

# 10 minutes with...

## GERRY MOLUMBY

### What are you up to now?

Tying up this interview, and planning our tour of UK with our Irish Cabaret - *Celtic Strands* - made up of Irish actors, musicians and dancers from within the Irish community in Britain.

### Who are your heroes?

Besides the great altruistic people, like our current president, and his predecessors 'the two Marys', who put the Irish Diaspora in the centre of Irish public life, my heroes are people like the late Val Doonican - an all round entertainer, and the actor/comedian Niall Tóibín.

### What's been the best decade of your life so far and why?

The late 1980s and early '90s, I was in my late 30s and full of my creative energy with no child minding restrictions. In those years I produced and directed a number of plays by JB Keane, Brendan Behan and Brien Friel - in such varied venues as The Galytmore Dancehall and Hammersmith's Riverside Studio Theatre.

### What record sends a shiver down your spine?

Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin - *Oíche Nollag*.

### What is your favourite place in Ireland?

I love Galway right out to Renvyle Beach where I am going to spend my eternity!

### What makes you angry?

Human beings or regimes who think they have a right to detain people without trial, to apply torture and solitary confinement. Whether it be the bully in school, or a dictatorship repressing people, for me, it is the lowest form of human behaviour and we are

the only animals that do it. You won't be surprised that my favourite charity is Amnesty International.

### What book influenced you most?

*Against the Tide* by Doctor Noel Browne. Told with honesty and emotion but especially a profile of a life lived in bravery. Noel Browne - at a time of heightened clerical influence and power in Ireland - single-mindedly campaigned for reform of the health system, especially the Mother and Child Scheme of 1951, and encountered the strenuous opposition of both the Catholic Church and the medical establishment. The programme planned to introduce free ante and post-natal care for mothers and to extend free healthcare to all children under the age of 16. The Church cited the legislation as "anti-family", expressing concern regarding the provision of family planning advice and what they claimed would be increased interference by the state in the parents' rights to provide healthcare for their children, wanting to keep this as their moral domain. Abandoned by his party colleagues, he embarked on a stormy

political career over most of his adult life.

### What was the worst moment of your life?

When my son was very ill following his birth

### Which local star in any field should the world outside Ireland know about?

John McGahern

### If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be?

As I get older, I take myself less seriously and I wish I had been braver in my youth and believed more in ability, but I am catching up on myself.

### Can you recommend an interesting website?

[www.irelandanditsdiaspora.com](http://www.irelandanditsdiaspora.com)

### What is the best lesson life has taught you?

How short it is.

### What is your favourite film and why?

I still love watching *The Quiet Man*, it makes me laugh and nearly cry, and having got to know Maureen O'Hara before her death, I

Multi-faceted Irish community activist Gerry Molumby has taken on many roles in his lifetime.

At the forefront of Irish welfare in Britain, Gerry founded Triskellion Irish Theatre Company, has directed plays, is an actor, reporter, photographer, and an active theatre and concert director / promoter / compere.

Originally hailing from Thurles, Co. Tipperary, in 1980 he relocated to Britain. Following the move, Gerry held a position in the National Health. "My career was working with, and for, older people in health and social care. My last position was the setting up of a project in all the GP surgeries of Rushcliffe NHS Commissioning where we now have mechanisms where carer's health and wellbeing needs are met," remarked Gerry.

"Gerry was pivotal in setting up this service for our carers throughout Rushcliffe, Nottingham city and County," said Janet Leigh, Senior Service Manager of The Carers Federation.

Among the many projects that occupy his time, Gerry writes for several Irish and British publications, including *The Irish American Post*, and works tirelessly to help preserve and expand Irish culture in Britain.

In 1996, Gerry founded Triskellion Irish Theatre and Concert Productions in London. Now in a partnership with London-based friend Patrick O'Connell, the company aims to preserve and enliven Irish drama, comedy, and music in Britain and has staged numerous classic Irish plays, including Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and John B. Keane's *Big Maggie*.

More recently, he has taken on promoting plays and concerts already in production. "Our main focus now is to act as facilitators for producing Irish plays by touring companies from Ireland and Britain," says Gerry, and since the company's inception, Gerry has led all the concert productions.

Showcasing some of the best Irish entertainment from Britain's Irish community, the concerts are based on the model of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* and are called *Celtic Strands*. Along with Patrick, Gerry has raised thousands of pounds for charities, including: CAFOD, Irish Homeless, Church Restoration, British Adoption Agency, and St. Luke's Hospice. "Basically we bring together a variety of Irish artists and put on a great show," says Gerry. The concerts also attract Irish luminaries such as Niall Toibin, Philomena Begley, Finbar Furey, and Seán Cannon from The Dubliners.

They have most recently been touring with *The Rare Owl* Times, a two-act Irish play on the lives of Brendan Behan and Patrick Kavanagh.



**MULTI-FACETED:**  
Gerry Molumby

feel my favourite film story is complete.

### What do you believe in?

I believe your quality of life is as much about good luck as any influence from a deity. Whether you die young, are born with a chronic disability, live to old age, etc., is just your good luck and surely, then, is one of the perennial questions yet to be answered? My father was a self-employed builder and we lived hand-to-mouth. We were so lucky, as my mom and my seven brothers and one sister depended on him being in good physical and mental health. Without an established Welfare State in my youth, I shudder to think what would have happened to us without him. I believe that we 'have not here a lasting city' and although brought up a cradle Catholic who, at the age of seven, had an overfed conscience, I still try to believe in the afterlife of some sort. But, like 'Doubting Thomas', I want/ need to see a glimmer of that truth. Ironically my mother's devout Catholic faith has imbued my life and

I have spent my adult working and voluntary life in health and social care and still maintain, like a lot of Irish people, a social conscience based on 'love your neighbour as yourself'. I accept that I will be remembered after death, but like an abandoned grave, I will eventually be more and more forgotten and less spoken of - I can live with that.

### What trait do others criticise you for?

My free spirit, ironically. Although I am a team player, I can become impatient with inactivity and the pace of motivation, and will, even within the team, plough that furrow! For example, the campaign I am passionate about currently is votes for the Irish abroad. I want my Irish vote back before I die. Also my punctuality - I need to be more on time!

### Where do you live and what are the best and worst things about that place?

Nottinghamshire, a bit of a journey to London and the

sea, but the best county in this green and pleasant land.

### On what occasion is it OK to lie?

Part of me hates the phrase "It's on a need to know basis" - usually delivered by someone who is excluding you from the circle of knowledge. But sometimes in life your instinct tells you, or asks you, "what actual good would it do for them to know this?". That would be my barometer, and done in good will I would trust my informed instinct. Again, lying is never the best option, but in some situations brutal honesty is unnecessary, cruel, and doesn't really solve anything.

### What do you consider the greatest work of art?

Cormac's Chapel in the Rock of Cashel.

### What is your ultimate guilty pleasure?

A good red wine - better in convivial company.

### Who is/was the love of your life?

My one and only son.



**HELLO MR PRESIDENT:** Gerry meets Michael D Higgins