

Kells: The Whole “Irish Enchilada”

BY MEGAN LEE

The Market's unique community is home to many diverse ethnic groups. The collection of ethnicities and influences The stratification keeps things exciting, diverse and gives rise to our amazing specialty shops Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Greek, French, Polish, Turkish, Bolivian, Korean, Hmong, American kitsch and of course Irish.

Kells, 1916 Post Alley, is known locally as Irish HQ. St. Patrick's Day is their most popular day. The celebration is so big, it now lasts over a week. This year, Kells' 23rd St. Patrick's Irish festival will include traditional music, dancing, foods and celebrating.

Owners Joe and Ethna McAleese, originally from Belfast, love expressing their culture. The restaurant is decked out in all that is Irish, more than traditional 'pub'-style: Waterford crystal, paintings of favorite Irish places, shillelagh, a map worth of good whisky, cabinets of Irish trinkets and traditional wooden furniture

Joe McAleese explains that the music and the singing is arguably the most important part.

“We [Irish] sing songs from our village, from our country, from *the* country. It's part of our history,” he said. “An Irishman never keeps quiet, always singing. You walk by and hear a fella on the scaffolding singin' away, on a hot summer day. Like Europeans, we like to sing.”

He explains how one must understand Irish history, to understand and really feel the songs. Many are ancient and widely known. The well-read McAleese jokes that songs are written about anything and everything. For example a Lord Nelson statue was attacked in Dublin, and before the concrete hit the ground there was a



Ruadhri McCormick, McAleese nephew, has worked at the restaurant since he was a kid. If you want good Irish whisky he recommends Red Brest.

song about it. Or *Foggy Dew* about the Irish rebellion of 1960. Or songs about places, like Cushendall. (“There is Paris, there is Rome and there's Cushendall.”)

Joe McAleese performs regularly at Kells, since they opened in 1983. (Though he says he doesn't consider himself a *performer*.) He, Liam Gallagher and Mick Chegweggen are the house band, plus Joe frequently sits in for a few songs with the visiting acts—many groups he knows—direct from Ireland.

“If you're not a blood relative in Ireland, you're related through drink,” says Joe, perfectly at home shuffling around Kells.

Joe Martin, from the Market Clinic next door and is related to the author of the Irish National Anthem, fondly remembers playing with “Joe [McAleese] and the boys” over the years.

“He [McAleese] has a very silken voice—a lovely voice reminiscent of the

crooners with a very distinct Irish ingredient,” says Martin. “Irish music has a inherent appeal to a broad audience. To any ethnic background. Irish music is one of the two foundation stones of American music.”

The rest of the Kells staff has mixed options about the ‘Joe show.’ His wife, Ethna, jokes that they sell the CD he recorded to insomniacs. “By the second song that's you asleep.”

Besides music, food and drink are the next most important elements.

All the recipes are Ethna McAleese's, they are the corer stone of the restaurant. She grew up taking care of her siblings from an early age. There wasn't a lot of money but she prepared tasty, healthy meals for the family. A bowl of porridge in the morning and two meals of potatoes and vegetables with her signature Irish soda bread. The hard times made her more determined. She brings this philosophy to the Kells menu.

“I am not what you call culinary-ily adventurous. Just plain potatoes and vegetables, and meat once a week, on Mondays,” Ethna says. “I don't eat anything that isn't good for me, and I won't feed people anything bad for them. I wouldn't offer food to anyone unless it was good. We started with the basics, soup and bread everyday. Dublin cobbler. Customers started to grumble about eating the same thing everyday so we ad

up in the *New York Times* as one of the four best restaurants in America.”

Her elemental style is reflected in the simple but pleasing Kells cuisine. Her brother, who lives in Vancouver, frequently pops by for a munch. Though he declined to comment.

The felling of the bar is good, it's a locals and tourists hang out. Guest are frequently visit from all corner of the globe and there is always entertainment. The energetic and dynamic Ethna runs a tight ship—though technically son Patrick run the place. She says people ask her why she works everyday. She replies in her singsong Irish accent, “Because I don't want to go to bed hungry.”

She buys her produce from the Market farmers because, she says, we always support the neighbors children.

From the beginning Kells has been a family endeavor. Ethna McAleese recalls when her son Gerald first found the place.

“There was *nothing* there. I looked around but I couldn't find it,” she says. “I called him back after I looked and looked. I said there was just a few bums lying around.”

But when she saw it and he told her the address (1916 was the year of the Irish rebellion) they knew it was the place, it just need work. She remembers chasing people out of the doorway and having to hose the alley with bleach. Post Alley has changed a lot since the early 1980s, now it and Kells is a destination.

A destination and a place to watch football (what Yanks call soccer). The Charlie Tully Celtics' Supporters Club, founded in 1997, is alive and well. Tully was a famous Celtic player who died in 1971. Several members show up for the games, it's a good *craic*.*

On St. Patrick's Day, Kells will be the place to be, all day long. As their motto states, ‘if you can't go to Ireland, come to Kells.’ On the 17, a \$20 entry fee will be charged. This covers entrainment, a collectable t-shirt and entry into the drawing for a free trip to Ireland. Check the website (kellsirish.com) for entertainment listings. Kells donates a portion of the proceed to St. Vincent De Paul.

During the 17 through 19 weekend, Kells will bring out the tent. The area will provide extra, dry room and during that

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