



Dancing at Lughnasa

Written by Brian Friel

A Royal Exchange Theatre and Sheffield Theatres Production



This visual story is designed for visitors to the
Sensory Adapted performance of Dancing at Lughnasa

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Content warnings for this show

- Smoking on stage, haze and airborne (gluten-free) flour

The production explores the following themes, which are all implied in the text and not visually represented on stage:

- Rape
- Animal cruelty, suffering and death
- Slur
- Ableism
- Death

Information about the Royal Exchange Theatre

The Royal Exchange Theatre building is open from 11am.



If you're coming in a wheelchair, you can use the lift to enter the building from St. Ann's entrance.



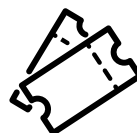
If you are walking, you can use both the St. Ann's entrance and the Cross Street entrance.



When you arrive, you might be asked by a member of the security team if they can look inside your bag. This should only take a few minutes.



You will also be asked to show your ticket.



You will then go into the Great Hall, which can be quite noisy and busy.

You will also see areas where you can buy souvenirs and refreshments.



You can put your coat in the cloak room for £1.



You will be able to take your seats from 5.30pm.



The Great Hall

The Great Hall looks like this:

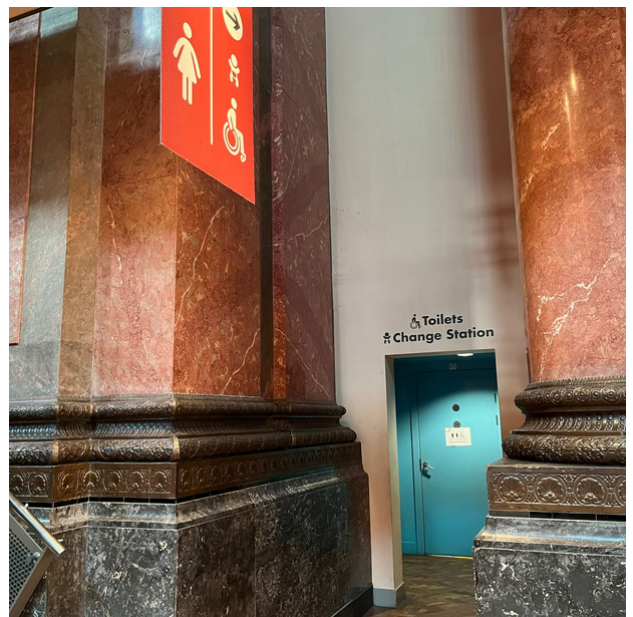


If you need to go to the toilet they are near the bar.

The entrance to these looks like this.



There are also accessible toilets, which include a baby change station.



The Great Hall continued

If you need to collect your ticket please go to box office. It is at the same end of the hall as the café. It looks like this:



There are also toilets near the studio Theatre. The entrance looks like this:



There are 3 bars and a café – they will open before the performance.



Asking for help

If you need any help you can always ask one a member of staff. They will be wearing a red lanyard round their neck – they will be happy to help!

Entering the Theatre

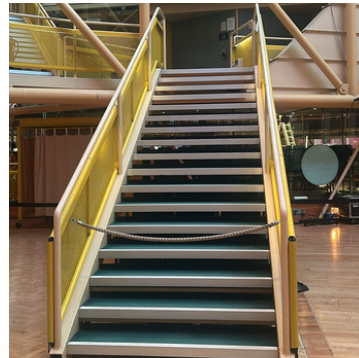
If you are sitting downstairs, you will need to go through the numbered door which is printed on your ticket.

They look like this.



