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Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

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

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MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

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



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THE WRITTEN WORD
MUSIC & DANCE
THEATRE & FILM
VISUAL ARTS

FREE

MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

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WESTMEATH POET JOHN ENNIS PUBLISHES THE FINAL WORK IN HIS TESTAMENT FOR HOME SERIES

Midlandia is the final work in the author John Ennis's **Testament for Home** (*Postponing* 2013, *A Pullet for Jack* 2014 and *Going Home to Geatland* 2015.) *Midlandia* celebrates the wider Irish midlands landscape of town and country, its people and the mystic Uisneach at the heart of the place: no lyric jaunt, the book attempts to embrace both the ugly and the awesome in humanity. The work takes its cue from the *Finlandia* of Sibelius. The style is a similar *plein air*. *Midlandia* was launched in Mullingar's features poems inspired by John's native Westmeath as well as work inspired by family members and people from neighbouring counties.

I.M. JOE DOLAN

You filled each dance hall with the South Seas
When you walked immaculate on stage,
When you hurled at them *Make Me an Island*.
And if there had been *ma'o han hele* to hand
Say, or the wildest blossoms of pacific islands,
Women would have strewn
the like under you,
Gathered petalled chains for your shoulders.
As often as not, Ireland was washed
with November weather
All the flowers were falling battered
with the rain,
And all the mothers who'd been
through the mill of kids, –
They'd no bouquets for you,
only petalled bras and panties,
So they stripped themselves
then and there of these,
Flung them on stage to strew
beneath your feet.
As your hips shook and they
danced in the heat.



A Word from the Editor

It's been a dark, damp winter but finally there is a glimmer of light. The dawns are brighter and as they say "there is a stretch in the evenings" ... it is also a time to consider outdoor activities and getting out and about and enjoying all there is to see and experience in the midlands.

In this month's issue our regular contributor Manchán Magan waxes lyrical about the beauty of the bogs throughout the four counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath and the major influence the peatlands have had on all aspects of the arts. The centenary of 1916 is also a common theme in all four counties with many varied events being scheduled to mark this historic occasion.

As always there is a strong emphasis on youth activities in the arts while at the other end of the age spectrum Claire O'Brien paints a vivid picture of an afternoon with artist Ray Murphy who is retiring as caretaker at Emo Court. Numerous links with international television and film companies are highlighted in this issue, once again highlighting the wealth of talent in the spheres of music, acting, dance and the visual arts in the midlands.

Finally, in this issue we welcome the news that Tullamore finally has a home for the long-awaited arts centre.

Vivienne Clarke of Acumen Media,
Editor

MOUNTMELICK DRAMA FESTIVAL 2016

Drama enthusiasts in the Midlands will be pleased to be reminded that it is almost Mountmellick Drama Festival time again!

The Festival which is run under the auspices of the Amateur Drama Council of Ireland attracts Ireland's finest and most talented drama groups. Their passion and love for their craft ensures that we are treated to productions of the highest standard, as they vie for a coveted place at the All Ireland Finals.

Following on from last years very successful 25th Anniversary celebrations, the Festival committee is confident that this year's line up of plays will prove to be an exciting and entertaining mix. Patrons will be spoiled for choice as the programme contains both familiar and traditional plays, several of which Mountmellick audiences will not have seen before.

The Festival runs from Friday 4th March to Friday 11th March Venue; Community Arts Centre, Mountmellick.
At 8PM sharp each night with the exception of
FINAL NIGHT which will start at 7.30pm
TICKETS; ONE NIGHT €10 (€5 concessions)
SEASON TICKETS; €50 (€25 concessions)

FESTIVAL PROGRAMME

FRI 4 MARCH: "SHARONS'S GRAVE" by John B Keane – Shoestring Theatre Company
SAT 5 MARCH: "THE QUIET MOMENT" by Mike Finn – Skibbereen Theatre Society
SUN 6 MARCH: "JANE EYRE"™ adapted by Polly Teale – Dalkey Players
MON 7 MARCH: "MOONSHINE" by Jim Nolan – Bunclody/Kilmyshall Drama Group
TUE 8 MARCH: "WHERE HE LIES"™ by John Barrett – Kilmuckridge Drama Group
Wed 9 MARCH: "THE THRILL OF LOVE"™ by Amanda Whittington – Holycross/Ballycahill DG
THU 10 MARCH: "PROOF"™ by David Auburn – Compántas Lir Drama Group
FRI 11 MARCH: "STEEL MAGNOLIAS"™ by Robert Harling – Ferns Dramatic Society

■ this amateur production by arrangement with Nick Hern Books
* this amateur production by kind permission of Amateur Drama League of Ireland
● this amateur production by special arrangement with Samuel French Ltd.



DOWN WINDMILL LANE

by Ciara Kelly

Forty members of Moate Community School Choir recently had the opportunity to visit and record in Dublin's Windmill Lane Recording Studios.

Windmill Lane Studios in Dublin's docklands area, is often referred to as the "U2 studio" with the group having recorded much of their material there and fittingly Music Generation's national programme, from where this visit arose, is co-funded by U2. The studio has also played host to many of the world's top musicians including Rod Stewart, REM and Lady Gaga, to name but a few.

Arriving at the studio, the students were met with the infamous graffiti covered wall, which is a pilgrimage spot for U2's global fan base. Inside, its atmospheric lighting and seemingly infinite buttons on the mixing desk gave pupils an exciting insight into an essential feature of the music industry. A truly memorable experience for this young choir who were here to record a piece of music composed just for them.

Moate Community School Choir won the All-Island Choir of the Year 2015 and to further build on that achievement, Vincent Kennedy a renowned Irish composer, conductor and trumpeter visited the school and composed and arranged a new piece for the choir, *Our Time*. Kennedy who has had his compositions performed by the likes of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and The Band of An Garda Síochána is currently involved in projects related to the centenary year including a composition entitled "Proclamation - 1916" which sets music under the words of the Proclamation and received its debut in Dublin last year.

Moate Community School Choir's performance of *Our Time* (conducted by Lorna Duignan) was premiered during Culture Night last September

and consequently recording the song became the next exciting endeavour. Keep an eye on the Facebook page for Music Generation Offaly Westmeath for news on the recording release.

This project was supported by Westmeath County Council and Music Generation Offaly Westmeath. Music Generation Offaly Westmeath is a music education service for children and young people, it is part of Music Generation - Ireland's National Music Education Programme initiated by Music Network and co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, The Department of Education & Skills and Local Music Education Partnerships.

www.offaly.ie/musicgeneration and
www.facebook.com/musicgenerationoffalywestmeath

YOUR LOCAL ARTS OFFICERS



County Offaly
WHO: Sinead O'Reilly,
WHERE: Offaly County Council,
Charleville Road, Tullamore
CONTACT: Telephone 057 9357400
soreilly@offalcoco.ie
www.offaly.ie/arts



County Westmeath
WHO: Miriam Mulrennan
WHERE: Westmeath County Council
County Buildings, Mullingar
CONTACT: Telephone 044 93 32016
arts@westmeathcoco.ie
www.westmeathcoco.ie



County Laois
WHO: Muireann Ni Chonail
WHERE: Laois County Council,
Portlaoise, Co Laois
CONTACT: Tel: 057 8664109
mnichonail@laoiscoco.ie
www.laois.ie/arts



County Longford
WHO: Fergus Kennedy
WHERE: Longford County Council,
Great Water St. Longford.
CONTACT: Tel: 086 8517595
fkennedy@longfordcoco.ie
www.longfordcoco.ie/arts_office.html



CELEBRATING photography as an art-form

by Aoife Carberry

Following the success of last year's Expressions Portrait Photography competition which attracted entries pouring in from all over the world, the organisers are looking forward to seeing what the second year will bring.

Longford photographer and organiser-in-chief Shelley Corcoran explained; "Last year was the first year and we were privileged to have Co-Director/CEO of the Gallery of Photography, Tanya Kiang open it.

"It was an enormous success, especially for its first year. We're hoping to build on that of course, and we're hoping to reach a wider audience as well. We were overwhelmed by the response from so many countries around the world, not alone counties across Ireland," Shelley continued.

The volume of entries were not the only thing that impressed last year, however. The quality was also something that judges marvelled over, and Shelley outlined the elements that they will be looking for this year.

"It's twofold and you can't talk about one without the other. We want excellent quality photos, technically excellent, and something that shows the photographer is technically competent but is also willing and not afraid to experiment. The second part is the concept," Shelley explained. "Again, we'll be asking for a description of the work; the idea behind the image, what the image is saying, what is it trying to express to the audience. However, we don't need the photographer to explain away the photograph, because the audience brings themselves to each image they see." The judges are also keen to see the process that led to the final image, even if the finished product is different to the initial intent.

"We're very excited at the prospect of this year's competition," Shelley admitted, going on to add; "We really feel like it's something that can grow and grow. The reason we started was to showcase the talent that there is - not just in Ireland but around the world - in photography, and to show photography as an art-form."



For more information on the 2016 Expressions Portrait competition, to view the video from last year's exhibition and to find out how to enter, visit <http://www.longforddigitalarts.ie/expressions/>

Book Launch 'Home' by John Dunne



Dunamais Arts Centre will expand its literary programming over the course of 2016 with a wide range of author readings and writing workshops for all ages, as well as proudly hosting book launch events by local authors.

The first of such celebrations is the launch of *Home*, the eagerly-awaited new book by Portlaoise writer and historian, John Dunne. His novel, *Purtock*, set entirely in the Midland bogs, was hailed by Books Ireland as '...a beautiful, vivid, memorable story, intelligently and daringly realised...' Apart from the odd venture into the surrounding county, his new collection of short stories and historical articles is entirely set in Portlaoise. Combining the emotional truth of fiction and the documented truth of history, *Home* presents a multi-faceted view of life past and present, real and imagined, in an Irish midlands town.

Home will be launched by Pat Boran, the acclaimed Portlaoise writer who has achieved a major reputation as a poet, publisher and broadcaster. The evening will feature a short reading and presentation of images and music relating to the book. All are welcome to what promises to be a landmark event in the literary history of Portlaoise, on Tuesday 19 April, from 7pm at Dunamais Arts Centre. Further info from 057-8663355 and www.dunamais.ie



INDUSTRIAL TO MUSICAL

by Ciara Kelly

On two cold nights in November last, the story of the Goodbody legacy in Clara was illustrated with a unique performance as members of the Clara Musical Society sang an especially composed choral piece by Tom Lane entitled *Meeting House*. The Friend's Meeting House, the society's rehearsal space, was also transformed with a striking yet functional giant jute harp, a direct connection to the fabric made by Goodbody's in Clara.

Collaborating alongside Clara Musical Society on the project was the artist collective known as *Stone//Lane//Grubb*. Tom Lane is a composer, singer and multi-instrumentalist, who's most recent work, includes composition and scoring of *Oedipus* by Wayne Jordan in the Abbey Theatre. Director of the project was Limerick born theatre director Maeve Stone and artist Rory Grubb provided additional composition and sound engineering for the duration.

Audiences in the three fully booked performances were initially treated to spoken extracts from Robert Goodbody's memoirs, before being ushered into the main room of the meeting house. Upon entering the room the scale of the installation was revealed; the interior, strung like a giant jute harp, behind which the singers performed. With the setting beautifully lit to create a rich atmosphere, the performance reflected echoes of the Goodbody industrial and architectural legacy in Clara.

The Friend's Meeting House, formerly the Quaker House, was acquired by Clara MS in 1989 on a 99 year lease from the Goodbody Family trustees for one pound. In a quirk of fate for the

building, historically the Quaker tradition, to which the family belonged, had shunned instrumental music which gave these particular performances a wonderful irony.

Meeting House is one third of the Public Art Project *Secrets of Offaly*. In 2015 three villages in the county revealed an innovative figure from their community in the early 20th century, exploring the legacy of the individual and presenting it to the public with a professional artist through a creative medium.

As part of the Offaly 2016 exhibition programme, the month of February saw the *Secrets of Offaly* exhibition which included abstract photographs of the harp installation. Attendees of the exhibition launch were treated to an encore performance with members of Clara Musical Society and Tom Lane.

Further details on *Meeting House* themeetinghouseproject.wordpress.com/

For more on the *Secrets of Offaly* visit www.offaly.ie/arts & [facebook.com/offalyarts](https://www.facebook.com/offalyarts)



'Little Stories Little Prints'

One of many events taking place as part of the Westmeath Centenary 1916/2016 Programme, which has a strong community focus with over 65 events taking place across the county

As part of an impressive Centenary Programme 1916/2016 being rolled out in Westmeath, *Little Stories Little Prints* exhibition travels to Westmeath as part of a larger national touring schedule. The project was devised and coordinated by Pamela de Brí in collaboration with the Leinster Printmaking Studio.

Fifty Printmakers from eight Printmaking Studios around Ireland accepted an invitation to participate in the project, which aims to create awareness of little known events or incidents during or around the time of the Easter Rising in 1916. The artists researched incidents and aspects of life at the time and created little prints in response to their research. A limited edition illustrated publication is available for purchase on request.

With over 65 events planned for Westmeath and more likely to be included in the coming months, Westmeath is set for an exciting year of commemorations, where everyone of all ages, both in Westmeath and overseas, will have an opportunity to join in. Lectures and exhibitions, memorial gardens, genealogy workshops, proclamation readings and recreations of life in 1916, are just a few of the activities taking place across the county.

Other highlights of the programme include *A Terrible Beauty is Born* in the Aidan Heavey Library, in Athlone which gives insights into the key players in the Rising. It is accompanied by rare material from the Aidan Heavey Collection and Westmeath County Library Archives. This is the first of many events in Westmeath Libraries offering people the chance to explore 1916 through history, drama and literature.

An exciting synergy of music and poetry will see local composer Enda Seery creating a musical piece in response to renowned poet John Ennis's work on the Elliott sisters, who were founder members of Cumann na mBan from Glasheen.

The *100 Art Exhibition* and *The People, the Land* are two exciting art exhibitions hosted by Luan Gallery, Athlone. They offer the chance to engage, explore and reflect on art which is inspired and responsive to the events of the Rising and the emergence of a nation.

Further information on the Westmeath 2016 Centenary Programme is available on the Council's website at <http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/ourservices/communitydevelopment/ireland2016commemorative-support-grants/>

the Year Ahead for Laois Youth Theatre

2016 is already shaping up to be an action-packed year for Laois Youth Theatre.

The junior members are currently busy rehearsing *Don't Shoot the Messenger* by John Morton. The cast find themselves in a landscape where all the adults have disappeared. The Messenger can only find four different families of children left in this barren land. Each family has access to different, important things that they definitely do not want to share! The Messenger needs to find a way to get everyone working together so they can survive the next winter, but to make her plan work, she'll have to tell a white lie...

