

## Why **OUTSIDE MULLINGAR?** [2014 Tony Award Nominee for Best Play]

by David Ceccarini

It was nearly five years ago that I learned of this delightful play, which premiered at the Manhattan Theatre Club in January of 2014. Upon my first reading, I was enchanted by John Patrick Shanley's loving portrayal of his fictional, but quite probable, Irish kinfolk.

Up until *MULLINGAR*, Shanley had avoided his Irishness: he found a knack for writing about Italian Americans. He grew up in the Bronx, in close proximity to tough Italian neighborhoods, which led him to write *ITALIAN AMERICAN RECONCILIATION* (Next Act, 1992) and his Oscar winning screenplay for the hit movie *Moonstruck*.

### HOME TURF

Finally, though, in 1993, Shanley's father asked to be taken back to his boyhood home in the Irish midlands, near Mullingar in County Westmeath. The farmstead and Shanley's old-country relatives left a deep impression on the writer which was to germinate nearly ten years later in a new play. As Shanley himself recalls:

*"The farm had become a place in my imagination where I had stored up so many things. My*



John Patrick Shanley

*love for my father was there. Feelings of grief. My romantic hunger, my frustration with this unpoetic world. I had held back much for a long time, and I kind of erupted with language. I felt free suddenly, free to be Irish. Family stories, family names, changed by dreaming, mixed with my own longings for love, and impossible happiness unfurled across the page. I had turned 60, and the knife at my throat woke me to the beauty of my own people, the fleeting opportunities of life, the farce of caution. I wanted to write a love story. I wanted to find all the words I had not been able to find because what I have been*

*unable to express has caused me anguish, even as what I have given adequate voice has lent me peace."*

### THE IRISH VOICE

A few years ago, I had the pleasure to adjudicate the Irish Arts Theatre Festival (with partner Mark Ulrich), held at Next Act, and what a treat it was to hear the Irish storytelling bursting forth from those nine fascinating plays. We were met with the occasional challenge in deciphering the thicker, urban accents of Belfast, Dublin or Londonderry. But never fear; *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*'s characters are direct, country people. Their language is open, accessible and poetic, it's lyrical and flowing, with clear definition and phrase after clever phrase of witty delight. Shanley has written from within his Irish roots yet kept the storytelling lively and clear for the American ear.

How *MULLINGAR* has charmed me lies in all that Shanley says above: it's certainly a tale of love

*Continued, page 3*

### Inside This Issue

Summer in Door County	2
Back by Popular Demand	3
Old Meets New	4
Images from Ireland	6
It's Time You Got to Know	7



Irish Midlands

I had the pleasure to work at Door Shakespeare this summer, acting in *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS* and *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*, playing Benedick opposite my wife Deborah Staples' lovely Beatrice. Here are some entries from my virtual diary.



Photo: Heidi Hodges

Beatrice & Benedick Square Off

**Shakespeare belongs outside as much as possible.**

Human beings have been telling each other stories long before the written word was concocted, and their venues have been around campfires, in the woods, on a butte, within protective caves, or under a grand and holy tree. In the case of Door Shakes, this last was our lot. We worked and played under the loving arms of a double-trunked, massively-mature and beautifully-canopied maple firmly rooted in Björklunden (birch woods), a rustic estate on the Lake Michigan shore, bequeathed to Lawrence University. Costumes, simple props, some platforming, stairs and wood chips are more than enough to make Shakespeare spring alive for anyone ready to listen awhile. Oh yes, plus some intrepid, inventive, intelligent, insightful and indefatigable actors to say all those wonderful words!

**The Bicycle is a really smart and simple, efficient and healthy mode of transit.**

There are some busy, if slow-moving, highways in Door County. Just how fast can a monstrous motor home with extra car in tow really go on a two-lane road? However, there are lots of inside roads, county highways and smaller, that offered good cycling. Challenging hills, open straight-aways, and the sights, smells and sounds of nature that immerse the bike traveler but can't penetrate a fast-moving car. Given the bike lanes being added to roads all over this country, it seems that the humble bicycle is getting a second look. In good time.

**Having the natural world as the primary work space has few drawbacks and many benefits.**

In rehearsal, one usually agonizes over choices, or time, or memorization, or other crazy things that

seem important at the moment. But then, you're outside, the air is fresh, the bugs restrained, Lake Michigan lapping nearby, and your wife looks lovely in the brilliant light of our fireball star, Sol: that's when you ask, "How bad can it be?" We leave nature behind at our peril.

