

Community

Irish culture for all ages, from 7 to 90

Nora Mulready reflects on a year of her Irish Elderly Advice Network's Culture Office and its highlights

The Irish Elderly Advice Network launched our Culture Office just over a year ago this Christmas. We have worked with older Irish people providing welfare rights support and advice for over twenty years. In recent years we have been increasingly aware of the importance of Irish culture to enhancing the lives of older Irish people and so we founded the Irish Elders Culture Office in 2014. Now, over a year on, we wanted to share with the Irish community the highlights of this wonderful year for older Irish culture.

Last Christmas we formally launched the Irish Elders Culture Office through a Christmas concert at Haringey Irish Centre. We sent a message out to the Irish community across London to see who would like to be involved and were overwhelmed by the support we received. On the night we had over 100 musicians, dancers and singers turn up to be part of this incredible night. Everyone played for free, even the headline artists, the legendary Sean Cannon (Dubliners) and his son James Cannon. It was a wonderful night for the Irish community with performers aged from 7 to 90. We are incredibly grateful for the support and goodwill shown to the Irish Elders Culture Office around this event and ever since.

We have collaborated with Karen Ryan and the internationally renowned Return to Camden Town



Sean Cannon

“It’s a beautiful record, and it is evocative of an Ireland of long ago.”

Festival to host a, now annual, traditional Irish music concert for older Irish people on the final day of the festival. These took place during the day and had a great atmosphere, with this year’s being standing room only.

Outstanding

We have an outstanding new choir teacher for the Irish Pensioners Choir, Natasha Lohan. Natasha is a Galway woman who, as well as studying music at Trinity College in Dublin, has many years of experience working in music and theatre in both Ireland and Britain. The choir is always open to new members so please do contact us if you would like to join.

We have recorded an album of classic Irish poetry and songs, *Ceol Agus Soul*, kindly funded by Ireland’s Electricity Supply Board and recently launched at a very special event at the Embassy of Ireland in London. The album features older Irish people reciting the poetry of W B Yeats, Seamus Heaney, Kathleen Blanchfield and Michael D Higgins, and we are particularly grateful to Ambassador Dan Mulhall for his recitations on the album. It is a very beautiful record, evocative of an Ireland of long ago.

We also supported 10 older Irish people to enter the Gaelic Voices Festival competition 2015 and were delighted that one of our choir members, Anne Morrissey, won first prize in the Gaelic language category.

One of our major pieces of work over the last year was an older Irish theatre project, *The Nuns’ Chorus*, written by Sally Mulready. The play is set in Galway in 1956 and follows a group of Carmelite nuns as they



The Elders' Choir in Camden

travel out of their convent for the first time in several years on what they call an 'enforced holiday' to Galway Bay. The play explores their journey of self-discovery and is a moving commentary on an important part of Ireland’s history. The play was performed in community venues by older Irish people who had never acted professionally, with incredible performances by all. It was supported by one younger professional actress and musician, Jacqueline Hynes, two wonderful older musicians Billy Stevens (guitar) and Tom O’Connell (button accordion) and the magnificent accompaniment of Billy Faughnan (piano). The play was very well received, with standing ovations and requests for more

performances. We aim to tour the play around the country and possibly even to Ireland in 2016, and are very grateful to the Ireland Fund of Great Britain for their recent grant to help us with this work.

1916

We are about to begin a project for 1916 recording the childhood memories of some of the oldest members of the Irish community and are very grateful to the Department of Foreign Affairs for their grant of £1000 towards this project. If you have memories of being a child just after 1916 which you would like to share please do get in touch by calling 02074280471.

We are delighted that to round off the year, the legendary Irish folk singer

Sean Cannon (Dubliners) and his son James will be performing a very special, intimate Christmas concert celebrating older Irish people. The Irish Pensioners Choir will also be performing. The concert will take place on Friday 18 December at 2pm to 4pm in the London Irish Centre. There are only 100 tickets available so if you would like to come along, please do try and buy your ticket in advance by calling us on 02074280471 or by emailing kathy@irishelders.org.uk.

• If you would like to learn more about the work of the Irish Elders Culture Office please visit www.irishelderscultureoffice.com. We would love to hear from you.



Galway Bay, 1956