



Lyric

# The Plough and the Stars

by Sean O'Casey

Education Pack

# The Plough and the Stars: a brief history of this production

Following a sell-out season at the Abbey Theatre as part of the 100th anniversary celebrations of the 1916 Easter Rising, as well as a successful Irish and US tour, The Plough and the Stars, comes to the Lyric as a co-production with the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. The Plough and the Stars was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1926. The audience rioted in hostility. Now regarded as a masterpiece, this provocative play is an essential part of our understanding of Ireland in 1916. Olivier Award-winning director Sean Holmes brings a new perspective to Sean O'Casey's absorbing play, which was nominated for 4 Irish Times Theatre Awards in 2016.

This Education pack can support both GCSE and A Level student's exploring 'Live Theatre Review' as well as generic information that contextualises the play in its historic, political and social background whilst exploring how it has been contemporised and is relevant to a British audience.

Written by Marilyn Rice (Producer of Education) & Julia Josephson

Teacher Consultant: Mary Ling

\*This is in line with Edexcel, AQA, WJEC- Educas and OCR examination boards

## Index

1: Cast and creatives from The Plough and the Stars.....	Page 1
2: Starting points.....	Page 2
3: Directors Interpretation.....	Page 08
4: Performers.....	Page 09
5: Design elements.....	Page 10



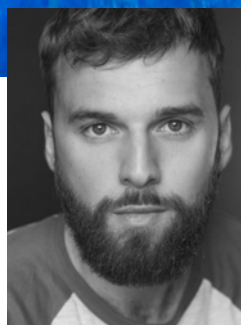
## Cast



**Ian Lloyd Anderson**  
Jack Clitheroe



**Niall Buggy**  
Peter Flynn



**Charlie Cassen**  
Sgt. Tinley



**John Currivan**  
Bar-tender



**Phelim Drew**  
Fluther Good



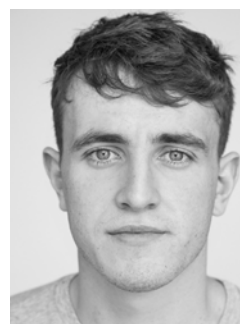
**Hilda Fay**  
Bessie Burgess



**Liam Heslin**  
Captain Brennan



**Julie Maguire**  
Mollser



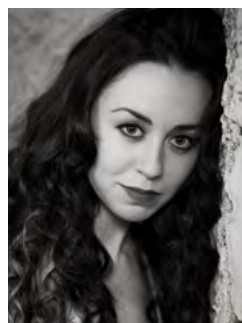
**Paul Mescale**  
Lieut. Langon



**Janet Moran**  
Mrs Gogan



**Ciaran O'Brien**  
The Young Covey



**Kate Stanley Brennan**  
Nora Clitheroe



**Adam Strawford**  
Corporal Stoddart



**Nyree Yergainharsian**  
Rosie Redmond

## Creatives

Written by **Sean O'Casey**

Directed by **Sean Holmes**

Assistant Director **Anna Grace**

Set Design by **Jon Bausor**

Lighting design by **Paul Keogan**

Costume Design by **Catherine Fay**

Composer and Sound Design by **Philip Stewart**

Casting by **Kelly Phelan**

# Starting Points

Before bringing your students you may want to give them some information on the plot, characters and themes of the play as well as some social and historical context on Irish politics and Dublin in the early 1900's.

## Irish Politics

The play is set between 1915- 1916, at this point in history Ireland was still under British rule and had been since the late 12th century. After centuries of discontent under British rule and numerous attempt at rebellions, this came to a head when, after the outbreak of World War I in 1914, their Home Rule Bill, which would have given them some political autonomy, was suspended. For centuries they had experienced a lack of political power and repression of the Irish language and culture. There was religious tension from the introduction of a protestant church in the reign of King Henry VIII in a Catholic country, this continued to be a main factor of unrest within the relationship of Britain and Ireland.

