



**T**HE Irish Arts Center graced the residence of the Consul General of Ireland Barbara Jones a couple of weeks ago to launch yet another ambitious fall program, twinning the opportunity to pay homage to New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito who was also joined by some fellow members from the Irish caucus who are ardent supporters of the Hell's Kitchen redoubt on Manhattan's West Side.

The ceremonial chorus was pretty much singing from the same hymnal all evening in bolstering New York City's well-earned reputation as a melting pot (and the sweltering heat that night did nothing to deter that) where polyglot culture still remains important in fortifying its community diversity and on this occasion the focus was on the Irish.

The always ambitious programming seasons at the Irish Arts Center as announced online at [www.IrishArtsCenter.org](http://www.IrishArtsCenter.org) and in their 48-page booklet each autumn and spring are filled with innovative and contemporary performances and exhibitions that would rival many of the more established cultural centers around New York blessed with greater resources like Lincoln Center or the 92nd Street Y.

And from its inception over four decades ago, the Irish Arts Center's educational mission introducing and teaching mostly adults in a wide array of Irish music and

dance and language classes remains a vital portal to those who want to learn more about their heritage or engage in a more personal way in the rich vein of Irish cultural activities.

In recent years there has been a step-up in children's programming both as a community-building exercise and outreach for those who want to expose young children to the many facets of what it means to be Irish.

The vision and drive to produce all of this edifying and entertaining fare comes from a very talented corps of culturally minded and evolving personnel led by the visionary and focused Executive Director Aidan Connolly and the IAC Board Vice Chair Pauline Turley, whose own tenure there at the IAC has been

the corner on 11th Avenue as yet another "garage" waits to be transformed into New York City's thriving Irish cultural catalyst for the 21st century.

But as we know neither Rome nor New York City were built in a day, so while we patiently wait for a new home for the IAC to spring up we applaud those who have stepped up to the plate financially to make this a reality. Last year's Spirit of Ireland gala at the Cipriani Hotel yielded over \$1 million, and in the past six months personal donations from Bob and Kate Devlin in the spring and Roma Downey this summer each contributed a similar figure, adding to the swelling coffers that will bring the new state of the art building closer to the finish line.

To date almost \$47 million

to was extolled by Connolly, Turley and for her open embrace of their efforts towards solidifying Irish culture in the Big Apple and her commitment to seeing it sprout even more.

Echoing Viverito's sentiments that night while also praising her leadership at the Council were Council Member Danny Dromm, leader of the Irish caucus that includes Jimmy Van Bramer and Elizabeth Crowley (cousin of Congressman Joe Crowley). Those three members hail from Queens but recognize that the Irish Arts Center is making historic strides, and they have also been able to call upon the staunch support of Corey Johnson, whose West Side district the old and new center to be falls in.

It is hard not to be impressed

city but it attracts outside investment like the additional financial support from the Irish government to the tune of \$5 million, plus the expertise of the Office of Public Works in designing the new space and ongoing support from Culture Ireland to individual programs each year.

It also helps leverage donations from the inspired community like the Devlins, Downey and the many generous people who have donated down through the years.

Among the many in the crowd at the launch party was the local New York girl who caught the world's attention through *Riverdance*, dancer Jean Butler, once a champion Irish dancer taught by Donny Golden of Brooklyn.

Butler will star in her own production, *this is an Irish dance*, in November collaborating, with Irish cellist Neil Martin at Danspace in the East Village which will showcase her work as a dancer inspired by the music and vice versa, which to me is the highest compliment that can be paid to an artist.

Most assuredly this will be cutting-edge fare and encompass much of what she learned after *Riverdance* in the realm of contemporary dance crafted at the University of Limerick Irish World Music Center. It will also build upon her many years of training in Irish stepdance that reached its pinnacle in *Riverdance*.

New York City undergoes so much change that the old adage "It will be a great place when it is finished" doesn't hold water, and neither will it contain the new Irish Arts Center because its vision and mission goes well beyond bricks and mortar. It is all about capturing the creativity of the Irish mind, heart and soul and in doing so, it knows no bounds.

## Irish Arts Center's Focus on the Future

one of remarkable growth and aspiration.

The fruits of their labors and that of their team at the three-story garage that has been "improved" as much as it can be is prodigious really in the annals of the Irish in New York. And characteristically, like much of what is offered on the stages of the space-challenged yet totally intimate Donaghy Theater on a nightly basis comes across not what the Irish have done in New York in the past, but more of what Irish creativity is all about in the here and now and heading towards in the future.

The future for the IAC in a new home awaits them just around

has been raised and according to Connolly, some \$34 million of that has been an investment of the City of New York which sees the value of establishing strong multicultural facilities that reflect the population of this city. While the lion-share of the funding came from the previous administrations of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Council Speaker Christine Quinn, it is worth noting that Viverito committed \$5 million in the last fiscal year's budget which also saw the commitment of \$4 million from Mayor Bill de Blasio's capital expenditures, displaying not only the continuity of municipal support but also their confidence in cultural capitalism enhancing New York City's neighborhoods.

At the reception Viveri-

with not only the hard-won dollars from the city government but also the sincerity and commitment to helping the Irish Arts Center reach its long-awaited dream in the next few years when the shovel finally goes into the ground on the West Side of Manhattan which is no longer "wild" but an important part of an ever-changing city landscape.

The City's investment as expressed by Viverito's own comments and echoed by Connolly who has long labored in the municipal corridors and planning rooms reflects a diversified city that looks like its population that values and holds fast to its cultural traditions.

Not only is that a policy that serves the entire



At the Irish Arts Center launch are Pauline Turley, Elizabeth Crowley, Jimmy Van Bramer, Consul General Barbara Jones, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito, Danny Dromm and Aidan Connolly. (Photo by Vitaly Piltzer)