

# Dunne Debuts Concert in NYC

## FROM THE HOB

Paul Keating



ONE of the most exciting elements in the world of the traditional arts in Ireland is how important collaborations are in sparking creativity and innovation that broadens their appeal and breathes new life into the arts and the artists in that realm.

TG4, Ireland's native language television channel and foremost presenter of the native music and dance, recognized a recent production cobbled together by dancer Colin Dunne, director Sinéad Rushe and composer Mel Mercier with a Gradam Comharceol (Musical Contribution Award) last February at the annual awards show in Belfast which made that case in spades.

The production called *Concert* seemed simple yet daring enough in pitting the world-renowned Irish step-dancer Dunne in a musical conversation or interpretation of the iconic recording from 1972, *The Liffey Banks*, from fiddler Tommy Potts from Dublin.

At long last the acclaimed show will have its U.S. premiere next week at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in Manhattan in a co-presentation with the Irish Arts Center.

The seeds of this creative production were laid 18 years ago when the brilliant dancer Dunne from the Irish diaspora in Birmingham sought to reinvent himself in 2001 by going for a master's degree in modern dance at the blossoming Irish World Music and Dance Academy at the University of Limerick. Its pioneering founding director, Dr. Micheal O'Suilleabhain, posited a suggestion in his new student that perhaps he could channel some of the angst that came with reaching the pinnacle of Irish dance as a dominant world champion stepdancer, followed



Colin Dunne prepares for Concert. (Photo by Maurice Gunning)

by worldwide acclaim as the star lead male dancer in *Riverdance*.

O'Suilleabhain's doctoral work featured the idiosyncratic musical work of Potts that mystified Irish music aficionados and musicians because of its unique take on traditional Irish dance tunes. The complexity and mischievous nature he exhibited had twists and turns deemed unworthy and un-danceable according to the norms placed on it.

Dunne, who went to the University of Limerick to recreate himself as a modern dancer and climb out of the strait-jacket of traditional Irish dance, wasn't ready to tie in with another project that still had strong ties to traditional music. So he parked the notion of exploring the world and mind of a similar artist like Potts, who was also resisting pressures to stick to the traditional way of performing his craft.

Dunne would pull the album off the shelf occasionally though as he contin-

ued to hone his solo work as a dancer in today's scene with a new impressive body of work as a performer and master instructor at the university.

In 2015 one such episode in a studio led to movements while the album was playing that he admits he couldn't do or appreciate early on in his conversion from tradition to modernity that led him finally to take up the challenge of matching his own evolving dance form with the music of Potts. Dunne admits he is a "slow-burner" when it comes to realizing and executing projects, but he was now seized by the potential of going forward in step with the exploration of Potts' *Liffey Banks* well after the 1988 passing of the Dublin master.

The linking of two masters in different forms will surely inform the conversation of tradition versus innovation which is at root in the dynamic work being carried out at places like the Irish World Academy thanks to

O'Suilleabhain and his creative successor in Mel Mercier, and Colin Dunne in his own studies and classes.

"The paradoxes of Potts' music in its eccentricity and fragility along the beauty and harshness, plus the unusual timing and rhythms that made them unwieldy for Irish dance appealed to me," Dunne told me by phone in preparation for his show's New York City debut.

In what will be his second joint collaboration with the Irish Arts Center and the Baryshnikov Arts Center after a similar debut of his earlier work, *Out of Time*, in 2011, it promises to bring further acclaim to the very talented dancer who refused to be solely captured forever as one of *Riverdance*'s most iconic superstars.

*Concert* will be performed for three nights, November 14-16, at the Baryshnikov Arts Center (450 West 37th Street, Manhattan) at 7:30 p.m. For tickets call 866-811-4111 or via email to [info@irish-artscenter.org](mailto:info@irish-artscenter.org) or [info@bacnyc.org](mailto:info@bacnyc.org).

## Tradfather Hosts Irish Fest

EARLIER this year *The New York Times* surveyed some New York City Irish trad music haunts and publicly declared Brooklyn fiddler Tony Demarco "The Tradfather," an endearing term drawn from his Italian/Irish heritage and his long dominance in the Irish music session scene around the Big Apple.

The term has been on the street for a long time, but when the newspaper of record says so it gives added heft to his reputation for promoting Irish music in myriad ways locally and around the country and even in Ireland, where he was once dubbed the "Sligo Indian" by a Gurteen pub owner who noted that despite his hippy demeanor, Demarco had a firm grasp on the legendary music and tunes that defined the Sligo/ New York style.

One of his pet projects is the New York Trad Festival now in its seventh year where the mission is to showcase as much local talent in the Irish and kindred roots scene as he can manage each year over two consecutive weekends in November. In recent years, the Irish Arts Center on West 51st Street has assisted his efforts by hosting a concert to kick things off so Saturday night, November 16 there will a show there at 8 p.m.

The emcee for the night is Mickey Kelly, who was

one of the leading talents around the Irish Arts Center over four decades ago as a singer, actor and storyteller. Eileen Ivers, the popular Irish fiddler originally from the Bronx, is performing along with her bandmate Mattie Mancuso from Brooklyn on fiddle and guitar who has his own Italian/Irish thing going on.

And since Demarco has many strings to his bow, he has a couple of Cajun musicians, Joel Savoy and Kelli Jones, on the bill. This concert is likely sold out but you never know so call and see.

The big concert at Connolly's Pub in Times Square (121 West 45th Street) is on Saturday, November 23 at 7 p.m. Listed to appear as we go to press are Brian Conway, John Nolan, Andy Stein, Rhys Jones, Jerry O'Sullivan, Donie Carroll, Don Meade (emcee), Niall Connolly, Jonathan Srouer, Annmarie Acosta School of Music, Calum Pasqua Band, Johnny Cuomo, Clare Horgan and Megan Downes and, of course, Demarco himself.

Connolly's' does get packed out so get your tickets in advance and get there early for the first come first served sitting in the third floor Klub 45 room.

For more information, visit [www.newyorktradfest.org](http://www.newyorktradfest.org) or call 646-896-1510 and ask for the Tradfather.



Tony Demarco.