

SOFT
PRODUCTIONS



AN ABBEY THEATRE AND
SOFFT PRODUCTIONS CO-PRODUCTION

AN OLD SONG, HALF FORGOTTEN

Written by Deirdre Kinahan
Directed by Louise Lowe

14 APR—6 MAY 2023
ON THE PEACOCK STAGE



funding
theatre



An Roinn Turasoireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



CREATIVES

CAST

James Bryan Murray
Younger James Matthew Malone
Alternate James Barry McGovern
Alternate Younger James Darragh Feehely

Writer Deirdre Kinahan
Director Louise Lowe
Assistant Director Samantha Cade
Set Designer Conor Jacob
Lighting Designer Ciaran Bagnall
Sound Designer and
Additional Composition Philip Stewart

Original Music for String Quartet

Costume Designer

Violinist

Violinist

Violist

Cellist

Personal Assistant and Partner of Bryan Murray

Hair and Makeup

Voice Director

Casting

Paul Frost
Maree Kearns
Mia Cooper
Brigid Leman
Ed Creedon
Aoife Burke
Úna Crawford-O'Brien
Leonard Daly
Andrea Ainsworth
Sarah Jones



The performance on Thursday 27th April has a professional interpreter, who translates the production into Irish Sign Language.

Running time
Approx. 1 hour

Image L-R
Úna Crawford-O'Brien,
Deirdre Kinahan,
Bryan Murray

COMPANY

Production Manager	Caroline Duke (SoFFt Productions)	Personal Support Administrator	Sarah Johnston
	Cliff Barragry (Abbey Theatre)	Publicity Images	Pat Redmond
Company Manager	Danny Erskine	Production Images	Ros Kavanagh
Company Stage Manager	Tara Furlong	Irish Sign Language Interpreter	Ali Stewart
Deputy Stage Manager	Leanna Cuttle		
Costume Supervisor	Síofra Ní Chiardha	FOR SOFFT PRODUCTIONS	
Chief LX	Mick Murray	Creative Producer	Natasha Duffy
LX Programmer	Nate Lennon	Production Manager	Caroline Duke
Deputy Head of Lighting and Sound	Dave Carpenter	Assistant Producer	Rua Barron
Chief Sound Engineer	Morgan Dunne	Production Assistant	Shane O'Callaghan
Sound Engineer	Aidah Sama	Assistant Production Manager	Eva Carolan
Props Master	Eimer Murphy		
Stage Crew	John Finnegan	FOR THE ABBEY THEATRE	
	Larry Jones	Producer	Craig Flaherty
	Shane Kenny	Producing Assistant	Clara Purcell
	Davy McChrystal	Production Coordinator	Justin Murphy
	Brian O'Carroll	Graphic Design	AAD/Wove
	Martin Reid	Marketing	Saibh Hooper
	Pat Russell		Muireann Kane
Scenic Artists	Rashelle O'Regan		Heather Maher
	Pat Hendrick	Press	Conleth Teevan
	Craig Starkey		Stephen Moloney
Set Construction	Quiver	Social Media	Jack O'Dea
Care Consultant	Bairbre-Ann Harkin	Artistic Director	Caitriona McLaughlin
		Executive Director	Mark O'Brien

An Old Song, Half Forgotten by Deirdre Kinahan was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre.
Original Music composed by Paul Frost commissioned by Meath County Council Arts Office.

THANK YOU

Excerpts from *The Plough and the Stars* by Sean O'Casey are included with the kind permission of the estate of Sean O'Casey and Macnaughton Lord Representation. Very special thanks to Shivaun O'Casey for allowing their inclusion.

Special thanks to Clodagh Whelan, Saoirse Kelly and all at the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Kathleen Farrell and the Irish Dementia Working Group, Owen Boss, Dr Austin O'Carroll, Caoimhe Tyndall, Anne Clarke, Gerardette Bailey and Meath County Council Arts Office, Kevin Rafter & Martina Fitzgerald, Bríd Ní Neachtain, Rex and Míglé Ryan, Eamonn O'Reilly and all those that supported our development week in Dunderry Park, Southpaw Pictures, Steve O'Connor, Adrian O'Connell.

CREATING 'AN OLD SONG, HALF FORGOTTEN'

CAITRÍONA MCLAUGHLIN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

In *Long Day's Journey into Night* a character says: "The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future too." Those living with Alzheimer's experience this duality of time daily, where the present moment is not only vital; it is *everything*. Similarly, the greatest actors achieve this ability to repeatedly be in the moment, not as a memory exercise, but as a *presence*. I've never liked that diminution of the art form that equates acting with line-learning and memory. An actor's skill is to make *us* feel and ideally understand something fundamental about what it is to be human. Watching Bryan rehearse this play shows us we don't 'lose' people to Alzheimer's, but rather that they are on a new journey. A national theatre, whose remit is to reflect the kaleidoscopic stories of the nation, in its rich diversity, must also reflect on the different ways we understand and tell stories. Courageously, and with consummate skill, Bryan invites us to take that journey with him.

