

## Birmingham Irish Community present Cáisc (Easter) and tell their story of 1916 ~ 2016

Story and pictures GERRY MOLUMBY



South and City Collage 400 seater theatre is full to capacity as Bray born community actor Phil Denver delivers the famous lines from Yeats:

"I write it out in a verse--  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,

Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born”

Here he sets the scene and along with twenty five other actors and two musicians we are fritted between modern day 2016 Birmingham Irish and right back to Dublin 1916. Known as the Easter Rising this insurrection led the way for Ireland to take its place amongst the Nations of the World.

The musical play opens as the Pearce family are gathered for the funeral wake of James, a grandson of Padraig Pearse. A step of imagination as Pearse did not have any children but it connects a family in modern day Birmingham to having a direct connection with the events of Easter Week. Feisty Teresa Pearse his widow produces from her handbag a precious family heirloom – a journal written by Padraig which she now in turn entrusts to her son Patrick.

So for the rest of the two act performance we are told by narrators, actors and musicians the events of Easter week and fleetingly we are brought right up to date and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Birmingham Irish challenge themselves and each other about their Irish identity. This is nicely conveyed between brother and sister Siobhan (played by Shannon Kavanagh) and James (played by Patrick Hickey) ; Patrick is a manic GAA young man while his sister has ditch the Irish Dancing and wears (hiding it from her dad) an English football shirt.

Written and directed by Anna McKiernan who came to Birmingham from Belfast at the age of five. A qualified actor and creative writer student from universities in London and Glasgow; Anna has created a wonderful ensemble production where dialogue, music, singing and narration weave seamlessly together to move this Irish storytelling along. As in the essence of good Irish Drama from the likes of O’Casey, Friel and Keane, Cáisc has many tragic/comic moments.



For the months of planning and rehearsal on Cáisc, Anna was assisted by Mellissa Roche the Project Officer for Irish Culture, Heritage and Sport in Birmingham. All the actors acquitted themselves well and I was particularly impressed by the quality of music delivered by Chris Elliott (Guitar/Violin/Bouzouki/Vocals) and Caitlin (Tin Whistle/Vocals). Considering there was only two of them their performance was very wholesome and confident. As you would expect in any story of 1916 and the Irish Diaspora today we were treated to 'Grace', The Foggy Dew' and The Fields of Athenry', with audience participation – a sure sign that a performance is going down well.

Mellissa told me that they were able to perform Cáisc is the theatre of the South and City College Campus thanks to a grant from the Irish Government Diaspora 1916 Commemoration Fund and Ruaidhri Dowling (First Secretary Irish Community Affairs) was on hand to open the performance and hailed it as an example of an Irish Diaspora Community wanting to tell its connection with the foundation of the Irish State but yet interpret it in one of the largest Irish Communities abroad.



So popular is this production that it is being performed again at the Irish Centre so watch of for details here.

<http://www.birminghamirish.org.uk/>



