

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

A REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN LAOIS, LONGFORD, OFFALY AND WESTMEATH **SUMMER 2012**

ISSUE

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MUSIC & DANCE
THEATRE & FILM
THE WRITTEN WORD

FREE



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A Word from the Editor



It's hard to believe that the first quarter of 2012 is well behind us and it is becoming increasingly apparent that, as is oftentimes cited, time

goes quicker the older you get.

There has never been a better time than now to check out at least one arts and culture item of interest in your area of the midlands. The choice is enormous and all encompassing for all ages and abilities.

In this issue, across the counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath the wealth and diversity of the arts and culture on offer is mind blowing.

There is so much going on, in fact, that this issue has been increased from 32 to 36 pages.

We have drummers at the Olympics; films making history at all the best festivals; singers hitting the high time; schools embracing artistic projects; mental health projects; a plethora of festivals; art commissions; art exhibitions; world-class dancers; authors; photographic competitions; poets; comedians; drama - indoors and out; music and everything imaginable and unimaginable in between.

Be sure and check out your local Arts Officer's website also as we just can't fit in everything and there are a number of festivals and additional activities coming up in the weeks and months ahead. Take a particular note to check out the arts and culture events happening in and around all the bank holidays and this is a time where you need never be stuck for some entertainment.

What is truly amazing is that the midlands is forging ahead, bucking the national trend against the odds and bringing some additional impressive and important facilities to fruition such as the state of the art, purpose-built Athlone Art gallery which is currently under construction and the Community Arts Centre in Tullamore which is moving a step closer with the signing of contracts. In our last editions we noted that Athlone had opened the Abbey Street Artist Studios and Laois the Arthouse at Stradbally. And, you can read in this issue how Longford boasts a profusion of public art commissions - a real feat in the face of adversity.

The vision and determination of the Arts Officers in the face of escalating funding cuts inspirational - but make no mistake they need OUR support and the current state of affairs of working in the face of daily funding cuts is simply not sustainable. You just need to think about the possibility of the lights going out on the Backstage Theatre in Longford to realise how much we, as a community, stand to lose if we - and national bodies - don't support arts and culture in the midlands - and beyond now and into the future.

There's never been a better time to take that step forward to embrace what is on your doorstep. The time is now.

To discover just what a valuable contribution the Arts make to our society check out the National Campaign for the Arts on www.ncfa.ie

YOUR LOCAL ARTS OFFICERS



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Longford student drums up support at Olympics

By Conor Barrins

An expected audience of four billion people might intimidate some people but for one Ballymahon woman it's all going to be part of a day's work this July.

Twenty-four-year-old Gráinne Kavanagh has been selected to play the drums at the opening ceremony of this summer's Olympic games in London's new 80,000 seater Olympic Stadium!

The former Mercy Convent, Ballymahon student, is taking it all in her stride. "If I thought about it too long it'd probably bring about stage fright, and you definitely don't want that with all those people watching," she laughed.

Gráinne is currently a full time student at Tech Music School in West London, studying Commercial Music Performance in Drums.

The drums are not traditionally an instrument associated with women. For example, only four of the 36 people in Gráinne's class are female.

"It's certainly a male dominated instrument but I just had one of those moments nine or 10 years ago when I decided I wanted to give the drums a go, and I've never looked back," she told the

Leinster Leader recently, while home from London for a few days.

There are a number of sentences that strike fear into parents, one of which is undoubtedly, 'I want a drum-kit,' but for Gráinne's mother, Kathleen, getting her daughter another musical instrument was a natural thing to do.

"We always knew the musical ability was there – she was a self-thought musician right from a young age. She was always trying out different instruments but it always came back to getting a drum-kit. So, we got one and the rest, as they say, is history," Kathleen laughed.

Gráinne graduated with a degree in Business Computing from Athlone Institute of Technology last year before following her heart and heading to London to study drums.



Each week the Tech Music School sends an email to its students detailing upcoming auditions. "One of them was for the opening ceremony at the Olympics, and I just thought, why not? I went for the first audition in October, then I got called to the second round in November and then on January 16 I found out I had got it," Gráinne said, adding that it hadn't really hit home just how big an event this is to be involved with.

The Artistic Director of the opening ceremony is Academy award-winning director Danny Boyle, whose films include *Slumdog Millionaire*. Rehearsals for the big day have not yet begun, but when they do, the musicians will be sworn to secrecy as London prepares for one of its biggest showcases of all time. They are set to get under way towards the end of May with an intensive two month practice period in the build up to July 27.

"I just really can't wait to get going on the project," Gráinne said excitedly. **M**

The EDge is back

EDge, the postgraduate performance company of London Contemporary Dance School, has announced that Offaly is to feature on its annual 2012 Spring Tour.

Under the direction of Artistic Director, Jeanne Yasko, the company's 12 exceptional dancers will visit 21 venues nationally and internationally including Birr Theatre and Arts Centre on Saturday, May 26.

Venue Manager at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, Emma Nee Haslam said: "This unique event is filled with high-level energy and technical excellence that pushes the performers to their limits and will leave the audience on the edge of their seat.

"What a joy it was last year to see these extraordinary dancers perform here in Birr and we're thrilled to be welcoming the new post-grads back again this year."

The varied programme includes works that are intellectually stimulating, playful and charming. Leading dancemakers Matthias Sperling and James Wilton

(winner of the *Sadler's Wells Global Dance Contest* in 2010) have been commissioned to create two new pieces respectively entitled *Dances with Purpose* and *Through Shards*. Completing the programme, dancer and choreographer Delphine Gaborit has restaged *The Quartet*, a poetic and powerful German masterpiece by world famous German choreographer Sasha Waltz.

About EDge

EDge has built a reputation for touring engaging works that range across different styles of contemporary dance performed by young dance artists at a key stage of their professional development.

The EDge Spring Tour represents the culmination of a year-long course of study which offers postgraduate performers the chance to work together as an ensemble and collaborate with guest choreographers.

This year the dancers of EDge come from around the globe: Jessica Hatfield, Michael Kitchin, Thomas Meyers, Alexandra Pickering, and Katie Webster (UK); Tim C J Chew, (Malaysia); Erin Johnson, Jacquelyn Price, Nicole West and Gracelynn Whyte (USA); Simone Mousset, (Luxembourg) and Elisabeth Schilling, (Germany). **M**

Tim C J Chew performing Tony Adigun's *Unleashed* image by Ivar Sviestins.



All are recent graduates from the world's finest dance conservatoires and the period spent with EDge forms the main part of their Postgraduate Diploma in Performance at London Contemporary Dance School and gives them an invaluable insight into creating, rehearsing and touring work as a professional company.

Double dance delight

Also on May 26 in Birr, *Legitimate Bodies Dance Company* will host *You(th) Share*. Now in its third year, *You(th) Share* is an increasingly important date in the calendar for youth dance companies from across the country. It is a platform that annually presents the audience with a chance to see the progress of young dance performers who converge on Birr. **M**

Briefs

BEALTAINÉ 2012

Planning for the Laois Bealtaine Festival 2012, celebrating creativity in older age, is well under way. 2012 is European year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations – opportunities to bring young and old participants/organisers together this year to help explore the festival theme *What kind of old do you want to be?* are particularly welcome.

Last year well over 2000 people took part in all kinds of arts activities in the county from a Dawn Chorus on the Rock of Dunamais to exhibitions, concerts, dance events, writing workshops, theatre performances and film screenings in venues and centres countywide. As the country's largest collaborative arts festival, Bealtaine is locally owned by communities but retains an enviable reputation as the world's first national celebration of creativity in older age. Scotland and Australia are laying the foundations for their own similar festivals and we expect this year's Irish festival to even bigger and better!

Confirmed events arranged for 2012 include:

- Carnation Theatre will perform a theatre show entitled *Circus Comes to Town* for residents and out patients in St Vincent's Hospital, Mountmellick on Tuesday, May 8 at 3pm and in Abbeyleix Hospital and Day Care Centre at 1.30pm.
- Art workshops in the Arthouse, Stradbally on May 15.
- 'Gay Byrne Live on Stage' in the Dunamais Arts Centre, May 17.
- Exhibition and Sale of Arts and Crafts made by members of Portarlinton Active Retirement Association – Happy Hearts Club – Thursday, May 24 from 2pm to 4pm in the Community Centre, Link Rd, Portarlinton.
- Inter-Generational Waltzing with school children and the 50 plus Active Retirement Association, Portlaoise, May 30.

If you would like to organise a Bealtaine event in County Laois, please contact the Arts Office to be part of the programme for the county. The Arts Office, Laois County Council will publish and launch a comprehensive brochure that will include all events happening in the county in May. For further information on all the events above contact The Arts Office on 057 8674342/43 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie.

SOUTH EAST ARTS NETWORK CONCERT

South East Arts Network presented a concert at the end of April featuring renowned accordion player and singer Seamus Begley and guitarist Tim Edey, BBC Radio Two Folk Musician of the Year 2012!

The tour funded by the Arts Council will visit six communities to bring professional touring performance to areas like the South East Arts Network. The concert took place in Coolanowle House, Ballickmoyler, Co Laois. For more information contact 087 6729953

Beelicious Recipes for Kids

Dolores Keaveney writes about the publication of her fifth book for children - Beelicious Recipes using Honey.



"If you had said to me three years ago that I would have become an author and illustrator of children's books, I would not have believed you. So, this really confirms my belief that you never know what is around the bend. I have been an amateur artist for the past 35 years, starting as a beginner at a night class and I continued to paint for pleasure. It was a great way for me to chill out and to express myself in my paintings. I loved painting flowers and I really made this my painting choice.

Then, a few years back I decided to train as therapist but I found full time work very restricting and missed the freedom to paint and garden at will and so I took a break. My interest in the healing and spiritual side of life continued and continues unabated and it was during this 'down' time that I got

the inspiration to write the poems about the bees. I had lots of paintings of flowers completed and I took the poems and the flowers and put them together and I had the makings of a book. I self published this book in 2009 and have produced three more since then.

Just when I thought I would be retiring a whole new career has opened up in front of me, which I am hugely excited about leaving me full of confidence and expectation about the future.

I am a grandmother with three wonderful children and five beautiful grandchildren and I have to say that my grandchildren are my inspiration; they are full of life and they really have brought out the child in me.

Self-publishing is not for the faint hearted. You need great stamina to go down that route. I spent hours and hours on my computer looking up ways that I could promote my book. In fact, I suppose, you could say it took almost two years before I was ready to publish my first book. With a lot of hard work and determination I think I am getting there.

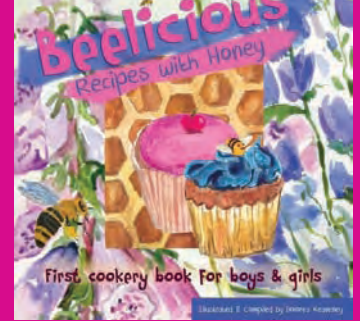
Writing books is a bit addictive because when you have one written, then you want another and another. Financially you will not make a great deal out of it, but it is very satisfying."

Launch

Mullingar woman Dolores launched children's cookbook *Beelicious Recipes using Honey* in Red Earth, Mullingar in April.

The colourfully illustrated book draws together many of the skills Dolores has garnered over the years. *Beelicious Recipes using Honey* is a simple cookbook for small children containing honey recipes gathered from family and friends.

Learn how to bake simple scones, buns and banana bread along with many other tasty snacks using the magic ingredient, honey. All of the recipes in this book with the exception of four are



ones which her daughter-in-law Hilary and her grandchildren Ellie, Greg, Mal and Will have tried and tested many times. Ellie and her Mum along with Greg and Mal bake daily in their beautiful kitchen which Ellie calls Buttercup Bakery, and Will and Ali cook buns regularly.

Ellie her granddaughter has hand written some of the recipes and Dolores said: "I think this adds great charm to the book." here is an added bonus in the book - lots of information about the bee! Dolores added: "I hope that the recipes will be enjoyed by children and their parents and that they will give joy to everyone who uses them and that the book helps promote one of my favourite insects the amazing bee!"

Beelicious Recipes using Honey is available in bookshops and costs €9.99. You can also purchase any of Dolores' books at www.doloreskeaveney.com

Business of the Year awards recognises importance of arts projects

The Midlands Gateway Chamber of Commerce has announced the launch of The MidlandsIreland.ie Best in Business Awards 2012, which is now in its second year.



Pictured at the presentation of the Outstanding Business Award Plate, to Belvedere House Gardens and Park, Mullingar, County Westmeath are: L-R Daniel McLoughlin, County Manager, Westmeath County Council, Cllr Micheal Carrigy, Cathaoirleach, Midland Regional Authority; Bartle D'Arcy, General Manager, Belvedere House, Gardens and Park (Award Winner) Ray Byrne, President, Midlands Gateway Chamber, Martin Daly, Director, Midland Regional Authority. Pic: Ger Rogers/HR Photo

The President of the Midlands Gateway Chamber, Ray Byrne, said: "This year's competition is bigger and better. We have added two new award categories and included the chambers of commerce from the entire midland region of Offaly, Westmeath, Laois and Longford."

The awards categories are:

- Emerging New Business Award
- Best Multi National Business Award
- Business Person of the Year Award
- Outstanding Business Award
- Best Cultural Tourism Business Award
- Green Initiative Award
- Retail Excellence Award
- Lifetime Achievement Award, Athlone
- Midlands Gateway Chamber Ambassador Award

The Best Cultural Tourism award recognises the huge importance of the arts projects, festivals, centres, theatres, studios, galleries, hotels, exhibition and convention centres, country house properties and the restaurant sector of the cultural tourism industry which operate from or are based in any of the four Midlands Counties of Offaly, Westmeath, Laois and Longford.

Ray continued: "These awards aim to recognise and promote excellence and innovation in the regional business

community and the judging panel plays a pivotal role in the Awards programme."

"There is a rigorous judging process involved, the first round of judging involves short-listing the entries down to five in each category."

The first round judges were chosen from direct nomination from each of the chambers in the region. Business people from outside the region conduct the second round of judging; selecting the three finalists in each category and this decision will be announced in June. The overall winner in each category as selected by the second round judges will then be revealed at the MidlandsIreland.ie Best in Business Awards to be held in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Thursday June, 21.

Mary Kennedy will be master of ceremonies and over 450 key business personnel from the region will be present along with a large media contingent.

Tickets are on sale now and cost €75 each for this black tie event, meal and wine included. If you wish to reserve tickets please contact Midlands Gateway Chamber, info@midlandsgatewaychamber.ie or phone Angela Rigney on

086 3891675. M

SUBMISSIONS:

The Gallery at Abbeyleix Library is inviting submissions from artists, photographers and sculptors who would like to book an exhibition space in the gallery for 2013. Please call in to the library to pick up an exhibition application form or download it at Gallery@AbbeyleixLibraryApplicationForm. Please also consult the guidelines for exhibiting in the gallery Gallery@AbbeyleixLibraryGuidelines.

Tullamore Community Arts Centre moves step closer



Tullamore Community Arts Centre has moved on to the next stage with the signing of the design contracts between the Board of the Arts Centre and A2 Architects, which took place in January.

Chairperson Desmond Doyle said: "Signing the contracts represents a significant shift in pace now and will allow the project to progress to planning phase within a matter of months.


"People may have wondered why this process took a number of months but this is a complicated procedure and we wanted to be sure that we are entering into a watertight agreement to protect the finance being generated by the community and the public funding we have been allocated. Nobody would have thanked us for rushing into this without serious deliberation to all aspects of the design team and delivery, fees and health and safety considerations," he explained.

The next steps include topographical site surveys and a Part VIII planning process. All going smoothly, it is expected the tender process for construction will be advertised in the summer. The construction tender will be open to all local qualified contractors and will be advertised

through the appropriate public channels.

Fundraising drive

Meanwhile, the fundraising draw celebrated its mammoth success of selling 2,000 tickets, raising €160,000 towards the capital costs - a huge achievement in this climate.

The Board would like to acknowledge the mammoth effort gone into this project, particularly by Paddy Fenning (Offaly person of the Year 2012) Fionnuala Corrigan, Mary Roche and Sheila McDermott and the many others who are sold tickets. Many arts groups are also planning fundraising events during the year and any suggestions for events and activities should be emailed to info@tullamorecommunityartscentre.ie so that they can be co-ordinated to maximise impact. In the meantime, progress on the project can be followed on the official website www.tullamorecommunityartscentre.ie or on Facebook (follow the link on the website) 



Board - (Seated L-R) Cllr Sinead Dooley Cathaoirleach of Tullamore Town Council, Desmond Doyle (Chairperson), Caomhan Murphy (A2 Architects), Cllr Danny Owens, Cathaoirleach of Offaly County Council.

(Back L-R) Declan Kirrane (Director of Services), Cllr Declan Harvey, Sean Murray (Director of Services), Dominic Doherty, Tom Farrell, Cllr Molly Buckley, Peter Carroll (A2 Architects), Fionnuala Corrigan, Martin Heffernan (Punch Consulting Engineers), Sinead O'Reilly (Arts Officer)

STRIKING A NOTE WITH ADRIAN DUNCAN

by Majella Reid



Adrian Duncan

Ballymahon's Adrian Duncan is a man with an avid interest in the arts, music and literature and this has manifested itself in many forms from his involvement in the Goldsmith International Literary Festival to his completion of a Bachelor degree in Music (Hons) in 2009 from NUI Maynooth.

It is therefore, perhaps, inevitable that this musicologist should undertake a series of lectures focused on *The Story of Western Music*. To this end, Adrian designed a series of six lectures covering 1,000 years of the world's most famous and influential periods of music that he will deliver over a six-week period.

The content of the lectures examines the development of western art music from the Middle Ages to the present day. The classes presented in an informal manner and talks are interspersed with samples of music from the different genres and periods.

"This lecture series is open to anyone with an interest in music. It's very much about covering the basics," said Adrian, who also teaches piano and provides tuition in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Music examinations. It is his intention that the content of each lecture will roughly coincide with the various periods throughout music history.


Through the ages

Starting with the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Periods, the lectures will look at areas such as Gregorian Chant, Josquin, Du Fay, and English Lute Song. During the Baroque period, the lecture will move to artists and movements such as Monteverdi, Strozzi, Corelli, concerto (Vivaldi) and fugue (Bach). In the classical period, the areas covered include Symphony/String quartet (Haydn), opera (Mozart), French Revolution and the rise of the middle classes.

The Romantic Period is divided across two lectures, the first of which looks at Beethoven's late period, Schubert's German Song, and Mendelssohn's piano works. The second lecture concerning the Romantic Period, will allow students to delve into artists such as Brahms, Strauss, Foster and, of course, influential events such as the Franco-Prussian War and the emergence of the United States. Finally, in the Modern and Post Modern Period, the class is taken on a journey through key concerns such as Atonality, Stravinsky, Cage, the Jazz Age, world music and recording techniques.

In what promises to be an inviting lecture series, Mr Duncan said: "It is something that I have thought about doing for some time. Perhaps it is eventually something that I can prune into a single school module. That's a possibility."

The lectures started on Tuesday, March 20 and conclude on Tuesday, April 24. These evenings commence at 7.30pm Ballymahon Community Library. Admission is €5 per lecture or €25 for the complete series.

For further information contact Adrian on 086 2580068 or email adrianduncanmusic@gmail.com. 

Arthouse Stradbally Band Rehearsal Space Available to Rent



If you're looking for great band rehearsal space that's clean, has a great sound system equipped with digital drums, amps etc

Look no further than the Arthouse at Stradbally, Co Laois Rehearsal Studios Session Rates valid from March 2012

Monday to Friday
(10am to 4pm)
€10 per hour

Tuesday & Thursday
(7pm to 10pm)
€25 per session

Saturday
(10am to 1pm)
€25 per session

Call us to-day to book your rehearsal space

Arts Office
Laois County Council
057 8641740
Email: artsoff@laoisoco.ie





Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival makes surprise move to Tullamore

The Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival is relocating to Tullamore, beginning with the 2012 festival this autumn. Having spent 10 years in Longford Town, the move, announced in January, came as a surprise to most people in the midlands.

The festival started in Longford back in 2002 following the death of legendary banjo player Johnny Keenan. A tribute concert to mark Johnny's passing in 2000 was held in Vicar Street, Dublin and it was then decided to hold a festival in Longford where Johnny and his wife Chris had set up home.

