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Tuning into Celtic music

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For a thorough, and thoroughly entertaining, crash course in Celtic music, you need to go no further than your car radio.

WKNO-FM 91.1 airs the nationally-syndicated show "The Thistle & Shamrock" every Sunday at 5 p.m. Hosted by Scottish native Fiona Ritchie, the long-running NPR program features established and emerging Celtic performers, as well as visits from world-renowned recording artists like piper Liam O'Flynn and fiddle champion Liz Carroll.

Further up the dial at WEVL-FM 89.9, Robert Campbell, an affiliate of the Mid-South Celtic Arts Alliance, which promotes Celtic music concerts and co-sponsors the annual Clamjamfry, a Scottish festival held in Midtown every September, hosts the three-hour "Strands of the Celtic Knot" on Saturdays from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Cassie Tobin, host of WEVL's "Delta Celtica" program, which airs on Sundays from noon-2 p.m., says she often plays songs from the Celtic Woman album, alongside offerings from traditional Irish choir Anuna and fusion act Afro-Celt Sound System.

Tobin has several recommendations for fans of Celtic Woman's ancient-meets-modern style.

"I also like the Mediaeval Baebes, punk singers in a choir setting, who are like self-styled musicologists reviving old music from obscurity," she says. "Their lush arrangements are a lot of fun to listen to."

She also lists multi-instrumentalists the Cottars, from Nova Scotia, among her favorites.

"They're child prodigies who've been adopted, so to speak, by Paddy Moloney of the Chieftains," says Tobin, who describes the group as "fabulous players" who are getting marketed to a rock audience.

"During the hard times in Ireland, our music is all we had to hang onto," says Celtic Woman vocalist Chloe Agnew. "I suppose that's why it's such a vital part of our identity today."

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