

a shopping spree took them to that Mecca of men's bespoke tailoring, Savile Row, and then to Burberry and Aquascutum nearby. Shirts at Turnbull & Asser in Jermyn Street and, in the same street, Foster & Son had been providing shoes for the well-dressed man for over 150 years. After a haircut at Geo F Trumper, under the ever-watchful eye of Gregory, a well-equipped and confident Patrick Donovan was back in business in London's West End.

But on their return from shopping, a somewhat agitated Stuart greeted them at the front door.

"Mr Patrick, while you were out a rather dishevelled man came to see you. I thought I recognised him, but couldn't be sure ... Name's Mike – dunno if he's got a surname – the guy who was the stage doorman at the Theatre Royal when you were playing in *Journey's End*."

"What did he want, Stuart?"

"Wouldn't say, but I don't like the look of the old geezer. I took the liberty of saying that you didn't like to see people here and I gave him your phone number and he said he'd call. I hope that's all right. But whatever he wants, it don't look like good news to me."

"That's all right, Stuart. I certainly don't want to see him and prefer not to speak to him either. I remember the man very vaguely and can't imagine what he wants."

"Sir, if this bloke is any trouble to you, you just let Stuart here know and he'll take care of the situation – if you know what I mean. I may be a humble man but I's got my contacts and you will never see or hear from him again."

"That's very kind and loyal of you, Stuart, but I don't believe that such drastic action will be necessary."

While *The Seagull* was running in the West End, Cyril Goodman was dealing with enquiries about Patrick's services. There were new scripts, offers from Ireland and revivals, and after carefully sifting through the offers, there was one proposal that interested

him greatly. It wasn't West End but it was from the Nottingham Repertory, a much-respected provincial company that had a reputation for staging important theatre. The play that they wished Patrick to appear in was a revival of Clifford Odets' *Winter Journey*, which had been billed as *The Country Girl* on Broadway in 1950. Regarded as a classic backstage play, it offered what amounted to an Ibsen thesis: a middle-aged actor, after his enslavement to alcohol and drugs, comes out of retirement to play a leading part. Cyril knew that the main protagonist, Frank Elgin, was a great role and that its originator in London in 1952, Michael Redgrave, had emerged himself from a dark period to triumph in the part. It seemed to Goodman that Patrick was so well versed in the requirements of playing Frank Elgin that not much research would be required by him. But, more important, he believed that it would be a good career move for the Don to take the lead in a typical American play, a genre in which he was untried. Goodman diligently found the 1954 movie *The Country Girl* and screened it for Patrick. It starred Bing Crosby, with heavyweights Grace Kelly and William Holden in supporting roles, and Patrick's reaction was that he was pleased to have seen it "as I now know how it should *not* be played".

Patrick was thrilled with the idea of appearing in *Winter Journey*. After being part of an ensemble in *The Seagull*, he relished the opportunity to have a big starring role where he would not be limited by restraint but would be able to give full vent to the histrionics that would be required. The experienced American director, Josh Heilbron, met with Patrick, and the two men seemed to be in accord, sharing a mutual passion for the play. Coming from the deep-burrowing naturalism of the Stanislavsky school, Heilbron emphasised that he would not be looking for a technical performance, but would require the actor playing Elgin to immerse himself in the part.

"I specifically don't want the type of acting one sees so often on the West End stage – excellent as it may be – where the actor remains aloof from the performance; where he makes no attempt at real characterisation or emotion but rather declares himself to be a

detached professional performer participating in a general plot. I hope you don't think I am disparaging English acting ...”

“Not at all. I know exactly what you mean. And after some of my recent experiences with technically good but timid English directors I am really looking forward to working with you.”

“The English way, historically, has been that ‘you are in the theatre witnessing actors’ whereas Stanislavsky’s approach, which I prefer, is that ‘you are part of the action witnessing life’.”

Enthused by the prospect of working with Heilbron, there was another reason why *Winter Journey* appealed so much to Patrick. He had long admired and felt he had an affinity with the late Michael Redgrave who had also been through a crisis in his own life caused by drinking excessively. Further, despite having fathered three hugely talented children – Vanessa, Corin and Lynn – Redgrave was a known bisexual, a fact that seemed to leave his wife, the excellent actor, Rachel Kempson, totally unfazed.

Cyril Goodman, with efficiency reserved only for his star client, finalised Equity contracts with Nottingham Rep, which provided for London rehearsals until the end of the run of *The Seagull*. Gregory, in turn, took great delight in the high spirits of his friend who seemed to be enjoying a new lease of life. Patrick thrived in his West End run where he enjoyed a very amicable relationship with the cast and his general *joie de vivre* augured well for the future.

As anticipated, there was a call from Mike.

“Don't know, Mr Donovan, if you remember me. I'm Mike, who was the doorman at the Theatre Royal when you played in *Journey's End*. Great performance, if I may say so; I used to sneak to the front sometimes to watch you. Never seen better acting ...”

“Thank you, Mike; what is it you want?”

“Well, sir, you may remember that I used to do you some favours. I recall that you liked a salt beef-on-rye sandwich, light on the mustard, which I used to fetch for you from the Nosh Bar in Windmill Street. Not there any more – all them old delis seem to

have disappeared. Now it's all Pret a Manger and Starbucks, I suppose some folk like 'em but it's not the same these days. Oh, and there was that friendly priest who I allowed in to see you one day in your dressing room. Not very interested in clerics, mind you, but he was an interesting man and afterwards we had such a nice chat about you."

"Mike, I am rather busy, what is it that you want exactly?"

"Sorry, sir, the missus says I am so long-winded. Fact of the matter is that my grown-up son has that cancer blood disease – leukaemia, I think it's called – and to add to it his wife is proper poorly and can't look after him. I'm the only one they can turn to and, to be frank, I am too old to work and am really down and out."

"I have to go – what is it you want, Mike?"

"Sir, if you could help me with a loan. Two thousand quid? I know that's not a lot to you these days, but it would allow me to have someone look after my son and his wife for quite some time."

"Mike, I hardly know you ... Why should you impose on me like this?"

"Sir, you're the only kind gentleman I can think of who might want to help me. All those toffee-nosed actors I knew wouldn't want to help"

"But, Mike, there must be someone with whom you are better acquainted?"

"Well, Mr Donovan, there's one other way for me to lay me hands on that amount of cash, of course ... There's this newspaper guy from the *News of the World* who's been on at me to give him an exclusive. Says that when I was in charge of the stage door I must have picked up a lot of stories about actors and their life stories. You know, not the ones that their publicity agents hand out but, you know, the real dirt ... Says they're experts at making stories seem even worse than they really are. This journalist, he says he could get me a lot of money if I, so to speak, spill the beans. What d'you think I should do, sir?"

"Mike, I believe you know a man who says he is my father."

"Oh Alby, fine chap he is ... interesting career he had as a boxer ... bit down on his luck these days, I believe."

“He approached me recently and asked for money which he wanted to give you. And I did give him money for you.”

“Never heard from him, sir; as God is my witness, I have never gotten any money from him. We had a beer together a month ago and have not seen him since.”

“Let me think about this ...”

“Sir, me and the missus are desperate ... I’ll call you in a coupla days to find out if you can help an old man out; if not, I’ll have to go the other route, if you understand what I’m getting at. Mind you, my friends will love it if old Mike gets a big splash in one of them tabloids.”

