

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF CORK CITY COUNCIL
HELD ON SATURDAY 2nd JUNE 2007 TO CONFER THE FREEDOM OF THE
CITY OF CORK ON MR. MICHAEL FLATLEY

- PRESENT** An Ardmhéara Comhairleoir M. Ahern in the chair.
- NORTH EAST** Comhairleoirí J. Kelleher, A. Spillane.
- NORTH CENTRAL** Comhairleoirí M. Barry, G. O’Flynn, D. Wallace, P. Gosch.
- NORTH WEST** Comhairleoirí J. O’Brien, D. McCarthy, C. Burke, M. O’Connell, T. Fitzgerald.
- SOUTH EAST** Comhairleoirí D. Counihan, C. O’ Leary, D. O’ Flynn, T. Shannon, J. Corr.
- SOUTH CENTRAL** Comhairleoir S. Martin, T. O’ Driscoll.
- SOUTH WEST** Comhairleoirí J. Buttimer, F. Dennehy, M. Shields, B. Bermingham.

Mr. J. Gavin, City Manager read the Resolution conferring the Freedom of the City on Michael Flatley as follows:-

At a meeting of Cork City Council held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Cork on Monday 10th April 2007, An tArd Mhéara Comhairleoir Michael Ahern proposed and it was unanimously agreed:

“That the Freedom of the City be conferred on

Michael Flatley

In recognition of his personal achievements as a worldclass dancer, musician, performer and as a person of outstanding artistic talent and capability.

In recognition of his exceptional vision and achievement of raising the profile of Ireland abroad by bringing Irish Dance and Music to a new level and to a worldwide audience through the phenomenal international success of his shows. In recognition of his pursuit of pushing boundaries and passion for his heritage, and as a token of the high esteem in which he is held by the people of Cork, for all this and much more, the Lord Mayor and Councillors of Cork City Council consider him worthy to be enrolled in the roll of Honorary Citizens and so direct

An tArdmheara then addressed the meeting and said:-

Michael & Niamh Flatley, Mr. & Mrs. Flatley Senior, Mother of Niamh Flatley Mrs Monica O' Brien , City Manager Joe Gavin, Fellow Councillors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, today we are gathered together to bestow the highest honour our city can award to a very worthy recipient a man of vision, dancer and son of Irish parents, Michael Ryan Flatley. Bestowing the Freedom of our City is not something that is entered into lightly and it stands to reason that the person to whom this award is given must be exceptional or have achieved greatness in some particular field. I don't think there can be anybody present here today who would argue that Michael does not fit those criteria.

Michael Flatley is an American Irish dancer from the south side of Chicago, a city which he considers his home town. With the influence of parents that were born in Ireland he began dancing lessons at 11 and, in 1975, became the first non-European to win the World Championship for Irish dance. As a trained boxer he won the Chicago Golden Gloves Championship in the same year. Michael is also known as being a proficient flautist. His first dance teachers were his mother and his grandmother Hannah Ryan, an Irish dancing champion. Michael attended Brother Rice High School in Chicago, Illinois. After high school graduation, he opened a dance school. It is clear from the fact that immediately after graduation he would open a dance school that from an early age Michael was marked out as someone with drive, ambition and self-belief.

Although Michael has no family roots in Cork , he has chosen Cork to be the place where he wished to start his family. The wonderful refurbishment of Castlehyde is a clear indication that Michael and Niamh have set down roots in the area and will be part of the local community for some time to come. We all join in congratulating Michael and his wife Niamh in the recent birth of their beautiful baby boy, Michael Jr. Maybe your son will bring the Mc Carthy cup or the Sam Maguire (or both) back to Castle Hyde some day.

Michael first came to international prominence when he joined The Chieftains for tours in the 1980s. His unique and explosive take on what was previously considered by many to be an arcane dance form exploded on the public consciousness when Riverdance was the interval act in the Eurovision Song Contest on April 30, 1994 . The impact of Riverdance on the international perception of Ireland, of Irish dance and culture was truly astounding. From being what was usually considered a filler before the voting at the Eurovision, it redefined interval acts at Eurovision forever and was a platform for all traditional Irish dance to impact on the national and international consciousness.

After Riverdance Michael produced, directed, and choreographed his own show, *Lord of the Dance*. In 1998, he put together a dance production called *Feet of Flames*, a version of which toured Europe and the US in 2000 and 2001.

Michael's current Irish dance show is *Celtic Tiger*, which opened in July 2005. The show explores the history of the Irish people and Irish immigration to the US and fuses a wide range of dance styles, including jazz. The show also includes popular elements from his

previous shows, such as his trademark flute solos and the line of dancers in the finale. Regarding his future plans, Michael was quoted in the Celtic Tiger program book as saying, "I will be a dancer until the day I die". For all our sakes let's hope that day is very far away indeed.

Today we bestow our city's highest honour on Michael Flatley but Michael is no stranger to awards and public recognition. Michael received the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship in 1988 and was named one of National Geographic Society's Living Treasures in 1991 for mastery of a traditional art form - the youngest person at that time ever to receive this accolade. He has set Guinness World Records for tapping speed per second not once but twice and was of course on hand when, as part of the celebration of the European Capital of Culture in 2005, Cork set its own world record with the Céilí Mór. In December 2001, Michael became the first recipient of the Irish Dancing Commission Fellowship award, an honorary degree in Irish dance, and was simultaneously made a Fellow of the American Irish Dance Teachers' Association. Irish America Magazine named Michael Irish American of the Year in March 2003. Michael has also given generously of his time and money to a variety of deserving causes but is uncharacteristically shy and reticent to disclose the full extent of this.

My proposal Michael to make you a freeman of Cork was not so much founded on the fact that I believe that you are the greatest dancer that ever lived which would have been more than sufficient reason but because you saw Irish Dance and conceptualised its performance in a form that would present it on the world stage as the greatest most artistic most exciting and most athletic of dance forms and had the belief and the dedication and the energy to bring your concepts to the stages of the world and thereby generate admiration and goodwill for our country and its culture as had never been generated before.

What you have done in promoting the culture and vibrancy of Ireland on the global stage is impossible to measure. Ireland has many international diplomatic ambassadors, state and semi-state organisations charged with promoting a positive image of Ireland abroad from a commercial and tourism perspective. You Michael have done as much as any of these to raise the positive modern image of Ireland internationally by sheer force of your intellect energy enthusiasm and skill. You are not just the greatest dancer of your or any generation you are a man of prodigious talent. You are Michael a very worthy Freeman of Cork.

In honouring Michael here this afternoon we are honouring someone who has taken a traditional Irish cultural and artistic form and re-invented it for the new Millennium without losing any of the skill, tradition or heritage of the form. He has brought Ireland and Irishness centre stage and no doubt inspired many others to do likewise.

A Mhicíl, ár mbuíochas duit don éacht atá deanta agat ar son cultúr, Oidhreacht agus cáil na hÉireann

go raibh maith agaibh

Cllr Michael Ahern, Lord Mayor of Cork

The Meetings Administrator then announced there would be a poetry and musical recital. At the conclusion of the recital, An tArdmheara invited Michael Flatley to sign the Certificate of Freedom and presented him with a specially inscribed casket.

The Meetings Administrator then invited Michael Flatley to respond.

An tArdmheara declared the Special Meeting at an end.

**ARDMHEARA
CATHAOIRLEACH**