First day of rehearsals
for *An Old Song, Half
Forgotten*.



LOUISE LOWE

DIRECTOR

One of my greatest theatre privileges has been the opportunity to go on this incredible adventure with Bryan and the whole company. The rehearsal room has been a nexus of innovation and learning. Doing what we know to do for every play and then being prepared to learn how to do it all afresh.

It's a first for me that all actors in this ensemble play the same character. From the beginning, Bryan has been brilliantly supported by fellow actors Matthew Malone (playing his sometimes younger / sometimes contemporary / sometimes older self), Darragh Feehely and long-time friend and collaborator Barry McGovern. The ultimate power in Deirdre's play is that we are not just witnessing but experiencing the authentic evocation of living with Alzheimer's that Bryan brings to the role. Secondary to this, her play brilliantly deals with the power of memory both to define and to nourish us. As time slips seamlessly between past and present, we understand for James (our protagonist) that his time may not match up with the time those around him see and move through. Within this, there are divine moments of connection, of loss, love, heartache and redemption.

Rather than approaching the play from the inside out (which we frequently do as theatre makers) we have had to embrace it from the outside in. A person living with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's means that they live entirely in the present. This meant meeting Bryan in the present every day and facilitating his emotional connections to the material (which may change on a day-to-day basis). All actors seek the truth of the moment. It has been extraordinary to witness Bryan navigate the play in the now. An actor whose craft is par-excellence, delivering a performance that is always truthful in the moment, because this is the only way it can be.

On our first day of rehearsal, we were joined by Abbey Theatre Archivist, Mairéad Delaney, who took us through some of the highlights of Bryan's past productions. We learned a lot of his fantastic legacy in this theatre, but what I observed is his legacy in the present. His approach is so full of joy and he is capable (like all great actors) of delivering devastating moments and in the next have us howling with laughter. Ultimately, Bryan has shown us how to live completely in the present with ambition, verve and an insatiable joy of living.

DEIRDRE KINAHAN

PLAYWRIGHT

I hope the audience enjoys this hour inside the heart and mind of James O'Brien, a man inspired by and written for the actor Bryan Murray. I hope they go home thinking, "life is life, life is beautiful, life is tough, life is life – even with Alzheimer's." I hope they see that a magnificent actor can still give a magnificent performance regardless of the challenge of Alzheimer's. I hope they think "Theatre talks. Theatre moves. Theatre questions. Theatre celebrates. Theatre uncovers. Theatre can sing for all of us, with or without Alzheimer's." This entire project is a game of trust. The Abbey and my friends at SoFFt Productions trusted me to write this play. I trust an extraordinary creative team to deploy their magic in a whole new way. Bryan trusts in his talent, and in us, to take to the stage with no immediate memory or certainty of what is coming. Then we all trust our audience to empathise, engage, celebrate and hold us up in this special place of art, understanding, truth and ... hope!

MATTHEW MALONE

PERFORMER [YOUNGER JAMES]

I'm very honoured to be making my Abbey debut, but it's been made all the more humbling to do it alongside Bryan who began his acting career here. We'll share the stage on which he first met audiences. The magic of that has affected not only the play but also our rehearsal room. The history of all the actors that came before you feels palpable, and despite our different stages of life, Bryan and I relate very deeply about the sensation of acting: what it gives your mind, how it lifts your heart, the connection it offers, these are all the most important things about acting that his illness doesn't preclude him from. I'm looking forward to feeling our audiences realise the truth of that – creativity and connection are life-long desires and capabilities. I think our whole (brilliant) team has felt that each day of making this production.

NATASHA DUFFY

CREATIVE PRODUCER, SOFFT PRODUCTIONS

I believe deeply that all of us should have access to creating art, especially those of us traditionally locked out from the process of telling our own stories. When Deirdre Kinahan approached me in December 2021 to produce a play she was writing for Bryan Murray, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2019, I didn't think twice. Of course, the answer was yes.

The politics of access and belonging for those of us who are disabled is something dear to my heart. I had been producing festivals that created space for neurodiverse people to have their sensory needs met and had a hunger to do more.

We knew that the story of living with Alzheimer's should be told by someone living with Alzheimer's, and we knew that person had to be Bryan Murray.

