The Brilliancy of Bandon

FROM THE HOB
Paul Keating

MYBE Ireland’s first blush with wealth and fame enjoyed during the decade-long era of the Celtic Tiger was such a disaster as its many critics and survivors would admit.

After all, didn’t it unleash a new-found confidence of Ireland’s youth and potential and dividends in investing in its educational system to train students for the modern world of the newly wealth-led Ireland of the 1990s where the internet and technology would revolutionize the world?

And can we not accept the seismic shift towards the economic and entertainig a myriad of forms. Myriad ways and forms. Countless artists have now followed in the Irish Arts Center and shared with the Fishamble theater company and the Irish Arts Center programming. So it was a win-win-win for the play. McAuliffe comes from Malahide just outside of Dublin and spent almost decades in the world of competitive Irish dance through competitions and then as a teacher before forsaking that world for a stage as an artist and dancer and along with the supportive work of an actress and director Stephanie Preissner and Fishamble, turned out the one-woman play only after the concept and title had been submitted and approved.

The play was a smash success at the Dublin Fringe Festival where McAuliffe winning a prize as the best new performer and also for the play. Fishamble grabbed it up for its touring menu and kept Alain and the simplicity of mounting it on the road as a "show in a bag."

So on the road it went to the Edin-

brugh Fringe Festival and then back to the Dublin Dance Festival where the Irish Arts Center programming director Rachel Gilkey saw it and recom-

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rent season there. Gilkey has consider-able experience at the center and knew it was also a viable contender for the New York Irish Center, the Minola Irish American Center and the Irish Cultural and Sports Centre of Southern Ontario.

So it was a win-win-win for The Humours of Bandon which attracted and enthusiastic crowds at all the shows. It was a full-on energetic performance with brilliant acting and dancing (often at the same time) and a brilliant script that was heartwarming and heart-breaking.

The show is also very credible for those who can recognize the intense devotion it can take to stick to the training, rigorous and lows and lows of an Irish dancer.

It was a full-on energetic performance of an hour with agile shifts between characters: the dancer Annie O’Loughlin Harte, her mother, teacher Assumpta and Tanya. McAuliffe mixed the comedy and dramatic elements unflinchingly in each performance, revealing the edge that she still no doubt feels as she revisits her own dancing life in each performance.

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ciliar and unfamiliar aspects of the world around us in a thought-provoking way and when it comes to the world of Irish dance and theatre, the same holds true. The play is a testament to the possibility of mounting it on the road as a "show in a bag."

The Humours of Bandon was a massive collective effort on behalf Fishamble and the Irish Arts Center and, of course, McAuliffe, who has managed to build a cultural bridge between Irish dance and theatre. I hope it comes around again.

Aiding and abetting that on a corollary plane was the global success and outreach of the Celtic Tiger economic tiger, where Ireland's diplomatic mission tapped into the cultural appeal of its homegrown artistic assets as the elixir to expand business and trade with old and new customers in the global economy.

Building on Ireland's abundant legacy in the literary arts and theater and in music and dance and other creative forms, it was easy to draw on their heritage through a new generation who were passionate about their culture and reinventing new ways to express it.

In 2005, the Irish government recognized that culture was one of its most enduring assets and dedicated a new department towards it called Culture Ireland under the aegis of one of its pioneering pro-seniors, Dr. Michael O'Sullivan, who was a university-level program around it at the University of Limerick.

Funds were delegated to the new mission of promoting Irish arts and artists abroad which continues today as a very vital organ to their promotion.

The Irish government also recognized the role of the diaspora in helping to make Ireland the nation that it had become and, in particular, those immigrants who still looked fondly on the Old Country and supported it through every means possible since emigrating.

On a similar trajectory in New York was the emerging Irish Arts Center established back in 1972 in the wild and wooly days of revolutionizing everything in counter-cultural mode. In the late 1990s, there was a sea-change of sorts at its Hell’s Kitchen that saw its visionary artistic home become more open to working with a wider group of people in the Irish community in New York.

Those same winds of change in Ireland swept over the Irish Arts Center and as the new millennium dawned, it soon became the staging ground not only for the nascent Culture Ireland unit but increasingly as a powerful adjunct for the cultural mission of New York's Irish Consulate which correctly viewed the varied cultural assets of the Big Apple as notable states to build its supportive community within its diaspora. That is the short-hand history.

Now back to the main reason for this column. Fishamble (the new play company) has partnered with the Irish Arts Center on a number of productions beforehand as both are happy recipients of grant funding from Culture Ireland. Working in a sophisticated and organized fashion in what you might call a meitheal-like environment (the Irish farming term where the neighbors help one another out at critical times of the year like harvesting for mutual benefit), the tritium can leverage logistics, travel costs and quality productions that could use their assistance in bringing the art to more and more people. And that was accomplished in The Humours of Bandon.

The creator of the play, McAuliffe, had built a cultural bridge and knew it was also a powerful new performer and also for the play. Fishamble grabbed it up for its touring menu and kept Alain and the simplicity of mounting it on the road as a “show in a bag.”

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