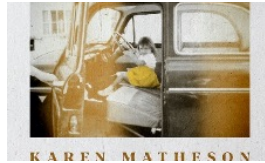




**FIRST DAY OF SPRING,  
IMBOLC**



**JAMES AUGUSTINE  
ALOYSIUS JOYCE**



**NEW MUSIC FROM  
KAREN MATHESON**



**A' BHREATANN BHEAG**

# BANGOR CELTIC CROSSROADS NEWSLETTER

As winter comes to a close, we are dreaming of live musical performances perhaps as soon as summer, if circumstances allow. The board is considering beginning the musical performance season with an outdoor concert. Stay tuned for more information as our planning process moves forward. Meanwhile, as winter wanes, enjoy the longer days.

## Imbolc

We may not think of Spring as beginning February 1 here in Maine, but in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Mann, February 1, known as Imbolc is marked as the first day of Spring and also St. Brigid's Day.

Little is known about the historic Brigid, but it is believed she was born about 451 in what is now County Louth, to a Pictish slave mother and an Irish chieftain. She became a nun, abbess and was involved in the founding of the oldest Irish monastery of nuns in County Kildare, where she died around 525. She was also credited with the conversion of some pagan Irish clans to Christianity. But she is also



closely linked with the Celtic goddess Brid, the goddess of poetry, healing, smithcraft and domestic animals, and pagan Celts celebrated this goddess on February 1st, the festival of Imbolc, which welcomed the coming of Spring. The Kildare monastery was said to have been founded on a site sacred to Brid. The two prominent Celtic women, one pagan and one Christian, may have been blended in an example of Christian syncretism. Many may be familiar with the Brigid cross (pictured here) which seems to combine symbols from Celtic tradition with the Christian cross. Other traditions include Biddies, effigies of the saint made from butter and used to supplicate the saint for the household's financial well-being. Another tradition was that of the St. Brigid's mantle: stripes that were sewn into the sweaters or outer clothing of fishermen to protect them from drowning. In my family, my cousin, Annie Molloy McElhenney remembered an old Donegal tradition that her mother, Bridget Sharkey Molloy

kept alive in the New World. On St. Brigid's Eve, she would go outside the front door and knock. The children inside would answer in Irish,

Oiche Bhríde brichíneach  
 Bain an ceann den croiceanach,  
 Gabhaigi ar na glúnaí,  
 Déanaigi umhlú  
 Is ligigí isteach Brid Bheannaithe.  
 'Sé beatha, 'sé beatha, 'sé beatha.

(On St. Brigid's night  
 Take the head off the rushes,  
 Go on your knees,  
 Make obeisance  
 And let St. Brigid in.  
 You're welcome, you're welcome, you're welcome.)  
 -Brian P. Molloy -Acknowledgments to  
 IrishCentral and Wikipedia.

## James Augustine Aloysius Joyce

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was born in Dublin on February 2, 1882 to a middle-class family. He attended private Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools, and matriculated in University College, Dublin. At university, he studied English, French and Italian, began his mastery of several other languages, and read widely in English and European literature, even teaching himself Norwegian to read the plays of his early literary hero, Henrik Ibsen. Joyce was also an accomplished tenor, and often sang sentimental Irish songs and operatic pieces, winning a bronze medal in a Feis Ceoil in 1904.

On June 16, 1904, Joyce went on his first outing with a young Galway woman named Nora Barnacle, who later became his wife. That same year they traveled to Trieste, at the time an Austro-

Hungarian Adriatic port city. There he took a variety of jobs, taught English, and wrote, while Nora gave birth to two children, Giorgio and Lucia.

Joyce published his collection of short stories, *Dubliners* in 1914, and his *Bildungsroman*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1916. He also wrote and published his only play, *Exiles* and some collections of poetry. His *Portrait* was a highly influential modernist novel, and introduced his alter ego character, Stephen Daedalus, as well as Joyce's inner monologue or stream of consciousness style.



Joyce moved to Switzerland in 1915, and then to Paris after the war's conclusion. Joyce published his masterpiece *Ulysses* in 1922 with the aid of the American poet, Ezra Pound, and the American publisher and bookshop owner, Sylvia Beach. Banned in Ireland, the United States and some other countries for several years for alleged obscenity, the novel skillfully used the story outline and many of the characters from Homer's *Odyssey* as a framework for Joyce's epic tale of one quotidian day in the life of three major characters in Dublin - that day being the same day he first went out with Nora: June 16, 1904. Leopold Bloom, a Jewish ad canvasser is the modern Odysseus, Stephen Daedalus returns as a Telemachus figure, and Bloom's unfaithful wife, Molly, as an ironic Penelope. Stream of consciousness dominates the telling of the tale, among many other styles, and scholars are still discovering many hidden riches in Joyce's masterpiece.

Though nearly blind from glaucoma, he published his final work, *Finnegan's Wake* in 1939. If *Ulysses* began at dawn and ended with Molly's nighttime soliloquy, *Finnegan's Wake* is wholly immersed in night, in the world of dreams, mythology, archetypes, symbols and languages. The story is set in Dublin and environs, the city to which he returned to only twice following his self-imposed exile.

Joyce moved back to Switzerland when World War II broke out, and there he died in Zurich on January 14, 1941. Joyce remains a major figure of 20th Century English literature and a source of pride to his Irish countrymen and women. -Brian P. Molloy

<https://www.biography.com/writer/james-joyce>

Bangor Public Library has [quite a few books by or about James Joyce](#).

## New Music from Karen Matheson

Karen Matheson's life in the limelight began with her performing as a child in her local village hall in Argyll on the West coast of Scotland, where she was brought up immersed in the deep well of traditional songs that have been her inspiration for over 35 years of recording and performing worldwide.

Known as the lead singer of Capercaille, she has four acclaimed solo albums of her own. Her new album *Still Time* is available to order from <https://karenmatheson.com/music/>



## Brittany (a' Bhreatann Bheag)

Brittany, or Small Britain in Gaelic (a' Bhreatann Bheag) is one of the seven recognized Celtic language communities- The Breton language is similar to Welsh and Cornish.

The name "Brittany" derives from the Britons who, back in the dark ages, came south across the English Channel to seek refuge from the Anglo Saxon invaders who were pushing them out of a large part of the island of Great Britain.



In this historic past, other Britons fled to the west and south west of their own island, to Wales and Cornwall; and so it is that today,

Brittany shares a historic culture with the other Celtic regions of northwest Europe. It is known for its prehistoric stone monuments such as at Carnac.

In cultural terms, Brittany is very distinctive, with its own language and Celtic cultural tradition that set it apart from the rest of France. The Breton language, though not much used in everyday life, and not understood by most of the modern population, has made a comeback in recent years, and is taught in a lot of schools. Celtic traditions are alive or recalled today in Breton folk music, its Celtic festivals, and its many prehistoric monuments.

For a list of Brittany's top folk artists go to <https://www.last.fm/tag/breton+folk/artists>

And here is a sample of a traditional song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MImv7d8-DI>

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