

# £15m concert hall opens on the right note



Reynolds talking to Jeanette McDonnell, president, Chamber of Commerce, at the opening. (LL)



Pat Kennedy with Monica Bourke, at the first night. (LL)



Mayor O'Sullivan with Mary Delaney at the opening. (LL)



Guy Brommell and Margaret Lyddy at the opening. (LL)

A LIMERICK composer got the country's new purpose-built concert hall off on the right note when the National Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Colman Pearce, premiered his work, *River of Paradise*, at the weekend.

The work by Templeglantine's John Buckley, marked the opening of the £15m Foundation Building at the University of Limerick.

The 133,000 square foot building, with its giant atrium, was opened by the Taoiseach, Mr Reynolds, and the new US ambassador, Jean Kennedy Smith.

Mrs Kennedy Smith was not alone when it came to US representation at the launch - three former US envoys, Margaret Heckler, Richard Moore and Robert Kane were among the many dignitaries from business, education, politics and the arts who attended the gala event.

And the US involvement in the £15m Foundation Building was evidenced with the attendance of such leading American businessmen as Frank Doyle, senior vice-president of General Electric. Mr Doyle is also chairman of the University of Limerick Foundation Inc, which raised £10m towards the cost of the new building through the American corporate sector. The rest of the cash came from private investors in partnership with the State.

The Foundation Building can hold the full national Symphony Orchestra and

can seat 1,000 people. By day it divides into two lecture theatres, as well as offering student and post-graduate research areas, along with housing the National Portrait Gallery, the Irish Watercolour Society Collection and the Hunt Museum. The museum will be housed in the old Customs House in the city from next year.

At the opening, Mr Reynolds praised the energy, enterprise and drive of the university's president, Dr Edward Walsh, and his collaborators, who include vice-president, Dr Noel Whelan, a former secretary at the Taoiseach's Department.

"This fine complex is an excellent illustration of what is possible through partnership between the private and public sectors," said Mr Reynolds.

The University of Limerick Foundation, he said, are to be highly commended on having the courage and vision to initiate this project, and for their outstanding fundraising achievement.

"International contributors from the business, industrial and professional world recognise the innovative enterprise culture of the university which has, for quite some time now, fostered close and mutually beneficial links between the business and academic worlds," he stated.

"We need third-level institutions like Limerick that have excellent links with the US and Japan to follow closely, and, indeed, if possible, participate in, technical development and to advise us of their implications and how they can be

best applied here," he said. Universities, said Mr Reynolds, have a crucial role to play in the industrial context.

It is important, he contended that the huge science and technology resources in our universities are harnessed for the benefit of industry and for national economic development generally.

"They are such a big and valuable resource and their potential for positive development is so great, that there is an onus on us all to ensure that they are fully utilised," he emphasised.

One of the unique attributes of the Foundation Building complex, he said, is that it combines research and development with teaching of the arts, in one purpose-built facility.

The Foundation Building facilitates the provision of an additional 1,000 student places.

This expansion, according to Mr Reynolds, is particularly impressive when one considers that over the past four academic years the student population of the university has more than doubled.

"Limerick university graduates are much sought after, and the university makes a key contribution to the location of international investment and the growth of indigenous enterprise in the region," he claimed.

Mr Reynolds specially commended those involved in the Limerick Community Based Education Initiative in Southill.

The initiative provides educational support at first, second, and third level.

So far, 18 people availing of it have gained entry to

third level education, where they benefit from a £900 supplementary grant from the Department of Education, with further funding under consideration.

Mr Reynolds further commended the year long modular Foundation Study Programme, which gives priority to unemployed adults over 23, and leads to matriculation at the university.

Mrs Kennedy Smith

extended her warmest congratulations to the University of Limerick, and said the inauguration of the Foundation Building symbolises its dedication to an education ideal which recognises the equal validity of the arts and sciences in the formation of future generations.

The inauguration, she said, represents another milestone in the university's remarkable history of growth and development. She said she was especially proud that the institution has strong American connections.

The university's participation in the Fulbright programme, its formal links with Cornell, and the warm welcome it extends to visiting American students are important connections, she said.

The Taoiseach and Mrs Kennedy Smith jointly unveiled the plaque marking the official opening.

On Sunday, Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach, opened the concert hall's lecture theatres.

The university, she said, had developed as a centre, not alone of teaching and research, but as an industrial focus and a cultural catalyst.

Meanwhile, the week of celebration concerts continue this Thursday night with a concert by former student, Luka Bloom. This Friday, it's the turn of the Irish Chamber Orchestra, under the baton of Stephen Kovacevich, while the Ulster Orchestra brings the week to a close on Sunday night.



Cathy Cosgrove and Veronica



The Bishop of Limerick, Dr Dail opening.



David and Kathy O'Mahoney at concert hall.



Cllr Kieran O'Hanlon and his



Mr Reynolds with Dr Walsh and Pat and Fiona O'Sullivan. (LL)



Deputy Peadar Clohessy, Jean Clohessy and Ann and Cllr Paddy Hourigan, chairman, Limerick County Council, enjoy the opening night. (LL)



Hanna Finucane, left, Helen enjoy the first night.