

Monday 25th May, 2015 - Maddy Baghurst (our SM) has her say...

“...FIGHT ME, FIGHT ME, FIGHT ME”. We are in our final weeks of Misterman rehearsal and with just under two weeks until opening night the heat is rising to boiling point for all involved, especially Tom Campbell as he tackles his fight choreography. Yesterday fight choreographer Diego AR Melo joined us at Kate Gaul’s rehearsal space/cafe where he showed Tom (without giving too much away) some seriously crunchy, explosive moves for making his fights on stage look and feel like the real thing. YOUCHHH

We also had the pleasure of spending the morning with the lovely, talented Deborah Galanos who is providing the voice of Thomas Magill’s Mammy. The morning was spent finding the heart of the relationship between Thomas and his Mammy, followed by a visit to the recording studio (Kate’s lounge room) where they put their voices down ready to be heard in their full glory when it is brought to life on the Old Fitz stage.

On another note, Sunday’s rehearsal was an exploration in tonal shifts! And yes I have never actually used this phrase in a sentence till now, so thank you Kate for the new phrase for the week, which I will be employing in all areas of life mind you, so far have also used it to describe my eggplant parmi, my house mate’s fresh tattoo and some bodily excrements that I won’t go into here. In the world of the theatre tonal shift refers to the change of tone from light to dark throughout the piece and the contrast between these. Within Misterman it is about exploring these on a micro level from moment to moment but also looking at the larger tonal shift in the arc of the piece. We are discovering that to provide a more nuanced journey for the audience that these contrasts grow larger with the intensity of the play reaching huge swings for the climax. So, without spoiling these so called ‘shifts’ it’s safe to say that Misterman’s audience are in for quite a ride so get your bucket ready and book your tickets now.

Monday 11th May, 2015 - Carissa Licciardelo (our intrepid rehearsal observer) spills the beans.....

Another Monday in the Misterman rehearsal room, and we’re well into nutting out the second half of the play. With plenty of coffee under our belts, courtesy of director/barista Kate Gaul, we’re driving forward towards the increasing darkness of Misterman’s third act. Luckily, playwright Enda Walsh’s skill is such that a plunge into darkness is almost always followed by a deft swing back into the hilarious. Speaking of swift transformations, as I write this, actor Thomas Campbell is drilling one of the more difficult scenes between protagonist Thomas Macgill and town simpleton Eamon Moran – both played by himself. With Stage Manager Maddy Baghurst on book, Tom is working hard to master the physical, vocal and psychological gymnastics of the play. It’s a workout in every sense of the word. And as Kate notes, the more Tom drills the scenes where he moves between characters, the easier it will get, and the more likely the clarity and detail will remain. It’s beginning to stick. It’s clear that by the time Misterman hits the stage in June, each transformation will be total. (Insider’s tip: keep an eye out for my favourite of his characters so far, Inishfree’s most flirtatious café owner, Mrs. Cleary. In Tom’s hands she is pure delight.) Kate watches carefully, and at this stage directs with a light touch, giving Tom the space to find his way through the piece as they set a rough shape for it.

This week’s rehearsals have also seen the addition of some of the most important props into the room – a number of reel-to-reel recorders that Thomas uses to play back snippets of reality. These massive, weighty machines are courtesy of a number of Sydney-siders who appeared to have some lying around, just waiting to be picked up on eBay or Gumtree...who would’ve guessed? Also amongst the props beginning to make their way onto the floor are a number that Thomas amusingly endows with an unusual significance - soft toys he tapes over his ears as mufflers, for example, or the jumper that becomes Trixie, the cat (she looks soft but she’s feisty alright). It’s all part of the magic of the world Thomas (and Walsh) have established, and all fodder for some serious hilarity. A number of empty Fanta cans have also

appeared...not sure who Kate tricked into drinking those...especially since she told us about the origin of Fanta in relation to Nazi Germany...yep, you read that right. You learn something new every day, I guess!

