & Celtic Inspired Pagans

Welcome to the first of a new series of interviews with people from the Druid and Celtic-inspired Pagan community. To start the ball rolling we have interviews with Adam Sargant and Wayne Hughes.

Interview with Adam Sargant

What was your introduction to Druidism? What led you here?

Blimey... I can't remember... I suppose my introduction goes back as far as the 70's when, as a teenager, I saw images of Druids at Stonehenge for the solstice and of the Gorsedd of Bards of the Isle of Britain at the Eisteddfodau. That, combined with images of Merlin and other romantic figures in fiction. I guess, however, you mean Druidry as a contemporary pagan path.

Since my early teens, probably even early, I was aware of having a "mystical" view of reality... when I was able to formulate it, it was that I always understood consciousness to be a fundamental, pre-existing all other things and intimately related to all things. This led me down a number of paths over many years until I came across OBOD. At that time I was taken by the idea that the Druids were a philosopher class, and having spent so many years wandering paths alone, or that didn't entirely fit with my emerging philosophy, I sought the companionship of those I believed were seekers of truth...

I completed the Bardic programme with OBOD, but found it, and the community, still not to my taste. I was then introduced by a mutual friend to Greywolf, the Chief of the British Druid Order. I am now most actively involved in a group known collectively as Clas Brython, a re-connectionist group who have chosen to reject the use of the term Druid as irrelevant to their approach to contemporary indigenous spirituality, while I retain an active involvement in assisting Greywolf in maintaining an internet presence and the BDO.

How does your faith and beliefs affect your daily life?

It is actually difficult to answer that one... they are part of my everyday life, so working out how my life is affected by them, I'm not sure. Being aware of spirit of place and the relationship we can have with the spirits of place can impact on every level of your life, even down to choosing where to live. Respect for the natural world as both something one is intrinsically a part of and as a teacher. I was a member of the Green party before I identified with Druidry in any way, so there is a bit of the "chicken and egg" in the answer.

Many hold a romanticized vision of the Celts and Druids and their beliefs and practices. How important is maintaining authentic tradition to you?

I would consider my path to be "re-connectionist" as opposed to "re-constructionist". I actually no longer identify as a Druid for a number of reasons (I see myself as a lay pagan following, at least in part, a contemporary Druidic path), not least being that I do not wish to be connected with what I perceive as certain forms of new age fantasy. Since we have no unbroken tradition, I think it is imperative to be brutally honest about what it is we do know and ask ourselves what this knowledge means for a 21st century contemporary indigenous spirituality.

What role do you see for modern day Druids?

I cannot easily answer this one... to do so would require me to distinguish between those I regard as authentic Druids and those I do not. At best, I would say to maintain, develop and make accessible a body of lore that relates spiritual life and the natural world within the context of contemporary society.

Are you involved in any Interfaith work and how important to do you think that working together with others on common goals is?

I am not actively involved in Interfaith work. I do however believe that true Interfaith is an important objective.

What virtues from Druidism would you most like to see the world adopt?

Truth. All else follows.

How important is it that modern Druidism is "seen" in the world?

Again, the thorny issue of Druid authenticity. On the whole, Druidry stands for something, the development of an indigenous nature based spirituality, that needs to be "seen" in the world. But... such a spirituality needs to be seen to derive from folk in suits or sneakers, not dressed, if I may be so bold, in tea-towels and bed-sheets. The spiritual heart of Druidry needs to be seen and to be accessible, not set itself up as a form of fantasy role play to be ridiculed by the media.

Where do you think that Druidism is heading, what is your vision of the future for Druids?

hmmm... contemporary pagans are in general such an anarchic bunch it is difficult to say... I think I would *like* to see it de-robe and lose the titles. Druid is a title that should be earned, not the name given to an adherent of a religion in the same way as Christian or Moslem is. Anything else in my view fails to adhere to any sense of authenticity to our pre-Roman past.

What message would you most like to send to those who share your pathway worldwide?

I think if you boiled down the answers to the last questions, you will have the answer to this one. Focus less energy on ceremony and bed linen and titles, more on promoting an understanding of the sanctity of the natural world we are already and always a part of.

Adam Sargant

Interview with Wayne Hughes of www.p-o-d.org.uk

What was your introduction to Druidism? What led you here?

From being a child I always knew that there was something more there than the usual doctrine that the churches etc were saying. And I had seen war and death and people being hurt by my god is right your god (even though they were and still are praying to

the same god?) is wrong attitudes I saw that even Christians were killing blowing up and hurting each other in what they thought was right.

