



**ADVANCE PUBLICITY
GUIDE**



1650 Broadway
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[WHAT DOES RIVERDANCE MEAN?]

The theme of the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest was ‘The River’, as produced by Moya Doherty. Bill Whelan took this theme as a starting point when composing music for that seminal interval act.

Riverdance traces the life of a river.

The invocation sung at the start is called Cloudsong: it is the rain falling, feeding the river, which springs to life and flows through the land and out to sea. There, the cloud reforms and returns to the land, nourishing, renewing and refreshing it. The constant refrain ‘uisce beatha’ translates as ‘water of life’. The number builds from the gentle song to the dancers’ feet rhythmically recalling a river gathering force and rushing to the sea.

The choreography reflects this cycle. The riverwoman dances alone, her soft-shoe dance evoking the flow of the river. As she crosses the land, the earth, represented by the male dancer, awakens and bursts forth onto the stage. As the strength of the river builds, so dancers gather, signifying new life and energy, until the full *Riverdance* line swells to fill the stage as the river meets the sea. Then earth and river dance in harmony, as the water of life renews the land.

The river, from cloud to sea to cloud again, symbolizes the life cycle, and echoes the Irish experience of emigration and renewal: people who had left their homeland and travelled across the sea, returned in the 1990s to enrich Ireland with their talents and experience gained abroad.

The show as a whole builds on this idea, also exploring the way people from different lands enrich the countries they emigrate to, bringing with them their own culture, music and dance.



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[APPROVED COPY]

The international Irish dance phenomenon is back by popular demand in *Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour*. Drawing on Irish traditions, the combined talents of the performers propel Irish dancing and music into the present day, capturing the imagination of audiences across all ages and cultures in an innovative and exciting blend of dance, music and song. Of all the performances to emerge from Ireland - in rock, music, theatre and film - nothing has carried the energy, the sensuality and the spectacle of Riverdance.

Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour is composed by Bill Whelan, produced by Moya Doherty and directed by John McColgan, and returns directly to North America from a sold out run across Europe and Asia.

www.riverdance.com

[MEDIA MIX]

*The below breakdown is a recommendation and will differ slightly from market to market

Television / 35%

- Network: Morning & Evening News, Daytime Talk, Entertainment News
- Cable: CNN, MSNBC, Food, Travel, HGTV, TLC

Radio / 20%

- Adult Standards, News/Talk, Today's Hits

Print / 15%

- 4C Breaking Print Ad for on-sale
- Regular placement of 4C & BW ads in major daily 4 weeks out
- Glossy Monthly Publications
- Weekly Entertainment Publications

Interactive / 10%

- Banner Ads, Google Adwords, Facebook Ads & Promoted Posts, E-Blasts, Search Engine Optimization

Outdoor / 10%

- Billboard, Street Furniture, Transit, Cinema

Miscellaneous / 10%

- Grassroots Efforts, Direct Mail, Production

[PLAYBILL]

Riverdance does not have a union requirement to have a Playbill, so we do not allow for this expense. We will provide Playbill copy upon request as a courtesy, but may not be charged for any fees associated with the printing of the book. An official *Riverdance* Souvenir Book will be available to patrons for purchase at the merchandise stand.



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[PRESS ANGLES]

*Please submit ALL interview and appearance requests via formal Interview Request Forms available at <http://media.riverdance.com/2015/08/21/marketing-information/>.

**See ARTICLES section below for pre-existing editorial features that you can utilize.

SHOW FEATURE

Riverdance is the legendary, innovative and exciting blend of dance, music and song and a must-see theatrical spectacular for anyone living in or traveling to your city. *Riverdance* returns to North America to celebrate its 20th Anniversary with a fresh, young, sexy company in a show that features new costumes, new lighting, new projections and the addition of a thrilling new number. *Riverdance* is back and better than ever.

RIVERDANCE – 20 YEARS LATER

After 20 years, *Riverdance* has been seen by over 25 million people in over 46 countries and the *Riverdance* family hasn't stopped growing since that first performance as the interval act at the Eurovision Song contest in 1994. Since then, the show has played over 11,000 performances and featured 2,000 Irish dancers. With over 60 marriages and 88 babies between company members and a Guinness World Record for the "Longest Riverdance Line," an infographic pitch to break down Riverdance "By The Numbers" is a fun, engaging look at just how far and wide Riverdance has gone around the world.

