

The reel deal

Goitse are proving a big hit on the folk scene. Next stop could be California, writes Eileen Martin

It is 11.30am as Irish traditional quintet Goitse take to the stage to open the second day of the Cambridge folk festival, one of the most prestigious such events in the world. As line-up positions go, it doesn't get much tougher. Straight off the red eye from Dublin to Stansted themselves, the group, whose name is an informal Irish greeting meaning "come here", must rouse the tired yet discerning festival-goers, many of whom have been camping, back into another day of music appreciation and enjoyment.

If the members of Goitse are fazed, you can't tell. After lulling the crowd gently with a polished set of reels and plaintive melodies, including the enchanting *Ye Lovers All*, it's not long before the young but already vastly experienced group have many in their audience jiggling. Some are

Summer of fun The band members are young but already vastly experienced

even attempting to sing in Irish as fiddle player and vocalist Áine McGeeney leads them in a call-and-response chorus of an up-tempo number entitled *Tá Se na Lá*. Literally translated as "this is the day", it means the same as *carpe diem*, she says, and was written by her late teacher and mentor Eithne Ni Uallachain.

It's a sentiment that resonates with the entire group, who met while studying in Limerick University's Irish World Academy of Music and Dance. Since graduating in 2011 they have released three albums — the second produced by Donal Lunny — and toured across four continents.

Strangely, Cambridge is their first time performing in the UK, and they are keen to make an impact and perhaps pick up an agent. Word has spread that Goitse are an act to catch. They end up playing more sets on the other stages across the weekend, as well as giving a youth workshop and joining in a musical melee with the other "Celtic" acts at the festival for a group jamming session, or

presence and audience rapport betray her experience with Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance* show, there is Colm Phelan, a world and All-Ireland bodhrán champion; Tadhg Ó Meachair on piano and accordion; Philadelphia-born rhythmic guitarist Conal O'Kane, whose father hails from Buncrana; and James Harvey, at 24, the youngest member of the group, on banjo and mandolin.

McGeeney and Ó Meachair are Gaeilgeoirí while the rest have a decent grasp of the language. While individually they can boast impressive hauls of medals and world titles in feis cheols and fleadh

Some festivals are more set up for drinking. At others you can hear a pin drop

since childhood, collectively they were recently crowned Live Ireland's Trad Group of the Year.

Their latest album, *Tall Tales & Misadventures*, is a fun yet sophisticated mixture of their own compositions, interspersed with traditional pieces and original arrangements.

The quirky titles they use for songs refer to adventures, escapades and even accidents the five have had along the way. "Some festivals are more set up for drinking than the music, and it can be hard to be heard over the talking," says Ó Meachair. "Other times you can hear a pin drop and you can tell they are really appreciating the music; while on other occasions, even if it's quiet, you might feel they're not getting it at all."

Their influences cover a wide spectrum. While Lunasa, who closed the Cambridge festival last year, are arguably their biggest inspiration, the group's musical tastes span everything from rap to classical. They love rock'n'roll and Van Morrison, and apparently Phelan is currently hooked on Jackie Wilson.

Right after last weekend's Cambridge show they go to Germany to perform at three festivals. Later in the month they will combine a solo tour in America with the Milwaukee Irish Fest, the world's largest Irish music festival, with an attendance to rival Glastonbury. While "all those 130,000-plus visitors are not all there at the one time and to see only us", as Phelan puts it, they are high up on the bill. "We're on the main stage Saturday night, yeah," says McGeeney.

Next there's a stint on the Disney Magic Cruise liner in Barcelona, then another festival in Switzerland, before landing back at UL at the start of September — a day before three of them start a master's programme. Not that study is going to stop their performing or recording. "We'll just work around it," says Ó Meachair, who already has his master's. There are plans to start writing another album towards the end of the year, with more tours and gigs scheduled until early 2017.

Last month, they were approached after a gig in Whelan's by a Californian who gave them his card and proffered help and guidance. It was only later they worked out it was Mike Post, the multi-Grammy and Emmy award-winning composer of TV theme songs for *Law & Order*, *NYPD Blue* and *Hill Street Blues*. They have since exchanged emails and hope to visit and work with him in Berkeley.

Every opportunity has to be pursued. *Tá se na lá*, as the band might say themselves. **■**

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WE BELIEVE THE CHILDREN

A Moral Panic in the 1980s

by RICHARD BECK

Public Affairs £17.99

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Hollywood is the world's leading manufacturer of fantasies. But in the 1980s, its home state of California exported a particularly dangerous fantasy to the English-speaking world. This was the notion of an "epidemic" of ritualised sexual abuse of children, the subject of this remarkable book by American journalist Richard Beck.

Most British readers will know of this

moral panic from what came to be called the Cleveland child abuse scandal of 1987, where well over 100 children were unjustly taken from their families and put into care, based on the claims of a consultant called Dr Marietta Higgs, whose theory of "reflex anal dilation" in children was the sole forensic evidence.

Yet the Cleveland case was just a distant echo of the much more dramatic panic that gripped America from 1983. Its epicentre was the McMartin preschool in Los Angeles County, a nursery school opened in 1966 by Virginia McMartin, and the panic began when a parent called Judy Johnson became convinced one day that her son's irritable anus had been caused by sexual interference by McMartin's grandson, Ray Buckey, who helped run the school.

The police investigated — rightly. But

then, disastrously, they took the decision to tell other parents at the school about the investigation, at which point the solitary suspicions of one mother flamed into a wildfire of paranoia. Before long, thousands of parents at preschools across the region began to attribute erratic behaviour by their children to the effects of sexual abuse by their preschool carers.

As the original McMartin case ground its way to the courts, the nature of the woman who made the original claim was — remarkably — never scrutinised. Yet Johnson was a deeply troubled person, an alcoholic who for years had been on anti-psychotic drugs following a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.

Unfortunately, there were much less frail characters for whom her accusations (and later, similar ones) appeared as a