THE SCENIC DESIGN FOR *DANCING AT LUGHNASA*

AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the degree Master of Fine Arts in the

Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

Fereshteh Rostampour Hough, B.F.A.

****

The Ohio State University

1995

Masters Examination Committee: Approved by

Dr. Kathleen Conlin, Ph. D.
Mark W. Shanda, M. F. A.

Adviser
Department of Theatre
THESIS ABSTRACT

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

NAME: Hough, Fereshteh
QUARTER/ YEAR: Summer, 1995

DEPARTMENT: Theatre
DEGREE: M.F.A.

ADVISER'S NAME: Mark W. Shanda

TITLE OF THESIS: The Scenic Design for Dancing At Lughnasa
at The Ohio State University

This paper is a documentation of the design process for The Ohio State University
Theatre's production of Dancing At Lughnasa. The aim of the design was to enhance the
director's concept in creating a vital and energetic play that the characters could bounce
back and forth between the world of reality and the world of illusion. Included are
discussions of the design concept, design solutions, production process, and all of the
design requirements.

Adviser's signature
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Russell Hastings, for his encouragement and wise suggestions in the course of my entire study at The Ohio State University, but more than that I appreciate his support and his belief in my work as an artist that made this project a success. I am indebted as well to Jim Knapp for his kind help and assistance during the preparation of my work. And I am specifically grateful for his direction and personal advice. Thanks go to Mark Shanda for his sincere input in solving many scenic problems, and his friendly suggestions at the times that I needed them the most. My appreciation also goes to Carl Skorepa for his contributions as dramaturg to my research; Dan Semour and Linda Pisano for their friendship and beautiful sound and costume designs; Dennis Parker and Beth Sullivan for their help and support during the course of this project.
NOTES

A fully illustrated copy of this thesis is available at the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, located on The Ohio State University campus, 14th floor, Lincoln Tower. The set design of Dancing At Lughnasa, which is the subject matter of this thesis, was produced by the Department of Theatre of The Ohio State University, May 17 to May 27, 1995, in the Thurber Theatre.
VITA

June 29, 1957 ......................................................... Born - Tehran, Iran
1992 ................................................................. B.F.A., Design, Otterbein College,
............................ Westerville, Ohio
1992-1995 ......................................................... Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio
............................ State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre

Studies in Design, first emphasis on scenery and second emphasis in lighting, The
Ohio State University, Professors Russell Hastings and Mary Tarantino.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Plates</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. About the Playwright</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. About the Play</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Production Concept</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Design Concept</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Design Process</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Method and Techniques</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VII. EVALUATION ................................................................................................................................. 28

APPENDICES

A. FIGURES .............................................................................................................................................. 31
B. PLATES ............................................................................................................................................... 45
C. STUDY GUIDE ..................................................................................................................................... 55
D. DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT ..................................................................................................................... 59
E. ARTS CALENDAR ............................................................................................................................... 63
F. SELECTED RESEARCH ....................................................................................................................... 66
G. PROGRAM .......................................................................................................................................... 70

LIST OF REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................... 75
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>THUMBNAI SKETCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>THUMBNAI SKETCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>THUMBNAI SKETCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>THUMBNAI SKETCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PRELIMINARY GROUND PLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PRELIMINARY GROUND PLANS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>GROUND PLAN'S ROTATION AND SETBACK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>GROUND PLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>FRONT ELEVATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>FRONT ELEVATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>FRONT ELEVATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>FRONT ELEVATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>FLOOR MOUNDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>CENTER LINE SECTION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Plates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plates</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Original Rendering</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Final Rendering</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Painter's Elevation - Ground Row and Roof</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Painter's Elevation - Hutch</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Painter's Elevation - Wood Floor and Stones</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Production Photo - Act I</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Production Photo - Memory Sequence</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Production Photo - Dance Scene</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Production Photo - Without Actors</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This thesis contains the documentation of the set design process for a production of Dancing At Lughnasa by Brian Friel produced by The Ohio State University Department of Theatre. The production was directed by Dr. Rex McGraw and was performed in Thurber Theatre from May 17 - 27, 1995.

Chapter I provides a biography of Brian Friel and the development of his writing style as a playwright. Chapter II presents a brief production history and analyzes the play and the characters. Chapter III describes the production concept as it unfolded from the director's statement. Chapter IV presents the original design ideas developed from the play analysis and the director's concept. Chapter V discusses the design process, modifications, and developments. Chapter VI explains the method of construction and painting techniques used in development of the set in addition to the discussion of budget, time, and the skill level. The final chapter evaluates the design choices and the growth of the designer. This chapter is followed by the supporting paper work in the appendices, including figures, plates, study guide, director's concept, program, and examples of
research.

All script quotations are from the Dramatists Play Service edition of *Dancing At Lughnasa* by Brian Friel, published in New York in 1991.
CHAPTER I
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Brian Patrick Friel was born in Killyclogher, Ireland, one and half miles northeast of Omagh in County Tyrone, on 9 January 1929. His mother was a postmistress and was very influential in Friel's life. His father was principal of the local Culmore primary school where Friel acquired his primary education. Friel has two sisters, also teachers, and had a younger brother who died in infancy. The atmosphere and experience of school life provided Friel with rich material for his plays, and the figure of father and the schoolmaster appear in many of his stories as the central character. In two of his early stories, *My Father and the Sergeant* and *The Illusionists*, Friel discusses a child's relationship with both of these authorities.

Friel's father's family came from Derry, in Northern Ireland, and his mother's family was from Donegal, where the playwright spent holidays. These Irish roots not only affected Friel's imagination but gave a sense of place and location for the world of his plays. As a result Friel saw himself as a "sort of peasant at heart" (Morison 14). The
appeal of the rural hinterland of Donegal was enhanced when in 1939 his family relocated to Derry city for his father's appointment to Long Tower school. Friel attended this school before completing his secondary education at Saint Columb's College. From there he went to Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth (The Republic of Ireland national seminary), near Dublin with the idea of studying for the priesthood. After two and half years and graduating with a B.A. degree, Friel changed his mind and decided to follow his father and his sisters into the teaching profession. In 1949 he took a postgraduate teacher-training course at Saint Joseph's Collage, Belfast and by 1950 his formal education was complete. For the next ten years he taught in various primary and intermediate schools in Derry.

