

ECHOES IN THE SHADOWS OF HISTORY

BY VINCENT WOODS

Hard Times Require Furious Dancing

Alice Walker

If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution

Attributed to Emma Goldman

Writing about music is like dancing about architecture

Attributed to many sources

CoisCéim has been at the heart and cutting edge of contemporary dance in Ireland for thirty years: their first performance was *Dances with Intent* at the OMAC in Belfast as part of Dancetime Festival in spring 1995 – three decades of brave, original work which has helped define and shift the ground of the country's dance landscape. The company's unstinting commitment to developing contemporary dance in Ireland has established CoisCéim as a powerful and ever-growing force of originality and excellence; and their many memorable shows have left a vivid imprint on the minds and imaginations of audiences, adding immeasurably to the growing archive of contemporary dance as a vital art form in Ireland. That original intent to dance has produced work like *Ballads*, *Out of Harm's Way*, *Knots*, *Touch Me*, *The Rite of Spring*, *The Wolf and Peter*, *Swimming With My Mother*, the sublime Ulysses-inspired *Go to Blazes*, *Our Fathers* and *These Rooms*, the unforgettable

co-production, with ANU theatre company which explored the submerged history of Dublin's North King Street Massacres in April 1916, when 15 civilian men were killed in house-to-house raids by British soldiers.

The inspiration for *Palimpsest* connects to that first production in Belfast, originating in a conversation between CoisCéim's founder and Artistic Director, David Bolger and fellow choreographer and dance artist Donking Rongavilla in the famous and frequently-bombed Europa Hotel when they were performing *Our Fathers* at the Belfast International Arts Festival in October 2021. David realised that a younger generation of people like Donking were not aware of what had happened in places like the Europa, that relatively recent history had been obscured by time, social and political change and a transformed landscape of peace that showed no immediate evidence of old war scars. That set the two artists talking and asking questions: What is remembered decades after war? What is forgotten? Do we have a duty to remember and interrogate the past and the versions of history we receive? Who carries the seeds of memory and what happens when we plant them afresh in the fertile ground of art? These are potent questions to raise in relation to our commemorations for the *Decade of Centenaries*, inevitably merging with questions of aesthetic choices, practical challenges, shared and disparate artistic perspectives and a kind of through-line of moral responsibility in the light of time.

I was privileged to witness the unfolding and creation of *Palimpsest*, from first rehearsal to first performance; and to discuss the concept and creative impulses with director David

Bolger, set designer Maree Kearns and many of the dancers and other creative artists. This short essay seeks to reflect my experience of that creative journey and explore some of the wider landscapes of connection and context that fold out of and around a dance work that reaches deep into Irish history and myth to explore notions of memory, truth, commemoration, loss and artistic witness.

PALIMPSEST IN REHEARSAL

Fairview. Dublin 3. CoisCéim's home is an old building with the space and flexibility to accommodate a rehearsal space, administrative offices and host the occasional performance. Thirty artists, including fifteen dancers, have gathered here on a Monday morning in January 2024 to start a journey together towards a live performance of a new dance show which will explore some of the layers of history and humanity that lie in unexcavated corners of commemoration's rubble.

In the rehearsal room a piano stands against the faded-yellow-and-red brick wall. A lace-curtained window looks down on the ground-floor from the admin office above. Through the white bars of the high, tall windows at the front you glimpse a splash of green growth against a decayed brown brick building, whose russet corrugated roof is scraped and streaked a dirty silver. The distinctive Dublin coastal soundtrack of seagulls' harsh cries hovers outside and above. Chances are that nobody else notices these details; they're all too absorbed

in their work – talking, planning, sharing ideas, studying the model for Maree Kearns' set which will transform performance space at The Complex in Smithfield, itself a transformed old warehouse.

I never cease to be astonished at the process of rehearsal: how a work of art is developed and refined in a bare room, the trust and openness that is needed, the will to make something new and vital, the sharing and vulnerability, the almost architectural nature of a process that builds from near-nothing, to the ground work and foundation of all that is gathered in a rehearsal room: a reading, a model presentation, demarcation lines on a floor, trial, sweat and failure, added layers of music, sound, costume, then the move onsite to the performance space and onto set; the technical rehearsal, first dress rehearsal, preview and opening performance.

Plays, opera, musicals begin with a script, a score, a book, but dance begins with ideas, bodies, a physical alphabet of possibilities.

