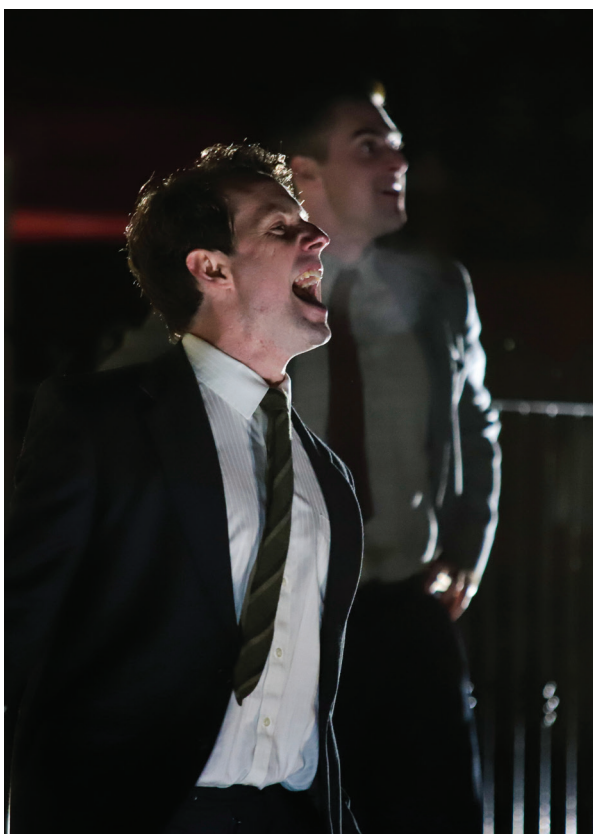




On the Outside by Tom Murphy with Noel O'Donoghue

An Educational Resource
for Secondary School Students
and Teachers



Donal Gallery in Druid's production of *On the Outside* (2020)
at The Mill Museum, Tuam. Photo: Emilija Jefremova

Contents:

Cast & Creatives	PAGE 2
Images	PAGE 3
A timeline of <i>On the Outside</i>	PAGE 5
Tom Murphy	PAGE 6
Key Themes and Discussion Questions	PAGE 7
Ireland in the 1950s	PAGE 10
Druid, Tuam and <i>On the Outside</i>	PAGE 12
Cast Interviews	PAGE 14

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On the Outside

by Tom Murphy with Noel O'Donoghue

**As part of DruidGregory, A Galway 2020 Commission
September – October 2020**

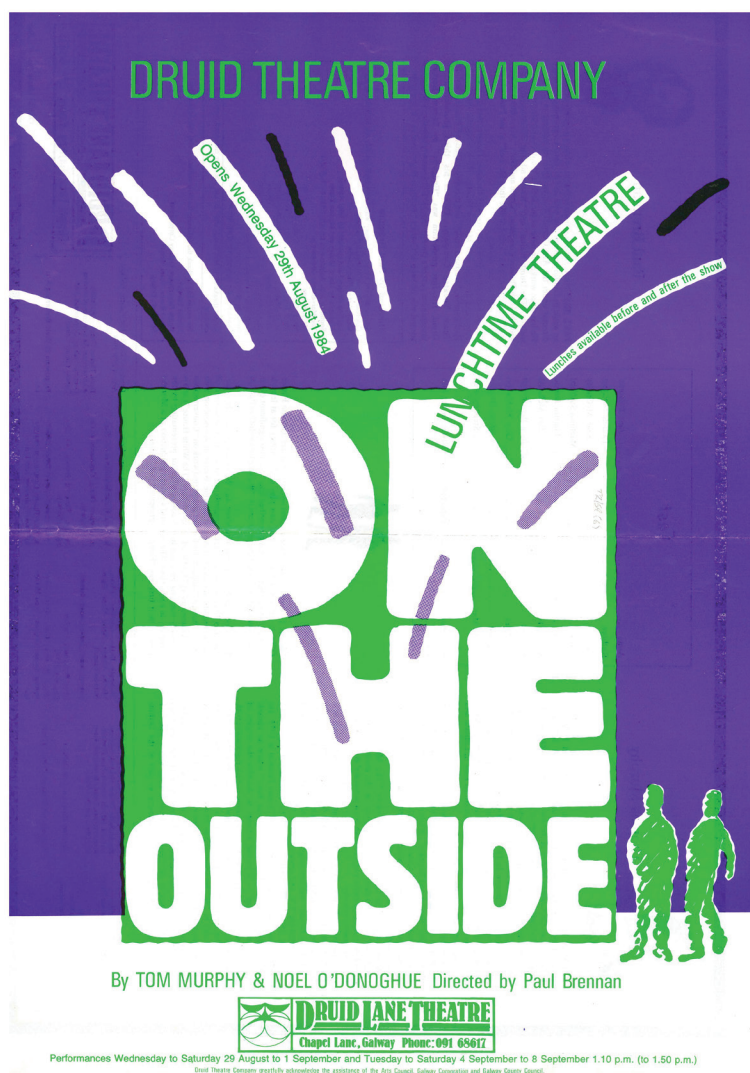
On the Outside is Tom Murphy's first play, in which began a lifetime of engagement with the idea of what it was to be Irish and live in 20th century Ireland. Two townies, Joe and Frank, may be short a few bob to get into the country dancehall, but that won't stop them trying. A satirical comedy about exclusion and trying to overcome social barriers in 1950s Ireland.

