

# Our pick of Edinburgh Festival Fringe – Dublin Oldschool

☒ This garrulous blizzard of Gælic word wizardry, riotous punchy patois and infectious urban guerilla idiom screams from the eclectic, eclectic pen of Award winning playwright, Emmet Kirwan.

Inviting blush-inducing accolades such as, 'dark comedy, family drama and spoken word odyssey that snaps, crackles, raps and rhymes,' we follow the fissile rapprochement of two brothers, as much strangers to themselves as each other, who have some serious sibling angst to sort out.

The Edinburgh Reporter felt duty bound to pick the brains of the engagingly named Mr. Emmet Kirwan and get him to do some explaining of himself. Two actors, seventeen characters, sixty minutes? Honestly!

**TER:** The title Dublin Oldschool has a cheeky ambiguity to it given that the expression 'oldschool' has a sentimental retro romance to it. Was that deliberate?

**EK:** Yeah definitely, I'm not sure of the etymology of the expression is but it seems to be used primarily in relation to Hip Hop, and seems to have been adopted at all levels of society. I've even heard politicians use it. I wanted the title to give a sly wink to the Hip Hop/spoken word poetry elements in the show. It also references to the character Daniel, a man who is part of an early wave of heroin users in Dublin who years later are still addicted. He's like a walking anachronism, an 'oldschool' drug addict who is now out of time and step with society in every way, forgotten about.

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**TER:** Having not only written the play, both you and Ian Lloyd Anderson take on seventeen characters between you. Some might suggest this is ambitious to say the least – others that Equity might be knocking on your door soon asking why!

**EK:** I hope they don't picket the show! My dad always told me never cross a picket line so that could cause me to sweat. Most of it was originally down to economics but also my faith in the ability of the actor Ian to slip into any accent and character you give him. The ones he plays are all wildly different so it's fun to watch him switch it up in an instant, from moment to moment. I wrote the parts for him so I knew he'd be able to pull it off.

**TER:**The synopsis sounds like a slightly psychotic mash-up of The Commitments meets Father Ted and Trainspotting – possibly! Dare we ask if it is informed by personal experiences?

**EK :** Yeah, definitely! The more absurd comedy elements in the play could be straight out of a Father Ted sketch, that type of absurdist humour is very common in Ireland from the people chatting in the pub to the writings of Flann O'Brian and others. Irish people love dropping non-sequiturs into every day conversation just to get a laugh. Irish humour could be defined less by 'joke' telling and more rambling funny stories.

**TER:** And the music?

**EK :** Ah, well. The music scene in the play is very much like The Commitments and I wanted to write about my personal experiences of the subculture of dance music which I lived a large part of my formative years in and which is huge in Ireland, but not really talked about in main stream media, the world of theatre and dance music rarely correlate so I wanted to do a show that would exhibit the wildness and energy of that world. As for the Trainspotting elements, I've never sweated in a bed detoxing with babies crawling across the ceiling, but Dublin has it's fair share of Begbys and Rentons

and lets just say I've come across a fair few of them in my travels. Although, like the film the play does start with a chase from police after a Ketamine deal goes wrong!

**TER:** Think we'll stick with the 14+ Parental Advisory sticker then! You had some scorching reviews when the show played in both Dublin and Cork in 2014. Talk us through the decision and process in bringing it to The Fringe and what that means to you.

**EK:** It's a big deal for all of us personally involved in the show to get it to Edinburgh. In Ireland we can be accused of making Art only for our selves in recent years and the tradition of touring that we used to have took a hit and kind of stopped during the economic downturn. This will be a chance for us and other Irish shows going over this year to showcase what Irish artists and theatres such as Project Arts Centre are producing currently. Hopefully audiences will see a certain amount of quality and get a taste of what used to be our main export, our culture of story telling.

**TER:** We get the impression this is very much a team effort/production. How came you by such fortuitous company?

**EK:** I had known the director and Dramaturge of the play Phillip McMahon since we were in Dublin Youth Theatre as teenagers. Phillip is a playwright and director who'd I'd worked with there and in our adult life in Ireland's National Theatre, The Abbey, for his musical Alice in Funderland.

His company THISISPOPBABY is known for celebrating youth, club and queer culture through their work and Phillip was of an age and similar experience to myself so I thought his theatrical sensibility would be a perfect fit. I had worked with the actor Ian Lloyd Anderson for a number of years and had written the part specifically for him.

