IrelandAmerica
THE TIES THAT BIND

March 14 - August 13, 2011
THE DONALD AND MARY OENSLAGER GALLERY
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
DOROTHY AND LEWIS B. CULLMAN CENTER

Part of Imagine Ireland: a year-long season of Irish arts in the US in 2011, an initiative of Culture Ireland.
The very name evokes a host of associations, images, and emotions in the United States. The roots of these are deep chronologically and rich culturally. Ireland lures, America beckons, both inspiring artistic expression in each other.

Ireland is a temperate and verdant island in a north Atlantic archipelago whose nearest American neighbor is the state of Maine, roughly its equivalent in size. How is it, then, that across the vast reaches of the United States, even to its farthest corners, things Irish still resonate? Why does a small country on the edge of Europe have such enduring appeal here?

The Ties that Bind looks at one aspect of this unique relationship—performance—to explore why certain airs and songs, particular dances and dramatic roles, continue to imagine Ireland for Americans. From the melodies of Thomas Moore to the percussion of Riverdance, Irish arts have been attracting audiences in the United States for more than two hundred years.

The history of the Irish in America is girded with performing arts. Its range of expression is influenced by Irish tradition as well as American popular culture. That heady mix was passed to each successive generation by new means - in the home, on the street or the stage, via concert hall, records, and radio - thus continuing to inspire creativity, identification with, and affection for Ireland in the United States.

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts will also present throughout the course of the exhibition several poetry readings, musical performances, staged readings and panel discussions. A series of case exhibitions on American avant-garde theater, dance and music inspired by James Joyce can be seen in the 3rd floor reading room. Rare artifacts from The Library’s archival collections include Zero Mostel’s annotated script for Ulysses in Nighttown (Off-Broadway, 1958) and John Cage scores.
Ireland has a long history, with very old artistic and cultural traditions. Its geography made it vulnerable, thus successive waves of invaders—Celts, Vikings, Normans, Anglo-Saxons—and multiple religious traditions on the island all added elements to what we now understand as “Irish.” Stories and songs that chronicle centuries of conquest, rebellion, economic, political and social turmoil have rehearsed Irish history from time immemorial. Its contours were well known among those who left Ireland for North America even before the American Revolution. Ireland in the nineteenth century was Thomas Moore. Moore was inspired by both the Romantic canon, with its classical allusions and glorification of nature, and by the aspirations of the United Irishmen, a nationalist movement whose hopes were crushed by the British Government between 1798 and Robert Emmet’s rebellion in 1803. He took very old Irish airs formerly played on the harp in the bardic tradition—such as “Grá mo chroí a Máire,” “Eibhlín a Rúin,” “Móirín.”—and transformed them into songs for English and American drawing room pianos, known today as “The Harp that Once through Tara’s Halls,” “Erin, the Tear and the Smile,” and “The Minstrel Boy.”

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Technological innovations, especially the new field of recorded sound, combined with impressive talent, made the cream rise as the twentieth century opened. John McCormack, a native of County Westmeath, could hold a Carnegie Hall audience as equally with "Mother Machree" (composed in 1910 by Olcott) as with the hymn "Panis Angelicus." Likewise, Dublin’s Victor Herbert, perhaps best remembered today for operettas like Babes in Toyland (1903), could premiere his second cello concerto with the New York Philharmonic and write a nationalist opera, Eileen, in the wake of Ireland’s bid for independence in 1916. Herbert conducted McCormack on recordings that found their way into parlors across the United States, filling homes with Irish music whether their roots were in Ireland or not. The process went East as well as West. Records made in the United States by the traditional musician Michael Coleman, who emigrated from County Sligo in 1914, found their way back to Ireland and influenced a generation there in a particular regional style of fiddle playing.

Coleman and his contemporaries, such as the dancing master Tommy Hill, were superstars in their own constellation, a world of Irish traditional performing arts that simultaneously existed but only rarely trod the boards or saw the inside of a concert hall. Until the 1950s, it remained part of an ethnic subculture in the United States even though emigration continued to transplant master musicians, singers, and dancers who were steeped in Ireland’s folk traditions. American fascination with the genre dates back to Elias Howe’s Musician’s Omnibus, published in 1864, which included 250 Irish tunes for instruments like the violin or flute. Howe's work of compiling what we might call the soundtrack of the Irish immigrant home was greatly expanded by two other collectors, William Ryan in Boston and Francis O’Neill in Chicago. In particular O’Neill, a native of County Cork, helped to insure that the connection between jigs or reels as solo dance steps was not lost, publishing a thousand tunes in 1907 called The Dance Music of Ireland.

