

# Big entrance for Harris Film Festival

■ Film-making diaspora to be celebrated at new festival in honour of Richard Harris' 'A-list' Hollywood status

ALAN OWENS

ON the fiftieth anniversary of his Oscar-nominated star turn in *This Sporting Life*, Richard Harris is to be celebrated in his native city this weekend.

Fittingly, in the year of *The Gathering*, a large posse of Harris family members are to attend the Richard Harris International Film Festival in Limerick.

*Mad Men* star Jared is expected to jet in for a few hours on Saturday - together with glamorous new wife Allegra Riggio, an American TV star - to attend a screening of *This Sporting Life*, first released in 1963, depending on tight filming schedules for his own *Poltergeist* shoot in Toronto.

The movie star has strongly indicated to organisers that he will fly from Toronto to Limerick for just under 12 hours, despite being at risk of penalties if he misses filming in Canada.

Harris' son Damian and granddaughter Ella, who famously encouraged her grandfather to take the role of Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* films, and up to 30 extended family members will attend the inaugural event, which opens with a gala screening of Irish movie *Life's A Breeze* on Friday night in 69 O'Connell Street, the home of the festival.

There will be showings of *Mister John*, starring Aidan Gillen, plus, in an Irish premiere, Evanna Lynch's new film *G.B.F.*, her first since *Harry Potter*.

The idea for the festival was borne out of a mutual meeting of minds in the Strand Hotel over a year ago and received funding from the *Gathering* and the Harris family have supported the notion of it from the outset.

"This is a real stamp of approval from the family that so many of them are attending. We have Harris family members coming in from all over Europe and specially for the festival which is really fantastic," explained Eleanor McSherry, creative director with the fledgling festival.

A showcase of short films will take place on Saturday, as will a talk on Sunday, and a number of film industry executives are to attend.

"Industry people from all over Ireland are coming, which is extremely important for film makers in the city, that they see Limerick as a viable option for



Looking a million dollars, Richard Harris arrives at Shannon Airport 43 years ago this Friday. It was November 6, 1970 and the *Leader* was there to see him step off the Aer Lingus plane, bound for the Savoy Cinema in the city and the world premiere of his new movie, *Bloomfield*. As well as being the lead actor, Harris co-wrote and co-directed the movie. All these years later, members of the Harris family are flying in this weekend for the inaugural Richard Harris International Film Festival. Above right: the movie legend received a big welcome as he returned to his home town in triumph. Over his shoulder is Maurice Gibb of the Bee Gees, who was accompanied by his wife, singer Lulu

filming," said Eleanor.

"It is really important to impress these people and hopefully they will be around for the showcase on Saturday to see the best of Limerick."

But the central focus is on Harris' extensive film career, with a showcase of gritty

drama *This Sporting Life* on Saturday afternoon and a talk by Sharon Slater on 'Limerick and Hollywood' at 2pm on Sunday.

At the Harris family's instigation, the theme of the festival focuses on the Irish film-making Diaspora plying their trade abroad, as the actor did

to spectacular effect over the course of his own career.

"It seemed to me that what the city was really lacking was a way of honouring Richard Harris in the most appropriate manner, which obviously, is a film festival," explained Rob Gill, the festival's director.



"With the Harris family we developed a concept. They suggested having a long lasting theme, to involve the Irish Diaspora, given that they are part of it themselves and their father was one of the first to really make it as an A-lister.

"We discussed it and thought it was a brilliant idea, because there isn't a festival like that in Ireland that recognises the Diaspora film making talent."

Harris, who once said he felt "most alive when I'm working on a film", passed away a matter of weeks before the premiere of his second turn as Dumbeldore, a role he was certain would overshadow his glittering career, which included stellar turns in *The Guns of Navarone*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Camelot*, *Gladiator* and another Oscar nominated turn *The Field*.

The tenth anniversary of his death was marked in the city in October 2012. Organisers hope to make the film festival an annual event in Limerick.

See the website [www.richardharrisfilmfestival.com](http://www.richardharrisfilmfestival.com) for full programme details.



Looking forward to the weekend: Anna Maria Harris, Castletroy; Gillian Fine (Richard Harris's niece) Castletroy; Zeb Moore, project manager of Richard Harris International Film Festival and Hayman Harris, the screen legend's nephew, also from Castletroy



Hollywood star Jared Harris, Richard's son, pictured with his wife Allegra. The couple are expected to fly in for this weekend's film festival

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