



The society was a focal point in meeting people

By JOAN GEARY

MY earliest memories of The Cecilian Musical Society go back to the late 40s and I recall that my first Show was the pantomime, "The King of Candyland" at Christmas 1947.

The stars of the Shows at the time were to all of us as "Star Wars" is to the modern generation.

The excitement was immense and the wonder to our young minds was enchanting.

I still, to this day can recall the names of those who played at that particular time: Ged O'Donovan-Reid, a wonderful soprano and Limerick's own magnificent tenor Jimmy Penny, also Josephine O'Mahony, Anthony Riordan, Eamonn Martin, Mick English of Rugby fame, Liam Benson, Paddy Glynn, Gerry O'Dowd and Rose Hanrahan - later to become husband and wife and of course, Michael O'Doherty - who was to become a producer in his own right in later years.

The Society at the time was a great focal point for meeting and making friendships and an opportunity to try one's talent either vocally or dramatically.

It was in effect a family gathering and I would have to state that at one stage in the early 50s, there were three members of one family on stage and one in the orchestra.

They were of course the Geary family from the South Circular Road and one of them, Gould, was to become my husband.

In 1955, my friend Anne Larkin and I presented ourselves at the Crescent for audition. Fr. McMahon ran us through the number and we were admitted.

The Show was "The New Moon" and its leads were Noel Harris and Kay Condon. It also had Paddy Portley and Josephine O'Mahony with Gerry O'Dowd and Bobby Eades.

It was a wonderful experience and to this day, the melodies of Romberg remain in my mind. Wonderful songs such as "Lover Come Back To Me", "One Kiss" and "Wanting You" bring me back to those early days in The Society.

1956 gave us "The Belle of New York" and again we had Noel Harris and Phila Collins as the leads and indeed, on the two subsequent occasions that the society reprised "The Belle" in 1965 and 1976, Phila was also involved playing two different parts.

"The Belle" was a great favourite for us "Girls of the Chorus" who at that time included Ursula O'Connor, Florence Gardiner, Anne Larkin, Verette Geary, Marion Condon, Rita O'Shea, Mary Geary and many others.

"The Bowry Boys" were Jim Kelly and John Raleigh. "The Belle" was really a fun Show to be in and we all had tremendous enjoyment from it.

The Production of "Showboat" in 1958 recalls "The Cotton Blossom" and songs like "Make Believe" from two wonderful leads, Tom D'Arcy and Phila Collins. Michael Yelverton excelling himself in "Ol Man River" and a beautiful rendition of "Fish Gotta Swim" from Mary Hanon.

This was to be my first opportunity to play a lead and I found myself paired with Kevin O'Connor as the comic pair "Ellie" and "Frank".

These indeed were wonderful times and "Showboat", which was original-

ly to run for one week was extended for three additional days due to popular demand.

It was now coming to the time when Gould and I were about to marry and so I took a rest from the Cecilians for a number of years but came back in 1967 to a revival of "The New Moon" to play "Clotilde" opposite Sean Prendergast.

The leads in this show were a lovely soprano from Bunratty Castle who hailed from Dungannon, Una Kelly, who captured the hearts of all the men with her lovely personality and beautiful singing and her leading man, Billy Leahy.

They looked and sounded the ideal leading man and leading lady.

This show saw the arrival on a Cecilian stage of the multi talented Claude Byrne who played "Alexander" opposite Emma Leach as "Julie".

It should be mentioned at this stage that Claude Byrne's daughter, Derbhille Byrne is the present musical director of The Cecilian Musical Society - so the family connections continue.

I was delighted to be involved in the 1969 production of "My Fair Lady" which saw the arrival of Joyce Bradfield to Limerick.

The Show ran for two weeks and received rave reviews.

What I remember most from this Show, apart from the wonderful reception, was the versatility of Cyril Gallivan as "Doolittle" and the gentleness of Eileen Fitzmaurice as "Mrs. Higgins".

The leads for this were played by Joe Donnellan and Mary O'Callaghan.

Cyril Gallivan's side-kicks were played by Aidan Boucher and Maurice O'Leary and I was "Mrs. Pearce".

A feature at that time were the after show concerts given by Ireland's renowned pianist, Charles Lynch, who played for the duration of the show.

The orchestra was under the baton of Captain Denis Mellerick and he combined the activities on stage and in the pit in a wonderful manner.

I have already stated that friendships have been made in this society and they have been lasting and indeed, in the course of "My Fair Lady" Gould and I formed strong links with Aidan and Noreen Boucher, Frances and Joe Donnellan, Maurice and Claire O'Leary and Fr. Joe Brennan S.J.

Maurice O'Leary was a wonderful tenor who died tragically at the young age of 32 and indeed, it was a pleasure for us to be present in Cork within the last fortnight at the wedding of Claire and Maurice's daughter, Hilary.

In referring to the friendships that one forms in a society such as The Cecilians, it merely requires a group of past or present Cecilians to meet and the reminiscences begin and talks of the goods times and the happy times and all the memories come flooding back.

My daughter Siobhan Coonerty joined the Cecilians in the '70s and maintained a Reddan/Geary tradition with the society.

Whilst no longer actively involved, we maintain our interests in all the activities - the comings and goings and the changing personalities of what is a wonderful Society.

It simply remains for me to say that, the Cecilian influences have been imprinted on many of us for all of our lives.

I am happy to say that they are still entertaining and fulfilling us to this day. Long may it last.



The 1957 ladies chorus of The White Horse Inn: Pat Cunneen, Mary Geary, Flo Gardiner, Ursula O'Connor, Nuala Ryan, Olive Kennedy, Kay Hanrahan, Angela Dennehy, Terry Egleston, Helen Vaughan, Pam Waterman, Claire Nestor, Joan Geary, Riana Maher, Marion Condon, Anne Larkin, Monica Holland, Anna Nestor, Anne Hackett, Mona McMahon, Rita O'Shea, Rosemary Croagh, Mary Molloy, Celene Healy, Verette Geary, Dorothy Franklin, Eileen Donnellan, Anne Hassett and Marie Cunneen.