



Celtic Tap

By Michael Wood
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On a crisp October evening, the Institute of Contemporary Art kicked off its fall dance series with the rousing **Celtic Tap**. From beginning to end, renowned Irish dancer James Devine inspired his audience with unbelievable tapping abilities and improvisational rhythmic sets with fellow music makers. Devine was flanked by an adorable Scottish percussionist, Paul Jennings, and on violin, 19-year old Berklee phenom, Duncan Wickel. If anything, "Celtic Tap" paid the utmost respect to its musical and cultural roots while looking ahead to the future with from a youthful and fresh perspective.

In case you haven't picked up the Guinness Book of World Records in a while, James Devine is kind of a big deal. Clocking in at 38 taps per second, Devine holds the title of the fastest dancer in the world, and in history. Devine takes the stage alone to begin the night of frenzied rhythms and never lets up thereafter. While you take in his bulging calf muscles as he stomps, slides, and slams his feet across the floor, he is busily extracting music from his surface. There is no hesitation in his approach and no frenzy in his frenetic feats. He is calm and joyful inside the bombastic intricacy of his sounds.

Soon Devine is joined on stage by his young and talented cohorts for a round of introductions via improvisational one-upping. Devine throws out a rhythm which violinist Wickel effortlessly transfers into melody which percussionist Jennings beats out on his combination of cymbals, hand drum, and cajon - a dynamic Peruvian boxed drum.

The show is most engaging when the three share the stage and when the one-upmanship takes a backseat to in-the-moment collaboration. As their sounds blend simultaneously, they tug at every fiber in the viewer's body, beckoning us to jump up and join in.

Some of the more unique moments in "Celtic Tap" include Jennings' solo on the spoons in which he eventually finds himself in a rhythm duel with Devine, battling back and forth tit for tat or spoon for tap, as it were. Devine's synapse-scrambling foot speed combined with equally quick spooning creates a humorous dynamic, with Jennings throwing in embellishments reminiscent of Devine's own dancing flares.

And later, Wickel proves to be the standout performer, exploring his instrument more in-depth than one might have guessed one could with a fiddle. He plays his violin as fiddle, bass, ukelele, and even scratches it like an 80's DJ would vinyl. He is doing exactly what artists do best, stretching the boundaries of his sound through

experimentation and play.

It's easy to see why Devine's work has become such a worldwide phenomenon from his native home of Ireland to Australia and beyond. He simply loves what he does, and he's good at it. It will be Devine who will help continue his homeland's for the next generation and show people of all ages the artistry in creating new ones.