



The Ceilíer

A Publication of the Pittsburgh Ceilí Club

"All The News We Want To Print"

Summer 2025

Getting to Know... Alex Canto

Alex Canto – whom many of us know as “Banana Hat Alex” – is a member-at-large of the PCC board who also often offers dance instruction at the Harp and at monthly ceilis.

Alex grew up in northern California, in the historic gold mining town of Sonora. It was a safe place to grow up, where everybody knew everybody else. But it was also very rural and isolated. Alex was home-schooled until age fifteen, when he opted to take the long bus ride to high school so he could have friends his own age. He learned to hide the fact that it was his decision from his school-jaded classmates to avoid alienating them.

Alex describes his parents as hippies. They had their own business turning their art into rubber stamps, and teaching art classes using rubber stamps, and worked from home, other than most weekends, when they traveled for craft fairs and hobby and educational conventions. They had no extended family nearby and Alex was an only child. But he reports that his parents were very sociable people who made a found family of close friends.

Alex's parents met dancing and always enjoyed it. They met doing folk dancing and taught ballroom dancing for a while. His mother died in 2017, but his father is still dancing. So, Alex grew up dancing and continued it into adulthood. He and his wife, Anna, met in 2007 doing swing dancing at 920 Special in San Francisco. You name a traditional dance style and Alex has done it: Irish, Scottish, swing, English Country, contra, waltz, polka.



Besides dancing, Alex's great loves are dressing in costume and cosplaying. He loves the intersection of art and community that has come with his cosplay hobby.

Alex started doing ceili dancing in San Francisco. When he and Anna moved to Phoenix, they found that the ceili scene there wasn't much fun. So, when they came to Pittsburgh, he was thrilled to find the Ceili Club. If I do say so myself, we are a LOT of fun.

Alex and Anna married in 2014. Their honeymoon was backpacking in Yellowstone National Park. He loves his

wife's sense of adventure and credits her with introducing him to hiking, backpacking, festivals and travel. Something many of you may not know about Anna: She is a physicist and CTO of a startup company that makes electronic components using artificial diamonds.

Alex works as a Computer Aided Design (CAD) draftsman for a company that makes refractory brick. He'd worked as a machinist for fifteen years, but got tired of the odd hours. He likes the technical aspect of his work, and figuring out what people need. He also likes working with technical people and having the freedom to work from home a couple of days a week.

But his great loves (besides Anna) remain cosplaying, costuming and dancing, and his goal is to build a community around those passions.

And speaking of community...I already liked Alex a lot, but I liked him even more when we started talking about

con't. on page 7

What's Inside

Together through Life	2	Condolences & May Ceilí	5
DANCE AND MUSIC IN PITTSBURGH.....	4	Kick Off Ceilí 2025	6
May Ceilí.....	4	Events.....	6
THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF TRADITIONAL		Summer Garden Notes.....	7
IRISH MUSIC	5	Life Events & 2025 Parade.....	8

Together through life

June is traditionally the month of weddings, and I thought it would be fun to see each other's wedding pictures. So please find below, for your entertainment, wedding photos of some of your friends. Some are recent. Some not so recent, as evidenced by hair color, body shape and costume. But love shines through in every single one.

I had also asked for a few little wedding or how-we-met stories. Colleen, Marissa, and Mary Margaret were kind enough to provide theirs, and I wrote one as well.

If you would like your wedding picture to appear in the next issue, please email it to kbashaar@gmail.com or text it to me at 412-953-1278. We will run some more pictures in the fall issue of the Ceilier if I receive any.



Al and Kathy Bashaar

When Al and I met, we were both just coming off brief, early-20s "starter marriages," so we were in no hurry to commit again until

we were absolutely

sure. We dated for two years and lived together for three years before we felt we were solid and wanted to buy a house and start a family.

