

Joyce's Women

by Edna O'Brien

Programme notes for Audio Described Performance
Abbey Theatre, 8thth October 2022 at 2pm

Welcome to the introductory notes for **Joyce's Women** by Edna O'Brien. The play is directed by Conall Morrison. Set Design is by Sabine Dargent and Costume Design by Joan O'Clery. Lighting is designed by Ben Ormerod and the Composer is Conor Linehan. The Sound Designer on this show is Ivan Birthistle and the Movement Director Justine Doswell.

The audio described performance is in the Abbey Theatre on the 8th of October and begins at 2pm. It lasts for approximately one hour and thirty-eight minutes, with no interval.

ABOUT THE PLAY

One of Ireland's greatest contemporary writers turns her attention to the life of one of the country's greatest novelists, in a powerful new play *Joyce's Women*.

Written for the occasion of the 100th anniversary of *Ulysses*, this world premiere from Edna O'Brien gives voice to the women who were central to the life of James Joyce.

On the Abbey stage as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, this audacious world premiere is directed by Conall Morrison.

ABOUT THE SET

Heavy velvet ruby red curtains hang from the proscenium arch so that we feel we are in a music hall theatre. A black corked floor covers the length of the stage and reaches back two metres where the curtain rests upon a step. Characters enter from stage right and left and when they speak in this part of the stage there is a slight echo.

Later the curtains open and the step leads us onto a white painted wooden floor, a mostly naturalistic guest house living space which doubles up as a Brigitte's seamstress workspace. There is an expressionist-styled two walled backdrop made up of black framed mirrors and frosted windows. The two walls meet near the back corner to our right. The wall to our right nearest to us is more frosted glass than mirrors, a little bit like a snug in a pub. There's a ledge here where Zozimus sits taking everything in. He's unnoticed most of the time. There's a similar panel on the back wall to furthest left. The nearer the panels get to the meeting point the more the mirrors become more jagged and fragmented. In between panels there is space for characters to enter. Spotlights and characters can sometimes be identified in the mirrors. Against the left hand back wall about a third of the way in is an Edwardian cast metal stove that opens at the top, next to it on the right a brass coal bucket and on the left of the stove, a comfortable armchair with ochre coloured upholstery. To the left of the armchair is a wooden side table with a black rotary dial retro telephone upon it. A little closer towards the corner where the left and right wall meet is a heavy dark wood table placed width ways facing us, there's a shelf underneath full of folded clothes and material. A white communion dress is laid out on the table with a sewing basket and scissors nearby. A wooden chair with a cushioned seat set near the head of it nearest us and a similar chair sits further in on our left of the table. Where the panels meet there is a clear space on the floor. Along the right hand wall dark coloured clothes are hung on a wooden clothes horse, a sewing basket at its feet. Finally before we arrive at the snug where Zozimus perches there is a Singer sewing machine fitted with a foot pedal.

The lighting in the play has a touch of film noir about it in that the shadows can be dramatic and there are atmospheric wisps of smoke evident in the spotlights.

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

The show opens with the voice of **Zozimus** played by **Bill Murphy**. Zozimus appears in warm but well worn clothes – dark brown woollen trousers, a grandfather shirt with a deep red waistcoat and a ragged deep red woollen scarf around his neck. Dark fingerless gloves warm his hands and on his feet he wears workman's boots. Zozimus has a bushy brown beard and brown hair over which he wears a bowler hat. He wears a frayed dark brown overcoat and holds a shillelagh.

James Joyce played by **Stephen Hogan** in comparison appears dapper in his outfits - a heavy linen cream coloured two piece suit of trousers and jacket with pinstriped shirt and paisley dicky bow. A silk pocket handkerchief in silver and blue peeps out from his jacket pocket. On his feet white tennis shoes. On his head a fawn coloured straw panama hat. He carries a cane similar to Charlie Chaplin's. Later he wears fawn coloured trousers with brogues and a brown dog tooth sports jacket with a shirt and dicky bow. As a young man courting Nora he wears a flat cap and dark green sports jacket with cream trousers and brown brogues, white shirt and a blue tie. James wears his iconic round glasses all the way through the play. He has a stache with a soul patch under lip.

May Joyce played by **Deirdre Donnelly** appears looking pale and frayed around the edges. She is barefoot and wears a dark grey dress made of course material. Her grey hair pinned up but also a frayed around the edges.

Brigitte Zimmerman played by **Hilda Fay** runs the guest house where Nora resides, she is also a seamstress. Brigitte wears a thirties style brown dress with flowers of yellow, purple blue print upon it and a white lace collar. On her feet she wears brown leather brogues. Over her dress Brigitte wears a yellow cross over apron with a wild flower print on it. Brigitte has jet black hair pinned up in a tight bun which emphasises her high cheek bones and kind eyes.

Nora Barnacle played by **Bríd Ní Neachtain** is a woman in her fifties and is smaller than the broad shouldered Brigitte. She wears a burgundy coloured skirt with splashes of dark green and yellow. It has two pleats on the front and many pleats on the back. She wears a light pink blouse over which she wears a turquoise jacket fitted about the waist with a single button. On her feet she wears brown heeled court shoes. Later she changes her blouse to a burgundy coloured fitted blouse with a white collar. When she's going out she wears a burgundy fascinator that has two small feathers to one side, her coat an aubergine colour with a fur trim. Nora has red hair fashioned in a sleek bob with soft waves in it. She's prone to sulking and scowling.

Lucia Joyce played by **Genevieve Hulme Beaman** has an effervescent energy about her, like a sparkle - you don't quite know what she's going to do next. She's petite with long brown hair and has an impish like quality in that she darts about the place. We first meet her standing in a line with the other women. She stands out in her red fitted dress with elegant heeled shoes and full length fur coat with wool bucket bowler hat. When we next meet her she is reclining on a golden coloured chaise longue wearing a calf length cornflower blue slip shift nightdress in silk with a dusty pink cardigan and barefoot as she often is. At her father's birthday party she wears a light yellow chiffon dress with a black motif. When she arrives in Zurich she wears a pewter coloured dress with pleated skirt and double breasted top with white woollen tights and thick grey socks tucked into black boots over which she wears a man's woollen overcoat.

Stanislaus Joyce played by **Patrick Moy** first arrives wearing a black and white pinstriped waistcoat and trousers with black lace up shoes and a white shirt. His dark hair short, parted centrally. Later he wears a similar outfit under a warm woollen overcoat with black leather gloves and black trilby. Stanislaus is in his thirties/early forties

Martha Fleischmann played by **Caitríona Ní Mhurchú** moves with confidence. She wears a black vintage midi dress with bits of silver thread running through it. On her feet black high heeled shoes with a strap across.

Her coiffed white hair pinned up and the style completed with a black pill box hat with a small net veil. She wears pearl stud earrings and a necklace.

Ali White plays **Harriet Shaw Weaver** a conservative looking woman who wears two piece outfits of pleated skirt and fitted jacket with an elegant wool hat to match, on her feet brown leather low heeled shoes. Sometimes she wears brown leather gloves.

That concludes the programme notes for the audio described performance of **Joyce's Women**. The notes were prepared by Mo Harte who will be audio describing the performance. Audio Description at The Abbey Theatre is provided by Arts and 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.