

irishtheatre

MAGAZINE

€10/£7 VOLUME 6, NUMBER 28 AUTUMN 2006

Galway's flowering:
Project '06

How green is
our theatre?



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glór, Ennis

Mon 13—Sat 18 Nov

An Grianán Theatre, Letterkenny

Mon 20—Sat 25 Nov

Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire

Mon 27 Nov—Sat 2 Dec

Backstage Theatre, Longford

Mon 4—Wed 6 Dec

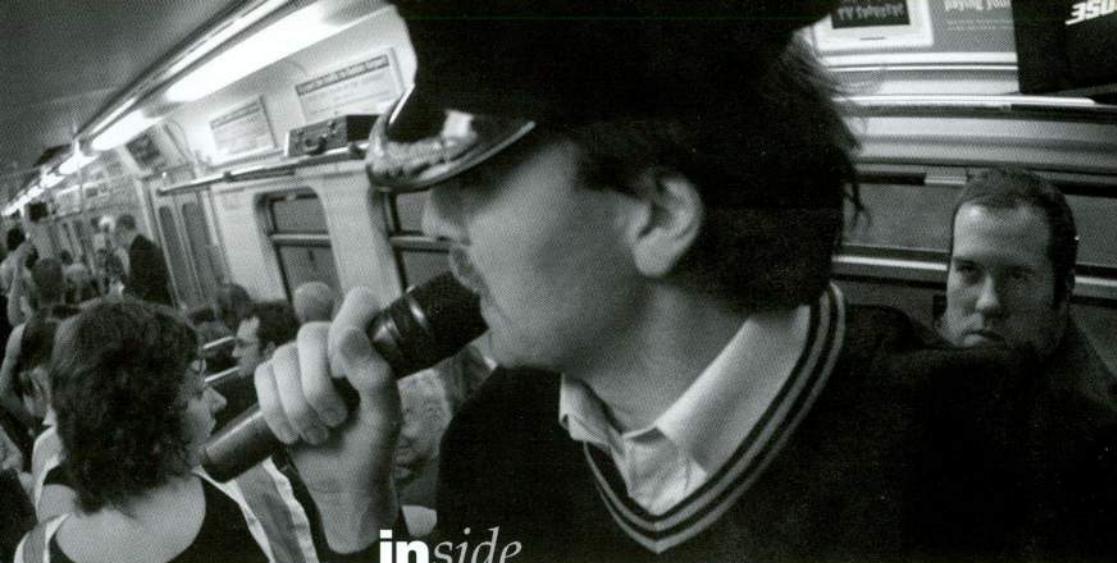
Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge

Fri 9 & Sat 10 Dec. Matinee Sat 10 Dec 3pm

Dunamaise Arts Centre, Portlaoise

Mon 11—Sat 16 Dec





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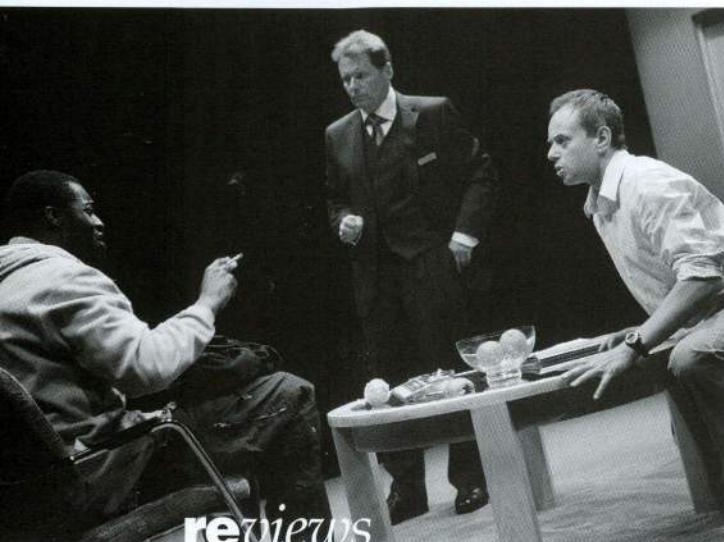
28 FOLLOW THAT ENERGY It began as a protest and blossomed into something different. Galway's Project '06 had all the hallmarks of a successful Fringe festival - and the city is ripe for one, argues director Thomas Conway.

34 BEYOND THE FINAL CURTAIN What is the afterlife of a theatre production? Can material elements of shows be recycled, or does 'ephemeral' always mean 'wasteful'? Stage manager Lisa Mahony traces the lifespan of sets, props and costumes as they move from the theatre to their final resting place of the storeroom - or the skip.

44 BOOK REVIEW Belinda McKeon assesses the biographies of two remarkable women of the theatre.

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REVIEWER

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Studying the life-cycle

THE ECOLOGY OF THEATRE IS ON our minds in this issue, as we consider what the optimum conditions are for the gestation and development of noteworthy new work — whether in Galway, as theatre director Thomas Conway considers, or elsewhere. On Page 28 he assesses the achievement of Project '06, an initiative that may not have had the outcome or effect its organisers intended, but which was, nonetheless, a significant creative development for Galway.

We're also examining how much waste there is in theatre production in Ireland, and why the issue of the storage and recycling of material - sets, furniture, props, costumes - is not as straightforward as it might seem. Lisa Mahony considers the environmental and economic aspects of the afterlife of stage productions.

What are the optimum conditions for the gestation and development of noteworthy new work - in Galway or elsewhere?

As we embark on the festival season in Dublin, look out for our online reviews of every theatre production in the Dublin Fringe Festival, published the day after the shows open.

Our most experienced critics will be joined by some eager newcomers, all under the keen eye of our Web Editor, Peter Crawley (www.irishtheatremagazine.ie).

A few weeks later, the annual ITM International Critics' Forum will take place during the second week of the Dublin Theatre Festival, with discussions of as many festival shows as our critics can take in (Project Cube, 12 October, 4.30 p.m.) As always, admission is free and audience feedback is welcome.

Comments on anything in this issue may be sent to editor@irishtheatremagazine.ie.

- Helen Meany

what's news?

A Golden Opportunity

WITH THIS YEAR'S DUBLIN THEATRE FESTIVAL HITTING the boards on September 28th, plans for its fiftieth anniversary programme next year are already well underway. To realise its golden anniversary ambitions, however, the festival will require an increase in funding – a huge increase, according to its artistic director. "A fiftieth anniversary is

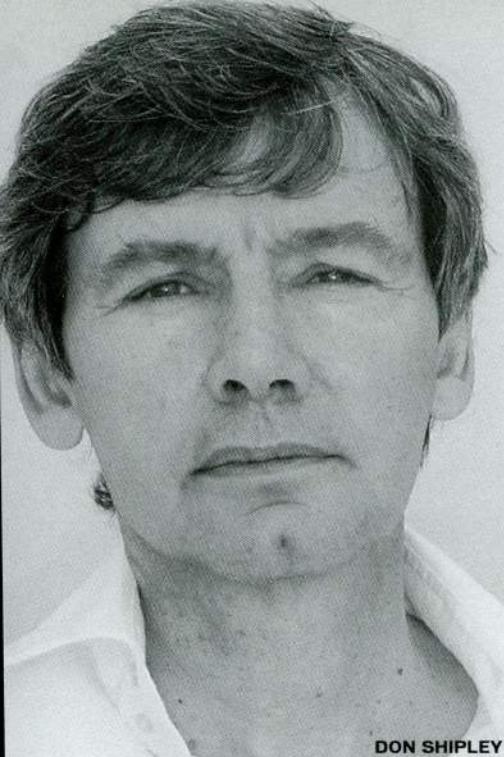
fairly momentous," says Don Shipley, who is to leave Dublin after this year's festival to take up a co-directorship at the Stratford Festival in Canada.

"There are certain productions we've always wanted to be able to bring to Dublin, but we've never had deep enough pockets." These include the work of the Comédie Française, a company that has indicated a strong willingness to perform in Dublin, and the theatre of Ariane Mnouchkine. "Those are big shows which require more finances than we currently have. For

an anniversary year you want to be able to showcase the international gems that you can only do once in a lifetime."

To this end, the festival plans to make an application to the Arts Council for double its current budget, which, at €773,000, is the highest it has ever been. "Certainly to realise 'the golden festival', you'd have to look at double what we currently have," says Shipley.

As well as expanding the festival's programming budget, Shipley intends



DON SHIPLEY

to invest further in its marketing, with hopes to boost its international profile. This follows last year's re-branding of the event as the "Dublin Theatre Festival International".

The festival is also intensifying separate sponsorship and fundraising drives, but if funding falls substantially short of the festival's ambitions, Shipley says the scope of the festival's plans will have to adapt. "The elasticity of the budget will dictate the size of the programme." But, he adds, "I know that the programme we have now, we could

probably not afford in another year, because of inflation alone."

Although this year's festival will be Shipley's last complete programme as artistic director, he already has several productions lined up for 2007 - leaving room to wonder what input into the programme his successor might have. Although Shipley's departure was announced in early July, at the time of writing, the festival's directorship has yet to be advertised.

Among the projects mooted for 2007, he hints, are a festival co-production of a new Frank McGuinness play and the fruits of "initial, tentative discussions" with Michael Keegan-Dolan. "How far along are plans? I could probably lock down 20 per cent tomorrow - 50 per cent if I was pressed. So it leaves lots of room for new stuff to be found."

Pointing to the \$11 million afforded to the Sydney Festival, Shipley sug-

Critical Moments

The annual Irish Theatre Magazine International Critics' Forum takes place, as ever, during the Dublin Theatre Festival. (28 September - 14 October). Chaired by Prof Brian Singleton, Head of Drama at Trinity College Dublin, it will bring leading critics together to discuss a wide range of productions in the second week of the festival.

This year's forum will be held on Thursday 12 October, at Project Cube, 4.30 - 6 p.m. Audience feedback is welcome. Admission - and opinion - free.

gests, "\$1 million in programming doesn't buy you an awful lot anymore, when you're talking about moving sets and actors around the world. I think one should be able to make a really positive statement about a fiftieth anniversary."

Dublin Theatre Festival runs from 28 September – 14 October.

www.dublintheatrefestival.com

EDINBURGH OR BUST

Every company that performs at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival is looking for one thing: an advantage. Competing with 1,867 shows for audiences and opportunities this year, that advantage may have lain in the reputation of a venue, a four-star review from the *Scotsman*, a Fringe First award, or, most likely, a flyer

that made promises of laughter, tears and possible onstage nudity.

This year ten Irish productions seemed to arrive with a considerable edge; each of them in receipt of healthy State funding, allocated by Culture Ireland.

Culture Ireland invested €325,000 in its showcase of Irish theatre, granting different levels of funding to various applicants. Rough Magic's *Improbable Frequency*, for instance, received €110,000 (although this included funds to travel to the Kontakt International Festival in Poland earlier this year), while Flipside and Spacecraft's one-man show, *The Friends of Jack Kairo*, received just €5,000.

Regardless of financial assistance, the Edinburgh Fringe is always a perilous platform. For every success story



Under Ice, directed by Rachel West

there are many more casualties. This may be why this year has been a learning experience for several Irish companies on the Fringe – and for Culture Ireland itself.

Improbable Frequency is the showcase's clearest success, earning rave reviews, boosting the international profile of writer Arthur O'Riordan and attracting transfer interest from the West End. CoisCéim's *Knots* at the Aurora Nova venue also benefited from critical rapture and a Fringe First award. Other productions languished without exposure, however, and were in danger of incurring substantial losses before their return to Ireland.

Without the imprimatur of the

Traverse or Aurora Nova (curated venues of good repute) Rachel West's production of *Under Ice* went largely unnoticed in the C Venue, lost among 250 other shows, until a review from the *Scotsman* appeared during the second week of its run. Audiences shot up following the four-star critique, but for West, who hired a UK-based PR company, the experience was not easy.

Half of her costs were covered by Culture Ireland, but, "In the end, like so many others, I'll come away with a debt," she says. "But I have to see it as some sort of investment in myself." The debt, she admits, is "pretty dire", but is unavoidable, she thinks, "unless you're in The Traverse and you're »

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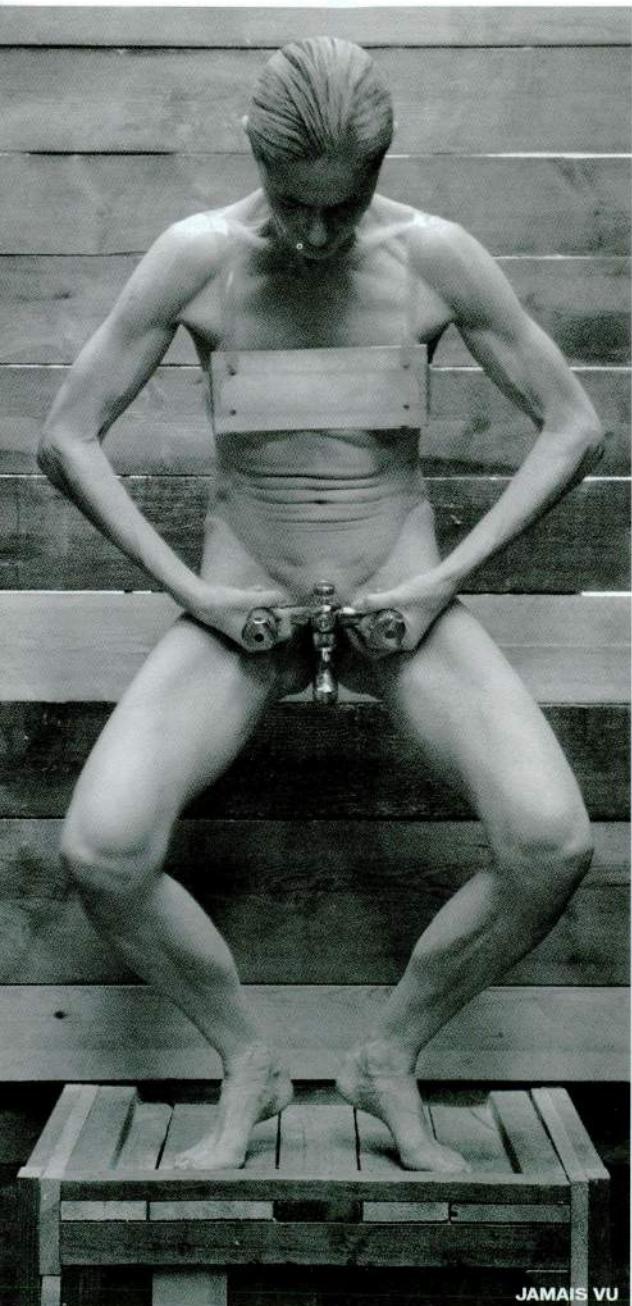
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JAMAIS VU

Coming Un-Fringed

In the early gallop of each Dublin Fringe Festival, a few productions will inevitably fall before the first fence. Shows bow out for different reasons, mainly financial. Fans of NTUSA, the wildly anarchic New York group that has delighted the Fringe twice before, will be disappointed to learn that Kid Moustache! (a sort of NTUSA side project) has had to cancel its scheduled appearance, as expected American funding fell through.

Phase 2 - the group's site-specific show which was to have positioned audiences in a city-centre shop window and performed for them on the street - hopes to return to the Fringe next year.

Other productions to fall from the schedule are PurpleHeart Theatre Company's premiere of American writer Jack Gilhooley's *The Warrior*, and *Will Spud*, the bizarre-sounding story of how William Shakespeare is transformed into a potato. Sadly the central question of this project planned by Karl Shiels and Anthony Kelly - can a vegetable love? - will this year go unanswered.

Dublin Fringe Festival runs from 9-24 September and this year includes performance artists such as Anne Seagrave (left), at IMMA.

ITM at Dublin Fringe Festival

We're There For You (9-24 September)

Visit www.irishtheatremagazine.ie for reviews of all theatre shows on the Fringe, coming online the day after they open.

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moving to the West End."

According to Doireann Ní Bhriain, arts consultant, broadcaster and board member of Culture Ireland, the organisation's ambition, "was to establish some kind of critical mass and to create a bit of a fuss about the Irish presence. For Culture Ireland the macro picture is to benefit the country." One way of gauging the success of the showcase, she says, is to work out whether "our contribution allowed those companies to make connections with international promoters that will allow them to take that work a bit further."

This, she admits, is not the only way of measuring success, nor is the show-

case the only way of promoting Irish theatre abroad, but with the organisation still in its infancy, Culture Ireland is still trying to fathom Edinburgh.

"We certainly weren't expecting [Culture Ireland] to promote our

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BY DAVID GREIG

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3



**MARTIN McDONAGH**

show," says Rachel West, "but that's definitely something they could look at in the future. It would be a really good investment."

Culture Ireland never intended to offer a safety net for the Edinburgh experience. "There's a certain element of risk-taking in this, for anybody," says Ní Bhriain, "as there should be. On the other hand Edinburgh has proven over the years to be a pretty good opportunity to showcase your work internationally."

The one-year-old organisation has yet to appoint anyone in executive positions or to publish a defined strategy for its aims – both of which may materialise before the end of the year – but it is hoped that the Edinburgh showcase will become an annual event.

"I would describe the whole initiative as a pilot," says Ní Bhriain. "Let's hope we all will have learned lessons

from it." She cannot yet say what those lessons may be. "It will be more carefully worked out next year. But we were willing to take a risk and go with it this year; to see how things worked."

McDONAGH GOES NORTH

It may not be surprising that Martin McDonagh's grisly comedy *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, depicting the violent behaviour of IRA terrorist and militant cat-lover 'Mad Padraig', has caused concerns over its first Northern Irish tour. But it is surprising that those concerns belong to the playwright himself.

"There was some question raised over the rights for the Derry week, for a short period," says Mike Diskin, manager of Galway's Town Hall Theatre, which is currently producing the first home-grown production of McDonagh's play. "These were

satisfactorily resolved. I really can't say any more."

The Town Hall Theatre has not had to renegotiate its contract in order to resolve the matter, which suggests that it had not fallen foul of any contractual stipulations. It is thought, rather, that McDonagh had made verbal assurances to one actor, who has played Mad Padraig before, that, should the play ever be performed in Northern Ireland, he would reprise the role. Instead, the cast from the Galway run of this production remains intact for Derry.

Crisis averted, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* will conclude its Irish tour at The Millennium Forum in Derry from 12-16 September - but the

absence of further controversy can't be guaranteed.

ONCE-OFF, ANNUAL OR REGULAR?

The Arts Council's long-gestating Arts Strategy, replacing the long-since shelved Arts Plan, tends to be high on aspiration and low on clarity. Its most recent unfurling, an announcement of the Council's plan to reform funding programmes, has raised more questions than it answers.

Under the rubric of flexibility, revenue funding for 2008 is to be replaced by five "tailored" funding programmes, designed to better suit the needs of artists. Some of these, such as the new Project: Once Off award, have

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met with enthusiastic responses. Others, such as the Regularly Funded Organisations programme, are teasingly ill defined. Although not scheduled to come on stream until 2008, RFO funding encompasses programming and operational costs (revenue funding, in other words) for periods longer than one year, which, though sounding rather non-committal, seems like code for multi-annual funding.

As yet, however, there is no information as to what qualifies as a Regularly Funded Organisation, or how one might hope to gain membership to this new club.

"We can't get any more information," says Theatre Forum's Tania Banotti. "Multi-annual funding is the holy grail for longer established organisations. We're one of the few countries in Europe not to offer it. But we just don't know how many people will be on the Regularly Funded Organisations programme or on what basis you get on it."

