

Tales from the Holywell

by Damien Dempsey

Audio Description Programme Notes **for the performance in the Abbey Theatre** **Friday 17th February 2023, at 7.30pm**

Welcome to the audio description introduction to **Tales from the Holywell**, written and performed by Damien Dempsey.

This production is directed by Conor McPherson. Set and Lighting Design is by Paul Keogan, with Costume Design by Saileóg O'Halloran. The Sound Design is by Sinéad Diskin.

The performance runs for approximately two hours and fifteen minutes with one 15 minute interval. Patrons who leave the auditorium during the performance may not be readmitted.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

This world premiere Abbey production is a journey through Damien Dempsey's life. Directed by acclaimed Irish writer and director Conor McPherson, **Tales from the Holywell** sees one of Ireland's great musical storytellers appear and perform onstage like never before.

This is a story of a young boy from Dublin's Northside finding his voice, his muse and his tribe.

Tales from the Holywell brings to the national stage, in words, music and song, a reflection on Damien Dempsey's childhood, the early stages of his music-making, and life as an Irish musician.

Raised on Holywell Crescent, Donaghmede, Damien's song writing career spans more than 20 years, releasing 10 albums and performing with Sinéad O'Connor and Bob Dylan along the way. His work is known for his truthful and emotive lyrics, celebrating how music can move us all.

Tales from the Holywell - an Abbey Theatre commission - is a revealing insight into the artist we know and love as Damo.

ABOUT THE SET

When the audience arrives, a thick black screen hangs at the front of the stage, with a thin rectangle of bright white light framing the full width and height of the stage. The floor is a charcoal grey.

When the performance begins, this thick screen at the front is lifted up and away, revealing a lighter gauze screen behind it, and a series of five smaller rectangles of light. Each of these small light-frames is lined with gauze. The five performers in **Tales from the Holywell** are placed behind each screen.

When stage lights are shone onto these light-frames at particular angles, they can be very opaque, and the musicians are only shown in silhouette. Other times, they can be as clear as a window.

In the centre is a low platform, about two by two metres, with a microphone stand at the front, two amplifiers on either side and three guitars sitting on guitar stands. Behind this low platform is a second platform, slightly higher, that runs the full width of the stage. This is where the rest of the performers are placed. On the far left is a wooden piano - its back to us - covered in gold stencilling of a bracken fern leaf pattern. Bracken ferns are found across Ireland, and often near holy wells.

At the back wall of the stage is another thick black screen which is later hoisted up into the rafters, revealing a wall of light at the back of the space onto which colours are projected that follow the narrative. Sometimes a bright sky blue, or the acid orange of Dublin streetlights. Sometimes the pinks and purples of rich sunsets, or the watery, milky haze of a foggy day.

Later on in the evening, a second piano is brought onto the stage, sitting towards the front, against the side wall on our right, its keyboard towards the centre, and a piano stool.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Damien Dempsey, who sings, talks, and plays guitar, is a tall man, in his forties. He has wavy, light brown hair which is long on top and slicked back with gel, with the back and sides closely shaved. Around his neck he wears a brass torc – a band of twisted metal forming a circle with a section missing – with wolf heads cast at the two ends of the band. He wears gold Celtic knot stud earrings, and a brass bangle on his wrist.

Damien's costume is simple – a heavy cotton black shirt, over black jeans with workman's black leather boots, and a well-scuffed black leather belt. The costume designer has continued the stencilling that is found in the set onto the costumes as well. Around the top buttons of Damien's shirt are bracken fern leaves hand-painted in gold, that reach up and over his right shoulder, and wrap around the cuffs of his shirt sleeves.

Damien tends to stand centre stage, and has three guitars sitting on stands - one to the left of him, one to the right, and one behind. Each guitar has hand-written notes on white paper selotaped to the body of the guitar. The first one Damien picks up is on our left. There is an old black and white photo of a bearded man playing the banjo selotaped to the front of this guitar. This is the late, great, Barney McKenna of the Dubliners, and formerly the Chieftains. On the front of Damien's second guitar is a white sticker with a red love heart, and the words **Love yourself today** in cursive writing – a quote from one of Damien's songs called **It's all good**.

Behind Damien on a slightly higher platform is the band. From left to right, they are as follows: the Band Leader, **Éamonn de Barra**, also playing piano, organ, wooden flute, tin whistle and tambourine, Fiddle player **Lucia McPartlin**, Double bassist **Aura Stone** and, on drums and percussion, and seated on the far right, is **Rod Quinn**. Éamonn, Lucia and Rod also provide backing vocals throughout the performance.

Éamonn, seated behind the piano on our left, has fair, shoulder-length hair, and wears a black polo neck top with an open black shirt, black wool suit trousers and black leather Chelsea boots. The shoulders and sleeves of Éamonn's over shirt, and the leg of his trousers, are decorated with a network of painted thin, gold veins. This is inspired by the Japanese practice of kintsugi (or golden repair) – the art of mending broken pottery with seams of gold running along the joins. Kintsugi treats the break and the repair as part of the thing itself, and not something to be hidden away. This theme of mending, of healing while acknowledging the break, runs throughout the performance.

Midway between Éamonn and Damien stands **Lucia**, with her fiddle, a black chair, a music stand and a microphone. Lucia has long brown hair, pulled up into a topknot bun.

She wears small gold loop earrings, and a black satin tunic dress with long sleeves gathered at the cuff, black tights and black ankle boots. Lucia's dress has the bracken stencilling over the cuffs, and around her waist, with the kintsugi gold veins over her right shoulder.

To the right of Damien is **Aura**, who plays the double bass, perched on a stool, with a music stand in front of her. Aura has shoulder-length, fair hair, and wears a black cotton shirt, wide-leg black trousers and thick-soled black lace-up shoes. Aura has large gold earrings with a leaf pattern, and her costume is festooned with the stencilled fern leaves and shadows of greyish blue.

Lastly, furthest to the right, is **Rod**, seated behind a classic rock drum kit, also with Tibetan hand cymbals, bongos, and a set of brass chimes. Rod wears a black shirt, with the Kintsugi gold veins over his left shoulder and the fern stencil on his right, with black jeans and black lace-up suede shoes.

At the end of the performance, Damien invites the audience to join him in singing one of his songs - **Sing all our Cares Away**. A link to this song will be sent in the email accompanying these notes, should you want to listen beforehand.

That concludes the audio description introduction for **Tales from the Holywell**. It was prepared by Bríd Ní Ghrúagáin, who will also provide audio description for the performance. A Touch Tour will also be held, gathering Front of House at Five Thirty PM (5.30pm) 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.