We took our time with this project. Our first port of call was a development week in Meath where we learned how we could create a play with an actor living with Alzheimer's. We discovered new ways to write the script, from taking out a lot of the stage directions or communicating them more clearly, to colour coding the characters so it was clear for Bryan which lines were for him. We agreed what scaffolding we would want to put in place around the project. This included

an additional Personal Assistant to support Bryan and Úna (who herself is so integral to the project). Recruiting Bairbre-Ann Harkin, a consultant for the project, who had worked in Alzheimer's and arts, and could teach us or advise where needed; practicing good communication when working with a person living with Alzheimer's. It also involved setting up talks and workshops for the wider Abbey staff and the core team.

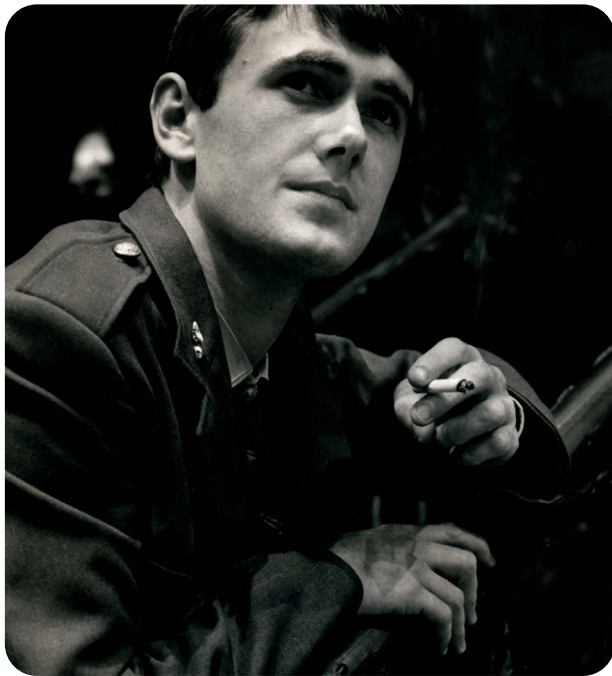
Bairbre-Ann reiterated how groundbreaking this project is. This analogy was very helpful as with everything that is groundbreaking you never know what is underneath and that is ok; it is a process of exploration, experimentation, risk-taking and creation.

This production has been underpinned by an ethos that puts the person first, rather than their dementia, focusing on what is still possible and how we can support each other. As human beings we shape and are shaped by the people around us, and we allowed ourselves, and this production, to be shaped by Bryan's experiences. We focus on what can be done and what we, as fellow creators, can put in place so a person living with dementia can not only continue to work, but continue to be an integral part of our social fabric, so that we all may be changed in the process.

Matthew Malone and Bryan Murray in character.



Bryan in hair and make-up with Leonard Daly.



1970 *The Hostage* by Brendan Behan.
Bryan as 'Leslie'.



1970 *The Hostage* by Brendan Behan.
Bryan as 'Leslie' and Máire Ní Ghráinne
as 'Teresa'.

BRYAN MURRAY PERFORMER [JAMES]

It feels wonderful to think that someone would even think to write a play especially for me, and Dee Kinahan is that someone. But it is also quite scary, as I want to be sure I do the best job that I can and do the play justice. The support that I have received from everyone involved has been incredible, they have been there for me every step of the way, which helps to make me feel safe.

Coming back to the Abbey and the Peacock feels like coming home. I learned so much as a young lad and I will always be thankful for those years. I was lucky enough to be in the company of Cyril Cusack, Sir Hugh Hunt, Leila Doolan, Frank Dermody and Rhona Woodcock to name but a few. I made great friends during that time and I am happy to say they are still my friends.

I am very grateful to everyone involved in this production, for giving me this opportunity but especially Dee for believing in me.

ÚNA CRAWFORD-O'BRIEN PERSONAL ASSISTANT AND PARTNER OF BRYAN MURRAY

As I write this, I am sitting in the rehearsal room in the Abbey Theatre and I am in a semi state of disbelief. When Dee first suggested the idea of the play I was in awe of her that she could do something so wonderful for Bryan. However, as it wasn't going to happen for about sixteen months, I was concerned it might be too late for Bryan, that the Alzheimer's disease might have progressed too far. It has changed, it is changing all the time, but we are here, the play is going ahead and I am so happy that Bryan has been given this wonderful and amazing opportunity. It hasn't always been plain sailing, there were days that Bryan didn't remember that the play was happening and I had to explain, again, that Dee had written a play especially for him. Each day I am asked, "what are we doing today?" and to be able to say to him that he is going into the Abbey, for rehearsal, is a joy.