Rehearsals for *Winter Journey* commenced each day at noon and were held in Al Burnett’s Stork Club, a basement nightclub in Piccadilly near St James’s Church. Patrick disdained using Stuart’s services with the Bentley and preferred to walk each morning from Eaton Close. Gregory thought a little exercise might benefit him too and decided to join Patrick, so it became a healthy morning ritual for the two men to walk together, often greeted by passers-by who recognised the Don. If rehearsals ran late, the two would cross the road to Bentley’s Oyster Bar & Grill in Swallow Street for an early dinner, after which it was a short walk to the Queen’s in Shaftesbury Avenue for Patrick to have a nap in his dressing room before the performance.

Patrick found working with Josh Heilbron exhilarating. The American’s approach brought a new dimension to Patrick’s work and for the first time for years he felt that he was really benefiting from sound direction. In the ‘Take 5’ breaks from rehearsal, the two men were often closeted together and Patrick thrived on his director’s tales about the legendary Clifford Odets, the author of *Winter Journey*. As an actor, Josh had worked with Odets in the late fifties, a few years before he died and subsequently had become a specialist in his plays. He had appeared in a revival on Broadway of Odets’ first and most famous work, *Waiting for Lefty* – the play that dealt with trade union corruption, which the author had directed –

and later, when Josh took up directing, he directed *Awake and Sing, Till the Day I Die, The Big Knife, Golden Boy* and *The Country Girl*, the American title of *Winter Journey*. Patrick learned that Odets was one of the founders of Group Theatre in the USA and worked with Lee Strasburg and others in introducing the method style of acting. He also enjoyed stories of Odets' humble background, that he was a champion of the under-privileged and that he sought to introduce his left-wing political views into plays that dealt with important social issues. It was clear that Patrick felt some identification with Odets.

After *The Seagull* closed, Gregory and Patrick moved to Nottingham where rehearsals for *Winter Journey* continued. They had obtained an excellent suite of rooms with its own catering facility at the Sunnyside B&B, within easy walking distance of the theatre, and settled down comfortably to provincial life. In fact, the city of Nottingham was very much to their liking. With two universities, it has a young population, good restaurants and the locals proved very friendly, particularly those who recognised Patrick from his photograph on posters that proliferated throughout the town.

At rehearsals the cast responded with enthusiasm to Josh Heilbron's dynamic style of directing. He was not like many restrained English directors who manipulated the traffic on stage with the odd interpretive comment thrown in. Josh was all action, beating out the tempo he required with an outstretched arm and urging the actors on rather like a cheerleader. "Keep going, kid ... Now sock it to him – tell him how you feel ... Fuck me, that was great!" His passion for the characters was contagious and there was a general feeling in the company that the Nottingham Playhouse was going to have a big hit on its hands.

Patrick was in complete control of himself and during the final run-throughs Gregory administered the now customary small tot of whisky to Patrick shortly before his first entrance. The cast had been told about this unusual ritual, which defied the age-old stage taboo, but they accepted it, especially as – far from harming Patrick's performance – it seemed to stimulate him to even greater heights.

The opening night of *Winter Journey* justified the company's sense of anticipation and was an unmitigated triumph. Gregory, in the audience, joined in the applause, which rose to a crescendo when the Don stepped forward. The press were in accord and called Patrick's performance "imaginative casting leading to a most impressive piece of acting". It also praised Josh Heilbron's direction for making character more important than the plot and his courage in introducing to the English stage "a style of acting popularised by American actors". One critic, unusually, added a rather personal note about Patrick:

"The uncertainties that were Frank Elgin's ghosts reportedly are Mr Donovan's too. I believe the actor won't mind my saying that he has gone through a dark period during which he was hospitalised for causes that are endemic in the entertainment industry. Mercifully this most gifted actor has now recovered and we look forward to seeing more of the Don in the future. This has been a most important evening in the annals of English theatre."

After all the glowing notices, Patrick, accompanied by Gregory, met with Josh Heilbron for a celebratory lunch.

"Josh, I must thank you. I found it extremely stimulating to be working with you. You are a great director and you really brought out the best in me."

"Believe me, I so enjoyed this experience with you. To be frank, pal, I was told you were a difficult son of a bitch and I was concerned as to how we would get on. You know by now that I don't take shit from anyone ..."

"Well, you weren't entirely misinformed. I guess I have been a pain in the arse to some directors but Gregory here has reigned me in and keeps me on a short leash. I have started to feel my old self and the confidence has returned – but you have certainly opened my eyes as to what I could achieve. I believe, given the right parts, I can exceed even my own expectations."

"Pat, you should seek out the heroic roles. There are many American playwrights whose work would suit you: Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Arthur Miller, the new playwright David Mamet, they all have written leading male roles that would suit you. Come to think of it, I heard that producer Podlashuk is

contemplating a revival of *Death of a Salesman* and has George Mallet in mind as director.”

“I would love to be in any Miller play; I have never seen *Salesman* – read it, of course. Do you think I am right for it?”

“Right for it? Christ, you’d make a tremendous Willy Loman – right up your street. And George Mallet, he’s a pal of mine ... Excellent director with a lot of experience in the States with method actors. Great, no-bullshit guy. You’d get on well with him. I’m gonna invite George to come up and see our play. What d’you think, Greg?”

“Josh, I have been keeping quiet. I saw Paul Muni in the original London production and, as I recall, he was remarkable. However, more recently I saw Dustin Hoffman as Willy and I thought his interpretation was way off the mark – or he was dreadfully miscast. Having now seen Patrick in *Winter Journey*, I truly believe he would be a superb Willy Loman.”

CHAPTER 15

George Mallet attended a performance of *Winter Journey* and afterwards sat at the bar with Josh.

“Beautiful production, my friend – and as for Donovan! Christ, he’s bloody marvellous. I think he would make a phenomenal Willy Loman. What’s he like? Easy to work with?”

“George, I was warned not to touch him with a bargepole. Many people over the years have had terrible trouble with him.”

“What sort of trouble?”

“Oh, the usual: drink, drugs and sex and at times just fucking difficult. Apparently he was inclined to screw anything that moved and was indifferent as to whether they were wearing skirt or trousers. I’m told that he has been through several rehab programmes but he seems to be OK now – he certainly was with me.”

“Would I be taking a chance?”

“I had confidence in him and it paid off. You would have to get used to the fact that he takes a swig each night before going on. Makes no bones about it – says it steadies his nerves ... At first the cast didn’t like it but they got used to it and the consensus was that the booze gave him a boost that enhanced his performance.”

“Well, I suppose I could live with that.”

“One other thing ... Before this play he appeared in *The Seagull* and I am told he gave the young director a hard time – to the extent that he disagreed with the director’s interpretation of Trigorin. Apparently, he went along with him during rehearsals but on opening night changed the character of the part completely.”

“What did the director do?”

“Sulked like hell at first but as the play and Donovan got raves, he disappeared happily into the sunset. Let’s go back stage and you can meet the Don.”

There was an immediate affinity between George Mallet and Patrick. The actor was already out of costume when George arrived in his dressing room and although he was about to leave for home, the two sat down and chatted.

“Patrick, I have been engaged to direct Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* for Nathan Podlashuk. The play has been cast, save for Willy Loman. Are you familiar with the play?”

“I have never seen it performed but of course I know it well. Have read it several times.”