Friel gradually began writing short stories, and the early fifties saw the beginnings of Friel as a creative writer. In 1954 he married Anne Morrison. His immediate family grew to include four daughters and a son. Despite his busy schedule as a full-time teacher and a family man, Friel began to spend more time writing. "As for playwriting it began as a sort of self-indulgence and then eventually I got caught up more and more in it" (Morison 4). Some of his short stories were published in The New Yorker and by 1960, the year that Friel quit teaching, his first dramatic attempt for radio, A Sort of Freedom, was accepted by BBC in Belfast.
In 1962 Friel gained the attention of Sir Tyrone Guthrie, the legendary theatre director who revolutionized post-war theatre design with his innovative use of the thrust stage. Guthrie was a mentor and a friend, who admired Friel's stories and wanted to share his experience and knowledge of practical theatre with the promising dramatist. Sir Guthrie invited Friel to spend four months in America and observe Guthrie's direction of Hamlet and The Three Sisters. Guthrie assured Friel that the time spent would be crucially instructive and valuable for the playwright. Watching Guthrie as he staged these classics gave Friel a new vision in theatre art and its practice. It encouraged him to hear his own voice more confidently than before and try daring new things in theatre.

I learned a great deal about the iron discipline of theatre, and I discovered a dedication and a nobility and a selflessness that one associates with a theoretical priesthood. But much more important than all these, those months in America gave me a sense of liberation- remember this was my first parole from inbred claustrophobic Ireland- and that sense of liberation conferred on me a valuable self-confidence and a necessary perspective....(Dantanus 51)

After return to Ireland, Friel achieved his first international success by writing Philadelphia, Here I Come in 1964. The play was a sophisticated form of theatrical art, and represented a significant development for Friel both as a public and a private man. When Philadelphia, Here I Come was produced at Dublin Theatre Festival for the first
time, the critics announced it as the best new Irish play of the year, and subsequently the
play moved on to Broadway.

Since 1969, the writer lived in the village of Ballybeg where many of his plays take
place. In the next ten or fifteen years Friel wrote many plays, and became very well known
as an outstanding Irish playwright. He eventually gained an international reputation in
Ireland, England, and the United States. In 1979-80 Friel wrote three of his best plays,
*Aristocrats, Faith Healer, and Translation* which become the subject of serious critical
attention. In 1989 he wrote *Dancing At Lughnasa*, which demonstrates his artistic
freedom and abilities more than ever before.

It began very modestly about three years ago, I was at a play at a National
Theatre with the playwright Thomas Kilory. We walked across the
Waterloo Bridge and up the strand. It was about eleven-thirty at night and
there were homeless sleeping in the doorways. Tom said, "If you talk to
those people, I'm sure many of them are Irish." And I said, I had two aunts,
who, I think, ended up something like that. He said, "why don't you write
about that?" So that's how it began: backward (Lahr 174).
CHAPTER II

ABOUT THE PLAY

In Dancing At Lughnasa Brian Friel maintains a tradition of Irish literature by addressing local themes to give the play a universal significance. Lughnasa opened for the first time at the Abbey Theatre on April 24, 1990. When the tickets went on sale in Dublin for a three week run the entire run was sold out before opening. On the second night the five actresses in the cast were driven in a limousine from the theatre to appear on Ireland's premiere television interview program. After that victory, the play moved to London where it won the Oliver Award. After opening on Broadway on October 24, 1991, Lughnasa earned three Tony Awards in The United States.¹ Dancing At Lughnasa is Friel's masterpiece, and it claimed almost every major theatre award in Ireland, England, and United States for its outstanding dramatic effect. Friel's achievement in Dancing At Lughnasa is described in his own words:

"I would like to write a play that would capture the peculiar spiritual, and indeed material, flux that this country is in at the moment. This has got to be done, for me anyway, and I think it has got to be done at a local,

¹See appendix C
parochial level, and hopefully this will have meaning for other people in other countries." (O'Brien 126)

Although this statement was made in 1970, Friel has realized his ambition in play after play and mastered it in *Dancing At Lughnasa*.

*Dancing At Lughnasa* is a memory play that is largely autobiographical and like Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* has a story telling quality. The play offers a world that is both real and conceptual, directly related to the way that Friel sees the world. In his mind there is no distinction between fact and fiction. Almost all of Friel's plays are sculpted from his own experience and *Dancing At Lughnasa* is not an exception. In a autobiographical essay Friel says: "A fact is something that happened to me or something I experienced. It can also be something I thought happened to me, something I thought I experienced. Or indeed an autobiographical fact can be pure fiction and no less true or reliable for that." He also describes a scene from his childhood about a fishing trip with his father. Then he realizes that some of the facts in his memory about that scene could not have been accurate. He says, "have I imagined the scene then? or is it a composite of two or three different episodes? The point is - I don't think it matters. What matters is that for some reason the vivid memory is there in the store house of the mind for to me is a truth. And because I acknowledge its peculiar veracity, it becomes a layer in my subsoil; it
becomes part of me; ultimately it becomes me." (Pine 57)

Friel's hunger for fancy and imagination results in an intense romanticism that confuses fact with fiction and history with myth. This "confusion" explains why Friel writes with such distinct dualism. The play, dramatizes an intense opposition between Paganism and Christianity driven by Friel's skepticism. Indeed Pagan myth and Christian scripture are not always distinguishable in the Irish mind because there are a great many parallels between the two philosophies; therefore, the dualism of Christianity and Paganism co-exist uneasily in the spiritual world of Ireland.

Lughnasa is a rich story about five poor and unprivileged sisters scraping together a living in rural Ireland along with the three men in their lives. The three men are: Michael, the illegitimate son of the most rebellious Mundy sisters; Gerry Evans, Michael's father who makes two of his infrequent visits during the time of the play; and Father Jack, the sisters, older brother, a missionary priest who just returned from Africa after 25 years. The play takes place outside the village of Ballybeg which means "small town," County Donegal, the location of many Friel's plays. The time is 1936, early August, as remembered by Michael (the narrator who was seven at the time), and we are in the home of the Mundy sisters. The sisters are: Kate, the school teacher, and the most rigid of the
five, an advocate of Christian moral; who complains that the radio "has killed all Christian conversation;" Maggie, housekeeper and the most spirited one who is "the joker of the family;" Agnes, the quietest one who earns a living by knitting gloves; Rose, another knitter, who insists on living her own simpleminded life; and Chris, the youngest, Michael's unwed mother. The last, but not the least important character is the radio that sisters call it Marconi, Friel's central metaphor and connection with Pagan rituals.

The title of the play refers to the festival of Lughnasa, the Irish name for the celtic god of harvest Lugh. This August festival was celebrated until very recently on hilltops and by lake and river shores. The Lughnasa festival involved various rituals such as bilberry picking and a great deal of dancing. Rose describes the mysterious celebrations in the back hills: the bonfires, the dancing, the drinking, and the ritual sacrifice of animals. Michael talks about how Maggie wanted to call the radio Lugh, symbolic of combining the pagan past with the present age of evolution. Jack also mentions the similarities between the pagan practices in Africa and the festival of Lughnasa in Ireland, making the point that imposed Christianity on both countries has mixed with pre-existent religion. The play touches on all these issues to show the women's search for identity through the unreachable dreams and excitement of going to the Harvest Dance of Lughnasa.

