

House Plays

*Written & Directed by
Mina Tenison*

APRIL 20TH & 27TH, 2024

COOLLATTIN HOUSE • SHILLELAGH, CO. WICKLOW

Welcome to Coollattin House

Coollattin House, the former Fitzwilliam estate, is among the grandest private houses extant in Ireland. Its fascinating transformation from a majestic mansion surrounded by thousands of acres to its current incarnation encircled by lush golf greens is a dramatic tale waiting to be told.

House Plays is a production of House Plays Monaghan, a non-profit organisation founded in 2015 to promote theatre in unusual venues in digestible and entertaining bites.

Writer: Mina Tenison

Director: Mina Tenison

Producers: Ruth Barry & Mina Tenison

Chairwoman: Caroline Stephenson

Videographers: Anna Liza Bella, Emile Dineen, Conleth White

Lights: Conleth White

Sound: Ed Marx & Mina Tenison

Director's Assistant: Celina Tran

Special Thanks:

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- Oliver McCabe for Food Art mediterranean stew donation
- Dolores O'Brien for Food Art material/ingredients donation
- Caroline Stephenson for 2024 Tour support & strategy
- Barry McSkeane for sound support
- All our families, friends, volunteers & audience members without whom we couldn't make this happen!

From the Playwright

The idea first came to be one evening when I was attending a party in County Louth in 2015. One of the guests, Audrey Gallen, told me that the party's host often staged mini-plays in the drawing room of Barmeath Castle.

I had always been intrigued by the depictions of amateur plays and charades staged in country houses, as described in 19th century English novels of the Brontë sisters and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Soon thereafter, I had the good fortune of attending Giles and Alexandra FitzHerbert's joint birthday party where their few hundred guests were treated to a small play performed by their children's ad-hoc drama troupe.



A lightbulb suddenly went off in my head. Why not write and stage plays that harken back to the days of grand house party entertainment, where a masque, such as Purcell's *The Fairie-Queen*, was to be enjoyed between canapés, meal courses and bottomless goblets of imbibement?

So here I am, throwing a cocktail party, to put a twist on the 20th century notion theatre as a desultory activity that greying middle-aged couples do for a night on the town.

All I ask is that you relax, grab a drink and exchange pleasantries with your friends & neighbors. Because all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players – as the bard once wrote.

Let the stories unfold...

- Mina Tenison

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The Performances

Saturday April 20th, 2024

HOUSE PLAYS ACTS I, II & III: Raised in a big Georgian house in Ireland, Clare is finding that her enviable life is breaking apart at the seams.

- ACT I: Clare & Tom – “WAS THAT YOU?” - 18 mins.
Canapés & Drinks (Drawing/Chinoiserie Room)
- INTERMISSION / First Course Served (Dining Room)
- ACT II: Clare & Henry – “I SAW MY LIFE PASSING RIGHT BEFORE MY EYES” – 20 mins. (Main Hall)
- Main Course is Served (Dining Room)
- ACT III: Clare & James – “THE TREE OF LIFE” - 22 mins. (Main Hall)
- Dessert is Served (Dining Room)
- EXEUNT
- CODA: Charlotte & Henry – “THE ROAD AHEAD” - 3 mins. (Audio Recording on Loop)

Saturday April 27th, 2024

HOUSE PLAYS ACT IV: A duel for dominance emerges amongst the support staff as the household gets ready for the big funeral of its 90-year old patriarch.

