

EW-01-16-FN

Aidan Maher, Irish Fiddler

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Eleanor Wachs, Interviewer

Date of Interview 5/20/00

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I heard about Aidan Maher from Maggie Holtzberg. She told me that there was a fiddler playing regularly in a bar in Quincy. With some detective work, I found the bar, Paddy Berry's at 1374 Hancock Street. The bar has Irish music every Wednesday night and it's Aidan and his students who play for the bar's patrons.

I arrived one Wednesday night to a long and narrow pub right in the middle of downtown Quincy. Once I stepped inside, I thought I was in a bar in Dublin or almost any pub in Ireland. The bar was smoky and crowded. Down past the long bar, there were a group of about eight musicians playing traditional Irish music and some American fiddle tunes. The group had five fiddlers, an Irish drummer, and two guitarists. They played tune after tune and after a half hour or so took a break. The musicians were in their 20s and 30s. It was clear that the leader of the group was Aidan Maher. He called the tunes and even called the break. I later discovered when talking with one of the fiddlers that all of the players were Aidan's students. He insists that they play in public to gain the experience. It was obvious that the abilities of the musicians were mixed; yet everyone had a chance to solo with their instrument.

During one of the breaks, I approached Aidan and explained the project. He was very interested and I think pleased that his type of music was being acknowledged. He was extremely affable and agreed right away to an interview that I arranged with him later in the week.

I met him at his small home that once inside reminded me of the typical home decoration common to Irish Americans in the area: white lace curtains in the parlor and Irish knick knacks. As soon as we introduced ourselves again and before the interview started, he offered me some Irish tea and tea biscuits that I graciously accepted.

Aidan started to tell me about his teaching fiddle to students in the area. He teaches both children and adults from his home. (At the time of the interview, he was looking for another place to teach and I suggested the Beechwood Community Center nearby which he decided to contact. He needs teaching space other than his home.) Though he is a painter, he mostly earns his living as a musician playing at private parties and weddings, teaching, and performing at festivals, such as the Irish Festival at Stonehill College in early June.

Aidan was born in Dublin but grew up in a small town outside of it. He came from a musical family and in the interview describes how the family would entertain themselves playing fiddles, the piano and wind instruments. His description of his musical family and their love for traditional music and the way he describes is as if it were taken from a fieldworker's diary from the Irish Folklore Commission! Aidan clearly had a gift for music at a young age (8) and was encouraged by his parents to take lessons. He learned how to play the classical violin and encourages his students to read music and not play only by ear. In addition, to playing several instruments, he also studied step dancing and during his teenage and adult life traveled all over the continent performing with a dance troupe. (He no longer dances.)

During the interview, he demonstrated several traditional styles and tunes (waltz, jig, etc.). He also provided information about the local Irish music scene. In fact, every month he invites musicians and his former music students to his house for a music gathering where they play music together for hours. (That certainly would be a great scene to film.)

Aidan was very interested in the apprenticeship program as he is very interested in carrying on the Irish fiddle musical tradition. He also has some young students who would benefit by learning his style. I hope that he is made aware of the upcoming apprenticeships and applies for one of them He is clearly deserving of one.