## What was the Easter Rising?

This play represents the build-up to the Easter Rising and the events that took place, this was an armed revolt during the Easter week April 1916 led by the Irish Republicans to end British rule. The rebellion lasted six days where the Irish Citizen Army (of which Sean O'Casey was originally a member) seized control over the Dublin post office and other prominent points of the city, the uprising witnessed looting and a staggering amount of civilians being caught up in the cross fire. The Irish army were heavily outnumbered by British troops, on the sixth day Patrick Pearse, leader of the Irish volunteers, surrendered . Many civilians were killed and imprisoned due to being confused for rebels; leaders were also executed and over 3500 taken prisoner. Ireland finally gained their independence in 1918.

## Why O'Casey?

Sean O'Casey was a Dublin-based dramatist and memoirist who was noted to be the first to write about the Dublin working-class. What really struck people about O'Casey's work was that it put the working class front and centre stage, giving them a spotlight that they have not historically experienced through Theatre.

## Relatable characters

O' Casey grew up as working class; this learned experience allowed him to form three dimensional characters that translate as real people, not attempting to dramatize the situations or exaggerate the characters, but simply to reveal the lifestyle of these people as a given truth. Something noted about all of O'Casey's work is the rhythm in the language, a sing-song tone in the writing that portrays the speaking manner of Dubliners. What is most important to remember about O'Casey's work is that it is meant to celebrate the Irish culture as well as acknowledge and retell the history, presenting flawed yet lovable characters that his audience can empathize with and reflect on.

## The voice of the women

*'Nora voices not only the feeling of Ireland's women, but the women of the human race. The safety of her brood is the true mark of every woman. A mother does not like her son to be killed – she doesn't like him even to get married.'* O'Casey

O'Casey was ahead of his time by also giving a voice to his female characters; strong women who are holding things together through difficult circumstances. O'Casey layers his plays with several traumas, repetitively occurring throughout each play, however by matching these occurrences with characters who acknowledge it as the norm and hold it together, he creates a realistic story of how to get by. This is demonstrated by Bessie in Act Four who nurtures Nora whilst housing Fluther and Covey and managing the intrusion by the British Army.

In Act One it is clear that the three central women; Nora, Bessie and Mrs Gogan dislike each other and have distinctly different opinions on both political and social viewpoints. By Act Four we see the camaraderie of women that despite their differences unite to support each other.

## Who's who?

JACK CLITHEROE (a bricklayer), Commandant in the Irish Citizen Army

NORA CLITHEROE, Jack's wife

PETER, FLYNN (a labourer), Nora's uncle

THE YOUNG COVEY (a fitter), Clitheroe's cousin

BESSIE BURGESS (a street fruit-vendor)

MRS. GOGAN (a charwoman- cleaner)

MOLLSER, her sick child

FLUTHER GOOD (a carpenter)

LIEUTENANT LANGON (a Civil Servant), of the Irish Volunteers

CAPT. BRENNAN (a chicken butcher), of the Irish Citizen Army

CORPORAL STODDART, of the Wiltshires (British Regiment)

SERGEANT TINLEY, of the Wiltshires (British Regiment)

ROSIE REDMOND, a daughter of "the Digs"

A BAR-TENDER

A WOMAN

THE FIGURE IN THE WINDOW

## Terminology and references

**Tenement:** The characters live in a Dublin tenement, these were derelict houses that were subdivided into several different rooms where multiple families would live. These were the Dublin slums that were made up of the very poor residents of the city.

**Consumption:** This refers to Tuberculosis but in the 1800s was named as having 'the consumption'. Characters use this in reference to Mollser's illness. TB was a killer disease especially fatal to the poor because it is infectious in overcrowded living conditions.

**The Starry Plough flag:** this was originally used by the Irish Citizen Army. The significance of the banner was that a free Ireland would control its own destiny from the plough to the stars.





## The Plough and the Stars: A brief synopsis

### Act One: November 1915 in the living-room of the Clitheroe flat in a Dublin tenement.

The first Act focuses on creating an image of the typical working-class life. We meet Jack Clitheroe, a former member of the Irish Citizen Army, and his wife, Nora who are surprised by the arrival of Captain Brennan who reveals that Jack has been promoted by referring to him as Commandant. Nora is upset by Jack opening the door, and when he does, Captain Brennan informs Jack that he must come to a meeting with James Connolly, leader of the Irish Citizen Army. It is also revealed that Captain Brennan had given the letter of promotion to his wife who decided to burn the letter, therefore leaving Jack in the dark about this promotion. Nora begs him not to go and we are informed of her objection to the uprising.