This dance performance builds over the weeks, ideas tried and tested, concepts and scenes worked and reworked, some discarded, most developed towards a single consistent vision, a coherent narrative – strong work that will bear the weight and lightness of its ambition and of audience expectation. The directed democracy of artistic collaboration is seen at its most vivid and effective in theatre and dance; each person working towards a common goal, each working with their individual gift and talent, each investing so much of their energy and vision,

each one here thinking how do we achieve what is best, true, right for *Palimpsest*.

I remember the dedicated work of designer Monica Frawley and dancer Emma O’Kane, both of whom contributed so much to individual CoisCéim shows in their time. I remember how hard Monica worked on any project she took on, the unstinting passion and generosity that drove every stroke of her pencil, every sharp question, every demand for excellence, each critical assessment of what had been achieved and what was lacking. The artist never stops working, is always asking questions, always watching, listening, thinking; the left hand moves and the mind follows – or so it seemed with Monica. There is something of a mystery, an occasional flash of near-miracle in that creative process, but none of that happens without tough graft, without a sacrifice of time, without personal cost.

Audiences often fail to realise just how hard all dance and theatre artists work to stage a performance. I’m reminded of this as I watch *Palimpsest* take shape. Dancers are the athletes of the arts and a day’s dance rehearsal requires enormous stamina and adaptability. In this rehearsal, ideas become manifest in movement, layers of film, music, sound build around both idea and movement, costume and set transform everything, and eventually dance becomes the thing.

PALIMPSEST IN PERFORMANCE

David Bolger had told me that in conceiving of *Palimpsest* he was struck by the reality that monuments and history become peripheral to everyday life and living; we pass by memorials, shadows of history every day but don't stop to think about them. Dublin city centre is crowded with memorials, markers, layers of the past. But if we stop to think and observe, we might become aware of the cyclical nature of it all, how one thing is piled on top of another, one layer constructed on the foundation of what came before, old rubble used to build new stories.

David wanted to see how the contemporary body and dance could reflect something of this, something of Dublin's story and Ireland's twentieth century history, What happens when we dance with specific details, when we remove some of the 'standard' choreography and seek the pure essence of things?

The piece, he said, is looking for the real spirit of the world and humanity.

And so we move towards the performance space in The Complex, a ricochet away from North King Street, site of those street battles remembered in *These Rooms* and in Frank Shouldice's fine book *Grandpa the Sniper: The Remarkable Story of a 1916 Volunteer*. We move through rooms and a dimly-lit corridor lined with archive boxes, props and costumes, some of CoisCéim's history labelled according to individual shows and years; and enter the arena where the work of recent months will become a live performance.

Maree Kearns' set design for *Palimpsest* is inspired and impressive, transforming a large, bare performance space into a multi-dimensional place of memory, reflection, confrontation and occasional transcendence. Giant projections border two sides of the performance space, echoing, opposing and shadowing each other.

A slightly surreal opening scene evokes Ionesco's *The Chairs*, mixed with images of looting and echoes of O'Casey. Questions rise up in the watching mind: What do civilians cling to in war? What will we do to survive? How do we remake home? What songs, music, movement, myths rise up from flame and gunfire, from death and martyrdom? Here the domestic becomes political and a subverted double-take of the iconic revolutionary image of Dublin's GPO floats in space, two filmed images of the general post office waver and face each other, a double-image of politicised architecture which provokes and inspires dance 'about' the shape and architecture of memory, memorialising, official and personal history and the potency of storytelling and mythmaking.

Flickers of previous CoisCéim shows appear in *Palimpsest* – the suitcases and pile of earth of *Ballads*, the hurleys of *Reel Luck* – but they take on new meaning and power here.

You're reminded of the film documentary *Steps of Freedom*, which explores the history and development of Irish dancing, and includes a scene where two dancers are seen in prison cells in Kilmainham jail, symbols of resistance and endurance, transcending time and historical circumstance, the dancing body at once image, spirit and flesh. In *Palimpsest*,

seven male dancers embody something of the mythical power of the seven signatories of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic of Easter 1916; the camáns of their choreographed game of hurling becoming rifles, then the guns with which they are executed, Cúchulainn's blood sacrifice ritualised in dance and fall, the bodies scattered on the ground, the men's shadows intact upon the wall.

Denis Clohessy's evocative score carries a freight of emotion and meaning, linking well-known songs and lyrics like *Grace*, *Bánchnoic Éireann Ó* and *The Parting Glass* to the music of Seán Ó Riada; the beat of his own compositions holding everything intact, both wineskin and wine, hive and honey.

