

Portia Coughlan by Marina Carr

Audio Description Programme Notes for the matinee performance in the Abbey Theatre Saturday 5th March 2022, at 2pm

Welcome to the audio description introduction to **Portia Coughlan** by Marina Carr at the Abbey Theatre.

The play is directed by Caroline Byrne. Set Design is by Chiara Stephenson, with Costume Design by Catherine Fay, and Lighting Design by Paul Keogan. The Composer and Sound Designer is Mel Mercier. Video Design is by Jack Phelan, and the Voice Director is Andrea Ainsworth. The Movement Director is Megan Kennedy, and the Fight Director is Ciaran O'Grady.

The performance runs for approximately one hour and fifty minutes without interval.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Today is Portia Coughlan's 30th birthday, but she doesn't have the heart to celebrate. It's also the anniversary of the death of her twin brother, Gabriel, who drowned 15 years ago.

Is it her fate to join him in the Belmont River, or can she escape the past and find her place in this world?

Marina Carr's haunting play premiered at the Abbey Theatre in 1996. This new production is directed by Abbey Theatre Associate Director, Caroline Byrne, and stars Olivier Award winner, Denise Gough in the title role.

ABOUT THE SET

The set for this play is stark, and highly stylised. The floor of the stage is covered in black Styrofoam tiles set in a grid pattern with a centimetre gap in between. A shallow stream of water runs across the front.

At the stage level, there are side walls and a back wall, creating an enclosed space. The walls reach up to the height of about 2 and a half metres, or 8 feet. The side walls are slightly splayed, so that the bottom of the walls reach further onstage, with the top of the walls angled outwards. Cut into the side walls on either side is a long counter which slides onstage on tracks when needed: one towards the front of the stage on our left, and one towards the back of the enclosed space on our right.

In the dead centre of the back wall, a narrow staircase has been cut into the wall. 13 steps bring us up to an upper level with a walkway, and a curved back wall that reaches up into the rafters of the venue. Characters can enter onto the upper level and walk behind the lower room, over to the far right. Here, there is a steep sloping bank that can be clambered down, bringing someone from the upper level, right down to the stream at the front of the stage.

In the dead centre of the upper level is an open doorway, in shadow.

All the walls are rough to the touch - an uneven surface. The curved wall of the upper level is painted in a mottled, pale grey. Back at stage level, in the enclosed space, the walls are a brownish-maroon at the top, gradually darkening to almost black at stage level.

This stark space represents all the different locations visited in the play. In the kitchen of Portia's house, a counter slides in from our right, and two black pendant lampshades are lowered to above head height. On the far side of the counter is a set of shelves from which the characters find what they need for the space: a pair of stools to place by the counter, glasses and plates, even a radio. All is placed neatly underneath again, and the counter slides away, flush with the wall and the pendant lamps hoisted up and away.

In the local bar, a counter slides in on the left, with an overhead shelf lowered into the space. This overhead shelf has wine glasses hanging from it, as well as cream lampshades. The counter in the bar is higher, and has a beer tap attached. The barman carries in some bar stools, an amplifier, and a radio.

There are two gaps in the left-hand wall, one in front, and one behind the counter, through which the cast come and go for all scenes.

For scenes by the bank of the Belmont River, both counters are hidden again, and the characters sit on the sloping front of the stage where it joins the shallow stream.

The lighting in this production is natural at times, when located in the kitchen, or the bar. But there are times when a chord of music strikes, and Portia stills - the lights picking her out against the rest for a moment. There are also large video projections cast on the massive curved wall above the stage and, on occasion, on a black gauze screen that is sometimes lowered at the very front of the stage. The content of the video will be described as part of the audio description during the live performance.