The Arts Council was unable to shed any further light when *ITM* was going to press, although a spokesperson indicated that further announcements will be made this month, which may – or may not – distinguish between those who are eligible to be in the Regularly Funded Organisations category and those remaining in the mill of Annual Funding.

Some new measures – such as rolling applications for bursaries, trav-

el awards and professional development awards – have won praise. But the postponement of the announcement of a touring funding programme from July to the autumn has prompted more uncertainty about an issue that is important to many of the Arts Council's clients, and one that they have had to push onto the Council's agenda.

The continuing efforts of the Arts Council to seem transparent, flexible and supportive are to be welcomed, but those efforts are often puzzling. Policy statements like these have all the clarity of a riddle.

TIME ON HER SIDE

Rolex like to call it "the gift of time", but the benevolence of the Swiss watchmakers' Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative goes much further. Dublin-based director Selina Cartmell has recently been selected to spend the next year in contact with American directing powerhouse, Julie Taymor.

Cartmell, who receives a \$25,000 bursary (enough to afford even the 18k gold mid-sized Rolex Oyster Perpetual, with diamond dial and diamond bezel) was nominated for the award by an anonymous panel, and subsequently hand-selected by Taymor from a shortlist of four international young theatre artists.

Rolex require that mentors spend at least six weeks with their protégés, but Taymor and Cartmell have already

spent two months together, working on Taymor's opera *Grendel* in Los Angeles. Their discussions are set to continue when Taymor attends Cartmell's production of *Festen* at The Gate during the Dublin Theatre Festival next month.

The Rolex scheme sets no deadlines nor seeks a final 'product' from the awards recipients, but it does offer additional financial support following the mentorship year, if the protégé wishes to organise an event or exhibition. With Taymor's encouragement, Cartmell has already been mulling over staging a new opera, entitled *Gas*, in 2008.

Rolex's generosity knows some bounds however: *ITM* understands

that protégés do not receive a watch.

DESIGNS ON DUBLIN

The exhibition of stage design being organised by PQ Ireland has acquired a name - EXTR.acts - and a venue since we reported on it in the last issue of *ITM*. Celebrating all aspects of Irish theatre design from 2002-06, it will be open to the public daily during the Dublin Theatre Festival in the Rotunda at City Hall, Dame St. The selection of designs has been made by the exhibition's Curator, John Comiskey, along with fellow designers Brian Vahey, and Wendy Shea – rather than members of the PQ Ireland board, as was erroneously reported here. 

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opening nights

TANYA DEAN marks your diaries for the months ahead

Island Theatre Company presents **OUT-LYING ISLANDS** by David Greig in the Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick from 11 – 23 October.

THE FULL MONTY plays at the Cork Opera House from 11 – 23 September; Millennium Forum, Derry from 2 – 7 October; and at the Royal Theatre, Castlebar from 18 – 21 October.

Marie Jones's **STONES IN HIS POCKETS** will tour to the Gaiety Theatre from 11 – 30 September, and the Millennium Forum,

Derry from 16 – 21 October.

ARMS AND THE MAN by Bernard Shaw plays at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, from 12 September – 7 October.

Ines Wurth and Mark Soper's play **MISS COMMUNISM** will play at Glór Theatre, Ennis from 15 - 16 September.

Gúna Nua Theatre in association with Civic Theatre, Tallaght presents **TROUSERS (OR: PANTS)** by Paul Meade and David Parnell, at Draiocht, 18 –



23 September.

On 18-23 September City Theatre Dublin will present **THE MATCHMAKER** by John B Keane at the Everyman Palace, Cork.

Crooked House Theatre Company and Riverbank Arts Centre present J.M. Synge's **PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD** from 19 – 23 September.

GAELFORCE DANCE plays at the Royal Theatre, Castlebar from 19 – 24 September / 27 – 30 September.

Gare St Lazare Players present **MOLLOY** by Samuel Beckett at Clifden Arts Week on 20 September; at Daghdha Space, Limerick on 22 September; and at Glór Theatre, Ennis on 29 November.

Opera Theatre Company presents **FIDELIO** by Beethoven on 21, 23, 25, 27, 29 September in Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin

The Courthouse Arts Centre, Tinahely, Co. Wicklow presents Mend and Make Do's production of **MY FATHER'S LIFE** by John McKenna on 23 September.

On 25 September – 7 October, Pageant Wagon presents **DEDALUS LOUNGE** by Gary Duggan in the Civic Theatre.

TEAM Educational Theatre Company presents **LAST CALL** by Frances Kay in

OEDIPUS LOVES YOU



collaboration with TEAM, touring post-primary schools from 28 September – 1 December, and in Space at The Helix from 16 - 20 October.

City Theatre Dublin presents **THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES** by Eve Ensler in Draíocht from 3 – 7 October.

Daghdha Dance Company presents **MAMUSKA NIGHT** in Daghdha Space, St John's Square, Limerick on 6 October.

ROSE by Martin Sherman plays in The Courthouse Arts Centre, Tinahely, Co. Wicklow on 7 October and Draíocht on 20 October.

Pan Pan presents **OEDIPUS LOVES YOU** by Gavin Quinn & Simon Doyle (after Sophocles) in Smock Alley Theatre, Temple Bar, Dublin, from 9 – 21 October (pictured above).

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

presents **THE CHAIRS** by Eugene Ionesco at The Factory Performance Space, Sligo from 10 – 21 October, touring to Galway's Town Hall Theatre from 26 – 28 October.

Wexford Festival Opera presents Donizetti's **DON GREGORIO** and Conrad Susa's **TRANSFORMATIONS** at Dunamaise Arts Centre, 25 October – 5 November.

Púca Puppets presents **CORALINE**, adapted by the company from Neil Gaiman's novel, at Project Arts Centre, 16 – 28 October; Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, 1 November; The Source Arts Centre, Thurles, 9 November; Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, 16 – 18 November.

On 19 October and 16 November, Daghdha Dance Company will present **SOUNDINGS** in Daghdha Space, St John's Square, Limerick.

Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford presents **THE SALVAGE SHOP** by Jim Nolan from 23 October – 11 November.

City Theatre Dublin presents **WUTHERING HEIGHTS** by Emily Brontë (adapted by Michael McCaffery) from 24 – 25 October in Glór Theatre, Ennis and from 7 – 11 November in Draiocht.

DOUBT by John Patrick Shanley, plays at The Peacock from 25 October – 25 November.

Ballet Ireland present **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**: Moat Theatre, Naas, 27 October; National Concert Hall, 28 – 29 October; Riverside Theatre, Coleraine, 1 – 2 October; Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, 3 October; Watergate Theatre, Kilkenny, 4 October; Backstage Theatre, Longford, 5 October.

Galloglass Theatre presents **WAY TO HEAVEN** by Juan Mayorga (translated by David Johnston) at Parochial Hall Theatre, Clonmel, from 3 - 7 October, then touring to Kilkenny, Limerick, Sligo and Cork.

Bedrock Productions presents **THIS IS NOT A LIFE** by Alex Johnston and devised by Bedrock in Project, Dublin, from 2 – 18 November.

THE TRESTLE AT POPE LICK CREEK by Naomi Wallace from Prime Cut Productions will tour to Linen Hall, Castlebar, 6 November; Garage, Monaghan, 7 - 8 November; Riverside, Coleraine, 9 November;

Dance Theatre of Ireland presents **EXODUS/GRAND JUNCTION** (Ch. Robert Connor & Loretta Yurick (Irl)/Charles Linehan (UK)), playing at the Pavilion Theatre 8 - 11 November; Galway Town Hall, 13 November; Draiocht, 17 November; Mermaid, Bray 22 November; Tipperary Excel, 25 November; The Watergate, Kilkenny 29 November; and Iontas, Castleblaney, 2 December.

SILVERY SNOT



Tinderbox Theatre Company presents **GIRLS & DOLLS** by Lisa McGee, touring from 9 November – 9 December to Drama & Film Centre at Queens and Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast; Water-side Theatre, Derry.

Druid Theatre Company will bring **THE YEAR OF THE HIKER** by John B. Keane to the Glór Theatre, Ennis from 13 – 18 November.

The Opera Ireland Winter Season at the Gaiety Theatre from 18 – 26 November, will feature Puccini's **LA BOHEME** and Previn's **A STREET CAR NAMED DESIRE**.

In Garter Lane Theatre, Waterford, from 20 November – 2 December, Red Kettle Theatre Company will present **BOY SOLDIER** (working title) by Ben Hennessy.

As part of their THREADS season, CoisCéim Dance Theatre presents **OUT OF HARM'S WAY** by David Bolger from 28, 30 November, 2, 6, 8, 9 December; and **HANGING ON BY A THREAD** by Irina Pauls on 27, 29 November, 1, 2, 5, 7, 9 December at Project.

DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL 2006 IRISH HIGHLIGHTS

Rex Levitates presents **CROSS PURPOSES + THE SAME JANE** in Project Upstairs from 11 – 16 September.

Barabbas presents **HAIRDRESSER IN THE**

HOUSE in Andrews Lane Studio from 11 – 16 September.

THE RAINSTORM by TYGER Theatre Company runs at the Axis Arts Centre, Ballymun, from 11 – 16 September.

Third Dimension Theatre Company's **THE HAPPY SUICIDES - THE LAST DAYS OF TONY HANCOCK & KENNETH WILLIAMS** will run at the Mill Theatre Lounge, 11-16 September.

Hungry Ghost Theatre (in association with The Attic Studio) presents **DR DILION & GEORGIA** in T36 (The Teachers' Club) from 11 – 16 September.

From 11 – 16 September, Painted Filly Theatre presents **NOISE** at the International Bar.

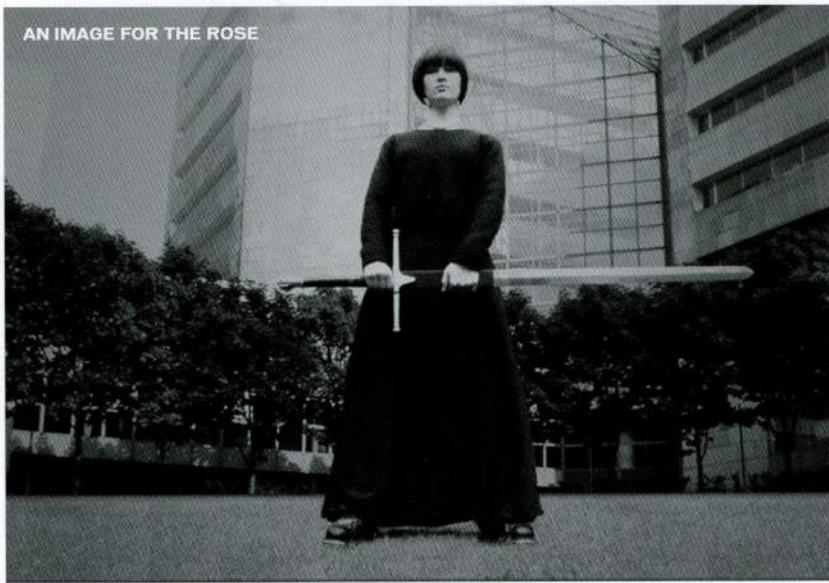
ON THIS ONE NIGHT from Brokentalkers will run from 11 – 16 September (meeting point, Project Arts Centre).

Andrews Lane Theatre presents Mor-Wax Productions' **WHY MEN CHEAT** from 11 – 17 September.

Coalface Theatre Company presents **THE UNFORTUNATE MACHINE-GUNNING OF ANWAR SADAT** in Players Theatre from 11 – 17 September.

Bewleys' Café Theatre in association with Bang Bangs presents **AND THEY USED TO STAR IN THE MOVIES** from 11 – 24

AN IMAGE FOR THE ROSE



from 11 – 24 September.

From 12 – 16 September, Tu Pie Are presents **HEAVEN SCENT?** at Players Theatre, Trinity College.

Fidget Feet present **I CAN'T HANDLE ME** from 12 – 17 September in the Samuel Beckett Theatre.

XSPIRED by Performance Lab runs from 12 – 17 September in Project Cube.

DoppelGäng presents **OZ: A FAIRYTALE PLOT** in Liberty Hall from 12 – 17 September.

From 16/18 – 23 September, The Performance Corporation in association with Once Off Productions will pres-

ent **DRIVE BY** at the Pigeon House.

DEDALUS LOUNGE from Pageant Wagon will be performed at the Samuel Beckett Theatre from 17 – 23 September.

BEHINDTHEEYELIESBONE from Myriad Dance Company will run at the Project Upstairs from 18 – 20 September. (Part of a double-bill, with **SKID MARKS** from Schlotmit Fundaminsky).

Sole Purpose Productions present **AH 6905** at the Dublin Dental Hospital from 18 – 22 September.

Project Cube hosts **REVISIONS** from Making Strange Theatre Company from 18 – 23 September.

DIARY OF A MADMAN will be performed by Blank Canvas at Andrews Lane Studio from 18–23 September.

Landmark Productions' **UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL** runs at Project Cube from 18–23 September.

THE KINGS OF KILBURN HIGH ROAD (Arambe Productions) runs at T36 (The Teachers' Club) from 18–24 September.

From 18–24 September, Volta presents **AN EVENING WITH PRIONSIAS O'FERFAILLE** at Bewleys Café Theatre.

ANTIGONE INTERACTIVE from Lightswitch runs at the International Bar from 18–24 September.

Yucca Productions present **BEAR HUG** in the SS Michael & John from 18–24 September.

Gentle Giant Productions will perform **DANNY & CHANELLE (STILL HERE)** at Crawdaddy POD from 18–24 September.

From 19–23 September Monkeyshine Theatre's **THE GRANDMOTHER** runs at Andrews Lane Theatre.

Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre presents **THE FLOWERBED** in the O'Reilly Theatre from 19–24 September.

THE EVILS OF TOBACCO & THE BEAR by Mangiare Theatre Company will run from



LETTING GO OF THAT WHICH
YOU MOST ARDENTLY DESIRE

19 – 24 September at Filmbase.

At SS Michael & John, Lost Trolley Productions present **BLACK SNOW** from 19 – 24 September.

SILVERY SNOT by Irish Modern Dance Theatre will run from 21 – 23 September in Project Upstairs (part of a triple billing including **BEAUTÉ PLASTIQUE** from Compagnie Etant- donné and **EFFECTO MARIPOSA** from Blanca Arrieta)

SPEAKING IN TONGUES (BORRADH BUAN) will run at the Axis Arts Centre, Ballymun, from 22 – 23 September.

From 22 - 23 September, Rebecca Walter, Lian Bell and Hugh O'Neill will perform **WALK DON'T RUN** at the Dame St/George's Street Intersection.

DUBLIN THEATRE FESTIVAL 2006 IRISH HIGHLIGHTS

Rough Magic's new production, **THE BONFIRE** by Rosemary Jenkinson, will play at the Project Cube from 28 September – 14 October.

FESTEN by Thomas Vinterberg runs at the Gate Theatre from 3 -14 October.

Druid presents **EMPEROR OF INDIA** by Stuart Carolan from 4 -14 October in the Abbey Theatre.

FarCry Productions presents a new

work by Gerard Mannix Flynn, **LETTING GO OF THAT WHICH YOU MOSTARDENTLY DESIRE**, at various locations in the city from 5 - 8 October. (Pictured opposite.)

From 10 - 14 October, Corn Exchange in partnership with Dublin Theatre Festival presents **EVERYDAY** by Michael West (in collaboration with the company) in the Samuel Beckett Theatre.

The Abbey Theatre presents **THE ALICE TRILOGY** written and directed by Tom Murphy in the Peacock Theatre from 10 October - 4 November.

BELFAST FESTIVAL AT QUEEN'S 2006 IRISH HIGHLIGHTS

From 13 October - 4 November, Green Shoots Productions present **HOLDING HANDS AT THE PASCHENDALE** in the Lyric Theatre.

Cahoots NI's new show by Dan Gordon, **ONLY BEELIEVE**, will play at the Tower Street Theatre from 19 - 21 October.

From 19 October - 4 November, Red Lead Arts presents **THE LIVERPOOL BOAT** in The Dockers Club.

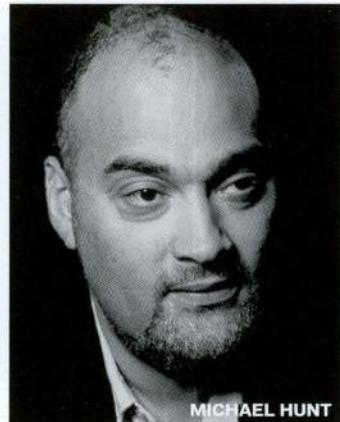
Prime Cut Productions presents **THE TRESTLE AT POPE LICK CREEK** in the Old Museum Arts Centre from 26 October - 4 November.

entrances & exits

TANYA DEAN notes movements behind the scenes in Irish theatre



CATHERINE NUNES



MICHAEL HUNT

DON SHIPLEY is stepping down as Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Dublin Theatre Festival to become one of the co-Artistic Directors of the Stratford Festival of Canada.

CATHERINE NUNES will step down as Artistic Director of International Dance Festival Ireland at the end of the year.

CATHERINE CAREY has been appointed Director of Public Affairs at the Abbey. Prior to joining the Abbey, Catherine worked as Director of Marketing and Development at The Arts Fund, an independent UK funding and advocacy body for the visual arts.

JANE NOLAN has been appointed The-

atre Manager at the Abbey. She previously worked as Assistant Theatre Manager at the Gaiety Theatre.

WENDY DEMPSEY has been appointed General Manager of Dublin Fringe Festival.

JEANETTE McGARRY-KEANE is the new Press and Marketing Officer at the Abbey. She most recently worked as Marketing Officer with the National Chamber Choir.

Also in the Abbey, **JON WOODLEY** has been appointed Assistant Production Manager.

WAYNE JORDAN is the first participant on the Abbey Theatre/Trinity Col-

lege Directing Programme. This will involve an eight-month placement in the Abbey, during which the participant will work in all departments and as assistant director on some productions.

CIAN O'BRIEN is stepping down as Administrator for the Focus Theatre to join Rough Magic's SEEDS3 programme as a producer.

PHILIPPA DONNELLAN has joined Cois-Céim Dance Theatre as Community Dance Director. She previously worked with Green Candle Dance Company and Sadlers Wells in London.

LISA HEANEY has left TEAM Educational Theatre Company as General Manager to train as a chartered accountant. The company is appointing a replacement.

MICHAEL HUNT has left Theatre Royal Waterford to become Chief Executive of Wexford Festival Opera.

ANDREW McLELLAN has left Opera Theatre Company as CEO to go freelance. **RANDALL SHANNON** is replacing him as Acting General Manager on a temporary basis.

HELEN CAREY is stepping down as Director of the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris at the end of the year. **SHEILA**

PRATSCHKE will replace her. Her current position as director of Annaghmakerrig has been advertised (see below).

SITUATIONS VACANT

The Courthouse Arts Centre in Tinhely, Co. Wicklow, is recruiting a new Technical and Front of House Manager. For details contact Sharon Corcoran at 0402-38529 or tinahely@iol.ie.

Barnstorm is seeking a new Administrator/ Public Relations Officer.

Opera Theatre Company is seeking a new Artistic Administrator.

The Association for Professional Dancers in Ireland (APDI) is seeking a General Manager for its new purpose-built dance venue, Dance-House.

Annaghmakerrig, The Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Monaghan, is seeking a new Director to run its artists' workplace retreat.

Big Telly Theatre Company is seeking a Project Manager for its Educational/Heritage Arts programme to run between October 2006 and September 2007.

The Lyric Theatre is seeking a new Marketing Manager.



