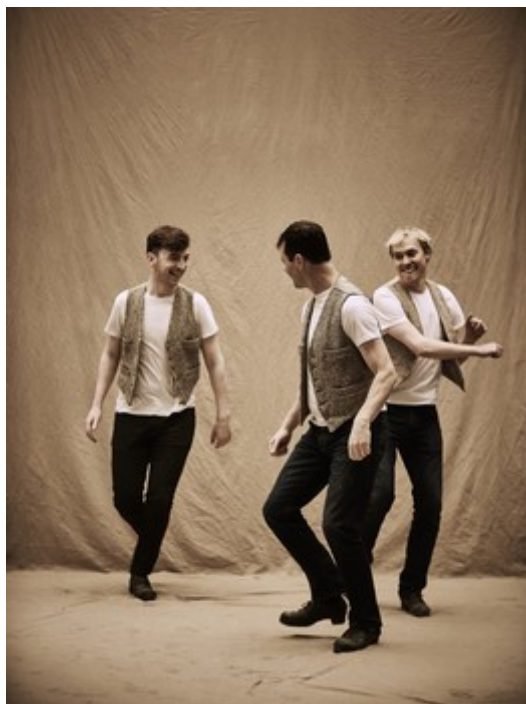

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Dublin Dance Festival 2016 'Anam' throws the best party

May 23, 2016

8:18 PM MST



Ros Kavanagh

Anam by Siamsa Tíre/The National Folk Theatre of Ireland in association with The Dublin Dance Festival

Rating: ★★★★★

Not that you'd think it to begin with. At first it's all quiet and mysterious. A lone uilleann piper plays a haunting tune in the semi dark as slowly, one by one, a dancer enters, scattering a handful of sand on the floor before standing as if bathed in a beam of moonlight. It's all very soulful and dark, in a Celtic mists kind of way. Not necessarily a bad thing, but as the dark begins to clear a sort of Brigadoon emerges. A place of youthful exuberance steeped in the annals of time, as old as the earth yet fresh, wild and deep. As "Anam" kicks off and its four male step dancers and three male musicians get their dancing shoes on to weave their ancient magic, another kind of soul emerges. As in life and soul of the party. And when "Anam's" magnificent seven throw a party it is, unquestionably, the best [dance](#) party in town.

Co-commissioned by Dublin Dance Festival and The National Folk Theatre of Ireland “Anam,” which translates as soul, embodies both a generous hint of mystery coupled with the feeling of a late night lock in. There’s a sense of something untamed at play as world class dancers John Fitzgerald, Jonathan Kelliher, Matthew Olwell and Nathan Pilatzke undertake some virtuoso displays of step dancing. Accompanied live by musicians Fergal O’Murchú on vocals, Joseph McNulty on bodhrán and guitar and Mikie Smyth on pipes and tin whistle, “Anam” exudes a sort of friendly rivalry and camaraderie as dancers square off in order to show off their considerable individual and collective talents. The musicians too display their consummate skills and together the seven strong, waist-coated performers, take the audience on an invigorating journey through the when, how and the joys of step dance.

Co-directors Jonathan Kelliher and Sue-Ellen Chester-McCarthy craft a loose structure built around archive footage projected onto the rear of the stage. The party energy gives way to storytelling as, individually, each dancer gives something of an introduction to themselves and their styles. In what constitutes the lion share of the production Jonathan Kelliher talks about the North Kerry, or Munnix, style, Matthew Olwell introduces Appalachian Flatfoot, Nathan Pilatzke speaks on Ottawa Valley and John Fitzgerald on Modern Irish, with the personality of each performer being allowed to shine through. While the quality of archive footage was often poor, this was offset by the sometimes hilariously embarrassing personal photos. But always it's the speed, energy and craftsmanship of the dance that dominates in this rousing and stirring performance.

If it all has the feel of a mutual appreciation society, what of it? “Anam” is joyous good fun that evokes spontaneous outbursts of clapping, tapping, woops and hups. If “Anam” is a party it’s a celebration party, celebrating the similarities and differences, the past and the present, the joys and the mysteries of percussive, hard shoe, step dance. Catch it quickly, before it gathers up its grains and disappears back into the dark. Wildly exciting and wonderfully executed, “Anam” is without doubt the most joyous party to be had, hands down.

“Anam” by Siamsa Tíre/The National Folk Theatre of Ireland runs as part of the [Dublin Dance Festival 2016](#) at The Samuel Beckett Theatre until May 25th

Doors open 7.30 p.m.

Tickets: €25.00 or €20.00 concession

Post show talk with Catherine Foley on May 24th

For more information, visit [Dublin Dance Festival](#)



Chris O'Rourke
Theatre Examiner

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