Welcome to this introduction to the audio described performance of Plough and the Stars by Sean O’Casey. It has been directed for the Lyric theatre by Sean Holmes and was first performed at the Abbey theatre, Dublin on 9th March 2016.

The audio described performance will take place on Saturday the 31st of March at 7.30pm. There will be a touch tour at 6pm when you will have an opportunity to explore the set and the costumes. The production itself lasts for approximately two hours and thirty minutes with a twenty minute interval.

We’ll repeat this introduction live in the theatre 15 minutes before the show, so we can let you know of any last minute changes and you can check that your headset is working. The Plough and The Stars will be audio described by Alison Clarke and Willie Elliot.

The theatre warns that this production includes loud noises, strokes and flashing lights.

There now follows information about The Plough and the Stars, including a short introduction to the play and descriptions of the set, characters and their costumes.

**Introduction.**

The flyer accompanying this production tells us:

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.

Set amid the tumult of the Easter Rising, The Plough and the Stars is the story of ordinary lives ripped apart by the idealism of the time. The residents of a Dublin tenement shelter from the violence that sweeps through the city’s streets. A revolution that will shape the country’s future rages around them. What kind of Ireland awaits them? The Plough and the Stars was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1926. The audience rioted. Now regarded as a masterpiece, this provocative play is an essential part of our understanding of Ireland in 1916.

**The set**

‘The Plough and the Stars’ takes place in Dublin in 1916. It’s a tight knit community where no one living in the squalid tenement buildings locks their doors, neighbours come and go as they please and your business is everybody else’s.

This production of the play reflects the squalid atmosphere of the time, when money was scarce and disease was plentiful. Despite the story being set in 1916, the design of the set and costumes is more modern and reflect the more recent troubles in Ireland that ran from 1968-1998. Characters are given day jobs in burger bars and cafes and wear the uniforms of those trades, later changing into matching cotton shirts and trousers, or jeans, sometimes skirts with a slight flare, reminiscent of the 1980’s.

When we enter the auditorium the safety curtain is lowered concealing the stage.

The materials that make up the set are rough and ready, old and roughly painted. Furniture is torn, with the stuffing bursting out of sofas and chairs. Another modern element is a microphone, which the characters use to make particular comment, or to sing into.

The set sits within a dark open space, with the walls of the theatre, left right and back, hidden from view by dark green plastic sheeting that rises from the floor, out of view, to the ceiling.

There are four locations in the play; inside an apartment in a tenement building, a bar, the street outside the tenement and an attic room.

As you take your seat, the stage is hidden from view by the theatre’s safety curtain. A microphone on a stand sits in the centre, at the front of the stage.

When the safety curtain lifts away, we are presented with the tenement apartment of the Clitheroe family. It’s a mishmash of wood screens, old furniture and scaffolding.

In the back left corner of the apartment, two wood screens, over two metres high, stand with their plain wood backs to us, one facing us and the other side on to it, forming a corner.

Sitting just in front of the screens is a rough wooden kitchen table with a tray of china cups and saucers and an electric kettle. Nearer to us, on the left, a waist high chest of three drawers faces into the room, backed against an unseen wall. A kitchen chair sits in front of it, with a white shirt hanging neatly over the back, a white frill running down the front. A beat up old chesterfield settee sits in the middle of the room. The black leather upholstery is ripped on the arm and the stuffing in the seat cushions hangs out.

To the right of the settee, a battered square wooden table sits surrounded by three mismatched wooden chairs, one upholstered with its insides pouring out.

A two door wardrobe stands behind the table, at the back of the room. The wood is pale and unvarnished. When it is opened, a single pink dress with a flare to the skirt, is visible, hanging inside. Hanging on the left hand side of the wardrobe is a print of a classical painting of a reclining female nude.

Two strip lights with silvery metal shades hang above the room illuminating it with a harsh light.

The door into the flat is in the near right corner. Its a rough unpainted door hanging on a plain scaffold structure that stands six metres high. Each of its four side are around two metres wide. The scaffold bars criss cross the structure and give a clear view of the stairwell inside, which leads up two flights, to the unseen rest of the building.

Before the safety curtain is raised we meet . Before the curtain is raised the character of **Mollser** appears. She is a young girl, probably in her mid teens. Her long dark hair is swept back from her face and her face has the unnatural high colour of a consumptive. She wears a short divided skirt with a tiny floral print on a black background and a shapeless, oversized red tee shirt with the letter AON emblazoned on the front in large white letters. On her feet are white trainers and white ankle socks.

The first characters we meet are inhabitants of the tenement. **FLUTHER GOOD** is replacing the lock on the door. He is a rangy figure in his 40s. His dark hair is slicked back from his thin face and he has brooding dark eyes and a full black beard. He wears baggy grey jogging pants with a white stripe down the side with a round neck black tee shirt, a gold chain hangs around his neck. **MRS GOGAN** soon joins him In her late 30s she is a local busy body. She wears faded blue jeans with a shapeless grey tee shirt and long grey cardigan. Mrs Gogan has frizzy fair hair scraped back from her face and caught up in a pony tail. Mrs Gogan has a teenage daughter, **MOLLSER** . Her long dark hair is swept back from her face and her face is pallid. She wears a short divided skirt with a tiny floral print on a black background and a shapeless, oversized red tee shirt with the letter AON emblazoned on the front in large white letters. On her feet are white trainers and white ankle socks.