### Act Two: November 1915 in a public-house, outside of which a meeting is being held.

Inside the local pub, the characters can hear the political speeches at the rally taking place outside. Jack, Lieutenant Langan and Captain Brennan enter in uniform and carrying The starry plough flag, and the Irish flag. The image of this flag on stage preempts what is to come. They discuss being willing to face imprisonment, injury or death for Ireland, drinking quickly and leaving again to march their respective companies away.





Please note Act Three and Four take place one year on...

**Act Three: Easter week 1916, the street outside the Clitheroe tenement.**

This Act takes place on the opening day of the Easter rising, Easter Monday. The characters go through Dublin looting the shops and we hear of the Rebel's defeat. Jack enters with a wounded rebel, and as Nora begs him to stop fighting, she goes into labour.



**Act Four: Easter week 1916 (a few days on), the room of Bessie Burgess.**

We are informed that Mollser has died from Tuberculosis, an illness that has been witnessed in the play but never fully acknowledged. It is revealed that Nora has had a stillbirth in the home and is now being cared for by Bessie. Nora calls out for Jack and we see a woman in fragile mental health, she flits from sleep, to hallucinating dreams and mania throughout the act. Brennan arrives and announces that Jack has been shot and killed. The men are taken out of the house by soldiers who suspect the aiding of a rebel sniper. Nora runs to the window to call for Jack, but when Bessie goes to pull her away, Bessie is shot in the back being mistaken for a sniper. As Mrs Gogan arrives with the two soldiers and sees Bessie's body on the floor she takes Nora off to her room. The play ends with the two British soldiers drinking the left over tea.





## Discussion points...

- Jack chooses to leave his wife at home to fight for Ireland's independence; we see Nora lose the baby and then Jack is killed during the riots. Did he make the right decision? Did he have a choice?
- The play depicts the extreme poverty at that time in Dublin, does this still relate in 2018?
- How is the role of women depicted in the play? Is there a difference in how women are perceived today?





### Actioning the story

With your students in a circle and using the synopsis notes go through the storyline getting students to take on different characters, as they take on this character they enter the space and improvise the storyline given. As the teacher you act as the joker and narrate throughout. This can also be done with props and pieces of costume so the character can be interchanged.

**Outcome:** this should give your students a brief idea of the storyline

### DUBLIN RIOTS/ 2011 RIOTS

As the play explores Irish history that may not be familiar to your students it is important to find contemporary connections. During the riots there was a substantial amount of looting; the original script sees characters stealing jugs of whiskey and bags of flour. This production sees trollies with good and a washing machine being carried by Covey.

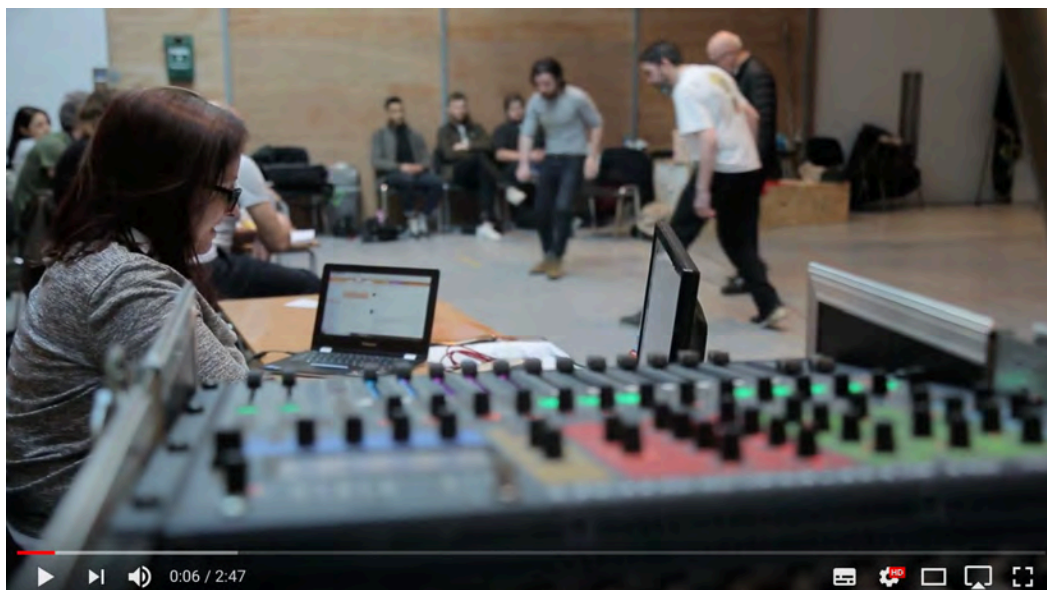
In London 2011 we saw the start of the London riots which then spread further into Northern cities and towns. This also lasted six days (6th – 11th August). This was instigated by the death of Mark Duggan and local people seeing an injustice in actions perpetrated by the police. There was widespread looting and buildings were set alight.