In the 10 years that followed some of the biggest names in bluegrass, Irish traditional and folk music played in the Longford Arms Hotel, including Steve Earle, Gerry O'Connor, Guy Clark, Peter Rowan, Tony Trischka,

Altan, Rodney Crowell, Iris DeMent, Thom Moore and the legendary Earl Scruggs - the musician credited for perfecting and popularising a three-finger banjo-picking style that is a defining characteristic of bluegrass music.

Citing "financial sustainability, growth and expansion" the organisers Kathy Casey and Chris Keenan said the event could not be financially sustained in Longford and that one of the main reasons behind their decision to relocate to Tullamore was the financial support. To date the festival organisers have been consulting with businesses in Tullamore, for its support.

Statement

In a statement issued regarding the move the festival organisers said: "It is with regret that the festival can no

longer be financially sustained within Longford. The move marks the end of a decade of national/international music and visitors from all over the world to Longford each September. We hope that the people of Longford have enjoyed the festival as much as we have enjoyed sharing it with them."

Tullamore boost

However, given that no festival was held in Tullamore in 2011, the news was welcomed locally, particularly for its impact on the cultural tourism potential of the town, which has already played host to large events such as Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann.

The Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival will take place from September 20 to September 23. A committee is being set up to co-ordinate the event at local level. As well as concerts the festival will include workshops, pub sessions

and free music performances.

The annual four-day event celebrates cultural exchange, particularly between Ireland and America, through the medium of music and education.

It features the very best of Irish traditional, American bluegrass and folk music, bringing together top international musicians and attracting visitors from around the world.

Chris Keenan stated: "We are very excited and proud to call Tullamore our new home, and look forward to a long, bright future here. We welcome suggestions, ideas and any input from the local community, and wish to emphasise that this is a community event, which draws a positive type of crowd to the town, benefiting all."

For more information on the festival see www.johnnykeenan.com **M**

THE HILLTOWN NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL

tunes up for fifth year

The Castlepollard festival, which is in its landmark fifth year, showcases Irish and international contemporary music, presenting innovative new work to audiences and providing a sustainable place for contemporary music in the midlands.

The 2012 festival takes place from July 20 to 22 and will be based around a series of concerts as well as sonic and visual art installations presented over

three days.

The festival opens with a special gala concert on the Friday night with a banquet

dinner presented by the Westmeath Slow Food convivium.

The weekend will provide an exciting selection of world class contemporary instrumental and electronic music by emerging and renowned composers with the programme focusing on the relationship between contemporary music and the visual arts.

The centrepiece of the concert programme is the performances by the resident Hilltown Ensemble throughout the three days, augmented by distinguished international guest performances. Among these guests are English musician, sound artist and author David Toop, a well-known figure on the international experimental and improvised music scene; pioneer German electronic musician and composer Asmus Tietchens and virtuoso violinist Barbara Lüneburg, who has enchanted Hilltown audiences with new programmes of cutting-edge new music each year since the inception of the festival.

grounds of the medieval castle keep of the Hilltown House, an 18th century listed building. The buildings have grown organically over the centuries and create a unique setting for 21st century events. This year the festival welcomes anyone who has an interest in and an appreciation for music and arts, from adults to children. There will be guesthouse accommodation and camping available nearby.

As with previous festivals, there will be an open call for new compositions for the Hilltown Ensemble with selected works being performed as part of the concert programme. There will also be a call for audio works inviting artists and composers to submit a short audio work to be included as part of a listening room during the Hilltown New Music Festival in July 2012.

The Arts Council and Westmeath County Council sponsor the festival. For further information and bookings please visit the festival website www.hilltown.ie or email contact@hilltown.ie **M**

Hilltown New Music Festival will take place in the beautiful and picturesque



Tullynally Castle – a perfect setting for *Midsummer Night's Dream*

The Quantum Theatre group will be making a welcome return to Tullynally Castle Gardens (just outside Castlepollard) on August 10 with their musical version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, specially adapted for family audiences.

The performance starts at 6pm and lasts just under 2 hours with a 20 minute interval and takes place in the terraced lawns directly in front of the castle, which have spectacular views of the parkland and woods beyond.

The audience is welcome to bring picnics, rugs and cushions and take time to explore other parts of the gardens before or after the performance. Children will enjoy the family of llamas in the walled kitchen gardens and the ducks and swans on the two ornamental lakes.

There will also be drinks and refreshments available in the castle tearoom.

First written as an entertainment for a grand Elizabethan wedding in 1594, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is probably the most versatile and enduringly popular of Shakespeare's plays. It has been played in turn as a masque, pantomime, slapstick comedy, burlesque opera, film, ballet and straight musical.

Probably the most classic rendering was Peter Hall's film in 1968 starring Helen Mirren and Judi Dench famous for its fairies in green body paint. More recently, Elvis Costello composed the

music for a full length ballet, *Il Sogno*.

The plot is really a series of three plots elaborately intertwined and any attempt to summarise might run to several pages; so, it is best to say only that the play's setting is an enchanted forest outside Athens where the fairies, led by Puck and directed by their King, Oberon, bewitch in turn the fairy queen Titania, two young courting Athenian couples and a company of 'rude mechanicals' or yokels brought in to perform a play at a local wedding.

The Quantum Theatre group has been specialising in adapting classic stories and plays for children for more than a decade and Director Hugh Whitmore has made this fast paced production both easy to follow and hugely enjoyable.

Six energetic actors undertake all the roles, combining slapstick, conjuring tricks and music without in the least debasing Shakespeare's play.

There is an hilarious handbagging scene between the two heroines, Hermione and Helena. Cunning staging allows the actors to disappear in trunks and craftily chosen snippets



of pop music offer a neat commentary on the ongoing action.

Pride of place goes, as it often does, to the hapless 'mechanicals' - Peter Quince, Bottom and Snug - ineptly struggling to perform 'the play within the play' about two star-crossed lovers Pyramis and Thisbe. Even the wall between Pyramis and Thisbe gets its own speaking part!

Quantum Theatre claims it can keep going even if it rains so don't forget to bring your umbrella.

Tickets, including entry to gardens cost €10 per adult, €5 per child or a family ticket (for 4) costs €25. Reservations can be made at tullynallycastle@eircom.net or by paying at the garden entrance gates from 2pm on August 10. **M**

Briefs

What do you want from the Arts into the future? Have your say...

Laois County Council is in the process of preparing a new five year Arts Plan for 2013-2017 and has issued an open invitation for people to get involved in the planning process by coming forward with their ideas, comments, and observations.

The Arts in Laois has flourished and grown in confidence during the term of the last plan 2006-2011. New arts venues have opened including The Arthouse Studios in Stradbally and new Art Galleries within the Libraries in Abbeyleix, Mountmellick and Stradbally.

Other highlights include the development of the Laois School of Music and Laois' selection for Music Generation Round 2 Funding 2012-2014. The challenges that face all aspects of the arts at this time is something that needs to be addressed as a collective, with confidence that we will sustain and build on our achievements.

Everyone is welcome to have their views heard in this important process of arts planning for the next five years.

Submissions will be considered up to 31 May. A consultation meeting will be held on Monday 18th June at 6.30pm in the Arthouse & Library, Stradbally to discuss the proposed plan and take feedback. The plan will be published in the Autumn, 2012. Submissions to be considered for Laois Arts Plan 2013-2017 can be emailed to: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or posted to the Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois on or before Friday, May 4.

M

Spring is everywhere and a visit to the President is blooming

A few words from wordsmith Jean O'Brien

The Look

You have to catch the looks, the small similarities, hints and winks before they grow too old to remember the souls they brought with them from beyond. We have all been hooded when our eyes lock with those of our newborn.

We are in a petrol station, delayed, our three year old is strapped in the back with all the days' paraphernalia; car seat, drinking cup, the baby rucksack, suddenly in the tone and timbre of my father's voice. "Thank God we're going, I though we'd be here all ruddy day". Started we turned wondering if imagination was at play, but no, the two of us had heard his voice almost three years to the day he died. We recognised his impatient tone out of the mouth of our baby.

This caused us to think of how many other souls were lying easy in that young breast, soothed by the rhythm of her growing. Now in her turbulent teens sometimes we glance at each other and one of us will say it again and smile for lost souls, lived years and maybe for just a moment pause and wonder if we too will hitch a ride into a future unknowable.

Spring is everywhere. From the pink blossoms on my cherry tree to the newborn lambs gamboling in the field at the top of the lane, it is, as is said, bursting out all over. Time to start looking up the many literature festivals approaching, time to contemplate a visit to the beautiful and inspiring artist's retreat of Annamakerrig.

Myself and poets Noel Monaghan and Nula Ni Chonchair, along with our respective county librarians in the midlands, are involved in a new initiative called *Midlands Poetry For Pleasure*, which is designed to encourage secondary school children to get involved in both reading and writing poetry.

Poetry is a subject close to the heart of our new president Michael D Higgins who has invited the group of children, teacher, librarians and poets involved to the Aras to meet with him.

My new collection *Merman* is still in the offing and although the publishing date is not yet set in stone, it will hopefully be around May. I have seen mock-ups of the cover which incorporates a wonderful drawing by Laois based Cork artist Ray Murphy and am looking forward to seeing it on the bookshelves.

Together with other poets including Mary O'Donnell, I recently read in the Centre for Creative Practices in conjunction with the Polish Embassy to commemorate their Nobel Prize winning poet Wislawa Szymborska who died this year.

I will leave the last word on poetry to her: "It's small, but it flies on mighty wings". **M**



LATIN DRAMA IN NORTH LONGFORD

By Majella Reid

In 1946 a drama group called **The Carnation Players** was born in the north Longford village of Dromard. For the following 20 years to 1966 these amateur actors delivered a wide array of comedy and drama to the north Longford community and beyond. Among these was community man, the late Pearse Daly.

“Pearse was involved in the original group and he would have directed and acted in many of their productions. It was perhaps inevitable that another group would one day be formed in their place,” said Chris Donohoe, Dromard.

In January 2010, the Latin School Players was born following a meeting in the Latin School Community Centre, Moynes.

“People have said that it’s great for the parish to have a drama group,” said Chris, Chairperson of the Latin School Players.

Named after the Latin School, which has been the local community centre

since 1984, this drama group aims to be all encompassing, reaching out to interested individuals in communities further afield than Dromard.

“We are on the border of Cavan and Leitrim also, so we get a lot of support from those areas too,” said Chris.

In their first year (May 2010), the group delivered two one act plays.

“Our maiden voyage was *Murder Play* and *None the Wiser*,” she said. “In 2011 we put on the *Wake in the West*, a widely acclaimed comedy by Michael J Ginnelly and that proved so popular we had to put on an extra show.”

This year the Latin School Players are staying with their winning comedy

formula. “We’re sticking with comedy. In times like this people need a little light entertainment!”

This year the drama group chose another Michael J Ginnelly comedy, *Pretend Sick*, directed by Arva, County Cavan man, Jim Williamson.

“Jim has been involved for the past 30 years with drama and groups including the Cornmill, Beez Neez and ourselves. He has studied both with Michael Chekov and Stanislavski methods of performing and directing under Jorg Andress (Berlin) and David Scott (Sydney and Dublin). He also writes reports on the All Ireland Drama Finals in Athlone,” added Chris.

The play, which took to the stage at the end of March, revolved around Katie, a manipulative and cunning mother of Seán and Mary. Katie pretends to be sick to keep Mary at home.

“Mary is dominated by her mother, and Seán, while molly-coddled by Katie, is rough, greedy and selfish. Martin has been courting Mary for 10 years but is afraid to leave his own mother. Everything changes when Matt, the English tourist, arrives on the scene,” said Chris.

The 11 cast members were Chris Donohoe (Katie); Margaret Dunne (Mary); James Grimes (Seán); Seán Conefrey (Matt); Ray Murphy (Martin); Lorna Hourican (Tracey); John Duffy (Jack); Francis Gray (Joe); Eddie Ward (Mick); Annette Hamilton (Marian) and Jacinta Brady (Samantha). **M**

Laois School of Music applies for European Union Funding

Laois School of Music has joined forces with Tallaght Community Arts to make an application for funding under the European Union’s Leonardo programme.

The Leonardo programme is part of an initiative by the EU to support Life Long Learning. This programme is specifically targeted at the Vocational Educational and Training Sector and its relationship with the world of work.

The title of the Laois School of Music application is *Preparing for Success in Music* and should the group be successful in its application it will receive funds to work with up to six other partners around Europe. Potential partners include the UK, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Italy and Turkey.

The programme encourages organisations from around Europe to visit each other’s countries over a two year period and work together on delivering an agreed programme of work which will be of benefit in the future to the Vocational Sector.

The proposed programme of work includes exploring both the music and the non-music skills which are necessary for a successful career in music.

Music skills include proficiency on one’s chosen instrument, ability to read music, vocal technique and so on while non-music skills include personal management, familiarity with information technology, basic business and marketing skills and the like.

The group intends to develop a self-coaching toolbox which will enable musicians to determine their degree of proficiency in a range of skills/competencies.

Depending on the outcome of the assessment there will be a suggested programme of work or direction towards helpful resources to make good any identified deficiencies as well as the development of teaching modules to compliment the toolbox. Laois School of Music is a successful music college established by the Arts Office, Laois County Council in 2001, in partnership with Laois VEC and The Arts Council. It caters for instruments of all levels and pupils of all ages, with some 10 per cent of the student body being adult pupils.

Tallaght Community Arts, which has teamed up with Laois School of Music to apply for the funding, is a pro-active arts development organisation working with professional artists, local

communities, schools and youth groups to activate arts programmes in line with the needs of the wider Tallaght community - geographically, culturally and socially. **M**



The AOIFE Carlton Best of Festivals Marketing Awards were announced recently with *Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival* winning Best Festival Photograph, taken by Emma Nee Haslam. The 44th annual *Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival* takes place from August 3-10, 2012 with planning for the arts programme currently underway. Festival Programme Co-ordinator, Michelle de Forge said she was looking forward to a diverse programme: “The Festival, which provides exposure for artists practicing in the county – actors, filmmakers, dancers, musicians, performers, visual artists - has grown an audience for contemporary art as well as more traditional forms, aiming to offer as wide a range as possible for artists and audiences alike.” See www.birrvintageweek.com or follow on Facebook.

Singing her way into the history books

By Majella Reid

Before Emer Barry could speak she was able to sing.

Her parents, John (RIP) and Imelda, of Longford town, saw their daughter's potential and nurtured her vocal development.

"I was really shy as a kid and I remember Sr Peggy in Scoil Mhuire making me sing. After that I sang at various school events," said Emer, who divides her time between Dublin and London.

Although she showed exceptional talent in singing, her parents encouraged her to pursue a wider degree and not to "put all my eggs in the one basket". "They persuaded me to do an Arts degree in UCD. I took Italian and music as my subjects and I then went on to do a Masters in Music Performance from the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama."

Then in 2011 she received the opportunity of a lifetime. She was invited to attend the Opera Works programme with the English National Opera (ENO). Only 20 participants are invited onto the prestigious programme each year and Emer is the only Irish person in the 2011/2012 programme. The programme will conclude with a showcase in May 2012 - an event where Emer will have the opportunity to show her talent to some of the biggest names and agents in the world of Opera. "I'm travelling a lot at the moment between London and Dublin, but it's worth it," she said. "It's an amazing opportunity."

Emer added: "I specialised in Opera because the music is absolutely beautiful. I wanted to be able to do anything that I wanted to do with my voice," explained Emer who also teaches Opera and individual singing lessons at the Walton School of Music Dublin. "Opera training is incredible. You learn how to stretch your instrument (voice) to the absolute limit. Now I'm able to sing Opera and other forms of music. The training makes me quite versatile."

Emer has already performed extensively throughout Ireland and abroad as a soloist on both the concert platform and as guest soprano with choral societies and orchestras and is a regular soloist at the National Concert Hall and has performed as guest soprano with leading Irish composer and singer Liam Lawton.

Her Operatic roles include Fulvia in Rossini's *La Pietra del Paragone*, Nedda in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Susanna in Mozart's *La Nozze di Figaro* and First Lady in *The Magic Flute*. Her favourite role, however, was Serpina in Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*.

"This Opera is a parody on a maid who wants to marry her employer. She plays tricks to make him fall in-love with her. Serpina really is an energetic character. There is so much drama and comedy in this work," she said.

In terms of her own influences, Emer's first love is Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007). "He is quite inspiring for




someone like me. His work shows the potential of the voice, which is so incredible. He was all about technique."

A Celtic Rose

In addition to Opera Emer is also a member of Celtic Rose, a group that plays an eclectic mix of classical, rock, pop, traditional Irish and jazz. The other members of the trio are Aisling Ennis (Harp, Dublin) and Mary McCague (Violin, Dundalk).

"Our style is Celtic, classical and contemporary...We specialise in taking contemporary music and putting a classical twist on it. We try to fuse different styles together."

Celtic Rose is currently recording its first CD which the group hopes will be available by the end of the year and featuring *One Day Like This* by English rock band, Elbow. "We have a music video on YouTube where we perform this song," she said.

Emer's website is available at www.emerbarry.com 

Briefs

ATTENTION ALL THIEVES

A POEM BY Anne Maher

I am away for the weekend
The house is empty
There's no need to break-in.
There's no telephone, no mobile
phone,
No television or d.v.d
No radio, no laptop,
No hidden cash whatsoever.

The alarm system is banjaxed
There's no expensive camera,
No heirloom jewellery,
No Newbridge Cutlery,
No Waterford Cut-Glass,
Nothing!

The hypersensitive dusk till dawn
Lighting system is on the blink.
There's no car in the driveway,
No bicycle in the shed,
No ride-on lawnmower in the garage,
No tools or building supplies lying
about
Nothing at all!

Attention all sticky-fingers,
I am away for the weekend
Ignore the yard signs and window
stickers
You can access the key under the
doormat.
Thank-you very much for your co-
operation,
There's absolutely no need to
break-in.....

.....A-G-A-I-N!

Anne Maher (c) Derymore, Killucan, Co Westmeath. 

Portlaoise Quilters receive award from President

The Knockmay Women's Voice Quilting Project was awarded an AONTAS STAR Award in Leinster from President Michael D Higgins at a special ceremony at the Burlington Hotel, Dublin.

This project focused on regeneration of a local authority estate in Portlaoise through a local women's group. Women living in the estate came together and created a quilt, 11 foot by 13 foot in size and consisting of 11 'patches' on which each of the women put their own unique stamp.

The quilt expresses the experience and hopes of women living on the estate and was created while a new resource centre was being built. The award was made on the basis of the variety of skills and learning which the women experienced as they created the quilt. The project brought with it other benefits as, throughout the experience, the women developed their confidence as well as skills such as time management, teamwork and planning - all of which have enhanced their involvement and participation in the community. One of the women involved said: "This is the first time in my life that I've ever finished anything."

Funding for the initiative was secured from the 2010 Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion as well as The Department of Social Protection. Speaking at the awards, President Higgins said: "We know that career and indeed other opportunities are often determined by the level of educational attainment we achieve. For some the lifelong learning journey has been a natural progression through primary and second level and onwards but for others that experience may have been very different and the path of re-engagement with the world of education may seem daunting and uncertain.


"Many of the groups nominated for the awards today have done wonderful work within communities in helping others with previously low levels of education to resume the journey." This is the sixth year that AONTAS has organised the STAR Awards, which recognise the achievements of outstanding adult



education initiatives throughout the country. "For many adults around the country who are feeling disillusioned in these difficult times, adult education is offering them a second chance," explained a spokesperson.

The Judging Panel for the STAR Awards this year brought together a number of experts in adult and community education.

Speaking on behalf of the Judges, Claire Byrne from the NQAI said: "The winning projects demonstrated a high level of collaboration, imagination, entrepreneurial spirit and actively involved learners themselves."

For more information contact Niamh Farren AONTAS Communications' Officer on **01 406 8220** or **087 911 0569** or see www.adultlearnersfestival.com 

Áras an Mhuilinn, Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann Midlands Regional Centre open to all

Busy summer ahead as public invited to join in the music and the fun at Aras an Mhuilinn.

Áras an Mhuilinn is the Regional Resource Centre for the counties of Westmeath, Longford, Offaly, and Laois. The centre, recently established by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and Meitheal Lárúire, is a state-of-the-art cultural facility in which traditional music, song, dance and Irish language classes are run on a weekly basis.

