

Actor Gabriel Byrne, living in Midcoast, lends voice to domestic abuse awareness fundraiser

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Gabriel Byrne likes to keep a low profile.

The actor who starred as savvy criminals in “Miller’s Crossing” and “The Usual Suspects” has been living in Rockport for nearly 10 years, quietly enjoying the area’s lively arts scene and a landscape that reminds him of his native Ireland.

AN EVENING WITH GABRIEL BYRNE

WHAT: A screening of “The Usual Suspects,” followed by a live Q-and-A with Byrne, who lives in Rockport.

WHEN: 7 p.m. March 9

WHERE: Camden Opera House, 29 Elm St., Camden

HOW MUCH: \$35

INFO: camdenoperhouse.com

WHAT ELSE: All proceeds benefit Finding Our Voices and Maine women and child domestic abuse survivors. For more information, go to findourvoices.net.

But he recently decided to become a bit more public in his adopted home state, to help raise awareness about domestic abuse.

An Evening With Gabriel Byrne will be held March 9 at the Camden Opera House as a fundraiser for the advocacy organization Finding Our Voices. The evening will include a screening of “The Usual Suspects” plus a question-and-answer session with Byrne.

Byrne said he offered to help Finding Our Voices after meeting founder Patrisha McLean, who lives in nearby Camden, at a Midcoast cafe. He said he was impressed with the work that she has been doing and wanted to help in some way.

“I do admire very much the work, the necessary work that she does, in Maine. She’s provided a refuge for these people. Of course, in an ideal world, it wouldn’t be necessary,” said Byrne, 73. “This is the first thing I’ve ever gotten involved with here. I usually just keep a very low profile, but I think this is something worth doing.”

Patrisha McLean, the former wife of singer Don McLean, began advocating for survivors of domestic abuse after an incident in 2016 at the home she shared with her then-husband. The incident led to [several domestic violence-related charges](#), some of which Don McLean [pleaded guilty to](#). Patrisha McLean, a photojournalist, later organized a photo and audio exhibit called Finding Our Voices, focused on 14 local women who were survivors of domestic abuse. In 2021, Finding Our Voices became a nonprofit organization working to support Maine domestic violence survivors and “amplify survivor voices.”



Patrishia McLean of Camden founded Finding Our Voices, an organization that encourages women to talk about domestic abuse. *Gregory Rec/Portland Press Herald photo*
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Byrne is covering the cost of renting the opera house, and the venue is paying to have the film shown, Patrishia McLean said.

Byrne said he thought showing “The Usual Suspects” would be a good way to draw people to the event because it’s a “crowd pleaser” and “not like the art house films I’ve made.” The 1995 suspense film tells the story of gang of criminals and a mysterious crime lord. Besides Byrne the movie stars Kevin Spacey, Kevin Pollak, Stephen Baldwin and Chazz Palminteri.

Byrne thinks the film continues to gain new audiences nearly 30 years later because it’s an “absolutely original thriller.”

“Very few people see the ending coming, people are always surprised and shocked,” said Byrne. “It’s a movie that just keeps moving from generation to generation. It’s not dated, and it’s not seen as a product of a particular time.”

Though the fundraising event will feature a screening of “The Usual Suspects,” Byrne said he’ll be happy to talk about the making of that film or any other film he’s been involved with, how filmmaking has changed and his own life story.

Byrne first discovered Midcoast Maine years ago while attending a wedding. The area around Camden, Rockport and Rockland reminded him a lot of Ireland, enough to convince him he wanted to live there.

“I think a lot of immigrants look for some connection with home in the landscape that they find themselves in. The fields and rivers and trees and hills of Maine, I really connected with them,” said Byrne.

Byrne, who lives in Rockport with his wife, Hannah Beth King, also appreciates that the area has a lot of artists, photographers, writers and other creative types, as well as book stores, independent movie theaters and the Camden International Film Festival.

“It reveals itself, bit by bit. Somebody will say, ‘Oh, I’m a writer, I’m a photographer,’ ” Byrne said. “It’s an area that’s culturally alive.”

Byrne grew up in Dublin and didn’t start acting until he was about 30 years old, “so I missed out on all the young roles people play,” he said. He had never thought of acting while growing up and went to college to study Gaelic and European literature, with the hopes of becoming a teacher. He taught at St. Enda’s, a secondary school in Dublin, for about eight years.

He began a drama class at one point, where students would write plays, and sometimes they wrote roles for him, he said. After one performance Byrne was in, a parent told him he should consider acting full-time.

“I was shocked because I thought there’s no way I could ever become an actor. I’ve never met an actor. The only actors I’d ever seen were on the screen,” said Byrne.

He decided to start auditioning for amateur theater productions and thought it would be a nice way to spend his spare time, when not teaching. He was soon working in a theater group with Liam Neeson and Stephen Rea, two other Irish actors who’d go on to film careers. He worked on stage in London in the late 1970s and early 1980s before getting into films and coming to Hollywood.

One of his first roles to make a big impact on American audiences and filmmakers was Tom Reagan in Ethan and Joel Coen’s 1996 gangster film “Miller’s Crossing.” The 1990 film also featured Marcia Gay Harden, John Turturro and Albert Finney.

Byrne, who has not lost his strong Irish accent, said he had to learn over the years to do a believable American accent in order to get parts. He said an Irish actor once told him that all he needed to do to sound American was to speak quickly and through his nose. But the first time he auditioned that way, the casting director thought he had a cold.

Byrne lived in Los Angeles, to be near the film industry, for about seven years. He missed the change of seasons and felt like he didn’t quite fit in.

“You know, it’s a working town, and people talk about films there from one end of the day to the other. And that can become a bit wearing and draining,” Byrne said.

Byrne said he’s “taking it very easy, at the moment” and not working in films as often as he once did. He starred as Irish playwright Samuel Beckett in the 2023 film “Dance First” and played Italian racecar driver and entrepreneur Enzo Ferrari in the 2022 film “Lamborghini: The Man Behind the Legend.”

He still goes back to Ireland three or four times a year but doesn’t think he’d ever live there full-time again. He travels around the world for work and visits New York often but considers Maine home.

“I’m 100 percent Irish and I’ll never be anything else. But I think once you leave a place, you change and the place you leave changes too,” said Byrne. “I have a sense of belonging in Maine. It’s comforting to know that you can come back to a place that feels like home.”



Actor Gabriel Byrne, who lives in Rockport, at the Irish Film and Drama Awards in Dublin in 2018, where he received a lifetime achievement award. *Photo courtesy of Shutterstock*

SOME OF GABRIEL BYRNE’S FILM AND TV ROLES

“Dance First” (2023) as Samuel Beckett (old)
“Lamborghini: The Man Behind the Legend” (2022) as Enzo Ferrari
“In Treatment” (2008-2010) as Dr. Paul Weston
“Jindabyne” (2006) as Stewart Kane
“Vanity Fair” (2004) as the Marquess of Steyne
“The Man in the Iron Mask” (1998) as D’Artagnan
“The Usual Suspects” (1995) as Keaton
“Little Women” (1994) as Friedrich Bhaer
“A Dangerous Woman” (1993) as Mackey
“Miller’s Crossing” (1990) as Tom Reagan
“Excalibur” (1981) as Uther Pendragon

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