

THE SIAMSA ECHO

Chronicling a celebration of Irish music and culture
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

**"So civil's our Echo in Ireland, quoth Teague, That, if you but whisper to't, how do ye do?
It answers, tho' distant far more than a league, I'm very well, thank ye—pray, Pat, how are you?"**

Robert Anderson 1770-1833

MESSAGE FROM DENIS MARTIN, DIRECTOR OF SIAMSA 2011-2017 & 2022-2026



This is the third time that I have the privilege to write to you via the Siamsa Echo. In April, I informed the Siamsa Board that I had made the decision that I would not continue in my role as Director of Siamsa. So this note is a very special opportunity for me to thank you all for your support of all activities relating to Siamsa.

I have been on the Siamsa Board going back to 2006, then as Director from 2011 until 2017, and most recently from 2022 until 2026. During that time, we have had challenges in finding venues for classes, ceilis, sessions, and concerts. Throughout these significant challenges, students, members, and friends of Siamsa remained faithful in their support of our main objective of promoting Irish traditional music.

Reviewing the post-pandemic period after 2022, we had to find new classroom locations at Collège Notre-Dame, and new céilí venues – twice over (now at St. Kevin's Parish Hall since 2025).

We were delighted with our group trip to Grosse Île, numerous concerts and workshops, and most importantly, your award-winning participation in the St. Patrick's Day parade in 2025 and then in 2026. All of this helped highlight Siamsa's important role within Montreal's Irish community.

Post-pandemic, the Board has played a significant role in guiding the school. While we have a good number of members on the Board, Siamsa navigates via an ad hoc structure. I sincerely thank all Board Members for their contributions, patience, and foresight.

Many thanks to the teachers for their dedication to their students and for providing the best learning platforms possible.

Paul Cunningham has announced that he will step down as Treasurer. He has contributed significantly, ensuring that Siamsa remained viable financially. I thank him for his involvement with the registration process, céilí ticket sales and concert activity support.

Gemma Brooks will also not renew her role as Secretary with Siamsa. Gemma, sincere thanks for all that you have contributed. In addition to her support for the registration process, registration evenings, and class start-up evenings, Gemma has also been instrumental in establishing new merchandise offerings. Importantly, Gemma provided invaluable support for our trip to Grosse Île in August of 2025.

I sincerely wish the very best to the new Board that will be in place in June 2026. Siamsa is celebrating 35 years of teaching success and involvement with the Irish community. There will be more years to come and other opportunities to celebrate.

Finally, to our students, thank you all for your support. You are critical to Siamsa's success. I wish you the very best as you advance in your musical journey.

Denis Martin
Board Director





MESSAGE FROM GEMMA BROOKS SECRETARY OF SIAMSA 2022-2026

It has been my privilege to serve as Secretary on the Siamsa Board for the last 4 years. As a result of the previous COVID period, Siamsa was dealt a severe blow and many challenges were faced in the years that followed. However, teamwork and strong motivation served well to promote the activities of the organisation and bring recognition to the excellence of the School of Irish Music. The outstanding events include the trip to Grosse Île in 2025, the Saint Patrick's parades, the visiting Irish musicians, the céilís and Porchfest.

Strong leadership is the key ingredient in the success of any organisation and we have been blest to have had Denis Martin as the steady hand on the wheel.

I wish Siamsa every success and hope that in the future it will shine like a beacon highlighting the richness of Irish music and culture.

Gemma Brooks
Board Secretary



FIDDLING ACROSS TRADITIONS : A CONVERSATION WITH KATE BEVAN-BAKER

Following two recent private fiddle lessons with Kate, I had the pleasure of interviewing her for this Siamsa Echo article. I am delighted to share what I discovered with you here.



Brendan Walsh
Irish fiddler in progress

From classical conservatories to late-night Irish sessions and Québécois jam circles, fiddler and educator Kate Bevan-Baker has built a musical life that bridges several traditions. As a performer, ethnomusicologist, and teacher, she seamlessly moves between concert halls, university classrooms, and pub sessions where tunes are passed from ear to ear. Her story shows how curiosity, listening, and a shared love of music can shape a fulfilling career.

Early Beginnings

Kate's musical journey began at four when she received her first fiddle and started classical violin lessons with a Suzuki Method teacher. At the same time, another musical journey was unfolding. Her father's relatives in Scotland played traditional fiddle music, and visits across the Atlantic to her ancestral Celtic homeland introduced her to the lively tunes of that tradition.

One aunt, affectionately known as "Big Kate," became an unlikely long-distance mentor to "Wee Kate." She mailed cassette tapes of tunes recorded slowly, allowing Kate to learn melodies by ear. This habit of careful listening before playing a single note remains an integral part of her musicianship.