It's time we found our voice

Considering how dependent it is on State subsidy, the arts sector invests little in ensuring that its interests are communicated effectively in public. What's needed now is an independent arts lobby, argues **MARK MULQUEEN**

THE MANNER IN which the arts community handled the RTÉ Radio One arts coverage issue is a reminder of just how ineffective the Irish professional arts sector remains at articulating a public position on a subject it deems of importance to itself.

On this occasion a semi-state public service broadcaster decided to demote the arts within its overall schedule. The response? A few letters to *The Irish Times* (signed collectively, either out of a misplaced fear of making individual statements or as a token gesture at conveying the impression of cross-sectoral solidarity) an opinion piece from Theatre Forum and an editorial in the same newspaper. This prompted the State's arts development agency to take a very public step into the breach, demanding and securing a high-profile summit be-



tween it and the State broadcaster. The result of this well publicised meeting? The Arts Council announces it will commission a report to inform itself on the subject of arts broadcasting for future reference.

More telling has been the subsequent silence from the arts community, suggesting that it is either satisfied with the promise of a report, despite absolutely no change in the situation that triggered the whole furore, or, that it never *really* cared about the issue in the first place.

Leaving the specific issue aside, one must ask: is this good enough? Is the letters page of a particular national newspaper really the appropriate place for an intrinsically important social, economic and cultural sector of Irish society to seek to make its case on matters it deems so critical?

Ill-conceived letters to newspapers, under-subscribed petitions or publicly heralded meetings that yield no actual result do more harm than good to the strategic advancement of the arts. Such gestures could even be counterproductive, reinforcing a sceptical view – held by some – of the arts as a semi-professional activity that neither takes itself fully seriously nor expects the wider society to do so. Though no doubt well intentioned, these gestures should only be employed when part of a co-ordinated lobby with a clear negotiation position and a defined outcome.

N MY OPINION, WE ARE LIVING ON borrowed time on this issue. Over recent months, predictions that Ireland's economic boom will end, and end soon, have been fed to us on an almost weekly basis. A consequent reduction in Exchequer spending is unavoidable. Cast your mind back to the relatively mild cuts of 2003 and recall just how unprepared the arts sector was to handle their impact. Then imagine the effects of a multi-annual freeze or fall in arts funding.

The reality is that the arts sector competes for its slice of the Exchequer expenditure cake with a wide range of other public services and interest groups. From the construction sector to groups arguing for the needs of the disadvantaged, the public purse is squeezed for all its worth. It is difficult to think of another sector, so dependent

on this income source, that makes its case in such an unstrategic manner.

So, what should be done and where does the responsibility lie?

On this occasion, the responsibility is not with the Arts Council. It is a State agency charged with advising Government, as well as disbursing funds in accordance with State policy. Clearly it cannot also carry out the role of an independent arts representative, nor should it seek to do so. However, the Council's new-found desire to play the role of advocate for the arts should not see it cast, or casting itself, as that which it cannot be: an independent and representative champion for the arts. There is little doubt that the ambiguity arising from this dichotomy, between being a State agency on the one hand and a champion of the sector on the other, contributes to the lack of mobilisation within the sector. The Council's desire to cast itself as such a champion was evident in the case of the *Rattlebag* issue, but its relative impotence, beyond the arts sector, was equally clear.

The arts sector, on the other hand, must be capable of speaking collectively and wholly independently of the State and its agents on core issues. More specifically, a level of both authority *and* responsibility lies with the major cultural bodies around which national resources have long been concentrated. In varying ways, these bodies facilitate each strand of the arts process, from conception to exhibition and perform-

ance. They are the principle commissioners and employers – the major national and regional theatres, galleries and resource organisations. So, in en-

Other sectors of society manage to be far more vocal and convincing in making their case to the State, and to the wider public, without the need for a mini bureaucracy.

joying their leadership status they must also begin to accept particular responsibility for what is a real weakness in the Irish arts scene.

An independent arts lobby need not cost anyone a great sum. Other sectors of society manage to be far more vocal and convincing in making their case to the State, and to the wider public, without the need for a mini bureaucracy. Setting aside the extraordinary influence of interest groups such as the vintners or the trade unions, all sorts business interests such as sporting, tourism, and agricultural groups manage to make their case in a consistently convincing manner.

Key to this is that these groups have representative bodies that stay focussed on fundamentals, such as legislative and budgetary issues. By not drifting into areas such as training, conferences or skills dissemination, they achieve an awful lot on quite slim resources. The increasing number of subsidised art form and artists' bodies might take note. In the case of the arts

sector, such fragmentation of purpose is particularly unnecessary, as these are the very developmental activities that actually *are* the responsibility of the Arts Council.

In fact, our position is very strong. The Irish public holds the arts in high regard; they are seen as a defining feature of our national identity and, even, as a symbol of what is good about Ireland. Added to this is the considerable modernisation / professionalisation undertaken over the last decade that has done much to make the Irish arts a success story. As well as this goodwill, the arts now have a generously resourced and dedicated State agency. Moreover, the presence of a Minister for the Arts at the cabinet table is an advantage to this sector that, arguably, is yet to be fully utilised by it.

So, far from facing a doomsday scenario, it is a matter of seizing the opportunity. It is true that a popular and able sector has neglected to develop an effective platform from which its fundamental needs can be articulated. However, we have the time and know-how to ensure that we are far more prepared for when the current Exchequer expenditure honeymoon ends and each sector will have to argue its corner. Simply put, it's time we found our voice.

Mark Mulqueen is Director of the Irish Film Institute. He was formerly Cork City Arts Officer, and is a current member of the board of Culture Ireland.



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| FOLLOW THAT ENERGY

28

Little John Nee in Limavaddy, My Heart's Delight





Follow that energy

It began as a protest and blossomed into something different. Galway's Project '06 in July had all the hallmarks of a successful fringe festival - and the city is ripe for one, argues director **THOMAS CONWAY**

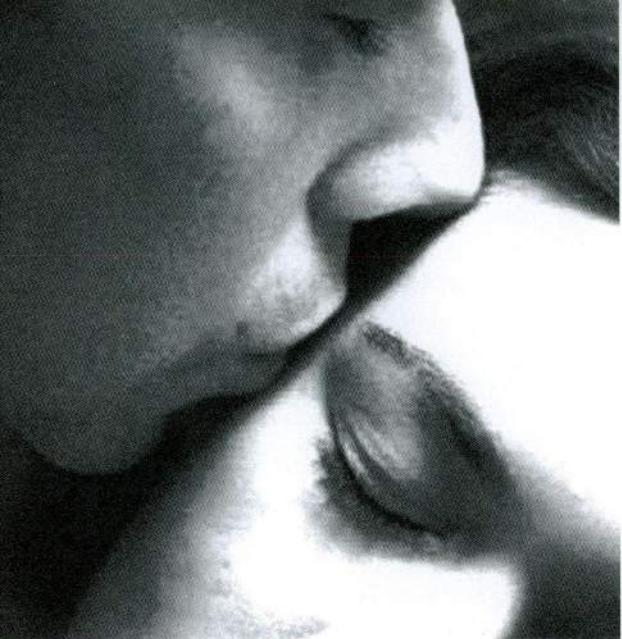
AT SOME POINT SOMEONE IS GOING TO HAVE to tell the uncomfortable truth about Project '06. It went from planning to execution in six months. It fielded thirty-one theatre shows, as well as visual arts, comedy, a children's programme and an impressive music programme. The high quality of its execution – on a shoestring – attests not only the

personal commitment but the organisational acumen of those at its core. It worked, and for reasons that had nothing to do with its wellspring in a protest. Whatever about making the case for the inclusion of more Galway-based artists in Galway Arts Festival, the case it has made for a separate fringe festival has become impossible to ignore.

Project '06 had all the attributes of a successful fringe. It maintained a state of healthy tension with the main festival. It showcased emerging theatre artists in conditions that ensured that their particular signatures came into proper relief. In spaces where there had never before been theatrical activity, there exploded an energy, a spirit of enterprise, a breaking out into new forms, styles, use of locations: in every sense emerging artists were rewriting the rules.

Galway also proved to have an audience that moved easily between the two festivals. Much of Project '06 sold well, if not sold out altogether. Word of mouth sent audiences off to what was hot, and they were duly rewarded, not only with something great but with a sense of getting in on it at the start.

Should the Galway Arts Festival organisers be the ones to discover emerging artists based in Galway? Does it serve these emerging artists best to have Galway Arts Festival showcase their work? Artists such as playwrights Colm Corless



Discovering new locations: Hamlet and Ophelia in a nightclub

Murdering Hole), school rooms (*The Fairgreen Slaughterhouse*), bars (*Restless Sleep on a Bed of Ideas*), theatre foyers (*Horae*), odd corners of church yards (*Zest Féist*), even Ladies Beach on Salthill strand (*Papercuts Buttercup*), to name only the few I've seen. What emerges in the encounter with new acting talent - such as that coming through Galway Youth Theatre - on a fringe as against a main festival?

The Project '06 organisers protest that Galway Arts Festival should be showcasing emerging "Galway-based" artists. In all this, has Project '06 asked why a theatre company has yet to emerge from Galway and gone on to acquire a national and international profile, having first been given a platform by Galway Arts Festival? Or, what genuine-

It should be recognised that Project '06 is saying precisely what any fringe worth its salt says to a main festival: "this is where it's at, right here, and you're missing it".

ly are the conditions in which such a theatre company might emerge in Galway? Catastrophe, a company which has featured in recent Galway Arts Festivals, seems ready to take on the wider Irish scene. In the meantime, it should be recognised that Project '06 is saying precisely what any fringe worth its salt says to a main festival: "this is where it's at, right here, and you're missing it".

Project '06 could readily be put on a permanent footing. But the Project '06 core insist that it was a one-off: a director of a future fringe will have to come from somewhere other than this core, the energy from something other than this specific protest. I'm told time and again in conversations around the city that no

(*The Fairgreen Slaughterhouse*) and Jessica Cooke (*The Murdering Hole*); directors Kelly Colleen MacMahon (*Hamlet and Ophelia*), Caoimhe Connolly (*Crave*) and Cathal Cleary (*The Cripple of Inismaan*). What does the discovery of artistic signatures in locations outside the confines of a main festival signify - locations as diverse and untried as night clubs (*Hamlet and Ophelia*), churches (*The*

such person exists. However, the energy does. Take note: few fringe festivals exist that didn't first start as a protest.

It was never imperative that the performers who came under Project '06's banner should subscribe to its agenda and manifesto. They came saying: "we're untried, talented and this is what we do", and it was eminently enough. They'll come again, and others too, if the opportunity is afforded them. If goodwill in the city holds out, conditions are ripe for a fringe.

Much has been said of the political aspects of Project '06 *vis à vis* Galway Arts Festival - the main festival bringing in non-Galway work, Project '06, as a redress, showcasing Galway-based artists. In all this, I wish it were acknowledged that Project '06 gained its main strength from its independence. While Project '06 can only in the loosest sense be said to have showcased "Galway-based" talent, and only mischievously could Galway Arts Festival be said to have programmed only artists from elsewhere, it should be obvious that these dichotomies are impossible to regulate and are ultimately meaningless in the contemporary context.

Consider. Little Johnny Nee performs in Project '06 his *Limavaddy, My Heart's Delight* and takes us to every part of the globe except Limavaddy itself, in a classroom where a poster announces all the national origins of the schoolkids who have lately occupied it, including Sri Lanka, Lithuania and the USA. The dichotomies of local versus international would become even more unworkable the more a fringe in Galway gained a national, and indeed an international, profile.

Project '06 may well be an indication of the underlying maturity in Galway Arts Festival and the arts scene generally in Galway. Artists showcased in Project '06 will eventually progress to the Galway Arts Festival, enriching Galway itself and Irish and international arts scenes for many years to come. It bears repeating: no independent theatre company in Ireland of any standing and longevity has emerged in conditions other than those of a fringe. With a fringe, Galway will be far better positioned to enable something world class to emerge, just as it has before.

Thomas Conway is a freelance director and New Writing Manager with Druid Theatre Company. He directed the revival of Dael Orlandersmith's *The Gimmick*, staged during Galway Arts Festival 2006.



Two New Third Level Courses in Performance and Directing from NUI Maynooth

NUI Certificate: Performance

This Certificate level course is designed to provide an introduction to actor-training for amateur actors that they can bring back to their local groups, and is also designed as a first step for those who would like to 'try out' or experience acting before investing in further study or training in the area.

Course Aims

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- >> Prepare students for further study in acting and performance
- >> Prepare students for RADA Shakespeare Certificates
- >> Assist people to build confidence and competencies in public presentations

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This course is aimed at the following potential students:

- >> Mature students who wish to train for the theatre industry in Ireland and who would like to be prepared for further study in the field of directing. Those who wish to explore the field to discover if they wish to make a career in it. In this sense the Certificate serves as a skills-based training course for new directors.
- >> Those people in the amateur, youth theatre and community theatre sectors who wish to formalise their experience into specific training, acquire accreditation, and to gain additional skills by doing so.
- >> Those who are emerging directors in the professional theatre and who wish to gain specific skills available from the Certificate and to acquire accreditation.



Course Aims:

- >> To introduce students to the basics of directing for theatre
- >> To prepare students for further study in directing for theatre

Admission Requirements

- >> Participants must be 23 years or over
- >> Have the capacity to complete a course at NUI Certificate level.

Course Duration

- >> 100 hours part-time over 1 year

Location:

Kilkenny Campus (NUI Maynooth), College Rd. Kilkenny

Fee

NUI Certificate in Performance: €995

NUI Certificate in Directing: €1,400



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann MÁ Nuad

For further Information please contact

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(NUI Maynooth),
College Rd., Kilkenny

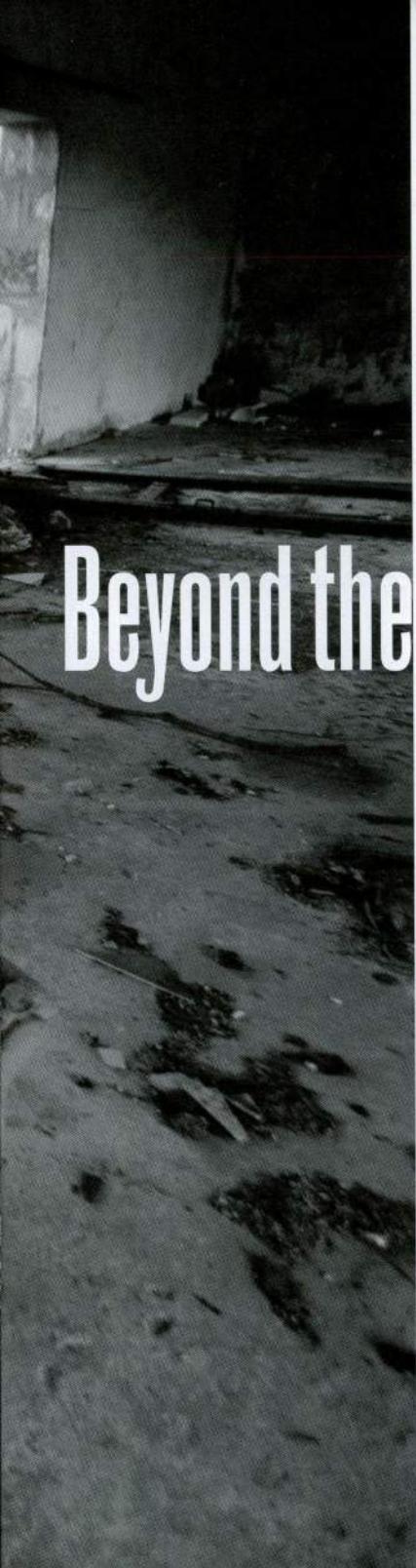
Tel: 056 777 5910/777 5919

Fax: 056 776 1369

Email: kilkenny.campus@nuim.ie

Website: <http://kilkenny.nuim.ie>





Beyond the

Final Curtain

THEATRE MAY BE TRANSIENT by nature and theatre design an essentially ephemeral art form, but for the professionals who deal with the logistics of theatre production, the materials with which a

design is realised can sometimes be all too substantial. After the final curtain call on the final performance of a show; after the audience has left and the performers have retired to the bar; after the work lights have been switched on, the stage crew has arrived for the get-out, the truck has parked outside and any last residue of the fleeting magic of performance has evaporated; then begins a process that will see the physical realisation of a designer's concept gradually transformed from a work of art into little more than an accumulation of unwieldy scrap. De-

pending on the type of show, the theatre company involved and the circumstances of its performance, this process of material decomposition may take anything from a few hours to some years. But, apart from major commercial shows that tour incessantly or enjoy perennial revivals, few production designs are preserved fully intact, with their set, costumes and props all safely stored, for more than two to three years at most.

Because so little remains of their work in terms of tangible, quantifiable artefacts, the creativity of those working in a transient medium such as theatre is always at risk of being undervalued.

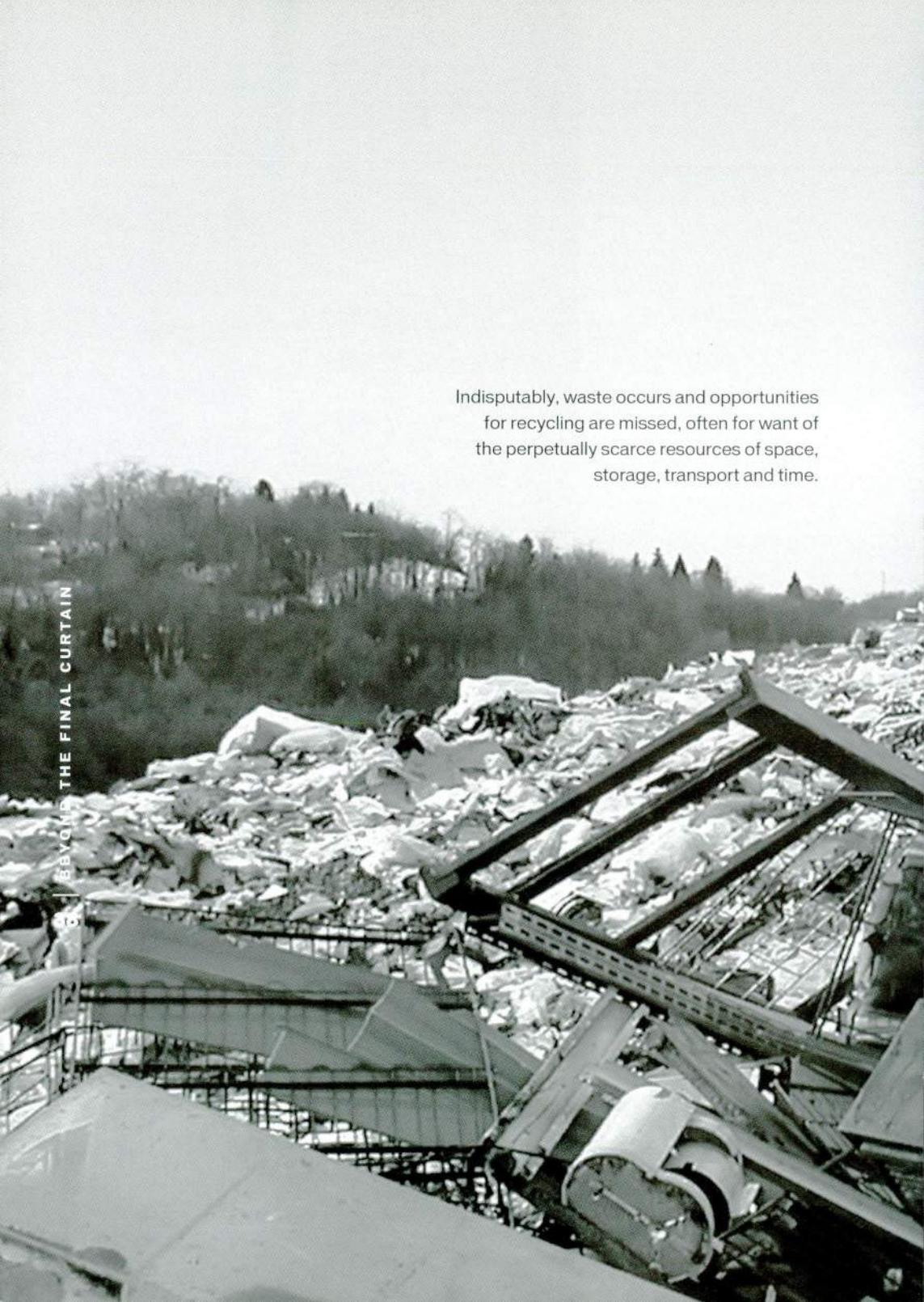
We are accustomed to thinking of an actor's performance as being the most transitory and difficult to document of art forms but

the question of what happens to a designer's contribution to a show once it has ended is also an intriguing one. As part of the upcoming Dublin Theatre Festival, a major exhibition entitled EXTR-acts, which aims to showcase the best of contemporary Irish design for performance, will take place at Dublin City Hall. Produced by the Irish Theatre Institute and curated by John Comiskey, the exhibition will subsequently form the basis for Ireland's first ever submission to the Prague Quadrennial – the foremost international platform for scenography and theatre design, which will next occur in 2007.