- OPENING: *Dido's Lament** – Purcell
Canapés & Drinks (Drawing/Chinoiserie Room)
- First Course is Served: *Ave Maria* – Schubert (Dining Room)
- INTERLUDE: *Ave Maria* – Caccini/Vavilov
Main Course is Served (Dining Room)
- ACT IV: The Butler & The Housekeeper – “DEAD AS A DOOR-NAIL” - 28 mins. (Main Hall)
- Dessert is Served (Dining Room)
- EXEUNT: *Pie Jesu* – Lloyd Webber

* FEATURED SOPRANO: Aimee Banks, HARPIST: Giulio Bryant

The Players

Eabha Fitzpatrick (PIPPA): Eabha is a third-year Drama & Theatre student studying at Trinity College Dublin. This Erasmus year abroad, she is studying acting at Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey. She is delighted to be performing for a second year in *House Plays*. Eabha's other theatre works include performances in the Samuel Beckett Theatre (*This Too Shall Pass* and *Spilled Milk*), Players Theatre (*Candlewax*), Glor Theatre (*The Importance of being Earnest*) and Disney Stage Florida (*Jane Eyre*).



Ken Fletcher (TOM/HENRY/JAMES): Ken is delighted to be working on *House Plays* again. Recent film work includes *Jack* in *All Good Things* (MUI Media); Derek in *The Drummer and the Goalkeeper* (Irish Film Board) and the Detective in *Guilty* (Undoubtedly Guilty Prods), Fr. Sean in *A Good Friday* (London Film School); notable TV credits include a reprised Paddy Coyle (Fair City RTE) and Gerald (*Game of Thrones* Season II HBO).



Carmel Stephens (CLARE): Carmel is delighted to reprise the role of Clare. Recent TV work includes *Harry Wilde* on Acorn and RTE, *The Madame Blanc Mysteries* for Channel 5, and *Acorn & Smother* on RTE. Recent stage work includes *Home, Part 1* (Abbey Theatre) and *The Snapper* (Gate Theatre). Carmel is also founding member of Inis Theatre. In Ireland, she is known as Geraldine Fahy on RTE's *Fair City* and Carmel Doherty in Ros na Rún. She can also be heard as the Irish language voice of Sandy Cheeks in *SpongeBob SquarePants*.



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The Players (cont.)

Sebastian Stephenson (THE BUTLER): Sebastian is an actor, voice over artist and freelance journalist. Sebastian has performed at the Dublin Fringe Festival, *Scene + Heard* and many other festivals and venues across Dublin. He trained at the former Focus Theatre, now renamed Dublin Stanislavski Studio, and is an alumnus of Screen Acting Academy on Bow Street. As a freelance journalist, Sebastian creates dispatches for *Monocle* and *Deutsche Welle Radio* and you might hear him there.



Angela Braghis Ghirghircic (THE HOUSE-KEEPER): Angela is delighted to reprise her role as the Housekeeper in *House Plays Act IV*. When she is not making theatre, Angela works in Drogheda, Co. Louth with the Connect FRC team as an office administrator and integration support worker. She is from Moldova and speaks three languages: Russian, Romanian and English. She has recently finished training as a Cultural Ambassador and mediator. Her hobbies include traveling, volunteering, flower arranging and spending time with family.



Deirdre Young (CHARLOTTE): Deirdre is currently a full-time student at Griffith College. She has performed in local Louth & Meath Co. amateur theatre productions including *Les Misérables*, *Oklahoma* & *Mamma Mia*. She worked as the head choreographer for the latter two performances and *The Addams Family*.



Participating Visual / Mixed Media Artists

Una Curley: Una is a mixed media artist using mainly natural materials, repurposed and/or found objects to express concepts and emotions which words cannot. Her labour-intensive arts raise awareness of artist value and our emotional relationship to time, materials, & cultural heritage.



Ruth Barry: Ruth Barry is an Irish artist whose practice reflects her interest in our connection to the food chain and the organic world. Tonight, she invites you to indulge in her banquet dinner installation feast to hail in the beauty of spring.



Musicians

Aimee Banks: Aimee is a Soprano from Galway, currently pursuing her Bachelors of Music Performance at The Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin. She has performed in such venues as Carnegie Hall New York USA, The National Concert Hall, Christchurch Cathedral and The National Gallery of Ireland.



Giulio Bryant: Born in Italy, Giulio studied harp from an early age at the Venice Conservatoire with Elisabetta Ghebbioni. He currently studies with Geraldine O'Doherty at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin. In 2022 and 2023, he collaborated with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland as second harp in concerts given at the National Concert Hall.



