

MARTIN McDONAGH

the  
beauty queen  
of Leenane



AUCKLAND  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

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for life

# BREAK A LEG

(JUST THIS ONCE)

## from the producer

On behalf of us all at Auckland Theatre Company, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Martin McDonagh's award-winning **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE**, the third production of the Volvo WILD CHILD Season.

McDonagh has been hailed as a 'Punk Pinter', the 'Tarantino of Theatre'. Barely thirty years old, the man and his writing share an irreverence that is perhaps the mark of a generation. In 1996, while collecting an Olivier Award for Best New Playwright (for this play), he offended the great and the good of the theatrical establishment in a much-reported run-in with Sean Connery, eventuating in his telling Connery to "F\*\*\* Off". When Connery thundered that "Nobody tells me to 'F\*\*\* Off'", McDonagh amended his jibe: "Shut the F\*\*\* Up, then". Apparently, the former Mr Bond had to be restrained from using his license to kill. The interlude is instructive, to the extent that McDonagh and his work confound traditional expectation. His first love and inspiration is cinema and, in its twisted comedy and brilliantly crafted, surprising and suspense-laden plots, his writing owes more to Hitchcock than Hare. The great irony is that McDonagh eschews modern theatrical convention only to return to its classic roots. First and foremost, he is a master story-teller. His Ireland is not heroic, whimsical or folksy. It is a place of violence, solitude and rain and it is this landscape that shapes and drives his characters inevitably towards a breath-taking climax. So strap yourself in. It is a wild ride!

We welcome Jonathan Hardy who, after three unforgettable turns on stage, makes his ATC directorial debut and salute the three generations of Auckland actors who constitute tonight's cast. As ever, we gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support of Creative New Zealand and Auckland City and applaud the valued contribution of our Corporate Partners.

We trust that you are enjoying the Volvo WILD CHILD Season and invite you to join us for Margaret Edson's Pulitzer Prize-winning **WIT**, which opens at the Maidment next month.



Simon Prast  
PRODUCER

**VOLVO**

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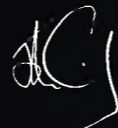
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The direct relevance of all this to THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE might initially appear unclear, but at least you may start to breathe a little easier!

I hope you enjoy tonight's performance and will continue to support ATC's Wild Child Season (and keep an eye out for one of the new pollution-eating Volvos).



John Snaith  
GENERAL MANAGER  
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Join us at Circa, the winning restaurant of the hotel section of the 1999 Corbans Wine & Food Challenge. There was steep competition from 75 other restaurants, all of which were judged by a panel of 14 wine and food experts. Circa is a great place to meet, relax and enjoy a drink or meal before or after an Auckland Theatre Company show.

Let us tempt you with a selection from our latest menu:

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Sugar roasted pears with fried goats cheese in a light cider dressing

Spiced quail fritters on a lentil salsa with mango essence

Black tiger prawns and Morton Bay Bug dumpling around a leek salad with mulled red wine

**Mains**

Seared salmon on saffron smashed potato

Charred fillet of beef on caramelised onion and blue cheese rosti with a rich port jus

Pot roast chicken breast on thyme scented fondant potato and corn puree

**Desserts**

Caramelised lemon tart, lemon sorbet and a poppy seed biscuit

Summer fruit terrine on a glazed champagne sabayon

Chocolate nemesis under a white chocolate marscapone

We look forward to welcoming you.



John Clarke  
GENERAL MANAGER  
Rydges Hotel Auckland

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AUCKLAND



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and SCREEN ARTS

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he's another one  
of our graduates



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Circa restaurant is the winner of the 1999 Corban's Food and Wine Challenge - Best Hotel Restaurant

## PUNK PINTER

**Martin McDonagh, Playwright**  
Interview excerpts by Marion McKeone,  
*Sunday Business Post Online*

After three days of cat and mouse games of farcical proportions, Martin McDonagh and I sit down with a drink and a tape recorder. It is precisely 2:40 am in O'Lunney's, an Irish pub on Times Square in New York, where the Druid Theatre Company is continuing its round-the-clock celebrations to mark the Broadway triumph of McDonagh's play, *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE*.

The interview has been on and off more often than the peace process, and I'm beginning to get an inkling of how George Mitchell must have felt. We have spent countless hours in the same hostelrys and have had several informal chats, which have turned out to be little more than a jocular trading of insults.

Eventually, at the tail-end of a lively evening, he taps my shoulder and says, "OK, let's do it", with such tension in his voice you'd imagine he was offering to donate a kidney there and then, without anaesthetic.

He leads the way to a small table away from the din and pulls out a chair for me. He has, I've observed, quite impeccable manners. Unfortunately, I fail to observe the chair's movement and almost end up on the floor. Out of the corner of my eye I see him suppress a malevolent snigger.

