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The 50,000-strong march in a freezing Dublin showed just how deeply people want to hope

Tonight in Dingle, the singer/songwriter Richard Hawley is staging a major gig with *Other Voices*. He's pulled together a line-up including Jarvis Cocker, Laura Marling and Anna Calvi. They're all performing for free.

Hawley and his crew are to music what Arthur Cox Solicitors are to legal advice. He's like the managing partner; Cocker the senior banking expert; Marling the fast-rising associate; and Calvi the apprentice headhunted from a top law school.

Why charge nothing? If Hawley was, say, the Secretary General of the Department of Finance, he'd be earning over €200,000 a year. And he'd get to negotiate with the IMF and the EU, which would be a major point in his career.

Indeed, if Hawley were leading RTE, the ESB, UCC, NAMA, Anglo-Irish or some of the commercial semi-state agencies, he'd count as one of the 600 senior public servants who persuaded Brian Lenihan to excuse them from the full weight of cuts done to their colleagues because, the seniors claimed, their work is so important. Except he'd have refused such an arrogant deal.

Hawley may be a wealthy man, but many other artists in this weekend's *Other Voices* aren't. They come to perform because of the value they place on the enterprise. They give so that their industry can grow.

Let's not turn the gig into a parable for the future, but it's a thinking point all the same. The past

can't be fixed. The future is hungry for new stories.

"The discourse, dreams, thoughts and philosophies that will help create a new Ireland will be formed every bit as much at gatherings like this as they will be in Merrion Street," says Philip King, the producer/musician behind *Other Voices*.

What kind of Ireland might this be? Taiwanese News pictures Ireland's bailout as a comedy peopled by leprechauns and demonic

avatars. In Dingle, as elsewhere, people are trying to redefine 'values' while the shibbolethic ethics of the Celtic Tiger decompose.

The scale of political and structural change desired — and needed — doesn't seem to be appreciated within the elected assemblies, the civil and public service, by the trade union leaders, or by those 600 senior public servants who treat themselves as 21st Century grandees. Four-year austerity plans alone may keep creditors happy but they won't inspire people to dream and thrive.

Language matters. Do we seriously believe Brian Cowen when he claims the Greeks 'envy' our interest rates? He and others used to say the whole world envied Ireland and its economic boom. Envy isn't a smart strategy. Humility, respect and red-hot belly-fire are more to the point. *Other Voices* is about what's possible when you grow goodwill and mobilise your allies. Technically, it's a node where music and technology converge. It's bloomed since King started it with his partners Nuala O'Connor and Tina Moran. Their collaborations also include the Emmy award-winning documentary

Bringing it all back Home (with BBC) and the recent *Limits of Liberty* led by Professor Diarmaid Ferriter (with RTE), which invited us to rethink the republic we call home.

"This is about what is possible," says King.

"We produce the thing on a shoe string with significant human capital investment and have created a model where music, culture and technology coalesce to produce something remarkable."

AND PHILOSOPHIES THAT WILL HELP CREATE A NEW IRELAND WILL BE FORMED EVERY BIT AS MUCH AT GATHERINGS LIKE THIS AS THEY WILL BE IN MERRION STREET'

Performers this year include The National, Marina and the Diamonds, Smoke Fairy along with Cathy Davey, The Minutes and other Irish bands.

Tickets for the tiny St James's Church sold out (it only holds 70) but you can access it on Wifi or on big screens around Dingle. Or wait until RTE screens it in spring 2011.

I don't know if Hawley will perform the song *Tonight the Streets are Ours*, but I wish. It's about defying hopelessness and fear when you feel like an outsider in your own homeplace, when you want things to change but don't know how to make change happen.

Change is whispering in the culture, thank Zeus. The political initiative is at the people's door and its sound is rising. Last Saturday's 50,000-strong march in a freezing Dublin showed how deeply people want to hope. October's RDS event *Claiming Our Future* was booked out, as was David McWilliams's Kilkennomics festival.

People with such different beliefs as Richard Boyd Barrett and Marc Coleman are showing that you can engage politically and find common ground. On this week's *Frontline*, the two men upstaged serving party politicians.

And people say the Irish are apathetic. But is the establishment listening? They can't make citizens outsiders in their own place.

The 600 grandees, and their political bosses (and the rest), must show solidarity with citizens by refusing to accept more than

€150,000 a year in salary and allowances. Trade union leaders really should excuse themselves from the gentlemen's club and knuckle down, sleeves up, to reforming the public service. Give, so that industry can grow.

More of the same won't deliver hope. Austerity all the way will crush people's spirits and paralyse creativity, as well as innovation.

"We create something here at the edge of Europe that will help Ireland reconsider itself and make Ireland again considerable in the world for some of the right reasons," King says. Let's go global with that thought.



Where's the apathy?
Last weekend's march
proved that we're hungry
for change and hope