

MOHILL ACORN PLAYERS

IN THE LAST few years the Mohill based Acorn Players, have made a name for themselves in drama circles around Ireland. Venues are booked out and people are turned away. What is the story behind their success?

Around 2012, two childhood friends and neighbours Anella McGuinness and Pádraig McLoughlin, over a cup of tea, tired of trivial, though successful Scór sketches, and observing the upsurge of local drama, wondered what they could do for drama in Mohill! After very little deliberation they decided they would stage a play. Pádraig was already infected by the stage bug with the Sliabh an Iarann Players. Anella on the other hand had very little experience but she had a great interest in drama and a hidden talent for direction that was just waiting in the wings, ready to go.

The Acorn Players seemed like a good name for the group. So the first play they chose was a classic old comedy by Tom Coffee, *'Anyone Can Rob a Bank'*, with a local cast and direction by Josephine McCaffrey, just returned home having studied theatre in London. Josephine taught them many tips that have been useful ever since. The production was a great success and did what it said on the tin. It made the people laugh.

The seed was sown—there was no going back, no stopping Anella. She begged and borrowed scripts, finally coming up in 2014 with another comedy, *'The Two Loves of Gabriel Foley'* by Jimmy Keary. Auditions were held, some people were successful others were not so lucky. Finally, there



Pádraig McLoughlin & Mary Farrelly was a solid block of actors and stand-ins, ready to role and 'role' they did all over Ireland and beyond for two years, doing over ninety performances to packed halls and theatres. They were lucky on top of all their talent to acquire the undoubted acting skills of Phillip Flood from Ballyconnell. He was the ideal man to star alongside Pádraig McLoughlin in the lead roles. As well as the two lead actors, those also involved with that great comedy in the years that followed were: Anella McGuinness, Margaret Healy, Dave Price, Martina *Anella McGuinness, James Grimes & Anne Macklin*



Ward, Edel Palmer, Mary Farrelly, Máire Canning, Brendan Keane, Arlene O Reilly, Monica Reilly, Nicola Kearns and Bridie Fitzpatrick. Dave also made the set. It was erected and taken down after every performance by the cast.

Early in 2017 they reluctantly bade farewell to *'Gabriel Foley'* and again Anella sought scripts. A follow up to *'The Two Loves'* was read through but good comedies are scarce. Then just by chance, John McManus, the writer of many of Seamus O'Rourke's best known shows, came to see Phillip Flood on stage, both were Ballyconnell men. At the après drinks in Spirit Bar in Mohill, he announced that he had the perfect play for the Acorns. This was a great complement from a recognised playwright. But no one thought any more of it until some weeks later, true to his word, the script arrived via Phillip. It was titled *'Loophole'*. Over the winter, the Acorns rehearsed and finally in the spring of 2018 the premier of *'Loophole'* was staged in a cosy Gortvagh Community Centre. It was an instant hit, a great comedy and surely



Padraig McLoughlin, James Grimes & Philip Flood

one of his best. It's outrageous, homophobic, sacrilegious, politically incorrect, you name it, it's got it, but it is extremely funny, and that's all that matters in the end.

the best of all. Posters are erected and fliers are distributed all over the area. This is hard work when the venue is a distance away. *No pain, No gain*, is the mantra.

Getting a play ready for stage is the easy part. If there was no audience what would be the point? Before every production, Director Anella McGuinness and the cast get the PR into action. Local papers, radio stations, drama groups, active age groups are contacted. Social media is a modern and efficient way of advertising, word of mouth

The Acorns and 'Loophole' have filled Halls and Community Centres all over Leitrim and the North West and are now concentrating on Theatres. A recent staging at the Corn Mill Theatre in Carrigallen, was sold out for two nights on Oct 11th and 12th. Dundrum, Athlone, Letterkenny, Enniskillen, Galway are in the pipeline and more thea-

tres are booked well into 2020. Anella's dream is to bring Loophole to New York next year and when this lady sets her mind to something it generally materialises.

Those who now take part in 'Loophole' are: Padraig McLoughlin, Phillip Flood, James Grimes, Rosie Kiernan Ellis, Martina Ward, Anella McGuinness, Anne Macklin and Mary Farrelly.

Backstage: Stuart Davies, Anette Kivlehan, Orla Redican and Maureen Lynch.

Make them laugh! Make 'em laugh!
Don't you know everyone wants to laugh...

My Dad said: "Be an actor my son
But be a comical one" (*Singing in the Rain*)

Acorn Players Group

Back Row: Martina Ward, Padraig McLoughlin, Maureen Lynch, Anella McGuinness, Mary Farrelly, Orla Redican, Annette Kivlehan & Philip Flood
Front Row: Anne Macklin, James Grimes & Rosie Kiernan Ellis.