Although he has been written about in *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *New Republic*, and countless other publications, he has been refusing interviews for months and has decided not to do any more for at least a year.

"It's just that every one of 'em ruins three more days of my life. I'm pissed off the day before, because I have to do it, I'm pissed off the day I'm doing it, then I'm pissed off the day after I've done it as well." He laughs when I retort that this interview has fairly blighted the past three days of my life as well. "I'm sorry. Really, I am. I don't want to seem like a bastard but... I suppose I do."

You can't blame him, really. There was precious little on his CV to suggest that at 27 he would have a play on Broadway which is a dead cert for a fistful of Tony nominations. Meanwhile, *THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN* continues its sellout off-Broadway run, albeit to more mixed notices.

A South Londoner of Irish extraction, McDonagh drifted out of school at 16 and spent the next five years watching daytime TV and rifling through his brother's book collection.

"You get into it when you're unemployed. All you do is watch telly. You know it's stupid, but you do. You get to a point where you just can't miss an episode of *Neighbours*. And then," he says with exaggerated horror, "you start watching the repeats."

McDonagh was a classic specimen of the lost generation; no qualifications and fewer employment prospects. But then he started to write plays. He wrote 22 radio plays, which he sent to the BBC. All were rejected. *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE* was rejected by everyone, he says, including the Abbey.

A sustained verdict of null points might have driven others back to a couch potato existence, but for McDonagh it acted as a spur. "It gave me more self-belief because what they were doing at the time was such crap, it kind of reassured me. But it also means that now, when people say what I've done is brilliant, I take that with a pinch of salt too."

The first play he wrote was *A SKULL IN CONNEMARA*, part of the Leenane Trilogy. By chance, he says, he happened upon a demented world, "where you can't kick a cow without someone bearing a grudge for 20 years". His is a skewed reality, beyond politics, beyond morality, a sort of kitchen sink drama on acid, where animals are tortured, children brutalised, relatives murdered at random.

The dilemma of trying to inject some moral fibre is voiced in *THE LONESOME WEST* by the parish priest, who frets over his inability to adapt to his new surroundings in "the feckin' murder capital of Europe". But as he observes, "you'd have to have murdered half your feckin' relatives to fit in here."

*THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE* is a bleak, brutal tragicomedy about a 40-year-old spinster and her cantankerous mother who pass hours of grim isolation tormenting each other. McDonagh shifts the balance of power so seamlessly throughout, the audience can never really tell who has the upper hand. But when her mother wrenches a glimpse of future happiness from her embittered daughter, the consequences are as brutal as they are unexpected.

He writes at a frenetic pace. *Beauty Queen* was written in eight days. The faster you write, he says, the more honest it is, because you don't have time to conceal anything.

It was Garry Hynes, artistic director of Druid, who spotted McDonagh's talent. Since she read a copy of one of his plays two and a half years ago, he has experienced the sort of heady overnight success usually reserved for film and rock stars. By his own admission, he expected to slave away in his South London garret for 40 years before he was discovered. Not that he ever had any doubt but that he would be discovered, just not this soon.

If his detractors think he has risen too fast, he too feels unprepared for the pressures of the sudden fame his writing has triggered. He doesn't like talking about himself or his work, because he doesn't really feel comfortable analysing either.

"It just sort of comes from in there somewhere... I don't know where," he pauses and scratches his head. "Look, I just feel really stupid talking about myself, that's all."

He sighs and tries again. "It was like writing down conversations in my head. I remembered how my relations used to speak. It didn't feel like an expurgation of anything. But you have to allow your feelings to be true to the story."



There is a sort of innocence about him, which is totally at odds with the grotesque, twisted characters of his astonishingly fertile imagination. Although his features are open, candid, with a ready, engaging smile, the eyes provide something of a giveaway. Set deep and restless under Gregory Peck brows, they fairly glitter with mischief and, occasionally, menace.

He looks around and a sudden look of despair clouds his features. It may have been the late hour or the cumulative effect of several days partying, but suddenly the flirtatious, mischievous facade drops.

"I hate being here all the time," he says, sounding genuinely miserable. "I'm so bloody sick of it. And I hate all this superstar shit. I just want to go home and watch the telly."

But suddenly he cheers up again. The grin returns and he says "Mind you, I like being

able to afford things. And I thought this was what I wanted". Cribbing about the fame game and its responsibilities may make him sound like a petulant brat who doesn't know when he's got it made — but he's not. He's just smart enough to realise that being flavour of the month is not all it's cracked up to be. And homesick as hell.

Home is a modest house in Camberwell, what estate agents would call an unpretentious corner of South London, which he shares with his brother. Friends say it's unlikely to ever feature in *Hello!* or *Good Housekeeping*.