——See appendix C and appendix E
Friel demonstrates his insights through the most ancient form of nonverbal communication, dance. Marconi, the new wireless radio, has brought music to the lives of the Mundy women giving them the opportunity to release their imprisoned emotions. In an unforgettable moment of climax in the first act, Chris turns on the radio and Maggie suddenly bursts into a rough dance streaking flour on her face like war paint. All the others become caught up one after another and join in. Friel calls this scene "a conscious subversion of order, of near hysteria being induced". Dance creates an energetic action and a primitive ritual of joy along with a short moment of escape from the puritanical restraints of Irish life among Mundy sisters. Dance is their unvoiced cry of freedom.

Dance provides another dimension of ritual action in the play when it functions as the ritual of love between Chris and Gerry as they dance in the yard. It symbolizes their unapproachable dreams, both in Gerry's account of giving dancing lessons in Dublin and Chris's fantasy of going to the Harvest Dance. Father Jack has his own dancing memories to offer to his sisters. He mentions his own dance with Ryangan lepers for days at the time, fueled by palm wine, during their harvest festival. And Michael focuses on the music and the dancing in his final lines. He remembers those memories of the last Lughnasa as:
"Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement— as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer exist because words were no longer necessary."

*Dancing At Lughnasa* is a solid exhibition of truth as defined by Friel. Friel's ability to escape sentimentality by uncovering the dark side of life in Ballybeg— without mocking the Mundy family makes this play a major contribution to the world of theatre.
CHAPTER III

PRODUCTION CONCEPT

Before the first production meeting for *Dancing At Lughnasa*, I had an informal meeting with director, Rex McGraw. In that meeting we discussed my preliminary design ideas for the play; I mentioned that I would like to have something more than just a blue cyc in the background. He jokingly replied, "you are not going to set it in Mars are you!?!" I assured him that I would not, but I realized that he was leaning towards a realistic approach to the production. I explained that I would like to use a rear screen slide projection with a beautiful and crisp images of Ireland's country side taken at different times of the day to show a progression of time from sunrise to sunset. For the kitchen, I envisioned a theatrical realism limited to only the necessary furniture; I wanted to create a cinematic verses theatrical look.

Dr. McGraw was fully aware of my point of view and the research that I had started in July of 1994 on *Dancing At Lughnasa*. He had also read my paper that I wrote in Dr. Sullivan's Theatre Criticism III class about the play, so he knew much about my
preliminary ideas. He seemed to like my ideas, and encouraged me to move forward and expand them even more. He said that he was interested to see how I was going to put these preliminary ideas into practice.

On January 17, 1995 Director Rex McGraw submitted his "Non-concept Statement" to the production team. He presented his view that Dancing At Lughnasa is a memory play, similar to The Glass Menagerie, both having a story telling quality. From the beginning he was concerned that in this kind of play with the narrator stepping in and out between the scenes and in case of Lughnasa that narrator is playing two characters, that it is easy to fall into a series of "loosely connected, slow maudlin scenes." He wanted to drive the play forward making the transitions fast, more believable, and interesting from scene to scene. Although Lughnasa could be a depressing play, Dr. McGraw did not want to produce a grievous and gloomy work. He explained in his concept statement that "There will be no pausing, no moments of lethargy, no wallowing in pity. These people are alive, energetic and vital."1 His primary goal was to establish a physical force in the heart of the play to get the audience involved in an emotion that they can not put their finger on.

1See appendix D
From this point on Dr. McGraw let the design team make decisions about the visual aspects of the play while giving helpful suggestions and valuable input about the production. He continued his statement by asking questions such as: What is behind the cottage? Is it a whitewashed cottage? Has it been prettied up by these women? and How realistic should the set be? These questions helped me to start finding ways to transfer my theory into practice. In addition, Dr. McGraw expressed a desire for an overall realistic, but not a dark naturalistic set and his only request in relation to the kitchen space was to give each sister a home base so they can identify as their area as they go on with their everyday tasks. Furthermore, the director mentioned a production of *Dancing At Lughnasa* that he had seen elsewhere. In that production, the sycamore tree in the garden of Mundy sisters became very symbolic because it was centered on stage, and in Dr. McGraw's opinion there was no reason for that symbolism. The tree was a necessity to the play, but the director wanted to see only a branch or two exposed on stage and just enough to do the necessary action.

The production concept inspired the design team and set the foundation for all the other design concepts.
CHAPTER IV
DESIGN CONCEPT

In *Dancing At Lughnasa* Brian Friel constructs a dialectical opposition between two interacting forces, Paganism and Christianity. This philosophy is the reflection of skepticism driven from his Irish conscience where Christianity and Paganism overlap. The play is fiction about reality, static about dynamic, and black about white. These elements of contradictions are displayed simultaneously in dialogues, actions, visuals and theatrical illusions.

Near the end of *Dancing At Lughnasa*, Michael, the narrator, imprints his last words into the audience's mind: "In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory. "The duality of fact and fiction and being unable to draw a fine line between reality and dream or tell them apart is what this play is about.

At the opening Friel creates a "formal tableau" of motionless characters frozen in an action which in fact, is a dynamic moment captured in time, (similar to an impressionist
painting) full of life yet motionless. I believe that the setting should create a physical reality while further complicates and embodies Friel's dualities. It should frame, and create the "formal tableau" that he asks for at the beginning of the play. This frame should contain two contrasting entities which are not easily distinguishable, a cinematic look and projected images on the screen to resemble the dream quality of this memory play, and a theatrical look to resemble the reality, although theatre is a fiction within itself.

Even though the play contains a great deal of sadness, it also evokes great joy with the small but vivid exchanges of every day talk. By keeping the director's concept of creating a vital and energetic play in mind, and undertaking Friel's theory of dualism, I designed a shallow and picturesque set against an atmospheric landscape of Ireland's countryside projected in the background. The projections provided a strong sense of depth and emphasized the contrasting images of the play. This picture in the background should expand and continue to the edges of the proscenium arch. To accomplish this expanded background I planned to use the masking flats as a series of screens to do layers of projections on both sides of the wings.¹ The projected images should be clear, crisp, and very cinematic (ideally rear projection screens would be used for both back drop and masking). The background landscape should set the mood and change color along with

¹See plate I
changes and shifts in the story (the color of a hazy morning, sunset or a stormy sky) specifically during Michael's narration.