Our wedding and reception were small, held at Old Economy Village, where his family has history. As you can see, it was a very 80s wedding, with Al's enormous mustache and my Princess-Di poufy sleeves. The fashions may not have lasted, but – this time – the love definitely did.



Mary Margaret Murtha and Ken McCarthy

Ken and I met through my cousin. He'd grown up as their paper boy. He asked me to a church dance at Assumption. Three years later we were married on 9.23.89 - the day after Hurricane Hugo blew through Pittsburgh - though the sun came out just as we exited church. A few decades later our daughter, Catie married Bryan in the same church.

Those little boys in the pics are our boys, Kenny, Kevin, Kurtis - all grown with their own families now.



Colleen and Charlie Rumble

As young girls, my cousin, Bev, and I would play dress up with my mother's various gowns. One of those was her white satin wedding gown. Bev and I took turns pretending to be the bride, but I made sure to let Bev know that it was going to be my wedding gown.

When the day came Charlie placed an engagement ring on my finger, I told my mother to send her wedding gown to the cleaners.

My mother was not only much taller than me but thinner as well. So, much alteration was needed on the gown. I don't remember how much had to be taken from the hem, but the waistline needed to be expanded by 4 inches. Fortunately, in the 1940's, dressmakers allowed plenty of extra material in the seams. All the seamstress had to do was let the seams out. We didn't have to "put in stretch panels" as Charlie would tell people.

I wanted to wear her veil as well. It was designed and made by my great aunt who was a professional milliner. Unfortunately, the veil didn't fare as well in the attic as the gown. Mom was able to find someone who came close to duplicating the materials and design.

August 25th, 1984, was a beautiful, sunny day for a wedding. We were married in Heinz Chapel and the wedding reception was held on the lawn of Chartiers Country Club. One of my favorite memories of the day was when a golfer noticed Bev trying to walk our 90-year-old grandmother to the reception area. He put our grandmother in his golf cart and drove her across the lawn right to me. She greeted me with "Hello Mrs. Rumble".

"Where did we meet?" Kathy asked. "In a psychiatric hospital" I replied.

con't. on next page





Mary and Dan McIntyre



Terry and Dave Harnett



Greg Boris & Joan Reddy



Val and Pat Keeley



Joyce Rothermel and Michael Drohan



Marissa and Jonathan Kelly



Liz and Giles Grinko



Clare and Richard Withers

con't. on next page

DANCE AND MUSIC IN PITTSBURGH

Among the first accounts of music from the British Isles found in our region comes from the autumn of 1758. A bagpiper from an English regiment was sent forth to play outside the walls of Fort Duquesne. The intent was to lure the French troops from what was thought to be a lightly-defended installation. His comrades laid waiting in the wood line, expecting to surprise the French when they marched out to silence his pipes. Unfortunately for the bagpiper and his friends, the French were in full force and chased our poor piper from the field.

It was not long, however, until the English established Fort Pitt which would soon become an important cultural center on the frontier. Through the 1770s, settlers poured over the Allegheny Mountains and brought with them dance and music from their homelands.

Violins, more affectionally known as fiddles, were of course the chief musical instrument of the time. The earliest record of a known fiddler-maker comes to us from the mid-1770s in modern Jefferson Hills south of Pittsburgh about ten miles. Here we find a furniture maker churning out violins from his home off Gill Hall Road much to the joy of his neighbors. Music was commonly found in the harvest season when important social gatherings happened. Fiddlers were often called upon quickly to attend a spontaneous dance and were not given much time to prepare which is where we get the antiquated saying, “a fiddler’s notice”. Attendees would “pass the hat” to ensure the musician was properly compensated.

