

*Review*

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## Solas rises above the din at Iron Horse

**BY MARIE P. GRADY**

NORTHAMPTON – At one point during the sold-out performance of the Irish band Solas Sunday night, Séamus Egan felt obliged to tell the audience at the Iron Horse Music Hall that the banjo he has played for years did not survive a recent trip home from a tour.

That was before his fingers proceeded to streak like lightning into a medley of tunes the band simply calls “Bobby Casey’s,” after the legendary fiddler from County Clare on the windswept west coast of Ireland.

The band Solas has long been recognized by traditional Irish music fans as the top band in the world ever to start in the U.S. But it was half way into its first eight-song set that the band showed why it is the original and only Gaelic storm.

As vocalist Deirdre Scanlon joined the band on stage with a fiddle in hand for “Leslie’s March,” the band’s musical power was fully unleashed, drowning out even a gaggle of men at the bar who were celebrating a friend’s Irish heritage by loudly talking through every song.

They couldn’t have been Irish because real Irish men drop what they are doing - even if it’s lifting a pint - shut up and sit still when there is great Irish music in the air.

In a 16-song, one encore set broken up by an intermission, Solas showed that their depth as musicians and songwriters goes well beyond Egan, who is a four-time All-Ireland champion on four different instruments and whose credits include co-writing “I will Remember You” with Canadian songstress Sarah McLachlan.

The band that celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> reunion with a CD/DVD release last year raced through reels and jigs but also displayed its enormous talent on individual songs. One was fiddler Winifred Horan’s “A Daisy in December,” a hauntingly beautiful air she wrote after finding a lone flower that had survived the savage weather on a beach in Connemara,

Ireland. Horan had to delay the opening of the song after realizing that one of two violin bows she had just purchased did not have any rosin.

She first was going to leave the stage to find another bow then politely asked whether someone could help. "I'm such a diva," she joked.

The set also featured "Someday You Will See" by guitarist and pianist Eamon McElholm, a ballad about the eternal quest for freedom we all share as human beings.

Solas has never limited itself to traditional Irish musical songs or styles. One of the most rousing jigs it performed was one written by Egan for musician Carlos Núñez, from the Galician region of Spain, where Celtic pipe music knows no language.

The band also performed Dolly Parton's "Silver Dagger," the New England seafaring song "Bury Me Not," sung by button accordion player Mick McAuley, and Richard Shindell's "Fleur De Lis."

By the end of its performance, the audience was clapping in tune and emitting the yelps that often punctuate great Irish jigs and reels, proving why Solas has come back to Northampton again and again over the years. Solas means "comfort" and "light" in Irish, but, as Egan has said, it is the audience that emits the energy.