I started writing songs poetry as far back as 1986 so my journey had began before even I knew this. As I got older I got to meet more people who had the same feelings and thoughts as myself so I spoke to them they taught me what they could and guided me then one day I was told by my mentor and father figure Albert McCaig “there is the door you have a choice poke your head through and see the wonders on the other side or stay in the comfort zone you know or be the druid you were meant to be.

So a few years ago I asked him “did I poke my head through”

He told me “no you dived through the door smashed it to bits and I’m so proud of you “ By this time I had formed The Grove Of the Round Table As Head of the order and became ArchDruid of The Phoenix Order of Druids where I made the Grove of the Round Table mother grove of P.O.D which I have ran since 2005.

We have had our highs and lows as all groups do but we are a family group and we love to share and learn from each other and we do what we can as an order and individuals for the greater good.

How does your faith and beliefs affect your daily life?

Its from the second I wake up to the moment I sleep I give thanks that I get through the night as i have a few health issues and that I'm blessed with a wonderful lady who I love so much and I have the added fact she is the druid priestess of our order P.O.D and 5 amazing children and 4 beautiful granddaughters and a wonderful little grandson.

Its a weird thing were I used to live in Liverpool you were no more than 10 mins from a park and an open space and you could go and see nature and the god/dess in all there beauty. To now I am no more than 2 mins away where I live in Wales. Nature and the sacred it is everywhere I can also look into my garden and look at my silver birch tree and see the birds feeding on the food we put on it for them and to me that is all part of my life.

Someone once said to me is being a druid a style or a choice I told them it is my life from the second I wake to the second I pass to spirit. So my beliefs affect my life every day in one way or another.

Many hold a romanticized vision of the Celts and Druids and their beliefs and practices. How important is maintaining authentic tradition to you?

I know and hold no illusion to it we are doing now is nothing in comparison to the druids of old as they lived in trial war like times we revere the earth and the gods of old as they did and we hold our beliefs sacred as did they.

To go to places that we know they were be it Llyn Cerri Bach on Ynys Mons and soak up the atmosphere to feel the wind in our hair and know they walked on the same sacred earth we do is special and makes you feel proud of who and what u are so the feeling to each person is authentic to the individual

What role do you see for modern day Druids?

EOLAS

WISDOM OF THE OAKS

In my own way it is just as important as it was then I have in the past i helped people in dealing with death from helping the family grieve to doing the funeral (the last 2 funerals were in December within a week of each other) also handfastings namings to giving council over disputes and any kind of help people need and also going to schools to educate so the role of a modern day druid is just as important as the druids of old.

Are you involved in any Interfaith work and how important to do you think that working together with others on common goals is?

I have done a lot of work with the interfaith and have been on the end of both sides from the joy of people wanting you there to the nasty get lost you uneducated devil worshipping baby killing scumbag so one tries to educate them and show them we are nothing like this so its a swings and roundabouts I also do chaplaincy for hospitals and now get asked for by name from all over even prisons so the joy I get from this outweighs the bad situations

What virtues from Druidism would you most like to see the world adopt?

I would love to the world adopt a love of our sacred earth love for each other tolerance and understanding.

How important is it that modern Druidism is "seen" in the world?

Most ordinary people only hear of the Druids for the summer solstice but to me we need to shown in the light of who we are and what we do and show the good that we are doing but not the negative light that silly Daily Mail journo's throw at us as a dangerous naked Cult!

Where do you think that Druidism is heading, what is your vision of the future for Druids?

The internet is a great tool and we are able to communicate with the whole of the world and I know we are able to help learn show others that enquire about who we are to let us learn from each other or teach others who don't have the information they need or at least guide them to ones who can help.

What message would you most like to send to those who share your pathway worldwide?

Keep up the great work
Work with each other
Remember where we came from
Revere the ancestors
The God and Goddess
And keep our sacred earth in our hearts