We dance with our history.

Here's Máire Ní Ghráinne as a kind of eternal spirit of Ireland, the words of *Míse Éire* clear and resonant down time; and again with the magnificent, timeless poem *Our Future Will Become the Past of Other Women*. You think of Colm Ó Foghlú's musical settings of some of Boland's poem, the way in which poetry and music infuse each other and together touch on a deep pulse of human experience, on truths that can simultaneously console and enrage. You think of Rita Ann Higgins's witty and subversive take on Yeats and official Ireland in *The Women of 1916*, her 'written out' verses of remembrance, honour and mockery clear as a secular bell.

Clear as its own true-tuned bell is the music and song of *Palimpsest*: cello, mezzo-soprano, tenor and the informal choir of voices that meet and reach towards harmony in conclusion.

Note and performers move with grace and ease among the dance and dancers, merging into a single horizon.

A world-wide-web of dancers brings an international zest and diversity to this exploration of Irish history and identities. Influences from and connections to Brazil, the Philippines, Russia, Mexico, New Zealand, Ukraine, London, Manchester come together backstage in a generous spirit of sharing and creation. Old journeys are echoed in new forms; Justine Cooper's great grandmother emigrated from Quin in Co. Clare, made a life and home in New Zealand, never forgot her roots, or the roots of her displacement. The precious ground carried symbolically in a *Palimpsest* suitcase echoes that individual displacement and the wheel of return and renewal that turns almost imperceptibly in this dance meditation.

DANCING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

The title *Palimpsest* inevitably brings me to the book of the same name on Dublin's architecture by the late, brilliant architect and writer, Niall McCullough. In his *Palimpsest* and most recent (and sadly, posthumous) book *Dublin – Creation, Occupation, Destruction*, McCullough lovingly, meticulously and miraculously traces the making, destruction and re-making of Dublin in words as carefully-crafted, elegant and satisfying as the finest of buildings, the most expansive of public parks. The postscript image for Niall's final book is the angel on the College of Surgeons in Dublin from the 1916 series of pictures in the

Military Archives, an image and a place closely associated with the Easter week rebellion of 1916; This Angel of History stands high over the grey city streets, invoking both Walter Benjamin and Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*, as Valerie Mulvin points out in her moving postscript to Niall's writing. She concludes that "the book is made of the ammunition of his whole life of thinking, of looking, of comparing, of piling things up and being bound by no one." David Bolger's methodology is not dissimilar, and his freedom of application and expression brings dance to bear in the consideration of Dublin's history and Ireland's story and mythology, the architecture of historical narrative and individual tragedies and triumphs.

A myriad of people, named and unnamed, known, lost, strewn in the ruins of memory, inhabit the landscapes of McCullough's palimpsests of Dublin and CoisCéim's *Palimpsest*. The humanity that imbues the architect's vision and writing finds a kind of parallel space and expression in the collaborative and individual art of CoisCéim's creation: the brilliant and transformative set designs of Maree Kearns; the lighting and projection designs of John Gunning and Neil O'Driscoll; Denis Clohessy's composition and sound design; Arran Murphy's memorable costume design and all the creative artists and makers who brought this original concept to vivid life. Two women hover out of memory into a reimagined being: Mary Dunne, 'Dancing Mary' (who once prayed for me in public when a group of college friends mischievously told her I was a Communist), an elegant holy roller who paraded, prayed and sang full-throated hymns on O'Connell Street in the 1980s; and the severe, black-clad, black-bereted, rosary beads-wielding proselytiser and protester, Margaret



Image: Máire ní Ghráinne,
Jonathan Mitchell and members
of the cast of *Palimpsest*.
Photograph: Ros Kavanagh

O'Donoghue, whose photograph (a classic picture by Derek Spiers) became the an abiding image of Ireland for a generation of people in the later twentieth century.

The CoisCéim team filming a kind of floating, ethereal recreation of 'Dancing Mary' Dunne close to her original holy ground one February morning prompted some of the flower sellers to share memories of a woman who seemed to embody a wing or version of a now (almost) vanished Ireland. Those same flower sellers shared with me the story of their friend whose ashes are interred close to the GPO, and helped inspire the poem *Sunflowers for Parnell*. Local memory is often more accurate and inclusive than the official memorialising of statue and monument. It's striking that there's no official public memorial to a woman on O'Connell Street, though the sculptor Jackie McKenna had originally planned that her lovely bronze women that have resided happily north of the Liffey, near the Ha'penny Bridge, for more than three decades would sit at the base of the monumental statue of James Larkin, close to the GPO. The sculptor's simple, subversive idea was that the vision of the heroic male union leader would be augmented by the presence of two women in unreadable, intimate conversation, perhaps on topics domestic and personal, perhaps plotting political change or revolution.

