

The Long Christmas Dinner by Thornton Wilder

Audio Description Programme Notes for the performance in the Peacock Theatre Thursday 16th December 2021 at 6.30pm

Welcome to the programme notes for **The Long Christmas Dinner** written by Thornton Wilder. The play is directed by Sarah Jane Scaife and Raymond Keane. The Costume Designer is Sinead Cuthbert and the Set Designer is Sally Withnell. Lighting design is by Stephen Dodd and the Sound Designer is Aoife Kavanagh.

The show will be audio described in **The Peacock Theatre** on Thursday 16th December at 6.30pm. The performance lasts for 50 minutes, without an interval.

ABOUT THE PLAY

In this shapeshifting meditation on family, progress, death, and renewal, we see the Bayard family experience 90 Christmas dinners over 90 years.

Compressed into 50 minutes of playing time, **The Long Christmas Dinner** gives us a moment to pause and reflect on our own families, what has been lost to us, and what Christmas means for each of us.

ABOUT THE SET

The Peacock Theatre has a smaller stage than The Abbey. At 15.6 metres wide and 7.5 metres deep there is a more intimate feel to the space.

The set and costume design in this particular play was inspired by the paintings of Edward Hopper. This is evident by its simplicity, expressive lighting and sense of stark realism.

Set in the dining room of the Bayard family there is a mahogany eight seat curved end dining table with ball claw legs placed centrally length ways across the space. The table is dressed with a white linen tablecloth that has lace trim. It's decorated with two bottle green taper candles set in clear glass dinner candle holders, they are surrounded by decorative mid winter foliage – pine and holly leaves, pine cones and decorative fruit.

There are classical clear glass wine glasses set on the table along with an empty clear glass carafe. Everything else is imaginary and mimed by the actors such as the carving of the turkey, serving the cranberry sauce, eating the food.

There are five 18th century Hepplewhite chairs that are placed around the table so that the characters face us. Two carvers at each end and three stand chairs facing us on the other side of the table.

The back wall is painted a light grey with hints of green and blue in rough brush strokes, the bottom half of the wall is panelled, to the right of it is a doorway through which we can glimpse the entrance to the hallway where all but the nurse enter. The hallway is painted in similar style but with hues of light brown. Expressive lighting from an unseen window hits the little piece of hallway throwing light into the dining room. A hint of the external world – soft sunset peach, bright yellow sunshine, sometimes darkness.

The floor reflects the colours in the wall, soft grey almost blueish with hints of green.

To the front right of the dining room is another doorway where the nurse enters and exits.

To the left of the space another doorway that some characters walk through via the dining room.

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

The costumes in this piece are inspired by Edward Hopper so do not span the 90 years we are privvied to in this play but are simply set in the second world war era and the fifties.

I'll begin with **Lucia** played by **Valerie O'Connor** who is the first character to enter the room. A matriarch. A woman perhaps in her late thirties. She wears a conservative but bright red 1940s style dress, fitted at the waist with pleats at the front. The dress is adorned with a gold brooch with wave motifs. She wears a simple string of pearls and diamante stud earrings. Lucia's blond hair is highly stylised, sculpted as was the style in the 1940s with waves. Curled under at the back and a large curl at the front. Her make-up again very much of that era – she wears bright red lipstick. On her feet black patent leather court shoes.

Her husband **Roderick** played by **Bryan Burroughs** and **Mother Bayard** played by **Rachael Dowling** are the next to arrive. Roderick, a man in his forties wears light brown wool suit trousers and waistcoat over a double cufflink white shirt. His tie a rusty red colour with a paisley patterned stripe running through it. Metal sleeve garters hold up the shirt sleeves. On his feet he wears brown brogues. Roderick sits at the head of the table to our left.

Mother Bayard sits in a wheelchair, her greying hair pinned up in a bun. She wears a black silk dress with a raised neck that is embroidered with white petalled flowers and swirls. There are satin covered black buttons down the front. On her feet she wears sensible black lace up shoes.

