



More Saint-Gervais scenes top to bottom—Donegal two-hand dancing; set dancing; Claddagh group musicians and their spectacle; Berni and Ellen McGinley; and Bal de l'Ephémère.

Saint-Gervais—Pulled the heart strings

◀ and Owen Williams, and French friends Agnès Haack and Michelle (sorry, I never got your surname), who willingly offered a hand when needed to demonstrate, or to help as people danced.

The workshops in set dancing taught by Maria and Sean, ceili dances by Maria and old-style step dance by Michael were well attended. Maria and Sean cleverly interspersed their French explanation with English terminology and people were soon able to understand the movements. As ever, the demonstrations cemented what was being explained. The bals run by Claddagh worked very well, with a brief demonstration and explanation of each figure preceding its being danced. Once again success can be measured by repeat attendees and smiling faces.

The highlight of Claddagh's contribution to the

week was their *spectacle*—not my words but the words of the many who came to congratulate the group afterwards. The *spectacle* was a brief depiction of a night of music and dance with family and friends in an Irish home. It was just people enjoying themselves and yet came across as a hugely entertaining performance. A few figures from different sets were danced. Cristina, as well as dancing, played fiddle with the musicians and entertained with a lovely song. Maria and Michael demonstrated their steps skills, Jack sang a haunting refrain, Michael played a delightful slow air on the flute, and then Annette and Berni gave a very polished performance dancing hornpipes and reels. But I am sure that all in the group will agree that the sight of Berni dancing the traditional step dance Maggie Pickens with her little Ellen and elder daughter Cora, whilst son Peter accompanied the musicians on tin whistle, was the part of the show that not only entertained but pulled at the heart strings. Some French ladies I talked to afterwards said that it had brought tears of joy to their eyes.

Donegal two-hand workshop

NINA SOLO WILL BE KNOWN TO MANY READERS as she used to write musical articles for this magazine.¹ Some may have danced and possibly played fiddle with her in Co Donegal where she lived for eleven years until leaving in October 2012 to return to France and settle down in the Midi-Pyrénées region in Cordes-sur-Ciel, voted by the French as their Village Préféré 2014! Nina obviously simply changed one Irish bit of heaven on earth for a French one—a sea of clouds even surrounds the medieval city at dawn on some special days to remind her of Falcarragh Bay.

Whilst in Donegal, Nina was schooled in the ways of Donegal fiddling and is an accomplished fiddle player. She also learned Donegal two-hand dances and is indebted to Connie McKelvey and Anne Conaghan for their excellent tuition, which she more than ably passed on at a half-hour discovery workshop. Nina has a charming, gentle but very effective teaching style, and over the first workshop, then two extra ones added during the week on demand, she soon had the class mastering the Erin O, Corn Ricks, Barn Dance, Highland and Donegal Mazurka, all of which were very much enjoyed by well-attended classes. She gave me the honour of helping her demonstrate, which was a real joy. Then at the last workshop, Nina offered me the opportunity to teach a version of the Peeler and the Goat (Donal Savage was very kind and helped with the music) that I had learned in Blacklion, Co Cavan, some twenty years ago. Despite my Ardglass French, all seemed to go well. Nina, thank you for your courage! I am delighted that your success has been immediately recognised and confirmed by the fact that one dancer of the organisation team has already asked that you come back next year to provide a lengthier programme.

Lasting impressions

LASTING MEMORIES FOR ME AS EVER WILL BE THE joy of dancing with like-minded people whose beaming smiles said it all. Dance partners there are like set dancers—helpful, understanding and wanting you to have as much fun as they are having. The music is just magic, such variations and variety—I danced to Alsace, Belgian, Israeli, and lots of French music. I danced Irish dances, of course, Bretagne and Belgian dances, Welsh and English contra dances, attempted Swedish polkas (my poor partners) and managed to pack in very many waltzes (normal and asymmetric), polkas, mazurkas, schottisches and bourrées and many mixer dances.

The musical variety is amazing from the well established groups like Parasol and Cécilia and Philippe Plard and Shillelagh. There are also bals where the incredible music was solely vocal.

For me, and I know that I am biased, there were two particular groups who impressed me hugely, and dancing to their music was a very special experience. One was Bal de l'Ephémère and the other was Deux Sans Frontiers. Why were they special? In their own unique way they both made the music and the dance become one entity. Bal de l'Ephémère consist of Cathy Donin (accordion), Raphaëlle Yaffee (fiddle) and Gérard Tévenet (guitar) and they write a lot of their own music. When their instruments and voices combine, they create a very special and captivating effect which makes dancing to their music such a joy. The other group, Deux Sans Frontiers comprise Mark Prescott (fiddle) and Mike Gulston (octave mandola and guitar). Their music is sensual, emotional and all consuming. For me their music takes over your body; you don't need to think what you are doing as you and the music become one. I get a similar sensation dancing sets to the Tulla Ceili Band.

I do hope that the legs will keep me going for another year so I can come back for more in 2015.

Ashley Ray, Ardglass, Co. Down

¹ Her magazine articles were signed Nina Watrelot.