

The Epoch Times

Behind the Scenes with American Film Producer Thomas Kane

By Martin Murphy/The Epoch Times

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(Martin Murphy/The Epoch Times)

One advantage to being a journalist is the *carte blanche* you have when it comes to satisfying an inquisitive nature: for instance, last week I spotted an artist painting a scene by Dublin's Grand Canal at Baggott Street Bridge, and let my curiosity get the better of me.

The painter in question turned out to be American film producer Thomas Kane, who was on a short relaxation break in Ireland, where he planned on doing some sketching and perhaps a few hours of 'work' pitching a film workshop idea with the Irish Film Board.

Being half Irish himself, Mr Kane did not take much persuading to fill me in on his journey to date. The first time he was in Ireland was back in 1968 as a twenty five year old while he was travelling the world.

"I had the good fortune of getting rejected from the army, in 1968, when they were drafting 35 thousand men a month," said Mr Kane, and winced.

"So I decided to make a tour of the world and I took a year out. I didn't get the whole world in but I did get all through Europe and North Africa, and Ireland was one of the stops on the way."

At the time, Mr Kane wasn't exactly cash-rich; so, in order to extend the life of his year out, he did some painting to earn a little spending money.

"I discovered that you could stay out much longer and not need any money if you just did side-walk drawings, people threw money at them ... I would draw for two weeks and have enough money for two months."

Mr Kane, who is a New Yorker, studied art at the school of visual arts in New York City, which, together with his BA in English literature, put him in good standing when he decided to pursue a career in film production.

Mr Kane decided to leave painting because, as he says, that lifestyle was "too lonely", and he began working as a producer on documentaries for American television before he got his

He began working as a producer on documentaries for American television before he got his break to make feature films.

"I got lucky after three years of working in documentaries - I went off on my own and managed to 'score' my first picture, which was *The Stepford Wives*". Mr Kane added with a grin that it was the original 1974 production, and not the later remake.

"To get from documentaries to features you had to go back to the bottom, you had to be willing to do that, and I was."

This learning process provided Mr Kane with invaluable experience that he incorporates in his movie production workshops which are geared towards budding film makers/producers.

Mr Kane recited an impressive list of movies that he worked on from "*Taxi Driver* in '76 ... *Kramer v's Kramer* in '78 ... *Raging Bull* in '79 ... a bunch of smaller movies, and then '*Prizzi's Honour*' [1985] with Jack Nicholson and Irish man, John Huston....." The list goes on.

He didn't mention it at the time, but I discovered afterwards on film website IMDb.com that he worked with the 'Duke' himself, John Wayne, on a film called *McQ* in 1974.

The Film Workshops

Mr Kane retired in 2006, but that did not last for long and he got back to what he loves doing in a less hectic way by giving film workshops around the world.

"I teach young people how to put a film together," he says. Mr Kane has been in contact with the Irish Film Board as he hopes to hold his workshop in Dublin soon.

"You have a finished screen play, now how do you take it to completion, how do you break it down, schedule it and, very importantly, how do you budget it so you don't run out of money ... no one has ever figured out what to do with two thirds of a movie."

Mr Kane remembered working with John Huston and he described him as a "very giving" person because he would talk about what he was doing and why, which was of great help to those who were learning their trade. He was also very open to new ideas. "At that point I was the production manager and you were not supposed to have any ideas ... and he took some of them and I was more than thrilled."

That is one of the reasons why he now likes to help those who are starting out.

"As altruistic as it might sound, it gives you a chance to give back; I have been very lucky for the past 37 years, to get to do what I have done ... when I was coming up there was nothing like these film workshops. You had to learn it on your own, and most people were not very forthcoming as they were afraid you would take their job."

Mr Kane finds that the type of people he meets while doing his workshops tend to appreciate the difficulties involved in their chosen profession, the hard work and sacrifice required to make progress: "They are not like young people from other aspects of life who want to be a star right away, I don't sense that with the people who take this workshop, they get it ... there's a lot to know and they are anxious to gobble it all up, so it's a real kick for me to do it"

me to do it.

Mr Kane said that he always enjoyed the work but it was “never a walk in the park.”

“Maybe this is true in other professions - that as you move up the line it gets easier; In film, the hardest job is the first assistant director, he's got all the pressure to get all these things done that the director wants him to do, the production manager worries about the money ... the producer basically does not do anything but hopefully he thinks of everything, and makes sure that it gets done.”

Love of Painting

Mr Kane started off his career painting before making his way into the movie business, and now life has come full circle with his rediscovering his love for painting and a new found appreciation for the quieter, solemn aspect to work that he left behind back in the early seventies.

“I'm more proud of these two paintings than the film's I've done because it's all me ... you have all that pressure [producing movies], millions of dollars that you are spending, but this, it's all cool - just you against the canvas.”

Mr Kane says he had a great time in Ireland just relaxing, chatting and painting. He has three paintings to show for his time on the banks of Dublin's Grand Canal, which he does not wish to sell. He jokingly told me that a passer-by offered to buy an unfinished canvas he was working on: he told her it was unfinished and she replied “Well that's ok - my mom will like it the way it is.”

Mr Kane says that some day he would like to do an art show, therefore he's reluctant to sell any of his paintings yet: “I want to do a show, if you sell them [paintings] you won't have enough to do that.”

filmtvworkshops.com/

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