

★ SUNDAY NIGHT ★

AT

THE LONDON PALLADIUM

WITH

BILL KENWRIGHT

CBE



SUNDAY 10 MARCH 2024



Everton
in the Community

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How do you describe Bill Kenwright?

You can't. Not in just a few paragraphs.

He was a larger-than-life character; you felt his presence before he even entered the room - his energetic and enthusiastic voice echoing down the hall. He's left a lifelong impression for me, of a truly remarkable human being. I've heard countless stories from so many, recalling how Bill inspired and nurtured their early careers in some of the over 600 productions he's produced.

No project was too big, no project, too small. If it grabbed Bill's attention, he was on it. One of the greatest and most successful independent producers of our time. Always 100% involved from beginning to end. Bill loved his job.

There was, of course, another 100% of energy that he found, for his beloved Everton Football Club. In 1951, as a six-year-old fan, he used to stand in the boys' pen, right at the bottom, so when the adult fans above him relieved themselves, it trickled down to where they were all standing and, more often than not, he had holes in his shoes... But he loved it. It was his tribe. His family.

On October 23rd, 1989, that kid became a Director of the club. Ten years later he bought the club, and in 2004 became the CHAIRMAN of Everton Football Club, until the day he died. Now here's the rub: Jenny Seagrove, Bill's beloved life partner told me, as Everton Chairman Bill very, very rarely went into the Everton Players dressing room. But when he did it was to great effect. The truth is, he felt it wasn't his place. So, you see, the kid with the holes in his shoes never left him! He was intensely shy and private and put on the public face of Bill and that is the face most people know.

On the personal side of Bill's life, he loved his family dearly. Not limited to his blood relatives. Through his life, his family also came to include football friends, his work colleagues, his actors, directors, creatives, anyone in fact who became close and loyal. And once you were part of the family, it was forever.

I love the empathy that I witnessed during our friendship. He would be deeply interested in peoples' lives, relationships and circumstances and if they needed help in any way, he was always first in line to give it. He never wanted people to feel that they owed him anything, if he'd done things or given to them. He gave because he wanted to share.

To the people of the Hillsborough disaster, to little kids that were sick or dying, doing, privately, whatever it took to alleviate people's suffering, on countless occasions. He never forgot his more humble beginnings and the position of privilege that he'd now achieved. He would give you the coat off his back. And yet haggle over one pound in a deal!!!

I found that Bill always had a sense of shyness and insecurity, Inside he was really, just Bill, a Liverpool lad, who wanted to do well, to love and be loved... And he was!

I'm so pleased that our paths crossed in this business and coincidentally, in this very theatre where I worked for him.

You were a true and blessed friend Bill!

Michael Crawford

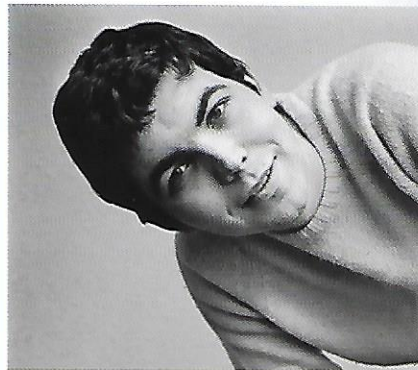




A few memories of Bill by Rod Coton

Bill and I first met in 1965 when he was a callow youth appearing in the West End production of *The Passion Flower Hotel*. Over the following years we kept in touch and in 1974 he asked if I would like to join him at his office in the Strand. He was about to mount *West Side Story* at the Shaftesbury Theatre - in the midst of an IRA bombing campaign. Over the next 30 years whether broke or very broke we mounted hundreds of productions from Broadway to Bridlington. Whilst producing and directing *West Side Story* Bill was also travelling up and down to Manchester to play Gordon Clegg in *Coronation Street*.

He was probably the most complicated person I have ever met and few people ever saw the real side of him. At 3pm one Thursday afternoon he asked if it would be a good idea if we should take Colin, our accountant at the time, and drive to the South of France for a long weekend. He said there was no time to worry about packing, "We'll sort it out later." The first thing we did in France was go gambling, where Bill won enough for three changes of clothes for five people



