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Robert O'Shea looks forward to two films at the Cork Film Festival



Pilgrim Hill is on at the Gate cinema at 6.30pm on Saturday night.

Shoestring hit pulls global heartstrings

WHEN Listowel man Gerard Barrett went into his credit union last year he told the manager he needed €4,500 to buy a car.

A few months later he showed the man what he had actually used the money for and it had a glaring lack of wheels.

"Arr, he was grand about it and told me well done and well spent."

The 24-year-old instead used every cent to make *Pilgrim Hill*, which will screen at the Gate at 6.30pm on Saturday night.

The film he produced, directed and wrote is a poignant portrayal of rural isolation, the story of a middle-aged bachelor farmer living in Kerry and caring for his critically ill father.

"I come from a farming background and my uncle is a bachelor farmer," explains the young director.

"And I always thought it would be interesting to explore his story.

"Jimmy (who is played by Kilfinane, Co. Limerick actor Joe Mullins) is not really living in 2012. People like Jimmy never saw or benefited from the Celtic Tiger nor were they the cause of the country going bang, but they have to deal with the consequences, like all of us.

"I think we all know people like Jimmy," Gerard explains.

"Many of us have uncles and aunts like Jimmy or even close neighbours.

"These are people who exist in the background of society. Sometimes their lives were taken out of their own hands and they just had to get on with it. You have to admire that most of them did just that.

"But I always wondered how they felt about siblings moving on, having families and doing the normal thing like getting married and sharing a life with someone.

"There was always one who stayed at home. Sometimes their parents were quite selfish, I feel. It's not that simple, of course, because we all have a chance to

do our own thing when we hit a certain age, but for some people, if a parent is sick, it's not easy to walk away and you have to make sacrifices."

The film has got rave reviews from festivals as far afield as Colorado and Korea and audiences have had no problem with getting what might seem a peculiarly Irish story.

"The loneliness thing hits a nerve with people because it is something we all dread. The possibility of living out your life with no-one by your side, no wife, no kids and no legacy. Your life and your impact on earth just stops when you pass on," says Gerard.

He has been overwhelmed by the reaction so far, with positive reviews in *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*.

The Irish Times picked it as the best movie of the Galway Film Fleadh and it won the top feature award there as well.

"I've been blown away by the response. I didn't make the film to win awards or to receive acclaim; I made the film to tell the story of Jimmy. It was a very personal project for me and I just wanted to do it justice."

Barely out of college — he studied TV, radio and new media broadcasting in Tralee — Barrett has signed with Troika Talent in the UK (fellow Kerryman Michael Fassbender's

agency) and with Martin Scorsese's agent in the US.

"It's a dream come true. Sure, you can never imagine something like this happening when you make a film in seven days."

He credits the literary tradition of his home town for instilling him with the confidence to tell his story.

"You can't help being inspired by storytelling in this part of the world, if you have it in you at all it'll come out.

"I'd made a few short films and written a play and decided if you want to stand out you need to stand up and I had my script for an 80-minute feature, so I just decided to do it.

"I'm glad nobody (none of the reviewers) has really brought up the production values or said they weren't up to scratch.

"I'm indebted to my crew (all three from Cork — with Ian Murphy on camera, Fergus Long as focus puller/additional camera and Rob O'Halloran on sound) and to Michael Lynch of AV3 Productions in Blarney, who loaned me the equipment.

"It was a tight budget, but the key was to keep the production small and tight.

"Not to overextend ourselves — you don't have car chases if you are making a film for five grand."

He says it was liberating, film-

ing with no one to answer to.

"Yes, it means it isn't contrived in any way.

"We were never trying to make the film stylish or using techniques for the sake of them, we just did what we needed to do to tell the story. And I think when people watch it they know right away that it's not trying to be anything, it's just what it is. The script is the most important thing. The images shouldn't take over the story or you'll probably have a flop.

"Now that I'm involved with financiers in the UK, there are more voices you have to listen to. But we'll keep it small for now. You can't go from League of Ireland and expect to prosper in the Champions League."

That next project is a script that he will start shooting in January in Dublin. He is casting at the moment and the movie, which only has a working title that he is reluctant to reveal, will have the same crew.

"It's an urban setting this time, about a family in crisis with a son who is trying to hold it all together."

But first he is looking forward to tomorrow night

"*Pilgrim Hill* is a Munster film and I'm looking forward to bringing it there to see the reaction of Cork audiences."

Even if he might have to come on a bus.