

News

Music enchants President at Milltown Festival

By Noel Carney

PROTOCOL and timetables were abandoned in Milltown last Friday night when President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina were among a huge crowd who enjoyed a wonderful performance of Irish Traditional music and song at the opening night Gala Concert of the inaugural PJ Conlon Festival weekend.



AT the church door: President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina with Maude Connolly, Fr John D Flannery, Fr JJ Cribben, Aine Sheridan, Tony Sheridan, Anne Tierney, Bernie Greene, Tony Murphy and Noel Carney.

Although the visit by the Presidential couple to the local St Joseph's church was officially planned as a private night out which would mean no speech or statement and was not an official public engagement, President Higgins was so moved by the excitement and enthusiasm of the crowd and their reaction to the music that he sprang to his feet and spoke briefly but brilliantly in Irish and English. Expressing his appreciation for the entertainment that he and his wife had just enjoyed he spoke of "the great gift that giving music to children and handing it on from generation to generation" is and he commented on what a fine example all present had seen and heard that night as several local children under the guidance of local music teacher Maude Connolly revelled in their ability to blend with masters of the genre.

He was impressed by the talent and the numbers of very young people playing. He remarked that "it is good to see so many of the younger generation enjoying and expressing in music our unique culture."

It was that culture, he stated, that "makes us different and gives us our identity". Referring to the companionship and loyalty that artists provide for each other he described that friendship as a "comhlúadar cheoil."

Always recognised as a man of the Arts and the Irish language, he knew when MC Aine Sheridan mentioned Maigh Seola and Mrs Eibhlín Costello's wonderful collection of songs from the area around Knockma, Castlehackett and beyond, that many of them were contributed from the Milltown area. He described them as a priceless legacy.

Apparently, according to Aine, when Eibhlín's husband, Dr Tom Costello from Tuam, went out the country to visit patients his wife would accompany him when appropriate and spend the time collecting the words of songs which she would set to music when she got home.

The President drew laughter from the 400-plus crowd when he remarked that the visit to Milltown gave him "a chance to nip down the road to see the in-laws." His wife Sabina was born on the Milltown-Ballindine border and, consequently, on the Galway-Mayo border so she has to maintain a discreet attitude when both sides want to claim her.

She was actually baptised in the old Milltown parish church which stood on the same site as the one

in which she was standing and local man Frank Glynn pointed out to her that the baptismal font that was used in that ceremony was still in use today. She was pleased to see it there still. She was surrounded by relations, well wishers and friends afterwards and, like the President, was the target of dozens of people who wanted to be photographed with them.

Among the audience in the church which proved to be an ideal venue with wonderful acoustics were local parish priest Fr JJ Cribben, a native of Ballyhaunis who was an outstanding footballer with Mayo in the 1960s and 70s and locally born Fr. John David Flannery who wore the maroon and white of Galway as well as the royal blue of Milltown. No doubt both were delighted with Mayo's wonderful display in Croke Park a couple of days later.

Proceedings off to a top quality start. They were followed by versatile harpist-singer-composer Úna Ní Fhlannagáin from Craughwell. The multi-talented Greene family flew the flag for local music and the superb performances of Shane, Ronan and Aoife drew rapturous applause. The same applied to Maude Connolly, Aine Sheridan, Bríd Dooley and friends who also highlighted the depth of talent in Milltown and north Galway.

Among the household names on the bill were Charlie Harris, formerly of Shaskeen and a lifelong admirer of PJ Conlon, Andrew McNamara from Clare, a former member of the Tulla Céili Band and Charlie Pigott who for many years was a key member of De Dannan. Singer John Faulkner also contributed handsomely as did well-known London born musician John Carty who has Roscommon roots.

Brilliant Headford musicians Breda and Claire Keville also thrilled the audience as did Pádraig Keane and his sister Siobhán from Oranmore. Pádraig was the 2012 TG4 Young Musician of the Year. Paddy Joe Tighe flew the flag for Mayo as he formed a box-playing duet

with Alan Morrisroe who wrote a valuable and well researched booklet on the life of PJ Conlon. A surprise inclusion on the bill and a very entertaining one too, was Oireachtas and All-Ireland sean-nós dancing expert Pádraig Ó Dubháin from Árd Mór near Cárna in Conamara.

Another surprise guest and one who went down extremely well with the crowd was Barnaderg-born but Tuam-based PJ McGrath. He had the added distinction of playing on an old accordion that was actually once owned by PJ Conlon. In the hands of a fine player like PJ McGrath it still sounded great despite being over 100 years old and the audience loved his set comprising a delightful selection of old Delia Murphy favourites.

