

Youth's the Season -? **by Mary Manning**

Audio Description Introduction **for the matinee performance in the Abbey Theatre** **Saturday 19th April 2025, at 2pm**

Welcome to this introduction to **Youth's the Season -?**, by **Mary Manning**. The play is directed by **Sarah Jane Scaife**. Set Design is by **Sabine Dargent**, with Costume Design by **Sinéad Cuthbert**, and Lighting Design by **Stephen Dodd**. The Composer and Sound Designer is **Rob Moloney**. Hair and Make-up is by **Val Sherlock**. The Movement Director is **Ella Clarke**.

The performance runs for approximately two hours and fifteen minutes, including one twenty-minute interval. This production contains haze, herbal cigarettes and loud noise.

ABOUT THE PLAY

"Youth's the season made for joys, love is then our duty" – the play's title references a line from John Gay's **The Beggar's Opera**, from 1728.

This play, written when Mary Manning was just 26, and first performed in 1931, is a startlingly modern coming-of-age satire, exploring the ups and downs of life for privileged young Irish people in Dublin. Manning's plays were extremely popular with audiences of their time, and this 2025 production offers the opportunity to revisit this precious gem from the Irish theatre canon.

Is youth really the season made for joy? Set in a newly independent Ireland, a group of young Dubliners gather to celebrate Desmond's 21st birthday. They flirt wildly, discuss the nature of love, and trade devastating insults as the party gets into full swing. However, every party has to come to an end... You may never think about life in the jazz age in the same way again.

ABOUT THE SET

The events in this play take place in the home of the Millington family: a Georgian house near the coast on Dublin's south side. The play opens in a somewhat stylised version of the drawing room of this house, likely on the first floor, with two Georgian sash windows almost the full height of the stage taking up most of the back wall. The drawing room walls are painted a deep and warm purple, and the floor is in polished dark wood. There are shapes cut out of the walls here and there, like chinks in the plasterwork with daylight shining through. Over on the far right there is a doorway which leads to the landing and staircase. This wall has a whole jagged section cut out of the top. On the left-hand side of the room is a fireplace, and a section of wall between the fireplace and the back wall is entirely missing. This creates the impression of a house that is past its heyday, that may be beginning to fall apart.

The window surrounds, shutters, fireplace, and door are all painted in cream. The windows are dressed in several layers of swagged net curtains, making the daylight more diffuse. Over the fireplace is a very large mirror, its surface rippled and distressed, and losing its silvering, so that it no longer casts recognisable reflections. At the fireplace, while the mantelpiece is ornate, the exposed brick of the chimney is sooty, and only a small pile of logs sits directly on the hearth floor, unlit. Sitting atop the mantelpiece is a bronze figurine of a dancer, a yellow vase, several ashtrays, a box of cigarettes, and an ornate silver cigarette lighter.

For such a large room, this drawing room is sparsely furnished. Sat between the two Georgian windows at the back wall is a small dark wood desk, with an Art Deco table lamp, a black rotary telephone, a cut-glass ashtray, and an inkwell with several pens. There are a few books and notebooks piled here as well. A stool, upholstered in velvet, is tucked underneath the desk.

There is a cream sofa near the fireplace, with three plump, floral-patterned scatter cushions. A walnut-coloured console piano sits over on the right, nearer the door. This is a small upright piano, with a large two-seater piano stool set in front of it. Music books, ranging from classical, to Broadway, and parlour music are placed on top of the lid, along with a silver bell for the maid, a box of matches, a cigarette lighter, and an ornately decorated, carved wooden box.

In the centre of the room, two dining room chairs have been set haphazardly.

And at the beginning of the play, there is a wooden box with artists' materials in it, a smaller case for pencils and paintbrushes, and a large lap easel set on the floor, as well as eight or so watercolour paintings: including paintings of peacocks, of women, and sketched designs for lamps and vases, even an ornate fireplace.

A second, much larger, distressed mirror is on the ceiling, reflecting rippled light from the large windows into the room. And suspended in mid-air, way above the actors' heads and at various heights, are seven vases, some brass, others painted ceramic, and each one filled with fresh blush pink roses and peonies.

Beyond the Georgian windows, at the very back of the stage, is a massive screen of very pale grey, as though the windows looked out over a foggy sea.

In Act Two, we move from this room to the garret at the top of the house where one of the characters, Desmond, has an art studio. The windows in the garret are much smaller and sit low in the wall, as this studio is squeezed under the roof of the Georgian house. Here too the walls are deep purple, and the floor is of dark wood planks. There is no fireplace, though, and the walls are draped in a smoky plastic sheeting, to protect them from the making of art. There are large blocks of sandstone with some carved markings across the surface, or incomplete marble statues, all draped in plastic. There are mismatched wooden chairs about the space, and a few items that may have once been used in a nursery, like a child's high chair, and a small rocking horse. There are two long wooden benches, one on either side of the garret. The piano from Act One is draped in plastic, with a tray of mismatched glass tumblers set on top, and a collection of bottles to create a makeshift bar. There is a finished statue in carved sandstone: a tall column with rippled surface, with a stylised man's head at the top. There is also a bull's head, made with plaster of paris stretched over a wooden frame and painted black. This has been placed on top of the child's high chair. Just left of centre, there is a side table draped in plastic with a gramophone perched on top, and a box set on the floor beside it, filled with records.