“Podlashuk has two top names lined up for me to choose from for the lead. But you could well be my Loman ... Would you be prepared to read for the part?”

“Since my name went up in lights in the West End, it has been my immodest principle never to audition for a part. But by God and by Jesus, would I like to read for you!”

With either Gregory or Stuart answering the phone, Patrick had been able to avoid further conversation with Mike but the matter continued to play on his mind. Although Gregory repeatedly reminded him not to dwell on the matter and by no means to give in to an attempt at extortion, he was extremely worried as to the mental affect this was having on Patrick. With rehearsals for *Salesman* about to start he did not want this worry to precipitate in any way some of his past behaviour. However, on a Sunday at home, Patrick unfortunately did answer the phone.

“Mr Donovan, I’m glad to have got you at last. I think you have been avoiding me. Have you reached a decision? Can’t wait forever, y’know.”

“I need more time. I would like to help you ... How is your son?”

“My son? Yes, my son. Very bad. I need to raise the money by next week otherwise it’ll have to be Plan B.”

“Well, phone me next week and we will see.”

Gregory was exasperated.

“Patrick, I heard what you said to that gold digger, and putting him off is not going to work. Tell him ‘No’ and let him do his worst. If his story doesn’t read well in print, we will get a good PR firm to turn it to your advantage. You will emerge more of a hero

having come from a background of poverty and deprivation. You'll see ..."

"Gregory, I hear what you say but I am trying to stall him until *Salesman* opens. After that, I am prepared to face the music."

Death of a Salesman was to be staged at the Lyric Theatre, the oldest theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue, and because a dance recital was being performed there using only black drapes, the stage was available for the five weeks of rehearsal. Patrick had a great affection for the Lyric, having performed Rattigan plays there many years previously. Seating just under 1 000 in its four levels, he knew that a well-projected stage voice reached past the upper circle to the balcony beyond. At the first rehearsal, after the cast had had an opportunity to get to know each other and, in accordance with tradition, wished one another good luck, all were seated in the first two rows of the stalls, with George Mallet on the edge of the stage facing them.

Making the actors stand up in turn, George made a few appropriate remarks about each of them and then put them at ease with a few choice stories about his own career. He then got down to business by reminding them of the play's credentials: that in 1949 it had won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for best play; that it had achieved five other Tony Awards, including the great Elia Kazan winning Best Director; that it had been staged countless times internationally with great success and it was his intention that with this outstanding cast the result would be a definitive production of the play.

"There is no place for mediocrity: we are the beneficiaries of a play regarded by most people as the best play ever written by an American. Its author, Arthur Miller, is a man of giant stature in world drama. His play had an enormous impact when it was first staged. Different socio-political and psychological points of view were expressed. People to the right saw it as a bomb placed with precision under the edifice of Americanism and dismissed it as communist propaganda. Others, to the left, called it absolute decadence. Doctoral theses were written about the play. Commercial firms complained that their difficulty in recruiting new salesmen was directly attributable to the play. General Motors

grumbled that sales of Chevrolet fell off because Willy Loman first says that the Chevy was the greatest car ever built, but later contradicts himself by saying ‘... they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car’. Studebaker sales were also affected because Willy criticised its steering. The emotional effect has been unequalled in modern drama. Different people saw different things about it. One man, on leaving the theatre, was quoted as saying ‘I always knew that the New England territory was no damned good!’ My friends, this play is a triumph of writing in plain understandable language and it rings with many phrases that have come into everyday usage. ‘He’s liked but he’s not well liked.’ ‘The woods are burning, boys.’ ‘A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.’ ‘Attention must be paid’... Linda’s rebuke to her sons for having treated their father with contempt and mockery.”

George emphasised to his cast that Loman never made a lot of money, that his name was never in the papers and that he was not the finest character who ever lived, but that he was a human being and terrible things were happening to him. He reminds them that Linda says he shouldn’t be buried like a dog.

Moved by their director’s passion for the play, a general discussion about the play then ensued. Patrick gave the appearance of being entirely absorbed in what was happening but had not participated in the analysis taking place. Trying to draw him into the conversation, George asked: “Patrick, as you well know, the success of this play depends on your interpretation of Willy. How do you see him?”

There was a long pause and while all had remained seated during the discussion, Patrick stood up to respond and faced the cast imposing his presence on them.

“I see Willy Loman as exhausted, old beyond his 63 years, unstable and with his mental state deteriorating, the boundaries between the present and the past merging as he lapses in and out of his memories. He has nostalgic flashbacks of an idyllic past when Biff was a college football star, fantasised conversations with his successful brother, Ben, and hallucinates about his reputation as a star salesman. He also speculates about the future and expresses his supreme confidence in the American Dream.”

“You certainly have a complete understanding, and I agree with everything you’ve said. D’you see a turning point in Willy’s mind – a crucial scene in the play?”

“Yes, I do. Willy’s collapse occurs in a flashback when his son, Biff, urgently seeking his help, surprises his father in a Boston hotel room with a woman buyer. This is a moment of calamity, a turning point, for both Willy and Biff. The raw emotions are different: severe guilt on the part of Willy and concomitant disgust for Biff who calls his father ‘a phony little fake’.”

“Absolutely correct. Patrick, how do you see the relationship in the present time between father and son?”

“Willy believes it is *his* right to expect Biff to fulfil the promise inherent in him and the fact that he doesn’t do so he regards as betrayal. However, his love for his son persists even after Biff tells him that he has been to jail and says, ‘Pop, I’m nothing! I’m nothing, Pop. Can’t you understand that?’ And Willy replies: ‘That boy – that boy is going to be magnificent!’”

The cast were totally absorbed in Patrick’s understanding of the play and its nuances. Captivated by his make-up-enhanced theatrical appearance and the unique timbre of his voice, there was optimism in the camp that *Death of a Salesman* was going to live up to their director’s expectations. The first reading of the play then took place, with Patrick – refusing the benefit of a script – giving it very low-key rendering to get the feel of playing opposite Dame Mary Martinelli and the rest of the cast.

Back at Eaton Close, enjoying his sun downer with Gregory, Patrick related the events of the first rehearsal.

“You know, Gregory, I have never felt so comfortable at a first rehearsal. George is such a sweet boy and he has created such a nice atmosphere. They all seemed to be very impressed with my understanding of the play and many complimented me on my first reading. Except that, thanks to you, I wasn’t reading ... I seem to be almost word perfect. And if my effort today pleased them – I was only coasting – wait until I am in full throttle. But I don’t want to get there too soon. I want to pace myself so that the full performance is reached only at the first dress rehearsal.”

“That’s great, Patrick; I’m so pleased it has started so well.”

“I owe it all to you, my darling. I am wonderfully relaxed these days ... I am more mature and at peace with myself and it’s all because of what you have done for me and our love for each other.”

“Patrick, your talent is all your own; I haven’t contributed to that one iota.”

“Oh, my dear, you have ... you have relieved me of all mundane responsibilities in life; I am waited on hand and foot, and you have provided a loving setting that has enabled me to concentrate on my art, to remain relaxed and composed allowing my theatrical juices to flow unrestrained. But *Salesman* is going to exhaust me – it is a really tough assignment and I am going to need all my strength to cope. I know that you will keep me in great shape for this.”

