

THROUGH IRISH EYES

The Emerald Isle says 'Yes' to equality, and always did.

BY GILLIAN KENDALL



The news that Ireland passed a vote legalizing gay marriage on May 23—the first country in the world to do so by plebiscite—is good news for anyone who cares about freedom. And it's one more reason why Ireland is my favorite place in the Northern Hemisphere.

As anyone who has spent five minutes on any Irish tourism website knows, *craic* is a Gaelic word, meaning "good time," or, specifically, "good time in a pub, involving drinking and live music." It's pronounced "crack," and one of the synonyms for "fun-loving person" is "ho," so when I arrived in Ireland I told the immigration authorities at Passport Control that I was visiting their country as a "*craic ho*." Ho, ho, ho!

Irish people sing and socialize as naturally as other people breathe. On a Sunday night at The Moorings, a guesthouse on the coast in County Kerry whose pub is famous for its "trad music" nights, 50 or so people of all ages and styles of dress were talking,

drinking, and singing together in one large-but-cozy red-walled room. Everyone but me seemed to know all the words to the Irish songs. Everyone but me was unself-conscious and unafraid. Everyone but me looked—and sounded—terrific.

The professional musicians sat in a circle in a corner of the crowded pub, where they were joined by several people who were obviously not professionals, but who were singing just for pleasure. At least, I thought it was pleasure, except for one particular petite, redhead woman who, I thought, looked sad, maybe tearful.

I sat with a handful of American and Irish friends. Everyone else in my group was straight, and I wondered if everyone in the pub was, too.

Still, the cider was good, the rounds came often, and I could gaze unashamedly at one of the most beautiful women in the pub, since she was the lead singer. Claire Horgan is a curvy, dark-haired, blue-eyed

alto, and I was hoping she might be thinking of different pronouns for the old-fashioned love ballads she sang.

As I was settling into a cider-fueled nostalgia for past and distant loves, the singers took a break, and Claire Horgan—yes!—wandered over to my side and asked a friendly question. Despite a desire to flutter my eyelashes, I realized that she wasn't flirting, just being nice to a visitor. I told her what a great time I was having, but mentioned my concern about the woeful-looking redhead.

Claire Horgan—internationally known musician—said something gentle about the lady being "special needs," and went on chatting.

During the next set, looking carefully, I noticed that several of the people sitting and singing with the band did indeed have the slightly lost, out-of-place expression of those whose intelligence has not formed in time with their bodies. But despite their