



## The heart of European Opera: Wexford Festival Opera hosts international conference

### Wexford Author Colm Toibin delivers powerful closing address

(Thursday, 31 October 2013) Wexford Festival Opera has always had a long history of cultural pioneering and making an international impact. Now in its 62<sup>nd</sup> year, the festival has reinforced this proud tradition. In the middle of this year's festival season, the spectacular Wexford Opera House played host to hundreds of representatives of opera companies from all over the world. The conference is Wexford Festival Opera's contribution to The Gathering, which aims to highlight Ireland as a top cultural and tourism destination.

The arrival of the Opera Europa conference made history in two different ways – it was the first time the conference had ever been held in Ireland. It was also the first time that Opera Europa had been hosted in a place that was not a major city. From the 28<sup>th</sup> until the 30<sup>th</sup> October, over 170 delegates from 23 countries took part in important discussions on a number of topical issues such as cultural tourism, international networking and the challenges facing opera festivals today. As 2013 is the year of *The Gathering*, the timing for Opera Europa in Wexford couldn't have been better.

Chief Executive of Wexford Festival Opera David McLoughlin was instrumental in securing this prestigious conference for Wexford. *"All of us in the broad Wexford Opera family, including the local community, are so proud to have been chosen as the host venue for this major international cultural conference resulting in Wexford being very much the focal point, and the capital, of European and global opera for the past few days. I am particularly grateful to Opera Europa Director Nicholas Payne and his board for having faith in Wexford Opera and for recognising our position in the international opera world."*

The Opera Europa conference also offered a unique opportunity for many of the young singers performing in Wexford this year. On the stage of the O'Reilly Theatre, both lead singers and chorus members performed for some of the major figures in international opera. The auditions,

which took place on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October, are another example of how Wexford showcases emerging and exciting talent every year.

Over the course of the three-day workshop, the delegates engaged in intense dialogues on working in partnership with international festivals, raising funds for cultural events and planning festivals within a full season. A discussion on Wexford's successful Volunteer model was also well received. With more than 300 local people giving up their time to Wexford Festival Opera year on year, the contribution of volunteers featured greatly during the conference. Opera Europa delegates also attended all three of this year's mainstage evening operas.

Commenting on the conference, Director of Opera Europa, Nicholas Payne said, "*Wexford's jewel of an opera house has provided the perfect home for our three days of intensive debate about the challenges of promoting opera today. For many of our delegates, it has been a first visit, but it is unlikely to be the last, for they have been bowled over by the warmth of your welcome and the sheer good manners of the people of Wexford.*"

The conference ended with a concluding address from international author and Booker prize-nominee Colm Tóibín. Born in Enniscorthy, Colm Tóibín was shortlisted for the prestigious award for his latest book, *The Testament of Mary*.

In his speech to delegates, Colm recalled his first experience with opera as a teenage boarder in St Peter's College. As a 16-year-old, he managed to attend a dress rehearsal of *The Pearl Fishers* in the old Theatre Royal. This introduction to the operatic world had a great influence on Colm, and he has loved opera ever since. He also referred to Wexford's rich literary and musical heritage, which is intrinsically linked to the festival.

*"The written word held power here, as it still does. And with this came an interest in music, which had very deep roots in Victorian society in Wexford,"* Colm said. *"To be a member of a choir, or to sing in public, was a normal aspect of citizenship."* Colm also highlighted the close, historical relationship between opera and Europe. *"It is a sign of our great and shared heritage as Europeans. It is Europe, in the same way as Chartres Cathedral is Europe,"* he added. *"Opera is Europe's hidden nervous system, its sensibility at its most exquisite and valuable and playful."*

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Wexford Festival Opera will run until Sunday, 3 November. The programme includes three mainstage opera productions: ***Il cappello di paglia di Firenze*** by Nino Rota; ***Cristina, regina di Svezia*** by Jacopo Foroni; and a double bill of ***Thérèse*** and ***La Navarraise*** by Jules Massenet. Four daytime ShortWork operas will be presented: ***La Traviata*** by Giuseppe Verdi; ***The Sleeping Queen*** by Michael William Balfe; ***L'Elisir d'amore*** by Gaetano Donizetti; and ***Losers*** by Richard Wargo.

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Wexford Festival Opera is grant aided by the Arts Council, Fáilte Ireland and Wexford County and Borough Councils.

Tickets for all daytime and evening performances can be purchased online at any time on [www.wexfordopera.com](http://www.wexfordopera.com), or from the Wexford Festival Opera box-office, telephone: Lo-call 1850-4-OPERA or (053) 912 2144. Tickets from €15.

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