



**DONAL O'KELLY'S**  
**Catalpa**

**PERFORMED BY DONAL O'KELLY**  
**WITH LIVE MUSIC BY TREVOR KNIGHT**

**Out of Australia - the true story of  
the Fenian whaling ship rescue 1875**

**THÉÂTRE CITÉ BLEUE**  
**CITÉ UNIVERSITAIRE, CHAMPEL**  
**20.00, 18TH JUNE**



*With the kind support of the Geneva Irish Association and  
the Anglo Irish Bank (Suisse) S.A. Proceeds from this event  
will be shared between the Masambo Fund and the Global  
Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS.*

A thank you email received from Stuart Flavell, the international co-ordinator of the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS.



*On behalf of the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, I would like to thank the Geneva Literary Aid Society for your generous contribution of EUR 5000.*

*Unrestricted contributions are very helpful, as GNP+ takes on work that it thinks is important, not what is trendy in funding. Your assistance helps us pick our own road. Thanks.*

*My favourite part of all this is that you raised these funds having fun and enriching the life of the community in Geneva— such a great vision for sustainable living that can be responsive to the needs in the larger world....very lovely.*

*I would like to stay informed of GLAS myself... please add me to your email list.*

*Warmly,*

*Stu*

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The organizing committee for this event comprised:

Sophie Barton-Knott, UNAIDS; Claire Geraty, WHO; Chris Black, WHO; Mark Willis, the Global Fund; Brian Tisdall, ICRC; John Donnelly, Cite Universitaire; Denis McClean, SITA; and Harold Masterson, IFRC.

## INTRODUCING DONAL O'KELLY

**D**onal O'Kelly is a writer and actor. His much-travelled solo plays include the award-winning *Catalpa*, *Bat The Father Rabbit The Son*, and *Jimmy Joyced!* He recently completed an Irish tour of his new play *The Cambria*, performed with Sorcha Fox.

Other plays include *The Dogs*, *Hughie On The Wires*, *Trickledown Town*, *The Business Of Blood*, *Asylum! Asylum!*, *Farawayan*, *Judas Of The Gallarus* and *The Hand*.

He has twice been awarded an Arts Council literature bursary, and in 1999 was awarded the Irish American Cultural Institute Butler Literary Award.

For radio, he has written *Running Beast*, a play-with-music based on the life of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, as well as radio versions of *Catalpa*, *Bat The Father Rabbit The Son*, *The Dogs*, *Hughie On The Wires*, and *The Cambria*, all broadcast on RTE.

As an actor, his movie roles include Bimbo in Roddy Doyle's *The Van*, and roles in Irish movies *Spin The Bottle* and *I Went Down*. On stage, he has played the Lincoln Centre New York with Beckett's *Act Without Words I*, Toronto Winter Garden as Lucky in *Waiting For Godot*, Joxer in the Abbey Theatre's *Juno And The Paycock*, Sean O'Casey in Colm Toibin's *Beauty In A Broken Place* at the Peacock, and he has toured to the UK, Europe, the US, Canada and Australia with his solo plays.

He was a founder and for ten years a director of Calypso Productions, and also served as a director of the peace and justice organisation Afri.

## INTRODUCING TREVOR KNIGHT

**F**or theatre, Trevor has created sound for Beckett's *Act Without Words II* (Lincoln Centre New York and Barbican London), *The Plough And The Stars* (O'Casey Theatre Company), *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *King Lear* (Second Age), *The Business of Blood*, *Rosie and Starwars*, *Farawayan*, *Five Kinds of Silence* (Calypso), *Juno and the Paycock* (Abbey), *The Crucible*, *Petty Sessions* and *Choke My Heart* (Red Kettle). He created the sound design for the *Cambria*, and most recently for Garrett Keogh's *Dog Show* at the Galway Arts Festival.

He devised and directed *Just a Little One* from the works of Dorothy Parker for Bewleys' Café Theatre, and was musical director for the Bloomsday 2004 open air celebrations in Dublin, Rejoyce. He is in ongoing collaboration with visual artist Alice Maher and performer Olwen Fouere as part of the Cork 2005 City of Culture. He is also a well-known musician and music producer.