The American folkdance scholar Elizabeth Burchenal was inspired to publish Rinnce na h-Éireann in 1924, which detailed footwork for a collection of céilí dances like the popular "Siege of Ennis." Regional styles and such titles bound the Irish abroad to the local in Ireland in ways that defied time and space. ‘Home’ was both there and here, especially when the teaching, practicing, and performance of Irish traditional arts must frequently occurred in the homes of immigrants and the second generation.

Domestic settings dominated much in Irish theatre too, where hearth, kitchen, or parlor are the center of the action. Its intimacy allowed for a range of emotions to be expressed that otherwise were kept hidden: frustration or rage resulting from dysfunction, for example, but also Irish language terms of endearment like mo mhurinín and a stóir (respectively, my darling and my dear, anglicized as mavourneen and asthore). Both impulses are sprinkled across and throughout Irish American drama.

“The Babies on Our Block,” a song from Ed Harrigan’s 1879 play The Mulligan Guard Ball, is arguably the first dramatic revelation of Ireland rising in a new world:

There’s the Phalens and the Whalens
From the sweet Dunochadee,
They are sitting on the railings
With their children on their knee.
All gossiping and talking
With their neighbors in a flock
Singing “Little Sally Waters”
With the babies on our block.
Children raised in Irish homes had a ringside seat to the process of performing Ireland while becoming American. Eugene O’Neill’s masterpiece, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, could not have been written without growing up with James O’Neill, his Irish-born actor father, who was personally balancing both the inarticulateness of Famine Ireland and the loquaciousness of the American stage.

In 1900 there were more than four million Americans with direct family ties to Ireland. Its efforts to promote cultural nationalism as a prelude to political independence found fertile soil in the United States. The Gaelic Revival prompted Irish Americans to study the language, folklore, and literature of their homeland. Ireland’s Abbey Theatre made its first tour of the United States in 1911, presenting twenty plays including J.M. Synge’s then controversial *The Playboy of the Western World*. American tours were financially critical to the Abbey’s survival before it became a state-subsidized national theatre. A major legacy of those tours was local dramatic companies who performed the Abbey repertoire in the United States, such as *The Courting of Mary Doyle* and *Look at the Heffernans* by New York City’s Thomas Davis Irish Players. The Abbey also defined the type of play that twentieth century Broadway audiences would accept; only certain dramas, usually domestic ones like Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* or Hugh Leonard’s *Da* could make it critically and commercially, paving the way for the recent successes of, for example, *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. But innovation and the unexpected could always be found in off-Broadway productions by the Irish Theater (Sheridan Square in the 1920s), by the Irish Players (Seven Arts Center in the 1950s), by the Irish Arts Center (Clinton since the 1970s), and the Irish Repertory Theatre (Chelsea since the 1990s).

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With only a handful of exceptions, American Irish radio programming between 1930 and 1950 was permeated with an Irish musical repertoire that had nineteenth and early twentieth century origins, helped in no small measure by popular artists like Bing Crosby and Morton Downey. “Danny Boy” (lyrics written in 1910) inspired versions by Glenn Miller and Harry Belafonte in the 1950s even as modern Ireland began to emerge after decades of slow nation-building in the wake of independence in 1922. Fresh Irish voices began to be heard on the American scene, where there was growing receptivity to folk traditions, and television allowed Ireland to be heard in a new way. The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem began with songs – strong vocal interpretations from the Irish ballad tradition – while others like the Irish Festival Singers and Mary O’Hara resurrected Thomas Moore and the eighteenth century harp music that inspired him. Without them, the subsequent careers of artists like The Chieftains, James Galway, Frank Patterson and Ronan Tynan would have been very different. In every generation since the 1970s, Ireland has debuted talent that continues to revive and reinvigorate ways of performing Ireland. The circulatory movement of music, dance and drama between Ireland and the United States has always been evident in the annual pageantry of St. Patrick’s Day parades, a tradition which...
in New York City marks its 250th anniversary in 2011. Those parades are the most visible and constant performance of Ireland in the United States, although some argue that they now say more about Irish America, where the “Wearing of the Green” is literal as it is played in the line of march. In a similar way, Riverdance in the 1990s summarized two centuries of an American love affair with Irish performance. This combination of dancers and musicians trained in traditional methods — especially second generation Irish Americans Michael Flatley, Jean Butler, and Eileen Ivers — pushed the boundaries of their art forms to a new level, married their talents to Bill Whelan’s orchestral score, and then brought it all back home in a brilliant stage show. More people on earth know Ireland through Riverdance than could ever have seen vaudevillian Kitty O’Neil do her champion jig or the pioneering dramas of Chicago’s Trinity Irish Dance Company in the 1980s, both equally the antecedents of Riverdance.