“Patricia, my love, we have come a long way together ... two old queens. We have had our difficulties ... You gave me a tough time when you strayed, but you are back in the fold and I don’t believe that our love for each other has ever been stronger.”

“I love you dearly, Gregory. I believe our love for each other is very special. I would do anything for you. ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.’”

Nathan Podlashuk was an astute producer. He attended rehearsals often and was so delighted with the progress being made with his latest production that, as he had hoped he would, he extended his three-month lease on the Lyric by another three months and secured an option for yet a further two months. And yet, knowing Patrick’s track record, he was not so confident that he wasn’t at least a little anxious about him and enquired often from George Mallet as to how things were going.

“Nate, stop worrying ... The Don’s doing just fine. I have a very good rapport with him and he and Mary seem to love each other – in the best sense, that is. Biff and Hap were a bit in awe of him at first but they too have become firm friends; they call him ‘Pop’.

“George, is Patrick’s performance what you expected?”

“He is still pacing himself and when he increases the intensity this will give everyone a lift. Look, he’s not in the style of Lee J Cobb who was a lumbering giant. Patrick will give a more intelligent rendering; he really has studied this play intensely. Legend has it that Cobb lacked emotion and that Elia Kazan, on the day of the opening night in New York, took him to a matinee performance of a Beethoven symphony in order to instil some passion in him. After Cobb received fabulous notices, Lee awarded himself a status higher than the theatre world gave him. He was great as Willy until he was told he was great and believed it; then he became less great. Patrick certainly doesn’t lack emotion; he is currently restraining himself and I am confident that our Don is going to surpass Cobb and give a better and more consistent performance.”

Because it had been agreed that *Salesman* would follow the style of the original production, Podlashuk had been successful in obtaining the rights to use Jo Mielziner’s innovative set design. Mielziner had been the most admired and successful set designer of his time on Broadway and his skeletal three-platform stage setting had become an integral part of *Salesman*. Likewise Alex North’s agent was contacted to obtain the rights to the incidental music he had composed. It was a fragile, wistful, haunting score arranged for flute and the lyrical quality of the recording would only enhance the play. North had composed the film score for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and went on to write film scores for *Spartacus*, *Viva Zapata*, *Cleopatra* and many others.

As the time for previews approached and costumes and props were being introduced for the first time, the cast became a little tense but soothing words from the experienced George Mallet assured them that they were doing just fine. With each rehearsal, Patrick was increasing the intensity of his lines and Mary was responding appropriately. Scenes between the two of them drew spontaneous applause from the rest of the cast while George just muttered, ‘Very beautiful, my darlings.’

There were two dress rehearsals prior to the first preview and at the first of these certain members of the cast mentioned that

Patrick smelled of liquor. After the run-through George went to his dressing room and spoke to his Willy Loman:

“Patrick, that was simply great. Is that it or do you still have more to give?”

“There is still some fine tuning, George, and a little more emotion I am saving for opening night. Didn’t Mary do well? She responds so well to me.”

“You are both wonderful together. Patrick, a couple of busybodies reported that they smelled liquor on you tonight.”

“Absolutely, I think I did warn you that I have a nip each night before going on. It controls my nerves ... fortifies me ... gives me courage. Way back it used to get out of hand, but nowadays it is strictly controlled and can only enhance my performance. I hope you don’t object?”

“No. It certainly violates the age-old principle of no liquor backstage but as your performance tonight was not affected in any way, I am prepared to turn a blind eye.”

“Thank you for your understanding, my friend.”

“By the way, when the stage manager heard that you smelled of liquor, he searched this dressing room from top to bottom while you were on stage and he couldn’t find a thing. Where do you keep the goddamned stuff?”

Patrick chuckled and pointed to a bottle of ‘Leichner Make-up Removal Spirits’ on his dressing table.

“This bottle certainly has spirits, but Gregory substituted scotch for Leichner and that’s where I get my swig.”

The previews were sold out, the performances went off without a hitch and the talk was excellent. Both producer and director were filled to the brim with confidence as the all-important press opening night approached. On the day of the opening, Patrick was quietly self-assured.

“You know, Gregory, I have never been better prepared for a play. George has done a wonderful job, Nathan is the complete

professional and every member of the cast is outstanding. This show, my boy, is going to be a hit.”

“I am so excited. I have planned a noon lunch for us and I then suggest you have about a two-hour nap. If we get you to the theatre around 5 o’clock – two and a half hours before curtain – how would that suit you?”

“Just fine. Nathan has arranged a party afterwards at Quo Vadis. I don’t know if I want to go.”

“Why not? Everyone will want to congratulate you ...”

“I’m going to be exhausted, Gregory, and I don’t want to drink. Perhaps we will just put in an appearance and two of us can come home and have a quiet glass of Champagne together. I would like that best.”

And, as predicted, the first-night audience sat spellbound. The Don came into his own, pulling out all the stops, and gave a heart-wrenching performance. When towards the end of the play, the sound of a car speeding off accompanied by a crescendo of music, the almighty noise of a crash, followed by the poignancy of a single cello string, all signalling Willy’s suicide, there were hushed gasps in the audience. Then followed the requiem, with hardly a dry eye in the auditorium, as Willy’s wife Linda, dressed in black, kneeled down stage facing the audience and in a hushed voice said her farewell.

“Forgive me, dear. I can’t cry. I don’t know what it is, but I can’t cry. I don’t understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can’t cry. It seems to me that you’re just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can’t cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can’t understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there’ll be nobody home. We’re free and clear. We’re free. We’re free... We’re free.”

Then, as Biff helps Linda to her feet, they began to walk off, only the sound of the flute filling the darkening stage as the curtain fell. There followed a magical moment that is rare in theatre: absolute silence for fully five seconds before rapturous applause erupted. Unusual in British theatre, every member of the audience rose to applaud with many cries of ‘Bravo!’ and several calls of

'The Don' as the curtain rose on the fully assembled cast. There were no individual curtain calls: Biff and Hap took a bow together and then Willy, holding Linda's hand, stepped forward to a crescendo of recognition. Patrick looked drained and exhausted and Mary Martinelli glanced up at him, hardly concealing her admiration. It was indeed a night to remember.

Backstage Gregory stationed himself at the star's dressing room, holding back a throng of well-wishers while Patrick discarded his stage clothes and pulled on a white towelling robe over his perspiring body. First allowed in were George and Nathan, who each hugged Patrick emotionally. The director told him, "You were absolutely sensational tonight – you really pulled out all the stops."

The producer, with tears streaming down his face, held both Patrick's hands: "My darling man, you were superb. Surpassed my expectations – it has been the greatest night in my life as a producer."

"George, Nate, my very dear friends, I am so happy that the Don didn't let you down and that it has worked out to your satisfaction. I owe you both a deep debt of gratitude for having had confidence in me."

Gregory then admitted all those waiting, included a frumpy old lady who reminded Patrick that she was Agnes Armitage, secretary to Nathan Podlashuk. "I was at your audition and I told Mr Pudlashuk not to be a schmuck and to cast you. Thank God he listened to me. Now would you mind signing this programme for me?"

The party at Quo Vadis was in full swing when Patrick entered to loud cheers. he shook hands, gave hugs, kisses and autographs, but after 15 minutes he and Gregory slipped out and into the waiting Bentley, which Stuart had skilfully manoeuvred outside the restaurant.

