

## 'The Mouth of the Cave' at The Halifax Irish Festival – July 2008

The profoundly mystical and at once very human richness of an age obscured for centuries by a drab and dreary modernity and seeming lost forever is discovered for us again by Siobhán MacMahon in 'The Mouth of the Cave'. Her poetry, bold and assertive, with flaunting and unashamed panache, wallows in delightful word-music that celebrates the compelling immanence within each of us which is nature's awesome, yet intimate and almost lyrical presence at the root of our being.

Under the artistic direction of Sarah Hope, the performance is at once provocative and challenging, as it recovers the anima, the power of the woman through versification colourfully dramatic and some times humorous. Before a backdrop of mood catching imagery with heavy symbolic content, the poet structures an elaborate but controlled fluidity of linguistic expression. Couched progressively in carefully crafted pieces, the ancient myth of the Celtic Goddess is invoked as offering a healing and restorative source of well-being. Images of vibrant sensuality abound as the poet deconstructs patriarchal religiosity to allow the free flow of human feminine physicality, fecund and creative to demonstrate its power, at times verging on the bawdy, but never losing sight of the seriousness of our involvement, our immersion in consanguine accord with the earth - an osmosis that paradoxically issues in experiences of the spiritual.

Signified in her performance is the mystical heritage of Ireland crying out to be rediscovered and re-appropriated as our own. Esther De Waal, the specialist writer on Celtic spirituality, wrote of 'The Church We Have Lost', in which she laments the disappearance of a spiritual heritage the essence of which was life lived in complete oneness with the natural world, in which that world was held in deep reverence and respect. Not a pantheistic deification this, but a profound sense of the noumenon, encountered in and through the biosphere of which we are part; in that sacramental meeting is met the Other, closer to us than we know.

The poet in iconoclastic mood takes time during her performance to demolish some Manichean doctrines that have served, under patriarchal hegemony, to smother the emergent power of the woman. In her reflection on the ritual of 'Churching' centuries of ignorance and superstition collapse in the repetitive uttering of the simple word 'No'. The sweet songs, guitar and bodhran playing of Sabrina Piggott punctuating the poetic performance are a delightful accompaniment complimenting Siobhán MacMahon's tour de force.

Prepare to be swept along by a swirling, heady evocation of the joy, ecstasy, existential excitement and libidinous energy submerged in us for so long and now prompted as possibility by this explosive playfest of word crafting, a declaration for Life by a very talented poet who gives us a liberating glimpse of an alternate way of being.

The work is a deeply moral assertion of the sanctity of all life and the planet that supports it. It resonates with contemporary relevance as we attempt to establish some sacred ground, a dimension that will offer us a place to stand and know

**ourselves as people of the Spirit. I was astonished to find myself consumed by sobbing, and then again attempting to stifle a guffaw during this performance, both sponsored by poetry that highlighted some of the incongruities of our little humanity; the words at times reaching into a place within me that reverberated with an echoing recognition of my own mystery as human, alive, sensual, funny and ultimately beautiful and if me then everybody and everything else.**

**Joe Sheeran  
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