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# Celtic Force

By **Teresa Thomas**  
for Revels

Some pin it on his ancestry, but fiddler Jamie Laval's love for traditional Celtic music is much more involved.

"People have conjectured that it is my Scottish genes that have made me identify with the music ... but for whatever reason, I have always felt very sympathetic to the character of the music, which is rustic and very full of expression with an undercurrent of melancholy that characterizes the wide-open spaces of the Scottish Highlands," says the fiddler, currently based in Ashville, N.C.

Laval, whose grandparents were Scottish and mother a first-generation American, comes from a classical background and admits he wasn't introduced to the Celtic fiddling tradition until he was 19 and took his first professional music engagement at the Prince of Wales Hotel in Alberta, Canada.

He left high school as a junior to study classical music at Victoria Conservatory of Music in British Columbia and poured himself wholeheartedly into music, practicing seven-plus hours a day. Eventually, he became a professional violinist in the Victoria Symphony, Northwest Chamber Orchestra and Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra. He also recorded with orchestras for several movie soundtracks.

For many years, Laval kept his Celtic and classical worlds separate until, one day, he realized his passion for the wild and jubilant, Celtic-folk tradition usurped his other preoccupations.

"I started finding my voice as an individual interpreter of Scottish music," he says. "As that started happening, I turned a corner ... and started doing solely Celtic music."

Under the umbrella of Celtic music, Laval plays the traditions of Ireland, Scotland, Brittany in western France, Quebec, Nova Scotia's Cape Breton, Boston and Appalachia.



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**Jamie Laval**

In concert, Laval, the 2002 U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Champion, plays old, traditional melodies — some dating back 400 years — along with his own original melodies, which have "the voice of old."

"The ideal would be if one could devise a melody that sounded so characteristic within the form that the average listener would not know it was a new tune," he says.

New or old, Laval's music has nuance, created through finger work and bowing techniques inspired by the bagpipes. He plays 16 to 32

notes per bow stroke and, between each note, employs "ornaments" that bagpipers use. The result is a tenuous, flowing sound "with a sort of glittery sparkle from all the ornamental notes," he says.

Laval, accompanied by Zac Leger on guitar and Rod Weeks on Scottish smallpipes, will perform at 7 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 11, at Grizzly Peak Winery, 1600 E. Nevada St., Ashland. Laval explains that smallpipes aren't the loud Scottish pipes but a parlor or chamber instrument, ideally suited for more intimate, indoor concerts.

Both Leger and Weeks appear on Laval's third and most recent album, "Murmurs and Drones," which won the 2012 popular vote at the Independent Music Awards for Best World Traditional Album.

Tickets to the show cost \$15, \$8 for students, and are available at [www.brownpapertickets.com/event/282285](http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/282285). See [www.jamielaval.com](http://www.jamielaval.com) or call 541-499-2511 for information.