

Inspired by artistic achievement

By Peter McDermott

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"In a day's walk, you wouldn't meet a man more passionate about the arts than Charles Hale," said County Offaly-born poet Connie Roberts, "Nor a man as generous in his support of artists, of all stripes—poets, playwrights, musicians, singers, dancers, actors, filmmakers."

She is a member of and occasionally reads her work at events hosted by Artists Without Walls, an organization Hale cofounded with singer-songwriter and Leitrim native Niamh Hyland.

"Charles works tirelessly on behalf of its members," Roberts said. "I don't think a day goes by that he's not promoting us on social media, planning upcoming showcases or scouting out new performers. Charles is a visionary, to be sure, but more importantly, he's a doer. And he's also a born storyteller, in the rich tradition of the Irish seanchaí."

Hale "took a chance," according to Joseph McElligott, the director of the City and Humanities Program at Lehman College, by staging the first Artists Without Walls event on a campus in the Bronx.

"His wonderful generosity and immeasurable kindness has extended to the student body and the results have been life changing," he said of Hale, who is a widower with a son in his 20s.

"Whether it's the urban history of New York City, Irish immigration or the rights of the disenfranchised, Hale brings his passions to life on the stage," McElligott said, adding that the City University of New York has honored him for his service to the city and the Irish-American community.

The Echo recently put some questions to Hale himself to find out more about his work.

Tell us something about your background?

I was born, raised and educated in New York. I'm a descendant of New York City's Irish Famine immigrants, and a former partner of a New York-based consulting firm that specialized in succession planning for family-owned and closely-held businesses.

About five years ago I began writing shows, which incorporate storytelling, music, dance and images. Three of the shows

have been performed in New York City in the last 18 months: "Jazz in the City: The New York Connection," "The Musical History of the Lower East Side" and "New York City: A Shining Mosaic." I am most excited about a new six-part series I will be producing here in New York, called "New Yorkers: Together in Story and Music."

Is there a particular reason for your great interest in stories and storytelling?

I grew up in a family of inveterate storytellers. If someone asks me to tell him or her something about myself, what do I do? I share something of my life and put it in story form. I think we all do that. Stories are the narratives that we live by, revolving scripts of our own creation.

We're all subject to an endless source of new material that impacts our experience and I think we define ourselves, our world, and our role through these experiences. All of these moments coalesce into our personal narrative in which each of us play bit parts. Thus, we are connected through our stories.

A word I use and think of often is "connection." Much of our lives and history are connected; sometimes they're connected by design but often the connection is subtle and borne of chance. Many great philosophers have talked about being born of other lives. The great humanitarian Albert Schweitzer talked about how nature compels us towards mutual dependence, and how, in the fibers of our being, we bear within ourselves the solidarity of each other. Thus we recognize how connected we are. I often think of that.

Explain how Artists Without Walls came about.

I've always been inspired by the flowering of artistic achievement, which often arises when cultures come together. Jazz is one of the great examples. As a result, I was inspired to create a dynamic environment that allows for and promotes cultural collaboration and artistic achievement. Four years ago I set the vision into motion, when with my cofounder, Niamh Hyland, I created a nonprofit organization that would support both the arts and artists.

Artists Without Walls provides artists with something truly unique—a stage in the center of the universe. Month

after month the lights come up at the Cell Theatre with a consistently full house, where remarkable artists have the opportunity to showcase their talent.

Tell us about your latest venture and the event series.

My new goal is to take the Artists Without Walls' concept to the next level. To this end, I have created Charles R. Hale Productions to promote today's emerging artists and to give them more than just a single stage. I want to help them to realize their full potential as musicians so they can write their pages in this city's long history of creating art.

Our first production will be on Feb. 28 at Nancy Manocherian's the cell where we're having a free-admission Season Opening Fundraiser for a new six-concert series called "New Yorkers: Together in Story and Song." The goal of the series is to support a diverse and extremely talented collection of artists from around the world. On that night you can meet and hear three of the artists, vocalist Niamh Hyland, guitarist Yuri



Charles Hale.

Juarez and his AfroPeruvian band and pianist Harriet Stubbs who will present a sampling of three of this season's six shows. Other performers who will be appearing during the season are Miho Hazama, JP Jofre, Annette Homann, and Alexander Wu.

And into the future?

I would like to organize and produce a global event that would help promote cultural unity. Why not think big?

The webpage for information on the Feb. 28 Fundraiser is charlesrhaleproductions.com/2017-spring-summer-season-music-and-stories-connect-us/

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