

SOUNDING OUT... CORK

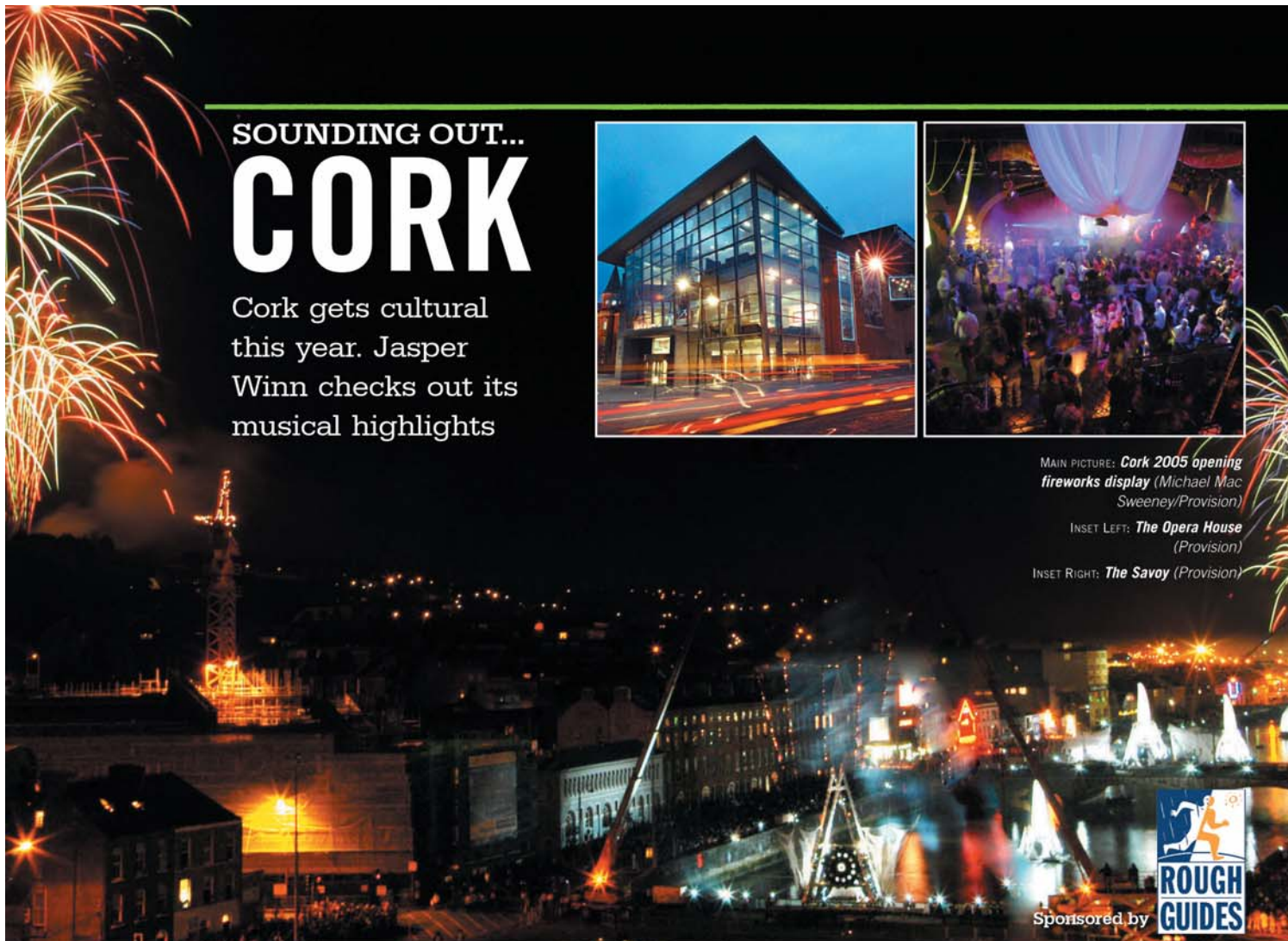
Cork gets cultural this year. Jasper Winn checks out its musical highlights