Dancing was not just a bunch of farmers skipping around in a barn, however. Young men and women were expected

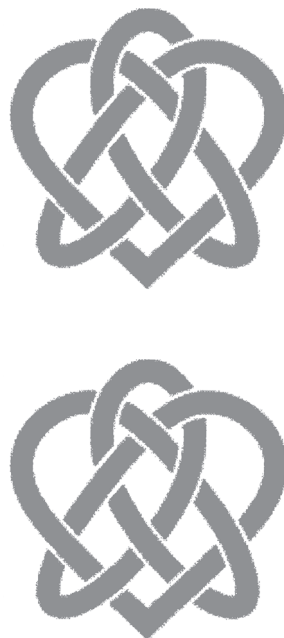
to know how to dance, evidenced by advertisements in early newspapers imploring people from many social classes to send their young ones to the local dancing master. In a room full of one’s peers, couple dances were performed and watched by critical eyes. Young men would wear knee-length breeches to show off their calf muscles, which is where we get the term “put your best foot forward”. Although today we simply call them “set dances”, in older days the descriptions were more specific. Reels, jigs, minuets, cotillions, quadrilles, lancers, barn and country dances were common styles that required their own nuances. One might notice a French influence in the calls and names (such as “do-si-do”, meaning “back-to-back” in French), and this is because much of the set dancing from the British Isles filtered its way up from the high courts of France.

By the turn of the 20th century, these types of dances and the music that accompanied them began to leave colloquial life and entered the realm of “tradition”. The difference, of course, is that while it was once a common part of everyone’s life, it was becoming something that required a more deliberate effort to maintain. In the 1930s, Allegheny County’s parks system was up and running. Many of the barns that once held dances for farming neighborhoods were now centerpieces of the parks and were equipped with pianos to facilitate country dances held by a variety of societies. Two such barns, the Rose Barn in North Park and the Silent Brook Barn in South Park, stand to this day. How fortunate we are to take part in this centuries-old tradition!

By Alex Brown



Kate and Jim Guay



Joanne Fitzgerald and Jim Tipe



Kelsey and Evan Adcock

THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC

Dancing on Tuesdays with the PCC has acquainted us with a few of the familiar instruments commonly found in traditional Irish music, especially as they pertain to dance. Some of these instruments are as old as the music itself, while others are relative newcomers. The oldest among them all is likely the Celtic harp. Carvings nearing a millennia in age of harp-like instruments, sometimes resembling a lyre, can be found in Ireland. The harp most familiar to us might be the model used by Guinness which is based on a 15th century example found in Trinity College.

Violins, or fiddles, have their roots in renaissance Italy. Catherine De Medici, the mother of three 16th century French kings, was a famous patron of the arts and dance. She ordered more than 30 instruments from the Amati family of Cremona, Italy, which is also where Stradivarius plied his trade as a student of the Amatis. Catherine's order standardized the size of the violin which, along with her love of set dancing, filtered its way to Scottish, English, and Irish courts.

Among the most emblematic of Irish instruments might be the uilleann pipes. "Uilleann", the Irish word for "elbow", was an 18th century improvement on shepherd's pipes. Bagpipes of many varieties can be found in almost every European culture, but none are as complex and beautiful as the uilleann pipes. Unlike the great Scottish highland or war pipes which most are familiar with, the uilleann

pipes are well-suited for indoor and dance playing. A full set costs as much as a car, so they are a rare treat!

On the contrary, penny whistles are among the most accessible of the Irish instruments. Flutes are some of the oldest instrument humans play but reached their zenith in the 19th century when tin or penny whistles, called so because of their low cost, were being mass-produced in the British Isles. They are easy to play, but difficult to master.

The 19th century also saw the introduction of free-reed instruments such as the accordion and concertina. German missionaries to the far east brought the technology back with them which invariably found its way to many types of European folk music.

A unique example of America giving back to its Irish musical roots was the banjo. This instrument had its inception in West Africa, then to the Caribbean, up the Mississippi to places like Pittsburgh, and thence to Ireland with musical exchanges. By the 20th century, other instruments like the mandolin, bazouki, and guitar became staples in traditional Irish music.

If you are interested in learning traditional Irish music, feel free to join the Pittsburgh Irish Sessions every Thursday evening around town, and grab a free penny whistle from Alex Brown at the Pittsburgh Irish Festival in September!

