

A portrait of Gilbert O'Sullivan, a man with long, dark, curly hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a light blue striped shirt. He is sitting on a blue tufted leather chair, with his hands clasped in his lap. The background is a textured, mottled grey wall.

GILBERT O'SULLIVAN

Freedom of Waterford City and County

March 27th 2024



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae Phort Láirge
Waterford City
& County Council



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GILBERT O'SULLIVAN

BORN
1 DECEMBER 1946

BORN IN
WATERFORD, IRELAND

Gilbert O'Sullivan's unique blend of melodic craftsmanship, witty wordplay, topical acuity and surrealist humour has given him an enduring and endearing career.

His song writing knack has outlived and transcended fashion, global million-sellers and critical acclaim.

Now recognised as one of our great singer-songwriters, he's been championed in recent years by everyone from Paul Weller, Nina Simone, Mick Hucknall, Squeeze's Difford & Tilbrook, Neil Diamond to Gary Barlow (whose Crooner Sessions Gilbert duetted on earlier this year), Empire Of The Sun, Boy George and The Charlatans' Tim Burgess whose acclaimed 'The Listening Party' recently featured Gilbert's 'Himself', 'Back to Front' and 2022's 'Driven' albums and who recently joined him on stage for a duet of 'Nothing Rhymed'.

Gilbert O'Sullivan's career has spanned 50 years. His first single success 'Nothing Rhymed' was released in 1970 and almost overnight it achieved Top 10 status in the UK and European charts.

His 1971 debut album *Himself* was littered with the most perfect examples of his art and craftsmanship. His second, 1972's *Back To Front*, firmly cemented Gilbert amongst the world's best, with Top 10 singles and no. 1's around the world, including the classic 'Alone Again (Naturally)' which topped the US charts for six weeks and earned him three Grammy nominations.



MAYOR'S SPEECH

CLLR. JOE CONWAY

Fellow Councillors, ladies & gentlemen, and guests of honour, Gilbert and the O'Sullivan family.

Is cúis áthais domsa a bheith anseo inniu chun onóir a thabhairt don bhfear gur cáil a hainm ar fud an domhain mar cheann dár n-amhránaithe agus dár gcumadóirí is fearr riamh in Éirinn.

Gabhaim buíochas faoi leith lena bhean chéile Aase, a hiníonacha Tara agus Helen Marie agus lena gharpháistí Benny-Ray, Stevie, agus Jeannie as ucht bheith anseo linn chun Saoirse Chathair agus Chontae Phort Láirge a bhronnadh ar Gilbert O'Sullivan.

Since it was first granted in 1195, the Freedom of Waterford City and County has represented a distinguished honour, graciously extended to individuals both from within and beyond Waterford. This honour not only permitted the bearer to conduct trade freely within the city's bounds but also established the tradition whereby the city's Council members were chosen from amongst these freemen.

The 300-year-old tradition of presenting the freedom scroll in an engraved, handmade silver box has now been revived by Waterford City and County Council. The freedom scrolls and miniature certificates too are in the medieval tradition, made of calf skin vellum, the same material that was used to make the Book of Kells and our own Great Parchment Book.

Drawing upon this cherished history then, it is with great honour and pride that I, as the Mayor of Waterford City and County, extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to Gilbert O'Sullivan – a signal composer and performer from Waterford roots who has made an indelible mark on the world of modern music.

Today, within the walls of this our historic City Hall, we gather to bestow upon him the Freedom of Waterford City and County, a testament to his contributions and the esteem in which he is held both here and worldwide.

It is also my pleasure to welcome his family, friends, and all those who have come together to share in this occasion. Together, we celebrate not only the conferring of this accolade but also celebrate the impact Gilbert has made on our community and beyond.

MAYOR'S SPEECH

CLLR. JOE CONWAY

Born on the 1st of December 1946 on the Cork Road here in the city, Gilbert's early life was marked by a spirit of resilience and creativity. Like myself, he is one of six children, and again like myself and many in the 50s and 60's, his family soon relocated to England for new opportunities, initially in the SW of London in Battersea – just up the road from my own clan in Wandsworth – before settling in Wiltshire in the shadow of the Cotswolds, it was here that Gilbert's musical journey began, playing the piano and honing his craft not through formal lessons, but playing by ear, a testament to his outstanding natural talent.

His first single success 'Nothing Rhymed' was released in 1970, quickly achieving Top 10 status in the UK and European charts. His 1971 debut album Himself was littered with perfect examples of his song writing craftsmanship. His second, 1972's Back To Front, firmly cemented Gilbert amongst music's best, with Top 10 singles and no. 1's around the world, including the classic 'Alone Again (Naturally)' which topped the US charts for six weeks and earned him three Grammy nominations.

Worldwide recognition soon followed with the songs 'Clair' and 'Get Down' reaching the summit of the UK singles charts and his LP Back To Front topping the album charts. In the same year at the 18th Ivor Novello Awards, Gilbert was named 'Song Writer of the Year'.