ABOUT THE CAST AND COSTUMES

Portia Coughlan, played by Denise Gough, is 30 years old. She has a slight build, and long blond hair, slightly darker at the roots. Portia's face is pale, with large blue eyes, her mouth downturned. When she first appears, she wears a thin and loose black cotton t-shirt with a low V-neck, over a pale slip that comes to her mid-thigh. Over this she wears an oversized open cardigan with brown, cream, and red repeated pattern, like an old-fashioned carpet. Later, she adds a calf-length A-line skirt in teal corduroy, with pockets and a small slit at the front. Portia has a habit of stuffing her hands into the broad waistband of this skirt as she paces. She goes about barefoot most of the time, but also has a pair of light-brown Birkenstock sandals. She wears a plain gold wedding band on her ring finger.

Her husband, **Raphael**, played by Marty Rea, is about the same age. A very tall, and thin, man, Raphael has neat black hair, cut short and slicked into a neat side parting. His pale face is framed by a few days' growth of a dark beard and moustache. He first appears wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit, with white shirt and a tie. He wears black ankle high cowboy boots, tucked under his trouser legs.

Raphael also wears a plain wedding band, and a chunky silver wristwatch. He often carries his old-fashioned mobile phone and a heavy set of keys.

Portia's aunt, **Maggie May Doorley**, is played by Anna Healy. In her fifties, Maggie May is a larger woman, with curly brown hair piled loosely up and back, and held in place with a tortoise shell hair grip. She first arrives wearing a bright red, fluffy jumper, with several gold necklaces around her neck, a tight, black leather skirt, black fishnet stockings and black kitten heel shoes. She wears large, hooped earrings and carries a big handbag.

Maggie May's husband, **Senchil Doorley**, is played by Gary Murphy. He is about the same age as Maggie May, maybe a little older, and has grey hair and is clean-shaven. Senchil wears a soft, chenille cardigan over a pale, cotton shirt. He wears chinos and soft brown leather loafers. All of Senchil's clothing is in tones of muted moss-green and pale brown. He is soft-spoken.

Portia's mother, **Marianne Scully**, is portrayed by Derbhle Crotty. Like her sister, Marianne is in her fifties. She wears her auburn hair pulled back tightly into an austere bun, which also keeps her face quite taut. She does not wear much make-up. She first appears in a light-brown dress with cream floral pattern, with cream court shoes and a matching small handbag. Marianne wears a narrow gold watch, and simple gold chain necklace.

Portia's father, **Sly Scully**, is played by Liam Carney. His grey hair is closely cropped, and sometimes hidden under a baseball cap, as when he first appears. Here, Sly wears a blue peaked cap, with blue jumper, under a tan sleeveless jacket, grey jeans and brown workboots. He wears a wedding band, and a chunky, silver, men's watch.

Blaize Scully, played by Barbara Brennan, is Sly's mother, and Portia's grandmother. Blaize is about eighty, and uses a wheelchair. Her silver grey hair is cut short, and she wears a lilac blouse under a magenta cardigan, and a plaid skirt in pale brown, with a thin magenta check pattern. We wears skin coloured tights and comfortable, black leather shoes.

Stacia Doyle, played by Imogen Doel, is Portia's friend. She too is about 30, with very long blond hair, most often pulled back into a half-ponytail. She wears a patterned cotton shirt and pale blue, high-waisted denim jeans, with brown leather ankle boots and a black bomber jacket with an embroidered red rose pattern. Stacia wears an eye patch over her right eye.

A neighbour, **Damus Halion**, is played by Fionn Ó Loingsigh. Also about 30, Damus has brown hair, and is unshaven. He wears grey jogging bottoms and a green polo shirt, with brown workboots and an anorak. When he first appears, he has a cigarette tucked neatly behind his ear.

The local barman, **Fintan Goolan**, is played by Jamie Beamish. Full of swagger, Fintan has thick auburn hair, and a full beard. He wears a cotton shirt patterned in garish colours, under a bottle green waistcoat, and jeans, with a leather belt and silver buckle. He wears brown cowboy boots.

That concludes the audio description introduction for **Portia Coughlan**. It was prepared by Bríd Ní Ghruagáin, who will also provide audio description for the matinee performance. Audio description at the Abbey Theatre is provided by Arts & Disability Ireland with support from The Arts Council.

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Thank you. Go raibh maith agaibh.