TARA FURLONG STAGE MANAGER

As a Stage Manager, I feel deeply that the rehearsal room being a safe place for the actor is of primary importance. This became even more essential as I prepared to work with Bryan. Firstly, we increased our signage to facilitate Bryan's navigation of the building. To make these easy for Bryan to spot, we colour coded signs so that they would stand out from other imagery around the theatre. We also displayed photos of all relevant personnel on the wall of the rehearsal room, and everyone involved in the production process wears a name tag. A whiteboard containing information about each day's work is also displayed for Bryan to check on. At the beginning of the process Bryan would work from a script that included not just his lines, but also his

movements around the stage. As the process has developed, Bryan has moved to working without his script. This is with the help of an earpiece and diligent support from Darragh Feehely, who is the Alternate Performer for the character of Younger James O'Brien. Darragh's agility as an artist, combined with his intimate understanding of the fabric of Deirdre's play, allows for a unique theatrical dynamic. Darragh relays lines to Bryan in direct response to Matthew Malone's performance as Younger James O'Brien. This frees Bryan up to focus on bringing his own well-honed talent to the fore. All actors, no matter their circumstances, have different needs and challenges. It is inspiring to engage with an actor who is as committed to his craft as Bryan.



Niall O'Brien and Bryan Murray in the world premiere of *Volunteers* by Brian Friel, Abbey Theatre 1975.



1976 *The Plough and the Stars* by Sean O'Casey. Sorcha Cusack as 'Nora Clitheroe', Clive Geraghty as 'Jack Clitheroe, Des Cave as 'Captain Brennan' and Bryan Murray as the wounded 'Lieut. Langon'.

KATHLEEN FARRELL **IRISH DEMENTIA WORKING GROUP**

As a person living with Lewy Body Dementia, it is an honour and a privilege to be asked to share my views and experience about a play that is taking place in Ireland's National Theatre. I would like to congratulate all the staff at the Abbey and SoFFt Productions for making this possible. Often when people hear the word dementia they think of doom and gloom but this is not always the case. It gives me so much hope to know that one of Ireland's most talented actors, Bryan Murray has been supported and enabled to stay working while living with the diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease.

It is so important that our voices are heard and acted upon. Bryan and myself recently talked to all the staff involved in the play to ensure that everyone has an awareness and understanding of what it is like for people like Bryan and myself living with a diagnosis of dementia.

I would like to thank Deirdre Kinahan who wrote this play specifically for Bryan and all the staff involved. Their dedication and hard work have ensured that people living with dementia are respected and valued in our society. I cannot wait for opening night to see this amazing and powerful project come to life.

KEVIN QUAID **CHAIR OF THE IRISH DEMENTIA** **WORKING GROUP**

I want to congratulate everyone involved in what can only be a masterpiece, a piece of work undertaken by an actor who has given so much to his craft. When you look at his diagnosis of dementia, ask yourself: did his diagnosis stop him, did his diagnosis define him? The answer is no. To have this play in the national theatre is true dementia inclusivity. If this can be done on stage by a person with dementia then why don't we take it out into the community and make our communities and our lives dementia inclusive.

The main lesson that we can all learn from this is to see the person first and not the disease. We are still the same person with the same feelings, only now our power to keep going has become stronger; we might have to dig a little deeper to find our passion and this beautiful play is living proof of that. This is the main vision of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and it is working each and every day for so many of us but the Alzheimer Society of Ireland still wants to reach more people and with your help they can. I am so proud of this work and so proud to be Chair of the amazing Irish Dementia Working Group.

RESOURCES

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland's National Helpline Service is open 6 days a week. Call **1800 341 341**, email helpline@alzheimier.ie or Live Chat Monday to Friday 10am to 11am and 3pm to 5pm, on a Saturday 10am to 1pm.

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland's National Helpline is a confidential information and support service for people with dementia and their families, carers, anyone concerned about their memory and those working or studying in the field.

If you are living with dementia, or know someone who is, you might be interested in Azure, which provides dementia-inclusive art tours in galleries and museums nationwide, including IMMA in Dublin. Azure tours take place at 11am on the first Friday of every month in the Irish Museum of Modern Art, for more information contact talkingart@imma.ie.



Matthew Malone and Bryan Murray as Younger James and James.
Image: Pat Redmond

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**‘ULTIMATELY, BRYAN
HAS SHOWN US
HOW TO LIVE
COMPLETELY IN
THE PRESENT WITH
AMBITION, VERVE
AND AN INSATIABLE
JOY OF LIVING.’**

– LOUISE LOWE



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