Meanwhile the older members of the youth theatre are embarking upon a series of writing workshops with Michelle Read. Michelle comes to the youth theatre with the help of funding from NAYD and Laois County Council. Michelle is a playwright and theatre-maker. She also works as a dramaturge, supporting other playwrights through the ideas and drafting phases of their plays and as a creative writing facilitator. Michelle will be facilitating Laois Youth Theatre in writing pieces for performance and helping with the script development of same. The youth theatre will perform their own written scripts in the end of year show.

Don't Shoot the Messenger and the performance pieces generated from the writing workshops will both be presented in the Dunamais Arts Centre on Saturday 21st May 2016.

And in the summer, the youth theatre will be busying themselves devising and developing a physical theatre project entitled *Cherish* to mark the 1916 Centenary.



Laois Youth Theatre workshops for young people gives an opportunity to learn all aspects of theatre, from creative game play to back stage management, gaining confidence and making new friends along the way. Aspects of drama, including voice, movement, improvisation, physical theatre and performance skills.

Affiliated with the National Association for Youth Drama, our members are offered the prospect of travelling to other shows and networking nationally with other Youth Theatres. Established for over twenty years, many of our past members have gone on to study and pursue careers in theatre nationally and internationally.

Youth Theatre coordinator Siobhan Coffey is a highly qualified drama tutor. She has worked with Laois Youth Theatre for many years and has successfully produced and directed plays with LYT and has been a driving force for youth drama in Laois.

Held weekly in the Dunamais Arts Centre:

Workshop 1:	12-14 years	10am-11.30am
Workshop 2:	15-18 years	12noon -1.30pm

Fee for the year is €100 and can be paid in full or in two installments. Call the Laois Arts Office now to book your place on 057 8664033/13 or email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie. For more information check out our Facebook page www.facebook.com/laoisyouththeatre or www.laois.ie

Community creating TV to remember

An interesting dimension has been added to Longford's 1916 commemorations, thanks to local film-makers' group Out-take Media

According to Chairperson of the group, Seamus Clarke, they initially started life as a gathering of like-minded film enthusiasts. However, when the opportunity arose to expand their horizons, they grabbed it with both hands. "One of our members applied for a grant," Seamus explained. "At the same point in time, DCTV was shutting up shop in Dublin." After securing the necessary equipment and finding a suitable premises, the group opened the doors to their state-of-the-art studio at the Mastertech Business Park, but it was far from an exclusive venue.

"We did a programme called Banta Central with the four Deis schools in Longford. We've worked with Youthreach there on the Battery Road and we then had a course for teachers who are looking after TYs," Seamus explained. What's more, according to Seamus, the group are eager to get more locals in to create their own programmes, which they proved by hosting a 'TV to remember' course over a number of weeks late last year.

"It went well and everybody seemingly enjoyed it," Seamus continued. "14 people started the course and by the end of it we had only lost one participant. The feedback was all positive." Out-take Media ran the course with a view to facilitating locals in creating unique programmes for the 1916 centenary celebrations and Seamus also revealed that the group have their own plans for the occasion.

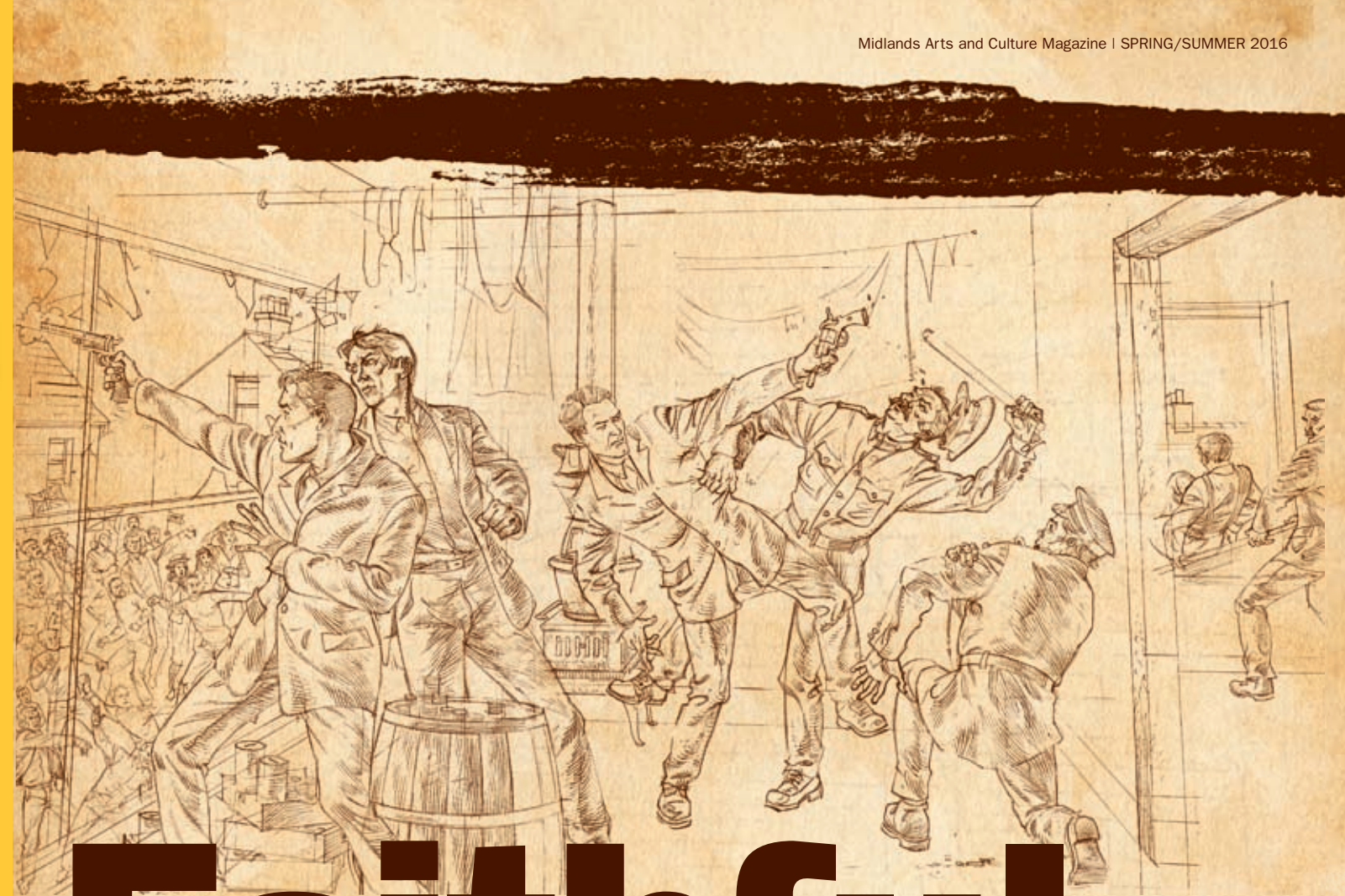
"We are going out and recording some of the events around the whole year

and we're looking at maybe doing a documentary as well," he told Midlands Arts and Culture.

Already planning for further expansion, Seamus acknowledged the positive comments they have received about the studio, before adding that it's a pursuit that appeals to all ages and interests.

"Longford has been crying out for something like this and as long as we can keep it going there will be a need for it," Seamus concluded.

For more information on the group or any upcoming events, visit outtakemedia.com, email or search for Out-take Media on Facebook.



Faithful Rising

In this centenary year, there is no escaping the story of the 1916 Rising – the immortalised leaders; the bullet-riddled buildings; the rise and fall of a revolution.

In what seemed a very Dublin based event, one would be forgiven for thinking that the towns and villages of rural Ireland remained untouched by the events of Easter Week, but the men and women who fought in Dublin came from all over the country, and this centenary year provides the opportunity to tell their stories.

Hello Camera has received funding from Offaly County Council under their 2016 Centenary Programme, to make a documentary entitled *Faithful Rising*. The roles played by two young Offaly men will be revealed; Éamonn Bulfin, an Argentine born, Birr man who raised the green flag of the Republic on the roof of the GPO, and Peadar Bracken, a Tullamore stonemason who fundraised for arms in Australia, and whose actions caused Pádraig Pearse to announce, "*The first blood has been spilled and the first blow struck*", following an extraordinary incident in Tullamore on March 20th 1916.

Using official eye witness statements to key events, including Peadar Bracken and Éamonn Bulfin's own words, as well as family interviews and previously unseen archive materials, this landmark documentary will tell their incredible stories, from their international escapades, back to the bullets and blood of the GPO Garrison. These stories will be brought to life by a stunning collection of graphic novel style illustrations which provide imagery of Bracken and Bulfin's exploits where before there was none.

Leading us through their adventures is one of Ireland's most passionate historians, Tullamore's Dr. Paul Rouse, a lecturer at UCD's School of History & Archives, an award winning journalist and author, and a regular contributor to history documentaries and television programmes.

The illustrations for the film have been created by Eoin Coveney, whose distinctive style has been shaped by a lifelong love of comics, horror movies and science fiction. For the last 17 years, Eoin has worked as a freelance illustrator, using realistic figurative work coupled with storytelling skills, honed under the mentorship of the legendary U.S. comic artist Will Eisner.

Co-directed by Gary Hctor and Miriam Smyth of Hello Camera, *Faithful Rising* is much anticipated locally and will have its premiere screening in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre on Friday April 29th. The film will also be available to purchase on DVD later in 2016. For more information see www.offaly.ie/2016 or www.hellocamera.ie. Booking can be made at Birr Theatre 057 9122911 or www.birrtheatre.com

CALVINDOYLE

Emerging filmmaker Calvin Doyle describes in his own words what it is like starting out as a filmmaker with a unique midland voice.

Nine months ago when Conor English and myself decided to get into film making we didn't want to make films for the sake of making films. We wanted to make films about the Ireland we live in and not the Hollywood version. So many Irish films abandon our culture to be internationally accepted, this doesn't help Irish cinema, it holds it back. There's no worth in these films. Irish cinema deserves a genre of its own and the only way to do that is to make films that are unique to us. Unique to Ireland.

With our debut short *Live Psychic* we wanted to capture the Irish attitude towards suicide, bottling it up until it's too late. We knew Mary McEvoy would be perfect for the lead role, and she was, we

love her, she added so much to the project. We shot the film in a day and edited it in a week. The support we received during the process of making the film was amazing, raising over €2,500 through 'fundit.ie' and we had a brilliant team working on it with us. A month later we made, *Dyed Hair*. Seamus Moran played the lead role and he exceeded our expectations. We shot *Dyed Hair* in a couple of hours, it's sort of a docu-drama, the dialogue in that film really improved from the way we wrote *Live Psychic*. This year we will target some awards and competitions with a script which is about a young woman obsessed with becoming famous on social media. It's a huge issue these days especially amongst the younger generation.

We are aware both films are just calling cards for us and are far from the finished product we aim to achieve. The main thing is to make the films, just make them, there is no right time and it'll never be perfect but at least you will have something done and you can learn from it and build on it and make the next film even better.

SINGFEST 2016 THE CHORAL COUNTDOWN

by Ciara Kelly

Under the direction of internationally acclaimed choral conductor Greg Beardsell, young singers from Offaly and Westmeath are on a countdown to one of the biggest youth choral performances in Ireland this June. Involving 3,000 young people in Athlone IT, the event is Music Generation Offaly Westmeath's first major concert.

Greg Beardsell is often described as someone who turns the accepted idea of a choral conductor on its head. He is as vibrant a personality as the performances he conducts. MGOW Development Officer Margaret Broome explains "He enjoys working with young musicians and you can see this clearly when everyone sits up straighter and

tries harder than they have ever tried before - which is just as well because he can be a very demanding conductor!! Children and young people can't help but start to sing or play their instrument and that starts the journey of being part of and creating a musical experience together ...which is what *Singfest* is all about!"

Beardsell works predominantly between the UK and Ireland, his most recent project was conducting the Peace Proms, the concert series by the Cross Borders Orchestra of Ireland which involved some 20,000 children, some of whom are a part of Music Generation's regional programmes. When asked about his current projects Greg expressed "I'm having a fantastic time working with children from all over Ireland [with] the Peace Proms and I'm really looking forward to Music Generation Offaly Westmeath's *Singfest* ...2016 is shaping up to be an exciting year."

Singfest will involve up to 3,000 young people from Offaly and Westmeath singing out from the heart this summer. Comprising of three separate choirs, it will include members from age 8 to 19 and those involved will be learning in a

challenging yet fun atmosphere with an emphasis on the overall experience, not just the final performance.

"There's part of the brain which is a social brain, which gets switched on when you make music with someone else, and if you're in a choral setting, you see it even more so." Graham Welch, University College London. The *Singfest* choirs will perform on Saturday 11th June 2016 in Athlone Institute of Technology. For more information on the concert please keep on eye on the projects Facebook page

Singfest is a project of Music Generation Offaly Westmeath in partnership with the Association of Irish Choirs and the Arts Council. Music Generation Offaly Westmeath is a music education service for children and young people, it is part of Music Generation - Ireland's National Music Education Programme initiated by Music Network and co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, The Department of Education & Skills and Local Music Education Partnerships.



Music Generation Laois New Works Series

The Music Generation Laois New Works Series brings young musicians and composers together, to collaborate, compose and perform a series of new works for ensembles in the County. Three composers have been appointed to compose music in collaboration with young musicians. Martin Tourish, composer and accordionist with the Donegal-based band Altan, will work with the Music Generation Laois Trad Orchestra and Choir to create a new twenty minute piece of music '1916: Visions and Voices' to mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising. Elaine Agnew, a renowned composer from Northern Ireland, will work with the Laois School of Music Youth Orchestra to create a new twenty minute piece of music for Youth Orchestra and Choir. Scottish Virtuoso Harpist Catriona McKay will work with the Music Generation Laois Harp Ensemble to create a ten minute piece of music for harp ensemble. The New Works series will be premiered as part of a gala concert on Sunday 22 of May in the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise.

'1916: Visions and Voices' is inspired by the actions and events of the 1916 Rising, and is part of the 'Ireland 2016' programme of events in County Laois, and funded by the Laois 2016 Community Grants Scheme. All 3 new works are also funded by Per Cent for Art through the Laois Arts Office, and the Music Generation/Arts Council Partnership.

For further information contact Music Generation Laois on 057 8664176 or musicgenerationlaois@laoiscoco.ie

About: Music Generation Laois is part of Music Generation, Ireland's National Music Education Initiative, funded nationally by U2, The Ireland Funds and The Department of Education and Skills and locally by Laois County Council (lead partner), Laois Offaly ETB and Laois Partnership Company.

Brave Giant is no 'flash in the pan'

For Longford band Brave Giant, 2015 was an unforgettable year, which saw them play their first headline gig in the Backstage Theatre, before performing to a packed-out Whelan's in Dublin, a gig they described as 'crazy'.

"About 200 people came up from home and absolutely packed Whelan's," recalled band member Mark Prunty. This year, however, is set to be even better, as the band look forward to releasing their debut EP and getting back into the studio.