So, are there parallels with *THE LONESOME WEST*, his play about two bachelor brothers who live in the same house, where the ears are chopped off dogs and there are fights to the death over crushed packets of Tayto crisps? By way of reply, he grins and asks: "What do you think?"

As was common in the Sixties, when his parents emigrated they settled in the same area as other relatives. So McDonagh grew up within a stone's throw of aunts and uncles and other Irish families.

This, Garry Hynes believes, is the key to McDonagh's work thus far. "I don't think he could have written the trilogy if he had grown up in Connemara," she says. "He needed that distance."

Certainly, school holidays spent in Galway would have fuelled his imagination, but his London base afforded him the necessary detachment.

This collision of the two Irelands, real and imagined, at home and abroad, gives McDonagh's plays a powerful velocity and him a sense of belonging to both and neither. He says that two attempts to write plays about England haven't succeeded so well, because he wasn't afforded the necessary element of detachment, which allows room for his imagination to take over.

He may have an encyclopaedic knowledge of film, books and daytime TV, but he has precious little knowledge of the great Irish playwrights. The actor Mick Lally notes that when McDonagh was first being compared with Synge, he barely knew who Synge was. "Comparisons are inevitable, but he's an original," he says.

His work has invited countless comparisons to Synge, Behan, Murphy and Keane. But there are also similarities to British playwrights; he has Pinter's ability to imbue banality with sinister proportions, and Orton's ability to fashion ordinary words into outrageous dialogue.

The Tarantino of Theatre is an obvious label, but he has more in common with Shane MacGowan. Just as MacGowan reinvented traditional Irish music by giving it a punk makeover, McDonagh's treatment of traditional Irish theatrical themes has been equally explosive; he hasn't just taken it by the scruff of the neck, he's given it a swift boot up the rear.

But he has been accused of lacking emotional content, of ruthlessly manipulating his characters. Such charges do not withstand close scrutiny; McDonagh's brilliance may be flawed at times but his subversion of our expectations, the twists, turns and savage humour that keeps pulses racing, form the web that draws us into lives that are deeply tragic and sorrowful. Without his irony and brutal humour, the frustrated and horribly familiar lives of his characters would be unbearable to watch.

Druid has provided a formidable vehicle for his talent, and the warmth of his relationship with the theatre company is obvious. He and Mick Lally share some sidesplitting moments while they engage in some viciously funny banter with the actor Brion O'Byrne. He chats intently with Garry Hynes, locking her in a semi-permanent embrace. When the formidable Anna Manahan prepares to leave, he stands up and helps her with her jacket.

Yet at times you can see him detach, as though wandering off somewhere else, retreating back into his own world, much the same way as a child's attention might wander in search of a new stimulus. At one point he opens a book, and scribbles



for a few moments while a mixture of intense concentration and pernicious glee suffuse his features. You shudder to think what fresh hell has taken root in his thoughts.

Success can be a great liberator, but it brings its own insecurities. One of the things, which upset him most he says, was an off-the-cuff criticism of his work by Shane MacGowan in a recent interview with this newspaper. But if his self-belief is so absolute, why does a remark made half in jest bother him so much? Surely someone who wields such a savage pen can't be that thin-skinned?

"Because I'm shy. I'm easily intimidated and I think Shane is brilliant so if he thinks I'm crap, well, that really upsets me," he responds.

Can this be the same young pup who told Sean Connery where to go, in front of an entire assembly of theatre luminaries? Apparently, yes.

But did he deliberately orchestrate it?

"Well, not that particular incident. I was just drunk. But at first I wanted to get my plays noticed. So I acted up a bit during a few interviews because I didn't think people would be interested in seeing them otherwise. So people thought I was this arrogant bastard."

There were suggestions that, whatever about handling his 15 minutes of fame, McDonagh certainly couldn't handle his drink. Later when challenged by the press pack he declared he wouldn't apologise to Connery. Connery had only ever made one good film, he said, while he would make "seven brilliant plays and at least 20 good films".

He's well on his way; four of his plays have been staged to massive acclaim. He has accumulated a dresser full of drama awards and he recently completed what he calls a Sam Peckinpah sort of gorefest for Paramount Studios.



A return to drama based on storytelling rather than confessional angst or issues is certainly refreshing. Using a stage as a conduit for relaying one's personal angst — a worrying trend amongst many Irish writers — is another unforgivable crime in McDonagh's book. "It's just bollocks. It's got nothing to do with storytelling," he says.

"I have opinions which I try very hard to keep out of my work, because that right on stuff usually just turns out bad art."

The fact that many of his contemporaries try to fuse the two is he believes "the reason they turn out such boring shit". Some sectors of the media have trumped up a rivalry of sorts — a sort of Blur versus Oasis hostility — between him and that other gifted storyteller, Conor McPherson.

