

PROSCENIUM

The Seafarer

By Conor McPherson

The Seafarer

Wednesday 1st to Saturday 4th February 2017
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The Seafarer

Conor McPherson

The Cast

James “Sharky” HarkinDuncan Sykes
Richard HarkinDavid Pearson
Ivan CurryBen Morris
Nicky GiblinCharles Anthony
Mr Lockhart.....Mark Sutherland

Directed bySheila Harvey & Crystal Anthony
Stage ManagerHannah Lester
Assisted ByLinda Hampson
Lighting and Sound OperationArnold Glickman
Set ConstructionRichard Kessel & Rene Lester

Setting - A house in Baldoyle, a coastal settlement
north of Dublin City

Act One, Scene 1 - Christmas Eve morning
Act One, Scene 2 – Christmas Eve late afternoon
Act Two - Late Christmas Eve night

There will be an interval of 15 minutes between Acts 1 and 2

He knows not,
Who lives most easily on land, how I
Have spent my winter on the ice-cold sea,
Wretched and anxious, in the paths of exile,
Lacking dear friends, hung round by icicles,
While hail flew past in showers.

“*The Seafarer*,” c. 795 CE
Author Unknown
translated by Richard Hamer

Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of paradise.

From “*Kubla Khan*”
S.T. Coleridge
1798

Conor McPherson

Born August 6, 1971 McPherson grew up in a working-class area in Dublin. He enrolled at University College Dublin and majored in Philosophy and English, going on to receive a Masters in Philosophy. It was philosophy that taught him “that what you have to accept is that you don't know anything, and that you're ignorant, which is a very liberating place to be” (*The Guardian*). While at college, he discovered David Mamet. “The day I read *Glengarry Glen Ross*, that was it, I knew exactly what I was going to do.” McPherson began writing his first plays as a member of UCD Dramsoc, the college's dramatic society, and went on to found Fly By Night Theatre Company, which produced several of his plays. He is considered one of the best living contemporary Irish playwrights. His plays rose from humble beginnings in makeshift pub theatre spaces to international productions (notably in the West End and on Broadway). *The Weir*, which resembles *The Seafarer* in setting (a small Dublin pub) and tone (supernatural ghost stories are told as alcohol flows freely), won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play for 1999.

In September 2006 McPherson made his National Theatre debut as both author and director with *The Seafarer* at the Cottesloe. Jim Norton, in the role of Richard Harkin, won an Olivier Award for his performance while McPherson was nominated for the Olivier and Evening Standard Awards

for Best Play. In October 2007 *The Seafarer* came to Broadway, retaining most of its creative team, including McPherson as director. The production on Broadway received rave reviews including such statements as "McPherson is quite possibly the finest playwright of his generation" from Ben Brantley at *The New York Times* and "Succinct, startling and eerie, and the funniest McPherson play to date" from *The Observer*.

The film of McPherson's first screenplay, *I Went Down*, was critically acclaimed and a great commercial success. His first feature film as a director, *Saltwater*, won the CICA award for Best Film at the Berlin Film Festival. His second film was *The Actors*, which he wrote and directed. He is the director and co-writer of *The Eclipse*, a film which had its world premiere at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival. He currently resides with his wife, a painter, in their three-storey home and studio in his Dublin hometown.

McPherson and *The Seafarer*

McPherson reportedly wrote *The Seafarer* in eight months. He has admitted that his work comes from "the unconscious." He describes his plays as, "coming from the body and your brain is catching up." He confesses that inside him "there's a nuclear reactor of anxiety constantly churning away, and the product is these plays that pop out every so often."

"Human beings are animals: 90% of our behaviour is animal behaviour, and we've just got this 10% veneer, the semblance of civilized, rational choice. Our thoughts are always trailing around after our appetites, justifying them with language: it's tragic and it's hilarious. That's the picture I put together in my plays: of the animals who can talk, and think because of that they know everything."

To Hell or Howth

It's a dark winter night in the mountains. The wind and rain howl around a skull-faced building overlooking Dublin city. In the womb-like warmth inside, members of the Hellfire Club play cards, betting recklessly – money, horses, land, and women. They are all prominent members of the working class – MPs, Lords and even the city Sheriff.

