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Celtic concert keeps up the Irish culture after St. Patrick's day

By Laura May Hedeem
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If you're still feelin' a bit Irish after this weekend, stop by the Arts Center of St. Peter this Friday, March 23, to listen to some jigs, reels and other folk tunes from the Celtic country. Harpist Amy Kortuem and her Celtic Band will be accompanied by Irish step dancer Megan Maloney to entertain and inform the St. Peter community about Irish dance and song. Original arrangements of traditional Irish tunes like "Danny Boy" and "She Moved Through the Fair" will be performed, along with some of Kortuem's own compositions.

The band consists of a Celtic harp, Irish drum, violin and whistles, including harp solos, instrumentals and vocal parts. Kortuem made sure to point out, however, that it will "not be a traditional harp concert...not stuffy by any means." Arts Center Performing Arts Chair Faith Wicklund expects the group to be "enjoyed by both Classical music and folk music fans."

Kortuem began her music career in 1988 when an Irish family friend gave her a folk harp that would "change my whole life plan," said Kortuem. She taught herself to play and has since recorded three CDs and performed at numerous locations and events, including weddings, pubs, Irish fairs and ensemble concerts. In fact, Kortuem has performed with the Gustavus orchestra and was also featured in Christmas in Christ Chapel. Recently, she was invited to play at her alma mater, Mankato State University, as part of a tribute to women and music – "it was a great honor," said Kortuem. She also performs every November in a concert rather well known in the area, called To Drive the Cold Winter Away.

Kortuem is of Irish and German heritage, but she said, out of her family, "all the Irish landed on me." She sees music as her "calling," and had the opportunity this past year to make a trip to Ireland. She will be sharing stories from her trip and traditions of the Irish culture with the audience at the Arts Center.

The Arts Center has never had Kortuem play before, but "offers a series of about nine performances a year," said Wicklund. "Gustavus students are always welcome at the Arts Center," said Wicklund, and it's proud to offer "a wonderful and rich respite from campus life, a chance to link up with the St. Peter community, a chance to experiment with your own creativity through our classes and a chance to refresh yourself," all for a free or affordable price.

Samples of Kortuem's music can be heard at her website, amykortuem.com. The concert will be "very fun and relaxed – a laid back kind of concert," said Kortuem, and she would "love to see students there." The show will begin at 7:30 p.m.