Artist Statements

When I first heard the stories about Tuam babies and Magdalene laundries, I was bewildered. I just couldn't understand how these nuns, who were purportedly devout followers of Christ, could treat women and their newborn babies so poorly. As more of the gruesome details emerged, the sicker I felt. The two occasions I was in labour, I felt so close to death, so I knew how vulnerable a woman is at this moment. And instead of getting the tender care she deserved, she was treated like dirt.

I knew I had to address this topic and one day, I realized that the answer lay in my two favorite arias: Schubert's *Ave Maria*, where the world is beautiful, orderly and everyone is blessed; and the other, *Ave Maria* by Caccini/Valvilov – which is a heartbreaking rendering of despair, as sung by the great Latvia soprano Inessa Galante.

The question I want to pose is: Why did we let these women down and how did we do this collectively? I hope my work will bring some solace and a path to healing.

- Mina Tenison



Unidentified Irish Magdalene Laundry, c. early 20th century
From Finnegan, E: *Do Penance or Perish* Congrave Press, Piltown, Co. Kilkeeny (2001)

Artist Statements

Ireland is in the crossroads of politically and socially dichotomous national narrative. Against the continuous and historical national rally cry for Irish culture, creativity and freedom, we are washing our dirty laundry clean of the stains of the nation with the hands of the innocent. Tuam babies, Magdalene laundries, and the grotesque Catholic Church abuses that went unchecked and unpunished for so many decades are all catching up with us.

In *House Plays*, Mina Tenison explores this subtly via the presentation of operatic pieces. As the soprano sings *Ave Maria* to lament the loss of her child, she is staged in ragged linen dress to resemble a young Magdalene laundry worker.

To create a material connection between the live performance's theme and my visual art installation, I use traditional Irish garment textiles including linen and cotton, in addition to flax and rushes. A traveling version will be installed in each *House Plays* big house venue – including in former basement servants' quarters where possible.

We seek to take the audience on a physical and emotional journey throughout the night, opening the entire building to the public, including staircases, waiting areas, and lavatories.

My installation begins with feelings of static powerlessness but ends in a place of freedom. It explores themes of confinement, abuse of power, apathy to resilience – leading to awareness and justice.

I am very excited to collaborate with Mina on this presentation.

- Una Curley
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House Plays



Our Unique Venues

Previous seasons of House Plays have been hosted at many historic and spectacular venues, including:

- Anaverna House, Co. Louth (crtsy. Vere Lenox-Conynham)
- Castle Leslie, Co. Monaghan (crtsy. Sammy Leslie)
- Cavan County Museum, Ballyjamesduff Co. Cavan (crtsy. Savina Donohoe)
- Clonageera House, Co. Laois (crtsy. Adrienne & Glascott Symes)
- Lisnavangh House (crtsy. William & Emily Butler)
- Mountainstown House (crtsy. Atlanta Pollock)
- Narrow Water Castle, Co. Down (crtsy. Marcus Hall)
- Rokeby Hall, Co. Louth (crtsy. Jean & Jeff Young)
- Rossnaree House, Co. Meath (crtsy. Aisling Law)
- Ryevale House, Co. Kildare (crtsy. Caroline Stephenson)
- Stradbally Hall, Co. Laois (crtsy. Thomas & Gesa Cosby)
- 12 Henrietta Street Dublin 1 (crtsy. Ian Lumley)







Photos Courtesy of Sir William Hall
Narrow Water Castle, Co. Down

It was an era when guests came for weeks and months, not days. And a little house play was staged and participation was requested of all those “resident” in the house. It offered a great excuse to dress up and rifle through the old chest in the attic full of dusty costumes, and an opportunity to amuse and to be amused...

tickets

WWW.HOUSEPLAYS.COM

The BookMarket Kells, Co. Meath (+353 46 924 1650)

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