Cast

Venetia Bowe	Anne
Megan Cusack	Kathleen
Peter Daly	First Man
Donal Gallery	Frank
Liam Heslin	Joe
Garrett Lombard	Mickey Ford
Sarah Morris	Girl
Rory Nolan	Bouncer
John Olohan	Drunk
Marty Rea	Second Man

Creatives

Director	Garry Hynes
Set Design	Francis O'Connor
Costume Design	Clíodhna Hallissey
Lighting Design	Barry O'Brien
Assistant Director	Sarah Baxter



The poster from Druid's production of *On the Outside* in 1984.



Thomas Murphy

THOMAS MURPHY was born in Tuam, Co. Galway in 1935. He attended the Christian Brothers and Tuam Vocational School in Mountshilleen, Co. Galway for five years until 1952 when he emigrated and emigrated to England to pursue a career as a full-time writer. The first of his plays to receive production was "On the Outside", written with Noel O'Donoghue in 1955. It was first produced in Cork and later broadcast on Radio Éireann. In 1974, it and a new companion piece "On the Inside" proved the hit of the Dublin Theatre Festival. He made his first major impact on professional theatre with "A White in the Dark" when it was staged at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East in London and later transferred to the West End. During the eight years he spent in London, he wrote a number of plays for the B.B.C. including "The Fly", "Veronica", "Young Man in Trouble" and "Scales and Ropes". While in London, he also wrote "A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant", first presented in the Abbey in 1969 and "Famine" which was first staged at the Peacock and later transferred upstairs to the Abbey. After returning to Ireland in 1970 he wrote "The Morning After Optimism" described then by the Irish Times as 'the most original and one of the most impressive plays to have been presented at the Abbey in the past quarter century'. He joined the Board of the Abbey Theatre in 1972 and served as a Board member for eleven years until 1983. Also in 1972 he received the Irish Academy of Letters Award for distinction in literature. In 1973 "The White House" was first staged at the Abbey Theatre and two years later adapted for T.V. and screened by R.T.E. Between 1972 and 1975 he wrote "The Sanctuary Lamp" which proved a controversial part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1975. He followed this with "The J. Arthur Maginnis Story" which he himself describes as 'a romp' — a jokey attempt to describe the origins of Guinness. After two years he returned to writing and his fascination with generation and gangster movies led him to write "The Blue Machine". In 1981 he adapted and directed Liam O'Flaherty's novel "The Informer" and in 1982 he adapted and transferred to an Irish setting "She Stoops to Conquer" which was presented at the Abbey. An idea which he'd had since the early seventies but never got around to really working on until 1981 formed the basis for his next play "The Gigs Concert". He finished it on Christmas Eve in 1982 and it was first presented last October at the Abbey Theatre as part of the Dublin

Cast

Anne	Jane Brennan
Kathryn	Pauline McLynn
Joe	Seán McGinley
Frank	Mairéad Stelfox
Donk	Mairéad Stelfox
Mickey Fudge	Ray McBride
Bouncer	Padraig Breathnach
First Man	Clay McMahon
Woman	Riona Hughes
Second Man	Stephen Wall

The action takes place outside a detached in Co. Galway in the late fifties.



Theatre Festival in immediate acclaim — in the Sunday Tribune Fintona O'Toole described it as 'the best new play at the Abbey for at least a decade', while Theatre Ireland described it as 'the most significant event in European theatre since the premiere of "Waiting for Godot" in Paris in 1953'.

Tom lives in Dublin with his wife Mary, and their three children Beniam, Neil and Johnny. He is a regular contributor to several publications at home and abroad and last August became Writer in Association with Druid Theatre Company. He has just completed work on "Conversations on a Homecoming" for Druid (adapted from "The White House") and is currently working on a full length commission for presentation by the company in early 1985. This is Druid's second production of a Murphy play — their first was "Famine", presented last January.



Paul Brennan

PAUL BRENNAN — who was born in Dublin, played a variety of roles as an actor in Dublin theatre and with R.T.E. before becoming a trainee director under the Arts Council Trainee Director scheme in 1977. He has since worked in most of the Dublin theatres and his productions include "The Death of a Traveller" and "Where all your Dreams come true" with the Irish Theatre Company, "Come and Go", "Act without Words" and "Hundred Years" — "I do not like them Dr. Fell" at the Peacock, and "The Field" at the Abbey. He has worked as Staff Director with the Gate Theatre, and for a period acted and directed with Moving Theatre. He is a regular on the RTE Radio series, "Harbour Lights" and recently played in "Two Houses" for Team Theatre Company. This is his third production for Druid. His first production was "Endgame" by Samuel Beckett presented as part of a Double Double Bill Season in October 1981 and his second was of Sean O'Casey's "Bodiney Story" revised last month.