A knock comes on the door – a well-dressed, but saturated traveller is ushered in, bade to warm himself by the turf fire. He joins the card game, quickly showing himself a quiet, confident talent. The luckless players fall away, stumbling to bed in beatific stupors. The stranger is soon on a winning streak, no sign of wavering. His opponent fumbles, drops a card beneath the table. Bending to retrieve it in the flickering light, he sees the cloven hooves of the cardsharp stranger.

He recoils in horror, as the devil, or *puca*, vanishes through the ceiling in a ball of flame, “in a thunder-clap leaving a brimstone smell behind him”.

Or so we're told. The 18th century hunting lodge still casts a baleful eye upon modern Dublin from the hills above Rathfarnham. These mountains are a kind of middle ground – a liminal, or threshold zone that's not really city, not quite countryside either.

Dave Walsh (National Theatre programme for *The Seafarer*, 2006)



Vocabulary and Terms

<i>Banshee</i>	Irish mythological figure, a woman-messenger of death
<i>Chipper</i>	Irish slang for fish and chip shop
<i>Coddle</i>	a dish traditionally associated with Dublin, made of sliced pork sausages, bacon, potatoes, and onions; it is boiled and steamed and served in a large pot.
<i>Craic</i>	pronounced “crack”—difficult to translate, but close to “fun times and conversation”
<i>The Dart</i>	acronym for Dublin Area Railway Transit; public transport system
<i>Flathulach</i>	generous
<i>Gobshite</i>	loud-mouthed person whose words amount to nothing
<i>Jarred</i>	intoxicated, drunk
<i>Jacks</i>	toilet, restroom
<i>Lough Derg</i>	third-largest lake in Ireland
<i>Matt Talbot</i>	Irish aesthetic embedded in the popular mind-set as a former alcoholic turned devout Catholic; icon for Ireland’s temperance movement
<i>Pig’s Mickey</i>	(to make a) mess of things
<i>Poteen</i>	illegally produced Irish whiskey; moonshine. Extremely potent
<i>Reef</i>	beat (a person) up
<i>Shebeen</i>	similar to the American speakeasy; a bar where liquor is sold without a licence

The Devil in Popular Culture, Legend, and Myth

The earliest version of the story of the favoured angel's fall from heaven is found in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 14, though it is important to note that the passage never specifically denotes that this is the story of Lucifer.

The evolution of Satan/Lucifer in literature and popular culture has a long and storied history over the years since its first appearance in the Bible, and the most prominent early reference is found in the *Inferno*, by Dante Alighieri. *Inferno* is the first part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and is a 14th century allegory detailing the journey of Dante through the medieval concept of hell. The notion of the "Nine Circles of Hell" comes from this work; with each concentric circle symbolising a gradual increase in wickedness, culminating at the centre of the earth where Satan is held in bondage. Each circle's sinners are punished in a fashion befitting their crime, and in Dante's version, Satan is represented as a giant, three-faced beast, waist-deep in ice...

Many of our contemporary conceptions of the devil, particularly as intelligent, astute tempter, [come] from English poet John Milton. Milton's *Paradise Lost* grapples with theological issues of fate...the temptation of Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Here, Satan is ambitious and proud, but also eloquent and a rousing public speaker who must employ his rhetorical abilities towards gaining followers to wage large-scale war against God. It is here that Satan becomes a more fascinating, fully realized figure, rather than simply the "embodiment of evil". In Dante's version he is held captive, here the gates of hell fly open whenever Satan wishes to enter or exit. Through his delusions and narcissism, creatures such as Sin and Death are begot, and in fact hell is a creation of Satan's own tormented mind.

Our Next Production

Otherwise Engaged, by Simon Gray

A contemporary comedy of manners.

A man brings home a new classical record and attempts to play it. He is thwarted by a series of interruptions from family, friends, associates and apparent total strangers, which reveal much about him and his relationships past and present as his morning and eventually his entire life unravel before us.

Directed by Jevan Morris

26th to 29th April 2017
7:45 pm, Compass Theatre, Ickenham
Box Office : 01895 250 615

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 in Harrow 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 : David Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk