

Cricklewood Community Play Association

The Bodhran Makers

By John B. Keane

3rd-15th December 1993 the Galtymore Cricklewood

The idea of putting on a community play in Cricklewood was first thought about in 1991 by Robert Rae (a professional director) as throughout the seventies and eighties the community play movement had inspired great work up and down the country.

By January 1992 a group of committed people were attracted to the idea and a Steering Committee was formed after several exploratory meetings: Anita Geaney, Bernadette Hourigan, Mary Hourigan, Kathryn O'Connell, Mossie Quirke, Robert Rae, E. Rudkin, Maria Ryan and Jackie Wardlaw. June 6th 1992 formed itself into the steering committee of the Cricklewood Community Play Association with the objective of producing a play towards the end of 1993.

An important early decision by the group was to use John B. Keane's 'The Bodhran Makers' as the source of the play. The committee debated long and hard as to whether the project should celebrate Irish identity or have a more multicultural base. Eventually it was decided to favour Irish identity, as by going back to Ireland for the source with this tale of emigration this would relate to the experiences of many Irish people in London. Also, it would provide a vehicle for celebrating the traditions these people brought over with them particularly in music, song and dance.

In July 1992 John B.Keane gave his permission and encouragement to adapt his work 'The Bodhran Makers for the stage. The close link with John B.Keane and North Kerry was a very rewarding aspect of the project. A meeting in Birmingham at the opening of 'Big Maggie' furthered and developed contact with him and allowed him to hear how the project was developing.

On 8th July 1992 a finance committee was formed with the daunting task of raising the funding for this ambitious project. After 200 grant applications it was beginning to look more hopeful but there were many disappointments on the way. However, with generous support from Brent, Barnet, The London Arts Board, the London Borough Grants Unit and many generous trusts and foundations the Cricklewood Community Play Association was on sound financial footing by summer 1993.

The task of gaining this amount of grant aid was made possible by the very high level of grass roots support in Cricklewood and the surrounding areas. The confidence of potential funders was attracted by the uniqueness of the artistic idea and also the success of local fundraising through benefit ceilis, jumble sales, a Race Night, a car boot sale, a 25 Card Drive and a Tombola stall at the London Irish Festival organised by an active and enthusiastic fundraising committee.

In early 1993 the Association's work became more structured and in February 1993 a full time Coordinator was appointed and an experienced disabilities coordinator was co-opted onto the steering committee. In March 1993 the Community Play office opened in Dersingham Rd at Childs Hill School.

In March and April 1993 the Cricklewood Community Play Association put on a series of workshops in Music, Drama, Set Dancing and Writing all of which were well supported by the local community as they enjoyed sampling the varying delights of community arts.

In the summer of 1993 the Association was hard at work laying the artistic corner stones of the project. In July there was an Adaptation weekend where people were invited to offer their input into the process of turning the 150,000 word novel into a 15,000 word play. The music was commissioned and the design team started work on the set.

On 7th September 1993 there was a public meeting at The Galtymore where the project was officially launched and was attended by 220 local people. With a musical director now on board auditions and rehearsals began.

'The Bodhran Makers' was a play by and for the community. It was built by the hard work of all the people who came through the door to offer help. It had a cast of around 100 actors of all ages and an orchestra of some 50 musicians not to mention all the back ground staff. It was truly a huge community project which had a very well received 12 night run at The Galtymore in Cricklewood.