One of the many hoped-for benefits of the Dublin exhibition, from the point of view of the organisers, will be to raise the profile of contemporary Irish theatre design in the public consciousness and to give recognition to the talent and excellence of those working in what can sometimes, for a variety of reasons, be viewed as a marginalised discipline. Because so little remains of their work in terms of tangible, quantifiable artefacts, the creativity of those working in a transient medium such as theatre is always at risk of being undervalued.

The remarkable Scene Change exhibition - held two years ago as part of the AbbeyOneHundred celebrations - demonstrated that it is possible, where they have survived intact, to present designers' drawings and models, together with production photographs, as artistically viable exhibits in their own right, as well as providing valuable documentary evidence of the rich history of theatre design in this country. While the formidable archives of the National Theatre made that exhibition a possibility, one imagines that the organisers of EXTR-acts face a considerable challenge in gathering materials from the broader Irish theatre community and the independent sector in particular, where the preservation and archiving of designers' paperwork and preparatory materials is more haphazard. Presumably many of the material artefacts of recent important productions, the ➤



A black and white photograph showing a vast industrial waste facility. In the foreground, several long, dark conveyor belts are visible, moving through a massive pile of discarded materials, likely plastic or paper. The ground is covered in a thick layer of trash. In the background, there's a dense line of trees and some industrial buildings under a clear sky.

Indisputably, waste occurs and opportunities
for recycling are missed, often for want of
the perpetually scarce resources of space,
storage, transport and time.



'relics' (as the programme notes describe them) that might give spectators a more concrete grasp of how a design functioned in its original context, have already, in just five years, been lost, recycled or simply disposed of.

Although it may seem a shame that the material realisations of so many beautiful designs for the theatre are disassembled and destroyed, it would be ab-

solutely incorrect to infer that such destruction stems from any disregard for the importance of designers' work. Outside the very specific context of an exhibition such as EXTR-acts, the issue

Practicality and economics, rather
than the needs of posterity, are the principal
determining factors in how companies deal with
the aftermath of a production.

of preserving and documenting theatre designers' work bears only an oblique relation to the question of what actually happens to the material elements of any given design after a show's run has ended. For the companies who engage in the difficult and expensive process of mounting performances, and for the production managers who co-ordinate the material aspects of that process from start to finish, practicality and economics, rather than the needs of posterity, are the principal determining factors in how they deal with the aftermath of a production.

Irish theatre in general, and more particularly the infrastructure that supports it, is far from a homogenous entity. Broadly speaking, the theatre scene in this country is characterised by a lack of producing venues and an abundance of independent, essentially baseless companies, all competing for a finite pool of production resources. However, even within those parameters, companies differ greatly in terms of size, productivity, accommodation and financial clout and their ability to deal efficiently with the material remains of a show, and possibly to recoup resources already invested, varies accordingly.

Ostensibly it may seem like the easiest and most desirable option for any company which has invested months of effort and thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of euro in painstakingly realising a designer's concept, to simply keep all the material elements of a show indefinitely, in case they may be used again. However, for the majority of independent Irish companies who operate from small offices (if even that) storage space is an extremely finite resource, and a highly expensive one at that. The storage costs for a large scale set - one that would fill a 40ft container for example - can run to hundreds of euro per month, particularly in Dublin, where storage space is at a premium.

Taking the high price of transport and labour into account, for busy production companies who may be storing two or three separate productions simulta-



neously, the cost of simply keeping something can quickly become prohibitive. The possibility of a show touring is, for most companies, the only real motivation for keeping a production fully intact and sets often spend years in storage without ever being re-used, only to be scrapped subsequently.

For many small companies, long-term commercial storage is not a viable option, while at the other end of the production scale, some large shows are not designed to tour in their original format, and so frequently the process of dismantling a production begins immediately. Once a company embarks on this process, waste, in both the economic and environmental sense, quickly becomes an issue. But given the high cost of transport and storage, the desire for production managers to simply, cheaply, quickly and cleanly get rid of those elements of a design which are not easily reusable can be overwhelming. It may seem incongruous that a relatively close-knit and permanently cash-strapped community such as that of Irish theatre can generate what is perceived to be so much waste, but when the real costs, financial and logistical, of salvaging and re-using materials are factored in, it is perhaps surprising that more doesn't make its way directly from the stage to the skip.

Even giving away potentially useful items for nothing can prove difficult. Charitable organisations are justifiably picky about what they will accept as donations, while advertising on barter websites such as Freecycle or Jumbletown and waiting for genuine responses takes time – often one of busy production

managers' least plentiful resources. And despite the best of intentions, even the most seemingly suitable recycling arrangements can go wrong. Tales are told of a commune somewhere in the country which was happy to take all the wood that the theatre community could throw at them to use for fuel until they realised that most of it had, of course, been fireproofed.

Most Irish venues and arts centres, particularly those built in recent years, tend to be largely devoid of storage or workshop facilities and are ill equipped to function as anything more than receiving houses.

longer use with other companies in need of resources, and nothing of value would ever be dumped. In reality, the ability of the theatre sector in general to re-use and recycle materials in numerous productions is hampered by a whole variety of complicating factors, not least of which is the nature of the raw materials used in production. This is especially true of many of the materials used in set construction. A skip full of wood, for example, may seem wasteful, but once raw materials have been cut, shaped, textured or painted, then the subsequent effort and labour costs involved in re-conditioning them for re-use could make salvage a false economy.

Other design elements succeed much better in avoiding the skip and being put to multiple good uses. Many companies can store costumes and some props, and a healthy trade exists in these commodities, often aided by large storage facilities, such as those enjoyed by the Abbey (pictured on preceding pages) and the Gate, and by commercial hire businesses. Technical equipment and other non-consumable resources such as risers, masking and cycloramas for example, all enjoy a high degree of mobility between different venues and production companies, again facilitated by hire companies and long established practices of swapping favours.

Industry-run information services have begun to appear to assist with this flow of resources, such as Theatre Forum's barter pages or the more bluntly named "Beg, Borrow and Steal" section of the recently established AIST website. Word of mouth, however, is still the most valuable asset in this theatrical economy, with production managers, particularly those who freelance, ideally placed to both source and disseminate re-useable commodities. Indisputably, waste still occurs however, and opportunities for recycling are presumably missed, often

Needless to say, in an idealised theatre world, companies would save vast amounts of money by salvaging the materials from their last production to use in their next, or by trading whatever they could no

for want of the perpetually scarce resources of space, storage, transport and time.

For the theatrical community as a whole in this country, infrastructure is, obviously, a fundamental element in determining efficiency. Companies that enjoy a permanent home in the form of their own venue can capitalise on benefits such as storage and perhaps less pressurised production schedules. Set builders with adequate workshops and space are in a much stronger position to take back and re-use raw materials than those without. Large producing houses such as the Abbey have the resources to salvage, keep and recycle whole scenic elements such as floors, cloths and furniture where viable. Designers themselves even, given the opportunity, sometimes choose to keep and reuse some of the raw materials that go into creating their work. Flexibility and co-operation are key factors in facilitating the many different ways in which companies create work, and yet the majority of Irish companies function as isolated entities.

Most Irish venues and arts centres, particularly those built in recent years, tend to be largely devoid of storage or workshop facilities, and as such are ill equipped to function, in technical terms at least, as anything more than receiving houses for the companies that use them. While a wholesale switch away from the largely independent structure of Irish theatre towards in-house production is certainly not to be advocated and would surely damage the diversity we currently enjoy, there are perhaps practical advances, such as shared storage facilities for instance, or better salvage services, which might ease some of the burden of production on individual companies and reduce the amount of wasted resources.

Lisa Mahony is a graduate in Drama and Theatre Studies, from Trinity College Dublin. She currently works as a technician at Project Arts Centre and contributes reviews to this magazine. 



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Writing lives, theatrical acts

Two remarkable women of the theatre, Augusta Gregory and Margaretta D'Arcy, are viewed through the lens of gender in these new studies. **BELINDA McKEON** disentangles their lives from their biographies.

If the act of writing must be firmly yoked to gender politics, as it is to varying degrees in these two volumes about women's lives in the thick of theatre and theatricality, then the act of biography, whether of the self or of another, is likely to be towed along the same path. And a risky path this can be. In her new life of Lady Augusta Gregory, having ventured roughly one third of the way into the staggeringly complex and colourful life of her subject, Judith Hill pauses a moment to offer a curious view on the female biographer. Describing how, in the wake of her husband's death in 1892, Gregory wrote an account of his ec-

centric friends at the Athenaeum Club, Hill neatly sketches both Gregory's ability as a writer and the extent to which her baptism by fire, as a young wife in the social scene of aristocratic London, may have quickened and sharpened her way with words. Hill dubs Gregory's fond piece "the literary equivalent of dinner conversation," written as much as a debunking of eccentricity as it

was in homage to certain literary figures. Yet Hill then suggests that this approach was not the result of a stylistic decision on Gregory's part, as much as it was the mark of her sex: the essay showed "that if written from a woman's perspective, biogra-

LADY GREGORY:

AN IRISH LIFE

by Judith Hill

Sutton Publishing 2005

LOOSE THEATRE:

MEMOIRS OF A GUERRILLA

THEATRE ACTIVIST

by Margaretta D'Arcy

Trafford Publishing and

Women's Pirate Press, 2005



Dearbhle Crotty as *Lady Gregory* in
Beauty in a Broken Place

phy might be incomplete, partly subjective, based on oral sources; quite different from the authoritative portraits being incorporated in *The National Dictionary of Biography*.

Even if it refers strictly to the "woman's perspective" of Gregory's era, this is an extraordinary assertion. It strays with damaging effect into what has been up to this point a frustratingly flat recounting of a life which, by the mid 1890s, had already reached an impressive pitch: marriage well above her birth; several months a year spent travelling and mixing in high-born society in Europe, North Africa and India; involvement in the politics of the Land Act in Ireland and the fight for nationalism in Europe; a love affair with a political opponent of her husband (Wilfred Blunt, who would eventually be jailed for his disidence); motherhood (to a son she barely saw); the management of an estate; and a confident start as a commentator and writer of poems and plays. In short, even halfway through her years, Gregory had already lived the sort of life that calls for the focus of an "authoritative portrait", that is, for a biographer committed to finding and backing sufficient material to build an account that is more than a chronicle, more than a work of relatively light analysis.

Although it is intended as a scholarly work, Hill's biography does not display sufficient breadth of, or adept-

ness with, primary sources to earn that tag. In fact, much like the type of biography she ties to the "woman's perspective", it comes across as incomplete and, in places, subjective. Opportunities to draw more fully stories that have been merely outlined by biographers of writers connected to Gregory (Foster on Yeats, Murray on O'Casey) are too often missed. Foster has already related the myth that Gregory's son was, in an arrangement presided over by her husband, fathered by a local blacksmith. Hill does little more than to acknowledge the existence of this myth when, as Gregory's biographer, it is surely her responsibility to dig further. Telling of Gregory's love affair with Blunt, Hill refers to diary entries and letters without quoting from them thoroughly enough to give more than a sketchy picture of what must have been a deeply exciting time in Gregory's life.

Much later, the impressions of her involvement in the founding and running of the Abbey Theatre come across as watercolours rather than as the rich oils they should be. Fascinating aspects of Gregory's character – her kindness to her tenants, her apparent despisal of Catholicism, her dread and avoidance of suffragism, her scepticism as to whether a famine had existed in Ireland, her antagonism to England – are presented, too often, in fleeting terms. Insights begin to emerge, patterns of analysis begin to form, but

There is a rich exploration of how Gregory's immersion, as a young wife, in the politics of imperialism shaped the brusque, business-like attitude for which she would come to be revered and feared in equal measure by those who encountered her.

are forgotten as Hill moves on, skimming the details, never fully grasping her subject.

This problem has nothing to do with the woman's perspective, but everything to do with the challenge of gaining a perspective, within too short a work and perhaps too short a research period, on a woman whose life encompassed so much. At the few points at which Hill does slow her pace and narrow her focus, the results are satisfying. There is a rich exploration of how Gregory's immersion, as a young wife, in the politics of imperialism shaped the brusque, business-like attitude for which she would come to be revered and feared in equal measure by those who encountered her in the Dublin theatre scene.

There is a memorable report of Gregory's time in America, when an Abbey tour yielded a personal lecture tour, romance with the wealthy patron John Quinn, and the threat of arrest, not to mention death threats, from Irish-Americans (and pseudo-Irish Americans) angered by the run of Syn-



ge's *Playboy*. Well drawn, too, is the desolation of the period following her son Robert's death, made more desolate still by war in Ireland, which raged brutally around the walls of Coole, forcing her eventually to acquiesce to its being sold by her daughter-in-law.

Predictably enough, however, it is for its account of the friendship, the collaboration, and the co-dependence between Gregory and W.B. Yeats that the biography is most valuable. There is little new material – again, far more source material can be found in Foster – but there is, whether intended or not, an almost comical undertone in the setting out of their relationship as it wound its strange course through infatuation and indulgence. It casts Yeats in a deeply unflattering light: simpering, selfish and spoiled by Gregory even as a man of fifty.

Over the years, she gave him her money (the equivalent of €40,000 today), her words (he acknowledged that she had written much of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, but gave her no credit, a tactic which would be repeated again and again, with her consent) and her house (he occupied the master bedroom at Coole, even when Robert and his wife had moved there), only

to be described, at the last, as "an old woman sinking into the infirmities of age" in his acceptance speech for the Nobel prize. Still, she deferred to him. Hill does not fully account for the reasons behind such deference, pointing mostly to Victorian womanhood as a sort of cloak behind which Gregory could hide as she worked for the things which mattered to her – her son, her poet, her theatre, and her "impossible country".

IRELAND HAS PROVEN AN "IMPOSSIBLE country", too, for Margaretta D'Arcy, the formidable England-born playwright and activist who has lived in Galway for many years. Like Gregory, she was a collaborator in a theatrical relationship for which she gained unequal credit; with her partner, John Arden, she created dozens of works for stage and radio. Like Gregory, she faced arrest for her work in theatre; unlike Gregory, she actually spent time behind bars – three months in Armagh prison for a demonstration in a museum during the H-block protests. And, like Gregory, she takes a fragmented approach to the task of memoir-writing: like the early drafts of Gregory's *Seventy Years* described by Hill, D'Arcy's autobiography is presented as "extracts cut, spliced, reassembled and not fully (sometimes not even) identified" or referenced.

D'Arcy's approach to editing is novel (the book is self-published),

and demands patience from the reader, as she lurches from format to format – anecdote, diary entry, scripts, lists and records – and from one era to another – Jewish ancestry, adolescence in Ireland, apprenticeship at the Royal Court, motherhood in Galway, a long protest outside the Arts Council in Dublin, a surreal and at times nightmarish period at the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common in the 1980s - without much evidence of an overarching scheme. But a scheme, after all, does exist: that of "loose theatre", the art form - based on the idea that theatricality can be enacted anywhere, at any time - to which she has dedicated herself over a long, and continuing, career on the margins.

D'Arcy's book is of value not so much as a document of the British progressive theatre scene of the 1970s and 1980s – the scene from which she emerged – but as an exploration, indeed as a biography, of the radical sense of theatricality developed within that scene and of how it can be lived as well as performed. As is illustrated by the diary excerpts from places as diverse as the nascent Galway Theatre Workshop in the 1970s to economically depressed London in the 1980s, from Belfast at the height of the Troubles to Gateshead during the Gulf War, the drive to make theatre has always been the foremost drive in D'Arcy's life; a drive, she in-



John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, co-authors and partners

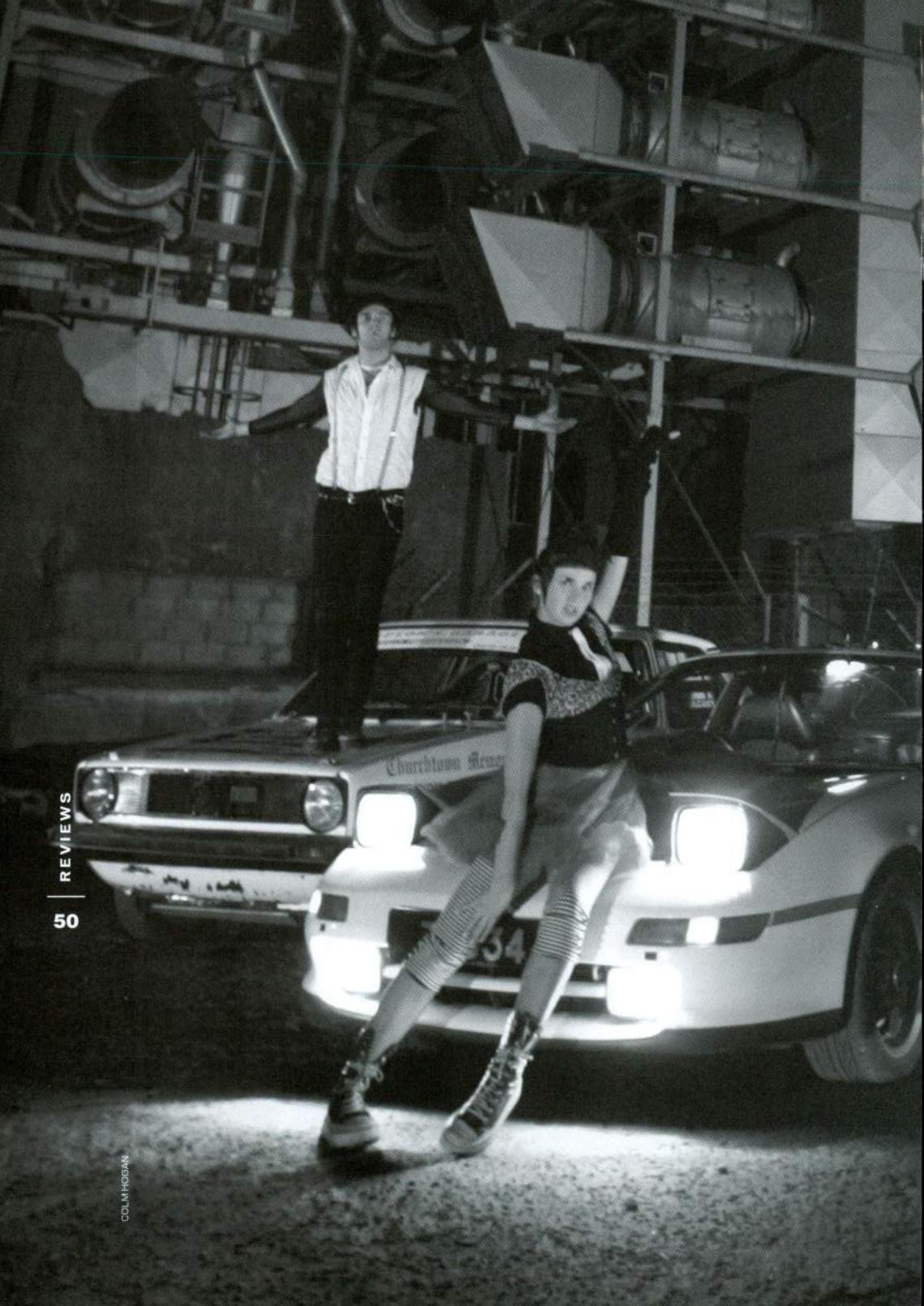
timates at several points, even above that of motherhood.