Sitting in the back together, Gregory held Patrick's hand and whispered: "It was indeed a night to remember. I'm so proud of you. I have a cold glass of Dom Pérignon and scrambled eggs with caviar for you at home."

“I couldn’t think of anything nicer. I do love you so much, Gregory.”

CHAPTER 16

The notices were universally ‘raves’ – as the profession likes to label highly successful critiques. Critics seemed to want to outdo each other with their superlatives and the last sentence of *The Times* review seemed to sum it all up:

“This was a memorable intellectual production on every possible level – human drama, moral statement, an exercise in brilliant acting and direction but the evening undoubtedly belonged to the brilliant Patrick Donovan. Take notice ... The Don is back!”

Among the hundreds of letters and telegrams Patrick received, he cherished particularly the warm congratulations from many of the actors and directors he had worked with over the years, some of whom had been in the first-night audience. A charming letter from Amelia, now a middle-aged mother of three children, brought back many nostalgic memories, particularly of his sexual initiation. And another letter of congratulations from Julie McGovern – “You might remember me as your Ophelia” – reminded him of yet another period in his life about which he had conflicting emotions. There was, however, also a letter that he found extremely depressing.

Mr Donovan

I have herd you have had a grate sucess in The Salesman and you must now be rolling in it. I can't wait any more. My address is Flat 4A 25 Shepherd's Bush Road and if you can't see your way clear to lending me £2,500 – a cheque posted to me would be good – I will have to keep an appointment I have with my reporter friend. He doesn't know the name of the actor I will be disclosing but he says if the story is big enough he will run it the day following the Olivier Awards sereminny. I don't know much about this sort of thing but he says it would have quite a bit of clout on that day.

Yours very sincerely, Mike.

Within days the first three months of the run were sold out and Nathan told an excited Agnes to instruct the PR firm, advertising agent and box office to open booking for the next three months.

While Patrick was enjoying the run and willingly giving one hundred per cent of himself at each performance, he was however taking strain, particularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays when there were two performances. In bed each night by midnight, he slept until midday, thus eliminating breakfast and starting his day with lunch. Despite 12 hours' sleep he was still tired when he awoke and because this concerned Gregory he arranged for a doctor to come to Eaton Close. However, after a careful examination, the doctor concluded to Gregory that Patrick was an old 55 but that he could find nothing wrong and suggested Patrick's languidness was probably attributable to punishment taken by his body in days of reckless living. He prescribed a course of vitamin B12, which might be useful in giving him a boost at a time when he needed as much energy as he could muster.

Well into the run of the play, Gregory began to notice that the scotch was disappearing faster than had been the case previously. Each Monday he filled the Leichner Spirits bottle to capacity and no one else drank whisky. Surreptitiously he marked the level on the label and a few days later was disturbed to find that the scotch was considerably lower. Without wishing to rock the boat, Gregory felt he had to raise the matter and did so one day at lunch.

"Patrick, my dear, I have noticed that the whisky is going faster than usual. Do you think Stuart is drinking?"

"I cannot bear false witness against Stuart. If this is the confessional, I must admit that I have occasionally increased the nightly dosage."

"But, dear boy, secret drinking is a breach of our pact ... This is not good. Everything had been going so well!"

"Gregory, my darling man, do you not appreciate that I am under strain? I love playing Willy Loman but the goddamn salesman is killing me. I also received a very depressing letter at the theatre from that man, Mike, and it seems as if he is going to carry out his threat of talking to that reporter. They plan the article to appear the morning after the Olivier Awards. That will give you

some idea as to why I have increased the dosage I have been taking ... When I wake, it calms my nerves – it helps me get through the day. And it is so bloody little, it can't do any harm.”

At the theatre rumours began doing the rounds that the Don had been increasing his nightly tot. Not that it harmed his performance in any way noticeable to the audience, but the actors could determine an almost imperceptible change in his delivery and they had no doubt that his breath indicated increased alcohol. However, it was at this time that the nominations were released for the Laurence Olivier Awards, and the star's drinking habits slipped off the backstage agenda. The prestigious Olivier Awards were awarded annually to recognise excellence in professional theatre and were accepted internationally as the highest honour in British theatre. The actual awards, designed by the sculptor Harry Franchetti, were handsome brass busts depicting the man they honoured, Lord Olivier, as he was as Henry V at the Old Vic in 1937.

There was great excitement in the company when *Death of a Salesman* received five nominations in different categories. The presentation evening was arranged by the Society of London Theatre Managements and took place on a Sunday evening in the ballroom at the Grosvenor House Hotel. Entering on the red carpet at the Park Street entrance, and lit by television lights and camera flashes, Patrick and Gregory, dressed in their black-tie finery, made a handsome couple and Patrick waved to the crowd and responded to cries of 'The Don!' Asked by interviewers if he fancied his chances for Best Actor, he replied, “Well, if I take the notices I received seriously I suppose I must be in with a good chance.”

It was a glittering evening and Patrick seemed to be enjoying the occasion immensely. He started off with a mild whisky that Gregory ordered for him but when walking around to the tables that beckoned him he accepted drinks from friends just to be sociable. When the results were announced, *Death of a Salesman* received awards for Best Revival, Best Director and Best Actress, and when Patrick Donovan was awarded Best Actor he received a tumultuous standing ovation.

At the culmination of the proceedings a Special Award was made to Nathan Podlashuk for his outstanding contribution to drama over many years. This caused the joyful members of the *Salesmen* company to gather around the award recipients, Nathan, George, Mary and Patrick, and in high spirits there were many toasts. Excluded by force of numbers from this inner group, Gregory watched anxiously, hoping that Patrick was not drinking as furiously as the others. But by the time he did connect with him, he saw that the damage had already been done and that Patrick was unsteady on his feet and very drunk. And still Patrick was reaching out for glasses of anything in sight and recklessly downing the contents. Propping him up with the help of George, Gregory managed to usher Patrick out of the ballroom and into a back lobby where the mumbling actor collapsed onto the floor. A passer-by identified himself as a doctor and asked if he could help. Gregory told the doctor that he thought Patrick had collapsed as a combination of fatigue and lack of adequate air conditioning but after examining him the doctor declared that the man was just plain drunk.

A message was sent to Stuart to bring the Bentley to the front entrance of the hotel on Park Lane, away from the waiting crowd, cameras and reporters, and with the assistance of some waiters, Patrick was carried to the waiting car.

From mid-morning the next day a very anxious Nathan Podlashuk was on the phone to Gregory wanting to know if he should alert the standby to get ready for the evening performance.

“I don’t know, Nate. He was dreadfully sick when we got home last night – God knows how much he had to drink – and probably nothing to eat. He is still asleep and I think it best that I don’t wake him.”

“OK. Please call me as soon as he wakes and give me a status report.”

Gregory sat alongside the bed waiting for Patrick to stir. At 1 o’clock he opened his eyes, mumbled something and collapsed

back onto the pillow and slept for another hour. When he awoke at last and sat up, Gregory enquired how he was feeling.

“Don’t let’s make a mountain out of this molehill, Gregory. I think I must have had a drink too many on an empty stomach. I feel dreadful, but after a hot shower I’ll be just fine. I’ve given many a great performance after binges that make last night seem like tea time at a nunnery.”

“Nate phoned to enquire about you and asked whether he should alert the standby.”