By Alex Brown

Condolences

Condolences to Stevie Hogan on the recent death of their grandfather, and to Ken McCarthy and Mary Margaret Murtha on the death of Ken's mother, and their families.

The PCC made a donation to the Make A Wish Foundation in memory of Ken's mother and we received this lovely note of thanks: "Dear fellow dancers, Thank you for the generous gift to Make A Wish in memory of my mother. We are all very appreciative of your kindness and condolences. She was just two months shy of 100 years and was ready to meet the Lord and be with Dad who has been waiting 50 years for her. We feel blessed for all the good friends we met through the Ceili Club. You're like family to us. Affectionately, Ken, Mary Margaret and Rose."

May Ceili

The club had a ceili dance on May 17 at the Shiloh Center in Lawrenceville. Alex Canto offered step instructions. We partnered with Steel City Squares, so attendees also had the opportunity to attend a square dance afterward.



Another Successful Kick-off Ceili in the Books!

The 2025 PCC Kickoff Ceili was held at the Fox Chapel Yacht Club on March 13.

Vince Burns, Carla Dundes, and Mike Hurley provided music for almost 100 enthusiastic dancers. Jim Guay provided the sound, and Craig Connelly and Jenn Rumble served as callers.

We owe thanks to so many people for the success of this event. First and foremost our president Alex Brown and the rest of the Kickoff Committee: Joanne Fitzgerald, Jackie

Schaefer, and Jim Tipe. Nan Pischke, Mary McIntyre and Maureen Strotmeyer helped with the basket raffle. And those baskets: wow! When Mary deservedly retired after several years of putting together the baskets, I wasn't sure what to expect this year. But this club really outdid itself. Several people stepped up to the job, and the quality of the prizes was as good as ever. Great job, everyone! Thanks also to all those who helped with setup and cleanup.



REMINDERS:

Don't forget that you can now pay for membership dues, event admission and apparel via Venmo. Venmo address for payment is @PghCeiliClub. Please add a 2% tip to cover the Venmo processing fee.

Upcoming Local Irish Events

What	When	Where	Contact & Information
AOH Division 4 Day of Irish Entertainment	POSTPONED	Schuetzen Park, Ross Twp	www.aohdiv4.org
Pioneer Total Abstinence of the Sacred Heart mass for living and dead members of Pittsburgh Chapter #3212	6/15/25 11:30a	St. Jude Parish, 310 Shady Ave.	
Calliope House Summer Concert:			
Penna Players Jazz	6/20/25 7p	Schenley Plaza	https://calliopehouse.org/event/calliope-summer-concert-series
The Grass Gals	8/14/25 7p	Schenley Plaza	https://calliopehouse.org/event/calliope-summer-concert-series/
John & Wendy Macken Band	9/4/25 7p	Schenley Plaza	https://calliopehouse.org/event/calliope-summer-concert-series/
Pittsburgh Irish Festival	9/5 to 9/7/25	Carrie Blast Furnace	https://pghirishfest.org/
PCC Picnic	9/21/25 11a	Rose Barn, North Park	

Thanks, as always, to Diane Byrnes, host of Echoes of Erin, for most of this event information. Listen to Echoes of Erin at 12:30 Sunday afternoons on WEDO 810 AM or 93.3 FM.



Summer Garden Notes

How is your garden growing?

I have started vegetable seedlings and will be ready to plant before or by May 15. When I was in my 20's, a few years ago, the planting was May 30, Memorial Day. We are warmer and the date has moved up 15 days! Dahlia tubers are growing well and will be ready for the ground at the same time.

Before planting I have a compost pile where leaves, grass clippings and last year's plant material are dumped. A compost pile or container is a good thing to start to add more nutrients to the soil. You can start it now for next year. It does take a while for the material to break down, especially the oak leaves if you have those. I started it a few years ago because of Doug Oster's article. The awful mistake I made was adding all kinds of food scraps to the compost. The result was a wonderful crop of rats! I killed 12 in and around my house! Now I just add coffee grounds and banana peels! The lesson is to be careful of what you add to compost!

