

***Photographs from the Éigse launch will be issued to your newsdesk this afternoon by Sean Curtin of Fusion Shooters (083-1047796 / sean@seancurtinphoto.ie)***

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Friday, 17 April 2015

### **Joseph O'Connor launches Éigse Michael Hartnett**

Author and broadcaster Joseph O'Connor last night officially launched Éigse Michael Hartnett, the annual festival celebrating the life and work of County Limerick poet Michael Hartnett (1940-1999).

Hundreds of literary enthusiasts from all over Ireland have descended on the town of Newcastle West to attend the weekend event in the very streets which shaped Hartnett's poetry.

This year's festival, which is an initiative of Limerick Arts Office and supported by The Arts Council, runs until Saturday night and offers a mix of poetry and music, literature and drama, visual arts and dance.

Participants include writers Joseph O'Connor and Kevin Barry, poets Peter Fallon, Doireann Ní Ghríofa, John W Sexton, Mike MacDomhnaill, and Micheal Rowsome, musicians Martin Hayes and David Power, as well as Paul Dunworth and the Brad Pitt Light Orchestra, actor Pat Kinevane, and visual artists Niall Hartnett and Eric Tobin.

The programme also includes a schools programme, a walking tour of the town, an Open Mic competition and the Michael Hartnett Poetry Award, which was this year won by Marcus Mac Conghail for his first collection *Ceol Baile* and Cairtriona ní Chléirchín for her second collection *An Bhrídeach Sí*.

Addressing last night's festival opening in Newcastle West Library, Joseph O'Connor spoke about an encounter he had with Michael Hartnett during a poetry recital at University College Dublin in the 1980s.

"Michael had decided he would be the last to read and when he did so the air in the room seemed to change in some way. As though air can take on a colour. And it may have been the moment when poetry entered my life, the instant, if there was one, when I felt as though I owned it," stated Mr. O'Connor, who is the Frank McCourt Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Limerick

"In Michael's work you can see a pride and passion for place. Hartnett without Limerick is impossible to envisage. It's Joyce without Dublin, Van Morrison without Belfast, Bob Marley without Jamaica. How he was able to mix the strict formal elegance he loved in poetry to the zest and power of everyday speech is truly an amazing thing. He was a remarkable poet of this remarkable part of our country, and I am honoured and privileged to launch this year's festival," he added.

Speaking at last night's opening of Éigse, Mayor of Limerick City and County Kevin Sheahan said: "Every festival has its own story to tell and Éigse Michael Hartnett in Newcastle West in Limerick is no different. Since its inception in 2000 it has had at its heart the ambition to create a festival of quality, a festival with meaning and a festival that touches us all."

"Michael Hartnett's name is etched in Irish literary history and in the story of Newcastle West and all of County Limerick. Éigse allows us to honour his memory and in doing so, provide a platform for others to showcase their literary works and talents," added Mayor Sheahan.

Eigse Michael Hartnett continues today (Friday) with performances of integrated dance, involving students from local schools and service users from the Rathfredagh Cheshire Home and the Brothers of Charity. This will be followed by storytelling, song and dance with Sonny Egan at St Ita's Hospital and the launch of Eric Tobin photographic exhibition, Ode to a Misfit in the Red Door Gallery. It is a "visual exploration inspired by the writings of an unbridled poetic master."

The 13th century Desmond Hall will be the background for a feast of music and poetry this evening at 8pm featuring Irish music luminary Martin Hayes on fiddle, David Power on the pipes and poems by Doireann Ní Ghríofa. To finish off the evening, actor Pat Kinevane will perform his new solo play, Underneath, a production by Fishamble: The New Play Company, in the Newcastle West Area Office at 10pm.

Saturday morning will give the opportunity to relish the words and wisdom of one of Ireland's foremost men of letters, poet and publisher Peter Fallon, who founded Gallery Press. A long-time friend and publisher of Michael Hartnett, he will deliver this year's Michael Hartnett Memorial Lecture under the title The Hold of English.

A new addition to this year's programme will be a guided walk on Saturday afternoon through Newcastle West with Mick MacDomhnaill and Míchéal Rowsome. Called The Poet Dreams and Resolves, it will be an exploration of landscape, memory and West Limerick's artistic imagination. The Hartnett Viva Voce will undoubtedly again attract a large entry, with a prize of €300 for best original poem. The Open Mic however also carries a prize for the best rendition of a Michael Hartnett poem.

The festival draws to a close on a high note, with award-winning novelist and short-story writer Kevin Barry, who will be joined on stage by the Brad Pitt Light Orchestra for an evening of words and music.

Many of the Éigse Michael Hartnett events are free and the festival is part of Limerick City and County Council's Arts Office arts programme. More from [www.eigsemichaelhartnett.ie](http://www.eigsemichaelhartnett.ie).

**-ENDS-**

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