

Healing the Lord of the Dance

by TARA KING

IF any of the local farmers needed a ditch or two dug out in Doonbeg last week, one man staying at the Doonbeg Golf Resort would have been more than capable, and probably more than happy, to have lent a hand.

Michael Flatley, the charismatic Chicago man who spent 35 years digging ditches before he went on to make Irish dancing bigger than the Rolling Stones, visited West Clare with his family last week where he met his friend and health therapist, Michael O'Doherty.

In an exclusive interview, Michael Flatley spoke in depth about overcoming the serious illness, which first attacked his health just over two years ago.

"I've had a very serious illness now for two years, very serious," he begins. "In fact, there was a couple of times I thought they were going to lose me. It's a scary place to be, but I don't believe in the drugs or any of that stuff, and normally when they give it to me, I just stop taking it after a while, because I just don't like taking drugs. Through a very good friend of mine, I was introduced to Michael O'Doherty of Plexus Bio-Energy and he did some energy healing on me to try and get my energy flowing and to clear my chakras. It has made a huge improvement in my overall well-being and I highly recommend it. No matter what you think your problems may be, they can be cured if your energy is cleared, cleaned and moving again.

"The Chinese are 5,000 years ahead of everybody else and their medicine is all about chi and the parts of the body that you can't actually see. If your energy is moving then it's going to help everything."

He adds, "I felt it working right from the get go. If you have a good energy person who really knows what they're do-

ing, you'll feel it immediately. It might take 24 hours until you feel the full benefits but you do feel something straight away. I don't have anything against doctors but I just don't think that drugs are always the answer to everything."

While Michael has always been enthusiastic about natural healing methods, a positive outlook is a staple part of his day-to-day life.

"I think positive thinking is a huge part of this. I've always worked with energy, in that I've always had Reiki people working on me; I've had terrific people in the past that have done energy work on me but I had to come home to Ireland to get the best one, back to Ennis," he smiles as he nods at Michael O'Doherty.

"Michael (O'Doherty) made a significant improvement into my overall health and because of that, that puts you in a positive state of mind to keep on fighting and keep on doing more things. I was already in training when I met Michael. It's like when you're lifting weights; when there's a guy on either side helping you lift the bar, it's much easier. My message to anyone in Clare who has any illness is to take that chance to deal with it in a positive way rather than just taking a crutch and saying 'I'll rely on drugs'. You have to do it yourself. Before I go to the bathroom in the morning, I'm on the floor doing stomach crunches because if you let it go five more minutes, you'll talk yourself out of it. That's the energy I have to put back in. Your body can cure itself of anything if you're willing to believe in it and work at it."

When Michael Flatley was a name unknown to the world, his working platform was not a stage but a ditch.

"I've always believed in having a positive attitude," he explains. "I remember 20 years ago when I was out digging ditches, it looked like I wasn't going to get any further but I believed in my heart that I would be on the stage at Radio City. I kept focused and I spent my days in that ditch



thinking I was somewhere else and it got me there. It's important. I had a very bad time with Riverdance, but I believed in myself and I went back and I created a new show. Nothing is impossible. 20 years ago, if I told you that some guy from Chicago that does the jig is going to outsell the Rolling Stones, you'd still be laughing. But I did it!"



■ (Left) Michael Flatley pictured at Doonbeg Golf Club. ■ Michael O'Doherty welcomes dancer Michael Flatley as he steps off the golf course.

Photographs by Declan Monaghan

Michael O'Doherty, who comes from Doonbeg and is based in Ennis, outlined the pivotal nature of Michael's positive outlook when it came to the success of his healing treatment.

"When I met Michael first, I looked at his biography and I had seen how he had overcome a serious injury in the dancing and obviously that mentality and that belief that he had was so crucial that when I had the opportunity to meet Michael I was absolutely delighted to be associated in some way to help him continue his process of recovery. He had begun a journey and I was a cog in that whole chain. Ultimately, it was Michael's whole attitude because he's consciously aware of those dimensions. I think he has something fantastic to offer the Irish people. He gives leadership, confidence and he expresses what people are capable of doing."

A gifted flautist, Michael Flatley is incredibly au fait

with Clare's stamp on traditional music.

"I played music in Ennis years and years ago," he says. "I know all the terrific musicians from here, the young Martin Hayes and all the lads, the Tulla Céilí Band. What a great place for music, absolutely great. I play in a lot of trad sessions. Matt Molloy is one of my best friends, so I play a lot in Westport with Matt. My dad is from Sligo, so there's a lot of traditional music in me. I grew up playing with Seamus Tansey, Peter Horan, Fred Finn, Kevin Henry, all those guys were the guys I looked up to."

He adds, "From Ennis, Doolin, Lahinch, Ennistymon, Doonbeg, and all along this coast is sensational. The thing I like most about Clare though is the people; people mean everything to me. When you're sitting here in Doonbeg, it's hard not to first speak of the unbelievable beauty of where we are. I spent several

hours on my very first day walking up and down that beach and it was a beautiful sunny day. Then I played the golf course and I just couldn't believe it, the people here are just unbelievable. My caddy today is Gary who is actually a dancer in my show. He was in Celtic Tiger and we opened together in Madison Square Garden. I love that kid! You can see him on the tape doing some Gaelic football on stage."

Not once does Michael complain about Clare's stormy clouds.

"It's a beautiful county," he smiles. "My wife and I love walking along the beach when the rain is blowing sideways and it's really rough. That's our favourite time to be out there. I love that. Tonight, it's a few 'aul' pints in the local pubs and I'll take down the flute and play a few tunes and meet some people. The night is young and the sky's the limit."