

# City to honour Riverdancer Bill and the Sundancer JP

By JESSICA QUINN

TWO of Limerick's favourite sons will be given the city's highest honour this Friday after a wait of almost two months.

The legendary JP McManus and Bill Whelan will be conferred with the freedom of the city at a ceremony in City Hall.

The original ceremony was to be held during the St Patrick's weekend, but it was postponed, along with the rest of Civic Week, as a result of the foot and mouth crisis.

Both JP and Bill have often spoke of how proud they are of their Limerick roots.

Bill is even quoted as saying: "It is one of my personal ambitions to write a piece of music as a tribute to my Limerick. Hopefully that will be in the not too distant future."

Now it's the city's chance to show these two sons of Limerick exactly how proud we are of them.

A huge sports fan and horse owner, JP now spends his time between

his homes in Geneva and Martinstown Stud in Kilmallock.

Multi-millionaire JP continues to show that despite his vast fortune, he will never forget those in need, particularly in his native city.

Last July he raised £15m through the hugely successful pro-am and charity auction at Limerick Golf Club.

The golfing world's top stars, including Tiger Woods, Mark O'Meara and Dave Duval, were persuaded to come to Limerick to raise this huge sum of money for local charities.

He has supported a wide range of Limerick charities and worthy causes over the years ranging from educational scholarships to fund-raising for hospitals and health care institutions while his golf classics have been huge successes.

He also donated a whopping £50m towards a new national sports stadium, the largest figure donated by anyone to the state.

He is perhaps now at his most popular ever in Limerick and his large string of horses, including hurdle champion Istabraq,

have established him as a folk hero with the racing public.

Once known as the Sundance Kid, he used to describe himself as a gambler, but nowadays his business portfolio has been launched into high finance, international stock exchanges and leisure ventures. And though he jets around the world and mixes with some of the best-known and richest people, he has never forgotten his roots.

He set up the CBS scholarships as a gesture of gratitude to his old school on Sexton Street.

The former CBS boy got into backing horses in his school days and at 17 he joined his father, Johnny, who ran an earth-moving business. Three years later he joined the ranks of the bookmaking fraternity at Limerick greyhound track and he also had pitches at point-to-points around the country.

His wife, Noreen, is also noted for her charitable work and has done wonders for charities such as Cura, to name just one.

The first horse to carry his famous South Liberties colours was Cill Dara, which he bought in 1976. Trained by Con Collins, she won the Irish Cesarewitch in 1977 for him. As an owner he has dedicated himself to national hunt, a sport which has held a lifelong fascination for him.

JP with his wife, Noreen, bought the magnificent Martinstown Stud on 400 plus acres in 1982 and it is home for the couple and their children, John, Sue Ann and Kieran.

Bill Whelan is perhaps best known to most people for his work on River Dance, but his musical career spans even further. For all his success the composer is very much a down to earth man, in touch with his Limerick roots.

Both his parents played music. His father, a newsagent on William's Street played traditional music and the harmonica. His mother was a fine amateur classical pianist.

Now living in luxury at Roundstone in Galway, Bill has made a name for himself world wide as a result of a piece of music that was originally meant to fill the interval of the Eurovision Song contest.

But his success has been the result of years of struggle. His first big break came when one of his demo tapes caught the eye of Dermot Harris, brother of Richard. They were looking for music for the film Bloomfield and they liked what they heard.

His music went on to become the theme song to the film, however, young Bill turned his back on a full time career in music, instead studying law at UCD.

But he never forgot his music and soon after graduating he was back doing what he really loved.