MAIN PICTURE: *Cork 2005 opening fireworks display* (Michael Mac Sweeney/Provision)

INSET LEFT: *The Opera House* (Provision)

INSET RIGHT: *The Savoy* (Provision)



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Second cities are like younger brothers – smaller, cocky and spoilt. So that's how Cork, a sixth the size of Dublin, ended up as European City of Culture 2005. By punching above its weight, mainly. There was a bit of a last minute scramble to get the show on the road. The streets were mostly waterfilled ditches in the process of being transformed into state of the art urban landscape up to January. And befitting its Irish tagline – Rebel Cork – the city's official culture committee was soon under attack from alternative city of culture visionaries flying under the banner of 'Where's me Culture', and owing some allegiance to the established and creatively zany People's Republic of Cork.

For a small city, Corkonians or Corkers (both words are in vogue – though with the name *Corcaigh* in Irish meaning a wet, marshy place, there's a case for calling them Marshians) are intensely tribal. Accents – the most beautiful in the world thought Anthony Burgess – and slang identify areas and even individual streets. Yet Cork is also eclectic and cosmopolitan. It has to be. There's rarely enough of a single strand of culture to go around. If one's whole life was opera, Cork wouldn't be the best place to

live. But even if one lives for traditional music there would be some slim seasons. So Corkettes are experts on everything. One meets people at a Norwegian free-form jazz recital one night, at a hardcore traditional session the following night, and dancing to Cork's own Sangre Latino band the next. And they'll have a strong opinion on every one of the musical forms.

Cork loves its culture. It owns it. And it gets angry about it. When Sir Henry's – a venue that gave a stage to John Martyn as a regular, Nirvana, and then turned into a black lightproof box for the brief summer when Cork became the clubbers' Mecca as a sort of Ibiza with rain – was pulled down for redevelopment, there were close to riots. And the arguments about how Cork should approach its 12 months as European City of Culture have been nearly as passionate. And divisive.

But the general agreement in the city is that, though the city council are making a mess of the roads, and there isn't enough money for things that really matter like accordion workshops, or celebrating Cork heroes (though Rory Gallagher does get an exhibition), at least there's one thing: Cork is making a better job of it than anywhere else. Dublin wouldn't have a pig's notion of how

to run a festival. The capital of Ireland, for fecks'ake, only has one brewery, but the second city has Beamish and Murphys. Fair play to Cork, it'll be a grand year and a bit of *craic*.

YEAR OF CULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

You might come for the music but as a bonus you get the World Road Bowling Championship, too; the Ocean to the City river race matches oar and paddle powered craft against each other in the heart of the city. And, in June, there's an unmissable Corcadorca production of *The Merchant of Venice*, which transforms the streets of the city and the quays along the River Lee into a 'promenade theatre' for its ambulatory audience.

The programme of specific music events during this Year of Culture is as inventive. On May 6 the Cork Opera House will host the world premiere of *Daughters of Albion* – a special concert celebrating English song, featuring some of England's best-known traditional female singers including June Tabor, Eliza Carthy, Norma Waterson and Kathryn Williams.

July has *Soul of the Mountains* reflecting the 'twisted heart of American roots music'.

Cork has long had a love affair with country, bluegrass and new country and even the purest session in Cork allows a certain amount of Americana. This series of concerts acknowledges the kind of music which Cork groups like Any Old Time, Two-Time Polka and Prince's Street have made their own.

The Irish Voice traces Ireland's musical heritage from the raw bar of the pure tradition to the new and vital 'Other Voices' of 2005. In a similar vein TG4's *Gradam Ceoil* (Traditional Irish Music Awards) 2005 takes over the Opera House on November 12.

Two offbeat musical events are a visit by the Shanghai Percussion Ensemble and a November programme of concerts celebrating five centuries of Spanish guitar.

See www.Cork2005.ie for more details about all these events.

