National Dance Company of Ireland –
Rhythm of the Dance

Monday, March 17, 2014; 7:30 pm
Tuesday March 18, 2014; 7:30 pm

From the creation of Rhythm of the Dance in 1998 (initially the show was set up for a 3 week tour of the United States) it has toured consistently internationally and is achieving greater critical acclaim year after year.

This wonderful show continues to evolve thanks to the constant striving for perfection by its Director/Producer, choreographer and composer to keep the show fresh and interesting so that audiences who attend performances will always find some new and exciting elements within the program.

With a wonderful, gifted young cast of dancers, musicians and 3 Irish tenors, featuring live performances from the entire troupe, this is a show that has won critical acclaim across four continents of the world in 51 countries to over five million fans. And now after 12 years of showcasing the very best in Irish dance to the world, the show has undergone a process of renewal, reinvigorating the choreography and music to create an even more spectacular performance. Producer Kieran Cavanagh is very excited about the updated format of the show. He hopes that Rhythm of the Dance will be a breath of fresh air into Irish dance with this traditionally rooted and authentic production.

ACT I
The Odyssey (Storybook) – Rhythm of the Dance will bring you on an epic journey through the ages, from ancient mythology to the travels of the Irish emigrants, from the rolling hills and stonewalls of Connemara all the way to the modern skyscrapers of New York, with some surprises along the way.

Blind Encounter (Opening/Dance) – The French revolution in the late 18th century stirred in the Irish a thirst for equality. Our hero, the military commander is too preoccupied with the impending battle and as a result, is unable to see the love that awaits him. Troops stand ready to protect their lands and as potential invaders approach, it soon becomes apparent that they are neighboring allies. Our commander returns for a glorious finish.

Medley Irish Storytelling (Song) has inhabited every corner of the world through song. This cheerful medley embodies the exuberance that exists in this art form.

Rhythm in Motion (Dance) – The introduction of show bands to Ireland in the 1960s heralded an opportunity to feel the rhythm of the music and dance! Not to dance alone but to find a dance partner, someone who could share the passion of rhythm in motion.

Northern Exposure (Dance) – The history of Ireland will always be marked by struggle; for Irish independence from English rule. However, the people of the North of Ireland have shown great courage in accepting their neighbors in the hope of a peaceful future. Communities divided by religion led to many years of turmoil, but they’ve endeavored to forgive, move forward and accept each other’s differences.

Bringing it All Back Home (Sean nós Dance) – Translated from the Irish meaning, “old style,” it is the oldest form of dancing in Ireland. Over time it gave way to a more intricate and controlled form known as Irish Step dancing, which is much more common today. The strong revival of Sean nós force the two forms to compete. Who will dominate, or is there a possibility that the two forms can come together as one synergy?
Rhythm of the Dance
continued

The Drill (Dance/Acapella) – Michael Collins (1890-1922), an Irish revolutionary leader, called on many to protect the land and its people. But what made him a renowned leader was his ability to put himself above no man and share in the struggle as much as each of his own men.

The Hill of Tara (Band) – The Hill of Tara was the former seat of the High King of Ireland; it was a battle ground where pagan Celts met the Christian faithful. By the 7th century, Christianity was the prevailing religion but prior to that, paganism was the religion of the common man. This Celtic legacy is still to be found in the roots of Irish Christianity.

Lightning Strikes (Dance) – Music is ingrained in the hearts of the Irish people. Various festivals take place yearly in Ireland and across the world; the streets come alive with a cacophony of rhythms and melodies that soar into the early hours of the morning.

Afro Celt (Dance) – After the potato famine in 1849 many people left the homeland; the multitudes landed on the shores of the United States. The Irish embraced a new and vital community of diversity; they fused their traditional style of music with the diverse sounds of their new home. New sounds and rhythms emerged, ones that could never be imagined at home in the Emerald Isle.