Directed by Paul Brennan

Set constructed by Sean Meehan with Moss McHugh, Charles McBride, Gerry Colgan, Brian Walsh, Helen Lane.
 Sound: Anne, Tom Conroy
 Lighting designed and operated by John Adams.
 Costumes by Anne Mullen and Monica Fennell.
 Staged by John Adams with the MacDonagh Orchestra.
 The MacDonagh Orchestra is:
 Mr. J. Cullen, Guitar, Bass, Voc.
 Mr. J. Higgins, Trumpet
 Mr. T. Maher, Piano, Bass, Accordion
 Mr. M. McMahon, Trombone
 Mr. O. Keenan, Drums
 Publicity and Program by Joyce Joyce
 Poster by Robert Armstrong
 Production Photography by Mark Kline

Special thanks to T. McDermott and Co. Ltd. for their continued support of the company.

We would like to thank the following for their assistance with this production:
 Monica Fennell
 Books Department, Galway Corporation
 David Burke, Team Herald
 St. Mary's College.

Artistic Director: Gerry Hayes
Company Administrator: Jerome Hayes
Stage Manager: Seán Meehan
Technical Manager: John Adams
Writer in Association: Thomas Murphy
Director: Paul Brennan

Players: Marie Mullen, Sean McGinley, Ray McMahon, Pauline McLynn, Mairéad Stelfox, Mairéad Stelfox, Jane Brennan, Riona Hughes, Padraig Breathnach, Clay McMahon, Stephen Wall.
Secretary/Reception: Orla Stelfox
Front of House Manager: Padraig O'Neill

Front of House Staff: Eithel Burke, Elizabeth Burke, Constan O'Flaherty, Maria Conner, Anne Marie Egan, Nuala Farrell.
Druid Performing Arts Ltd.
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Board Members: Gerry Hayes, Marie Mullen, Seamus O'Donoghue, Jane McGinley.
Company Secretary: Jerome Hayes
Solicitors: Hanna Meehan & Co., Sigs. Ltd., Galway.
Accountants: Deasy, Conner & Co. Ltd., Galway.
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A Druid Theatre Company production
 for Druid Performing Arts Ltd.

Opened at Druid Lane Theatre, Galway, August 29th 1984.
 Druid Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Arts Council, Galway Corporation and Galway County Council.
 Programme © Druid Performing Arts Ltd.
 CDD/100 Longue Rue Ph. 73231

The programme from Druid's production of *On the Outside* in 1984. The production was directed by Paul Brennan and ran at the Druid Lane Theatre.



Tom Murphy (second from left) and Noel O'Donoghue (far right) Tuam Theatre Guild.



Tom Murphy aged 25 (around the time *On the Outside* was written)



Tuam Christian Brothers School (now, St Patrick's College) in the 1940's. Tom Murphy (second row from the back, second last on the right) and Noel O'Donoghue (first row, first on the right).

On the Outside: A timeline

Written in 1959 by Tom Murphy with Noel O'Donoghue

Produced as a radio play in 1962 by Radio Teilifís Eireann

Premiered in Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 1972

Staged by Druid, in Druid Lane Theatre, Galway, 1984

Staged by Druid, Galway, as part of a county-wide tour, 2020



Donal Gallery, Garrett Lombard and Venetia Bowe in Druid's production of *On the Outside* (2020) at The Mill Museum, Tuam.
Photo: Emilija Jefremova

Tom Murphy

On the Outside is Tuam playwright Tom Murphy's first play. Tom Murphy would go on to become one of Ireland's most significant literary and theatrical figures.

Tom was born in Tuam, Co. Galway, in 1935. At the age of 24, he wrote his first play, *On the Outside*, in collaboration with his great friend Noel O'Donoghue. The following year, he completed his first full-length play which, under the original title *The Iron Men*, won a number of Irish national playwriting awards. In 1961 it was produced as *A Whistle in the Dark* at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London, one of the most momentous premieres in British theatre in the 1960s. This production later transferred to the West End. His next plays were produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and included *Famine* (1968), *A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant* (1969) and *The Morning after Optimism* (1994). Two of his most controversial and highly regarded plays were to follow, *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975) and *The Gigli Concert* (1983).

In 1984 he became writer in association with Druid. This relationship began with the productions of *Famine* and *On the Outside*. These were a prelude to the landmark Druid productions of the mid-80s, *Conversations on a Homecoming*, *Bailegangaire* and, in a co-production with the Abbey Theatre, *A Whistle in the Dark*. These productions were widely acclaimed both at home and internationally and saw Druid work with some of the great Irish actors of our time, including Siobhán McKenna and Godfrey Quigley.

In 2012, Druid produced *DruidMurphy*, a cycle of three of Tom Murphy's plays, *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985), *Bailegnagaire* (1985) and, in a co-production with the Abbey Theatre, *A Whistle in the Dark* (1987). *DruidMurphy* toured extensively in Ireland, beginning with a tour of Galway, before touring to the UK and the US. Druid earned multiple award nominations for the production.

In 2014, Tom wrote his last play *Brigit*, a prequel to *Bailegangaire* which Druid had premiered in 1985. Druid staged the world premiere of *Brigit* alongside *Bailegangaire* in Galway and Dublin with Druid co-founder Marie Mullen in the lead role of Mommo in both productions.