The festival was held to commemorate the legendary accordion player who was born and reared in Milltown but who emigrated and became world famous in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. It was a real triumph for the organisers and judging by the reaction of both locals and visitors it could become an annual fixture on the social calendar.

Music and Song

The concert itself was opened by another man who performed with distinction on the football fields, Iomar Barrett of Mountbellew-Moylough and Galway fame who, with his group, got pro-

Planners have concerns about Tuam's supermarket plans

By Siobhán Holliman

GALWAY Co planners have serious concerns about the latest large supermarket plans lodged for Tuam.

Permission is sought for an anchor supermarket and two retail units on a site close to Tuam Stadium and Gilmartin Road.

Planners have written to the applicant Regalview Ltd stating their concerns regarding traffic safety and the ability of the road network to accommodate such a large scale development in a largely residential area. A road safety audit must be carried out in relation to the proposal.

The group representing independent grocers in Ireland has hit out at the plans, claiming that it is being developer-led and not planned. RGDATA says the proposed supermarket on the Cloonthee Road, close to Tuam Stadium and Gilmartin Road, goes against the retail planning guidelines and would have a profound negative impact on the town centre.

Regalview Ltd lodged the plans for a large anchor supermarket and two individual retail units for the site which is strongly speculated to attract German budget-style supermarket group Aldi, although Tesco and Dunnes Stores could also be possibilities.

However, RGDATA says the four-acre site shouldn't be considered for such a development and that it is located in a largely residential area that is too far from the

town centre.

A planner with Tesco Ireland has also made an observation to the planning file and asks Galway planners to ensure that the access proposals will have sufficient capacity to accommodate the proposed supermarket.

The letter states that while "investment is welcome, it is requested that Galway Co Council ensures that no adverse traffic impacts arise from this proposal."

Planners have told the developer that the proposals put forward in relation to traffic levels at the minor road that links Gilmartin Road with Cloonthee Road are not acceptable and alternative proposals to accommodate traffic must be submitted.

Given the siting and design of the development on a prominent site within Tuam town and flanked by residential properties, the applicant has also been asked to submit an urban design statement and photomontage for the development.

Information must also be sent to planners on the amount of floorspace to be devoted for the sale of convenience goods and that for comparison goods.

The applicant must also address the planners' concerns regarding the possible risk of flooding on the site.

It's no secret that Tuam, which has the largest population of any town in the county, has attracted interest from the major supermarket chains as a location to establish in. However,

while permission is in place for two large anchor supermarkets, on the Glynn's Hardware site and the existing O'Toole's SuperValu site, the economic downturn has deterred retail investment.

Earlier this year, An Bord Pleanála turned down plans for a second time for a large-scale anchor supermarket development on the Milltown Road – supposedly the preferred location for Tesco.

In its objection lodged with Galway Co Council, RGDATA points out that there has been a significant history of edge-of-centre and out of centre applications being submitted for Tuam and while none have been successful the group feels there is pressure to grant such a significant retail unit as it would be the cheaper option for developers.

The independent grocers group acknowledges that there is a lack of national retailers in Tuam but says there are viable permitted options available within the town centre to accommodate these chains, such as the Glynn's site, as well as other alternative sites.

RGDATA argues that the Cloonthee project is being developer-led and not plan-led and that while the scheme will be commercially cost effective it would have a severe detrimental impact on the established town centre. A decision on the application is on hold pending the response by Regalview to the request for further information on the development.

13 of Tuam's best known faces feature in photo exhibition

AT the launch of a photographic exhibition entitled Faces of Tuam in the Corralea Court Hotel, Mayor of Tuam Imelda Kelly said the 13 portraits represented the beating heart of the town and featured many of those who make a significant contribution to their community.



Johnny Ryan, Mayor Imelda Kelly, Jacinta Kelly and Alan Braddy at the opening of Johnny and Jacinta's Faces of Tuam exhibition in the Corralea Court Hotel on Friday night.

The photographs were taken by well-known photographers Johnny Ryan and Jacinta Kelly as their tribute to some of the best known personalities about Tuam. It is their contribution to the Tuam Summer Fest.

