

BLUE RAINCOAT



Flann O'Brien's

At-Swim- Two-Birds

adapted by Jocelyn Clarke



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Tour 2011: Project Arts Centre, Tron Theatre, Traverse Theatre

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FOREWORD

This tour of *At-Swim-Two-Birds* to Dublin, Glasgow and Edinburgh coincides with the 20th anniversary of Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's first production, *Double Cross* by Tom Kilroy, which opened in February 1991. Our 20th anniversary year celebration includes six theatre productions, a national and international touring programme and the launch of a new theatre publishing concern *Blue Raincoat Press* in December.

At-Swim-Two-Birds is an original stage adaptation commissioned by Blue Raincoat Theatre Company from Jocelyn Clarke. It was first performed in 2009 and toured throughout Ireland in 2010. *At-Swim-Two-Birds* followed Jocelyn's adaptation of *The Third Policeman* for Blue Raincoat which has also toured nationally and internationally throughout 2009 & 2010. Our premiere of Jocelyn's new adaptation of *The Poor Mouth* in October completes the trilogy of original Blue Raincoat work based on the novels of Flann O'Brien. These three productions will be toured to the US between 2012 and 2014.

At-Swim-Two-Birds will be followed this year by a restaging of our 2006 production of *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco in July. This production was described by *The Irish Times* as "an outstanding production of Eugene Ionesco's 1952 absurdist classic" and by the *Sunday Times* as "Inspired craziness in a Blue Raincoat triumph". Blue Raincoat have never had the opportunity to tour this award winning production in Ireland, and will now do so in 2012 & 2013.

For our annual Yeats Project in August we will stage our existing productions of *The Cat and the Moon* and *At the Hawk's Well* alongside a new production of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and our 20th birthday year production programme will be completed in October by our new stage adaptation of *The Poor Mouth*.

December will see the completion of the Blue Raincoat Theatre Resource Project 07-11. The aim of the project was to make a comprehensive contribution to the development of theatre as an art form. Under the project we opened our Theatre Library at The Factory Performance Space in Sligo, launched our annual Mobile Theatre Programme,

and established an annual Lecture Workshop series. The current scheme will be completed with the launch of our theatre publishing concern *Blue Raincoat Press* in December.

In January 2012 we will announce details of our Blue Raincoat Theatre Resource Project 2012-16.

We hope you will enjoy tonight's performance of *At-Swim-Two-Birds* and that we will see you at some of our other performances and events throughout 2011.

Malcolm Hamilton

Niall Henry



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CAST

John Carty

Kellie Hughes

Bob Kelly*

Ciaran McCauley

Fiona McGeown

Sandra O'Malley

*Bob Kelly in place of John Carty for performance from Feb 22nd - March 5th at Project Arts Centre

ARTISTIC TEAM

Director:

Niall Henry

Author:

Jocelyn Clarke

Designer:

Jamie Vartan

Lighting Design:

Michael Cummins

Sound Design:

Joe Hunt

Production Manager:

Peter Davey

Set Construction:

Gus Henry, Graham Reid, Peter Davey, Michael Cummins

Tour Set Construction:

Peter Davey, Barry McKinney



BIOGRAPHIES

BLUE RAINCOAT THEATRE COMPANY

John Carty

John trained at the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, Dublin, graduating in 1988. He worked with Co-Motion Theatre Company and Graffiti Theatre Company before returning to Sligo to become a founder member of Blue Raincoat Theatre Company. He has since trained at The Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique, London, at the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, New York with Anne Bogart and at the Roy Hart Theatre in Malerargues, France. John has appeared in most of the company's productions to date.

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 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.

Niall Henry

Niall is from Sligo and is Artistic Director of Blue Raincoat. He studied in Paris with Corrine Soum and Maximillion Decroux and returned to Sligo in 1991 to co- found Blue Raincoat with Malcolm Hamilton. He has directed six of Malcolm's plays, most recently *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* and *A Brief Taste of Lighting*. Other shows directed for Blue Raincoat include *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, Jocelyn Clarke's adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (co-production Peacock theatre) and Brendan Ellis' *Hollow in the Sand*. He has directed on two occasions for the National Theatre; *Playboy of the Western World* in 2002 and Colm Toibin's *Beauty in a Broken Place* for abbey one hundred. Niall has directed Jocelyn Clarke's two stage adaptations from the works of Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* and *At-Swim-Two-Birds*.

BIOGRAPHIES

BLUE RAINCOAT THEATRE COMPANY

Kellie Hughes

Kellie first performed with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company in 2004. Initially trained in dance, she performed in the World Tour of Riverdance - The Show in 1996/97 before graduating from University of Ulster, Coleraine in 2000 with BA first class honours in Theatre and History. She then completed an MA in physical theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. She spent three years training with Corinne Soum and Steve Wasson, last assistants of Etienne Decroux and directors of the Theatre de L'Ange Fou and the Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique. Upon receiving her diploma Kellie returned to Ireland to work with Blue Raincoat. Kellie is guest lecturer in University of Ulster, N.U.I. Galway and I.T. Sligo and is Training Coordinator for Blue Raincoat Theatre Company. She also directed *The Cat and the Moon* (2009) and *At The Hawk's Well* (2010) for Blue Raincoat's annual Yeats Project.

