

Irish stage show performer has roots in Redford

BY MARY McDONOUGH
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When actor Brian Mallon talks, a slight lilt in his voice gives away his years of informal performance in the pubs of Ireland and a hint of New York, and reveals years in the Manhattan theater circuit.

Twenty years ago he met a school teacher, Frank McCourt, now known for beyond the shores of those smelly puts as the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir "Angela's Ashes," along with McCourt's fun-loving brother Malachy, fellow actor, bar owner and author of "A Monk Swimming."

"The Mallon's association with the elder McCourt that is bringing him back home."

The Redford native stars in McCourt's stage show, "The Irish and How They Got That Way," a song-and-dance stage perfor-

mance celebrating the Irish in America, playing through Sunday, March 12 at Music Hall in Detroit.

"It's great. I'm looking forward to it," said Mallon, of performing the show in his hometown. The 1970 graduate of St. Mary's of Redford said he expects many cousins and his mother, who resides in Livonia, to attend.

Speaking from his hotel in Seattle, Mallon said the show is "first and foremost entertainment. It's got heart and soul and razzmatazz. It's a celebration of the Irish experience in America, really."

In "Irish," six actors joke, dance and sing their way through snippets of Irish history ranging from the potato famine to the assassination of the John F. Kennedy, the nation's first Irish-Catholic president.

"It makes fun with the stereotypes and how they came to be and it's really irreverent," said Mallon.

What: "The Irish... and How They Got That Way"
When: continues through Sunday, March 12, performances 7:30 p.m. Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday; 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. Saturday; and 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday.
Where: Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, 350 Madison Ave., Detroit
Ticket: \$20-\$35 may be purchased at the Music Hall box office and all TicketMaster locations, call (313) 963-2366 for more information.

Unlike McCourt's melancholy "Angela's Ashes," "Irish" contains 30 songs and is mostly upbeat, said Mallon.

"Mallon tells about a family leaving Ireland during the famine and it gets fairly serious treatment. One-fourth of the Irish population was lost, so it's sort of the holocaust of the Irish," said Mallon.

As the grandson of Irish immigrants who fled Ireland during the famine, Mallon said those scenes recalled familiar territory.

The show's reception has been favorable, particularly in San Francisco, where Mallon said it attracted a diverse audience which included, "Asians and blacks and all types of people who aren't from this particular tribe."

Mallon says the personal, irreverent nature of Irish storytelling is what continues to perpetuate interest in Irish culture. With "Angela's Ashes," a subsequent memoir and a third one written by McCourt's younger brother, there has evolved a sort of "Mallon cult," says Mallon.

"When 'Mallon' started writing it he never thought it was going to go anywhere," said

Mallon. "The first three chapters used to run in a pub newsletter." Mallon says that the "Mallon cult" is part of the second of two recent waves of interest in Irish film and culture.

"I started with 'My Left Foot.' Irish works have sort of a stark, realistic quality. For a while it was a lot of fake accents and stereotypes but since then, they've gotten hit with the real thing and I think in a way people feel that's more engaging," said Mallon.

The public's renewed interest in the "real thing" hasn't hurt Mallon's opportunities for roles any.

He is preparing to reprise his role as "General Hancock" in "Gads and Generals," the prequel to the film "Gettysburg," co-starring Jeff Daniels, which begins shooting this summer.

He has toured the United States and Europe with his award winning one man show,

"Secrets of the Celtic Heart," directed by actress/director Ellen Burstyn. He has also served as the artistic arts director at New York's Irish Arts Center.

True to the irreverent nature of Irish entertainment, Mallon occasionally retreats to his home in Ireland, to the comfortable stage in the pubs of Galway, to perform his comedy piece "Beside the Pint," based on "crazy pub humor."

His favorite Irish pub in the Detroit area? Cowleys' Old Village Inn in downtown Farmington. "They have some great Irish bands that play there," he said.

While he's in town, Mallon said he plans to visit with his family and as a former member of Detroit's Gaelic League, says he may take in Detroit's St. Patrick's Day parade on March 12, on his way out of town.

With St. Paddy's Day 'round the corner, the timing for Mallon's journey back home couldn't be better.

Celebrate from page E1

win a Grammy Award. We enjoy playing for people."

Blackthorn's repertoire includes ancient airs and melodies, Irish jigs and reels, traditional folk songs and music from contemporary Irish songwriters.

The four members play a dozen instruments including accordion, cittern, bodhran (Irish frame drum), penny whistle and flute. Belfast native Richard McMullen formed the group in 1996. The other members are Fred Klein and Dennis Green.

During the concert McMullen tells jokes, and stories about Ireland, he also talks about the songs the group plays, and encourages people to sing along.

Singing and performing is a joyful thing for McMullen and other members of the group.

"We hope a good time is had by one and all and we're thrilled and flattered that people support us. As long as people come see us, we will play."

Gary McMullen

Musician and member of Blackthorn

Inspired by the Kingston Trio, McMullen begged his parents to buy him a banjo when he was 12. He's been playing for over 36 years, and also plays guitar. "He always played folk music," he said. "I even had a bluegrass band, and was frequently playing Irish tunes. It's just been a passion of mine."

