

Paddy Henry: An Appreciation



The amateur drama world in Ireland has been shocked and saddened by the recent death of one of its longest serving and most successful producers, Paddy Henry. Born in Charlestown, Co. Mayo in 1932, where he ran a drinks business until he retired to Knocknacarra in Galway City in 1998, Paddy produced dozens of plays in both communities, spanning a period of over fifty years. He passed away on 8 July last after a brief illness and is survived by his wife Geraldine, six children, ten grandchildren and his brother, Desmond.

Paddy was first and foremost a devoted husband and father, and he and his wife Geraldine have been the heart and soul of the communities in which they lived. In both Charlestown (where Paddy ran a successful family business) and Knocknacarra (where he spent nine active years of retirement) he and Geraldine always gave of themselves to promote local groups. Drama was Paddy's passion, and apart from writing short plays and short stories, it was as an actor and producer that he excelled. He worked equally well with young and old, as was epitomised by his involvement in recent years with Living Scenes productions – a collaboration between Knocknacarra Actively Retired Association and Galway City's Presentation Secondary School, in which Paddy directed an annual variety show at Galway's Taibhdhearc Theatre.

His motivation and drive for producing was endless. In his lifetime he interpreted the works of the many great playwrights, constructing pictures of scene after scene with the care and craft of a master. He often joked modestly that he would have much preferred to have been an actor, but he could never get anyone else to produce. The reality was that there just wasn't anyone else that could match him.

There are many stories from business and community colleagues and friends of Paddy's passion for drama infiltrating their lives. If Paddy thought you had a talent for the stage, or were good enough with your hands to build a set, there was no place to hide. And if the set needed transporting to a drama festival ... ? Well, suffice it to say that if a pub in Foxford could manage without a few bottles of soda on a night coinciding with a performance at a festival in Clare, the pub could expect the delivery (without fail) the next day.

His career in amateur drama was marked by many great successes, including winning the All-Ireland Drama Festival in Athlone on two occasions: once with Charlestown Drama Group with *Buried Child* in 1991 and again with Knocknacarra Amateur Theatre Society (KATS) with *Rashomon* in 2003. But arguably the biggest achievement of all was to be at the helm of amateur drama productions every year from 1953 to 2007; a beautiful, award-laden career of over half a century. Indeed, only a few months after his multi-award-winning production of *All My Sons* on this year's Drama Festival Circuit, he was already reading scripts for 2008 when he passed away. A truly remarkable and dedicated commitment.

Paddy Henry was one of nature's true gentlemen, whose unassuming demeanour belied a steely determination which saw him through many setbacks, and brought him success in business, drama and in life in general. But more than this: he also managed to touch anyone that he met with a sense of worth, self-belief and faith in humanity that makes us better people. He simply made the world a better place.

Tá cara uasal cailte againn. Sólás síoraí dá anam dhílis.