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 the multi-media designer for Blue Raincoat Theatre Company.

Bob Kelly

Bob is a former member of County Sligo Youth Theatre and a recent graduate of Ecole de Jaques Lecoq in Paris. Work in theatre since his graduation last year includes Fulgurances at the Louvre and l'Ecrivain Public at Theatre B in Paris. Bob made his debut with Blue Raincoat as Berenger in the company's production of *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco in November 2010.

Ciarán McCauley

Ciarán is from Sligo and has been a core member of Blue Raincoat Theatre since October 1991. He has trained at the Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique, London with Corinne Soum and Steve Wasson, at the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, New York with Anne Bogart and at the Roy Hart Theatre in Malérargues, France. He has performed in the *Playboy of the Western World* at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin directed by Niall Henry and has worked with Crossroads Repertory Theatre, Indiana. Ciarán has directed productions of *At the Hawkswell*, *Purgatory* and *The Cat and The Moon* and has been a guest tutor at Queens University, Belfast, and NUI Galway.

Fiona McGeown

Originally from Armagh, Fiona has been working with Blue Raincoat theatre company for 15 years. She has performed in many of the companies productions to date including *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* and most recently *The Third Policeman*. She trained with the Gaiety school of acting in Dublin, Anne Bogart's New York based company Saratoga International Theatre Institute and with Corinne Soum and Steven Wasson at L'école de Mime Corporel Dramatique in London. Fiona runs her own drama school for children based in County Sligo.

Sandra O Malley

Sandra is a graduate of the Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique. She studied under Corinne Soum and Steven Wasson, Etienne Decroux's last assistants. Having performed with their company, she returned to Ireland and has been working with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company since 1997. Sandra has provided workshops both nationally and internationally for University College Galway, the Drama League of Wales and Potsdan International Dance festival, Germany. She has also directed productions for the Sligo Youth Theatre.

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 the premiere of Colm Toibin's *Beauty In A Broken Place*, both directed by Niall Henry. For Blue Raincoat Theatre Co., he has designed *The Chairs*, *The Third Policeman*, *The Last Mile*, *At Swim Two Birds* and *Rhinoceros*. Current work in theatre includes *Misterman* (Galway Festival 2011) with director Enda Walsh. He was involved 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) was selected for the 1999 Prague Quadrennial Theatre Design Exhibition. Designs for opera include *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Salzburg Festspielhaus), *The Queen Of Spades* (La Scala, Milan), *Albert Herring* and *Death In Venice* (Salzburg Landestheater), *Don Giovanni & Romeo et Juliette* (Varna), *Manon Lescaut* (Teatro Regio, Parma), *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, *Aida* and *Carmen* (Teatro Lirico di Cagliari; Premio Abbiati Award for Best Production 2006; selected for the 2007 Prague Quadrennial), *La Statira* (Teatro San Carlo, Naples), *The Dwarf* (Teatro Comunale, Florence), *La traviata* (Malmo Opera), *Il Pirata* and *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (Opera Marseille), and *L'Isola disabitata* (Royal Opera House, London).

FLANN O'BRIEN

(1911-1966)

Flann O'Brien was born Brian O'Nolan in Strabane, County Tyrone, on 5th October 1911, and was raised in Dublin. He was a civil servant for 18 years, and in the 1930s began writing a bilingual column for *The Irish Times* under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen (Myles of the Small Horses). He also wrote a column for *The Nationalist* and *Leinster Times* under the pseudonym George Knowall. His works include *At-Swim-Two-Birds*, *An Béal Bocht* (translated into *The Hard Life* by Patrick C. Power), *The Dalkey Archive* and *The Third Policeman*. In addition, many of his satirical and surrealist non-fiction columns for *The Irish Times* have been published as *The Best of Myles*. He also wrote a play, *Faustus Kelly*. He died in Dublin on 1st April 1966.

Under the name Flann O'Brien, his published novels have attracted a wide following for their bizarre humour and Modernist metafiction. As a novelist, O'Nolan was powerfully influenced by James Joyce. Indeed, he was at pains to attend the same college as Joyce, and Joyce biographer Richard Ellman has established that O'Nolan, fully in keeping with his literary temperament, used a forged interview with James Joyce as part of his application.

As Myles na gCopaleen, O'Nolan published a regular column entitled the *Cruiskeen Lawn* in *The Irish Times*, usually in English, but sometimes in Irish, and sometimes in Latin. The columns introduced a regular set of characters, such as the Plain People of Ireland, the Brother, and the Da, included a 'catechism of cliché', and proposed numerous schemes for the improvement of the Irish nation.

Flann O'Brien's writing led him to be regarded as a major figure in 20th century Irish literature.