The alternative Where's Me Culture festival has its *WMC?* magazine available, and a website on www.wheresmeculture.com. Whilst the People's Republic of Cork do something very similar and also sell must-have People's Republic of Cork T-shirts (spotted as far afield as Bishkek, Tasmania and Buenos Aires so far). See website www.peoplesrepublicofcork.com



The Lobby Bar: a Cork institution (Pat Conway)

The Opera House Biggest dedicated venue in the city: the sort of sit-down place that Van Morrison plays (Emmet Place, +353 21 427 4308, www.corkoperahouse.ie).

The Everyman Theatre Looser than The Opera House and has interesting late night gigs with an adjoining bar (15 MacCurtain Street, +353 21 450 1673, www.everymanpalace.com).

The Savoy Newly reopened – a vintage cinema turned into a multi-stage gigdrome that is the alternative music venue of size (Patrick's Street, +353 21 425 1419, www.savoycork.com).



Drinkers in An Spailpín Fánach (Provision)



Cork Jazz Festival 2005

LISTINGS

Whazon produces a weekly single sheet colour flier, found in shops and pubs that lists most of the city's events and entertainment (www.whazon.com).

The Evening Echo Cork's own paper covers events in less breadth but usually more depth (www.eecho.ie).

Hot Press Dublin-based music magazine that gives the odd nod to acknowledging cultural life beyond the pale (www.hotpress.com).

VENUES

The Lobby Bar A Cork institution that has supported live music for years and given a platform to developing local talent as well as bringing one of the most eclectic gig lists to a small city. Everyone from Andy Irvine to Japanese folk punk girl bands have played the tiny upstairs venue, and regular traditional sessions keeping the balance in the downstairs bar. The Lobby has started the year of culture with a licensing problem which has kept its doors closed for two months, but should be making a return to Cork's cultural scene by the time you read this (1 Union Quay, +353 21 431 1113, www.lobby.ie).

PUBS

Recommending Cork pubs – and even sessions – is a futile exercise; the Cork way is to stroll around, meet up with people, see what happens and wherever you end up that night is the right place. But as an exercise in futility one could list the following:

Charlie's Monday night sessions with Cork legends Ray and Hank (1 Union Quay, +353 21 496 5272).

The Mutton Lane Inn (3 Mutton Lane, off Patrick's Street, +353 21 427 3471).

Sin É Tuesdays for trad sessions (Coburg Street, +353 21 450 2266).

The Corner House Tuesdays for trad sessions (Coburg Street, +353 21 450 0655).

The Phoenix The inimitable Jimmy Crowley (balladeer, pamphleteer, songwriter and repository of historic tunes and ballads) holds court (Union Quay, +353 21 496 5275).

Aoife Landers Traditional music and dancing (5/6 Oliver Plunkett Street, +353 21 427 4712).

An Spailpín Fánach Has trad sessions on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturday (28 South Main Street, +353 21 427 7949).

FESTIVALS

Cork's industry of annual festivals – virtually one a month – has been beefed up by City of Culture status and funding.

The International Folk Dance Festival (August 17-21) draws hoofers and swirlers from all over the new, enlarged Europe and from a fair few Mediterranean islands as well as from more local areas.

The annual **Beamish Folk Festival** (September 2-11) this year includes regular visitors Márta Sebestyén and Muzsikás, the Galician piper Carlos Nuñez, more pipes from Liam O'Flynn's band, La Bottine Souriante and Eddi Reader. Locals include North Gregg (box, fiddle, guitar and voice sextet worthy of headlining), Altan and Sliabh Notes. (www.corkfolkfestival.com)

The Guinness Jazz Festival (October 28-31) is headed by McCoy Tyner, and there is the inevitable Norwegian duo, Terje Rypdal and Ketil Bjornstad 'doing' the kind of jazz that has become close to a folk music in Scandinavia. More fun might be had in the jazz trail of pubs that invariably go for good time swing, stomp and rhythm and blues. (www.corkjazzfestival.com)

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