**Working with my wife, Deborah Staples, is both challenging and rewarding.**

We drove the 11 miles to rehearsal, together, most every morning, and returned in the evenings, together. Sometimes we talked about the play, the work, and how we thought things were going. Other times, we looked for the sandhill cranes, or deer, or coyotes who occasionally revealed themselves. When the shows are up and running, Deborah doesn't stop working; she looks for different and better ways to tell the story. So, the challenge comes in keeping up with her pace, and allowing her vision to affect mine. Sometimes, I was successful. Sometimes, she needed extra patience. Bless her for her extra.

**It's kind of frightening to see how much my children like ice cream and frozen custard.**

Sure, we can usually find a Culvers or swing by Leon's or Kopp's in Milwaukee, but they've got nothing on Not Licked Yet restaurant and custard stand in Fish Creek. The butter pecan was luscious and appropriately nutty, and they touted many exotic dessert creations, all pleasantly served by a cheery bunch of Romanian young people, on work visas (lots of summer work for teens up in Door). And in the unexpectedly cool summer air, their outdoor heaters were a welcome amenity for Deborah and my visiting sister, Lois.

**Watching the construction of a brand new theatre space is always exciting.**

At the junction of County Highways A and F, Northern Sky Theatre (formerly American Folklore, originally Heritage) has begun construction of a

*Continued, page 7*



The Stage at Björklunden

**HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART returns by popular demand**

The Connecticut Disco King



Photo: Ross Zentner

After a successful spring run, Next Act, Anthony Crivello and Steve Scionti will team up once again this October to remount *HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART: An Italian Shoemaker's Tale*.

*HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART* celebrates Steve Scionti's beloved grandfather, Angelo Morello, with all the passion and humor that's part of most any Sicilian-American family. Scionti paints a loving family portrait by transforming himself into a dazzling array of relatives and friends - including his two shady uncles and the crazy pizza guy. This funny and touching story of Steve's journey into adulthood will move you to laughter and touch your heart.



Steve Scionti as Jerry the Pizza Guy

Photo: Ross Zentner

The audience this spring fell in love with Steve and his family - not to mention his sexy disco moves!

*"This play, like all the others this season, was amazing. What really surprised me is how versatile and energetic the [actor] was throughout the entire 80 minutes. What a creative way to give a tribute to one's grandfather all from the heart."*

*"The actor was tremendous and the story very well told."*

*"The show was wonderful. I am a second generation Sicilian American and I recognized a lot of my own history in this show. Extremely well done."*

*HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART: An Italian Shoemaker's Tale* runs October 24 - 28, 2018. Tickets are \$33 (all fees included). For more information about the show, including a behind-the-scenes video, visit [nextact.org/special-presentations/heart/](http://nextact.org/special-presentations/heart/).

**HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART: An Italian Shoemaker's Tale**

By Steve Scionti & James Shanta | Directed by Anthony Crivello

Wednesday, October 24 • 7:30 PM (Preview)

Thursday, October 25 • 7:30 PM

Friday, October 26 • 7:30 PM

Saturday, October 27 • 4:30 & 8:00 PM

Sunday, October 28 • 2:00 PM

*WHY MULLINGAR, continued*

and a shout against caution and fear. There's also the writer's authenticity at work - of character, of language, and of the human conditions which compel Anthony and Rosemary, two lonely people, to risk the loss of themselves for a final chance at happiness. Shanley compels us to root for their success, and we are more than happy to oblige.

This production finds itself in the capable hands of longtime Next Act collaborator, Edward Morgan, who may tell you that Irish plays are his favorite thing. As a director, Morgan is passionate about storytelling, and clarity with engagement remains his theatrical hallmark. He'll have good help from

stage veterans James Pickering as wily old Tony, Carrie Hitchcock as his longtime neighbor Aoife (EE-fa), and Deborah Staples as her daughter Rosemary, who has lived next to Anthony her whole life. It will be my privilege to join this marvelous group to play Anthony, the middle-aged, myopic farmer who needs a swift kick in the trousers to wake up to the world around him.

We can't wait to share this rich, subtle and humorous tale of rustic longing and hard-won love with you. See you at the theatre!



**Rosemary:** I was down at the bog cutting turf and the heather is everywhere.

**Anthony:** Cutting your own turf?

**Rosemary:** Who else?

**Anthony:** That's a two-man job.

**Rosemary:** Or one-woman.

In our play, *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*, Rosemary mentions "cutting turf." The Irish turf, or peat, or moss is found in peatlands, bogs, mires, moors, or muskegs bogs. These are interchangeable names for the wetland peat bogs found across the world (even in Wisconsin), but most prominently in Ireland. Peat – also known as turf – is a spongy, earth-like material which the Irish have harvested for centuries as an important source of heating and cooking fuel.