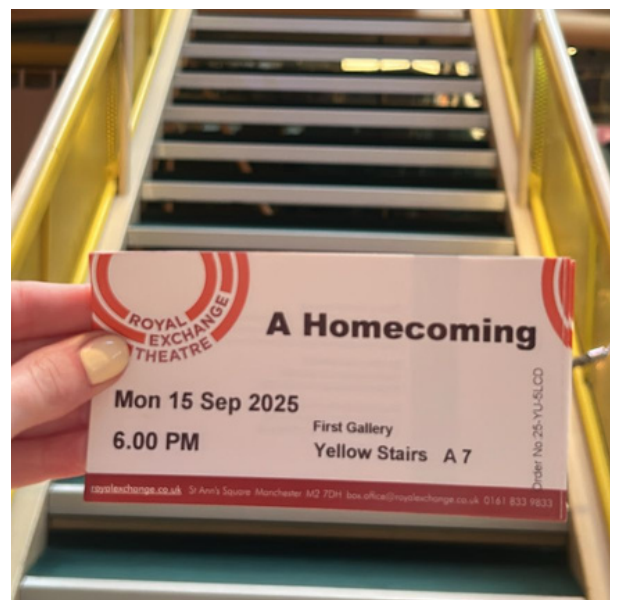
If you are sitting upstairs, you will need to go up the coloured staircase which is printed on your ticket.

They look like this.



A member of staff will help you find your seat. It will have a number on it that matches the number on your ticket.

This looks like this.



Entering the Theatre

The Theatre is where the audience sit and watch the performance.

The Theatre is made up of three levels.

The round stage in the middle is where the actors perform. If you are sat on the ground floor you may have actors walking past you during the show.



Information about the show

The first half of the show starts at 6:00 pm, there is then a 20 minute interval. The second half of the show will begin around 7:30pm.



This means the show will end at around 8.30pm.



The play is performed 'in the round' which means that the audience sits in a circle around the action on stage.



Mobile phones and tablet devices are permitted inside the Theatre. However, no photography is allowed during the performance.



Hot drinks are not allowed inside, but cold drinks can be transferred into plastic glasses.



You can come and go from the show. If you need to leave, it is okay to go and come back. During the play, there will be people around who you can ask for help if you need.



You are allowed to make as much noise as you like. The actors really enjoy it when you clap and get excited.

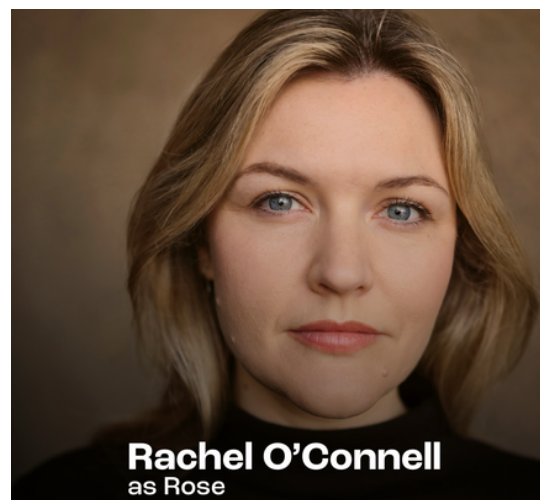
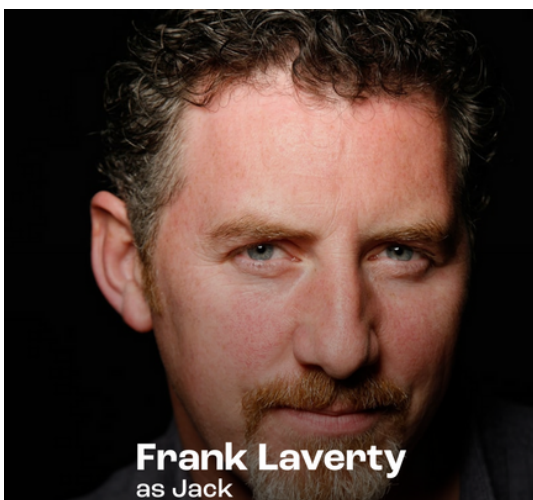
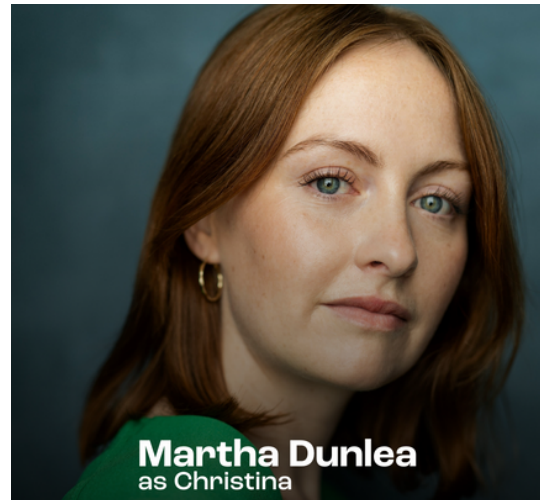
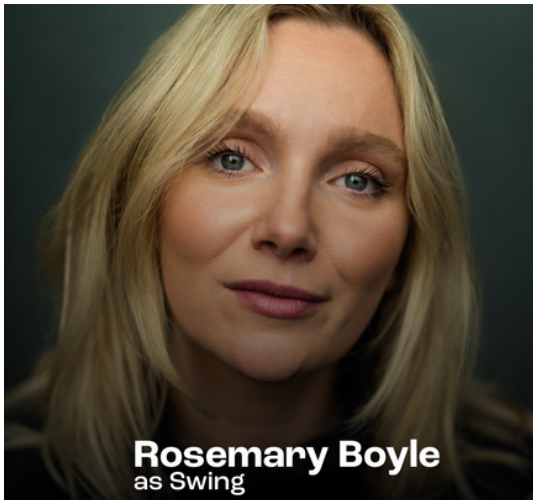