TREND PIECE

There is a growing trend of traditional dance entering the forefront of pop culture with television shows like *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*. Moya Doherty (Producer) and John McColgan (Director) launched this trend with *Riverdance*.

ARTS BUSINESS STORY

When looking at major business outlets, we encourage you to pitch Moya Doherty and John McColgan, who took the world by storm in 1994 when they launched the phenomenon that became *Riverdance* and has been seen by over 25 million people worldwide. They are the founding directors of Tyrone Productions, Ireland's leading independent television company, which produced, among others, the opening ceremony of the *World Special Olympic Games* in Dublin in 2003. See below for comprehensive background information for both Moya and John that will assist in this press angle.

BACKSTAGE PHOTOS/VIDEOS

We can offer exclusive access to a local news outlet to come backstage and shoot photos/videos behind-the-scenes of *Riverdance* including dance demonstrations with our lead dancers.

LOCAL ANGLE

We will alert you to any local connections our company members might have to your city. Whether they grew up near you, went to a local college or worked professionally in your market, we will give you plenty of advance notice so that you may garner additional publicity for the production and your theatre.



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[PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES]

*Please note that performance and choreography demonstration opportunities are subject to availability.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

All of the below performance numbers require a marley floor, ideally laid on a timber floor. Please note that concrete studio floors are not possible for us to dance on, so just laying Marley over the concrete does not solve the issue. We either have tracks to provide or these numbers are performance a cappella.

“RIVERDANCE”

- DVD Extract: <https://youtu.be/l9wm3KisCYY>.
- Riverdance 20th Anniversary Performance on NBC The Today Show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56fyAVYWZps>
- Riverdance 20th Anniversary Tour launched on The Late Late Show with James Corden <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLfaCl6hWAE>
- Riverdance perform on 'Willkommen bei Carmen Nebel' on Channel ZDF, Germany: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL3Qck1SedM>.
- Riverdance 20th Anniversary Tour launched on ITV's Ant and Dec Takeaway U.K. 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gbPGn6cUBg>
- Riverdance performance on UK TV (ITV) from St Patrick's Day 2014: <https://vimeo.com/137232817>.

“HEARTLAND”

- DVD Extract: <https://youtu.be/jDpyouGeuZl>.
- Riverdance perform on Circus Halli Galli German TV 2014: <https://youtu.be/HD4lppq-tso>.

“THUNDERSTORM”

- DVD Extract: <https://youtu.be/l07seQKKV4A>.
- Riverdance and Thunderstorm performance on BBC Proms in the Park (2015): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTr8lcTEK6E&feature=youtu.be>.

“ANNA LIVIA” [Brand New Never-Before-Seen Female Acappella Hard-Shoe Number]

- Scratch Tape: <https://vimeo.com/138530910>
- Pop up Charity Performance Dublin 2016
<https://www.facebook.com/Riverdance/videos/10153772424209163/>

CHOREOGRAPHY DEMONSTRATION (in-studio or backstage)

We can offer a choreography demonstration to television personalities in which we would bring two dancers into the studio to teach them some of the dance steps from *Riverdance* for a dance segment. Please click the following link for an example of this performance opportunity: [Hollywood Today Live](#);

Please note: This is typically the type of segment that we offer local morning, afternoon and evening news programs. There are no costume elements required and it makes for a fun, interactive segment that gives audiences of taste of what they can expect. There is no music track provided with this opportunity.

REHEARSAL PRESS JUNKET

We can coordinate a block of time during rehearsal to invite photographers, video crews and journalists into the rehearsal room and offer a performance of a number from *Riverdance* as well as an introduction by John McColgan/Moya Doherty/Bill Whelan/lead dancers (pending availability) in anticipation of the first performance.



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[BY THE NUMBERS]

Since *Riverdance* began performances in Dublin in 1995, the show has...

