

LIVERPOOL IRISH FESTIVAL

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

Context

The *Liverpool Irish Festival* is one of the largest, cross-disciplined Irish festivals in the country. Sitting as part of a national calendar of cultural activity, the *Liverpool Irish Festival* considers the gamut of Irish culture and the cross-overs developing between disciplines. Ireland's close relationship with Liverpool makes our festival unique as no other city has the same connection with the island of Ireland or demonstrates Irish influence on its fabric quite like Liverpool does. Even the kerbstones and sets of some of our docks are Irish granite, imported from near Newry!

It is estimated that 75% of Liverpudlians are of close Irish descent. The connections between music, port city life, religious, political and social evolutions are echoed in one another's psychosocial development and their music, dance, community groups and architectures share more than a passing resemblance. Indeed, it is understood that Irish influence is partly responsible for the Scouse accent and that there is something in our shared waters when it comes to abundance of creativity issued from our collective shores.

LIF's ability to work with Liverpool, Liverpool Irish and Irish artists and communities means we are unlike other Irish festivals in Britain or around the world, many of which focus primarily on music and/or use St. Patrick's Day as their rallying call. Liverpool's distinctive genealogical, historic and geographical connections distinguishes *LIF* from those celebrated in London, Manchester or Glasgow (or international Irish communities in New York, Milwaukee and Belgrade!) and makes us a 'must visit' occasion for artists, tourism audiences, local communities and Irish commuters, as well as those with no connection, but an interest in one of the most creatively prolific countries in the world, in one of world's greatest cultural hotspots!

Liverpool Irish Festival 2018 and themes

In 2018, the *Liverpool Irish Festival* (aka #LIF2018) will consider 'Migration'. We will think about migration in multiple ways, such as the way philosophies and concepts travel; the transit of peoples, the passing of time and history through stories and the way place is held or informs identity and memory. As a global community, 'Irish' is a complex one. We hope to consider how retaining and gifting identity to future generations, creates new Irish identities. We will use work and ideas which travel. Brought from the Ireland or taken internationally, these works will each show us something of what Ireland's people are talking and thinking about today. In light of the May 2018 referendum, we will consider the 12 women per day who are forced to travel from Ireland to England for abortions; the pills others import from abroad to abort at home; unaided, illegally and with unknown consequence. We would like to consider the mixed migrant story – of multiple nationalities merged in to single family lines; of fusion forms and overlaps forming between cultures; where synergies allow for alignment and shared understandings or where juxtaposition can cause conflict and disassociation.

We have a string of questions to be considered, debated and argued at any given moment:

- How are Irish stories, music, art, theatre and food affected by the migration it has come through?
- How might these stories lead us to new ways of communicating, hearing or seeing our world reflected and how might it taste?
- Does being a migrant instantly make you exotic or does it make you a threat?

- What can we learn from the Irish diaspora's integration in global settings that we could apply to our society today?
- How do we benefit from migration in our choices and day-to-day lives?
- In the 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement, what can migration teach us about tolerance, loving our neighbours and living in a diversity of thought, race and faith?

As a concept for identity, "Irishness" is striking for its multiple and layered meanings, inferences and diasporic nature. Away from the popularised shamrocks and leprechauns is similarly misleading global recognition of an Emerald Isle, abundant with countryside and agrarian workers, tilling the land and playing fiddles in to the early hours. Yet what of the 'metropolis' and major conurbations? More questions emerge.

- What of the *Google* and *Apple* headquarters ad pillars of commerce? Of the big business and digital futures projects?
- What of the mixed, progressive histories of its settlers and the inward, global influence on its music, literature, dances and character?
- What of its contemporary life as an island of 4 million, with a global neighbourhood of another 44 million (registered – it's projected that up to 70 million can claim Irish status)?
- What of its Peace Process (almost 20 years on) and its developing gender and sexual rights tolerance versus entrenched rights systems?
- As the United Kingdom rolls towards 'Brexit' and the political and geographic conclusions are determined, what can we learn from the Irish story about migration and division?
- How will an altered diaspora continue to share culture, history and art?
- How do the islanders and the diaspora combine to create 'Irishness'?
- With more people than ever claiming their Irishness in order to remain a part of Europe, how will traditional Irish values alter to adapt to the contemporary world?

Liverpool voted to remain in the European Union. With so many Liverpudlians being of close Irish descent, how does Brexit affect them and the city? Having potentially closer ties with Ireland than with neighbouring Manchester and a distinct and profound – publicly recognised and celebrated - belief in itself as a European – not a British – city, how do we engage in the debate? Will President Trump's term of office affect Irish Americans and with space on the island of Ireland at a premium, will Liverpool become a migrant home for the international Irish on the move?

