

Mundelein fiddler Liz Carroll headlines all-Irish show

By LILLI KUZMA Contributor February 28, 2012 9:08PM

Liz Carroll with Cormac McCarthy and special guests / Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W. Campbell Street, Arlington Heights / 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 3 / Tickets are \$30 and available online at MetropolisArts.com or call (847) 577-2121

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It was very cold that winter day as she was driving in her red VW beetle. But Liz Carroll had an idea for a song and didn't want to forget it.

"I stopped the car and drew the lines on the windshield," said Carroll, speaking by phone from her home in Mundelein.

The tune, a hornpipe, was later christened "The Plane of the Plank," and is among the songs in this world-class fiddler's first book of original compositions, "Collected," now in its second printing.

In 2011, Carroll was honored at Ireland's Wexford Opera House with the esteemed "Cumadoir TG4" (Composer of the Year) award, and is the first American-born composer so honored in the award's history.

Champion fiddler

With a passion and brilliance for music, a talent honed since childhood, Carroll has enjoyed a very successful and exciting career, from winning both the Junior and Senior All-Ireland Fiddling Championships, to earning a Grammy nomination along with John Doyle for the 2009 release, "Double Play" (Compass Records).

Carroll writes and performs in solo and in collaboration, and her exceptionally proficient and lively fiddling has thrilled audiences all over the world.

Cork-born pianist Cormac McCarthy, and other special musical guests will join Carroll on stage March 3 at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre in Arlington Heights for an all-Irish concert.

"I saw Cormac at the Old Town School, and he was so terrific," said Carroll, "and I knew that I should be playing with him."

McCarthy is presently a resident of Chicago and a graduate student at DePaul University. He is an award-winning composer, and holds bachelor's and master's degrees in music from the Cork School of Music.

The show at The Metropolis will consist of all instrumental music, with a lot of new tunes, but also some old favorites and traditional music.

“I think of myself as a jig and reel player,” said Carroll, “but we’ll have some beautiful slow pieces from the Irish lexicon, too.”

Irish music has long had a special place in Chicago-area hearts, but it got a big bump in popularity with blockbuster productions like Riverdance, and Michael Flatley’s dance shows.

As Carroll noted, “Irish music reached a fantastic level of popularity with the ‘Lord of the Dance,’ that seems to have continued, with more people than ever fans of both traditional and more contemporary Irish music. I travel a lot, and Irish music always goes over well and has a very nice audience.”

Tough teaching

Carroll began music lessons at age nine at the Catholic Visitation School on Chicago’s South Side, where she was blessed with a tough teacher. The nun who instructed her made a huge impression on the youngster.

“My memory of Sister Francine is that she really cared if you practiced. It was fun when someone was paying attention to you enough that it mattered,” Carroll recalled. “You don’t really want to get away with it. I know loads of people with stories about getting ‘out’ of their music lessons and all, and it occurred to me that maybe they didn’t have somebody that cared enough.”

Carroll, however, also had a personal drive and motivation to learn all the tunes. “I played a lot. I loved it and pushed myself,” she said.

Asked about other influences on her early career, Carroll said it was a rich mix, and then some.

“I grew up in a Chicago full of musicians, different styles, some really wild running into every note, some really elegant players, some who played for dancing,” she said. “So you had a nice mix of people who were all about rhythm, others melody, others a mix of that, and everything from really scratchy to clean players — but, at the end of the day, what fun and what nice people!”