- Played 11,500 performances.
- Been seen by over 25 million people in 515 venues worldwide, throughout 47 countries across 6 continents.
- Travelled 750,000 miles (or 30 times around the world).
- Played to a global television audience of 3 billion people.
- Sold over 3 million copies of the Grammy Award winner CD
- Sold Over 10 million *Riverdance* videos and DVDs
- *Riverdance* holds the Guinness World Record for the 'Longest *Riverdance* Line,' which featured 1693 participants.
- Since the *Riverdance* Summer School began in 2015 over 500 Irish Dancers from 15 countries worldwide have attended and learned the iconic *Riverdance* steps.

...And there had been...

- 2,000 Performers from 29 countries
- 22,000 Dance Shoes worn
- 17,500 Costumes worn
- 500,000 Gallons of Water Consumed
- 6,000,000 Pounds of Dry Ice Used On Stage
- 62 Marriages Between Company Members
- 92 *Riverdance* Babies Born (With More On the Way!)
- 34,000 Cumulative Years of Study in Step-Dancing
- 50,000 Rolls of Self-Grip Tape Used by Company Physiotherapists
- 20,500 Hours of Rehearsals On Tour
- 1,000,000 Pounds of ice in post show ice buckets used by the dancers to aid muscle recovery
- 80,000 Pounds of chocolate consumed (For Energy) by the cast.



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[APPROVED QUOTES]

"The show is quite simply incredible. A phenomenon of historic proportions" - *The Washington Times*

"As for the flaws? Well, there simply aren't any. Here's to another 20 years!" - *The Edinburgh Evening News*

"A *Riverdance* to Love! Exciting! Hypnotic! Thrilling!" - *The Globe and Mail*

"...this one is the original, it is full of energy and exudes a smooth professionalism." - *South China Morning Post*

"*Riverdance* is the No. 1 dance show of the world." - *Shenzen Daily*

"Unmatched and unrivalled and beautiful to experience." - *Anchorage Daily News*

"A family evening unlike anything else!" - *Times of London*

"Delightful! Energetic! Sexy!" - *Toronto Star*

"*Riverdance* is as much a phenomenon as a show." - *New York Post*

"Triumphant! A perfect Gem." - *New York Post*

"An Irish phenomenon." - *Pariscope*

"A show of superlatives." - *Neues Deutschland*

"Entertainment doesn't come much better than this." - *The Irish Examiner*

"One of the most entertaining shows you will ever see." - *The Evening Herald*

"Dance does not often get so good." - *The Guardian*

"The phenomenon rolls on!... There will always be a *Riverdance*!" - *The New York Times*

"The art of pure enchantment." - *The Sunday Mail*

"The sort of spectacle and experience that comes along once in a lifetime." - *The Hollywood Reporter*

"The originalthe best." - *The Irish Times*

"Excellence beyond compare ... majestic unshackled emotion ... the audience was teeming with passion, so much that some audience members were even dancing in the aisles." - *Guangzhou Daily*

[APPROVED PRODUCTION PHOTOS]

Download production photos for *Riverdance* at: <http://media.riverdance.com/category/photo-gallery/>