For this sensory adapted performance the intensity of sound and the lighting effects will be reduced, and the house lights will be kept on.

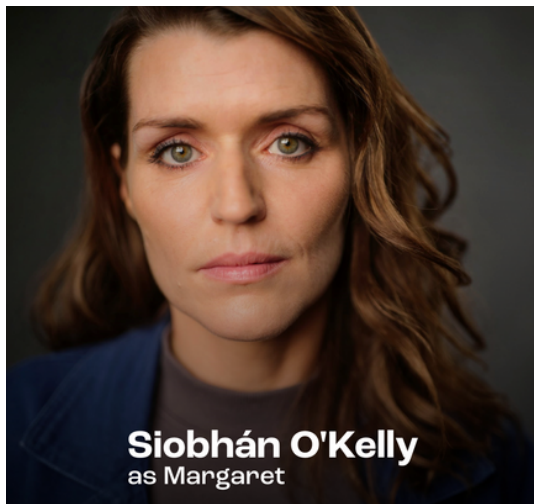


Information about the cast and creative team

List of the actors:



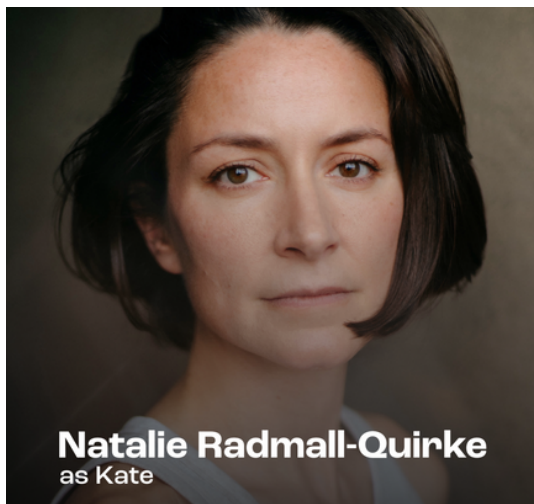
The actors in these pictures might be different from the actors performing on stage. This is because we sometimes have 'swing actors', who cover someone's role if they are unable to perform.