- Ask your students what they remember from the 2011 riots (what was typically being looted, why did it start, who was involved?)
- In pairs ask them to choose to be either (A) a young person choosing to join the riots or (B) the young person's partner, sibling or best friend
- The pairs must improvise the conversation that would take place A's objective is to go and B's objective is to make them stay.
- Ask the pairs to show these back. Discuss any similarities that can be seen between these two characters and Nora and Jack in the play.

**OUTCOME:** Students find parallels through events they may have experienced and choices made by characters in the play

# Directorial Interpretation

Sean Holmes, Artistic Director of the Lyric talks about his vision and process for *The Plough and the Stars*





## TRY THIS...

Nora is a central character throughout the play, we see her life go from one of hope for a better life to complete despair by the end of the play.

### Key moments

Ask you students to create a one minute speed scene that outlines all of these events, they must fit in as much detail as possible. Perform these back and discuss what and who the catalysts in each event were.

**Outcome:** Students can identify key moments on the play and explore the character of Nora

### Pride or patriotism?

Jack left the army when they did not make him a Captain, when this promotion does come in Act one we see him choosing to fight- but is this through his own pride or a patriotic duty to his country?

Dividing your group into two groups: they have five minutes to form an argument on either side

Group one: Will argue that Jack re-joined to fight for his country

Group Two: Will argue that he re-joined for his own ego and pride.

Set the space as if an Irish Citizen meeting room- a spokesperson for each will deliver their argument and the opposing group are then invited to ask further questions.

**Outcome:** Students explore a key characters relationship with his home life and country and decisions that are made that impact lives and inform the storyline throughout.



# Designers

## Set design (Jon Bausor)

Overview: The set depicts a modern Dublin with a contemporary version of what a tenement would look like. The large steel frame work gives us a sense of an industrial city, it lacks any sense of warmth or luxury and instead highlights the stark poverty that ensues in this part of Dublin.

### Historical research of the time period

These images depict the time that the play was set and gives us an idea of what the deprived areas of Ireland would have looked like.





This picture shows a more contemporary setting of Ireland today, the set takes on both eras to represent the historical context of the play but its contemporary relevance in the 21st century.





## Act One

The steel tower represents the steps from each room in the tenement where people enter and exit from. Inside Nora and Jack's room we see a very basic set up with a small sofa, wardrobe and table and chairs. We see all four characters that reside in this part of the tenement using this one room for eating, dressing and conversing.





## Act Two

The steel tower now moved upstage and we see a bar placed centre stage. It is basic and continues to enforce the sense of economic struggle.

The set is moved by the actors throughout; several are dressed as workman and these actions demonstrate the manual labour within their day to day jobs, again we see a picture of working class life.





### Act Three

As this act is one year on from the initial talks we can see the progression in the political events accentuated through the set. The action takes place in front of make-shift barricades in place whilst the rioting continues. There is a door centre that accesses the tenement behind.





## Act Four

A seminal moment is seeing the tower fall from its horizontal position onto its side. Its movement symbolising the downfall of the Dublin residents through the uprising. In the last act we go back inside the steel tower and the top is used as the inside of Bessie's room. Nora climbs inside the tower and uses this as her bedroom. There is a sense of being trapped in this tenement as they take refuge in here away from the cross fire happening outside.





## Costume Design (Catherine Fay)

The costume sees a mixture of both contemporary and period costume.

In the early design meetings for costumes for Plough and the Stars there was always the intention of mixing periods. It was decided pre rehearsal that a number of characters would be strictly period and others would have “elements” or a “feeling” of the period, Nora was one of those characters.