Pregnant in Bristol in the 1960s with her third son, she finds herself "naturally inclined to birth" – the birth of yet another new mode of theatricality. The neighbours she has talked to daily become part of an alternative theatre group which has its rehearsals in her flat, between cots and pushchairs. It is from a theatre – the Royal Court – that D'Arcy and Arden get what she describes as their "feeling of family". That feeling clearly existed for her also, albeit in a more troubled form, at the women's camps at Greenham Common and at Armthorpe, where the mines were closed in 1993.

D'Arcy's memoir breaks new

ground as an account of radical popular culture because of the lens through which it views that culture, at once self-consciously and with an odd and often poignant artlessness: the lens of gender, the perspective of womanhood. As an autobiography written from this perspective, her approach is at once a realisation and a rebuttal of the approach envisioned by Hill: "incomplete, partly subjective, based on oral sources" but at the same time stridently authoritative, and in its very oddness and its fractured form is a theatrical act which, while not unproblematic, is ultimately compelling. 

Belinda McKeon is a journalist and critic currently based in New York.



Watching the Spectacle

ITM's team of critics gets to grips with the past three months' productions around the country. Some of these reviews were first published on our website: www.irishtheatremagazine.ie



Aidan Turner, Ailish Symons and Tadg Murphy in *Drive-By*

Women in the picture

A woman on her deathbed confronts her alter ego; a London socialite exposes her sexual double-standards; a frustrated wife rejects feminism and dances the night away. Our reviewers take a look at the gender issues raised by three very different portraits of women.

WOMAN AND SCARECROW

by Marina Carr

The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

Directed by Ramin Gray

With Brid Brennan, Peter Gowen, Stella

McCusker, Fiona Shaw.

16 June to 15 July 2006. Reviewed 21 June

BY LYN GARDNER

A RESTLESS WOMAN LIES GAUNT AND seriously ill in a bed. There is something nasty in the wardrobe waiting to come out. It growls and claws and emits an ominous noise like a far off roll of thunder that is drawing ever nearer. Childhood fears of something lying in wait in the bedroom, ready to emerge and swallow you up as soon as darkness falls, combine with a touch of Stella Gibbon's *Cold Comfort Farm* in the latest play from Marina Carr.

Full of the kind of laughter used as a protective charm that you hear echoing off the walls of the lunatic asylum, and howling with rage and poetry, Carr's play offers an extended two-hour deathbed scene as Fiona

Shaw's bedridden unnamed Woman – mother of eight children and one-time abandoned wife and passionate lover – wrestles with the bedclothes and the demons of regret, watched over by Scarecrow (Brid Brennan), who may or may not be her soul. She also endures occasional bedside visits from her feckless husband, Him (Peter Gowen) and her clucking, unsympathetic Auntie Ah (Stella McCusker).

This could well be a tad on the dull side, for in the theatre – as in life – waiting for the dying to actually die is a period of suspension, not action. But although the evening is inevitably static, it motors along because Carr enlivens it with such mordant wit that the writing never seems other than vibrantly alive. As the Woman comments, dying feels "a bit prosaic, all said. It feels more like I'm drifting into a bad-tempered menstrual sleep". Later she admits that it has some advantages for the figure: "Now finally I have achieved bones. I am graveyard chic."



Stella McCusker and Fiona Shaw in *Woman and Scarecrow*

But it is not all pesky jokes and references to Demis Roussos' gargantuan appetite ("The man ate nine lobsters in one sitting. Now that's what I call a passion for living"). *Woman and Scarecrow* is about our own under-developed passion for life: it is a meditation on how it is only in dying that we really understand how to live, and the way we all carry our own deaths around with us during every second of our lives—even when purchasing a pair of crocodile shoes on an over-stretched Visa card.

It is not an entirely original thought – but then what in the theatre is? – and

the crocodile shoes are a wholly authentic touch. There is something both immensely touching and completely barmy about both the shoes and the play. Particularly when the something nasty in the wardrobe does eventually emerge in all its beaky, gothic, vengeful glory. The writing is so moist and so distinctly female and Irish, that it is the kind of play that has English theatre critics rushing home for a medicinal dose of David Hare.

It is, however, its unashamed, cackling womanliness and its Irishness that lend it its distinction. Carr's play offers echoes of Yeats and Beckett but

never pastiche. She doesn't copy, she steals, and in the process creates something maverick and original; she is like a deep-sea diver who has dredged our collective memory of every play and every death we have ever witnessed, even the memory of our own death yet to come. It is the reason this play more than deserves its berth at the Royal Court Upstairs.

Another reason is the presence of Fiona Shaw, a great classical actor who, astonishingly, is here making her debut in her first piece of entirely original new writing. Shaw – who barely moves from the bed in two hours – not only anchors the play physically, but also emotionally. Sometimes in the past she has seemed in danger as middle-age approaches of metamorphosing into an Irish Maggie Smith, all studied twitches and mannerisms. Here however she not only demonstrates her undoubted gift for comedy, jabbing at the lines with wonderful precision but also a restraint that always serves the writing first. Ramin Gray's unembellished production finds the grace notes in the play and if the final moments tumble into something a little too tragicomic, then perhaps it also finds a truth by showing that like life itself, death isn't pretty but messy and rancorous. I wept anyway.

Lyn Gardner writes about theatre for the
Guardian.

THE CONSTANT WIFE

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Gate Theatre, Dublin

Directed by Alan Stanford

With Stephen Brennan, Simon Coates,

Susan Fitzgerald, Michael James Ford,

Laurence Foster, Paris Jefferson, Catriona Ni

Mhurchú, Judith Roddy, Jade Yourell.

1 June – 2 Sept 2006; reviewed 26 June 2006

BY SARA KEATING

DESPITE THE CENTRALITY OF FEMALE characters in W. Somerset Maugham's works, popular mythology has created him as one of twentieth century literature's greatest misogynists. A bitter public divorce (from Syrie Wellcome in 1927 after eleven years of marriage) and his sexual preference for male company seem largely to blame for this superficial caricature of the writer and his work. However, *The Constant Wife*, his most popular drama both during his life and in literary posterity, plays out the various possibilities of the feminist position and comes down favourably on the woman's side. For, when Constance Middleton, the play's eponymous heroine, declares that "The modern wife...is a prostitute who doesn't deliver the goods", she has already proved that she is far more virtuous than those wives she condemns.

Written in 1933, when the suffrage movement and political emancipation had ushered in an era of sexual



Simon Coates and Jade Yourell in *The Constant Wife*

liberation for women, the play presents Constance (Paris Jefferson), the loyal wife to esteemed surgeon John Middleton (Simon Coates). John's extra-marital indiscretions are the most popular subject of gossip within Constance's immediate circle of female friends and family, who are unsure whether they should tell her about her husband's infidelity. The play's intrinsic plot device, which demonstrates Constance's composure, constancy, and clear-headed thinking, is that she already knows that her husband is having an affair. Her silence

is not submission, but a strategy for dealing with his infidelity; Constance is the first to admit that she and John are no longer sexually attracted to each other, but marriage is a partnership that she subscribed to on her wedding day and she is prepared to fulfil her end of the contract – as long as it suits her anyway.

When John's impropriety is rudely brought to her attention by another's indiscretion, Constance is forced into action. However, she has already negotiated a set of personal standards for her marriage through which she

will emerge as the victorious party rather than the betrayed. She agrees with her mother Mrs Culver (Susan Fitzgerald) that it is natural that John should look elsewhere for sexual fulfilment when he isn't getting it at home. She also agrees with her best friend Barbara Fawcett (Caitríona Ní Mhurchú) that taking a job would give her economic freedom and thus emotional independence, limiting the capacity for her being hurt by her husband again. However, Constance will not agree with her younger sister Martha (Judith Roddy) that divorce should be her natural reaction, but would prefer to negotiate her marriage difficulties on her own terms.

Constance takes a job, but not for the symbolic freedom that her own career will offer. No, once she can pay her own way in her husband's household, Constance's believes herself entitled to break the double standards that make infidelity a natural rite of passage for men but a social sin for a woman. The exterior social tenets that still structure the behaviour of women, despite their recent suffrage victory, are shattered by Constance in the play's closing moments as she disappears to Italy in a certain moral victory for the modern independent woman. Maugham, the fabled misogynist, comes down firmly against the double standards governing the gender divide, and a modern audience, faced with not dissimilar issues even

to the present day, cannot help but applaud.

Despite its period setting, there is much contemporary relevance in the issues that the articulate female characters in the play debate, particularly in this country when we reflect that the gender-inflected determination of women's domestic responsibilities in Article 41 of *Bunreacht na h-Éireann* was only put forth for amendment early last year (of course, these changes were as much to do with equalising male rights within the home, as liberating women from the legally sanctioned ideological subservience of the Irish Constitution). It is strange, then, that Eileen Diss' supremely stylish set fails to capitalise on such contemporary reflection; her meticulous recreation of an Edwardian drawing room directs the play towards the genteel past despite the fact that the 1930s setting could have incorporated some more remarkable Art Deco design into the interior setting than a token lampshade.

Such modernist touches would have been particularly appropriate because Constance herself is an interior designer, but they would also have reflected the contemporary fashion for gentrifying period red-bricks in city-centre Dublin. Peter O'Brien's unusual and wonderfully constructed costumes are more authentic: at times garish and angular, they reflect the transition from the

masculine styles of the Jazz Age to the more elegant celebration of femininity in early 1940s fashions.

Under the pacy direction of Alan Stanford, the female cast steal the show from the bumbling peripheral men: even Stephen Brennan, as Constance's old flame Bernard Kersal, disappears into the intellectual fabric that the women create with their witty barbs, one-liners, and earnest debate about their rights as marital partners. Paris Jefferson is luminous as the victorious Constance, her charm and charisma winning the argument for the self-possessed independent woman. Even if Constance's plans to return to her husband at the end of her illicit voyage seem questionable, Jefferson's personal magnetism ensures a palatable ending to the evening's entertainment.

While this satisfactory finale ensures that the play will be an undisputable commercial success, this is no prostitution for the commercial mass: the preceding action has certainly delivered the intellectual goods. Instead, it will provoke lively debate over post-theatre menus, and you can be sure that it will be the women diners who have the last word.

Sara Keating has recently completed a PhD on twentieth-century Irish drama at Trinity College Dublin, and writes about theatre and visual arts for various publications.

WALLFLOWERING

by Peta Murray

Tall Tales

Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Directed by Muirne Bloomer and David Horan.

With Helen Norton, Mal Whyte,

Diane O'Keeffe, Icleiber Klaus.

On tour, 18 May – 18 June. Reviewed 8 June.

BY TANYA DEAN

PETA MURRAY'S TOUCHING, FUNNY, and sometimes wistful play vividly dramatises the everyday struggle against mediocrity. It is also a tale about ballroom dancing, which can often seem like mediocrity wrapped in sequins and wearing a fixed smile. Cliff Small (Mal Whyte) is engaged in a familiar battle, constantly striving to prove that he is a "unique and special snowflake", that the universe notices and smiles upon him – while also fighting the nagging thought that he may just be very ordinary after all. In contrast, his wife Peg (Helen Norton) spends much of her time guiltily apologising for not wanting to be unique and special, before beginning to rediscover her own self-worth.

Turning the theatre into a virtual house of mirrors, these two characters are presented for the audience's viewing pleasure by four different actors. Whyte and Norton play the middle-aged Smalls, but also onstage are "Dancing Cliff" (Icleiber Klaus) and "Dancing Peg" (Diane O'Keeffe), shadows cast from the couple's days



Helen Norton, Mai Whyte, Icleiber Klaus and Diane O'Keefe in *Wallflowering*

as former ballroom dancing champions. While Whyte and Norton gaze with wistful envy at their younger selves, Klaus and O'Keefe waltz, twirl, and sparkle their way across the stage, dancing in mute tribute to the couple's glory days.

Believing himself capable of greatness, Cliff confidently explains that he is merely awaiting the spark, the moment when his latent genius will suddenly bloom, not seeing that his crucial flaw is his lack of imagination. Cliff obviously loves his wife and does not seek to repress her, but his narcissism means that he unthinkingly (although not cruelly) sees his wife

as an adjunct to him. When she begins to discover interests outside of their marriage, Cliff is hurt and confused: he never connects the similarities between her attempt to forge an identity independent of her role as wife and mother, and his own attempts at self-improvement.

Such inequality within a marriage is never satisfactorily explored in *Wallflowering*, and the gender politics of the piece raise a few problems. Norton's wickedly credible description of Peg's lunches with her friends shows a woman cowed by her newly empowered peers, who are fresh from the discovery of feminism and ready to scorn

any female who finds quiet contentment in domesticity. "You're not happy", they insist scathingly, "You can't be". Perhaps, but the stereotypical, tyrannical version of feminism portrayed here does not seem an attractive alternative to a bland marriage. Faced with two unappealing choices, Peg is never allowed to articulate any clear ideology of her own.

Instead, *Wallflowering* uses dance to communicate her restlessness (although it does not indicate which direction this restlessness should be channelled). Peg asserts her burgeoning independence by begging Cliff to let her lead the dance. Startled out his narcissism, Cliff cannot adapt to his wife's transformations. "These are championship moves," he argues. "We've always won with these." This sea-change in their relationship is indicated by Dancing Peg and Dancing Cliff. In the second act, they switch from graceful waltzes to strutting across the stage in a deliberately sexualised dance. Cliff obviously feels awkward and embarrassed by his alter ego's gyrations – but Peg stares enviously at her uninhibited avatar. Here the split between public and private self in *Wallflowering* is at its most overt: even after reading all the *de rigueur* feminist tomes, Peg is unable to articulate her own sexuality, but can only watch enviously as it is enacted.

This use of dance as a tool for the communication of inner turmoil is

very engaging, but perhaps a little simplistic. Dance never becomes a catalyst for the improvement of the Smalls' lives; it merely acts as a signifier of their desire for change. This newly found desire is seen as a positive moment of personal growth for Peg and latterly Cliff, but *Wallflowering* tapers off before it translates into any tangible improvement in their lives. The stark difference between the graceful Dancing Cliff and Peg and their awkward real-life counterparts is obviously meant to indicate a clash between inner and outer self, but it is never clear if a rapport is reached between the two, or if the glamour of the inner life is subsumed in the acceptance of the need to transfer the quest for happiness to the more mundane outer life.

However, despite some mixed messages, this production as directed by Muirne Bloomer and David Horan, is possessed of an irresistible charm, aided by excellent casting and strong performances all round, particularly by Norton. *Tall Tales* puts centre stage two people who might easily be discounted, and gently persuades the audience to empathise with these insecure, run-of-the-mill people who occupy that tender place between extraordinary and the mundane.

Tanya Dean recently graduated from Trinity College with a B.A. in Theatre Studies and Classics. She is General Manager of this magazine.

Reports from the Global Village

Irish companies increasingly explore plays by international writers in order to comment on life in this country. In recent months we've had stagings of Turgenev adapted by Brian Friel, drawing parallels between the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and pre-revolutionary Russia, while Joe Penhall's attack on the British health service has some lessons for our own. Our critics take note.

IT'S A SHORT LIFE

by Stanislav Stratiev

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

The Factory, Sligo

Directed by Emmanuel Vacca

With John Carty, Ciaran McCauley, Kellie

Hughes and Sandra O Malley

1-12 August 2006. Reviewed 5 August

BY DIARMUID O'BRIEN

WE HAVE ALL HAD BRUSHES WITH bureaucracy – a good indicator is if you know your PPS number off by heart – so that we've learned to accept a certain amount of it as part of modern life. However, the audience for *It's A Short Life* barely get a chance to settle into their seats before the actors bustle out and ask everybody to stand for a roll call. As our names (from the advance bookings, I hope) are ticked off the list, we question our eerie promptness to answer to anyone with an authoritarian air and a clipboard. It's an elegant way to set

the tone for this inventive and brutally funny addition to Blue Raincoat's singular repertoire.

Considered Bulgaria's foremost satirist, playwright Stanislav Stratiev (1941-2000) would have known a thing or two about being at the mercy of insensitive authoritarian forces. During the bulk of his lifetime, Bulgaria embraced a particularly stern communism before later undertaking a difficult and outstandingly corrupt transition into democracy. Stratiev's work typically demonstrates the Kafkaesque misadventures of powerless people, who try to actually get something done in the face of an apathetic system.

The victim of the play is an architect, a position of some standing (his Lada 1500 is a coveted status symbol), who one day righteously decides to make the world that little bit better. He intends, as chair of Sofia's building commission, to veto the con-



John Carty, Sandra O'Malley, Ciaran McCauley and Kellie Hughes in *It's A Short Life*

struction of yet another set of bleak tower blocks, as he feels they are not fit to house human beings. However, on his way to strike this blow for humanity, he loses a crucial and far-reaching button on his trousers. Forced to hold them up with both his hands, our hero wanders through a hostile labyrinth of tower blocks, seeking help in vain from their indifferent occupants, the very people whose conditions he intends to better.

Upon first glance, the set, designed by Carol Betera, did not impress, as it appeared to be merely two tiers of cardboard boxes, stacked high to represent the oppressive tower-blocks. It turned out they were also a limitless

source of invention and fun. The individual boxes were painted differently on each side, so that when reassembled in successively demented Rubik's cube arrangements, they formed the varying doors, corridors, and office desks that block the architect at every turn. Though those set changes are lengthy, they are danced and clapped along to with lively Slavic folk music. This is a good example of one of the play's more questionable tendencies: that of presenting the audience with something enjoyable, such as an inspired bit of audience interaction, and uncomfortably prolonging it just past the point of tolerance.

Striking a balance between mild-

mannered and finicky, John Carty delights as the long-suffering architect, whose increasing frustration eventually betrays his latent sense of class superiority towards the "little people" of Bulgaria. The other three cast members are let loose in various roles, forever foiling the architect's every intention through a frantic vaudeville that is evocative of the Marx Brothers and even Looney Tunes. For the introductory section of the play, the story is narrated by Ciaran McCauley and Kellie Hughes as enthusiastic gameshow host types, while Sandra O Malley is particularly affable as a sort of drowsy porter. For the second half of the play they assume the guise of the three astonishingly unhelpful staff of a Specialist Alterations Service, each of whom has three different "red tape" generating jobs, which they take very seriously.

