



# MY HAVEN – MICHAEL FLATLEY

*The Riverdance creator, 57, in the hall at Castlehyde, his 18th-century estate in County Cork*

## 1 FLUTE CHAMP

Castlehyde was a wreck when I bought it in 1999 and I've spent a fortune restoring it. Now it's my haven, full of works of art and valuable objects, but the most precious things are my wife Niamh and our son Michael St James, who's eight. I have a collection of about 50 rare flutes that I'm told is one of the finest in the world – most were made in the early 19th century. This one, made in 1836, is particularly special because it was the prize for the first of my two world flute titles as a teenager.

## 2 FAMILY HONOURS

Here's a collection of medals won by a talented bunch of my ancestors. My grandmother was a champion dancer, my grandfather was a sensational athlete who was a world class hammer thrower in the 1940s, and my father and uncle were fine boxers. The big medal in the centre was given to the family after my great grand-uncle Michael Ryan was killed in the Boer War – I was named after him. These medals have inspired me when I've been striving to overcome the odds.

## 3 MAGIC SHOES

These old dancing shoes were made by a Mexican craftsman in Los Angeles about 30 years ago and I keep them in a glass case because they're so important to me. I created all my shows with these, including Riverdance. They have such an amazing balance to them and they create a sound like an old bass drum. I love them so much I've had them rebuilt 13 times over the years. Me and these shoes are partners for life. They have such a magic that I swear they could dance on their own!

## 4 WHISKY GALORE

This is an empty bottle of Midleton Irish whisky. It's a very rare numbered bottle, which I bought at auction in Canada about four years ago and I've yet to see another one come up for sale. It's one of the finest whiskeys I've ever tasted and I think I've drunk the best in the world. I have a whisky room with hundreds of bottles, but this bottle is special because I finished the last few shots with my father Michael about two years ago. He died in March and I miss him every day.

## 5 BOOKWORM

Books mean a lot to me and I have a library with a collection of rare first editions. These three are very dear to me. The large one on the sofa was given to me by Muhammad Ali after I spent some time at his house in Arizona a few years ago. It's the story of his life and has some amazing unseen photos. There's also a first edition of Ulysses by James Joyce with illustrations by Henri Matisse, signed by both men, and a signed copy of Nelson Mandela's autobiography.

## 6 ARTY FEET

Painting is another passion of mine and over the past ten years my style has moved towards Expressionism and abstracts like this. I never use brushes, I dance on the canvas – I use strips of vinyl flooring – in an old pair of dancing shoes. Sometimes I throw paint or use an old rag. I had my first exhibition in July in London and it went well. When I paint I go into a world of my own for days. Niamh has to bring food to me in the studio and I even fall asleep in there.

*As told to Rob McGibbon. Michael's show Lord Of The Dance: Dangerous Games is at the Playhouse Theatre, London, until 3 January. lordofthedance.com.*

**LOOK WHO'S 55**

It's Tilda Swinton's birthday this week, but how well has she aged compared with her peers?



**ALL OVER** Princess Margaret called off her wedding to the divorced Group Captain Peter Townsend on this day in 1955