“Absolute bloody nonsense!” Patrick winced. “If I remember correctly I did win the Olivier Award last night and my audience won’t want to see some second-rate understudy. Tell Nathan I’ll be there – and I shall give the performance of my life.”

After his shower, a few morsels of dry toast and another two-hours nap, a passably sober actor made his way backstage and greeted everyone with a jovial wave and a greeting, “Good party last night, heh?” Nathan and George, unusually during a run, came backstage to say hello and decided to hang around in case ... The standby actor was also in attendance, lurking in the wings where Patrick would not see him. Mary Martinelli was scared out of her wits but the stage manager assured her that Mr Donovan seemed OK. Without Patrick’s knowledge, Gregory decided to hang around backstage after dropping him off at the stage door. Although this was against company rules, all were glad for Gregory to be there. As usual, at the ‘half’ the assistant stage manager looked in to Patrick’s dressing room and enquired if everything was all right. Patrick was made up, in his stage clothes and busy writing at his dressing table. The ASM always admired how Patrick personally replied to fan mail.

At the call ‘Beginners on stage!’ Patrick and Mary gave each other their usual hug in the wings. Mary was conscious of the odour of alcohol on his breath – perhaps it was a little stronger than usual. She then positioned herself in her stage bed. The faint stage lights came on, the auditorium lights dimmed, the house curtain was raised, and the plaintive sound of the flute was heard as Willy Loman, the salesman, entered slowly carrying two old suitcases; he mimed unlocking the door to the house, entered the kitchen, put

down the cases and gave an audible sigh. As the flute faded away, he ambled to the bedroom and sat on the bed holding Linda's hand and told her he was tired ... tired to the death.

And so another performance was under way of the Olivier Award Best Play, *Death of a Salesman* with Patrick Donovan and Dame Mary Martinelli, the recipients of the Best Actor and Best Actress awards. The play progressed without incident. Patrick showed no signs, certainly not to the audience, of anything untoward and gave a particularly dynamic performance. The cast, from Mary downwards, were on the other hand understandably apprehensive and, as a result, felt that they were below their best. At the intermission, on the way to their dressing rooms, Patrick gave Mary a big hug:

“Well done, darling – it’s going particularly well tonight.”

She smiled and nodded in agreement.

During act two Patrick continued to surpass himself but at the end, at his final exit, he was particularly emotional and distraught, tears streaming down his face. The requiem scene took place but at its conclusion, when the cast assembled hastily on stage for the customary curtain call, there were cries of

“Where’s Patrick? What’s happened? Where’s the Don? He’s missing ... Someone find him!”

“He’s not in his dressing room ...”

With applause out front continuing unabated, but no Willy Loman present, the stage manager called out over the Tannoy: “No curtain call tonight! Alex, house lights and backstage working lights please.”

There was pandemonium backstage as everyone searched for Patrick. The stage-door entrance to Wardour Street was open ... People outside were screaming and pointing ... A few yards away in Shaftesbury Avenue a red double-decker bus was stationary ... A man lay under the bus, just beyond its front wheels ... People were pulling the body clear of the bus ... Nearby policemen ran to the scene to hold people back.

The Lyric doorman was sobbing: “He rushed past me, pushed the door open and ran into the street ...”

A woman on the pavement cried: “Never seen anything like it. This madman rushed to Shaftesbury and deliberately threw himself under the bus’s wheels. It was horrible ... the driver probably never even saw him.”

The large crowd that gathered mingled with the audience making their way out of the Lyric Theatre. Above the theatre canopy the lights twinkled *Death of a Salesman – Patrick Donovan* while below in the street the Don’s real-life drama occupied the stage. From the people gathered around the body, several recognised the man being pulled from under the wheels of the bus and word filtered back that it was Patrick Donovan.

“Can’t be! I saw him on stage just minutes ago.”

“What? It’s not possible.”

“Oh my God ...”

Gregory was cradling Patrick’s head and, covered in blood, he was weeping inconsolably. Within minutes he was joined by a priest who kneeled down beside him and, noticing a gold chain around Patrick’s neck, pulled it out from inside his shirt and saw that it held a small gold crucifix. He immediately performed the last rites while George, Nathan, Mary and the *Salesman* company gathered around.

A letter addressed to Gregory was found on the table in the Don’s dressing room.

My darling Gregory

By the time you read this I should have shuffled off this mortal earth; or that is at least my intention. Perhaps by now I have been introduced to my Maker and will have discovered whether an Olivier Award in any way mitigates a life not entirely devoid of sin. You are probably at this time echoing Linda’s line from the Requiem: ‘Why did you do it?’

You, who have been so good to me, are entitled to an answer. After my behaviour a night ago I have finally come to the realisation that I am an irredeemable alcoholic – a recidivist if ever

there was one. The past years of so-called sobriety have been a hard-fought remission and unfortunately I have now returned to a drunken path where I cannot guarantee being responsible for my actions. I also cannot face the prospect of going to meetings with likewise smitten drunks and standing up to declare, 'I am an alcoholic.' I just cannot do it. And I think you know that. Likewise I cannot face the prospect of lengthy periods of rehabilitation, along with dregs of humanity in musty-smelling sanatoriums. This would all be too much for me to bear.

My nerves are shot and the billet-doux I received from that despicable doorman was the last straw in my deep depression. Were I to continue being Willy Loman eight times a week, I know that to accomplish this I would have to fortify myself increasingly each performance and eventually – to the embarrassment of myself and the rest of the company – it would end inevitably in a disaster. Far better that I leave and say goodbye on a high and give the standby an opportunity to prove himself.

My darling man, you have been like a saint. But for you my departure from this earth would undoubtedly have occurred many moons ago. I love you very deeply and am sorry that I am causing you so much grief. You deserve so much better.

My deep apologies to George Mallet and Nathan Podlashuk. I have never worked with finer professionals and I am sorry to have let them down. And tell Mary Martinelli that I love her deeply and regard her as one of the finest actors I have ever worked with.

And now, my dearest, I am about to go on stage and intend ensuring that my final performance is my greatest ever.

Good night, sweet prince.

Your devoted soul mate,

Patrick.

APPENDIX

ANTON DOLIN

Sydney Francis Patrick Chippendall Healey-Kay was born in England in 1904. Regarded as the finest English male dancer of his day, he started his career with the great Russian impresario, Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes where he changed his name to Anton Dolin and created the leading role in Nijinska's famous *Train Bleu*. He was later to originate many other iconoclastic ballet roles, notably in George Balanchine's *Prodigal Son*, Ninette de Valois's *Job*, and Michel Fokine's *Bluebeard*. Over a career in excess of 40 years, Dolin partnered the most famous ballerinas in the world but his partnership over many years with Alicia Markova, *prima ballerina assoluta*, made him arguably the finest male partner of his generation. His role of Albrecht in *Giselle* with Markova was regarded by cognoscenti as setting a standard for generations. Dolin danced and choreographed for the foremost ballet companies in the world; was *premier danseur* with the American Ballet Theatre when it was formed in 1940; and formed Festival Ballet in London in the early 1950s.

In the late '40s and early '50s, Dolin appeared at the new Festival Hall in a revival of the 1911 children's Christmas fantasy, *Where the Rainbow Ends*, directed by Italia Conti. Clad in a suit of armour he strutted the stage as an imperious St George, enjoying himself to such an extent that he acquired the rights to the musical, redirected it enlarging his role and introducing Alicia Markova in a cameo dance sequence as the Spirit of the Lake.

