

# Dance/Ireland, Scotland on pupil's itinerary

Continued from Page 5BBC

upper bodies still and straight as their legs go through a series of motions.

Girls wear soft shoes, called ghillies, and traditional dresses embroidered with Celtic designs. They concentrate on quiet movements.

Boys wear shoes with hard heels and toes — made of fiberglass — designed to produce loud but rhythmic clicks, taps and stomps.

Michael admits to taking some teasing at school from kids because "not a lot of boys dance."

"A lot of times, kids make fun of me," he said. "Then, when they see it, they say it kind of looks cool."

"I tell them to look at Michael Flatley," he said, referring to the well-known dancer and director. "He's making millions."

As someone who practices daily for two hours, either on his own or in lessons, he knows that Irish dancing is both demanding and athletic.

In addition to two classes a week at Lynn Academy, Michael travels every Friday to Tarrytown, N.Y., to study there in a more advanced class.

One of the challenges Collins has given him is to execute 115 kicks where his foot touches his posterior in a single dance.

"I've made it to 60," he said.

"But you lose your energy."

Michael's mother, Brenda, was born in Ireland and grew up with a father who was very interested in music.

"He would have loved the fact that Michael's dancing," she said of her father, who passed away before Michael was born. "It's hard work, but it

builds character."

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MARCIN SZCZEPANSKI/Courier-Post

**Michael McDonald, 11, shows off his Irish dance skills at the Lynn Academy of Irish Dance in Audubon.**

## Mt. Laurel pupil to dance overseas

By **RICHARD PEARSALL**  
Courier-Post Staff

### ON THE WEB

■ [www.irishdancingdirectory.com/](http://www.irishdancingdirectory.com/) — Irish dancing directory

■ [www.lynnacademy.com/index.htm](http://www.lynnacademy.com/index.htm) — Lynn Academy of Irish Dance, Audubon

Michael McDonald looks forward to playing baseball and maybe some tennis this spring.

But for now, Irish dancing is the 11-year-old's sport. He's preparing for two major competitions — February's all-Ireland championship in Killarney and the world championship in Glasgow, Scotland, the first week of April.

Michael, a sixth-grader at Hartford School in Mount Laurel, qualified for the championships at local and regional U.S. competitions.

He has been dancing since he was 7 and came by his inspiration the old-fashioned way — in Ireland.

"In 2002, we went to Ireland for two weeks," Michael said. "We went to a pub, and I saw some kids dancing around. I thought

it was cool how they could lift their legs and how sharp it looked."

When the family returned, they searched the Internet for a school that would teach the traditional dance form and came upon the Lynn Academy of Irish Dance in Audubon.

Maureen Collins is the instructor there.

Collins, 33, is an accomplished dancer who performed with Riverdance ensembles for several years, both on Broadway and in touring companies in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Toronto.

Irish dance requires its participants to keep their

## ▷ Irish

Continued from Page B1

number of male contestants.

"A lot more boys are competing now," Kane said, "I always tell the fathers of the boys that all great boxers were great dancers first."

Eleven-year-old Michael McDonald of New Jersey started taking lessons six years ago, after a family trip to Ireland, his mother Brenda said.

"We were in a pub in Ireland and there were dancers. He said he'd like to try it," she said.

Michael has become an accomplished dancer, winning open championships at several levels. He will dance in the world championship in Ireland later this year.

Dancing in front of a large audience was an early problem.

"But I've been doing it for a while, so it doesn't make me nervous anymore," he said.

Brenda McDonald said her son also has a ready comeback for other boys who tease him about his dancing — "Look at Michael Flatley. He makes millions of dollars."