## OUT OF AUSTRALIA: THE 'CATALPA' RESCUE

**B**y all appearances, there was nothing unusual about the departure of the 200-ton whale ship *Catalpa* from the harbor at New Bedford, Massachusetts, on the morning of April 29, 1875. Both *Catalpa* and her skipper, 30-year-old Captain George S. Anthony—a New Bedford man who had pledged his life to the sea at the age of 15—were sturdy, veteran sea rovers. Appearances can be deceptive, however. Under orders given to him two months earlier by three strangers in the darkened back room of an outfitter's shop in New Bedford, Anthony, with his lone, unarmed barque and a handful of sailors, was about to defy the mightiest naval power on Earth.

The mission: Rescue six Irish political prisoners from a British prison in Fremantle, Western Australia and bring them safely to America.

A decade before Catalpa embarked on her perilous journey, the centuries-old struggle for Irish independence was brought to a crisis by the revolutionary 19th-century Fenian movement in Ireland and America. At the first signs of Fenian agitation, British authorities, aided by a network of spies and informers, clamped down hard. As early as 1865, they had suppressed the Fenian newspaper, *Irish People*, and had arrested its editor, James Stephens. A year later, the writ of habeas corpus was suspended in Ireland, and many Fenians, including scores of Irish soldiers serving in the British army, were incarcerated throughout the British Empire.

Meanwhile, the Fenian movement had taken on a personality of its own in the United States, where it flourished under the banners of the Fenian Brotherhood and Clan na Gael. Membership surged after the Civil War as both Northern and Southern veterans joined. The influx was so great that a provisional Irish government blossomed in New York City in October 1865, and Fenian cells, or centers, sprouted in cities and towns from coast to coast. By 1871, the British had issued conditional pardons to the last batch of civilian Fenian prisoners—under the condition that the former inmates must live outside Ireland. Seven remaining soldier-prisoners, however, were exempted from the pardon and remained jailed in Fremantle. “Releasing these Fenian soldiers,” claimed the Duke of Cambridge, commander in chief of the British army, “would be subversive of discipline.” Six of those men were now slated for rescue by Catalpa’s crew; the seventh soldier, James Kiely, exposed as an informer by his comrades, would be left behind.

Among the Irish expatriates who emigrated to the United States was John Devoy (Pictured below as a young man, and later in life), once a fervent recruiter of Fenians from within the British army. The same man who

had recruited John Boyle O'Reilly into the Fenian movement in Dublin. Pardoned after serving five years of a 15-year sentence, the 29-year-old Devoy traveled to the United States in 1871 and became a reporter with the *New York Herald*, where he continued to champion Fenian causes. In July 1874, a *Clan na Gael* convention in Baltimore named Devoy to oversee the rescue of the prisoners in Australia.

Fund-raising was still unfinished in February 1875, when he traveled to New Bedford in search of a ship and crew. Devoy carried an introduction from John Boyle O'Reilly, a former inmate at Fremantle who had escaped by stowing away on a whaling ship in 1869, and contacted former whaler Henry Hathaway. Hathaway then introduced Devoy to John Richardson, a whaling agent and Fenian sympathizer who nominated his son-in-law, George S. Anthony, to command the rescue vessel. Devoy explained the rescue plan. Under the guise of a whaling voyage, Anthony merely would have to sail to a given point off the coast of Western Australia on a certain date, take on several passengers, then make a beeline back to the United States. He would be well compensated. Anthony relished the chance to return to the sea, but it would mean leaving behind his wife of less than a year, his infant daughter and his invalid mother—not to mention the risk of capture and imprisonment by the British. To aggravate matters, the Irishmen had only given him 24 hours to make his decision. That night Anthony weighed the risks and decided to accept the command.



Within days of his decision, Anthony and his father-in-law began to scour the wharfs of Boston for a ship.

They finally purchased a three-masted barque, *Catalpa*, for \$5,200—to be reimbursed with money raised by the Clan. Anthony recruited 22 seasoned deckhands from New Bedford and nearby ports. A 23rd man, Dennis Dugan, was added to the roster by the Clan na Gael to look after its investment. Otherwise, the crew was comprised mainly of Pacific island natives and Africans. *Catalpa* slipped her moorings at New Bedford about 9 a.m. on April 29, 1875. Anthony then took a reading on the ship's chronometer—a time-keeping instrument that was vital to navigating the craft—and got bearings that placed the 90-foot whaler in the heart of New York state!