There are only one or two lamps in this room, so the scenes here are darker than before, with long shadows cast by the artworks, and a strange glistening sparkle from the smoky plastic sheeting.

ABOUT THE CAST AND COSTUMES

Desmond, played by **David Rawle**, is a young man, turning twenty-one. He is slim, and of medium height, with piercing blue eyes, and short brown hair, styled into a side parting with a slight curl in his fringe. Desmond appears to have highlighted his eyes with just a little eyeliner. He wears a white shirt with a spearpoint collar, left open at the neck so that the collar points spread widely, peeking out of the neck of his fine knit jumper in sage green. His trousers are loose in the leg, the style of the 1930s, and pale grey. He wears neat black leather shoes. His only accessory is a wristwatch with brown leather strap. Desmond's movements are precise and delicate, holding a comb with as much precision and care as he would a paintbrush as he goes about his design work.

Later, for his party, Desmond changes his jumper for an ornate bolero jacket in jet black, with sequins and beads, and ruffled sleeves, in a sort of 'matador' style, with a grey and burgundy silk cravat with his white shirt. He changes into patent black dress shoes.

His sister **Deirdre**, is played by **Sadhbh Malin**. A couple of years older than Desmond, she is of medium height, and trim, with her brown curly hair cut short in a bob. Deirdre is a scientist, and wears a duck-egg blue jersey blouse with a boat neck, and a plain bow on the left shoulder, with forest green, fitted woollen trousers with cuffed legs. She wears black heeled lace-up brogues. Deirdre wears a double-string pearl necklace, and drop earrings with a sea-green stone. She wears horn-rimmed glasses which she keeps on a chain around her neck.

Later, for the party, she wears a dress of cream silk with a net overdress of sugary pink netting - light and delicate as candyfloss - dotted with tiny pearls. It has ruffles at the waist: an unusually girly choice for someone who dresses a little more austerely than the other young women. She adorns this outfit with silver strappy heels, a glittering rhinestone bracelet, and her gold wristwatch. The following day, she wears a bias-cut skirt with navy and blue geometric pattern, with a cream silk blouse that has a pussy bow tied loosely at the v of the neckline, and her reading glasses on once more.

Another sister, **Connie**, is played by **Molly Hanly**. She is tall and slim, with brown curly hair to her shoulders, side parted and pinned behind the ear. She first arrives wearing a neat bottle green hat, beige overcoat, and a silk dress in mushroom and grey geometric print with a pleated skirt.

She wears strapped tan leather shoes with a mid heel, simple pearl earrings, and a long chain of pearls and other milky-coloured glass beads around her neck, as well as a gold watch.

For the party, Connie wears a sleeveless, silver silk dress with a softly draped cowl neck, and a swishing, hanky-hem skirt. A sash detail around the waist is finished with a rhinestone flower brooch. She wears silver T-bar heeled shoes, and carries a small clutch handbag. She wears sparkling drop earrings, a pearl bracelet and a glass bead necklace. She has pinned a silk flower in her hair. The following day, she wears a mustard yellow silk tea dress, with a black overcoat with matching mustard embroidered flowers and tied with a mustard silk bow at the front.

Their mother, **Mrs. Millington**, is played by **Valerie O'Connor**. A woman in her late forties, her long blonde hair is pinned at the nape of the neck. She first arrives wearing a wine-coloured dress with an elaborate collar of gold sequins and coloured beading. She wears a matching wine hat, and a brown fur overcoat. This overcoat was donated to the Abbey Theatre Costume Department so as not to create demand for new furs. Mrs. Millington also carries a small leather handbag, and a long, pale pink scarf. The following day, she wears a similar ensemble, this time a chocolate brown tea dress, with dark brown coat, hat, and long, silk scarf. She wears black T-bar heeled shoes.

A family friend, **Toots**, whose real name is Diana Ellerslie, is played by **Ciara Berkeley**. Just a little younger than Desmond, Toots is tall and thin, and has straight, dark brown hair cut in a sharp bob which comes to her jawline, and a neat fringe framing her forehead. She has large brown eyes. Toots arrives at the house first wearing a teal suit: a long boxy jacket with deep pockets and a buttoned tie detail at the back, with a calf-length skirt with box pleat panels on the left and right mid-thigh. She wears a blush-coloured silk blouse with a ruffled neckline, and a long chain of gold and rhinestone beads. Her shoes are low-heeled, with a strap across the front. She wears simple drop earrings.

