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Musicians provide plenty of warmth

By BOB SAAR
 for The Hawk Eye

Someone please bring Cherish the Ladies back to town in February, when we're locked down in the winter doldrums and need some good news to cheer and warm us.

Cherish the Ladies is the all-female Irish-American group that played Burlington's [Memorial Auditorium](#) Sunday night as this month's Civic Music offering.

They were hot.

Cherish the Ladies was formed in 1985 in New York by Joanie Madden. The six-piece musical group plays acoustic traditional music ranging from Irish jigs to Scottish hornpipes to waltzes.

Madden was unable to perform last night, but the band -- and the audience -- lucked out when the Irish duet Bohola filled in for her, adding accordion virtuoso Jimmy Keane and bouzarist Pat Broaders to the sextet. Keane shared the Irish piano accordion work with Mirella Murray of County Galway and Broaders worked his bouzar -- a cross between a Greek bouzouki and guitar -- in and around Mary Coogan's guitar.

The band included two traditional step dancers: 25-year-old Joe Dwyer of Brooklyn was an audience favorite with his high-stepping style of Irish dancing. Fiddler Dan Stacey of the Celtic rock band Seven Nations is an expert Ottawa Valley step dancer and fiddler, but he spent most of the evening dancing with Dwyer rather than fiddling with Belfast native Roisin Dillon.

After a brief introduction by Roger Hatteberg and Barbara McRoberts, the band went straight to the point with a strong set of traditional songs ranging from the upbeat "When the Boys Come Rolling Home" to an original ballad by vocalist Michelle Burke.

No one dressed in what could be mistaken for traditional Celtic garb, least of all Burke, who dazzled all with her star-spangled boots and snazzy tights.

The band waltzed, then polkaed, then hornpiped their way throughout the evening.

A number of the songs had a distinct Cajun flavor. Scottish and Irish music blurred together over several centuries, then was further mixed with French music in Quebec by immigrants, and then migrated to Louisiana when the Acadians -- French Canadians -- were expelled by the British.

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Thus the uptempo accordion numbers sounded at times like New Orleans street music sung with Irish and Scottish accents.

Canadian Stacey came on early with a solo fiddle number accompanied by his own tap shoe rhythms.

"That's a thing they do in Quebec," he explained. "You'll never see an Irishman doing that."

The upbeat numbers -- nearly every song was upbeat and had the audience grinning and clapping -- were never dazzling forays into incomprehensible solo musicianship: They were just plain good, solid performances. The more sedate numbers, although mellower in tempo and attack, were never in a morose vein and in fact had as much psychic and emotional energy as the uptempo songs.

The rumors that the auditorium would be a chilly version of hell due to a downed boiler were unfounded, and most of the audience had stripped off their coats long before intermission.

"I think the tunes are kind of keeping us warm," Coogan said.

Civic Music's next event is the Chicago Jazz Orchestra on Thursday, Dec. 11.

Someone please bring back Cherish the Ladies.



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