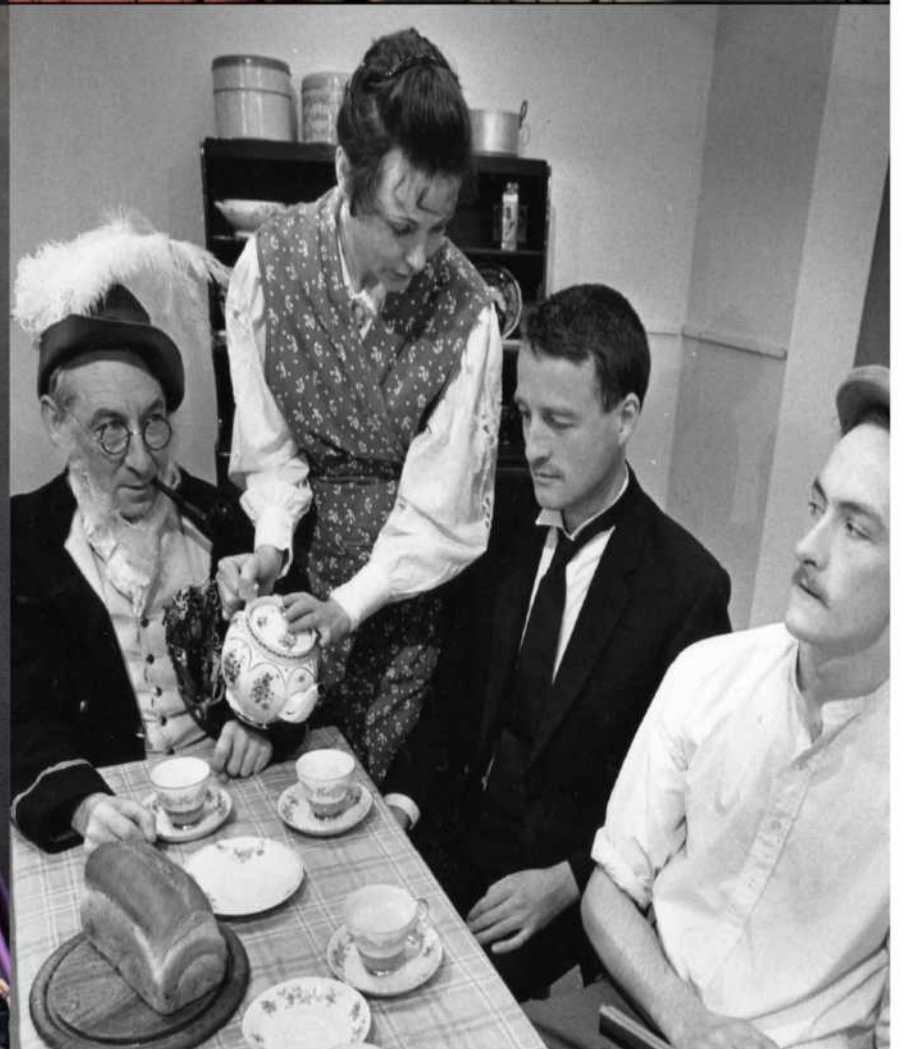




40 Years



Balally Players
Theatre Company
1982 - 2022





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INTRODUCTION

This booklet aims to capture some of the achievements, energy and fun of the Balally Players over its first four decades in existence. In that time the group has brought great fulfillment and friendship to its members and entertainment to our audiences.

A booklet like this cannot hope to mention by name everyone who has contributed to the success of the group, or include their photograph. But I hope everyone will recognise the spirit of Balally within its pages.

My thanks to everyone who took the time to write articles, rooted out photographs (pre-digital and digital!) and made suggestions along the way. Special thanks to **Declan Brennan**, whose amazing photographs adorn many of the pages. Happy reminiscing!

Mark Coen







FOREWORD

Balally Players was founded in 1982, our first production was in 1983, and we are lucky to have some of our founder members still contributing to our company. Balally is a very tightly knit group, with many long-term friendships formed over the years. I joined the group in 2003. My first production was a one act circuit play, **'The Bear.'**

The future of Balally Players looks bright. We have 70 members, our staple productions the Christmas show and the summer Shakespeare continue to attract a large audience. I am looking forward to the coming year. We are back on the three act circuit with **'Alone It Stands'** and our 10 minute **'Balally Shorts'** will return. The Shorts are great for members wishing to try directing and were a great success earlier this year. Another major achievement this year was the rehearsed readings of **'Juggernaut.'**

We have lost many members and friends over the years. This booklet will bring back great memories of the time we spent together. I would like to thank **Mark Coen** for all his hard work and thank everyone who has contributed to this booklet.

Here's to the next 40 years.

Patrick Hand, Chairperson
Balally Players Theatre Company



A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

Karen Carleton

In the beginning there were six members - **Karen Carleton, Peter Collier, Nora Connolly, John Fennell, Jean Monahan** and **Fred Rogerson**. Luckily for the world of drama we agreed there was no possibility of performing Chekov's 'Cherry Orchard' – Peter's choice for first play. Peter was loud, brash, confident, and liable to wear a hat and shout 'Action' during the first years. But he did get us up and running with scenes from 'St. Joan', and a performance of 'Spreading the News' directed by **Liam Marron**. Liam at least knew what he was doing. 'Christmas in the Market Place' directed by Peter followed, best left unheralded. **Kevin Fahey, Antony Delaney, Carmel Hanlon, Doris Cullen, and Teresa Dempsey** had joined, and we were on a roll. St. Tiernan's Community School had a very supportive principal in **Paddy Byrne** and two teachers **Matt** and **Cathy** were now part of the group. Stanley Townsend, then making a name as a professional actor in London, agreed to speak with the senior classes and we had a lovely workshop with him, resulting in **Dave Walsh, Barbara Kavanagh, Paddy Feehan** among others joining us.

By 1986 we had a thriving group of young and exciting performers. We had lost Peter whose work brought him to Paris. In 1986 we performed a one act ('Zigger Zagger') and for some reason I agreed to bring 'Ritual for Dolls' out on the confined circuit. **Kevin Fahey, Antony Delaney** and **Carmel Hanlon** were excellent but I'm afraid the production or direction weren't at a level...but it was a start and the following year **Paddy Feehan** and **Angela Mills** were amazing in 'Out for the Count'. We performed 'I do Not Like Thee Dr. Fell' in Tiernan's, which went down well with our first local audience.

Two years later in 1989 we performed 'The Nightingale and Not the Lark' starring **Jean Monahan** and 'Joggers' directed by **Gerry Lynam**. I directed my first full length, 'Translations', starring **Angela Mills** (Maire), **Gerry Lynam**, (Jimmy Jack) **Sean Hopkins** (Hugh), **Paddy Feehan** (Doalty) and **Carl Cleary** (Manus). We had a super set built by master craftsman **Brian Dempsey** in Tiernan's and a full house.



Peter Collier was now in Paris and we were supported by the Cultural Relations Committee to travel there for the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution in 1989. We brought 'The Shadow of a Gunman' directed by **Noel McCarthy**. It was a fabulous experience – we played in a beautiful venue (La Galeria 55), all red plush and velvet, and later in Finnegan's Wake, an Irish pub, on the Sunday afternoon. Peter showed us around Paris and organised a wonderful evening in Le Porc Mahon - the first time I ever tasted Moroccan food.

We were up and running before we could walk but we were learning all the time. The next project was a radio play, and RTE gave us a script by a young man from Dalkey: 'Squat, Squabble, Squawk!' by **Gerard Bourke**. It was an experience, but I never felt we had the help from RTE that was

promised – but we did have many years of set design and direction from Gerard in the years that followed. We were improving and 'The Wooden Pear' with **Brian Molloy** and **Angela Mills** was just pipped for a place in the All Ireland on the last night of the last festival in Skerries. Gerard had designed the set which was sparse with a large tree... we were beginning to see that less was more in a one act setting. In that time there were no mobile phones or internet and the members of the panel for the All Ireland were present in the hall. All through these years I had been taking courses in directing, whenever I could get away and whatever I could learn so some of the basics were coming together.