The Irish Ballads Medley (Song) – “Will You Go Lassie Go,” “Jug of Punch,” “The Holy Ground,” and “The Aran Sweaters” are synonymous with the Clancy Brothers, an influential Irish folk singing group in the 1960s. Their success across the country popularized Irish music in America, even touching a young Bob Dylan.

Solstice (Dance) – No longer blinded by night, the lovers emerge from the darkness and become lost in their dance, a tango which fades to the oncoming sound of neighboring dancers as they welcome in the sunrise.

ACT II

A New Dawn (Opening/Dance) – The sun rises over the mythological hills in the east of Ireland, in the province of Ulster. Queen Maeve, the powerful queen of the western lands of Ireland, Connaught, embarks on a battle known as the “Cattle raid of Cooley.” While successful in bringing the bull back to Connaught her army is forsaken in Cooley, the “hound of Ulster,” and his Red Branch Knights.

The Irish Airs Medley (Mountains of Mourne) – A beautiful song written and composed through the eyes of a young Irish emigrant as he tells his love back home of his experiences in London.

The Sessions (Band) – The celebrations continue with a lively reel that pulsates deep in the hearts of the crowd gathered. Sporadic and spontaneous dance is inevitable as the music exposes high spirits and joyous festivity.

Beat of the Bodhrán (Dance) – Granuaile (Grace O’Malley), a pirate of the 16th century nicknamed the “Sea Queen of Connaught” was a fearless leader by land and by sea. She challenged and manipulated the turbulent politics of her time and was a true feminist trailblazer. Here her strengths are put to the test by the beat of the drum.

Stomp to the Beat (Dance/Sean nós) – Many variations circulate about how the brush dance originated. One such account speaks of how men outnumbered women and that the brush was used as a substitute in the kitchen while they practiced! Here our sean nós dancer is found outnumbered, and possibly in danger, can she find a way to emerge victorious?

Danny Boy (Song) – Turloch Carolan (1670-1738), a harpist, was regarded by many as Ireland’s national composer. Blindness by small pox at the age of eighteen did not deter his musicality and for fifty years traveled all of Ireland composing and performing his tunes. The familiar anthem of Danny Boy is delicately played on the harp, portraying the heartache of a parent bidding farewell to a son as he courageously sets off for war.

Swing Time (Dance) – Not only did the Irish land in places like Boston and New York in times of immigration, the ports of Savannah and New Orleans also saw them flood in. 1809 saw the first St. Patrick’s Day parade in New Orleans but by the roaring 20s the Irish were well and truly integrated into American society. Like much of American popular culture, swing music crossed ethnic and racial lines freely.

Celebrating the Emerald Isle (Band) – Rural Irish bars or pubs were often frequented by the working class folk and farmers. A pint could be enjoyed whilst a gathering of musicians clustered together around the open fireplace. Often a sean nós dancer would partake in the fun or craic. It was said that a good dancer could dance on a silver tray and a really excellent dancer could dance on a six pence!!

Celtic Warriors (Dance/Acapella) – Rhythmic cadences were often drummed in the onslaught of battle as a way to ward off the enemy. The drumming, indicative of a Celtic heritage, became a symbol of togetherness, our hearts beating in time ready to take on our adversaries.

The Journey’s End (Dance/Closing) – This final time travel traverses the trial and tribulations of Ireland’s historic times at full tilt. The varying tempos, formations and rhythms lead to a climactic finish, resonating with the abundant spirit and energy of its people.
INSTRUMENTS
The Uilleann Pipes
The Uilleann Pipes, (pronounced ill-in) are uniquely Irish. The Uilleann pipes had their beginnings in the early eighteenth century. Pre-dating the Uilleann pipes the common form of Irish pipes, “the Irish war pipes,” were very similar to the present day Scottish pipes. At one time bagpipes were popular throughout Western Europe and parts of Asia. Borrowing and combining ideas from other countries like Scotland, England, and France, the Irish began redesigning their bagpipes.