The band started life as 'Dutch Courage' in 2011, with Mark and fellow guitarist and singer Podge Gill performing their first gig at their friend's 21st birthday. When they were joined by Ross McNerney (banjo and mandolin) in 2013, they changed their name to Poroma as they directed their attention at writing and performing their own original material. When the band first secured a spot at the renowned Marquee in Drumlish festival, they were joined for the gig by drummer Emmett Collum, who later turned down the opportunity to return to the USA to stay with the band full-time.

Just months later, bassist David Kilbride came on board to complete the line-up, and before long, Brave Giant was born. It wasn't an easy transition, however. While the band members worked together perfectly on stage and in studio, the name was a point of frustration as they racked their brains for a moniker that would match their unique sound.

"So many people suggested 'the country boys', and all that sort of thing," Mark laughed, as Podge interjected with, "the lovely lads!" "Names can be

pretty much anything nowadays, like as 'Imagine Dragons'," Mark continued. "There's so many names, iconic names, but before they were iconic they were silly names, so we kind of wanted something like that. "If you say 'One Republic', 'Brave Giant', 'Imagine Dragons' all in one sentence, it doesn't sound out of place," Mark continued.

It wasn't a decision that was reached quickly however, as Emmett told Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine, "It came up really early and then we just forgot about it." Admitting that they were 'sick of thinking of names', Ross added; "I think what won us over was seeing it visually." Worries that the new name would alienate Poroma's followers thankfully proved to be unfounded when, in just three days, Brave Giant hit 1,000 likes on Facebook, a feat which took them three years as Poroma.

With the necessary admin out of the way, and now signed to Collective Management (the same PR company as Gavin James) the band's full attention turned to their EP, recorded between Transmission studios, Drumlish and The Vibe studio, Drumshanbo, and the official release of its lead single 'Lordy Lordy' which dropped in March. "We're hoping that will kind of open up some avenues for us," Mark said of the EP. "The main thing is to get airplay.



by Aoife Carberry

"We've the EP recorded now and we have any amount of songs ready," he continued. Indeed, the band are already starting to get some national attention, with Fergal D'Arcy attending their gig in Whelan's, after the band had appeared on his Today FM show. They were also thrilled to be invited to record U2's 'One' as part of the 100 Artists for Tony Fenton event, which saw them join the likes of Delorentos, Róisín O and Hudson Taylor on the track.

While the months preceding Christmas were filled with countless gigs and appearances, the band, as Ross pointed out, are "working behind the scenes" to ensure that their upcoming releases go as smoothly as possible. "It's a matter of building up a fanbase and network so it's not just going to be a flash in the pan," Podge stated, before Mark concluded; "When we made the plan back this time last year, we said we wanted to do it right. "We're looking forward to it and we're optimistic."

To keep up to date with Brave Giant and for news on their debut single 'Lordy Lordy' and its new video, search for the band on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

“With a genuine excitement for film in Ireland and its growth, and his intentions of further using Offaly as both a location and a base, it’s clear that the future is bright... even if the film is dark!”

CAPERtrail

Two thugs embark on a convoluted plan to tie up loose ends following the robbery of a local crime lord. Things go awry when a crucial element is forgotten in FilmOffaly’s latest award winning short. **Ciara Kelly** talks to producer Eoin Naughton about his most recent project and career in film.

In what would seem like a case of doing “exactly what it says on the tin”, film short *Caper* is a dark comedy with a self referential edge. Written by David Olaf Svedberg, the short’s script won the coveted Film Offaly/FilmBase 2015 Bursary Award and was shot on location in Tullamore last December. Casting for the film’s included both established Irish actors and local talent. Brian Fortune, best known for starring in *Game of Thrones*, plays a lead role in the short.

Producers on the project *Five Knight Films* was co-founded by Tullamore native Eoin Naughton, in speaking to Eoin it is clear that his career path would always lead to film. Naughton remarks that at an early age he was making stop-motion type films with Lego on an old digital camcorder, he did not enjoy the academic side of school, but always gravitated towards the more practical side, and mentions having the “gift of the gab” (which is quite clear from our conversation.)

Choosing a film degree at Dublin Business School where many of the lecturers were actively involved in the Irish film industry, prompted him to ask around regarding opportunities. Asking paid off when Eoin became a location trainee on RTE’s comedy series *Damo and Ivor*. “I was just running around picking up rubbish and holding open doors for people, but you work your way up quickly in locations...” On making the transition

from locations managing to production Eoin explains that it was a token ‘natural progression’ “it develops into you being a very good planner and organiser, which lends itself to producing. A mate of mine wanted to set up a production company and he asked me did I want to get involved so I jumped at the chance.” That company, *Five Knight Films*, has been up and running for about a year and with *Caper* in post production and a feature film *Cardboard Gangsters*, Eoin tells me there is a lot in the pipeline for the next year. Aptly he mentions the latter the day before he heads off to Berlin with the Irish Film Board just in time for the film festival.

On Ireland and the industry, it’s clear from his enthusiastic tone that a lot is happening here and rather than take the popular path of going to the UK or US, Eoin seems to have every intention of staying put. Using that very contentious word ‘boom’, he says the Irish film industry is certainly heaving with projects but there’s just not enough crew to supply the demand “obviously there’s a lot of criteria to meet like proper training, knowledge and experience which makes it more difficult to get something off the ground.”

When asked about Offaly in particular Eoin is even more enthusiastic about its potential, he sees himself potentially establishing a base in the county, as he explains “it’s quite common for Irish

film companies to have branches around the country, you might see a company’s address as Dublin but their van is driving around with Galway slapped on the side.” With a genuine excitement for film in Ireland and its growth, and his intentions of further using Offaly as both a location and a base, it’s clear that the future is bright ...even if the film is dark!

Caper is the second notable film project to take place in Offaly in recent months, the pilot RTE Storyland series *Quinn and O’Grady*, described as “Cagney and Lacey meets Father Ted” is currently available to view on the RTE player.

FilmOffaly has also recently been awarded a significant grant under the Rural Economy Development Zones pilot project for a media marketing campaign and following a tender process are engaging Red Dog to work with the on the further promotion of the county. www.filmoffaly.ie

Niall Breslin, better known by the alias ‘Bressie’, is a musician, coach on *The Voice of Ireland* and mental health advocate. Born in Dublin, Bressie was raised in Mullingar, Co Westmeath. He is the second youngest of three sisters and a brother. The 35-year-old jack-of-all-trades has a remarkable portfolio - prior to the aforementioned role as mentor on *The Voice of Ireland*, he was a Leinster rugby player and front man for indie rock band *The Blizzards* before enjoying success as a solo artist.

Since 2014 he has spoken frankly out about living with anxiety and depression since he was a teenager “I spent almost 50% of my time on this earth disguising, ignoring and waging war against my mind, which at times seemed hell bent on destroying every relationship, career and passion that I pursued.”

In 2015 he launched his blog entitled *My1000Hours*, which was developed into an online hub dedicated to helping improve mental fitness. Due to the blog’s popularity and growth Bressie decided to rebrand the blog thus giving birth to the *A Lust for Life* website.

WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?

A Lust for Life is a movement about wellbeing. The ethos of the site is to create and share information that can help anyone struggling with mental illness navigate in the right direction. The site has a huge range of doctors and clinical psychologists writing daily articles with the hope of providing expertise and useful information for those who need it.

Not to be mixed up with a counselling service Bressie strongly encourages those in need of some extra help to contact yourmentalhealth.ie where a full range of phone and online supports are listed. A certain level of stigma exists in Ireland in relation to mental health. An important strategy in reducing stigma is education – the more people know about something, the less likely they are to hold negative attitudes. Educating people about the prevalence of mental health problems in Ireland will be a key step in making mental health more relevant and important for people, while contributing to an

improvement in attitudes. Currently in Ireland one in four people will experience a mental health problem sometime in their life. Something Bressie strongly feels needs to change right now. “We have to make mental health more accessible to people. It’s about understanding that everybody is affected by it, not just the one-in-four people with a problem.”

Lust for LIFE

Mullingar musician Bressie’s *Lust for Life* joins the dots on Irish Mental Illness.



HIGH STREET MOVE for TULLAMORE ARTS CENTRE

There was an overwhelming positive public reaction to the recent announcement that the long awaited Arts Centre for Tullamore had altered its original plans for a purpose built centre to purchasing a landmark premises on High Street to redevelop.

Sale agreed (subject to surveys and planning) has been achieved on the former Kilroy’s premises (beside Ulster Bank) on High Street, which will now house the arts centre, bringing a much needed redevelopment and footfall to High Street in Tullamore. The decision comes following an exhaustive process to bring down the costs of the original design for the arts centre on Kilbride Park in line with its budget of €3m. Developing a building in the town centre is now the most cost effective solution achievable within the budget available.

The public and cultural use of the building in recent years for the Foundation Arts Festival and the Made in Offaly Pop Up shop opened up a new possibility for the location of the centre, once it became clear that they had exhausted every angle to make the original plan achievable.

Preliminary sketch plans for the building and site on High Street should mean that the accommodation for a performance space, gallery, multipurpose meeting/rehearsal rooms and office accommodation can be achieved, albeit within the character of the building and footprint of the site. This decision means that the fundraising efforts of the community will soon to be put to good use

on this building. The board in announcing their decision, took the opportunity to sincerely thank the fundraising team and the artists behind the Foundation Arts Festival, their commitment to the arts centre in Tullamore has been hugely important to this process.

The announcement of this new location should shorten the time span in which the centre can be opened; meaning that the team can now focus on a redevelopment within the budget rather than trying to face the insurmountable costs of the original plan.

The chairman Desmond Doyle in a press statement said “We have at all times borne in mind the financial and ongoing commitment required of the community to achieve a viable operating centre. We have left no path unexplored and we pay tribute to all our board members and staff at Offaly County Council who have worked tirelessly to find solutions to the complex challenges that building the original centre presented. We are very much excited by this turn of development and assure the community of Tullamore of our steadfast commitment to delivering this centre.”





Ray Murphy

Ray Murphy is a man for all seasons, an artist, musician and sharp-witted raconteur. As he got ready to move on from his live-in role as caretaker at Emo Court, he talked to Claire O'Brien about Emo, Major Cholmeley Harrison, art and the future.

At the top of the back stairs that leads to the caretaker's quarters at Emo Court, there's a small plaque on the door. 'Nulle dies sine linea,' it reads. Pliny's Latin phrase means 'let no day pass without a line' and it's as good a motto as any for an artist to live by. It means a lot to artist Ray Murphy, who, at 66, is retiring this spring from his position as caretaker at Emo, a role he's held since 1995.

It's challenging, and a little sad to imagine how bare the walls of the apartment will be once he takes down his portraits of family, friends and a host of subjects, including a large body of work relating to Shackleton and Crean and their sub-zero expeditions. The Gandon house in the Palladian style, where Murphy's three children grew up, is a far cry from Pope's Quay in Cork City where he remembers as a child watching the Opera House going up in flames across the river Lee. "It drizzled that night. Sparks came across the river to our place," he says leaning back in a kitchen chair, his eye sweeping across the picture-crowded mantle, the neat stacks and shelves of hundreds of LPs. Murphy has, unsurprisingly, a strong visual memory and his stories are peppered with visual clues that make scenes come vividly to life.

He describes his son Eliot, now 25, drawing in the Blue Room as a small child at the feet of Chomeley Harrison, who bought Emo Court in 1969 and died in 2008 aged 99. "Cholmeley loved kids. He liked kids better than adults. He was interested in me as an artist being able to do things as opposed to what I did, or understanding what I did. I was able to restore a painting, do practical things," says Ray, who looks back on their time together quite fondly.

"I met Cholmeley when he was 80. Imagine having a relationship with a man for 20 years nearly – when I rented the house initially [on the estate grounds], then coming up here. It's so

extraordinary, that age difference. And the kids had a great time with him."

Now that he's at retirement age, does he feel tired or at least conscious of getting older? Not a bit. He wakes early, around 5am and is immediately alert and ready. "I'm amazed at the amount of energy I have now. I remember Paul Durcan visited here one day. I had him up here for a cup of coffee." "I asked him if there's an age restriction on work and he said it's to do with having the energy at a particular age to do stuff." "I think it's all in the brain. It's not the physical thing at all. If your mental capacity can handle it then your physical thing comes after," he says, adding that he's become more productive in the last year.

In the corridor is a stunning body of work produced recently for an exhibition in Mountmellick Library. It's a series of images relating to the Shackleton expedition. There are beautiful renditions, in warm shades of orange and polished greys of the working belly of the ships, of stoves and galleys and boilers. "My favourite paint is burnt sienna, that's my palate," he says when I comment on how it appears in so much of his work, often only in tiny, important amounts.

"It goes back to my classical thing as well," he says, referencing his attachment to Renaissance artists and old-fashioned, well-crafted figurative work. "Michael Davitt the poet used to sit behind me in school. He used always say he couldn't understand it, how I was interested in the Rolling Stones – and Leonardo," and he laughs. Those things haven't changed in fifty years. As the next stage of his life approaches, he's feeling limber and excited. "I think it's the idea that I was freeing up mentally and physically. I was very responsibly tied to here. I'm a responsible type of person so I don't like putting a foot wrong. If an alarm is to be put on, it's on, I'd go to great lengths to do the job right so I

felt a change personally when I saw myself leaving, a kind of realising that I'll be back on the street."

He's moving down the road, in fact. And while he's open-minded about the future and its possibilities, he's traditional about art, preferring drawing, figurative work to the 'Dulux colour card' of some contemporary art.

He explains himself using a musical analogy. "How come when a guy hits a bum note he's reminded? He won't get away with it. Aurally music is still hummable, it's tonal, but when it comes to the art world, a lot of it is atonal, you can get away with a lot now," he says. "What I do like to see is where is the work, there's a mental process there as well," he says. Murphy is a figurative artist, clearly in love with lines, but playful too. He laments that the art of drawing, of drawing from memory and of still life are vanishing from art education. They're essential skills for an artist and they're an essential part of his sense of self. "There was a Miss Frost, a lecturer, a lovely woman. I remember her saying Raymond, you've a great economy of line, and it's true, ever since." That economy extends to his vocabulary, and he plays with words too, rolling them around to see what he can make them do, referencing Caravaggio-oh-oh-oh and 'Baroque and roll.'

Emo has been a nice place to live, he says, but he isn't sentimental. "All I need is the stuff I plug in or paint," he says, and then remembers the collection of good books. "I'm not going to throw them out," he adds quickly. "Generally, you just need a bed and a cooker and key to the door... books and reading and music, a bit of art... What would it be?" he stops to think, then laughs and smiles his wide, open smile when he gets the formula right. "Books, food and rock and roll." And no day without a line.



Backstage Theatre Group return to the ALL-IRELAND CIRCUIT

It has been a busy year so far for Longford's Backstage Theatre Group who, in March, enjoyed their first foray into the All-Ireland qualifying circuit in more than 20 years.

