

Newpoint have had an extraordinarily successful year and are now fully recovered from the lingering effects of Covid.

In April the group took Happy Days to the AUDF Finals in Newtownabbey and ADCI finals in Athlone. We made many new connections for the group and further established our reputation up and down the country and even 'over the water.' The Gala night with the All-Ireland results was on 6<sup>th</sup> May. While there was a huge commitment from the many people involved, we have to single Treasa Davey out for the monumental achievement of memorising what is essentially a one-woman play. Both shows had great audience responses and generally proved lucrative, setting us up for the Youth Summer Show.

Preparations for that began around the start of June. The ever resourceful Sean Treanor wrote a two act play, Orphans, for the group based on the girls from the Newry Workhouse who were shipped off to Australia during the famine years. He created scores of characters and situations pulling in musical items to provide an excellent vehicle for our young ones. The search for a director and musical director was swiftly accomplished when previous successful occupants of the roles stepped up to the plates: Anthony Fitzpatrick as Director with the music under the ears of Elizabeth Freeburn and Mary McManus. This show rehearsed and performed in Sticky Fingers who gave us the use of the facilities for a donation far below what would be demanded of us in our usual venue – the Town Hall. The latter had given our traditional dates away to another group making its use impossible.

Also in June, Sean & Donal performed in Joycean Bloomsday events with their fees bringing in substantial funds for Newpoint.

In July there was a flurry of activity with Happy Days being invited to participate in the UK finals in Coventry after a warm-up in Rostrevor – we won the competition, becoming UK champions; we staged The Trial Of The Orange Order in Brownlow House – home of the Orange Order – just 2 days before the institution hosted the Twelfth there; rehearsals began for Orphans with some 25 young actors. The rehearsals were intensive: 4 hours

daily, 5 days a week for 7 weeks. As always, the programme was entirely free to all participants and we succeeded in securing funds to commission our Director and MD from the fabulous Brian Conlon Foundation.

The summer show culminated in 3 nights' performances at the end of August and was acclaimed by all who saw it. The writing, direction, musicality, acting and staging were magnificent. A further thanks should be extended to Mark who, with the support of Declan Farrell, turned a black box into a workable theatre. Feedback from parents and participants was fulsome with some testimonies illustrating the profound benefits our young actors accumulate from their participation in such an extensive, skill-packed, creative venture. Most will be buddies for life.

Also in August, we performed in the Thomas D'Arcy McGee summer school with another play in Anthony Russell's historical trial series. All these plays contribute to funds for projects as well.

In October, the cooperation with Anthony reached new heights in an exciting project in association with Irish National Heritage with a new trial being commissioned from Anthony examining the role of the landlords during the Famine. Newpoint were in turn commissioned to stage the trial in Carnlough, Brownlow, Newry and Strokestown. While the travel, accommodation and subsistence cost significant amounts of money, we still managed to retain enough to further enhance funds for our core work – the youth show.

October also saw the culmination of the long and joyous rehearsals for *The Cripple Of Innishmaan* in Newry Town Hall and the Market Place, Armagh. This was directed by Mark Hughes and attracted good houses. Financially most advantageous; critically adored by the audiences. Everyone in the cast had an hilarious time rehearsing and found the audience response most rewarding.

In October we made a significant financial investment in 20 sq. m of platforms with adjustable legs which will allow us to work in places without a stage and provide levels in other locations opening many staging options for

all the shows, youth & adult, which we do. The modular nature of them enhance our health & safety for all.

In December, by popular demand, we restaged the Cripple Of Innishmaan in Newry Town Hall and a week later gathered together with many old friends to honour Newpoint's greatest influence and the founder of our Youth Group, Sean Hollywood, when a blue plaque was erected in the other place in which he achieved so much, St Colman's College. Many of our Newpoint old boys spoke in his honour.

Meanwhile the baton had been handed back to Sean Treanor who was in rehearsals for a truly innovative, spectacular, re-imagining of In The Shadow Of The Glen. This required expanding our skills' base in a huge way for set, costume, sound, lighting, masks & movement. This brought experts old and new to the fold. Extensive and intensive rehearsals from dedicated actors and crew led to more festival participation than we usually do and was a huge commitment by all involved.

I thank the officers and members of the committee for their sterling efforts this full, exciting, elevating, growth-filled year and I commend this report to you for your approval.