

KIND HEARTS & GENTLE PEOPLE

The Story of

Stephen Collins Foster

A new play by Peter McDonald



FEATURING THE HIT SONGS:

*Oh! Susanna - Camptown Races - Old Folks at Home
Beautiful Dreamer - My Old Kentucky Home
and many More.*

Peter McDonald - Writer

Peter has been involved in theatre since childhood. He grew up wandering the wings of the Rialto Theatre, St. Columbs Hall and The Playhouse. He adapted and directed his first play, *Rage*, at the age of nineteen and has acted, directed, written and help tech hundreds of shows since then. His last play, *Five Years Time* was performed in the North West Regional College in June 2010.

Peter is currently the Playhouse Theatre Manager and runs his own podcasting website *Sherlock Studios* (www.sherlockstudios.com).

Previous writing credits include:

Rage by Stephen King (Adaptation) 2005,

The Green Room (Original) 2007,

Rachael & The Rat King (Original) 2008,

Five Years Time (Original) 2009,

Kind Hearts & Gentle People - The Life of Stephen Collins Foster (Original) 2011.



Anne McMaster - Director

Originally from Garvagh, Anne has worked in both the USA and Ireland as both playwright and director. She began by writing monologues and short plays for Radio Ulster and R4.

Over the past 16 years, her plays have been performed regularly in Chicago and have toured Northern Ireland, Scotland and Canada. As well as lecturing in Performing Arts and working as a freelance writer, Anne is the artistic director of *FarmGirl Productions* - a theatre company specialising in new writers and devised works - and of *North Ship* - an opera company new to the north west.



Debbie Caulfield - Stage Manager

Debbie is a writer and performer. She wrote and performed "*Paris on the Foyle*" and toured it as an independent production. She also wrote "*The Shadowmen*" for Sole Purpose Productions. Debbie has wide experience stage managing productions in the Playhouse and also for touring productions.



Helen Quigley - Costume Designer

Helen has been costume making and designing for theatre since 1987 after completing a BTEC Diploma at Salford Technical College. She is delighted to be involved in this production.



Joe Connolly - Artist and Set Designer

Joe has been designing and making sets for longer than he can remember. He remembers "*The Port Pagent*", "*The Columba Pagent*" last june, umptenn pantos in St. Columb's Hall and many, many shows in The Playhouse

Kieran Griffiths - Stephen Collins Foster

Kieran is the artistic director of Ki Productions. He has a Masters in Musical Theatre from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD). He toured the United States with West End production company Spirit Productions as the lead singer and compere in the '12 Irish Tenors'. He has an extensive performance C.V. & performed to critical acclaim at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival as Murray Finkel in 'The Iron Curtain' & Aesop in 'The Fabulist' at the Cardiff International Musical Theatre Festival. He has also devised his own cabaret act called 'An Irish Crossover' which played to rave reviews touring in Scotland. His most recent credit was as Fergal in the women on the verge of HRT. He works as an actor, producer and director, most recently producing and directing 'The Last 5 Years'.



Nicky Harley - Eliza and Miss Jane

Nicky Harley has been involved in the arts from the age of 6 years old. In 2008 she completed a BA (hons) in Drama with a first class honours. Since then Nicky has performed in several professional productions across the province. In 2009, Nicky launched her own childrens drama school, Playbox, which currently runs in The Playhouse Theatre.

Martin Bradley - Mr. Brown

"Martin returned to the stage in September 2011, after a break of 4 years, appearing in Hacks. Previous productions include Beaten Docket, Packies Wake, 12 Angry men, Of mice and men and Just another Sunday".



Alan Wright - William Foster, Dunning, Morrison, Mr. Cowan & Pianist

Alan trained at the RSAMD and the University of Ulster. He has appeared in many productions over the years, from Restoration Comedy to Pantomime to Musical Theatre. His credits include the Northern Irish premier of "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change" for Ki Productions, "The Beaux Stratagem", "Love and A Bottle" and a 353 performance run of "Fair Faa Ye" for Blue Eagle Productions, "Rat In The Skull" for Playhouse Productions, "Jack In The Beanstalk" and "Cinderella" for Millennium Forum Productions, amongst many others. Currently he is a private singing tutor and Assistant Musical Director for the Millennium Forum's Christmas Pantomime and the Summer Youth Musical.

THE LOCAL CONNECTION

There is an old story amongst the musical fraternity in the North West that Stephen Foster's family came from Ballougrly just outside Derry.

Two years research has thrown fresh light on this. Records show that Stephen Foster's great grandfather, Alexander Foster, born 1710, emigrated from the "Port of Londonderry" in 1725, with his mother and one brother, to America.

However it would appear that the members of the Foster family who remained in Ireland did not purchase the lands at Ballougrly until c.1840 and in fact moved there from Stranorlar Co. Donegal.

The great Diaspora of Ulster Scots Presbyterians took place between 1700 and 1750 and Londonderry was a major emigration port for this exodus.

Mrs Foster's own reasons for leaving with two of her sons remain a mystery but it appears she was in fact a Donegal woman and not from the maiden city!

The Musical Legacy.

Stephen Foster's music has never gone away.

During his own life time he was the best known songwriter in the world. His songs were sung in America and Europe and as far afield as India, Japan and Australia.

After his death his work continued to be performed in vaudeville, variety and music hall.

With the coming of cinema his music was extensively used. Many romantic westerns used orchestrated Foster songs.

The Marx brothers, all Foster fans, featured 4 of his songs in their films with, poignantly, Harpo's solo in their final movie "Love Happy" being "Swanee River".

In 1928 "My Old Kentucky Home" was designated the official state song of Kentucky and "Old Folks at home" was bestowed a similar honour by Florida in 1935.

In the 1930's and 1940's Al Jolson and Bing Crosby each recorded long players of Foster's songs. Frank Sinatra recorded a medley of his songs in the 1950's and both Roy Orbison and the Beatles were featuring his songs in their early 60's repertoire.

Stephen Foster was inducted into the American Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970.

Since then his songs have been sung or recorded by almost every major American folk/rock star, including Bob Dylan, James Taylor, Bruce Springsteen, John Prine, Roger McGuinn and Alison Krauss. A recording of his songs featuring some of the above artists won a Grammy award for best traditional Folk Song Album in 2005.

His music lives on and it's worth exploring!

My sincere thanks to Brian Mitchell for his help in researching the local connection and to Sean McMahon for his valued support throughout this production.

Martin McDonald

Producer