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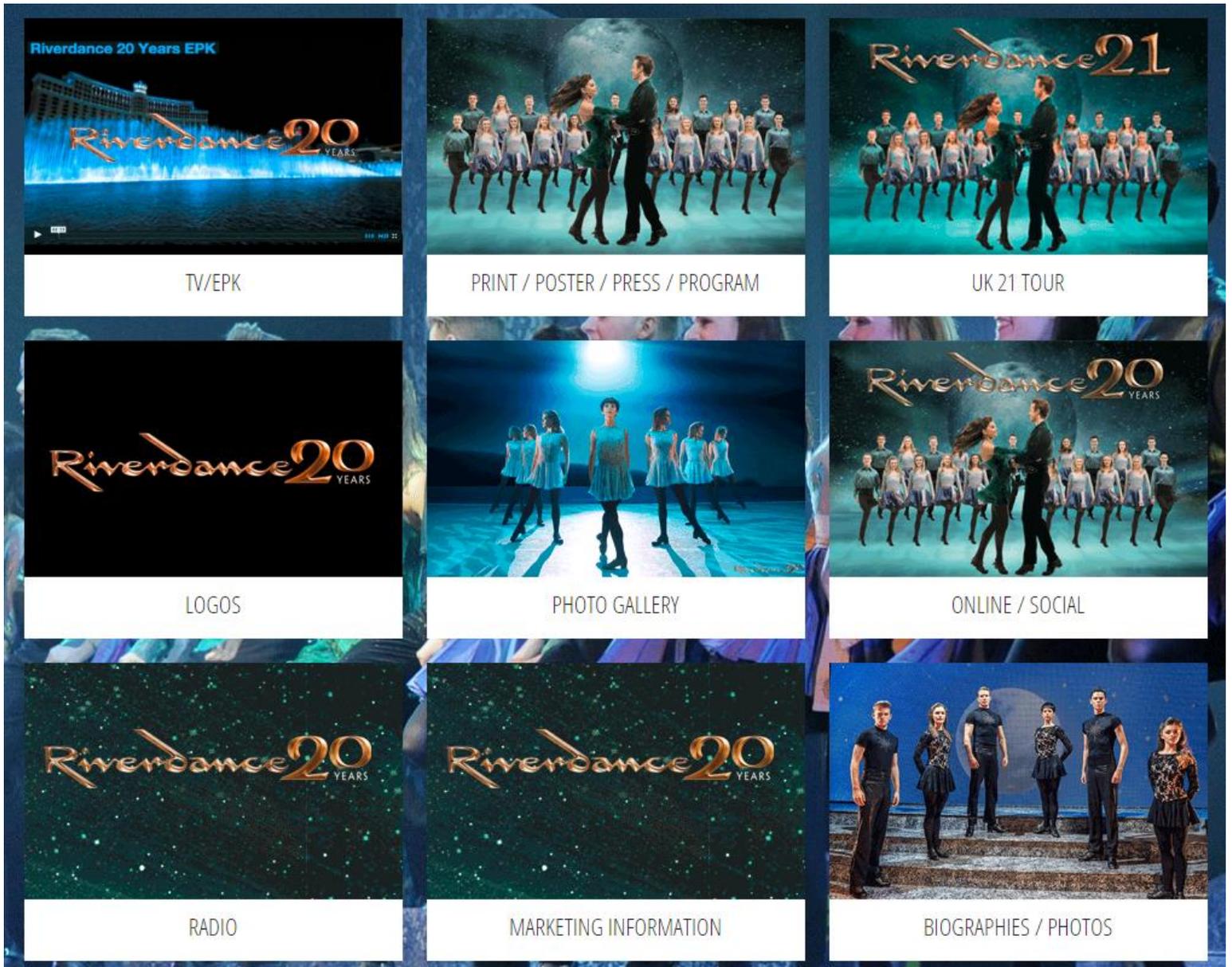
[PRODUCTION PHOTOS AND B-ROLL]

A sizzle reel, EPK, commercials of varying length, print and web advertising materials and beautiful production photos are available to employ from the announcement phase through the end of the engagement. Click the link on the page above to access production photos and click the following link to view the video assets for the show:

<http://media.riverdance.com/>

User: Media

Password: riverdancemedia





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[LOCALIZED TOUR ENGAGEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT PRESS RELEASE]

DATE

For Immediate Release

National Press Contact: Matt Polk, Wayne Wolfe, Colgan McNeil, Kelly Stotmeister (kelly@polkandco.com)

[Local Press Contact Here](#)

PRESENTER NAME PRESENTS

RIVERDANCE - THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY WORLD TOUR



**THE INTERNATIONAL IRISH DANCE PHENOMENON
 TO PLAY THEATRE NAME AND ENGAGEMENT DATES**

2017 NORTH AMERICAN TOUR INCLUDES OVER 45 CITIES

(City, State) Moya Doherty is proud to announce that *Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour*, back by popular demand, will play a strictly limited engagement at **theater name** from **Day Date, 2017 – Day Date, 2017**. Tickets for the international Irish dance phenomenon, will be on sale beginning **Day Date, 2016**. Celebrating an extraordinary milestone for an incredible show, *The Edinburgh Evening News* raves about *Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour*, “As for the flaws? Well, there simply aren’t any. Here’s to another 20 years!”

Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour is composed by **Bill Whelan**, produced by **Moya Doherty** and directed by **John McColgan**. *Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour* will feature new costumes, new lighting, new projections and the addition of a brand new number, “Anna Livia,” featuring the female members of the Irish dance troupe in an a cappella hard-shoe number.

For the complete *Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour* North American tour schedule please visit www.riverdance.com.

“The success of *Riverdance* across the whole world has gone beyond our wildest dreams,” said producer **Moya Doherty**. “The fact that the show continues to draw and excite audiences is a tribute to every dancer, singer, musician, staff and crew member who have dedicated themselves to the show. This 20th Anniversary Tour is a thank you to our audiences and a celebration of what has been an incredible journey across two decades.”

Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour is an innovative and exciting blend of dance, music and song. Drawing on Irish traditions, the combined talents of the performers propel Irish dancing and music into the present day, capturing the imagination of audiences across all ages and cultures. *Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour* has set design by **Robert Ballagh**, lighting design by **John Comiskey**, costume design by **Joan Bergin** and sound design by **Michael O’Gorman**.



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For over 20 years, nothing has carried the energy, the sensuality and the spectacle of **Riverdance**. Riverdance began its journey as the interval act in the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest, produced for television by Moya Doherty. This electrifying and innovative seven minute dance piece was then developed into a full-length stage show by Producer Moya Doherty, Composer Bill Whelan and Director John McColgan. With its fusion of Irish and International music and dance, the show broke all box office records during its world première run in Dublin in early 1995. When the show transferred to London the reaction was unprecedented. There followed a hugely successful tour starting in New York in March 1996, where 8 sold-out shows at Radio City Music Hall heralded the start of 16 years of non-stop touring by Riverdance companies throughout North America. Since its inception Riverdance has packed theatres throughout North America, Oceania, Asia, Europe, South Africa and South America.

For more information, please visit:

Website: www.riverdance.com

Facebook: www.Facebook.com/Riverdance

Twitter: @Riverdance

Instagram: @Riverdance_Official

Snapchat: riverdance-real

#

[BIOGRAPHIES]

BILL WHELAN (COMPOSER)

As a composer, Bill Whelan has written extensively for theatre, dance, film and the concert stage. His film work includes *Dancing at Lughnasa* starring Meryl Streep, *Some Mother's Son* featuring Helen Mirren and Lamb with Liam Neeson. Music for television includes *The Seven Ages*, a history of the Irish State. He was appointed composer to the W.B. Yeats International Theatre Festival at Dublin's Abbey Theatre in 1989, writing original music for 15 Yeats plays. His adaptation of *HMS Pinafore* received a Laurence Olivier Award nomination.

The Seville Suite, Whelan's first large-scale orchestral work, was commissioned for Ireland's National Day at Expo '92 and was performed at Maestranza in Seville. *The Spirit of Mayo* followed in 1993 and *The Connemara Suite*, a trilogy of pieces written for chamber orchestra, premiered in Carnegie Hall in March 2005. Bill Whelan's Symphonic Suite from *Riverdance* received its first performance in 2013. He is currently completing the recording of an album of choral music.

Bill's production and arranging credits include U2, Van Morrison, Kate Bush, Richard Harris, Planxty, The Dubliners and many traditional world musicians and performers. He was honored with the 1997 Grammy Award for 'Best Musical Show Album' for the lyrics and music of *Riverdance*. The album is a certified Platinum record in the US, Ireland and Australia.

Bill is a member of the boards of Berklee College of Music in Boston, University of Limerick, Crash Ensemble and Music Generation, the newly established music education body for Ireland. He has completed a co-teaching course with Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Paul Muldoon at Princeton University and was recently appointed Adjunct Professor to Trinity College Dublin's School of Drama, Film and Music. Bill Whelan is a Fellow of the Royal College of Music and is the recipient of many international awards including the Spirit of Ireland Award in New York.

MOYA DOHERTY (PRODUCER)

Moya Doherty's career includes theatre, radio and television journalism and an award-winning track record in television production, both in Ireland and the UK.

