

Life & Style

ACTING/ACADEMICS

Northport Resident Blends Theater With Academia

By **Jano Tantongco**

jtantongco@longislandergroup.com

Mary Caulfield values Irish theater for its ability to entertain, but she's also fascinated by its ability to catalyze political change.

"Ireland was able to use something I loved so much as a political tool to help inspire and gain independence," said Caulfield, of Northport.

The fascination has served as the basis for Caulfield, 37, to fuse her own on-stage acting with a rigorous academic background, which has a focus on Irish theater and its historical context.

The combination has, over the course of 20 years, taken Caulfield to Ireland and surrounding areas; through critical academic studies; to theater roles Off-Off Broadway, Off-Broadway; and even a gig on popular television show "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit."

And today it's brought her Farmingdale State College where she works as an English professor.

"She has quite an interesting background in the Irish theater, which she has translated into an acting career on the Island," said Peter Crescenti, media relations manager for Farmingdale college.

The love for Irish theater was instilled in Caulfield by her late father, Jack, who passed away when she was 18 years old.

"He made Irish music and Irish culture a part of our lives," she said. Caulfield appreciated that the Irish people "saw theater as a means to celebrate their culture and history."

Born and raised in East Northport, she moved to Northport Village when she was 18. She first cultivated her love of acting as "Maria" in Northport High School's production of "West Side Story."

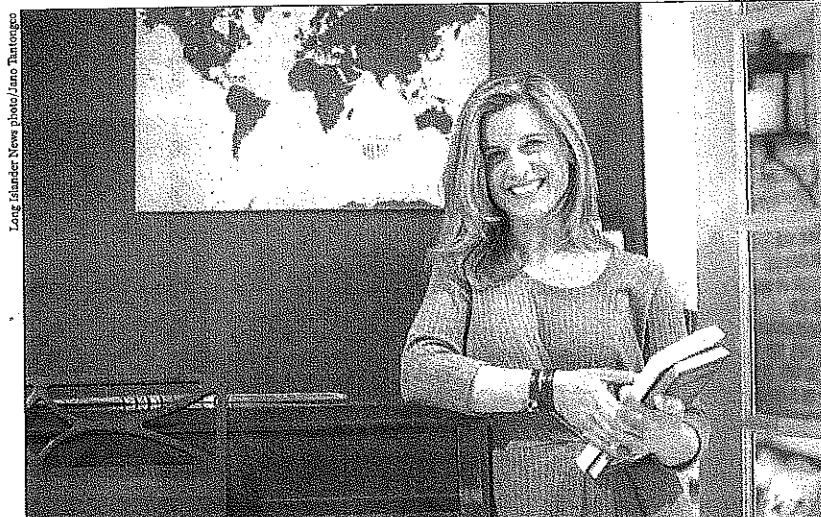
In 1996, Caulfield left for Syracuse University to study theater, but ventured to Ireland for spring break, stoking the fire of her love for the Irish theater. She backpacked across the country, visiting areas like Galway, Connemara, Westport, Mayo, Dublin, Cork and Belfast.

"That was my Irish-American roots and really finding a love of that music," said Caulfield. "A lot of place names are really prevalent in their music."

In Ireland Caulfield made an effort to visit the locations referred to in the music that she loved, including those referenced by contemporary Irish rock band, The Saw Doctors, whose songs include the "N17," "Green and Red of Mayo" and "Clare Island."

After returning from her trip and graduating from Syracuse in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in drama, she moved to Manhattan and eventually landed a job in Off-Off-Broadway productions, eventually transitioning to Off-Broadway.

Caulfield also worked on the set of "Law & Order: SVU" as a production assistant from 2002-



Northport native Mary Caulfield wears many hats, including those of an Irish theater actress, a boatyard launch operator and, most recently, an assistant English professor at Farmingdale State College.

"There were times when I had to be up at 4 a.m. and sit in the rain for 12 hours, but it was a lot of fun to see the business from the other side."

Caulfield appeared on the show as a backup for NYPD Detective Odafin Tutuola, who is portrayed by rapper and actor Ice-T. Caulfield said she was very excited to work with the artist.

"You wouldn't know it to look at me, but I'm a big fan of breakdancing and hip-hop," she said.

She also played the humble role of a dead body found in a garbage can. The appearances helped her secure membership in the Screen Actors Guild.

Caulfield next sought to acquire her Master of Arts degree in theater and performance studies at New York University through the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. There, she designed her own academic track, fusing the performance studies aspect from NYU's Tisch School and Irish studies from the university's Glucksman Ireland House. She completed her degree in 2004.

Two years later, she moved to Ireland and earned her doctorate in theatre literature and history and criticism from Trinity College in 2011.

Caulfield said she fully immersed herself in Irish culture at this time.

Recently, Caulfield has been acting with Centerport-based theater troupe Arena Players Repertory Theatre Company.

Frederic De Feis, founder and producer of Arena Players, noted that plays featuring Caulfield have garnered rave reviews. He added that she brings in-

In the troupe's latest production, "Toyer," a tale of a serial killer who paralyzes his victims by turning them into living dolls by severing their brain stems, Caulfield plays the lead psychiatrist.

De Feis said that Caulfield brings "a lot of understanding of psychiatric problems... she uses intelligence and psychology" in her role.

Off-stage, Caulfield enjoys sailing, golfing and animal rescue. She has two "misfit dogs with three eyes between them."

She's married to Matthew DeBlasi, another Northport resident, whom she has known since they were 11 years old.

As a Northport native, Caulfield has also committed to the nautical life by working at Seymour's Boatyard for the past 20 years.

General Manager of the boatyard Dave Weber Jr. said that Caulfield started working at the gas dock, selling fuel to boaters. A year after that, she became a launch operator, transporting customers to their boats and back to the main dock.

He recalled a time about 10 years ago when the seas were especially stormy. She had to transport 20 boaters back to the dock. Because the water was so rough, she was forced to transport them safely to the gas dock.

While he might have expected a rough landing, Weber said that Caulfield skillfully brought them back "like an everyday Sunday."

"You could probably put her in any situation. She's very adaptive. I can't say it enough, but our