

The Weir

by Conor McPherson

Audio Description Programme Notes for the performance in the Abbey Theatre Saturday 7th January 2023, at 2pm

Welcome to the audio description introduction to **The Weir**, written by Conor McPherson.

This production is directed by Caitríona McLaughlin. Set and Costume Design is by Sarah Bacon, with Lighting Design by Jane Cox. The Composer and Musical Director is Tom Lane, with Sound Design by Rob Moloney. The Movement Director is Sue Mythen.

The performance runs for approximately one hour and fifty minutes without interval. Patrons who leave the auditorium during the performance may not be readmitted. Please note that haze effects will be used during the show.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Gathered at the bar on a windy night in rural Ireland, the landlord and his regulars share old stories with Valerie, a young woman who has recently arrived from Dublin. At turns ghostly and mesmerising, their tales draw Valerie into their world – but it is her story that stops the men in their tracks.

Written by Olivier award-winning, and Tony award-nominated, playwright Conor McPherson, who is currently Senior Associate Artist at the Abbey Theatre, **The Weir** won the Olivier Award for Best New Play on its premiere, and has since been staged the world over.

Directed by Caitríona McLaughlin, this major new staging of **The Weir** promises a spellbinding winter production for the Abbey stage.

ABOUT THE SET

When the audience arrives, a thick black screen hangs at the front of the stage, with a lighter gauze screen behind it. As the performance begins, music is played by two musicians onstage, and the screens are raised high up and into the rafters of the theatre.

At the back wall is a vast backdrop, showing a dark evening sky, with steely grey storm clouds gathering in the gloom. The stage is covered in a rough, black surface, like gravel ground into beaten earth.

On our left, an old gunmetal grey hatchback is parked facing us, with its headlamps turned on. With a Leitrim registration plate, dated 1989, it is a Vauxhall Nova, with its paintwork pockmarked all over with patches of rust, and light spots where the tree sap has corroded the paint. As the performance begins, white mist billows out over the stage from behind this hatchback and out into the audience, before finally dissipating.

The whole right-hand side of the stage is taken up with one single room. As the screens lift, we are faced with a blank outside wall, painted white once, though a little grubby now, with a doorway, and a large picture window. A second wall has another doorway in it, and a neon sign hangs on the wall with the word "Bar" in red lettering. This room slowly revolves in place until the interior is revealed to us. This is Brendan's bar.

When the room comes to a stop, the large picture window is in front of us, with a bench seat underneath it, covered in red vinyl upholstery, and a long Formica-topped table in front of it. The window is dusty and grimy, with collections of dead flies in the corners of the window. There is a coat stand just to the left of this large window.

Between the window and the door in the right-hand corner of the room is the bar counter with three beer taps – Guinness, Smithwicks and Harp. In front of the counter are three tall barstools. Nearer the front there is another small Formica-topped table, with a chair and stool stacked on top of it. In the left-hand corner of the room, nearest us and close to the centre of the stage, is a small cast-iron stove, with a bucket beside it filled with peat briquettes. On the wall over on the far left is a doorway with a glass pane in it, which leads outside. There is a red mat in front of the doorway. The bar floor is made up of vinyl tiles, mostly dark grey, with some red, pale blue and light grey.

This bar seems to belong to the end of the last century, with an old television and remote control on a shelf in one corner of the room, and a large trout in a glass frame hanging over the window. Between the window and the bar is a section of counter that lifts up.

On the shelves underneath are teapots, a box of Barry's tea, china cups, a milk jug and a sugar bowl, with a Yellow Pages telephone directory and a massive reel of twine on the shelf below. All around the doorway behind the bar are photographs of customers pinned to the door frame, some postcards, and paper money of different currencies. There is a landline phone hanging by the doorway as well, with business cards for local hackneys all around it, and a handwritten note with a contact number for babysitting. There is an engraving of a ruin of a church in Jamestown, Co. Leitrim hanging on the wall.

On the wall behind the bar is a high shelf, well over head height, with old biscuit tins, and two photographs of Gaelic football teams, one black and white, the other colour, both the Leitrim inter-county teams. The rest of this high shelf is crammed with footballing trophies, and a photo of a Leitrim player hoisted up on the shoulders of his teammates.

Behind the bar are more shelves, one filled with packets of cigarettes – Carrols, Silk Cut, Sweet Afton, Major and Players – and boxes of matches. There's a Santa ornament sat in behind them. Another shelf holds an old ghetto blaster with a radio and cassette deck, and a stack of tapes alongside it. On the lowest shelf is a cash register with a shot measure, and bottles of spirits and liqueurs, like Paddy Whiskey, Hennessy cognac and Courvoisier. There's a couple of poor boxes on display too – one for the Salvation Army, and one for Irish Guide Dogs. There is a small fridge under the bar with bottles of beer and stout. The customers use punts and Irish coins, rather than euros.

Lastly, on the side wall on our left, under a lighting sconce, and between the bar and the doorway to the outside, a set of black and white photographs are hung. Some show construction of a large dam on a river, with others showing workmen posing for a group photo.

