

Faith Healer by Brian Friel

Audio Description Programme Notes for the matinee performance in the Abbey Theatre Saturday 15th January 2022, at 12pm

Welcome to the audio description introduction to **Faith Healer** by Brian Friel at the Abbey Theatre.

The play is directed by Joe Dowling. Set Design is by John Lee Beatty, with Costume Design by Joan O'Clery and Lighting Design by Sinéad McKenna. The Sound Designer is Derek Conaghy and the Composer is Carl Kennedy. The Voice Director is Andrea Ainsworth.

The performance runs for approximately two hours and forty minutes with one fifteen minute interval.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Frank Hardy. Faith Healer.

Travelling through remote and isolated areas in Scotland and Wales, Frank Hardy offers his unique cure to the most desperate and hopeless of people. Does he actually possess a gift? Or are these rare and miracle healings only tricks of the mind?

Telling the story of Frank, his wife Grace and manager Teddy, we encounter differing perspectives of their absurd and momentous lives together. With each tale come new revelations in this spellbinding narrative.

More than 40 years since directing the Irish Premiere of **Faith Healer** at the Abbey Theatre, Joe Dowling returns with a new production of Brian Friel's masterpiece on the Abbey Stage.

Originally scheduled for March 2020, we are delighted to bring this highly anticipated production to perform in front of a live audience.

ABOUT THE SET

The main body of the set is comprised of three walls, at the back and sides, constructed of simple wooden planks laid horizontally between upright beams. There are slight gaps between the horizontal planks, which allow for chinks of light to pour through from beyond at times. The floor is also laid in timber planks running front to back in three wide bands. Hanging from the rafters is a grimy canvas banner which was white once upon a time, with the words "The fantastic Francis Hardy – Faith Healer – one night only" written in blue and red capital letters. In the back right-hand corner is a large pile of mismatched wooden chairs, heaped, not neatly stacked. A smaller heap of chairs sits in the back left-hand corner, with some hessian sacking behind it. Towards the back of the stage, just slightly left of centre, is a lone wooden chair, picked out by a dim spotlight.

The play is set in three different locations, with one character in each. We first encounter Frank Hardy in this wooden and windowless space, with some wooden chairs set out at the front of the stage – a single chair, then two side by side, and a wooden bench – on our right and facing the left-hand side of the stage.

Next, we move to a small flat. The middle section of floor slides from left to right, drawing in a little kitchen table and single wooden chair. A panel of wooden wall on our left is raised, and a large Georgian window fits neatly into place. Watery afternoon light floods into the space from this dusty window, and through the chinks in the plank walls.

The table is covered with an oilcloth of sage green, with acorn and oak-leaf print. Sitting on top is a small radio, three cloth-bound books, a bottle of John Power's whiskey and a glass. There is also a pewter ashtray, a brown pill bottle and some knitting, with the needles stuck into a ball of wool, along with a box of Afton Major cigarettes and a steel Zippo lighter. The piles of chairs are still behind, in the background, as well as the canvas banner. On the right-hand side of the stage, opposite the Georgian window, a section of timber wall has opened, like a massive barn door.

Our third location is another flat. This time, the central section of floor slides from right to left, taking the Georgian window, and kitchen table and chair out into the wings. The wooden wall on our left closes again, as a set of furniture is swept in from the right.

Sitting on a faded, but colourful, large Oriental rug is a high-backed armchair, with grimy and worn wine-coloured upholstery. To the left of the chair is a large side table, with a table lamp with floral lampshade on it, and a shelf underneath for letters and magazines. There are two brown glass bottles on the side table – Openshaw Brewery’s bitter beer - a glass, and a bottle opener. To the right of the armchair, a wooden cabinet, with a record player perched on top. Alongside this cabinet is a small steel bucket. Set a little further to the right of the rug is a small wicker dog basket, with claret rug inside.

On our right, a section of plank wall has been removed and replaced with a large wooden door with a window over the top. Orange streetlamp-light streams in through this high window into the space. A wine-coloured men’s jacket hangs on a hook on the door. The “Francis Hardy – Faith Healer” banner still hangs in the background.

ABOUT THE CAST AND COSTUMES

Frank Hardy, played by **Aidan Gillen**, is a middle-aged man with a head of thick, tousled grey hair, and piercing eyes. He is unshaven, with maybe a day’s worth of grey stubble on his chin. Frank wears a charcoal grey herringbone weave suit, un-ironed, and somewhat ill-fitting. The legs of his suit trousers are a little short, revealing bottle green socks with his black leather shoes. He also wears a white cotton shirt, with the top button open, and a patterned tie. When he first appears, he is also wearing a dark grey woollen overcoat and black, broad-rimmed fedora hat.

There is a fizzing energy within Frank, clenching his fists, or outstretching both arms to accentuate a point. To counteract this, he regularly stuffs both hands into his trouser pockets to keep them in check. He speaks with an Irish accent with a clipped delivery, and slightly nasal tone.

Grace, played by **Niamh Cusack**, is also middle-aged, with light brown hair pulled messily into a roll at the back and clipped in place. Many strands of hair have come loose and frame her open and expressive face. She wears a light brown blouse with the top couple of buttons undone, a steely-blue A-line tweed skirt with pockets and a box pleat at the front, skin-coloured tights and brown sandals with an ankle strap. Over this outfit she wears a loose-fitting pale blue crocheted cardigan with brown and cream stripes. Her only jewellery is a gold wedding band on her ring finger.

Grace has an anxious demeanour, often clenching her fists, or rubbing her forehead, lapsing into repeating a mantra to steady her nerves. When she feels strongly about something, she will often underline it with a determined stamp of her foot. She too speaks with an Irish accent, with a warm, sonorous tone.

Frank's manager, **Teddy**, played by **Nigel Lindsay**, is also middle-aged. A tall man, with thinning brown hair, and a neat moustache, Teddy wears a check country shirt, with a claret bow tie with tiny, pale polka dots, and a claret wool waistcoat. He wears beige trousers, with grey socks and grey tweed slippers.

A calmer figure than the other two, Teddy moves more slowly and sedately, though he is prone to broad arm gestures when reminiscing. When he comes to particularly poignant memories, he stills for a moment. Teddy speaks with a pronounced Cockney accent, in a broad and rich baritone voice.

That concludes the audio description introduction for **Faith Healer**. It was prepared by Bríd Ní Ghruagáin, who will deliver the audio description for the matinee performance. The audio description script was developed by Máirín Harte. Audio description at the Abbey Theatre is provided by Arts & Disability Ireland with support from The Arts Council.

For updates about audio described and captioned performances, text **ACCESSARTS** to **51444** or head to **www.adiarts.ie** for more information.

Thank you. Go raibh maith agaibh.