Seisiún take place in the bar on the third Wednesday of every month. Seisiún summer shows will take place each Wednesday on a weekly basis from July 4 until end of August.

Facilities at Áras an Mhuilinn include three classrooms, meeting room, performance hall, bar and reception area.

A variety of events have been hosted in the performance hall and bar including concerts, ceili, seminars, table quizzes, meetings, set dance and sean nós dance classes. The Performance Hall seats approximately 90 people. The facilities are also available to all community groups and to the public in general. Music classes are hosted by Mullingar CCE.

In the archive section there is a wonderful resource centre of Irish traditional music, song, dance and folklore relating to Meitheal region of Westmeath, Longford,

Laois and Offaly. The archive material exists in the form of sound recordings and printed material and people are welcome to browse through the collection.

Áras an Mhuilinn also incorporates a display area for the sale of CDs of traditional music, books and other items representing traditional culture and everyone is invited to come along and have a cupán tae, read a magazine or listen to some traditional music.

A little bit of history: Mullingar - where it all began!

It happened, that in January 1951, representatives of the Thomas Street (Dublin) Pipers' Club went to Mullingar for a meeting with traditional music enthusiasts from County Westmeath (Cáit Uí Mhuimhneacháin, Willie Reynolds and Jim Seery, among others)

Two ideas already muted amongst traditional musicians were discussed at this meeting - the first was the founding of an organisation to promote Irish traditional music while the second was the organising of an annual festival of Irish traditional music, song and dance.

The very first Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

A further meeting was held in February 1951, and at this meeting it was decided

that, in conjunction with Feis Lár na hÉireann (a Gaelic League Feis which had been held in Mullingar for many years), a Fleadh Cheoil would be organised in Mullingar in May over the Whit weekend. The aim of the Fleadh was to promote traditional music and to arrest the decline in its popularity and the cream of traditional Irish musicians attending the Fleadh played a major role in furthering its aim.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is founded

On October 14, 1951, at Árus Ceannt, Thomas Street, Dublin, the first standing Committee of Cumann Ceoltóirí na hÉireann was elected. At a meeting in St Mary's Hall, Mullingar on January 6, 1952, the title of the organisation was changed from Cumann Ceoltóirí na hÉireann to Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

From this point on Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann grew from strength to strength to become a great annual national festival attended by traditional musicians, singers, and dancers from all parts of Ireland and overseas.



Pictured enjoying traditional music in the bar of Áras an Mhuilinn are Ber Seery, Paddy and Moira O'Brien and Seamas Seery Chairman of Westmeath CCE



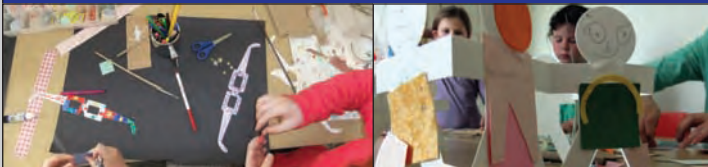
Andy Flood, Enda Seery, Ciarán Seery and Leona Kelly play a monthly seisiún which takes place on the third Wednesday of the month at Áras an Mhuilinn

Dates for your Diary:

- Seisiún at Áras an Mhuilinn: the third Wednesday of every month at 9pm
- Longford & Offaly Joint County Fleadh: Friday, May 11, Saturday, May 12 and Sunday, May 13 in Ballinalree
- Laois County Fleadh: Saturday, May 19 and Sunday May 20 in Clonslee
- Westmeath County Fleadh: Saturday, June 2 and Sunday, June 3 in Ballymore
- Weekly Summer seisiún, Áras an Mhuilinn: starts July 4 until end of August
- Leinster Fleadh: Friday, July 13, Saturday, July 14, Sunday, July 15, Enniscorthy

For information on traditional Irish music, song, dance and language classes and special events contact Áras an Mhuilinn, Jail Hill, Mullingar, County Westmeath by phone on **044 9344673/9330644** or at email eolas@arasanmhuilinn.ie **M**

SUMMER ARTS PROGRAMME 2012



The Arts Office, Laois County Council will run a series of art workshops for children and young people as part of the 2012 Summer Arts Programme.

Projects are selected from proposals designed and submitted by a panel of artists. The aim of the programme is to inspire imagination and self-expression with a world of hands-on art activities. Through painting, sculpture, dance, music, drawing, pottery, dramatic play, creative writing, songwriting, performance and much more, our classes encourage confidence and support artistic potential.

This quality arts programme will run in the month of July for two hours from Monday to Friday. Weekly courses cost €25 with a reduction for family members. Age ranges from 7 to 15 years and can cater for up to 20, according to the type of arts activity.

Locations in 2012 will include Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Durrow, Stradbally, Emo, and Luggacurran.

For more information on the programme or to receive a booking for/ brochure please contact: **The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co. Laois Tel: 057 8674342/41 Fax 057 8674382 Email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie**

Award-winning Laois author examines reactive nationalism

Slouching towards Jerusalem is a unique contribution to comparative literature - Irish, Israeli, and Palestinian - that deals with the under-researched phenomenon of reactive nationalism - emotional rather than ideological nationalism.

In fact, it is the only comparative study of its kind involving the three literatures reflecting its author's long term engagement with two arenas of conflict: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Northern Irish conflict.

The book surveys these through the eyes of contemporary novelists from both arenas.

Slouching towards Jerusalem's selection is wide and varied and includes both lesser known and emergent novelists.

Author John Maher is a prizewinning novelist himself who uses various prisms - of language, land, religion, love, war, and the changing image of

the enemy - in his quest for insight into the realities behind the novelists' portrayals of their situations. His conclusions are iconoclastic and challenging as befits such a unique journey into the three contrasting contemporary literatures.

John, an award-winning writer based in Laois, has won the Francis McManus Award and the PJ O'Connor Award with RTE. His novel, *The Luck Penny*, was shortlisted for debut novel on BBC Radio 5 and he is currently completing a new novel with an Arts Council Bursary in Literature. **M**



Movie filmed in Offaly makes history in Cannes



A sleepwalker. A body. A family. A small community. Arlene is like a ghost in her life.

She lives in a small town in the midlands – surrounded by field after field, woodlands and lane ways to disappear down and never come back... One morning Arlene wakes in the woods beside the body of a young woman. Someone watches from the trees. The body is soon discovered and suspicion spreads through the community. Increasingly drawn to the girl's family – her grieving sister and accused boyfriend, Arlene barricades herself in at night, afraid to sleep. Haunted by grief, Arlene's sleeping and waking realities soon blur. And all this time someone is watching her...

The *Other Side of Sleep*, which was filmed over four weeks in Offaly in April

2010 and included many local cast and crew in the making of the film and with the help and support of FilmOffaly, has received some rave reviews.

The Other Side of Sleep has gone on to be lauded as the acclaimed debut feature by Irish filmmaker Rebecca Daly that features a powerful and compelling performance from Antonia Campbell-Hughes, one of this year's Berlin International Film Festival's Shooting Stars award recipients.

This hotly-anticipated suspense drama made history at its World Premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011 as it was the first film directed by an Irish woman to be selected for inclusion in the Festival.

The film, produced by Fastnet Films, also screened in competition at the Toronto International Film Festival and

was nominated for Best Director and Best Actress at the Irish Film and Television Awards.

The film took only six weeks to shoot, (in Geashill, Clara, Tullamore and Portarlington) but results in an exceptionally still and haunting film, choosing locations that offer Offaly in a new light and, in particular, the tunnel-like driveway of trees in Geashill.

Leading a fantastic ensemble cast in *The Other Side of Sleep*, as well as being named one of Berlin International Film Festival's Shooting Stars, Antonia Campbell-Hughes' career is at a high point. Other key cast members include two veteran Irish actresses of stage and screen, Olwen Fouere and Cathy Belton as well as hot newcomer and Tullamore native Sam Keeley who has gone on to star in *RAW* and *What Richard Did*.

MullingART brings splash of colour to town for third year

Now in its third year, The MullingART Project will again be subtly adorning the shop windows of Mullingar Town bringing a welcome splash of colour for a few weeks over the summer.

"The real joy of MullingART for me," said Project Co-ordinator, Don Mortell "is that it isn't in your face. It's a gentle celebration of the incredible wealth of talent in Mullingar that largely goes unrecognised."

He explained: "The principle of the project is a simple but incredibly successful one. We ask local creative talents to provide a piece or two of their work from whichever discipline they choose. Photography, oils, watercolour, sculpture, the only limit is that of the artists imagination.

"The pieces, once assembled together, are then distributed to business premises throughout the town to be displayed in shop windows, pub and business walls, anywhere that the public, be they locals or visitors to our town can see and enjoy them for the duration of the project. Ultimately it is, in effect a 24/7 people's art gallery.

"To my knowledge, our project is unique in Ireland and by definition, 'uniquely Mullingar'."

At the end of the project the submitted pieces are collected together and displayed in one static exhibition. Last year the gallery was situated in Danny Byrnes' old nightclub space.

"It was through the generosity of Mark and the staff of Danny Byrnes pub that we acquired this perfect space for our gallery last year. Other than a generous grant from Westmeath County Council Arts Department, our greatest asset, as a project, is goodwill.

"MullingART exists only because of the belief placed in us by Catherine Kelly (Arts Officer of Westmeath County Council) and the kindness and positive of the town's artists and business owners and operators. Without any of these vital components, MullingART would not be the success it is becoming and indeed, may not exist at all."

Don went on to say: "MullingART is not about generating money. Its



sole purpose is to bring a touch of pleasure and enjoyment to the town and its visitors while promoting the incredible amount of talent that exists in Mullingar which perhaps otherwise would never get the exposure, recognition or adulation it so richly deserves.

"With each year that passes, I am consistently impressed at the quality and variety of pieces submitted. The pleasure for me is that while a number of MullingART artists are professionally trained and are selling their work outside of the project, the vast majority of contributors are enthusiastic hobby artists and nothing gives me greater pleasure than hearing that one of our artists is surprised and delighted at selling a piece or pieces as a result of the project.

"All pieces are displayed with an individual "exhibit card" which carries the artists contact details. Any potential sales negotiations or commissions are discussed directly with the artist. MullingART merely acts as a conduit to make this possible".

Last year's MullingART saw nearly 150 pieces submitted and wants to see more in 2012, not only from Irish artists but from other communities who live in Mullingar.

"I would love to see more submissions from other Mullingar communities and groups. This project is totally inclusive. I want to hear from the African, Eastern European, Traveller, Asian and British communities or any other groups who would like to display their work. The project is not about work being judged. It is about making something special happen as a town. I would love to see the different styles and perceptions of art that these groups can bring to our project," added Don.

MullingART 2012 will take place over July and August. It will be supported by an extensive local media campaign, a website and Facebook page.

For more information, please contact Don on **087 611 6883** or email donmortell@gmail.com

Briefs

MAY/JUNE LINE-UP AT THE DUNAMAISE ARTS CENTRE

As ever, there is a very eclectic mix of performances at the Dunamaise Arts Centre throughout May and June with theatre and music to the fore.



Two very well known faces lead the charge: Gay Byrne comes to the theatre on Thursday, May 17 for what is certain to be a unique event and Des Keogh returns with the hilarious show based on JB Keane stories **The Love Hungry Farmer**.

In June, there is a new theatre show entitled **Love All**, which tells the amazing true story of the only Irish person to feature in the Wimbledon tennis final.

Other performances include a Riverdance style musical/dance extravaganza **Celtic Dream** on May 31 and a much-anticipated performance by local tenor **Ambrose Dunne** on June 23.

The Dunamaise film programme is always worth a look and this season is no exception.



Films lined up for screening include the big Oscar winner **The Artist**; the acclaimed **My Week with Marilyn**, featuring an Oscar nominated performance by Michelle Williams; the much anticipated Irish made movie featuring Martin Sheen, **Stella Days** and **This Must Be the Place**, a film partly filmed in Dublin featuring Sean Penn, Frances McDormand and Eve Hewson.

Also one to look forward to is an adaption of the great Yasmina Reza play **God of Carnage** featuring an all-star cast of Jodie Foster, Kate Winslet, Christoph Waltz and John C Reilly and directed by Roman Polanski. **God of Carnage** is set in a New York apartment and observes the increasingly childish and chaotic behaviour of two couples that meet to sort out a playground row between their sons. Also not to be missed is Madonna's debut as a film director with the story of Wallis Simpson and Edward VIII in **W/E**.

Full details on all the performances and screenings are available on www.dunamaise.ie

Director of Dunamaise Arts Centre praised for contribution
SEE PAGE 29

Education for all through the stained-glass window

By Majella Reid

Education as a basic human right was the theme adopted by a group of 16 teenagers from second year at Lanesboro Community College who came together to create a 20 by 10 foot stained-glass window under the guidance of teacher Michelle Spence.

"It started with a talk by Amnesty International who visited us here in Lanesboro Community College. The visitor talked to us about human rights," said Ms Spence, a teacher at the school for the past seven years. "It was also the 50th anniversary of the school's opening so we decided to focus on education as a human right," she added.

The students started the project by sketching symbols such as the scales of justice, a kite to represent freedom, and a tree - the central point of the stained glass window representing growth.

"We also included the River Shannon; that's where the roots of the tree grow from," said Ms Spence, a teacher of art, art history and photography. "We then had a professional stained-glass artist come in to the school and she taught us how to cut glass. We made a giant template on paper first of how we wanted it to be and then we cut the glass into the proper measurements."

For most of the students, this was their first time working with stained-glass techniques.

"They were very enthusiastic and they really were great. I thought, because they were so young, that they wouldn't have the length of attention to complete it. But they did great, all their names are etched into the glass," added Ms Spence.

The stained-glass window, which consists of 12 large panels of glass was framed by woodwork teacher Brian Concannon. "He made all the frames so that it would fit into the window," said Ms Spence. The window now proudly adorns the assembly hall at the school covered in layer of perspex for protection.

Each year Amnesty International holds an exhibition, and this year the group at Lanesboro Community College were invited to participate in the Dublin event. They brought their sketches with them to display. "They all loved it and they are now all really proud," said Ms Spence.

The second-year students are not the only members of Lanesboro Community College to have an interest in the arts. Leaving Certificate students recently completed the school's first ever art-only tour to Paris, France. Ms Spence said: "We visited places such as the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, Versailles and Centre George Pompidou. In celebration of their visit, the class are going to make a large-scale Mona Lisa for the assembly hall." **M**



Youth Work Ireland Laois offers variety of programmes

By Aishling Hennessy, Youth Arts Worker

Our organisation has worked tirelessly to promote and support the arts within the youth community in Portlaoise and throughout Laois.

And, our Arts focus over the last year has increased greatly due to our committed Youth Arts Worker, Aishling Hennessy, Youth Worker; Sarah Corcoran, Office Co-ordinator; Nicola Coss, Project Manager; Joe Thompson and all our dedicated volunteers and the young people we work with.

2011 saw Youth Work Ireland Laois focus its attention to developing and supporting new Youth Cafe's/Centres (Abbeyleix, Stradbally and Portlaoise) and several Youth Clubs Youth across the county.

Throughout 2011 arts, in particular, became one of the most obvious avenues that young people through Laois connected with us. From the Graffiti Wall in Portarlinton which saw young people from Portarlinton Youth Club work over a week long period to create a mural demonstrating their view of youth culture in the area to African Drumming workshops in Abbeyleix Youth Cafe which saw young people participating in the exploration of drumming and musical instrument making, Youth Arts in the County is vibrant and strong.

Graffiti art

The Graffiti wall that was created last year in O'Moore's Place in Portlaoise proved to be a piece of art demonstrating the young people of the area's interests in youth culture, focusing on the positive aspects that the youth bring to a community. This Graffiti programme that was co funded by Laois Partnership.

Photography workshops

In October 2011 Youth Work Ireland Laois worked alongside local Photographer John Lalor to facilitate photography workshops over a series of eight weeks. This project was also funded by Laois Partnership and was ran in Kiln Lane Community Centre in Mountrath and we hope to continue with these popular photography workshops in the future.

Music Programme

The beginning of 2012 saw a great energy towards the Irish Youth Music Awards. This Music Programme that began in 2009, run through Youth Work Ireland Laois, provides young people with the opportunity to explore their musical talents and interests in a very structured programme.

The aim of the music programme is to help young people develop their skills within their own view of the music industry and to get an impression and experience of what it takes to make it in the business.

In 2010, Youth Work Ireland Laois' representatives Bebop and Rocksteady were honoured with winning the IYMAs which gave Laois youth music an amazing platform for all young people to aspire too and this programme goes from strength to strength.

Then, in March this year, the band MTBA were crowned the Laois representatives to go forward to represent the county in the National Finals in Liberty Hall in Dublin in April. MTBA is a Portlaoise based band comprised of Gary Maher on vocals, Shaun Costello and John Delaney on guitars, Robert Brennan on drums, and Stephen Kehoe on bass.

Summer 2012

Commencing in the summer 2012 Youth Work Ireland Laois will be launching many arts and music programmes and activities from its exciting new youth cafe in Portlaoise. The Portlaoise Youth Cafe will be an integrated, inclusive and accessible safe space for all young people of the county. The Portlaoise Youth Cafe will be utilised to its full capacity for such purposes as live music performances, art, dance, drama, yoga, exhibitions, training, club, information group, volunteer, parent and public meetings or for simply for 'chillaxing'. There will be more information about the grand opening to the new Youth Cafe over the coming months.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer with us, curious as to what is we do or interested in upcoming events, please call 057 8665010 or email info@ywilaois.ie **M**



Walshestown Art Group celebrates decade of creativity

On Tuesday, February 19, 2002 the Walshestown Art group was founded in Walshestown Community Centre by seven ladies and went on to reach 24 members. Classes commenced on February 26 and have continued with different media and interests since to bring the group to its 10th Anniversary.

Funding is received from Westmeath County Council Art Acts Grants and Westmeath VEC ALCES grants where a

minimum of 50 per cent is paid on tutor's fees, insurance, rental of centre and some materials. On receipt of funding, accounts and register are kept up to date. With the help of the VEC some members took part in a FETAC Level 5 Painting VTOS course.

In 2003 the group exhibited paintings at the Mullingar Show and since has promoted art in Westmeath at the show

with various media such as water colour, acrylic, pastel, drawing, card making, jewellery making, origami, slate painting, an introduction to interior design, monoprinting, flower arranging and stained glass.

In 2007 the group then attended the first Cathaoirleach Awards, exhibited in Walshestown Community Centre, the Greville Arms Hotel, Mullingar Show, MullingArt, Lakepoint and Heritage week.

Members of the group told *Midlands Art and Culture Magazine*: "We would like to continue as a group in our community and remember all our members both past and present in particular, a founding member, Olivia Geoghegan." **M**



Making musical magic in Granard

By Majella Reid

Last year a young Mullinalaghta lady was inspired to establish a music school in the County Longford town of Granard. Jackie Callaghan, 19, an avid music lover, identified a strong need for the development of music among younger ages within her native north Longford area.

And, so began the Rath Mhuire Music School which now meets weekly at the Rath Mhuire centre and the community hall.

Each week four teachers - Cian Farrelly, Laura Callaghan, Sinéad Sheridan and Jackie Callaghan - gather in the two Granard venues to teach a variety of instruments including whistle, flute, fiddle, banjo, guitar, keyboard and piano accordion.

A daughter of Séan and Lucy, Jackie started playing music when she was nine years old. Today she is a second-year student of Irish Music and Dance, a four-year degree programme at the University of Limerick.

"The response has been great to date. We're getting a lot of kids from around the local area and out as far as Mullahoran and Edgeworthstown," said Jackie, who plays piano and piano accordion.

Such is the success of the Rath Mhuire Music School that the teachers and students alike are hoping to broaden the range of instruments available to the children.

"It is hoped to provide a music instrument bank which will encourage children to take up other instruments and learn to play them," said Jackie who is also Youth Officer with the Joe Callaghan branch of Comhaltas.

Parents may, quite rightly, be concerned about which instrument to purchase for their children who are just starting out with music. There is always the possibility that the child may not keep up an interest in that instrument and may decide to play a different one altogether, explained Jackie.