SPARKING DEBATE — MARCH 18TH 2024

THE BLACK BOX, TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, GRANGEGORMAN CAMPUS

A CoisCéim *Broadreach*¹ event linked, tangentially, to *Palimpsest*. Thirty two dancers compete in seven freestyle rounds. Who says you can't dance about politics or political debate, make shapes about current affairs? This is a kind of Strictly Come Debating, except that it's on-your-feet (and toes) physical debate, the eight teams of four dancers responding in movement to themes of:

First Peace, Then Justice; A United Ireland for All; Borders should be Defined by Nature; If You Would Know Me, Come and Live with Me; Northern Ireland Can Teach the World Peace is Possible; Climate Care Starts at Home; To Build an Irish Identity We All Have to Want One.

Thirty two dancers representing many modes of dance and from all four provinces of Ireland (five, if we include that wonderful Fifth Province of art and imagination) competing: rap, disco, funk, garage beats. Five judges. Six minutes allotted to each. The new Ireland in flow. And in the background a little girl in tee-shirt and pink and white pants is throwing her own shapes, making her own breaks.

The future is sound.

1. CoisCéim conducts a wide-ranging, integrated access and engagement initiative through programmes delivered by CoisCéim *Broadreach*.

Sparking Debate chimes beautifully with the film *Breakin' Brothers*, about breakdancing brothers Cristian and Cosmo (José) Dirocie, whose family moved from the Dominican Republic to Tramore in Waterford in 2014. CoisCéim and Wildfire's film is a vivid snapshot of dance energy and the new creative dynamics at work in Ireland, a gift of migration and intermingling cultures. The 'battle' scenes with bodhrán player Rónán Ó Snodaigh are a joy, an inspired and inspirational touch, and a rhythmic reminder of the power of inter-cultural exchange and collaboration.

Both *Sparking Debate* and *Breakin' Brothers* are antidotes to the poisonous lies about migrants that are spreading in Ireland, and an example of the arts engaging with current and urgent themes and developments. It's hard not to contrast the joyous, positive energy of the Dirocie brothers and their street breakdancing with the street violence and destructive surge of the Dublin rioters of November 2023. How many of those deluded young people might take a different route if they had opportunities to dance, act, sing, build, explore and express their power of creativity; if they had access to the kind of open door that a group like CoisCéim offers? Those deluded, neglected, gullible youngsters, the 'scumbags' (awful, offensive label) of media reports and Ministerial comment, were in a kind of rebellious dance against perceived injustice, against alienating authority, moving in the streets like a choreographed film. Dancing with danger and flames, spurred by the excitement of riot and looting and violence.

Image: Leon Dwyer and members of Ireland Allstars in the *Sparking Debate* Physical Debates.
Photograph: Sinéad Jerromes



DANCE AND POETRY

Dance is a physical poetry. Poetry places words in a shape and space that aspires to movement and grace. The streetscapes around Dublin's GPO hold layers of imagined, vanished, tangible, sometimes visible dance and poetry. The alert (or dreamy) wanderer sees and feels it every time they walk there. I saw this Easter scene two years ago:

SUNFLOWERS FOR PARNELL – EASTER 2022

for Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Good Friday on O'Connell Street: a baritone evangelist
is belting out God songs just across from the GPO:
At first I think he's singing 'Sean South from Garyowen' –
but it's his own mangle of faith, fire and Catholic brimstone.
I watch and listen for a while, taking in the fervour and indifference,
then walk north, pause at a street stall to buy sunflowers for their light
and their great butter blackness. The man selling them
tells me a friend of his is buried under a tree nearby,
an old soak who loved drink and the north side of Dublin:
'We got his ashes into the hole they were digging for that tree –
he must be the only man is buried on this street. The flowers suit you;

sure flowers never put calories on a body.’
Walking home I get an approving look or two, forgetting
that the sunflower is one of the symbols of Ukraine. And then –
a lovely shock: someone has placed sunflowers at the base
of the Parnell monument; the same brown paper wrapping as mine,
the same glow and suddenness as the five I’m holding.
I’ve never seen flowers left for Parnell before;
who placed them there, I wonder, and why?
The song of the holy singer fades as I cross the luas tracks.
He’s gone when I return on Easter Sunday,
and so are the sunflowers, the cold stone bare.

