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## **IRISH FEST ANNOUNCES 2012 FESTIVAL ENTERTAINERS**

*In Addition to New Acts and Festival Favorites, Lineup Pays Tribute to Ireland's Influence on Bluegrass Music*

**MILWAUKEE, WI (June 15, 2012)** – Milwaukee Irish Fest, North America's largest celebration of Irish music and culture, today announces their music and entertainment lineup for the 2012 festival taking place August 16-19 at Henry Maier Festival Park along the beautiful shore of Lake Michigan. The lineup, which includes both new and returning musicians along with a special tribute to Ireland's influence on Bluegrass music, will showcase some of the finest Irish music talent from around the world. This year, Irish Fest will feature more than 100 acts on 16 stages over the four-day festival.

"Every year we bring in a diverse lineup of artists that covers Traditional, Celtic rock, folk, singer/songwriter, and contemporary styles," said Ed Ward, entertainment coordinator for Milwaukee Irish Fest. "There's truly something for everybody."

### **Festival Favorites**

Returning to Irish Fest again this year are all the big names and the best acts that fans have come to expect over the years. Artists back by popular demand include traditional favorites like Slide, Scythian, McPeake, Liz Carroll, Jackie Daly and Matt Cranitch, the Fuchsia Band and Moloney, Keane & O'Connell. Guests can rock out to acclaimed contemporary groups like Skerryvore, Enter the Haggis and Gaelic Storm, soak up folk balladeers like The High Kings and The Makem & Spain Brothers and enjoy the impeccable harmonies of The Henry Girls.

"We're bringing back the fan favorites and, frankly, friends that have been coming to Irish Fest for the past 32 years," Ward said.

### **New Acts**

For those looking for something new, artists making their debut at this year's fest include soulful Nova Scotia group, Sprag Session; foot-stomping folk artist, Mossy Moran; the culturally dynamic Open Arts Community Choir; and virtuoso flute and whistle player, Larry Nugent with award-winning songwriter, Patsy O'Brien. Regional bands appearing at Irish Fest for the first time are An Dro, Chicago Reel and Nashville Ceili Band.

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## **2012 IRISH FEST LINEUP – ADD ONE**

Other artists appearing for the first time who are also featured in this year's Bluegrass music showcase include Tim O'Brien with Bryan Sutton (former Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder band member), High Roads & Railroads (collaboration between Irish band, Teada and U.S. based Ebony Hillbillies), the April Verch Band (a Canadian group known for its foot-stomping music and fusion of influences) and Gerry O'Connor (considered one of the best tenor banjo players in Ireland's history). Regional Bluegrass acts include Chicago's Henhouse Prowlers (performing in neatly ironed suits around a single microphone) and Cornmeal (an American Roots and folk music band also from Chicago). The showcase's headliners cover both the genre's history and its future: Del McCoury was one of the early proponents of this style of music while The Punch Brothers is a progressive Bluegrass band with an innovative and jazzy sound.

### **Bluegrass Music Showcase**

This year's tribute to Bluegrass music celebrates Ireland's influence on this unique form of American Roots music. Guests are invited to celebrate the genre's rich past while renewing their appreciation of this style of music today. Performances will come to life on the Celtic Roots stage and the sights and sounds of Bluegrass will be found in other areas of the festival, including an exhibit put on by the International Bluegrass Music Museum located in Owensboro, Ken.

It's not widely known that Bluegrass music evolved out of the folk music traditions of 18th century immigrants who settled in the Appalachia region of the United States. With origins in Irish, Scottish, English and Welsh ballads and tunes, the early music had a predominant string band format dominated by fiddle, and grew to include the iconic banjo, guitar, mandolin and autoharp. Called "mountain" or "Old Time" music, it frequently accompanied rural dancing styles. As recordings and radio programs began to spread, the commercial "country music" industry was born. Over time, the center of country music was shifted to Nashville with the growing success of the Grand Ole Opry. The term "Bluegrass" first came into use in 1948 and is often credited to long-time Opry performer Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys. Bluegrass has since continued to merge with jazz, gospel, country and Celtic music to produce the sound enjoyed around the world today.

"The entire Bluegrass lineup is exciting as it brings Ireland and Bluegrass cultures together," Ward said. "We've had Bluegrass-Celtic acts at the festival in the past, but the idea of an entire showcase focused on Bluegrass is something we've been toying with for several years now. There is such resurgence in interest surrounding Bluegrass music right now that the timing is perfect. We even have a few collaborations you won't see anywhere else that keep Milwaukee Irish Fest on the leading edge of entertainment."

Bluegrass headliners include Del McCoury whose music has defined authenticity for hard core Bluegrass fans for fifty years. An International Bluegrass Music Association Hall of Famer, McCoury was a member – and eventually lead singer – of Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys band and today stands as a living link to the days when Bluegrass was made only in honkytonks and on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. On the other end of the spectrum headlining the showcase is progressive Bluegrass band, The Punch Brothers, who, with Grammy awards, appearances on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman* and a single on the soundtrack of the "The Hunger Games," is helping push the genre into mainstream culture.