Although in Friel's drama there is no distinction between fact and fiction, the set should be fairly realistic to create a ground for fiction. The kitchen is a typical Irish country kitchen with the wooden floor, plaster walls, and typical furniture. The combination of the curved and jagged lines that are used in the steps leading to the house and the upstage edge of the platform demonstrate the contrasts in the play. Since the kitchen is the major acting space, and I wanted to emphasize the isolation of these women within that environment, I centered this room on stage making it a strong point of focus. The roof for the kitchen is designed to create a sense of closeness, and give a finished look to the top of the walls, but it also has to stay open for the sake of the lighting. The design of the garden, the wheat field, and the exterior of the house should look realistic and complement the kitchen.

The goal of the set was to eliminate the distancing of Thurber stage and at the same time create a sense of isolation for the characters. The audience had to take a journey through Michael's mind to a world of memory while the set made no distinction between memory and reality.
CHAPTER V

DESIGN PROCESS

The scenic design concept was presented at the second production meeting on January 31, 1995. In that meeting the preliminary design sketches and the color palette were reviewed by the production team and were approved for the production of Dancing At Lughnasa. However, the orientation of the house on stage created some safety concerns. The top edge of the down stage walls in the original position would interfere with the fire curtain. To solve this problem the walls needed to move upstage six inches. Another issue that was raised was the size of the kitchen. Was there enough room for actors to dance? This was a problem that had to be solved because of the fact that the production involved a great deal of dancing.

Dr. McGraw and I met on the stage of Thurber Theatre the next day discussing the space and the dancing areas. His intention was to use the forestage for most of the dancing scenes; consequently, he was more concerned with space in the forestage area. We decided to add three feet of depth to the kitchen giving more room for the dance scenes.
The entire kitchen platform was also moved back as not to diminish the space in the forestage area. I suggested a slight rotation of the structure to the right to open the kitchen up to the audience more and to address the fire curtain problem.

In another meeting, the director requested an actor entrance from the front of house. Therefore, I designed the wheat field to expand from up stage, wrap around the proscenium, and continue on to the apron so the stage become part of the auditorium and the actors could walk in and out without leaving their environment. In my design I had also provided a sufficient numbers of exit and entrance paths through the wings.

The script called for two doors and two windows. Based upon an agreement with the director the set was designed with one door upstage and one window on stage right, the other door and window were to be imagined down stage and supported through mimed action by the actors. During my discussion with Dr. McGraw he mentioned that he would like to place a bench downstage of the platform where the imaginary window was supposed to be, to allow the audience to envision the window. Since the bench was going to be placed on the downstage side of the platform slightly off center, I decided to change the preliminary platform level from two feet to eighteen inches to eliminate sight line problems for the first few rows of audiences.

1See figure 8
Prior to the next production meeting my advisor, Professor Hastings, suggested I eliminate the curves from the front edge of the platform because he believed that the straight lines would give the architecture of the house more validity, and that this correction would make the construction of the piece less complicated. His point was well taken and the revised set design was presented in the production meeting on February 7, 1995. In that meeting the production team discussed the quality of the projected background images and arrived to the point that the Pani projectors might be the solution because the regular projectors would wash out under the stage light. Since the university did not own any Pani projectors, the technical director, Mr. Jim Knapp, was going to look in to the possibility of renting them.

The budget for the scenery was set at $2,000. Unfortunately, the Pani projectors were very expensive and the production budget did not allow for such expense. The projectors were no longer a consideration and an alternative solution was presented in the production meeting on February 21, 1995.

It was very important for me to stay with my original concept, and I did not want to change the visual world of the set. After a discussion with the lighting designer, Carolyn Sarkis, a blue cyclorama was going to be used instead of the original rear projection
screens. This would allow Sarkis to project cloud patterns and create a sky in the background using standard theatrical instrumentation. The masking legs were reduced to one large diagonal leg on each side of the wings to function like a wraparound cyc. The fabric and the color of the masking were carefully chosen to match the cyclorama, with the intention that the sky patterns continue on to the sides of the proscenium arch and unify with the background. The wheat fields were expanded and in addition to the sides they were planed across the back of the house. The kitchen walls were also changed from an opaque plaster wall to a translucent plaster wall by using scenic scrim. I wanted the walls to become translucent while every thing else in the kitchen went to silhouette during sequences of Michael's narration. This would reveal the wheat field in the background so the audience could take a journey through the narrator's mind and fined themselves back into the world of reality moments later. The ground rows and the stone mounds remained the same, and the tree as originally planned was only a branch that extended out from stage left.

By using scenic scrim, the lighting design became of major importance to the set. On March 28 Jim Knapp, Carolyn Sarkis, and I met in the design studio to discuss and finalize the position of the cyclorama, masking tabs, and the ground rows. I suggested that since
the lighting was to play a very important role in characterization of the set, that these three elements could be positioned to allow for the best possible lighting. The new positions for the background cyclorama, side tabs, and the ground rows were decided and the trim heights were established according to the lighting designer's specifications.
CHAPTER VI

METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

After presentation of the final set design on February 21, the scenery budget was discussed with Mr. Knapp and small alterations were made to make the construction of the set possible. The color palette to be used on the scenery was discussed with the costume designer and the lighting designer in several meetings, and color swatches were provided. The ground plan and elevations were drawn on AutoCAD,¹ and from those drawings the working drawings were created. A construction method based on the function of the set was discussed in meetings with the technical director.

On March 27 the construction of the set began and crews which mostly consisted of Theatre 205 practicum students were assigned to the construction of the set. These students were supervised by the shop foreman and four Graduate Teaching Associates. Out of these students, two were identified as having painting skills to do detail painting; they worked as the production's scenic artists. Lughnasa had five weeks for construction before its load-in, but the crew's energy was mostly focused on The Trial, the first show of

¹See figures 8 through 13

24
the Spring quarter.

The lack of the skilled labor delayed the construction of the kitchen walls until April 21. The scrim walls required an open construction method because they had to become translucent and reveal the background in addition to carrying the weight of the roof. The frames were built from 1" box tube steel without any cross members, to appear almost invisible when the background was seen, and strong enough to support the weight of the roof. The texture painting of the walls was to resemble poor plaster work, and its color to be white like a typical Irish cottage. I wanted the walls to look realistic, but I also wanted to stay away from pure white for white is the light designer's nightmare and would dominate the costume designer's color palette. The scrim was white in its original color so I washed it down with a light gray using a spray gun, then used a paint brush to put strokes of white back on it. The colors blue, violet, and raw sienna were crosshatched for shadow colors and the result was very satisfying. To assist matching the texture of the fireplace with the walls, we used muslin to cover the wooden structure of the fireplace. Then, a mixture of glue, sawdust, and paint was used to create a plaster texture. The combination of these two techniques worked very well in creating a unify look for the walls and the fireplace.