It has been a busy year so far for Longford's Backstage Theatre Group who, in March, enjoyed their first foray into the All-Ireland qualifying circuit in more than 20 years.

The group performed in five festivals – Tubbercurry, Ballinamore, Roscommon, Kiltyclogher and Cavan – with 'Bliithe Spirit', a Noel Coward comedy with which they had marked success in Longford.

Charles and Ruth Condomine (played by Declan Neville and Christine O'Brien) invite esteemed friends Dr and Mrs Bradman (Eileen Murphy and John Kelly) as well as the mystic Madam Arcati (Maureen Dunne) to their home. Everything is going extremely well until the after dinner seance when Madam Arcati accidentally summons the spirit of Charles' first wife Elvira (portrayed by Liz Leavy) who can only be seen and heard by Charles.

The wonderful cast was rounded up by Vanessa Flood whose quirky charm provided plenty of laughter as Edith, the maid.

Having had a few successful turns on the circuit in the past, and after reaching the final in the one-act circuit last year, as well as earning a nomination for best performance, the group were hoping that they could repeat their success, but were under no illusions of the difficulties they could face.

"It's a great challenge," conceded director Ollie Kenny. "It is certainly a massive challenge – we probably couldn't have picked a harder play."

With that said, he also revealed that they were setting out to learn more about themselves and their craft.

"The circuit is a great learning process for anyone involved with a production," Ollie pointed out. "You just see, hear, and learn, learn, learn."

BEALTINE FESTIVAL 2016 IN LAOIS

County Laois once again celebrates creativity in older age with the annual May-time Bealtaine Festival. A music duet "Tandem" from the Showband Show era will visit Abbeyleix and Mountmellick hospitals for a trip down memory lane in music, song and story. The Laois Federation ICA choir will also visit and perform for residents and out-patients in Care Hospitals in the county. Exhibitions and workshops at Laois Arthouse, Stradbally as well as lots of creative events in Libraries and community venues around the county.

An estimated 120,000 people now take part in the Bealtaine festival, making it one of Ireland's biggest arts festivals. From dance to cinema, painting to theatre, Bealtaine showcases the talents and creativity of both first-time and professional older artists.

You can find out all you need to know about Bealtaine 2016 from the festival website www.bealtaine.com or locally on www.laois.ie. For more info please contact the Arts Office on 057 8664033 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie.

Culture Night 2016 in Laois

Expressions of interest are invited from arts and culture groups and individuals interested in organising events to be included in the funding application process for culture night in September 2016. Closing date is Thursday 26th March for receipt of completed forms. Forms available from: 057 8664033 or E: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie

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ANATION'S VOICE

A Nation's Voice is presented by the Arts Council and RTÉ, in association with the National Museum of Ireland, the Association of Irish Choirs and Music Generation, as part of Ireland 2016. On Easter Sunday, March 27th 2016, in the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks, Dublin, one thousand voices from all over Ireland will join with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in presenting a major new orchestral and choral work composed by Shaun Davey and Paul Muldoon. This free concert promises to be one of the highlights of the 1916 commemoration programme. **18** Students from the **Music Generation Laois Choral Programme** are taking part, representing 5 participating schools.

Photo caption: Music Generation Laois Choral Students with Minister Heather Humphries at the Helix for the launch of A Nation's Voice.

Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir

WILL REPRESENT IRELAND IN GERMANY

Every second year the picturesque town of Elsenfeld in the county of Miltenberg, Bavaria, Germany hosts a four day international choir contest – Internationaler Chorwettbewerb.

Only six choirs from around the world are chosen to represent their country and compete in this prestigious competition and this year the Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir has been chosen to represent Ireland in its 11th competition on 14th July.

This is a great honour for the choir, particularly as it is the first time in the competition's history that Ireland has been represented. Previous competitors have come from Brazil, Argentina, China, Indonesia as well as many European countries.

Each choir is required to compete in two different categories. Category A: Symphony of Voices (with compulsory composition) and Category B: Folksong, Spiritual & Jazz. The choir's conductor Ciarán Brady has carefully chosen a repertoire that will showcase some beautiful Irish works as well as

play to the choral strength of the Chamber Choir.

The Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir was formed in 2007 and since its beginnings it has grown in strength as well as numbers. Each member of the choir is a vocal student of Ciarán Brady and the choir's forte lies in the in-depth knowledge Ciarán has of each and everyone's vocal ability.

The process to be considered for this competition included proving a strong track record from previous competitions, which the choir was able to supply easily with a list of success stories including National Choir of the Year in 2012 at the Navan Choral Festival, 1st in the Sacred Music and the Early Music Competition at the Navan Choral Festival, 2nd in Lyric FM Carols for Christmas as well as many other accolades.

FROM LONGFORD TO BROOKLYN

By Paul Gurney

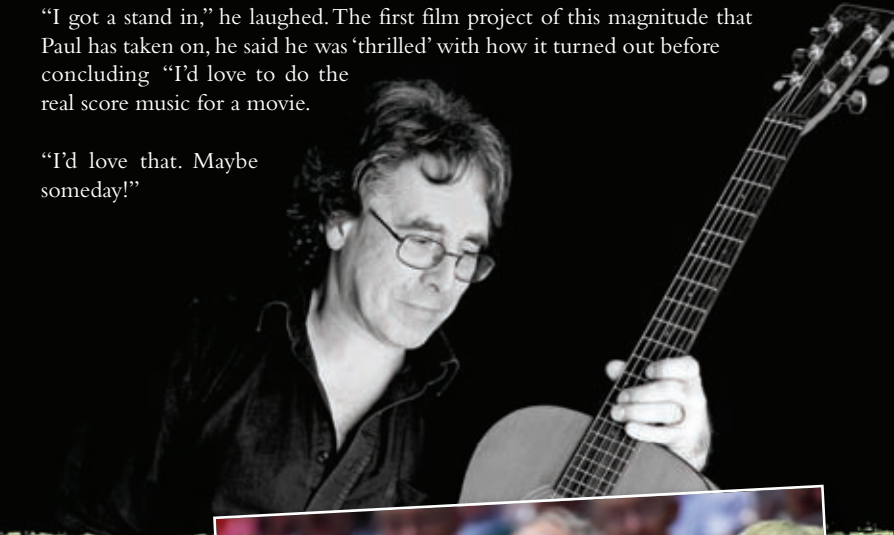
Nominated for three Academy Awards, the 2015 film 'Brooklyn' was a resounding success worldwide.

A touching and, at times, heartbreaking, screen adaptation of Colm Tóibín's acclaimed novel, 'Brooklyn' is set in the 1950s and follows Eilis Lacey as she leaves her home in Enniscorthy for a new life in the States. The era was perfectly captured by the characters, but the scene was largely set by a memorable soundtrack, which had a strong Longford influence.

Equally renowned for his skills as a musician and producer, Paul Gurney of Real World Studios jumped at the chance to contribute to the traditional soundtrack. Paul explained that he joined a number of other musicians in Temple Lane studios in Dublin to record a few tracks, before revealing that he missed his chance to star onscreen due to a prior commitment.

"I got a stand in," he laughed. The first film project of this magnitude that Paul has taken on, he said he was 'thrilled' with how it turned out before concluding "I'd love to do the real score music for a movie.

"I'd love that. Maybe someday!"



Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir - Kevin Booth of Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir at the rehearsals for RTE A Nations Voice photo by Clodagh Kilcoyne Arts Council

The choir is now in the midst of intense rehearsals as well as fundraising activities in what is already an eventful year as they perform in *Glór an Phobail, A Nation's Voice* on Easter Sunday in Collins Barracks. The choir will join 1,100 voices and the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in presenting a major new orchestral and choral work composed by Shaun Davey. It is sure to be one of the highlights of the 1916 commemorations.

For further information call Ciarán Brady the Academy of Music on 057 930 1122 or 086 0678250 or email info@theacademyofmusic.ie

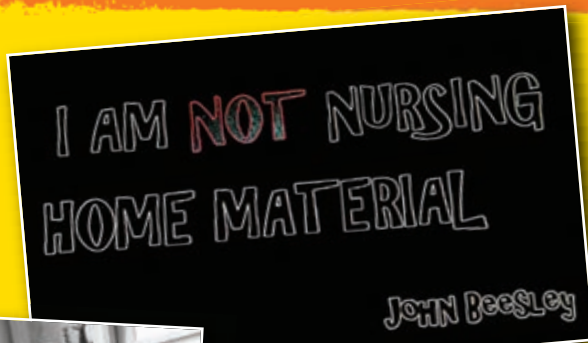
Animations & Publications

Anam Beo, Offaly's Arts, Health and Wellbeing programme celebrated 10 years in 2015; while we marked the decade we continued all the while facilitating over 104 art sessions at care centres, producing a diverse range of unique artwork whilst engaging over 110 participants in long term health care. There were many special moments, there always is when you work in a health setting, but a few stood out.

For many years I have worked with David Boland in the Irish Wheelchair Association, impressed with his capacity to create. We discussed doing a publication of his poetry and self portraits. David is a prolific writer and drawer and I had been encouraging him to catalogue some of his work and share it with a wider audience. His thoughts, pursuits in the arts and his keen interest in how a person is marked and moulded over time, are all reflected in his verses and drawings. It finally happened last year, he proudly and deservedly printed his first book!

My artist colleague Rowena has a long time creative companionship with John Beesley, a member of Clara Day Care Centre. "Not Nursing Home Material" turned into a very deep and personal exploration of what it means to be creative, the impact of that being denied or curtailed and a life lived to the full despite its inevitable contact with grief and loss particularly if that life is now in its 93rd year!

Rowena spent time with John, photographing, exploring and sitting with his work. They discussed how John has developed his own unique dialogue through paint, by visually recounting a personal historical narrative to engage the viewer. He describes it as, a 'freeze frame' process in which he will remember an event or place and will paint it exactly as he recalls it, complete with the original emotional as well as geographical content. This



John Beesley



David Boland

was also an opportunity to document his memories and the experiences being brought up, as often there were areas he hadn't explored in a long time. The poignant part being the realisation on John's part that if he doesn't record these memories now, they could be lost.

These are the gentle and important moments in an arts and health process. To have had the time over the past 10 years to really uncover new creative and assertive voices in people who felt that opportunity had passed them, has been really empowering. There are no bells and whistles, just the quiet realisation that we have made a difference.

You can see both John and David's work on our website www.anambeo.wordpress.com or contact us on anambeoart@gmail.com

WORLD RENOWNED CHOREOGRAPHER JOINS BOLSHOI LINE UP

This May, Russia will pay tribute to distinguished Ukraine dancer Svetlana Zakharova with a special performance at the famous Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow.

Ms Zakharova will perform in a triple bill, which will feature works by Yuri Possokhov and Patrick de Bana, as well as Longford choreographer Marguerite Donlon.

'Strokes Through The Tail', originally choreographed by Marguerite approximately ten years ago for the Chicago based Hubbard Dance company, is a 'witty and charming' piece, set to Mozart's Symphony 40.

"It's a mixture between very beautiful and very comical," Marguerite explained. An ideal performance to celebrate Ms Zakharova, whom

Marguerite described as 'a beautiful dancer, and very special', the piece was written for five men and one woman, and is a slight parody of the typical roles that males and females play.

This an exciting prospect for Marguerite, who is a daughter of Tom and Johanna, Abbeycartron, Longford, particularly as she has been offered the opportunity to work with esteemed designer Igor Chapurin to revamp the show's costumes.

The triple bill will run for two shows in Italy in early May, before it premieres at the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, on May 24.



a TERRIBLE BEAUTY is BORN

1916 A Terrible Beauty is Born is the title of the show to be staged in the Dunamais Theatre in commemoration and celebration of the 1916 Easter Rising.

The title are words taken from Yeats poem describing the poet's torn emotions regarding the events of the Easter Rising staged in Ireland against British rule. The rising was unsuccessful and most of the republican leaders were executed for treason.

This commemoration and celebration of the Easter Rising will feature a re-enactment of the life and times of that era with special emphasis on the role played by Co Laois. It is believed that the first shot of the rising was fired in Colt Portlaoise, when a group of local volunteers acting under the direct orders of Patrick Pearse participated in the demolition of a section of the railway line

The re-enactment will be portrayed through Words Music Song and Dance. Staged by Portlaoise Active Retirement Group together with Transition Year

Students from St Mary's CBS and children of the Gaelscoil, with special guests Vocalese, The MGL Harp Ensemble and other well know personalities. There will be particular reference to the seven signatories of the declaration of Independence and their writings and poetry. The audience will be transported to a crossroads outside Portlaoise and a local farmhouse kitchen, both venues very popular of the time for people to gather and socialise. A real treat is in store when the children of the Gaelscoil perform their drama Tir Na nOg and we proudly remember that Laois were the reigning All Ireland Hurling Champions at the time of the revolution.

Date of Show Wednesday 9th March 2016 - Time 2pm
Bookings directly with the Dunamais Art Centre Tel 057 866355
Tickets Price €5 Family Ticket €15 (2 adults 2 children)



FACEfest

Volunteer-led Facefest goes from strength to strength ... music and family fun this summer – without the hefty pricetag.

On June 18th 2016, Charleville Castle in Tullamore will host the 5th Facefest Festival. Facefest was created by volunteers with Charleville Castle as a family friendly Music and Arts festival in 2011 and has grown over the years into a very popular event. All artists and performers at Facefest bring their talents to the Castle at no charge, and remarkably at Facefest, camping is free and children under 12 go free.

This year at Facefest, there is a Fantasy theme so everyone will be decorating and dressing up in Fantasy costumes. 2015 was a movie theme and everyone who visited entered the spirit of the theme enthusiastically as is evidenced by the photos from the event. Tickets for Facefest are a very reasonable €20 for an adult ticket and €15 for a teenager, with all under 12 going free. Facefest also prides itself on a high quality food offering with multiple activities for all the family to ensure a great day is had. Facefest will have

two stages with Live and Electronic music and Tickets for Facefest are available online at facefest.ecwid.com. There might be some left on the day but there are no guarantees as the organisers very wisely limit ticket sales to 500 tickets which is a big part of the festival's charm so booking in advance is advisable.

Artists confirmed for 2016 Facefest include: *Minus Ten Thousand Hours, Reprisal, St. Simeon and the Stylites, The Bill, Changing Trains, Davina and the Messengers, The Mountain Man Band, Fuzz Gigolo, The New 52, Fat Baby Panda, Chris Brady, Carron, Maynooth Gospel Choir, Celtic Blondes, Two in Time, The Basskillers* and many more.

The idea for Facefest came from Ally and Ian O'Flynn with the ambition of bringing people and particularly families together...and as it enters its 5th year, it has clearly made-good on that ambition.



