

2018-03-26

## RTÉ Brainstorm: How do You Create a Pageant for the St Patrick's Day Parade?

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### Recommended Citation

Sheehan, B. (2018) *RTÉ Brainstorm: How do you create a pageant for the St Patrick's Day parade?*. RTE website, March 26th., 2018.

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# How do you create a pageant for the St Patrick's Day parade?

Updated / Monday, 26 Mar 2018 14:37



The grand parade: DIT students taking part in the St Patrick's Day festivities in Dublin

## Brainstorm St Patrick's Day: notes from DIT's School of Creative Arts on designing and making pageant pieces for the Dublin parade

In 2016 and 2017, [DIT](#) created pageant pieces for the [St Patrick's Festival](#) parade in Dublin. In the [Dublin School of Creative Arts](#) in DIT we designed and fabricated the pageant pieces and, together with students and staff from all across DIT, we performed in the parade. In one sense, this was relatively straightforward, whilst in another it was incredibly challenging. Moving over a hundred people through the city in front of up to 500,000 people, live, with no full-dress rehearsal, never having done it before. No pressure.

The theme for the 2016 parade was The Future. With the name of the city in our title, we wanted to make our piece relate to Dublin. Cities like Dublin are layered.

We don't destroy everything from the past. Our city is composed of elements from previous centuries and this will be the case in the future. We decided to make our piece about Dublin and call it The Future is the Present is the Past.

So far, so good, so conceptual. Now what? What would this look like, how would we construct it and how would we get it across Dublin?



DIT's theme for the 2016 parade

The Dublin School of Creative Arts is based in [Grangegorman](#), which is close to the starting point in Western Way and another DIT campus in Kevin Street is near the end of the parade. So that sorted out the assembling and taking down of whatever we created, but what would that be?

**Kerry Anne Ridley** a fourth year Visual Communication student, worked on the imagery of fish, birds, rockets, islands, buildings, waves and whatnot to create the visual elements that were to make up our pageant. **Megan Wetherhill**, a BA in Creative and Cultural Industries student, worked on the logistical elements. Staff and students got stuck in with making the piece. We knew we could design and



make it, but who would perform it?

No bother, DIT has 20,000 students, and we need around 100. We would be beating them off. We put out the call to all staff and students to see who would be interested.

We were rather surprised at what happened. The overwhelming first responders were students from Poland, Brazil, Malaysia, China, France, Moldova, United States, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Nigeria etc. This was followed by older members of staff from Ireland who have fond memories of the parade and replied with messages like "on bucket list – what's involved?"



Some of the DIT participants in the 2017 parade

It seemed that the parade doesn't quite resonate with our Irish students in the way I thought that it would. Perhaps it is not seen as cool - who knows? For those who did take part, the buzz was incredible. We expected large crowds, particularly around the [GPO](#), but we did not expect them to be ten deep all the way from the [Black Church](#) to the [St Patrick's Cathedral](#).

We were asked back in 2017. Our 2016 parade consisted of elements largely designed by one person and we decided to widen it out to all staff and students of DIT. for the second year. The theme was Ireland You Are. So, what exactly is Ireland? We decided to ask everyone for pictures and words that described their Ireland.

The pictures we received were mixed. I thought we might get some urban gritty images, but what we received were largely happy images of Ireland bathed in sunshine and lots of green. It seems that the traditional iconography associated with the St Patrick's Festival is deeply ingrained.

The words submitted were much more imaginative. **Declan Behan**, a Visual Communication student, came up with the idea of putting words on traditional signposts. We picked sets of opposites and used the signs to point at people in the crowd, twirling the sides to suit: Chancers and Romancers, Saints and Sinners, Ludramans and Gombeens, Myths and Legends, Hell and Connaught. We added in a sprinkling of silly puns: St. Patrick's Close and Saint Patrick's Far Away, Saint Brigid's Cross and Saint Bridgid's Happy. You get the idea.



## Signs of the time

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Once again we had Visual Communication students involved in the design concepts and additional imagery, as well as **Gillian Hopkins** and **Laura Burke** from the BA in Creative and Cultural Industries working on logistics. We had varied images of a modern Ireland, as well as a giant illustration of St Patrick riding a motorbike in his leathers banishing snakes. DIT societies got involved with the irrepressible [Dance Society](#) and the [DJ Society](#) as well as the [Design Society](#) jumping on board.

The 2017 theme was Ireland You Are. We had ponchos designed which bore the hundreds of words we received, some of which are:

Young, lovable, generous, contradictory, out the road, wet, multinational, ethnic, unique, optimistic, soggy, playful, welcoming, alive and whatever...

And we reflected who was actually taking part in our pageant with Ireland We Are:

Declan, Denise, Aoibheann, YuYu, Michelle, Martyna, Samya, Monikarita, Mehdi, Harshavardhan, Hiutung, Apurva, Muhammad, Jacinta, Declan, Fiona and Orla

The names reflect the international dimension of an institution like DIT, with a multiplicity of students with heritages from all around the world. DIT is situated in, and representative of, the modern open society that is Ireland, a country that now counts names other than John, Finbar and Patrick as its first borns.

Everyone should get behind the festival. After all, it is all about you.

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