McDonagh thinks McPherson is "really great". "I really liked ST NICHOLAS and I WENT DOWN. I was prepared to hate them, but I couldn't. You always want to hate your contemporaries. But who would be Blur and who would be Oasis in your view?" And he adds, in mock menacing tones, "you'd better give the right answer".



The answer is so obvious it doesn't need stating. You can't help thinking that theatre's gain is the rock industry's loss. With the most auspicious debut by an Irish playwright in years, he has brought an energy to the theatre which until now has been channeled into music by the sons of Irish immigrants; the Sex Pistols, the Smiths, the Pogues and Oasis.

While he seems comfortable with the large extended family that is Druid, despite his longing to return to London, he is unlikely ever to fit in with the British theatrical establishment.

London was the first place to experience McDonagh's explosive mixture of exuberance, violence and black, black comedy. THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE was produced by Druid in association with the Royal Court Theatre as the first part of the Leenane Trilogy.

Most British drama critics have pronounced themselves stunned by his gift for lyricism and structure, but others have rounded on him; for some reason the sort of behaviour encouraged in other creative areas is forbidden in theatrical circles. When he is quoted it tends to be in a flurry of censorious asterisks.

There was a feeling among some that this parvenu hadn't earned his stripes, and his penchant for audacity pointed towards the conclusion that he was little more than a wayward flash in the pan, who lacked the emotional or intellectual depth to sustain his success.

One snootily noted "he has yet to cultivate the coating of savoir faire that stood David Hare in good stead". Others, outraged by his lack of humility, have accused him of bringing the good name of British theatre into disrepute.

Such stuffiness is laughable, particularly since McDonagh doesn't regard himself as one of them. "I think theatre should be like a good concert, people should be entertained, they should leave with a buzz," he says.

McDonagh has reached a sort of creative crossroads, a crucial point. He agrees that he cannot plough the Connemara furrow

forever, that he needs to take his imagination elsewhere. Right now, it's time to get back to the drawing board, to put the razzmatazz behind him.

"I'm going to do nothing for a year. By that I mean, have nothing to do, so that if I just want to write again, I can do that. That way there's no pressure on. I can just continue writing at home, go back to where I was a few years ago."

But that place may no longer exist. The last two years have turned McDonagh's world upside-down, and he has been altered by the experience. So can he really go 'back there' now? "You can make an attempt. JD Salinger did it. Get rid of your phone, fax, and," he says as he draws in closer, voice dropping, eyes narrowed down to slits, "never ever do interviews again. Ever. But," he adds, with another devilish grin, "I'll keep the shoes."

Garry Hynes, artistic director, Druid Theatre Company and original director of  
the  
beauty queen of Leenane

THE INTERVIEW:

**Michael Enright:** One of the issues raised in Beauty Queen is about people always leaving Ireland. Now that certainly was true for centuries, but people are now coming back a bit, aren't they?

**Garry Hynes:** Yeah, they are. Economically, Ireland has forged ahead in the last decade and there's less and less need for people to leave. Indeed, a lot of the people who may have left in the '60s and '70s are coming back.

That's not to overlook the fact though, that there are still areas of the country – particularly in the west of Ireland – which really have been savaged by immigration. It's still the case that people leave because there simply isn't a sustainable economic life available to them.

**Michael Enright:** Is that part of what drew you to the play? That idea of, once again in Irish history, her children having to leave?

**Garry Hynes:** No. Immigration is a theme in Irish literature, both for the stage and everywhere else. There are many, many plays – perhaps some people might say too many plays about immigration. What drew me in the first place to this was simply that it was a fine play.

**Michael Enright:** How did you find it?

**Garry Hynes:** It was one of the very few scripts that I've received unsolicited in the theatre. I mean, every theatre receives many, many unsolicited scripts, but they very rarely end up on stage.

I came back to Druid Theatre Company as its artistic director and I simply asked to read what had come in over the last three months and I found the two plays by Martin McDonagh. But we were just one of many that he sent them to.

**Michael Enright:** And he was scandalously young when he wrote this play.

**Garry Hynes:** Yes. He was about 23 or 24. He's not quite 30 now. I read the play and I became quite excited about it, and I tried to find out a little bit about him. The company knew very little about him at that point. We didn't know what age he was, what nationality he was, whatever. But then I found out he was a young cockney from South London and it made a lot more sense.

**Michael Enright:** Really? He's a barrel boy from South London?!

**Garry Hynes:** Yup.

**Michael Enright:** Let's talk about the setting for a moment, Connemara. It's in the wild west of Ireland. You can almost see Boston from there.

**Garry Hynes:** You can. It compares to Boston.

**Michael Enright:** A big part of the play is its physical setting. It's chilly, it's a drab little house, and so on. Talk a little about this connection between Irish writers and playwrights when they write about the west – and the physical environment. Why is it so physical?