“But, so far, the high-water mark in the history of peatland art, has been the establishment of Sculpture in the Parklands on 20 hectares of cut-away bog at Lough Boora Discovery Park, Co Offaly in 2002.”



the Bog of Art

by
Manchán
Magan

Imagine a landscape in which the mountains were clad in gold rather than having it buried within them – a shimmering, disorientating realm, inconceivable to anyone but those born there... Ireland’s peatlands are like that, as unimaginable to those who’ve never set eyes upon them as a snowfield is to a jungle-dweller. Richly pigmented realms as dark as crème brûlée and as textured as tweed, with tints ranging through ochre, olive and emerald to the very brownest of purples.

For many of us familiarity dilutes the magic of these uncanny, touch-sensitive realms that are neither solid nor liquid and appear to bely the laws of nature. In terms of art their greatest gift might be considered to be the ancient chalices, psalters, jewellery and illuminated manuscripts that they occasionally disgorge, having been preserved for eons within them, but in fact, they are delivering an equally rich artistic harvest in modern times. Our Midland bogs have been catalysts for poets, painters, playwrights, dancers, novelists and film makers, so much so that this article can only hope to scratch at a few coiled strands and upturned turf clods.

Let’s begin, chronologically, in the 19th century when a fashion for bog oak sculptures took hold in Dublin and Killarney. Brooches, bracelets, walking sticks and furniture decorated with Celtic designs were the Victorian tourist equivalent of Guinness t-shirts and Leprechaun hats.

Bogland scenes then became popular in landscape painting in the early years of the Irish Republic, with bucolic vistas of blanket bog surrounded by hills; but these tended to be in the West of Ireland painted by the likes of Paul Henry and Maurice MacGonigal.

It was 1974 before the attention of the international art world turned steadfastly towards the Midlands, with the arrival to Ireland of Joseph Beuys, one of the world’s most influential post-war avant-garde artist. He was lured here by the sheer wonder of these fibrous almanacs that loyally record every fallen pollen spore and Neolithic wheel rut.

For Beuys bogs were: *“the liveliest elements in the European landscape, not just from the point of view of flora, fauna, birds and animals, but as storing places of life, mystery and chemical change, preservers of ancient history.”*

While in Ireland, he created a sculpture from two peat briquettes sandwiched together with a pound of Kerrygold butter, titled *Irish Energies* – still as potent a work today as ever.

During the same period of the 1970s two other prominent artists were also turning towards bogs: Barrie Cooke and Seamus Heaney. The former’s massive Great Irish Elk canvases displayed prominently in public buildings and at major exhibitions throughout the eighties brought home to many the epic drama of our peatland expanses. These scenes captured the dramatic grandeur of both the Irish elk (later proven to be a form of deer) and the bog itself – they consisted of skeletal forms on a treacly ruby and mustard peat background. It was as if the elk bones were animated by the vibrancy of the bog, given a form of blood or marrow transfusion by it.

Cooke’s great friend and collaborator, Seamus Heaney, was equally enchanted by bogs. His

seminal 1970s “bog poems” offered a new prism through which to see them; both, in their own right, in poems like “Boglands”:

“We have no prairies/ To slice a big sun at evening/ ...Our unfenced country Is bog/ that keeps crusting/ Between the sights of the sun”

and as multi-tangential metaphors for social and ethical issues, in particular the political turmoil in the North, addressed in poems such as “The Tollund Man” and “Strange Fruit,” with its eerie description:

“the girl’s head like an exhumed gourd. Oval-faced, prune-skinned, prune-stones for teeth.”

After Beuys, turf became a symbolic object in contemporary art, and appeared occasional in works, arranged geometrically and powdered, but it took until 2000 for the Bord na Móna briquette to regain international attention, when the architect, Tom de Paor, used 21 tonnes of them to build Ireland’s first ever pavilion at the Venice Biennale. His installation, titled N3, was like an early Christian oratory or Neolithic passage tomb on the edge of Venice. Once the biennale was over, the 40,000-odd rectangles of Irish midland bog were mulched and spread in the Giardini as a gift of ground to a drowning city.

But, so far, the high-water mark in the history of peatland art, has been the establishment of Sculpture in the Parklands on 20 hectares of cut-away bog at Lough Boora Discovery Park, Co Offaly in 2002. This has set in train a new era of Irish midlands art on the international stage that may very well end up defining this country’s artistic identity in the world, especially now that Bord na Móna has committed to ending all peat extraction by 2030. ... citizens of the future might come to know Ireland’s midland bogs for their gigantic sculptural installations rather than their turf production.

Sculpture in the Parklands began 14 years ago as a symposium at Lough Boora in which seven Irish and international artists were invited to work over a three week residency towards the creation of large-scale site-specific sculptures. That first year saw the construction of eight art works, including Eileen MacDonagh’s 6-metre high *Boora Pyramid* made of unmortared glacial stone and Mike Bulfin’s *Sky Train*, using abandoned peat wagons found on the site. Having been exposed to the harsh climate of this barren expanse, these now wonderfully weathered pieces are joined by over 20 other vast sculptures that stand out against the broad midland skies, both dominating and harmonising with the landscape and offering

intriguing juxtapositions between contemporary art and the Mesolithic culture that existed here 9,000 years ago. The intention is to continue to invite Irish and international artists to create significant site-specific works of art on this vast and evocative post-industrial site that is now a protected wildlife reserve, home to the native Grey Partridge, one of Ireland’s most threatened breeding birds.

These broad expanses of rusted bracken and spongy pelts of sphagnum have made their presence felt internationally in literature and theatre as well as art and poetry – most evocatively perhaps in Marina Carr’s *Bog of Cats* set in what the Irish Times called “a bitter stretch of the Irish midlands... a sunken and frozen place, stalked by ghosts, grotesques and vengeful characters steeped in myth.” The peatland surrounding the town is an ominous malevolent presence that is best summed by the genre title *Bog Gothic*, which is usually used as a way of describing the author Pat McCabe’s vivid, harsh and hilarious exposition of the dark vivacity of the Longford psyche, as captured in his books, films and plays

St Mel's Musical Society

in the spotlight

by Aoife Carberry

“There’s no people like show people” - or so goes the song.

It rings true, however, in the case of the members of Longford’s St Mel’s Musical Society, who have sang and danced their way through almost four decades of shows.

According to Chairperson June Belton, while the group had existed previously, it was revived in 1978 after a meeting which was attended by just four people. Thankfully, interest – and membership – quickly grew.

Kicking off with a one-night only, revue-type show, ‘Springtime Music Hall’, the demand was so great that the group were encouraged to stage it again, thus beginning a long tradition of quality, local entertainment. From their first full-length musical, *South Pacific* in 1983, to their 2016 production of ‘The Addams Family’, the society have made people laugh, cry, and – maybe most importantly – fall in love with theatre.

Several years, venues, directors, shows and awards (the society has won no less than nine Association of Irish Musical Societies or AIMS awards, and have been nominated and come runner up in many more besides) later, and the love for musicals that started the revival is still strong.

That’s mostly attributed to the backbone of the society – its committee, casts and crews – who strive year after year, not to achieve awards, but to whisk locals away from reality for a few hours.

Though they have in recent years hired professional directors (this year, they have been in the quirky, capable hands of Tralee native Tim

Landers), the core team remains the same. Emer O’Brien and Fintan Farrelly share their choreography and musical expertise respectively, while June’s husband Robert and Eddie Kiernan have collaborated on some truly stunning sets. June paid tribute to them, as well as to the entire casts and crews who have dedicated time to the shows, and their current cast which, among a number of stalwarts, boasts an impressive amount of new members.

“You have to have the commitment from them from the very start, for their own sakes as well, but the reward is a brilliant show,” she continued. “If you don’t put in the hours, then you don’t get it.” June also acknowledged the owners of their past and present rehearsal spaces and venues, as well as their supportive audiences and sponsors, who, she says, ensure that a show goes ahead each year. Because while she fondly recalls the good times the society

have enjoyed, she is also honest about the challenges they have faced.

Trying to keep membership up is always a struggle, June admitted, and naturally, finances can be a tricky thing to manoeuvre.

“We don’t do it to make money. In the good times, we made money for the rainy days... and by God the rainy days came.”

There are rainbows though, and June laughed; “Even though I give out about it, I enjoy it. I do enjoy it.”

Indeed as that song ‘There’s no business like show business’ ends; “Still you wouldn’t trade it for a sack of gold.



OFFALY OBSERVED

Since June 2015, acclaimed photographer Veronica Nicholson has been travelling the length and breadth of Offaly taking photographs of people and places for a new photo book being commissioned by Offaly County Council.

The commission, called ‘Observing Offaly,’ is a public art project and forms part of the 2016 commemorative programme for Offaly, with the launch of the book and accompanying exhibition to take place at the beginning of November 2016.

We are living through a rapidly changing culture; already the Offaly of twenty five years ago seems very different. The technology, social practices, domestic customs or landscape we are familiar with today will seem dated or may have died out by the time today’s toddlers are adults. The intention of the project is to document what defines Offaly today and to publish it as a book and exhibition.

“This is a uniquely exciting project, for the county, and for me as a photographer,” said Veronica. “It’s an opportunity to present the county to the people of Offaly, but also to represent the county of Offaly to the country at large; to invigorate our own perception of county and by doing so, to refocus the national perception of Offaly.”

Although she grew up in Dublin, Nicholson spent all her childhood summers on her grandparent’s farm near Rhode, and this connection with place inspired her to relocate to Offaly in 2010. Since then she has been involved in many projects locally, including the documentary film, *A Grand Experience*,



View of Croghan Hill from Rhode National School by Veronica Nicholson

in which travelled by barge the length of Offaly on the Grand Canal from Shannon Harbour to Edenderry, creating photographs and a stop-motion animation.

She has continued her travels through Offaly, this time mostly by car. “I’ve met some amazing people who have very kindly let me into their homes and their lives to record life in Offaly today,” added Veronica. “Behind the most ordinary looking houses are extraordinary people, each with their story to tell. I try to encapsulate that story in a photograph.”

Veronica will continue to take photographs around the county until June 2016. If you have a story to tell, or you know of someone you feel should be included in the book, you can contact Veronica at . Or send a message through Facebook www.facebook.com/observingoffaly

Knowledge and Other Myths

Knowledge and Other Myths exhibition in Belfast is the work of an Artist collective which includes three Westmeath artists

Knowledge and other myths is the second contemporary art exhibition by a working group of six artists; Saoirse Wall, Tara McKeon, Kerry Guinan, Avril Corroon, Eimear Walshe and Renée Heléna Browne, who have been collaborating in research, writing, and art practice since 2013. Tara McKeon, Eimear Walshe and Avril Corroon are from Westmeath.

In this exhibition the artists articulate frustration with the unacknowledged labour of the cultural sector, the objectifying gaze of medicine, the indoctrination of patriarchal values, and the marginalising erasure of histories.

Shot on a HD endoscopy camera, Wall places the viewer in the position of a doctor and swallows him in *Sticky Encounter* (2016). McKeon, in *Weeje Weeje* (2016), speculates through video on why the mythical *Weeje Weeje* bird’s queer behavior was seen as threat in normative society. Collaboratively, Browne and Corroon satirise androcentric art historicism through video and sculpture in *How to Make a Masterpiece and 8ft Yellow* (2015). Walshe presents *Stained Glass Window Restoration* (2016), a fictional history of a queer society in the early 20th century Ireland through an A5 booklet and sculpture. In *Liberate Art* (2016), Guinan nominates herself for the Irish General Election 2016, presenting her campaign materials and props for exhibition. In addition, the artists present a co-authored catalogue of testimonials detailing oppressive experiences that prompted the production of the works.

Knowledge and other myths is part of the Spring programme in Platform Arts, 1 Queen St. Belfast, BT1 6EA.





THE COMIC GENIUS OF Rabbit and Paul

by Rebecca Kelly

It seems every couple of months we have a new animated movie and comic characters to feast our eyes on and get to know. They all start somewhere, usually with a keen illustrator who has a passion to get his characters out into the world, which is exactly what Seán Hogan has done.

It seems every couple of months we have a new animated movie and comic characters to feast our eyes on and get to know. They all start somewhere, usually with a keen illustrator who has a passion to get his characters out into the world, which is exactly what Seán Hogan has done.

Not only that but the 22 year old student, who hails from Killeen just outside Birr, also scooped the Irish Comic News Best Newcomer of the Year Award just before Christmas for his very first comic, *Rabbit and Paul*.

"The characters had been knocking around for a few years so I knew exactly who they were," says Seán. "It took me about 3 months to write the script, working on it part time for the first 2 months and then it took me about 5 months to draw the entire thing. So altogether, it took about 6 months to finish."

Rabbit and Paul follows Paul who gets lost in the small Irish town of Bally O'Jhaysus. After accidentally buying a 6 foot tall, anthropomorphic

rabbit, it's up to the two of them to work together to get Paul home! However, along the way they get distracted by peculiar townsfolk, illegal candy and the largest Chinese restaurant in the Midlands.

"I really wanted the book to feel like it was Irish, as I don't think there's enough media out there that's set in Ireland and celebrates Irish humour. I think *Father Ted* and *Moone Boy* do this really well, so I used their quality and authenticity as a target for *Rabbit and Paul*."

Currently in his final year of 3-Dimensional Design, Model Making & Digital Art in IADT, Dun Laoghaire, Seán's passion for drawing began at an early age. "My imagination as a child was pretty limitless. I came across comics first through *The Beano* and *The Dandy* around 8 years old. I loved collecting them every week from my local newsagent, and then around the age of 12 I got my hands on my first Spiderman comic. I was completely smitten with the art form from that point on."

So what advice does Seán have for those considering an excursion into the world of comics? "Just do it! It may not be fantastic and you'll never be completely satisfied with the finished comic, but you'll learn so much in the process that the next one you create will be miles better. I'd suggest starting with small, that way you'll quickly develop your skills and be able to clearly see that you're improving."

But despite the success of *Rabbit and Paul* so far, Seán says he won't be returning to Bally O'Jhaysus in the immediate future. "I'm currently in the planning stages for my next release. It won't be a sequel to *Rabbit and Paul*, it's going to be something completely different. I will get back to *Rabbit and Paul* soon. Those guys are so much fun and I have plenty of stories left to tell with them!"

Rabbit and Paul is on sale at The Big Bang Comics in Dundrum, Birr Castle Gardens in Birr and online at <https://gunroad.com/l/RabbitandPaul>

Locals RESPOND well to ground-breaking arts project

On February 11, the worlds of digital and literary arts merged to create a ground-breaking new project - Respond 2.

Following the triumph of the first initiative, which saw the collaboration of writers and visual artists, Longford Arts Office repeated the project, this time inviting film-makers to work from pieces written by local literary figures.

"Artists and art lovers know that the visual arts and film are both capable of creating an energy and atmosphere unique to the arts," commented County Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy. "However, when you combine the two different forms of creative expression you can create a wonderful frisson of imaginative energy and excitement."

Well known writer Lorne Patterson acted as Literary Editor on the project, and he oversaw the work of Margaret Nohilly, Edward Denniston, Eileen Moynihan, Mary Melvin Geoghegan, Ann Gerety Smyth, Ciaran Furey, Pauline Flood, Kathleen Dowd, Rose Moran and Emma Donohoe as they composed poetry and prose on a theme of Longford.

