

# A word from the new director

## *The Glens Centre*

BRENDAN MURRAY



*O'Tahaney Dancers in the Christmas Panto Little Red and the Black Dog in 2017*



*Open mic for Cruinniú na nÓg in June!*

**In its 22 years** of operations, *The Glens Centre* has established itself as an arts centre of national renown with a reputation for high quality production values and a venue that has a unique, intimate atmosphere. The converted Methodist church that is the auditorium, allows for excellent acoustics. Actors, musicians, singers alike, they all delight in the rich timbre that resounds from the stage.

As the recently appointed Director, I can lay no claim to being part of the great success story that is *The Glens Centre*. It does, however, allow me a certain objectivity. Many an artist I have heard over the years extolling the virtues of its resonance as they had experi-

enced it. The calibre of artist that has played in what is a relatively small venue is mighty impressive.

Nestled as it is amidst a topography of drumlins and lakes that is in itself a work of art, I like to think of *The Glens* as the artistic heart of a hinterland that has not only inspired natives such as John McGahern and Kathrine Lynch to climb to the summit of artistic excellence, it has also inspired many other writers, film-makers, painters and performers to settle in North Leitrim, making it a hub for outstanding artistic expression. The census of 2016 revealed that this area has an exceptionally high concentration of artists living here.

It is this cohort that *The Glens* strives to resource. It is our mission to inculcate and expand artistic endeavour and achievement through residencies and community based projects. Through collaboration with Women's Groups, Men's Sheds, schools, minority sectors, etc. we encourage artists to engage with inhabitants and environment in order to enhance their own practice and to inspire others to explore their own creativity. We offer the space and time that is essential to imagine, process and express. As that great philosopher, John Cleese put it — 'It's not enough to create space; you have to create your space for a specific period of time'.

The (post)modern arts world has evolved greatly since the (truly) great 18th century philosophers started to luxuriate in discussing the merits or otherwise of art, from Kant to Wollstonecraft to Rousseau, as the western world became more middle class and recreation more accessible to the masses. But it is a lesser known

Frenchman, Victor Cousin, who popularised the term *l'Art pour l'Art* or Arts for Art's Sake. This, to my understanding, is a neat summation of the argument that art does not have to have any intrinsic moral, societal or intellectual meaning or input for it to have any value or worthiness.

The very consideration of art to such an extent may indeed appear to be a luxury to many people today, as the individual struggles for economic equanimity in a turbulent, market driven, 'global village'. It is exactly this type of discourse that can disenfranchise

those many people who see the arts as, to coin another French cliché, a *bourgeois* hegemony that benefits the elite alone. It was not until after the 2nd World War, that art, theatre, in particular, became a vehicle for the masses to reflect on life and living, as artistic endeavour expanded through improved educational systems into the consciousness of the working class.

The 'angry young men' of 1950's Britain (John Arden, John Osborne, Harold Pinter etc) brilliantly questioned the validity of the old world order. One that had literally ordered millions of other young men to

senseless deaths in two world wars. European drama theorists like Maria Knebel, Bertolt Brecht, and Jerzy Grotowski revolutionised dramatic theory as they variously explored the subconscious, the intellect and physical impulse/memory as the conduits of expression to affect social change. The arts became mainstream and were recognised as an important harbinger of modern society.

So whether it is art for its own sake, for pure entertainment, or to promote discourse, Leitrim can be proud of the role, however small, that The Glens Centre plays therein.

## Ballagh Choir of Ages SARAH BRONKHURST

**The New Ballagh Centre** in Ross-inver was approached in 2017 with the idea of making a television series about the formation of a choir made up of older people and children, led by renowned conductor David Brophy. This led to the highly acclaimed three part series "David Brophys' Choir of Ages" screened on RTE in December 2017.

Participants enjoyed the experience so much that funding was sought to continue the Choir when the cameras stopped rolling. Led by Sligo Choirmaster Dave Flynn, the Ballagh Choir of Ages was supported in 2018 by the Reconciliation Fund at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and includes members from County Fermanagh so is Cross Border, Cross Community and Intergenerational. In 2018 the Choir performed at the Stoneywoods Festival in Kiltyclogher and at the opening of the Cashel Community Centre in Fermanagh. The highlight of the



year was when members of the original Choir of Ages TV series performed for the pope in Croke Park at the World Meeting of Families.

The Choir recorded a 4 track CD during the summer, which was launched at a star studded concert held at the Beepark Community Centre in Manorhamilton in October. One of the tracks on the CD is a cover of the Joni Mitchell classic "Both Sides Now" which includes a unique spoken word section,

*Choir of Ages performing at the Beepark Manorhamilton in October 2018. Inset the Choir of Ages CD. Photos: Jonas Dellow*

where members of the Choir, both young and old, talk about their everyday experiences of living close to the border. A beautiful music video has been made for this song and can be found on Youtube by searching "Ballagh Choir of Ages Both Sides Now"