



Of Emerald Invites & Live Radio Broadcasts

In 1964, Bill O'Shaughnessy, who at age 26 was not yet a broadcasting legend, got the idea of celebrating St. Patrick's Day with a live WVOX-radio show from a shot-and-beer joint in downtown New Rochelle called Paddy O'Neil's.

The event was *sui generis*, to borrow a favorite O'Shaughnessyism.

It was a hit, too — so much so, in fact, that O'Shaughnessy emceed the remote broadcast the following year and then the year after that. And so it went every March of every year, until it became a tradition



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as fixed as corned beef and cabbage and green beer — at least that was the case within the 500-Watt listening radius of Westchester County.

Microphone in hand, O'Shaughnessy tirelessly worked the room. For five hours, he interviewed practically anyone who walked through the door, and he did it without a seven-second delay. He called it “flying without a net,” which was risky since interviewees reinforced by a gallon of Guinness may speak in an idiom not necessarily appreciated by the FCC.

It is said that on this day everyone is Irish — and O'Shaughnessy lived up to

that credo. Printed on green paper, his mailed invitations customarily appended an ‘O’ in front of everyone’s name regardless of ethnicity. Therefore, if your name happened to be Schwartz, voila, it became O'Schwartz.

O'Shaughnessy's velvet-voiced interviews on St. Patrick's Day were always brisk, extemporaneous, lighter than air and sometimes unintentionally funny — though with Bill you couldn't always be sure. Like the time he asked a local barrister, “Tell me judge, do you ever get tired of

pounding that damn gavel all day?”

Clearly, it was never about “The Troubles.” However, O'Shaughnessy once recalled a tense moment at O'Neil's when an IRA partisan and a Northern Irishman supposedly mixed it up. He also claimed that the saloon's proprietor used some “new-fangled stuff” to melt the ice outside the bar but all it did was turn the snow an orange color — “I thought we were going to have a disaster on our hands.”

Neither of these stories were probably true. But that was O'Shaughnessy for you — a raconteur who politics writer E.J. Kessler described as “a prolix, poetical

Irishman who could convince the Hudson to flow north.”

Urban renewal inevitably caught up to O'Neil's, but the annual radio event flourished for decades at other local haunts. Wherever O'Shaughnessy planted his WVOX mic, the holiday broadcast drew people from all walks of life. Plebeians rubbed shoulders with patricians. For politicians it was an essential stop.

Bill celebrated characters, especially if they had colorful nicknames like “Shipwreck” or “Cueball.” In the world according to O'Shaughnessy, a shopkeeper was a “merchant prince” and a bank executive was a member of “high estate.” Anyone with an Irish brogue was of “the Gaelic Society.” If a crooked politician was jailed, Bill euphemized that he “went to college.”

They all came together on St. Patrick's Day. “We've had some wonderful people,” O'Shaughnessy said, “some infamous, some disreputable... but on this one occasion they seem to rise to magnificence on the airwaves.”

They were his beloved “townies.”

Blessed with height north of six feet and sporting a lustrous mane of white hair, O'Shaughnessy effected the air of a yacht club commodore. But truth be told he was a self-made man, and he recognized that for all his dinners at the 21 Club and Le Cirque, he was at bottom a townie, too.

After surviving a brief hiatus during the pandemic, the St. Patrick's broadcast was moved last year to Mirage near Iona College where O'Shaughnessy, visibly frail, courageously made his final appearance. He died two months later at the age of 84.

His seventh and last book was published posthumously. Fittingly, it was titled, “Townies.”

“Bill always had a soft spot for the underdog, the little guy, the powerless and the voiceless,” Andrew Cuomo, the former governor said at his funeral. “He was a champion for the left out and the left behind.”

O'Shaughnessy was *sui generis*, one of a kind.

His spirit lives on.

And so does the St. Patrick's Day broadcast. According to his son, WVOX president David O'Shaughnessy, the tradition that started more than a half century ago will continue.

Look for those green invitations. 

The opinions and beliefs expressed by Phil Reisman are his alone and do not necessarily reflect those of Westchester Magazine's editors and publishers. Tell us what you think at edit@westchestermagazine.com.