



entre erick

professionally geared to knock out three flats at the back, rehearse on a smaller space and give their one hundred percent full performance."

The stage in the Arts Centre will be twenty three and a half feet across with a further fourteen feet to one side of the wing. While it might not be suitable for a full Ballet production I agree with Brid that it is probably better suited to a modern political Ballet such as "The Green Table", for which fewer dancers are required. As well as theatre, ballet and concerts, Brid is also planning for two galleries, a restaurant and a wine bar and she feels strongly about the Centre being available to the Limerick community, not just artists. It will be open from ten in the morning until midnight and people will have an opportunity of renting it for meetings and seminars. It will have a seating capacity for three hundred people. Brid also hopes to have ten exhibitions every year - five Limerick oriented and five travelling shows which will include the Oireachtas. There will be quite a lot of theatre involving most of the local theatrical groups and also regular lunch time poetry readings possibly in the restaurant. Other plans include a children's film club every Saturday morning which will hopefully have a membership of six hundred children between the ages of five and fourteen. Brid has a special interest in children and has published a children's novel written in gaelic and published by F.N.T. Dublin, "Filiann an Feall" as well as a full length play performed at the Project Theatre.

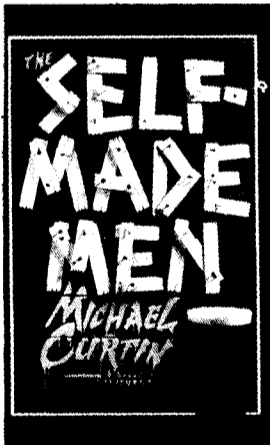
The major task of organising and running Limerick's Arts Centre falls lightly on the shoulders of Brid Dukes. For her, no problem is insurmountable. She works from a basic premise that one uses what one has and so whatever drawbacks the old Confraternity might have, it will not prevent Brid Dukes from realising her ambitions for the Arts Centre. Perhaps a measure of her ability to plan for the future is the fact that she is slightly worried as to who will perform the official opening of the centre next March. "I might suggest that man with the purple strings, Charles J. Haughey. But whoever it might be, all those people interested in Limerick's artistic growth should rally around Brid Dukes and ensure that Limerick gets a Centre that will be second to none.

There is the memorable smell of ink and the rhythmic sound of the printing press and a man with grey hair and glasses sitting by an IBM type setting machine tapping out words with the fastest two fingers I have ever seen.

Michael Curtin is a writer who prints for a living - in a sense his whole life is taken up with words. He works an eight hour day at his own printing business, Limerick Off-Set Printers, and in the evening he works at being a writer. For the past five years he has written every single day with the exception of Good Friday and Christmas Day.

It is that kind of discipline and dedication which has seen seven of his stories published in David Marcus's New Irish Writing page and one or two in The Stony Thursday Book. Those long hours at the desk eventually paid off with the publication of his first novel last April by Andre Deutsch, 'The Self Made Men'.

The novel is set in London and Limerick and concerns the lost soul of its hero, Billy Whelan and how he regained his self respect and dignity through a series of comical, farcical, real, yet saddening events. Whelan is a lonely, destitute (even though he has £1,200 in the bank) heavy drinking Limerickman, working on the buildings in London. He is haunted by the antagonists of the novel; Higgins, Murphy, Mark Brown and Nicky who have kept alive the bitterness and frustration that has welled up in him since his schooldays. But there are other ghosts he must exorcise: the ghost of his fatherless past, the ghost of those impoverished '50's which prompted him to seek out a living elsewhere. In short, Whelan's struggle is to find his true self (if there is such a thing) and to rid his life of all he despises - the rules and regulations of an unnatural existence. His aim is to live according to his own unwritten rules and he does this by returning to Limerick and marrying the girl he loves after answering a small, seemingly insignificant advertisement in Screen Monthly, one dinnerless Christmas Day. The consequences of those two actions eventually lead to his salvation.



