

Dear Poetry Lovers,

Every year around this time, audiences gather in a small theater space in Hell's Kitchen to listen to and enjoy the company of terrific poets from Ireland and the U.S. This is Irish Arts Center PoetryFest, which Aengus and I have had the pleasure of putting together for the past seven years now. PoetryFest came about during a conversation in a Brooklyn back garden with Aidan Connolly, Executive Director of the Irish Arts Center; Aengus and I had just returned from a trip to Dublin, for the international poetry festival I ran there for a number of years, and, hearing about that festival's pleasures and about how many brilliant voices it had presented, Aidan said -- as Aidan so often does - why not make something that great happen here? Why not a dedicated poetry festival at the Irish Arts Center? He and his team, most of all Director of Programming and Education Rachael Gilkey, worked with us to make it happen, and in 2009, the first IAC PoetryFest took place.

Back then, it was a one-day event focused exclusively on Irish poets. It's now a weekend-long festival bringing together poets from both sides of the Atlantic for a series of readings, panel discussions and good old-fashioned conviviality; the atmosphere of PoetryFest is one of the things we love most about it, although we're pretty delighted, too, about the amazing caliber of the poets we've been able to present to audiences, and to place in conversation with one another, over the years: Irish poets including John Montague, Thomas Kinsella, Paula Meehan, Sinead Morrissey, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Vona Groarke, Nick Laird and Leanne O'Sullivan, and North American poets including Gerald Stern, the late CK Williams, Robert Pinsky, Anne Carson, Mark Doty, Kevin Young, Meghan O'Rourke and Adam Fitzgerald, to mention just a few. For us, the festival is about the chemistry between these voices; about the many conversations which have long been going on, consciously and unconsciously, between Irish and US poetry. They just work together, and every year in new and ever richer ways. And they have fun together, too.

We think it's New York's best kept literary secret, but we would say that. This year, we're happy to welcome onboard our new partners; *Stonecutter Journal*, who've curated the emerging poets slot (featuring Connie Roberts, Wendy Xu, Elaine Feeney and Lucy Ives), and Literary Hub, who'll be presenting lots of juicy PoetryFest content on their site in the weeks ahead. Also flying from over yonder will be Ciaran Carson, Kerry Hardie, Alan Gillis and Leontia Flynn, as well as this year's winner of the Seamus Heaney Prize for Poetry, Fiona Benson, and joining them from these parts will be Vijay Seshadri, Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Alicia Ostriker and Tracy K Smith. As well as listening to them read, we'll be talking favorite Irish poems, the Yeats anniversary (he turned 150 this summer, and doesn't he look well on it?) and whatever else comes to mind. We hope you'll join us. There are no hierarchies at PoetryFest; all weekend, the readers mingle with the audiences in the intimate theater and lounge areas of the Irish Arts Center. Soon we'll be moving to a bigger space, as the new Irish Arts Center building becomes a reality, but we don't think the special PoetryFest atmosphere will go anywhere. That's stamped into its DNA.

All the best,

Belinda McKeon and Aengus Woods