**Garry Hynes:** It's a very dramatically beautiful environment. To travel out, say from Galloway, to travel west to Clifton, it's a stunning drive. So obviously there's room for the imagination there. I think that, since the beginning of the century, the west of Ireland (because it was the least colonized part) contains the essence of what it means to be Irish.

Well, that's not quite true. That's one of the reasons the Druid was founded in 1975 – because we wanted a theatre company that was about our lives in modern Ireland.

One of the extraordinary things about Martin's play is on the face of it, when it opens, it looks like a throwback to the '30s or '40s. It's the type of play that a theatre says, 'No, we're not going to do a play about an Irish kitchen with a picture of a sacred heart over the fire. That's been done.'

What's wonderful is the way he turns that on its head. He takes what's there and makes it unique and right at the moment. That's what good new writing is always about.

ANDREW GLOVER

as Ray



**What is your most marked characteristic?**

My spirit, my enthusiasm

**When and where were you happiest?**

New Year's Eve 1999 – I was ready

**What is your idea of perfect happiness?**

An ideology pure yet grounded in essential experience

**Where would you like to live?**

In hearts, minds, on stage and movies screens, and in a Manhattan loft apartment

**What do you consider the most overrated virtue?**

Perfection (aspire, don't obsess) / Chastity

**What is your greatest extravagance?**

Indulging my desires to act, sing, dance, cook, play, sleep, speak up, dress up, and live as I wish – also, an aptly named desert called AMBROSIA

**What is your favourite journey?**

From the dressing room to the stage

**If you were to come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?**

A ghost – probably a poltergeist. Yeah, a really scary one

**If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?**

A really scary poltergeist with magical powers in a big old house with gargoyles, secret passages, booby traps and new tenants

**How would you like to die?**

No thanks. Not even on stage

**What is your motto?**

Breathe in, breathe out, repeat at least twice daily, with meals

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

IMPROV BANDITS  
MEATWORKS ROCK OPERA  
LOOK ME IN THE EYE  
PARADISE ENOUGH  
SOFCORE  
LIFE'S CAROUSEL  
OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD  
THE PROGS  
THE LOWER DEPTHS  
WOYZEC  
FAUST  
JASON AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE  
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM  
MACBETH  
AS YOU LIKE IT  
THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK  
UNDER MILKWOOD  
OEDIPUS THE KING

**LEE GRANT**  
as Mag



**What is your most marked characteristic?**

Loud voice and waving arms

**When and where were you happiest?**

New Zealand

**What is your idea of perfect happiness?**

Having my family and friends close to me. Alas, we are all so scattered

**Where would you like to live?**

In an apartment overlooking the Seine river in Paris

**What do you consider the most overrated virtue?**

Most of them!

**What is your greatest extravagance?**

Shoes and expensive perfume

**What is your favourite journey?**

Going to San Francisco to see my family and coming to New Zealand to see all my friends

**If you were to come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?**

A wailing Banshee!

**If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?**

A fat pampered Cat!

**How would you like to die?**

I'm not going to!

**What is your motto?**

I have four mottos:

Get on, say the words, get off.

Age is something that doesn't matter unless you are cheese.

It's bound to be right on the night.

Live day by day.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

Difficult to choose from the 100+ roles. Let me just say, every opening night at the Mercury Theatre from 1968 to my 100th role in GYPSY in 1988, and so on, and so on.

**MICHAEL LAWRENCE**  
as Pato



**Where would you like to live?**

South London, London

**What do you consider the most overrated virtue?**

Good looks

**What is your greatest extravagance?**

Bournville bars

**What is your favourite journey?**

South London to East London

**If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?**

Antique Collector

**How would you like to die?**

Fighting

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

BiFF in DEATH OF A SALESMAN  
Stanley in THE BIRTHDAY PARTY  
Lee in TRUE WEST  
Lenny in THE HOMECOMING  
Aston in THE CARETAKER  
Mike in EAST  
Richard in THE LOVER  
Pale in BURN THIS  
Marco in A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE  
Ralph in HITTING TOWN