Often requested songs include "The Reel & the Flickering Light," and "The Black Velvet Band."

Blackthorn works to keep their music fresh. They exchange tapes and e-mail lyrics to one another. But because everyone's so busy, they do an awful lot of rehearsing on-stage, and sometimes in some unusual places.

"We worked on an a cappella song on the golf course," said McMullen. "By the end of the 18th hole we had it. We pride ourselves on our harmony."

After hearing Blackthorn play,

McMullen and the other band members hope you'll walk away with a song in your heart, and know a little more about Irish culture and music.

"We hope a good time is had by one and all and we're thrilled and flattered that people support us," said McMullen. "As long as people come see us, we will play."

Family festival

Fifteen years ago, Mick Gavin of Redford called some of his Irish musician friends, and asked them if they would play at an Irish Fest on St. Patrick's Day.

Gavin, the father of three boys, and an accomplished local fiddler, wanted to offer families an alternative to the pub scene. The Redford resident has been playing the fiddle most of his life and brought his sons up to love Irish music too.

Seen, 13, the youngest, plays in a group that recently won second place in an under age 18 musical group competition in Ireland.

You can hear Seán and Gráinne Coyle play at the festival. In addition to Gavin, group members include Colleen Burke, Jeremy Kittle and Colleen Shanks, and Tyler Duncan.

All Ireland champion dancer Pat Quinn, who is a member of the "Riverdance" dance troupe, will perform with dancers from the O'Hara School of Dance. Also appearing will be the Kitty Heinzman Ceilidh Dancers.

Duncan, who won first place for uilleann (or elbow) pipe solo at the All Ireland Fleadh Ceo (the Irish music equivalent of the Olympics) last summer will also be performing. Duncan is the first American under 15 to win the coveted Leo Rowsome Cup.



Award-winning piper: Tyler Duncan, who won first place for uilleann pipe solo in Ireland, will be playing at the 15th annual St. Patrick's Day Irish Fest.

He's returning home to Ann Arbor from Dublin where he spent the last nine months studying Irish music and attending school.

Gavin will also be playing at the festival, along with his son, Michael, 21 who plays fiddle and guitar, and other well known local entertainers including Terrence McKinney, Charlie Wilkie, Dawn Hudak, and Ed McGlinchey.

"There will be Highland pipers, musicians, singers and dancers," said Gavin. "There's plenty of room, and a dance floor. It's a great gig. I enjoy it, people love it, and are really looking forward to it."

There will be a cash bar, corned beef and cabbage dinners, pizza and other snacks will be available for purchase.

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ENTRY FORM

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| BEST PICTURE: | BEST ACTOR: | BEST ACTRESS: | BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AMERICAN BEAUTY | <input type="checkbox"/> Russell Crowe
in THE INSIDER | <input type="checkbox"/> Annette Bening
in AMERICAN BEAUTY | <input type="checkbox"/> Janet McTeer
in TUMBLEWEEDS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> THE CIDER HOUSE RULES | <input type="checkbox"/> Tom Cruise
in MAGNOLIA | <input type="checkbox"/> Julianne Moore
in THE END OF THE AFFAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> Mary McCormack
in MUSIC OF THE HEART |
| <input type="checkbox"/> THE GREEN MILE | <input type="checkbox"/> Michael Clarke Duncan
in THE GREEN MILE | <input type="checkbox"/> Hilary Swank
in BOYS DON'T CRY | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> THE INSIDER | <input type="checkbox"/> Kevin Spacey
in AMERICAN BEAUTY | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> THE SIXTH SENSE | <input type="checkbox"/> Daniel Washington
in THE MURKIN | | |
| BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR: | BEST DIRECTING: | BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY: | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toni Gholson
in THE SIXTH SENSE | <input type="checkbox"/> Sam Mendes
in AMERICAN BEAUTY | <input type="checkbox"/> Alan Ball
for AMERICAN BEAUTY | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angelina Jolie
in GIRL INTERRUPTED | <input type="checkbox"/> Spike Jonze
in BEING JOHN MALKOVICH | <input type="checkbox"/> Charlie Kaufman
for BEING JOHN MALKOVICH | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catherine Keener
in BEING JOHN MALKOVICH | <input type="checkbox"/> Lasse Hallstrom
in THE CIDER HOUSE RULES | <input type="checkbox"/> Paul Thomas Anderson
for MAGNOLIA | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cameron Diaz
in SWEET AND LOWDOWN | <input type="checkbox"/> Michael Mann
in THE INSIDER | <input type="checkbox"/> M. Night Shyamalan
for THE SIXTH SENSE | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cuba Gooding Jr.
in BOYS DON'T CRY | <input type="checkbox"/> M. Night Shyamalan
in THE SIXTH SENSE | <input type="checkbox"/> Mike Leigh
for Topsy-Turvy | |

Send or fax entries by 5 p.m. Monday, March 13, 2000
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