

"Laughing Fit"

An interview with Brendan O'Carroll

Multi-talented Brendan O'Carroll is more than just Ireland's favourite comedian. He has graced the national airwaves with 'Mrs Brown's Boys', hosts a hit TV game-show, 'Hot Milk and Pepper' and has a film or two in the pipeline. His novels, 'The Mammy', 'The Chisellers', and 'The Granny' have all topped the bestsellers lists. But he has also found time to be a successful playwright. His first play, 'The Course' was initially rejected by the Dublin Theatre Festival, but went on to become a national success, selling out for a year and a half. His new play opens in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, on the 30th of June. In an interview with Yoga Teacher and Ki Massage therapist, Karen Ward, he talks about his many successes, his involvement with "Recharge for Research Day" in aid of the Richmond Brain Research Foundation, and reveals how a combination of Positive Mental Attitude and Ki-Massage helps him stay on top of it all.

Karen: Brendan, could you tell me how you came to write your first play?

Brendan: The idea actually came to me about ten years ago, while I was doing a positive mental attitude course (PMA) in a hotel in Athlone. It was preparation for an insurance job that I was going for. The job itself was dreadful, but the course was magnificent! It was my first contact with the philosophy of positive mental attitude, which is a willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve a result in a given situation, provided you don't transgress the laws of God or Man.

I like that approach to life.

It's my philosophy. I like the idea that you can set your own goals. If you set a goal, you should visualise that goal, write it down, tell as many people as you can, because the best thing to get anything done is pressure. So, for example, if you tell enough people that you're writing a play, and it'll be on by a certain date, then you just have to do it. And that's exactly what I did!

You seem to have a lot of natural self-confidence.

I think everybody has a certain amount of positive mental attitude in them, and I got a lot of it from my mother, who told me when I was a kid that I could be anything I wanted to be, which is a great way of thinking and obviously she must have believed it about herself as she was Ireland's only woman TD in 1953. So yes, I have always been very confident, but that course in Athlone reinforced it with a scientific approach.

How did your friends react to the idea of you writing a play?

Initially they were a little bit sceptical about it, because of the nature of the Outrageous Comedy

Show, which was a very much off-the-cuff, in-your-face sort of show, and remember, the people who were working with me depended on the show for their income. There was I, about to stop performing in the show, to go off and write a play!

So they weren't 100% sure about the concept!

Exactly. Anyway, eventually in 1995 I finished the play, which was called "The Course". In January of that I had done a press interview, where I mentioned the play for the first time. I was asked about my plans for the year, and I said, "this year, I am going to write a play, and I am going to open it in the Dublin Theatre Festival"

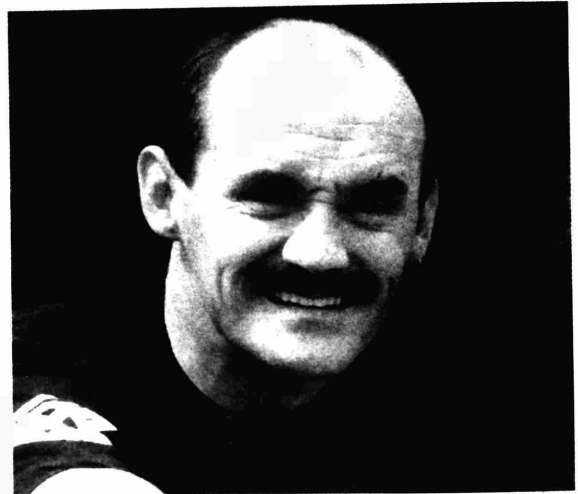
Did you pick the Theatre Festival because you felt that was where the best Irish theatre happens?

There were a couple of reasons. The first time I ever went to a play was when I was 12 years of age, during the Dublin Theatre Festival. My mother brought me to the Gate Theatre to see a comedy, and it was so funny that I told myself, "This is what I want to do!" The other reason was an award in the Dublin Theatre Festival for the best new Irish work, which I really wanted to win, so I just had a crack at it. I had my hopes pinned on that award, but we didn't even get to the judging stage, because I got a letter from the Festival Committee, telling me they were rejecting the play, because it was "not up to the standard required by the Festival". I was really bamboozled, because they hadn't even seen the play!

Did your friends rally round you?

Some of them said, "well, there you go, it was worth a shot, now let's go back to doing the Outrageous Comedy Show". But I wasn't going to let this slip, and at the same time,

I felt I was really out in the cold because even my friends were saying, "Well, if the festival committee says it's not up to scratch..." That weekend Steve Collins was fighting his second fight against Chris Eubank, in Paire Uí Chaoimh in Cork, and we were going down for the fight, for one of the "boys' weekends". When we got down to Cork the place was really buzzing, but I wasn't in much of a party mood. The stuffing was really



■ Brendan O'Carroll

knocked out of me. We went for a few drinks, but I was feeling gutted. Jimmy Magee was at the ringside and wanted to know if I would have a few words with him live on the air, before the fight started. We were cracking a few jokes when suddenly the music started for Steve's entry. There was a TV monitor beside me, and as Steve was coming down the steps I could read his lips and he was saying "I'm still the champ, I'm still the champ".

Did you think Steve would win?

Yes, I did, but 90% of the crowd that came to that fight believed that

Steve was going to lose, even the Irish! They believed the win in Millstreet was a fluke, and that Eubank was now going to hammer this guy, but Steve was still a champ and he won, and won well. After the fight it just dawned on me, "I am still the champ!"

So, in a way, Steve's victory inspired you to go ahead with the play?

That's right, I said to myself, "I've still got the play and I've got the theatre booked - I'm still the champ!" On the way back to the hotel in the car, I said to the boys,



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