Wayne Hughes Arch Druid P.O.D



EOLAS

WISDOM OF THE OAKS

Kate Louise Johnson Druid Priestess

www.p-o-d.org.uk

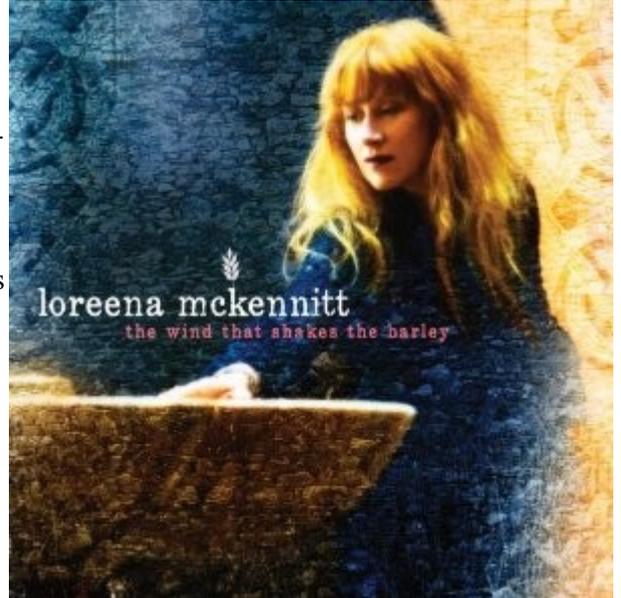
Loreena McKennitt – The Wind that Shakes the Barley

A Review by Charles Larsen

One of the great gifts of my Canadian heritage has been a life-long exposure to a tradition of fine acoustic music preformed by local, primarily non-professional musicians all across the rural vastness of the plains, mountains, forests and waterways of my mother's country.

From the French musical traditions to the Scottish and Native American ones, live music played in private homes and small public taverns, in churches, and native longhouses, and town halls all across rural Canada, keeps alive ancient musical treasures that we in the north still hand down through the generations to our children.

Born in Morden, Manitoba to Scottish and Irish parents in 1957, Loreena McKennitt was also exposed to this precious gift of traditional music as she grew up. Though her youngest dreams were of becoming a veterinary physician, her clear, rich voice and her exposure to the magic of Canadian rural music, redirected her life in her early teens. She developed a passion for Celtic music, and learned first to play the Celtic harp.



She began busking with other local musicians at various public venues as she grew through her teens. By 1981, when she moved to Stratford, Ontario, she was an accomplished accordion and piano player as well as Harper and vocalist, who had performed live in public markets, union halls, and countless other public places across much of Canada, from Vancouver to Toronto, where she played for the shoppers in the St. Lawrence Market to earn the money to publish her first album. Today, she is known and loved around the world for her fourteen albums, most published on her own label, Quinlan Road.

Her newest album, “The Wind that Shakes the Barley,” is a departure from her other recent musical explorations in “A Mediterranean Odyssey,” and her Christmas album, “A Midwinter Night's Dream.” This album returns to her roots, and to her love of Scottish and Irish ballads about lost loves, friends remembered, and beautiful maidens and handsome, but untrustworthy soldiers.

The first cut, titled “As I roved Out,” is a rather fun and wicked rendering of the traditional story of the soldier who takes advantage of the maiden by promising her marriage, and then leaving her. McKennitt's talented company of musicians join her song with acoustic guitar, violin, bodhran, base, whistles, and uilleann pipes.

In sharp contrast to the first cut, is the second track, titled “On a Bright May Morning.” Sad and winsome, this song about lost love, is very gentle, and tugs on the heart strings with a softer accompaniment of acoustic guitar, violin, and harp.

The third track, titled “Brian Boru's March,” is a wonderful all-instrumental piece combining harp, bouzouki, drone, hand drum, taber, whistle, mandolin, and button accordion into a graceful early Renaissance style tune. It is beautifully performed.

EOLAS

WISDOM OF THE OAKS

The fourth track, titled "Down by the Sally Gardens," is a sweet, slow-swaying and wistful love song, paced like a thoughtful walk through a garden. Here, McKennitt's voice soars up from gentle, soft phrases, to ringing, flying clarity, accompanied by the uilleann pipes, harp, guitar, violin, and base.

The fifth track, titled "The Star of the County Down," picks up the pace again with McKennitt's quick, bold, musical style of story telling, complimented by the whistles and pipes, bouzouki, mandola, guitar, and base.

The sixth track, is the title song of the album, the sad, tragic murder tale, "The Wind that Shakes the Barley." Here, McKennitt's wonderful musicians use keyboard, hurdy-gurdy, electric guitar, and whistles to set a ghostly-dark, airy, deeply atmospheric backdrop to McKennitt's slow, tragic vocalizations counter-balanced with sad, slow, violin and mandolin accompaniment. This song evokes rustling grasses in the cold breeze of a moonless and starless night filled with ghostly memories.

In contrast again, track seven is the lovely poem-put-to-music "The Death of Queen Jane." A beautiful, lilting song accompanied by harp, guitar, violin and whistle.