Anthony unable to repair the Chronometer had to rely on his own skill as a navigator. The end of October found *Catalpa* docked at Fayal Island in the Azores, where she off loaded 210 barrels of sperm oil for transport back to New Bedford. The profits helped to finance the mission. Then, without warning or explanation, most of *Catalpa*'s crew deserted at Fayal. Three more hands had to be discharged for medical reasons. Meanwhile, Irish agents who had been dispatched from the United States to “manage the land end of the rescue” had left Sydney where they had collected further funds from local Fenians supporters were making their way off the southern coast of Australia toward Fremantle, West Australia.

They were led by John Breslin, a 40-year-old railroad agent and former hospital official who was posing as a wealthy American mining speculator named James Collins. He reached Fremantle in November. His companion was Thomas Desmond, a carriage maker who found work as a wheelwright in Perth, about 20 miles north of Fremantle. Breslin and Desmond were able to travel freely, gathering important intelligence and plotting their course of action.

The genteel Breslin managed to endear himself to the governor and was led on a tour of the Fremantle stockade by the prison superintendent himself. Five other Irish sympathizers aided Breslin and Desmond: William Foley, an ex-prisoner residing in the community; Denis McCarthy and John Durham, who volunteered to cut the telegraph wires after the prison break; John King, a New Zealander who turned up with nearly \$4,000 that his countrymen had raised to help fund Breslin's operations; and Thomas Brennan, a Fenian who had traveled from the United States at his own expense.

Anthony, meanwhile, had deftly smuggled a new crew onto Catalpa, composed of native whale men who had been stranded in port without passports, and then beat a path to Tenerife in the Canary Islands. On March 27, 1876, Catalpa reached the bluffs at Cape Naturaliste on the southwestern tip of Australia. Early the next day, Catalpa dropped anchor off Bunbury Harbor. Learning of Catalpa's landfall, John Breslin made the 100-mile trek to Bunbury from Fremantle via mail coach. He met Anthony on the afternoon of March 31. Breslin said that once the prisoners were free, he and Desmond would transport them to Rockingham, a settlement on the coast about 20 miles south of Fremantle. There, Anthony would meet them with a whaleboat and row the prisoners a dozen miles out to Catalpa. The jailbreak was set for April 6. Their meeting ended, Anthony accompanied Breslin back to Fremantle aboard the mail steamer *Georgette*. The two departed Bunbury on April 1, but what they found upon arriving in Fremantle changed their plans completely. Riding menacingly at anchor in the harbor was Her Majesty's gunboat *Convict*. Another gunboat, they learned, was due to arrive any day. The rescue was rescheduled for April 17. During the interim, Anthony kept his crew occupied painting and overhauling the ship and severely restricted their shore leave.

On April 11, a telegram from Breslin arrived: The British gunboats were gone. A sudden storm and scrutiny by several customs officers delayed

Catalpa's departure until Saturday, April 15. She arrived about a dozen miles offshore of Rockingham at noon on Sunday. Just an hour later, Anthony was at the tiller of a longboat, guiding five sailors toward the rendezvous site. The jailbreak commenced before dawn on Monday. At 5:30 a.m., Breslin alerted the stable to harness his horses to his carriage. At 6 a.m., Thomas Brennan left Fremantle with a wagonload of luggage and weapons and headed straight for the beach. An hour later, Desmond ordered his own team and carriage to be harnessed, and headed out to meet Breslin at a prearranged spot on the main route to Rockingham. At about 8 o'clock, Breslin spotted three prisoners scurrying along the road toward him. James Wilson, Robert Cranston and Michael Harrington had slipped away from their morning work assignments outside the prison walls—a privilege granted them for their good behavior—and quickly made their way to the pick-up point, where they climbed onto Desmond's carriage. Not far behind, the three remaining prisoners—James Donagh, Thomas Hassett and Martin Hogan—clambered onto Breslin's carriage and soon were eating Desmond's dust. The time was

about 8:15 a.m. Brennan, first to arrive on the coast, hurried to stow the luggage and weapons on board Catalpa's whaleboat. At 10:30, the carriages with Desmond and Breslin at the reins rattled up. Passengers and crew boarded the whaleboat and shoved off none too soon.