\(^2\)See plate IX
The kitchen platform was built according to the specification of the design drawings and covered with 1/2" Homosote to deaden the sound of the foot steps on the deck. The platform, then was finished with 1/4" luan and wood grained with four different colors to look like individual planks. The platform's facing was dressed with scenic stones that were cut out of Homosote, rough sanded and shaped, then painted with various colors. These stones looked very realistic on stage and were my favorite scene painting work in this production.

Another major part of the scenery was the stage floor which was to resemble an uncultivated garden. Professor Shanda suggested using a ground cloth which allowed painting of textures and looked great with little effort after completion. The most difficult part of the scenery was the construction of the stone mounds. Although they did not require a high skill level, they did require a long time for construction. These mounds served three purposes in my design. First, to provide an anchor for the stands of wheat; second, to breakout the flatness of stage and give it an interesting composition; and third, to create different levels for acting. The actors had to be able to walk or sit on the mounds, so they had to be structural. These pieces were constructed from layers of Homosote glued and pressed together, then the edges were sanded and covered with

3See plate V
muslin. After these mounds were securely mounted to the floor they were painted with a wet blend technique and dressed with funeral grass and wheat stalks.
CHAPTER VII
EVALUATION

The set design for Dancing At Lughnasa was a great achievement in reaching the expectation of the director's concept and the requirements of the production. The success of the scene design was determined by the following: first, the design visually satisfied the production concept; second, the designer provided the necessary physical elements for the play; third, the task was completed on time; and fourth, the design saved about 25% of the scenery and the properties budget.

The most specific strength of the design was the visual quality of the set, which was enhanced by lighting. As stated before, the play was a memory play that needed to have dream qualities, and visualized illusions on stage for the audience. The design successfully fulfilled this need. I was approached by college professors and graduate students who congratulated me for creating such a beautiful set that was both "actual and illusory." I was also invited as a guest speaker to a theatre script analysis class and the students commented on the strength of my specific design choices that helped them to understand
the play better.

The set had to fulfill a few physical demands. The action needed an isolated and at the same time open stage to accommodate both the kitchen and the garden scenes. This was accomplished by the use of the scrim on the kitchen walls which became translucent and revealed the background in the specific moments of the play. The entrances and exits were well designed to meet the demands for entering actors from the auditorium without interrupting the flow of the action. And the design provided strong blocking areas as specified by the director.

The other issues were the issues of time management and budget limitations. Although the construction did not begin as scheduled, the set was completed on time. Due to careful planning the scene designer accomplished every detail that she intend to do in her original design. Everything was completed and was executed smoothly during the tech week. Most of the props were borrowed, built, and found; therefore, 25% of the given budget was saved.

The problems within the design that might have been corrected were the following: the kitchen could have been slightly larger to give the actors more room for dance; the side tabs could have been more carefully designed to become unified with the background;
and the lighting designer had technical difficulties in projecting the sky patterns on the matching pieces. The goal of having a unified background was not achieved. The visual appearance of the deck was not satisfactory because of the use of luan material, and I would like to have used actual planks instead.

Overall, I think, *Dancing At Lughnasa* was a pleasurable and stimulating production. Scene painting for this show was very exciting. I experienced and learned many challenging techniques and worked on various surfaces upon which I had never worked before. I was very pleased with the way that the costume designer's color palette complemented the set colors while the rich color of lighting made the characters looked vibrant. *Lughnasa* was not only a challenging work, but it also gave me a great opportunity to learn and work with wonderful technicians and artists like Rex McGraw, Jim Knapp, Linda Pisano, and others. Without question, my skills and confidence in my artistic abilities grew during the production of *Dancing At Lughnasa*. It was a great pleasure to serve as a scenographer for this production.
APPENDIX A

FIGURES
FIGURE 6 - PRELIMINARY GROUND PLAN

FIGURE 7 - GROUND PLAN'S ROTATION AND SETBACK
FIGURE 9 - FRONT ELEVATION
FIGURE 11 - FRONT ELEVATION
FIGURE 13 - FLOOR MOUNDS
This diagram represents a section of a structure with various labeled elements such as "Beam 1," "Beam 2," "Slot 1," and "Slot 2." The diagram includes dimensions and notes indicating the structure's layout and components. It appears to be a technical drawing, possibly for an engineering or architectural project.

**Notes:**
- Beam 1 is located 20'-0" on 80'-0" center line.
- Beam 2 is located 20'-0" on 80'-0" center line.
- Slot 1 is located 20'-0" on 80'-0" center line.
- Slot 2 is located 20'-0" on 80'-0" center line.

**Dimensions:**
- Overall pipe length is 11'-6".
- Dead end marker is at 21'-10".

**Legend:**
- (Refer to the legend area of the diagram for a comprehensive understanding of the symbols used.)

**Figure Description:**
- Center Line Section
- Layout of beams and slots
- Dimensions and locations

**Technical Details:**
- OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
- DANCING AT LUHNASA
- CENTER LINE SECTION
- SCALE 1:100

---

FIGURE 14 - CENTER LINE SECTION
APPENDIX B

PLATES
PLATE III - PAINTER'S ELEVATION, GROUND ROW AND ROOF
PLATE IV - PAINTER'S ELEVATION, HUTCH
PLATE V - PAINTER'S ELEVATION, WOOD FLOOR AND STONES
PLATE VI - PRODUCTION PHOTO, ACT I
APPENDIX C

STUDY GUIDE
Study Guide for *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Upon entering Thurber Theatre at Ohio State University to see *Dancing at Lughnasa* (L00-na-sa) the excitement and mystique of theatre will begin. For the production staff and cast, the mystique was conceived and developed from the script written by Brian Friel. The inception of *Dancing at Lughnasa* occurred during the summer of 1987 in London near the Thames river. Friel related the following story in 1990: "It began very modestly about three years ago. I was at a play at the National Theatre with the playwright Thomas Kilroy. We walked across the Waterloo Bridge and up the Strand. It was about eleven-thirty at night, and there were homeless sleeping in the doorways. Tom said, ‘if you talk to those people, I’m sure many of them are Irish.’ And I said, ‘I had two aunts, who, I think, ended up something like that.’ He said, ‘Why don’t you write about that?’ So that’s how it began: backwards" (Lahr 176).

Continuing backwards, Brian Friel recalled his youthful memories of the summers he lived with his aunts in Glenlona, Ireland, to create *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Friel frequently uses autobiographical memories as a starting point to write his universally relevant plays with such themes as: dispossession, dreams of departure, lost illusions, and his new theme on the collision between Christianity and paganism. At the age of seventeen he studied for the priesthood but he changed his mind because, as he recently explained, being a priest "would somehow be in conflict with my belief of paganism" (Gussow 56). Following in his father’s footsteps, Friel became a teacher and while teaching he gradually devoted more attention to writing short stories for *The New Yorker*. The legendary Irish stage director Tyrone Guthrie admired Friel’s writing. After Guthrie wrote Friel a fan letter a firm friendship was forged. At Guthrie’s request, Friel came to America to be an unpaid observer during the inaugural season at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

Friel acknowledged that the months he spent at the Guthrie Theatre were perhaps the most important in his life because he was immersed in both the practical and theoretical sides of theatre. Friel describes the importance of working with Guthrie as: “The experience was enabling to the extent that it gave me courage and daring to attempt things" (Gussow 56). Friel’s daringness is revealed in *Dancing at Lughnasa* by his mixing Christian traditions and pagan rituals together to create both the external and internal conflicts for his autobiographical characters.