Two Musical Languages

Learning classical violin and traditional fiddle simultaneously proved invaluable. Kate compares this to growing up bilingually. Classical training gave her technique, discipline, and tone, while fiddle playing provided spontaneity and, most importantly, creative freedom.

"Music is something you can learn for your entire life."

Because she absorbed both styles from a young age, switching between them felt natural. Many classically trained musicians struggle later to adopt the rhythmic looseness and ornamentation of traditional music, but for Kate, the two music languages developed side by side.

«As anybody who has had the good fortune to work with Kate can testify, she is truly a "musician's musician"; she always delivers a flawless performance perfectly suited to the demands of the occasion.»

Steve Jones, Siamsa fiddle and accordion teacher, and céilí band leader



FIDDLING ACROSS TRADITIONS : A CONVERSATION WITH KATE BEVAN-BAKER

A Life in Fiddle Communities

Kate's childhood involved moves across several Canadian provinces. Born in Newfoundland, she later lived in Ontario before settling in Prince Edward Island. Each place contributed its own new musical influence.

Youth orchestras strengthened her classical playing, but summers were devoted to fiddle music. By age 14, she was regularly performing at ceilis and concerts around Prince Edward Island. At Avonlea Village, inspired by Anne of Green Gables, she played in period costume for visitors.

From Violinist to Ethnomusicologist

Though traditional music was central to her life, Kate initially pursued classical performance at university. Graduate studies brought her to Montreal and McGill University, where she encountered a vibrant community of Irish and other Celtic-rooted musicians. Late-night sessions and informal gigs led her to ethnomusicology, the study of music within its cultural context. She completed her PhD in 2018, focusing on Irish fiddle traditions on Prince Edward Island.

Tracing Old Tunes

Kate's research involved interviews with local fiddlers, archival work, and musical transcription. Comparing present-day performances with tune collections published centuries ago, she discovered something remarkable: many melodies had changed very little over time. The island's relative isolation helped preserve these versions. In some cases, musicians had lived there their entire lives, passing tunes directly from one generation to the next.

Choosing Community

Like many classical performers, Kate decided that the intense competitiveness of orchestral training was not for her. Instead, she turned her attention to folk music communities, where collaboration replaced competition. She found a sense of belonging in musical sessions that were based on shared repertoire and mutual encouragement—much like the musical communities she had known growing up.

Teaching the Tradition

Today, Kate balances performing, university, teaching, private tutoring, and research. At Concordia University, violin students can now focus on fiddle as their primary discipline, a reflection of the growing acceptance of traditional music in academic settings.

Her teaching approach is patient and practical. Instead of overwhelming students with corrections, she encourages them to tackle one challenge at a time—be it rhythm, intonation, bowing, or ornamentation. Progress, she emphasizes, happens gradually.

«Kate is a wonderful fiddle teacher with a gift for connecting with students.
They appreciate her skill and the genuine care she shows them.

She delivers personal attention in a supportive environment where they are encouraged to grow.»

Denis Martin, Siamsa Director



FIDDLING ACROSS TRADITIONS : A CONVERSATION WITH KATE BEVAN-BAKER

Montreal Sessions

Kate has immersed herself in Montreal's thriving traditional music scene. Jam sessions introduced her to Québécois music, whose rhythms and phrasing share historical ties with Irish tunes. To deepen her connection to this community, she has worked hard to improve her French, reflecting the openness that has guided her musical journey from the start.

Advice for Players

For newcomers to traditional music, Kate's advice is simple: listen widely (*e.g. to fiddlers and other musicians from many folk music traditions*) and play as often as possible. Listening builds instinct, and pub sessions build confidence. She says, "Beginners shouldn't be discouraged by the learning curve; many tunes can be learned in a few months, allowing new players to join sessions sooner than they might expect."

A Musical Home

Montreal's Irish cultural scene has given Kate a strong sense of community. Organizations like Siamsa host sessions, dances, and workshops that welcome musicians of all levels. These gatherings capture the essence of traditional music—people coming together, sharing tunes, stories, and laughter.

In an era of screens and digital distractions, Kate believes these real-world musical spaces are more important than ever. They foster friendships, pass along repertoire, and remind musicians why the tradition endures.

For Kate, the fiddle is not just an instrument but a bridge between generations, cultures, and communities. Its sweet music continues to travel, just as those early cassette tapes once carried tunes across the ocean to an eager young listener.