The resulting Uilleann pipes are regarded as outstanding among the pipes of the world for their mellowness and sweetness of tone. These newer pipes had a chanter of two full octaves compared to the old war pipes with just nine notes. Instead of a blowpipe the bag was inflated with a bellows operated between the waist and the elbow. The final design came about the late eighteenth century with the addition of the third drone. These pipes are played in a sitting position rather than standing or marching like with war pipes or the Scottish Bag Pipes.

The Gaelic word for elbow is uilleann; hence the name Uilleann pipes.

The Bodhrán
The Bodhrán is a framed drum, usually of bent wood and goatskin tacked to one side. The other side is open ended for one hand to be placed inside the drum to control the Pitch and timbre.

The very origins of this instrument are shrouded in history. One legend dates its use to 1603 where it was used as a battle drum for the Celtic forces of “Tyrone Rebellion” fighting the forces of Queen Elizabeth I.

Recent years have seen a significant resurgence in the bodhrán popularity in no small part due to the work of Irish Composer Sean O Riada, who declared the bodhrán to be the native drum of the celts with a musical history pre-dating Christianity.

From mysterious origins the bodhrán has become popular throughout the world, known as the Irish instrument central to the driving rhythms, on which Rhythm of the Dance is based.

Irish Flute
The wooden instrument known today as the Irish flute was actually not developed for that kind of music. It had been used in orchestras until it was replaced by the modern metal flute.

When the modern orchestral flute was developed by Theobald Boehm in the mid-19th century, simpler six-hole wooden flutes began appearing in pawn shops. These were sold cheap to traditional musicians who used them to play traditional Irish music. Soon a few instrument makers began duplicating the earlier wooden flutes for folk players. The newly crafted Irish flutes still had six finger holes, but now only a few or no keys as there are few sharps or flats in traditional folk music. Irish flutes are also traditionally used in bands made up of only flutes and drums. Flutes of three to seven different sizes (and ranges) are used together. The center of this band activity is Northern Ireland.

Today, Irish flutes are made from woods such as grenadilla, boxwood, or bamboo, or polymer. They can cost anywhere from a couple of hundred dollars/euro to several thousand.

Fiddle
The lovely, lilting sound of the Irish fiddle is synonymous with Irish music. The term fiddle may refer to any bowed string musical instrument most often the violin. Fiddle playing, or fiddling, refers to the style of music playing, which is generally louder and more rhythmic than traditional classical violin. Fiddles are generally strung in a different way to a classical violin, in order to capture a uniquely Celtic sound.

The fiddle emerged in 10th-century Europe, deriving from the Byzantine lyre. By the 11th or 12th century the bow had been introduced to Ireland and, upon arrival in the Emerald Isle there was a rapid evolution, as the lyres were adapted for bowing. As early as these Middle Ages Ireland was fast gathering an international reputation for the quality of its musicians.

For centuries, Irish fiddles have been a powerful part of the cultural tradition of Ireland and are of the most important instruments in the traditional repertoire.

By the early 19th century, certain modifications and improvements to the fiddle were in place...chin rests for comfort appeared around 1820, and the range of the instrument was increased by the creation of a longer fingerboard. In the early 20th century, Irish families and friends would gather in the country, often at crossroads, and practice Irish fiddling in a group. Get-togethers at houses and pubs were also very common the instrument became a way of uniting the Irish people through traditional folk music. Modern musicians remain intrigued by the traditional folk melodies and techniques of the past and contemporary Irish musicians use the fiddle to add traditional elements to a variety of styles, including pop and rock. The fiddle is
considered the oldest traditional Irish instrument of all. Irish fiddle playing today has never been more vigorous, whether at a professional or amateur level, with an extremely high standard of playing and a strong demand for the music both in Ireland and elsewhere.

**Harp**

While its earliest origins are lost, the Irish harp has a certain history dating back at least 1000 years. Brian Boru, the last High King of Ireland (d 1014), is said to have been an accomplished player. At this time, the Gaelic harp was revered in Celtic culture (and all over Europe). It was commonplace for Irish Kings and chieftans to have their own resident harper.

