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Abbey Theatre 'Waking The Nation' in 2016

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With three world premieres reflecting Ireland today, new interpretations of some of the best plays of the last one hundred years, extensive Irish and international touring and a symposium on the challenges of commemoration, [the Abbey Theatre's](#) 2016 programme "Waking The Nation" sets out to commemorate and acknowledge the major historical events of 1916 as well as extending an invitation to artists and audiences to reflect on our past, the Ireland of today and of the future. Running from January to September 2016 as part of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme, "Waking the Nation" features an exciting roll-call of new Irish voices alongside major revivals of some of the great plays from the Abbey Theatre repertoire.

Speaking at the launch of "Waking the Nation," Senator Fiach Mac Conghail, Director of the Abbey Theatre said:

"The Abbey Theatre was a central part of the Irish Cultural Revival and as a theatre company, played a leading role in the cultural and political debate around our emerging understanding of our Irishness and our independence from Britain. The Abbey Rebels did not distinguish between the role of culture and independence, theatre and politics. Today we carry the legacy of these remarkable individuals as we embark, with our artists and audiences, on a year of reflection and conversation through theatre.

In "Waking the Nation," our intention is to interrogate rather than celebrate the past. For over one hundred and ten years now the Abbey stage has been a platform for the reflection of Irish society through theatre. Plays have the power to ask questions that resonate for generations. I believe that we should listen to and reflect on what our playwrights have written, whether it's Sean O'Casey, Tom Murphy or Frank McGuinness. Their extraordinary plays offer us signposts in our critical understanding of Irish history and what the future may hold. Their plays ask urgent questions about the safely guarded narrative of our nation. In a year of national introspection, these stories have the power to hold a mirror up to our society. In continuing the Abbey Theatre tradition we are proud to present our audiences and the nation with three world premieres of new Irish plays by David Ireland, Sean P. Summers and Philip McMahon and Raymond Scannell. These fresh and provocative Irish voices will reflect on the legacy of the 1916 Rising.

Some of the greatest writers, directors, actors and theatre-makers in the world are coming together to contribute to "Waking the Nation." In the spirit of artistic interrogation I have invited two directors from outside the Irish theatre tradition to direct two seminal plays, which challenge the

narratives and context the 1916 Rising and the Battle of the Somme. Sean Holmes, Artistic Director of the Lyric Hammersmith returns to the Abbey Theatre to direct a challenging new production of "The Plough and the Stars" while Jeremy Herrin, Artistic Director of Headlong, returns to direct "Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme" in a co-production with Headlong, Citizens Theatre and Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres.

Speaking at our "Theatre of Memory Symposium" in 2014, President Michael D. Higgins said: 'We need new myths that not only carry the burden of history but fly from it, making something new'. I hope that our programme of classic Irish plays revisited by fresh eyes and new Irish writing will help us do just that.

Following the success of the "Theatre of Memory Symposium" in 2014 and the "Theatre of War Symposium" in 2015, I look forward to continuing our conversation about the challenges of commemoration in our third and final symposium, the "Theatre of Change Symposium" which looks to the future and the challenges that will face Ireland in the next five years. Dublin was a centre of conflict in Easter 1916. We at the Abbey Theatre believe we should acknowledge conflicts taking place in the contemporary world today. In this regard we invited a company from the Golan to present their play "New Middle East" to Irish audiences. During the symposium we also welcome Jimmy Murphy to the Peacock stage with "Of This Brave Time." This staged reading features stories woven together based on eye witness accounts taken from Fearghal McGarry's book "Rebels: Voices from the Easter Rising."

With touring from Wexford to Washington, Ireland's national theatre will travel far and wide in 2016 reaching forty locations across Ireland, Britain and the US and seven hundred Irish schools with "Me, Mollser." Our co-productions with the best and most innovative theatres in Britain represent exciting new partnerships between Ireland and Britain in 2016. I am looking forward to a stimulating year and to welcoming the artists and audiences who will answer our call by "Waking the Nation" through theatre."

An Tánaiste Joan Burton added: "2016 will belong to everyone on this island and to our friends and families overseas – regardless of political background. The Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme launched in March made this very clear – 1916 and next year's centenary year have to be inclusive and reflective of all narratives on this island. We, as citizens, owe it to the Republic that we live in today to allow political debate, discussion and analysis of all the threads which have led to the creation of our modern State. The Abbey Theatre aims to reflect this ambition through a wide ranging programme which will reflect all aspects of Irish life on the stage and will seek to explore the various narratives through the medium of theatre."

In April 1916 members of the Abbey acting company and staff left the theatre to join the Easter Rising. The Abbey Rebels included: Sean Connolly, Abbey actor, a member of the Irish Citizen Army, and the first rebel fatality; Máire nic Shiubhlaigh, Abbey actress and a member of Cumann na mBan; Helena Molony, Abbey actress and a trade union and a Citizen Army leader; Ellen Bushell, an usher; Barney Murphy, a stage hand and Irish Volunteer; Arthur Shields, an Irish Volunteer and later a Hollywood actor, and Peadar Kearney, prop-man and author of the Irish national anthem "The Soldier's Song." The Abbey Theatre will unveil a new and updated plaque to

honour the Abbey Rebels during 2016 to incorporate others who should be acknowledged and remembered.

Highlights of the Abbey Theatre's "Waking The Nation" 2016 programme include:

On the Abbey stage

- ▶ "The Theatre of Change Symposium" 21 – 23 January
- ▶ "The Plough and the Stars" by Sean O'Casey, directed by Sean Holmes. 9 March-23 April. Opening Night: Tuesday 15 March
- ▶ "Othello" by William Shakespeare, directed by Joe Dowling. 5 May – 11 June. Opening Night: Wednesday 11 May
- ▶ "The Wake" by Tom Murphy, directed by Annabelle Comyn. 22 June – 30 July. Opening Night: Tuesday 28 June
- ▶ "Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme" by Frank McGuinness, directed by Jeremy Herrin. 6 August – 24 September. Opening Night: Tuesday 9 August

On the Peacock stage

- ▶ "Of This Brave Time" by Jimmy Murphy, directed by Conall Morrison. Staged reading. 20 – 23 January
- ▶ "Cyprus Avenue" by David Ireland, directed by Vicky Featherstone. 11 February – 19 March. Opening Night: Tuesday 16 February
- ▶ "New Middle East" by Mutaz Abu Saleh, directed by Bashar Murkus. 30 March – 2 April
- ▶ "Tina's Idea of Fun" by Sean P. Summers, directed by Gerard Stembridge. 14 April – 14 May. Opening Night: Tuesday 19 April
- ▶ "Town is Dead" written by Phillip McMahon, music by Raymond Scannell, directed by Phillip McMahon. 2 June – 9 July 2016. Opening Night: Wednesday 8 June

For further information visit [The Abbey Theatre](#)



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