Irish Music Sessions

THE IRISH MUSIC session (or seisiún in Irish) is an informal gathering of musicians and singers that performs a shared repertoire of traditional reels, jigs, slides, polkas, and songs. Historically, sessions took place in homes and pubs throughout Ireland. Most of the performers were, and continue to be, amateurs, drawn by a love for “the music” and the community of musicians.

Today, sessions are often held at prearranged times in pubs throughout Ireland, as well as in Irish establishments throughout the world. In Belfast and Londonderry, or Derry, as well as New York, London, and Hong Kong, Irish musicians can usually find a session “to sit in on” almost any night of the week.

Although all musicians who know the traditional Irish repertoire are welcome to join a session, they must follow a subtle and intricate etiquette. Session “leaders”—the strongest and most respected players—select or “set” the tunes, their order, and tempo. Session leaders also decide when to start, stop, or invite a singer to “give us a song.”

Some of the leading session musicians in Northern Ireland will perform in this Festival tent. Visitors familiar with Irish music are invited to join one of the sessions. As in Northern Ireland, the session leaders are in charge!