JOCELYN CLARKE

Jocelyn Clarke is a freelance dramaturg and writer. He is a creative adviser on the Screenwriting programme at the National Film School in Ireland as well as a member of the artistic staff of the Sundance Theatre Lab. He was the Commissioning and Literary Manager of the Abbey Theatre for four years, and lead theatre critic with *The Sunday Tribune* for nine years. He has taught dramaturgy and criticism at the Samuel Beckett Centre in Trinity College Dublin, the Kennedy Centre (DC), and at Columbia University. He is an Associate Artist with the New York-based theatre companies The Civilians and Theatre Mitu. He has worked as a dramaturg on several productions by Blue Raincoat Theatre in Sligo, and has written four adaptations for the company - *Alice in Wonderland*, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, *The Third Policeman* and *At-Swim-Two-Birds*. He has written five adaptations for Anne Bogart and the SITI Company - *Bob*, *Alice's Adventures Underground*, *Room*, *Score* and *Antigone*. *Here I Am Human*, a new music theatre piece with the Tiger Lillies, opened in Prague last September, and his investigatory theatre piece with Civilians, *In The Footprint*, was revived in New York in November 2010.

He is currently working on a new version of *Trojan Women* for the SITI Company, which will premiere in September 2011, at the Getty Villa in Los Angeles.



Ruth O'Donnell, *Points of View I*

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AT-SWIM-TWO-BIRDS

IN AN IRISH LITERARY CONTEXT

The article below is an extract from *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* by Carol Taaffe, published by *Cork University Press*. Carol is a senior tutor in the School of English and Drama, University College Dublin.

Reviewing *At-Swim-Two-Birds* in 1939, Jorge Luis Borges neatly described it as an exploration of 'the many ways to conceive of the Irish novel.' While *At Swim* is often read simply as a novel about writing a novel, it is more specifically a novel about writing an Irish novel of the 1930s. Its student narrator - a latter day Stephen Dedalus - presents a work in progress which mixes parodies of the literary revival, Joycean Modernism and Irish popular fiction, from the cowboy western to the Catholic morality tale. Combined with the seedy realism of the student's frame narrative, these literary parodies have bolstered Flann O'Brien's reputation as a representative figure of a disillusioned, post-independence generation - a subversive satirist who was wholly frustrated by social and intellectual life in the Irish Free State. Certainly, this novel is more than a simple collage of literary styles: it dramatises the writing process, demolishes the notion of original genius, and allows its characters to move between the roles of writer and reader, storyteller and audience. It also indicates that collaboration is an inevitable part of literary production, whether this is implied in the student's parodies or dramatised in the critical debates between his characters. And in the making dialogue an essential element of the text, O'Brien acknowledged Dublin's oral culture as much as its literary heritage. The result of these clashing perspectives is that *At Swim* produces a curiously ambivalent image of contemporary Irish culture. O'Brien began writing the novel shortly after his graduation from UCD in 1935, and to a large degree its humour plays on the contradictions of the college's intellectual life at the time. If the student imitates the avant-garde literature popular among his contemporaries, he is also suspicious of its pretensions in a way that is typical of the Ireland of his day.

Since the central conceit of *At-Swim-Two-Birds* is to expose itself in the process of being written, battles between storytellers and audiences are intrinsic to its development. True to the convention of the *Fianna Tales*, Finn McCool only tells stories when prompted by Conán. The torture of Trellis is passed from writer to writer. Even the student is criticised and goaded by the friends who read his manuscript; when Brinsley complains that the cowboys Furriskey, Shanahan and Lamont are indistinguishable, the narrator quickly devises a brisk memorandum of their ‘respective diacritical traits or qualities’. There are also more subtle influences at work throughout. Finn McCool’s account of mad Sweeney’s leaps from tree to tree inspire a contemporary equivalent, the yarn about Jumping Craddock. Effectively, the romantic notion of the author as an original genius is thoroughly demolished in *At Swim*: each new digression embarked on in the novel is a response to something else, and each new storyteller betrays the influence of his predecessors. Admittedly, each character recounts his tale primarily in the style suitable to his own genre, so *At Swim* often reads not only as a novel produced by committee, but as an experiment in assembly-line fiction - albeit with all the pieces inserted in the wrong order. There was a precedent for this: as a UCD student O’Brien colluded with the poets Denis Devlin, Donagh MacDonagh and other friends in composing what one called ‘the Great Irish Novel.’ This was to be a parody of a generic best-seller, which would apply the principles of the industrial revolution to literature. Each contributor would write a chapter, and the book (with the working title, *Children of Destiny*) was to be constructed from a series of ‘ready-made’ fictional clichés. The shape of *At Swim* owes something to this project, as it does to the student magazine - the very model of chaotic composition. Arguably, the only structure this novel really has is that of a work in progress, and both O’Brien’s playful intertextuality and the student’s self-reflexive narrative suggest that the process of writing is a collaborative effort.

O’Brien’s model of the writer at work is not the bard alone in his cell, but the raconteur at large in the pub.

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BLUE RAINCOAT



Artistic Director: Niall Henry
Writer in Residence: Malcolm Hamilton
Ensemble: John Carty, Ciaran McCauley,
Kellie Hughes, Fiona McGeown, Sandra O Malley
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Tour 2011: Project Arts Centre, Tron Theatre, Traverse Theatre



Blue Raincoat Theatre Company would like to thank the following funders



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