



Although Malachy McCourt is perhaps best known as the younger brother of Pulitzer Prize winner Frank, he is a talented and accomplished writer/performer in his own right.

A quick glance at his CV shows an incredible diversity and no lack of achievement indeed.

As a film actor he has featured opposite the likes of Harrison Ford, Richard Harris, Brad Pitt and the talking hairdo Jennifer Aniston.

In addition to his writing he also has his own TV and Radio shows in the US and at one point in his life he was even a gold-smuggler!

A very interesting individual indeed, DROP caught up with him when he was in town to promote "A Couple Of Blackguards", a play he co-wrote with Frank, which plays the Belltable from the 2nd - 7th February. Also on Sunday the 1st, the Belltable Film Club in association with the Limerick Irish Film Festival, present a screening of "The McCourts Of Limerick", which was made by Malachy's son Conor. The screening is in honour of Jim Kemmy, with proceeds from the night going to the Irish Cancer Society.



BLACK GUARDING

DROP: Welcome back to Limerick. To start could you tell us your impressions of how Limerick has changed since you were growing up here ?

Malachy McCourt: There have been many changes since my youth. Aside from the obvious, like more cars on the streets, I find a much greater vitality and energy in the city. I particular I've noticed the much greater amount of well-dressed, vivacious young people, who are full of fun compared to in my day. Back then you were more likely to notice the apparent disfigurements in people, such as blindness, limping and carbuncles. More a case of 'dropsy' as opposed to DROP.

DROP: How have you found peoples reaction to you and your family, having left penniless and come back successful ?

MMcC: It's unusual to be meeting people for the first time, who know so much about you. They have their perspective of who they think you are. This can be very different from your own perceptions of yourself. There are many different arts - the visual, the oral, musical, theatrical. Also there is "the art of begrudgery". There are very few who are truly great at practising this art and they have to be admired. For example a person who can write a memoir about a time without being there himself.

DROP: Your play "A Couple Of Blackguards" is in the Belltable from 2nd to 7th of February. Could you tell us what to expect ?

MMcC: It's not like Frank's book. In fact it was written long before Angela's Ashes. It's a two person play, featuring Nick Kelly (in Frank's role) and myself. It's a rather affectionate look at the peccadilloes and eccentricities of Limerick people and institutions. I would advise people with no sense of humour to stay away.

DROP: You've just finished a run of the play in Andrews Lane in Dublin. How did it go ?

MMcC: The reaction in Dublin has been very good.. We've got a lot of laughter and positive audience reaction. The audiences themselves have had a surprisingly large number of young people, which of itself leads to a much less restrained reaction.

DROP: The night previous to the play opening in Limerick, there is a charity screening of your son Conor's film "The McCourts Of Limerick" in the Belltable. Could you tell us more about that ?

MMcC: The film is an hour long documentary dealing with my family's time in Limerick. It contains old footage of Angela and of our father, old still photographs and interviews with all the brothers: Mike, Alfie, Frank and myself. In fact is interesting looking at it to see just how similar all our memories were of that time. Obviously some strong impressions were left. Even walking around the streets of Limerick now, memories come flowing back. Just seeing a place or even a person, seeing a contemporary makes you think, "God he looks old !"

DROP: Speaking of memories. How do you remember the entertainments/arts scene in Limerick, when you were growing up here ?

MMcC: Even though times were not the best in many ways, the scene was very busy. People had a great sense of self-entertainment, with local acts and concerts every night of the week. At the time there were nine cinemas in Limerick, all of which were supported by the city. I remember making my own debut at the Crescent Hall in a talent contest. I put together a routine of gags borrowed from various sources and won a sum of money that doesn't exist anymore: a guinea.

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DROP: Once this run of the play is over what's next for Malachy McCourt ?

MMcC: Immediately after we finish in the Belltable, Conor and I are off to India to retrace my steps from my days as a gold smuggler, as part of the work on his next film "The McCourts of New York", which picks up where the previous film let off. Also next summer sees the release of my own memoirs "A Monk Swimming", which deals with the same period of my life.

DROP: Thank you

After the interview was over Malachy remembered that Angela's Ashes made their final public appearance on the stage of the Belltable in 1984, when Frank and Malachy last performed "A Couple Of Blackguards" in Limerick. As they were returning to Limerick the brothers decided to bring their mothers ashes back with them, to be scattered on the family plot in Mungret. Incidentally they remembered that once in reply to an interview question as to what if anything she would do differently with her life given the chance, Angela replied that she would have loved to be an actress, to be on the stage. In recognition of this ambition, Malachy and Frank placed her urn in the drawer of a bureau, which was part of the set for "A Couple Of Blackguards". Thus she shared the stage with her two sons during every performance that week. On the closing night, Malachy was delivering the final routine of the play, which comprises a series of thank yous. "I'd like to thank my brother, you the audience etc." To this he added "And I'd like to thank my mother. Would you like to meet her?", whereon he went to the bureau, removed the urn and showed it to the audience. "This is my mother. Give her a round of applause." Cue applause. Fade lights. Curtain down.



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