"This is where the idea of a music instrument bank would be useful. With some funding it is hoped to purchase instruments for the school and then children could rent these instruments as trials until they are decided as to where their interest lies," said the 2010 All Ireland Champion in Piano Accordion.

She added: "We have also been encouraging families where there may have been some instruments handed down to bring them to the school with a view to selling them at a reasonable price."

It is hoped that a Rath Mhuire Music School concert will take place in late spring, the purpose of which is to raise funds for the music instrument bank.

In July 2011, Jackie and her fellow teachers organised the week-long Rath Mhuire Music Summer School where 50 students attended and were exposed to a wider variety of instruments than

during the ordinary weekly classes including the bodhrán, mandolin and button accordion. "It was split into two sections. One where we did games and music theory and the other where we learned to play the instruments," said Jackie who hopes to run the music school this summer also. She added: "I think a music school is good for kids because it gives them good discipline. They learn to respect one another and to develop and grow in confidence. It gives a basic music knowledge."

The classes, from children aged six to 16, begin at 7pm and last one hour. Each class costs €10 per child. There is a family discount whereby the cost is €8 per child if there is more than one family member taking part.

For further information about the Rath Mhuire Music School contact Rath Mhuire Resource Centre on **043 6686309**. [M](#)



Portlaoise Camera Club snap happy for more than a year

The Portlaoise Camera Club, formed by a group of enthusiastic photographers in February 2011, is now a very vibrant and active society.

As well as the workshops the members have organised many field trips and hosted their first exhibition and even have two winners in national individual photography competitions. Portlaoise Camera Club is aimed at people who are passionate about photography, whatever their skill level, and has built up a very active social networking page. The group meets in the Parish Centre every Wednesday evening from 8pm to 10pm. Check out portlaoisecameraclub.com or become a Facebook friend at www.facebook.com/PortlaoiseCameraClub [M](#)

Carl Cutland

Jane Boylan



MidlandsIreland.ie launches photography competition

MidlandsIreland.ie has launched a photography competition as part of its drive to promote the midland region as a vibrant location in which to live, visit, work, study and do business.

The competition runs from April to September and invites amateur photographers to **Capture the Uniqueness and Magic of Our Region** over the summer months from the many events that are planned in the region.

MidlandsIreland.ie hopes that the entries which capture the uniqueness

and magic of the four counties in the region, Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath will communicate a positive message to a global audience of the many attractions and benefits of the midlands as a vibrant location in which to live, visit, work, study and do business.

Entrants are asked to place their entries in one of four categories which are aligned to the four pillars which are promoted by the regional brand, Tourism, Living, Learning and Enterprise.

MidlandsIreland.ie has partnered with the Sheraton Athlone Hotel for the top prize of a luxurious weekend for two people. The prize, worth almost €600 also includes spa treatments.

The closing date is September 7 and winners will be announced in October and the overall winner, category winners and placed entries will form a touring exhibition which will be on display across the midlands.

Contact info@midlandsireland.ie for more details. [M](#)


MidlandsIreland.ie
gateway to living



Pictured at the launch of the MidlandsIreland.ie Photography Competition: Ms Ruth McNally, Director, Midland Regional Authority; Cllr Micheál Carrigy, Cathaoirleach, Midland Regional Authority; Ms Gemma Hynes, Sales & Marketing Manager, Sheraton Athlone Hotel and Mr Joe Kavanagh, Group Sales and Marketing Director, Hodson Bay Group.



The Mission Statement of Mullingar Town Band is: To Educate, Elevate and Entertain through the Art of Music.

Mullingar Town Band marching to success for generations

The Mullingar Town Band is a midlands-based marching and concert band located in the town of Mullingar in the heart of County Westmeath. While officially founded in the year 1879, as a Holy Family Confraternity Band, it can trace its roots as far back as the mid 1800s.

The local Military Barracks supplied many of the early members who themselves were serving members of the British Regimental bands stationed in Mullingar. Many of the members of these bands settled in the town, married locally and joined the band. The band remained under the auspices of the Confraternity until the 1940s when it was handed over to a committee who continued under the title of Mullingar Brass and Reed Band. And, so it remained until membership had dwindled to three or four members in 1957 when the present Director, Hubert Magee was asked to take the helm.

Hubert was only studying the clarinet for a year or so when landed with the task of holding the band together. In 1979 the

centenary was celebrated with a membership of over 100, thus realising the goal of one member for every year of the band's existence.

The Mullingar Town Band prides itself in its dual role of a marching band - The *Celtic Crusaders* - and a concert band. Both disciplines have won many top awards in Ireland, Northern Ireland and England. Music education is important to the Mullingar Town Band and therefore all of its members undergo at least one year of music lessons in a junior band class before entrance into the marching element of the band. As well as playing musicians, the band supports a dance corp/colour guard which perform as part of the marching element of the band. The Mullingar Town Band has travelled

nationally and internationally - to Europe and the Carolinas in the United States.

Including the junior bands, marching band and colour guard, the concert band and the committee, the Mullingar Town Band has more than 200 members involved in the organisation - and growing. With the band frequently catering for such a wide audience, the repertoire of Mullingar Town Band is varied including modern day popular chart music, jazz, blues, classical, traditional, spiritual, country and more.

The Mullingar Town Band, as a leading Irish marching and concert band, is constantly updating its repertoire, membership, style and education to its members and audiences. **M**



Our school orchestra reached the National Concert Hall!

By Ruth Henry and Serena Dempsey

The Sacred Heart School in Tullamore is the only all girls school in Offaly with an enrolment of over 700 students. It has a strong Music tradition and there are many opportunities for students to participate in music making through the various ensembles that exist in the school, from its award winning choirs, an orchestra, a traditional group and many chamber ensembles.

The school's dedicated music staff offer a comprehensive range of tuition in all instruments and each student involved in tuition takes a Royal Irish Academy of Music exam, appropriate to their level, at the end of the school year.

It has been an exciting musical journey since the school orchestra was set up in 1990 by its Director, Regina McCarthy. Over the years they have gone from strength to strength.

The present orchestra has almost 100 members ranging from first year to sixth year, which offers additional options for students taking the Junior and Leaving Cert Music practical's.

Many past pupils of the orchestra have followed professional music careers while some have been members of the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland.

The orchestra has won many awards at festivals throughout the country. In 2009 it was awarded the Dorothy Mayor Cup in Feis Ceoil. Recently the orchestra performed in concert with the Band of An Garda Síochána and in February this year they were selected to perform in the '17th Festival of Youth Orchestras', organised by the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras at the National Concert Hall in Dublin. This was a special achievement for the orchestra and school and was true recognition for all their hard work and commitment.

In February the Sacred Heart School Orchestra set off on an exciting journey to the National Concert Hall, an experience we would never forget. Excitement mounted as buses were loaded and uniforms packed. On arrival we were guided to the Carolan Suite by the friendly IAYO staff where preparations for morning rehearsal got underway.

Before we knew it, we were lining up backstage waiting for the concert to begin. We were the first of four orchestras to perform and now nerves were beginning to set in. After being welcomed on stage by a warm applause from the audience we began our repertoire with *The Waltz from Sleeping Beauty* by Tchaikovsky. This was followed with a traditional arrangement of 'an' Irish tune from County Derry' and the *Dance of the Tumblers* from the *Snow Maiden* by Rimsky Korsakov.

Providing contrast we performed *Autumn* and *Winter* from *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi. As we reached the final fortissimo chord of our last piece *The Dambusters March* by Eric Coates the audience rose to its feet.

We know we are very privileged to have been part of such a wonderful experience which will raise the bar and encourage us to play even more challenging repertoire in the future. **M**

Druid Art Group enjoys camaraderie for all levels

The **Druid Art Group** in Portlaoise has existed in its present form for six years although several members had met in an earlier group.

The group meets on Thursday evenings in the Methodist Church Hall and there are currently 14 regular attendees, several of whom have been attending for five years or longer.

The range of styles, like the level of experience and skill, varies widely. The group includes a highly skilled water-colourist who has taught painting professionally as well as self-taught hobbyists. All enjoy the challenge of applying paint to a surface in order to create meaningful visual images.

Landscapes, flowers, animals and abstract concepts all feature in this group's output which has been exhibited in the Methodist Hall in each of the last five years. Several works by members of the group will be on display in the gallery soon to be opened above Phyllis Clegg's craft shop, Rudai, in Portlaoise's Lower Main Street.

Asked what they most like about the group, members agreed that the friendly atmosphere and the readiness of individuals to help each other with advice, encouragement and the loan of materials all contributed to their enjoyment of Thursday evenings. **M**





There's something about Mary

By Majella Reid

Hearts and minds throughout the midlands have long been inspired by the creative words of Longford poet, Mary Melvin Geoghegan. With three collections to her name and a fourth to be published later this year, Ms Melvin Geoghegan is one of Longford's most prolific and highly regarded literary figures.

Award-winning poet Nuala Ní Chonchúir, is one of her many admirers. She has stated: "Melvin Geoghegan has an original use of language – she is gifted with imagery – and a unique approach to each of her subjects...Here is a poet who can magnify the smallest detail until it becomes as important to the reader as it is to her."

In the early 1990s, Mary joined the Longford Writers' Group and it was there that her poetic spark was ignited. Such was the Dublin-born writer's poetic evolution that within a few years she was delivering poetry workshops at schools throughout county Longford. The Writers in Schools Scheme with Poetry Ireland and Free the Butterfly are just two programmes through which Longford children were poetically nurtured.

Her success at delivering these workshops meant that in 2003 she could compile a collection of poetry from Longford children entitled *Ride Along Dear Grandma*.

In 2008, she was invited to take up a residency at Stonepark National School (NS). "Every child in the school wrote a poem. It was funded by Poetry Ireland and it (the resulting published work) was called *A Hand in the Future*," said Mary, who is quick to acknowledge the support of Stonepark's Eamon Brennan and Belinda McKeon.

Today Mary's work with children continues. As Regional Editor of Eurochild, she compiles a variety of

*I clean out the wardrobe.
Anything that's five years or more
not worn goes into the spare room.
But, not my father's shirt or jacket.
I search the pockets
for anything I'd missed and
in a corner an old plastic crucifix
severed from its beads.*

On Good Friday by Mary Melvin Geoghegan. This is one of over 60 poems that will feature in her latest collection of poems, *Say it like a paragraph*. The collection will be published by Bradshaw Books, Tigh Fíli, Cork, in autumn 2012.

poems from across the region for the project. Now in its tenth year, Eurochild is a project which gives children a voice.

"It might be the first opportunity that they are asked to write something out of the ordinary confines of the school day," said Mary. "Poetry helps people to connect back into themselves."

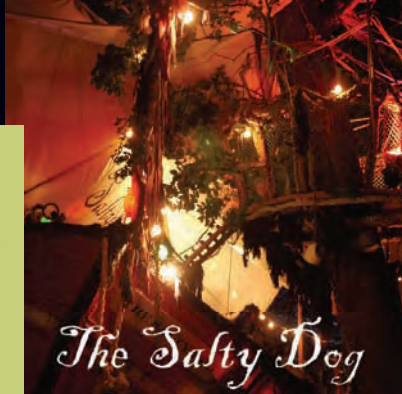
Mary's work has been widely published in publications such as *Crannóg* (2011), *Revival* (2011), *The Shop*, *The Stony Thursday Book* (2011) and *The Moth* (2012). In looking at her own influences, she tells me that she admires the work of poets such as Nuala Ní Chonchúir and Vona Groacke.

In her fourth collection *Say it like a Paragraph*, Mary looks at a new phase in her life, one which began with the passing of her father, Alfred Melvin. "I write whatever inspires me. I'm inspired by photographs in newspapers, anything that interests me really." She was encouraged to publish this collection of poems following a workshop with American poet, June Herstfield

She added: "Temperamentally I'm suited to poetry. I think in lines. I feel so fortunate...Poetry is like the expletive of the heart or the moment captured," she said.

But, despite all her success Mary has a practical view on life. "You are only as good as the next piece you write. It's never a given that it's going to be there," she said.

Mary lives in Abbeycartron, Longford. Her two children, Peter and Robbie, work in the United Kingdom. Peter writes as a journalist for a number of publications including *The Guardian*, *Sunday Business Post*, *Irish Times*, *Examiner* and the *Irish Independent*. Robbie is an English teacher in Glasgow. **M**



Salty Dog and the Electric Picnic

"In the murky shadows of the woods in Stradbally, an old friend peels a few leaves off his forehead and flicks a caterpillar from behind his ear, and recalls some distant promise to try harder... its the captain of the Salty Dog, stumbling into the lengthening Summer days with his flies undone and wondering how the winter was so effortlessly squandered", reads the official announcement for The Salty Dog Stage 2012...

The Salty Dog Stage has something of a reputation at the Electric Picnic—permanently dwelling on the naughty step of the full scale music festival up the road in Stradbally Hall in September. And rightly so, for it is a renegade 40-tonne French trawler, a shipwreck to you and I, which 'fell off the back of a lorry' in the woods in 2008 and declared itself open for business. It has become a well-liked stage at Electric Picnic, with over 30 bands performing on her decks over the three days, and countless revelers finding a second home under her non-judgmental bows.

Operated by Stradbally resident Hugo Jellett, who also runs Carlow Arts Festival (Eigse) and Charles Preston, 'the best tent guy in the business', the Salty Dog is one of the few stages which devotes itself almost entirely to Irish acts—although Seasick Steve and Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros have both performed recently

Polar Ice, a dry ice company from Portarlinton put on a foggy spectacular for the three days, and it runs until the sunlight cracks thought the early morning mist each morning and the last few revelers fall to their knees in exhaustion.

Jellett and Preston set about rounding up the fringes of society and giving them stage to play on. "Sea shanties from pub-tanned codgers, bluegrass at the whim of corn-nibblers down from the hills, blues solos from tinny-swilling double bassists with bockety eyes, and the occasional cracking set from a confused rock-star kidnapped from the main stage and spirited into the forest" as they put it.

Somehow it's fitting that in all the hullabaloo off giant Main Stages and international headline acts, the humblest, wittiest and best loved stage of them all is a permanent Stradbally resident. **M**



FESTIVAL REPUBLIC & POD presents **ELECTRIC PICNIC MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL**

STRADBALLY HALL, CO. LAOIS
Friday, August, 31,
Saturday, September 1,
Sunday, September 2, 2012

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

Over the last eight years Electric Picnic has established itself as a melting pot of fine music, art, comedy, spoken word and so much more. This year won't be any different...another infusion of colour, vibrancy, sparkle and mischief is on the way as we commence our countdown to Electric Picnic 2012 by revealing the first acts who will be bestowing the soundtrack in Stradbally over three days at the end of the summer.

THE CURE; **THE KILLERS**; **ELBOW**; **SIGUR RÓS**; **ORBITAL**; **HOT CHIP**; **THE XX**; **GRIZZLY BEAR**; **CHRISTY MOORE**; **THE ROOTS**; **GLEN HANSARD**; **METRONOMY**; **THE HORRORS**; **AZEAALIA BANKS**; **ROOTS MANUVA**; **BAT FOR LASHES**; **TINDERSTICKS**; **BELL X1**; **STAFF BENDA BILILI**; **MILAGRES**; **ED SHEERAN**; **ALABAMA SHAKES**; **CRANES**; **LITTLE ROY**; **LAND LOVERS**; **BAXTER DURY**; **JONATHAN WILSON**; **SOLAR BEARS**; **FATOUmata DIAWARA**; **WILLIS EARL BEAL**; **LANTERNS ON THE LAKE**

THE CURE will play a two hours plus set of songs drawn from all 14 of their studio albums - including tracks from their epic *Wish* album, celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2012. This will be **THE CURE**'s first ever appearance at Electric Picnic and is definitely not to be missed.

Electric Picnic goers will revel in the powerful anthems of **ELBOW** this year as they head to Stradbally. They have recently been given the honour of writing the BBC's Olympic theme. Throw those curtains wide, Elbow have arrived!

Other areas to be explored include **BODY AND SOUL**, **MINDFIELD**, **COMEDY TENT**, **THEATRE OF FOOD**, **GLOBAL GREEN**, **SOUL KIDS** and much more.....

"I'm really looking forward to this year's festival, particularly having **The Cure** on the lineup, a band we've been trying to get on the bill for 7 years." John Reynolds, POD

Further information about tickets is available at www.electricpicnic.ie



Paper Girls at Electric Picnic Launch



Collaborate? Pontificate? Man-I-Pulate?

UNIQUE TO OFFALY, MAN-I-PULATE IS A PERFORMATIVE INTERFACE, EMERGING IN A CURIOUSLY SPONTANEOUS MANNER FROM THE BOG BEFORE RETURNING TO IT.

The group consists of a highly incongruous jazz outfit 'Miles 'O Bog Ensemble' (Joachim Hein), a rather unlikely farmer's son from Cloghan; (Ronan Coughlan) and an out of joint contemporary dancer (Nick Bryson) who loathes being described as 'from a community' in Northern Ireland, yet who secretly permits himself to be described as an 'interpretive dancer'.

The only question we are concerned with is "who is manipulating who?" – as ever. And it does all come down to language and vocabulary; powerful people are powerful because they occupy the vocabulary of power.

As well the founding fathers, Man-I-pulate consists of the highly skilled and motivated musicians Anne Mcghee (flute), Connor Hein (guitar) and Dave Cashen (drums).

This crowd of Sunday Miscellanies has performed equally bizarrely to a crowd of dance aficionados at last year's Absolut Dublin Fringe in what was a rather argumentative pub Sweeney's on Dublin's Dame Street as they launched a tirade against the arts establishment juxtaposed with some arabesque in an attempt to placate the bewildered audience. This manifesto and bluster, counter culture and countering counter culture, posturing and provoking, is a strange thrashing about for an identity.

So how is this collaboration translating? Bryson says: "I regularly shout these days in my performance work 'I am not scared to live in Offaly!'"

Describing what inspired his involvement, Coughlan would say: "Two fine gentlemen from different countries to me. One is a Nordic and the other is a Kraut. Now don't be so easily offended they do not play up to their stereotypes, these two men are of International mind. Pablo Picasso said that "a great artist has no nationality".

"I am a firm believer that a great artist has no borders or boundaries and can see national identity as a farce in itself. Every artist knows that, right? Maybe not. So we decided to try and put on a touring show of what it's like being a male artist in Offaly. It was a simple plan and we began, talking that is. We decided to call ourselves Man-I-Pulate. We were three men of different generations trying to make pulate a verb. Our shtick was that of the rural avengers, I wanted to let people know that we are HERE! LISTEN UP, we are artists from Offaly and we want people to realise that it's OK to be an artist from the countryside. I have put up with years of stick over being an artist from my contemporaries but I don't give a s**t what anyone thinks of me, I would prefer if they had an opinion, position or angle, but ultimately begrudgery does not keep me awake at night.

"Audiences don't know what to think of us. People act like they know what is happening; like they have figured it out when they haven't... this is called pretending. Like so many shows after, I think people find it hard to talk or approach us because they think we are some sort of manic assholes who has more time than sense and chip on our shoulder that you could deem 'considerable'. But sometimes what happens in an art space makes no sense at all.

"I regularly shout these days in my performance work 'I am not scared to live in Offaly!'"

"Edmund Burke, the Irish philosopher stated that 'evil prevails when good men do nothing'. Or in this case bulls**t prevails when Great men do nothing. Joachim, Nick, Dave, Connor and Anne are all brilliant at what they do, we have had plenty of praise along the way and we work together to try and challenge the status quo."

Joachim Hein, a bassist and composer, is a musician who grew up with Miles Davis, Coltrane, Mingus, Monk and the prospect of working with Man-I-Pulate as the musical "founding father" was and remains beyond his wildest dreams. He describes his input as "about creating, through free form improvisation, the soundtrack to the spoken word and dance performance, responding to subtle changes in dynamics or mood, sometimes prodding the guys on to reach even further, dig deeper, or search more intensely. It is such a challenge every time and in so many different ways, that I do not think a creative musician could ask for much more.

