

Leader2

Saturday April 21 2012

A cut above Mick Flannery talks about his recent chart success ahead of his Limerick gig this weekend >>P4



Keep this under your hat Ahead of her daughter's wedding Patricia Feehily expresses her apprehension of wearing a fancy headpiece >>P3

Style in the City
The countdown to Limerick's biggest fashion event has begun >>P20



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A celebration of creative life ... and Hartnett

Eigse Michael Hartnett promises a feast of poetry, singing, music and dance writes **Norma Prendiville**

THE creative spirit of poet Michael Hartnett continues to glow in his native Newcastle West. And that spirit will burst into full flame next week when Eigse Michael Hartnett gets under way. Beginning next Thursday, this year's Eigse, says festival director and Limerick County arts officer Joan MacKernan, offers a programme to tempt and delight all ages and all tastes and is certain to

"The warmest and most imaginatively programmed literary festival in the county"

- Poet Theo Dorgan

gladden the heart.

And with guests such as President Michael D Higgins, actor Stephen Rea, poets Fleur Adcock and John F Deane, it is

an event that will also be both thought-provoking and passionate.

Described by poet Theo Dorgan as "the warmest and most imaginatively

programmed literary festival in the country", the three-day features poetry, music, singing, a dollop of comic drama, integrated dance, book launches and a range of activities for younger visitors.

"It is a great honour to have our president open this year's Eigse - and to be able to welcome him back to Newcastle West where he has given readings of his own poetry in the past," Joan MacKernan said this

week. "I think this year's Eigse will be fun as well as stimulating. It is always a very colourful time in Newcastle West when poems hop out at you from every shop window and where the ambience is lively and festive."

Because of the large crowds expected for President Michael D Higgins, the opening ceremony has been switched to the Courtenay Lodge hotel. The doors open at 7.15pm and



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The late Michael Hartnett, from Newcastle West: acclaimed as one of the country's foremost poets

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What's going on
around Limerick

Thursday

THE Irish Chamber Orchestra return to the University Concert Hall with a concert featuring virtuoso clarinettist and composer Jörg Widmann.

Widmann is the ICO's new principal guest conductor and artistic partner and will present an introductory showcase that highlights his many talents as a clarinettist, composer and conductor. The concert takes place at 8pm. See www.uch.ie.

Friday

LONDON Classic Theatre company bring their production of Peter Shaffer's play *Equus* to the Belltable this week.

Running until Saturday, *Equus* was inspired by a true story and was originally staged in 1973 before being resurrected to acclaim on the West End in 2007. See www.belltable.ie.

Saturday

LIMERICK Choral Union return to the UCH for their annual Spring concert, under the baton of conductor Malcolm Green, this Saturday.

The 100 strong choir will perform a programme that includes pieces by Brahms and Gounod and a number of guest soloists. See www.uch.ie.

Bruree's Susannah enjoys standing ovations at Abbey

Aine Fitzgerald

A BRUREE actress is among a cast who are currently receiving standing ovations from audiences at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

Susannah de Wrixon who is a singer, actor and comedienne - she was one of The Nualas trio - is starring in the musical *Alice in Funderland* at the famous Dublin theatre. "I am enjoying it immensely," explained Susannah who has



President to help launch Eigse

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➔ all those attending are asked to be in their seats by 7.45pm at the latest. The President will deliver an address after which this year's Michael Hartnett Poetry Award winner Stiofán O'Cadhlá, give a short reading.

Large crowds are expected too for Bright Night of Two Moons which takes place on Saturday, April 28, when actor Stephen Rea's rich and resonant voice will be used to great effect as he recites some of his favourite poems while the evocative singing voice of Rita Connolly will fill the evening air.

Eigse Michael Hartnett is honoured also to welcome the distinguished British poet Fleur Adcock who will read along with one of Ireland's stalwart poets John F Deane on Friday evening with music and song by Michelle Enright.

This will be followed by "The girl who thought she was Irish", a lively, one-woman show starring Biddy O'Loughlin, an Australian now living in Ireland who uses a blend of poetry, songs, stories and stand-up comedy to tell her tale of growing up in one place and feeling



A sculpture of the poet, Michael Hartnett, was unveiled last year by his friend and fellow-poet Paul Durcan who praised the town for its creative act in placing "this bronze re-incarnation of him" in the very middle of Newcastle West

an affinity for another. This show, reviewers say will "charm your socks off and then steal your shoes."

