



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Playbill for A Flea in Her Ear**

Extracted on Apr-18-2024 12:15:09

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[[image: colour photograph headshot of a young Caucasian man with dark, graying hair and a severe expression on his face. A white building and part of an American flag are in the background. Attribution - Carol Rosegg]]

[[boxed, captioning previous image]]

The Beauty Queen of Leenane was Martin McDonagh's (left) first play. "I couldn't believe a man of 25 could write so truly about a woman of 40 and a woman of 70," says Manahan. [[/boxed]]

The Beauty Queen of Leenane, McDonagh's first play — two years later he had four works including this one running simultaneously in London — received such raves in its New York premiere late last February at Off-Broadway's Atlantic Theatre that in mid-April, transplanted intact — same cast, same director Garry (nee Gearoldine) Hynes — it reopened at Broadway's Walter Kerr.

"It was Garry, whom I'd known since she was a young student directing shows 20 years ago at Galway University, who drove down to see me at my home in Waterford City in the winter of 1995, right near Christmas. No matter how well-known you are, or how talented," said Anna Manahan, "Garry likes to hear. Likes to hear the tones, wants to hear the right note. She knows from that."

Reading the script Garry Hynes had brought her, Ms. Manahan was fascinated.

"I couldn't believe it was a first play, and I also couldn't believe a young man of 25, as he then was" — an Irishman born and raised in London, for that matter — "could write so truly about a woman of 40 and a woman of 70. I don't like to throw the word 'genius' around, but I think he shows signs of genius."

Sitting in her dressing room, black-haired, black-eyed, black-sweatered Anna Manahan, one of Ireland's leading actresses, ticked off the production history of Beauty Queen, from its start as a presentation of the Hynes-founded Druid Theatre Company at Town Hall, Galway City, to a first run at London's Royal Court, an Irish tour, a Dublin booking, an Australian tour, a second run at the Royal Court and now America.

"I've been in every performance," Manahan said. Then, wryly: "Every time I tried to get out, I was blackmailed into staying. They threatened to kill me. This is a wonderful character to play and all that, but sometimes one wishes for something else. The greatest sadness for me is I'm unable to get home. A great loneliness..."

As in the play?

"That's right. And though it's been exciting to be in on the birth of a play like this, you still have to equate it with film and telly, which are shorter and pay more money, enable you to put your feet up and smell the roses."

It is to be doubted that, roses or no, Anna Manahan will ever put her feet up. A widow "since I was very young" — her husband Colm O'Kelly,



stage manager at Dublin's Gate Theatre, died of polio, in Egypt, at age 27 — she's been acting all her life ("Never known anything else"), and was last in New York 30 years ago in Brian Friel's *Lovers* as Hannah, a daughter domineered by her mother.

"So here we are, 30 years later, in a reversal of roles."

Among her celebrated performances— leading up to this, the most celebrated of all — were Big Rachel in the original Royal Court production of John Arden's *Live Like Pigs*, and Bessie Burgess in a National Theatre production of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, for which the *London Evening Standard* hailed her as Most Promising Newcomer.

She's kept that promise. Her portrayal of Mag, she says, is based on no one and nothing except what's in the script. "That's one of the wonderful things about Marty McDonagh. These characters are what they are; they're not subtext. He's only interested in the instant happening, the here and now of the play."

As when old Mag in her rocking chair cocks a slantwise peek at that letter lying there, gingerly extends a hand toward it, senses that she may be spotted, snatches the hand back, waits for the door to shut behind young Ray Dooley, waits, waits...

[[boxed]]  
CLUE #3—FOR PHOTO #3 ON PAGE 6:  
Natasha Richardson and Liam Neeson, both back on N.Y. stages this season, co-starred in the revival of this Eugene O'Neill classic.  
[[/boxed]]

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[[bordered in black, yellow background in rectangular box]]  
WWW.PLAYBILL®.COM – to its right is a black arrowhead-shaped mouse pointer – to its right the words PURE THEATRE ONLINE, underlined, and the words printed in orange, then red, then purple.]]

[[end page]]  
[[start page]]

[[advertisement]]  
[[image - A color photograph of a young female dancer leaping gracefully. She has dark, pulled back hair and wears a coral-colored dress with a frilled skirt and ballet slippers.]]

American Ballet Theatre is recognized as one of the great dance companies of the world. (Pictured: Paloma Herrera in *Don Quixote*, photographed by Nancy Ellison.)

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[[image - logo: A black circle surrounds a capital letter "M," which is

underlined by a line forming a downward point.]]  
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[[image - a color photograph of the Movado Museum Sports Edition  
Bracelet Watch, featuring a black, numberless watch face surrounded  
by diamonds and a steel watch band. The time appears to be 10:10.]]

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