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A glorious madness "Inside The GPO"

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Don Wycherley, Ronan Leahy and Gavin Fullam in Inside The GPO
Dan O'Neill

Inside The GPO by Colin Murphy presented by Fishamble and directed by Jim Culleton

Rating: ★★★★★

Ireland's 1916 Centenary events have certainly generated a significant amount of debate. Indeed, it can seem unclear at times whether the Easter Rising is an event we should commemorate, commiserate, interrogate or celebrate. A pyrrhic victory, a glorious failure, a rallying cry, a military disaster. Add into the mix a reappraisal of the role of women and children during the Rising, along with an acknowledgement of the Rising's darker aspects, including widespread looting and the murder of innocents, and it becomes clear that the Rising tells a complex tale with many strands and personalities. A tale which is exceedingly well retold in Fishamble's extraordinary site specific performance 'Inside The GPO' in which the rich complexities surrounding the defining act in the declaration of Irish independence are done full justice in what is, quite simply, one of the theatrical events of the year.

Colin Murphy's exceptional script defies easy categorisation. Part recreation, part reimagining, Murphy takes poetic licence in the absence of all the facts, striving for truth rather than accuracy. A complex truth, allowing all the competing, conflicting, chaotic voices present in the GPO during those pivotal five days in 1916 to be heard. A put upon Patrick Pearse, a poet punching above his military weight, must make the decisions that will shape a nation. Each decision challenged and questioned by one of his comrades in arms. The exasperated, military minded The O'Rahilly advising strategic withdrawal battles with first signatory of the Proclamation, Thomas Clarke, screaming no retreat and no surrender, each vying for Pearse's approval. Inside the GPO they fight one another almost as much as they fight the growing military presence outside the barricaded windows. Standing shoulder to shoulder with them Irish women, demanding to be treated as equals both in voting and fighting, and children who refuse to be locked away, wait in hope for the nation outside to rise up and join them.

Inside the large foyer of the GPO, director Jim Culleton does an outstanding job in realising the poetry, passion, panic and power plays of the men, women and children behind that first reading of the Proclamation. Played in the round, Culleton, along with his first class team, craft a visceral, haunting experience, steeped in memory and history as the small, doomed band of rebels face overwhelming and impossible odds. Niamh Lunny's excellent scenic and costume designs, Mark Galione's lighting design and composer Carl Kennedy's excellent sound design ensure the past and present converge, transforming the GPO into a place of living memory, where voices, sounds and shadows seem to rise like ghosts from the past into the immediacy of the present. Culleton, along with movement director Bryan Burroughs, maximise every inch of space, choreographing fluid sequences from the large cast, including a capable group of young actors from The Gaiety School of Acting. Performances are strong across the board with Ronan Leahy as the poet and propagandist Pearse, Michael Glenn Murphy as a defiant Thomas Clarke, Manus Halligan as the love torn Mac Diarmada and Don Wycherley as The O'Rahilly being simply phenomenal.

Viewed as a factual, historical documentary 'Inside The GPO' will undoubtedly trouble the purists. As a truthful, theatrical document 'Inside The GPO' is hair standing on the back of your neck good. It's often said that if you totalled up all the people who ever claimed to have been in the GPO during those five crucial days in 1916 the number would amount to several thousand at least. The same may well be said, in the years to come, of people claiming to have seen this incredible production. An insane undertaking gloriously realised, 'Inside The GPO' is something of a theatrical masterpiece.

'Inside The GPO' by Colin Murphy, presented by Fishamble and directed by Jim Culleton runs at the GPO until April 9th

For further information, visit [Fishamble](#).



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