'No Picnic' in 1991 and 'White Liars' in 1992 with **Kevin Fahey, Angela Mills, Mary Ryan** and **Brian Molloy** were outstanding. **Margaret Twomey, Jack Kelly,** and **Harry Johnston** joined us from St. Thomas. Harry was a skilled director and Margaret and Jack fine actors. We learned a lot from Margaret on Stanislavski – he was a hero. And as for **Wes Scully**, you rarely saw Wes without a copy of 'An Actor Prepares' in his back pocket.

'The Factory Girls' was the full-length play for 1992 and we played in the Mountainview in Stepside. It was great to have a bar and a helpful venue but it was small – and the set had to come in across the wall at the

back of the pub. We brought it to Wicklow to the Charles Stuart Parnell Festival and came back with Cyril Cusack in the car. I remember he mostly talked about the fact that we have no honours system in Ireland - no OBE for senior actors here.

1993 and we played **'Move Over Mrs Markham'** in Tiernan's and in Andrews Lane. It was the first of a run of very successful comedies in the Pavilion in Dún Laoghaire. I remember sitting in a café on Wicklow Street and feeling so elated that our performance had brought gales of laughter to the audience. **'The London Vertigo'** went out on the circuit with **Margaret Twomey** in a voluminous costume. The set was amazing, painted by **Frances Cullen** and wonderfully evocative of the Malton prints of Dublin but my God it was not actor friendly as entrances had to be made sideways. We won lots of Best Set awards of course. **Gerry Lynam** directed **'Abigail's Party'** in 1995 and **'Failed Investment'** on the circuit. A bumper year in 1996 with over sixty active members in the group when we performed three full length plays and two one acts. At the time **Sean Hopkins** was seriously ill with cancer and in remission, so myself, **Dave Walsh** and **Kevin Fahey** worked with him on his **'Someone to Watch Over Me'** – it was an emotional experience for all of us and Sean's swan song. We played in Trinity. **Gerry Lynam** directed **'A Tomb with a View'** to great success at home.

We had good relations with our local council and were sponsored as part of L'Imaginaire Irlandais to travel to Brest as part of the twin celebrations. We brought a large cast production of an abridged version of **'The Playboy of The Western World'**, with dancers. We all went by coach and sea and stayed in the Moulin À Vent hostel. Pan Pan was on the trip as the professional company. **John Canning** didn't want to leave, and we had to manhandle him onto the bus. Lots of good times.

I had a kind of epiphany at Maynooth during the course with Nigel Williams - it was on the art of Grotowski and Artaud, and something just clicked. I was able to take on **'Vinegar Tom'** with a large ensemble cast and this has been my favourite way to work since. **Geoff O'Keeffe** was on the same course, and he joined us for **'Vinegar Tom'** with **Antoinette O'Reilly**, **Claire Reilly** and a cast who allowed me to be quite mad. Four wins on the circuit and a very disappointing finish in the All Ireland made me very wary of counting chickens and was devastating for the cast. But we continued in that style with **'Hunger March'** 1998 (3rd in All Ireland) and **'Women in the Assembly'** (2nd in All Ireland). **'Vinegar Tom'** went on to represent Ireland in Liverpool, Nova Scotia the following year. I still have the t shirt.



'The Cherry Orchard' finally blossomed in 1998, sixteen years following Peter's first proposal. It was played in Milltown, in what was then the Marian Hall. Lots of space on the floor but the audience were at a remove on the balcony, and this was not helpful. **'Lend me a Tenor'** played in the same space in 1997. Finding a space to play or perform was by now a real problem. Nomadic I expect is the best way to describe how we worked. **'Our Country's Good'** was performed in a venue in town in 1999 and **Bernard Doyle's** lovely production of **'Steel Magnolias'** was played in an annexe of the pub in Ballyogan. So, when I saw the planning permission notice tacked on the side of the wall at Dillon Digby's on the Sandyford Road, I made every effort to contact and meet with Castlethorn to ask for a performance space, which six years and many more meetings later became The Mill Theatre.

I had a new hero now and was fascinated by Peter Brook's **'The Empty Space'** and his Shakespeare productions. I had many chats with the very alternative Sancho Gallilei in Airfield. Balally Players by this time were well recognised and respected and were asked as one of the four companies from the All-Island amateur groups to play on the Abbey Stage. **Geoff O'Keeffe** took on the Yeats play **'On Baile's Strand'** and this I feel was a fitting end to the years 1982 to 2000.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE EARLY DAYS OF BALALLY PLAYERS

Jean Monahan

My first venture into the world of amateur drama commenced shortly after I moved to Dublin in 1973. This involved me becoming a member of the ICA. Indeed the three female founding members of Balally embarked on our thespian road through the ICA one act circuit. We were involved in quite a number of one act plays with considerable success.

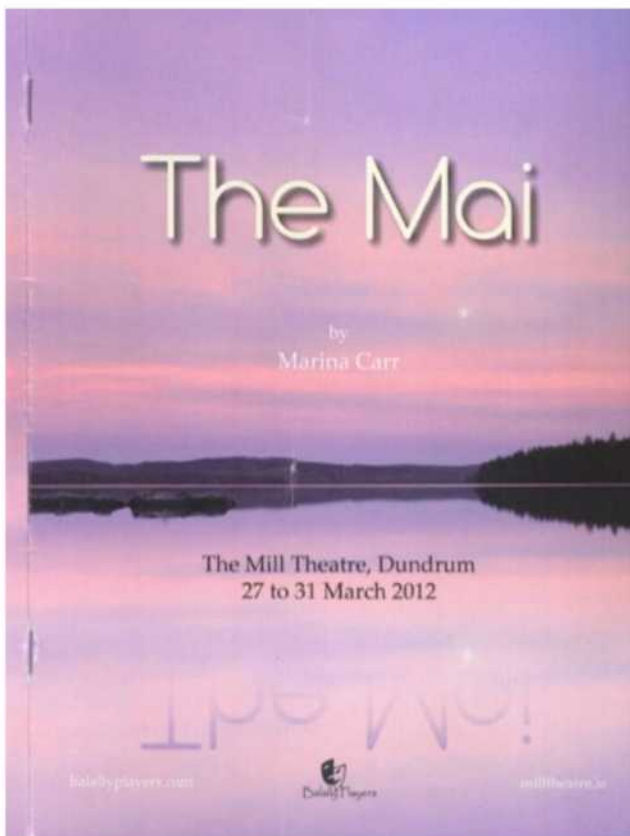
The founding of Balally Players opened new horizons which we took to with aplomb and for me it has been a major part of my life to this day. In short it has been an adventure of highs and lows (more anon) creating drama on and off stage and making and retaining great friendships which I will always treasure.

Balally afforded me the opportunity to act, direct, produce, coach and more often than not to be a general dogsbody in ensuring that the group not only survived but thrived. It was a question of learning on the job enhanced very much by participation in Summer School at the University of Limerick, Maynooth and Gormanston. I found the tuition and guidance from the "Masters" of the period most beneficial. However it wasn't all work and study. The participants loved to party and many great friendships and stories emerged which are still rekindled when we meet.

The one act circuit has been our forte for the past 40 years but the achievement that gave me greatest joy, and dare I say it the greatest pride, was the production/direction of three full length plays '**The Mai**', '**Happy Birthday Dear Alice**' and '**The Bog of Cats**.' My husband Pat was drafted in to play a small part in the latter play when a cast member dropped out. It was his only time ever on stage; i.e. first and only ever, not to be repeated he assured me.

The one low side for me took place in Florida. It was my first stint at directing. The play was '**The Country Boy**' with a very large cast. My baptism of fire so to speak. I found myself very isolated and in the searing heat and panic trying to get the stage ready and organise lighting. The Mounties came to my rescue i.e. in the form of the Canadian group who were also competitors in the festival. The show did go on and indeed the ever ready and talented Margaret Twomey got best actress award. Well deserved.

I started the Dundrum One Act Festival and ran it, supported by Balally Players. In this time I built up a very strong relationship with many groups and this ensured a full programme of talented groups each year in the festival. Karen and myself are the only two of the founding members still actively involved in the group.



A 'CONCERT' IN CAVAN

Teresa Dempsey



1992 What is it about Balally Players that when asked to tread the boards, be it in far away places or close to home, they are slow to refuse? I was on holidays in my native County Cavan in 1992, when the chairperson of the Community Centre approached me and asked 'Would you have a concert up there in Dublin that would entertain the people of this community?'

