

Boston's Magners Irish Film Fest. a reel deal

By Michael P. Quinlin
mquinlin@irishecho.com

Filmmakers are coming out of the woodwork in Ireland these days, as evidenced by this year's 9th annual Magners Irish Film Festival, taking place in Boston and Cambridge November 8-11.

The gathering of filmmakers, academics, film industry insiders, film distributors and actors has made this annual festival an important gathering for the Irish film industry and for the American public seeking to understand Ireland through its cinema.

"Irish filmmakers from around the world are using visual media arts to dramatically and poignantly express themselves, their culture and a near-limitless array of experiences and aspirations," offers Peter Flynn, festival director and Emerson College professor.

"Our festival is a celebration of the best and most recent work."

Heading the marquee this year is movie star Aidan Quinn, who is receiving the Festival's annual Excellence Award.

Quinn, who was born in Brooklyn to Irish parents, will accept the award at a special ceremony on Thursday, November 8, following the showing of "Song for a Raggy Boy" which stars Quinn as a Spanish Civil War veteran teaching at an Irish reformatory school in the 1930s.

The content rich festival, which Flynn started in 1999 with fellow Emerson professor Jim Lane, includes a variety of feature films, shorts, documentaries and animation that is helping to elevate Ireland's film industry. Many of the Irish films are receiving their American premiers during over the four days.



This year's winner of the Best Feature film "The Front Line."

concerns a Congolese immigrant who is granted asylum in Ireland and gets mixed up in a plot to rob banks. Directed by David Gleeson, the film is described as "a compelling character study and unflinching look at contemporary Dublin."

"The Tiger's Tail," directed by John Boorman, offers "a savage indictment of Celtic Tiger Ireland."

Starring Brendan Gleeson and Kim Cattrall from Sex and the City, the film examines the "corruption, greed and social costs of Ireland's so-called economic miracle." Boorman also worked with Gleeson in his last Irish film, "The General," and directed the American "Deep South" film classic, "Deliverance."

death-by-starvation of Bobby Sands and nine of his prison comrades.

Harkin, who appears at the festival

to discuss her work, has a second film in the event. "Bloody Sunday: A Derry Diary," revisits the infamous incident on January 30, 1972, when the British Army killed thirteen unarmed citizens on a civil rights march in the City of Derry.

Harkin follows the aftermath of the murders, as the families undertake a six-year battle to uncover the truth about the incident and to hold the soldiers - and the British government - accountable.

Rounding out Northern Ireland's input is the documentary, "No Go - The Free Derry Story," directed by Vinny Cunningham. No Go is a follow-up to another Cunningham documentary, "Battle of the Bogside," which screened at the festival in 2005.

Festival director Peter Flynn, a Dublin native who teaches at Emerson College's Department of Visual Media Arts, is completing his Ph.D. on Irish cinema at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and is working on a book about the Irish in early American cinema.

Details on the festival its various events an complete schedule are available at www.irishfilmfestival.com.

As is the case with all cutting edge art, the films in this year's festival reflect the urgent concerns of Irish society as it continues to transform itself.

The Irish Diaspora is well represented too, with contemporary films like "On Broadway," written and directed by Boston's Dave McLaughlin and a winner of the festival's the Director's Choice award.

A new feature of the festival this year is a series of educational forums designed for filmmakers and for the general public.

Emerson College is hosting a symposium on short film distribution on Friday, and Harvard Film Archives and the Huston School of Film and Digital Media in Galway is presenting a series of lectures on Irish cinema.

Among the topics being presented by Professor Tony Tracy of the Huston School is: Contemporary Trends in Irish Cinema and The Green Grass of Home: Irish American Cinema in the 1950s.

As is the case with all cutting edge art, the films in this year's festival reflect the urgent concerns of Irish society as it continues to transform itself.

"The Front Line," which is this year's winner of the Best Feature film,

A number of Irish short films also tackle head on the social issues challenging Modern Ireland.

"Saol an Maor," directed by Sean O Cualain, examines one of Ireland's great scandals - the pollution of its waters and the destruction of its fish stocks by state-sponsored activities.

"My Heroin Hell - Rachel's Story," directed by Alison Reilly, tells the story of a Dublin woman addicted to heroin from age 15.

And "Sin Sceil Eile: Tell me a Story," directed by Catherine Donahue, examines a small village in County Kerry affected by the Celtic Tiger, and provides insight into "how Ireland's longstanding traditions are being lost in the fact of profound social change."

Not to be forgotten, Northern Ireland continues to be a source of material for cinematic Ireland. This year's festival presents "The Hunger Strike," directed by Margo Harkin, winner of this year's best documentary prize.

The one-hour film revisits the dramatic story of the 1981 hunger strikes in Long Kesh prison that led to the

On Broadway



By Michael P. Quinlin
mquinlin@irishecho.com

This year's Director's Choice award goes to Dave McLaughlin, whose film "On Broadway," is one of the feature films of the Magners festival.

A third generation Irish-American whose family came from County Kerry, McLaughlin was born and bred in Boston, the youngest of eleven children.

He broke into the film industry in his twenties, co-writing the Indie film hit, "Southie," a gritty tale about the mean streets of South Boston starring Donny and Bob Walberg, Will Arnett and Amanda Peet.

McLaughlin's new film, "On Broadway," is a more gentle, uplifting examination of neighborhood life in Boston's Irish-American community. It's a loving portrait of Jack O'Toole, a 30-something carpenter, as he tries to do a play about his dead uncle, hoping that it will bring him closer to his own father.

Playing the lead is local favorite Joey McIntyre, former teen star of

New Kids on the Block and a well-regarded singer, actor and dancer (he had a successful run on Dancing with the Stars awhile back).

McIntyre is joined by a number of up and coming actors from the Boston area, including comedian Mike O'Malley, Will Arnet, Robert Walberg and Amy Poehler.

McLaughlin says his films are "Diaspora stories," largely set within the Irish American community.

"I'm very interested in how much I feel that I am both American and Irish and how so many people I know feel that. And I'm interested in where the characteristics born of these two very different cultures come into conflict," he says.

"On Broadway" was filmed at the Skellig Pub in Waltham, a traditional Irish music pub owned by musicians Tommy McCarthy and Louise Costelloe.

The film won second place as "Best First Feature" at the Galway Film Fleadh this year and was named "Best Narrative Feature Film" at the Woods Hole Film Festival.