

The Last Mile

by Malcolm Hamilton

Directed by Tom Creed

BLUE RAINCOAT



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Foreword

Our premiere of *The Last Mile* by Malcolm Hamilton at The Factory Performance Space is Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's 3rd production for 2009. It has been preceded this year by our performances of *The Third Policeman* (2007) at The Project Arts Centre in Dublin in February and by our international tour of *The Strange Voyage* of Donald Crowhurst (2004) to theatre festivals in Istanbul and Adana in Turkey in April.

The Last Mile will be followed by a production of *The Cat & The Moon* which will coincide with the 50th Yeats International Summer School in August and by our second premier of 2009, a new stage version of *At Swim Two Birds*. Adapted from Flann O'Brien's original novel by Jocelyn Clarke, *At Swim Two Birds* will open in Sligo in November. Our Mobile Theatre initiative will be launched in late November & December with performances of *A Brief Taste of Lightning* (Premiered in 2001) at regional venues throughout the northwest.

More immediately the month of July will see our company and our venue, The Factory Performance Space, continue to play a pivotal role in supporting and developing Sligo's CAIRDE summer festival. Now an independent event in its own right, Blue Raincoat Theatre Company established this festival in 2003 as a showcase event for the year round arts participation programme we continue to undertake with diverse community groups and regional support agencies.

Our Theatre Resource Project under which we will deliver five new theatre initiatives between 2007 and 2011 sees the continuation of our Lecture Workshop programme commenced in 2007, as well as the opening of our theatre / DVD library in 2008. In 2009 our Mobile Theatre initiative mentioned above will establish a new professional theatre touring model in Ireland. Under this element of the Theatre Resource Project we will present work from our repertoire in outlying rural community venues and halls throughout the regions on an annual basis.

The two remaining Theatre Resource Project initiatives for 2010 & 2011 are the launch of a theatre publishing initiative and the establishment of a theatre school respectively.

Foreword

2009 also sees us extend and develop a 3 year performance & mentoring programme with community based theatre concerns spread throughout different counties in the northwest region. Flowing from an existing and highly successful Arts Partnership arrangement with Sligo Local Authorities - covering community based theatre concerns in South Sligo - this initiative will pioneer a new and vibrant regional outreach / audience development model for professional arts organisations and the broad communities in which they exist.

Finally, with this production of The Last Mile we are launching a new E-programme initiative. Those who are already on our email list, and those who would like to join it now have an opportunity to receive our production programmes in a high quality electronic [PDF] format. Our audiences will have an opportunity to read up on the background to our productions before they arrive at the venue if they so wish. In future programmes we will include active links in the e-programme that we will have used in our research and rehearsal processes, interviews with the artistic team, as well as collated preview materials from national and regional press in the run up to the production. As the initiative evolves, there will be other active links in the e-programme, to relevant materials from our DVD Library and to archive material on past productions. We hope you enjoy our play this evening and that we will have the opportunity of meeting you again through some of our other productions and activities in 2009.

Malcolm Hamilton

Niall Henry



Cast & Artistic Team

The Man
Director
Author
Design
Production Manager
Lighting
Sound
Costume

Brendan Ellis
Tom Creed
Malcolm Hamilton
Jamie Vartan
Peter Davey
Michael Cummins
Joe Hunt
Jamie Vartan



Biographies

Tom Creed

The Last Mile is Tom's first production with Blue Raincoat. He is Associate Director of Rough Magic Theatre Company, and a co-founder and joint Artistic Director of Playgroup. He studied English and Philosophy at UCC, and trained as a director on Rough Magic's SEEDS programme and at the National Theatre Studio, London.

