

# BWW Review: ROCKIN' ROAD TO DUBLIN Rocks The Oncenter Crouse Hinds Theater

by Natasha Ashley May. 4, 2018



The company of *Rockin' Road to Dublin*. Photo by Brian Doherty.

Is it a rock concert? A musical production? Or an Irish dance show? *Rockin' Road to Dublin* can be categorized as all three. The one-night-only engagement of this unique Irish dance and rock concert at Syracuse's Oncenter Crouse Hinds Theater proved to be a fantastic experience. It offers a fresh take on traditional Irish tunes, showcases some very familiar classic rock hits, incorporates Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová's Academy Award-winning song "Falling Slowly," along with Irish dance. The combination of all of this results in a powerful and memorable entertainment experience. The concert/dance show is referred to as "the new generation of Irish rock and dance because there's more than one road to the Heart of Ireland." I must say this generation of Irish dancers is on point!

The current national tour of *Rockin' Road to Dublin* is presented by creators Celtic rocker Chris Smith and Irish Dance World Champion Scott Doherty. The spectacle is directed by Broadway choreographer Jeff Whiting (*The Producers*- Tour; *Bullets Over Broadway* - tour). Not surprisingly given his theatrical experience, under his creative direction the song lyrics are used to tell an Irish war love story with the dancing taking center stage. The dancing and the music are first-rate.

Scott Doherty is the male dance lead and he selected three-time international Irish dance champion Ashley Smith-Wallace to star alongside him as lead female dancer. It's a wise choice. Their chemistry is pure magic. They're not the only dancing talents this show has to

offer. It boasts an impressive troupe of dancers with credits that include *Lord of the Dance* and *Riverdance*. They execute Scott Doherty's remarkable and energetic choreography with passion and precision.

The vocalists and musicians under music supervisor, arranger, and orchestrator Brent Frederick bring this rock concert to life. Vocalists Esteben Suero and Megan Lynn Browning dazzle the audience with their rocking voices and dramatic flair. Suero's raspy voice is an asset and Ms. Browning often reminded me of Kelly Clarkson.

Each musical number is unique and impressive, but some stood out as my favorites. With the opening number "Rocky Road to Dublin," male vocalist Esteban Suero brings us swiftly into the rocking show as Doherty and Smith hypnotizing the audience with their Irish dance skills, passion, and energy. Female vocalist Megan Lynn Browning makes a memorable entrance and offers some impressive vocals on "Field of Atherny." The two vocalists are strong together, exhibiting perfect chemistry and stellar singing on "Mo Ghile Mear," the Celtic tune "Black is the Color," "Falling Slowly," "Somewhere Only We Know," and the finale "A Nation Once Again." I would be remiss not to mention the crowd favorite "The Rock Medley" featuring Journey's "Any Way You Want it," Survivor's "Eye of Tiger," Aerosmith's "Walk This Way," and The Who's "Teenage Wasteland." The vocalists and dancers brought the house down with these classic rock hits.

An elite group of musicians add to the great listening experience and make the most of their time in the spotlight. Music director Joe Schermann on keyboard shows off effortlessly. He is quite the entertainer. Brandon Cantwell is perfection on the bass. Lead guitarist Marc Malsegna knows how to rock out non-stop and slow it down beautifully for the number "Falling Slowly" (which Suero and Browning sing beautifully). Kelly Mills demonstrates his considerable skill on rhythm guitar and even shows off his percussive skills on drums alongside Chris Smith (auxillary percussion/bodhran) and Mike Moore (drum set) on "The Battle" - a crowd favorite. The percussionists go head to head with the Irish dancers. Julia Hoffman and Corey Walden rock out while skillfully playing the violin - often stealing the spotlight. They dazzle the audience on "Toss the Feathers," "Fiddler's Despair," "Flash of Black," "The Butterfly," and "John Ryan's Polka."

The production also features some strong technical elements, including original costume design by Sarah Coffey and Ashley Wilson, which blend traditional and rock influences. Carolyn Wong's lighting design (complete with strobes and theatrical haze) brings the energy level up even further. David Bengali's projection helps bring the story to life and allows for close-ups of the various dancers. Brian Barker's set design and Jason Ardizzone-West's additional scenic designs are perfect for this experience.

*Rockin' Road to Dublin* proves to be a one-of-a-kind rock and dance concert experience that offers a non-stop toe-tapping, rocking good time. It provides a unique experience for those that love Irish dance, rock music, and/or musicals. It all happens in the same theatre so nobody will be disappointed.

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