The 66 year old playwright, whom some have elevated to the same status as Sean O’Casey, John Synge, and Tennessee Williams, explains his art as: “It’s not going make a person anymore worthy or noble, but I do think it can make some tiny, thumb-screw adjustments on our psyche” (Gussow 59). Friel has been adjusting the audience’s psyche since the early 1960s with such plays as *Philadelphia, Here I Come*, *Aristocrats, Translations* (recently revived on Broadway), and *Molly Sweeney*. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel’s greatest success to date, was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on April 24, 1990, and now is being widely produced by professional, university, and community theaters. *Dancing at Lughnasa* won virtually every major theatre award in Ireland, England, and the United States. In London it won the *London Evening Standard Award* and the *Oliver Award* which is the equivalent to winning the *Tony Best Play Award*. After the play opened on Broadway on October 24, 1991, it won three *Tony Awards*, including Best Play, the *New York Drama Critics Circle Award*, *Outer Critics Circle Award*, and *Drama Desk Award*. Here is how some critics describe *Dancing at Lughnasa*:
It is precisely its loving, eloquent vindication of these women's contributions that makes _Lughnasa_ a masterpiece of the most astonishing kind. It is hard to think of any play that has more explicitly honored women's work - manual, intellectual, and spiritual - as the foundation upon which community survival is built.

-Margaret Spillane
_The Nation_

There are places only theatre can visit. Friel's pastoral historical is a magical evocation of a world on the brink of extinction... Friel's achievement in the finest play you will find in the West End is to delineate the wider forces acting on the family through inspired characters.

-Carl Miller
_City Limits_
_London_

Critics have consistently described the emotional power of _Dancing at Lughnasa_ in their reviews. The internal, spiritual turmoil of Friel's characters generates an emotional phenomenon for audiences.

The characters' spiritual sources come from their traditional Catholic heritage and also from the mystic pagan rituals of Ireland. The term _Lughnasa_ refers to the August 1st Celtic festival that marks the season of harvest. Although it is named after the pagan god, _Lugh_, its origins are more closely associated with _Lugh's_ foster-mother, _Tailtu_, who labored to clear the plains of Ireland for agrarian use and so died. _Tailtu_ was the Goddess of the Land. Sacred games were held in her honor at Tailtean and temporary marriages were lightly entered into, with no binding contact, though many such unions endured. Farm-hands were hired and animals were sold at this time. Other events include dancing, singing, building bonfires, and the weaving of garlands from flowers or bilberry vines. The reason for attaching _Lugh's_ name to this feast is presumably due to his association with the Goddess of Sovereignty, with whom he mysteriously entered into marriage and with whom he ruled the Other world. In this play the decision whether to attend the Lughnasadh Festival Dance during the summer of 1936 is the first major conflict between the five Mundy sisters. On the surface the conflict is resolved, however, each sister battles with the spiritual conflict of whether to remain steadfast to their Christian religion or to yield to their internal pagan desire to dance. To quote Spillane:

_In Dancing at Lughnasa_, dance emerges as a force both seductive and terrifying, and with rich multiplicity of forms and meanings as language itself...dance outstrips the primacy of the word, as if, 'says the narrator Michael, 'The very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those swaying notes and those lashed rhythms and in those silent hypnotic movements' (102).

Friel skillfully and unobtrusively weaves dance into every fiber of the play to underscore the pagan forces and to enhance the arresting memories of Michael. As the narrator, Michael reminisces and relives his memories as a seven year old boy living with his mother and four aunts in the village of Ballybeg.
Prof. Rex McGraw, the director of Ohio State's production, wants the performance of *Dancing at Lughnasa* to present the dream-like remembrances of Michael without creating a lethargic or sappy atmosphere. McGraw explains his intentions to avoid a maudlin image:

The characters who people this piece have a great desire to live. There needs to be an underlying sense of energy and vitality in the characters as they go about their seemingly monotonous daily tasks or in their discussions of the events in their seemingly boring lives. There will be no pausing, no moments of lethargy, no wallowing in pity. These people are alive, energetic, and vital.

As the director McGraw will have harnessed the creative and mystical talents of the actors in the OSU Theatre Company along with the production and design students of the Theatre Department to achieve:

A mystical ritual that leads to some kind of truth. In the final analysis, the production must be some kind of emotional experience for the audience even if they can't quite put their finger on what exactly happened to them while watching the play.

Scene designer Fernshich Hough will have created the physical and visual world for Friel's play. Hough explains the goal of her design as:

Everything in Friel's world has a dual quality. Everything is actual and at the same time illusionary, music is half-heard and half-imagined, the field of golden wheat and the rural kitchen are displayed side by side as an environment of the play which creates a substantial psychological irony for the spectators. Audiences find themselves dealing with two opposite spaces (indoor and outdoor) at the same time. There is also an exclusive opposition and conflict between paganism and Christiinity within the characters and the world of the play.

The Department of Theatre intends to accomplish these goals and receive similar praiseworthy reviews as did the original commercial productions of *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

Page four of this study guide can be employed in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. The questions, activities, and quotations can be photo-copied and distributed to the students. The reviews and production goals can be cut and pasted together for students to read prior to attending the performance. For example, the goal statements can be used as a post-performance criterion to evaluate how well we accomplished our goals. Specifically, I would suggest that you assign an individual student or a small group of students to focus on one aspect of the production. With the hundreds of spoken and visual messages presented during a theatre performance, limiting their focus to a single aspect of the production will give their viewing a purpose. With each student watching with a pre-designated purpose they will thus become the individual "expert" for the class on one aspect of the play. The various insights presented in this guide can be used at your discretion. Listed below are some additional resources available through the Columbus Metropolitan Library that can better prepare your students to understand and appreciate *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

**Bibliography of Additional Resources:**


APPENDIX D

DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT
DANCING AT LUGHNASA
A Non-Concept Statement

In the Magazine Section of the New York Times, dated September 21, 1991, playwright Brian Friel made the following pronouncements:

I want a director to call rehearsals, to make sure the actors are there on time, and to get them to speak their lines clearly and distinctly. I've no interest whatever in his concept or interpretation. When did these people appear on the scene?