"With this amount of complete creative freedom comes a bundle of responsibilities, such as never overpower the performance of the front men, nor let them down when they are reaching for their respective heights or, worst offence, just bore the socks off everybody. Like a binding circle that is permanently challenged until it bursts and then you hurry back to create a new, perhaps bigger but certainly different form. I try to tame a subtle chaos only to unleash it again until the performance eventually comes to its end. As a player in a collective of like minds, yet individually inclined to bring their very own creative juices to the pot, I believe this is as close as you can get to heaven this side of the coffin and I would not want to miss it for the world. Long may it continue!," he concluded. **M**

PORTLAOISE NATIVE TAKES SOJOURN TO THE PUBLIC

The Arts Office, Laois County Council recently hosted an exhibition of paintings by Portlaoise native Christy Brown, entitled *Sojourn*. In association with the HSE, the exhibition was officially opened on Thursday, March 29 in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise by Kevin Kavanagh, Director of Kevin Kavanagh Gallery.

About Christy Browne

Christy was born in 1954 and lived in Bridge St, Portlaoise where his family ran a General Merchants shop. The shop later became a restaurant and take-away, one of the very few in Portlaoise, which was a very different place at that time. It is now Kelly's butcher shop but the Brown family remains synonymous with the business fabric of the town.

Christy's first dalliance with the art was in primary school with the Sisters of Charity and this interest followed through to secondary school in the CBS where he did Irish dancing and played tin whistle.

Christy lost his dad at an early age and at this point he came into possession of a guitar, his first love and went on to become very proficient at it, the mouth organ and blues harp.

In the mid 70s he then indulged in performing arts, busking firstly in London and then eventually in Portlaoise where his regular pitch was the archway at Marshes Lane. He also busked in Tullamore and indeed was the subject of an article in the *Leinster Express* with the headline *Laoisman becomes Tullamore's Troubadour*.

His musical leanings were folk and ballad with nationalistic tendencies and, so, it was a natural progression that he joined Amnesty International.

Christy suffered a stroke in 2008 which impinged on his guitar playing and led him to be more involved in the visual arts. He describes his influences from both performance and visual arts as Neil Young and Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan and Christy Moore and also working with Seamus Morton.

Health and art

From the late 70's Christy encountered mental health problems needing hospitalisation in St Fintan's Hospital and it was there that Christy really became involved in art, collaborating with other artists, but with no formal training. In the past five years Christy has attended the Link activity centre in St Fintan's campus. Under the guidance of Angela Delaney CNS in Art Therapy intervention his art began to flourish and he won a national competition last year at an exhibition entitled *Art against Stigma* in Farnleigh Estate, Pheonix Park.

Since 2010 Christy has lived in Erkina House, Rathdowney, where his art continues to flourish and where he has his own studio, beside fellow artist Seamus Morton. He is also attending Abbeyleix Further Education Centre, completing an art course under Mary Delaney, Arts Teacher.

To say that Christy has been on a long sojourn with art is putting it mildly. Christy's journey has been greatly assisted by the Arts Office at Laois County Council culminating in his very first solo exhibition.

This wonderful exhibition ran from March 29 until April 20 open to the public in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

The Arts Office acknowledges the financial support of the Arts Council in making the Arts Programme possible.

For more details contact: The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise. Tel: 057 8674342/44 or email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie 



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Being a full time funny man is no laughing matter

“It’s hard work being funny,” comedian Bernard O’Shea tells Midland Arts and Culture Magazine Editor, Angela Madden.

competition but no one entered. One day he said ‘would you do it’ and so I did it to get people in and make his event work. That was my first gig.”

This was to be the gig of his life as Bernard said after that unplanned performance things started happening quickly. “What happened was I got offered £50 and I got a support slot to Pat McDonnell and Joe Rooney.” Both Pat and Joe were household names as a result of their Father Ted fame. “I did the support act before them and that was my second gig!”

Ironically – accidental comedian Bernard had never actually been to a comedy gig before his debut support act.

In the next phase of life at the end of his college days, the big smoke called Bernard who headed to Dublin and ended up living in a bedsit and playing Irish music on his accordion or singing to make a few pounds “and really going nowhere”.

Bernard then explained that around 2004/5 a new comic turn was borne with the revolutionary Des Bishop and his group and his brother Aidan Bishop, which started running every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. “I was friendly with Aidan and then he allowed me to gig three or four times with them - and then, gradually, over time I spent more time doing comedy than music.”

Durrogh, county Laois, funny man Bernard says he owes his success to his best friend who died extremely young and that he simply fell into the role of comedian thanks to this much missed pal Danny.

Bernard is the youngest of a family of four and the only male in the mix. “Basically I got away with stuff,” said Bernard who admitted he had the happiest childhood one could hope for with Mum Mary and Dad John.

In was early in this idyllic childhood, from about the age of 13, that Bernard started taking to the stage – but not as a comedian but rather as a musician playing Irish traditional tunes with his Dad and this he

continued to do throughout his formative years.

“Success does not necessarily give you the right to do this forever or to make a livelihood forever. It is simply a platform to use to build upon.”

Then, at the age of 17 or 18 Bernard headed into the great unknown – or at least Dundalk – to study Cultural Studies, which was a brand new course at the time, he told *Midlands Art and Culture Magazine*.

“The course covered theatre, film, archaeology, arts and cultural theory,” he explained. “And with it being the first course of its kind it really was quite experimental.”

It was during this four-year course that Bernard got to meet a new group of friends – and his great friend Danny (RIP). “In our third year we had to get a project – a cultural event,” said Bernard “and Danny decided to put on a comedy show. He ran a

“More than any show I have seen this Fringe, I desperately want to see it again. It is O’Shea’s first show in Edinburgh and is endlessly delightful and surprising. glorious vulnerabilities and fabulous impromptu raging that reminds you how extraordinary stand-up can be.”

The Scotsman (5 star review)

About Bernard – a snapshot

- Bernard started out in entertainment at an early age playing traditional Irish music, touring Europe with several groups.
- While at college he studied Theatre and went on to star in several theatrical productions.
- He worked in the National Theatre of Ireland and the Abbey Theatre.
- He won the Harp Newcomer Comedy Award in 2000 and performed in the BBC Newcomer Awards the same year.
- He was chosen to perform in The Montreal *Just for Laughs* comedy festival in 2005 and also *The Killkenny Cats Laughs* festival in 2005 and 2006.
- He wrote *TJ and TJ* sketches on Today FM.
- His Edinburgh debut *Do not adjust your mind reality is a fault* received a five star review from *The Scotsman*.
- He has previously co-hosted the *Breakfast with Bernard and Keith* show on the Irish radio station 1105-107FM.

Television credits

- *The Liffey Laugh* (RTÉ)
- *Naked Camera* (RTÉ)
- *Just for Laughs*
- *The World Stands Up* (Paramount)
- *Newcomer Awards* (BBC)
- *The Cafe* (RTÉ)
- *Touching People* (RTÉ)
- *The Byrne Ultimatum* (RTÉ)
- *Republic of Telly* (RTÉ)
- *The Panel* (RTÉ)



A year later in 2005 Bernard auditioned for Montreal Show – the Xfactor comedy equivalent which was auditioning in Ireland and involved standing in front of the panel and performing a four or five minute skit. Bernard made the cut.

Then “one night when I was having a good night back in 2005 I was asked to perform at the Montreal Comedy Festival,” added the Laois native.

But, Bernard explained that such or any successes achieved in comedy – or in the arts in general – does not give you a free pass for the future; that you can not expect or assume that people will like your work for always or as much. “Success does not necessarily give you the right to do this forever or to make a livelihood forever,” said Bernard “it is simply a platform to use to build upon.”

In fact, ironically, Bernard said that for him, the more success he achieved the more comedy became a job and the more difficult the job became. “Initially you just got up on stage and had a laugh,” said Bernard. “Then it became a source of livelihood and you know how important that livelihood is. You had to work and prepare; you just couldn’t get up and hope for the best any more.”

It’s hard work and long days that go into Bernard’s craft. “What I am finding right now with TV, travel, radio abroad, gigs in Ireland I have to get up at nine am and start writing and usually keep writing until 3pm when I

have a break and then get back to it until maybe 7 or 9pm. It is work.

“It is getting the stage where I am always saying that the only thing I like about stand up is being on the stage, waiting to go on stage. Developing, preparing is work. It is just work.” Bernard said that while it may seem glamorous and, while he loves it and feels extremely luck, it is a job like everyone else’s.

“Initially you just got up on stage and had a laugh. Then it became a source of livelihood and you know how important that livelihood is. You had to work and prepare; you just couldn’t get up and hope for the best any more.”

But how does Bernard actually come up with the sketches and put his ideas down on paper? “The way I

normally write it is, I see something in life that interests me. I write a lot of the stuff on the concept of hope – what we hope for and where it can go wrong even if everything seems right. I see something that is funny. I go on stage and thrash it out...Big things do not amuse as much as the little things.

“One four to five minute skit can take a year to develop for stage.”

He added: “All art is some form of entertainment and some people pay to have a laugh,” and so he admits that if you fail to do that your art simply hasn’t delivered. But, comedy can also be used to make a point – but only as a secondary aim. Bernard said that while he is endeavoring to make people laugh, “after they have the laugh then you can make a point but never the other way round”.

Bernard also that the public perception of comedians being depressed and anti-social off stage was just an “easy paradox” for people to make and nothing short of a “stereotype”.

However, he did say that part of this view might come from the fact that the public have a view of your character. But, Bernard points out we all have good days and not so good. “Someone may say hello to you and expect a particular type of reaction but it may just be that you received some bad news that day and so just aren’t in the best form or make a witty retort,” explained Bernard.

One of Bernard’s dislikes is reality TV because of the impact this cheap to broadcast format had on more meaningful productions and creativity in general. “Reality TV is responsible for cutting so many jobs in the arts – from scriptwriters right through,” said Bernard “so many different types of jobs. Reality TV is just dirt cheap.”

Now a regular on the popular *Republic of Telly*, Bernard admits that TV is a very different proposition to the stage where preparation is less important than the ability to be able to react quickly.

And, while the modest Bernard said it was up to others to determine whether he will be making a return for the next season of *Republic of Telly* we will certainly be hoping that he remains a fixture on our tellies on a Sunday night. **M**

Tour Dates

- **July 2:** The Trim Satire Festival (Trim, county Meath) 2.45pm, The Cirque du Satire
- **July 15- 16:** Cork Comedy Festival
- **July 21 and 23:** The Vodafone Comedy Carnival, Iveagh Gardens Dublin



Athlone celebrates 60th RTÉ All Ireland Drama Festival

The 2012 RTÉ All Ireland Drama Festival will be a glittering affair this year as the event gets set to celebrate its diamond jubilee. The 60th festival will open at the Dean Crowe Theatre, Athlone on Thursday, May 3 and performances will continue nightly to Friday, May 11. A gala awards ceremony in the Radisson Blu Hotel, Athlone on Saturday, May 12 will close the festival.

BEGINNINGS

The festival was born out of an initiative conceived by members of An Tostal to develop a national competition in drama. (An Tostal was an organisation set up in the early fifties with the objective of organising cultural and sporting events around Ireland in order to generate a feeling of national pride while encouraging local tourism.)

In October 1952, Cecil French Salkeld, Cultural Director of the National Council of An Tostal, came to the midlands in search of a venue for this national festival of drama.

On arrival in Athlone he met with Paddy Lenehan, Managing Director of Gentex, a local textile industry and then the largest employer in the region. Paddy offered the facilities of

the Sportex Hall (part of the Gentex complex) free of charge as a venue to hold the event. Together with local teachers, Brendan O'Brien and Alfie Faulkner, a committee was set up and plans to host the event were put in motion.

With funding from the Arts Council, which also celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, the first All-Ireland Drama Festival was held in Athlone in April 1953 with Brendan O'Brien as Festival Director - a position he held for 40 years. It comprised competition in 3-Act, (Open and Rural) 1-Act, (Open and Rural) and Verse.

The festival was officially opened by Dr Hanly, Bishop of Elphin and the adjudicators were Maureen Delaney, Lennox Robinson and Gabriel Fallon.

CURRENT PLANS

Sixty years on and the festival is regarded as the premier event of its kind in Ireland and beyond and with unprecedented attendance rates in recent years, demand for seats is immense.

The top nine groups who qualify for a place in Athlone have already come through a gruelling nationwide circuit of 35 festivals involving 29 groups in all.

With works by Irish and international authors, audiences are in for a feast of drama that will entertain and enthral in equal measure.

The adjudicator for the festival is Brian Marjoribanks, a distinguished speech and drama lecturer and international adjudicator.

During his long and varied career, he has been a professional footballer, has worked in radio and television and has chaired an international panel of jurors at the Prix Italia Television Festival in Sicily.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Apart from the competitive business of the performances at the Dean Crowe Theatre, the event has a wider dimension involving the town of Athlone at large.

Fringe events, many which are youth-focused, will include drama workshops, art exhibitions, street theatre and shop window displays. The town will be decorated to give a truly festive welcome to the many visitors from all over Ireland who are expected to descend on the town. Main sponsors RTÉ will broadcast some of its radio schedules from

Athlone during festival week, with daily reports of the goings-on at the Dean Crowe going out on air around mid-day.

Another important feature of the festival is the post-performance entertainment in the theatre bar. Here, performers, crew, committee and patrons will gather and exchange views on the night's production and later render a song or two well into the small hours.

MEMORIES

No doubt, in such convivial surroundings, conversations will wander down memory lane where reminiscences of festivals past will be evoked: the feats of Strand Players and Sundrive Players who jointly hold the record for the most wins (4); the acting prowess of Kitty Norton, Grace Brophy and Victor Wheatley; producers of the calibre of Terence

O'Doherty and Una Parker; such memorable winning productions as Listowel's *Sive*, Moat Club's *Abelard and Heloise* and Charlestown's *Buried Child*; the conversations with John B Keane; the adjudications of Alan Nicholl or the written commentaries of Des Rushe. Many will remember the old caravan in the theatre forecourt which served as a box office, the odds offered on a black-board outside P J Bannon's 'Festival Bar' or the glorious splendour of the Esso Trophy.

SIGNIFICANCE

The importance of amateur drama in local communities throughout Ireland is further exemplified by the continued association with the festival by RTÉ, which has been involved as main sponsor since 2004. The high esteem with which the festival is held among the wider

theatre community is evidenced by the generous invitation extended by the Abbey Theatre to one of the finalists at Athlone to perform their play at the Peacock for a short run during the Summer. This feature was introduced last year and the amateur drama movement is especially grateful to Abbey director Fiac MacConghail and Chairman of the Abbey Board, Judge Bryan McMahon who were influential in bringing this about.

LOOKING AHEAD

In recent years, groups such as Silken Thomas Players, Cornmill Theatre Company, Estuary Players and Kilmeen Drama Group have presented award winning productions to an audience primed for indulgence in drama at its best, whether it is through the familiar territory of well known plays or through rarely seen ground breaking exploits which

challenge both performer and spectator. Having survived the trials of the last six decades, whether political unrest or advances in digital forms of entertainment, the drama festival will continue, as in the past, to be the torch bearer for cross border theatrical endeavour and dramatic achievement. **M**

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

In 1959 the festival moved from the Sportex Hall to its present location at the then known Dean Crowe Memorial Hall. This was also the year when Esso became the first sponsors whereby they presented a perpetual cup to the festival which was known as the Esso Trophy.

The first winners of the trophy were a group from Listowel, Co Kerry presenting a play by a little known budding playwright by the name of John B. Keane. The play was called *Sive*.

The competition streamlined itself into the 3-Act Open Finals from 1969 and remained in much the same format as today with the number of finalists reduced in 2004 from twelve to nine. In 1999, the hall underwent major renovation and refurbishment opening its doors in 2000 as the Dean Crowe Theatre and Arts Centre, presenting a modern, fully-equipped venue fit to bring the festival into the 21st century.

Esso ceased its long association with the festival in 1999, making way for Ericsson to become main sponsors from 2000 to 2003. In 2004 RTÉ stepped on board with the festival getting major prominence thanks to the facilities provided by the national broadcaster. **M**



Kilmeeen Drama Group, Champions 2011

My Hometown

- a photographic journey through the streets of Birr

Artist Jackie Lynch recently launched a book about her hometown of Birr having spent two years walking around the town photographing the streetscape and each time noticing and capturing details she hadn't seen before. Her book is a celebration of the craftspeople that made this heritage town what it is today.

Jackie had lived for a year in Xian, PR China and a further six years in Kyoto, Japan and her work is heavily influenced by Asian aesthetics, in particular the Japanese aesthetic of 'wabisabisuki' which can be loosely translated as 'the patina of old age'.

Jackie has chosen to highlight the charm in a worn step, a rusty gate, chipped paint and details that are enriched by the forces of nature and decay. The shabby door is just as beautiful to her as the brightly

painted one because it has character that only time can create.

This book celebrates the uniqueness and good craftsmanship of Birr but it also celebrates the proud sense of place the artist has and the affection she has for the town she is so familiar with. This is not just Birr through an artist's eyes; this is Birr through treasured eyes capturing the changing seasons and the spirit of the town.

The book contains an introduction about Birr's legacy by Caimin O'Brien and a thought-provoking conclusion representing the future by Rosalind Fanning.

Only 500 copies were printed and a few are still available in The Organic Store, Birr, Birr Castle Shop, Birr Theatre and Arts Centre or directly from Jackie at wabisabisuki@yahoo.co.uk costing €25. **M**



My Residency in **Part 2** **The Tyrone Guthrie Centre**

by Ann Egan



“...I had a plan of work for my fortnight here. I planned to write a series of poems inspired by the past. I had also brought with me notebooks in which I write on a daily basis. I had them as a fall back. I wanted to make the very best of this marvellous and blessed opportunity gifted to me so my notebooks were with me like familiar friends but a little neglected.

The Tyrone Guthrie Centre is ideal for reflection and also has all the modern communication facilities of Broadband, Wi-Fi and all technological support we rely on today. Above all these modern aids, the house has a deep sense of peace, calmness and belonging. I settled in on my first day, listening to the wind rise all about the sweeping grounds.

The house is set well back from the surrounding forest and while they are several beautiful, ancient trees growing about the spacious lawns, they all look deep-rooted and sturdy enough to withstand the wind and storm's rigours.

My second day dawned to the peace of the storm's aftermath. Annagmakerrig Lake was shining in early morning sunrise as I walked around its shores and noted fallen chestnuts that gathered about the path, victims of the wind, now abated. My walk was long and pleasant. It afforded me the time and peace to reflect on the

details of the plan of writing I had laid out on my first evening. I sat awhile by the boathouse and soon in the tranquillity surrounding me, began my new writings.

There is no need to worry about domestic duties and chores for all one could ever need is left in readiness in the huge kitchen here. The house hums along and offers all a person all essentials and even more. The helpfulness and friendliness and willingness of all the staff create the illusion of effortless housekeeping and cooking but in the background careful and meticulous planning makes it all possible.

It is a blessing to be here, to be in the silence of this great house, to work according to a predetermined plan and when a break is needed from the work, there is the beauty of the forest walk, the silver tranquillity of the lake and the very grateful knowledge that my new notebook's pages are being filled.

Later in the day I will type in and revise and edit and bring it to the best shape I can in the calm and warmth of a magnificent workroom.

There is a time-honoured tradition here, all artists in the house meet at 7pm for dinner. The gong rings out to call everyone to the kitchen where the large table is set and can accommodate up to 20 people. The fire is glowing in the raised stove and all gather about in the company of Robert and a magnificent meal is served. The pace is slow and relaxed. People move about the table from one evening to the next and within a few days everyone knows their neighbours. The talk usually begins with the beauty of the meal, most of which is grown and produced on the farm, everything is home-produced and homemade and is truly beyond compare.

The chat grows with the evening's passing and it is very beneficial to hear

the work of each artist being discussed, their ideas, how the ideas are being developed, how the atmosphere of the house lends itself willingly and generously to the development and sharing of art.

For myself, over the passage of my two weeks residency here, I had many interesting conversations with artists, writers and composers. Sharing ideas is a great benefit and opens new horizons of creativity. The house offers a backdrop to these ideas and one gains invaluable insights into one's own journey with words. What is so beneficial about being here is the constancy of calm, peace and the sheer comfort of the surroundings, the care and concern of all the staff to make a residency a blessing of learning and of achieving each day...

**See next issue
for the LAST
installement**

On board the Carousel with Leonard Anderson

By Majella Reid

Leonard Anderson fell into musicals by accident. A quiet invitation to join a male chorus, followed by a further invitation to do some choreography resulted in a full-time career for a man who is today an award-winning musical director.