Moya was the Commissioning Producer and originator of *Riverdance* for the Eurovision Song Contest of 1994; she is a founding Director of Tyrone Productions, Ireland's leading independent television production company, whose many credits include *Beckett on Film* and the Opening Ceremony of the Special Olympics World Summer Games (held in Dublin in June 2003), and drama credits including *Ros na Rún*, now in its 18th season, for TG4 and *Quirke*, a major co-production with the BBC, starring Gabriel Byrne. Moya is Chair of RTÉ, Ireland's national public broadcasting service. Moya is a writer and broadcaster and has co-presented a number of radio arts documentaries on George Bernard Shaw, John McCormack and Paddy Kavanagh, amongst others. She is a founding Director of Today FM radio station. She has sat on a number of arts-related boards, including Chair of the Dublin International Theatre Festival for seven years, The Ark Children's Theatre in Dublin, Business to Arts and the Board of the Abbey Theatre.

She is the Producer of the new music and dance stage spectacular *Heartbeat of Home* which had its world premiere in Dublin in October 2013 and has played in Beijing and Shanghai and North America as part of its global tour. Awards and honours include: *Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year*, *Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year*, and honorary doctorates from the University of Ulster and the National University of Ireland in recognition of her success and her ongoing commitment to the arts in Ireland.



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JOHN McCOLGAN (DIRECTOR)

John McColgan's career as a multi-award-winning producer and director began in the mid-seventies at RTÉ Television where he went on to become Head of Entertainment. While in RTÉ he produced and directed a wide range of programming from light entertainment to drama to documentary. He was awarded a Jacob's Television Award in 1980 for 'the consistently high quality of his entertainment programming'. He was also Head of Weekend Entertainment at TVAM – ITV's breakfast television service.

He played a key role in the evolution of Riverdance from the original seven minute dance number and went on to direct the full stage-show spectacular.

John has been closely involved with the Abbey Theatre – he was on the Board of the theatre for five years, served as Chairman of the Abbey Centenary Committee and directed a critically-acclaimed production of Dion Boucicault's 19th century melodrama The Shaughraun. In May 2011 he produced a major theatrical event marking the historic State visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland.

John is the director of the new music and dance stage spectacular Heartbeat of Home which had its world premiere in Dublin in October 2013 and has played to universal acclaim in Beijing and Shanghai and North America, as part of its global tour.

John has received many awards during his career, including an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the National University of Ireland, in recognition of his services to the arts and entertainment industry.



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[SOCIAL MEDIA]

Riverdance social channels are a great source of exclusive content and a behind the scenes look at what it takes to bring *Riverdance* to life.

- Feel free to share *Riverdance* posts with your fans and followers.
- Tag *Riverdance* social channels in any social media posts/tweets.
- Please use #Riverdance or #Riverdance20 when referencing the *Riverdance* 20th Anniversary tour.



@Riverdance



@Riverdance_Official



/Riverdance



Riverdance-real



/Riverdance



/Riverdance

Riverdance maintains a blog which features behind the scenes content written by the dancers themselves. A number of dancers on the North American tour will be documenting their experiences online at: <http://riverdance.com/blog/>.



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[ARTICLES]

'BEYOND WORDS' THE STORY OF *RIVERDANCE*

By Fintan O'Toole, *The Irish Times*

885 Words

When Riverdance first opened in Dublin, you could hear, even above the pounding feet and the swirling music, the audience gasping for breath. And then an explosion of shouts and whoops as all that air bursts out again in a wave of wonderment. It was, of course, the sheer force and energy of the dancing, the rapture of the music, the fantastic sight of so many bodies in motion. But there was something else as well, some longsumerged emotion breaking the surface and gulping in the oxygen.

Overnight sensations seldom last. In the merciless world of showbusiness, today's novelty becomes old news in the blinking of an eye. No amount of hype or clever marketing can sustain a show beyond its immediate impact. Unless, that is, it is fuelled by some deeper source of energy. And it can't just draw from that source. It also has to renew it, to give back at least as much as it has taken. Riverdance has continued to find and excite audiences all around the world because it does both of these things. Even as it grows and changes, it stays in touch with the emotions that made that opening night audience gasp. Even as it touches people in distant places, it continues to shape and refresh the culture from which it sprang.

Traditional dancing starts out as an expression of togetherness. It conveys a sense of belonging. Everyone knows the steps. Everyone can join in. The different generations and classes become, while the dance goes on, part of a community. It depends, therefore, on the existence of a stable culture. The moves, rhythms and the patterns are passed down from generation to generation. However lively the movements, however wild the rhythms, there is, behind them, a quiet confidence that this community will always exist, that these rituals will always celebrate its survival.

