



Irish Music & Dance Association

Tune of the Month by Amy Shaw

December 26th may be the second biggest shopping day of the year in this country, but it seems the Irish have better things to do on the day after Christmas. In many areas of Ireland, particularly in the south and west, Wren’s Day is celebrated. This holiday comes from the old custom of “hunting the wren,” in which wren boys carried a wren (variously, dead or alive) on a decorated pole (or on a holly bush) from house to house, and in song or verse asked for money to “bury the wren.” December 26th also happens to be St. Stephen’s Day, and somewhere along the way somebody decided this little bird was personally responsible for the martyr’s downfall, allegedly having revealed Stephen’s hiding place to the Roman soldiers who were pursuing him. I’m afraid it can’t be said that no wrens were harmed in the making of this holiday over the years, but nowadays you’re more likely to see an artificial wren being used.

In the town of Dingle in West Kerry, Wren’s Day has grown into a huge, colorful event reminiscent of Mardi Gras. Groups of “wrens,” wearing traditional straw costumes (sounds itchy, doesn’t it?) parade through the town, playing fifes, drums, accordions, tin whistles, and other instruments. The wrens (pronounced “wrans” locally) are named for various streets in Dingle, such as the Goat Street Wren. Each group elects a captain, and the wrens seem to be competitive in a friendly way. They spend the day playing music all over town, visiting patients in the West Kerry Community Hospital, and raising money for charity. I’d love to be in Dingle sometime for Wren’s Day. By the looks of all the photographs hanging in O’Flaherty’s Pub, it’s quite a spectacle.

This month’s tune is associated with Wren’s Day, and it comes from Caoimhín Ó Sé, who was also the source of last month’s tune. A flute and whistle player from West Kerry, Caoimhín’s repertoire includes a wealth of slides and polkas. Caoimhín recorded this polka on *O Thuaidh!*, the duo album he made with his father, Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé, in 2001.

Usual disclaimers: Any transcription errors are my own. The notation here is not meant to be a substitute for listening. It is simply an aid to learning the tune.

The Wren’s Day Polka Lá an Dreoilín



Source: Caoimhín Ó Se, *Ó Thuaidh!* (track 10, tune 1)

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IMDA Board Meetings are open to the membership. The Board meets regularly on the First Tuesday of each month at 6 pm at Perkins in HarMar. Members are encouraged to verify the time and location shortly before, as meeting times and locations can change.

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We welcome our readers to submit articles of interest, news, and notices of events to be published in the newsletter. The deadline is the 20th of the preceding month.