It is a coup for the Blue Raincoat to host director Emmanuel Vacca, former creative director of Marcel Marceau's International School. As well as preserving Stratiev's humour, Vacca shapes superb performances from the company's core actors, exploiting their attributes and training in Corporal Mime. The play also delivered impressive production values through its sound and lighting design by Joe Hunt and Michael Cummins respectively.

However, at ninety minutes in

length, the production's innate repetition and it begins to try the audience's patience, and its constant boisterousness somewhat alienates the relatively sedate sensibilities of the Irish audience. Nevertheless, its novelty and superior sense of humour are invigorating.

Diarmuid O'Brien is a writer and critic based in Galway.

A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

A version by Brian Friel

Abbey Theatre

Directed by Jason Byrne

With Andrew Bennett, Declan Conlon, Derbhile

Crotty, Deirdre Donnelley, Peter Hanly,

Laurence Kinlan, Elaine Symons,

Don Wycherley

20 May - 1 July. Reviewed 22 June

BY HARVEY O'BRIEN

FROM ITS OPENING SCENE, FRIEL'S *A Month in the Country* foregrounds the inadequacy of language in communicating emotion. Seated around a card table, an imperious Anna Semyonova Islayvea (Deirdre Donnelley) expounds on the meanings of words and their contexts, as the goofy Herr Schaff (Andrew Bennett) produces comical malapropisms (many of them sexual) which cause the elder Islayvea to speculate if his vocabulary is not "wilfully inadequate". Certainly, the failures of communication are in play here, in a world so in-



PAT REDMOND

Derbhle Crotty and Declan Conlon in A Month In The Country

tensely insular that drama arises when deficient expressions of emotion convey inaccurate meanings.

The setting is nineteenth century Russia, on the estates of a well-to-do family and their various hangers-on. The play centres on Natalya Petrovna (Derbhle Crotty), whose sense of self seems defined largely by her ability to hold the attention of men she admires. Though she is the wife of Arkady Sergeyevich Islayev (Peter Hanly) and beloved of Arkady's childhood friend Michel Aleksandrovich Rakitin (Declan Conlon), she finds herself drawn to Aleksey Nikolayevich Belyayev (Laurence Kinlan), tutor to her orphan ward Vera (Elaine Symons). This is possibly not so much for any qualities he actually possess, as much as a result of Natalya's need to project herself towards ever more distant youth.

There is an affinity between the worlds of Tsarist Russia and Anglo-Irish Ireland, a terrain as ably mapped by Friel as the former has been explored by Chekhov and Turgenev. The Russian dramatisation of emptiness and uncertainty borne out of the pre-revolutionary class system and its attendant social conventions has provided Friel with room to explore currents of the social and cultural translation of emotional drama across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and it has provided an enlivening perspective on familiar themes.

At his best, Friel has proved an admirable re-visioner of nineteenth century Russian drama, with the stunning *Afterplay* taking slash fiction to new heights by bringing Sonya Serebriakova from *Uncle Vanya* and Andrej Prozorov from *Three Sisters* together in a Moscow cafe to discuss lives of inconsequence after the passage of grand narratives in which they have played a part. Yet *A Month in the Country* seems to add nothing to an already stated set of ideas and in itself offers few pleasures on the level of execution.

Part of the problem is that this drama requires exquisite performance and direction to pull off the delicate shifts in emotion which define the way this world turns. The emotions of these characters are so delicately uncertain that it takes tremendous skill to explore the nuances which keep the action from becoming overly familiar. Unfortunately, the play has been so beautifully mounted on a decorative level that the impression of a museum piece is generated right from the start, and this impression persists. The action is staged like a carefully rendered oil painting, and the result is static and lifeless to a point beyond where this may be a metaphoric echo of subject. One finds oneself longing for revolution, not only as subject, but in representation.

One might have thought Jason Byrne might bring it as director, but

he seems to have bowed to the pressures and expectations of the venue and delivered a patiently tasteful summer entertainment. The audience finds itself as desperately seeking vitality as Natalya, but all they find are two very nice comic performances by Bennett and Don Wycherley, the former playing a Germanic caricature which always risks being more *Fawlty Towers* than it should be.

The rest of the performances suffer from the weight of what is being attempted. The play itself presents an age-old problem, in that intense inferiority inevitably runs the risk of registering externally as vagueness. This is what happens. Natalya seems neither tragic nor absurd enough to generate a response from anyone, let alone her various suitors. Michel seems so respectfully aloof that Conlon might easily wander off stage and not be missed, while Arkady bursts into tears in a moment which almost prompts laughter rather than sympathy. A final nail in the performative coffin comes from Kinlan, whose eventual confession of love for Natalya really is shocking because it seems to come from absolutely nowhere. There is no sense of connection between Natalya and Aleksey on anything but a conceptual level, and had Aleksey remained blissfully unaware of Natalya altogether, Kinlan's wide-eyed characterisation might have worked. As is, it merely cements

the sense that Friel's attempt to explore brittle and delicate eddies of emotion as they are misread and misunderstood is falling flat in the face of a whole other level of inadequacy.

Harvey O'Brien lectures in Film Studies in UCD and reviews theatre for www.culture-vulture.net

BABYLON HEIGHTS

by Dean Cavanagh and Irvine Welsh

The Attic

The Studio, Mill Theatre, Dundrum

Directed by Graham Cantwell

With David Heap, Rachel Rath, Dermot

Magennis and John Fitzpatrick.

8 – 19 August 2006. Reviewed 8 August.

BY TANYA DEAN

MUNCHKIN ORGIES. MUNCHKIN opium addicts. Munchkin suicide. Urban legend has a lot to say about the alleged off-screen activities of the actors playing the loveable characters in *The Wizard of Oz*: one persistent rumour maintains that one of the actors playing a Munchkin hanged himself on set, and that his body can be seen swinging in the background of the 'Tin Woodsman' scene in the film. True or not, this story has earned a permanent place in the mythology surrounding one of the most loved motion pictures of Hollywood's golden age. Receiving its European premiere at the newly opened Mill Theatre in Dundrum, *Babylon Heights*



David Heap in *Babylon Heights*

takes this urban legend and creates a fictitious retelling of the events that might have led to such a tragedy.

In a dingy hotel room in Culver City, four very different characters are brought together as part of the large cast of little people gathered for the filming of *The Wizard of Oz*. In this production, none of the characters is played by actors of restricted growth. Instead, the visual conceit is that shortness must be "performed" in order to be made visible. Victor Grennan's extremely striking set of a grimy hotel room of stylistically

oversized proportions includes the audience in the perspective of a little person, creating a world that is forbiddingly inadaptable to anyone of less than average height.

When the first character appears onstage (the foul-mouthed circus performer Bert Kowalski, played by Dermot Magennis), this skewed perspective creates the illusion that he is approximately three feet tall. The first few minutes of the action show just how difficult adapting to the "normal-sized" world is, as Magennis mutters profanely while strug-

gling up onto the oversized bed, exploding in splenetic frustration when he falls painfully to the ground.

Kowalski is soon joined by Charles Merryweather (John Fitzpatrick), a fresh-faced young gardener from England. Fitzpatrick deliberately plays up the nervy naiveté of the foppish Merryweather, providing a stark contrast to Kowalski's foul-mouthed cynicism. Into the mix is added the would-be thespian Raymond Benedict-Porter, played with bombastic relish by David Heap, who wastes no time in sidling up to the impressionable Merryweather whilst ignoring Kowalski's pointed jibes about their shared time as circus performers. The final member of this rag-tag troupe is the seemingly pious Philomena Kinsella (Rachel Rath), fresh from a convent in Ireland (and yes, there are several leprechaun jokes).

Graham Cantwell's strong direction attempts to keep the character progression and storyline moving steadily, but the pace occasionally dips in the face of the shrill and repetitive dialogue. The costume designs by Kevin Gleeson and Gabby Rooney accentuate the illusion of restricted height, and add to the strong visual element of the production's gradual descent into menace. The appearance of the actors in their Munchkin costumes in the second half drew a few laughs from the audience, but laughter quickly faded when we were con-

fronted with the grotesque image of an adult man dressed in a pastel baby-gro, on his hands and knees scrabbling for alcohol. Any hope for a happy ending is eroded as dark secrets are dragged from each of the characters, and the action moves towards a tragic conclusion.

Unsurprisingly, there have been protests about this production, which is accused of being exploitative of people of restricted growth. Cavanagh and Welsh have countered that the play decries that exploitation during the filming of *The Wizard of Oz*: famously, the actors playing Munchkins received less pay than the dog that played Toto and had distinctly inferior lodgings. This may have been the laudable intention, but this two-and-a-half-hour production is grimly, relentlessly unredemptive.

A few flaws might have made the characters more human and sympathetic, but the depressing succession of horrors – opium addiction, kleptomania, nymphomania, and male-on-male rape – systematically grinds away any sympathy this production might evoke. Some effort is made to create a shared spirit of “Us versus Them” towards the unseen “big people”, but this rings a little hollow against the characters’ treatment of each other. Visually strong but morally barren, *Babylon Heights* is an uncomfortable take on what life might have been like somewhere over the rainbow.

BLUE/ORANGE**by Joe Penhall**

The Peacock Theatre

Directed by Annabelle Comyn

With Emmanuel Ighodaro, Christopher Staines,

George Costigan

Reviewed 11 July

BY SUSAN CONLEY

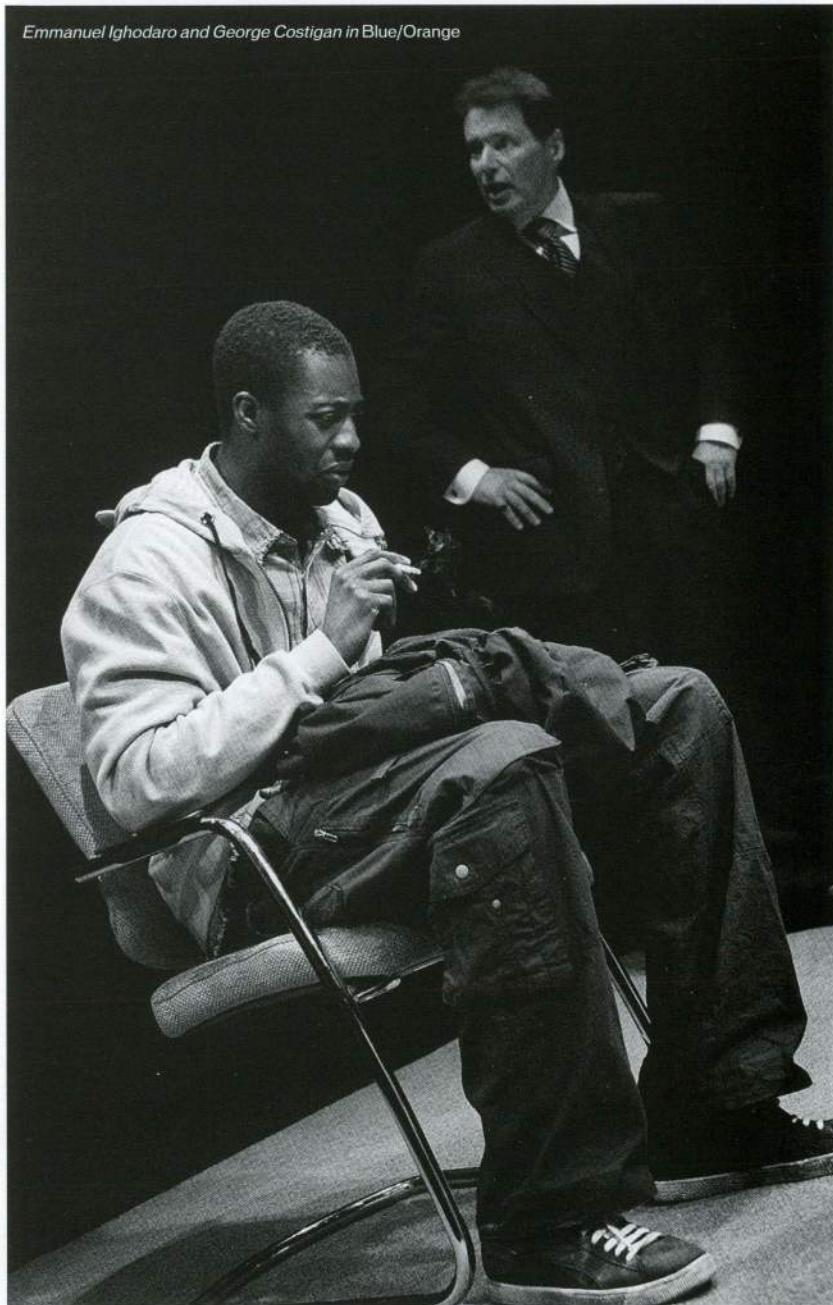
EVERY PLAY HAS A PSYCHOLOGY of its own, a psychology that is, generally, embedded in the subtext (or, if you will, the subconscious of the play). In *Blue/Orange*, Joe Penhall creates a dialogue between conscious and subconscious that not only provides an unblinking illumination of what constitutes modern madness, but also seems to take all the fun out of locating the pulse of the play. Using a psychologically classic triangulation structure—an ego-driven energetic pattern that involves a victim, a saviour and a persecutor—Penhall sends his characters into each of these roles. While much of the interest in the play is watching this pattern chop and change, it becomes less about personality than about puppetry.

Christopher (Emmanuel Ighodaro) is about to be sprung from the mental hospital in which he was placed, having been caught interfering with a piece of fruit in public. His primary psychiatrist, Bruce (Christopher Staines) is not entirely convinced that Chris is ready to go back out into the

big bad world. Borderline psychosis complicated by implied drug use and alcoholism swirls around in a cocktail of apparent obsessive-compulsive disorder, garnished, in Bruce's opinion, by the possibility that the true diagnosis is schizophrenia. In an effort to come to such a conclusion, Bruce calls in his superior and mentor, Robert (George Costigan) to observe Christopher and concur with Bruce's diagnosis. Robert, the master politician, knows that such a diagnosis will mean that Chris will inhabit an NHS bed for the rest of his life, and in Robert's reality, the less the merrier within his hallowed walls. Patients interfere with his life's work, which exists on a borderline of its own between research and racism—that people of colour have an entirely different psychological make up than whites.

It is here that the play overtly claims its controversial nature, in this notion of two white men fighting over a black man in order to advance their personal ambitions. It has additionally been classed as an indictment-of-the-National-Health-Service play, as though the text were an extended public service announcement warning us of the dangers of mental health institutions. It is also, perhaps, one of the oldest saws in the world: that the professionals are sicker than their patients. All of these ideas contribute to the

Emmanuel Ighodaro and George Costigan in Blue/Orange



sense of the piece, but they are not the presenting story; as inflammatory as they may be, and as relevant as they strive to be, they are a thin cover for a good, old-fashioned struggle of status.

That the play's ego is healthy is not in doubt. Penhall masterfully manipulates his characters throughout the victim-saviour-persecutor cycle; even Chris, who seems to be the everlasting victim, takes his turn as the inflexible bully. Its superego, as symbolized by its pacing, its control of its impulses, is adroit as well: subtle when subtlety is needed, explosive when subtlety bursts the bounds of emotional sense. It's the id (not surprisingly) that's the problem. While the situations that the play creates are deeply appropriate—in that Chris-as-black-man is not as important as Robert's agenda, and has in some unhealthy way become Bruce's entire agenda—one feels that the actual point—a young, mentally ill black man at the mercy of his white supervisors—has not been fully given its due.

This raises the question: does Penhall have a play without playing the race card? If Chris were a white man, would any of this have mattered? The play sets out to attack the treatment of a minority male by his white superiors by, in turn, attacking the bourgeois and petty ambitions of same. But the black guy still ends up the victim, at

the bottom of the triangle, and if we're left with the message "The NHS is racist", well... okay. And a pipe is sometimes just a pipe. The ego has essentially clamped down fully on the id and we're left with some fancy footwork and word play, a puppet show in which the puppetmaster gives us an immediate hit of drama without lingering emotional resonance.

It follows that the production would be hampered by the strong personality of the play: Annabelle Comyn faced a tall order in staging what is basically a series of conversations that escalate. She paces things well, but more often than not we're faced with static imagery, two people facing off on some crucial textual point.

Paul O'Mahony's set reproduced institutional genericism, and all other aspects of the production's design did what was asked of them in a straightforward manner. In staying out of the way of the text, however, the production asked quite a lot of its actors, who moved through the majority of the status games with investment. There are few mysteries and fewer surprises in *Blue/Orange*, and while psychologically correct, it manipulates the messiness of life into a hollowness that ultimately mocks it.

Susan Conley is a writer and art director of this magazine.

Into the Conflict Zone

The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East continue to provoke responses from Irish theatre practitioners, often with mixed results. Here we review a play from the 1980s that sheds light on the war in Lebanon; an adaptation of Ovid with a contemporary setting, and a reminder, in a new play by Gary Mitchell, that there's unfinished business in Ireland too.

TWO ROOMS

by Lee Blessing.

Focus Theatre

Andrew's Lane Studio.

Directed by Mary Moynihan

With Simon Coury, Phelim Drew, Ann Sheehy,

Una Kavanagh.

18 – 29 July 2006. Reviewed 20 July

BY TANYA DEAN

ORIGINALLY COMMISSIONED IN 1988, Lee Blessing's *Two Rooms* is the fictional account of an American captured and held hostage in Beirut by Shiite militiamen, and the suffering of his wife back home in America as she anxiously awaits news of his status. This production attempts to deal with how war is experienced by the individual: the victim, the victim's family, and those who try to mediate the war. However, already a tale of international politics and media spin, *Two Rooms* inadvertently acquired uncomfortable contemporary resonance during its run in Andrew's

Lane Studio, premiering less than a week after Israel invaded Lebanon, which meant that audiences for this production were already saturated with media images of victims and devastation.

The play opens with American teacher Michael Wells (Simon Coury) blindfolded and manacled as he tells the story of his capture by terrorists in Beirut. This, Michael's cell, is the first of the eponymous two rooms. Hundreds of miles away, his wife Lainie (Ann Sheehy) has created a second room by clearing all the furniture out of her husband's study in an effort to mimic the conditions of his imprisonment, so that she might to create a connection to him in his current condition. Both locations occupy the same space in Marcus Costello's simple but striking set, made up of a series of panels coloured in a wash of duck-egg blue and deep rust. Disappointingly, blackouts are used to end each scene and signify the move from



Una Kavanagh and Ann Sheehy in *Two Rooms*

one room to the other. As the concept of *Two Rooms* is of a husband and wife connecting through an ideologically shared space, it would have been more effective if the action moved from one “room” to the other continuously; instead, the use of lighting to indicate changes of scene disrupts the pace of the production.

Michael must narrate his own story: his blindfold means neither he nor the audience can see his captors or his surroundings. Lainie’s side of the story is allowed two other human players: the twin vultures of media and politics, hovering opportunistically in the form of journalist Walker Harris (Phelim Drew) and State De-

partment official Ellen Van Oss (Una Kavanagh). Both are unwittingly similar, talking enthusiastically about the “greater good” to a bewildered Lainie. Both are convinced that they are helping her, but they also wish to use her as a figurehead for their respective campaigns, whether as the “face” of hostage relatives, or as an example of how to let the government do its job.

Husband and wife are both being manipulated by higher powers: Michael is imprisoned by unseen bogeymen for his value as a political bargaining chip and, while Lainie’s “imprisonment” is an imagined attempt to feel closer to her husband,

she also finds herself being used as a pawn in the battle to present war to the public. Sheehy tacitly rejects the well-intentioned manipulation of Harris and Van Oss. Whilst her performance vividly embodies Lainie's loss and anguish, she also allows the character's (very human) selfish side to appear. At her core, Lainie does not care about the "bigger picture"; she merely wants her husband back.