Originally from county Down, Leonard is now well known in county Longford having directed eight musicals produced by St Mel's Musical Society since 2000 – and he is currently in rehearsals for his ninth production with the award-winning group!

According to Leonard, this year the group has chosen one of its most ambitious projects to date - the much-loved Rodgers and Hammerstein classic *Carousel* in a production which will feature more than 70 cast and crew members.

“*Carousel* is slightly darker as a musical and it has some of the best known music in musical theatre,” he explained.

The musical, which first premièred in 1945 on Broadway, is set in New England in the United States and in its day the production was considered something of a taboo-breaker touching upon topics such as suicide and wife-beating.

“Along the way there is a lot of fun, however,” said Leonard. “This comes in the form of Mr Snow (Tony Wadde) and Carrie (Deirdre Leavy).”

Making his début performance in musical theatre is Aghnacliffe man Kevin Gormley who plays the lead role of Billy Bigelow. Deirdre McCabe of Mohill, County Leitrim, plays Billy's love interest, Julie Jordan.

Mr Anderson, who has been directing musicals full-time since 1993, believes the story line is one which will appeal to musical lovers, and indeed theatre lovers, of all ages.

The plot revolves around the character Billy Bigelow and his relationship with

Julie Jordan. Billy falls fowl of badness and eventually commits suicide.

“When he goes to Heaven he is given a chance to go down again (to Earth) and to do some good for a day. In doing so he may just earn the right to get into Heaven,” said the director.

The stage will also be graced by St Mel's Musical Society stalwarts such as Aideen Mulligan (Nettie Fowler), David Flaherty (Jigger), Liz Leavy (Mrs Mullin), Roy Davis, John Kelly, Justin Forde, Gráinne Fox, Jim McDonald, Luke Cassidy, Heather Moore and many, many more.

This Rodger and Hammerstein classic is widely known for its legendary songs which include *June is Bustin' Out All Over*, *If I Loved You*, and, of course, the Liverpool football anthem *You'll Never Walk Alone*.

“It (*Carousel*) really has something for everyone. There are a couple of mime bits in it also and I've brought in Amy

Duignan and her dancers to execute the balletic moves,” said Leonard. “We have about 23 children ranging in age from five years to 12 in this production,” he added.

The show which ran over the last weekend in April at the Backstage Theatre was a sell out. **M**



“Homage”

Exhibition by George Burland at the Arthouse Gallery, Stradbally

“Trying to put into words what one is doing with paint is an enormously difficult task and one that is doomed to fail, nevertheless, a paragraph or a title can serve as an opening for the viewer to become first acquainted with a work in a similar manner as each of us has firstly a name then a personality, interests, a profession, a role. How can we sum all that up? Does each of us contain a meaning? Does a painting have a meaning?” asks George Burland.

Declan O'Donovan, current Irish Ambassador to Portugal, has several paintings and sculptures of George's, and is of the opinion: “Irishman George

Burland has lived and worked abroad for many years, but these colours are of his homeland.

“Like many artists, George would say that the work is what you see, not what he may have intended you to see. For me, the work presents the preserving bog, rich earth and ever-changing sky of historic Ireland. In one particular painting, it is winter but there is green growth and above is the lighter green of a new day dawning, the whole a living sculpture of nature at a time of Christmas joy and reflection at the turn of year. No flowers to catch the eye. They will come later.”



Although Declan was referring to a particular acrylic painting from a few years ago, it could be considered as a precursor to those paintings that George plans to exhibit in June at Stradbally Arthouse. These recent works are mostly gouaches on paper and the lighter medium permits a looser and more transparent handling of paint and colour.

George was reared on a farm in county Kildare from which one could see the Wicklow Mountains and no matter how far he has travelled abroad or where his mind has wandered to, that initial landscape was and is always present in the subconscious.

So, too, is the canal of Naas where he spent his earliest childhood years and to where his parents returned on their retirement.

A number of years ago George bought an old house in a small village in the

north of Spain and moved there from Madrid, where he has have lived and worked since.

About 50 years ago the region was agriculturally very active but vast expanses of land have since fallen idle and are being reclaimed by nature providing for stimulating landscape - in a manner similar to the present focus on Irish bogland as an aesthetically pleasing nature reserve.

His paintings are largely abstract. Painting, as in anything else, allows one to leave out certain elements in order to better focus on others. In his paintings he tries to focus on an “all over” approach, a perceived energy, a search for balance, no description.

The exhibition opens 13 June in the Arthouse Gallery and will be on exhibition for President Higgins visit to the Arthouse and Library on that day.

M





Anna Duffy and Ann Wingfield

LE CHÉILE12

Collective remembers residency

A testimony from four Westmeath and Roscommon-based visual artists of a week long residency in Spring 2012, at the renowned creative arts retreat, Tyrone Guthrie Centre, County Monaghan : Siobhan Cox-Carlos, Anna Susay-Duffy, Lorraine Mimmagh and Ann Wingfield rekindle images of their experience.



“The opportunity to find oneself near the aptly named village of Newbliss, on the shores of Lake Annaghmakerrig, Co Monaghan is blessing enough, but for four midland-based artists to be in situ at the same time was too valuable an opportunity to miss.

Over a couple of dinner chats and plenty of humorous banter, we found ourselves by candlelight at the dining table about to embark upon experimental portraiture photography, not unduly influenced by spooky tales of past hauntings and Old Masters paintings!

Our nightly fervour wasn't long in captivating several more residents of other creative disciplines and a mini-epic photo shoot project ensued, the resulting portraits of which soon became the 'must have' Residency memento of many.

Having found such synergy, a seed of thought was sown, to present our creative thoughts and concepts as a collaborative group, becoming a reality as we stepped out of the shadows and onto the page.

Progressing individual personal practice through evaluation and critique is the norm but collaboration was uncharted territory for some of this group. With this in mind, we chose a format of collaborative work that would suit each of our schedules and directive enough to be achievable. Our daily meeting place would be neutral ground in the Conservatory at four bells! And of course, a pot of tea to keep out the cold! Roll out the critique!

The short 10-minute art brief that we each assigned the others in daily rotation, sometimes consisting of only one word, was intended to evoke an instant response to our location. Moments encapsulated like snapshots on small scale pages which were deliberately chosen to convey a sense of intimacy with both materials and subject.

Naturally not everyone's experience on any one day is the same, and as visual artists know, a day's painting can present plenty of highs and lows, thus, moods and choices were certainly reflected in the end pieces, often raising a laugh to combat a frustrated frown!

We were delighted to include this project in our end of residency exhibition as a week in the life of four visual artists, contributing to an evening of performance, of a medley of literary recitation and several wonderful piano recitals.

As testimony to the far reaching effects of time ever spent at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, it's not surprising that this collaboration is taking those influences with it and enhancing their energy to keep the groups working wheels turning!

We artists express our gratitude to Westmeath County Council Arts Office for its support in the progression of our work at Annaghmakerrig, and for Artists Bursaries awarded, and look forward to future developments and artwork from our new collaboration!"

M



Siobhan Cox Carlos in studio



"I couldn't talk to anyone. That's when I started writing, that was my saviour, pen and paper"

(Wally O Loughlin from *Wally*)



Anne Marie Kelly
Broadcaster

Hear me, See me

The mental health project that grew out of a chance meeting with a rapper!

By Anne Marie Kelly

A weekend of training arose from the making of *Wally*, a film documentary about Wally O Loughlin from Portlaoise who attempted suicide in 2009.

Music was his escape and the film is his story. It is a story of survival that aims to empower young people today to believe in themselves.

In order to make an impact on young people in Laois, ***Hear Me See Me*** was born out of the realisation that Wally did not have the confidence or the tools to express himself, and the weekend intends to address that.

As a result, the weekend brings 40 young people and youth workers together on common ground to express themselves through the arts, so that

this project can grow beyond the weekend.

This weekend will take place on the May bank holiday weekend in the Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise and is funded by Laois Partnership. Some 40 young people from Transition Year in Mountrath Community School have been chosen as the first group to take part.

Ann-Marie Kelly first met Wally with the intention of making a radio documentary on him. He had got quite a name for himself as a rapper and he had spoken to the newspapers of his suicide attempt in order to help others. When Ann-Marie met him she knew it would go beyond a radio documentary, and so she called in filmmaker Gary Hctor from Hello Camera from Birr and

they started shooting the documentary. ***Sometimes when you think the journey is over, it's only just begun***

A year later and Ann-Marie has just stopped filming. She purchased her own HD camera and followed Wally for over a year.

Wally went from the depths of despair to getting his blackbelt, recording his own music and becoming a father.

The documentary will be premiered on the training weekend and will then go to festivals

This initiative doesn't just allow young people to express themselves through film, music and radio, but also affords the opportunity to comment on what they see. It aims to empower young

people with the knowledge that you don't have to have a degree in art to express your opinion on it. The art of film, radio and music also allows them to escape their daily lives and delve into their own world of wonder, imagination, curiosity, playfulness and being somebody else, and that is an aspect of life we all love. It also gives them a voice.

The weekend will be run by professionals from film, music and radio industries and the young people's radio program will be broadcast on Midlands 103.

They will also perform and show their work on the final evening of the weekend after the premier of the film ***Wally*** that will be open to the public.

M

Synergy and Light - shining a light on the joy of movement

One afternoon in a frenzy of creative excitement Suzanne Hogan had a dream - a dream in which dancers of all disciplines and all abilities could come together and move... move with no prejudice, no judgement, just move for the sheer love of dance, of being, of performance... move so that audiences could see and connect with the feeling of it, so that all could feel inspired, or at least leave with a slightly bigger smile on their face, and a little spring in their step.

And, so, the concept of Synergy and Light as a festival and experience was born!

"Synergy- for the feeling of harmony when there is movement in the body and with others.

"Light- for the light it brings into our selves and our lives when we move. "Whether dancing, walking, running or jumping. We shine when we move!

"Imagine if all of us could discover a little lightness from our own synergy? What a world it would be...," explains Suzanne.

Synergy and Light Festival began in 2011 as a community venture in collaboration with the Westmeath County Council to bring Westmeath dancers of all disciplines together in one magical afternoon of celebration, enjoyment and engagement with the audience and other dancers. Energy Plus School of Dance from Mullingar, Athlone's Attitude Dance School both performed along with Bachata Ireland and contemporary dancer Orla Shine to name a few.

Crowds gathered in the Athlone Town Centre Shopping Centre last April, and enjoyed an afternoon of fast-paced entertainment along with workshops in Zumba, Couples Latin Dancing and Contemporary Dance. To top off this amazing afternoon Fidget Feet performed their piece 'Hang On' in the Civic Square.

This year promises to focus yet again on the community aspect of dance, actively encouraging interaction between the audience and the performers and offering a series of free workshops open to all, regardless of abilities.

This year even the tiny tots will get a chance to shake and move in their very own Disco Tots Workshop.

The Mini-Musical Company, the brainchild of artists Suzanne Hogan and

Niall O'Connell, will be debuting two of their mini- musicals *Broken Doll* and *Snow White and the One Dwarf*.

The Athlone Town Centre Shopping Centre has agreed, for a second year, to hold the Synergy and Light Festival on Sunday, May 27.

This free festival will run from 1pm until 6pm in the shopping centre followed by a grand finale, once the centre has closed, in the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone. Organisers say it is a 'big surprise' for now, but promise it will cap off a great day of free family fun and entertainment.

For more information, or if you or your group would like to participate in this year's festival, please contact Suzi on **086 8677164** or email suzi@synergyandlight.com M



Miriam in front of the Athlone Castle (left of picture)

Meet Miriam

THE NEW ART AND HERITAGE MANAGER, ATHLONE

Miriam Mulrennan may well have the most illustrious arts news this year with the opening of Westmeath's new art gallery and a renovated Castle in the old town of Athlone – but what is for sure is that she has her work cut out writes Angela Madden.

Miriam has returned to her place of origin in Tulsk, County Roscommon to take up the new position of Art and Heritage Manager for Athlone.

Having lived in London, Dublin and the an Rinn Gaeltacht she is excited about being back - as she said "closer to home, family, friends and familiar places".

She is already well advanced in the task of managing Athlone Castle (under renovation), Athlone's new Art Gallery (under construction), Abbey Road Artists' Studios (opened in September 2012) and The John McCormack Experience (awaiting funding approval).

For those who don't know, Athlone Art and Heritage Ltd is a company of Athlone Town Council responsible for managing the aforementioned attractions and facilities.

At present, Miriam is the only employee of the company and so as she says herself she is an interesting hybrid of "chief bottle washer and chief executive curiously intertwined".

The lively launch of Abbey Road Artists' Studios in September in 2012 featured in our last edition of *Midlands Arts and Culture* magazine and the studios have since become a hotbed of creative activities with resident artists, school groups, community groups and a programme of exhibitions and educational activities putting it firmly on the midlands artscape.

The scale and variety of these projects is undoubtedly an enormous challenge, but clearly Miriam has always been up to a challenge, having managed to combine extensive studies and a varied management career over the past 20 years.

She told *Midlands Arts and Culture* Magazine: "I studied advertising and marketing way back in Rathmines College of Commerce. Even then I was always aware that I needed some touchstone with creative endeavour – be that through TV, film, art or music. How we identify ourselves through story has always appealed to me, so I guess I have found myself somewhere in that space between the business of managing creative sectors and the creators themselves. It's a space I feel very comfortable occupying."

From 2000 to 2004 Miriam was the Finance and Operations manager of Screen Producers of Ireland, the representative body for film, television and animation producers. "This sector had always interested me. I love TV and film as a viewer – or a consumer, if I can use that much-loathed word when talking about film and TV and it was a great opportunity to learn about advocacy and crucially - about providing real and tangible support for a creative sector and what that really entails."

In the late 90's while in London Miriam worked for a global marketing company in London gaining some international exposure, managing heavyweight brands such as Ford Motor Company, GE Capital, Aston Martin and NBC.

In 2004 Miriam took some time out. "I knew it was time for change in my work especially when you work in a role where you are yourself advocating 'change' so moving on from Screen Producers Ireland was the right thing to do. I knew I wanted to remain close to a creative sector, if I can call it that, but my next step was unclear."

Miriam went travelling for a year and explained: "It was the ideal time to take

some time out; this was 2004 remember - it was that crazy time in Ireland where it was actually true that it was a 'candidate's market'. So I took a leap of faith and decided I could manage to take a year out, and return to the job market in 2005."

It worked out well and on her return Miriam took up a position as Learning and Development Director with Irish Language TV Production Company, Nemeton Television which is based in the an Rinn Gaeltacht. Nemeton produces a large variety of television programmes. "It's one of the biggest production companies in the country," Miriam explained, clearly remembering her former role and employers fondly, "and employs around 30 people full time with up to another 50 part time and when crewing up for big gigs". Miriam remained with the company, setting up and running an education arm as an add-on to the core TV business, for some seven years.

Miriam also carved out the time to complete a Masters in Pedagogy in the last two years. "I was working so intimately with third level curriculum design and I was so interested in how teaching and learning had evolved since I had last studied... I guess it was inevitable that I took up some course of study."

Cranes on the skyline of Athlone are visually telling the story of the much anticipated castle redevelopment. Athlone art gallery is a completely new departure for the building which has had many former incarnations. It will be a purpose built modern facility, incorporating the old building, sympathetically restored, and combining the new wing and a modern glass section over a cosmopolitan boardwalk area.

It is intended that it will cater primarily but

not exclusively for the visual arts, with an emphasis on meeting local audience needs in terms of art exhibitions and engagement. It will also target national/international projects.

"This is a really exciting project, and the perfect compliment to the neighbouring castle development on the other side of the bridge. We are making great progress with programming the first series of exhibitions. Obviously - until the exact date of the build completion is tied down, aspects of exhibition logistics, timeframes are tricky to bed down – but it's a really exciting time, for Athlone, for artists from the region and for the wider catchment area."

The gallery is due to be open later this year and Miriam said she is "looking forward to getting into the building, getting to know the spaces and how the planned exhibitions will 'sit' in them in the coming months".

To assist in developing these attractions Miriam describes a volunteer project she is developing with Westmeath Volunteer Centre, which aims to have local ambassadors involved with the day today activities of the various venues.

"These 'ambassadors' might "one day be in the town centre welcoming people to Athlone from the river boats, and the next be in the Artists' Studios helping to organise a creativity workshop with students or leading an International tour group around Athlone Castle," said Miriam.

The Tulsk native is adamant that Athlone's "cultural renaissance" will place Athlone very firmly on the map.

For further information see www.athloneartandheritage.ie



Athlone Art Gallery projects.

Profusion of Public Art Commissions in Longford

Despite the significant reduction in capital funding being experienced by local authorities throughout the country Longford County Council will “buck the national trend” by commissioning at least eight public art commissions over the next 12 months.



As some of these commissions will not arise until early 2013 - and to avoid confusion - we wish to focus on the earlier commissions which include the recently completed sculptural piece celebrating the opening of the new Fire Station in Edgeworthstown, a site specific piece in Centenary Square (a prominent location in the centre of Longford town) and a large scale piece celebrating Longford's long and rich musical heritage to be located on the new N5 Longford town bypass.

The commission for Centenary Square was primarily a site-specific piece by virtue of the spatial limitations of the site and other complicating technical factors. However, the commissioning committee did request that a nautical reference be included in the design based on the traditional association of the site with a shipping company ticket office. (The closing date for receipt of commission proposals was Friday, March 16.)

The N5 Bypass commission is still current. The proposed piece is to be situated on a raised platform facing south on a cut at the western end of the new bypass. The Theme of the piece is a celebration of the rich musical heritage of county Longford. Closing date for submissions for this project is Friday, May, 4.

Another interesting commission which will be offered by Longford County Council is a celebration of the life and work of General Sean MacEoin entitled *Sean MacEoin Blacksmith, Revolutionary and Politician*. The piece will be erected at a prominent location in the middle of the village of Ballinalee. This commission will not be offered until early in the summer.

For further information on public art commissions in Longford please see www.longfordcoco.ie



Laois School of Music

Ten Years of Music with an International Flavour

Laois School of Music officially celebrated its 10th birthday with a Gala Concert in The Dunamaise Arts Centre, Portlaoise on Friday, April 27.

Amongst the performers will be past and present pupils of the school along with a number of musicians from the schools teaching staff.

Since its inception in September 2001, the school has progressed from a zero base to 380 pupils, 18 part-time tutors and a full-time Co-ordinator. There is also the Orpheus Orchestra, Senior Ensemble and a Flute Choir.

When talking about the school's activities, the focus can be so often on the pupils and their progress so this article will focus on some of the schools tutors who bring an International flavour to the teaching staff.

Robert Solyom

Hungarian native, **Robert Solyom**, is the newest addition to the school and brings over 20 years experience in the field of music performance and education.



He teaches clarinet, saxophone, flute, music theory, music history and chamber music to students of all levels. Being a musician endorsing the Kodály method of music education, Robert teaches his students in an interactive way to attain a love and appreciation of music. He studied in the prestigious Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest and has several academic and performing awards to his name. He re-located to Ireland with his family in 2009 and also teaches in

Maoin Cheoil na Gallimhe, Coole Music, Gort and Mayo School of Music.

Andreas Balke

Andreas Balke hails from Holland where he graduated from the School for the Arts, Faculty of Music, in Arnhem. He has taught piano in Holland, France and now in Ireland.



Teaching children and adults of varying levels, he likes to encourage students to explore their own musical creativity. He has played with and composed for various jazz formations, a soul band and several theatre groups. Teaching in the Laois School of Music, in addition to individual piano lessons, Andreas has recently embarked on the teaching of small groups with different instrumentalists, the art of Improvisation, using rhythm and simple scales like the blues scale. Andreas is open to exploring all types of musical combinations – piano, clarinet, guitar, violin and so on so it would be ideal for people who want to develop their skills in an interactive way with other musicians.

Kimberly Melia

Kimberly Melia is originally from Countryside, Illinois, a southwest suburb of Chicago in the United States. She has a Bachelors Degree in Music Education specialising in Flute and Choral Music Studies from the Eastern Illinois University in Charleston and a Masters Degree from Vandercook College of Music, Illinois.