Cousin Brandon played by **Will O'Connell** is placed at the opposite end of the table to Roderick. He arrives in a darker brown wool suit complete with jacket and trilby. He also wears a white shirt, his tie a dull orange with little yellow motifs upon it. Cousin Brandon's brown hair is greased back and he sports a small moustache.

The next character to arrive does not take a seat at the table. **Nurse** is silently played by **Fiona Lucia McGarry**, amazonian in stature and generally stoic in nature. She wears a uniform of black wool skirt and a black top with wide white collar and white on the sleeve to match. Nurse has thick black hair rolled up tightly and pinned up on both sides. Her large brown eyes express a lot even when stoic. Her full lips painted a darker shade than the other women so that they appear dull in comparison.

Lucia and Roderick's son **Charles** played by **Emmet Byrne** is the next to take his seat at the table. Charles is a man in his twenties who is confident in his movements. His cobalt blue double breasted suit with pleat front trousers as was the style of the fifties, accentuates his confidence. The same as the other men he wears a white shirt but, a more jazzy tie – a paisley bottle green tie with aubergine swirls and gold and sky blue embroidered patterns. Charles wears a gold ring on his right hand pinky finger.

Charles' sister **Genevieve** is in her twenties, she is played by **Fionnuala Gygax**. She wears an aubergine coloured short sleeved wave print, a-line fitted dress with a black thin leather belt around the waist. On the lapel a small bone china flower design brooch in aubergine, cream and green. She wears low heeled black shoes that have a strap across the front and similarly to the other women, also wears her dusty blonde hair highly stylised. Her lipstick an orangey red. Genevieve exudes confidence as she energetically moves about the room.

Leonora of similar age to Genevieve played by **Rachel O'Byrne** is the next guest to arrive. A broad shouldered woman wearing a bottle green and navy checked fitted dress with a ruched collar and pleats in the skirt. She

has a leaf motif diamante brooch on the the collar. Around her neck she wears three strings of pearls. Her red lipstick accentuates her green eyes and when she smiles dimples appear in her cheeks. Her shoulder length dark brown hair a little simpler in design than Genevieve's but still firmly sculpted to curl under, a single large curl at the front.

Ermengarde the elder of the group played by **Máire Ní Ghráinne** is next to seat herself at the table. A petite woman in her seventies wearing a dark green fitted dress that rests just below the knee. It has a simple sash waist that elegantly ties to the side. The dress is decorated with embroidered flowers with tiny little bits of light pink here and there. On her feet she wears low heeled suede shoes that have a thick band across the front.

The twins arrive together - **Lucia II** played by **Aisling Kearns** and **Sam** played by **Eoin Fullston**. They are in their late teens/early twenties. Lucia named after her grandmother, whirls about the place in her 1950s style yellow, almost lime dress that has a tight fitted bodice with green cord embroidered leaves and gold beaded flowers. The gathered skirt is made from organza. On her feet she wears dainty cream leather dance shoes with a gold t-bar. A necklace - three cream acrylic roses mounted on a gold chain decorates her neckline. Unlike the other women she wears her blonde hair long but she still has a stylised curl at the front.

Her brother Sam is a slight fellow with bright blue eyes. He turns up wearing a world war two US army winter service uniform of olive drab wool complete with sidecap. Unlike his sister he appears shy.

Their brother **Roderick II** played by **Liam Bixby** is the last to arrive sauntering in casually, wearing stylish aubergine/purple trousers that have pleats down the front and turn ups and a white shirt and checked sports jacket in cream, brown and navy blue. On his feet cream, brown and black brogues. A grey trilby decorated with a few small feathers on the side – red, black speckled and grey. He sits slouched, wide legged.

It is worth noting here that although staff are addressed during the play, they do not actually appear.

That concludes the programme notes for this production of **The Long Christmas Dinner**. They were prepared by Mo Harte. Audio description at the Peacock Theatre is provided by Arts & Disability Ireland with support from the Arts Council.

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