Before mechanized agriculture, peat was harvested by hand. Often, in the spring, teams of men or entire families would venture out to the bogs to harvest their peat supply for the year. The process is laborious. First, the top layer of sod must be stripped, or "pared" away. These parings were often used for



the underside building material of thatched roofs on barns and homes. Then, by layers, the peat was scooped up in brick-like form using specially-shaped tools. These moist peat bricks were then spread out on the land to dry, and then some days later were loaded into wagons and taken home for the year's fuel supply.

One peat brick will burn for approximately an hour. The burning bricks generate more carbon dioxide than coal, but contain only about 1/3 the heating value. However, they burn rather efficiently, leaving only a fine white ash behind.

Peat is generated over thousands of years through the accumulation of partially decayed vegetation or organic matter in acidic wetlands. It is, technically, a fossil fuel, containing combustible carbon, though some classify peat as a "slow-renewable" fuel (regenerating at just one millimeter per year is, indeed, slow). From just below sod level, the peat deposits run from 5 to 7.5 feet in depth. Peat has been used as fuel for electric power in Russia, Finland and still today, in Ireland. These days, it is commercially harvested on a massive scale, using huge 10-tire tractors to dredge the peat up from below, and then form it into long "sausages" which will be dried and cut into bricks.



A European Union ban on cutting turf in designated conservation areas has rankled many Irish in the countryside, resulting in outright defiance of the law. Turf-cutting campaigners say the European Commission is destroying part of traditional rural Irish life and interfering with property rights. A compromise has been issued that may allow both concerns to be addressed.

Meanwhile, just *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*, Rosemary Muldoon and Anthony Reilly continue their turf harvesting and burning, more likely out of the need to augment their energy supply rather than to uphold a centuries old tradition.



**THE CELTIC TIGER**

**Rosemary:** Don't even joke about the rope and the suicide with half the country hanging from the trees and bridges.

**Anthony:** It's me joking, that's all.

**Rosemary:** It's not funny, with the Celtic Tiger belly up and people leaping off castles and cliffs.

The Celtic Tiger period in Ireland, roughly 1996-2006, has also been called "The Boom" or "Ireland's Economic Miracle". During this time, the country experienced a period of economic growth, transforming it from one of Western Europe's poorer countries into one of its wealthiest. The causes of Ireland's growth are numerous, but may arguably be attributed to a combination of factors: state-driven economic development, social partnership among employers, government and trade unions, more women in the labor force, investment in domestic higher education, foreign investment, a low corporate tax rate, an English-speaking workforce, and membership in the European Union, which provided transfer payments and export access to the Single Market.

However, it did not last long. By mid-2007, in the wake of the growing global financial crisis, the Celtic Tiger had all but died. Some have accused the Irish government of mismanaging economic conditions – over-spending and over-promising – as a major cause for decline. Ireland was also subject to the same conditions which brought financial collapse to much of the globe: low interest rates, over-heated housing markets and rampant speculation in risky financial instruments. Said one critic, "The entire Irish episode will be studied internationally in years to come as an example of how not to do things."

One interesting, if tragic, effect of Ireland's rapid expansion was an increase in suicides, primarily among its young people. Intuitively, one might

think this was caused by rapidly increasing unemployment rates during economic decline, but a statistical analysis suggested that the increased expectation for success felt by young people, along with an uncoupling from traditional values, generated debilitating stress and drastic reaction.

In *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*, Rosemary and Anthony are wrestling with a changing Ireland, and also a recent loss in each of their families. Faced with uncertainty that comes with change and middle age, they find they may have common ground that will help them weather the storm of modern pressures bearing down on a vanishing way of life. Their story is not unlike what many Americans in our rural areas or blighted labor markets are enduring. Commercial-scale enterprise and world-wide markets have the power to swallow up tradition and dislodge people from their roots. John Patrick Shanley's *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR* reaches out a sympathetic hand to touch people like Rosemary and Anthony, and encourage them to find their way through.



Mullingar, County Westmeath

**Ancestral ties to the land** is a strong theme throughout Irish literature and central to the generational drama in John Patrick Shanley's *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*. The drama of the Irish landscape is beautifully captured in the rich, black and white photographs of local photographer Fred Fischer, our featured lobby gallery artist for this season's first production.



Fred has traveled to many countries, including a number of trips to Ireland where he primarily used infrared black and white film to capture his images. Infrared is a spectrum of light that we cannot see and he loved the idea of capturing that invisible world, but since light meters are not sensitive to



infrared he needed to learn to trust his instincts for exposure. Fred has good instincts. His photographs are stunning.