A Final Word from this Writer

Don't take my word for the musical gem we have in our midst. See Kate play in person with the great flutist, Dave Cossage, at Hurleys Pub at 9 p.m. on Tuesday nights. And, if you're lucky, you will probably see her playing at the music session upstairs, starting at 7:30 p.m. Bring your instrument and join in.





MESSAGE FROM WILLY LE MAISTRE: TENOR-BANJO, MANDOLIN & GUITAR A SIAMSA TEACHER MOVING ON...



I grew up in a musical household where piano lessons were pretty much mandatory and kitchen parties were frequent. My parents were really into traditional and folk music and would bring me along to concerts and festivals, so I was exposed to it quite a bit from an early age. As a teenager I rebelled against the piano, played trumpet and french horn in the high school harmony band, then rebelled against that too and started playing rock&roll on the guitar. Eventually, I went on to study jazz guitar and big-band arrangement at St-Laurent Cégep. That's where I met people who were discovering and playing traditional music, one of them being my wife who sings and plays the fiddle.

Melodically, I started on the mandolin/tenor banjo, then the flute and later fell into the rabbit hole of old time music for a while on claw hammer banjo. Over the years I've played in all sorts of bands and styles, from jazz to Celtic, to funk/disco, to rock, to folk etc. Since quitting my day job as a woodworker a few years ago, I've been keeping busy and supporting myself playing gigs, doing sound for events and music halls, giving private lessons and of course teaching at Siamsa, thanks to Steve Jones who wrangled me into it a few years ago.

I've really enjoyed being part of the Siamsa community, such nice and caring folk, like the ones that came to the kitchen parties of my youth.

Cheers, be well and play tunes!

Willy





Happy first birthday to Ceol le Cairde - Irish for “music with friends”! It was Donna-Marie Sullivan of Dragún Bán (“white dragon”) who suggested the name for us last year and we all agreed it is a great name for us. I have been saying “if you take care of the craic, the ceol will take care of itself”, but it is also true that if you take care of the “cairde”, then the craic and the ceol follow along.

People often ask me if we are a band or a group. I describe us as a loose collective, which makes us sound very lax. But what it means is that we don't have any formal structure or plan. You don't have to pass an audition or fill in any forms to join us. Everyone suggests tunes, gigs, places to play, or anything else that we might be interested in, and folks join in as and when the events and sessions fit in with their schedules.

We are not an official part of Siamsa, because we are not an official anything, but many of us met at the Slow Session on Saturdays. Our Sunday afternoon sessions at Le Depanneur Café are a great “next step” for musicians who have learned tunes at the Slow Session and want to get them up to speed before the faster session at Hurley's Pub on Tuesdays.



[*see page 16 for details about sessions around Montreal](#)

As well as our Sunday sessions, we organize Acadian evenings, inspired by Guy Breau and Martin Auger, who introduced us to Gilbert Arsenault, a rising fiddle star of the PEI trad scene. Our last Acadian “kitchen party” was on March 7th, at the lovely Café Noctis in Verdun, where we played a couple of times last year, and we are planning a showcase of Martin's compositions later on in the year too.

Guy organized our series of “after supper” sessions at La Petite Marche last year, as well as our performances at the Porchfests in Verdun and Hudson. We always enjoy joining in with the Siamsa session at Porchfest NDG. We love to support good causes, and so far we have played at seniors' residences, at a fundraiser event to support Le Chaînon women's shelter, and for the children at La Phare hospice. **If you have a worthy event and need some music, please get in touch.**



We also get invited to play at private events, and thanks to our good friend Hug the Bass Player, Felicity Spence and I played at the Imagine Monkland street festival last August.

When there's nothing else going on, some of us go busking, with the big busk of the year happening in the morning before joining Siamsa at the St Patrick's parade. If all this sounds like good craic to you, then all you need to do to become cairde is turn up and join in with the ceol. In other words, if you come and play music with us, you'll soon find you have a lot more friends!





BUILDING BRIDGES BRICK BY BRICK, FROM BELFAST TO MONTREAL - BY DÓNAL GILL

Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, president of Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League), and Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, director of Glór na Móna visited Canada in March to launch the Croí na Carraige Buy a Brick campaign.

Hurley's Irish pub downtown hosted the Montreal event, with a goal to build transatlantic connections and offer opportunities for members of Montreal's Irish community to support a worthwhile initiative of building a community center called Croí na Carraige (heart of the rock) to operate in Irish language in the area of Ballymurphy in Belfast.

Thursday March 12th, 2026, was a very special night for the Irish community in Montreal. Siamsa was proud to be at the heart of a successful event designed to promote the Irish language and culture in Belfast and beyond.