When the English Monarch Henry VIII declared himself King of Ireland in 1531, such was the fame and prestige of the Irish harp, it was chosen as the official national symbol of Ireland and used on the coinage of the time.

As the Celtic social order waned, the Gaelic harp became an emblem of resistance to the Crown and England. As such, it was banned at the end of the medieval period and the old Celtic harp tradition began to die out. By the 19th century, the Irish harp was practically extinct.

In 1792 a group of traditional harpers assembled in Belfast for a traditional harp festival where the musician and folk music collector, Edward Bunting wrote down the music they played and the terminology of the harpers. Amazingly this appears to be the first time traditional Gaelic harp music had been recorded on paper, thus saving these tunes for our enjoyment.

The traditional Irish harp’s distinguishing features are its use of wire (usually brass) strings and its resonating chamber carved from a single log (traditionally willow). The highly tensioned strings are played with fingernails, producing a very clear sound.

**The Young Irish Tenors**

Throughout the history of Irish music the male tenor voice has cast a long and distinguished tradition. This powerful vocal form sits beautifully alongside the other traditions of Irish music. After touring the world, *Rhythm of the Dance* returned to Ireland to recuperate and reconnect with its roots. It was during this period that the producers of *Rhythm of the Dance* were captivated by the powerful voices of the Young Irish Tenors. Work began immediately to incorporate their gifted voices into the show. If the reaction of the worldwide audiences are anything to go by then their contribution has been hugely appreciated. The Young Irish Tenors perform many much loved Irish ballads such as “Danny Boy,” “Star of County Down,” “The Kerry Dancers,” “Carrickfergus,” “Molly Malone,” “Trotting to the Fair,” and “Phil the Fluthers Ball.”

Now for the first time the *Rhythm of the Dance* has compiled the best recordings of The Young Irish Tenors on one album for your enjoyment.

**Choreography**

Doireann Carney is a member of the Hession family and as a result has been dancing professionally since her early teens. After an auspicious start to her dancing career performing in festivals in Barbados and L’Orient, France, she went on to become dance captain with Alan Kelly’s *Celtic Legends*. Her talent was promptly snapped up by the phenomenon *Riverdance - The Show*. Doireann has toured extensively in America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Her most memorable appearance to date was performing at the opening of the Special Olympics in 2003, in front of a stadium audience of 85,000 and a television audience of millions, and sharing the stage with the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mohammed Ali and Bono. She finished her touring career with *Rhythms of Ireland*, on an extensive tour of Australia with *Lord of the Dance’s* Michael Donnellan.

Having a wide range of talents, Doireann took to golf during her travels and now, as a qualified Irish dancing teacher, she combines her teaching in the family dance school with her passion for the game of golf, representing Connaught at interprovincial tournaments.

Since joining *Rhythm of the Dance*, Doireann has been working tirelessly, tweaking and intensifying the beats and passion at the heart of the *Rhythm of the Dance* spectacular, we hope you will enjoy the fruits of her efforts.

**The Dancers**

*Rhythm of the Dance* blends the principle forms of Irish dance Step, Set, Old Style Step and Sean-nós, re-invented and reworked to deliver the passion and beat for which *Rhythm of the Dance* is world renowned.

*Rhythm of the Dance* dancers are among the most accomplished Irish dancers in the world. Over the years the show has been proud to boast numerous national, international and world champion dancers. Their dedication to the art form of Irish dance is clearly evident on stage during production. With their graceful movement and disciplined control it is often said that “they make it look easy.” What is not evident is the off-stage commitment required to reach the panicle of Irish dance demanded of the *Rhythm of the Dance* dancers. With the rigors of touring and the endless hours of rehearsals and practice, working and reworking routines the dancers of *Rhythm of the Dance* form lifelong friendships and get to know intricately know each other’s dance styles and timing. And it is this unique knowledge that enables the dancers and choreography team to deliver the driving rhythmic performance which has been enjoyed live by millions worldwide.