



*Faith Healer* audio described performance accompanying notes

Welcome to this introduction to *Faith Healer*, written by Brian Friel, and directed by Rachel O’Riordan.

The audio described performance will be on Monday 08 April at 7.30pm. Please check with the Box Office on 020 8741 6850 for the time of the touch tour. The performance lasts for about 2 hours and 30 minutes, including one 20-minute interval and will be described by Ruth James and Willie Elliott.

This performance features haze, and also includes references to sensitive life experiences which may affect some audience members.

The theatre’s website sets the scene like this:

Trawling through the remote and lonely villages of Wales and Scotland is the Fantastic Frank Hardy, who for one night only promises miracle cures for the sick and the suffering. He might just be more showman than shaman but... the promise of the impossible is irresistible.

But it’s Frank’s shapeshifting gift and proclamations that bring him into conflict with his wife Grace and manager Teddy. As they each recount their lives together, they unveil a well of fractured memories.

The set remains unchanged throughout the play, except for slight changes in the arrangement of furniture. As you take your seat, the stage is open to you.

The impression given is of an old school or church hall. Ancient wooden floorboards slope slightly upwards from us, running from front to back. At the front left, four of five boards curve over the front of the stage, and at the back right, several boards curve upwards by about a foot, as if crumpled against a back wall.

As we enter, the back wall and sides of the space are curtained with heavy black drapes. On the left side, near the back, a large, well-worn banner is suspended high above. The gold fringing on the lower scalloped edge is tattered and the background is a faded brown. The text on the banner reads: The Fantastic Francis Hardy, FAITH HEALER, One Night Only.

In front of the banner is a tall, square table. Facing the table on the right are lines of sturdy wooden school chairs, two rows of three at the back, with one at the front. Four more chairs are stacked behind them.

At first, a golden light streams in from the right through the haze, casting the shadows of the chairs across the floorboards.

It's here that we meet Francis Hardy, also known as Frank, a man in his fifties with grey hair and a full grey beard. He's a slim figured man with a ruddy complexion, who quickly removes a dark overcoat to reveal a baggy, black three piece suit, the waistcoat wrinkled and loose fitting. He wears a light bronze tie at the collar of his white shirt. Frank has a soft Irish brogue and stands calmly, hands in his pockets, speaking directly to the audience.

During scene changes, dark figures swiftly add and remove furniture and props in the darkness.

The next person we meet is Frank's wife, Grace, who's in her forties. Grace's strawberry blonde hair is parted in the middle, and hangs over her shoulders. She slumps in a chair smoking and drinking, and wears a black pinafore dress over a soft yellow long sleeved shirt with bell sleeves and a pointed, 1970s collar.

When we meet Grace, she is sitting on one of the school chairs by the table on the left. The rest of the space is empty. On the table is a nearly empty bottle of whisky, a tea cup, plate and an ashtray.

The curtain at the back has risen about 4 metres revealing a wall behind it. Inspired by pictures of decaying walls, seen by the designer, it's cracked and flaking and feels like, as he says in the printed programme, "the patchwork aerial view of the fields of Ireland, Scotland, or Wales. Lit from different angles, or even from within, it felt like it could take on different personalities to reflect each monologue."

As a backdrop for Grace, the wall is lit so that it looks variously like crumpled silver, or gold, that's been crushed and then flattened again.

The third character we meet is Teddy, a full-figured, ebullient man in his fifties, with a shiny bald head, a round expressive face and a light grey moustache. He wears a grimy brown cord waistcoat over a white shirt, with a brown bow tie at the collar, worn with grey suit trousers, and speaks with a broad Cockney accent.

Teddy sits in an area of light that seems to define his living space. The screen behind is now at least 6 metres high, and is lit a reddish copper, the previous wrinkles seeming like the peeling, cracked paint in a decaying house.

The table has been moved to the right, with a slightly more comfortable armchair beside it – although it's of minimalist Scandinavian design, with slender curved wooden arms and legs, the back and seat padded with black leather.

On the table beside him is a pewter tankard. Behind him, just right of centre, is a silver-painted cupboard on legs that is full of brown bottles of Newcastle Brown Ale. On top of it is a record player with a raised red lid and beside it is a tall rubbish bin of black wire mesh, which resonates dully every time a bottle is thrown in.