Personally, as a fan of his work for a half-century now, I regularly enjoy his "Berry Vest" compilation as I drive the miles here and there – my personal favourite being the very sparse and captivating "Miss my love today", but I also have a naughty chuckle still at "Permissive Twit".

I could go on, detailing the milestones and accolades that Gilbert O'Sullivan has achieved throughout a career spanning 50 years. However, the essence of the man is captured not just in the length of his career, but in the depth of his impact on music and the hearts of those who have had the privilege to witness his journey.

With that in mind, it is now my pleasure to hand over to Cllr. Lola O'Sullivan, to formally propose the motion that the Freedom of Waterford City and County be conferred on Gilbert O'Sullivan.

I extend my thanks to her for bringing us together today to celebrate such an illustrious career. Cllr. O'Sullivan, the floor is yours to share a few words.

Go raibh maith agaibh.

PROPOSER'S SPEECH

CLLR. LOLA O'SULLIVAN

I would like to echo the Mayor's comments and welcome you all today to the awarding of the Freedom of Waterford City and Council to Gilbert O'Sullivan.

It is a singular honour for me to propose the motion to admit Gilbert O'Sullivan to the Freedom of Waterford City and County in recognition of his enormous service to the music industry for the last 50 years.

Waterford-born Gilbert has carved out a remarkable career with his unique blend of melody, wit, and surreal humour, earning global success and critical acclaim. He's now hailed as one of the great singer-songwriters, acclaimed by a diverse range of artists including Paul Weller, Nina Simone, and Gary Barlow. Recently, Tim Burgess featured Gilbert's albums on 'The Listening Party' and joined him for a duet onstage, solidifying his place in music lore.

Music aside, Gilbert is a proud father and grandfather. Although he may no longer live here, he will always be one of Waterford's greats.

I thank you all once again for joining us and Gilbert, once again, I commend you on an amazing career and it is my great pleasure to see you award the Freedom of the City and County today.

SECONDER'S SPEECH

CLLR. JOE KELLY

I too would like to welcome you all to City Hall and I reiterate what was previously been said in regards to Gilbert's illustrious career.

From the Cork Road to the Royal Albert Hall, Glastonbury and everywhere in between, Gilbert is world renowned. An eye-catching visual image consisting of a bowl cut, cloth cap and short trousers inspired by his love of silent films made him stand out and scored him his first contract after catching the eye of the professional manager.

Gilbert, you burst onto the music scene with the witty and original hit "Nothing Rhymed," marking the start of a successful career under MAM Records, guided by mentor Gordon Mills.

The string of hits continued with chart-topping singles like "Clair" and "Get Down," and albums such as "Back to Front" reaching top positions in the UK charts. Shedding the older image, you embraced a new style, symbolized by the iconic "G" sweaters.

Further achievements include three Ivor Novello Awards and notable performances at BBC Proms and Glastonbury. Recent albums, like 2018's "Gilbert O'Sullivan" and 2024's "Driven," produced by Ethan Johns and Andy Wright respectively, have reignited interest in your exceptional talent, earning acclaim from critics.

A fifty-year career, adorned with awards and performances around the world, is exactly why Gilbert is deserving of this honour.

Gilbert, I wish you a continued long and lustrous career and it is my pleasure to second this proposal and indeed, to be a part of today's proceedings.

Thank you.

HISTORY OF THE AWARD

The Freedom of Waterford City and County has been a coveted privilege and honour since civic government replaced military governors back in 1195.

The Freedom allowed the recipient to trade freely within the city and it was from among the freemen that members of the Council were chosen. The present Council members might be interested to hear that until 1840 membership of the Council was for life.

In the middle ages according to the Great Parchment Book in order to be admitted to the freedom, one had to provide the Council with two half barges of stone, the stonewas to be used for building a wall around the city.

In the 18th century it became the custom to present the freedom in small circular handmade silver boxes, a number of which we have put on display in the Large Room. The freedom certificate was folded and put into these boxes and the earliest surviving Waterford freedom cert is just over 300 years old and the earliest Waterford made freedom box we have dates to 1772. Both the certificate and the freedom box are on display downstairs in the Mayor's Exhibition.

On visiting Waterford City, distinguished visitors such as the King's representative in Ireland were given the freedom in either a silver or silver gilt box. The idea of conferring notable personages with the Honorary Freedom began in the 19th century when many of the leading figures of the Home Rule movement were presented with it - Isaac Butt, Charles Stuart Parnell. It was given to John Redmond in 1902 by Mayor Richard Hearne, father of John Hearne who was Ireland's first ambassador to the United States of America.

Honorary Freedom is the highest honour that Waterford City and County Council can bestow. For Waterford it is comparable to Oxford University conferring an honorary degree.

The 300 year old tradition of presenting the freedom in a silver box has now been revived by Waterford City and County Council. The engraved box was hand made by silversmith Séamus Gill.

The freedom scrolls and miniature certificates are in the medieval tradition made of calf skin vellum, the same material that was used to make the Book of Kells and our own Great Parchment Book. The calligrapher is Tim O'Neill a renowned scholar and a national expert on the Irish manuscript tradition. Tim has worked with the likes of Seamus Heaney and has published widely on the art of calligraphy.



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