Track eight is titled "The Emigration Tunes." This instrumental piece evokes in the minds eye lonely pipes played on the stony bluffs of Cape Breton, looking east, back across the western sea. The tune is a series of musical verses, each featuring the guitar, or violin, or whistle, or mandolin, all played to a slow waltz-like rhythm set by the acoustic base.

The final track is titled "The Parting Glass," and it is a song about one's sad memories of a friend not seen in a long while, and a shared, parting glass. This track is every bit as atmospheric as "The Wind that Shakes the Barley." In the background of this very quiet song a synthesized violin simulates the airy, delicate, reverberating sound of Ben Franklin's glass harmonica. The instrumental voice of this violin reminds me of the far-off voices of Humpback Whales singing in the cold north seas. Over it, McKennitt's voice sings, sometimes almost at a whisper, to the simple, solitary notes of the guitar.

While this album lacks a stand-out song like many of her past albums, all of these songs together make a wonderful whole; a collection of Celtic ballads as she remembers them, and passionately stylizes them, passed down from the rich and beautiful musical tradition of Canada. In her jacket notes she writes, "Every once in a while, there is a pull to return to one's own roots or beginnings, with the perspective of time and experience, to feel the familiar things you once loved and love still." I give this album a rating of four stars, and highly recommend it to everyone.

Charles Larsen, Dealg MacTire, O.W.O.

"A pilgrimage is a prayer in the shape of a journey to a place where spirit resides."

First Planting Ritual

Tony the Prof

Long ago at this season, our people set out on a journey. Our native lands had suffered poor harvests, and there was a famine, and fighting over food. So we gathered our cattle, and our bags of grain, and set off away from the conflict, to find a good soil where we could settle and plant anew.

Now our tribe was weary. For many months we had travelled across a cold and desolate land, following our wise man, who told us the omens were ripe for our departure, as Saturn and Jupiter moved closer to each other, heralding a sea journey. We passed through the wild woods, and from there to the coastal regions, where we saw the sea, blue and clear. There we cut down trees, and made a ship and embarked to find a new land.

A soft wind from the south began to blow, and we sailed as close as we could to the coast. But soon a very strong cold wind - the one called "Northeaster" - blew down. It hit the ship, and since it was impossible to keep the ship headed into the wind, we gave up trying and let it be carried along by the wind.

For many days we could not see the sun or the stars, and the wind kept on blowing very hard, and there was a violent storm. Our ship was lifted high in the air and plunged down into the depths. In such danger, our sailors lost their courage; they stumbled and staggered like drunks, and all their skill was useless.

Our children were crying, and we were all afraid, with the rain pounding around us, and the ship heaving in the tempestuous seas. But there was with us our old wise man, who was also a weather worker, and as the storm reached its height, he stood up, and spoke softly to the wind, and the wind and waves diminished, and soon there was a great calm.

So it was that we came into the small bay of the Island that was to be our home, and there we managed to make the ship's boat secure and disembarked on golden sands with waves breaking on the shore around us.

All the tribe disembarked, and climbed upwards, until at last we came to a high place. It was night, and Saturn was slowly been rising in the east. This was the place for us to settle down, and we made a blazing bonfire for thanksgiving to the gods who had brought us here through perils to safely. And from the fire, we lit candles, and passed them around our circle.

Then the wise woman stood and intoned this blessing

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.

May the light of the candles we kindle together tonight bring radiance to all who still live in darkness.

Lighting these candles, we create the sacred space of the Festival of Freedom; we sanctify the coming-together of our community.

And the following day, we began to build our huts, and till the soil, so that the seeds were ready to plant. Very soon, the land was ready, and the elder of the tribe stood and blessed the soil:

EOLAS

WISDOM OF THE OAKS

Blessed be the Earth Mother, and all creative hands
Who plant and harvest our fertile lands.

Blessed be the orange carrot and brown cow,
Bless also potato and mushroom, even now
Bless too red ripe tomato and runner bean,
And blessed be parsley and peas so green
And onion and thyme, garlic and bay leaf,
Blessed be the yellow corn, each golden sheaf
And blessed be all that we come to sow
In the good soil, that so richly does bestow.

May all be fed, may all be nourished, and may all be loved.

Now we are settled into this new land and have put down firm roots. And as long as the world exists, there will be a time for planting and a time for harvest. There will always be cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. And we shall always plant, and while we care for the land, the land will nourish us, and each spring we plant the seed into what seems to be the dead soil, and life is born anew, and the green blade rises once more.