



Drama League of Ireland

Presentation to

Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media

Wednesday 15th November 2023

Discussion Topic: Local & Community Arts

Opening Statement

Without doubt it will be very difficult to capture in this opening statement the importance and benefits of amateur drama, and indeed the Drama League of Ireland, but I will endeavour to try and give you a sense of our community within the wider Irish community. For over 60 years, the Drama League of Ireland has supported, nurtured and enhanced the aspirations and activities of amateur theatre artists through education, training, advocacy and advisory services. Through our library, summer school, ongoing workshops, play licensing services, competitive insurance scheme and information service we support a membership of over 20,000 people nationwide (based within more than 600 groups) to realise their creative ambitions and produce highest quality local and community drama.

It is fair to say that education, in its many forms, is key and our members engage with us to tell us what they need and how we can best support these aspirations, enabling us to work together. To this end, we strive to ensure that the education we provide is suitably pitched, robust and will enhance the dramatic ambitions of the participants. We present invaluable education opportunities during our annual flagship week-long Drama League of Ireland Summer School in the University of Limerick, bringing the best of Irish and international theatre practitioners to work with our attending members. We also offer a wealth of regional workshops, masterclasses and online learning opportunities. If we look at academia, the STEM approach has now been replaced by STEAM, recognising that the arts play a role in the creation of the human being.

Amateur drama in local and community arts offers a wide range of benefits, to both individuals and the communities they serve. These include creative expression, community building, cultural enrichment, skills development, personal fulfilment, emotional intelligence, and can often provide a safe space for exploring social issues in an artistic setting, raising awareness of important topics. It also completely erodes generational differences and fosters an attitude of inclusivity in a community

as amateur drama welcomes peoples of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. It provides entertainment & cultural enrichment and adds tremendously to the local economy.

The work of our members provides a core strand of programming to theatres, community halls and arts centres across the country and a continuous stream of payments to playwrights, local businesses, hospitality providers etc. In essence, it plays a vital role in enhancing the life and cultural fabric of towns and cities up and down the country, through community cohesion and fostering creativity and expression.

Ireland is rich in culture and heritage and as the year of centenary comes to an end, we think of the importance of retaining the cultural tradition. Many local drama groups produce historical or traditional plays that help preserve and celebrate the history and traditions of their area - an important aspect of cultural preservation. We are after all *the land of saints and scholars* and between All-Island playwriting competitions and providing a vehicle for the exposition of the arts around the country, there is a body of evidence to suggest that the DLI is contributing to that conveyor belt of scholars and artists. Liam Neeson, Fionnuala Flanagan & Gabriel Byrne are but three of so very many that come to mind when thinking of those that have migrated from the amateur to the professional scene.

We are an ambitious and charged board of volunteers with great aspirations and these need support. Recent comprehensive applications for Arts Council funding to support capacity building, audience development and inclusion projects were unsuccessful so we hope that this committee will acknowledge the contribution made by our members, and in turn support the activities we conduct in DLI on their behalf.

I conclude by urging you to consider your last visit to your local theatre, community hall or arts centre to see your local or visiting group. Here we have explored the depths of human emotion and the endless possibilities that live within the realm of the stage. People have laughed, cried and grown together.

Here, the commitment to excellence has presented us with multiple dramatic achievements on the amateur scene in the halls and villages around the country, feeding and sustaining the audience. Long may that continue to thrive.

For it to thrive it needs support, investment, access to resources, financial stability and political support. During Covid we received funding from the department which this committee represents for an extensive outreach programme, particularly to rural areas-the very areas often unreached by professional theatre. This funding, administered by the Arts Council, required us to spend it on supporting professionals during the pandemic, who obviously were very impacted by its ramifications. We were, because of it, in a position to offer a suite of workshops around the country, allowing our members to hone their craft regionally and in the '*teach a man to fish*' approach, return to their own groups to share the learning. We want to continue this model, and perhaps our presentation here today will highlight the relevance of the initiative and the myriad benefits it offers.

I thank you for your time today, and look forward to fielding any questions you may have.

Edward Hayden
Chairperson
For & On Behalf of the Drama League of Ireland Board