Directing credits for Rough Magic include Solemn Mass for a Full Moon in Summer, Life is a Dream, Attempts on her Life (for which he was nominated for Best Director at the 2007 Irish Times Irish Theatre Awards), Dream of Autumn, and 4.48 Psychosis as part of the SEEDS 2 showcase. He has directed all of Playgroup's work to date: Say Hi To The Rivers And The Mountains (a music theatre piece by Jonathan Coe and the High Llamas for note Productions and Dublin Docklands' Analog festival); The Heights (a show based on Wuthering Heights at Project Arts Centre, Dublin); The Art of Swimming (a show about long distance swimming in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cork, Dublin, Kinsale, Amsterdam and the Hague, nominated for Total Theatre Award – Edinburgh Festival 2007, winner of Bewley's Café Theatre Award – Dublin Fringe Festival 2007); The Train Show (a performance on a train with Once Off Productions for Cork Midsummer Festival); Dark Week (a large-scale promenade event at the Everyman Palace, nominated for Judges Special Award at Irish Times Irish Theatre Awards 2005), Soap! (a live soap opera at Cork Midsummer Festival, Dublin Fringe, Everyman Palace and and radio version on Red FM, nominated for Sexiest Show at Dublin Fringe Festival 2003 and PPI Award for Best Radio Drama 2004); Crave and Integrity (Granary Theatre, Cork). Other directing credits include: Ian Wilson's The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World with Gavin Friday at Brighton Festival and Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris; Labour's Lost and Vinegar Tom (Samuel Beckett Centre); The Coming World (Making Strange); The Case of the Rose Tattoo (Dublin Theatre Festival); Mr Kolpert (Once Off Productions Rep Experiment at Dublin Fringe Festival); Mimic by Raymond Scannell (Cork, Galway, Kilkenny and Dublin); Love's The Ideal Homes Show (Activate Youth Theatre); Purple (Dublin Youth Theatre); Older People for Beginners (Cork 2005's Culture and Health programme); Crystal (Meridian).

He is a board member of the Dublin Fringe Festival and Theatre and Dance Curator for Kilkenny Arts Festival.

Paddy Dooney
& sons

Biographies

Michael Cummins

Michael is from Dublin and studied painting at N.C.A.D. He has designed sets and lighting, and acted as production designer for many of Blue Raincoat's productions including Hamlet, Once Time, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass, Macbeth and The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst.

Peter Davey

Peter is from Tubbercurry in Sligo and has a lifetime involvement in amateur drama having worked extensively with Beeneeze Theatre Company and The Phoenix Players. He has been the recipient of national amateur drama awards for both acting and lighting design. He is currently Production Manager at The Factory Performance Space.

Brendan Ellis

Brendan Ellis is the author of eight plays and a children's book. He is also an actor and a director and has featured in 13 Blue Raincoat productions since first working with the company in 1993. With Blue Raincoat Brendan also directed and scripted The West Port Murders and wrote The Hollow In The Sand which premiered in 2001 and toured throughout Ireland in 2004. For each of the last four years Brendan has staged productions for the annual Ranelagh arts festival in September. The most recent of these was a fully rehearsed reading of Under Milkwood by Dylan Thomas featuring a cast 54.

Malcolm Hamilton

Together with Niall Henry Malcolm Hamilton co-founded Blue Raincoat Theatre Company in 1991. He is the company's writer in residence. Malcolm has written 6 plays for Blue Raincoat. These are A Vinegar Fog (1996), Once Time (1998), Still Life (2000), A Brief Taste Of Lightning (2002), Sanctuary (2003) and The Strange Voyage Of Donald Crowhurst (2004). Of these A Brief Taste Of Lightning and The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst are part of Blue Raincoat's current national and international touring repertoire. Prior to founding Blue Raincoat Theatre Company and The Factory Performance Space Malcolm was a director of Sligo Arts Festival between 1994 & 1999. He was a founding director of Sligo Arts Centre Committee between 1998 & 2000, which established the Model and Niland Arts Centre.

**The Harp
Tavern**

Biographies

Joe Hunt

Joe is Technical Manager and Sound Designer with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company since 2001. Prior to this, Joe also worked with the Hawk's Well theatre on lighting and sound operation as well as stage construction. Joe is also involved in digital projection and image design for Blue Raincoat Theatre Company.