**DONOGH REES**  
as Maureen

**What is your most marked characteristic?**  
My big toe.

**When and where were you happiest?**  
Looking down at my newly born children

**Where would you like to live?**  
Here, Auckland New Zealand

**What do you consider the most overrated virtue?**  
Youth (although is it a virtue?)

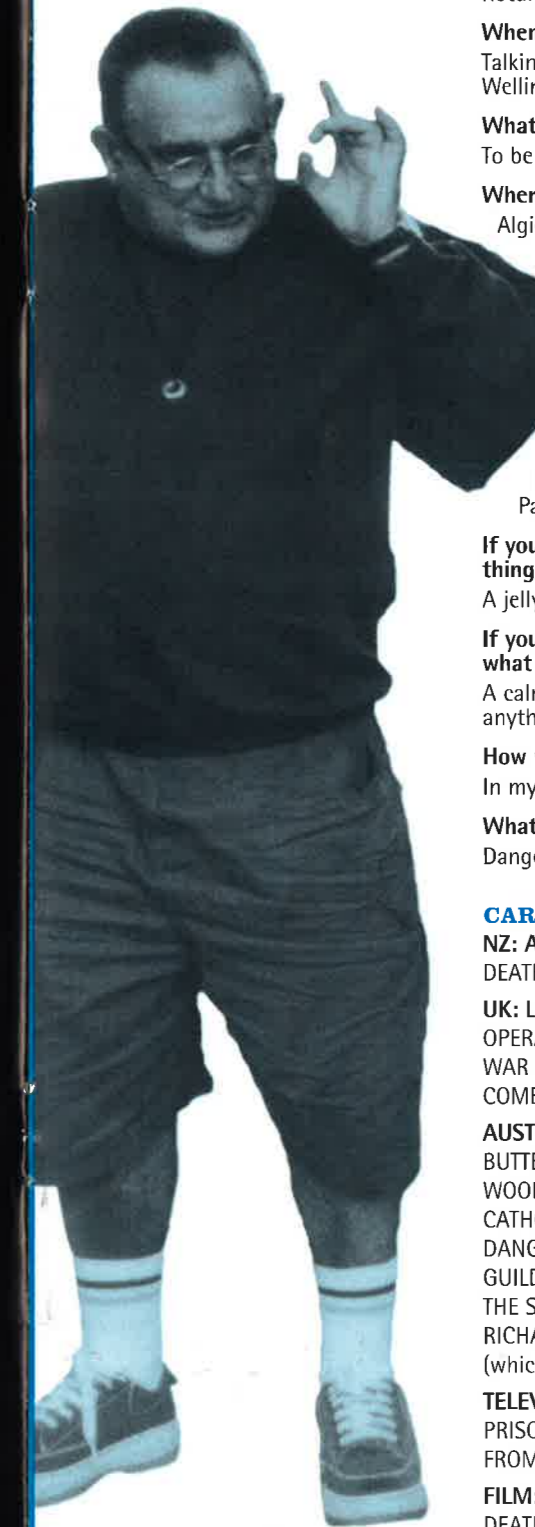
**What is your favourite journey?**  
A play such as this, most exhilarating and exhausting

**How would you like to die?**  
At home

**What is your motto?**  
Treat others as you would expect to be treated yourself

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

**Ophelia** – being the first major role, as a young actress  
**TROJAN WOMEN** – a production that took place out-doors, between the glass houses in the domain  
**LADY MACBETH**  
**WITHIN A MAGIC PRISON**



**What is your most marked characteristic?**  
Rotundity & Garrulousness

**When and where were you happiest?**  
Talking to Hedgehogs in Strathmore Park Wellington E5, 1945

**What is your idea of perfect happiness?**  
To be surrounded by dogs

**Where would you like to live?**  
Algies Bay

**What do you consider the most overrated virtue?**  
Chastity

**What is your greatest extravagance?**  
Gadgets and slimming ideas

**What is your favourite journey?**  
New South Wales Northern Rivers, Pacific Highway

**If you were to come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?**  
A jellyfish

**If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?**  
A calm, peaceful, content, quiet, self assured anything

**How would you like to die?**  
In my sleep

**What is your motto?**  
Danger I court / I won't die wondering

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

**NZ:** ATC: TWELVE ANGRY MEN, DEATH OF A SALESMAN

**UK:** LOOK BACK IN ANGER, THE BEGGARS OPERA, PETER PAN, DIARY OF A MADMAN, WAR & PEACE, SENECA'S OEDIPUS, COMEDY OF ERRORS

**AUSTRALIA:** PRIVATE LIVES, MADAME BUTTERFLY, WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF, THE ELIXIR OF LOVE, ONCE A CATHOLIC, KISS ME KATE, YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY, ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD, THE SHAUGHRAUN, THE CRUCIBLE, RICHARD III, SIMPATICO, BREAKER MORANT (which he later adapted for film)

**TELEVISION:** ALL SAINTS, STATE CORONER, PRISONER, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE, THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER, THE THORN BIRDS

**FILM:** MAD MAX I, THE DELINQUENTS, DEATH WARMED UP, DOWN RUSTY DOWN



# of <sup>the</sup> beauty queen Leenane

BY MARTIN MCDONAGH

This is the third production of the VOLVO 2000 Season of Wild Child  
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE opened at the Maidment Theatre 5 May 2000

Maureen Folan	Donogh Rees
Mag Folan	Lee Grant
Pato Dooley	Michael Lawrence
Ray Dooley	Andrew Glover
Director	Jonathan Hardy
Set & Costume Designer	John Verryt
Lighting Designer	Rob Peters
Wardrobe	Elizabeth Whiting
Stage Manager	Frith Walker
Technical Manager	T.O. Robertson
Props	Suzanne Gratkowski
Accent Coach	Barbara McVeigh
Set Construction	Third Stage Ltd.

