

Islander finds calling in Celtic rhythms

Fiddler Jack Wright keeps the spirit alive

By Susan Carroll

When Jack Wright traveled to Ireland in the early 1980s he returned with more than just vacation memories: the trip inspired his interest in traditional Irish music, a genre he's been playing ever since.

Central to the sound is the fiddle, also known as a violin. While Wright had been involved with music most of his life, the instrument was new to him — and he knew it was a difficult one to master. He started with lessons and after a few months, ventured out on his own, practicing daily.

With his skills honed, Wright sought out other musicians in the state who shared his passion for Celtic tunes. A resident of Westerly then, he joined a band and occasionally performed at events but yearned to immerse himself deeper into the Irish music scene.

After a few years, he moved to the Narragansett Bay area, where he found the growing number of

versatile, skilled musicians he had been seeking. He started playing regularly at local events and today performs with about six musicians in several different combinations, depending on the occasion.

Wright and his bandmates play several times a month at weddings, anniversaries, wakes, private parties — wherever people want to infuse the sounds of traditional Irish music.

For Wright, the continued bookings represent validation of his talent and of the music he loves so deeply. "It's nice to know that people like our music, like what we're doing," says Wright, who notes that interest peaks around St. Patrick's Day, particularly in the Newport area.

Traditional Irish sessions — which Wright defines as an informal gathering of musicians of various levels of experience and ability — provide another outlet for Wright to perform regularly. He attends one or two sessions a week at pubs located anywhere from Mystic, Conn., to Fall River, Mass. "Sessions are a great way for you to hear what other musi-

cians are playing, improve your skills and socialize," explains Wright.

Despite his regular gigs, Wright says he still needs to practice the fiddle every day. He's also taken up other Irish musical instruments over the years on which he must stay sharp as well, including the button accordion, tin whistle, Scottish small pipes and harmonica.

Wright's traditional repertoire remains true to the music that goes back generations, passing, says Wright, from one musician to another. "You pick up tunes at sessions or from recordings. That's how the music spreads."

And Wright's happy to take part in the evolution. "I've grown musically every year," says Wright.

Another thing that's grown, says Wright, is peoples' interest in traditional Irish music, and he credits the musical show Riverdance with the increased awareness.

"Today, there is much greater public attention to the music and a lot more players involved," says Wright, including several in Jamestown.

Wright, 57, plans to continue playing and performing as long as he's healthy. "As people age, we tend to get weaker in a lot of areas. But in music, you just get stronger" says Wright. "You just



Jack Wright and his fiddle.

Frostbite sailors return to the water

A record 10 sailors turned out for Sunday morning's Conanicut Shellback Dinghy frostbiting series. After two weeks of cancelled racing due to bad weather, the sailors welcomed the sunny 40 degrees and light northerly winds.

Race Committee Dick Allphin and George Rice set up the start/finish line just east of Conanicut Marine's breakwater float. The windward mark to the north of the gas dock had to be re-set just before the start of the first race due to a westerly wind shift.

The usually crowded starting line was empty at the start whistle for the first race because the strong tide pushed the fleet away from the line. The windward leg strategy was to correctly predict where the next puff or advantageous angle of wind would come from. Bursts of private little wind puffs would help a skipper go right by the boat next to them. And moments later, the situation was often reversed with the other boat getting the lead.

In the five races held, three different skippers took first places. Mike de Angeli got his first win of the season. Rob Salk took a first and also executed a perfect port-tack start, not an easy thing to do. The big winner of the day was John Quinn, with three firsts. Quinn also managed a second-place finish despite giving the fleet a head start. He was over early at the start and had to double back and re-start.

The day's results were: first, John Quinn, 8 points; second, John Horton, 17 points; third, Rob Salk, 18 points; fourth, Joe Logan, 26 points; fifth, Mike de Angeli 30 points; sixth, Henry Siegal, 30 points; seventh, Jack Hubbard, 35 points; eighth, Gary Fischer, 36 points; ninth, Terry Jones, 37 points; 10th, Winston Knight, 38 points.



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