

# The City

## EAST VILLAGE

### For Green Music, Rainbow Bands

There are no "songs" in Irish traditional music; there are "tunes." A young woman, packed in a tight circle in the corner of this dark bar, starts one off with a series of smooth draws across the strings of her fiddle. A man joins on banjo, a woman on the concertina, then two more fiddlers. Feet stamp the worn floor. It is Monday night at Mona's, the time when one can hear a bit of Ireland on Avenue B in the East Village.

But which is more unlikely: that one of New York's longest-running and most highly regarded Irish music sessions is held in a pub owned by Italian-Americans? Or that a majority of players don't have a drop of Irish blood in them? The guitarist, Danny Littwin, is a mix of French and Russian. The concertina player, Luisa Bennion, comes from a Welsh background. The lead fiddler, Dana Lyn, a 31-year-old classically trained violinist, is the child of Taiwanese parents who was born and raised in Southern California.

These non-Irish musicians and aficionados stumbled upon Irish music in different ways: an impulsive tin-whistle purchase, say, or a concert at the Beacon Theater with an old Irish girlfriend. Ms. Lyn happened upon Irish music

when she played in a band that covered the Pogues, the Irish group, while studying at the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio 10 years ago.

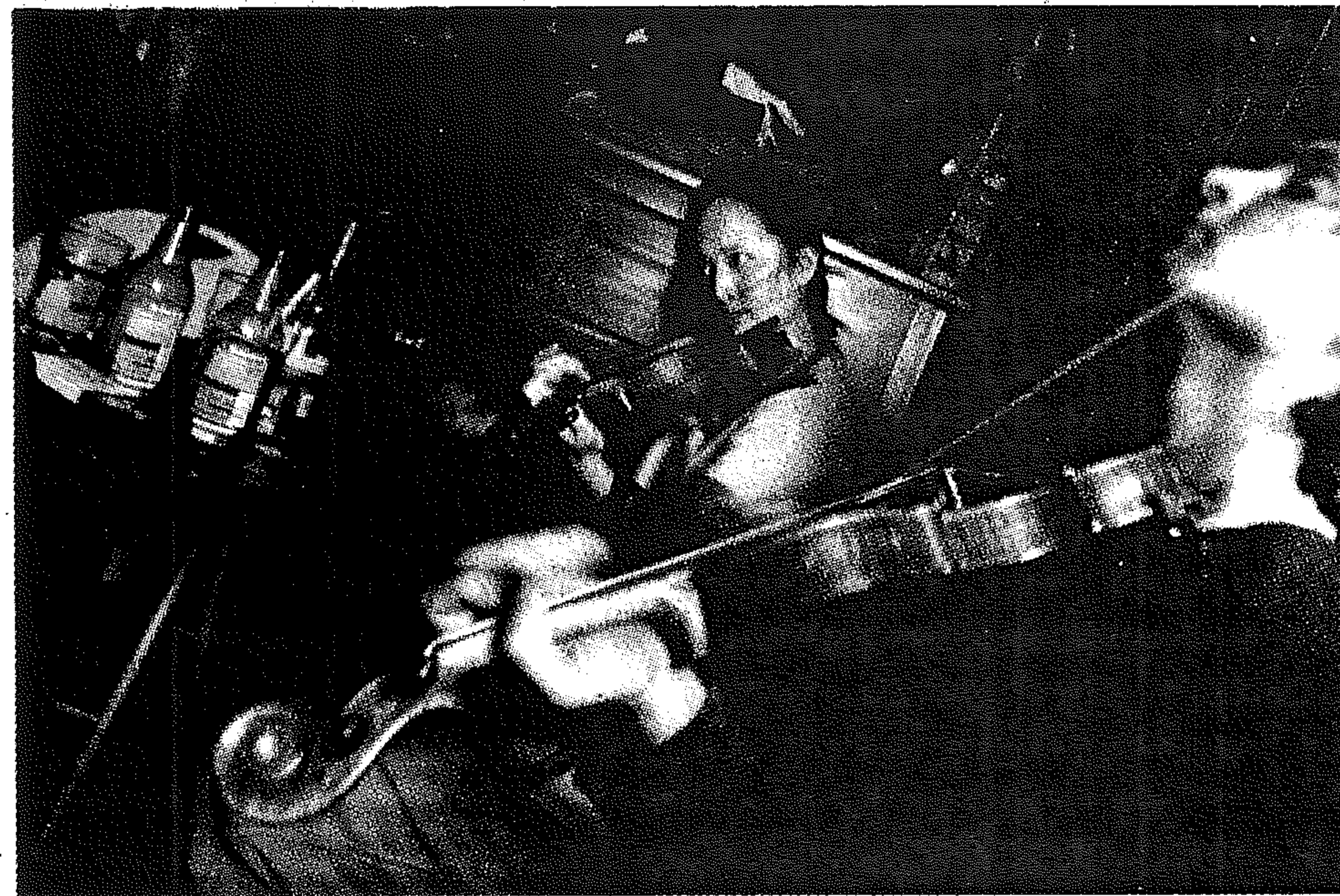
But what, more fundamentally, attracts the non-Irish to the genre? For some, it is the thinness of their own musical heritage. "If I was to restrict myself to Taiwanese music from L.A.," said Ms. Lyn, "I wouldn't have much to play." Emmet Henry, a wiry Dubliner who works as a bartender at Mona's and helped form the bar's Irish session in 1994, put it more simply: "People pick up on it."

On stage, the question of heritage is moot; the only thing that matters is sound, and these largely non-Irish musicians seemed to pass the test.

"The people here are high caliber," said Frank Floyd, a member of the audience who is African-American, with roots in Cape Verde.

Joanie Madden, a member of the Irish group Cherish the Ladies, who stopped into Mona's on break from a national tour, nodded toward the circle of musicians. "This is the real deal here, people sitting in a corner, playing music together," she said. "It's more Irish here than in Ireland." MEERA SUBRAMANIAN

Dana Lyn, in the background, who is of Taiwanese descent, discovered Irish music when she played in a Pogues cover band.



Hiroko Masuike for The New Yo