The ending of old certainties and the possibility for radical

reformation will be looked at by author Christy Kenneally when he delivers The Michael Hartnett Memorial Lecture on Saturday morning.

One of the highlights

of the festival is likely to be a performance by Spoken Dance, County Limerick's first professional integrated dance company. Sultan Kakar, who lost the use of his legs as a result of land-

mines in Afghanistan is joined by Mary Hartney, Limerick County dancer in residence and Lisa Cahill from Patrickswell, for a dramatic and moving dance with a difference. The trio will

perform in the Red Door in the Square at 3.30pm on Friday afternoon.

Hearts Wheels and Horses is also billed as a showcase for integrated dance and a celebration of the imagination

involving residents from Rathfredagh, Cheshire Home, service users from the Brothers of Charity, Shanagolden Youthreach and transition year students from Scoil Mhuire agus Ide, Desmond College and Copewood College. They will take to the floor on Friday morning at 11.30 in the Courtenay Lodge is what is expected to be a lively and imaginative dance.

This year's festival will also include three book launches, new collections by poets Paddy Bushe and James Harpur and a new book about Michael Hartnett by Pat Walsh. The Red Door will also host a variety of children's activities on Friday afternoon while Sony Egan will entertain residents in St Ita's hospital. Another regular festival feature, the Hartnett Viva Voce, with €300 for best original poem and €100 for best-read Hartnett poem takes place as usual on Saturday afternoon.

Programmes for the festival are available from the library in Newcastle West, from shops and the Courtenay Lodge hotel or go to www.eigsemichaelhartnett.ie or Facebook.

Poet's life and times and his act of defiance

A NEW biography of Michael Hartnett by Mayo-born author Pat Walsh will be launched at Eigse Michael Hartnett next week. Entitled *A Rebel Act: Michael Hartnett's Farewell to English*, the book looks at what led up to Michael Hartnett's decision to stop writing in English - and what happened afterwards.

In June 1974, the author explains, Michael Hartnett announced, from the stage of the Peacock Theatre in Dublin, that he would write exclusively in Irish from then on. "It always fascinated me that he

had given up writing in his first language. He wasn't a native Irish speaker even though he had some Irish from his grandmother," Pat explained this week. "To me it was like self-harming, to deliberately not write in the language he made his reputation in."

And although Pat Walsh in his book does not argue any one particular view, he believes that the decision didn't help Michael Hartnett's career. "But then I don't think Michael was very interested in the career end of things. He followed

his own heart. It was an emotional decision rather than a hard-headed careerist move."

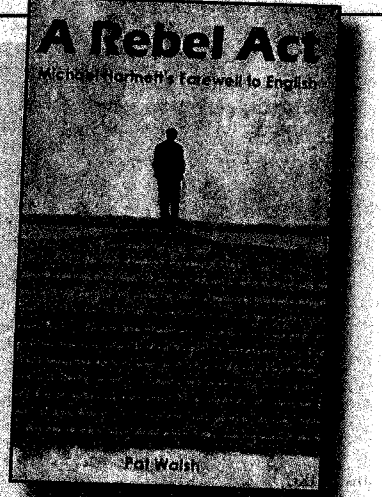
A Rebel Act is Pat's third book. He previously wrote *The Curious Case of the Mayo Librarian* and a book about Patrick Kavanagh and his 1950s libel case. The Hartnett book, he says, gave him the chance to write about the Irish poetry scene in the 1970s and 1980s.

"It is not a full biography," Pat explained, "more of a three-quarters one." The book excels in that it draws together views from a broad range

of sources, including Hartnett's own interviews and papers.

"I see myself more as a historical journalist, just putting the opinions out there," Pat said.

A lover of Hartnett's poetry, Pat, in writing the book, was also conscious that "when a poet dies, sometimes their reputation can fall away". But he believes that Hartnett's reputation is safe. *A Rebel Act*, published by Mercier Press, will be launched by Gabriel Fitzmaurice at the Newcastle West Book Store at 1.15pm on Friday, April 27.



The new book on Hartnett by Pat Walsh