

PROSCENIUM

Beauty Queen of Leenane

By Martin McDonagh

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Wednesday 13th March to Saturday 16th March 2013
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The Beauty Queen of Leenane

By Martin McDonagh

Cast

Mag Folan.....Susi Thornton

Maureen Folan.....Shirley Wootten

Ray Dooley.....Charles Anthony

Pato Dooley.....Duncan Sykes

Director and Stage Design.....Linda Hampson

Stage Manager.....David Pearson

Assisted by.....Crystal Anthony

Stage Properties.....Sheila Harvey

Sound.....Paul Robinson

Lighting.....Arnold Glickman

Wardrobe.....Anne Gerrard

Setting: Leenane, a small town in Connemara, County Galway. The living-room/kitchen of a rural cottage.

The Author

Martin McDonagh was born in London in 1970 and brought up in Camberwell by Irish parents from County Sligo and Connemara, Galway. His father worked in the construction industry and his mother as a cleaner: some of his parent's stories of their experiences of prejudice at work are found in the conversation between Pato and Maureen in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. When Martin was sixteen his parents went back to Ireland to live in Galway, leaving him and his brother, John (who also became a writer), in London.

Martin left school at sixteen and immediately began to write, supporting himself with a combination of odd jobs and unemployment benefit. He first wrote radio plays which he sent to the BBC and although he received no positive response he said

"It taught me I could do dialogue and storytelling which is all you need for the theatre."

He wrote at a furious pace: he claimed that in one nine month period in the early 1990s he produced rough drafts for seven plays, and that "*Beauty Queen* is a play I wrote in one and a half weeks and *The Cripple* is a play I wrote in five weeks". In a 1998 interview he reflected on this period in his life:

"The whole point of writing in the first place was to get out of the house a bit...My main ambition was never to have a job – a job like I was brought up in school to do. This isn't a job in those terms."

By 1996 he had had the occasional radio play accepted and the occasional short story published but that year saw his first great success in the theatre – a Trilogy set in Leenane, a small village on the West coast of Ireland. The first play in the sequence, *The Beauty Queen of Linnane*, was staged in 1996 by the Druid Theatre Company in Galway and a month later at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs: it won the Critics Circle Theatre Award for Most Promising New Playwright. A couple of

years later it was well received in New York and received a Tony Award nomination.

This was followed in the next year by *A Skull in Connemara* – a quotation from Lucky's speech in *Waiting for Godot* – and *The Lonesome West*, which completed the Trilogy.

He followed this immediately with a second prospective Trilogy set in the Aran Islands, beginning with *The Cripple of Inishmaan* which opened at the Royal National Theatre on the Cottesloe stage in 1997 and later at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre in New York.

At this remarkably youthful stage in his career, at the age of 27 McDonagh had four new plays being performed in England and Ireland.

The second play in the Trilogy, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, a more overtly political play, was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and in 2003 won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Comedy.

The third play, *The Banshee of Inisheer*, remains unproduced and unpublished because McDonagh thinks it unsatisfactory.

This was followed by his first play not set in Ireland, *The Pillowman*, produced on the Cottesloe stage at the Royal National Theatre and which won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play in 2004. And finally by *A Behanding in Spokane* in 2010.

However, after the success of *The Pillowman* McDonagh began working increasingly with film. In 2006 his first experience of directing, *Six Shooter*, which was filmed in Wicklow, Waterford and Rosslare, won an Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film.

In 2008 *In Bruges*, a feature length film which he directed from his own screenplay was a considerable artistic, critical and commercial success and won a BAFTA Award for Best Original Screen Play.

McDonagh has written and spoken frequently about the influence of films and film directors on his work. He describes Terence Malick's *Badlands* as the biggest influence on both his life and work, and he adds Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino and Sam Peckinpah as key figures

who have influenced his vision and his style. In an interview in with Finton O'Toole in 1998 he commented on the relationship of theatre and film in his work:

"I've written plays that I respect, even as a film-boy. That was always the place I was coming from, this respect for the whole history of films and a slight disrespect for the theatre. But now I'm in a place where I like the plays I've done, and even in comparison to the films I love, they still stand up. And I think they would also stand up for any film fan who goes to the theatre."