Despite its current resonances and a well-rounded performance from Sheehy, this production does not dig deeply enough into the human factors behind the performance of war, and over-simplifies the tug-of-war between politics and media. Both Harris and Van Oss needed to be fleshed out further to underscore the unavoidably personal biases of journalism and government. The script affords little depth to Van Oss in particular: politics is not given a human face in this production, merely a glossy veneer.

Given that the audience were hyper-sensitised to all things related to the Lebanon, an intimate drama about a hostage in Beirut should have been immediately, even uncomfortably, affecting. Instead, it left me cold. *Two Rooms* condemns journalism and the government for its attempts to "repackage" war events for popular consumption, yet this production falls unconsciously into the politics of the filtering of war through media:

Lebanon is not allowed to speak for itself – in fact, the only images seen of the country are narrated, in a slide show of media-friendly images. Despite a few poetic descriptions, the entire country is reduced to a dangerous Other-place that has swallowed an American citizen.

OLIVE SKIN, BLOOD MOUTH

by Gavin Kostick

Gaiety School of Acting, Project Arts Centre

Directed by Patrick Sutton

20-24 June 2006. Reviewed 21 June

BY PÁDRAIC WHYTE

CREATED WITH AND PERFORMED BY the graduating class of the Gaiety School of Acting, *Olive Skin, Blood Mouth* is a specially commissioned play from writer Gavin Kostick. Very loosely based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the production attempts to explore the impact of war and violence on a diverse group of people. Through almost twenty episodes of storytelling, one from each character/actor onstage, the audience is presented with both public and private perspectives on war, as experienced by a diverse range of individuals from members of the military to women and children (with un-subtle references aligning the play's action with the US invasion of Iraq). Unfortunately, rather than elucidating the complexities and chaos of war, the production itself is haphaz-

ard and chaotic.

The plight of each character begins as a story narrated by one of the performers, which is then re-enacted by the rest of the cast. What results is a series of stories within stories, a feature that is also central to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is soon evident that the actors are more comfortable with naturalistic acting than storytelling – yet even here, the majority of the cast appear to lack confidence, and continually shift nervously from one foot to the other. This gives the impression that they are self-conscious and uncomfortable, problems which probably should have been eliminated by the director during the rehearsal process. As a result, with the exception of Shadaan Felfeli as a frustrated artist, Sarah Greene as a victim of rape, and Julie Aspell as a scorned wife, the performances are not engaging.

Perhaps this problem arises because the actors have been encouraged to focus more on building their career than working together. In the programme, director Patrick Sutton states that "if you are in the business of offering work to any of the actors you see on the stage tonight, do so". In order to attract agents for these aspiring actors, the production ought to have positioned the cast within a stimulating and imaginative piece of theatre that would allow them to demonstrate their skills to best effect.

However, *Olive Skin, Blood Mouth* fails to meet this goal for several reasons. In particular, any sense of ensemble acting is absent, creating the impression that the cast are, as the programme note suggests, a series of individuals vying for the attention of any agents who may be in the audience. This idea is first apparent when the supposedly war-stricken characters appear on stage. While the costumes of the female characters are torn in places to allude to ideas of devastation, their hair and make-up are in pristine condition, presenting them not as victims of conflict, but as people ready for a night out on the town or, more probably, prepared to step into the nearest casting agency to pose for headshots. This impression is reinforced by the programme, which encourages a focus on the students as individual actors, when what is needed for this play to be successful is strong ensemble performance. Such difficulties also lead to an uninteresting production.

Fundamentally, the problems with the performance lie with the director. While he makes good use of stage levels, Sutton's direction produces inconsistent styles of acting, ranging from melodrama to comedic farce; he also allows his actors to wander aimlessly around the stage. This approach is evident throughout and is epitomised in the final scene: as one character is bathed in deep red light-



Oddie Braddell and Nika McGuigan in *Olive Skin, Blood Mouth*

ing, blood drips down her face and, once again, we are told of the futility of war. Rather than functioning as a climax to the action that has preceded it, this conclusion merely repeats an already explicit idea.

This unsubtle approach is not aided by Gavin Kostick's laboured script, which repeatedly tells us that there are multiple viewpoints of war. Although it may be important to acknowledge diverse perspectives of conflict and avoid simplistic binaries, the production merely presents a plurality of voices. There is no interrogation or contestation of the fundamental philosophies that inform the ide-

ologies of each character. Essentially, the construction of alternative viewpoints operates only on a superficial level, creating a vague liberalism that fails to question the validity of each argument. As a result, the play does little else but continually emphasise the futility of war, an idea so obvious that it fails to inspire debate about contemporary struggles, does nothing to deepen our understanding of conflict, and offers no new insights into the causes and consequences of war.

Pádraic Whyte is completing a Ph.D. at Trinity College Dublin.

THE REMNANTS OF FEAR**by Gary Mitchell**

Dubbeljoint Theatre Company

The Rock Theatre, Belfast

Directed by Pam Brighton

With Kieran Lagan, Sam Murdock,

Eileen Pollack, Lalor Roddy

3 August-9 September 2006.

Reviewed 3 August

BY TOM MAGUIRE

THE OPENING OF *THE REMNANTS of Fear* as part of West Belfast's Féile an Phobail was remarkable for a variety of reasons. It was a rare "home" premiere for Mitchell, one of the most accomplished writers in Northern Ireland. In presenting a play dealing with the internal dynamics of the loyalist community, the production marks a further step by republicanism to move beyond the isolationism of "ourselves alone" to engage with a more inclusive vision for Ireland. Perhaps most significantly, the play is the most emphatic repudiation of loyalist paramilitarism by Mitchell yet, following the well-documented expulsion of his family from his home in Belfast's Rathcoole housing estate by the UDA.

The significance of the performance as an event created high expectations for both the play and the production. The plot revolves around the battle between two brothers, Charlie (Lalor Roddy) and Geordie (Sam Murdock), for influence over Charlie's teenage son, Tony (Kieran Lagan). Charlie, a

former paramilitary, is trying to steer his son according to the Protestant values of hard work and honesty. Geordie wants to recruit him to his team of teenage henchmen through which he exerts his power as a local UDA baron. The problem for Tony is that without the UDA's backing he has no obvious path to becoming recognised as a man. Thus, the play turns on the ways in which the political has become personal. Mitchell sets out to expose the truth about the UDA that the sectarianism of their politics masks the criminality which is the real threat from which the Protestant working class needs to be protected.

There is something of the sit-com about the first act in which Charlie tries to sort out his son's relationship with the daughter of another UDA man. This televisual feel was accentuated by the containment of the action within a raised box set placed at one end of the long auditorium. Nonetheless, Mitchell's lines elicited much laughter of recognition at the verbal duelling between father and son; Mitchell never misses the opportunity for a corny gag either, and the cast relished the playing of this. Act Two turns darker as Geordie induces Tony into attacking a Catholic ceremony at a local graveyard, starting a riot. This in turn serves as a cover for Geordie's own act of revenge on a local rival.

The play culminates in a confrontation between the brothers, in which



Lalor Roddy in *The Remnants of Fear*

Tony is forced to choose between them. Thus, the family becomes the focal point for the threat from external forces; the domestic setting constantly on the verge of disruption as the household divides against itself. The mise-en-scène involving a detailed recreation of the sitting room of the home of grandmother, Maud (Eileen Pollack), is crucial therefore to the dynamic of the play.

However, the detail lavished on the set was not consistently evident in the characterisation. The figuration of Charlie as a reformed paramilitary who, relieved of his false consciousness, acknowledges the inevitability of personal and political change may well coincide with Mitchell's revisionist account of The Troubles when he argues that "There was no war" [with the IRA]. Likewise, Geordie's self-serving machinations present a

forceful view of the ideological bankruptcy of loyalist paramilitarism.

Yet, given that the action turns on how to protect Tony as the embodiment of the family, the complexity required to give this conflict emotional force is under-developed. This was due in part to the playing, which was of such unrelenting directness that the actors were deprived of opportunities to deliver more nuanced renderings of dialogue and character. Possibly, when the play has been run-in, this will develop as actors become more confident of their parts and the audience reception.

The result, however, was to provide the audience with a distance from the dilemmas of the characters as something outside of their own concerns. Given the context, this served to weaken further the production's capacity to challenge its actual audience.

Portraying the UDA as monstrous criminals and loyalism as a failed political conceit provided a drama of reassurance for a republican constituency at ease with itself. In avoiding any convincing case for a loyalist politics, Mitchell misses an opportunity.

Thus, in the absence of a space in which Mitchell could confront the

loyalist community within which the play is set, The Rock Theatre was the safest place in Northern Ireland to excoriate loyalist paramilitaries. Given Gary Mitchell's recent experiences, maybe that was a necessary thing.

Tom Maguire lectures in Drama at the University of Ulster in Derry.

Under the Festival Umbrella

Annual arts festivals offer the best opportunities for experimenting with locations, themes and methods. This summer, performers have taken over public parks, industrial estates and commuter trains in Cork, Galway and Kilkenny. Our reviewers appreciate the freedom - and the risk.

KING UBU

By Alfred Jarry, in a new version

by Vincent Woods

Fineswine Productions and

Galway Arts Festival

Town Hall Theatre, Galway

Directed and designed by Monica Frawley

With Malcolm Andrews, Michèle Forbes, Peter

Daly, Janet Moran, Rory Nolan, Mark O'Regan

20-26 July 2006. Reviewed 25 July

BY ALISON HARVEY

"MURDERANSHITE!" WITH THIS exclamation, a slouching Pa Ubu answers one of the questions that audiences familiar with Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* will bring into the Town Hall

Theatre: how will Vincent Woods render Jarry's "Merdre," the play's opening word that incited a near-riot at its 1896 premiere? Playing on both the sound and sense of "Merdre" (a distortion of "merde," French for "shit"), Woods' "Murderanshite" retains the strange excess of the original, while also establishing that this version, like Jarry's, will charge boldly into repellent territory—and will be just as interested in the murder as the shite.

When Pa Ubu exclaims "Murderanshite", Ma Ubu, in a vamping parody of Lady Macbeth, hears only what she wants to hear—"Mur-



Malcolm Andrews in *King Ubu*

der"—and the play unfolds the story of these two minor players in the world of Pooland, who kill the king and take his throne. Realising that satire works best when its targets are not wholly alien to the audience, this production gives us a human Ma and Pa Ubu, who nonetheless horrify us with their base desires and increasingly perverse abuses of power. Malcolm Adams plays a wonderfully whiny and petulant Pa Ubu to

Michèle Forbes' highstrung and fiercely ambitious Ma Ubu; once on the throne, his childish sadism combines with her lust for power to create a monstrous government.

Their regime enacts many of the worst excesses of the French Revolution—or of any totalitarian state—along with absurd rituals in which their terrorised citizens are forced into “games”, in which the winner is the player not shot dead by game’s end. This is heavy stuff, but the production preserves both the material’s dark hilarity and its inherently serious critique of the abuse of power, a balance maintained by the quality of the acting and the dialogue between design and script.

Director and designer Monica Frawley presents the action within three imposingly tall purple walls, whose skewed windows and doors visually convey how time—and space—are out of joint under the Ubus’ rule. With minimal props and nimble role-playing by a largely amateur supporting cast, the space morphs effectively from castle interior to torture chamber; to Russian steppes, and battlefield. Song and dance, though absent from Jarry’s

version (and at times overlong and awkwardly amplified here), nod to Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* and express the frantic anarchy of the Ubus' world, while also commenting thematically on the inanity of the play's violence.

All this manic energy adds up to great entertainment, but the play's weight comes from its updating of Jarry's political satire. In a technique carried over from his original, characters hoist placards that comment on the action, and the topical allusions are clear when soldiers carry cards reading "Hero" on one side and "Dead" on the other, while others bear the slogans "God bless our war" and "God is on our side". This use of the rhetoric employed in the war in Iraq may sound heavy-handed, but in performance it roots the production firmly in the contemporary political moment. It also addresses another question that viewers might have: why *King Ubu* now?

Refusing to provide one simple answer to this question, Frawley's production uses contemporary events to anchor the play's broader satirical energies, to which the programme gestures in stating that *King Ubu* was performed in Eastern Europe when communist regimes were collapsing, and was also seen as a "subversive political allegory" in Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe.

These details threaten to swamp

the play with an excess of meanings, and the production's eclectic mixture of genres and tones at times reaches the brink of semantic chaos. But it ultimately succeeds in conveying a powerful threnody on the killing of art by violence. Although early on, the production remains graphically true to Jarry's scatological preoccupations—having Ubu force his men swear allegiance by kissing a soiled toilet brush, for example—the consequences of the Ubus' reign are rendered in a minimalist theatrical aesthetic that contrasts interestingly with the Ubus' excessiveness. A cavalry charge is thus represented by one man galloping around the stage, while soldiers pull red ribbons from their shirts upon being shot. Representing by synecdoche the apocalyptic endgame of the Ubus' "murderanshite," this style draws attention to the play as theatre, creating a tension between the waste of war and the creative and even lovely techniques by which theatre can represent the most destructive and repellent objects.

This gives rise to a question: does depicting war in this way prettify violence and undermine the play's critical bite? The theatricality of the production shows that the best answer to tyranny is that it will fail in its ambition to subsume everything in its murderanshite. When the Ubus sail into exile across a fluttering sea of

pale blue silk (which recalls the rolling foil sea in the conclusion of Federico Fellini's own lovesong to theatrical art, *And the Ship Sails On*), the dark inevitability of their return is both chillingly underscored by a jaunty tango accompaniment, and undercut by the fragile but powerful artistry of the artificial ocean. The programme quotes approvingly Jerry's statement that the play can be seen as being about "everything—or nothing at all." But *King Ubu* succeeds precisely because it is not about "nothing at all", but at once about the destructive force of power run amok and the creative power of theatre to remake and resist that force.

Alison Harvey is completing a doctorate in Irish Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

THE FAIRGREEN SLAUGHTERHOUSE

by Colm Corless

POC Productions

St. Nicholas School, Galway

Directed by Paul Brennan

With Diarmuid de Faoite

22 - 29 July 2006; reviewed 28 July

BY DIARMUID O' BRIEN

THE PROBLEM WITH ATTEMPTING SATIRE in this increasingly deranged world is that the form can no longer compete with reality. As I write, the sky above Galway is full of helicopters, their constant drone making me

imagine I'm in the 'Nam or something. In fact, those helicopters are ferrying members of the upper tax bracket a mere three miles up the road to the Galway Races. This elite, and moreover their excesses, are the targets of playwright Colm Corless' new one-man satirical black comedy. Unfortunately, *The Fairgreen Slaughterhouse* places far too much confidence in its dated sense of burlesque to live up to its Swiftian proposal that the decadence of the rich has horrific consequences for the poor.

The set consists of three wheelie bins, of the type likely to be found around the back of nearly every home in Galway. This, along with the fact that we're in the hall of a primary school, might make the production sound a bit cheap. But this is a Project '06 show: every largish room and folding chair in the city has been drafted by the two arts festivals, and thus we're on exclusive real estate. George (Diarmuid de Faoite) has stepped outside with his glass of brandy for some air, as his dinner guest waits in the house. Dressed in a rather dandy cream suit and matching hat, he is a successful solicitor and socialite, an avid first-nighter – and a cannibal. He begins to relate how he became involved in a scandal where Galway's homeless and forgotten are literally consumed by the wealthy.

The play is robustly directed by



Diarmuid de Faoite in *Fairgreen Slaughterhouse*

Paul Brennan, and Patrick O'Reilly's lighting paints a sinister tone. But we can't take our eyes off Diarmuid de Faoite. From the opening prologue about the primal hunger on display in a Deli counter queue, de Faoite entrails an eager if increasingly queasy audience with his presentation of a swaggering, sublimely tragic grotesque, who is utterly submissive to his insatiable greed. De Faoite's downright relish in playing the monster is so enjoyable that it distracts from the play's lack of substance and effectiveness as a satire. As the Galway Races and similar events show, the reality of upper class greed is already so over-the-top that criticising

it with an even more extreme caricature may draw a few passive laughs, but won't help the play to be taken seriously. Our enlightened twenty-first century objectivity rejects such humour in the same way we look back on those old *Punch* magazine cartoons: with a haughty grain of salt.

While *Fairgreen Slaughterhouse* is more successful as a black comedy, it revels so much in its license for gleeful depravity that it often neglects to be funny or engaging. Though the play enjoys some genuinely lovely flights of phrase, and more than a few knowing asides (at one point George can't remember which combination of the three bins is meant be left out for the morning collection; a weekly challenge for all Galwegians), most of its fifty minutes are painfully predictable. This is true not just of the jokes but also of the plot: it comes as no surprise that George's wife turns out to be in on the conspiracy, or that he is ultimately forced to sacrifice her to the hunger of the group. And on the rare occasion that George gets to hit us with a novel twist, he just won't shut up about it.

His parting shot to the audience could pack the same impact as the infamous last line of *Silence of the Lambs*, except that it's stretched thin over several explanatory sentences. Satire demands a subtle edge, particularly if it's to get under the skin of those it's targeting. *The Fairgreen Slaughterhouse*

bludgeons us with a blunt hatchet but fails to leave a mark.

HAIRDRESSER IN THE HOUSE

By Barrabas

Directed by Veronica Coburn

With Raymond Keane

Bank of Ireland Theatre, NUI Galway

25-30 July 2006. Reviewed 27 July

BY PATRICK LONERGAN

ON PAPER, *HAIRDRESSER IN THE House* seems a novel idea: Raymond Keane, we're told, will deliver a monologue about his career as a hairdresser, before asking an audience member to volunteer for a free haircut. In practice, however, the show seems horribly misconceived, an attempt to blend the art of performance with the craft of cutting hair, which is dominated by inconsequential chitchat between Keane and his volunteer.

Things start promisingly, however. Keane's tales of growing up in Waterford and hairdressing in London and Amsterdam forge a strong link with the audience: the auditorium seems suffused with goodwill towards him, especially when a construction worker begins drilling in a building nearby, drowning out Keane's voice. "I work next door to a dentist, by the way", he bravely quips.

Further improvisations occur when Keane's volunteer arrives on stage. She's an unaffected, charming young woman from Dundalk, who

chats with Keane with a nice blend of confidence and self-effacing humour. "So what's Dundalk famous for?" Keane asks. "The Corrs", she replies, before launching into a tuneless rendition of *Runaway*. "That's what the Corrs sound like before the producers clean their stuff up," she says apologetically. Keane glances at the audience: "Think I've got a live one here", he says, looking a little frightened.

"You know," Keane says a bit later, "there are three things a hairdresser should never talk to a client about: politics, sex, and religion". He pauses, then asks the woman what kind of man she prefers: the James Dean type or the Brad Pitt. We all hope for Keane's sake that she's heterosexual, but she replies with confidence. "Definitely James Dean," she says. "I like my men with a bit of a bad streak, you know?" A woman in the audience, who, it turns out, is also from the northeast of Ireland, shouts ruefully towards the stage: "there's plenty of fellas like that in Dundalk anyway". She sounds like she really means it too.

Later, Keane asks his volunteer about her First Communion hairstyle. "I never made Communion," she says. "I wanted to do it for the cash, but my mother wouldn't let me." It turns out, you see, that not everyone who lives in Ireland is Catholic – a revelation that supports



Raymond Keane in *Hairdresser in the House*

the suggestion that there are things a hairdresser should never discuss with (or assume about) a client, but one which also appears to embarrass Keane, his volunteer, and the audience too.

