

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR SHEELAGH DRUDY**, University College Dublin - National University of Ireland, Dublin, on 7 June 2002, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **TONY Ó DÁLAIGH**

A Sheánsailéar, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Draíocht-magic! This is such stuff as the life and times of Tony Ó Dálaigh are made on. Throughout his career, education and drama have been intertwined. Drama is a magical thing. It can help us to learn about emotions, problem-solving and relating to other people. It develops the imagination and self-esteem. It works magic in the theatre, in the classroom and in the human heart. Through drama, music and dance the focus shifts from learning on an intellectual level towards learning through the emotions and empathy. The arts are, quite literally, the vessels that carry our culture. Theatre, which can encompass all of the arts, is the largest and richest of these.

Although more often a director and manager than a player, Tony Ó Dálaigh through his ages has played many parts, a large number of them in the arts. He was born in Mallow, Co. Cork in 1933 -the son of a carpenter. He attended the Patrician Brothers' primary and secondary schools and left school after taking the Intermediate Certificate -as did most of his classmates.

Having worked for a while in the post office and with the railways, he took the Clerical Officer Examinations in 1950 and joined the Civil Service. His first position was in the Department of Defense. Post-war over-staffing in the Department meant that he found time to get involved with cross-country running and acting. Over the subsequent fifty years Tony Ó Dálaigh was destined to make a remarkable contribution to the arts in Ireland. He first began acting with the Defense Department's amateur theatre group, the 'Revellers'. After ten years with Defense he joined the Department of Education.

While in this Department he co-founded the Strand Players which broke new ground by introducing contemporary European plays to the amateur stage. He became part-time manager of the Damer theatre, producing plays in the Irish language and presenting 'An Giall' ('The Hostage') by Brendan Behan as a world premiere. He also co-founded the Irish National Opera. The latter company toured for twenty years and provided the occasion of Suzanne Murphy's opera debut.

Tony Ó Dálaigh eventually became Ministerial private Secretary, serving under four Ministers of Education. During his career in the Department of Education he became closely involved with Youth Policy. During this time he was seconded for four years as the Chief Executive of a new state-aided touring company, the Irish Theatre Company, where he worked with various notable theatrical people, including Joe Dowling and Michael Colgan.

On his return to the Department of Education as a Principal Officer, he was appointed as head of Industrial Relations. He later returned to Youth Policy and established the Youth Employment Scheme. As part of this scheme, he helped to establish companies connected to the arts in many parts of Ireland, of which the best known, the Red Kettle in Waterford and Graffiti in Cork, still flourish.

One of the earliest productions directed by Tony Ó Dálaigh in 1961 was *Sive* by the late John B. Keane. The opening night generated some controversy but, fortunately, media reportage of it served to ensure full houses and a successful run.

From 1986 to 1990 Tony Ó Dálaigh acted as Director of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. During his Directorship the building was opened to the public for the first time. He organized a wide-ranging and exciting programme of concerts, exhibitions, theatre, opera and ballet. In 1990 he retired from public service to take up the position of Director of the Dublin Theatre Festival. During this time many international plays and shows were presented, including the French show *Archaios*, *The Odyssey* by Footsbairn, children's shows in the Ark and many others. He retired as Director of the Theatre Festival in 1999.

Since then he has been a freelance Arts Consultant. He has continued to spread the magic of the theatre to a wide audience and has acted as Consultant Artistic Director to Draíocht, a Community Arts Centre in Blanchardstown. It is hardly surprising to learn that this dynamic man is now involved in planning the Official Opening of the Special Olympics to be held on 21st June 2003.

During his life Tony Ó Dálaigh has been deservedly the recipient of many awards for his contribution to the arts, including various Irish theatre awards. In 2001 he was made a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government.

Throughout his career he has been facilitated and supported by his wife Margaret, who herself is a gifted actress and director. They have four children - two daughters and two sons.

It is fitting here to quote from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in so doing to pose a few questions:

Come now; what masques, what dances shall we have
To wear away this long age of three hours
Between our after-supper and bed-time?
Where is our usual manager of mirth?
What revels are in hand? Is there no play
To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?

Call - Tony Ó Dálaigh.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse, qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totaeque Academiae.