As luck would have it, **Karen Carleton** had directed the Frank McGuinness play '**The Factory Girls**' the previous month, with great success. This was the play that brought Frank McGuinness to prominence. When I returned to Dublin from Cavan, I spoke to Karen, the cast, crew and the committee about taking this play to a community hall in a remote part of Cavan for one performance. They were all in agreement. The bus to take the cast and crew was booked and the set was packed into the back of someone's car.

The parish priest, with the help of the committee, had been busy advertising the play in all possible venues available to them. He announced it every Sunday at Mass for three weeks leading up to the performance. For some reason, many of the local people referred to the play as a 'concert'. Regardless of how often I explained that this was a play - a dramatic story set in Donegal in the 1980s, where the jobs of the textile workers (mostly women) were under threat from cheap labour in Korea and Taiwan - they still referred to it as a 'concert.'

On 12 April 1992, with tickets selling at £3 each, Balally Players performed '**The Factory Girls**' to a full house. The play was warmly received by the community of Tunnyduff Parish. However, some members of the audience took offence to phrases like 'bad bitch' and 'wee bitch', 'stupid bitch' and 'sweet mother of Jesus', 'Christ Almighty' and with the occasional f**k thrown in, e.g. 'shut your f**king mouth', to name but a few. As I re-read the play now, 30 years later, I find 58 'offensive' expressions! Members of the audience were heard to say that this type of language was unacceptable. However, when this was brought to the attention of the priest, his reply was 'Sure I heard worse language outside the chapel gates on a Sunday after Mass.'





MY JOURNEY TO BALALLY

Dympna Murray

Well I suppose I should start at the beginning. My interest in theatre was formed at an early age, despite having few opportunities to attend dramatic productions. My parents had been keen audience members of touring productions by Anew McMaster and listening to radio drama from the BBC and Radio Éireann was a normal family event.

Early memories of mine are of cardboard cut-out dolls with numerous paper outfits which could be attached to the model dolls. I used to make and colour additional outfits for them. This then led to using shoe boxes to create stages, with scenery, in which I placed small cardboard ballerinas or Irish dancers to complete the scene. I also used to gather up pieces of fabric from the floor of my mother's dressmaker to make clothes for my dolls.

My birthday treat every year was to attend the Pantomime in the Olympia with Jack Cruise and I saw my first Shakespeare production, 'As You Like It', at Terenure College when I was aged about eight. The family moved to Co. Laois at this time and I had little involvement in theatre thereafter but I was always engaged in dressmaking, moving on from the dolls to make clothes for myself. The dressmaking skills were of course to prove very useful when I eventually found myself designing and making original costumes for the theatre.

We subsequently moved to Skerries and I joined the Marian Society there on leaving school. I had no real interest in acting but went to give moral support to my friend Marianne who wanted to perform. I got involved in stage management with some bits of work on sets and costumes in various productions. Having moved to Dundrum in the late 60's, I got involved in The Bankers' Drama Festival with AIB Group and we presented classic plays such as 'Blood Wedding', 'Deirdre of the Sorrows' and 'She Stoops to Conquer' to considerable success. Again my interest was in stage management with increased input on the design side. It was in 1975 that I attended my first DLI Summer School at Gormanston. Luckily for me the course was on costume design given by the inspiring and unique tutor Pat Murray from Cork. In subsequent years I studied stage design with him and from this grew the confidence to tackle more complex productions.

I worked with Club Players, Dublin Youth Theatre, Dundrum Musical Society, and on DLI National Productions 'Dosabird' and 'Volpone'. I was invited to join Take 4, a group dedicated to bringing modern musicals to Dublin and with them designed costumes/sets for shows such as 'Mack & Mabel', 'Promises, Promises', 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum' and 'Chicago', all performed at the John Player Theatre. Over time the costs of mounting such shows became prohibitive and we bowed out of this enterprise.



Career and family commitments became more demanding and I more or less retired from active involvement in theatre productions. However my interest in amateur drama did not wane and I found myself assisting in administration at a national level with The Drama League of Ireland. That is how I met **Karen Carleton**, when we were both elected to the Board of the DLI at the time the Summer School was reorganised and moved to Maynooth University. Karen asked me to come and look at a rehearsal of **'Vinegar Tom'** which Balally Players were about to bring out on the circuit and to cast an eye over the proposed costumes. Despite living in Dundrum I knew nothing about Balally who of course had no permanent performance space in the area. As I was at this time considering taking early retirement I was pleased to find such a vibrant drama group on my doorstep. So that is how I got back into live production work and found myself designing the costumes for Balally's first Shakespeare open air production of **'A Midsummer Night's Dream'** at Airfield in 2001. The advent of the Mill Theatre has of course greatly contributed to the group's development, artistically and technically, and has proved to be a marvellous performance space.

Since then, in addition to the annual Shakespeare, I have been involved in a range of plays, including **'The Glass Menagerie'**, **'All my Sons'**, **'Enchanted April'**, **'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof'**, **'On Baile's Strand'**, **'The Bog of Cats'**, **'Many Young Men of Twenty'**, to name but a few, with great directors, actors and stage crews. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be involved in these productions and to work with such great teams. Balally Players is like an extended family which supports and encourages its members to reach for and attain high standards and certainly my life has been the richer for my involvement in its activities and the friendship I have found there.



COMMUNITY

Baz Ashmawy

It's far too easy to forget moments in life. Usually there's a spark. Maybe you meet someone you haven't seen in a long time or a particular scent or aroma that brings you back. Luckily for me, my mind has never needed a catalyst of any type for me to remember what it was like being a member of Balally Players. It's easily one of the best times I've ever had performing on any platform.

There's a famous Christy Moore quote: "Be careful being paid for something you love as it soon becomes a job".

As I become an older man, who's lucky enough to have made a career in entertainment, this resonates greatly with me. The love, the heart, the dedication, but mostly the pure joy of being a player in the Balally troupe on numerous productions, was incredible. It was also a wake-up call because the members who did it as a hobby were streets better than me and taught me so much. They taught me everything.

There are way too many people to mention but the likes of **Teresa, Doris, Sean, Jamie, Antoinette**, and **Oran** all spring to mind amongst a sea of other faces. **Karen Carleton** was and is one of my greatest mentors and a life long friend who I owe much to. There are buzz words that are flung around nowadays like identity and belonging but nothing is more inclusive and rewarding than being part of a talented community group like the Balally Players. It's community mentoring and culture. It's people passing passion and dedication to fellow creatives. The love my children have for theatre is the same love that my fellow friends and players injected me with.

I love Balally Players because they loved me and made me feel welcome and part of a community like I had never experienced before. Here's to a hundred and forty more years and in case I haven't said it enough: 'Thank you Balally.'

Below: 'Shadow of a Gunman', 1989. Front row: Gerry Doyle, Eithne Flynn, Sean Hopkins, Barbara Kavanagh, Paddy Feehan, Jean Monahan, Carl Cleary. Back row: John Carleton, John Canning, Doris Cullen, Etta Burke, Larry Burke, Brian Molloy, Karen Carleton and Noel McCarthy. Missing: Gary Wall.





TRIPS ABROAD

Doris Cullen

It is unbelievable to think that Balally Players is over 40 years old now. We entered many drama festivals during that time, mostly one-acts but there were one or two three-acts as well and we entered festivals abroad. What times we had!

Our first venture abroad was to Paris where one of our founder members, **Peter Collier**, lived. He invited us over in 1989 to partake in the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution and to put on a play with a revolutionary theme. We did '**Shadow of a Gunman**' by Sean O'Casey and directed by **Karen Carleton**, another founder member. I recall that we stayed in the Algerian quarter, and there were a few Algerians who attended the play attracted by the picture of a gun on the poster! I also remember that one Algerian who came along to see the play asked about the "Black and Tans" and if this referred to their skin colour; he seemed quite relieved when I told him it was the colour of the uniforms. We performed it in a little hall on Rue de La Seine (we called it Liffey Street, ha ha!). Also, **Brian Molloy** came along as he was in Paris at the time – only a young fella then – and he's been with us, acting and directing, ever since.