The weeding begins once plants are in the ground.

Again, I use Doug Oster's method of putting newspaper down around/between plants and then cover the newspaper with straw. I buy a straw bundle for my Fall decorations and then store it for the Spring gardening. It does keep the weeds down. If you are going au-naturel you will need to weed frequently. Get them when they are small and before they blossom and spit their seeds.

Here come the bugs...Watch for the more common pests; aphids, white fly, and slugs. Insecticidal soap or just dish soap can help control the first 2. Slugs will be around at night when it is moist and can damage plants significantly. For slugs, beer in short containers can control them placed around the garden. The beer needs to be replaced every couple of days. I have a gardening friend who order aphids from Amazon to get rid of her aphids...who knew you could get aphids from Amazon! There are chemicals to help with all of these and others but some can be harmful to bees and other pollinators.

By Carolyn Bolton



Getting to Know... con't.

Pittsburgh. He loves his adopted city as much as I love it as my home town. He said that Pittsburgh has all the amenities of a big city, but also all the strengths of a small town. It's been easy to get to know people here and make friends.

Some fun questions I like to ask...

How Irish are you? Alex is not Irish at all, but we love him anyway.

Describe yourself in five words or less. Alex came up with one word: Muppet. (Yes, but which one? I leave it to

your imagination.)

What are you good at? Alex reports that he has a good spatial mind.

What would you like to improve at? Keeping better track of things, having a better memory.

When I asked whether people are mostly good or mostly bad, Alex gave me the most interesting answer I've ever heard: "People are people. Whether they are good or bad depends on who's telling the story." Ponder that one for a while!

Life Events...

Jonathan Kelly and Marissa Canavan were married at Heinz Chapel on March 28, with a reception afterward at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Hall. A good time was had by all. To the surprise of exactly nobody, there was lots of dancing at that reception! Jonathan and Marissa took their honeymoon in France, visiting Paris and the Normandy Beaches.

Evan Adcock and Kelsey Stark were married at Mansions on Fifth on April 5. The reception was at the same venue. Surprise: Lots of dancing at that one, too! And another shocker: Kelsey was hyper-pumped up. The couple honeymooned in Puerto Rico.

You can see photos from both of these weddings in the Wedding Photos article.

Theresa Orlando fell and broke her wrist in May, Surprises keep coming: It hasn't kept her away from the Harp.

Please pray for Pat Keeley, husband of Val Keeley. Pat was severely weakened by his cancer treatments and fell and hit his head. He was hospitalized for several days and is now confined to home and receiving physical and occupational therapy to rebuild his strength and mobility.

Pittsburgh Ceili Club Wins Award for Saint Patrick's Day Parade

On April 14, 2025, at Mullaney's Harp & Fiddle the Pittsburgh St. Patrick's Parade Committee bestowed on 25 out of approximate 200 groups participating in this year's parade. Most of the groups set someone to receive the award. Unfortunately, our President Alex Brown could not attend so as the contact person and on our parade committee attended and gave an acceptance speech for receiving The Thomas Donohue Award (Best Adult Irish Dance Group).

The club has received about 17 awards from the Pittsburgh St. Patrick's Parade Committee. We have been in this parade since 1991 (I believe), we even had representation in the famous 1993 blizzard that received 2 feet of snow that day.

The award may be for the Best Adult Dancers but my outlook on this for our entire group, the banner carriers, drivers & occupants, music, dancers and walkers all did a fantastic job.

We even had 2 new members join us this year. They all deserve this award.

By Maureen Strotmeyer



Ceilier STAFF: Editor- Kathy Bashaar; Layout- Jim Guay

If you have an article of Irish interest that you would like to place in The Ceilier- email kbashaar@gmail.com.