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## 2012 IRISH FEST LINEUP – ADD TWO

Unique collaborations between Irish and U.S. bands will take place during the Bluegrass showcase, emphasizing the similarities in the styles of music. High Roads & Railroads brings together Ireland's Téada with New York City-based Ebony Hillbillies. Meanwhile, another pairing brings Irish folk act, The Henry Girls together with West Virginia string band, The Fox Hunt. Additional musicians in the showcase include: Brock McGuire, Tim O'Brien and Bryan Sutton, Cornmeal, the April Verch Band, Gerry O'Connor, Henhouse Prowlers, Aoife O'Donovan and We Banjo 3.

### Regional Musicians

On this side of the Atlantic, the festival draws strong Irish music talent throughout the Midwest with acts coming from cities such as Madison, Nashville, Columbus, Grand Rapids and South Bend. Regional bands include An Dro from Michigan, Kennedy's Kitchen from Indiana, The Kells of Ohio, Nashville Ceili Band of Tennessee and Navan and Capitol Ceili Band both of Madison, Wis. Considered the epicenter of Irish culture and music in the United States, Milwaukee boasts its own lineup of great Irish artists, including: Blarney, Fiona Molloy, Finbar McCarthy, the Gleasons, Ian Gould, Reilly, the Sandcarvers, Tallymoore, Theiss & O'Connor and Whiskey of the Damned.

### About Milwaukee Irish Fest

Milwaukee Irish Fest is North America's largest celebration of Irish music and culture. The four-day festival showcases more than 100 entertainment acts on 16-stages at Henry W. Maier Festival Park on Milwaukee's lakefront. The annual festival occurs every third weekend in August. The 2012 festival takes place August 16 to 19. The excitement continues next year, August 15 to 18, 2013.

More than just a festival, the Milwaukee Irish Fest organization is passionately committed to igniting a love of Irish culture in all people. Milwaukee Irish Fest teaches Ireland's music, dance, drama, sports, culture, children's activities and genealogy through year-round programming. For more information, visit [www.irishfest.com](http://www.irishfest.com).

### About the Artists

**Aoife O'Donovan.** When *USA Today* predicted that Aoife O'Donovan (pronounced EEF-ah) would soon become "the newest darling of the Americana set," it had already been true for quite some time. As the front woman for the alt-Bluegrass/string band Crooked Still for the past ten years, her natural talent for songwriting recently came to the attention of Alison Krauss, who recorded Aoife's song *Lay My Burden Down* on her album, *Paper Airplane*.

**April Verch Band.** Winning over audiences with sheer virtuosity on their instruments, and with charm, humor and boundless energy on stage, The April Verch Band hails from the Ottawa Valley in Canada – an area known for its foot-stomping music that fuses Irish, Scottish, French, German and Polish influences with American country music.

**Brock McGuire Band.** With two of Ireland's most celebrated traditional musicians at the front, the Brock McGuire Band keeps the purity of traditional music while exploring new territories. Their recent release, "Green Grass Blue Grass," is a cross-cultural CD which celebrates the music of the Irish and Appalachian traditions.

**Bruce Molsky.** Bruce Molsky stands today as one of the premier old-time fiddlers in the world, the defining virtuoso of Appalachia's timeless folk music traditions. As a fiddler, banjo player, guitarist and singer, Bruce Molsky embraces the music whether performing an ancient reel from Virginia, a waltz or a cowboy ballad.

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## **2012 IRISH FEST LINEUP – ADD THREE**

***Cornmeal.*** Heavily influenced by American roots and folk music, Chicago's Cornmeal blends lightning fast tempos and impeccable harmonies into an unrivaled live performance. With a rapidly growing fan base and ever-evolving sound, Cornmeal challenges the recipe of the bluegrass sound and live performance.

***Del McCoury.*** For fifty years, Del McCoury's music has defined authenticity for hard core bluegrass fans. An International Bluegrass Music Hall of Famer, McCoury was a member – and eventually lead singer – of Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys band and today stands as a living link to the days when Bluegrass was made only in honkytonks and on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry.

***Enter the Haggis.*** Toronto roots-rockers, Enter the Haggis, creates music that is a fusion of Celtic, bluegrass and rock with undertones of Latin, blues and funk. Their music crosses generations of fans that have connected with their creative, lively music.

***Fuchsia Band.*** Formed by County Cork natives de Cógáin and Heffernan, the Fuchsia Band specializes in traditional Irish music, story, song and dance. Their live shows are noted for frenzied and lively playing with a cheerful spirit and charm.

