

PROSCENIUM

Iron

By Rona Munro

Iron

Wednesday 16th January to Saturday 19th January 2013
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Iron

By Rona Munro

Cast

Josie.....Clare Wooster
FayIzzie Cartwright
Guard 1Duncan Sykes
Guard 2.....Amie Daly

Directed by.....David Pearson

Stage ManagerCrystal Anthony

Assisted byLinda Hampson

Set designed and constructed byMark Brookes

PropertiesAnne Gerrard

Sound and lighting design.....Richard Brice

Sound and lighting operationArnold Glickman

The play is set in a women's prison and the action takes place in the
Waiting Room, an Interview Room, Fay's Prison Cell
and the Prison Garden.

The Author

Rona Munro was born in Aberdeen in 1959, the daughter of a geologist at the university and a radiotherapist. She was eight years old when she realised she wanted to be a writer:

“When I was at primary school some of the girls did a play about Gypsies – in fact I have no idea what it was, it could have been *The Pirates of Penzance* for all I know. I thought this was the best thing I had ever seen, so then I wrote a play about Gypsies. A lovely teacher helped me to stage it and I was off.”

She read History at Edinburgh University and started writing professionally in 1981, taking cleaning jobs (‘which I was rubbish at’) to pay the rent. Much of her work during the 1980s was for radio and television and included episodes of *Casualty* and *Dr Who*; she has continued to write for television and her single dramas *Bumping the Odds*, 1997, and *Rehab*, 2003, were nominated for awards.

However, her principal interest has always been writing for the theatre and she has so far written more than forty plays, starting in 1983 with *Fugue*. She won the London Critics Theatre Award for the Most Promising New Playwright in 1991 with *Bold Girls*, a play about the lives of three women in Belfast, whose men have been killed or imprisoned for their political activities.

She has worked with a number of influential and experimental theatre groups, noted for their support and commissioning of new writing:

Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

Plays premiered include, *Fugue* 1983, *Iron*, in Edinburgh Festival of 2002, *Pandas* 2011 and *The Last Witch*, about the burning of the last witch in Britain in 1727, commissioned by the Traverse for the 2009 Edinburgh Festival and produced in the Royal Lyceum Theatre. Rosa is now Senior Playwrighting Fellow at the Traverse.

Citizens Theatre, Glasgow

Where her work includes a translation of *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

7:84

Bold Girls 1990, *Scotland Matters* 1992.

Hampstead Theatre

Since moving to London a lot of her work has been premiered at Hampstead including *Snake* 1999, *Little Eagle* 2011, about Sergei Korolyov, chief engineer of the Soviet space programme which launched Yuri Gagarin into space, and *Donny's Brain* 2012.

Paines Plough

The Way to Go Home 1987, *Long Time Dead* 2006 about the camaraderie of three obsessive mountaineers.

She also co-founded MsFits, a feminist theatre company, with actor Fiona Knowles.

Rona Munro has, in addition, had a distinguished career as a screen writer, where her credits include: *Ladybird, Ladybird* 1994, directed by Ken Loach, *Aimee and Jaguar* 1999, Max Farberboch, *Almost Adult* 2006, Yousuf Ali Khan and *Oranges and Sunshine* 2010, Jim Loach.

The Play

She sees herself as: “a woman writer, a feminist writer and a Scottish writer – and I hope these things inform the writing rather than define it.”

Iron is a fine and typical example of her work: set in a women’s prison in Scotland it shows the first meeting for 15 years between Fay, serving time for the murder of her husband, and her daughter, Josy, and examines the way in which the past, present and prospects for the future affect their developing relationship. So, inevitably, the play raises questions about the Justice System, particularly in how it responds to women, the treatment of women in prison and the effect it has on family relationships, punishment and rehabilitation. But people and relationships are at the centre of the play rather than politics and ideas.

“I suppose having been a single mother, I probably obsess quite a lot about the possible pitfalls of being a single parent. I think about a lot of characters who might have got it wrong, so Fay is possibly one example and an idea of the danger people can do. But what fascinates me is what redeems the characters.”



The Director's View : Why Choose Iron?

A year or so ago I received a publisher flyer of plays newly available for amateur performance, which included a brief synopsis of *Iron*. I was intrigued by the theme described; attracted by the fact that this was a modern work, first performed in 2002; saw this as an opportunity for some really good female roles and ordered an approval copy of the script. Reading the script convinced me this was an outstanding piece of theatre, which I would love to get my teeth into as a director. The story line is strong, the dialogue utterly convincing and the cast was of a size I reckoned I could manage. All four roles are complete characters that present the actors with a real challenge. The meat of the play is, of course, in the mother and daughter relationship, the circumstances of which are deeply moving, but the comparatively minor roles of the two guards are each convincing characters, who have significant input to the development of the plot and direct influence on and insight into each of the mother and daughter and their relationship. I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of working with the cast and technical team to bring to life this intriguing and emotional piece of modern theatre.

Women's Voice in the Theatre

Some recent research by Elizabeth Freestone of Pentabus Theatre and The Guardian identified a "2:1 problem" in English Theatre – two men for every one woman in all branches, playwrights, directors, designers, acting roles – reflecting, perhaps, as Stella Duffy suggests, "society's wider failure to put women's voices on an equal footing with men's".

Rona Munro is one of an increasing body of women playwrights working to correct this imbalance.

"I am not drawn to gender politics in a tub-thumping way. But because I started out in the eighties I was involved in a lot of things that have become quite unfashionable such as the women's movement, and so were a lot of theatre groups."

In the last twenty years the balance has certainly become more equal in the work of smaller theatres, such as The Traverse, Hampstead, Paines Plough, whose programmes include a high percentage of new work and who have all commissioned plays from Rona Munro.

However, she still warns about the dangers of didacticism in the theatre:

"You can't ever write a play or film where you know what you want the audience to think. All that does is make you feel good about your politics."

The Beauty Queen of Leenane

By Martin McDonagh

Martin McDonagh's powerful and moving play is set in late 20th century Connemara where Maureen, a spinster, is taking care of Mag, her selfish and manipulative mother. Maureen's sisters have escaped from the village of Leenane and mother and daughter are locked in a comically dysfunctional relationship. As the play progresses the secrets emerge. Mag's efforts to thwart her daughter's last chance of romance with Pato Dooley moves the play from comedy into something darker, while Pato's brother Ray proves to be the unwitting instrument of the final tragedy.

Directed by Linda Hampson

Wednesday March 13th to Saturday March 16th 2013

7:45 pm, Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Box Office : 020 8866 7075

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Clare Wooster

Chair : Dave Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk