

The Irish Echo

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First act in a future setting

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Loretta Brennan Glucksman (in green), flanked by Pauline Turley and Aidan Connolly of the Irish Arts Center, sets the celebratory tone before the first performance in the IAC's future home.

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This wasn't the usual premiere.

Overalls would have been more appropriate than a tuxedo, but leading figures from Irish arts and business were in Cybert Tire last week, one of Manhattan's last auto shops, for the first performance on the site of the new Irish Arts Center.

"We moved 2,000 tires in the first two days here," Paul Fahy, artistic director of Galway International Arts Festival, told the Echo afterwards, explaining some of what it took to present upstairs in the garage the U.S. premiere of Enda Walsh's play "Rooms."

The celebrated Dublin playwright and director, who won a Tony for adapting "Once" for Broadway and collaborated with David Bowie on a West End production just before Bowie's death, also was among those gathered to mark a major milestone in the IAC's decade-long campaign to have a fitting home for Irish arts in the United States.

Later this year, Cybert Tire, on 11th Avenue, will be demolished to make way for the new and greatly expanded IAC.

Riverdance composer Bill Whelan, international hotelier John Fitzpatrick, and philanthropist Loretta Brennan Glucksman playfully worked into their remarks exhortations on the surrounding walls, to "Replace your belts and hoses" or "Change your shocks and struts."

The punning began with IAC Vice Chair Pauline Turley stressing how tirelessly everyone had worked.

Adding to the silliness, an analog phone on the wall, with a ring suggesting it might have been there since the garage opened in 1916, rang and rang during remarks by IAC Executive Director Aidan Connolly.

Most important among them may have been, "We're going to build the damn building!"

The hope – when IAC announced its reconstruction plans in March 2014 – was that the building would have been finished by now.

Now, it's "Ninety five percent" of the way towards raising the funds required to grow up and out from its current base on West 51st Street, down the block, and around the corner onto 11th Ave., a vice chair of the funding committee conveyed.

Gerrard Boyle, president of Commodore Construction Corporation, added, "Six years ago if you had told me, 'we're going to build a sixty million building I would've said, 'no way.'"

Ireland's Consul General in New York, Barbara Jones, threw in the "cúpla focal," adding in Irish, "If you build it they will come."

The evidence is that they already have: lately, the IAC has often had to host its events in others' larger venues.

The forthcoming IAC is being proposed as bigger yet, a place not just for New York, but the seat of Irish culture in the entire United States.