Tom was a member of Aosdána, an Irish association of artists. President Michael D. Higgins presented Tom Murphy with the gold torc and the title of Saoi, Aosdána's highest honour, which recognises remarkable achievement.

Tom Murphy died in May 2018 and tributes to the playwright were led by President Michael D. Higgins, Fintan O'Toole and his wife, the actress, Jane Brennan.

"The importance of Tom Murphy's contribution to Irish theatre is immeasurable and outstanding. We have had no greater use of language for the stage than in the body of work produced by Tom Murphy since his earliest work in the 1960s. His themes were not only those which had influenced the very essence of Irishness, emigration, famine and loss - they were universal in their reach.

From the early beginnings of his writings in Tuam, Tom Murphy produced a unique and often provocative body of work. He was above all the great playwright of the emigrant, more than anyone capturing, in a poignant, creative way, the transience that is at the heart of the emigrant experience." - President Michael D. Higgins, May 2018.

Key Themes and Discussion Questions

The story goes that Tom Murphy and Noel O'Donoghue wrote *On the Outside* while waiting for the pubs to open one Sunday morning in Tuam. Whether this story is true or not, *On the Outside* went on to win first prize at the All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival in Athlone in 1959, marking the beginning of Tom's career as one of Ireland's most significant literary and theatrical figures.

It is the only play of Tom Murphy's written with Noel O'Donoghue and their friendship can be seen in the themes of the play. Frank and Joe are two broke young fellas trying to gain admission to the local dance. Themes of social class and status, gender, relationships and friendship, are framed through the lens of Frank and Joe's experience on this particular night.

Although the play was written over 60 years ago, the themes and settings remain familiar and relevant to a modern audience.

1. Social Status, Poverty and Power

The development of the characters and the story is highly influenced by a variety of personal, social and cultural factors.

The play opens with two young women, Anne and Kathleen. Anne waits hopefully for the arrival of Frank – a romantic interest. Afraid that Anne will expect Frank to pay for her admission as well as his own, Frank and Joe hide from her. Joe teases Frank, asking him will he *"tell her the truth so. I was hiding behind a wall all night watching you because I hadn't got the price of two tickets"*. To which Frank responds *"she thinks I'm loaded"*. Frank and Joe's situation deteriorates further when they realise the dance is more expensive than they thought. They don't even have enough money to pay their own admission.

The stage directions explain how Frank views his own status within his community. He is *"aware*

of the very rigid class distinctions that pervade a small, urban-rural community and resents "them" with cars and money because he has not got the same". He vividly describes how he sees himself in comparison to others in the town, who have more money and status. He compares his job, his home and the town to *"A huge tank with walls running up...we're at the bottom, splashing around all week in their Friday night vomit, clawing at the sides....And the bosses...are up around the top... looking down...spitting on top of us....For fear we might climb out some way. They smear the walls with grease"*. Despite the bleakness of Frank's speech, the two laugh, pause and move on, as if acknowledging the futility of them gaining a foothold on a higher rung in society.

Frank and Joe's circumstances are in contrast to their counterpart, Mickey Ford. Mickey is described as *"...well off, having a car and no lack of money"* and while Frank and Joe make fun of him, *"oh look out, there's handsome himself!"*, it is Mickey who ends up inside at the dance with Anne, while the other two are stuck outside. Mickey won't lend them the money to go in as he needs *"juice for the bus"*. In contrast to Frank and Joe, Mickey has money for dances and a car.

We see the various shades of class and power in 1950s rural Ireland when comparing Joe's and Frank's situation with Mickey's. While Mickey has his car, his loud ties and his uncle in America, Frank and Joe hand up half their meagre wages to help at home. They acknowledge that their families need the support, but still lament their situation, *"this bumming around from one end of the week to the other is terrible!"*

The women are also aware of the various strata in their society. At the beginning of the play, Kathleen tells Anne of an experience in Dublin with a man who told her he was in the civil service, but ended up being a hospital porter, much to her disappointment. Anne seems less concerned with what job or position Frank has in society. When Kathleen asks her what he does, she replies *"..he*

didn't say". When Kathleen encourages her to *"meet someone with a car"*, Anne replies *"I don't want a car...I don't care what he does"*. The stage directions describe Anne as naive. The playwrights note that her lack of interest in Frank's job and social status is unrealistic.

The characters are aware of their differences. Frank is embarrassed to tell Anne that he can't afford to pay their admission. Kathleen continually tries to convince Anne of the importance of a man with a good job and a car. Mickey even advises Frank to *"Pick on someone your own class."*

Discussion Questions:

Do you recognize the different divides of class in the play? How are they identified and explored?

Do we have the same divisions in class in today's society and are they as prevalent?

2. Relationships and Gender

We can examine gender relations in 1950s Ireland through the characters dialogue. Frank asks Joe what he thinks of Anne, *"not bad, is she?"* to which Joe replies, *"Not too bad for this hole, I suppose"*, but later he asks Frank, *'what's all the fuss about for this one anyway, she's only a mule.'* Mickey describes the women inside at the dance as *"loaded, stacked, powerful talent, deadly"*, and advises Joe and Frank that *"There's nothing like the ones that spend a while in England"*. Frank says, after hearing noises and arguing from inside *"the women are charging Ford!"*.

