



Impressions of an Irish Evening

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It is snowing outside, of course. And a man wandering in with a violin says – “Sure, we’re lucky with the weather.” And means it.

When we get there, the projectionist – Michael O Flynn – has got bored and gone home to feed his cat .

Four elderly men (one of whom only came in out of the snow) are trying to fix the thing... they are all wearing thick bottle-top glasses and 3 of them have a limp.

The man at the bar is singing, “I’ll take you home again, Kathleen” to a dog that is sitting in the middle of the stage. Dogs are not allowed in. “That’s no dog,” he says – “that’s me best friend.”

A man at the table behind us is explaining to his mother-in-law how you can send money to Africa on a thing called the YouTube. She has the most permed hair I have seen since... never. Since I was on a church trip to Dun Laoghaire when I was twelve – a few songs and a few good old dances ago.

(And dad’s ghost is up on the stage, waving.)

And you put my sticks down on the floor, and someone pretends to trip over them – “Sure , if we can’t have the fillum, we need a bit of drama,” he says, and is applauded.

Suddenly, they get the sound working – it’s so loud the dog runs amok in terror. John Wayne appears on the screen – and a woman shouts in the audience – “Ah , there’s the Yank” – there are wild cheers of approval when Barry Fitzgerald appears. “Me uncle thatched the cottage personally, you know,” says the guy at the bar – “And never saw a penny for it. That’s Dublin folk for you.”

Suddenly from nowhere – a woman appears centre stage and sings a Donegal lullaby. The man with the dog , cries – and the dog puts his head on his lap.

Then a storyteller tells a ludicrous story about the dangers of drinking too much tea – but as if it is the last story in the world – and the words must be preserved , and are somehow , sacred. No-one in the audience speaks a word while he has finished.

Everyone vows to give up tea – and on the stage dad is shouting over, “Two shillings a pint – that’s a disgrace. Get them in quick – we could be dead tomorrow.”

A banjo player, a fiddler, an accordionist and a guy with a guitar all strike up suddenly a wild, never-ending jig that makes you remember what feet are really for - and a group of young Irish dancers with angelic faces whirl each other round the floor – managing skilfully to avoid the dog. He joins in, anyway .

Then the poets are introduced one-by-one – they step forward like the priest at Easter Sunday mass – and give us all a special blessing.

A woman reads in the Gaelic, and people nod in agreement and order doubles and remember who they have lost – and how, though they will never come back, they will always be dancing in their heart.

(And dad is in full flight, singing full belt to *Danny Boy*.)

And the man's mother-in-law with the deadly perm wakes up and says, "Did I miss anything? Did I so??"

And you go to take a picture of the whole lot of us – only to find that the camera isn't working – it has a touch of the projectionist about it. And from nowhere forty or so people cram onto the stage – and a man with a flash camera like something out of the 1950's steps forward to take all of our photos – "Go forth in Peace and Guinness." "You have my blessings even though you're a bunch of eejuts," says the man at the bar – and Michael O'Flynn turns round (the projectionist) and says – "I'm glad I came back. You're not a bad bunch of eejuts after all."

And the dog takes all of our photographs.

And over on the stage, me dad is dancing.

And its midnight – the other side of midnight outside – if you follow me.

And it's still snowing outside.

But, this is Ireland – so through it all – the sun is shining.