Still, this is mostly enjoyable stuff for ten minutes or so – but it takes considerably longer (almost an hour, in fact) to complete the haircut. Keane fills the time with music, playing Ron Sexsmith's *Wastin' Time* about forty-five minutes in. This proves an unfortunate choice, Sexsmith's lyrics about the joys of doing nothing contrasting unfavourably with Keane's wordless and untheatrical snipping. There's also some dancing around on swivel

chairs; and the occasional return to monologue involves some interesting anecdotes, especially when Keane tells us that he met his partner when he cut her boyfriend's hair (now *that* could have been an interesting play).

But the production suffers in the movement from one style of performance to another, with the transition from improvisation to monologue being particularly strained: the spontaneity of the former soon makes the latter seem contrived. By the time the haircut has finished and the young woman is back in her seat (with what actually is a pretty decent cut) the show's momentum has been thoroughly dissipated.

With further performances, Keane may resolve some of these problems. As he becomes more comfortable with his lines, he may be able to blend more effectively his improvisations with his script; and one assumes that he and director Veronica Coburn will find a way of filling the many silences that occur during the performance. But the show has a flaw that may ultimately prevent it from being anything more than gimmicky: it depends too heavily on the personality of the volunteer from the audience. We're not so much watching a performance by an actor here, as eavesdropping on a young woman who is struggling to make conversation with a total stranger.

A play that uses audience interaction needs a structure that will create a safety net for improvisation, but *Hairdresser in the House* gets things the wrong way around, forcing us to watch a haircut that features occasional bursts of theatricality. Keane finishes the show by stating that artists need to be free to experiment, thereby risking failure. This of course is true, but as the concluding note in a production that depends so much on the (untrained and unprofessional) audience member, it sounds more like an apology than an artistic manifesto.

Patrick Lonergan is reviews editor of this magazine, and teaches Drama at NUI Galway.

THE TRAIN SHOW

Created by Playgroup

Once Off Productions

Directed by Tom Creed

With Ciarán Fitzpatrick, Siobhan McSweeney,

Paul Mulcahy, Hilary O'Shaughnessy

Departed from Kent Station, Cork, 27 June to 1

July. Reviewed 1 July 2006

DRIVE BY

By Tom Swift

Once Off Productions and

Performance Corporation

Directed by Jo Mangan

With Tadhg Murphy, Ailish Symons,

Aidan Turner.

Docklands, Cork, 27 June to 1 July.

Reviewed 1 July 2006

BY ALANNAH HOPKIN

CORK'S MIDSUMMER FESTIVAL featured two very different pieces of original site-specific theatre, one from Playgroup on a train, and the other from the Performance Corporation using cars. *The Train Show* took place on a carriage of a commuter train as it travelled from Kent Station to Cobh, while *Drive-By* was a late-night event on the R&H Hall industrial estate, which the audience experienced from the inside of their own cars. Both companies succeeded in their aims: in Playgroup's case, that of attracting new audiences to theatre in Cork, and for the Performance Corporation, "producing theatre that is an event, a



Ciarán Fitzpatrick and commuters in Train Show

spectacle, an experience".

Playgroup set itself an interesting set of limitations by staging their play on a live commuter train, and successfully overcame them all. There was the physical limitation of the open-plan carriage with three sections; the time constraint of the 24-minute journey; and the challenge inherent in creating a lively piece from the dreary repetition of the commuter experience.

The action was confined to the front carriage, where the audience was seated. A sense of drama was immediately created when three commuters and a conductor hopped on board at the last minute, as the train

left Kent Station. The Conductor (Ciarán Fitzpatrick) welcomed us aboard with a monologue parodying Irish Rail's frequent and often gnostic announcements – "this is the direct Cork-Cobh service, stopping at Little Island, somewhere else, another place and Cobh..." Meanwhile the commuters, who have been wrestling with giant newspapers, took out mobiles and begin the all too familiar chorus of "I'm on the Train, I'll be home in 25 minutes", lying on the floor and hanging from the baggage-rack in attempts to get a signal. Each of the three sections of the carriage had its own commuter to watch (Hillary O'Shaughnessy, Siobhan Mc-

Ailish Symons in Drive By



Sweeney, or Paul Mulcahy).

At the first stop, a choir boarded the train and sang *Take the Last Train to Clarkson* in harmony. At the next, a group protesting against the "seats are not for feet" window signs boarded, while the commuters tried to chill out with some yoga poses. At Fota Wildlife Park, a five-piece band in animal masks got on, while the choir sang *We Know Where We're Going but We Don't Know Where We've Been*. The conductor added to the surreal experience by reciting a litany of resolutions of a good commuter: "must spend more time with the family, achieve a balanced opinion on the Israeli-Arab conflict..." At the last stop, Carrigaloe, a crowd of "swingers" boarded and started stripping off, while choir and band played *If You Want My Money and You Think I'm Sexy*. The conductor had his trousers around his ankles, while the commuters had dressed for bed in sheep-decorated pyjamas, alarm clocks hung round their necks to remind us how little of their time is their own.

Irish Rail will never be the same again. But as well as being entertaining, *The Train Show*, by dramatising the commuting experience, also attempted to prompt the audience to consider the wider issue of commuting as a form of soul-destroying behaviour that, according to a study quoted in the programme, makes people feel "frustrated, anxious and despondent".

The dreariness of the average commute, in which the senses are numbed by over-familiarity, is contrasted with the more life-enhancing antics of the performances on the train.

On the return journey, there was time to enjoy the amazing harbour views from one of the loveliest commuter lines in Ireland, as groups of actors got off at their respective stops. The five "animals" at Fota, waving goodbye to the train in the long mid-summer twilight, were a magical sight.

While *Train Show* was consistently entertaining, *Drive By* was the most exciting and innovative thirty-minute spectacle I have witnessed in a long time. The audience's cars were lined up in the dark around three parked cars on a deserted industrial estate. The lighting by Arno Nauwels was dramatic, effectively focusing all attention on the action in and around the parked cars, two of which left the scene at high speed in the course of the play.

This was not straightforward theatre: it was a visual spectacle with a sound track, which was received on the audience's car radios. The central drama was acted out as *tableau vivant* by Tadhg Murphy, Ailish Symons, and Aidan Turner, while the soundtrack contained sound effects, *vox pops*, and music, but not conventional dialogue. The cars, with souped-up engines under customised bodies, garish paint jobs and loud stereos, were almost as much in

character as the actors, the movements of machines and performers acquiring a ballet-like quality. And like in a ballet, it was up to the audience to interpret the "dance". The voice on the radio says, "I don't drive fast", but the sight of a white car speeding away into the distance vividly contradicts this statement. After a crash is indicated by the sound track and changes in the lighting, Ailish Symons emerges from an open-top car in a red tutu to Mozart's chilling *Queen of the Night* aria, telling us in her gestures all we need to know about what has happened: two more teenage road deaths.

Drive By does not offer psychological insights into the mind of the "boy racer" who caused these deaths. Instead, and more originally, it gives the audience a taste of the adrenaline hit that tempts young men to risk their lives (and the lives of others) on the road. It is to the credit of sound designer and author, Tom Swift, that I could not tell if the agonised Donegal father on the soundtrack describing his bereavement was a genuine *vox pop* or a great piece of acting and writing. And it is sadly notable that the day after I saw this play, the 200th Irish road death this year was announced in the press.

Alannah Hopkin is a writer and journalist. She has reviewed theatre for publications including the Sunday Times, Irish Examiner, and Financial Times.

THE TEMPEST by William Shakespeare,

Adapted by Jocelyn Clarke

Corcadorka Theatre Company

Fitzgerald Park, Cork

Directed by Pat Kiernan

With Jamie Beamish, Charlie Bonner, Brendan

Conroy, Liam Heffernan, Damian Kearney, Suzy

Lawlor, Gary Murphy, Enda Oates, Aidan

O'Hare, Aonghus Og McNally, Denis Tuohy

20 June – 1 July 2006. Reviewed 28 June

BY BERNADETTE SWEENEY

CORCADORKA HAS A LOYAL FOLLOWING and a strong connection with its local and wider audiences, due in part to the fact that the company takes its work out into the community's landscape. Last year, during Cork's reign as European Capital of Culture, they staged the ambitious (and successful) *Relocations* project, which brought three European outdoor theatre companies to the streets of Cork city, together with Corcadorka's own acclaimed production of *Merchant of Venice*. Consequently, for the 2006 Cork Midsummer Festival, the company had to live up to, and build on, the previous year's successes, and chose to do so with another of Shakespeare's plays; *The Tempest*, which was staged by the pond in Fitzgerald Park.

The production started each night at 10.15 pm, when audiences were led in groups to the performance site. On the night I attended, it had been raining all evening: the smells of earth and wet grass added atmos-



Enda Oates in *The Tempest*

sphere as night fell. A rueful Irish festival spirit pervaded as, fittingly, we prepared to do battle with the elements, moving towards the performance site with an array of umbrellas and rainwear. We sat around the pond on benches, on the (wet) grass, and against walls; midges and moths danced above the pond: the space was transformed and was magical. And so, even before the action began, the company, designer Roma Patel, and lighting designer Paul Denby had created an extraordinary setting.

A series of pathways crossed the

pond, with a timber structure at the centre as the shipwreck, while two mast-like hoists by the fountain were used to raise and lower Prospero and Miranda's thrones, adding a dimension of height. An atmospheric storm soundscape built up as the action began, developing in tune with Linda Buckley's music throughout, performed by a live band.

The adaptation by Jocelyn Clarke and the staging as directed by Pat Kiernan involved a number of edits necessary to ensure that the production was less than two hours long.

There were some inevitable losses here, as some relationships between characters seemed underdeveloped or hard to discern. And in some ways, the production seemed too faithful to the play. For example, the staging of Caliban, with his low, animal-like physicality, seemed disappointingly literal. Perhaps I'd been expecting something overtly politicised, such as a more deliberate exploration of the play's treatment of colonialism – but then, maybe the casting of Irish actors throughout did just that.

The cast included some familiar faces from previous Corcadorca productions, with Suzy Lawlor as Miranda and Denis Tuohy as Alonso producing particularly strong performances. Enda Oates as Prospero was a commanding figure at the outset, as he sat high on his throne, or strode around and across the lake. The actual tempest as staged seemed a little tentative once it began, with the shaking of sails and splashing of water from the pond by figures dressed in wetsuits. Other images were simple but very effective, such as a game of croquet shared by Miranda and Ferdinand. Played on a grassy bank away from the pond, this moment was framed as something idyllically removed from the everyday turmoil of Prospero's island.

A strong community cast was crucial to the scale and scope of the pro-

duction overall. Some, in what looked like wetsuits, waded knee-deep into the pond, and created waves by splashing water towards the boat structure and elsewhere. The community cast thus became theatrical agents who could be seen staging the creation of the tempest, moving in and out of the pond, and the space between the audience and the imagination. This was a clever response to the knowing theatricality of the play itself; much more could have made of this device, and of the physical gestures of these agents of theatricality.

Generally, however, the actors seemed to be somewhat in conflict with the text, or perhaps the text in that setting. The radio microphones were either more effective than the cast realised, or else they had insufficient time to work with them, as their voices seemed unnecessarily pushed, adding a strident tone to the piece throughout which was at odds with the delicate setting.

As the audience filed out of Fitzgerald Park, glad that the tempest had held off for the duration of *The Tempest*, I felt that I had been taken somewhere beautiful by the staging of the production, but that some of the possibilities of *The Tempest*, both of the play and of Corcadorca's combination of text, place and players, had not been fully realised.

Bernadette Sweeney lectures in Drama and Theatre Studies in University College Cork.

THE OLD TUNE and NIGHT

**Written by Robert Pinget (*The Old Tune*)
translated by Samuel Beckett)**

Produced by Kilkenny Arts Festival at Watergate
Theatre, Kilkenny

Directed by Pat Kiernan

With Paul Bennett and Des Braiden

11-20 August, 2006. Reviewed 13 August

BY FINTAN WALSH

DURING THIS, HIS CENTENARY YEAR, it is hard to decide whether Beckett haunts us or we haunt him. In recent months, his presence has dominated theatre productions, and been heavily felt in literary, painterly, and musical quarters too. Entire festivals, exhibitions, and conferences have been devoted to his oeuvre; indeed, there is almost as much interest in Beckett's influence as there is in his own work. And even if his ghost is not immediately obvious, we can conjure it ourselves. "Ah an ellipse! How Beckettian!" (I could have sworn I saw him wink at me from some street-side bunting, but that's another day's work).

It is in the area of Beckett's influence that Kilkenny Arts Festival makes a contribution to the centenary celebrations, by focussing on the work of Robert Pinget, a friend and collaborator of Beckett. Pinget was a significant avant-garde Swiss-born French writer, and a leading figure of the nouveau roman. The pair often cooperated, if not collaborated, on

projects. In 1957 Pinget translated Beckett's radio play *All That Fall*, and in 1960 Pinget's play *Lettre Morte* was presented on a double bill with *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Théâtre Récamier in Paris. In 1965/66 Beckett directed Pinget's *L'Hypothèse*, and in 1960 the BBC Third Programme broadcast *The Old Tune*, Beckett's English translation of Pinget's radio play *La Manivelle*. In the hands of Pat Kiernan, the radio play is dramatised here, alongside *Night* (1973), which also contains Beckettian resonances, but is translated by Barbara Wright.

We can describe *The Old Tune* as a translation, although, like many translations, it is closer to an adaptation. Imagine a mixture of *Waiting for Godot* and *Come and Go* and you've got a good sense of what this piece is about. Two old men, Mr Cream and Mr Gorman, meet on a bench, not having seen each other in years. They talk about people they knew in the past, struggle to remember the finer details, bicker, and bemoan the direction of civilisation. In keeping with Beckett's translation, the portrayals by Paul Bennett and Des Braiden are distinctly Irish (and more specifically Dublin), but with a self-conscious edge that resists stereotyping.

Large white panels form the backdrop to the performance, featuring huge line drawings of people in various poses. These figures, drawn in a "Le Brocquy meets Matisse" likeness,



Paul Bennett and Des Braiden in *The Old Tune*

hang lazily behind three trees, as if in a park. Five years ago, such a backdrop might have jarred with our impressions of an Irish landscape, but this setting readily conjures an island on the recently redeveloped O'Connell Street. Numerous cars thunder by and disrupt the men's banter, indicating the impact of science and industrialisation on human relationships. Unfortunately, the recorded effect is a little too loudly engineered here, blocking out surrounding dialogue. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the piece is better suited to a radio performance than a staged production: the former medium

would allow for a more careful managing of musicality than took place in this realisation.

Night is a more successful production, featuring the same actors. A bedroom is constructed to appear as if the audience is viewing it from the ceiling. An electronic projection allows us to imagine that we can see late night revellers on the street below. Two men (played by Bennet and Braiden) sleep in the double bed, or at least they try to. Braiden's character is anxious, and wakes his partner for comfort. They are both aging, and the future looks grim. The closing pages of *Don Quixote*, which de-

scribe the hero's dignified surrender to death, are the only source of comfort. And so Bennet's character reads the passage aloud, as if he is reciting a nursery rhyme to a restless child.

This piece is beautifully presented and poignantly acted. The odd staging does not prevent access to the emotional core of the drama. Sentimentality is resisted, however (and here comes the Beckett bit), when the piece ends with two men (planted actors) standing up in the auditorium to critique what they had seen, as if it were a rehearsal. The actors break out of role, and walk from their beds.

Suddenly the group of spectators who laughed so disruptively throughout the performance did not seem so misguided after all. The final metatheatrical note suggested that the deferment, if not the resistance of investment, was the order of the day.

Fintan Walsh is completely a PhD in Drama at Trinity College Dublin.

TINTYPE

Written and performed by Frankie McCafferty.

erty. Directed by Jackie Doyle

Once Off Productions

Parade Tower, Kilkenny Castle

12-15 August 2006. Reviewed 13 August

BY FINTAN WALSH

FRANKIE MCCAFFERTY'S FIRST PLAY, in which he acts in the only role, travels on a catchy premise. A man

breaks down at an airport security desk, unable to explain himself to the staff. In a hotel room he experiences further psychological trauma, crushed between wondering what to say to the airport personnel, and unable to repress haunting memories. Unfortunately, you may miss the concept if you don't read the programme note first. While the play is conceptually rich in print, it translates less successfully to the stage.

Most of these concerns relate to issues of context. Crucial variables that need to be clarified at the play's outset are left in limbo, as are the audience. A man stands on stage throughout while some kind of crisis unfolds, but at no point is it made clear who this anxiously rendered individual is, whom he is talking to, or why he is experiencing a breakdown. It appears that some interrogation takes place at the airport, although the reason behind this also remains unexplained. We know that he moves from an airport to some kind of hotel room, although the connection between the locations is unclear on causal, geographical, and temporal levels. While it seems as if the man worked as a war photographer, no clear picture of this experience is painted, nor is there an obvious link forged between this history and what happens on stage. In light of recent allegations on the doctoring of photographs of the Middle East, the most resonant line of the



Frankie McCafferty in *Tintype*

play comes with the assertion "I'm not a photographer, I'm a propagandist." This context, or something similarly specific, might just provide the anchor the piece needed.

Part of the reason for this communication problem is that too much faith is placed in the visuals. Eighteen sepia coloured photographs form the main projected backdrop, each seem-

ingly related to a military situation, presumably taken in the past by the man himself. Whether the subjects are friends, lovers, allies, enemies, or random civilians, we do not know: the images are too mundane to arrest the eye, and too vague to spark an obvious connection with the spoken narrative (although, out of the context of this play, they form a beautifully re-

alised collage by Paul Keogan). This is also the case with the other images that tile the back wall – a woman with veiled eyes, a hat, and African soldiers – all unspectacular, all unexplained. Of course, if the images were affecting in themselves we might forgive their tenuous connection to the narrative, and even the tenuousness of the narrative itself.

Those familiar with McCafferty's acting would likely expect a sterling performance at least. However, his depiction of a mental breakdown is surprisingly cool. Energy resides in his flicking fingers and fearfully inflected voice, while the core of his body stands still, almost casually. Under Jackie Doyle's direction, movement involves a diagonal step backwards from centre stage, and lines are delivered as if intended for an interactive audience, although we are led to believe (thanks to the programme) that he is experiencing his breakdown privately. Would someone experiencing a breakdown announce his story so forthrightly? When his description of the interrogation takes the form of a direct address to the audience, we are automatically positioned as witnesses of some kind, but impossible ones as everything is so unclear.

One way of understanding these ambiguities might be to consider the significance of the man's profession as a photographer, someone who in-

cessantly frames. On stage, this framing is chiefly a psychological exercise designed to allow the central character to come to terms with his past. This narrative metaphor is what presumably motivates the company's description of the piece as a "visual theatrical journey". In the end, however, metaphor does not extend into staging, and the theatrical languages fail to fuse.

What we have here is a monologue, a performance, and a backdrop: distinct elements that slide by one another like tectonic plates, never realising earth-shattering contact. Out of these, written word is most proficient at capturing psychological trouble, as the character, Krapp-like, tries to structure his thoughts and memories. But here ends the trace of Beckett, master of the visual frame, with both the performance and staging in want of a little discipline.

These concerns are not helped by the venue. The Parade stage is small, and nearly all of the lighting apparatus is crudely visible on stage, working to illuminate the staircase that sweeps up near stage left, and a corner section of the white auditorium. A black box would surely work better, and no doubt naturally assist in framing the piece. Of course, this is the kind of area that companies might have little control over, particularly when it comes to festivals. But it seems crucial here.



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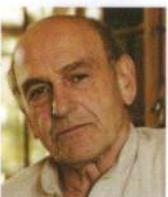
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