

# Seventh Irish fest serves up everything but green beer

Festivities conclude with contest for 'Celslav Cup'

By VANESSA BURAKCZ  
FOR THE POST

**Ceol Agus Cruid.** In Irish Gaelic, it means "music and fun." This year's Seventh Annual Irish Music Festival looks to bring exactly that to Prague for a 10-day period leading up to and following St. Patrick's Day March 17. The festival kicks off with a concert by Irish vocalist Julia Turner and closes with a touring double bill: a pub-style competition between Irish and Czech teams for the "Celslav Cup" and the equally messy Oyster Opening Championship.

Festival founder and organizer Frank Haughton, who owns Caffrey's and the James Joyce pub, sees the festival as a celebration of the coming together of the Czech and Irish people. Given the Czech Republic's pending accession into the European Union, Haughton says, "It is appropriate that at this time of Ireland's pres-

idency of the European Union we should have the opportunity to celebrate the most Irish of events with our Czech friends." Haughton hopes that the roster of both traditional and modern Irish music and dance featured in the festival will "appeal to a younger audience, many of whom will after May 1 venture freely to explore Ireland for themselves."

Turner, the young Irish singer headlining this year's festival, is currently enjoying a great deal of success in her native land. Her ethereal vocals and hard-hitting lyrics have garnered several Irish and UK press awards, including "Best Newcomer in Music" in 2002 from the London-based *Irish Post*. Not yet well-known outside her own country, Turner is looking forward to playing again for the international crowd that comes out to see her in Prague.

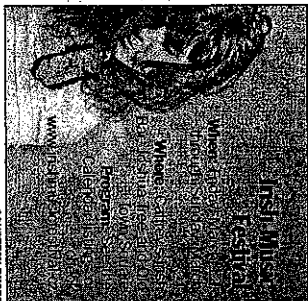
"It's a beautiful city and I'm very much looking forward to coming back," Turner says. "Audience reception was very positive last time." She will be accompanied by a backing guitarist from her Irish band. After her appearance in Prague, she will return to Ireland to get ready for an Ireland/UK spring

tour in support of her recently released third album, *Season of the Hurricane*.

A number of other musicians will be flying in from Ireland for the festival. Featured acts include ballad band Celtic Whisper, folk band Sheehy, roots singer Danny Healy, African-influenced traditional Irish band Sull, folk rocker Mark Sheehan and cover band the Dinniken Poets. Prague-based Celtic-Breton band Bran will also be performing.

Along with these acts, there will be casual sessions of fiddle and harp players at scheduled times throughout the festival. Music won't be limited to what's written in the program, however. When the scheduled music stops each night, informal jam sessions usually continue into the wee hours at Joshua Tree.

Despite the festival's name and lengthy list of performers, it's about more than music. "An important cornerstone of the festival is building a bridge between the Irish and Czech people," says Haughton. To that end, the festivities include a closing event every year to cement this happy union. This year's bonding affair will be the



CONTEST PHOTO

**Juliet Turner** headlines this year's festival. Celslav Cup competition, held in Old Town Square Saturday afternoon, March 20. The contest will take place between two teams of 10: one from Joshua Tree and Caffrey's representing the Celts and the other from Hospoda U Zlateho Vygra representing the Czechs. Events include a tug-of-war, arm

wrestling, beer-mat flicking and a general-knowledge pub quiz. And of course, in keeping with the greatest talents of the world's top two beer-drinking nations, there will be a speed-drinking contest.

The other featured nonmusical event is the Third Annual Oyster Opening Championship. In this competition, chefs from some of Prague's most prestigious restaurants — including Kampana Park, Palfy Palace, Ambivare, the Renaissance and the Hilton — will be racing to pry open oysters flown in fresh from Ireland. Participants will also be competing for the chance to represent the Czech Republic in the World Oyster Opening Championship in Ireland in the spring.

It all has the makings of a great, extended St. Patrick's Day celebration. But revelers should be forewarned: Don't come out looking for green beer on Paddy's Day, because there won't be any to be found. "I think people have gotten a little tired of the green-beer thing," Haughton says. "Besides, the Czechs don't like it. What we mess with their beer."

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