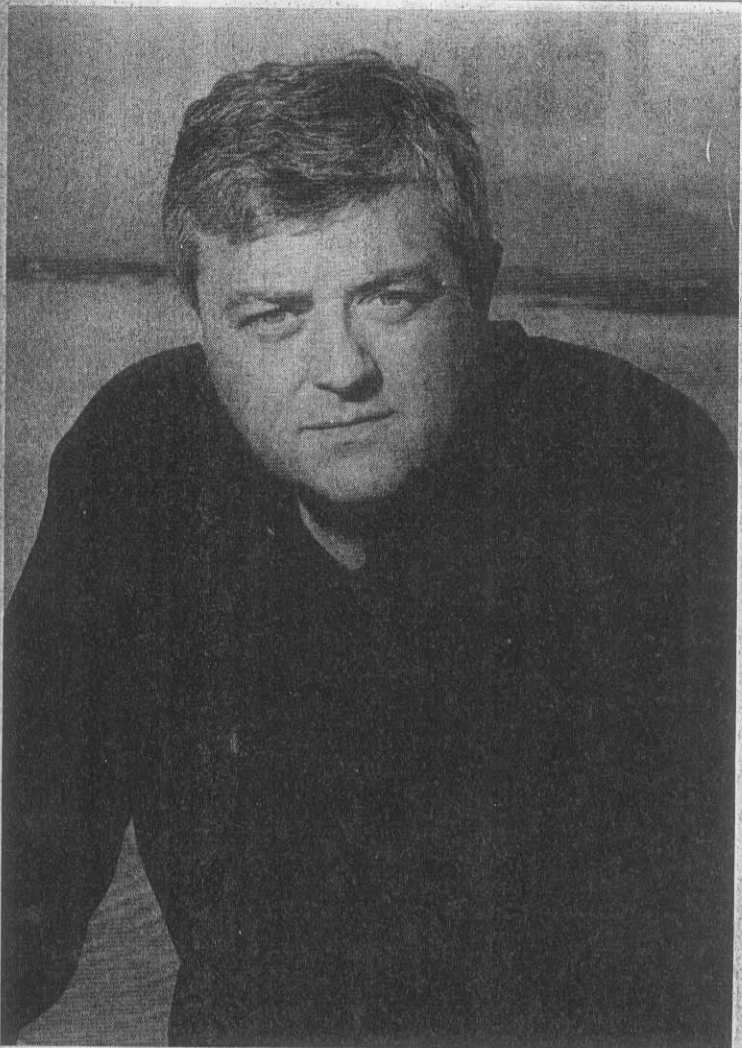
Touring with Planxty, working as composer at the Abbey Theatre, adapting Gilbert and Sullivan's HMS Pinafore and work-

ing with U2, Paul Grady, Kate Bush, the Dubliners, Van Morrison and the Hot House Flowers are just some of the achievements he made before his "overnight" success with River Dance.

Singlehandedly, Bill managed to change the face of Irish traditional music and Irish dancing with a seven minute interval piece.

What followed was sell out world tours, a grammy award and world wide acclaim.

Speaking about the pair Mayor Ryan who is conferring the Freedom of the City on them said: "While they have made their mark in very different fields, they have one common characteristic in that they have achieved international recognition while never losing touch with their roots."



Riverdance composer Bill Whelan: It is one of my personal ambitions to write a piece of music as a tribute to my Limerick

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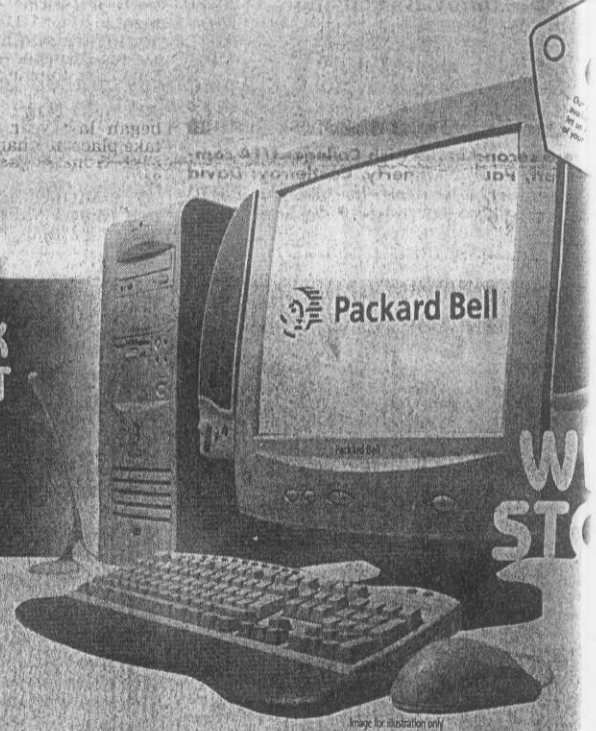
Racehorse owner and business tycoon JP McManus: though he jets around the world and mixes with some of the best-known and richest people, he has never forgotten his roots (LL)

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