Jamie Vartan

Jamie Vartan's design work includes a number of productions at The National Theatre of Ireland (Abbey & Peacock theatres) including The Playboy of the Western World and Beauty In A Broken Place, both directed by Niall Henry. He has also worked extensively with the director David Glass, including his involvement for three years as designer and artist-in-residence with the David Glass Ensemble on The Lost Child Trilogy, with residencies involving workshops, research and new devised productions in Vietnam, Indonesia, China, the Philippines and Colombia. The Trilogy was later presented at the Young Vic. The Hansel Gretel Machine (part one of the trilogy) was selected for the 1999 Prague Quadrennial Theatre Design Exhibition. Designs for opera include The Queen Of Spades (La Scala, Milan) Manon Lescaut (Teatro Regio, Parma), A Village Romeo and Juliet, Aida and Carmen (Premio Abbiati Awards 2006, Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Sardinia), La Statira (Teatro San Carlo, Naples), The Dwarf (Teatro Comunale, Florence) and La traviata (Malmö Musikteater, Sweden). Current work in opera includes Benjamin Britten's Albert Herring, at the Landestheater, Salzburg.

Interview

The Sligo Champion spent some time with stage designer Jaimie Vartan during a lunch break at The Factory performance Space. Jaimie is currently in mid design on Blue Raincoat Theatre Companies pending production of The Last Mile, due to open on May 7th.

Jaimie is an East London based award winning theatre designer who has worked for a veritable A-Z of the foremost theatre and opera companies in Europe. He has worked extensively with the director David Glass, including his involvement for three years as designer and artist-in-residence with the David Glass Ensemble on The Lost Child Trilogy, with residencies involving workshops, research and newly-devised productions in Vietnam, Indonesia, China, the Philippines and Colombia. The Trilogy was later presented at the Young Vic. The Hansel Gretel Machine (part one of the trilogy) and was selected for the 1999 Prague Quadrennial Theatre Design Exhibition.

His designs for opera include: Don Giovanni (Varna, Bulgaria); Death in Venice, Ariadne auf Naxos and Albert Herring (Salzburg Landestheater); Il Pirata (Opera Marseille); The Queen Of Spades (La Scala, Milan); Manon Lescaut (Teatro Regio, Parma); A Village Romeo and Juliet, Aida and Carmen (Premio Abbiati Awards 2006, Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Sardinia); La Statira (Teatro San Carlo, Naples); The Dwarf (Teatro Comunale, Florence); and La Traviata (Malmo Opera, Sweden).

SC: The obvious question first. You've worked all over Europe on opera and theatre. How has Blue Raincoat Theatre Company come to feature so strongly in your itinerary in recent years.

JV: That started in 2001. Niall Henry the Artistic Director of Blue Raincoat was directing The Playboy of the Western World for the National Theatre in Dublin. I was commissioned to design the set. Brendan Ellis - who is featuring in this current production and whose worked a lot with Blue Raincoat down through the years - Ciaran McCauley and Joe Hunt who are core members of Blue Raincoat were also involved in that production. Mikel Murfi, one of the founders of Barabbas theatre Company, another native of Sligo was playing the lead role. So suddenly Sligo was on my theatrical map and I got to know a little about Blue Raincoat and how they worked. What interested me about Nialls approach to the "Playboy" was that the whole auditorium of the Peacock was to be used

Interview

as the set, with the audience being introduced right into the middle of the action. The design from the outset therefore had to be fluid and evolving throughout the rehearsal process and I really liked that. It had been a while since I'd worked in that way and it was really interesting to do so again. I worked with Niall again with the national theatre a few years later when he was directing Colm Toibins Beauty In A Broken Place for The Abbey 100.

SC: Where did your career in theatre Design begin then?

JV: I studied painting and sculpture at Brighton Polytechnic and then Theatre Design at the Central School of Art & Design in London. My early theatre work was with The David Glass Ensemble in the late 1990s. One of the reasons I feel quite comfortable working with Blue Raincoat is that they are an ensemble group and that's the same environment and ethos as where I'd cut my teeth. I was a full member of the David Glass Ensemble and that meant in addition to being their designer I was also a stage manager, an actor (albeit masked) and had a host of other day to day roles within a very close knit company. This is the same working model in Blue Raincoat and it's very unusual these days. I believe Blue Raincoat is currently the only ensemble working in Ireland today.

SC: How does designing for an ensemble differ therefore from other working relationships.