When we first meet Kathleen and Anne there is much implied about their situation in the stage directions. Anne is described as *"sincere but stupid"* while Kathleen *"has a better idea of what it is all in aid of."* What is it all in aid of? Kathleen is focused on the importance of securing a man with money, a good job and a car. Family and domestic life was the clear course for women. Career opportunities were limited and unwed women were suspected and pitied. Furthermore, the marriage ban meant that women could no longer work once married, therefore they became dependent on their

husband and his earnings. Men like Frank and Joe, with low wages and few prospects, would not have fitted Kathleen's template for a suitable match. Frank and Joe are keenly aware of this.

However, there are shades of romance between Anne and Frank. Joe asks Frank *"What's so special about this Kelly one anyway?"*. Anne states several times that she thinks that Frank is a good person, without the ulterior motives of someone like Mickey, *"he isn't like that, he really is very nice"*. However, being nice isn't enough in the end. The play bears the playwright's thesis that men like Mickey, although brash, rude and immature, get ahead in life and romance because of their social status. Men like Joe and Frank get left behind.

Discussion Questions:

Do the characters have alternative paths or other options available to them?

What are the differences between the opportunities available to young men compared to young women in 1950s Ireland?

How has youth culture changed now compared to 1950s Ireland? What are the similarities and differences between social nights then and now?

How would the play change if it was set today?

3. Friendship

On the Outside was written in 1959 by two school friends from Tuam, Noel O'Donoghue and Tom Murphy, when they were 24 years of age. *On the Outside* could be read as somewhat autobiographical as the friendships certainly reflect Tom and Noel's relationship.

Kathleen looks out for her friend Anne. She sees herself as older and wiser than her younger friend. Kathleen is, according to the stage directions, *"two years older and more sophisticated"* than Anne. While Anne is *"very naïve and anxious to be conventional"*. Despite the differences between the two, Kathleen seems protective of Anne. She advises Anne to look for a man with a car, rather than wait outside the dance hall for Frank. In contrast, later in the play, she chastises Frank for not meeting Anne, *"she was very disappointed when you didn't come"*.

Frank and Joe's friendship is grounded in their similar social status. They are both stuck outside with not enough money to enter. They work in the same trade as apprentices. They are both expected to hand over money each week to help at home, leaving them short.

Like Anne and Kathleen, they are different in personality and outlook. Joe is described in the stage directions as *"immature and irresponsible but not bad"* while Frank has *"a stronger personality than Joe"*. Frank feels the impact of their place in society more keenly.

Their deep rooted friendship is evident. They seem to care about each other. Frank feels bad for speaking sharply to Joe after their pass-outs fail to work, *"yeh-yeh-yeh-yeh-yeh, you know it all"* and shares his last cigarette with him. They have a shorthand that is familiar between friends. They have quick wit and a special way of communicating with each other. When Mickey Ford emerges for the first time from the dance hall, Frank says to Joe, *"there's handsome himself!"* indicating to the audience that Mickey is someone whom they have often made fun of before. A little later, Frank and Joe poke fun at Mickey again, *"Brilliantino is coming back"*. However, they

struggle to communicate their deeper thoughts and feelings to each other. Discussions of their struggles are constantly brushed off or disguised behind a joke or a laugh *"...it's not so funny. No, serious, sham"*.

Discussion Questions:

What are the similarities and differences between Joe and Frank?

How and why is Frank and Joe's friendship so significant in the play?

How and why do the characters struggle to communicate with one another?

Ireland in the 1950s

Social and cultural change on the cusp

Ireland in the 1950s has been described by many historians as the worst of decades typified by high emigration, high unemployment, a repressive church, and a society jostling for modernity that was rigidly divided by social class and structural inequalities. With a population of 2,898,264 in 1956 and almost half a million emigrants, your life and life course were defined by your gender, social class, occupation and most importantly where you were from.

Respectability was key and it was defined by those in higher positions of social class. 'Townies' like Joe and Frank were low down the social rankings. It was a time before free secondary education, where apprenticeships did not always lead to an increase in your social status, where parental power was still key and the family economy for most involved contributing to the household.

In 1949 Ireland had declared itself a republic. One percent of the population was institutionalised, be it in psychiatric facilities, industrial schools and reformatory schools, Magdalene institutions or other institutions for 'unmarried mothers'. County homes, the remnants of the poor law system were still in operation. The Catholic Church as an institution had enormous social control – particularly in rural Ireland, most typically characterised by the reign of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid.

From the 'Mother and Child Scheme' to the continued censorship of writers, newspaper editors and artists, women, sexuality, and fears surrounding women's reproductive rights were at the core of many of the repressive policies. Demographically, Ireland had the lowest marriage rate and highest birth rate in Europe, contraceptives being illegal, and the marriage bar ensured that for many women in public service family life would take precedence whether they liked it or not. A 'good' husband was important.

