

The Emerald Isle: Why Now Is The Time!

The Emerald Isle is a piece that has, once again, found relevance. At the time of its composition (1901) The Emerald Isle ran for over two hundred performances. It was Sir Arthur Sullivan's optimistic view of where relations between England and Ireland might go. There was also optimism in Ireland about the prospect of peaceably achieving home rule. At this point Ireland was still administered, as it had been for hundreds of years, from London. But starting in the 1880's a movement to eventually allow home rule in Ireland was slowly gaining momentum (albeit with opponents on both sides) and in the early 20th century home rule was set to become law. Then World War I happened and the implementation of home rule was suspended. Frustration and mistrust boiled over into violent events like the Easter Uprising of 1916 and the Anglo-Irish War that followed. Most of Ireland gained its independence in 1921 but not before the land was partitioned. The lingering animosity continued to simmer, culminating in The Troubles during the second half of the 20th century. It's not hard to understand how a stage full of Irish rebels and English redcoats singing and dancing with each other would have been seen as ridiculously naive on both sides of the Irish Sea during this period. Perhaps even insulting to the memory of people who died in the conflict. Predictably, The Emerald Isle fell off the theatrical map appearing only sporadically, usually in excerpted or concert form.

This brings us to today, 2024, a quarter century since the Good Friday Accords. The Republic of Ireland is now one of the most prosperous countries in the EU and peace is holding fast in Northern Ireland. The Emerald Isle has some of the most beautiful music Sullivan ever wrote but what is just as beautiful is the message it conveys. It is time for this message to be heard again. The Emerald Isle is a comedy and a love story on the surface. On a deeper level it is a call to recognize the humanity in others and accept them for who they are. It is about reconciliation between people plagued by a history of hatred, prejudice, and mistrust. It is about love transcending religious divides, cultural differences, and politics to help us reveal our better selves. It is a message our world sorely needs and one I believe we can have great fun bringing to them. People have to imagine what is possible before they can make it so. That's where we, the artists, come in. Join us as we bring this wonderful show back to life.

In Act I, Rosie, Terence, Bunn, & Molly are conspiring to find a way to keep the English soldiers from marching off to find the Irish rebels in their hiding place at Carrig-Cleena. They hatch a scheme to convince the soldiers that the caves of Carrig-Cleena are haunted by the Fairy Cleena who will place them under a spell, Rip Van Winkle style, and keep them captive for 50 years. Molly dresses as the Fairy Cleena and initially the ruse works. The soldiers are terrified and refuse to march on the caves. Meanwhile, Blind Murphy, who is not really blind, conspires with Bunn to find a "cure" for his blindness that will allow him to pursue a romance with Molly.

In Act II, after much prodding and urging from the Viceroy, the soldiers resume their march on the caves at Carrig-Cleena. Rosie, Terence, Bunn, Molly, and the villagers hatch a series of increasingly elaborate plots to dissuade the soldiers but to no avail. Molly discovers the truth about Blind Murphy's condition but, after much soul searching, decides to forgive him. The soldiers arrive with the Viceroy and are on the verge of executing the rebels when Bunn stops the proceedings to point out that the Viceroy's family is half American. America is the friend of Ireland so they have no further need to rebel and are no longer rebels. The Viceroy can find no fault with this logic and the company dances arm in arm to end the show.