There will be a 15-minute intermission

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#### SET & COSTUME DESIGNER John Verryt

What is your favourite journey?  
From the towel to the surf

If you were to come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?  
A rock

If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?  
The Sultan of Brunei – with a right of retraction

How would you like to die?  
Painlessly of old age – in my palace

What is your motto?  
Be prepared

#### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

ATC: THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN  
Theatre at Large: KING LEAR, CYRANO DE BERGERAC

Opera NZ: LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR  
Douglas Wright: FORBIDDEN MEMORIES



#### LIGHTING DESIGNER Rob Peters

What is your most marked characteristic?  
Understated cynicism

When and where were you happiest?  
Europe, Yugoslavia 1985. Innocence, travel, great ideas, future foundations

What is your idea of perfect happiness?  
Perfection would be hard to find, stakes keep shifting, higher and upward

Where would you like to live?  
A little in many interesting places, Pacific Islands, Afghanistan, France, Russia

What do you consider the most overrated virtue?  
Honesty, usually taken for a ride.

What is your greatest extravagance?  
Spending money on myself, don't seem to get around to it

What is your favourite journey?  
Coming back to New Zealand after travelling to a beautiful place

If you were to come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?  
Butterfly, live an entire life in one day

If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?  
Let's finish this one first and see what is left undone

How would you like to die?  
Have not thought about it, too much life to do. Would have to be quick

What is your motto?  
Not to sit in an armchair at 75 wishing I'd done that

#### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Mercury Theatre: LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, FAUST, TWELFTH NIGHT, CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, WEED.

Auckland Theatre Company: ANGELS IN AMERICA, LOVELOCK'S DREAM RUN, AMY'S VIEW

Opera NZ: LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, LA TRAVIATA, LA CENERENTOLA

NZ Pavilion 1992 World Exposition, Seville Spain

1990 Commonwealth Games, Auckland NZ

by Amber McWilliams

# cracking up

Irish playwright Brendan Behan claimed that "an author's first duty is to let down his country". Martin McDonagh, English by birth and Irish by upbringing, seems to have adopted this maxim along with its country of origin. His comic plays, such as *THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN* and *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE*, depict an Ireland that is laughable because of its cruelty, its stagnation, and its dishonesty. He is not alone in his cynicism; Ireland's literary tradition is littered with lost souls and losers, failures and fakes. In the face of the grim reality of hundreds of years of oppression and poverty, what else could people do but laugh or go mad?

A macabre sense of humour has typified Irish art since before there were authors. The tall tales and extravagant stories that mark any oral culture tend to accustom people to laughing at misfortunes, for most humorous tales are predicated on embarrassment or discomfort. Ireland, however, has its own particular ideological idiosyncrasies when it comes to entertainment. This is a culture where telling obscene stories at funerals has been accepted practice for centuries, and where "performing tricks on the corpse" is listed among folk-tale activities suitable for wakes. When in *FINNEGAN'S WAKE* James Joyce translates the word funeral as "funferall", he is only partly joking.

If death serves as an object of mirth, so too does pain, and not just in literature. Playwright J. M. Synge writes in his non-fictional account of the Aran Islands: "Although these people are kindly towards each other, they have...little sympathy for pain...I have sometimes seen a girl writhing and howling with toothache while her mother sat at the other side of the fireplace pointing at her and laughing at her as if amused by the sight." Within this context, a pan of hot chip fat can overflow with possibilities for social commentary and antisocial laughter.

Synge's fictional Ireland contains characters who weave these chillingly comic truths into their own dramatic fictions. In *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD*, murder becomes both admirable and hilarious, as Synge explores the comic possibilities of parricide. The title's playboy is granted adored status in the play's small community because he claims to have fled his home after killing his father. Apparently this plot originated with an Aran Island's folktale about a parricide case where a boy hit his father with a spade and took refuge with a group of islanders. When questioned, the villagers argued that the boy had a right to their protection, saying, "Would anybody kill his father if he was able to help it?" Apparently Irish audiences agreed with the sentiment; there were riots in Dublin over the play, but not on the basis of its violence. Playgoers objected to the word "shift" being used to describe a female undergarment, which suggests that Irish moral sensibilities take sex more seriously than aggression.

Of course, one of the comic elements of *PLAYBOY* is that it is predicated on a lie. Despite his boasting, the boy proves not to have killed his father, and the older man appears toward the end of the play to reveal the truth and wreak revenge. Yet having replaced boredom and hard labour with notoriety, the boy serves his own best interest by perpetuating his murderous fiction and

convincing himself of his own exaggerated tales. When the only other option is to remain overworked and underloved, self-delusion becomes an attractive option.