Pat, as Dolin was known to his friends, was not only a wonderful classical dancer but was a great flamboyant and aristocratic figure who was larger than life and who lived life to the full. Despite his strenuous dancer's regime of daily classes, rehearsals and a huge schedule of performances, he was an inveterate heavy smoker and skilfully managed to speak and demonstrate dance steps with a cigarette dangling from a moistened lower lip. His preference after performances was for good scotch and woe betide a host or bartender who served only inferior whisky. And rather than relax at home on a night off, he chose to be a high-

stakes poker competitor, playing with chosen cronies until the early hours. As Dolin saw little need to hide his homosexuality, there was never any question of his 'coming out'. He was automatically 'outed' at least by 1923 when he had a well-publicised affair with Serge Diaghilev that became a salacious *cause celebre* when Pat found himself in competition for Diaghilev's attention with rival dancer Serge Lifar. But most of Diaghilev's star male dancers were available to the impresario: they did not have to be seduced by him as they were consumed by their ambition. Later in his career, Anton Dolin nurtured the talents and had a long-standing serious relationship with the extraordinarily handsome, blue-eyed, blond and 26-year younger *danseur noble*, John Gilpin, who at the time was England's finest male dancer. Their living together was interrupted when Gilpin married a female dancer from Festival Ballet but cynics were soon justified when the marriage foundered and the status quo between Dolin and Gilpin was restored.

My friendship with Dolin began in 1950 at the Stoll Theatre, London, when my parents took me backstage to meet the dancer after his performance in *Giselle* with the incomparable Alicia Markova (later Dame Alicia). Before her marriage, my mother, Miriam Kirsch, was a dancer and her ambitious parents in Cape Town sent her to London on several occasions to have dancing lessons and to forge a career in ballet. Ballet was in its infancy in London and was staged on the bill as part of variety concerts. However, Miriam auditioned and was accepted by Anton Dolin into his first ballet company and in 1925 appeared in the first ballet he ever choreographed, *A Flutter in a Dove Cote*, at the London Palladium. He never forgot this and he and my mother always remained friends and their professional encounter is recorded in Dolin's autobiography. In subsequent years I met Pat Dolin on many occasions: at dinners in London with my parents; at receptions at his apartment off Curzon Street; and when he danced in South Africa in 1949 with Markova he visited our home several times, including attending a large cocktail party hosted by my parents and about which he comments favourably in the Autobiography. (By a strange coincidence, on that same visit Dolin met in Johannesburg Toby Fine, a young ballerina with the

Johannesburg Festival Ballet, who was chosen to dance the Queen of the Willies in the Markova/Dolin *Giselle*. Dolin recorded in his book that Toby was a ‘splendid dancer’ and before he left the country, he taught her the role of *Giselle*, which she was later to dance with distinction. Seven years later, Toby was to become my wife.) On several occasions in London, Toby and I went backstage to meet Dolin and Markova after performances and we were always graciously received by them.

In 1960, as an impresario together with Percy Tucker, we brought Celebrity Ballet to South Africa for a seven-week tour. Belinda Wright and John Gilpin danced together and Anton Dolin partnered Toby Fine. At the conclusion of a successful tour, Dolin wrote to Toby: “I want to say how very sincerely I have enjoyed watching YOU dance and dancing with you. I do not forget Johannesburg in 1949, happily I hope teaching you just a little and now dancing these seven weeks at your side. You are a fine, brilliant ballerina and I am proud and happy to have been your ‘cavalier’ in many *pas de deux*. My love to you and my deep admiration always, your South African partner, Anton.”

The encounters I had with Anton Dolin over a period of years taught me much about this formidable character and have enabled me to introduce him into my narrative with some conviction and confidence.

IVOR NOVELLO

Welsh composer singer and actor, David Ivor Davies was born in 1893 and when early in life it became clear that his enormous musical talent was going to result in a career in theatre, he adopted his mother’s maiden name and became known professionally as Ivor Novello. As a songwriter, his first enormous hit – which lifted the spirits of the troops and the British people at the beginning of the First World War – was *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. So enormous was the song’s impact that it was popularly adopted as an anthem for the war effort. In the Second World War he replicated his ability to feel the pulse and inspire the nation by writing *We’ll Gather Lilacs*. Meanwhile he had been making his way as a

songwriter, actor and scriptwriter and even had a stint in Hollywood plying these trades. Novello was so good-looking that film directors claimed that they had difficulty finding someone as beautiful to play opposite him ... In any event, as enchanting a character as they found him, his acting was not taken seriously because his androgynous look and heavy-handed theatrical style made him difficult to cast in the movies.

Back in England he had several of his shows produced, but in 1935 *Glamorous Nights* defined his position as the master of the musical. His subsequent hits, *The Dancing Years*, *Perchance to Dream*, *King's Rhapsody* and *Gay's the Word* made him the most successful musical theatre composer of the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s. Novello's shows were always glamorous, had scintillating décor, outstanding music and excellent singers and dancers; there was always a distinguished leading role plotted for himself, which required little singing or dancing but required him to drift on and off stage wearing exotic costumes, one more beautiful than the other. Ivor Novello was enchanting, inspired love in his audiences and was in his time the undisputed matinee idol of the West End. Even when he went to prison briefly during the Second World War after receiving an exemplary sentence for a minor contravention of petrol rationing laws, the audiences received him back with rapturous applause. Like his friends Anton Dolin and Noel Coward, Ivor Novello made no secret of his homosexuality but certainly showed more discretion, enjoying a monogamous relationship with his life partner, the actor Bobbie Andrews – although the two did not live together and maintained separate apartments not far from each other.

I was in my late-teens when Ivor Novello came to Cape Town in 1947 with *Perchance to Dream* and recall seeing it at the Alhambra Theatre. I accompanied my parents and, because my father was mayor at the time, I suppose African Consolidated Theatres could not exclude his son from the after-show dinner given for the cast across the road at the then famous Del Monico restaurant. I have a clear memory of the handsome Ivor Novello, was introduced to him and even had the courage to ask for his autograph. In London in 1951, I was fortunate to see Ivor Novello

in his huge musical success *King's Rhapsody*. This most popular British entertainer of the first half of the twentieth century died suddenly a few days after that performance.

FRANK SHELLEY

In 1966 the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) commissioned an indigenous play to be written by the well-known South African author and journalist James Ambrose Brown. I was contracted by CAPAB to work with Brown and to direct *The Years of the Locust*. Set in South Africa during the heart of the apartheid years, the central character was a well-intentioned Anglican bishop, fond of publicity and given to pontificating, who found himself conflicted between the principles of his faith and political idealism. Not knowing of any local actor who could do justice to this role, I decided to audition in London for the bishop and at the same time for other parts. Despite British Equity having advised its members not to work in South Africa, a succession of actors, many well known in the profession, auditioned for the lead in *Locust*. After two full days of auditioning, I was beginning to despair of success when Frank Shelley walked in and introduced himself – and before he even began to read I knew that I had found my bishop. His commanding looks, bearing, gushing sincerity, obviously dyed black hair, measured gait, and the ecclesiastical tone of his regular stentorian speaking voice seemed perfect for what I had in mind. As a matter of record, Shelley's performance in *Locust* (opposite the distinguished actress Yvonne Bryceland) received superlative praise in a politically controversial play that created much public debate but which at the same time broke box office records at Cape Town's Hofmeyr Theatre. At the conclusion of the run, Shelley remained in South Africa for several years, both acting and directing in different parts of the country.