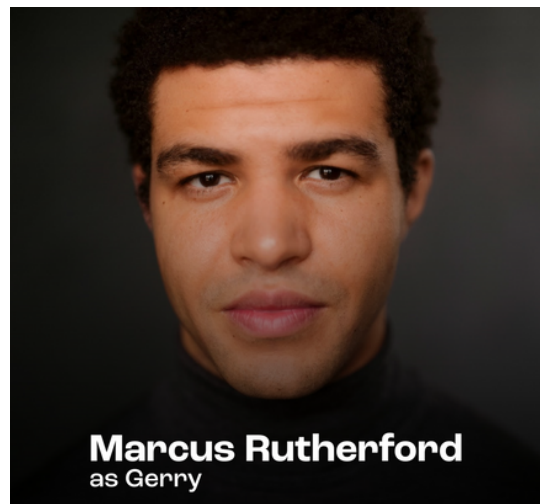
Siobhán O'Kelly
as Margaret



Laura Pyper
as Agnes



Natalie Radmall-Quirke
as Kate



Marcus Rutherford
as Gerry

List of the creative team who worked on the show:

Director Elizabeth Newman

Set and Costume Designer Francis O'Connor

Lighting Designer Chris Davey

Composer and Sound Designer Pippa Murphy

Movement Director Sundeep Saini

Associate Director Amanda Collins

Fight Director Kaitlin Howard

Casting Director Arthur Carrington

Birkbeck Assistant Director Sadie Mears

Associate Lighting Designer Mark Distin Webster

Stage Manager Sarah Smith

Deputy Stage Manager Saf Horrocks

Assistant Stage Manager Olwen Barnes-Archer

Information about the set design

There is a large Drum at the top of the stage which represents the sun. There is also a branch from a Sycamore tree.

There is a kitchen area with stone flooring surrounded by grass and rocks.

The space is fluid, meaning that the kitchen area and the outside area are bigger than they appear to be on stage. When 'in the kitchen' the actors can step out further into the space and still be 'in the kitchen', the same goes for when the actors are outside.



Information about the costumes

Adult Michael wears an outfit from the 1960s. He wears a sweater vest, white shirt, black trousers, and black shoes.

The rest of the costumes are from the 1930s period.

Kate wears a blue floral skirt and jacket, a blouse, a blue hat, and blue heels in Act One. In Act Two, she wears a dark floral skirt, blouse, blue cardigan and heels.

Maggie wears a blue and red floral apron dress. Underneath she wears a floral blouse, a grey skirt with a brown belt, and untied boots.

Agnes wears a floral apron dress over a blouse and tartan skirt, and boots in Act One. In Act two she wears the same skirt and blouse but with a short apron and cardigan.

Rose Wears a multicoloured floral apron dress over a tweed skirt and blouse, and wellington boots in Act One. In Act Two, she wears a blouse, blue skirt, green cardigan, and Sunday shoes.

Chris wears a multicoloured floral apron dress over a light blue dress and boots.

Gerry wears a tweed jacket, red sweater, suspenders, a straw hat and holds a cane in Act One. In Act Two, he wears a colourful sweater vest, shirt, suspenders, light-coloured trousers, and a straw hat

Jack begins the play in a white officer's uniform, he then wears a distressed beige suit, black hat and red scarf in Act One. He wears light trousers and a chequered waistcoat. He ends the play in an oversized and distressed version of the officer's uniform.

What is the story about?

Dancing at Lughnasa is a memory play told by the Adult Michael as he remembers the summer of 1936 when he was 7 years old.

The play is set in the fictional town of 'Ballybeg' in Donegal in Ireland. The play takes place over the time of the Lughnasa Festival.

It is about five sisters: Kate Mundy, Maggie Mundy, Agnes Mundy, Rose Mundy, and Christina Mundy. All sisters live together and are all unmarried.