Another trip was to Denmark for an international drama festival, to a town called Nykoping. We had funding from the Council for this trip. I remember there was an election on and so it was easy enough to get the funding. There were 11 of us. This was a terrific week. The play we took was a Brendan Behan one called '**The Hostage**', again directed by **Karen Carleton**. There was another group from North Dublin there also, as well as a group from Sweden and one or two other groups including a local Danish one. Well, on the first night at the "after" venue, we drank them out of beer...none left. A local brewery had donated "a week's supply" of beer called "Den Blu", Ha! Ha! Ha! However the Danes were great and decided that as they couldn't control us that they would join in with us and so they drank as much as us every night and they had a great time too. We visited a reconstructed Viking Village and had other coach trips too. I seem to remember the Danes were perplexed when we didn't arrive at the bus exactly on time etc. etc.

We had another trip to France, this time to a Drama Festival in Brest in 1996, travelling by boat from Rosslare to Le Havre. This time the play was '**The Playboy of the Western World**.' From what I can remember, also a very successful one.

We went to Nova Scotia after that, 1998 I believe, for their Drama Festival. We did a play called '**Vinegar**

Tom. Don't think we won. I just have a vague memory of **James O'Reilly** (now living in Germany) doing an Irish dance (think it was a hornpipe) as part of the after-entertainment.

Then we were off to Delray Beach in Florida in 2003 for an international Drama Festival. We took a play called '**The Country Boy.**' This was **Jean Monahan's** (another founder member) baptism of fire as it was her first time directing. We didn't win but I believe we came second.

A bit of a break after that, then in 2009 off to another international festival held every four years in Monaco. Another absolutely brilliant week. We took a play called '**Melody,**' starring **Geoffrey O'Keeffe** and **Hilary Madigan,** and we did very well with this. One of our audience members was Prince Albert who attended only our play, because it was an Irish one.

We had a trip to Belgium a few years ago. A strange country, but the festival was wonderful as per usual. We performed '**Guests of the Nation**' by Frank O'Connor there under **Gary Wall's** direction. This was the IATA Spots Op West Festival in July 2015.



SHAKESPEARE

Sean Murphy

Twenty-one years. Nine different plays. Four directors. Hundreds of actors (don't make me count them). The history of Shakespeare in Balally Players goes back to 2001. During a wild night of drunken revelry, some genius decided that it would be a great idea to try our hand at Shakespeare and ... wait for it ... perform it outdoors, without cover, in Ireland. The locals thought this was a gas idea and that the dramatic fools would end up howling above the gale force winds, sodden to the core from the rain that constantly falls on this godforsaken land of ours.

And yes ... we've had a few soakings. But, more often than not, we recall heat and sun rather than cold and rain. If anything, in recent years, the main complaint has been dealing with the weight of the costumes on hot summer evenings as the sun sets on the actors' faces at St. Enda's! We can't mention costumes of course without a massive tip of the hat to our own **Dympna Murray** who has spent years building up what is surely now Ireland's largest Shakespearian wardrobe.

PRESENTED BY
BALALLY PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

SYLVAN THEATRE,
KILLRUDDERY HOUSE

THURSDAY 6TH &
FRIDAY 7TH JULY
AT 8PM

BOOKING:
events@killruddery.com



Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

Presented by
Balally Players

16th-21st June 2010




BALALLY PLAYERS
present

A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare
Directed by Karen Carleton

at
Tallaght Little Theatre,
Greenhills Road
5th-9th June 2001

Open Air Performances
Airfield House,
Dundrum
Wednesday, June 20th
and
Midsummer Night,
Thursday June 21st
2001





From a personal point of view, I have some great memories of the shows I was lucky to be in. The early days with **Baz Ashmawy** before he went off to win his Emmy. The joyful chaos of running the first act of **'Much Ado about Nothing'** under the trees in Airfield and having to move the second act into the library where we had what felt like a postage stamp for a playing area. The pizza party at midnight on Midsummer's night in the courtyard in Airfield after **'Romeo & Juliet.'** The set of **'Much Ado'** collapsing in The Pavilion and **Geoff O'Keeffe** and the rest of the Watch rebuilding it as the action continued. The hilarity of the Pyramus and Wall scene in **'A Midsummer Night's Dream'**, which still has audiences in kinks of laughter 400 years after it was written.

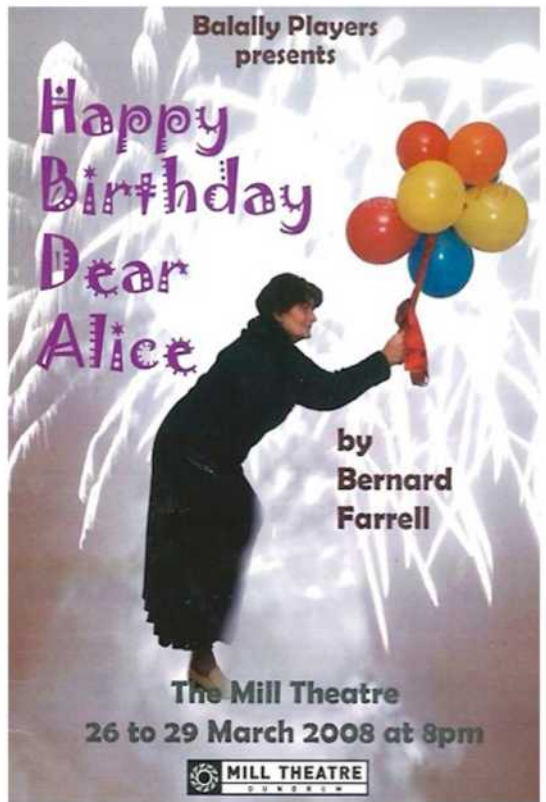
It all started in front of Airfield House, under that magnificent semi-circle of fir trees, the finest stage an actor could hope for. In recent years, the shows have found their home outside the Patrick Pearse Museum at St. Enda's Park, another natural setting full of dramatic potential. Moving to St Enda's took on special significance when we learnt about Pearse's love of the Bard and the fact that his pupils staged Shakespeare's work at the school during the early 1900s.

Shakespeare can be daunting to take on. Most actors will agree, however, that performing his work is a great way of understanding and appreciating it. Performing it outdoors in beautiful natural settings brings that to a completely different level. Everything has to be bigger, brighter, brasher. There isn't much subtlety in Shakespeare's work, especially the comedies, so it's perfectly suited to an outdoor space.

'Summer Shakespeare' in south Dublin is now synonymous with Balally Players, drawing hundreds of loyal audience members year after year. It has been a wonderful part of our history. Long may it continue!









THE CHRISTMAS VARIETY SHOW

Tony McGettigan

Yes, I was the producer-director of the first three Balally Players Christmas Variety Shows! The baton has since passed to **Teresa Dempsey**, who wields it with enthusiasm and skill. Strangely - or perhaps not all that strangely as it is about 20 years ago - I cannot remember who first came up with the Christmas Variety Show idea. I was asked to take on the production/direction of the show because I had done a lot of semi-professional variety show work in my twenties and early thirties (before 'adult responsibilities' began to hamper me - I've been told since that some people manage to avoid such encumbrances all their lives!).

The venue in those early days was Airfield House, Upper Kilmacud Road, which had been the home of the Overend family. They left it to a trust charged with maintaining the estate as near as possible to its old grandeur and making it available to the public. Twenty years ago, the estate and house were not anything as commercially organised as they are today. The drawing room of the house was available as a venue for occasional chamber music performances and, in mid-Summer, on the lawn beneath the trees, Balally Players performed Shakespeare. So, when it was decided to put on a Christmas Variety Show, the Airfield House drawing room, which sat around 80 people, was an obvious venue.



The Christmas variety show concept was that it was a party hosted by Mrs Overend for the entertainment of the staff and tenants of the estate. **Teresa Dempsey** became Mrs Overend and, dressed impressively as a Victorian Lady of the House, charmingly greeted the arriving 'guests' (the audience) at the front door, or in the entrance hall, and directed them in hostess fashion to the drawing room. At the show's interval, the 'guests' were served 'homemade' mince pies and mulled wine. The seductive odour of mulled wine pervaded the drawing room environs to such an extent that sometimes the more sensitive among the audience became quite giddy - in a jolly way, of course. When the show ended, Mrs Overend and her cast lined the route from the drawing room to the front door to shake hands with the departing guests and wish them safe home and a Happy Christmas and New Year.