Headed up by Film Editor Shane Crossan, film-makers and artists Shelley Corcoran, Gordon Farrell, Seamus Clarke, Eddy Bisi-adepoju, Michael Croghan, Deirdre O'Byrne, Brendan

Keogh, Patrick Baxter and Evelyn Kelly used these pieces to explore ideas of place, locality and pride in one's community.

The project culminated in an evening at Longford's Backstage Theatre, with readings and viewings of the entire works.

The completed project is now on display on the Longford County Arts Office websites at and



Real-life thriller *Making A Murderer* has a surprising Mullingar connection.

The gripping ten-part Netflix documentary series *Making A Murderer* has been enthralling Irish audiences since reaching our screens this year. However it was not the series lead protagonist Steven Avery that had Irish fans talking, but rather a hurling statue that can briefly be seen behind Defence Lawyer Dean Strang. Eagle eyed Irish fans, particularly those from Westmeath, spotted the statue from in the show which and social media did the rest.

The statue left Irish viewers speculating whether the lawyer had Irish connections or if in fact it was a GAA trophy. It turns out that the statue was designed and produced by Genesis Fine Arts of Mullingar. The statue, named Clash of the Ash, depicts two young men launching themselves into the air to compete for a sliotar. Speaking to DailyEdge.ie, Lisa Collins of Genesis confirmed that it is in fact their statue that appears in the Netflix documentary: "It's definitely ours, 100%. My Dad Tony Collins designed it and called me last night when he saw it, it's amazing."

Defence Lawyer Strang, also confirmed to DailyEdge.ie that it is indeed a hurling statue and that he received it as a gift some years ago. "It is a hurling statue, not a trophy. I have a dear friend, a wonderful criminal defense lawyer in Milwaukee who is a first-generation Irish American

from the south side of Chicago. He gave it to me some years ago as a gift. I treasure it, as I do his friendship."

Genesis in Mullingar has been in business for 26 years, and a lot of their business is based on exports to the US – and that's how Dean Strang's friend came across it, and a lot of their business is based on exports to the US – and that's how Dean Strang's friend came across it.

The name Genesis is synonymous with sculpture and fine arts in Ireland. Genesis engages many Irish sculptors to design and craft for its collections which depict children, animals, sporting moments, emotions, music and dance – primarily in bronze. These are on display and for sale in the gallery.



Paris in MULLINGAR

Water, Spirits and Nature breathes a little bit of Paris in Mullingar.

The 2016 programme of exhibitions in the Atrium of the Westmeath County Buildings, played host to French artist and former Westmeath resident Didier Riva, who presented his *Water, Spirits and Nature* photography exhibition in the Spring Programme. The Atrium exhibition space of the Westmeath County Buildings has established itself as an exciting improvised space in the Westmeath visual arts landscape, with artists seeing it as an alternative to more formal exhibition environments. In this way the space lends itself to a variety of uses, and suits artists and groups at various stages in their careers.

Riva started photography in Paris in the 80s, taking portraits for students at the Actors Studio, which led to work in cinema, theatre and a variety of music genres (rock, jazz, flamenco). Interestingly, Riva also worked with the

legendary Mime Artist Marcel Marceau on his show *Le Manteau* for a year. In 1998 Didier moved to Ireland where he joined the Mullingar Camera Club and became Licentiate of the Irish Photographic Federation. His work includes reportages for festivals as well as all family events.

Speaking about his recent exhibition Didier says “for the public, this series of photographs is all about observation, immersing oneself in the image to feel and see, to become a child again with no boundaries of the spirit, allowing the soul to breathe ... other shapes, faces and forms, spirits beings appear and show themselves only in this slice of time made by the act of making a photograph. The invisible world reveals itself from another dimension. Is it magic? Is it Quantum physics? I am sure it is both.” Didier is currently working on a series of portraits of artists.



ROOM22 Exploration of Theme

Aishling Hennessy is a Laois based Artist from Shaen, Portlaoise. She graduated from the Centre of Creative Arts and Media GMIT in 2004 with an Honours BA in Fine Art. Since graduating, Aishling has perused many creative avenues. She received a Higher Diploma in Arts for Art, Craft and Design Teachers from Crawford College of Art and Design in 2007. Aishling would describe her work as Abstract Dreamscapes. Her work intertwines her fascination with the Universe, her deep emotional essence together with the natural Earth that holds us.

ROOM 22 - EXPLORATION OF THEME

How did I end up here? Where did the threads fray and the spiral begin? Crawling up the walls and falling into the depths of the low, once more. Looking up from my paintless hands, I remember from someplace within... From your Head to your Heart and then to your Hands. It should be simple. Three simple instructions to use to begin creating again. It should, right? My Art practice became a dream as opposed to a reality. As my Art fell away, so too did my mental health. I became withdrawn, scared, and afraid and I did not want to be anymore. Room 22 was where I eventually found myself. After decades of sadness, destruction, depression and fear.

Within those pebble-dashed walls and numbified halls, I saw through my illusion.

The elephant in the room became real and I could not hide from it any longer. I am a painter. They are the way my soul speaks to me through colour. So I began. Again. This body of work has allowed me to tiptoe my way back into my joy. Back into the space I cherish within myself. The emotions, the darkness and the spirals now find their home within each of these canvases. Room 22 was not the end. It was the place the Elephant became the Phoenix and has begun to rise from the Ashes.

The title of this continuous body of work is directly linked to my experience of being an inpatient in St. Patrick's Mental Health Services in Dublin.

On entering the facility, my art practice was falling apart and I have no inspiration to create, let alone develop a language through my art and a way of working through my difficulties. As my depression lifted, so too did the fog surrounding my ability to connect to the world surrounding me. I began feeling inspired by other patient's lives. I began to sit in the garden and sketch the autumn trees. I slowly released the fear of not making “perfect” Art. I found some of the puzzle pieces I had lost within

and I began joining them together to be able to see more clearly. Through using a previous method – From amy Head, to my Heart and then to my Hands, I create 11 watercolour and mixed media pieces. Each piece represents aspects of my journey through depression. I have transferred components and emotions from the sketches I created within Room 22 onto large canvases using mixed media.

This Exhibition opened on the 5th February 2016 in the Gallery, Mountmellick Library.
Website : aishlinghennessy.com
Email : aishlinghennessy@gmail.com
Facebook : Aishling Hennessy – Artist
Phone: 00353 876478677



Drumcullen High Cross Head

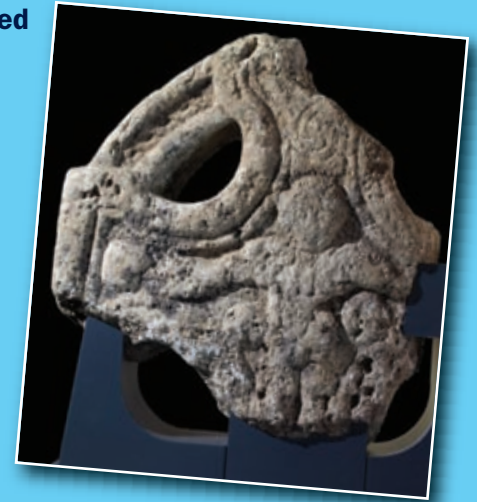
An ancient high cross-head, a 1,000 year old work of art, has been relocated in Offaly to a Catholic parish church, in what is believed to be only the second such time in Irish history.

The cross-head dates from around 900 A.D. and would have originally stood at about 1.8 meters. It was carved from limestone unlike most of the other Midland high crosses which were of sandstone, and had been at Drumcullen Monastic Site on the banks of the Camcor, near Birr, for well over 1,000 years.

Due to security concerns over its portable nature and further concerns about its condition and having consulted with the National Museum of Ireland and the National Monuments Service, a decision was made by Offaly County Council in partnership with the Parish to bring the cross-head to Rath as the nearest church in the same parish. With funding from the Heritage Council a stand was commissioned to display the cross in the church. The stand was a particular challenge to case makers JDB who extraordinarily, used over 1000 different match-stick sized pieces tailored to support the uneven shape of the broken cross-head.

Dr. Peter Harbison, one of Ireland's most distinguished archaeologists and well known high cross expert has described it as follows;

One face of the cross is decorated with a central spiral ornament within a circle, the spiritual meaning of which is sadly lost to us. This would originally have formed the east face of the cross-head. The reason why we can say this is because the other face bears a figure of the crucified Christ, which generally faces west on High Crosses. The Saviour is flanked by Stephaton on the left, who raises the bitter hyssop in a triangular vessel to just beneath Christ's chin. On the right is Longinus, who pierces Christ's armpit with a spear. The large smooth boss at the end of the surviving arm may have had the moon painted on it as a cosmic symbol. Christ's torso is draped in an unusual garment consisting of a weave of ribbons meshed together horizontally and vertically.



Peter Harbison has also pointed out how rare it is to have a high cross in a Catholic parish church with Slane being the only other example he is aware of.

This cross-head is connected to the high cross at Kinnitty Castle. A strong case can be made that the Kinnitty cross also came from Drumcullen as its inscription dedicates the cross to the King of Meath. The Camcor River marks the boundary between

the ancient territory of Meath and Munster. If the monks at Kinnitty commissioned a cross it would have been dedicated to their King of Munster. The likely explanation is that the Bernard family, builders of Castle Bernard, now Kinnitty Castle, brought the high cross there to ornament their demesne. The cross shaft is sandstone and the base limestone – indeed this may be the base for the cross-head now in Rath! Both can be viewed by the public.



Students by day rock stars by night

Performing at the renowned Marquee in Drumlish festival and joining the line-up of the annual Young Rockers Vibe for Phil Lynott commemoration event... it's all in a day's work for Longford band Reprisal.

Never mind the fact that all three band members are still in school. Friends from a young age, fifth year students Jonathan Reilly (guitar/vocals), Aidan Gray (bass/vocals) and Kian Johnston (drums) have been together as a band for less than two years, but they have already made a big impact.

They've been touring around the country, playing at intimate gigs, large festivals and everything in between. Though for the trio, a major highlight came in December at the Fence, Mullingar, when they supported the Strypes. “It was the best gig yet,” grinned Jonathan. Invited by Bressie to play at the gig, it was yet another note on the group's already impressive CV. “It was class, there was a great crowd at it.”

It also proved to be a great learning curve for them, as Jonathan revealed; “We watch bands we like and we study the way they look, the way they jump about and interact with the crowd.” “Even when you're supporting other bands in the flesh,” Kian said, “You can hear a different bass tune or some new drum sounds

and you take notes.” The band have also been putting pen to paper to write their own original material, some of which has already been aired on the stage – to great acclaim. They've been recording with Mike O'Dowd at Lakeland Studio in Glasson, an experience which they love.

“Studio time is always fun, because we're still a small band starting up,” Kian explained. “We're learning so much.” Though it's another cause for praise, their age is something which they feel can sometimes hold them back, as Aidan admitted; “It's not nice not being able to stay after a gig”, but it's a small matter compared to the enjoyment they get from performing.

“We always enjoy being on stage,” Kian added. Though they are remaining tight-lipped about future gigs, one gets the feeling that the best is yet to come from this midlands band. To keep up to date with the band, search for Reprisal on Facebook.

AIDAN TURNER'S GRANNY!

Everyone loves a 'local boy done good' story, so for *Poldark* actor Aidan Turner – it's no surprise that his proud Athlone grandmother Bridgie Turner is happy to sing her grandson's praises

Throughout the years proud Athlone grandmother, Bridgie Turner, has been hailing the achievements of her grandson, Aidan Turner, to various Irish media outlets. RTE Radio1's *Liveline* spoke to Bridget at the *RTE All Ireland Drama Festival* in Athlone last summer and most recently Bridget has been waxing lyrical about her grandson after he was presented with the Special Impact Award at the National Television Awards in early Spring. Turner won the prestigious accolade for his role in British Drama series *Poldark*. Speaking of her grandson's success to the Westmeath Independent Bridgie said "It's great, it's good to see it, he's doing very well. He's a nice quiet lad. Maybe he has come out of his box a bit!"

On receiving the award, a slightly bemused Turner joked modestly "I'm slightly confused, I didn't know I was nominated for an award". Aidan thanked the many talented people in the cast and crew, and dedicated his award to everyone who works on the show. *Poldark* regularly receives up to 8 million viewers in its prime BBC1 evening slot. Fans can expect a second *Poldark* series in late 2016.



THE TRENCH AWARD

A wartime tradition and a marriage full of music has led to a significant prize for young classical Midland musicians

Set up in 2014, The Trench Award is an annual bursary dedicated to helping singers and musicians from the Midlands or with a Midlands connection pursue their professional career in the field of classical music.

Named after the late Patrick and Julia Trench, who were famous for their musical evenings in Sopwell Hall in Ballingarry, North Tipperary, four prizes have been awarded to performers and musicians over the past two years. Music was the binding glue in Patrick's marriage to Julia who, even in wartime, travelled weekly to London to enjoy the opera season. When Patrick died, Julia provided funding for the beautiful Trench Harp as one way of commemorating him. Julia Trench was one of the many generous local benefactors involved in the establishment of Birr Theatre & Arts Centre in the mid-1990s.

Young Midland musicians eligible to apply are students either attending or who have been offered a confirmed place at a third level conservatory or college of music in Ireland. A prestigious selection panel then chooses six finalists to travel to Offaly to compete in a gala performance at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Nicholas Chalmers (Conductor of Northern Ireland Opera) and Fergus Sheil (Artistic Director of Wide Open Opera and Opera Theatre Company) have both previously served on the selection panel.

Portlaoise mezzo-soprano Heather Fogarty claimed the first ever Trench bursary in 2014, taking home the top prize of €2500. Since then, she has graduated from the Royal Irish Academy of Music with a Performance Degree in Vocal Studies.

Last year, she was chosen to travel to Sao Paulo in Brazil to perform "Carmina Burana" in their National Concert Hall. Here at home, she took to the stage at the National Concert Hall in Dublin where she performed Mendelssohn's "Elijah" alongside mezzo-soprano Imelda Drumm, sopranos Celine Byrne and Sarah Shine and the National Symphony Orchestra. Most recently, she performed with her first professional opera company, Northern Ireland Opera in Belfast last October.

Last year, Kildare mezzo-soprano Carolyn Holt took home the top award. Winning The Trench Award has allowed Carolyn to take up her place at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music in London where she has also been awarded the Cork Scholarship. She has enjoyed much success following her award winning performance in Birr, reaching the final of the Bernadette Greevy Bursary and being awarded a John McCormack Society Award as a result of winning the P.J. Geoghegan Memorial Cup & Gus Smith Award at the ESB Feis Ceoil 2015.

