

Families Enjoy Irish Music & Step-Dancing Program at the Library

The school-vacation crowd streamed into the Bellingham Public Library on a cold, late-February afternoon because of the promise of Irish music and step dancing. Button accordion, tin whistle, Irish harp, bodhran, and fiddle all stood at the ready, waiting only for the skilled hands of musicians Mary King and Phil Edmonds to bring the instruments to life. Although the duo live in Rhode Island, the gentle lilt in Edmonds's voice alerted the audience that he had spent his formative years in County Clare, Ireland.

After distributing rhythm instruments all round, King and Edmonds, along with rhythmic accompaniment, warmed the audience up with, what else? An Irish jig. Throughout the program Edmonds alternated between his accordion and the tin whistle, while King played the fiddle for lively tunes, the harp when it was time to change the pace of the program, and the bodhran (Irish drum) as well. King kept things moving quickly, soliciting volunteers to participate throughout the program. With the aid of simple props such as a chair, or scarves, children were magically transformed into kings, queens, even fairies.

Not to leave out the teens or adults in the audience, King invited everyone to join her for an Irish step dance tutorial. Teens Callie Ostrowski of Blackstone and Abby Farrell of Bellingham, who take Irish step dancing classes in Auburn, danced adroitly along with the crowd. "No, they weren't plants," King said later. "I've never seen them before, but they were good!"

When King brought out her Irish harp, she and Edmonds played together, slowly at first, then at a faster tempo, a subtle but delightful display of King's harping skill. With adept pacing, King then moved on to tell a participatory story. Three young girls from the audience supplied barnyard animal sounds throughout the story to great comic effect.

The duo finished up the program with a circle dance, King leading the dance while Edmonds supplied the music. In an unscripted encore, Ostrowski and Farrell danced for the crowd to King and Edmonds's music—and enthusiastic applause. Everyone clearly had a great time.

For more information about Mary King and Phil Edmonds, check out www.CelticHarpRI.com.

story & photo by Marjorie Turner Hollman
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Mary King and Phil Edmonds, Celtic Harp of RI