

The Day that Seamus O'Rourke played the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Sean McPartlin

THE FIRST TIME I heard Seamus O'Rourke saying "The Day that Leitrim played in Croke Park", I was 'home', sitting in the kitchen, in its warmth and peace, with the view over Drumnaughnan down to the Lake.

My favourite place on earth.

John Joe says: "Have ye ever heard this fella, Seamus O'Rourke?"

"No," says I.

"Well I'll put him on, so."

And he did.

And the words reached out to me and grabbed my heart and my Leitrim pride, as he talked of his aul fella, bating the whins in the haggard, as if they were Dub defenders, and his mother packing the bag for them, and their excitement on the Clonliffe Rd. The anticipation, the expectation, the acceptance, and the fear. The pride, as the county took its place among the 32.

And the sandwiches.

So when I saw he was coming to Edinburgh for the Festival Fringe, I could hardly believe it.

Says I. "Will we go?"

And they knew better than to say no.

We got the tickets, and I put on my county poloshirt, so everyone would know where I was from, and we went into town, and we joined the queue.

And the venue?

Ah, sure, it wasn't brilliant. It was underground and small and stuffy, but that worked for the single hander play, and it

■ **Sean McPartlin and Seamus O'Rourke**



was in the city centre, and looking at the poster for "Padraig Potts Guide to Walking" I felt proud of Leitrim.

Ah, it was grand.

Then Seamus himself arrived. He looked at me and the old Twitter timeline worked its magic.

"Seán?" he said.

"Seamus!" I said.

And I could have hugged him.

It was like when I met Emlyn Mulligan in New York on the field in Gaelic Park. It's great to be known by your own.

We talked about the play, and how it was going, and home.

For a minute, the Edinburgh street, slanting down to the Castle Rock, was like a sloping field in Leitrim, surrounded and protected by dreams and ditches.

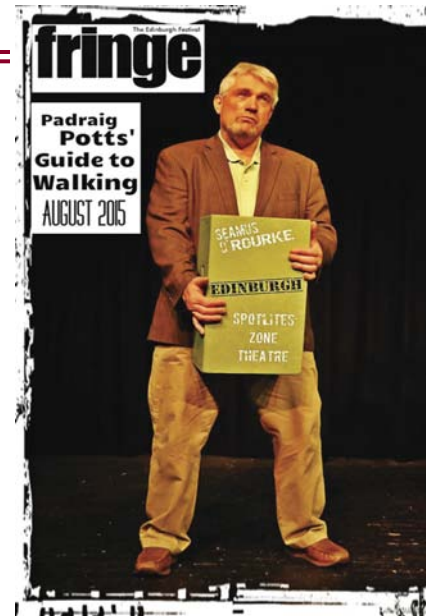
The story of Padraig Potts McKeirnan told of a different Leitrim, in a time before, before people built houses to be empty, and when the N4 was a winding road. There were Garda barracks, and post offices and the McPartland brothers living up the lane, the Parish Priest, his housekeeper, the pub, and the dream of a walk to the north to the tiny Leitrim coastline.

Padraig's longings, his confusions, his lack of self worth, and his innocence were so strong they could have left the small stage and come and sat beside me - nudging me when I laughed, and consoling me when the tears came, as they often did.

There was the bewilderment of drink, and love, and the world out there, and the mother who watched life through her window, and the father who thought deeply but said little.

And the sandwiches.

And how happy it was when Padraig finally escaped the fields of everything he knew - for the possibilities of the coast and the open sea.



And we waited for Seamus when it was over, and he came out tired—but, sure, having not been on the stage thirty minutes longer than Leitrim had been on the field the day they played in Croke Park?

We shook hands again and thanked him for putting the county on the stage—with all its certainties, its disappointments, its impossibilities, and its dreams, and if poor old Lamps McGovern never got further than the bridge, Seamus took us all the way to top with his joy and sorrow, and his understanding, and his puzzlement, and his yearning.

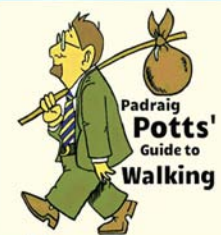
I mentioned the McPartland's up the lane, and that my mother had been a priest's housekeeper, and he just smiled the smile of a man who is constantly told he is portraying lives that are found familiar to his audiences.

Then he turned and was gone through the Festival crowds - a little piece of Leitrim come to Edinburgh.

We turned to leave, and I realised I had not been to Leitrim this year, and I missed the lane up through Baragh More, and the view down over Drumnaughnan, and the Lake, and Corry Mountain, and the flowers surprising everyone in the ditches.

And the sandwiches.

But, sure, there's always next year.....



Ardmore, Waterford
Monday 20th July

Claremorris, Mayo
Friday 31st July

Corn Mill, Carrigrohane
Saturday 1st August

Edinburgh from the 3rd to the 31st of August
SPOTLITES. Venue 278 SHOW STAGE
22 Hanover Street 9.10pm