He later added that the director should be "obedient to the play. If not, all you need is an efficient stage manager." Well, since at present we do not have a stage manager, in his/her place, the director will speak a bit about the play.

DANCING AT LUGHNASA is a "memory" play, along the lines of The Glass Menagerie or Brighton Beach Memoirs. In one sense, there is no obvious action in the play in the traditional sense, but the play consists of narration along with scenes showing various sides to the major characters. And herein lies the danger in doing this kind of play. We must, the actors, the designers, and the director find ways to drive the play forward so that it does not become a series of loosely-connected, slow and maudlin scenes about Michael's remembrances of his family. In short, the production must have as its core, VITALITY!!! The characters who people the piece have a great desire to live, even Jack who has come home to die. There needs to be an underlying sense of ENERGY as the characters go about their somewhat monotonous daily tasks or in their discussions of the events in their seemingly boring lives. There will be no pausing, no moments of lethargy, no wallowing in pity. These people are alive, energetic, and vital. The designs should reflect this sprightly vigor.

Now to some specific comments about the environment and clothes and music.

SETTING:

Friel calls for two areas: the kitchen and the garden adjoining the cottage. The kitchen should contain all of the necessary items (range, turf box, table, chairs, etc. Two doors are needed, one to the garden and one to the rest of the house. At least two windows, one looking out towards the path and one looking into the garden so that the sisters can see anyone coming and can watch over young Michael as he builds his kites. The garden needs a seat and, perhaps, branches from the sycamore tree. Most important, the paths leading to the house need to provide space for the ballroom dancing performed by Gerry and Chris and later Gerry and Agnes. The two large questions remaining, what is behind the cottage, hopefully more than just a blue cyc (the Irish countryside?) and how realistic should the setting be? Real, yes, but not a the dark naturalistic way. Are the walls complete? Is it a whitewashed cottage? Has it been prettied up by the five sisters? Is there color? It would be nice to have separate places for each of the girls—their areas: example, rocker and reading materials for Kate, a place for Agnes to sew, a place by the range for Maggie, a place by the turf box for Rose. In addition, we need two or three places for the narrator who sometimes must be unseen. All of these matters will be discussed further with the designers.
COSTUMES

Friel says it is a warm day in early August, 1936. Important things to consider: the financial state of the Mundy family, how warm is it in Ireland in August, are there any changes? Rose does wear Wellingtons, Maggie wears large boots, they all wear aprons at some time. Jack needs two uniforms, one magnificent, another shabby with two versions of the ceremonial "tricorn with white plumage." With reference to the original statement and to maintain the "memory" aspect, the usual dark brown tweeds of the typical Irish play may not be appropriate, after all it is summer and, hopefully, Michael's memories would be more colorful? See IMPORTANT SHIFT below which might affect slight costume changes.

LIGHTS.

Along with the setting and costumes, it seems that the lights can really emphasize the "memory" aspect. There should be subtle shifts as the play moves from inside to outside along with some special treatment of the background, once it is determined. In addition, Michael needs special lighting for his narration speeches and when he plays young Michael, he needs to be behind the sister to whom he is speaking so that there is no direct communication. Again, it seems that the lighting can be more theatrical than just basically realistic as befits the warm memories.

IMPORTANT SHIFT. There does seem to be a problem structurally in the second act. (Page 71 in the acting edition). Michael explains how Agnes and Rose lost their jobs, how they went to England, and how they died. He talks about Father Jack's death and its effect on Kate, Maggie, and Chris. He describes the fate of his father. The first time I saw this play, my reaction was: and where do we go from here? There are still eleven pages of dialogue. On studying the play, however, it seems that the play shifts here into a kind of lyrical piece, a heavenly tribute to these folks by the single heir. We should discuss this further, but it seems that in the lighting design, if possible, we could shift into another worldliness (?), an epilogue, something different from the rest of the play. It needs this shift, I think, to keep the audience from sliding into a complete state of depression at the end. Think ethereal.

SOUND:

Sound plays a particularly important part in the total design elements. The script calls for several specific musical selections: "The British Grenadiers," "The Isle of Capri," "The Mason's Apron" by a celti band, a long section of 30's dance music for Gerry and Chris, "Anything Goes" for Agnes and Gerry, plus many moments of static for the barely working Marconi. So a good sound design is essential and very much affects the spoken dialogue. I would also like to use some pre-show Irish music and intermission music. Playwright Friel has skillfully woven music and dance into the fabric of this memory tapestry.
CONCLUSION:

So Mr. Friel, maybe you did need a director after all. Whether you want to admit it or not, there have been directors since theatre began. They sometimes performed other functions, such as playwrighting, acting, managing, and nowadays, some of them even design their own productions.

In discussing Friel's latest play, Molly Sweeney, John Lahr in The New Yorker, refers to Dancing at Lughnasa as a kind of religious experience, the very act of dancing approaches the religious. He states that in most Friel plays, the playwright "embodies that mystical otherness in real estate--the unreachable and alluring island, called the Island of Mystery in Gaelic." And maybe that does relate to the concept that the play is a memory play, that is not quite real, but a mystical ritual that leads to some kind of truth. In the final analysis, the production must be some kind of emotional experience for the audience, even if they can't quite put their finger on what exactly happened to them while watching the play. It seems with this play that Playwright Brian Friel has managed to attain the high artistic level of some other Irish playwrights--Synge, Shaw, Wilde, Behan, Yeats and Lady Gregory. So let us get carried away with the mystical Irish spirit (not necessarily Irish whiskey) and turn DANCING AT LUGHNASA into an unforgettable theatrical experience.
Dancing the “Friel” at Lughnasa

BY REA MCGRAW

In an article about him in the magazine section of The New York Times, playwright Brian Friel had this to say: "I want a director to call rehearsals, to make sure the actors are there on time, and to get them to speak their lines clearly and distinctly. I've no interest whatever in his concept or interpretation. When did these people appear on the scene?"

Despite Mr. Friel's seeming aversion to them, directors all over the world, and particularly in this county, have taken to his plays and putting their concepts on his works. In fact, for the past two years, except of course for A Christmas Carol, Dancing at Lughnasa has been the most produced play in regional and university theatres. There continues to be a Friel frenzy around the U.S., in England, and in his homeland, Ireland.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Mr. Friel was born in County Tyrone. His father was a teacher and wrote plays for the BBC in Ireland, where he returned to Ireland after many years and has joined the household. A third male, the youngest sister's paramour, returns to visit. It is, in short, a memory play along the lines of The Glass Menagerie or Brighton Beach Memoirs. As Friel himself says, "There is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me often. I think of it as dancing... Dancing as if language had put me to one member... In this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak to whisper private and sacred things."*

Mr. Friel is professor of theatre and Director at the OSU Theatre production of Dancing at Lughnasa.

