

Hynes, (Oliver) Jerome (Morley)

by Lawrence William White

Hynes, (Oliver) Jerome (Morley) (1959–2005), theatre and festival manager, and arts administrator, was born 30 September 1959 at St John of God nursing home, Ballymote, Co. Sligo, one of two sons and two daughters of Oliver P. Hynes (c.1920–2004), vocational teacher, and his wife Carmel (née Morley). In his early infancy the family moved from their home in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon, to Monaghan town, before settling in 1965 in Dangan, Co. Galway; his father became chief executive of Galway VEC. Jerome was educated in Galway city at St Ignatius College and UCG (BA, 1980; H.Dip.Ed., 1981; LLB, 1988).

His parents were both active in amateur dramatics, and while still a schoolboy Jerome developed a lively interest in the theatrical activities at UCG of his elder sister Garry (b. 1953), and later did volunteer work (mostly in publicity) for the fledgling Druid theatre company, founded in 1975 by Garry (the company's artistic director and chief stage director) and the actors Marie Mullen (b. 1953) and Mick Lally (1945–2010). The first professional theatre company in Ireland outside Dublin, in 1979 Druid moved into its own theatre, in a converted tea warehouse on a lane off Quay Street, Galway (officially renamed Druid Lane in 1996). Jerome masterfully organised Druid's first international tour, a triumphant run at the 1980 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, acclaimed as one of the most impressive debuts by any company in the festival's history. Producing four original plays – two by Garry Hynes, and two by Geraldine Aron – Druid was awarded a Fringe First by the *Scotsman* newspaper. In addition to the merit of the productions, Druid's visit was remarkable for a publicity campaign of unprecedented imagination and effectiveness, 'orchestrated with a captivating gentleness by Jerome Hynes whose soft embassy melted some of the most hard-bitten Festival critics' (Edwards, 162).

Although he had trained for a teaching career, Hynes in 1981 became Druid's full-time administrator (latterly, general manager). Over the seven years of his tenure (1981–8), he managed Druid adroitly through the key period of its history, when it developed from a small, if vibrant, regional company to a major national company with a burgeoning international reputation. During this period the company's founders were joined by such acting talent as Maelíosa Stafford, Bríd Brennan, and Seán McGinley. While firmly committed to its Galway base, Druid embarked on a series of imaginatively conceived and skilfully managed Irish and overseas tours. Overseeing the manifold logistics of touring, Hynes took special satisfaction in implementing the company's ambitious policy of bringing live professional theatre to audiences in their own communities, thereby reviving the fit-up tradition, and touring not only to Dublin and other major centres, but also to small towns, villages, and islands throughout Ireland. Druid's first such URT (Unusual Rural Tour) was a production of 'The wood of the whispering' by M. J. Molloy (qv) in 1983. Other

unusual touring venues included Irish prisons. Central to the company's success and ethos were the landmark revivals throughout the 1980s of 'The playboy of the western world' by John Millington Synge (qv). Directed by Garry Hynes, with an outstanding cast and a daring interpretation, Druid in 1982 took the 'Playboy' on an Irish tour that included performances in the Aran islands, and (along with Synge's 'The shadow of the glen') on a resounding return to the Edinburgh Fringe. In subsequent years the 'Playboy' toured to London (1985), New York (1986), and Sydney (1987). Another highlight of Druid's programming under Hynes's management was its collaboration with playwright Tom Murphy (b. 1935), as writer-in-association, which included revivals, and acclaimed productions of two new plays: 'Conversations on a homecoming' and 'Bailegangaire' (the latter with Siobhán McKenna (qv) in her last role); after Galway premieres in 1985, both plays toured overseas. In his management of Druid, Hynes helped establish a production standard and programming tradition that the company continued to pursue after his departure, to become one of the most acclaimed theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Hynes remained on Druid's management board till his appointment to the Arts Council in 2003.

