



Updated November 07, 2008 12:48PM

# REVIEW: 'Irish Homecoming' stages a triumph

By Diana Nollen  
The Gazette  
diana.nollen@gazettecommunications.com

IOWA CITY — "An Irish Homecoming" is part bonfire, part pep rally and a major victory for performers and audience alike.

The Celtic music and dance celebration filled The Englert Theatre with a footstompin', hand-clapping hooley Thursday night for the first of two sold-out performances from Hancher's relocated season.

Brogues, jigs and feet flew through the air for 2 1/2 hours, led by the New York-based Cherish the Ladies and its sassy Irish whistle maven, Joanie Madden. Joining the six marvelous ladies onstage were powerhouse singer Maura O'Connell; hilarious singer/guitarist Dermot Henry; mesmerizing accordion/bouzouki duo Bohola; seven champion stepdancers; and five high-stepping lasses from Claddagh Irish Dancers in Dubuque, clad in their gorgeous solo dresses.

That was nearly more talent than the Englert stage could hold. I'm sure the dancers would have liked a little more room for the flinging finale, but it was really special to experience this show in such an intimate setting. Being close enough to see Cherish's Mirella Murray smile blissfully as she played her accordion, seated next to Bohola's Jimmy Keane who played his accordion with his eyes closed, lost in the reverie, added an unexpected layer of enjoyment. And to see the flying footwork up close was beyond thrilling.

Throughout the show, the masterful musicianship, from jubilant jigs and rollicking reels to heart-wrenching ballads, made it hard to sit still. Several songs sparked spontaneous bursts of hand-clapping, hoots and hollers — not surprising from a region home to the lively County Johnson Irish, SaPaDaPaSos and Wylde Neptiles.

The songs just kept rolling from the tireless players. Even though the groups have separate identities and established repertoires, the most amazing thing was the way they could blend seamlessly when playing as one. They traded melodies and harmonies, stepping into the spotlight and just as easily slipping into supporting roles, offering their own spontaneous stomps and whoops after especially fiery passages.

Just as captivating were the quiet moments, when Michelle Burke wrapped her delicate, pure voice around a mournful melody or O'Connell sang of the trials Irish immigrants faced through famine and perilous seas.

O'Connell and Madden complement each other's larger-than-life style, making saucy asides, filling the stage with theatrical exuberance. And even when O'Connell is singing the Irish blues, she has a smile on her face that lights up the room.

As wonderful as all the stepdancers are, a special nod must go to Canadian Dan Stacey, who not only dances with amazing precision, agility and vigor, but plays a mean fiddle, as well. And even when he's seated, his shoes

Print this  
Email this  
RSS News Headlines

My Account Subscribe Place A Classified

INFINITY skin care & spa  
HOLIDAY Open House!  
Thurs., Nov. 13th, 3-8pm  
15% OFF ALL GIFT CERTIFICATE PURCHASES!  
Raffle Prizes, Gift Baskets, Giveaways & not to be missed Holiday Specials!



(Rounder Records)

Cherish the Ladies, performing as part of Hancher's "An Irish Homecoming" at The Englert Theatre, includes (back row, from left) Joanie Madden, Kathleen Boyle, Michelle Burke and Mirella Murray and (from row, from left) Roisin Dillon and Mary Coogan. The show opened Thursday and continues tonight at 7:30. Both performances were sold out.

## Blogs

News Sports Topical

- Notes from the newsroom - By Jamie Kelly  
Latest post: Front page stories for 11/11
- 24-Hour Dorman - By Todd Dorman  
Latest post: Where's Todd?
- You Are Here - By Jennifer Hemmingsen  
Latest post: You, a commissioner?
- The Archive Attic - By Gazette Library  
Latest post: Thank You, Walt
- Keeping Up With The Joneses  
Latest post: Painting begins
- A Community Recovers  
Latest post: Clara & Larry, 1861 Ellis Blvd NW
- Arrested Developments - A Crime Blog  
Latest post: Girlfriend stalker gone wild
- Looking in at Iowa - By John McGlothlen  
Latest post: Winthrop, Iowa, native and 'Eagle Eye' star Michelle Monaghan has baby
- refocus - By Gazette Photographers  
Latest post: Live Chat about the Cedar River
- County Supervision - By Adam Belz  
Latest post: Westdale election extravaganza
- Eye on the Island - By Rick Smith  
Latest post: Is it deja vu all over again? Linn County Board of Supervisors seems an awful lot like the commission government that Cedar Rapids dumped
- Ramblin' With Rasdal - By Dave Rasdal  
Latest post: Iowans Show The World - Hopefully the result turns out better than in '76

keep tapping out a wonderful rhythm.



### Article Comments

[What we allow](#)

**Note:** Article comments will include your name as you submitted it when you registered. You can edit your personal information [here](#).

Post

Click the Post Button to add your comment to a story.



**keeping up with syaney**  
Latest post: Election Day!



**All Creatues** - By Diana Pesek  
Latest post: My dog can't tell time!



**Homegrown: Seasonal gardening**  
Latest post: Winterizing roses

## Gazette Data Central

- [Outstanding Arrest Warrants](#)
- [Searchable Crime Map](#)
- [Iowa City Assaults](#)
- [Criminal & Traffic Charges](#)
- [Church Listings](#)
- [Restaurants](#)
- [Property Transfers](#)
- [Clubs & Organizations](#)
- [Corridor Non-profits](#)
- [Building Permits](#)

## My Gazette

### My Account

- [My Account](#)
- [Login](#)

### My Resources

- [Place a Classified](#)
- [Reprint Rights](#)
- [Milestone Forms](#)
- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Story Idea](#)
- [Order Photos](#)

### My Subscription

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Phone/E-mail](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Pay A Bill](#)
- [EZ Pay](#)
- [Temporary/Vacation Stop](#)
- [Restart My Paper](#)
- [Report Delivery Problem](#)
- [Report a Technical Problem](#)

### Today's Gazette

- [Puzzle Answers](#)
- [Online Sudoku](#)
- [The Gazette Archives](#)
- [Special Sections](#)
- [Email The Editor](#)
- [FAQ Page](#)

### Circulation

- [Subscribe To The Gazette](#)
- [Subscribe To More Magazine](#)
- [Subscriber Loyalty](#)
- [Newspapers In Education](#)
- [Dealer Returns](#)

### iowa.com

- [Post An Event](#)
- [Search Events](#)

### Gazette Communications

- [Job Openings](#)
- [Internet Policies](#)
- [Advertise With Us](#)