Since moving to London she has been awarded joint first place in the inaugural Irish Heritage Bursary and performed in the Royal Academy and Kohn Foundation Bach Cantata Series. She looks forward to performing in the Royal Academy Opera School's production of 'The May Night' by Rimsky-Korsakov, sung in Russian, in March 2016 and a recital with Irish Heritage in September 2016. Offaly musician Gavin Brennan and Paul Kiernan, a trumpeter from Co Westmeath have also been awarded bursaries under the award. The 2016 Trench Award takes place on Sunday 1 May (Closing date for applications is Friday 18 March)

For more information and for details on how to apply, log on to www.birrtheatre.com



Longford's soon-to-be Stateside star

Longford will be ably represented on the national, and international, stage this year, thanks to Aughnaclyffe actor Liam Heslin. Liam, a graduate of the renowned Lir Academy, has landed a role in the iconic 'The Plough and the Stars', produced by the Abbey Theatre.

Earlier this year, Liam had to opt out of a production of 'The Poor Little Boy With No

Arms', which he cowrote with fellow Lir graduates and Mikel Murfi, after securing the role of Captain Brennan in the historic play. Set amid the Easter Rising, the play has almost completed its Dublin run, after which it will travel around Ireland.

Later this year, Liam and his costars will journey across the Atlantic for an exciting USA tour, a first for the 29 year old actor. "I've never been to the

States, so I'm really looking forward to it," he admitted. "I've travelled for work but not as far as America.

While it's a big step in his career, Liam isn't worried about how the audiences might differ to those in Ireland, which is mostly due to his confidence in the play. "If the work is good and it speaks to people, then it doesn't matter where they're from," he concluded.



Visiting sculptors at Laois Arthouse, Stradbally

American sculptor Stephen Shaheen will spend the month of March in Stradbally, Co. Laois, lodging at the Laois Arthouse.

Shaheen will work with his friend and colleague, Scottish sculptor Alasdair Thomson, working at McKeon Stone in Stradbally. They will create a large, private memorial with 2-meter Celtic cross destined for installation in Boston, Massachusetts. Kilkenny limestone was selected by the Irish-American family commissioning the work, due to its hardness outdoors and important pedigree as a traditional medium for Celtic crosses. Having developed clay models for the figurative elements in his New York studio, McKeon Stone will be providing the material and initial machining work

on the pieces. Managing Director Niall Kavanagh has kindly offered the use of their facilities for Shaheen and Thomson to perform the hand carving.

Artists Talk

They will conduct an illustrated talk on their practice in the Laois Arthouse on Wednesday 23rd March AT 1.30PM. Refreshments will be provided and a site-visit of the sculpture in Mc Keons Stone will be available after the talk.

Further details from: Muireann Ní Chonaill, Laois Arts Officer at artsoff@laoiscoco.ie and 057-8664033



Schools embrace art with Photography module

For the past number of years, Longford students have been reaping the benefit of in depth and fascinating photography lessons with Shelley Corcoran.

Now in its sixth year, the Longford Schools Photography Programme, an initiative run by the County Arts Office, provides Transition Year and PLC students with a unique education in the technical and artistic aspects of the art-form.

Having started in just five schools, the programme is next year expanding to eight of the nine schools in the county, a fact with which Shelley is thrilled, though her happiness is on behalf of her art.

“Obviously the expansion is fantastic, because it means that other schools have recognised what the students get out of it,” she told Midlands Arts and Culture. While the year’s work culminates in an exhibition and showcase at the end of the school year, each year group has also had the chance to work on a unique project – from an anti-drug and alcohol competition to fundraising photography books.

This year’s students were given the opportunity to prepare works for exhibition at Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre for their Frightfest Hallowe’en celebrations. “It’s great to have a project that has a theme to it,” Shelley continued. “We started by brainstorming ideas around Hallowe’en, and anything surreal and otherworldly.

“It actually fit really well with the way I teach photography, in that photography is not reality. We’re always creating something, creating a piece of art.” Instead of relying on the traditional Hallowe’en symbols, Shelley urged her students to delve deeper into the theme with some stunning results.

“It was great to experience so many different aspects of the one type of festival and break away from what you already know about Hallowe’en,” Shelley added. “Then to exhibit their images in Ardagh Heritage Centre for a different audience, was excellent and we would be delighted to do it again.”

Now, the students’ attention will turn towards the end of year exhibition and showcase, which will be the biggest one yet, and looking forward to the event, Shelley concluded by sharing her own feelings on the programme. “I absolutely love it. I just love the TY age group, because they’re old enough to be able to think outside the box and to be really creative with their imagination and they’re not old enough to have that barrier that says ‘you can’t do that’.

“All of my students have that creative element and that ability to create really interesting and inspiring concepts.”



“I just love the TY age group, because they’re old enough to be able to think outside the box and to be really creative with their imagination and they’re not old enough to have that barrier that says ‘you can’t do that’.”



KETTLE

Laois teen Lily Kettle is the leader of the Irish National Youth Orchestra. Claire O’Brien discovered that an hour with her is an inspiring and entertaining masterclass in drive and determination

The journey that took 16-year-old Lily Kettle to being leader of the Irish National Youth Orchestra started with her toddler-self playing a knife-and-fork violin along to ads on Lyric FM.

Mum Deirdre Kettle takes up the story at the kitchen table in their cottage at Wolfhill, Co Laois. Lily’s earliest request to Santa was for a “biolin.”

“I’d be listening to the beat or the story but Lily was picking out the music with strings,” says Deirdre, describing how Lily would sit in her baby seat with her cutlery and mimic the violin music.

When Santa delivered, three year old Lily started lessons Maria Kellerman in Dublin, a journey that became logistically unsustainable as the Kettle family grew.

At six she started in Kildare with Marianna Alabedova, an inspired music teacher whom Lily simply loves.

But, in spite of Lily’s early love of violin there were often typical tears about not wanting to practice. Joining the Midlands Youth Orchestra (under Vincent Hunt) at 12 changed that.

“One of the first pieces I did was Pirates of the Caribbean and Jurassic Park and I just loved it. I realised all my practising and all my solo work can get me here.”

Vincent thought she was ready for the national youth orchestra and so did Marianna but Lily thought she wasn’t quite ready.

So she auditioned “just for the experience” and jumped for joy when she got a place. The residential course which followed in Kilkenny College became “the best thing I’d ever done.”

Lily, who has been home-schooled all her life, is incredibly self-motivated, and the work ethic of the INYO really appealed to her.

“I love it so much because you’re worked so hard – ten and a half to eleven hours a day,” she says, untypically for a teenager.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” she says, adding that what appeals to her is “knowing that you’re getting somewhere. You can see progress in orchestra or solo. One day all of a sudden

something clicks and you can see that’s the product of all my work this week.”

That work ethic was central to securing the role of leader with the INYO.

Again, she started with low expectations, taking the audition just to prove to herself that she could be in the room with some of her excellent fellow musicians.

“But you’ve never worked as hard in your life,” interjects Deirdre and Lily agrees, adding that her driving force was to make sure she didn’t make a show of herself.

The audition had two parts – a solo performance and then an opportunity to lead the other auditionees. She was worried when the committee didn’t ask her to critique her performance and then lead the musicians again.

It wasn’t a sign they weren’t interested, but a sign of an impeccable performance. She got the job, and again, loves the challenge.

“There’s no time for messing around. I have to work out bowings and fingerings. It wasn’t as simple as reading the dots. You had to know the style, the dynamic – you have to be the composer, you have to know it so well.”

“It’s just brilliant, so fun, but tough. You have to prove it in the playing that you’re worth it,” she says and it’s a phrase she repeats several times.

She credits her work ethic to her home schooling and wonders how other musicians have the time to practice.

“They still have their homework or their mocks, stuff that gets in the way, I don’t know how they do it. I wouldn’t have been leader if I was in school, I wouldn’t have time. Most of my breathing hours are spent on music,” she says without any ego or arrogance. It’s simply how it is.

“I’ve never had a schedule, a curriculum or a teacher so I’ve had to put in my own plan, I’ll practice, then I’ll go back and then I’ll do maths. I’ve never been the ‘I don’t know what to do’ kind of person. I can’t sit around and I’ve never been like that,” she says, with an eye clearly on a stunning career that she’s more than willing to put the work into achieving.



Aislinn O'Keefe

As if she had a right to be there

As if she had a right to be there will open on Sat 12th March at 1.30pm and will run for three weeks.

As if she had a right to be there is an evolving series of work exploring women's involvement in the Irish struggle for an independent nation. This work explores the idea of space as gendered and highly politicised. Traditionally, 'feminine' space is the domestic, private sphere while the public domain, the realm of power and decision-making, is 'masculine' and male-dominated. Irish women in the period leading up to an independent, though partitioned, Ireland flouted convention and occupied public spaces (both ideologically and physically) while fighting for a free Ireland. They set up their own organisations, Inghinnide na hÉireann and Cumann na mBan, when they were barred from joining male-led nationalist groups. Women had a double fight on their hands; not only were they citizens of an occupied nation struggling for independence, they also had to fight for their rightful place within the nationalist movement itself. Often, they were relegated to traditional, 'feminine' roles such as administering first aid and performing menial tasks such as cooking and cleaning during the Rising for example. The 1916 Proclamation's promise of equal rights and opportunities for all remained an ideal rather than a reality.

Irish women fared much worse after the setting up of the Irish Free State. The newly free portion of Ireland set about differentiating itself from England's colonial rule by rejecting what it saw as 'modern', and therefore English, impositions including women's suffrage. Church and State became intertwined and the ideal of a pre-modern, supposedly 'Gaelic', way of life with the traditional family at its heart became the model that was eventually enforced in a highly repressive state. Ireland's fate was sealed with the regressive 1937 Constitution (and many acts of legislation thereafter) which saw the female population relegated to the domestic, private sphere, powerless and away from any role in public life. Women's participation in the struggle for independence too was brushed under the rug of history allowing for assumptions of women's 'natural' place within the home to cement. Today, we are still reeling from the effects of these regressive policies and women still fight for the ideals held in the Proclamation, read aloud on the steps of the G.P.O. one hundred years ago.

Many photographs remain from the early 20th century which attests to women's participation in attempting to secure a free Ireland. These photographs are a starting point for the work which attempts to make visible the invisible army of women who contributed so much to this nation through a series of drawings. Domestic materials and text pieces explore this notion of conflict within a conflict i.e. women's fight for equality within the nationalist fight for a sovereign nation. The work seeks to understand women's current status in Ireland through examining the attitudes and ideologies, both overt and latent, inherent in the founding of the nation.

May 5th-May 27th Artist Marie O'Brien will exhibit. Marie's work in oils focuses on the figure in the landscape. Also, to look forward to will be exhibitions by Mary Lee Murphy, Dorothee Kolle, Nuala O'Sullivan, Lorna Corrigan and Mette Sofie Roche.

For further details please contact the Laois Arts Office on 057 866 4033 or e-mail artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or visit www.laoisarthouse.ie

For further details on the programme contact the Laois Arts Office on 057 866 4033 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie. Further details from www.arthouse.ie www.facebook.com/theearthhouseandlibrary

"I'll never waver off who I am"

The music business is a difficult one to infiltrate but Rooskey native Eimear Reynolds is certainly going to give it her best shot as she releases her debut album this year.

The talented former Face of Ireland is looking forward to a summer release made up of well known songs, which she hopes will pleasantly surprise those who have not heard her beautiful voice before.

"I'm recording up in Navan with a producer called Mark Cahill," she smiled, speaking to Midlands Arts and Culture after a day in the studio. "I started with him this time last year." Eimear met Mark after a concert with the Roscommon Solstice Choir, which she set up for the Gathering in 2013 with her brother Andrew. "We do a series of concerts every summer and every Christmas," she pointed out.

"Mark just came up to me after the performance and started talking about what I was doing.

"We just clicked straight away and he just got me. He really understood what I wanted and he had the same outlook as I had for myself."

While recording has always been a dream for her, Eimear was reluctant to start until she found her niche.

"It took me a long time because I studied Music in college. I was trained to go down the opera route but I didn't really have the love for it that my peers in college had.

"It took me a couple of years to find my sound but everyone was so used to seeing me in the Church setting so when I wavered off that it took me a while to gain confidence."

Described as a traditional Irish or folk-style ballad album, indeed she cites Frances and Mary Black and Mary Coughlan as strong influences, Eimear's debut release is made up of her rendition of well known

songs. However, she is keen to eventually work on writing her own material and even keener not to be boxed into one genre or style.

"I don't consider myself one genre and that's kind of something I've struggled with the past year," she conceded. A founding member of Emerald Storm (again alongside her brother Andrew) and having taken over direction of the children's choir in St Mel's Cathedral, Eimear's voice is a familiar one to the people of Longford, Leitrim and Roscommon, and she was afraid that straying from her known style would alienate the people who have supported her from the beginning. It's not the genre that matters, according to Eimear, however, it's that she, and the listeners can relate to the song - be it classical, pop or traditional. "It is going to be a shock," she said of her album. "but I'm really confident about it and I'm really excited about it."

Being the Face of Ireland opened up a lot of avenues for Eimear, and while also promoting her album in Ireland, she is hoping to use some of her USA contacts to make a name for herself there too. She has also been dropping sneak peaks into her studio

life onto her Facebook, Twitter and Instagram profiles, including a Christmas single 'Get Me Through December', which was extremely well received and earned her plenty of airplay over the festive season.

Breaking into the business is not an easy task, though, and Eimear is under no illusions. Working with Joanne Costello on perfecting her image, Eimear didn't hesitate to acknowledge how image-based the industry can be. It's not something that phases her though, in fact, she is adamant about retaining her own identity, saying; "At the end of the day, as much as the package is important I would never waver off who I am.

"It's really important that people would never say 'she's changed', it's very important to me that I stay true to myself."

There is no doubt that Eimear has the talent and the drive to succeed, but regardless of what happens, she will never give up her music. "Whether I make a full time career out of my music or not, I'm always going to do it because I love it," she concluded.



FOIL, ARMS & HOG

Westmeath braces itself to welcome Global YouTube sensation Foil, Arms and Hog as they build on their massive following and take to the stage around the country

We all know the way to an Irish person's heart is laughter and if it's a love of comedy you have, *Foil Arms and Hog* are your men in shining tinfoil.

Over the past 6 years *Foil, Arms and Hog* have been rising through the ranks of Irish sketch with their particular brand of off-the-wall humour. The trio of Sean Finegan (Foil), Conor McKenna (Arms) and Sean Flanagan (Hog) began their lives together studying and acting in UCD doing engineering, architecture and genetics respectively. Now 6 years later the Irish comedy scene along with that of the UK, US and Australia is theirs for the taking!

To date *Foil Arms and Hog* have over 4 million hits on YouTube, five exclusives on American comedy website *Funny or Die* and an endorsement from Rowan Atkinson. In early 2016 as part of RTE's 8-days comedy festival, *Comedy Showhouse*, the trio performed at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin in front of a live audience, recorded live for RTÉ Radio 1.