If the plot is at times a little difficult to follow and the over all story been none the worse for a more diligent editorial eye, 'The Self Made Men' is a novel which becomes abundantly clearer and therefore more satisfying with every reading. The author has given us a present day hero, an ordinary mortal possessing some of the strength, will and tenacity of a Greek God. We may not like Whelan for his parnickety black and white philosophy, his refusal to budge an inch (even to the point of denying his wife a washing machine) or his insistence on being absolutely right all the time; nevertheless we admire him for surviving as an individual against the odds. The likable traits of his personality are what the best of us have sometimes to put up with in ourselves.

Michael Curtin first learned all about good English, good accent and good manners from Stan Downing, a teacher who once taught at the Christian Brothers School, Sexton Street, Limerick. Like his friend and fellow writer, David Hanly, he learned the basics of the English language from men like Mr. Galvin, Mr. Malone and Mr. Noonan. Their main function was to get us jobs but they also had a back-

Michael Curtin. A writer out on his own

Robert Nye: The Guardian

Marese Murphy: Irish Times

Crisply but crazily written - a bit like Flann O'Brien without the booze - the novel renders to modern

able darkness of the far, there is the author's real and merciless vision of life in Ireland today



Mr. Michael Curtin, with the fastest two fingers on Earth.

John Morrow: Irish Press

Peter Lewis: Sunday Times

I thoroughly enjoyed Mr. Curtin's debut and look forward to his second novel which, as the blurb genius guesses finally, is already off the slips

The novel does not end with a Molly Bloom-like yes, but it is positive and optimistic, with Billy and Breda reaffirming their love and their individualism with new confidence.

ground of Latin and so knew their English". Michael was a member of the Limerick Debating Society for five years and although he didn't know Maureen Ahern or Willie Feehan personally, he was fascinated with their oratory. On finishing school he worked in the Cement factory, a place that is synonymous with Limerick as Guinness's Brewery is with Dublin, and five years later he left for England. "Though I had five happy years in the Cement Factory I left for London thinking it might help me to write and my experiences of London are reflected in the book".

While in London he tried to write plays and his first attempt at having a play accepted is worth recalling: "I wrote a play in my own handwriting into two copy books and sent it to the Abbey. Six months later they sent it back because they could not read my writing. I never did anything with it after that." By the time he had returned to Ireland, writing seemed to matter less to him and he had in fact stopped for three years until David Hanly persuaded him to try again. The advent of the New Irish Writing page encouraged him further and when he shared first prize in the short story competition at Listowel Writers Week with another Limerick writer, Paddy Lysaght, he received the necessary nod to continue writing. His first story to be published was called

"Hogan". "It had taken me a long time to realise that I could write a story about cowboys and indians on my own home street".

Of the writers Michael Curtin admires he is quick to acknowledge the work of Somerset Maugham and in particular a story, "The Verger", which he likes to read again and again. "I love it for its punch line which possible means it's not a story at all. Maugham probably took a joke and made a story around it. 'Of Human Bondage' was my bible. I imagine many people couldn't have gotten over their adolescence without it". He also likes the work of Ben Kiley and feels his book Proxopera (a novel that deals with a particularly frightening but all too common incident in the North) is used as a vehicle to air Kiley's feelings on the North. "He knows it's horrifying. As do I. But it's too sad for writing". Michael feels that the best book writ-

ten in his life time is Tom Flanagan's 'The Year of the French' and, of course, he also liked David Hanly's book 'In Guilt and in Glory'. He was absolutely appalled by the hypocrisy of some people's reaction to the sex scenes in Hanly's book: "It would make you believe that some people were delivered by the stork".

With several good reviews, both from the English and Irish press, under his belt and the Penguin edition of his novel due out soon and a second novel, The Replay, already accepted by his London publisher, Michael Curtin talks and acts like a man who has found his own style and stride. He is quietly supported in his work by his wife Anne and if his three children are not yet aware of the writer they have for a father, they will no doubt grow to learn of the success that is their father's due.

Michael Herbert: Literary Review

Billy Whelan makes himself what he is. And the way Michael Curtin has remade himself in this book (as I suspect), he should give many a laugh to many a reader not upset by humorous indecency. On the strength of this lively, chic...