No less innovative are contemporary artists whose expression is not seen by Americans as overtly “Irish” as Riverdance was. A song like “Sunday, Bloody Sunday” by U2 is an historically-themed Irish ballad as timeless in its sentiments as Moore’s “The Minstrel Boy,” yet American musical traditions influence U2 the way Bob Dylan learned from Liam Clancy. Sinead O’Connor is as comfortable singing in the Irish language as she is with an American stage song like “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered.” Today, the ancient Ireland of Brian Boru and Tara can be conjured musically in our heads by Enya; her sound and the medium of dissemination are different, but the ultimate effect is not unlike that of Edward Bunting’s Ancient Music of Ireland two centuries ago. Powerful actors like Liam Neeson, Gabriel Byrne and Brian Dennehy interpret Eugene O’Neill, and Fionnula Flanagan is to Joyce’s Molly Bloom what Siobhan McKenna was to Shaw’s Saint Joan. The Beauty Queen of Leenane, in the hands of Garry Hynes, brings home the Tony for Best Direction of a Play, not only to Ireland, but for all women. “Molly Bán” finds its way into Alison Krauss’ repertoire just like “She Moved through the Fair” was in Odetta’s. Thirty years ago Mick Moloney began to bring Irish music and dance out of immigrant homes with a touring ensemble called the Green Fields of America, named after the jig; Cherish the Ladies continues that tradition, this time using the name of a very old Irish jig that Michael Coleman recorded in the 1930s.

Paths cross, common chords are struck emotionally and artistically, and history is layered at times with sweet echoes that complete the circle. When Ireland eddies, it resonates anew in America. These are the ties that bind.

Marion R. Casey
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1. The latter titles are from the Irish language. Pogue means kiss, thus Arrah’s kiss. Shaughraun (seachrán) translates as the stray or the wanderer.

2. Dunochadee is most likely the phonetic spelling of the Irish placename “Domhnach Daoi” which is Donaghadee in County Down.

3. Transliteration is most likely the phonetic spelling of the Irish placename “Straubhach Dheire” which is Strabhalagh in County Down.
Programs are presented in conjunction with the exhibition IRELAND AMERICA The Ties That Bind and take place in the Bruno Walter Auditorium. Admission is free and on a first come, first served basis. For Sunday afternoon programs, please enter by 111 Amsterdam Avenue just south of 66th Street. Doors open 30 minutes prior to the program (The Lincoln Center Plaza entrance is closed on Sundays). The Library for the Performing Arts’ exhibitions, collections, and other services are not available.

For further information about programs in this brochure, call 212.415.0142. For information about other programs at the Performing Arts Library, call 212.879.1650.

All programs are subject to last minute change or cancellation.
March 17 at 6:30 p.m.

With Will Rogers in Dublin (USA) 1927, 3 minutes

With Will Rogers in Dublin (USA)

March 19 at 6:00 p.m.

Tourist Board Present: Bord Fáilte/The Irish Tourist Board

March 19 at 6:00 p.m.

Show of Ireland

March 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Out of Ireland (USA)

With Will Rogers in Dublin

March 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Our Country (Ireland)

March 31 at 6:30 p.m.

The Irish Riviera (Ireland)

April 2 at 6:30 p.m.

The Columbans Fathers Present: President Kennedy in Ireland (Ireland)

April 7 at 6:30 p.m.

Man of Aran (UK)

April 14 at 6:30 p.m.

The Pilgrimage of Ti Jean (UK)

April 16 at 6:30 p.m.

The Yellow Rattler: The Life and Times of Liam Clancy (Ireland)

April 23 at 6:30 p.m.

Hard Road to Klondike (Ireland)

May 2 at 6:30 p.m.

A Sense of Loss (Switzerland/USA)

May 5 at 6:30 p.m.

Rocky Road to Dublin (Ireland)

May 7 at 6:30 p.m.

His and Hers (Ireland)

May 14 at 6:30 p.m.

The Pipe (Ireland)
Credits & Acknowledgements

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