

# Northern uproar

## JOHN CROWLEY talks to two young performers who are taking a play to Chicago

BRINGING a theatre production to the London stage is a tortuous enough process.

What may seem like an inspired idea on paper can soon go horribly wrong when dealing with fragile actors' egos and rising overheads.

So, when bright sparks Simon Fullerton and Patricia McGinnis came up with the notion last summer of taking a play across the pond to Chicago, USA, they couldn't have imagined their dreams would become reality less than a year down the line.

"We started off with nothing and everything just snowballed," Simon says. "It's been such a buzz."

But Simon and Patricia

haven't just chanced their luck and struck gold. They're two incredibly sussed, professionally-trained actors who first came across each other at the Ulster Youth Theatre eight years ago. The duo subsequently met up again when they both independently left Northern Ireland to study drama in London.

They also have acting and producing credits as long as your arm.

Patricia, who hails from rural Co. Derry, has worked as a television presenter on BBC Northern Ireland programme *Over The Wall* and co-produced an AIDS awareness theatre forum project. Belfast-born Simon,

meanwhile, who trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, has produced an acclaimed play at the Edinburgh Festival, made a fleeting appearance in Northern Irish film *Titanic Town* and is a trained circus performer to boot.

Both of them are part of an artistic collective called *Wide*. Formed in 1994, it's made up of a melange of young actors, writers, directors, DJs, artists, musicians and producers who have produced seven theatrical productions, numerous successful club nights and regular live gigs.

Their latest project, of which Simon and Patricia are executive producers, sees them take Paul Sellar's award-

winning play, *The Bedsit*, to Chicago. It focuses on a disillusioned IRA man who fakes his own death before coming to Kilburn. But his aspiration to disappear off the face of the earth and "write crap poetry" comes unstuck when two young idealistic new recruits come across the hero they thought was dead.

After sounding out to interested parties in the US about the play they were told at first it was too "political". Americans evidently don't want their rose-tinted view of Ireland challenged, but they were eventually convinced.

"This play is bang up to date with issues of the IRA and the Republican movement, the idea that is there still a call to arms despite the Peace Process," says Simon.

"We actually want to take what outsiders look upon Northern Ireland and tell them they've got it all wrong. We're not stupid, we're not Guinness drinkers, we might even like a gin and tonic sometimes! We want to smash the stereotypes all to bits and say, dare I say it, that

we're funky people. We're trying to look from both sides. Trish is Catholic and I'm Protestant and people think she has one view and I must have another."

Patricia adds: "We were trying to get sponsorship for this which was very difficult. We didn't fit into any category because we're both from Northern Ireland, we're living in London and we're taking this play to America."

However, the determined duo finally got sponsorship with the Northern Ireland

Tourist Board.

"I want to go to America and promote Northern Ireland as well," Simon adds. "We're two young people from Northern Ireland who are doing something. We're trying to do something positive."

■ If you would like to support the project email: [www.chicago@wideadventure.com](mailto:www.chicago@wideadventure.com) or phone 07931 304 297. A three-week run of *The Bedsit* on the London fringe will take place in the near future.



From left, Conor Moloney, John Paul Connolly and Simon Fullerton in *The Bedsit*

Picture: David Levene