

HIDDEN DEPTHS

Maureen Kelleher talks to the people behind a major new Irish-Canadian dance event

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Everyone has a secret, and the idea of the secret is the theme for a new dance work called ***The Secret Project*** by ***half/angel*** which is to be given its Irish premiere at The Firkin Crane, Cork.

New interactive technologies have been used in this work which is co-produced by the Firkin Crane Dance Development Agency and The Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada where it recently received its world premiere.

half/angel is co-directed by Jools Gilson-Ellis who is a choreographer, performer and writer as well as being a lecturer in English (Drama) at UCC and Richard Povall who is a composer and digital artist.

Gilson-Ellis and Povall created *The Secret Project* with the collaboration of two other choreographers; Mary Nunan, former Artistic Director of Daghdá Dance Company and Cindy Cummins, using Jools' poetic texts as a basis for the work.

I spoke to Jools, Mary and Cindy earlier this year at The Firkin Crane at the beginning of their project.

"The secret is a personal thing, a cultural thing, and a political thing," says Jools. "I wanted to work with people who were both dancers and choreographers who were interested in working collaboratively. This is the first time that we're coming together. In the mornings we've been learning how we can work together, and in the afternoons out in Cork video-interviewing people asking them about what they associate with the idea of the secret. We are gathering material that might be used as a resource..."

She described motion-sensing. "We develop environments which connect movements with sound... it's a similar principle to the motion sensing light that comes on' on approaching a building – only in this case the motion triggers sound."

The company had been at Canada's Banff Centre for the arts for five weeks before their opening performance there on October 1.

Jools explains that although Firkin Crane's support was invaluable, "Banff was important because it is one of the biggest arts centres in the world, and we worked with two departments; Media & Visual Arts, and Theatre in Dance. The particular expertise we found there was vital to us in the making of the project".

"The technology extends what we do, but it is used in subtle ways. There will be video fragments – wisps of things that you see – like a secret half seen – for seconds. You will see things that appear and disappear and hear things that appear and disappear".

Her text is performed in English, French, Irish, and "the associations vary a lot, for example, a child's skipping song – when Mary Nunan says it in Irish it has a haunting, yearning quality to it that is quite beautiful.

Funded by the Arts Council of Ireland through its Interdisciplinary Collaboration Scheme the production has just received a New Audience award from the Art Council of England and will tour the UK in early 2000.

"The piece will travel to Buenos Aires next summer, and hopefully to the Americas in 2001," Jools adds. "We also hope, of course, to tour in Ireland soon".