It was the decade of Patrick Kavanagh, Brendan Behan, Cyril Cusack, Mary Lavin, Liam O'Flaherty, and Samuel Beckett. It was still the age of the GAA. 'The ban' was in place which prohibited GAA membership to anyone who played or attended foreign games e.g. rugby or soccer. The association was a marker of Irish identity. There were sporting highs, in 1956 Ronnie Delany won gold in Melbourne at the Olympics and throughout the decade hurlers Christy Ring from Cork and the Rackard brothers from Wexford held the GAA crowds captivated.

The Youth

As Tom Murphy so eloquently describes, youth culture was influenced from Britain and the United States, both through the music and fashion of the decade, but also films like *Rock Around the Clock* or the assimilation of returning emigrants and their influence on the country. Dancehalls were still the go-to place, with Irish showbands attempting to contravene the rules by playing 'foreign' music in traditional ways. But it was not an open playing field – much of this culture needed money to be embraced. And while the Teddy Boys began to pop up in cities like Dublin and Waterford, in provincial towns the influences were less acceptable and less visible.

Economic Development

It was the era of running water and rural electrification – which would change the lives of women in Ireland exponentially and perhaps towards the end of the decade there were increasing signs of prosperity, with a consumer society emerging from decades of depression. But resources were needed for the modern appliances – be it a television in the 1960s, a car as Murphy describes or the very early stages of a ‘foreign’ holiday. In the 1950s a four-door Morris Minor would set you back £470, and Aer Lingus began to advertise an economy class from Dublin to New York for £155.5s. All of these were far outside the majority of people’s lives and expectations, where 6 bob was perhaps a key to married life

At the end of the decade, TK Whitaker was appointed as secretary to the Department of Finance and was quick to voice his belief that economic policy had to change. His *Economic Development* plan would change the way economic policy was approached. After a long and controversial career, Éamon de Valera departed the Taoiseach’s office in 1959. The Sixties saw changes that began to break down some barriers and open class boundaries – but it would take many years to effect major change to the lives of many women, ‘townies’ and those whose social status was wrapped up in deeper social anxieties.

Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley

September 2020



Liam Heslin in Druid's production of *On the Outside* (2020) at The Mill Museum, Tuam. Photo: Emilija Jefremova

Druid, Tuam and *On the Outside*

The story has often been told that when Tom Murphy and his friend Noel O'Donoghue set out to write their first play, they resolved that it would not be set in a kitchen. That was a reaction to the dominant genre of Irish drama at the time, the kitchen comedy. It is a style that did not die out for quite some time after *On the Outside* was written, and it could be said to have lived on in many of John B Keane's most enduring works, which are still being staged by amateur companies. So while the characters in these kitchen plays have their tensions, rows, disagreements and reconciliations, they are still on the inside of a society that assigns them well defined roles within which they may thrive or wither according to the playwright's whim.

But Frank and Joe, the two young men who lack the price of admission to the dancehall, are on the outside in more senses than one. They feel themselves to be at the bottom of the social heap with little chance of rising. They are on the lowest rungs of a hierarchy: above them is the foreman, to whom they kowtow in search of small favours. And they take grim pleasure in watching him snatch off his cap in the presence of the boss, the owner of the business.

This play was written more than 60 years ago. It is set in 1958, outside a country hall where the Irish National Teachers Organisation is running a dance. The culture of deference in which it was set and which gave it much of its power has waned, at least at local level. Few if any bosses are addressed as Mister or Mrs these days. And yet the essential hierarchies of social status remain, albeit in a far less obvious shape. It is fair to assume that the local audiences who will laugh at the predicament of Frank and Joe, in the comfortable knowledge that they can well afford the price of admission to whatever has replaced the dancehall, will still feel the resonance of the blowhard Mickey Ford whose car puts him in a superior bracket.

Tom Murphy said '*I believe I've met everybody in the world in Tuam — poor people and the affluent — only a difference in scale. I count myself rich in my home town. I am proud to be a sham.*'

Tuam was fortunate that it gave birth to a playwright of such depth and tenacity of purpose as Murphy. Many another town could have provided similar source material. And Murphy was blessed that in 1984, ten years after the first professional stage production of *On the Outside* in the Abbey, Druid Theatre Company chose to stage his epic drama *Famine*.

That production in February was followed seven months later by *On the Outside* in September, and the association of playwright and company provided theatrical riches in the years since, with productions ranging from *Conversations on a Homecoming* and *A Whistle in the Dark* to *The Blue Macushla*.

While Tuam cannot claim to be overtly represented in plays like *The Sanctuary Lamp* or *The Gigli Concert*, the wonderful *Conversations on a Homecoming* had a special resonance when performed in the playwright's home town, as it has been several times.

While Tom Murphy and Tuam are inextricably linked, so are Druid and the rural hinterland that spreads out from its Galway city base. From the early years one of the company's objectives has been to bring theatre to the communities which never saw a professional actor since the long-gone days of the travelling fit-up shows.

In their first local tour they brought *The Playboy of the Western World* to Inis Meáin and Inis Mór, hardly surprising, but they also brought *The Wood of the Whispering* by Milltown playwright MJ Molloy to the islands, to Lisdoonvarna and beyond. Their tours took in Kiltimagh, Killasser, Ballinrobe, Ros Muc, and many other stages.

