



Date: Wednesday, January 02, 2008  
Location: NEW YORK, NY  
Circulation (DMA): 80,000 (1)

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# Tapeire Takes Times Square

RIVERDANCE the juggernaut has floated the boat of so many talented Irish artists basking in the aura of the Celtic Tiger since the mid-nineties.

In particular, the Irish dancing world has never been the same since an "afterlife" emerged for those who poured years of sweat and practice into what had become a competitive exercise masked in a cultural ritual.

For that first generation of dancers who populated the various Riverdance and Lord of the Dance battering brigades, other outlets for their artistry cropped up for those whose skills gave them the confidence to match their love of the dance.

Out of that milieu comes a young Clareman named James Devine, who took on Broadway in November and lived the dream of so many chorus liners who want to see their own names up in lights as the star of the show.

Gambling that New York audiences wanted something more close and personal than the big shows, he created his own vehicle called Tapeire. In doing so he gave ample evidence that it wasn't such a long way from Clare to here when your artistic expression has universal appeal.

Over a 17-day stretch from November 9-26, Devine, 31, gave 26 performances of Tapeire ([www.tapeire.com](http://www.tapeire.com)) at the New Victory Theater on West 42nd Street that drew over 8,000 viewers, one of the best turnouts of their season.

The intimate space of 500 seats was anxious to have a cutting edge talent like Devine bring his cleverly conceived show built around rhythmic tap with an Irish flair to its family-oriented locale that helped reclaim the seedy area back in 1995 by offering a wide variety of informative and entertaining programming.

That Tapeire did so in a brassy hip hop style so commonplace in New York, in sharp contrast to the glitz of the larger stage show spectacles, made it even more endearing and earthy.

Devine's pedigree (his mother Patricia and grandmother Kathleen Sweeney were champion dancers) showed the normal progression through the dance world, though he excelled in competitions in Ireland, Britain and North America up to the time when he left the competitive arena winning championships in each area by age 16.

He even bested Michael Flatley in 1998 - who earlier hired him for his first professional dance job in the first Lord of the Dance company - as a Guinness world record holder for taps per second (38 to 35). While performing in Flatley's show at Radio City Devine was smitten by the new exposure and treatment given to rhythmic tap dancing by Savion Glover in Bring in the Da Noise, Bring in the Da Funk. He returned to New York to study tap and concentrated on representing the percussive side of Irish dance as it influenced and was influenced by other genres in tap.

Tapeire was Devine's vision first tested at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in the summer of 2006 to critical acclaim, which encouraged him to put together a full fledged show incorporating live music, so necessary and integral for his improvisational footwork that the New York audiences enjoyed. The spare performance stage effectively utilized musicians Paul Jennings on a variety of percussive instruments, including pots and pans, electronic harpist Phamie Gow (both from Scotland where Devine lives presently in Edinburgh) and Cape Breton's leading cutting edge fiddler Ashley MacIssac, a dance musician himself.

Devine's production was artistically well conceived and executed in its exposure to the natural rhythms and percussive panache of Irish dance. His academic study at the University of Limerick in electronic engineering gave him a modern command of technical enhancements like live mini-video cams that gave you a window on what the performers were actually doing on stage, without distracting you from it.

Also, the well-scripted slide show backdrop fleshed out the historic journey Irish dance had taken in Ireland through scenes old and new that served as chapters in its evolution, with focal points on sean nos dancing, the dancing master, ceili and feis as Devine displayed his riveting live percussive stepping to music or a-cappella. One of the more poignant and personal scenes was Devine dancing to the rhythm of old typewriter keys artfully struck by Jennings while the script appeared on the black wall. It emulated an early childhood experience he had of exploring Irish dance from his mother, a champion dancer and teacher, until a brain tumor took her off her feet and into a wheelchair, resigned to typing jobs that came her way.

At the penultimate performance at the New Victory, his proud parents Patricia and Stanley Devine traveled over from Ardnacrusha in southeast Clare just miles from Limerick City to see their son star on the Great White Way. Their dutiful son acknowledged their support of his artistic endeavors as he journeyed from the old to the new, including his new conversion to the hip-hop fashions of today and so germane to the success of this show. As only a mother could, she acknowledged his artistic achievement of following his dreams to Broadway.

It appears that his mother is truly an inspirational blessing to James Devine, and no matter where he roams her influence and encouragement will never be far from his heart and performance.

Isn't that what the tradition is all about, whether we view it from the contemporary prism or looking backward?