Before moving to Ireland in 2005, she taught in several schools in the Chicago area and is a Member of the Chicago Flute Club and the US National Flute Association. Kim currently works as a Flute and Kindermusic Instructor and Assistant Orchestra Director in Laois School of Music. She regularly returns to summer music classes in Chicago, bringing back innovative and creative methods of teaching music to children and young people. As a performer, Kim plays as part of a duo called 'Flute Cocktail' and is 1st chair flautist with the Irish Midlands Concert Orchestra.

Tatyana Vykhodtseva

Tatyana Vykhodtseva is a Russian national who qualified with a BA in Music Performance and Teaching from the College of Music, Kazakhstan and the Ural State Conservatoire, Russia.



She specialises as a Piano Teacher and Accompanist and was also a member of a Chamber Ensemble in Kazakhstan, taking part in recitals as soloist and accompanist for violinists and singers. Tatyana loves classical music of any styles, especially composers from the Romantic period such as Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky. Tatyana teaches a wide range of pupils from primary grades up to AVCM and LVCM Teaching and Performance Diploma. She is also in much demand as an accompanist once again from primary to music theatre diploma students. LSM also has tutors from Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and, of course, Ireland, bringing a wonderful mix of styles, traditions and musical genres to musicians of the future in County Laois. **M**



What fills the heart...?

Rosalind Fanning wonders what it is that can really make art impact on the lives of those around it.

go to see in our art in hallowed halls and studios - that's the stark reality - and therefore they won't give a toss if we create even smaller art-islands, of 'excellence'. That road doesn't help create openness to or a familiarity with the arts: if there is to be a Centre of Excellence in the midlands, let our central counties have that 'excellence' all around.

With excellent purposefulness, we could make art as ubiquitous as sport. But within our regional centredness, and in this time of doubt and worry and lack of funds, instead of 'doing nowt, in doubt', could we choose to try doing it all ways? Thus, be as excellent as often as we have energy and occasion for, and at other times be quite content in being average, or darn it - plain sloppy. Our laboured imperfections might be snatched up with joy and empathy. In these times when high-priced excellence doesn't necessarily sell, and instead, 'commercial art' with a bargain price-tag more often does, it is a subjective arrogance to make that decision as to what should be seen by the public, or not, and how often. The art of our hands and their hands, needs to find a constant, not an occasional presence. Art needs to be subtly all around, reachable and touchable and talked about quite casually or intensely, or at times insultingly!

It might also help our own productiveness, especially when we're stuck. Letting people witness that art is not an easy process is also admitting that as artists, we are evolving; there is not by any means a blank page one moment and a very good artwork a couple of hours later.

Artists can change the mindsets of, 'I can't do it' to, 'Oh look I'm doing it'. A quick inhalation of art is simply fulfilling the natural motivation to feel happy, within the process of creativity and observation. We read that ten minutes of meditation de-stresses, and that ten minutes of aerobic walking reverses ill-health; so let's offer ten minutes of art, in whatever changing way, on the main streets of our towns and villages.

For art to work its magic, it has to be seen and experienced every day: something catching the eye on a trot past a window. You have passed it twenty-three times but suddenly your attention is captured and on you go, thinking/smiling/puzzled and perhaps at peace.

Now is the time to be a bit more renegade. It's not 'a gallery' or 'a theatre' into which people fear stepping in: it could be a kind of Souk; a tumbling and touchable, bargainable, riotous heap, with gems amongst the unpolished. Art-sharing could be at another place too - creating temporary studio spaces in unused buildings where there's no great commitment to a regular presence but there is a consistency of up-to-date information about the local arts scene, in full view. Artists could be working collaboratively with local authorities and businesses. The more voluble and viewable the presence of creativity is, is also of proven benefit to commerce and tourism. We could move from 'site specific art' to site non-specific art-ing. We would commit to an interaction with more people and create opportunities for more people to experience and be participants in the start, the process and the finish of an artform and its ongoing dialogue.

What has brought on these thoughts? Well, they throb around my head after the all-too-frequent experience of having worked very hard on setting up an exhibition, only to have left no time for my own creative work, and close to tears at the end when the few sales were little above a tenner each - and that to charity.

Some of you may notice threads of conversations we have all had, some others will have confirmed the worth of such ideas and some others will already clearly see art as 'the path' to get the towns revived. These ideas are not really new, nor fully thought out, nor is this article perfectly formed or finished - you can probably tell. But I'm letting go now and wonder which way it will float. **M**

Rosalind lives in Birr and has been running Tin Jug Studio since 2000. She is an occasional writer/designer/artist, etc



'An rud a líonán an tsúil líonann sé an croí. *What fills the eye fills the heart.*' It is some years since I was commissioned to paint that Irish saying, now covered by a nice coat of white paint; indicative of the temporariness of art. Dented ego aside, it was not great art. I am convinced however that the way to accept 'destruction' or dissipation of something creative is to imagine it in a new configuration, or its essence being regenerated; reincarnated.

For instance, there is an energy change between the beginning and the end of an exhibition. Pieces are collected together, positions selected; the work of a sole, or group of artists is displayed under a title; a theme. The occasion might be a festival, or the opportunity to exhibit within the white-walls of a public edifice. For the selected parameters of time the subtlest threads of living energy hold the vibration of the exhibition together. And then, it can seem to lose lustre. The energy shifts.

I've wondered if it is due to familiarity; a ceasing to notice any more, when there is a formality of display. The pattern of the position of the images and artworks has been sub-consciously memorised and it is that which makes them pall in the eyes of the beholders. As artists and gallery doyennes we prefer things neat

and orderly on our walls. The chaos of the creative studio and the seeking of order in the process of setting up, at last leads to relief when the final piece has its position, in harmony with its theme siblings. All is calm now; serene. But break those comfortable horizontals and verticals and the brain gives a start, then the eyes notice.

So, uncomfortable as the idea might make some of us feel, would all our art become more noticeable if we were to make more informal displays: something that is ever-evolving and repositioned, to lead the eye a chase. Oh dear, of course! That's the art of retail display, and we wouldn't want to be labelled as 'commercial' would we?

The role of art and the artist

What I'm struggling to write down is both a philosophical and practical viewpoint on whether as artists; we have a moral obligation to make a lot more of our art reach out. In other words, if by being separate, exclusive, minimal, precious, and elevated more by words said and written about our talent amongst our peers than our next door neighbours, are we in reality losing an opportunity to fill more eyes and touch more hearts within a wider public? 'They' (within our communities for whom art is something more to scoff at or to be timid of engaging with) won't

Fiona Booth, model and dancer from county Laois. Photo taken in the Tea Rooms of Emo Court, county Laois. Photographer John Lalor.



Director of Dunamisa Arts Centre praised for contribution

The Director of the Dunamisa Arts Centre, Louise Donlon, has left her position after being appointed as Manager of the new Lime Tree Theatre in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

She moved to Laois in 1999 on her appointment to the Dunamisa and has been responsible for the programming of the theatre and gallery in the arts centre since that time.

Among the highlights during her tenure have been performances by The Chieftains, Druid Theatre Company, The Gate with its *Waiting for Godot* tour, John O'Connor, the Abbey - and many more too numerous to mention.

Mr Louis Brennan, Chairman of the Dunamisa Arts Company, expressed his sincere regret at the loss of such an accomplished Director/Manager of the centre. He said that his fellow directors and all employees were equally saddened by the news. "Louise has been a power of knowledge, experience and skills in relation to all forms of the arts," he explained. He said that her work in developing the Dunamisa as a model of excellence has been recognised throughout the country. "We were very fortunate to have the benefit of her managerial expertise since the Dunamisa was opened in 1999."

He wished Louise and her family every good wish and trusted that her relationship with the Dunamisa Arts Centre and the people of Laois would continue as she and her husband, Jim O'Brien, had made an important contribution to society in Laois since their arrival here in 1999.

Louise has worked in the sector for over 20 years. A native of county Longford, she holds a BA in Music and History, a Diploma in Arts Administration and a Masters in Public Administration.

She began her career in the arts at the City Arts Centre and at the Arts Council's offices in Dublin. In the early 1990s she worked in Limerick as administrator of Island Theatre Company before moving onto the internationally acclaimed Druid Theatre Company in Galway where she worked as General Manager. She was with the company during a time of major international success when Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (as part of *The Leenane Trilogy*) toured to London, Sydney and New York where it won four Tony awards on Broadway.

Louise's move back to Limerick is a sort of homecoming for her and her family as her husband, Jim O'Brien, is a native of Kildimo, county Limerick. The couple have three girls aged from 13 to 8.

M

Laois Photographer:

Solo Exhibition at the Photo Ireland Festival - July 2012

John Lalor is a Photography graduate from Griffith College Dublin where he also received an academic achievement of excellence in the field of photography.

Currently working from his studio The Sky-Lite in county Laois, John's first solo exhibition *Third World Eyes* was exhibited in 2010 which has fuelled a love of personal projects and motivated John to think long term about his work and think of each project as on-going, allowing it time to develop and change along its path.

His love of photography took him around the world for 18 months in 2007 exploring the world and involving himself in all aspects of life and world

culture. The expedition established a new way of seeing which has since put a frame around the world, and the camera has become a passport to enter places, corners, and situations in a new frame of mind or a new intensity of light.

Redesigned Landscapes

This project sets out to find a similar beauty to that of a desert landscape in the decaying urban landscape. The Irish countryside is a place of wonder and beauty that people travel the world over to be a part of. "Travelling about the Irish countryside, its hard not to notice abandonment, from century old buildings and castles to modern isolated ghost states, schools, hospitals, industrial work houses, mines that have all been left to waste and

decay," explains John. "There is beauty in decay, and excitement in desertion."

Further details

His solo exhibition takes place in The Darc Space, 26 North Great Georges St for the month of July. See www.denisbyrnearchitects.ie/contact for information.

PhotoIreland is a Dublin based organization dedicated to stimulate dialogue around Photography in Ireland. PhotoIreland is committed to the cultivation of a deeper understanding and a critical interest around photographic knowledge.

John's website can be found at www.johnlalorphotography.ie

M

Darkroom



Lost in Daylight



Art makes a difference to the places we live

Using the Arts to promote a town's regeneration

"The arts have a serious contribution to addressing contemporary social challenges as they cause social benefits integral to participation" (Matarasso 1997)

Portarlington is one of the most interesting towns in the midlands with its rich Huguenot history, distinctive architecture and the River Barrow which meanders through neatly divides the town between Offaly and Laois.

At an important rail junction, the town flourished as a commuter town of Dublin but in recent years this has brought new challenges.

The Portarlington Community Development Association (PCDA) was established in 1997 to be the voice of the community, to develop the entrepreneurial, social and cultural content of the town and plan for its future development. To date, the PCDA has

brought to fruition a Community Centre, the People's Park, recreational walks and an After Schools' Project among other initiatives. The (Port's) Vision 2020 plan presents the vision for the town's future; a foundation of the town's regeneration and growth up to the year 2020.

The group has been using the arts and artists to animate their vision for the town. Its recent inclusion the RTE's *Dirty Old Towns* series saw the development of a new piece of sculpture at the Barrow Bridge. Spelling out the word 'live' (it had initially been 'live' but its orientation meant that people could easily read it backwards, so the 'v' became an 'f') this has a Diarmuid Gavin stamp all over it but, nonetheless, it animates and draws attention to one of the most striking features of the town.

Other projects include 'welcome paintings' wall by the Railway Station led by artist Sarah Delaney and the walkway

from the Peoples Park to the Spa Bridge with architect Edel Roycroft. Cabrini Cahill, Theatre Director, added her artistic direction to the 2012 St Patrick's Day Parade to develop the parade as an artistic expression for the town. This was an opportunity for an artist to interpret Portarlington's 2020 Vision through different art mediums in order to communicate its message out to the town. Cabrini took the themes of the 'vision' and creating a parade through community workshops, exploring their ideas to encourage people to think and get involved.

The visual arts were used as an effective promoter to showcase the five action groups within Ports' Vision 2020; for example, the Business Section Cabrini's Peopleopoly Board: (13 foot square), was driven through the streets with a borrowed title of PORTOPOLY for the day. Aided by colourful characters, including

Mr Portopoly and the glamorous assistants who will have the audience rolling the dice and bartering carrots to buy a variety of potential businesses, which could add value to the town's economy. The festival was full of ideas, props, costumes made to express the town's ambitions for itself.

This process has communicated and brought alive what otherwise would have been a desktop exercise. Celia Devereil of Portarlington Community Development Association said: "We would consider this process could be used as a template for social and community regeneration in other similar Irish towns, and encourage people to talk to the artists in their community for ideas and inspiration to turn towns around.

In Portarlington, there have been over 1500 volunteer hours given on this project and 10 local artists who have contributed since 2010."



I AM HERE, I LIVE, I LOVE

As part of Offaly County Council's Engage with Architecture Programme architect Orla Murphy gave a talk in Daingean Library about the evolution of the Irish Town and its morphology pointing out that Irish Towns are central to our cultural identity, much more than we realise and appreciate.

The social relations which emerge as individuals and institutions interact to commodify place identity. Where there is evidence of a gradual redefinition of local identities through, for example, the changing of cultural practices, heritage and landscape resources, there is also

evidence of resistance to this re-orientation.

As the former County Town of Offaly, Daingean is one of these towns that has had to redefine itself. It is steeped in history from a time when it was one of the most important towns in Ireland from its well-known association with the Grand Canal and St Conleth's Reformatory. Daingean was the termination point for the Grand Canal until 1797 at which point the canal was completed to Tullamore and the Shannon and the trade went with it. The town went into decline and has struggled to recover since.

2012 sees the start of a new purpose for Daingean, beginning with the painting of the Main Street in association with Dulux; to help regain the town's proud heritage.

The town's huge courthouse is being renovated (an oversized building in relation to the rest of the town, which only makes sense only in the context of Daingean's history).

Also, RTE's *Dirty Old Towns* is being filmed there and a heritage trail is being launched in June, closely followed by the 25th anniversary Daingean Home Coming Festival in August.

So what does this all mean for a midlands town, or any town?

Towns which are proud of their heritage, who find ways to gather, create, celebrate and educate transform more than how it looks - they transform its residents, giving them confidence and a proud sense of identity. Towns that have this magical ingredient survive culturally, socially and economically. With this renewed focus on Daingean, it will be interesting to watch a new cultural legacy in the making.



Major regional venue is threatened by escalating funding cuts

Historic and groundbreaking

In 2012 Backstage Theatre in Longford faces into its eighteenth year in operation. Almost 20 years old the theatre can look back on many memorable and often challenging times in an ever changing arts landscape. When the theatre opened its doors in 1995 it was the only theatre in the midlands region.

Many would have thought the notion of a theatre in Longford a far too lofty and ambitious one when the concept was first announced but the determination and hard work of a relatively small number of people, with the support of the local community behind them, made this vision a reality.

Since then Backstage has been a leading force in the promotion and development of the arts, not just in the midlands, but in the country as a whole.

Impressive track record of theatre

A programme of theatre that has featured such notables as Druid Theatre Company, The Abbey, Rough Magic Theatre Co and Livin Dred has proven to be a great draw for audiences regionally and have cemented Backstage as fundamental to any national tour by the top theatre companies in the country.

Excellent dance venue

Backstage has earned itself a glowing reputation as a dance venue nationally and has a strong relationship with the Shawbrook dance organisation in Legan. Their partnership with this organisation has done much to strengthen the audience for dance, both contemporary and ballet, in the region. Fidget Feet Aerial Dance Theatre became the venue's resident company in 2011 and regularly rehearse and tech their work before national and international tours.

Two-time Olivier Award nominated Fabulous Beast Dance Company, who have toured to the Barbican in London

and Sydney Opera House, took up short term residency in the venue in December 2010 to produce a new piece of work entitled *Helen and Hell*. The programme of dance has also included companies such as CoisCéim Dance Theatre and Diversions Dance Company in Wales.

In recent years, the programme of music at Backstage diversified to include more contemporary and mainstream artists such as Rodrigo y Gabriella, Mick Flannery, Duke Special, Lisa Hannigan, Gemma Hayes and Paul Brady.

Touring



In 2006 Backstage joined forces with a number of other venues to become part of two touring networks; Nomad a regional network based in the north midlands and Nasc a network of seven venues with a wider geographical spread nationally. These were the first networks of their kind and Backstage was the only venue on both networks. In 2008 Backstage was the lead venue of the Nomad network and a production in association with Livin Dred of *The Dead School* by Pat Mc Cabe opened in the venue before touring to all venues in the network and subsequently to the Dublin Theatre Festival and the Tricycle in London. *The Dead School* was a huge success with audiences and critics alike, garnering three Irish Times theatre Awards nominations.

Community-focused

A strong programme of touring theatre dance and music is complimented by a steadfast community focussed programme. The theatre provides a platform for local community groups, schools and festivals to develop perform and present work encouraging participation in the arts.

Organisations such as Aisling Children's Arts Festival, an annual week long festival which has been in existence since 1998. Then there is St Christopher's Services, a service for people with intellectual disabilities. Backstage Youth Theatre has gone from

theatre project to produce and stage in house productions at the theatre. In the two short years since the project was introduced three productions have been devised and developed out of the Canal Studio at Backstage before transferring to the 212 seater auditorium for three to five night runs. T

he productions are cast through an open audition and have attracted many experienced and talented amateur actors living and working in the area. The production process involves a series of rehearsals and workshops with well-known figures from the world of theatre giving these local actors the chance to work with professional directors, choreographers, lighting designers and theatre staff.

The first production *Philadelphia Here I Come* was directed by Noel Strange from Longford in October 2010, as was the third production of *The Hostage* which toured to Ramor Theatre in Virginia after its run in Backstage in October 2011.

In August 2011 a production of *The Carnival at Glenaduff*, written and directed by Padraic Mc Intyre of Livin Dred Theatre Company ran for five nights.

All three in house productions played to full houses.

Funding cuts

Backstage has suffered significant cuts to its Arts Council funding in recent years, which almost certainly threatens the future of what has become a landmark venue in the national arts scene.

Those involved told the *Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine*: "We can only hope that the experience and expertise gained over almost two decades of consistent and commendable arts provision will provide this venue with the means and the resolve to survive and even continue to flourish." **M**

“I hope to create narratives which invite people to re-assess the familiar and ordinary.”



Face-to-Face

Face-to-Face with Westmeath artist, **FIONA KELLY**

How do you describe what you do to others?

I assemble visual fables.

Please give us some more details as to the materials you use, why and how you construct your art.

I work through a myriad of techniques and materials in reaction to my found environment, but primarily I find my narrations come in the medium of Relief Printmaking. A medium which historically is identified as a conduit which provides functional illustrations, presenting moral narratives in a simple informative way.

I utilise the resonance of the relief print to address my contemporary social concerns for the individual and environment. I use common place objects and fairly comical slogans to illustrate fables, facilitating the viewer to question this banal absurdity of everyday situations; what was thought to be familiar has to be re-accessed.

What are you trying to achieve through your work?

I hope to create narratives which invite people to re-assess the familiar and ordinary.

When did you first become attracted to art and when did you decide to follow this as a career path?

Art has always been a constant in my life. My parents always had a stock of crayons for us. I have never felt like I decided that art was a career path, it is just where I walked to.

You seem to work and be popular in the Nordic countries. Is there a particular reason for this?

I don't know if I am popular in Nordic countries, but Nordic countries are

popular with me! I am intrigued with the vacant Landscapes in the north, so wonderfully beautiful and cruel. The people I have met there have a tremendous sense of humour and I will always avail of any opportunities to go back.