The relationship with Airfield management was warm and welcoming, a big plus for the event. This was entirely due to the personality of the young man who managed the Airfield cultural programme. That young man was known to us only by his self-adopted name, Sancho. He had a wonderful enthusiasm for all the entertainment events but, it seemed to me, that our variety show was his main love. On one occasion, he took part in the show. The Drawing Room had a large window that looked out on the garden. The variety show was performed on a platform placed in front of that window, which had its blind drawn, of course. I can't remember what exactly Sancho's performance

piece was - song or poem or monologue or whatever - but I will never forget his entrances and exits, which were through the window at the back of the platform. When his piece was due onstage, his grinning face would appear under the blind, he would make a comical remark and then clamber through the window onto the platform. Likewise, his exits were elaborate disappearing acts, under the blind and out the window. What a character! A nice person. I wonder what became of him.

Variety show performance is very different to play performance (though there are some common characteristics). The principal difference is the absence of the 'fourth wall.' In play performance, the 'fourth wall' convention establishes the action and dialogue of the play as private and personal to the characters on the stage. The audience participates as 'fly on the wall' observers. Variety show performance engages directly with the audience. The Balally Players Christmas Variety Show performers were all play actors and I remember that initially many found it strange and difficult to play straight to, and engage directly with, the audience.

The addition of the Christmas Variety Show to the Balally Players annual programme has been very rewarding. It is loved by its performers and its audience. A big cast, more or less equally divided between men and women and young and older performers, is a prerequisite. The Show provides many more performance opportunities for the group's members than is provided by the great majority of plays (barring Shakespeare!).

'There's no people like show people, they smile when they are low
Even with a turkey that you know will fold, leaving you stranded out in the cold,
Still you wouldn't change it for a sack of gold, let's go on with the show.'



Teresa Dempsey adds:

When I was first asked to direct our Christmas variety show many years ago, I was proud to accept this role and be part of a team that has helped to make it the success it is today. This is a show that has proven time and again to be a favourite with our audience.

Taking on this role gave me a chance to do something creative and at times challenging, to be part of what the Balally Players do best, which as we all know, is to entertain. '**Christmas at Marlay**' is a show that is positive and heartfelt, while at the same time creating memories of times past, with songs and music, monologues and choir etc.

Thanks must go to **Tony McGettigan** who put pen to paper and created a show that our audiences never tire of.



BALALLY PLAYERS 2002-2022

Joanne Keane

Looking for a drama group to join in Dublin I went along to the open night of Balally Players in St. Tiernan's Community School in 2002. What a buzz there was that night – lots of members, lots of chat, lots of plans for upcoming plays and a warm welcome for new members. It felt like I was in the right place. I was invited to come to audition the following night, got a part – and I was off and running! It has been a great pleasure to have been a member of Balally Players Theatre Company for the past 21 years – my drama family!

There are many elements that go into making Balally Players such a successful group – a wide dramatic programme, one acts in the autumn, the Christmas variety show, a full length or two in the Mill Theatre, the outdoor Summer Shakespeare, lots of drama workshops, an annual table quiz, trips abroad, and in the last few years - an exploration of new writing. There's a good social side with trips to theatres and nights out. A 'mystery bus tour' that took us up to Carlingford and a weekend trip to London to see 'Wicked' were particularly enjoyable and the Christmas do in January is a well-established tradition!

Having a strong Committee has been an important factor in the success of the group – keeping an eye on proceedings and supporting the productions. I've been honoured to have been Chair twice (2009-11 and 2017-19). There's a lot of work in being on the

Committee but everyone should have a stint to see how much goes on behind the scenes to get and keep the shows on the road!

The loyalty of people to the group, particularly among those who were there at the beginning and are still here, is inspiring and the shows couldn't go on without the huge work of the backstage crew like **Patrick Hand** and **Aoife Braiden**, makeup artist **Teresa Dempsey** and of course our hugely talented costumier **Dympna Murray**.

We are so lucky to have the Mill Theatre to perform in since 2006, when the opening show 'Our Town' was a truly community theatre affair with members from all 5 local drama groups in the cast. I also remember super shows in The Pavilion, Trinity, Lamb Doyle's and The Cuckoo's Nest. It is the spirit of Balally Players that is the common thread. In the last 20 years the Company has performed at 4 overseas festivals: America 2003, the Isle of Man 2008, Monaco 2009 and Belgium 2015. The group was invited to perform at the Abbey Theatre's 100th Anniversary in 2004 on the Abbey stage and presented '**On Baile's Strand**' directed by **Geoff O'Keeffe**.

There is a special kind of magic in the outdoor Shakespeare plays, whether it be Airfield House and Gardens, Cabinteely Park, St. Enda's Park or Killruddery House and Gardens. I've always thought it is wanton optimism doing outdoor shows given the unpredictable weather in Ireland...but it always works and the audiences come back year on year! '**Christmas at Marlay**' is a heart-warming end to the year from its start in 2005 in Airfield House directed by **Tony McGettigan** to its current venue at the lovely Marlay House. Who could forget **Oran O'Rua's** 'Garda', **Paul Sharpe's** 'The Papist and the Prod' or **Doris Cullen's** '**Angel on the Christmas Tree**'!



The Dundrum One Act Festival started in the Mill Theatre in 2006 with **Jean Monahan** as Director and **Karen Carleton** as Secretary. Balally Players hosted the All-Ireland One Act Drama Finals twice. The first was in 2010 – many of you might remember the big snow that year, which presented such a challenge – but the Finals went on and all were safe. 2016 was much easier by comparison! Balally Players has had lots of success on the One Act Circuit, winning the All Ireland One Act Finals with **'Melody'** directed by **Gary Wall** in 2006 and with **'Riders to the Sea'** directed by **Geoff O'Keeffe** in 2007. The group has also reached the finals with many plays including **'La Corbière'** directed by **Geoff O'Keeffe** (2003), **'Healing the Dead,'** directed by **Gary Wall** (2004), **'The Great Hunger'** directed by **Geoff O'Keeffe** (2008), **'Guests of the Nation'** directed by **Gary Wall** (runner-up 2013), and **'At the Hawk's Well'** directed by **Aoibhinn Finnegan** in 2017. The group has won many awards in the Bray and the Glenealy One Act Festivals, which take place in January.



There have been many who have directed plays for Balally Players over the past two decades. I've been fortunate to have had roles in plays/shows directed by: **Karen Carleton** ('**Twelfth Night**' 2002; '**The Comedy of Errors**', 2003; '**Rumours**', 2004; '**Much Ado About Nothing**', 2004; '**As You Like It**', 2008; '**Many Young Men of Twenty**', 2009; '**Romeo and Juliet**', 2010; '**The Merry Wives of Windsor**', 2014), **Paul Sharpe** ('**The Heiress**', 2003), **Wes Scully** ('**Vinegar Tom**', 2009), **Padraic McIntyre & Geoff O'Keeffe** ('**Tarry Flynn**', 2011), **Joe Jordan** ('**All My Sons**', 2011), **Gerard Bourke** ('**Present Laughter**', 2013; '**Blithe Spirit**', 2014), **Tony McGettigan** ('**Christmas at Airfield**') and **Teresa Dempsey** ('**Christmas at Marlay**'). Other Balally Players directors include **Jean Monahan**, **Bernard Doyle**, **Pat O'Grady**, **Brian Molloy**, **Kevin Fahey**, **Lorcan Dunne**, **Gary Wall**, **Oran O'Rua**, **Aoibhinn Finnegan**, **Fiona Walsh**, **Kate Canning**, **Brendan Phelan** and **Aisling Uí Laoire**. I've directed '**Christmas at Marlay**' (2012), '**A Thousand Deaths**' (2022) and '**Dead Man's Bells**' (2023).

There have been so many good memories - personal highlights include:

The craic in '**The Comedy of Errors**', directed by **Karen Carleton** in 2003, added to in no small measure by **Baz Ashmawy**, who hasn't made too many errors since ... and his Mammy is still going strong.

Learning to slap **Len Nealon** properly in '**Many Young Men of Twenty**' in 2009 ... we've made up since! **Declan Brennan** took a striking shot!