With over 100 Irish language enthusiasts in attendance amid the broader Montreal Irish community, Siamsa played a prominent role in the evening's entertainment. Siamsa musicians enthusiastic response to an hour long set of traditional Irish music to kick off the evening's festivities. The musicians were: Philippe Murphy on flute, Richard Morgan on bouzouki & whistle, Sarah Crawford on fiddle, and Dónal Gill on mandolin.

Later, Siamsa's Irish language teacher, Miriam Ní Dhuinn, tore the house down with a beautiful vocal rendition of the Irish language song Casadh an tSúgáin, accompanied by Dónal Gill on guitar.

Dónal also said a few words to promote Siamsa's teaching and session activities, highlighting the growing success of Irish language instruction at the school and the rich value of transatlantic cultural connections exemplified by such an event.

Special thanks to Marion Mulvenna for helping to coordinate Siamsa's participation in the evening.



LEARNING GAEILGE WITH SIAMSA



For the second year in a row, Siamsa students have been actively and enthusiastically learning Irish Gaelige. The classes are full, Miriam Dunn has been creating dynamic lessons and her students are very pleased with the acquisition of this very rich and ancient language. Here is what a few of them had to say:



Why are you taking an Irish language class?

I am taking this Irish language course so that I can reconnect with the ancient language of my ancestors and to pay homage to the loss of language that occurred after they emigrated to Canada. While it is a language of patterns, it is best taught with an oral component.

- Michelle Dallas -



I have been in love with Ireland since my teenage years: its history, culture, and people. Learning Irish felt like the next step in my journey to better understand its culture. Now in my 50s, I also know that learning a new language is beneficial for the brain. In retirement, I dream of spending time volunteering in Ireland, and being able to understand and speak Gaeilge, even a little, would be both an asset and meaningful. Last but not least, I want to be an example for my young grandsons and show them that they can learn French if I can learn Irish at my age.

- Cindy -

I've been a big admirer of linguistics and Irish has also fascinated me as the most widely spoken Celtic language. I really wanted to take the class to get a better with pronunciation, and to connect more with my Irish ancestry.

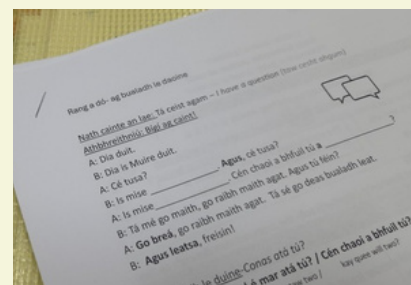
- Brendan -

What has the class given you? What are you getting out of the class?



I get to enjoy a safe space to learn, ask questions and practice with like minded people in the language of our history. It gives context and explanations where a text book would only give the rules. - Michelle Dallas -

First of all, Miriam is a great teacher! The class has given me the basics of pronunciation and the ability to have a first conversation in Gaeilge. Having the chance to speak it out loud in class is much better than being alone in front of an online video. It gives me confidence that, with a lot of work and perseverance, I might one day be able to understand and speak it. I do hope to be able to use some of it on an upcoming trip. - Cindy -



All of the students are very motivated, and it is empowering to have a small community of people who are also interested in learning about the Irish language. Miriam has created a very encouraging and welcoming space! - Brendan -



TIMELINE OF THE SEMESTER: JANUARY TO MAY 2026

JANUARY

First session at Honey Martin,
Sherbrooke St. West - hosted by Hannah Collins



MARCH

Spring semester begins

Glor na mona fundraiser -
hosted at Hurley's Pub + music by Siamsa

Green Season 2026

March 21: Saint Patrick's Day Ceili

March 22: Saint Patrick's Day Parade

Post-parade session at Saint Patrick's Basilica

APRIL

Willie-Clancy School Workshops & Concert
at Concordia & McGill University
for the first time in North-America!

Visit from Irish fiddler Manus Maguire



FEBRUARY

First ceili of the year



United Irish Societies

Post-Parade Awards & Banquet

Siamsa is awarded:

Best Authentic Irish Group & Best Overall Group



MAY

NDG Porchfest 2026

Student's Recital





SIAMSA'S FEBRUARY CEILI AT ST. KEVIN'S CHURCH FULL HOUSE IN THE MIDDLE OF WINTER!



Siamsa welcomed players from Canada's Competitive Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) to do some fundraising. Gabriella Doblas - Iliana Loupessi - Mairead Staslivlis aiming to participate in the LGFA 2026 World Games in Ireland - Caoimhin Reilly, Head Coach -



SIAMSA SNAPSHOTS OF THE 2026 GREEN SEASON

SIAMSA'S SAINT PATRICK'S DAY CEILI 2026 AT ST. KEVIN'S CHURCH:
HIGHEST ATTENDANCE AT A SIAMSA CEILI IN OUR 35 YEAR HISTORY!