There is in this quotation a suggestion of the view, perhaps of his parents, that the theatre is essentially a middle class institution which is 'not for them' and that the cinema is a more comfortable, classless place.

The Play

Much of the critical comment on *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* has centred on its Irishness. Michael Billington reviewing a 2010 production in The Guardian:

He offers all the familiar delights of farce and melodrama while at the same time offering a powerful critique of contemporary Ireland. A suave assault on the Irish faith in the sanctity of marriage. A vivid picture of the aching solitude of Connemara life. There are echoes of J.M. Synge and a hint of Beckett's *Endgame*.

Finton O'Toole in an article on the Leenane trilogy:

His Ireland reveals a dark, insular place of suppurating spite, internecine family feuding and simmering violence. Murder, solitude and rain are what bind the plays in the Leenane Trilogy. The almost mythic rural Ireland of

cottages and colleens clashes with a post-modern Ireland shaped by media imagery, by multi-national companies and by tourism.

However, although McDonagh visited Galway for holidays, he was born, brought up and lives in London. While Synge wrote *Playboy of the Western World* from the position of a passionate Irish insider, albeit a critical one, McDonagh has more detachment, he can observe Ireland as an outsider. He can certainly create the rhythms of Connemara speech most brilliantly and he knows his Synge to provide a parodic reference to that kind of rural village community, but as a Londoner he is well aware of the clash with the modern commercial world. And murder, solitude and rain can happen in London, and indeed almost anywhere.

Cruelty and Comedy

I suppose I walk a line between comedy and cruelty because I think one illuminates the other. I tend to push things as far as I can because I think you see things more clearly through exaggeration than through reality. It's like a John Woo or a Tarantino scene where characters are doing awful things and talking about ordinary things in a really humorous way

Martin McDonagh, 1998

We're all cruel aren't we? We're all extreme in one way or another at times, that's what drama since the Greeks has dealt with. I hope the overall view isn't just that though, or I've failed in my writing. There have to be moments when

you glimpse something decent, something life-affirming even in the most twisted character. That's where the real art lies. I've always suspected characters who are painted as lovely decent human beings. I would always question where the darkness lies.

Martin McDonagh, 2001

From The Director

I am delighted finally to be putting "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" before you with Proscenium. We had decided to present the play 5 years ago, but until recently the amateur licence to perform the play had been withdrawn.

I have directed three productions for Proscenium since, but never lost sight of my original intention. I hope and believe that you will agree with me that the wait was worth it.

I have seen several productions of the play since its premiere, the most recent having been "La Reina de Belleza de Leenane" which I saw in Buenos Aires 2 years ago. While Spanish could not begin to replicate the quirkiness of the Connemara style of speech, the production did bring home to me the universal appeal of the play – you really don't have to be Irish to understand or relate to this one. Like all good plays, it reaches beyond its time and place; this is perhaps why it has had international success and why I am confident that it will be performed for many years to come.

I should like to thank all who have assisted with this production, not the least the technical and front-of-house staff at the Compass.

Linda Hampson, 2013

The Tempest

By William Shakespeare

Proscenium presents one of Shakespeare's late, great plays. The Tempest tackles issues that are as topical today as they were when it was written in 1611; nature and nurture, domination and slavery, forgiveness and reconciliation. But above all it is a wondrous story involving a shipwreck, spirits of earth and air, young lovers, wicked uncles and drunken sailors, all overseen by the powerful magician Prospero.

Directed by Crystal Anthony
Wednesday June 12th to Saturday June 15th 2013
7:45 pm, Compass Theatre, Ickenham
Box Office : 020 8866 7075

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Clare Wooster

Chair : Dave Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk