# BEEZNEEZ CELEBRATE TEN YEARS OF THEATRE

*John McDwyer*

*It can hardly have seemed possible to the founders in 1997 that Beezneez Theatre Company would flourish to the point of celebrating a tenth anniversary in 2007 and continue to provide top class touring theatre to venues in Ireland and the UK. Artistic Director and co-founder of the company, John McDwyer explains that the formation of the company was very much a back of an envelope job. He explains, 'we certainly did not envisage the success that has been visited upon the company or that it would become so popular and well regarded but we are very grateful for the response our work has received'.*

The concept was born out of the friendship and respect that had developed over the years between amateur theatre practitioners in the area whilst competing against each other in festivals. A few thought that it was a pity that they never got the opportunity to work with each other and it was at that point that John McDwyer took the action which resulted in Beezneez arriving on the scene.

He says: 'I was on the point of retirement from banking to concentrate on my writing but my writing is quite spasmodic; really intense for a time but with long periods of inactivity. Working around that I felt it should be possible to put a group together, on an experimental basis and to tour a show or two on a "toe in the water" basis. We were fortunate in our timing in that a number of new receiving venues were coming on stream in towns like Longford, Castlebar and Virginia and these new theatres were very supportive of our aims. We were also very fortunate to receive the backing of Leitrim County Enterprise Fund and Arigna Leader and we cannot understate what their support meant to us in a start up situation'.

The company was determined to avoid the committee system of management and with the Artistic Director acting as general convenor and organiser of tours, Beezneez now runs like a well oiled machine. The company does take continuous soundings and feedback, in particular from receiving venues and is always alert to changing market trends.

Beezneez very quickly established that audiences wanted to be entertained above all and have always geared product towards that aim with a mixture of summer comedies; premieres of John McDwyer's work and classic Irish contemporary theatre such as *The Weir* and The Kings of the Kilburn High Road.

In the eleven years of their existence, Beezneez have toured twenty-one productions and highlights have included headlining the Tyneside Irish Arts Festival in Newcastle and three visits to London. John McDwyer's Leitrim Trilogy of plays: *Lovely Leitrim, Callaghan's Place* and *Unforgiven,* have been premiered to huge acclaim and these have now been published in a volume and have become a staple of the amateur drama movement.

The company has established an excellent working relationship with *The Gatehouse Theatre* in Highgate, London where The Leitrim Trilogy has been presented. The company return there in early May 2009 with John McDwyer's: *Love Is...* which took Ireland by storm on it's premiere tour and which plays in *Civic Theatre,* Tallaght before London.

Looking to the future, Beezneez are currently in the early planning stages of what will be the most ambitious and challenging project ever undertaken by the company. In Spring 2010, the company plan to tour *The Leitrim Trilogy* as a single entity, going into theatres for a week to present the three plays on consecutive nights with a cast of fourteen players taking the twenty three roles. On the surface it may seem a difficult, if not impossible task but the Beezneez attitude has always been 'the difficult we can do immediately, the impossible may take up to two days!'

Based in Carrick-on-Shannon but taking their actors from a fifty mile radius, Beezneez Theatre Company's first allegiance is to the three theatres in Co Leitrim and patrons of The Glens Centre in Manorhamilton, Corn Mill Theatre, Carrigallen and The Dock, Carrick on Shannon can look forward to many more 'good nights out' from the company.

## The Kings of the Kilburn High Road

**Beezneez cast relax before another performance of** *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road:* **Gerry Farrell. John McDwyer, Finbar Ryan, Michael Roper & Maurice Kehoe.**