The Irish sketch group are winning over the hearts of social media users everywhere with their litany of YouTube videos including *Election Time in Ireland*, and *How To Speak Dublin*. Speaking on their viral success Sean said "Lately it seems people have really taken to watching our Youtube videos. Our "How to Speak Dublin" video went super viral for us. We were getting messages from Irish people all over the world asking us for more. We've been banging out videos on

YouTube for about 7 years now so it's been a hard fought popularity contest but I think we are at a turning point now. In the end the YouTube videos are just a way to hook an audience into coming to see us live."

With multiple performances around Ireland including a Spring performance in the Mullingar Arts Centre which Conor said they bombarded with requests from the Midlands county "Please, please, please do a gig in the Midlands" is what one fan on Youtube asked us and we thought that's crazy! Nothing ever happens in the Midlands Right? But then many more people started calling for our show to come to the Midlands and we thought "Be more specific! The Midlands is a massive place!" so eventually we landed on the idea of doing a gig in the Mullingar Arts Centre. Hurray for democracy!" Its clear to see that *Foil Arms and Hog* are here to stay as they exude unbelievable energy, embodying everything from Irish mummies, working for a sex hotline to dentists.

To the Midlands and beyond for Foil Arms and Hog.

For more about Foil Arms and Hog you can visit their Facebook page at- www.facebook.com/foilarmsandhog.

Twitter- [/twitter.com/FoilArmsAndHog](https://twitter.com/FoilArmsAndHog)

YouTube- www.youtube.com/user/foilarmsandhog



AS YMBOL OF SUCCESS

The new start and endless possibilities offered by regeneration have been expertly reflected in Longford's newest public art feature, which was installed at the beginning of February.

Commissioned by Longford County Council on behalf of Clúid Housing Association and funded under the Department of Environment Percent for Art Scheme, the €38,000, stainless steel piece is a celebration of the successful completion of the St Michael's Road regeneration programme.

"The artists felt that designing the piece based on the unique space between the letters 'I' and 'F' gave a concrete expression to all of the possibilities that life held in store for the families of the newly-rejuvenated community of the St Michael's Road area."

Located on the corner of St Michael's Road and the Strokestown Road, the abstract structure was created by Leitrim based artists Joseph and Patrick Walker. It represents the negative space between the letters 'I' and 'F' in the word 'IF'.

According to County Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy, the brothers have been fascinated for years by the shape of spaces between letters.

"They selected a word that they felt was appropriate to the St Michael's Road rejuvenation project and that word was 'if'.

In keeping with the piece's purpose - to mark the area's regeneration - a number of local residents were directly involved in the adjudication process. This is the first piece of public art commissioned by the County Council since the N5 fiddle was installed in 2013. The next feature to be commissioned will be the piece awarded to the county following its victory in the IBAL (Irish Business Against Litter) National Litter Campaign. Again, as the piece marks the achievements of locals, they will have an active part to play in deciding on the final work of art and its location.



Homes for the Dead 1916

Four women in Kildare have banded together to create houses for the dead of 1916. Not for the soldiers who lost their lives but for the civilians caught in the crossfire. In total, 262 civilians, many of them children, lost their lives in the battles raging across the capital in the Easter Rising of 1916. Their numbers composed the majority of the total 485 deaths.

Led by ceramics artist and teacher Ciara O'Keeffe, the 1916 Arts project emerged from a theme of homelessness, emigration and loss. Ciara has been sculpting model clay houses in a series of exhibitions entitled *Dwelling* over the past five years. She looked at houses vacated because of death or emigration and she wondered if people's souls lived on even after they had departed.

Last year the Ciara and her three friends, Maggie Owens, Sharon Harris Byrne and Aisling Moran, were discussing the 1916 celebrations. "We felt we wanted to do something to commemorate the Rising but we were also very wary of becoming political," said Ciara. "1916 has shaped our state but in ways that are beyond mere politics."

Ciara researched the Rising and found to her horror that more civilians had perished than soldiers. "No one really talks about those killed by accident," said Ciara. "It seems such a waste of a life then and now for no one to take any notice of their deaths."

At the time many of these dead people were laid out in City Hall but no families came forward to claim them. "They had no money to bury their loved ones and so it was left to the State to dispose of the bodies," said Ciara. "They truly were the

poorest of the poor. In fact, many were buried with no names at all."

Broadcaster Joe Duffy had already turned the spotlight on the forgotten victims of the 1916 Rising, identifying 40 children under the age of 16 who died. His book *Children of the Rising* was published last year, topping the Irish non fiction book charts.

Ciara approached Joe Duffy and he agreed to launch their project, the 1916 Sackville Street project (www.1916SackvilleStreet.com) in 2015. The project aims to get volunteers to choose their citizen and then to create a model house for them. "To rehome them at last," as Ciara explains. "One young student had claimed an unknown girl and is creating a house of mirrors. She says the mirrors are to show the dead girl could have been any one of us." "We will host an exhibition in the National Botanic Gardens from April 8th to 24th, called Sackville Street, of all the model houses. We expect to cover some 3000 square feet in size. We really want to create a home for dead of 1916 and a permanent place for them to be remembered by."

To find out more visit: www.1916Sackvillestreet.com.



Hares on the March

Jck & Jill Foundation continue in meaningful partnership with an impressive line-up of participating artists

Hares on the March is sponsored by Lily O'Brien's Chocolates whose founder Mary-Ann O'Brien is also the co-founder of the Jack & Jill Children's Foundation which she set up along with husband Jonathan Irwin based on the home care plan of their late son Jack Irwin. Since 1997 the Foundation has supported almost 2,000 children from birth to 4 years old with brain damage who suffer severe intellectual and physical trauma, including 44 in Westmeath. Jack & Jill is hoping that funds raised from *Hares on the March* will make a big dent in the €2.7 million it needs in 2016 to provide home nursing care to sick children nationwide, with every €16 raised funding one hour of home nursing care.

Some of the other big name artists involved in *Hares on the March* are Pauline Bewick, Peter Curling, John Doherty, Martin Gale, Graham Knuttel, Paul Roy, John Shinnors and Donald Teskey, with a full list of artists and their hares and the latest auction bids on .

Paul Roy from Tyrrellspass says that *Here Hare Here* was inspired by, "a quote from the classic *Withnail & I* movie; I wanted to have a humorous element to my Hare, a little in-joke in some ways, but mainly a little bit of levity. The technique I used follows on from last year's pig 'Lou', with perhaps a more refined design.... overall I want you to look at him and imagine he has an interesting back-story and comes from an intriguing world."

The Jack & Jill Foundation's nationwide service includes home visits and care, advice, information, lobbying and bereavement support, with the Foundation providing funding for up to 64 hours of home nursing care per month at a cost of up to €1024 per family and up to 80 hours per month for end of life care. The Jack & Jill Children's Foundation relies on the generosity of the public and creative fundraisers like this to raise the €2.7 million it requires every year to provide this critical service.



Joseph in Mullingar!

Mullingar Community College's first musical proved that Joseph's Technicolor Dreamcoat will never go out of fashion.

At the start of 2016 both students and teachers of Mullingar Community College worked together to present the Community College's first ever musical – *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*.

The Biblical saga of Joseph and his coat of many colours ran for four performances in January at the Mullingar Arts Centre.

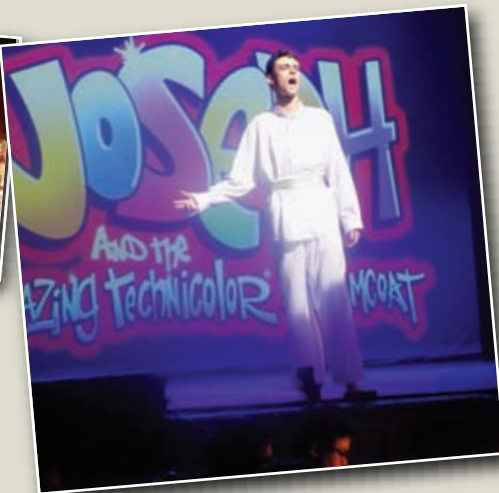
The delightful musical parable told the story of Joseph, his father's favourite son, a boy blessed with prophetic dreams.

Students from the school's PLC beauty course provided the make-up and the Mullingar Town Band, conducted by music teacher Patricia Magee, provided the music.

Collette Dunning, the deputy principal of Mullingar Community College, said that the reason they chose Joseph was that "it involves both adults and children. It is also recognisable and a lot of people would know the songs."

When asked why they decided to have their first musical now Ms Dunning said: "It was just the right time, we also got a new staff member, Patricia Magee who had worked on productions like this before."

Musical Director Patricia Magee is no stranger to the Musical Theatre world. Joseph was Patricia's 10th show as Musical Director. She previously worked with Athlone Community College. Her past musicals include *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Sound of Music*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Calamity*



Jane, *High School Musical*, *Grease*, *Back to the Eighties* and *Les Miserables*.

The staging of this musical is a fitting nod to the 20-year anniversary of Lakeland Productions adaptation of Joseph back in 1996, which was performed in the County Hall.

After the success of the Mullingar Community College's first musical you can be sure any dream will do for the Community College's future musical endeavours.

Easter Art Camps presented by Laois Arts Office

Looking for some creative fun for children and young people over the Easter break...Places are filling up fast.

Arts and Craft for Ages 6-9years. Artist, Wendy Wright will host fun, creative arts and craft workshops. Imagination, colour and texture will all play their part as the participants get to explore the themes of Easter and Spring and create their own imaginative pieces. Workshops take place in the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally on Tues 22nd and Wed 23rd March Fee: €5 per 2hr workshop running 11-1 and 2-4. Booking T: 057 8664033 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie

Spaces are limited, registration will take place 15minute prior to the start of each workshop.

Over the month of July the Laois Summer Arts Programme will run a series of workshops for children and young people over 3 days in venues around county Laois. Arts, Craft, Pottery, and Creative Writing will be included. To register your interest contact E: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or call 057 866 4033.

POETRY in the Park

Athlone 's love affair with poetry continues as local collective bring out their third poetry book.

With a staggering membership of 590 (aged 4 to 94) Athlone's local poetry collective *Poetry in the Park* continues to thrive. The group holds monthly poetry recitals in Burgess Park, on the first Sunday of every month at 2 p.m.

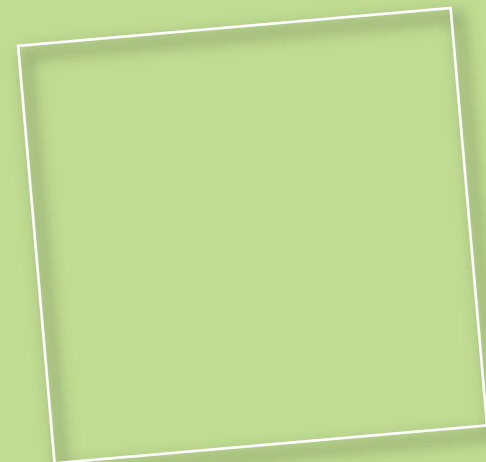
It is a community gathering that extends its invite for all those interested in poetry to meet up and enjoy all aspects of the art, such as poetry recitals. The group also encourages its members to share their own poetry or short stories.

Caroline Coyle who hosted the recent launch stated that Poetry in the Park's community Collection No 3 is unique. Coyle says "Poetry has the power to bring together and unite so many

different people in our community that otherwise may not have met. Poetry as a medium for community engagement has the capacity to change people's lives, and as an art form is vital to developing social capital for the community across all ages, races and abilities."

The poetry group is looking forward to another year of creative collaborations, taking poetry outdoors through different mediums and utilising poetry as a vehicle to engage all members of our community.

Further information can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/Poetry-in-the-Park-Athlone>



MOOVE

Returning from London's musical metropolis, Westmeath DJ Clodagh McCann is set to MOOVE up the ranks as she launches new music night.

MOOVE is an exciting new music night in Athlone, usually on the last or second last weekend of the month at Upstairs @ The Malt House, 41 Church Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

It's the brainchild of DJ Clodagh McCann who returned home to Athlone after 15 years of working as a DJ and promoter in London. Clodagh found that the town lacked something cool for an older crowd who wanted to hear new and exciting music.

MOOVE is a night of live music and DJs. It consists of 4-5 hours of local solo musicians, bands and DJs in a great venue. It's attracting strong

numbers, suiting an open minded, creative, older crowd who love music and dancing and Clodagh encourages people to come on their own if they wish, as the vibe is friendly. Electronic wise the music spans from House, Deep house to Tech House.

The Midlands is full of creative and talented musicians, bands and DJs and Clodagh wants to give them a platform to perform to a great crowd.

If you would like to attend or even perform at a future MOOVE event please get in touch via Facebook at www.facebook.com/MOOVETechnoParty or DJ Clodagh



Silk Road FILM FESTIVAL

Offaly natives, brother and sister Delwyn and Carla Mooney, both filmmakers are the brains behind the 4th Silk Road Film Festival which runs in Dublin from the 10th-14th March.

Ireland, but that seemed more limited and between Delwyn, Carla and Steinar Oli Jonsson (Icelandic) the Silk Road Film Festival (SRFF) was born four years ago."

The Silk Road refers to the historical network of ancient trade routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting the West and East from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Deriving its name from the lucrative trade in Chinese silk carried out along its length, many other goods were traded, and religions, philosophies, cultural exchanges and various technologies also travelled along the Silk Routes. Today the Silk Road reference still has strong economic links, but in the midst of sustained political and social upheaval along those routes, SRFF opens a new window for social and cultural understanding in Ireland.

So what inspires two Midland filmmakers to set up a film festival that focuses on Asian, Arab, Persian, Middle Eastern, African, Mediterranean and European cinema?

Carla explains, "Delwyn went work in Bigfoot Studios in the Philippines about 10 years ago and struck up a friendship with an Iranian filmmaker Khashayar Mahmoodabadi. They kept in touch after they returned home and in 2011 decided to co produce a film in Iran. We spent 45 days there with Khashayar in what became the first Irish-Iranian co production and it got us thinking about the potential to open more doors. We first thought we would establish an Iranian Film Festival in

No stranger to networking of this nature, Carla was recently appointed the Irish Ambassador for the European Women's' Audio Visual Network (EWA) and is using the festival programme to platform a discussion on international female documentary makers, with acclaimed Irish producers and directors including Rachel Lysaght-award winning producer (*One Million Dubliners*, *The Pipe*, *Dreams of a Life*, *Patricks Day*), Aoife Kelleher (*One Million Dubliners*, *Nice Stone Lighter*) and Paula Kehoe an award winning documentary director (*An Dubh ina Gheal*, *Deardhuil*).

SRFF is welcoming guests travelling from the Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, UK, USA and the Philippines to the multiple city venues the festival inhabits which include the Omniplex Rathmines, Trinity College Dublin and The New Theatre Dublin amongst other screening venues across the city.

It is early days yet, but the Silk Road Film Festival founders have already found their niche in the burgeoning film festival world, bringing an eclectic range of films from the "Silk Road" to a rich and culturally diverse Irish population and creating a networking platform for international filmmakers and aspiring student filmmakers.