ABOUT THE CAST AND COSTUMES

Brendan, the bar's landlord, is played by **Seán Fox**. In his thirties, Brendan has thick, dark brown hair cut short, and a light covering of stubble on his chin. A well-built, strong young man, he wears a red-, blue-, and white-striped polo shirt, with a cotton zipped-neck jumper over it in cream, navy and bottle green, and the words "New York" stitched under the zip.

He wears beige corduroy trousers, and well-scuffed brown lace-up shoes.

Brendan often stands behind the bar, gently leaning against the wall, or the bar, or a barstool, with his arms crossed in front of his chest. He has a serious expression on his face, and is quick to take offence, but just as quick to share an in-joke, and a cheeky grin, with his regulars.

The first of these regulars to enter the bar is **Jack**, played by **Brendan Coyle**. Jack is in his late fifties, with straight hair, once brown and now greying all over. His moustache and beard are also well-flecked with white and grey. A stout man, Jack stands tall, wearing a plain charcoal grey suit jacket and trousers, over a white cotton shirt with a vest underneath. His shirt collar is open at the neck, and he doesn't wear a tie. He wears mushroom brown patterned socks and black soft leather boots. His wristwatch peeps out from the cuff of his jacket. When he first arrives, he also wears an anorak, and a peaked cap with the words "Newholland Agriculture" in blue and yellow stitching on the front.

Jack tends to sit on a barstool by the wall, underneath the old black and white photos. He leans his back against the side wall so he can take in the whole room. He has a gruff voice, and a sharp sense of humour. He often lands a sly dig at his old friends, but follows up with a smile, with the crinkling of the corners of his eyes showing he means no harm. He can take a joke as well as he dishes them out.

Next to arrive is **Jim**, played by **Marty Rea**. It is hard to tell Jim's age, as he keeps a woolly hat pulled down over his hair, and his face is half-hidden under a bushy dark brown beard, but he is probably in his forties. Jim wears a grey-striped formal shirt open at the collar, with black Nike tracksuit bottoms that have grey stripes down the sides, long blue thermal socks, and black boots. When he comes in first, he is also wearing a navy fleece jacket which he quickly takes off and hangs on the coat stand. He also carries a blue and white-striped plastic bag, the contents of which are never revealed to us, and a newspaper open on the racing news, with copious notes handwritten in black pen.

Jim sits quietly most of the time, often chewing at the butt of the small, green, bookies' pen he has in his hand at all times, or giving a sideways glance to the racing page and furrowing his brow. His eyes are nearly always half-closed, sitting on the bench with his back to the large window, his legs spread wide, rarely making eye contact with anyone. From time to time, he takes a pile of coins out of his pocket and carefully counts out a neat pile of change to cover his next order at the bar.

Another local arrives in – **Finbar**, played by **Peter Coonan**. Finbar is in his forties, with his short, fair hair slicked back. A trim man of average height, Finbar wears a cream suit, with wine-coloured shirt underneath, tan leather belt, stripy socks, and tan slip-on leather shoes. His wristwatch has a blue leather strap, and he carries a leather wallet in his pocket.

Finbar's voice is a little higher than the other men, and he's a smooth talker. Something of a showman, Finbar doesn't gravitate to a particular spot in the bar like the others. He likes to take up the centre of the room, pointing this way and that, often pausing for effect to pull at the belt of his trousers, or fix the hem of his shirt before speaking again.

Finbar accompanies **Valerie**, played by **Jolly Abraham**, a new arrival from Dublin. Valerie is in her thirties, a slim woman with dark, wavy hair cut in a short bob. She wears a grey jumper under a beige, brown and black check jacket, with indigo jeans and chocolate brown leather ankle boots. She also carries a small navy and tan leather handbag slung over her shoulder with a long strap. Valerie wears a simple gold chain necklace which sometimes catches the light.

Valerie is friendly, with a good-natured smile. She speaks with an American accent and is unfailingly polite to the four men from rural Ireland who almost fall over themselves, each in their own way, to make her feel welcome to the bar.

Throughout the performance, two musicians come and go, adding to the atmosphere with live music. **Courtney Cullen** plays the violin.

Her long brown hair is plaited and wrapped up and over her forehead, and around the back like a crown. She wears a loose, black linen tunic, open at the front, with a plain black silk top underneath. She wears dark linen trousers, and black lace-up boots. Courtney often sits on the bonnet of the Vauxhall Nova, leaning back against the windscreen, playing the violin, or looking over into the bar.

Éamonn Cagney, a tall man, with his grey hair in loose locks around his face, is a percussionist. He wears a grey corduroy shirt with a well-worn leather waistcoat over it, and a dark grey knitted scarf with a Fair Isle pattern, over grey moleskin trousers and black boots. He stands at the back of the car, where the back window has been removed, and plays a series of percussion instruments, some of which are sitting in the boot, including bodhráns and tuned steel drums that sound like a glockenspiel.

That concludes the audio description introduction for **The Weir**. It was prepared by Bríd Ní Ghruagáin, who will also provide audio description for the performance. A Touch Tour will also be held, gathering Front of House at Twelve o’Clock, before this described performance. 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.