London-born Frank Shelley encountered the actor Sybil (later Dame Sybil) Thorndike while reading English at Oxford University. She was so impressed with the quality and power of his voice in debates that she was instrumental in his transferring his talent to the Embassy Theatre School of Acting (now the Central School). After graduating, Shelley toured the provinces with Sybil

Thorndike and her husband Lewis Casson's Theatre Company before returning to London to work in many distinguished productions, including at the Old Vic in Laurence Olivier's *Coriolanus*. After a spell acting and directing at the Perth Repertory Theatre, he joined the Oxford Playhouse in 1946 and for the next 10 years, as its actor/manager, directed the company, which became the most prestigious regional theatre in Britain. During that time he nurtured the careers of many actors who were to become famous, notably Maggie Smith, Ronnie Barker and Judi Dench.

Shelley became a major figure in the golden era of repertory theatre and in the late 1950s and '60s he worked in the West End and all over England playing alongside such illustrious actors as Alec Guinness, Joss Ackland, Claire Bloom, Joan Plowright, Albert Finney, Judi Dench, Peter Ustinov and Ronnie Barker. The latter dedicated his autobiography to Frank Shelley, whom he called "one of the three wise men who directed my career; without men like these, there would be no theatre." A consummate and versatile actor and an astute director, he was regarded as a Shaw and Chekhov authority.

When Frank Shelley first came to Cape Town he stayed at my home until he found his own accommodation. He was a witty conversationalist and my wife and I enjoyed listening to many interesting stories of his career. I particularly recall his telling me of a tricky incident that occurred when he was appearing with Ronnie Barker in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*. An actor not only missed his entry cue but was inexplicably absent for some five minutes and Shelley and Barker improvised a whole new scene that had some relevance to the plot. Shelley confided that, because of what he called the banality of Christie's dialogue, he and Barker did not find that too difficult! He also told me of another well-documented departure from the script when he had proposed marriage *sotto voce* mid-performance during the course of a play to actor Susan Dowdall who accepted and they were later married. They had four children but were divorced some 10 years later.

After returning to England from South Africa in the late 1970s, a whole new acting career developed for Shelley. He appeared in several West End plays, was contracted to the

Chichester Festival Theatre for several seasons, and worked in television and films. His final TV appearance was in 1992 in an award-winning film of Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* in which a distinguished cast included Michael Hordern, Cyril Cusack and felicitously his protégé, Maggie Smith. Frank Shelley, remarkable man of the theatre, died in 2004 aged 92.

LAURENCE OLIVIER

Laurence Olivier was 40 years old when he was knighted and was the youngest actor to receive this honour. Later he was the first member of his profession to be elevated to a life peerage and became Baron Olivier of Brighton. When asked if he should be addressed as Sir Laurence or Lord Olivier, he invariably responded, 'Just call me Larry.' During his lifetime he was a towering figure of stage and screen and was acclaimed as the greatest English-speaking actor of the twentieth century and the foremost Shakespeare interpreter.

Born in 1907, the son of an Anglican clergyman, he married three times, on each occasion to an actress: Jill Esmond (10 years), Vivien Leigh (20 years) and Joan Plowright, his widow (28 years). He had one son by his first marriage and a son and two daughters from his marriage to Joan Plowright. Having shown promise as an actor at school, he enrolled at the age of 17 at the Central School of Dramatic Art and subsequently began his professional career with the Birmingham Repertory. During an illustrious career involving stage, film and TV, he received 12 Oscar nominations, two awards and two honorary awards; nine Emmy nominations and five awards; three Golden Globe Awards; and three BAPTAs.

After the Second World War, Olivier became the artistic director of the Old Vic and was later the founder and inaugural director of the English National Theatre. The NT's largest stage, The Olivier Theatre, was named after him. Having met every acting challenge, Olivier was perturbed at the advent of the 'angry young men' period that invaded English theatre in the late 1950s and which he thought did not suit his style of acting. Anxious not to become an anachronism and to have a new challenge, he asked John Osborne to write a play for him and the result was *The*

Entertainer in which he had a shattering success playing Archie Rice, a pathetic music hall performer.

Laurence Olivier always claimed that his acting was pure technique and he was contemptuous of the Stanislavsky method style of acting popularised in America by Lee Strasberg and others. In one scene, while shooting the movie *Marathon Man*, the character played by Dustin Hoffman was supposed to be exhausted, having not had any sleep for three nights. The method actor, Hoffman, in order to be realistic stayed awake for three nights and went on a long run before arriving on the set dishevelled and exhausted. Olivier asked him, "Why are you so tired?" When Hoffman told him what he had done to get into the part, Sir Laurence replied: "Why don't you try acting, dear boy? It's so much easier!"

Much has been written about Laurence Olivier's bisexuality, it being strongly suspected that he had several homosexual affairs with, among others, actor Denys Blakelock, critic Kenneth Tynan, playwright Emlyn Williams, movie star Marlon Brando and American entertainer Danny Kaye. Much of this may have occurred during the actor's tumultuous marriage to Vivien Leigh when she suffered from manic depression but still found time to have a long-running affair with Australian actor, Peter Finch. In fairness, Olivier also had at least several heterosexual encounters, notably a much-publicised affair with actress Claire Bloom. (After Olivier's death, his son Tarquin repudiated his father's bisexuality and Joan Plowright denied his alleged homosexual affairs, but seemed to confirm his many affairs with the female sex.)

Upon his death in 1989, Lord Olivier became only the second actor since Edmund Kean to be interred in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

TYRONE GUTHRIE

Tony Guthrie was arguably the most important and influential British theatre director of his time. Between paradoxical extremes, this 6' 6" giant of a man was formidable but shy, very English in manner but privately a boyish Irishman, undeniably serious at work

but derived more fun from his productions than most of his contemporaries.

Born William Tyrone Guthrie in Tunbridge Wells, England, in 1900, he was a colossus in the world of theatre. After receiving a degree in History at Oxford University, he joined the BBC and produced plays for radio. Graduating to directing for the stage, he enjoyed many historic successes in England, becoming particularly noted for his imaginative productions and his attention to detail. He contended that in a production there were no 'extras', only some players with smaller parts than others. His worldly vision took him to many parts of the world where he not only directed plays, but created new theatres and theatre communities and taught people how to administer them. In Stratford, Ontario, Canada, he created a most successful Shakespeare Festival in a tent and when this became a fixture it led to the building of a magnificent theatre with a thrust stage. In fact Guthrie was the modern-day pioneer of this type of theatre and thrust stages at the Sheffield Crucible, Chichester, Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and a host of other theatres throughout the world owe their shape and style to the vision of this peripatetic pioneer – the man who dispensed with the proscenium arch.

Guthrie was not only an exciting director but a visionary too and in his will bequeathed his home in Annaghmakerrig, County Monaghan, to the Irish State for use as a residential workplace for artists, known today as the Tyrone Guthrie Centre.

Sir Tyrone Guthrie (a second cousin to the swashbuckling American movie star Tyrone Power) was knighted in 1961 and died in 1971 and was survived by his widow Judith Bretherton.