As rehearsals progressed it became apparent that using full period dress would not work. The characters had developed lives around whom they were on stage and that needed to reflect that in the costumes. To then have her get into a period blouse and skirt made no sense and would have caused confusion. A simple dress that gave Nora the essence of a period but without the formality of a full period costume. It managed to traverse periods regarding the design and complemented the other costumes on stage.





Without it being a glamorous dress Nora still looks more elegant than anyone else on stage, this supports the characters want to be 'respectable' in the play. In the opening act Mrs Gogan tells Flutter her thoughts on Nora '*Such notions of upperosity she's gettin*'.

Jack was coming in from working on the sites, Covey had a job in a fast food outlet and Nora was possibly a cleaning lady. The picture below shows Jack's modern day 'work' clothes.





The Irish uniforms are of the original time period but the British Army's uniform are contemporary. This shows the Irish pulling old uniforms together and their lack of funds compared to the British Army who appear more official and professional.

Uniforms have such impact that to break them down to elements or update them would have lost the powerful effect they have when they're introduced. The uniforms we see in the first half of the show are all pristine, intentionally. Uncle Peter's Forester Uniform is so theatrical it's humorous, which reflects real contrast with the Irish Citizen Army and Volunteer uniform.







## Discussion points...

- Looking at Nora's costume what does it tell us about her status? How does it change throughout the show?
- If you were staging the play what alternatives to costume could be used? Think if it was historically accurate, set at a different time period or had a non- naturalistic theme.
- Mollser opens the show in a Manchester United T-shirt, why do you think this design decision was made? (It was to do with the complex relationship between Britain and Ireland but shows how in certain element e.g. Football there is a link)





## Lighting: (Paul Keogan)

In Act one we see strip lights in the tenement which enhance the bareness and bleak living conditions. The lights are exposed and visible by the audience.

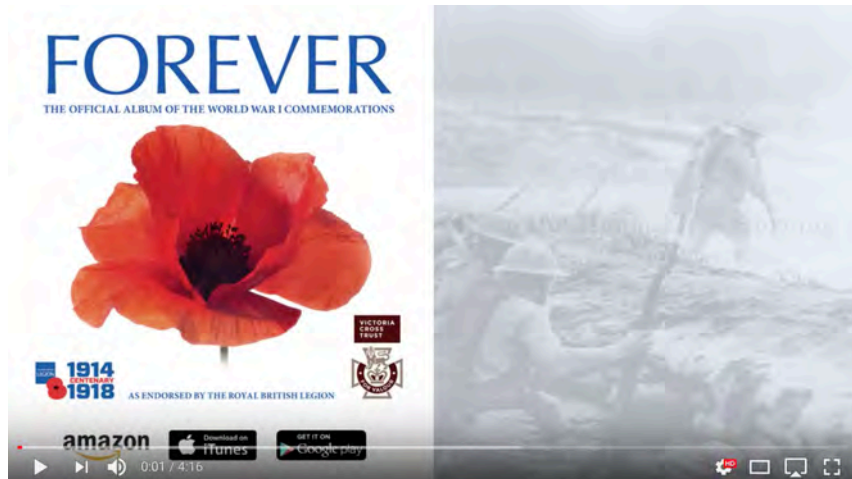
Lighting is used to enhance key moments in the play, this can be seen in the tower falling at the end of Act Three. Flashing strip lights pulse out at the front of the stage and lights are placed inside the tower as it falls. This enhances the sense of frantic chaos that ensues on the streets and has infiltrated into their lives in the tenement.





## Sound: (Philip Stewart)

This moment is also supported by loud dance music played out as we see Mollser dancing along to the beat. The songs remain thematic throughout to enhance the characters standing point. In complete juxtaposition we then witness the two British soldiers singing 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' a song that was a British patriotic song for the soldiers in the First World War composed by Ivor Novello.



A microphone is also placed on stage where at times throughout the play actors come and sing directly to the audience. This also enhances the directorial style of breaking the fourth wall and addressing the audience directly in scenes.





## DISCUSS

### Patriotism through music

Using 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' ask your students to consider what it would have been like to have to listen to this song as an Irish citizen. What would be a contemporary equivalent for them? This could be through different political standing points or even football teams, the interesting element is that the Irish citizens had no voice- they could not respond.

