

Newfoundland Room Opens at WIT Library



WIT Music lecturer Bridget O'Connell receives applause after performing in the Newfoundland Room.

A special room dedicated to Waterford's Newfoundland connection was recently opened at the WIT Library.

This is the latest strengthening of the transatlantic bond between the 'new' and 'old' countries, some 12 years after Waterford was officially twinned with St John's, the capital of the Canadian State of Newfoundland and Labrador.

WIT itself also operates a formal link with the Memorial University of Newfoundland, situated in St John's via a memorandum of understanding.

Hailing the development, WIT Business lecturer John Maher said the dedicated room should prove of considerable interest to students and the general public alike, keen to research the 300-plus years of history between both locations.

The new room is equipped with books tracing the history, trade and development between the south east of Ireland and the north east of Canada, and also references the music, cultural and linguistic bonds linking both areas.

WIT Music lecturer Bridget O'Connell, currently working on a PhD on Newfoundland and Irish music, provided musical accompaniment at the opening.

During her time in Newfoundland, she learned a great deal about their styles of fiddling and said that there's much great local knowledge and savvy of music in the rural Canadian east.

WIT President Ruadhri Neavyn saluted the centuriesold connection and the creation of the dedicated room, which was delivered after several requests from both John Maher and the Waterford/Newfoundland Twinning Group.



From left: John Maher, Dr John Ennis, Professor Robin Elliott, Dr Ruaidhrí Neavyn (President, WIT) and Kieran Cronin.

Mr Neavyn welcomed Toronto University Visiting Professor (to UCD) Robin Elliott, who provided a musicological perspective to the opening, in tracing the influences behind the development of Newfoundland folk music.

While Irish music had the strongest influence, Prof Elliott also cited French, German and Indian linkages in the creation of the Canadian state's rich cultural history.

Listening to old wax cylinder recordings of Indian songs at the opening was a fascinating experience, while listening back to old German and French songs also proved insightful.

In recent years, Prof Elliott added, major folk groups from Newfoundland have emerged with strong Irish links, including the Celtic Fiddlers (who played in Waterford two years ago), Connemara, Figgy Duff, Sons of Erin and Ryan's Fancy to name but a few.

Prof Elliott said the new West Air jet link between Dublin and St John's was a welcome development which ought to sustain and boost connections on a range of fronts, including jobs, business, academia, culture and tourism.

The Professor's visit has been subsidised by wealthy Irish- Canadian Craig Dobbyn, and he was delighted to be part of the event.

“Music can preserve an old language, be it Gaelic, German or French, and we ought to treasure all of our many shared cultural and musical links.”

Between 1800 and 1830, some 35,000 people left Waterford for St John’s, while many more also left these shores bound for Canada from neighbouring Wexford, South Tipperary and South Kilkenny.

Many from this region have emigrated there in the past four to five years seeking work as many of their ancestors did two or more centuries ago.