

## What's missing from the Dallas/Fort Worth scene?

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Fine dining? Got that. Theatres and concerts? Check. Night clubs? Got 'em. Sports bars? Oh man. Irish pubs? A few. Irish dancing for grown-ups? Hmm.



Springtime means the North Texas Irish Festival and its Saturday night ceili dance. With the O'Flaherty Irish Music Retreats, we have ceilis in the fall. The Denton Celtic Dancers have lately hosted two Scottish/Irish ceilis per year. That's about it for big dances with live musicians. Don't you want more?

If you've ever traveled to the west coast, east coast or Ireland you know that there is plenty of social Celtic dancing to be had. Did you know that Phoenix, Arizona has Irish set

dancing with live music on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of every month and that San Francisco has ceilis in a pub with a ceili band every month? So do Wilmington, Chicago, Baltimore, St. Paul, and even Albuquerque! To say nothing of New York, New Jersey, Seattle, Virginia, and Mississippi.

So what gives? Here in the metroplex we have an increasing population of talented musicians, and there is never a shortage of dancers at the big ceilis. The D/FW Scottish crowd is going strong, but somehow the Irish style has not taken hold here, at least not among adults. Over the last couple of decades people have attempted regular ceilis but they've all fallen by the wayside. It's high time to try again, starting small and building to a steady wave of monthly dancing.

Thinking of Irish style ceilis, there are actually two main flavors: the dances from *Ar Rinci Foirne*, a book of thirty dances published by An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha, and Irish set dances, many of which are described in *Toss the Feathers* by Pat Murphy. The first kind often involves a lot of jumping and varies in formations from four-person groupings all the way to groups of sixteen. Dancers usually have a partner, but the emphasis tends to be less on the couple



and more on each person's role in the larger figure. Many ceilis in the US feature this first style, especially when children and competitions are involved, as some of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* dances are used as competition pieces. If you have attended NTIF ceilis in years past, this is the type of dancing you have done. In Ireland today they seem to dance mostly sets, usually consisting of eight people. Couples are more important in set dancing, and many moves are performed in a waltz hold. The feet stay low to the ground, and the really flashy dancers wear leather-soled shoes and execute rapid, percussive steps called "battering." If you ever travel to County Clare,

for example, and are fortunate enough to find yourself in Ennis or the little village of Kilfenora, you can find spectacular examples of set dancing by serious-faced folks with happy feet.

Relax and picture this. You're in a cheerfully lit room, surrounded by happy people and tunes that set your toes to bouncing and your face to grinning. You and everyone around you have a shared purpose – absorbing the music and letting your whole body play it in a mixture of spontaneous and lightly choreographed movements. Does that sound like fun? In a couple of hours you can listen to terrific live music, laugh with friends, meet new friends, get a little exercise, learn something new, and squeeze in a little Celtic culture to boot. We can do a little of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* style, a little set dancing, and throw in some Scottish for variety. What do you say, once a month starting in the fall, Ceili for Celts and friends?



Keep an eye on the SCMA web site for more details.