Extension exercise: Using football songs/ chants or indeed political views divide your students into two groups, one must remain passive whilst they listen to the opposing song or viewpoint. Ask them what was it like to disagree but have to remain passive through this. What is like to feel powerless and without a voice?

### TRY THIS...

In small groups ask your students to come up with their own interpretation of *The Plough and the Stars*; they will need to decide on:

- An overall vision/concept for the play (if this is too broad they can work with a specific theme of either unrequited love or success and failure)
- Is it set in a time specific period or is it a symbolic or thematic interpretation?
- What type of staging will it use and how does this enhance their concept?
- What are the main components of the set and does it change in every act?
- Are the costumes from a set time period or non-specific? How do they enhance the understanding of the play?
- What lighting would be used and how does this enhance key moments in the play? (depending on the level they can refer to specific lights, effects and colours)
- What sound and music would they use to enhance their concept? Give examples that could be played and choose key moments of the play

Students could use illustrated diagrams, model boxes, sound clips and written references- this could be done as a quick response exercise or extended to a timelier one. Students in their group would present back their concepts and answer questions from their class.

**Outcome:** Explores their understanding of the play and developing key design elements in creating a show. They should be encouraged to use Theatrical vocabulary when describing referring to each point.



# WANT £10 TICKETS TO LYRIC MAIN HOUSE SHOWS?

## BECOME A YOUNG LYRIC MEMBER

### BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- £10 tickets to Main House shows\*
- Access to low cost or free courses and masterclasses
- Access to hire music practice spaces
- Performance opportunities

\*Terms and conditions apply.

See [www.lyric.co.uk](http://www.lyric.co.uk) for details.

Find out how to become a Young Lyric member at: [www.lyric.co.uk](http://www.lyric.co.uk)

---

### HOW TO BECOME A YOUNG LYRIC MEMBER:

- Fill out the form on the next page or sign up online at [lyric.co.uk/young-lyric](http://lyric.co.uk/young-lyric)
- If signing up in person bring your completed form to the Box Office or post to the address on the back of the brochure with your payment of £10. We accept cash (in person), cheques (made payable to Lyric Hammersmith Ltd), Visa, Mastercard and Maestro.
- Once we've received your payment, you will officially be a Young Lyric member and be able book classes and access Young Lyric benefits.

---

Membership  
costs



**£10**  
PER YEAR



# EDUCATION

---



The Lyric is pleased to offer a variety of packages and ticket offers for schools and colleges across London.

## TICKETS

We offer tickets at £15 per student with one free teacher ticket for every ten students for main house shows\*. For more information please call the Box Office on **020 8741 6850** or email **[schools@lyric.co.uk](mailto:schools@lyric.co.uk)**

\*Subject to availability

## BACKSTAGE TOURS

Our backstage tour offers a unique insight into the workings of one London's leading producing theatres. Tours offer the opportunity to explore non-performance routes into Theatre and gain a deeper understanding of all of the backstage roles. These are tailored to the age, study requirements and the interests of your students.

## WORKSHOPS

We offer workshops around our main house programme to enhance your students' knowledge and understanding of the show. We also deliver bespoke workshops around Theatre styles, techniques and practitioners.

These are all delivered by our Lyric directors and creatives. For Primary Schools we offer curriculum based workshops and enrichment days at Key Stage 1 & 2.

## TEACHER SUPPORT

Every main house show is accompanied by an Education pack which is available online before your visit. Join our Teachers' Network to receive emails about CPD workshops, teacher networking events and special offers for your students.

## SEND SCHOOLS

We are committed to ensuring the Lyric is accessible for all young people. Our facilities include a state of the art sensory space, fully accessible building and relaxed performances to accommodate all students' needs.

For any more information or to book any of the above please contact **[marilyn.rice@lyric.co.uk](mailto:marilyn.rice@lyric.co.uk)**

# JOIN OUR TEACHERS NETWORK

Join our Teachers Network to receive emails about CPD workshops, teacher networking events and special offers for your students. Contact our Producer of Education [marilyn.rice@lyric.co.uk](mailto:marilyn.rice@lyric.co.uk) to sign up.