Mayor Kelly said she was delighted to be asked to launch the exhibition as the 13 portraits represented people who had individually and collectively made an enormous contribution to their community. Anne Collins is noted for her voluntary work; John Concannon for his entrepreneurial contribution; Bernie Naughton of the Corralea Hotel for her renowned hospitality and her role in keeping life in the heart of the town; David Burke, editor of The Tuam Herald; Derek Cassidy for his voluntary work; teacher and historian Dr Tony Claffey; Jarlath and Declan Quinn for their outstanding support of the arts community; Eamon

Geraghty from a well-known Tuam business family; Jarlath Kelly for his fundraising activity; Shopkeeper Nora Halion, Tuam's first lady chair of the Town Council; entrepreneur and raconteur Tommy Varden; Des McNally, one of the last of the town's real characters and last but not least the Mayor herself, Imelda Kelly.

The Mayor congratulated Johnny and Jacinta on their exhibition and hoped the 13 Tuam faces who sat for them would have luck and success into the future and continue making their valuable contributions to their community.

of the town and their exhibition for the Tuam Summer Fest is typical of this spirit.

She also noted that Johnny Ryan had now reached retirement age but was glad to be informed that he would be out and about as ever with his camera for a considerable time to come as he had no intention of hanging up his lenses just yet.

She congratulated Johnny and Jacinta on their exhibition and hoped the 13 Tuam faces who sat for them would have luck and success into the future and continue making their valuable contributions to their community.

Tuam Youth Theatre presents Les Mis



THE principals of the Tuam Youth Theatre production of Les Misérables which opens in the Mercy Convent Hall on Wednesday night: Aileen Newell, Fantine; Clara Mulrooney, Young Cosette; Stephen Leo, Javert; Hannagh Rhatigan, Cosette; Cathal Sweeney, Marius; Emily Lohan, Eponine; Shauna Moran, Madame Thenardier; Oisín Foye, Thenardier; (back) Conor Hanley, Valjean; Conor Walsh, Enjolras; Alan Kelly, Gavroche.

Work begins on Little Mill – fundraising begins

By Jacqueline Hogge

A FUNDRAISING initiative has been launched to raise €20,000 to help restore Tuam's Little Mill as a public amenity.



THE Tuam Mill Project information point at the Market Day on Sunday was staffed by Riana O'Dwyer and Aoife Burke.

The Mill, which is held in trust by The Tuam Mill Museum Committee, is being restored as part of an overall project that will see the Mill Wheel, main Mill Building and Miller's House refurbished for community use and enterprise initiatives.

The first phase of the work started last month to reconfigure windows in the Miller's House, insulate the building and instal a new central heating system and boiler.

The works are due to be complete by the end of September and will include upgraded toilet facilities and a refurbished meeting room.

The main buildings are protected structures and the work being carried out is being done under the guidance of a conservation architect.

Mill Project Committee member Riana O'Dwyer said the group was hoping the local community would

support the project over the coming months.

"When work is completed we envisage that Tuam will have an amenity building of high quality, open to visitors and available to community groups for activities such as committee meetings, rehearsals, receptions, exhibitions, workshops etc," she said.

"Our main objective is to restore the Mill itself and the Mill Wheel to their former glory and to re-open it to visitors and for that to happen we need to raise a local contribution to support the funding we have received from Galway Co Council."

Riana and fellow committee members who had a stand at the Tuam Summer Fest over the weekend received a very positive response from the public.

"There was great interest from people, many of whom shared their memories of the Mill down through the years and others who were involved in previous conservation projects.

"We now need financial support and are looking at an online system where people can make a contribution. Every donation counts.

"We are also seeking patrons and corporate sponsors and we hope the work

being done over the coming months will encourage people to get involved and take ownership of this."

Preliminary works to prepare the site were carried out by local community employment schemes earlier in the summer and there are plans for Transition Year students from St Jarlath's College to get involved when they return to school next month.

"I think it's very fitting that the current generation will be a part of this considering our founder member Dr Tony Claffey started this back in the 1970s with his own students at the time," added Riana.

"Following on from the work being done to the Mill, we hope to restore the Mill Wheel and have had a donation of good quality timber from Pádraig and Margaret McHugh.

"They are very supportive of our plans as their daughter Ann Marie's memorial garden is very close to the Mill. However this phase requires the services of an industrial archaeologist as it's a very precise method required to conserve and restore the wheel structure.

"If it was done by this time next year we would be delighted, but for now we are concentrating on the first phase, which thankfully is now up and running."

The renovation work will also provide office space to support small business activity, with a view to providing an income stream to support the community activities in the Mill.

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