It's a while since Druid have hit local roads, but here they are, back in a time of another kind of drama, taking the daring gamble of staging *On the Outside* in the open air. We can only wish them fair weather, and hope for a return visit soon — inside or outside.

David Burke
September 2020



Megan Cusack in Druid's production of *On the Outside* (2020) at The Mill Museum, Tuam. Photo: Emilija Jefremova

Cast Interviews

Liam Heslin

Joe



Can you tell us a little bit about the character of Joe? What were your initial thoughts on Joe and on the script in general?

Joe is a young working-class apprentice tradesman. He's a bit happy go-lucky I think. He

tries to find the humour in things. I think this helps him deal with or mask what he might actually be feeling about his life and circumstances. The script is so seamless. It explores so much in a short timeframe especially the subject of class.

What did you enjoy, or not enjoy, about playing the character? Did you find anything particularly interesting or challenging in the role?

Tom Murphy's writing is so precise and musical in a way that it is very similar to Shakespeare. You can find great freedom in the preciseness of the text. I've enjoyed trusting the brilliant writing and letting it do the work. It has been a challenge to populate Joe with his nuances and figure out why he's saying or choosing not to say things at certain times.

Can you tell us a little about the relationship between Frank and Joe?

They are best-mates, I think. But how much of that is easiness, circumstance and actual commonality? They have a similar upbringing and work the same job. But would they. Would they be friends if they bumped into each other on the

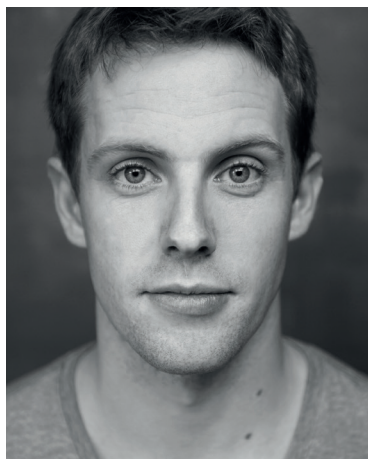
street? Possibly, possibly not. Joe doesn't seem to have Franks explicit ambitions.

Do you think there are messages/themes in the play that would resonate with teenage audiences today? Or are things completely different these days, do you think?

There are so many things that will resonate today. Class division and social status are things that have never gone away. Class and all its different facets are a big part of the play. Also, aspiration for change or difference is something I think is very strong in the piece. How these characters think they can obtain these things and what they fight against in trying to get them. Pride is something I see a lot of in the play. All characters have a different relationship to it. Do they try to save face? Do they let their ego come through more? Do they find it hard to show their real feelings? I think these are universal themes dotted throughout the piece. The anger and uncertainty of youth is bubbling throughout also. You could write a thesis but you would be at it for days!

Donal Gallery

Frank



Can you tell us a little bit about the character of Frank? What were your initial thoughts on Frank and on the script in general?

Frank is an intelligent guy, a tradesman from a working class

family in a rural town. He's twenty-two years old.

My initial thoughts were that Tom Murphy, in his first play (along with Noel O'Donoghue), had captured the frustration that many young men still feel to this day. The feeling of being perceived as a thug or as a low-class person because of where you come from or how much money you have, the feeling of being misunderstood and having nobody to confide in and the rage this can create.

What did you enjoy about playing the character? Did you find anything particularly interesting or challenging in the role?

As an actor you are always happy to work on any script that is as high quality as *On the Outside*. Frank is a great part to play because he is perceptive, sensitive and likeable in some ways but also human - he can be nasty and spiteful and carries a tremendous amount of anger.

The biggest challenge of this role is to chart the huge variety of feelings and situations Frank experiences over the course of the play. Towards the end particularly, there are moments where he is trying to fight his feelings of humiliation and mask them with cocky insults, then lying about his feelings for Anne to Joe, then suddenly feeling

utterly clear that he will leave Ireland forever. You want to nail all of these moments accurately as they come thick and fast. It's a great challenge as an actor.

What did you think about the roles of men and women in society at the time, as represented in the play? What did you think about the way that Joe and Frank talk about the women in the play?

I think the play offers an interesting insight into the roles of men and women in society in 1950s Ireland. For example, Kathleen places a huge emphasis on the job that any prospective male partner might have and whether he has a car or not. On the other hand, Frank, Joe and Mickey only speak of what the girls look like and make references to girls that have spent a while in England or Protestants being *the ones to get* as they are perceived to be more sexually liberated. Generally the men in the play seem to speak about women as though they are commodities. This is a reflection of the chauvinism of the time but also shows the mens' inability to be vulnerable in admitting any genuine feelings for women which, from the action of the play, it is clear that Frank has for Anne.

Can you tell us a little about the relationship between Frank and Joe?

Frank and Joe come from very similar backgrounds and work together. They are good pals who can easily riff and banter with each other, but they are also quite different characters. Frank has a dark and intense side which emerges in the face of the humiliations he suffers in the community. Joe always tries to make a joke of everything, even in the face of misfortune. As a result, Frank is unable to really express his deeper feelings to Joe.

