

CELTIC NIGHTS

SPIRIT OF FREEDOM: 1916-2016

***Celtic Nights* Celebrates Irish Independence with *Spirit of Freedom*, Marking the Centennial of the Easter Rising of 1916**

54 Concerts in North America by Acclaimed Irish Music and Dance Ensemble

Irish Centennial Tour Runs January 8th through April 20th

“... *Celtic Nights* has brought Ireland’s distinctive and evolving music and dance tradition to the world stage and showcased our tradition in spectacular fashion.” **Enda Kenny, Prime Minister, The Republic of Ireland**

Celtic Nights, Ireland’s acclaimed showcase ensemble for music and dance, is returning to North America in 2016 for a coast-to-coast tour of North America. The ***Spirit of Freedom*** tour will be visiting more than 50 communities with its celebration of the centennial of the event that gave birth to modern Ireland -- the Easter Rising of 1916.

According to Michael Durkan, Celtic Nights producer, *Spirit of Freedom* departs from previous theatrical productions he has created (among them, Gaelforce Dance) by centering the production’s music, dance, narrative and spectacle on the specific historical theme of the long struggle for Irish independence and self-determination. This struggle culminated in The Easter Rising, an armed insurrection in Ireland during Easter Week 1916. While unsuccessful at the time, the Rising was a key milestone on the path to the establishment of an independent Ireland in 1922.

“*Spirit of Freedom* is a lively, entertaining show that tells an inspiring story as seen through the eyes of its heroes and heroines,” Mr. Durkan says. “We capture the story as a musical journey of courage, pride and determination. We’re confident that this story will resonate strongly with American audiences -- indeed, with all people who cherish freedom, independence and democracy.”

Spirit of Freedom exemplifies Michael Durkan's production style by fielding a multitalented 14-member cast of singers, dancers, musicians and actors, many of whom are prize winners of various Irish competitions, in a free-flowing narrative structure that is underlined and illuminated by evocative visuals. The producer takes particular pride in conserving authentic folk elements of Irish music and dance within the context of a modern multimedia experience.

"The show brings together storylines from Ireland's history book, but in a way that engages the audience's mind, heart and spirit. They might be laughing one minute, pondering the next, maybe wiping away a tear or two," Mr. Durkan says.

"We also shine some light into areas that are sometimes overlooked, such as the role of women in Ireland's struggle for independence. Women played a very significant part in the Rising. We are honoring this history by telling the story of Grace Gifford and Joseph Plunkett, who were married in the Kilmainham jail only a few hours before Plunkett was executed for his part in the Rising."

Serving as co-producer for *Spirit of Freedom* is Rebekah Shearer, who performs in the show under the name of Rebekah Johanne. In this respect Ms. Shearer, a singer, shares exactly the same point of view on production as Mr. Durkan, who also began his theatrical career as a vocalist. Ms. Shearer notes that "when people come into a show being produced by a performer, they're getting a different kind of show. They're getting something real, something personal, because that's what Michael expects of the cast. He wants us to give of ourselves, not just sing notes or execute steps. I think audiences feel this and appreciate it."

Ms. Shearer believes that Celtic Nights has won its reputation and grown a following not only by its structured content, but by breaking through the stage's "fourth wall" to draw the audience into the performance. "That's what makes us special," she says. "One of my favorite parts of the show is the 'unplugged' section, where the cast comes to the lip of the stage in an informal way to talk, to sing songs, to lead the audience in singing along. It becomes a real Irish party, like one would find in a pub. It's not just a show, it's a friendship. It's brilliant."

The creative team of *Spirit of Freedom* includes Pat Macelwain, director, Claire Crehan, music director, and Richard Griffin, choreographer. The tour runs Jan. 8 through April 20.

Celtic Nights is a production of GFD Promotions. GFD productions have toured to more than 30 countries worldwide since 1997. The *Spirit of Freedom* tour is being presented in association with the New York-based talent agency CAMI Music.

"We're delighted to be coming back to the States, where we have wonderful audiences, to tell this epic story of a small nation seeking out liberty and independence," Michael Durkan says. "We're looking forward to a warm welcome!"

CELTIC NIGHTS

SPIRIT OF FREEDOM: 1916-2016

NORTH AMERICAN TOUR ITINERARY

01.08.2016	Bremerton, WA	The Admiral Theatre
01.09.2016	Kirkland, WA	Kirkland Performance Center
01.10.2016	Olympia, WA	Washington Center for the Performing Arts
01.12.2016	Salem, OR	The Historic Elsinore Theatre
01.13.2016	Longview, WA	Columbia Theatre for the Performing Arts
01.15.2016	Modesto, CA	Mary Stuart Rogers Theater
01.17.2016	Vacaville, CA	Vacaville Performing Arts Theatre
01.21.2016	Lancaster, CA	Lancaster Performing Arts Center
01.22.2016	Lancaster, CA	Lancaster Performing Arts Center
01.24.2016	Folsom, CA	Stage 1- Harris Center for the Arts
01.28.2016	Scottsdale, AZ	Virginia G. Piper Theater
01.29.2016	Cerritos, CA	Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts
01.30.2016	Campbell, CA	Heritage Theatre
01.31.2016	Arroyo Grande, CA	Forbes Hall Auditorium
02.03.2016	Beaver Creek, CO	Vilar Center for the Arts
02.05.2016	Parker, CO	PACE Center
02.06.2016	Parker, CO	PACE Center
02.11.2016	Ames, IA	Stephens Auditorium
02.12.2016	Green Bay, WI	Weidner Center for the Performing Arts
02.13.2016	Burlington, IA	Memorial Auditorium
02.14.2016	Milwaukee, WI	Pabst Theater
02.17.2016	Lebanon, IL	Hettenhausen Center for the arts
02.18.2016	Marion, IL	Marion Cultural and Civic Center
02.19.2016	Decatur, IL	Kirkland Fine Arts Center Theatre
02.20.2016	Carmel, IL	The Palladium

