

Theatre Newsletter

The Department of Dramatic Arts (PAC 1052 ; Mobile Alabama 36688-0002

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Theatre USA Presents DANCING AT LUGHNASA February 20 -24

The Winner of three Tony Awards, including best play, *Dancing at Lughnasa* has been critically acclaimed by Time Magazine as “the most elegant and rueful memory play since *The Glass Menagerie*”.

Theatre USA invites you to meet the members of the Mundy family, who reside two miles outside the town of Ballybeg, which is part of the Irish countryside. Five old-maid sisters live together in the family home, along with Michael, (a child born out-of-wedlock to the youngest sister), and their brother Jack, a Catholic priest who has recently returned from a 25-year long missionary service to a leper colony in Uganda.

Kate, the oldest sister, is a practical, pious, straight-laced Catholic, who believes that their religion

will hold the family together. She is a school teacher who serves as the primary breadwinner of the family and the only sister who works outside the home. Maggie is the feisty housekeeper. Agnes, a quiet, reserved woman, spends most of her time taking care of simple-minded Rose. They supplement the family income by knitting gloves at home. The youngest sister, Chris, is the mother of Michael (who narrates the play based upon his memory as a young child). Living during a time of oppressive Catholic beliefs, the women have all experienced serious disappointment. They live repressed lives, in which neither their emotions or sexuality are expressed openly. The sisters struggle – with economic hardship and their conventional religious values -- as they face the challenges of their day.

The play is set at harvest time in August, 1936, during the feast of Lugh, the pagan god of the sun worshiped by the Celts. The sisters discuss dancing in the pagan festival, even though rumors abound of its strange rites in which a local boy is terribly burnt. The sisters’ newly purchased radio supplies them with dance music of the 1930’s, which



Director Jean Galloway (Front) talks with the cast during rehearsal for *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

also has been condemned by the Catholic church. The music inspires them to dance like the pagans an “un-Christian” activity upon which Kate frowns.

The music from the radio transforms the sisters from “spiritually correct” Catholic women to shrieking, stomping wild women in their own kitchen—not unlike the primitive rituals observed by their brother Jack in Uganda. They ask Jack to introduce them to men, but he is struggling with his own adjustments to their civilization. To Kate’s chagrin, Jack has forsaken the Catholic faith and returns confused and in ill-

health to Ballybeg because he can no longer remain in Uganda. Michael, at age seven, unexpectedly meets his father, Gerry, for the first time. Gerry, a ne’er-do-well Welsh salesman, sweeps Chris away in an elegant dance across the fields, but fails to make any lasting commitment to her or to Michael. With the introduction of each new character, change is underway, and each change may compromise the sisters’ conventional values and familial stability.



Artist Spotlight Costume Designer Jeremy Floyd

The costume design for *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a Senior Project for student Jeremy Floyd. Jeremy graduates in May with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre with an Emphasis in Theatre Design & Technology. While he enjoys Costume Design and has been one of the most proficient students in the costume shop as a stitcher, fabric dyer and painter, his true avocation is Make-up for Stage and Film. After graduation he is heading to Burbank, California to attend The Make Up Designer, a school for makeup artists, in a conservatory-like setting where students are given an intense course of study taught by some of the leading makeup artists in the industry. Last year Jeremy's makeup design for Theatre USA's production of *The Bacchae* was chosen to represent the southeast region at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival's Mehron Makeup Design Competition in Washington D.C. where he placed in the top three.

He became involved in the department of Dramatic Arts in the fall of 1999 when he came to photograph auditions for *Hallow Screem!*. Once there he was talked into auditioning for the show and was cast as one of the leading characters. During fittings for his costumes for the show he became fascinated by the flurry of activity in the costume shop and started volunteering. That spring, he took his first design class and a Special Topics class in 3- Dimensional Makeup. he was again cast in a department show, this time as Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He became such a regular volunteer in the costume shop, he soon surpassed some of the more seasoned students in skill and productivity. By the end of that semester he had changed his major and has been in the midst of department activities ever since.