Megan Cusack

Kathleen



Can you tell us a little bit about the character of Kathleen?

Kathleen is two years older than Anne and a bit more savvy to the world. She's probably spent some time over in England or in Dublin so believes herself to be a

bit more worldly. She has definitely been around the block and is wise to the lies boys tell to get the girls. Although she is suspicious of them, it doesn't mean she isn't romantic. She just won't be fooled. She's inclined to be a little cynical.

What did you enjoy about playing the character? Did you find anything particularly interesting or challenging in the role?

I enjoyed getting to delve into a character that has a bit of sass about her. It's always fun getting to have a go at someone who's got a bit of attitude. Although that in itself has been a challenging aspect of the role. I don't feel it's something that comes naturally to me. Interestingly, yet not surprising, even back then, in 1958, if your best friend is outside waiting on a fella, you wait with her!

Can you tell us a little about the relationship between Kathleen and Anne? Are they good friends, do you think?

I believe you can see pretty quickly that the relationship between the two is a strong one. You don't have that kind of patience with just anyone. You get the impression they've been through

similar patterns of conversation before and usually know what the other is getting at before they even say it. There's a familiarity there that can only come from being close for years.

What were your initial thoughts when you first read the script? Were you familiar with the play?

Initially, on first reading of *On the Outside*, you can't help but be struck by the incredible writing of Tom Murphy, the flow and musicality of it. I hadn't read the play in years, so it was a real joy rediscovering it in the rehearsal room. The amazing ability to hit on real issues, such as class, whilst still bringing a warmth and humour to it all.

Do you think there are messages/themes in the play that resonate with teenage audiences today?

I mean dating and relationship, romance, love, will always be a relevant theme for young people. It may not be in the same vein of standing either side of the dance hall hoping to get picked for a dance, but there's definitely still the same sense of waiting for someone to make the first move. And of course wanting to impress whoever you've taken a fancy to! There's also another very prevalent theme of not being happy with the life you are living and wanting more than what your little town can give you. The urge and ambition to get out and do more!

Venetia Bowe

Anne



Can you tell us a little bit about the character of Anne?

She is twenty and full of hope but not a lot of experience. She is quite naive at the best of times and eager to be conventional. She's a romantic

at heart and has her eyes set on Frank.

Can you tell us a little about Anne's relationship with Kathleen? What kind of relationship do they have? Are they good friends? Do you think Kathleen has Anne's best interests at heart?

I think Anne looks up to Kathleen in many ways. She would be the first person Anne would turn to for any bit of advice. There's such a great familiarity between them - you get a sense they've known each other forever. They're almost like sisters and in that I think Kathleen truly does have Anne's best interests at heart even if they come out a bit scolding at times but sure that's just what sisters are like!

What did you enjoy about playing the character? Did you find anything particularly interesting or challenging in the role?

I tend to be rather cynical so I really enjoyed exploring her hopefulness and romantic notions - I'd never wait that long for a boy! It was also great fun discovering all the nuances of her and Kathleen's relationship. It was challenging at first finding the internal shift from being heartbroken to then gathering herself and telling Frank she's not interested, but now it's my favourite part.

What were your initial thoughts on the play when you first read it? Were you familiar with it or with Tom Murphy's work in general?

I'd never read it before so it was a pure delight! It's so beautifully balanced between being hilarious and heartbreaking. Although it's written in 1959 it's so relatable and it brought me straight back to teenage discos - all the anticipation and nervous expectations. I was lucky enough to have seen Druid's spellbinding production of *Conversations on a Homecoming*, but I had never been in one of his plays, so this is an incredible opportunity.

What do you think about the way that women are represented in the play?

I think it's very accurate for the time. Each of the three women represent very different characteristics and attitudes to life. Anne representing an ideal Catholic young girl - pure and sweet, then Kathleen being the more experienced and knowing one and the character of Girl being the one who is taken advantage of. They all have a real adolescent feel to them which Murphy captures so truthfully.



An educational resource created by Druid

About Druid

Vision

Irish performance for the world.

Mission

To be a touring theatre without peer, anchored in the West of Ireland and looking to the world, producing and presenting the best work, both new and old, with boldness, agility, passion and flair.

Druid began as a bold idea: to create Ireland's first professional theatre company outside of Dublin. There were few resources with which to build a theatre company in the West of Ireland in 1975 but through sheer dedication, and with the support of the Galway community, founders Garry Hynes, Marie Mullen and Mick Lally made this bold idea a reality. That reality has since become an international success story of extraordinary dimensions.

Druid is a writers theatre, exploring ambitious projects, reimagining classics and premiering new work annually. The company continues to nurture playwrights through its New Writing programme while also presenting classics from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to John B. Keane's *Sive*. At the heart of our artistic programme is the Druid Ensemble who work closely with the Artistic Director, Garry Hynes and the Druid team to deliver a varied and ambitious body of work.

Druid passionately believes that audiences deserve to see first class professional theatre in their own communities. The company has toured the length and breadth of Ireland as well as touring internationally to the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Hong Kong.

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