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Irish phenom Celtic Woman brings dulcet tunes to town

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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Imagine turning the ripe old age of 20 and being a seasoned performer with several top-selling CDs and DVDs filling your already illustrious resume. Add to that resume several concert tours around the world before adoring fans, throw in a performance before the president of the United States, and some just might say you have the luck

of the Irish.

Luck or not, that scenario is reality for Chloe Agnew, who is one-fifth of the group Celtic Woman, who will perform April 1 at the Embassy Theatre.

The all-female group consists of four singers and a fiddler who perform traditional Celtic music and more current songs by the likes of Billy Joel and Whitney Houston, but with a Celtic twist. Their well-choreographed concert is similar to the popular Irish music show "Riverdance" but with a focus on singing instead of dancing.

Agnew, who has been with Celtic Woman since its inception, says the group was not supposed to last beyond its first show, which was filmed in 2004 and first shown on PBS Television in 2005.

"Celtic Woman was originally just supposed to be a one-night show, and that was filmed in a theater in Dublin back in 2004," Agnew said in a telephone interview. "It was kind of, 'Come along, sing a few songs and enjoy yourselves, and invite your family and friends along.' Myself and the other girls didn't know one another, and I had just turned 15 — I'm still the baby of the group.

"When the show was finished that night," Agnew said, "all of us knew something special had happened. We had no idea we'd get the call the following January to say, 'Take the next few years out of your life.' It was just after that then that Celtic Woman kind of exploded here in the States, and it has just been a roller coaster since then."

Celtic Woman has grown into a successful musical act all over the world but especially in the U.S., where constant exposure on PBS public television has created enthusiastic audiences at every show.

"It never ceases to amaze us the reactions we get from the audiences," Agnew said. "They just get bigger and better. Particularly on this leg of the tour, the audiences have just been wild. We can't sit them down at the end of the night. We can't get them out of the theater fast enough. It's been absolutely just phenomenal."

"It's so rewarding for us to look out at the audience at the end of the night and you see people openly expressing their emotions, whether they're crying or smiling or just really enjoying themselves — it means the world to us."

The newest Celtic Woman show, called "Songs from the Heart" after the CD of the same name, holds quite a few surprises for even the most avid fan.

"The majority of the feedback at the moment has been that it is quite different to anything we've done before," Agnew said.

"We introduced a lot of elements that we have never had before with Celtic Woman, with the likes of the bagpipers," she said. "We had the Aontas Choir, we had the Discovery Gospel Choir, we had the Extreme Rhythm Drummers — so we had a load of different elements."

A surprise of a different kind came late last year when Celtic Woman was asked to perform for President Obama at the White House. Agnew viewed this not only as a highlight of her performing career but of her life.

"That was, without a doubt, one of the most amazing things I probably will ever do in my life," she said. "It was for the national tree-lighting ceremony in front of the White House in Washington just before Christmas. And it was just such an honor for us to think, wow, President Obama and his family listen to our music and want us to perform for them.

"It was so special, and especially meeting him and his beautiful wife Michelle; she was such a lady to us," Agnew said. "She told us how they love listening to our music and their daughters are big fans ... I still get goosebumps thinking about it."

With all the success and fame that has come with being a member of Celtic Woman, Agnew says the friendship with her fellow performers has been the best part of her experience.



More Information

Celtic tunes

What: Celtic Woman "Songs from the Heart"

When: 7:30 p.m. April 1

Where: Embassy Theatre, 121 W. Jefferson Blvd.

Cost: \$38.75 and \$62.75; available at Embassy box office, Ticketmaster outlets, www.ticketmaster.com and 1-800-745-3000.

Hear more

To hear audio excerpts from our interview with Chloe Agnew in which she discusses appearing on "Dancing with the Stars," go to www.news-sentinel.com, click the Entertainment link and then on this story.

“I think probably the most rewarding thing for me from Day One has been that I have become very much part of a family here with Celtic Woman. The other girls, they're like my sisters, they're like best friends.

“It's just been the most incredible journey,” she added. “We all thought it would only be a one-night show, and here we are five years later. For me, I'm only 20 ... I would like to think I still have so much I would like to achieve in life. I'm so lucky to have achieved so much so young.”