Anthony's little craft was barely a half-mile out when a squad of carbine-wielding lawmen galloped onto the scene. For some reason, however, the officers held their fire. Seven hours later, Anthony's oarsmen pulled within sight of Catalpa. Anthony had the whaleboat's small sail raised and claimed that with luck they would reach Catalpa in an hour. But luck deserted them on the winds of a sudden rain squall. "By the time we had the mast and sail stowed away," Breslin reported, "the ship [Catalpa] had

disappeared in the increasing darkness.” For nearly 12 hours more, the tortuous sea threatened to swallow the frail craft and its exhausted occupants. By sunrise the gale had subsided and, at 7 a.m., Catalpa was in sight again. An hour later, though, Breslin spotted a curl of smoke in the distance, beneath which emerged the British steamer Georgette. For several hours, Georgette dogged Catalpa, forcing Anthony and his anxious passengers to keep their distance. When Georgette finally turned away and retraced her course toward Fremantle, Anthony steered for Catalpa and safety. But as the big ship changed course, a new threat was revealed. Advancing from the opposite direction was a police cutter bearing 30 to 40 armed men. Anthony shouted for his rowers to redouble their efforts and they won the grim race. As soon as their boat smacked Catalpa, the prisoners were scrambling up ropes. Moments later, the police cutter swept by, then turned and lingered briefly beside Catalpa before heading to shore.

In Fremantle, the colonial governor was determined to retake the six convicts by force if necessary. The Georgette was recalled, laden with scores of militiamen and police officers and re-embarked that night with a 12-pounder cannon fixed at her gangway. By early light on April 19,



Georgette’s lookouts had Catalpa in their sights bearing south-southeast under full sail, about 18 miles offshore. At 8 a.m. the British ship overtook Catalpa and fired a shot across her bow. Anthony maintained his speed and course and raised the U.S. flag in defiance.

Georgette pursued for some time, while a British officer

tried unsuccessfully to threaten, bluff or cajole Anthony to stop. Finally, the British steamer veered away.

Although Catalpa was free, a wearisome four-month voyage ensued before she docked in New York Harbor to a tumultuous welcome on August 19, 1876. There, and at testimonials across America, the six Irishmen and the men who had liberated them were feted as celebrities. In England, the success of the Catalpa rescue became a humiliating cause célèbre in Parliament and the British press. Catalpa suffered an inauspicious fate. Presented as a gift to Captain Anthony, John Richardson and Henry Hathaway, she eventually was sold and turned into a coal barge. Not of great value in this capacity, Catalpa was finally condemned at the port of Belize, British Honduras.



## ***See you later.....***

Catalpa brings to a close this first short season of live professional stage events produced by the Geneva Literary Aid Society which has helped us to raise over CHF 14,000 in support of people living with HIV/AIDS. We have been particularly pleased to be able to fund care and treatment to Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers in Africa and funding support to the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+). In fact, Stuart Flavell, GNP+ international co-ordinator and a man who has dedicated his life to supporting the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS has honored GLAS by agreeing to be our first patron.



We would like to acknowledge here the support of all those performers and the people who worked behind the scenes to make these first three events a success and example of community solidarity in the face of the greatest single threat to human life and dignity, a virus that now infects 40 million people and claims some 8,000 lives each day.

In particular, GLAS acknowledges the support of the following:

David Norris

Ronnie Drew

Mike Hanrahan

Donal O'Kelly

Trevor Knight

Declan McAdams

Sorcha Fox

Jane Easton

Finola Keating

Brian Wall

Jean-Charles Chamois

John Black

Donal O'Neill

Anglo Irish Bank (Suisse) SA

World Radio Geneva

Geneva Irish Association



**DONAL O'KELLY'S**  
**Catalpa**

**SCOTSMAN  
FRINGE  
1<sup>ST</sup> AWARD  
EDINBURGH  
FESTIVAL**

**BEST EVENT  
AWARD  
MELBOURNE  
INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL**

**CRITICS'  
CHOICE  
TIME OUT**

**MAXIMUM  
FOUR STAR  
RATING ★★★★★  
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