Palimpsest uses a small treasure house of music and song from Irish tradition and post-independence composition, Seán Ó Riada's haunting air for *Mise Éire* floating in and around dancer and image. The homage to Ó Riada is a kind of dance-echo of a fine Irish language poem by Pearse Hutchinson, translated into English by the poet himself.

Ó RIADA

Thug tú féin an samhradh leat,
ag dul isteach sa ngeimhreadh dhuit,
ach d'fhágaís féin an samhradh again
gan fuacht air go deo.
Géimhreadh: cailleadh do cheol féin.
Samhradh do cheoil inár ngleic.
Gréagach i ngéibheann ár ngrósú,
do bhrostaigh, do bhroinn meanma;
i bhfuacht na carcrach, blas na gréine;
tú féin i ngéibheann an bháis
(ár gcomharsa réal-dorais)
ag seinm samhraidh. Ár múscailt.

You took the summer with you
as you went into the winter,
but you left the summer with us,
banishing the cold.
Winter: your own music lost.
But the summer of your music is ours.
A Greek in prison kept our hearts up,
he quickened us, lent hope;
in prison-cold, a taste of sun;
you now in the prison of death
(our next-door-neighbour)
performing summer. Waking us up.

The 'Greek in prison' here is the great Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, who wrote the magnificent score for the film *Zorba the Greek*, based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis.

Anyone who has seen the film will remember the superb, life-affirming dancing of Zorba and the soaring sense of freedom held and expressed in the merged whirl of music and movement. Theodorakis strove to express something of an eternal spirit of Greece, much as Ó Riada sought to capture and give freedom to a spirit of Ireland, a spirit whose awakening might trigger both renaissance and rebellion.

DEEP WITHIN PALIMPSEST

Deep within the layers of *Palimpsest* are echoes of one of the greatest tragedies and injustices of modern Ireland – the deaths of 48 young people in the Stardust nightclub fire in Artane on Valentine’s Day 1981. The nexus of power and money that we see reflected in almost comical images of Charvet shirts, yachts, frantic money and frantic dancing within perspex boxes, faces, hands and bodies pressed up against transparent, unyielding walls in gestures of possible appeal, desperation or supplication are a subtle mirror-image of the conjunction of forces that led to the unlawful killing of so many fine, bright young women and men in Artane, the constituency of then Taoiseach Charles Haughey, and the decades of state denial, indifference and abject failure to support the families of those who died in a blaze in a converted factory which should never have been used as a dancehall, those who never came home from what should have been a memorable and happy night of dancing and romance.

The architecture of dance
 The architecture of dancehall
 The architecture of denial
 The architecture of state power
 The architecture of law
 The architecture of grief
 The architecture of community

MICHAEL BARRETT	RICHARD BENNETT	CAROL BISSETT	JAMES BUCKLEY
PAUL BYRNE	CAROLINE CAREY	JOHN COLGAN	JACQUELINE CROKER
LIAM DUNNE	MICHAEL FARRELL	DAVID FLOOD	THELMA FRAZER
MICHAEL FFRENCH	JOSEPHINE GLEN	MICHAEL GRIFFITHS	ROBERT HILLOCK
BRIAN HOBBS	EUGENE HOGAN	MURTAGH KAVANAGH	MARTINA KEEGAN
MARY KEEGAN	ROBERT KELLY	MARIE KENNEDY	MARY KENNY
MARGARET KIERNAN	SANDRA LAWLESS	FRANCIS LAWLOR	MAUREEN LAWLOR
PAULA LEWIS	EAMONN LOUGHMAN	GEORGE MCDERMOTT	MARCELLA MCDERMOTT
WILLIAM MCDERMOTT	JULIE MCDONNELL	TERESA MCDONNELL	GERARD MCGRATH
CAROLINE MCHUGH	DONNA MAHON	HELENA MANGAN	JAMES MILLAR
SUSAN MORGAN	DAVID MORTON	KATHLEEN MULDOON	GEORGE O'CONNOR
BRENDAN O'MEARA	JOHN STOUT	MARGARET THORNTON	PAUL WADE
BABY CAREY UNBORN CHILD OF CAROLINE CAREY (17)			

What memorial or monument could ever hope to rise to the memory of the forty nine lives quenched out so cruelly in that Stardust fire? What monument or memorial could ever hope to rise to the grace and courage of their families?