Hynes became the first managing director (latterly chief executive officer) of Wexford Festival Opera (WFO) (1988–2005). Founded in 1951 by Dr Tom Walsh (qv) – the festival's first artistic director, who coincidentally died in the year of Hynes's appointment – WFO had developed an international reputation for producing recondite, rarely performed works to a high artistic standard (usually engaging emerging international talent as performers and directors), while incorporating a substantial voluntary participation in administration, production, and performance. A funding crisis in 1986–7, incumbent on the Irish government's withdrawal of WFO's grant from the Arts Council (subsequently restored in the election year of 1987), had exposed the fragility of WFO's administration and funding structures, and highlighted the urgency of employing full-time, year-round, professional management. Despite his prior lack of experience in opera, Hynes energetically fulfilled his brief to streamline and professionalise festival management, while preserving the voluntary component, and maintaining the festival's beguiling ethos of relaxed conviviality, marked by easily accessible events ancillary to the main operatic productions, and informal intermingling of visiting artistes, audiences, and the local populace. Hynes rationalised the organisation's labyrinthine structures, rendering them more efficient and self-sustaining, and effected the transformation from a voluntary committee of management to a board structure, with paid executive staff in support of the artistic director.

A renovation (1987) of the festival's venue, the Theatre Royal, had increased seating capacity by twenty-five per cent to 550; Hynes implemented an expansion of the festival's duration from twelve days to eighteen, which combined with the added capacity to augment the potential audience by over eighty-five per cent. Identifying improved marketing as a key component of his development strategy, he updated publicity, and cultivated new audiences, marketing the Wexford festival

internationally, and independently of other Irish arts and tourism organisations. Throughout the last decade of his tenure, WFO achieved 100 per cent audiences annually. With box-office receipts covering only forty per cent of festival costs, and government support perceived as chronically unpredictable, Hynes successfully pursued increased business sponsorship, securing new sponsors in both Ireland and Britain. WFO's budget of €2.4 million for 2003 marked an eightfold increase over the annual budget at the beginning of his tenure. A popular programming innovation under his management, supplementing the traditional orchestral and vocal concerts, was the 'opera scenes' performances: ninety-minute condensations of familiar operas, to piano accompaniment, featuring singers with minor roles in the festival's principal productions. Hynes advanced ambitious plans for a radical redevelopment of the venerable Theatre Royal (a touring theatre built in 1830), securing €25 million in public and private funding for the project, and purchasing neighbouring properties to allow for substantial expansion. The plans were realised after his death with replacement of the Theatre Royal by the new Wexford Opera House on the same site (opened in 2008), with a 770-seat main auditorium, substantially enlarged orchestra pit, improved amenities for performers and patrons, and an intimate and versatile 170-seat black-box space, named the Jerome Hynes Theatre in his memory.

A protracted controversy erupted in 2001 when WFO failed to conclude contract terms with RTÉ – whose orchestras (most recently the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra (NSO)) had been engaged for every previous year of the festival's fifty-year history, save one (1961) – and began a three-year association with the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus (2001–03), followed by the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra (2004–05). Yearly negotiations between WFO and RTÉ throughout the period continued to stalemate, largely over fees for travel, subsistence, and related expenses. (RTÉ's long-standing readiness to cover the NSO's salary costs in Wexford was cited by some commentators as an indirect state subsidy to the festival.) Though Hynes asserted that the new arrangement 'underline[d] the international nature of the event' (*Irish Times*, 28 October 2004), many critics lamented a decline in orchestral standards; the participation of the Belarus orchestra in particular was not regarded as an artistic success. Hynes rejected accusations by the Musicians' Union of Ireland that the eastern European orchestras were engaged on sub-standard terms and conditions (but acknowledged the budgetary savings); the union picketed the festival's opening night in successive years, urging the employment of Irish-based musicians (2003–04). Responding to a larger, but related, controversy surrounding the dearth of Irish artistes and other creative talent at the festival, Hynes argued for artistic independence in casting, and cited financial exigencies. When in 2004 the Arts Council urged WFO to 'respond with vigour' to the issue, some commentators accused Hynes – by then a council member – of representing conflicting interests. The orchestra controversy was resolved after Hynes's death when WFO in 2006 engaged Irish Film Orchestras to provide the nucleus of a Wexford Festival Orchestra, composed of Irish-based musicians.

Both Hynes and his sister Garry were among a group of leading figures in the arts, the so-called 'gang of eight', who in 2003 publicly deplored the Irish government's eight per cent cut in Arts Council grant aid to arts organisations, and ensuing funding decisions made by the council. In August 2003 Hynes himself was appointed to the Arts Council as deputy chairman (2003–5). The new thirteen-member council – the first appointed under a newly promulgated arts act, which mandated a sweeping restructuring of the council, and significant procedural changes whereby arts organisations were approved for funding – was notable for the overwhelming predominance of individuals working in the arts, and representing a cross-section of the entire arts sector. Hynes's service was distinguished by his efforts to make procedures clearer, simpler, and fairer for artists.