Such political tide-changes are re-contextualising understandings of migration, unity and diaspora. *LIF2017* provided a resonant moment to discuss 'Irishness' within a context of deep familial and emotional connection, but with a geographical distance that no other cities share with the island. *LIF2018* intends to interrogate and share stories that reflect upon multiple, complex and often juxtaposed histories that - combined - build a picture of modern Irishness, helping to tell the story of the island, thus potentially mirroring migration stories from around the world and helping us understand what 'Irishness' means today. By providing safe spaces, *LIF2018* opens access to diverse responses and difficult discourse.

Collaborating with our partners we will engage audiences, new and old, via a nexus of energy and promotion, culminating in events, exhibits, talks, storytelling, Q&As, writing, workshops and more to form *Liverpool Irish Festival 2018*.

HOW DO YOU GET INVOLVED?

If you have an idea for the *Liverpool Irish Festival*, we would love to hear from you, but before you say "I want..", "I'm Irish..." or "I have an idea...", we will need answers to all of the following questions.

What do you need from the festival to realise your idea?

Funds and space: We are publicly funded and consequently anything we pay for must be for the public good and not a commercial endeavour. So if it is money, we will need to see a draft budget and how much of it you expect LIF to provide you with. You will need to be prepared for us to need to venture in to a joint fundraising programme, because our funds are limited and as a charity we will not fund a commercial enterprise. Ideas that pay for themselves are great, but they will still need to meet the challenges of the theme and we will still want to see how it will work, along with the other conditions below. As a venueless organisation, we will need to work in partnership with our friends, colleagues and city venues to find programme space. Don't just assume we can do this. If you need us to find you a venue tell us.

We will need to understand if you expect us to pay and/or split:

- Artist fees
- Travel accommodation
- Per diems
- Materials
- Ticket income
- Technical fees and staffing

...and, if so, whether you will contribute anything to *LIF*.

Who is it for and how many people? You need to tell us how many people you think will engage with your work. If you are putting on a gig or performance, how many people would your work most suit? We're not just looking to engage the most people, we want to understand what scale of event you are proposing and how the audience is affected by the nature of the work. We also need to understand whether it is appropriate for all ages or whether there is a guidance rating for the work. We're not expecting official ratings, but an understanding of the main audience for your work may help us locate the right space, time and support system for it. If it has challenging content, don't hang back from telling us – we are interested in taking risk, but want to support the work accordingly. If it is not – or is wholly - appropriate for children, please state as much.

If you have ordinarily ticketed your events, please tell us what price you have ticketed at, where and when. The festival really wants to work with content that has not been shown locally or – at least- in close (time) proximity to the festival.

How does the work tie to the theme? Content is the supreme ruler! We believe we have provided a broad, but interesting and resonant brief. We need to know how you aim to respond to or meet it – tell us how you will or think you already do. It might not be obvious (it doesn't have to be), but in order for us to situate your work, draw it in to thematic strands of *#LIF2018* and truly collaborate with you, it is important you tell us. Expect us to be thinking about how we can introduce you to other artists and anchor work together that shares subject matter or offers counter ideas.

LIF is not just a badging exercise to assist with promotions. It is a producing festival that commits to taking risk, bringing new content to audiences and dynamising interest in Irish contemporary practice, whilst celebrating tradition. We are keen to create narratives that draw people in to your work, so thinking about stories that could be issued in advance of the work such as photo journals and social media stories, that bring audiences closer and drive conversation about aspects of your work, are really important to us.

What else can we do with you to generate additional interest? Ideas might include: short films, rehearsal diaries, journals, tour essays, photo stories, podcasts and interviews, Q&As following or during your

performance or exhibition... We don't just put things on – we want to drive conversation, tell stories and create interactions with the work. How do you help us via the theme or this additional content?

What kind of technical set up/support will you require? Will you be bringing this with you and does it form part of the overall fee? If not, what will you need and who do you expect to secure and pay for the services? How is it built in to the overall budget and profit split?

Do you know us? The *Liverpool Irish Festival* has existed since 2003. Our team has changed over 15 years of life. Please tell us if you have worked with us before, in what capacity and when (roughly). We hope to carry stories forward, but we are not all knowing, so may need your help with this. It's not senility – honest – but changes to our Board, leadership and structure mean we may need you to remind us!

WHAT NOW?

The vision is more important than the approach. Whilst we will need to establish all of the above, the most important part of your proposal is the vision and core ideals. It doesn't have to look good or have everything dotted and crossed. Your approach need only be informal and email based initially. Please don't spend time or money on expensive layouts, elaborate R&D or 'smoke blowing'. A great idea, with an understanding of its needs may take us some time to execute, but it will be heard and if we believe it has merit and can provide audiences with interesting content, we will want to work with you to execute it. Be professional, but don't let fear, complexity or money stand in the way of a good vision.

Ready? So, you've got all your answers and bucked yourself up to submit your idea? Great. Send it to info@liverpoolirishfestival.com Please note that outside festival delivery, *LIF* only runs a small, part-time team and it may take a little while to come back to you. Please be patient – we will do what we can to reply as quickly as we can.