Kate, 40, is the oldest sister, she works as a schoolteacher and is the breadwinner. Maggie, 38, is the next oldest and is the housekeeper. Then we have Agnes, 35, and Rose, 32, who are both knitters. Rose has learning difficulties and Agnes is her designated carer. Finally, we have Christina or Chris, 26, who is the baby of the family, she is Mother to her 7-year-old child, Michael.

Michael remembers this summer for three reasons:

Firstly, the family got their first wireless set (a radio) that summer, which they nicknamed Marconi.



What is the story about?

Secondly, Michael's Uncle Jack came home from Africa. Uncle Jack (also referred to as Father Jack), 53, worked as a missionary in a leper colony in Ryanga in Uganda for 25 years. Jack was sent home with Malaria in the summer of 1936. This was the first summer Michael had ever met his uncle.

Finally, Michael remembers that his father came to visit for the first time in thirteen months. Gerry Evans, 32, is Michael's father, however he is absent from the family, and him and Christina are not married.

When the sisters interact with 7-year-old Michael, Adult Michael speaks the lines, but the sisters interact with an imaginary child.

In 1930s Ireland, it was expected that women would be married young and be mothers. The women feel that time is running away from them as they remain unmarried, it is a fear that is central to the play. It would have been considered shameful and unholy that Christina had a child when she is not married. The women have created an unconventional family unit for themselves.



What happens in the story?

Act 1

The play begins with adult Michael remembering the Summer of 1936. His family getting the first wireless (radio) set, Uncle Jack's return and Gerry's visit.

We see the Mundy sisters, Maggie, Agnes, Rose, and Christina completing their usual household tasks. The sister joke about ageing and their relationships are established. We hear that Father Jack has returned from working as a missionary in Africa, is living in the house, and that he is unwell. Rose tells us of a man she is in love with called Danny Bradley and how he gave her a present at Christmas. The sisters are very disapproving of this and describe Danny Bradley as a 'scut'.

Maggie goes out to the garden and talks to young Michael. Boy Michael is an imaginary character voiced by adult Michael and he remembers the summer when he is 7 years old. The sisters talk and interact with an imaginary child on-stage.

Maggie jokes with the child, tells him some riddles and then leaves to feed the hens.

Adult Michael delivers his second monologue. He tells us of his shock at first seeing his Uncle Jack. Michael had imagined a strong and magnificent soldier, however, the reality of Jack upon his return had been a weak man, sick and jaundiced with Malaria.

What happens in the story?

Michael describes how Jack had been a priest in Ballybeg before he went to Uganda and the whole village was proud of his work there. Jack's position in the church had given his family a little bit of status, which had helped the women to keep their dignity when Christina had Michael 'out of wedlock'.

We are then introduced to the oldest sister, Kate, as she returns home from the Village and gives Young Michael a spinning top. She then enters the house and begins to unpack the shopping and tells the other sisters of the news from the town.

Kate tells the sisters that everyone in town is excited about the Harvest Dance taking place for the Festival of Lughnasa. Agnes proposes that they should all go. Kate shuts down this idea, saying that they are too old and would only embarrass themselves.

Maggie has another interaction with Young Michael where she plays tricks on him. Rose tells the sisters the Pagan rituals that happen up in the back hills for the Festival of Lughnasa. Kate tells off Rose for talking about such things in a Catholic home.



What happens in the story?

Father Jack enters the kitchen. He is confused and is struggling to remember the words for things having spent 25 years in Uganda speaking Swahili. After Jack leaves, Kate tells the sisters that she bumped into Maggie's old friend Bernie O'Donnell in the town who was visiting from London for the first time in 20 years. She describes how beautiful Bernie looks and how she had two gorgeous blonde twin girls with her, who she had with her Swedish husband.

Maggie is stunned at the news of Bernie and distractedly tells the story of how they once went all the way to a dance in Ardstraw. Maggie is upset by this story and to relieve the tension the sisters put the radio on.

The music does something to Maggie, and she begins a wild dance which all the sisters join. The radio cuts out, and they are all left feeling very embarrassed.