Hynes chaired a special committee on the traditional arts, whose report of September 2004, outlining a comprehensive and coordinated policy framework, was adopted by the Arts Council as the first official policy document ever produced on the sector. Recommending increased support for professional and voluntary artists and for transmission of the tradition, and emphasising the importance of supporting local activity, the committee controversially asserted the primacy of the Arts Council as the body responsible for support and development of the sector, and rejected the concept of a separate council for the traditional arts. Certain of the committee's conclusions were challenged in a minority report, and varied with proposals put forward by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Hynes served on the boards of the National Concert Hall, Dublin; the West Cork Chamber Music Festival; the Dunamaisé theatre, Portlaoise; Business 2 Arts, a body facilitating creative partnerships between business and the arts; and the advisory board of Arts from Ireland at the Kennedy Centre, Washington, DC, USA. He was an executive of the International Festivals Association, a judge of the *Irish Times* Theatre Awards, and a director and president of Wexford Chamber of Industry and Commerce. He married (1987) Alma Quinn; they had three sons, and resided in Wexford. In September 2005 Hynes and his family visited Inis Meáin, Aran islands, for the conclusion of the 'DruidSynge' tour, comprising the entire cycle of Synge's plays, twenty-three years after the Druid company, under his management, had first performed the 'Playboy' on the island. One week later, while addressing staff, casts, and crews, and welcoming the visiting artistes in the foyer of the Theatre Royal at the commencement of rehearsals for the 2005 Wexford festival, he collapsed suddenly and died shortly thereafter on 18 September 2005.

Hynes was acclaimed as probably the foremost arts manager in Ireland, wise to the ways of arts politics, a discriminating strategist, with superb organisational skills, and meticulous in forward planning. He commanded a rare combination of artistic values and vision, with sound business acumen. Fintan O'Toole postulated that Hynes could have been a supremely successful entrepreneur or corporate CEO, but 'instead, he put the skills that could have made him rich to work for the gaiety of the nation, embodying in the process the idea that business can and should be about

much more than greed' (*Irish Times*, 20 September 2005). Short in stature, extrovert in nature, generous, convivial, and widely respected, Hynes was eulogised by Patsy McGarry as 'truly an exceptional man, both publicly and privately#It is a decent custom to speak well of the dead, but where Jerome is concerned what has been written and what has been said is all true' (*Irish Times*, 26 September 2005). In 2006 the Arts Council renamed its recently inaugurated Fellowship for Ireland – awarded annually to a candidate living and working in Ireland and committed to developing a career as a cultural leader in the country – the Jerome Hynes Fellowship in his memory.

GRO (b. cert.); *Ir. Times*, 30 July, 19 Aug. 1988; 7 Apr. 2001; 29 Jan., 15 Feb., 26 Mar., 23, 29 May, 15 Aug., 11, 14, 17 Oct., 4, 6 Dec. 2003; 4, 8, 9, 14, 15, 28 Oct., 1 Nov. 2004; 20, 21, 22, 24, 26 Sept, 21 Oct. 2005; 24 Feb. 2006; Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Irish theatre in Scottish festival', Dermot Bolger (ed.), *Druids, dudes, and beauty queens: the changing face of Irish theatre* (2001), 148–72: 161–2; Gus Smith, *Dr Tom's festival legacy* (2001); Karina Daly, *Tom Walsh's opera: a history of the Wexford Festival, 1951–2004* (2004); The Arts Council (An Chomhairle Ealaíon), *Towards a policy for the traditional arts* (2004); *Independent* (London) (www.independent.co.uk), 21 Sept. 2005; *Guardian* (www.guardian.co.uk), 6 Oct. 2005; *Arts Council Newsletter*, iii, no. 10 (June 2006); *Soundpost: Newsletter of the MUI*, iv, no. 4 (winter 2006); Kevin Lewis (ed.), *What the doctor ordered: an encyclopaedia of Wexford Festival Opera since 1951* (2008); Druid Theatre Company, www.druid.ie (esp. Thomas Conway, 'The Druid story', etc.); Wexford Opera House, wexfordoperahouse.ie (websites accessed Apr.–May 2011)