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THE MAN TO KEEP UP WITH

Irish eyes celebrating

YOUNGSTERS from Tyneside are returning to the land of their forefathers to celebrate their cultural roots.

They are all members of the youth group at Tyneside Irish Centre in Newcastle, where they have learned the traditional skills of Irish music, singing and dancing.

A dozen of them aged 11 to 16 will perform a half-hour show over the Bank Holiday weekend at the Fleadh Nua folk festival in Ennis, County Clare.

Their musical instructor is fiddler Tony Corcoran, a popular turn at North-East ceilidhs and folk nights.

The show has been scripted by Chris Goulding of the People's Theatre, Newcastle.

It tells of a group of

poverty-stricken Irish people who head for Tyneside and a new life in the 1840s.

They arrive to work on the emerging High Level Bridge and discover a home from home.

Newcastle even has the same heraldic shield as Dublin – three castles.

Chris and Tony have been directing rehearsals at the Irish Centre and at Newcastle's Bridge Hotel which stands alongside the High Level Bridge.

Our Tyneside-Irish heritage is the theme of the show.

One of the characters highlighted is the legendary James Hill, who was mine host at The Hawk in Gateshead's Bottle Bank.

Hill was a great fiddler

and tunesmith and two of his compositions – *The South Shore Reel* and *The High Level Hornpipe* – will be revived for the folk festival.

Everyone connected with the show can boast an Irish ancestry.

Indeed, some of the great-grandfathers of the young people will have worked on the High Level Bridge.

The youngsters have contributed towards the cost of their working holiday by raising £2,000 in a series of concerts and shows over the past five months.

They will be competing in a celebrated folk festival which has become an international event.

Good luck to them.