In other news, Maddy and I have both had a crack at the Galway accent in reading opposite Tom during rehearsals (voices that Tom plays through his reel-to-reels, ultimately to be heard via recordings during the performances). Results have ranged from mildly-successful kinda-Galway-like to definitely-more-Scottish-than-Irish to who-the-hell-knows-anymore-this-is-kind-of-my-normal-accent. Definitely have some serious respect for Tom and for vocal coach Tash McNamara now.

The week is set to continue by diving right into the play's final act. Bring it on!

Monday 4th May, 2015

“Oh, yes. Yes! TOTO!”

If you were to wander past the door to an otherwise indiscriminate warehouse in St Peters on this dreary Monday, you might happen witness three fully-grown, fully-seated individuals absolutely revelling in Toto's Africa on full-blast, arms in the air like we just don't care (which we absolutely don't).

This is the rehearsal room for Siren Theatre Co.'s latest production, Misterman by Irish playwright Enda Walsh. My name is Carissa Licciardello, emerging director and long-time admirer of the brilliant and formidable Kate Gaul. I'm stoked to have been given the opportunity to observe her process through rehearsals for Misterman. Yes, I've actually been given permission to lurk in a corner of the room and beadily watch the whole process, scratching at my notebook and tapping away at my laptop. Ideal. As I greedily drink it all in, I'll serve as a rehearsal room insider on this blog and promise to give you all the goss.

It's been a few weeks since our first read, where a stellar cast has gathered around Kate's lengthy timber dining table for the first-read of what is actually, ultimately, a one-man show. Our protagonist, Thomas Magill, is alone onstage save for the audio recordings of various townsfolk, which he plays, pauses, rewinds and fast-forwards to construct his version of a particular day in Inishfree. Mirrors are scattered across the table, every actor “ooh-ing” and “aah-ing” (technical terms) into them as dialect coach Natasha McNamara instructs all assembled on the particularities of the Galway accent. And then we settle down for an incredibly lively read, at the end of which the awe in the room is palpable; awe for the mammoth task ahead of actor Thomas Campbell. His challenge, on top of sustaining an hour + show on his own of course, includes shape-shifting in and out of a variety of roles, finding and maintaining the nuances of each character – their voice, the quality and topography of their movement – and finding the shape of the protagonist's journey. Oh, and wrapping his head and mouth around the specificities of the Galway accent. No big deal.

Flick forward a few weeks and we're back to Toto – after intensive table-work on the play-text, and Kate and Thomas are deep into crafting the world of the play. During Thomas' first step-through up on the floor, Kate, drawing from the wall of reference images and the design she's created, verbally paints the stage picture for us. In between stints on the floor, the three of us are crowded around Kate's laptop, trawling the Internet to find the music that makes up part of the rich sonic landscape for the show. And it's taken us down some, shall we say, interesting roads, way away from what we're looking for. It's not often you find yourself listening to a track from “Intimate Sax.” Or three separate versions of the same church hymn, from a poorly piped version to the schmaltziest, Titanic-iest version you've ever heard. Think we'll stick with the church organ. (A classic choice.)

Today's other main focus is on engaging with business – stepping through the first half of the text and finding the physical shape of the piece, a particularly important step in a play where the protagonist regularly crafts and destroys various pockets of space and memory. The narrative construction of the show is also complex – there are multiple layers of reality, Thomas' re-enactments of memories and moments of divine intervention, often intruding on and bleeding into one another. Navigating them requires precision and specificity. Or in Kate's words, "The simpler it is, the more complex it can be."

Next up is making the choreography precise, finding the physical boundaries of each scene. And our first company challenge – for every member to drink a can of Fanta per rehearsal. You'll soon see why. Expect some very hyped-up blog posts in coming weeks.

You can hear Enda Walsh talking about Misterman <https://soundcloud.com/nationaltheatre/enda-walsh>