

IN ANOTHER LIFE

Killing mice for a living was my debut on 42nd Street

Tenor Ronan Tynan talks about his life in New York in the 1980s, where he enjoyed wild weekends with Irish expats, judged the Rose of Tralee beauty contest, got top dollar from a mundane job and, oh, didn't really sing that much

Back in 1984, when I was 24, I was in New York competing in the Summer Paralympics [at age 20, Tynan's legs were amputated below the knee after a car crash]. When I came home to Ireland, I got the US-J-1 working holiday visa and decided to go back to America. I found a job in the WR Grace Building on 42nd Street, New York. My job was to shred documents, many of which were confidential. They trusted me with their secrets and, of course, I never looked at any document. I had no interest. I think they just trusted me because I was Irish. My other job was to set mousetraps. I had to wear the uniform for a general operative, which was dark green overalls. Each floor had its own operatives and I was assigned to a floor with two lads from the Dominican Republic and one from Puerto Rico. A beggar couldn't be a chooser, so when they gave me the mousetrap job, I took it. Most of the other operatives didn't want to do that work because it meant they would have to set traps after everyone else had gone home. I'd set the traps from 6pm to 8pm, then I had to come in at 5am to collect the traps I had set the night before. They had an awful way of killing mice. The traps were glue traps, so the animals

Tynan, right, worked at the WR Grace Building on 42nd Street, below, as a paper shredder and mousetrap setter when he was in his twenties



“Every morning the traps were full. There would be 30 or 40 of them – it was a huge building

struggled to death: it is a cruel way of doing it. There was no bait – maybe the glue looked like cheese – and the poor unfortunates ended up walking on the glue. The staff used to get panicked and say: “oh no, oh no” and I'd say, “the poor little critters”. I don't know if such traps are still legal; I don't think they are. Every morning the traps were full. There would be 30 or 40 of them, as it was such a huge building. They had an incinerator, and everything had to be burnt. I did the job for three months for the sum of \$600 a week. That was huge. It paid for my education – I was doing PE at Thomond College in Limerick – and anything extra. In New York, I lived in Oceanside, Long Island, with a policeman's family. My friends were all firemen and policemen. Weekends were wild. I met up with other Irish people and we'd have a bit of fun, the usual. I did very little singing then – that wasn't my era of singing. We'd go to festivals and pubs and have great dinners, and go to trad sessions in Queens. I attended selection night for the New York Rose of Tralee – I was one of the judges to pick her. While I was in New York, I took what they call the graduate record exam as I was thinking of doing a postgraduate after college. I applied to Columbia University to study for a post-grad in physical therapy; I did well and told my father that I had “good and bad news”. I said: “The good news is I got in and the bad news is that it is going to cost \$20,000.” He replied: “You won't be going there, Ronan.” That was fine. It was 1984 – who paid \$20,000 for an education then? I had to finish my degree, so I came back home to Ireland. I didn't go back to America until 1998. When I worked on 42nd Street, it wasn't a very savoury place to be at night, but by the late 1990s, things were different. And by then, my singing career had begun.

Ronan Tynan will perform at The Quad at University College Cork on Saturday July 15; summeronquad.ucc.ie Interview by Yvonne Gordon

INSIDE SUNDAY THIS WEEK



Comic Eleanor Tiernan, above, on why she's a born spender

5

Clíodhna Prendergast prepares salmon two ways

10

Visit the Normandy landings

15



Dan Tani, above, spent 132 days in space

27

COVER IMAGE: CLÍODHNA PRENDERGAST

THIS WEEK WHY NOT



LET THE KIDS GET YOU PIE-EYED IN THE SQUARE

Merrion Square in Dublin will be full of spandex-clad street performers next weekend for the Laya Healthcare City Spectacular. The free festival, which runs over three days, features family activities such as Kids' Court, where a custard pie or bucket of water in the face is fair punishment for parents in the

dock. Dustin the Turkey, left, will host a “bird brain quiz” and visitors can bring their hounds to the Scruffs Dog Show. Young minds will also love tucking in to the brain food that is Imaginosity's interactive science show. The event moves to Cork for the following weekend (July 15-16) cityspectacular.com



SWAN OVER TO CLONMEL FOR A RIVERBANK BALLET

Embrace the avant garde at the Clonmel Junction Festival, which starts in Co Tipperary tomorrow. The week-long arts and culture gathering on the banks of the River Suir combines music and theatre with dance, visual arts, film screenings, street performance and food. Ancient and modern Ireland will meet in Michael

Keegan Dolan's production of Swan Lake, and there's music from Crash Ensemble, trad duo Martin Hayes and David Power, British act This is the Kit, and Cavan singer-songwriter Aine Cahill, left. Younger visitors can attend Lego workshops or go on a fairy trail at Plum Orchard farm. junctionfestival.com



CELEBRATE THE PAST WITH GLITTER AND FACE PAINT

About 200,000 visitors are expected at Ballina Salmon Festival in Co Mayo. Starting next Sunday, the eight-day event has been a highlight of the summer for more than 50 years. Much of the action takes place on the River Moy, but there are also land-based art exhibitions, walking tours, and busking

competitions. National Heritage Day is a day-long street party in which the town celebrates the skills and crafts of the past. The climax of the festivities is the Mardi Gras street party, left, a riot of noise and colour followed by a fireworks display on the river. ballina salmonfestival.ie



ROLL UP FOR CIRCUS AND TALES OF TEENAGE KICKS

Enjoy two weeks of music, film, theatre and visual arts at the Earagail Arts Festival in Co Donegal. The fun begins on Tuesday in venues ranging from village halls and galleries to forests and beaches. Enjoy adrenaline-filled fun from Guido Fanzini's Impossible Circus, featuring Con Horgan and Denis Butler, left,

better known as street performers the Fanzini Brothers, and the acrobats of Circus Raj. The island of Arranmore will host its own two-day mini music festival, while Michael Bradley will give a warts-and-all account of his days in punk rock band The Undertones. Runs until July 23. eaf.ie