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Limerick's 2020 cultural city bid takes centre-stage

Article by Jimmy Woulfe appeared in the Irish Examiner on Friday 6th November 2015

Many of Limerick's luminaries are publicly singing the praises of their home city as it bids for a special honour.

Next week, Limerick presents its case to be on a shortlist of two Irish entries seeking to be named Europe's City of Culture 2020.

One of the city's rugby giants, Paul O'Connell, said a successful nomination would bring the city "to the very top of the cultural realm in both Ireland and Europe".

O'Connell, who was joined in promoting Limerick by Cranberries guitarist Noel Hogan and author Donal Ryan, said the groundwork to achieving success had been shown during Limerick's selection last year as the national city of culture.



Dr Paul O'Connell is supporting the Limerick 2020 bid

"Sport is a huge part of our culture and in Limerick — it's in our blood; it crosses all cultures and boundaries, bringing people from all backgrounds, age groups and ethnicity together," said O'Connell.

"In Limerick, there is a huge wealth of cultural activity, be it sport, music, art, theatre, fashion, community, and heritage. Personally, I really saw that proven in 2014.

"Considering its size, our home in Limerick has produced some amazing artists, designers, entertainers, writers, performers, and much more.

"Given my career, I'm extremely familiar with the importance of teamwork and the Limerick of today is now working as a strong team.

"It is a confident, energetic place that is clearly on the road to a great future. Limerick 2020 would give many Limerick people the opportunity to excel on a broader stage, connecting the people of Limerick, culturally and I believe the Limerick 2020 European Capital of Culture bid comes at a perfect time.

Mr Hogan joined the chorus of praise, adding: "When the Cranberries took off, I was privileged to play and travel all over the world experiencing the many different cultures and music on offer, which really broadened my life experiences.

"But even when we stayed for any length of time in the most amazing places, at the back of my mind I was still thinking of home, Limerick, my hometown with family, friends, and the beautiful Georgian landmarks.

"I love Limerick. We have seen so many changes since the heady days of the Cranberries of the nineties, it's almost unrecognisable, physically and culturally, since then and it's still continuing to evolve on every level.

"Limerick has had a raw deal over the years in the press...

A lot of outsiders generally don't realise the wealth of culture and beauty in the city. Last year was an extraordinary year for the city when it was City of Culture."

During September, said Mr Hogan, there had been a month-long culture extravaganza in Limerick called the 061, referencing the dialling code for Limerick.



Noel Hogan from the Cranberries supports #limerick2020

"I got involved in Love Letters from Limerick, which was an art and collaboration gift project to the city," said Mr Hogan. "The top international sign writers from all over the world came to Limerick and in addition to workshops, worked on a huge sign which they gifted to the city. The sign title was taken from our very first 10m-selling album title, Everyone else is doing it, so why cant we?

"And that's how I feel about Limerick. With the wealth of experience we garnered from last year's City of Culture, there is no city better placed to be European Capital of Culture 2020. Not to mention it's a fun city."

Mr Ryan is writer in residence in the arts department of the University of Limerick, which

has introduced him to new young writers who have challenged his own way of working.

"My productivity as a writer has trebled since I took up the residency," he said. "I see it as a godsend."

Despite having his roots in Tipperary, he has strong links to Limerick. "Frank McCourt is one of the reasons I'm a writer. I often forget to credit his influence because the effect he had on the way I approach writing was so profound it has almost become part of my make-up, and not something I consciously think about."

Mr Ryan believes Limerick's bid for European Capital of Culture is a unique opportunity for the region.

"For anyone who has an artistic mindset but has yet to explore it fully, I think the opportunity that the bid presents is endless," he said.



Donal Ryan supports #limerick2020

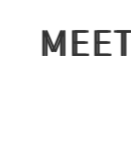
"So many talented creatives feel the urge to drop their talent in return for a 'traditional job'. They feel they need to play safe.

The fact that a place like Limerick, a small city, a scrappier of a city, could win such a prestigious bid would give such a boost not just to the city but the vast number of talented creatives the city is now generating."

Also backing the bid is renowned artist John Shinnors, who said "the ambition, the confidence, the enthusiasm and the creativity the bid embodies will leave a legacy that will inspire our artists, our musicians, our community and our leaders of the future".

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