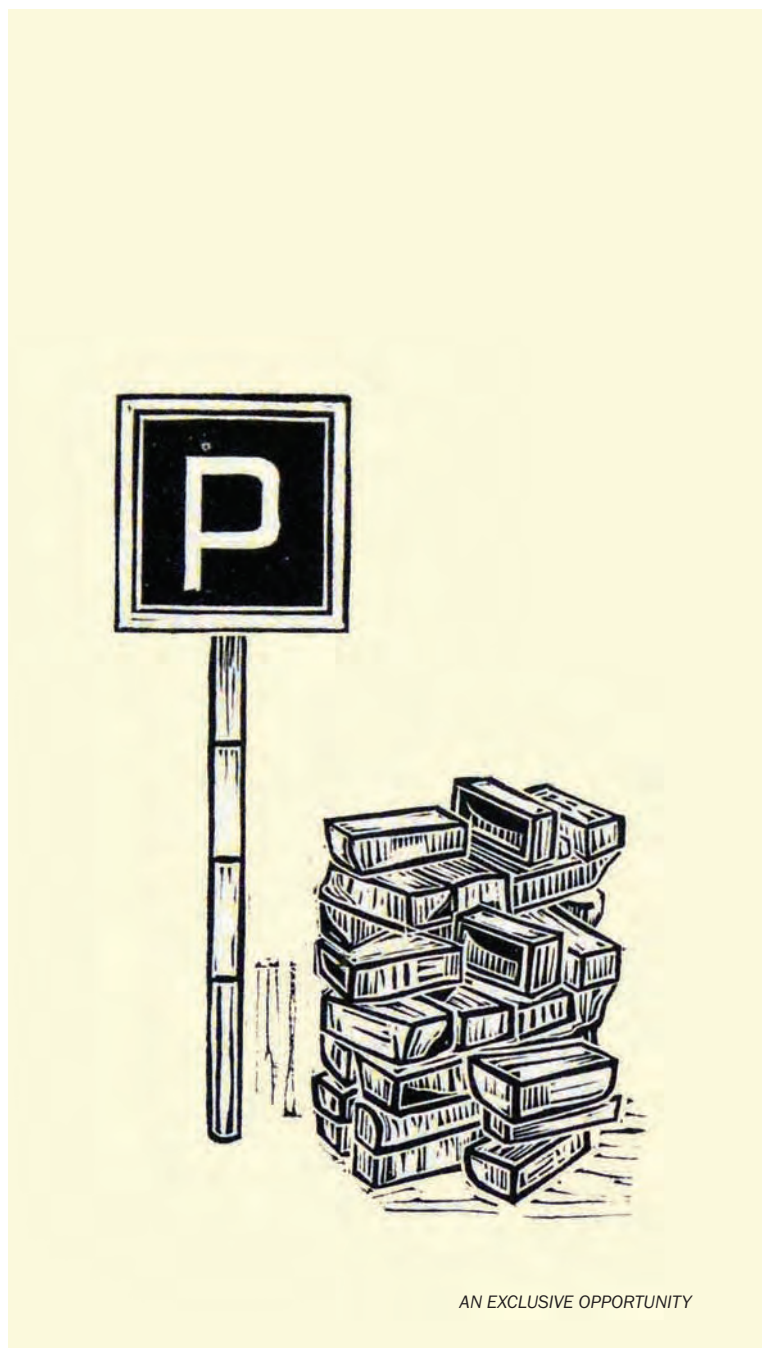
What was it like having your work displayed in Shanghai and New York?

The New York Print *Death Swap* Show was really fun; a friend in the States told me about the opportunity and we applied and got involved as we were big fans of the organisers- Cannonball Press. A punk band played at the opening and I realised how distinctive it was to be a printmaker, creating work in editions; sharing and swapping. It was a revelation and a working ethos that I have kept with me.

Shanghai was epic, my two collaborators - Amanda Rice and Edel O'Reilly, which I'm part of the Artist collective *Cork Contemporary Projects* with, worked extremely hard to get to that point. China was an amazing experience and the most challenging professionally thus far. I have been really fortunate to have such ambitious, accomplished and loyal friends as contemporaries. It is so important to have a network you can rely on, especially in such a high profile show. Amanda, Edel and I met while studying together at The Crawford College of Art.

When you set out on this path what was your ultimate goal?

I didn't have an ultimate goal, but now it's to have a little cottage with a big shed (studio) and a sheep dog!





you become repetitive and your ideas stagnate and that could happen no matter where you are based.

What are some of the best/worst things about arts in the midlands?

The best thing about the midlands is the emergence of new and vital artist collectives, groups and paces. There is a bright enthusiasm about and this will keep building with the creation of new artistic outlets.

The worst thing is that there is no established art gallery in Westmeath but this is been rectified at the moment in a beautiful renovation project in Athlone. I'm delighted at this new enterprise as Westmeath needs a non-static art gallery to promote its emerging and professional artists and provide them with the facilities to further their career not only in their own local, but to be of national recognition.

What do you think can be done to encourage more people to engage with the arts at a local level?

I think people have certain insecurities when it comes to viewing and making art that they should let go of. Everybody should pick up a pencil or crayon and allow some paper be a receptacle for their thoughts, if only for this moment.

What would you say to a young person who has expressed an interest in art as a career?

You have to start being really comfortable with rejection! I want to give confidence to other emerging artists to continue on an artistic route but the thing you never think of is how sturdy artists need to be. Perseverance and mettle are needed just as much as talent and concept.

M

The place which influenced me the most is probably the house where I grew up. It is a *wunderkammer* of objects and fragments.

Tell us a little about your current and upcoming exhibitions/works?

The unexpected architecture of folly caused by the indefinite interim experienced by materials on construction sites are currently of keen interest to my current research and practice, which is following on from my *bricks* series.

I am currently investigating the absurdity of this aspect of contemporary reality in construction by giving these inanimate stacks humane traits; introducing them to everyday objects with the combination of poetic slogans and void spaces to show the materials passive agreement to the imposed socio-economic situations effecting their locations.

I'm having a lot of fun with this train of thought right now and I'm working towards a three person exhibition in Galleria Harmonia in Finland. I'm also seeking out a space for a solo show in Westmeath. I had been visiting

some really nice spaces and hope to make some decisions soon. There are always a few projects on the go at any one time!

Outside of the studio, I'm facilitating a TY group from Kibeggan create and install an exhibition based on logos, branding and sign theory through the medium of relief printmaking. This has been made possible by the Westmeath Artist in the Community Scheme. I'm studying and designing the class and it's a really exciting venture for me. The exhibition will be a fringe event to The *Kibeggan Knighthood Festival* which makes its debut on June 1.

Was there a person/thing which influenced you most?

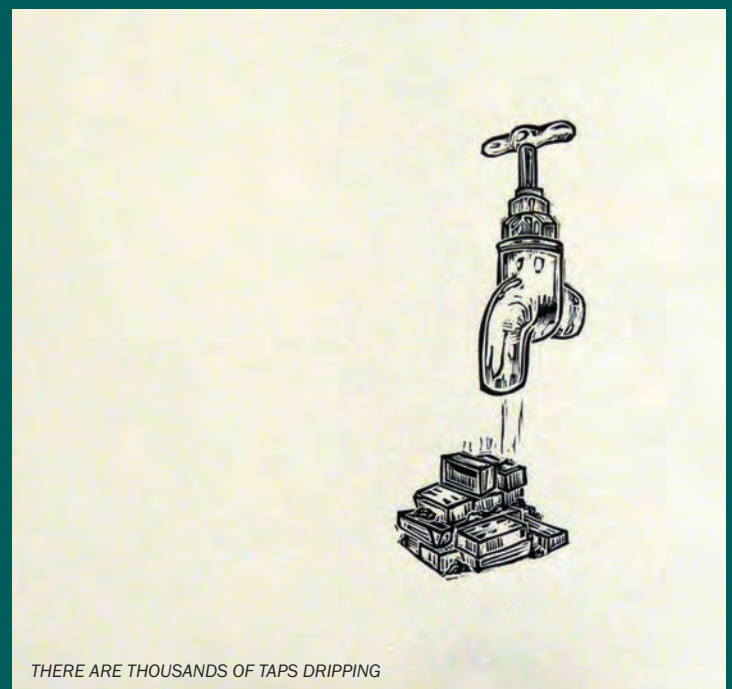
The place which influenced me the most is probably the house where I grew up. It is a *wunderkammer* of objects and fragments. My Father's family have lived here for generations and had various modes of employment alongside the farm. We had adjacent sheds to the house which were my Grandfather/Great-grandfather's workshops and they were just full of bric-a-brack and remnants; drawers upon drawers of nails, cogs, oil cans, string. In the house I would delight in opening a random cupboard to be greeted with a hotchpotch of objects - buttons, boxes of old pins, badges, hundreds of small keys each different from the next, old latch hooks and string-such an amount of string! I found wonder in these objects and was they were always a catalyst into my play and stories. So I thank my family and their

generations of collecting!

A person, aside from my family, would be Heather Seery, a wonderful lady and an extremely talented artist who taught me how to draw, which is the most important tool as an artist, but she also taught me how to relax into my ideas, which is everything.

Can you be based in the midlands and have a global reach?

Yes, I think you can - as long as you find the time, space, facilities, and have the all important banter with your peers, you can work from anywhere. The thing that will keep you from advancing artistically is if



The Collaborative Space

by Eileen Casey

How then does a poet collaborate with self in order to produce a poem?

Michael Longley once said: "if I knew where poems come from, I'd go there." Longley puts forward the belief that poems come from a certain pre-ordained place designated 'there'. However poems arrive, it's safe to say they do not arrive in delivery vans. There is no idea factory out there belching fumes of blood sweat and tears. Nor is there an introduction agency on a sleazy backstreet waiting to match the perfect poem with the poet. If Longley focuses on arrival, the departure point shouldn't be forgotten. Poems arrive mainly because the poet has been able to exit the departure lounge and keep faith and some degree of nerve until the craft is safely landed.

Isaac Bashevis Singer once said: "Every creator painfully experiences the chasm between his inner vision and its ultimate expression."

This 'space' can be a minimalist's delight or cluttered up with feelings, images, word play or what poet Anne Waldman calls "goofy profundity."

The collaborative engagement with the creative self requires courage, trust and an unerring instinct for following the directions on those quirky departure signs.

Picasso maintained: "The artist is a receptacle for the emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web." Trusting in both self and the universe inspires the confidence that comes from hoping whoever is pulling the strings will, on a particular day, give enough loosening of doubt, enough starlight to write, paint, sculpt, artistically create by, enough energy and generosity to get the work done.

Bridging the collaborative space between trust and finished work, means being a holder to some extent, gathering 'ordinary magic' from ordinary places, smells, tastes, sounds; noticing how a lily pad and a broken umbrella can be tenants on the same fully paid up terror of the blank page. In seeking their own collaboration, these disparate neighbours might make mischief then decide to make up, or not, as the case may be. While they share the same space, they are essentially seeking to

make their presence available in whatever shape the poet, having signed the contract on the dotted line, is fully committed to.

American Poet Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge describes the collaborative space between this trusting in self and universe as "finding the coyote in the poet; seeking out the nearest place with wildness in it, driving there if necessary, even for one hour".

Negotiation between the poet and the reader of the poems is not always, nor should it be, a symbiotic relationship. The meaning of text relies on social, cultural and historical factors. The prowess of the artist lies in an ability to provide the necessary gaps and chinks so that the reader is able to find enough airholes to be able to respond to the work without recourse to an oxygen mask.

Encaustic art

In 2007 I began working with encaustic art, or candle wax, using the images produced to generate themes and moods for the poems to come. The space between what can burn so brightly and painfully one moment and then freeze so solidly the instant it leaves the flame is, for me, a potential source of intrigue for me. The resulting collaboration between 'reading' what I saw and felt in the resulting metamorphic qualities of the wax and 'writing' the draft poems and the finished work went on show under the title *Reading Fire, Writing Flame* at Arás an Chontae, Tullamore, in 2007. The process of the work, the raw images, the drafts of the poems were on display also, together with seven of the completed works sign painted on 6ft x 4ft Perspex.

It was interesting to watch people using the council offices for all sorts of other engagements; stop and read the work. A seat was even provided for their convenience. Builders in hard hats, working in the offices at the time, who may also be committed library goers, sat and munched their sandwiches and read the poems. Does poetry taste nicer when flavoured with the collaborative miracle of mayonnaise or pickled onions? *Reading Fire, Writing Flame* featured in Poetry Ireland, Issue No 92, edited by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. In Ní Chuilleanáin's essay *Where is Poetry*, she explores the role of the poem in public places, describing it as being

"unpredictable" and saying it "can be ill-tempered, so it might snuggle down under the hotel duvet or snap back even as it is quoted. Perhaps it doesn't mind being co-opted into the regional piety".

Collaboration with Emma Barone

Between 2008 and 2011 I've enjoyed two collaborative productions with visual artist, Emma Barone. Our first meeting was rather a collision rather than an arrival or departure. I was running through an art exhibition called Shoe Show by Emma when I bumped into her, almost knocking her sideways but I knew I wanted to write poems based on her work. The visual aspect of the work was already there and I was collaborating with completed work. Many of the poems in this collection are Haiku, Shoe Haiku. *Birds Take off/At the end of sling-back days/Wings slapping skywards Fly Agaric Summer* was suggested by the title of one of Emma's shoe images but it was her innovative use of mushroom design that sparked the central image:

'Ball gowns balloon a soon of scent/ Plumed headdresses glisten with pomade
Rouge brightens leaded faces - everywhere / Fluer-de-lys. In the drowsy gardens
Fun.gal, cap and stalk, stripped pileus / Lamellae, gilled, frilled wings - / Spread beyond the Palace walls, / Where, clamorous as small-pox / The mushrooming mob. / Sounds of hurrying feet
Sculpt a rise and fall / - what surely must come / - and follow - in the long hall/At Versailles.'

Our next collaboration occurred in 2011, the fruits of which appear in our joint publication *From Bone to Blossom*. For me, as poet, the collaborative space to be negotiated required, for some reason, the purchase of a yellow notebook, and the commitment to include poems about environmental themes. Emma interpreted her vision through non-traditional representations which explored a collaborative relationship between the earth bound object of natural art that a tree undoubtedly is and its ability to transform and transcend. When we completed the work, we invited Dedalus Poet Grace Wells to write an introduction for us. This was of particular interest because it brought another dimension into the collaborative space, a critical focus that we couldn't articulate. Grace Wells saw the overall collaboration

In its broad sense, collaboration means to enter into a process, agreed or otherwise, with another out of which a product or purpose develops or emerges. This 'other' can be interpreted in many ways, including one's own creative self. It also encompasses the relationship between the author of the work and the consumer of it; whether the collaboration is a friendly one, or a traitorous one and what's generated when the collaborative space is reinterpreted with a critical eye.

as being in some ways symbiotic, while both artist and poet retained core individualism. Wells describes the collaborative space in *From Bone to Blossom* as 'shared', that word and image work off one another, Barone's striking images of Coastal Trees complementing engaging poems. Jean Cocteau said that 'an artist cannot talk about his art any more than a plant can discuss horticulture.' It's as if the poet and the visual artist have been given a third eye which is not distorted, a glass that magnifies and zooms in on places which might well be overlooked otherwise. In this sense, it's safe to say that the introduction of a third perspective into the collaborative space results in a lens through which the individual artist finds another way of seeing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the collaborative space is an available space, interesting, challenging, conversational and indeed, necessary. Emerson once said: "Everything in creation has its appointed painter or poet and remains in bondage like the princess in the fairy tale 'till its appropriate liberator comes to set it free.'" **M**

About Eileen

Eileen Casey is a poet, writer and creative writing facilitator from Birr, County Offaly and lives in Tallaght, County Dublin. Her poetry and prose is published widely and has received many awards including a Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship and a Hennessy Literary Award for Emerging Fiction. A chapbook *Spit and Clay* won The Green Book Festival Poetry Category in 2010. Her collections include *Drinking The Colour Blue*, (New Island) and *From Bone to Blossom* (AltEnts Publishing, Rua Red, Tallaght). She completed an M.Phil (Creative Writing) at The Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College Dublin. *Snow Shoes*, a collection of short stories is due out from Arlen House.



Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

Meet the team

Tempus Media and Brosna Press, using their combined expertise in journalism, marketing, design, print and production have created a new-look **Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine**.

TEMPUS MEDIA

There's never a wrong time to do the right thing

Tempus Media was established at the height of the recession in September 2009 as the founders saw an opening for a top quality, good value media company in a challenging marketplace for business and Government. Midlands-based Tempus Media specialises in five key areas - Publishing/ Copywriting, Public Relations, Media Training, Lobbying, and Business Crisis Management.

Editor: ANGELA MADDEN

Angela has more than 15 years' experience in the publishing industry as a Journalist, Foreign Correspondent, Editor, Group Editor and General Manager for trade, local and national press in Ireland and the UK. Angela has excellent local knowledge as she was previously Editor of the Athlone Voice and has an enviable list of contacts throughout the country, built up during her time as Group Editor for 13 River Media newspaper titles. She also has a wealth of experience launching new publications responsible for content, layout and templates having brought a number of new River Media titles to market in '07.

Deputy Editor: BRIEGE MADDEN

Briega is a trained journalist who has worked for local newspapers for close to four years. After attaining her BA Creative Writing & Media Studies degree she started her career at The Athlone Voice before taking up a more senior role at the Cavan Post. She joined Tempus Media in April this year as Business Development Manager and is the lead consultant on a number of important Public Relations contracts. Briega is also an avid poet, short story writer and artist.

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BROSNA PRESS

Creative Design and Print

Located in the heart of the midlands, Brosna Press has been providing a nationwide client-base with creative, high quality design and print for over 50 years. Its Irish Print Award acknowledges the company's commitment to the pursuit of excellence in print and creativity in design. Clients in the arts sector include: RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Music Network, Music for Galway, New Ross Piano Festival, County Council Arts Offices, Dunamais Theatre, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, Tuar Ard Arts Centre. Brosna Press operate their design studio & print works from a state-of-the-art 12,000 sq ft facility in Ferbane, Co. Offaly.

Creative Director: DIARMUID GUINAN

Senior Designer: ANDREW MOORE

Production Manager: CIARAN GUINAN

Creative Director Diarmuid Guinan holds a BDes, and has more than 18 years professional experience in graphic design and printing. He manages a highly creative and experienced design team including Andrew Moore, BDes, Senior Designer, Ann Quinlan, BDes, Senior Designer and the highly experienced Mary Egan. Managing Director Ciaran Guinan holds a Diploma in Print Management and has more than 25 years professional experience in the print industry. The production staff at Brosna Press are all highly skilled press operators and print finishing specialists.

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Have your story covered...

If you have a story or news relating to the arts in the Midlands that you would like to see covered in Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine, contact your local Arts Officer (details opposite).



OFFALY
YOUTH
THEATRE



OFFALY YOUTH THEATRE

Sunday, April 15 saw another exciting step forward for youth arts in Offaly with the official launch of Offaly Youth Theatre at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.

Speaking at the launch Cllr Molly Buckley, Chairperson of Offaly Youth Theatre, said: "Offaly County Council is delighted to be in a position to support Offaly Youth Theatre. In our new Arts Plan for 2012-2016 we have prioritised youth arts as we believe that facilitating projects in which young people can freely and safely be expressive, is investment into their capacity to be confident, independent and innovative thinkers. "This is not necessarily about creating Oscar winning actors, although wouldn't that be great, but about being able to imagine that anything possible."

This project is supported by Offaly County Council, the Arts Council of Ireland and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre with thanks is also due to the individuals, venues and schools that facilitated workshops. Offaly Youth Theatre is also affiliated with the National Association of Youth Drama.

New members are always welcome and should contact Janine on **087 2071258** or offalyyouththeatre@gmail.com



Co-ordinator appointed to Music Generation Laois

Laois Music Education Partnership has announced the appointment of Rosa Flannery as Co-ordinator of Music Generation Laois.

Based at Laois County Council, Rosa's role will involve developing access to music education for children and young people in county Laois.

Laois is among six counties currently selected for participation in Music Generation - the U2 and Ireland Funds' supported National Music Education Programme.

The appointment of Rosa Flannery to Music Generation Laois comes as Laois School of Music celebrates 10 years of music education in the locality.

Donegal native Rosa has a wealth of teaching experience and most recently was involved with North Wind Blows - a large scale cross-border intergenerational music project. She joins Music Generation Laois from Donegal Music Education Partnership where she worked as a project Co-ordinator.

Speaking about her appointment, Rosa said "Music Generation will bring great opportunities for children and young people to get involved in music in different ways and I am really looking forward to being part of the programme. I have worked across many different areas of music and the arts and I firmly believe in the Music Generation model of creating local access to music education will bring tangible benefits to the community."

Laois School of Music was established in 2001, as the result of a partnership approach by Laois County Council, The Arts Council and Laois VEC. Laois School of Music responded to a significant deficit in music provision in the county at that time, and now has over 380 pupils.

For more information on Music Generation Laois, log on to www.laois.ie



MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

A REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN LAOIS, LONGFORD
OFFALY AND WESTMEATH