Oliver Gogarty sums up this national tendency towards falsification by saying, "What you take for lying in an Irishman is only his attempt to put an herbaceous border on stark reality". Maureen's half-truths and self-deceptions are exactly this borderline reality - a precursor to her literal lashing out at an intolerable existence. In England, the inability to "tell the differ" between the real story and fiction is madness; in McDonagh's Ireland, it is a national characteristic essential for survival. Maureen's friend from Trinidad jokingly implies that Maureen must be mad to want to live in England rather than Ireland. The irony is that it seems Maureen must be mad to be able to live in Ireland, or to be able to escape it. However pretty from the outside, from within the Emerald Isle has the unhealthy green tint of jealousy, decay and despair.

Perhaps in some respects McDonagh only tells it like it is. His tales certainly fit into the Irish tradition of celebrating failure. From the flight of the defeated Earls in the 1600s to the martyred heroes of the battle of the Post Office in 1916, Irish literature has immortalised those who don't quite make the grade. Yet whereas the old stories gave honourable losers the dignity of tragic loss, McDonagh offers only mocking laughter to mark his characters' falls. In making pain and deceit funny, McDonagh questions the humanity of humour and the nature of truth. As *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE* makes clear, within the Irish tradition the blurring of the line between fact and fiction can become a matter of life and death.

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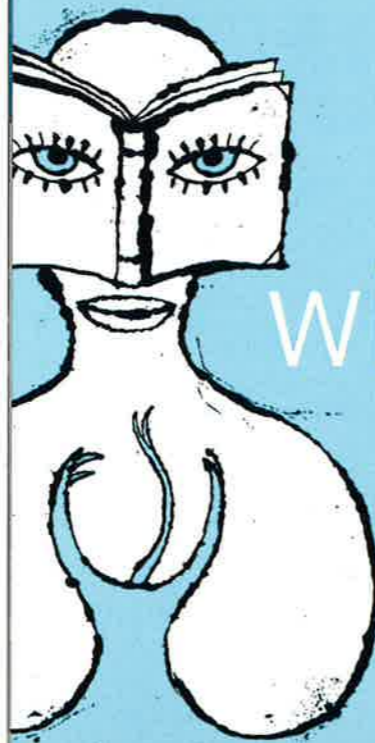
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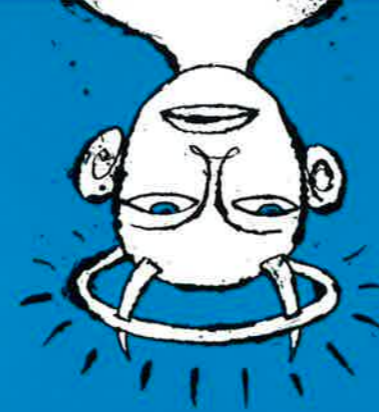
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wit

the  
god boy



**MARGARET EDSON**

United States 1998

"Now is a time for simplicity. Now is a time for, dare I say it, kindness"

Vivian Bearing, Ph.D., renowned professor of English and expert on the brilliantly difficult sonnets of metaphysical poet John Donne, is diagnosed with terminal ovarian cancer. Approaching her illness with the same academic rigour as her work, she becomes the prize patient of a teaching hospital, challenging, intimidating and fascinating her clinicians with her remarkable intellectual and physical tenacity. As her resilience fades and with the inevitable upon her, she comes to reassess her life and her work with a profundity and humour that are transformative.

Winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Margaret Edson's beautifully layered and humane new play is an uncompromising, uplifting experience of an extraordinary woman's last, great struggle. Dazzling in form and inspiring in content, WIT delivers an unforgettable night at the theatre.

Starring Ilona Rodgers, Paul Minifie, Beryl Te Wiata, Simon Roborgh

**IAN CROSS**

New Zealand 1999

"When things are good, why doesn't God just let them stay that way?"

Raggleton. 1950s. For young Jimmy Sullivan, idyllic days at the beach, fishing off the wharf and pictures once a week are a distraction from convent school and a growing disharmony in his parents' marriage. Struggling to reconcile the Almighty's love with the despondence of his home-life, he rebels against his friends, teachers and finally, his Creator, vowing no longer to be His "God Boy". However, when the matrimonial feud takes a murderous turn, Jimmy is confronted with a test of faith that will forever change his life.

Forty years after its first publication, Ian Cross's iconic novel of a childhood blighted by adult tragedy makes its transition to the stage. A true New Zealand classic, THE GOD BOY is a haunting and evocative story of one boy's coming-of-age and his soul-searing loss of innocence.

Starring Martyn Sanderson, Michael Morrissey, Darien Takle, Elizabeth McRae

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