Welcome to The Colleen Bawn at The Lyric, co-produced with Bruiser Theatre Company. The performance is in two acts of fifty five minutes each, with a short interval between.

Written by Dion Boucicault The Colleen Bawn is a masterpiece of melodrama. It is fast and lively and has proved to be timeless, engaging entertainment. It has been captivating audiences with its outrageous plots and musical interludes since it first premiered in New York in 1860.

The story is based on a real murder that took place in Co. Clare in 1819 that gripped Ireland. A young peasant girl had been married to a wealthy gentleman who became embarrassed by her manners. He persuaded his servant to kill her and both men fled. When her body was found the servant was captured, tried and hanged and later the gentleman was caught and he too hanged.

Boucicault created a more romantic version of the tale, full of Victorian music hall cliff hangers, skulduggery, blackmail, mistaken identity and passion.

In this version of The Colleen Bawn there are 11 characters, and just seven actors. So some of the actors play more than one character and throughout the play they change quickly from one character to another. These character changes are demonstrated by actors adjusting their accents and the way they speak, but also by small changes in their costume.

The Colleen Bawn is very fast paced and changes from one character to another sometimes happen very quickly. In the audio description we will indicate which characters are speaking, but there won’t be time to cover things like taking off hats or putting on glasses.

Actor Cavan Clarke plays Hardress Cregan and Father Tom.

Hardress Cregan is a handsome young man, well built with square shoulders and short dark hair. He wears a smart black hat, a white shirt with a neatly tied cravat at the neck and a tweed waistcoat. He has brown trousers and shoes.

His other character, Father Tom, wears floating black vestments with a long yellow stole round his shoulders. He has small round glasses. These are pulled on over the Hardress clothes to signal the character change when the actor swops from Hardress to Father Tom.

Patrick McBrearty plays the servant Danny Mann and occasional character Bertie O’Moore. Both Danny and Bertie wear green knee length trousers with long socks, a grubby shirt and a battered looking cap. Danny Mann is bent over with a hunchback that is really a cushion stuffed up the back of a waistcoat that the actor pulls on and off to show a character change.

Bryan Quinn plays Kyrle Daly and Myles-Na-Coppaleen. Kyrle is of mediun height and build and has a neatly trimmed, greying beard. He wears a brown coat jacket, a loose fitting shirt and a waistcoat with knee length trousers and long black socks, and a black trilby style hat. When the actor changes to the Myles-Na-Coppaleen character he removes the hat to reveal an unruly mop of curly fair hair.

Jo Donnelly plays Mrs Cregan and Sheelah. Mrs Cregan is a stout older woman with grey hair. She wears a high necked white shirt and long, layered brown and green skirts. As Sheelah she wears a woollen wrap round her shoulders and a lace cap on her head.

Colette Lennon Dougal plays Anne Chute (the Coleen Ruadh). She is a tall, striking woman with high cheek bones and a strong jaw. Her long black hair is rolled into a bun at her neck. She wears the clothes of a wealthy lady - a fitted, round neck shirt and a long, dark tweed skirt of three layers with a sash wrapped round her waist. Around her shoulders she wears a short, brown, checked cape.

Enda Kilroy plays Mr Corrigan, the attorney. He is an older man with a neat trimmed dark beard peppered with grey. He wears a tall black top hat and a brown frock coat with a white shirt and a cravat tied at the neck.

Maeve Smyth plays Eily O’Connor (the Coleen Bawn). She is a slim and pretty young blonde girl. She wears the clothes of a peasant girl – a loose white shirt with a waistcoat and a long grey skirt with blue and pink patches at the waist.

Towards the end of the play four members of the cast play military soldiers summoned by the bailiff, Mr Corrigan. They wear tall black helmets with a short peak and an insignia pinned to the front.

Set and costume design by Grace Smart.

SET DESCRIPTION FOR THE COLLEEN BAWN

When we first enter the theatre the curtains are closed and a large heart shape is projected onto the surface of the material.

The stage floor is of a dark colour with a slightly raised level dividing the front and the back of the set, via a shallow step. The area at the front of the stage nearest us is the lower level and is clear of props. This allows the actors to distance themselves from the set behind, and place themselves in a different situation or place. Later a small rowing boat on wheels will be towed across this area in front of us.

Most of the stage is taken up with the interior scene which remains static throughout the play. The props are moved to represent different places such as an Irish pub, a cottage by a lakeside, a grand manor house with stables and gardens, and a courtroom.

The curtains open to reveal the interior of an Irish building with exposed dark wooden roof trusses and supporting posts. Some of the high cross beams resemble those one would see in a medieval manor or castle. The walls are of a white-washed rough stone finish. This interior serves as both the Cregan’s ancestral home and the humble cottage where Sheelah and Eily O’Connor, known as The Colleen Bawn, live.

On the right of the stage is a stool tucked into an upright piano, above which is a shelf with various ornaments, musical instruments, and a lantern. Above the shelf is a semi-circular window with two panes of green leaded glass.

 To the left of the piano are three steps leading to the dark wooden door of a bed chamber.

In the back wall of the stage there is a window which is lit up at times to reveal silhouettes of various images illustrating action outside the cottage. We will see a boat on the lake, dancers, and people coming to the front door.

 Beneath the window is a large wooden table with a bentwood chair at one end. To the left of the table is the wooden front door of the building, which is painted dark green and has a cross bar running from the bottom right to the top left. Later this door will also become the front entrance to Myles’ cottage. A chair that matches the one at the table sits on the left of the door, and on the wall is a faded picture.

Moving further to the left, another door similar to the main one is visible behind some dark cross beams and support posts that rise into the stage roof. In front of these beams is a pair of dark wooden barrels supporting a wide plank representing a pub counter. These barrels will be later used as stools, and to represent jagged rocks by the lakeside.

 In front of the barrels is a pot-bellied stove on which sits an old fashioned red kettle for brewing tea and making hot whiskeys.

Other props include a silver disc used to reflect light from a hand held lantern used as a signal across the lake, and some small wooden whiskey kegs.

Square aluminium sheets are shook by the actors to mimic a violent thunder storm, with the theatre lights providing a good semblance of sheet lightening illuminating the stage. This would be the sound effects used in a Victorian stage production, and all the actions are visible to the audience and dramatically exaggerated.

As mentioned earlier, the stage floor directly in front of us is free of props, the set of the cottage is behind this, and extends to the back of the stage. Later in the play the actors will use this clear area by each taking the end of a shimmering blue cloth, stretching it across from left to right of the stage. They create an effective and realistic wave motion with the fabric to represent a stormy lake.

Thanks are made in the programme notes to the Lagan Boat Club who provide a real wooden punt for the lake side scene. The boat is guided across the stage in front of us by the actors pulling on a rope. There are wheels underneath the boat, which must be well oiled as this process is very silent.

A heavy rope suspended between two wooden posts is occasionally held up by two actors to indicate a change of location.

Thanks are also made to Matchetts Music who provided the musical instruments. Throughout the performance the actors play live music on a guitar, an upright piano, boron, flute, penny whistle and a fiddle.

The set and costume design is by Grace Smart.