



Celebrations Galore at IAC

By Paul Keating

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As New York was officially celebrating the 1916 centennial two weeks ago, it seemed like the Big Apple was thoroughly immersed in showing its green side.

The icing on the cake was the symbolic and ceremonial events at Wagner Park on April 24 and the accompanying cultural day on the nearby public stage and throughout Pier A. But leading up to that day were significant lectures and seminars at Glucksman Ireland House moved to Pier A for its greater capacity two days before, and a moving remembrance of 1916 starting with a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral followed by a march to the Irish Consulate where a Proclamation reading and reception was attended by over 2,000 people organized by the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

The United Irish Counties Association proudly convened to launch a book extolling the role of the Irish in New York around the time of the Rebellion on April 24.

With so much history swirling around New York that weekend, leave it to the Irish Arts Center to take the occasion to accentuate why the future of the Irish in New York looks promising and fulfilling for the Irish diaspora.

The center is taking a larger place in a world where borders and allegiances are less important than a common humanity and triumph of the human spirit. And so they did with their production "Ireland



Green Fields of America at Symphony Space: Joanie Madden, Mick Moloney, Athena Tergis and Billy McComiskey. Photo by Erin Baiano.

Rising: Words and Music For A New Century" to a capacity audience at Symphony Space on Friday, April 22 on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

The show melding both the literary and musical prowess of the Irish and their kindred spirits around the globe was the creation of Bill Whelan and Paul Muldoon, whose muse has been recognized worldwide for decades. They came together to help create a special endgame for the IAC's Almost Home campaign which will reach the goal line of \$60 million that will allow work to begin on the new center arising around the corner of 11th Avenue. In the audience were so many people who have helped the cultural juggernaut raise \$47 million so far in the most impressive and successful campaign

that the Irish have ever embarked upon in New York.

The audience included many wealthy philanthropists, power wielding politicians and culture-loving seekers drawn by the diverse, sophisticated programming on offer at the IAC. There was even a corps of early IAC members whose pioneering efforts back in the wild and woolly 1970s in New York gave rise to the Hell's Kitchen edifice whose influence could never be contained inside the humble brick and mortar of 553 West 51st Street, and where inspired visions always haunted its cramped hallways and rooms.

Whelan established the theme early on when he said, "Irish Arts Center brings people together and creates unexpected marriages."

That was born out over and over with a stellar lineup that included appearances by singer-songwriters Declan O'Rourke, JD and the Straight Shot (JD is Jim Dolan, CEO of Madison Square Garden by the way), Loah, Liam Ó Maonlaí, Nicole Maguire and Paul Brady; actor Lisa Dwan; authors Anne Enright, Colm Tóibín, Nick Laird, Peter Quinn and Zadie Smith; Irish traditional musicians Athena Tergis, Joanie Madden, Billy McComiskey and Mick Moloney, who flew the trad flag as Green Fields of America that night; drag queen and activist Panti Bliss; vocalist and guitarist Becca Stevens; vocalist and composer Christine Tobin; accordionist Billy McComiskey; jazz guitarist Andreas Varady and singer Cassandra Wilson; stepdancer Jean Butler; and Women of the World.

Many of these artists have embraced and graced the stage of the IAC over the years and were showing their solidarity this night when Whelan and Muldoon came calling.

The range and diversity of the talent on stage certainly created excitement and anticipation for the new Irish Arts Center, and also a need for the Irish community around New York to rally around their fundraising efforts as 2016 draws to a close and the dream becomes a reality. The IAC has created a dedicated webpage at www.almosthome2016.org to inform and encourage greater anticipation.

As we have come to expect though from the creative minds at the IAC, programming continues apace. Indicative of its ground-breaking reputation, the 10th edition of its original series "Masters in Collaboration" will be coming up soon with two dancers paired together for the week in New York.

On Wednesday, May 11, creator Mick Moloney will interview *Riverdance* star Colin Dunne from England, who took over for Michael Flatley in the lead role,

and an American, Nic Gareiss from Michigan, who is known widely for his original choreography in Celtic and American circles. Admission is free on the night.

The results of their week-long sojourn in the Big Apple will produce two shows at the Irish Arts Center on Saturday, May 14 and Sunday, May 15 both at 8 p.m.

For those who are looking to satisfy their trad IQ in a quality listening environment, you have a treat in store in New York City when the deeply rooted Open the Door for Three band crosses the threshold of the IAC's Donaghy Theatre to perform on Saturday, May 7 at 8 p.m.

The trio contains three highly seasoned and respected musicians within the tradition, with husband and wife combo Kieran O'Hare on uilleann pipes/flute/whistle and Liz Knowles on fiddle and Pat Broaders, who is one of the finest singers and accompanists (bouzouki) in the American Irish scene.

The intimacy of the black box theater will enhance the experience of listening to three musicians who came to the music from three different places but all found seminal sources upon which to build their own music repertoire as

well as inform their work as a threesome.

Further down the road on Friday, May 20, the Cuala NYC Festival curated by Susan McKeown dovetails the Songlives series highlighting contemporary singer-songwriters (initiated by McKeown and the IAC) with an Irish bent that would be at home busking in Dublin on Grafton Street or in New York City.

The night pairs two dynamic performers who will have their own acts in Luan Parle and Micky Coleman, who is well known around Woodlawn and Rockland County.

Visit www.irishartscenter.org

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From left to right: New York Assemblyman Michael Cusick, Congressman Joe Crowley, City Councilman Danny Dromm, and the IAC's Pauline Turley and Aidan Connolly. Photo by Erin Baiano.