***Gaelic Storm.*** From their start as a bar band in Santa Monica, California, to international performances, Gaelic Storm is famed for their rousing, energetic shows and post-concert fan meet and greets. The band was launched to stardom in 1997 with their role as the party band in the film Titanic, and a party band they remain.

***Gerry O'Connor.*** Gerry O'Connor is one of Ireland's premier tenor banjo players and considered one of the best banjo players in Ireland's history. O'Connor hails from four generations of musicians and gives a unique treatment to traditional Irish compositions and American Bluegrass along with his original compositions.

***Henhouse Prowlers.*** With a focus on traditional vocal harmonies, hard driving instrumentals and sincere lyrics, Chicago's Henhouse Prowlers strive to play bluegrass the way it was meant to be played. Performing in neatly ironed suits around a single microphone, The Henhouse Prowlers have gained a growing reputation for their highly original, intricate harmonies and electrifying stage energy.

***The Henry Girls with The Fox Hunt.*** The collaboration of The Henry Girls with The Fox Hunt combines gritty Americana with emerging Irish nu-folk. Playing rootsy music, the gorgeous three part harmony of the sisters that make up The Henry Girls has made them an up-and-coming folk act in Ireland. West Virginia based multi-instrumentalist string-band, The Fox Hunt, digs deep in the well of American roots, folk, blues and traditional Irish music.

***The High Kings.*** Ireland's Folk Band of the Year, The High Kings are the most exciting Irish ballad group to emerge in recent years. Playing 13 instruments between themselves and with voices that were the leads in Riverdance and Broadway productions, The High Kings live up to their reputation as a phenomenal live act.

***High Roads & Railroads (Téada with the Ebony Hillbillies).*** This collaboration brings together Téada, an Irish band driven by a fascination with the timeless, expressive force of traditional tunes, with one of the last black string bands in the U.S. – the New York City-based Ebony Hillbillies.

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## 2012 IRISH FEST LINEUP – ADD FOUR

**Liz Carroll.** Liz Carroll, the much-honored Irish fiddler will be joined by fellow Chicagoan and Bluegrass musician Robbie Fulks for this concert. Chicago has long had a tradition of country music, and has often been at the intersection of folk and bluegrass collaborations. With Carroll on fiddle, Robbie on guitar, and guest, Cormac McCarthy on piano, they will explore shared influences.

**Makem & Spain Brothers.** After years as a powerhouse Irish vocal group, the Makem Brothers joined forces with the Spain Brothers in 2003 to form a quintet as strong and unique as anything in Irish music today. Joined by second-generation performers, the Makem and Spain Brothers are a driving force in Irish folk songs today.

**McPeake.** Led by a fourth generation family member of one of the most revered names in Irish music, McPeake has a creative approach to music, blending influences from Irish traditional, folk, acoustic and country genres to make an experience for the ears and soul. Francis McPeake IV is one of the few authentic uilleann pipers in the world today.

**Moloney, Keane & O’Connell.** Singer, musician and folklorist Mick Moloney teams up with Irish music’s accordion virtuoso Jimmy Keane and vocalist Robbie O’Connell for a first class performance of traditional Irish music. Mick has recorded or produced over 40 albums of traditional music and has formed two of the great bands of our generation: Green Fields of America and Cherish the Ladies.

**The Punch Brothers.** The Punch Brothers are a New York City-based progressive bluegrass band led by mandolinist and singer Chris Thile. With Grammy awards, appearances on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*, and a single on the soundtrack of the “The Hunger Games,” The Punch Brothers are helping push the genre into mainstream culture.

**Scythian.** The members of Scythian are classically trained musicians who began as a group of street performers and went on to become one of the most energetic groups around. Scythian incorporates Celtic traditions, folk, Gypsy and Klezmer elements into a high-energy show featuring dueling fiddles.

**Slide.** Slide is a band made up of some of the most acclaimed young musicians from Ireland. Individually, they have been members of the great bands of this generation: together they are a powerhouse of traditional music with an electrifying fresh sound.

**Sprag Session.** Sprag Session is a group of five musicians from Nova Scotia whose music lingers somewhere amidst the rich, soulful roots of traditional music and the grooves of rock and funk. Their unique style of Celtic fusion will have you up and dancing Cape Breton-style.

**Tim O’Brien.** Tim O’Brien is a Grammy Award winning musician and two-time winner of the International Bluegrass Music Association’s (IBMA) male vocalist of the year who plays traditional folk and Bluegrass music – emphasizing the music’s roots in Irish ballads. Joining him is Bryan Sutton from North Carolina, a six-time IBMA guitar player of the year and former member of Ricky Skaggs’ band, Kentucky Thunder.

**We Banjo 3.** We Banjo 3 from Galway, Ireland, plays with swing and soul, effortlessly combining the best of Irish and Bluegrass banjo music. Mining the rich vein of the American Old Time tradition and thoroughly reinventing the banjo band sound, We Banjo 3 is guaranteed to put a smile on your face and get your feet tapping.