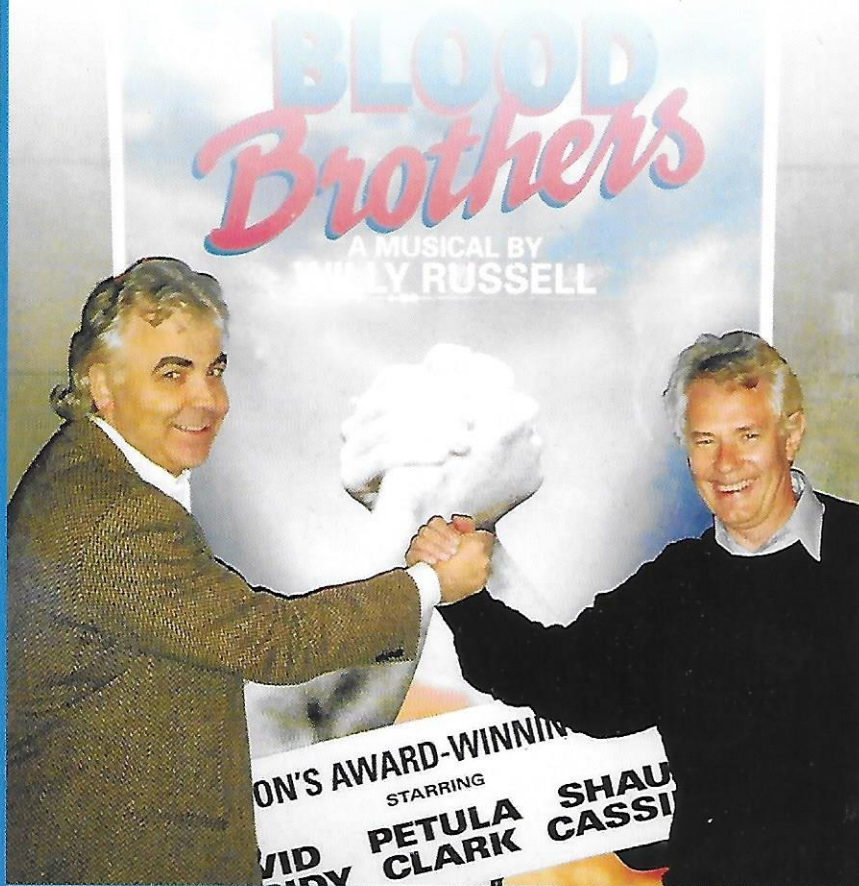
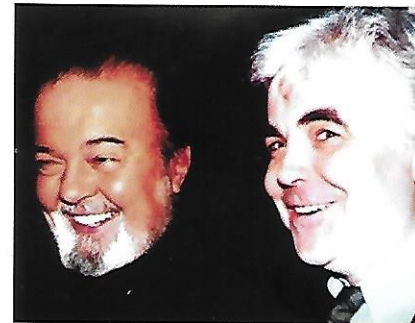
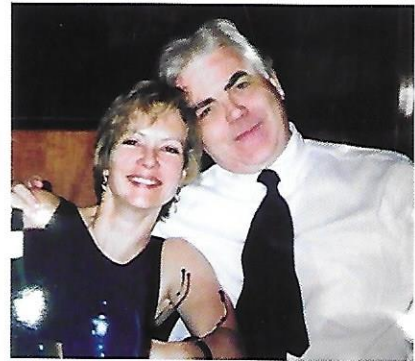
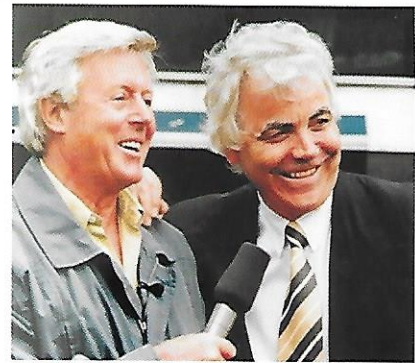
for about a month. He rarely worried about money, until he put his hand in his pocket and found it empty.

One day as I was pleading with a senior director of Natwest Bank to increase our already huge overdraft, Bill suddenly appeared outside the glass panel of my office, standing on a chair, wiggling an Emu glove puppet.

By this time I had become Deputy Managing Director and was co-producing with him. I met successful Australasian producer Phil Warren and concluded a deal for Pat Phoenix to do a tour of *Gaslight*. This proved to be not just an enormous hit but the most successful in Australasian history, including the visits of The Queen and the Queen Mother. As a direct consequence this resulted in us avoiding bankruptcy and The Times writing that we were the most successful independent company in the UK. This generated so much profit it enabled Bill to do what he did best, cast and produce tours, west end shows and productions across the globe, culminating in a collaboration with Sir Peter Hall and all that followed.

Few people knew of Bill's extraordinary generosity. It manifested itself in many ways. Like on one evening he left the office saying he would be about 20 minutes. Three hours later he returned with two boys and their mother who he'd found sleeping in a doorway in the Strand. We of course had to find them a place to live and at past midnight managed to put them into a nearby hotel.

There are so many similar memories which make up the many years of our friendship. The last thing Bill ever said to me was, "Oh, Rod, didn't we have fun." We most certainly did! I will always miss him.



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OUR THANKS TO

ACTORS AND SINGERS

VIVIENNE CARLYLE
ETHAN HUNT
AJ DEAN
BRADLEY WALSH
DAME JUDI DENCH
FINTY WILLIAMS
NATHANAEL CAMPBELL
KHALID DALEY
KARL QUEENSBOROUGH
ASHLEY SAMUELS
JIMMY NAIL
ELIZABETH CARTER
SALLY ANN TRIPLETT
DAME MAUREEN LIPMAN
DAME VANESSA REDGRAVE
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MARTIN SHAW
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ALI MCMATH

ANDY HUNTER

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GILL SHAW

TIM EVERETT

HEXAGON

BACK STAGE TEAM

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SIÂN WIGGINS

SIMON BANNISTER

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MIKE JEWITT

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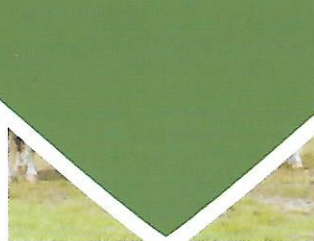
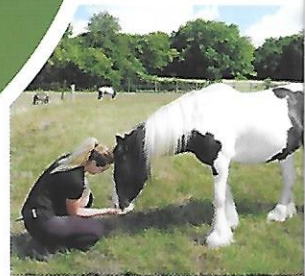
SPECIAL THANKS TO

**LORD LLOYD-WEBBER AND THE TEAM AT THE LONDON PALLADIUM
AND EVERYONE WHO HAS MADE THIS EVENING POSSIBLE**

*Thank you Bill
for all your love and support*



Mane Chance



We will carry on with you in our hearts.

www.manechancesanctuary.org