Taking the All Ireland winning '**Melody**', starring **Geoff O'Keeffe** and **Hilary Madigan**, directed by **Gary Wall**, to the Mondial du Théâtre Festival, Monaco in 2009 - that was an amazing trip! The glamour at the Red and White Ball was stunning! Green was the colour du jour for the Irish night and **Kay Hand**'s homemade brown bread, which survived the trip in the container, was the real star of the evening. The guest of honour was **Prince Albert**. I was standing next to him in a photo at the reception ... and still smile when I remember being asked what it was like to have my hand on the seat of power! Don't worry – it was brief!

Playing in '**Tarry Flynn**' in 2011, directed by **Padraic McIntyre**, in one of my favourite plays (the adaptation by **Conall Morrison**). It was considered 'theatre training' for the group to engage a professional director. We learned so much, had a great dramatic journey and the show was a big hit in the Mill Theatre.

Balally Players has kindly supported many members over the years with scholarships to the DLI residential Summer School in UL - to help develop their acting and directing talents and enrich the bank of skills in the group.

Covid-19 caused huge disruption in the country, but undeterred, Balally Players held Zoom meetings, ran Zoom quizzes and even did rehearsed Zoom readings of plays. Of course it wasn't the same as meeting in person but it served to keep the connections alive until we were able to get back together again.

Looking back over the years has been helped by the record of plays **Declan Brennan** has kept on the Balally Players website, and the excellent database of photos of shows on Smugmug.

Balally Players – thanks for the creativity, the friendships and the kaleidoscope of memories. Here's to the next 20 years of magic.



MY SECOND FAMILY

Muriel Caslin O'Hagan

I was very fortunate to resume my drama passion by joining Balally Players some years back! With 'Mummy' duties easing off, it was a very tempting notion and how fulfilling it turned out to be. The collection of talent, on all levels in this group, was an eyeopener and so it continues as it celebrates its fortieth birthday.

The group still has two original founding members, **Karen** and **Jean**, who continue to bring their knowledge, creativity, commitment and energy. Meanwhile members have been encouraged to avail of workshops, training courses etc that cover all the facets required to produce a fine production. Most importantly the group includes talent of the highest standard covering all the backstage requirements that include production, set design, set building, costume-creation, stage-management, lighting, sound etc. Most members happily help back stage from time to time and it is an educational experience, but our costume lady **Dympna Murray** and our set man **Patrick Hand** are first in line working on every production. I am always amazed! To see the collection of Shakespearean costumes in our store, created and stitched from start to finish by **Dympna** is miraculous. The annual programme includes one-act plays, full-length plays, an outdoor Shakespearean play in mid-summer and rounding off the year, '**Christmas at Marlay**'. Balally Players has a very strong reputation on the One-Act Festival circuit and has gathered quite a collection of trophies over the years, including winning the All-Ireland.

Social activities are not overlooked of course! They definitely include the 'wind-down' gatherings in the local pub, group outings to other productions, ad hoc summertime get-togethers, but more excitingly the group has enjoyed bringing many memorable productions abroad including representing Ireland at the International World Festival of Amateur Theatre in Monaco. We must revise that travelling idea again! Balally Players has a very busy Committee year on year. The workload is quite heavy and requires 100% commitment but without that, the group would not move along as smoothly as it does. Our AGM approaches and a new year will set off with all the enthusiastic members ready to work!

2005 was my joining year and I was lucky to get to work straight away in a charming play '**Enchanted April**'. I loved the role and more importantly it was a pleasure to work with a top-notch team. The following year brought a wonderful development for all the local drama groups - The Mill Theatre was opened in May 2006! I was unbelievably excited to be cast in its inaugural play. What a privilege! Since then Balally Players has graced the stage of the Mill Theatre many times over the years and I have enjoyed working on or off-stage for so many of those productions.

With the welcome, warmth and friendship I have enjoyed since joining Balally Players, is it any wonder I refer to it as 'My Second Family'?!



BALALLY AND ME

Aoibhinn Finnegan

I joined Balally Players in 2008. The first play I was in with the group was 'Vinegar Tom' by Caryl Churchill directed by **Wesley Scully**. What struck me about the group as a new member at that time was the camaraderie and support members had for one another. Long-standing group members sat in on rehearsals to give their opinions, and later assisted the cast and crew in pulling everything together towards

the end of the rehearsal period. It was a real collaborative process. I was pulled into this collective web from the beginning of my time with the group and made to feel at home; one of the gang. I quickly made some life-long friends in the group from nights in the Dundrum House doing the post-mortem of the night's performance and sharing our love of the theatre.

After my first role with the group I was asked to help out in many shows and found that my ideas were always welcome and supported. I went on to serve on the committee for a number of years with **Tony McGettigan** as chairperson and later **Joanne Keane**. I started the tradition of the Page to Stage evenings as I saw a need for new directors in the group who needed a chance to play around with texts and try their hand at directing small scenes with low pressure. Born out of one of these evenings was a production of 'At the Hawks Well' which I directed on the One Act Circuit.

During my first few years in Balally Players I noticed a pattern in the roles I was playing, which was highlighted to me by friends. It seemed I was mostly playing dying children! In 'Vinegar Tom' I played a sickly child. I played Mollser in 'The Plough and the Stars' directed by **Gary Wall**, which went on to the full length circuit. Poor Mollser coughed throughout the play but kept her chin up by uttering 'I'm alright Ma' every now and again before her ultimate demise. Then I went on to play the leading role of Angela in 'Like a Virgin' directed by **Jean Monahan** for the one act circuit. This character was in her teens this time – I suppose I was slowly getting older. But again, unfortunately she died. A notable mishap in this show was a premature costume change. This was a difficulty as my character never left the stage – except for costume changes. So it meant that there was nobody on stage to cover for me ... or so I thought. Unfortunately, the costume in question was the Madonna cones and wig. I was ably assisted by **Fiona Walsh** backstage and **Joe McCarthy** played a blinder on stage improvising until the costume was covered. I don't think he was even in that scene. It was definitely an unforgettable moment but we all pulled together to sort it out!

I have since played a wide variety of roles with the group and have broken out of the 'dying child' pattern, although it may always be my Balally legacy. I have gone on to do a lot of work behind the scenes as well as directing for the circuit. While directing, that collaborative strength of the group that had initially drawn me in as a new member came full circle. On many occasions, I have had the pleasure of working with **Jacqueline Wall** whose musical talents know no bounds. I hope we get the opportunity to work together again. I also had the wonderful guidance of festival stalwarts like **Jean Monahan** and **Gary Wall**. The group rallied behind me as a director and supported me on my circuit journey.

I grew up sitting on the side of the stage watching my mother's students in her drama school. This is how I learned my craft. It is still one of my favourite things to do. There is nothing nicer than sitting in the wings, the warmth of the stage floor underneath me and the heat of the lights on my face watching amazing actors do what they do best. Acting is still my greatest passion and always will be. Live theatre is one of the greatest pleasures and I love sharing that with my great friends at Balally Players and all of the audiences who come to our performances. I am looking forward to the next 40 years and the exciting work we will make together as an ensemble.





BEHIND THE SCENES

Aoife Braiden

My first introduction to Balally Players was through a friend of mine. She had become unemployed and was looking for a distraction so asked me to go with her to an open night/readings. When I told her I wasn't interested in being on stage she told me that the group was looking for people to help out in general and I was 'only there for moral support anyway'. She assured me I wouldn't have to go back after that first night. That was Spring 2010.

The readings were the following week. My friend never showed up (I later found out she had got a new job and decided not to bother joining). Ninety minutes after first meeting members of the group, I left the room having been appointed Production Manager for '**Romeo and Juliet**'! I should say, 13 years later I'm still none the wiser as to what a production manager is supposed to do.

Before we started rehearsals for '**Romeo and Juliet**' my next encounter with Balally was being asked by **Karen** if I was available to help with the play that was on the festival circuit that year. I said no problem, I could help out that weekend and so was asked to meet some of the crew that Sunday morning to help with a set. Many, many hours later we arrived in Newtownstewart - for those of you not familiar, it is a mere 205km away where nothing (nothing!) opens on a Sunday.

But back to '**Romeo and Juliet**.' To say it was a baptism of fire is like saying **Dympna** is a good costumer – a significant understatement! I was dropped in at the deep end of **Karen's** rehearsals, spending my spare time trying to gather various props, keeping track of who needed what and getting the actors to actually use Shakespeare's words rather than their own. That production, in Airfield and the Mill Theatre, is still clear in my mind (possibly partly due to post-traumatic stress). From the wayward actors, to the flying knives and missing props, to hiding with **Dave Walsh** (Stage Manager) behind a tree while throwing acorns at actors to warn them they were missing their cues, it had it all.