JV: Of course different companies ... be they ensemble or production based ... they work in different ways. Nothing is cut and dried. The best way I can answer your question in general terms is that I get to be more poetic with the detail when working with a company like Blue Raincoat. Usually, when you're commissioned to design for theatre or an opera, the time table can dictate things from the outset. My involvement is perhaps more to do with pre production preparation. You get the script or libretto, you meet the director a few times, visit the theatre and then you take everything away. You come up with your concepts and a set model. Basically at the end of the process, once everything is agreed, you deliver a set of technical drawings that a professional set building company constructs. The same applies to costumes. The actors take possession of your finished work 2 or 3 weeks before the curtain goes up, but they have typically been rehearsing with the technical blocking of your set design in mind. It's a challenging and demanding way to work and its very defined. With Blue Raincoat it's very different. rehearsal process is not predetermined as a result neither is the set or costumes.

Interview

As a designer I have to belong to the rehearsal process as much as the director, and the actors, the sound and lighting designer, because everything is linked in an explorative and questioning approach. You cannot impose upon a process like that. It's collaborative by nature. In that context you also have the opportunity to pursue your designs in the greatest detail, to refine your ideas continually alongside the other evolving elements of the play. You get to take into consideration details in ways that you would simply never get to address in more typical settings. Another way to describe working here with my background in sculpture and painting, is that I find there are more similarities to creating an installation than building a set.

SC Can you tell us a little about your approach to this new production.

Both the environment of The Factory Performance Space and Sligo's location on the Atlantic seaboard are influencing factors for me on this piece. In the first instance The Factory Performance Space is a very intimate and atmospheric venue. The previous two productions I've designed for Blue Raincoat were *Ionescos The Chairs* and *The Third Policeman*. Those are big touring productions for Blue Raincoat and I did not design them using The Factory itself as an inclusive element. With *The Third Policeman* for instance the set was trying to create the idea of a repetitive eternity that the main character had fallen into and was lost in. The Factory as a venue was extraneous to that idea. With this production, from my first discussions with Tom Creed who is directing this piece we felt we wanted to incorporate all that old stone that make up the physical walls of The Factory and that this would be very much in keeping with the script and themes that are in it. In a broader sense the piece itself is set on a beach. But for Sligo people, indeed for anyone living near the sea there is nothing metaphoric about a seascape setting. It's very much part of real life around here. This meant that we had an opportunity to take the idea of the seascape in the script a few degrees further, to reinterpret the idea of a shoreline if you like so that it would both surprise the audiences here and again at the same time address the central theme of the play. If I was working in London or elsewhere in Europe where the ocean and shoreline wasn't so prevalent we might not have gone in that direction as a realistic shoreline would already embody the idea of another place and time for the audience. Blue Raincoat has a different aim and intent – self contained – with each of its productions. That's why I get the opportunity to design from a diversity of starting points. These are the kind of issues I can get to consider in working on different projects. It's rewarding and challenging in a different way from a lot of my other work. At the same time, once this show is up and running

Interview

SC Are there any other significant differences between working with larger scale opera and theatre companies and an organisation like Blue Raincoat.

JV I think I'm lucky in so far as I really enjoy the different approaches to designing that my career throws up. I don't necessarily champion any single approach over another. One thing I do enjoy is that coming back to Blue Raincoat for my 3rd design in as many years, I'm building the set with the same company members and friends. Quite often you don't get to build that kind working relationship and indeed friendship with colleagues on a single project. A lot of the time as I say you might simply be feeding your designs to a professional set building company at some remove. But I'd also argue that Blue Raincoat is quite a large organisation by any standard. A lot of people are employed here, they've built a venue, tour all over Ireland and internationally and have an extremely busy schedule. Certain things still astonish me about a company like Blue Raincoat, and you find it in other ensembles where there's that feeling of collective responsibility. It's how much they can do on their comparatively miniscule resource base. This morning before we could get started on building our new set I was happy to help off load the set from their tour to Turkey two weeks ago. It's only arriving back in Sligo on an articulated truck today. Basically we're cannibalizing elements of that set to build the set for the new play. Not because we have to but because the materials are all perfectly good and shouldn't go to waste. That kind of thing doesn't happen in most of the companies I would work with. Also the fact that it's the actors, the management and company directors who are all down offloading the truck ... well you're sitting there for a minute or two watching all of this going on around you and then you remember ... Oh yea, it's the Blue Raincoat, I'm in Sligo! ... and you start helping with the offload.

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