

# The Irish Arts Center

Bringing the Best of  
Irish Arts & Culture  
to NYC and Beyond



This page: Colin Dunne performing *Out of Time*, a moving original work presented in association with the Baryshnikov Arts Center.

Since 1972, New York has been home to the Irish Arts Center. In a city renowned for its cultural life, the Irish Arts Center has been recognized as the hub of the Irish arts landscape. The Center not only presents music, dance, theater, film and literature but engages the community with classes, education, and opportunities to participate hands-on. It is, in the words of patron Liam Neeson, “A place to celebrate what we do best.” The American Ireland Fund has long supported the work of the Irish Arts Center in keeping with its own commitment to the promotion of the best of Irish arts & culture. We are proud that several members of our own Board of Directors have been honored by the Irish Arts Center for their personal commitment to and interest in Irish arts and culture.

Connect magazine invited Irish Arts Center Executive Director **Aidan Connolly** to share the story of the Center and the exciting developments they are undergoing as they seek to build a new home in New York City.

**FROM ITS HUMBLE ORIGINS** in a three-story walk up more than forty years ago, the Irish Arts Center is now well on its way towards building a state-of-the-art new home that will provide a landmark cultural platform for Ireland and Irish America in the 21st century. For decades the current Irish Arts Center has served as an intimate and inviting cultural hub where people of all backgrounds can bask in the warm glow of Irish arts and culture. The new Irish Arts Center and the great work that inhabits it will help restore Ireland's great reputation by reminding New Yorkers and Americans of all stripes what the Irish are best known for—our creativity and innovation, our passion and work ethic, our sense of welcome and sense of humor. As a locus for dialogue and a foundation for a new Irish American culture that both honors the past and looks affirmatively and outwardly towards the future, Irish Arts Center is poised to represent the evolving global Irish

community in a manner commensurate with the success Ireland and Irish America have achieved on the world stage.

It is not just audiences who gain from a thriving Irish Arts Center. According to renowned Riverdance composer Bill Whelan, Irish Arts Center's "capacity to change the arc in the careers of many artists, performers, dancers, writers, painters and musicians is enormous. And if the vision for its future is supported... then the sphere of its influence will increase proportionately." The list of artists affiliated with the Irish Arts Center is diverse and extensive: from world-renowned actors and established directors such as Gabriel Byrne, Liam Neeson, Terry George and Jim Sheridan to emerging theatre-makers such as Pat Kinevane and Deirdre Kinahan; from internationally acclaimed musicians

such as Bono, Paul Brady, Martin Hayes and Mick Moloney—to up-and-coming singer/songwriters such as Julie Feeney, Declan O'Rourke, and Wallis Bird.

Fueled by the profound generosity of donors, Irish Arts is growing into a leading cultural brand, rooted in excellence and innovation, which competes with the best, most intimate cultural experiences New York has to offer. Thanks in no small part to the enduring support of The American Ireland Fund and its dedicated members, Irish Arts Center is expanding its reach and impact like never before.



Renowned composer Bill Whelan and violin virtuoso Athena Tergis address the audience after a performance in IAC's Masters in Collaboration Series

"The Centre is an invaluable resource not only to the City and people of New York, but to Irish Arts and artists throughout the United States and in Ireland."

– An Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny

Right: Composer and singer Julie Feeney performs during her recent residency with Irish Arts Center



In an unprecedented partnership between the New York City Government, the Irish Government, the American Ireland Fund and private donors more than \$34 million has been committed to this groundbreaking project.

The new building is being designed by the chief state architect Ciaran O'Connor from the Office of Public Works. Speaking on his approach, Mr. O'Connor stated: "Our vision is to develop a design that rises above pure utility, beyond basic construction, to combine all that is practical and necessary, both functionally and economically, with a building that is culturally meaningful, humane and beautiful".

Recently in New York, Honorary Chairman Gabriel Byrne shared his vision for the project. "We had an idea of a building that would reflect what it means to be Irish—an architectural statement about who we are as a group of people." He continued: "I always think about the people who came before us, the ones who came over and didn't have the luxury of returning as often as they wanted, who had to make a life for themselves away from their families and away from their fields, away from their communities. They created the world that we inherited; and, through this new building, we are handing on our gift to the ones who come after us, our children, our grandchildren. So we are the bridge between those two generations, and it must fill us with real pride to know that our great-great grandchildren will be able to be in a place that won't be just a center for culture but will also be a meeting place where Irish people can come together to share our common humor, and our unique perspective on the world"

Gabriel Byrne has been working alongside his friend Liam Neeson in order to bring the project to life. As Mr. Neeson said in a recent interview, "I am truly excited and inspired by the vision, the strategy, the integrity, and the sheer hard work that has gone into making this new building a reality. When I think about our new Irish Arts Center, I feel an incredible sense of pride and satisfaction that, finally—we will have a place in New York that represents the incredible stature Ireland holds in world culture, and also in global business, philanthropy, government—in all walks of life."

The new facility will have the capability to project Irish arts and culture far beyond New York City. It will be equipped with recording technology that will allow for the capturing and distribution of amazing arts experiences—stunning live musical events, live conversations with leading figures in the arts, politics, business and media, stimulating education programs—through emerging online media channels. Won't it be great when Live from Irish Arts Center can occupy a place on your DVR or iPad alongside Live from Lincoln Center?

Irish Arts Center Vice Chair Pauline Turley recently expressed her motivation for the project: "Currently, a stroll down Park Avenue offers glimpses of cultural monuments



The legendary Paul Brady enjoys himself on stage during the first Masters in Collaboration Series



Niall O'Leary leads a workshop at the eleventh annual Irish Arts Center NYC Dance Festival, which attracts more than 5,000 participants each year

representing the diversity of New York City, and we can take inspiration from witnessing the accomplishments of Asia Society, Scandinavia House, Alliance Francaise, and the Cervantes Institute on behalf of their respective communities. In 2016, we will finally take our place among the city's leading cultural institutions, while helping restore Ireland's reputation as we ensure a dynamic image of Ireland and Irish America for the 21st century. And as Gabriel Byrne put it: if we don't tell our story, who will."

The new Irish Arts Center is about much more than a development on Manhattan's West Side. It is about building a Center of new and great ideas, a meeting place where everyone can come together to celebrate, enjoy our great culture, our sense of humor and build wonderful relationships.

There has never been a more compelling time to join the community and take pride in knowing you are helping to build something extraordinary for future generations.

This project has passed the point of inevitability. All that remains to be determined is just how fully we will reach our potential. We look forward to sharing this exciting journey with American Ireland Fund supporters in the months and years to come.

—Aidan Connolly Executive Director Irish Arts Center

"The Irish Arts Center is at the center of cross-fertilization of Irish and American talent in making this collaboration happen." — Paul Brady, Irish singer-songwriter

"I am very proud of the work the Irish Arts Center is doing to enrich the cultural tapestry of our country."

— President Bill Clinton

"The good reputation of Ireland and Irish culture in the United States is due in no small measure to the commitment and professionalism of organizations such as the Irish Arts Center." — Uachtaran (President)

Michael Higgins



Spirit of Ireland recipients: American Ireland Fund Board Director John Duffy and Jimmy Fallon

2012



Liam Neeson, Gala co-chair with Spirit of Ireland Award recipient and American Ireland Fund Board Director Dolores McCall

2011



Special guest Bono, Gala co-chair Liam Neeson, Spirit of Ireland Award recipient and Chairman of The American Ireland Fund Loretta Brennan Glucksman, Gala co-chair Gabriel Byrne

2008