Since then, and having learned how to correctly answer a question that starts with 'By any chance could you...', I have had the fortune to be involved in more than 25 Balally productions in some way or another – though I have successfully avoided being on stage! Many of these productions have tested my MacGyver skills, most have tested my patience, but on all of them I have learned something new and met some amazing people. I have had to learn how to simulate projectile vomiting on stage (and clean it up), get a play back on track after lights went out (literally and figuratively), dress/undress sets while keeping directors and actors happy (though I don't always succeed there!), cook real food, make fake food, find the best replacements for wine and whiskey, loan out my furniture for weeks at a time, paint and help with sets, operate sound for a play with 120+ cues (**Declan Rudden!**) and lights for a play with 70+ cues (Kris!). And all those things are just when we stay indoors in the vaguely controlled environment that is The Mill; going on the circuit or taking plays outdoors always add an extra layer of the unknown.

Over the last 12 years I have been stage manager/assistant stage manager, set crew, treasurer and committee member, lighting and sound operator, driver, 'in charge of curtains', assistant dresser, production manager, referee and therapist, among other things. I have had the opportunity to learn from some of the best in the amateur (and professional) drama business and despite all the random events that sometimes conspire to challenge us, I'm constantly and pleasantly surprised by the dedication and creativity of the members of Balally Players to solve problems and create high quality theatre and entertainment for our audiences. I would love to say my most stressful plays are behind me, but new challenges are always lurking around corners. At least we can say there is never a dull moment in Balally Players!



HOW I NEARLY DIDN'T MAKE IT

Barry O'Connor



It was a dank, foggy night in January. It had rained earlier and was still wet underfoot. I had a vague idea where St. Tiernan's School was but didn't know exactly how to get there. It surely wouldn't take more than fifteen minutes from my house, and I'd given myself a good half hour. I'd seen a large sign for it on Wickham Way. There had to be an entrance there. My wife thought it was somewhere off Sandyford Road. I headed for Wickham Way.

I could see the school from the road but an unbroken fence and forbidding rough ground stood between me and it. I turned and made my way to the Sandyford Road. Twenty-five minutes and two dead ends later, I did what no self-respecting middle-aged man does and asked a passer-by for directions. The man wasn't certain but thought there might be a back way through a small park on the Sandyford Road. I checked my watch. Already twenty minutes late. I resolved that, if I didn't find the entrance in the next twenty minutes, I would return home. Or go to the pub. Balally Players would just have to do without my talents for their forthcoming production of **'Move Over Mrs. Markham.'** Since returning from working in Brussels, I'd been anxious to get back to amateur theatre and, following some research, Balally Players seemed to fit my bill. I followed the Facebook page and came across the audition call. This was my chance.

My first foray into the park brought me to a short set of steps which looked like they were going in the right direction. This had to be what the man was talking about. I emerged at the top of Dun Emer Road, where I had been about twenty minutes before. Cursing, I went back to the park. Only ten minutes more, I thought. A little warily, I followed a track to the dark depths of the park, at the end of which a muddy, rocky incline led to what looked like an open area. I climbed, slipping a couple of times. Then I saw the school. My way was unencumbered by fences but was across a large, rain-soaked playing field. To hell with it, I thought, and set off over the pitch.



I arrived at the audition room thirty-five minutes late with my shoes and lower half of my jeans caked in mud. I walked in and sixteen heads turned. A man in his sixties (I guessed despite a head of curly dark hair) gestured at me to take a spare chair at the long table at which everyone sat. As I sat, a script landed with a thud in front of me. 'Philip!', the man in his sixties with the curly dark hair said. I realised he was looking at me. 'What?' 'Read Philip, page 12 onwards.' 'Er, okay.' I read Philip. He was a middle-aged man. The reading continued for about another 40 minutes. I read Philip again. Still a middle-aged man but now increasingly paranoid about the faithfulness of his wife. The play was very funny, if a bit dated.

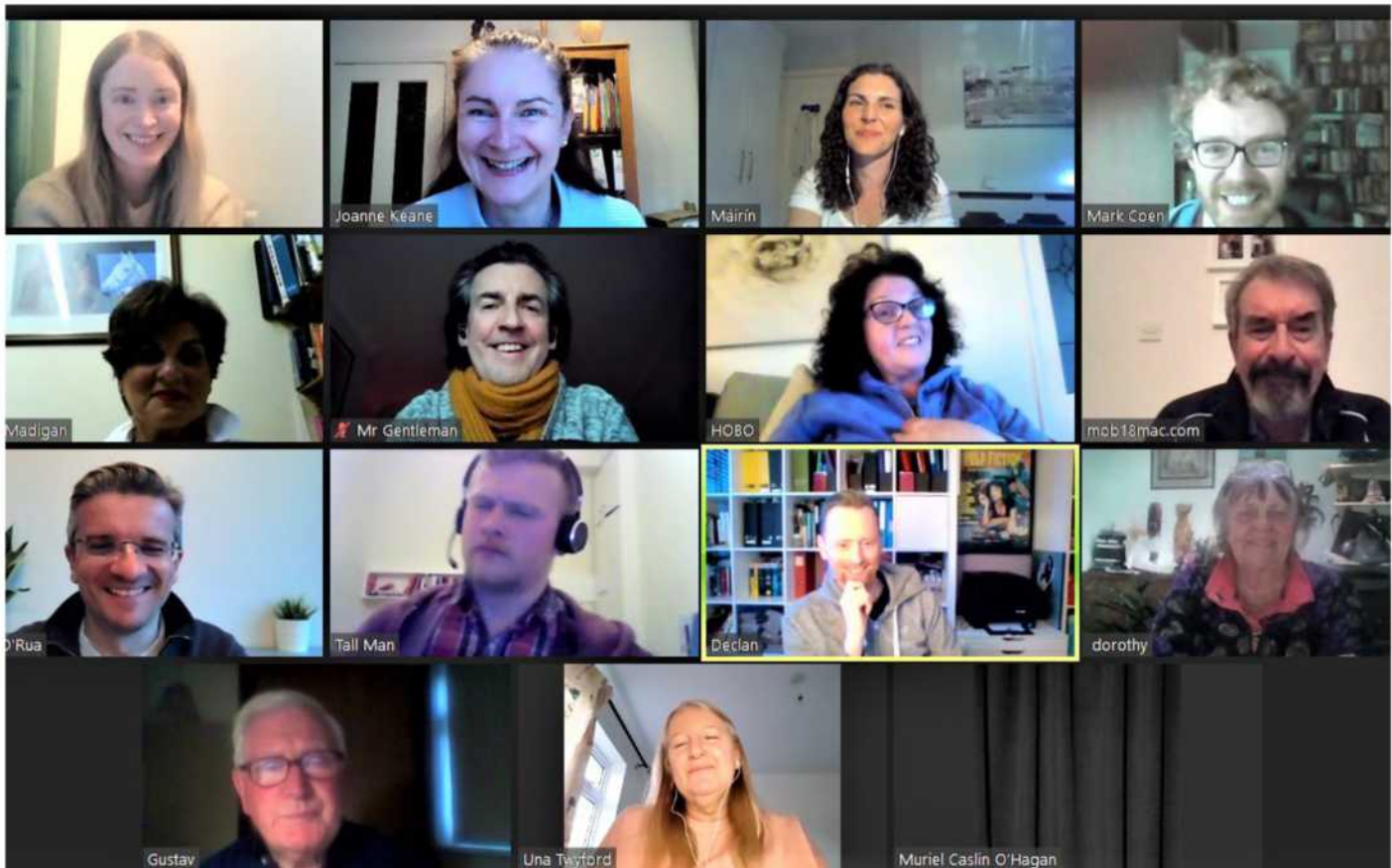
The man in his sixties was, of course, the director and he thanked us all for coming and said he would be in touch. We stood, gathered our belongings and headed to the exit. 'Excuse me!' I turned and the director waved his hand at me to come back. The others left. 'Can you come to the reading tomorrow night as well?' Now that I knew the way, I replied that I could. I apologised for being late tonight. 'Were you? Anyway, don't tell anyone but you're Philip. See you tomorrow night.' I walked out of the school slightly dazed but very happy. I texted my wife. 'I'm in!'