Photo Credit: Brad Hurley

THE UNITED IRISH SOCIETIES OF MONTREAL'S 201ST ANNUAL SAINT PATRICK'S PARADE



Photo Credit: Griffin Alcorn



The United Irish Societies of Montreal awarded Siamsa
for our participation in the 201st Montreal
Saint Patrick's Day Parade:

**Best Authentic Irish Group
&
Best Overall Parade Entry**

Photo credit: Griffin Alcorn



Simasa parade participants 2026

Photo credit: Jack Denison



Post-parade session, Saint Patrick's Basilica

Photo credit: Griffin Alcorn

SUMMER 2026 TRAD SESSIONS

SIAMSA'S MUSICAL FOOTPRINT THROUGHOUT THE CITY OF MONTREAL

The following sessions are either hosted by Siamsa or well attended by Siamsa members, which warrants a call out to their hosts for creating such wonderful opportunities to play music together.



TUESDAY EVENING : THE SIAMSA TRAD SESSION

Hurley's Irish Pub
1225 Crescent St, Montreal
7:30 to 10:30 p.m.
Level: intermediate & advanced



SATURDAY AFTERNOON : THE SLOW SESSION

Hosted by Gemma & Harold Brooks
Lord William Pub - in Griffintown
265 Des Seigneurs St, Montreal
2 to 5 p.m.
Level: beginner & intermediate

SUNDAY AFTERNOON : THE DÉPANNEUR CAFÉ SESSION

Organized by Fran Alexa
Le Dépanneur Café
206 Bernard St W, Montreal
3 to 5 p.m.
All levels welcome!

MERCREDIS SOIR SOUS LA COURTEPOINTE

Hosted by Robin Beech & Gord Fisch
Bar La Courtepointe
220 Villeray St E, Montreal
Every two weeks, 7 to 10 p.m.
Level: intermediate & advanced



THE HONEY MARTIN SESSION

Hosted by Hannah Collins
Honey Martin Pub - in NDG
5916 Sherbrooke St W, Montreal
June 7, July 5 & August 2, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Melody players welcome
Accompanists by invitation only
Level: high intermediate & advanced





UPCOMING EVENTS

SUMMER 2026

- MAY 30 LAST CEILI OF THE SEASON
Come and celebrate 35 years with us!
- JULY 6 CONCERT WITH AIDAN CONNOLLY & BRYAN O'LEARY
Saint Patrick's Basilica, Congress Hall
- AUGUST 2 MONTREAL HIGHLAND GAMES
Grounds of the Douglas Hospital
6875 LaSalle Blvd, Verdun
www.montrealhighlandgames.com

FALL 2026

Some dates yet to be determined
[Sign-up to our mailing list](#) to receive updates.

REGISTRATION NIGHT & TRAD SESSION
Hurley's Irish Pub, 1225 Crescent St, Montreal
Early September - Tuesday evening, 7:30 to 10 p.m.
Online registration at www.siamsa.org

SIAMSA MUSIC & LANGUAGE CLASSES
To begin in mid-September

FIRST CÉILÍS OF THE 2026-2027 SEASON
September 26th
October 31st
November 28th



About Us

Siamsa is a registered non-profit organization based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
We are dedicated to promoting Irish culture & music.

Board of Directors 2025-2026 School Year

The school is guided and administered
by a volunteer Board of Directors.

Director

Denis Martin

Treasurer

Paul Cunningham

Secretary

Gemma Brooks

Members-at-large

Allison Haggart

Brendan Walsh

Dónal Gill

Fred Graham

Gina Francis

Kelly Shannon-Parmar

Mayu Egan

Philippe Murphy

Reggie Parmar

Steve Jones

Teachers Spring 2026 Semester

Bodhrán

Fred Graham

Concertina

Hannah Collins

C#/D Accordion

Steve Jones

Fiddle

Émile Hooper

Mayu Egan

Steve Jones

Gaeilge - Irish Language

Miriam Dunne

Guitar, Tenor Banjo & Mandolin

Willy LeMaistre

Harp

Cécile Delage

"Siamsa Singers" Choir

Ros Williams, choir director

Tin Whistle and Irish Flute

Philippe Murphy

If you have questions, comments about Siamsa's activities, or would like to
contribute to an upcoming newsletters, please contact us at

info@siamsa.org



Siamsa
School of Irish Music
École de musique irlandaise