02.21.2016	Flint, MI	The Whiting
02.23.2016	Traverse City, MI	City Opera House
02.25.2016	Decorah, IA	Center for Faith and Life
02.27.2016	New Albany, IN	Richard K. Stem Concert Hall
02.28.2016	Clinton Township, MI	Macomb Center for Performing Arts
03.03.2016	Vineland, NJ	Frank Guaracini Jr. Fine and Performing Arts Center
03.04.2016	Manchester, NH	Dana Center
03.05.2016	Portsmouth, NH	The Music Hall
03.06.2016	Rutland, VT	Paramount Center Inc.
03.07.2016	Rutland, VT	Paramount Center Inc.
03.09.2016	North Bay, ON, Canada	Arts Center Concert Hall
03.10.2016	Brantford, ON, Canada	The Sanderson Centre Theatre
03.11.2016	St Catharines, ON, Canada	The New Performing Arts Centre
03.12.2016	Markham, ON, Canada	Flato Markham Theatre
03.15.2016	York, PA	Pullo Family Performing Arts Center
03.16.2016	Redbank, NJ	Count Basie Theatre
03.17.2016	Morristown, NJ	Mayo Performing Arts Center
03.18.2016	Newport News, VA	Ferguson Center for the Arts
03.19.2016	Wilmington, DE	Grand Opera House
03.20.2016	Fairfax, VA	Center for the Arts Concert Hall
03.24.2016	San Antonio, TX	Tobin Center for the Performing Arts
03.26.2016	Emporia, KS	Plumb Hall
03.29.2016	Springfield, MO	Juanita Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts
04.01.2016	Meridan, MS	Grand Opera house
04.02.2016	Homewood, MS	Wright Center
04.06.2016	Jacksonville, FL	Florida Theatre Performing Arts Center
04.07.2016	Gainesville, FL	Center for the Performing Arts
04.08.2016	Clermont, FL	Clermont Arts and Recreation Center
04.09.2016	Stuart, FL	Lyric Theatre
04.10.2016	Tampa, FL	Ferguson Hall
04.12.2016	Sarasota, FL	Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall
04.16.2016	Baytown, TX	Performing Arts Center
04.20.2016	Tucson, AZ	Centennial Hall

CELTIC NIGHTS PERFORMERS

DANCERS:

Gavin Boyle
Kevin Goble
Leanne Phelan
Rachel Hunter
Sarah Fennell

SINGERS:

Ciaran Olohan
Emily O'Dwyer
Ian Drew
Nik Parks
Rebekah Johanne
Sara Byrne

MUSICIANS:

Ben Gunnery (fiddle, whistles)
Laura Callaghan (guitar, banjo, mandolin)
Stephen O'Connor (uilleann pipes, flute, guitar, whistles)

ARTIST BIOS: <http://www.celticnights.ie/cast/>

THE EASTER RISING – Historical Notes

Spirit of Freedom is Celtic Nights' tribute to the Easter Rising of 1916, a milestone event in Ireland's centuries-long struggle to achieve national self-determination and independence. The Easter Rising was a defining moment in the emergence of modern Ireland as a free and democratic nation.

The Easter Rising, also known as the Easter Rebellion, was an armed [insurrection](#) in Ireland during [Easter Week](#), April 24-April 29, 1916. Most of the military action took place in Dublin, Ireland's capital. The Rising was initiated by [Irish nationalists](#) to end British rule in Ireland and establish an independent [Irish state](#). Like the patriots of the American Revolution, Irish nationalists took up arms only after the failure of repeated efforts to achieve Irish independence through peaceful means.

Led by Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, Irish nationalist forces seized important locations and proclaimed an Irish republic. The Irish Proclamation of 1916 sets forth: "The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities of all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally."

The Rising was put down by overwhelming British force, with the loss of 64 Irish fighters, 134 British troops and policemen, and at least 200 civilians, caught in the crossfire. Most of the Rising's leaders were court-martialed and executed. But the Rising had lit a fire in Ireland that would not be put out.

Michael Durkan, who hails from the central Dublin neighborhood where key engagements of the Rising took place, says that the Rising "revived the dream of freedom for the Irish people. It was all started by the brave men and women who hoped that someday their countrymen would realize their blood sacrifice and also take up arms against what they saw as an illegal occupation of their home. In fact, most of those who gave their lives knew beforehand that the Rising stood little chance of success. They went ahead anyway because they believed that the people of Ireland needed some hope, some gesture to inspire them to achieve their independence. In that respect, the Easter Rising of 1916 was a glorious triumph."

For more information on the Easter Rising of 1916, visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Rising

PRESS REQUESTS:

Cindy Byram

cindybyramPR@aol.com

201-400-4104