We shared a dressing room in the Abbey for another production

of Major Barbara. It was a long run and I had mentioned the next thing we should do is a show together. Something new, set in Ireland, contemporary and vibrant. An energetic antidote if you will, to slogging through an unedited Shaw play every night.

Dublin Oldschool came from an initiative called 'Show in a bag' run by Tiger Dublin Fringe, Irish Theatre Institute and Fishable, the new play company to enable and give support to actors to write their own work. After our initial run Project Arts Centre came on board to produce it, giving it a kind of deluxe version and adding some of Ireland's best sound and lighting designers.

Project is the main supporter and stage in Ireland for new experimental and exciting work. And Soho Theatre in London is supporting us greatly in our Edinburgh run; they've a list of great shows here this year.



**TER:** 'Dark comedy, family drama' do we read that as a show for all the family or as a family pulling itself apart? You could be answering to some irate parents post-show!

**EK:** Definitely! More a show about a family pulling itself apart, albeit with a dark cynical sense of humour, funnier than it sounds. Think family tragedy with zingers. I think if someone has a young person between the age of 10 and 14 then Mums and Dads might want to check if they're ok with their little loved ones listening to colourful Irish curse words for an hour. It could be an education in improved Hiberno-English vocabulary or a disastrous step backwards in the cultural development of your child's vernacular. The Irish curse 'Feck' is the least offensive thing they'll hear.

**TER:** 'Snaps, crackles, raps and rhymes' your 'spoken word odyssey' suggests that language drives the plot as much as

the frantic events?

**EK:** Yeah, the language and how it's delivered and phrased is very Irish in its break-neck speed. It's garrulous in parts and the frantic nature of the show needs a certain amount of athleticism both physically and verbally in getting through it that leaves us absolutely wiped after the show. I'd lost half a stone during the last run in Dublin. The opening seven minutes is all done in Rap to beats with a lot of jumping about and much of the play is delivered through spoken word segments with a few breathers in between, with the scenes between the brothers.

**TER:** Was/is the writing process for the stage very different and challenging than when you wrote for your very successful Irish TV series 'Sarah and Steve.'? And, from this, what have you in the melting pot right now?

**EK:** With theatre there's collaboration all the way through the writing process with the director and dramaturge. Because the part was written for Ian I had him from the early stages to sound out lots of dialogue, and you're allowed to say whatever you want as it's one of the last mediums that isn't censored by producers or executives. With TV it's very different, I was able to write something close to my heart but you're kind of left to your own devices, then you submit the piece to a lot of people or 'filters' who edit out anything unpalatable to them, or anything they feel needs to be censored like overtly political content or say having an unredeemable or unlikable character who doesn't get his comeuppance. Television is great for reaching a wide audience, but can be incredibly frustrating, kind of like a factory version of writing. I was luckier than most TV comedy writers though I must say. I was never asked to put things in I didn't want in the show, I was only asked to take stuff out!

**TER:** Catching up then – what have you got on the go right now?



**EK:** I'm currently writing a show called RIOT that will headline the Tiger Dublin Fringe in the Spiegel tent. For my part in the show I'm writing four epic spoken word poems, which will be part of a larger variety show about resistance through art. It's a different response to the current official 1916 Irish Rising commemorations, an armed rebellion that was led by a number of poets, artists and Socialists, a fact our government, led by The Fine Gael party (think green tinted Irish version of the Tories) has sidelined in the commemorations. At the same time they celebrate these men and women artists revolutionaries they cut the funding to the Arts in Ireland to some of the lowest levels in Europe. Our show will have the famous drag Queen Panti Bliss, lords of Strutt and the Irish dance duo Up and Over, it'll be a 'spectacular spectacular' Weimar cabaret type gig.

**TER:** Wishing you and the team the very best of success at The Fringe, where next?

**EK:** Thank you very much, we can't wait to hit Edinburgh, it's a great city and I'm so looking forward to getting there. For Oldschool we're hoping to perform at some stage in the new year with our producing partners The Soho Theatre at their venue in London and then hopefully America and then, ya know...the world!

Outdoor photographer, Albert Hooi, theatre production by Ros Kavanagh .

Dublin Oldschool

Beside- Pleasance Courtyard (Venue 33). 60 Pleasance. Edinburgh EH8 9TJ. Box Office 0131 556 6550.

Wed Aug 3- Sun Aug 28. 1.00pm. (ex 10, 15 & 22 Aug) Tickets: £6 from 3 Aug until 5 Aug, £8-10 from 6 Aug until 28 Aug.

Running Time 60 minutes. Age 14 +

<https://www.pleasance.co.uk/event/dublin-oldschool#overview>