Maggie goes out to find Michael and soon comes running back in as she has spotted Gerry Evans, Michael's father coming up the lane. This news sends the sisters into chaos and Christina is stunned.

Chris and Gerry meet, and Chris reveals that he hasn't been to visit in 13 months. Gerry tells her about his new job working as a gramophone salesman. He also tells her that he has joined the international brigade and that he is going to Spain to fight. Maggie and Kate watch the interaction from the kitchen window.



What happens in the story?

The radio starts up, and Gerry begins dancing with Chris. He asks her to marry him when he comes back in two weeks and she declines, knowing that he would abandon her. They dance down the lane.

Back in the house, Kate criticises Gerry. This upsets Agnes and she storms out the house. The sisters are confused by her outburst. Kate comments on how Gerry's presence poisons the atmosphere of the house. Kate then confides in Maggie about her worries about the house falling apart and tells her that she may lose her job at the school.

Chris returns from dancing with Gerry and excitedly talks to Boy Michael about his father, Gerry.

Father Jack enters. He recounts leaving Ballybeg 25 years ago and how the sisters and their mother waved him off at the station. Jack tells the sisters how he always spoke Swahili whilst in Ryanga and how he integrated with the community there. He says he was nicknamed 'The Irish Outcast' by the district commissioner there and they did not get on. The sisters are shocked by this information as they believed Jack was in Ryanga spreading Catholicism, not adopting the local beliefs.



What happens in the story?

Jack asks Chris if she is married, to which she confesses she isn't. Jack celebrates the fact that this makes Michael a 'love child', which in Rynaga is a blessing. Kate highly disapproves of this. Adult Michael tells the audience that Kate's worries were not unjustified and warns us of Rose and Agnes' fate. He tells the audience that Gerry did in fact return in two weeks and that Gerry and his mother once again danced.

What happens in the story?

Act 2

Maggie enters singing and sees the imaginary Boy Michael writing a letter to Santa at the kitchen table.

Jack enters looking much better and stronger. Kate enters and asks if Jack will say mass again, Jack agrees and says he will next Monday. He talks about how his house boy, Okawa, would hit a big gong at the beginning off the ceremonies in Ryanga. He then describes two of the Ryangan Harvest ceremonies to Kate and Maggie, how they sacrificed animals, painted their faces, drank palm wine and danced.

Kate is disturbed by this description and as Jack is leaving, she asks again if he will say mass. Jack says he will but jokes that she will have to find him a big gong.

Kate despairs that Jack has changed for good and that he will not say mass again. Maggie comforts her.

Chris and Gerry enter the garden; Gerry tells Chris about signing up for the national brigade and that he's going to be a dispatch rider. Chris asks Gerry to fix the radio. Gerry says he doesn't know how but that he will give it a go. They enter the house, and Gerry tells Kate and Maggie that they bumped into Jack outside and that he wants to exchange hats with Gerry, he wants to give Gerry a hat that the district commissioner gave him as a leaving present in Ryanga.

What happens in the story?

Gerry leaves to fix the arial for the radio and Chris tells Kate and Maggie that she bumped into the knitting agent, Vera McLoughlin, who told her that she will not be buying anymore hand-knitted gloves from Rose or Agnes because a new glove factory has opened in Donegal which makes gloves much more cheaply. Vera tried to sign up to work there herself but was told that at 41 she was too old.

Agnes returns from picking bilberries and sees Gerry up the sycamore tree trying to fix the arial. She goes into the kitchen and asks the sisters if Rose, who she believed returned early from bilberry picking, is feeling better. The sisters are confused as they have not seen Rose. They realise that Rose has been missing for hours and panic. Suddenly, Chris spots Rose on her way up the lane.