This past summer Jeremy received a costume apprenticeship at Santa Fe Opera which is counted among the most prestigious technical theatre internships in the country. His costume designs for *Dancing at Lughnasa* have been entered in the Southeastern Theatre Conference Design Competition being held here in Mobile this March. In his spare time he is President of the department's chapter of Alpha Psi Omega Honorary Dramatic Fraternity and Jesters, the Theatre Student Association. He hails from Dothan, Alabama and includes among his favorite off duty pastimes an intense devotion to watching episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

About Tony Award Winning Playwright Brian Friel

Renowned as one of Ireland's most prominent playwrights, Brian Friel was born in Northern Ireland in 1929. The son of a primary school principal, Friel attended seminary at Saint Patrick's College near Dublin, but selected a career in teaching instead of the priesthood. He married Anne Morrison in 1954 and has four daughters and one son.

Friel produced a radio play and published a short story in *The New Yorker* prior to having his first stage play, *The Francophile*, performed at the Group Theatre in Belfast in 1959. From 1950 to 1960, he published works in the *The New Yorker*. He retired from teaching in 1960 to



Jeremy Floyd's renderings for Chris's costumes

write full time.

Many of his plays are set in Ballybeg, a remote part of Donegal, the town where his mother was born and where he moved in 1969. The recurring themes of his writings describe the conflict between traditional beliefs and modern values in Ireland.

The accolades for Friel and his works are many. His plays have premiered and been produced at prestigious venues including the Abbey Theatre, London's West End and Broadway. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, a fictional work based upon memories of Friel's childhood, received three Tony Awards in 1992, including Best Play, and the Outer Critics Award for Best Broadway Play. The Irish Academy of Letters elected Friel as a member in 1972. He is the recipient of the Ewart-Biggs Peace

Prize, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Literature by the National University of Ireland in 1983, and was nominated to the Irish Senate in 1987.

In 1980, Friel help found

From the Director Jean Galloway

The pleasure of directing a play such as *Dancing at Lughnasa* corresponds to the challenge of the effort: working with dialect, learning authentic Irish dance steps, coordinating five disparate personalities to create comfortable, familial relationships among them while each remains a unique individual, and finding wonderful moments of levity and love in a play that is essentially about loss. Creating the atmosphere of the 1930's and seeing the action through the eyes of young Michael pose other challenges. But then, that's what theatre's all about.

Dancing at Lughnasa asks us to see, through Michael, another time and another place where the spare existence of the family is interrupted occasionally by burst of music from the radio and stomping dances by the sisters; where one seeks magic in the smallest of things, and where memory often replaces fact. We are brought into the world of the Mundy sisters just as the foundation of their world is cracking and will change forever.

The Cast for *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Michael Jonathan Conner
Kate Jessica Allison
Maggie Jamie Barbour
Agnes Leah deButts
Rose Jean Parker
Chris Jamie Englehart
Gerry Nicholas Yohn
Jack Jim Willsey

Mobile to host the Southeastern Theatre Conference Annual Convention March 6 - 10

Mobile will play host to the 53rd annual SETC Conference in March. Over 3000 theatre professionals, educators, students and avid amateurs will participate in auditions, lectures workshops, and theatre festivals.

Special guests include: Broadway and Film Designers **William Ivey Long**, and **Tony Walton**. Broadway leading man **Terrence Mann**, and noted theatre historian **Oscar Brockett**.

Live Play productions include: the **Community Theatre Festival**, the **Secondary Theatre Festival**, the **Children's Theatre Festival**, and the **10 Minute Play Festival**.
— *All open to the public* —

For more information or if you would like to volunteer to play host to this extraordinary conference, Call the Dramatic Arts Office at 460-6305.

Coming in April William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

April 17 - 23

Directed by
Dr. Matt Ames

Box Office & Ticket Information

Tickets for *Dancing at Lughnasa* \$10.00 General Admission, \$7.00 all students with valid student ID. One student ticket per ID.

Tickets will be available for advance purchase from 10:00 am till 5:30 pm Monday thru Friday starting Wednesday, February 13 at the Laidlaw Performing Arts Center Box Office.

Tickets are sold on a first come first serve bases. All seats reserved. All sales final. No refund or exchange.

When you buy tickets at Theatre USA bring cash or your check book, because while you can get tickets to a great show, you can't use your American Express Card (Visa, MasterCard or Discover card either for that matter) as we do not except any credit cards at this time. ; Sorry. ; For additional information call the Theatre USA Box Office at 460-6306 during regular box office hours.



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The Department of Dramatic Arts
Theatre USA

Presents the Tony Award Winning Play

Dancing at Lughnasa

by

Brian Friel

February 20 - 23 @ 8:00 pm
& February 24 @ 2:00 pm.

Laidlaw Performing Arts Center Theatre
on the University of South Alabama Campus