



Irish eyes smile on Fairfax

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Girsa (young girls in Gaelic), an all-female traditional Irish band from New York, will...



NICKNAMED "Mayberry on acid," Fairfax is the kind of town that historically prides itself on such great moments in counterculture history as the softball game between the Grateful Dead and the [Jefferson Airplane](#) that took place on its Central Field diamond in the 1960s.

The small Ross Valley town of 7,441 also claims more music venues — nine, all within walking distance — per capita than any city in the Bay Area.

So it sees itself as the perfect host of the first Fairfax Feis (pronounced "fesh") of Irish Music and Dance on Oct. 14 and 15, a festive weekend modeled on the traditional Gaelic "Fleadh Cheoil" (Festivals of Music) that take place annually in towns all over Ireland, attracting musicians who play for fans who pack the village pubs and community halls.

"I thought that Fairfax, being a small town where you can walk to all the venues, would be a perfect place to have a festival of Irish music," said feis co-founder Cormac Gannon, an Irish musician originally from County

Mayo in the West of Ireland who now lives in San Anselmo. "It's amazing the amount of interest there is in Irish music."

The idea for the feis sprang from the popular Irish music sessions Gannon co-lead every Sunday at the Sleeping Lady, one of three establishments with live music on Broadway in Fairfax.

"Cormac and I have been talking about starting an Irish festival for at least three years," said

co-founder David Smadbeck, an owner of the Sleeping Lady and co-president of the Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, a major festival sponsor. "Fairfax is similar in size and scope to many communities in Ireland. So this is a natural. The town council is behind it and we have the endorsement of just about everyone in the community on this one. We really want to make this an event that people look forward to every year."

For a debut, the festival boasts an impressive lineup of local and internationally known Irish musicians and bands.

The headliner is Girsá ("young girls" in Gaelic), an all-female traditional Irish band from New York. The bill also includes Todd Denman & Friends, Shay & Michael Black, Brosnan School of Irish Dancing, Culann's Hounds, Kyle Alden, Lucia Comnes Band, Gerry Carthy, Colm Ó Riain, the Gas Men, Gerry Forde, the Mild Colonial Boys, Dale Russ, Topsy House, Pat Hamilton, John Pedersen and the Toast Inspectors.

They'll play in venues around town, including the Sleeping Lady, Peri's, 19 Broadway, Iron Springs, Sorella Café, Nave's Bar and Fairfax Coffee Roastery. The larger Fairfax Pavilion will be the scene of an eight-hour Saturday concert marathon.

In the recent past, the chamber produced a jazz festival that didn't catch on. But this time it feels like it picked a winner; organizers expect more than 2,000 visitors to flock into town for the Irish Feis weekend.

"There's been a huge upsurge in Celtic music all over the world, so we think there's a large audience for this," Smadbeck said. "There's a big risk, but we decided we're going to go for it and just do it."