That we remember them is the quiet memorial that no bronze or stone can rival; that they are remembered and honoured in dance and music, in art and imagination, in the palimpsest of our broken days.

DANCE AFTERWORD

Weeks after the performance of *Palimpsest* in The Complex in the heart of Dublin, I stand in the theatre space of the Dock Arts Centre in Carrick-on-Shannon in Leitrim and witness again the power of dance re-empowered and reimagined. Edwina Guckian's *Leitrim Dance Week* has been part of a resurgence of dance led by a remarkable dance artist who is also a powerhouse of community activism. Often the two things go together. Sibéal Davitt performs her powerful, subversive one-woman show *Minseach*; a host of artists share their thoughts and aspects of their practice in *Dance Dialects*; the local Thursday morning market becomes a focal point for music and dance, locals, visitors, people of all ages, enthusiastic children, some with special needs joining in freeform performance, movement moving naturally among stalls and business. I'm struck by the profound transformation of the landscape of dance in Ireland in the past thirty years.

None of this would have been possible in 1994. Then I remember that the next year, '95 brought two significant developments that would change forever the perception and practice of dance in this country: the first performance of the stage show *Riverdance* in the Point in Dublin (based on the Eurovision interval act) and the first performance by CoisCéim Dance Theatre in Belfast. *Riverdance* went on to brand Irish dance as an international commercial and cultural force; CoisCéim became a driving force in asserting the role of contemporary dance in Ireland, creating a structure to support dance artists, and building a loyal and expanding audience for new, experimental work.

Both developments from that turning-point year of 1995 built on centuries of tradition, change, loss and renewal. The strong tradition of dance in Ireland is well documented, as is the survival and revival of that tradition in the USA, the force-line that brought Michael Flatley and Jean Butler back to this country and to Broadway prominence. The human spirit of freedom expressed in the act of dance is seen in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and to remind myself of that power of expression I often refer back to a reference in Eoin Bourke's essential book *Poor Green Erin*, his translation and compilation of German travel writers' accounts of Irish life in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Describing a market scene in Dublin in 1928, Count Hermann von Puckler-Muskau writes:

“The dirt, the poverty and the tattered clothing of the common man are beyond belief. And yet the people seem to be in permanent good spirits and on occasion are overcome on the open streets by fits of merriment that border on the lunatic. /... for instance, I saw a half-naked lad performing the national dance with the greatest of exertion on the market place for so long that, completely exhausted and like a Mohammedan dervish, he collapsed unconscious to the loud cheers of the mob.”

That market scene may well have been close to Smithfield, to the fruit and flower markets that survived down the decades, close to The Complex and *Palimpsest*.

Images from the CoisCéim show drift in my mind and I recall my own faltering forays into dance, the joy and pleasure I’ve derived from boogying onto a dance floor and letting go. Some of those memories seem apt in the context of David Bolger’s focus on twentieth century Irish history, and the exploration of conflict and loss in the context of performative art.

You’re thirteen again and hanging back, longing to take to the floor, not sure how to put a foot forward — best or worse — and kind blunt Kielty spots your need and grabs your hand, grabs the hand of little Bridget McGovern from Glan and pushes you together and out onto the pre-fab floor and you’re away 10CC *Rubber Bullets* — I went to a party at the local county

jail – not too far away real bullets flying years later '81 you almost land in the local jail as you dance around a garda car outside Creevelea Hall asking them what they're doing watching the crowds coming to a dance in support of the hunger strikers in the North. You're pinned against the car all your drunken fervour up against the strong arm of the law and you lose but are not locked up because the guard knows your sister and in you go to waltz triumphant, maybe jive you don't remember, talk for Ireland – *Sean South of Garryowen, We're on the One Road, The Men Behind the Wire...* And they should have been dancing, the young men, not martyred emaciated sainted dead. They should have been free and wild on disco floors in parish halls in mayflowers and ballrooms of romance and lust and falling in and out of love. Shots volley out clods fall.

Dance helps us remember

Dance helps us see

Dance moves into the spaces abandoned by words

CoisCéim at thirty is vibrant and engaged, forging new work and new ways of working, lighting the way for contemporary dance and dancers in Ireland.

CoisCéim's *Palimpsest* puts flesh on the shadows of our history. Dance, song, set, film and music combine in a seamless flow: image upon image, darkness into light, this art work raises a shattered mirror and asks us to look hard at our past and imagine a possible future.

VINCENT WOODS, MARCH/APRIL 2024