In a world where we are inundated with over-saturated, hyper-realistic colorful images, Fred's stark use of black and white forces us to look closer at the detail; to feel more intensely a personal sense of place too often missing in the glossy travelogue brochures. His photographs perfectly set the scene for *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*.

To learn more about Fred and to view examples of his extensive, eclectic portfolio, please visit his website at [www.ffischerphoto.com](http://www.ffischerphoto.com).

...some of our newest additions to the **Next Act Board of Directors**. We are blessed and very grateful to have a Board full of passion and enthusiasm for the art of live theatre. We'd like to introduce you to a few of the people that volunteer their time, talent and treasure to support and govern this organization and its mission.

**TOM GAUTHIER**



Tom has a tremendous passion for theatre; he attends about 40 theatre performances each year, and says Next Act is his favorite theatre company. He also brings an equally great amount of experience to his service on the Next Act Board. After 26 years at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Tom has worked in the nonprofit community since

1995. He founded and operates Adonai Employment, Inc., a nonprofit agency that makes a difference by helping individuals living with disabilities prepare for employment and matching them with employers in a mutually beneficial way. Tom is an alumnus of the UWM School of Letters and Science Honors Program, and has generously given his time to a number of nonprofits, including as Secretary of ABLE (Audio and Braille Literacy Enhancement), and as President of the Boulevard Theatre. Tom is also a member of the WUWM-Milwaukee Public Radio Advisory Board, and is Treasurer of the Greater Milwaukee Synod - ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

**KELSEY LAWLER**



Kelsey is a copywriter by day and zealot for local theater by night. She earned her BA in Writing Intensive English from Marquette University in 2009, and has been working as an editor, creative & freelance writer and blogger ever since. Kelsey is thrilled to be doing her part to spread the word about Milwaukee's vibrant performing arts scene.

**DANIEL P. MURRAY**

An avid theatre fan with a daughter who is a working actor, Dan brings both passion and professional talent to the Next Act Board. Dan owns and operates Broadway Law Offices in Waukesha, and has served as Court Commissioner in Waukesha County for over two decades. An alumnus of both UW-Madison and Milwaukee, Dan knows southeast Wisconsin very well. He's already rolled up his legal sleeves to give Next Act's bylaws a thorough review.

**Thank you, Tom, Kelsey, and Dan!**

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*Summer in Door County, continued*

new indoor theatre, production, administration, rehearsal and storage facility. With many functions currently spread across the Door County peninsula, this six million dollar complex will consolidate their work, and allow an even stronger focus on their artistic creations. Opens, fall of 2019. While stopping by on the bike, I had the pleasure to watch the builders' progress: a wall, a doorway, plumbing, the concrete shape of a stage - new construction dedicated to creating theatre. Inspiring.

**Reading James Michener's novel SPACE is best with dark skies and brilliant stars at hand.**

From the German rocketeers at the close of WWII, through the US space program of the 60s, and ending with the explorations of our solar system, Michener took me on one of his classic journeys, where you meet lots of great people - each with flaws, or brilliance - who eventually cross paths in one way or another as the epic tale unwinds. Early in the book, John Pope looks through the observatory telescope for his first time, and is astonished. After reading that, I drive home in the dark and stop

along the way, lights and engine off, crickets down below, the Milky Way up above. I am astonished. How can one not wonder deeply about immensity, infinity, and the great weight of not knowing?

Thanks, Door County!



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**Deep within Irish turf country,** Anthony is a shy farmer and Rosemary, next door, is the woman who secretly vows to have him at all costs. When Anthony's crusty father threatens to disinherit him from the land, Rosemary steps into the middle of a family feud to prevent disaster.

Inspired by a deep connection to his roots, playwright Shanley has found an authentic voice. His characters emerge whole, rustic, mischievous and beautiful, straight out of the magical Irish countryside.

*"...a valentine to the wonder and weirdness of love."  
 - NY Daily News*

SEPTEMBER 27 - OCTOBER 21, 2018						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				27 Preview 7:30	28 Opening 7:30	29 4:30 8:00
30 2:00			3 1:30 7:30	4 7:30	5 7:30	6 4:30 8:00
7 2:00			10 1:30 7:30	11 7:30	12 7:30	13 4:30 8:00
14 2:00	15 7:30		17 7:30	18 7:30	19 7:30	20 4:30 8:00
21 2:00	Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain)					
	Talkback		Pay What You Can			

Directed by Edward Morgan  
 Featuring David Ceasarini, Carrie Hitchcock, James Pickering, Deborah Staples

OUTSIDE MULLINAGAR is generously sponsored by Larry & Patty Compton