

Naomi O'Connell and Friends - Present *Songs of the Soul* Benefit Concert in aid of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland

The North Clare hills were alive with the sound of music as over two hundred people lifted their voices together for an encore of 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' at a gala benefit concert for Acquired Brain Injury Ireland in Ballyvaughan on Friday the 26th August, which raised over €3,000 for the charity.

Hosted by local singer **Naomi O'Connell**, who has spent the last three years studying at The Juilliard School in New York, the fundraiser concert was the culmination of the first ARTS 4 ALL week – a series of arts events, free and open to the public in the towns of Ballyvaughan and Lisdoonvarna.

The concert program, entitled "Songs of the Soul", paired opera with jazz and classical art song with traditional Irish melodies. The Ballyvaughan audience enjoyed the musical talents of soprano Donna Gallagher, who thrilled them with her rendition of the Queen of the Night aria and Clarecastle-born tenor Dean Power, who was equally at home singing the famous aria "Nessun dorma" as the beautifully simple Irish melody "The Sally Gardens". Performing on piano with both power and sensitivity was Brent Funderburk, recently graduated from The Juilliard School and currently based in New York City.

Also performing in the concert were four local participants from a masterclass, that took place the previous day, with esteemed vocal teacher Mary Brennan of the Royal Irish Academy and Dublin Conservatory of Music: *Ailbhe Howard (Lisdoonvarna), Marych O'Sullivan (Kinvara), Patricia Woods (Kilrush) and Katie O'Donohue (Fanore).*

Made possible by a grant from the New York "Sing for Hope" organisation, the benefit concert, raised a total of **€3,030** which will go towards purchasing specialised gym equipment for service users of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland. There are two ABI Ireland assisted living residential houses in Clarecastle where the equipment will be much appreciated by the service users.

Acquired Brain Injury Ireland is a national organisation which provides a range of flexible and tailor made community rehabilitation services for people with an acquired brain injury (www.abiireland.ie). Despite the

number of people affected by brain injury each year there is still a lack of understanding and awareness of the effects of a brain injury, which can be devastating for the person affected and their family. A brain injury can affect a person mentally, physically and socially and they often have to rebuild a new life as their plans take a different course.



Front: Naomi O'Connell, Sam & Paddy (ABII Clarecastle)
Back: John (Rehabilitation Assistant) & David (ABII Clarecastle)

ABI Ireland would like to thank all those who made "Songs for the Soul" happen and all those who attended and gave so generously on the night.