Since that night in 2015, I have been involved in almost 20 productions with Balally Players. I am so glad that I persevered in finding the school. What I also found was one of the most welcoming groups of people I have ever met. I have made many great friends for life in these last seven years. I have enjoyed every minute of it. I am so grateful for everything that Balally Players has given me and I hope it endures for many, many more years.

Below: 'Careful Rapture' presented in 1985. Directed by Joan Tolan.

Included: Anthony Delany, Gerry Lynam, Frances Counahan, Hilary McGartoll and Carmel Hanlon.





THE PANDEMIC YEARS

Oran O'Rua

There is a now well-known Chinese blessing, which says, 'May you live in interesting times'. The Pandemic Years (2020 - 2022) were certainly that on a global scale but felt most particularly on the individual level. I recall our 'Christmas' party (as is tradition, it was held well into 2020, several weeks after the bustle of the Christmas season had passed!) and people talking of a flu-like illness doing the rounds in China. Being a drama group, our thoughts were not only on how this might impact on us as individuals and friends if it ever arrived on our shores, but also on whether our forthcoming production, '**Alone It Stands**', would be affected. In the end the show did go on, to great audience acclaim. Two weeks later, the country was in full lockdown, theatres closed their doors and everyone's movements were restricted to a two kilometre radius from their home.

I had the privilege of being elected Chair of the company in July 2019 and in those few pre-pandemic months the excitement and enthusiasm with which the Committee planned its programme for the year ahead was palpable. We toured the One Act Festival Circuit with new writing from within the Company, winning several awards, performed our annual audience favorite, '**Christmas at Marlay**' in Marlay House, Rathfarnham, and picked up further awards at the Glenealy and Bray One Act Festivals in January 2020. The arrival of Covid-19 brought an immediate halt to our activities. We counted our blessings for at least being able to stage our full-length show immediately before the pandemic hit.

In lockdown, the programme of the Committee quickly pivoted to looking at ways we could maintain the core driving force of our company – the connection between its members – in a world where physical proximity was prohibited. We used new technologies (Zoom and Kahoot) to gather virtually for our ever-popular annual Pub Quiz and continued to keep our drama muscles flexed through online readings both of established playwrights and new writing from within the group. These Zoom readings were ably coordinated by **Muriel Caslin O'Hagan** and became more elaborate and rehearsed as the lockdowns continued. Some of our members engaged in a videography project based on new writing by long-time member, **Aoibhinn Finnegan**, dealing with the impact of the pandemic.

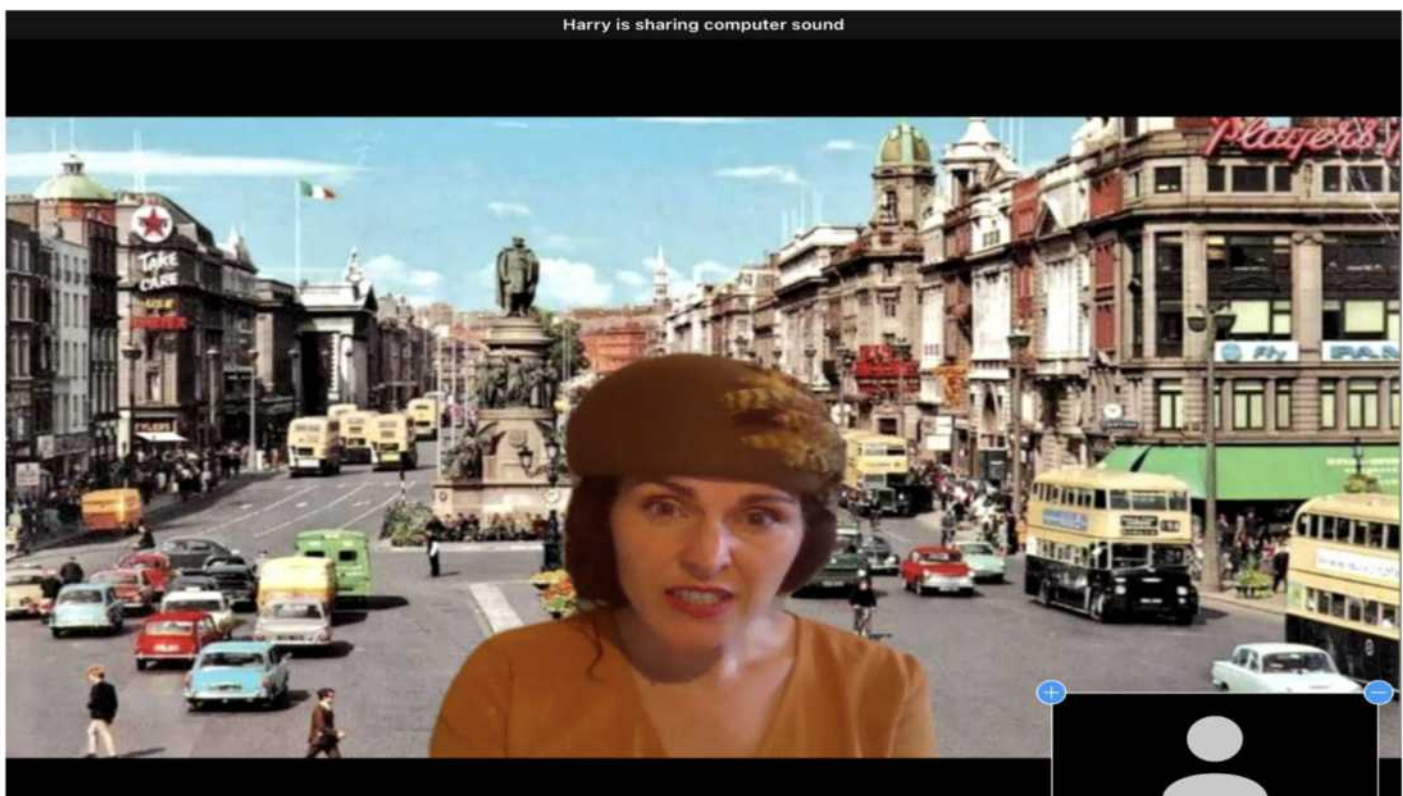
THE
DROPPING WELL
— Est. 1847 —

Welcome to
The Balally Players Christmas Dinner
at The Dropping Well on Saturday 15th February 2020

At our virtual 2020 AGM, we drew breath and took stock of what had been a difficult six months, but a period which we hoped would soon draw to a close and allow us to get back to normal again. As the lockdown persisted, our much-loved Mrs La Touche (aka **Teresa Dempsey**) made a huge leap into the 21st century bringing the Christmas spirit to Zoom with her online variety show. As a company, we made our first foray in over 25 years into radio plays, by entering the Clare Drama Radio Play Festival with '**Pizzazz**', by Hugh Leonard, directed by **Gerard Bourke**.

As we now know, with the benefit of hindsight, the dark tunnel of the Covid Pandemic was a long one. Even when we emerged into the light in late 2021 to tour the One Act Festival Circuit with '**Bedbound**' and returned to the dlr Mill Theatre stage in early 2022 for our first full-length show in two years, the new reality and challenges of staging a play with the dark cloud of Covid looming ever-present in the background were clear. Rehearsing in pods, wearing masks, having understudies for key roles and actors having to learn lines (sometimes with 24 hours' notice in the case of our first post-pandemic outdoor Shakespeare production!) all became the "new normal" in the amateur drama lexicon.

Without doubt, The Pandemic Years were some of the most challenging times the company has faced in its 40 years and yet, in a testimony to its strength and depth, the connection that exists between its members endured. The Pandemic Years reinforced this connection as life continued - members married, some had new arrivals and, sadly, some of our members passed away. All throughout, much like actors strutting and fretting our hour upon the stage, we stayed there for each other and helped each other to get through. It is this hallmark of Balally Players that remains and will sustain the company for the years to come.





The Beauty Queen of Leenane
Martin McDonagh

Balally Players
 Present its 40th
 Anniversary Production

dlr Mill Theatre Dundrum
Tuesday 07th February to
Saturday 11th February 2023

