

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Amateur Drama in Leitrim

Hubert McMorrow



DRAMA IS AN art form. Since as long ago as at least 500 BC, the Greeks, Romans and other early civilisations have acted out stories as entertainment or as part of pagan festivals. Heroes, villains, comic characters were all part of the tragedies, melodramas and fantasies.



■ The Glens Centre, Manorhamilton

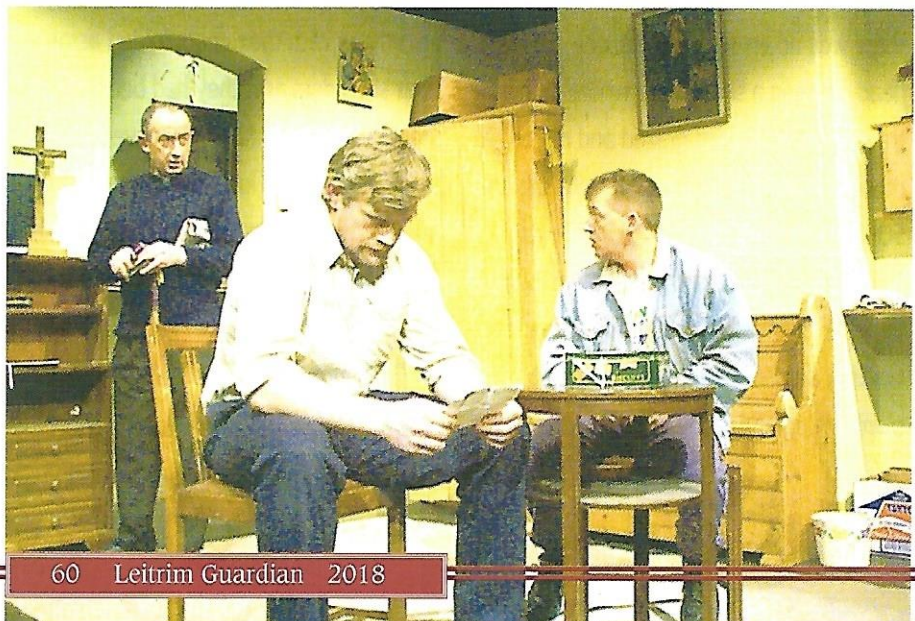
Leitrim would have been a late starter, probably in the late 1800's, or in most part of the county the early 1900's, with a gradual and greater interest seeing drama groups form especially from the fifties and right up to the present day.

Centre in Manorhamilton. The latter features a number of productions tré Gaeilge, thanks to Prin Ó Duigneáin, Luke McGinley and all the others involved in the local Splódar group. Another source of pride when considering drama in Leitrim is the number of playwrights whose work has been seen on the national and indeed the international stage—Vincent Woods, John McDwyer and Seamus O'Rourke.

Every community, parish or town in the county has had a drama group, society, troupe, club or "players" at some stage over the years. Many were formed ad hoc to raise funds for the parish, the GAA club, the Pioneers, the local school or whatever and they achieved their aim, as audiences would turn up to enjoy, or indeed criticise, the efforts of their neighbours on the boards. In

Few probably are aware that a total of 17 All-Ireland Drama titles have come to groups in Leitrim, with Carrigallen leading the field at seven, including three wins at the famed Open Finals in Athlone with *The Belfry*, *Stolen Child* and *The Devil's Ceilí*. It was the Breffni Players, Carrick on Shannon, who had set the pace for other Leitrim groups on the festival circuit. The county is fortunate and can proudly boast of having three fully equipped and ultra-modern theatres, Carrigallen's Corn Mill, The Dock in Carrick and The Glen

■ Sean McIntyre, Seamus O'Rourke & Raymond Hackett in *Belfry* Photo: Tony Fahy





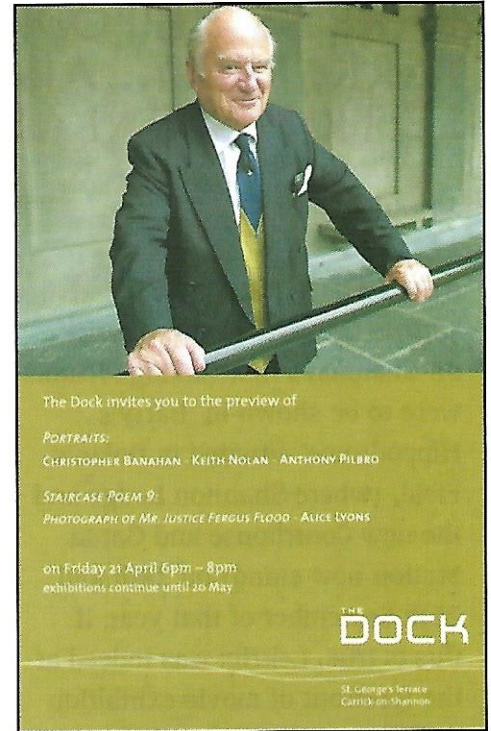
■ Fr Patsy Young & Eileen Ward Photo: Tony Fahy

most areas, however, there has been a long history of “the annual play”, usually during Lent, but extending now to Summer festivals and the early Autumn months. There are names as well-known as footballing stars in particular parishes, whose contribution to drama has been immense, some in front of the footlights, others as directors/ producers, set designers, lighting experts and all the various aspects concerned with a production, whether just locally, or in a wider sense at Drama Festivals throughout the region and much further afield. Three-act festivals, with nominations to the Open and Confined All Ireland Finals, are held each year in Ballinamore and Kiltyclogher, while one-act festivals and finals have also been held in other venues in the county. The young people are

not forgotten either, with Youth Theatre productions in Carrigallen, under the direction of Maura Williamson, while Drama Summer Camps are frequently held throughout the county, to whet the appetite and hone the skills of the younger generation. One prime example of this is the success of David Rawle, Carrigallen, star of a number of productions, including the TV series “Moone Boy”.

Listing the names of those who have made their mark in drama in Leitrim, would resemble a “Who’s Who” of the movement nationally. One name that is being honoured in a special way is that of Fr Patsy Young, with the Overall Winners of the Confined All Ireland Drama Finals to be awarded the Patsy Young Memorial Trophy. This distinction is well deserved and his input in various parishes, starting with Carrigallen, will live long in memory.

What would please Fr Patsy most of all, would be to see a drama group in every parish in



the county and those groups to put their heart and soul into their local production and present a practically professional show for audiences to enjoy. It can be done. He would be careful with the choice of play, whether it is for local or festival performances—those who may be enraptured by *Waiting for Godot* might doze off in *Johnny’s Britches*.

But, as the saying goes, the play’s the thing.

■ Members of Leitrim Youth Theatre Group, Carrigallen (LYTC): Director Maura Williamson Photo: Tony Fahy