An older figure, wearing only long white combinations haunts the tenement. He is **PETER FLYNN**,. He is in his late 60s or 70s, a slight figure. His bald head is fringed with white hair and he has a small neat white beard and moustache. Peter has pale troubled eyes. He will however emerge later in full dress uniform of the Foresters: immaculate cream breeches, highly polished brown boots, vivid Emerald green jacket with brass buttons, gold trim and large gold epaulettes, cream waistcoat, and a gold belt from which hangs a sword in an ornate gold sheath. The sword is slightly too longs for him and bumps into things as he passes. The whole ensemble is topped with a black tricorn hat with green band trimmed with white ostrich feathers.

Peter’s niece **NORA** comes home from work like a breath of fresh air blowing into the room. She quickly removes her navy uniform tabard and working clothes and unpins her mass of luxuriant dark hair to let it fall about her shoulders. She is an attractive young woman in her late 20s with large expressive eyes. From the wardrobe she pulls a candy pink shirt waist dress with a narrow white stripe. Its softly flared skirt accentuates her slender figure and shapely bare legs.

Nora is married to **JACK CLITHEROE.** He arrives home from the building site where he works still wearing his hi vis jacket and carrying his red safety helmet. Jack is a tall, well built young man. His sandy coloured hair and beard are cropped neatly. He wears loose brown work trousers with a dark plaid shirt open at the neck to reveal the white tee-shirt underneath.

Jack’s cousin, **THE YOUNG COVEY**, lodges with the young couple. He first appears in the brown uniform of a burger bar which he quickly discards in favour of dark grey trousers and grey shirt. He is a slim young man, his dark hair curls at his collar and he has a dark neatly trimmed beard and brooding dark eyes.

**BESSIE,** is another resident in the tenement, in her 40s she’s loud mouthed and vociferous. She wears jeans tucked into short brown boots and a tightly zipped padded jacket over a polo neck jumper. Her dark hair is scraped tightly back from her face.

When we move to a local bar, the two wood screens in the back left corner are turned round to reveal a dart board hanging on a black painted wall. The furniture is all wheeled to one side an piled in front of the flats. The scaffold structure is spun round and wheeled to the back right corner, while a waist high plain wooden bar is wheeled into the centre of the space. The bar has four sides, each around two metres long, with a flip up section on the left, for the barman to access it. Two whisky bottles sit towards the back of the bar on the right. Ready poured pints and whisky in shot glasses are set on the front. A single strip light hangs over the bar. Now and then characters use a TV remote to switch an unseen television on and off, which they look at over the heads of the audience, the moving light playing across their faces.

The **BARMAN** presides from behind the bar. He’s a stocky, fresh-faced man with a faint shadow of a beard and a shock of abundant fair hair. He’s neatly dressed in a check shirt open at the neck and grey waistcoat. His sleeves rolled up to the elbow.

A regular in the pub is the local prostitute, **ROSIE REDMOND**, She nurses her drink balancing on high heels. Rosie is wrapped in a short, shaggy white coat under which can be seen a tight, short lacy pink dress with thin shoulder straps. After the interval, we move to the street outside the tenement block. The scaffold tower sits just left of centre at the very back. Strip lights are attached to the front edge of the ceilings on each floor. The ground floor of the building is hidden from view by a wooden hoarding that fills the full width of the space. The hoarding is roughly painted with a thin wash of blue, which is patchy and graffitied, here and there. A door in the middle of the hoarding is made of untreated wood and gives access to and from the tenement behind it.

As the action continues men appear in military uniforms. The green uniforms of the Irish Citizen Army and the Khaki worn by the British Wiltshire regiment.

Finally we move to an attic room inside the tenement. The hoarding is dismantled and scaffold is wheeled to the left of the space and lowered hydraulically onto its side. The main room of the attic is set on top of the scaffold, two metres high. A battered old armchair sits in the near right corner. In the middle of the room, four beer crates are set as a table and chairs under a single strip light. In the near left corner, a set of steps lead down to a cramped space within the scaffold, used as a separate bedroom. In the back right corner, another set of steps leads up from the outside world, into the attic room.

In front of the scaffold, an unremarkable chipboard coffin sits on the floor with plain rope handles.

Cast

Jack Clitheroe Ian Lloyd Anderson

Peter Flynn Niall Buggy

Sergeant Tinley Charlie Cassen

Bar Tender John Currivan

Fluther Good Phelim Drew

Bessie Burgess Hilda Fay

Capt Brennan Liam Heslin

Mollser Julie Maguire

Lieut Langon Paul Mescal

Mrs Gogan Janet Moran

The Young Covey Ciaran O’Brien

Corporal Stoddart Adam Strawford

Rosie Redmond Nyree Vergainharsan

Director Sean Holmes

Set Design Jon Bausor

Costume design Catherine Fay

Lighting Design Paul Keogan

Composer and sound designer Philip Stewart