

THE SPEECH PROJECT

Bláithín Gallagher

IN OCTOBER 2012 the Irish premiere of Gerry Diver's *The Speech Project* took place in County Leitrim at The Glens Centre Manorhamilton and was followed by a second show in the The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon. An exceptional show, much appreciated by the audience, this was a special experience, which reminded me of my first viewing of *River Dance* during the Eurovision song contest, back in 1993. I was at a large gathering in a friends house. The Eurovision song contest was playing in the background but could not really be heard over the chatter and din of those gathered. Suddenly a hush descended on the group and all eyes turned towards the television. A memorable experience, one could even describe it as an emotional moment. This event helped renew the nation's pride in our long heritage of Irish dancing, which heretofore had been taken over by the wigs, embroidered gúna's, false tans, and make-up, that had become synonymous with Irish dancing. We were witnessing change. Attending the speech project



The Speech Project Photo by: Alan Smith

gave me that same feeling, I felt privileged to sit in a theatre in Leitrim and witness the premiere in Ireland of something very special musically.

According to the composer, Gerry Diver, *The Speech Project* was four years in the making. It is inspired by, and incorporates, recordings of the spoken word of seminal Irish folk musicians. The show featured special guest Lisa Knapp, plus specially commissioned accompanying videos for selected works, funded by the Deis fund of the Arts Council Ireland. The whole experience is based on interacting live with the spoken word recordings, of the Irish

musicians used in the *Speech Project* recordings.

Gerry Diver was born into an Irish family in Manchester, and relocated to Ireland in his teens. He made face-to-face recordings with Christy Moore, and trawled the archives and back catalogues for spoken word recordings of older musicians. Taking this all back to his Tooting studio he extracted key phrases from the recordings. Using the rhythm, pitch and phrasing as inspiration, he began to compose a series of works that are uniquely Irish, groundbreaking in concept and stunningly beautiful.

For more information see:
www.thespeechproject.com