Rose enters wearing her good clothes and revealing nothing. Kate demands to know where she has been and Rose reveals that she had been to meet Danny Bradley, that they went out on his boat and had a picnic and that he took her up to the backhills. She does not reveal what they did up there. She leaves to her bedroom to get changed. The sisters are deeply disturbed by this new information and are all visibly upset.



What happens in the story?

Adult Michael comes on stage and delivers a monologue about the fate of the characters:

He tells the audience of Rose and Agnes' fate. How they were visited by Vera McLoughlin who told them the news about the knitting factory but that they didn't apply. Instead Rose and Agnes ran away. They could not be found. It was only later in life that Michael had managed to track them down. They had gone to London and worked until Rose could no longer. They then became homeless and took up drinking. Agnes died on the streets and Rose in a hospice.

Michael tells us that Jack returned to full health but never did say mass again. Jack died within a year of his return.

Gerry sailed to Spain to fight and was injured falling off his motorbike. He would still visit occasionally but when the second world war hit, he stopped.

Michael received a letter in the mid 50s from his half-brother also called Michael Evans. He informed Michael that Gerry (father to both of them) had died and that he had a wife and a family in Wales. Michael decided to never tell his mother about that letter.

What happens in the story?

We return to the scene. Jack re-enters and Maggie jokes that she should go to Ryanga with him to find a husband. Jack jokes that he couldn't find a husband for reach of them but could find one for all four. He tells the sisters of how the family and marriage system in Ryanga works, that one man has several wives and children at once, and they all live in community together.

Suddenly the radio starts up and Gerry runs on. He asks Agnes to dance with him, and they dance out to the garden. Chris watches as Gerry kisses Agnes on the forehead. Chris is very upset by this. Gerry then comes back in with Agnes and asks Chris to Dance with him, she refuses. Maggie offers to dance instead and out of spite, Christina turns the Radio off.

Maggie proposes they eat dinner outside, and the sisters set up outside. Rose enters holding her dead rooster saying the fox must have got it. The sisters comfort her saying they will get her another, Rose says she doesn't want another one.

Jack enters wearing his old Officer's uniform from when he was chaplain to the British Army. He is also wearing the the 'ceremonial tricorn' hat that was gifted to him by the district commissioner. Him and Gerry perform a 'formal exchange', and they swap hats.



What happens in the story?

They all enjoy the last bit of sun. Maggie goes to tell a riddle but cannot remember it, the memory begins to break down. Adult Michael enters to deliver his final monologue.

Michael tells us that after Agnes and Rose ran away, his mother joined the knitting factory and worked there until she died and hated it. Aunt Kate lost her job as a teacher but later became a tutor. He tells us that in that memory of 1936 the most important thing was atmosphere, that he remembers it as music and dance which could express more than words ever could.



Explanation of words

Ballybeg – The fictional town where they play is set. Literal translation is “little town”.

Bilberries – A type of berry similar to a blueberry found in late summer and early Autumn.

Donegal – the northern-most county in the republic of Ireland, it is mountainous and isolated from the rest of Ireland giving it a distinct identity.

Jaundice - is a condition where your skin, the whites of your eyes and mucous membranes turn yellow.

Lughnasa – A pagan festival of the harvest which takes place in August. It traditionally begins on August 1st.

Marconi – The brand of radio, also the nickname given to the wireless set.

Mass - Mass is the central act of worship in the life of a Catholic.

Missionary - a person sent on a religious mission, in a foreign country.

Ryanga – A fictional leper colony in Uganda, Africa, where Father Jack worked and lived.

Scut - Word used to describe Danny Bradley, meaning an unpleasant person.

Swahili – A language spoken by the Swahili people primary along the East-African coast.

Wireless set – An old-fashioned name for a radio.

Questions

If you have any other questions please do reach out.

Find information online [here](#)



Email us on access@royalexchange.co.uk



Call Box Office **0161 833 9833**



Or come in and **talk one of our friendly Box Office** team members, Monday - Saturday from 11am



We hope you enjoyed your visit to the Royal Exchange Theatre.

See you soon!