But, of course, the communities don't just survive. They change. New influences come in. People move from the country to the city. And, in the case of Ireland over the last two centuries, they move from their own country to foreign cities. They take their music, their dances, their stories with them. And those things no longer say what they used to. They no longer express a stable, familiar world. The ears have to tune in to new sounds. The feet have to move to new, and at first strange, rhythms. The stories have to connect with new experiences.

These things have happened to all traditional cultures in one form or another. As the world shrinks, as technology impinges on everything, as closed societies are opened up, everything gets mixed up. All cultures face the same questions: How do we relate to the past? What does the culture we inherited from our ancestors mean now that the world that shaped it is slipping away?

People are faced with an unhappy choice. They can try to preserve their traditional culture by putting up barriers against the outside world and trying to resist change. Or they can go with the flow, forget the past and melt into a bland, generic culture where everything is the same and nothing much has depth. One way leads to isolation and hostility. The other to a nagging sense of loss. But there is another possibility. It is to carry what you have taken from the past on an open-ended journey, showing it off, throwing it open, making it into a point of contact rather than a point of honor. This is what *Riverdance* had done.



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It's not, of course, the first Irish show to reach out to international audiences. But it undertakes its journey with the great advantages of dance. Dancers are metaphorically as well as literally light on their feet. They carry less baggage than other performers do. Their language of steps and movements doesn't need translation. The materials they work with feet, legs, arms, heads are pretty much the same in every part of the world. Their response to infectious music may be more complex, more elegant, more athletic than toes tapping in the audience, but it comes from the same timeless and natural urge.

What the first audiences saw in Dublin and what made them gasp, was that the movement in *Riverdance* reflects the dynamic way in which culture has actually evolved. It has always been about fusions and adaptations, as new impulses are absorbed into the old frameworks and old ideas that seemed to be buried, suddenly reemerge with a new meaning and a new urgency. But it was always hard to capture this ebb and flow in performance. Things had to be either traditional or modern, either authentic or invented, either Irish or foreign. And then with one elegant, confident leap, *Riverdance* bounded over all those categories and expressed what Irish people have always felt- that you can have it both ways. You can preserve a tradition only by letting it live, breathe and change.

And the real proof of all of this is that *Riverdance* has re-energized the tradition from which it springs. Bad commercial shows exploit the forms and feelings they make use of, finally sucking them dry. *Riverdance*, on the contrary, has watered the roots of Irish dancing. It has created a previously unimaginable excitement, drawing in a new generation, releasing new energies, opening up new possibilities. And in turn, these forces have fed back into the show itself. Young dancers enthused by *Riverdance* when it first appeared are now taking their places in the thunderous chorus. For them, *Riverdance* is already part of the best tradition of all- the tradition of making old things new.



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A NEW DIRECTION IN IRISH DANCE

By John McColgan, Director of *Riverdance*

700 Words

From the moment the first *Riverdance* performance took place, in Dublin in 1994, we knew that something special had occurred. Producer Moya Doherty, composer Bill Whelan and myself, set about creating a stage show that could build on the thrill, the spectacle and the sheer creative energy of that first performance featuring Michael Flatley and Jean Butler in that first television appearance.

The challenge was not simply to achieve a working production. We wanted to open out the new vision of Irish dance, to have it share a stage with other world dancing. We dreamed that by doing so, these dances would mingle and spark off each other so as to create a performance with its own identity. It would be a performance rooted in the folk memory and arts of the Irish people, yet fresh, unique and exciting, and accessible to people everywhere.

In Dublin in 1995 the first performance of *Riverdance* met with an acclaim that was loud with the pride and pleasure of the Irish public. Then in turn, in London, the West End's first night applause made it clear that this performance could and would travel outside Ireland to rapturous approval.

But could it go further? None of us will ever forget the first night in New York, when a glittering audience filled six thousand seats in Radio City Music Hall. In the tension that always precedes curtain up, I looked across the rows of expectant faces of those six thousand, and wondered how they would react. Had we overreached ourselves? Could this show that had come from all our hearts really take another city and a different continent by storm? In the thunderous standing ovation that followed, we knew what the entertainment world now knows: that *Riverdance* had crossed all boundaries and taken its place as a performance the whole theatre-going world would enjoy.

There are now several companies touring the world. These companies, named after Irish rivers - The Foyle, The Shannon, The Barrow - have become a kind of extended family, even a small village. The dancers, musicians and singers don't simply perform together, they travel the world together, looking after each other, sharing their energies and aspirations, pushing each other to new heights and to the highest of standards. I know that for the Irish dancers and all the other performers the thrill of the dancing itself is magnified by an inner pride. It is pride that comes from knowing that they are bringing the dancing and music of their own countries, their own people, to the world at large.

RIVERDANCE THE MUSIC

By Bill Whelan, Composer of *Riverdance*

771 Words

There are two particular problems for the composer writing music in the idiom of any given folk or ethnic tradition – one is social and the other is technical. If the composer is Irish and working with the modes and forms of traditional Irish music, then the first of these problems is most acute – and for very positive reasons.

Traditional music holds a special position in Ireland. To many Irish people it has a defining role culturally and provides an authentic and eloquent link to their past. It is also a rich musical vein that reveals much about Ireland and the Irish – quirky, mischievous, evasive dance tunes, and dark proud airs that can heal grief and comfort loss.

So, when you find yourself in and around a music that has such a long tradition, and such delicate associations and nuance, it can begin to feel like being in a church. Even the lightest footfall can echo long and you may think twice before you dare to whisper.

From a technical point of view, the instruments from which this music has grown are themselves problematic. In particular the uilleann pipes, not being chromatic, tend to confine melodic writing and the very nature of the instrument itself demands caution. The uilleann pipes are a very beautiful but frustrating combination. Both primitive and sophisticated, their evocative abilities are boundless, but the piper's terror is that they may decide to desert him in the midst of his most ardent flight, like some haughty lover – sweet, mysterious and unpredictable. This dynamic goes to the heart of piping and the composer may do well to remember the piper's careful pampering of his reeds before setting a note on the page.

Add to this the varied demands created by whistles, bodhráns, Irish fiddling styles, and in the case of *Riverdance*, the quirks and vagaries of the Eastern gadulkas and kavals, and soon the relative familiarity of a symphony orchestra may beckon like a safe harbor in a storm.

Composition is essentially a solitary occupation, and it is only when you first bring your music into the dance studio that you experience the full rush of fear and excitement. The dancers do not quite know what to expect, and you have no idea how they are going to respond.

When *Riverdance* began back in 1994, it would be folly to suggest that we all knew exactly what we were at, or that there was some kind of grand design. But there is no doubt that as the pieces began to fit together, there was a sense that something unique was happening around and among us. I had deliberately written pieces with rhythmic patterns that were foreign to traditional Irish music, but after the initial raised eyebrows the thrust of the principal dancers' creativity took hold and I can still remember the excitement as they began to fashion their first steps.

Gradually these steps were learned by the troupe and I have many memories of arriving to the studio to find individual dancers in corners, corridors and canteens as they worked on the kind of precision that was to become a hallmark of *Riverdance*.

And then came the day that, for me, really copper-fastened it.

It was one of the last days of rehearsal for the Eurovision in 1994. Producer Moya Doherty, myself and the entire company were assembled in the dance studio. There was hardly room to move. We had seen the dance performed in sections, but had not seen it all in one piece. The music began, and for the next six minutes the room was like a power-station. When it



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was over we all just looked at each other and smiled. There may have been no grand design, but we knew at that moment that whatever it was, it worked. Riverdance was truly on its feet and I will never forget it.

Even though it is now a mature adult, Riverdance still holds that original potency and magic. There are young people performing the show today who had just arrived into the world when I was writing it back in 1994. These young dancers and musicians bring their own energy and interpretation to the performances. For those of us there since the beginning, it has been a joy to witness how a new generation, many of whom were attracted to Irish music and dance by the success of Riverdance, are now up there on the stage injecting it with a youthful verve, flair and enthusiasm that belies its age. For me, when I see the show these days, it is often just like that first night in 1994.