Galway and Chieftains delight with Irish music

JAMES GALWAY
AND THE CHIEFTAINS
Program of traditional Irish music.
Symphony Hall, March 16, 8 pm.

By KAI TAO

LAST SUNDAY, JAMES GALWAY and the Chieftains delighted a sold-out audience at Symphony Hall. The Chieftains, an Irish folk music group, have been together for over 25 years. In the process, they have released 25 albums and performed for over a million people. The Chieftains are: Paddy Maloney on the uilleann pipe, fiddler Sean Keane, harpist and keyboardist Derek Bell, and Kevin Conneff on vocals and bodhran.

The Chieftains' leader, Maloney, began the night by giving the history of the group, how they got started and the types of music they play. In a very informal atmosphere, he introduced the members of the group, each strumming their favorite instrument. The group then began improvisations on a traditional Irish folk tune as the fiddle's strum set the peaceful mood. The harp's gentle plucking added to the ambiance while the rising burst of the bodhran then joined the melody. From there, they descended the rest of the piece, quietly changing the mood.

Maloney then offered Galway the chance to perform solo, joking, "He's quite good at that!" Galway chose the classic Henry Mancini piece, "Baby Elephant Walk," to showcase his talents on the tin whistle, alternating the cheerful and playful notes with the pounding bass of the piano. Conneff followed Galway with a vocal solo on a traditional Irish ballad telling of the trials of the Irish immigrants. After the brief intermission, the distinctive sound of a bagpipe moving closer and closer again surprised the crowd. As it turned out, one of the musicians had donned Scottish garb and walked along the aisles, playing a traditional Scottish tune. The musician then joined Galway and the Chieftains back on stage as they began playing a few Welsh tunes.

Galway and the Chieftains closed the concert with "Drowsy Maggie," in which each musician had a chance to solo on his instrument. The playful mood reappeared, as the Chieftains and Galway hugged their respective solos, refusing to give that opportunity to the next musician. The versatile Bell even treated the audience to a ragtime piano solo. In keeping with the surprises, however, Galway and the Chieftains returned for an encore, with Maloney remarking, "We just don't know when to go home." The night ended with the dancers returning to dazzle the audience with their steps while everyone was clapping and stomping to the beat.

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