For Desmond's party, Toots wears a grey silk, sleeveless jumpsuit with wide trouser legs, and a flamboyant, ruffled black velvet jacket, a little like the beaded bolero jacket that Desmond wears. She also wears long sparkling earrings and diamante bracelets. The following day, she visits again, in a modest check pleated skirt, long, baby pink cardigan, cream lace blouse and a long, beaded necklace.

Deirdre's fiancé, **Gerald**, is played by **Jack Meade**. Of average height, with a broad, stocky build, Gerald has blue eyes, and fair hair which curls slightly, but which he has neatly slicked and combed into a side parting. He wears a grey wool, double-breasted suit, white shirt, wine and gold tie, and with a plain white handkerchief folded in his breast pocket. He wears comfortable, brown leather shoes. He arrives at the party in a black-tie tuxedo, with black patent leather shoes.

Connie has two men in her life. There is **Harry**, played by **Youssef Quinn**, who, like Gerald, is of medium height and quite broadly built. He has dark brown curly hair, also slicked into a side parting, and wears clothes one might associate with a country gentleman. He first appears in a brown tweed suit jacket, matching waistcoat, and plus fours trousers, which come to just below the knee. He wears long dark socks to the knee, and tan leather brogues. He has a neat white shirt, and his russet-coloured tie and the pocket square in his jacket both match. For the party, Harry also wears a black-tie tuxedo and black dress shoes. The following day, he returns, having swapped his tweed waistcoat for a colourful sleeveless wool jumper under his suit jacket.

Connie's other love interest is **Terence**, played by **Kerill Kelly**. Tall and thin, Terence wears a brown wool suit, with a fine knit russet polo-neck jumper underneath, and tan leather, lace-up ankle boots. His brown hair is left a little long on top, and not slicked back like the others. He wears gold-rimmed reading glasses.

Terence introduces his new companion, **Horace Egosmith**, played by **Lórcan Strain**. A tall, trim man, Egosmith is mostly referred to by his surname, and throughout the whole of Act One, he remains utterly silent. An enigmatic figure, Egosmith wears a neat, yet austere, navy pinstripe suit, pale shirt, and navy tie, with black leather shoes. Like Desmond, Egosmith's eyes appear to be somewhat highlighted by eyeliner, and the faintest touch of colour added to his lips. His face is pale. Egosmith's hair is worn longer than the others, and neatly combed into a side parting. He mostly follows Terence with his eyes, or mirrors his movements in sitting down, or moving around the drawing room. He addresses the others with a stiff, and deep bow of the head, which they return, even if a little bemused.

Egosmith keeps his face neutral: mostly in a kind of Mona Lisa enigmatic half-smile. During the party, however, his movements become more exaggerated, as the others get in higher and higher spirits during the festivities.

Willie, a friend of Desmond's, is played by **Eoin Fullston**. He first appears for Desmond's party, and is dressed quite similarly to the host. Willie also wears broad, dove grey slacks, and a cream-coloured bejewelled bolero jacket in the 'matador' style. Instead of a shirt however, Willie wears a black and white striped Breton jersey top, and has a flamboyant costume jewellery necklace on, with clear and pink rhinestones. Like Desmond, he too wears his hair side-parted, with a stylised curl teased over his forehead.

Pearl Harris, played by **Mazzy Ronaldson**, is a young acquaintance of the group of friends, who attends Desmond's birthday party. Though around the same age, she is a little more naïve than the others. Pearl has blonde shoulder length hair, coiffed and styled more than the others. She wears a dress with a pale blue silk underdress, with three-tiered skirt, and an overlayer of midnight blue tulle, flecked all over with glitter, like the night sky. She wears silver shoes, and has a blue glass bead bracelet on one wrist, and a diamante cuff bracelet on the other. Pearl's voice is a little higher pitched than the others, and she speaks with a slight lisp.

Later, the same actor also plays **Mary**, the maid, in a simple black dress with pintuck details on the torso, and black shoes. She covers her brown hair with a white cotton bonnet, and has a white frilled organza apron over the skirt of her uniform dress. Mary has a slight tremor, so whenever she carries a tray in or out, the China cups tend to gently rattle.

That concludes the audio description introduction to **Youth's the Season -?**. It was prepared by me, **Bríd Ní Ghrúagáin**, who will also provide audio description for this performance. A Touch Tour will also be held before the performance, meeting in the foyer at 11.50am. Audio description at the Abbey Theatre is supported by Arts & Disability Ireland, and The Arts Council. For updates about audio described and captioned performances, text **ACCESSARTS** to **51444** or head to **www.adiarts.ie** for more information.

The director's note, by Sarah Jane Scaife, which appears in the printed programme, is also available as a sound recording, along with this introduction.

Thank you. Go raibh maith agaibh.