Because of the title, many people think that Lughnasa is a place. It is not; it is a season of the year. The Druids, ancient spiritual leaders of the Irish, were naturally concerned with day and night and the changing of the seasons. Ancient Irish festivals commemorated those changing seasons: Samhain early in November; Imbolc in February; Beltane, early May; and Lughnasa, the Gaelic name for August, the festival of forgiveness. Eventually, the celebration acquired an agricultural flavor related to the harvest. Potatoes were a staple of the fare and were prepared with special recipes. Bilberries, referred to in the play, were strung into necklaces to indicate marriageable young women.

In the summer's twilight, great bonfires on hillsides illuminated the merrymakers who sang and danced; hence, dancing at Lughnasa.

The story of the play concerns the five sisters' daily existence. The illegitimate son of the youngest sister serves as narrator as well as the voice of himself as an imaginary child to whom the sisters talk from time to time. In addition, an uncle, who was a missionary in Africa, has returned home with failing health after many years and has joined the household. A third male, the youngest sister's paramour, returns to visit. It is, in short, a memory play along the lines of The Glass Menagerie or Brighton Beach Memoirs. As Friel himself says, "There is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me often. I think of it as dancing... Dancing as if language had put me to one member... In this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak to whisper private and sacred things."*

ABOUT THE PLAY

Lughnasa has become Friel's greatest success. It opened in Dublin, at the famous Abbey Theatre, then moved to London, where it received an Olivier Award as best play. It came to New York with many of the original Irish actors, where it was an overwhelming success. It is now being seen all over the country.

The play concentrates on the lives of five sisters who live in rural Ireland. It takes place in a mythical town in County Donegal, called Ballybeg, invented by Friel. In Gaelic, the word translates as "small town." Almost all of his plays take place in this town.

** Rea McGraw is professor of theatre and Director at the OSU Theatre production of Dancing at Lughnasa

Dancing at Lughnasa will be presented by OSU Theatre May 17-27. See the highlight and calendar listing on page 5.
1. IRel
[120x265];l'IRel
[120x258]'cc 292·5272 or 292·3007
[120x194]lun .. May 15, 5-7 p.m.
[120x208]'CO 292·5072
[120x229]I.I.A, Thesis Exhibition
School of Music and Dance
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-0789
Wed., May 10, 7:30 p.m.
A. School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
University Band
conducted by Craig Young
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-5272 or 292-3007
Thurs., May 11, 7:30 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Jazz Lab Ensemble
conducted by Phaer Whitted
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
Fri., May 12, 8 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Symphonic Choir
conducted by James Gallagher
School of Music
Women's Glee Club
conducted by Hilary Apfelstadt
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
Sat., May 13, 8 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Ballet
conducted by Hilary Apfelstadt
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
Sun., May 14, 3 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Women's Day Concert
concert Band
conducted by Christopher Weiss
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-5272 or 292-3007
Mon.-Fri., May 15-19
Summer Session: 11:15-19:30
11 A. Thesis Exhibition
Lab. Jams, photography, Eloisa Hall Gallery
ve 292-5072
piano Reception.
Sun., May 15, 5-7 p.m.

---

Wed., May 10, 4:30 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Alexander Frankel Music in Post-Soviet Russia
Sullivant Room. Music and Dance
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-0789

---

This extraordinary family drama won the 1992 Tony Award for Best Play as well as the 1991 Olivier Award. Brian Friel has shaped a beautiful memory play, told by the character of Michael as an adult as he reflects on his life at age seven. He is the only off-spring of five lonely Mundy sisters in the rural Irish community of Binnings.

Reflection is an important part of experiencing this retrospective family portrait, set just before the summer harvest in 1936. The absorbing mind of the seven-year-old is vividly conveyed in this segment of Michael's speech, when he perceives "an awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be."

We also meet the boy's unmarried father, a Welsh charmer who drops in from time to time for a few flirtatious moments with Michael's mother. These visits excite the women in the household. They always hold back — except on one occasion, when the Mundy sisters give in to the primal impulse and burst into frenzied dancing.

The result is a lyrical tale backed up by a "sometimes working wireless radio playing "Anything Goes."

We see the Mundy sisters hold on to moments of joy, as we realize their sadly unfulfilled possibilities.

Professor Rona Meehan directs the OSU Theatre Company in this rich dramatic production. The five sisters will be played by faculty members Joy Reilly and Janesha Thomas, and student actors: Anne Hansen, Maggie Ashok, and Emily Bash. Line Condlon is cast as Michael.

See cover story and calendar listings for more information.

Wed., May 17, 7:30 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Universe Chorus
conducted by James Major
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
Thurs., May 18, 7:30 p.m.
School of Music
Research Ensemble Series
Jazz Ensemble
directed by Hank Marr
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007

---

Fri.-Sat., May 19-20, 8 p.m.
Department of Dance
Spring Dance Concert
Sullivant Theatre and Weigel Film/Video Theater
Tickets: $3 at the door.

For information: 292-7977

Sat., May 21, 7:30 p.m.
School of Music
Special Benefit Concert
Men's Glee Club
Conducted by James Gallagher
Pentacol College Josephine
Tickets: $15
Call 292-4622 for information.

Sun., May 21, 2:30 p.m.
School of Music
Performing Ensemble Series
Soprano Stephanie Cone joins OSU Theatre Company in this rich dramatic production. The five sisters will be played by faculty members Joy Reilly and Janesha Thomas, and student actors: Anne Hansen, Maggie Ashok, and Emily Bash. Line Condlon is cast as Michael.

See cover story and calendar listings for more information.

Wed., May 17-27
OSU Theatre Company
School of Music
Tickets: $5; students $3
Weigel Center Ticket Office
ve 292-2354

---

Fri., May 19, 2-7 p.m.
School of Music
Faculty Recital Series
Donald Green, piano
Weigel Auditorium
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
Soprano Stephanie Carter joins pianist Donald Green for a recital demonstrating the vocal quality of the School of Music's Rosen-dorfer 2900FL piano. The program will be music of Mahler, Puccini, and Korngold.

---

Dancing At Lughnasa
By Brian Friel
May 17-27
The OSU Theatre Company
Thurber Theatre

This extraordinary family drama won the 1992 Tony Award for Best Play as well as the 1991 Olivier Award. Brian Friel has shaped a beautiful memory play, told by the character of Michael as an adult as he reflects on his life at age seven. He is the only off-spring of five lonely Mundy sisters in the rural Irish community of Binnings.

Reflection is an important part of experiencing this retrospective family portrait, set just before the summer harvest in 1936. The absorbing mind of the seven-year-old is vividly conveyed in this segment of Michael's speech, when he perceives "an awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be."

We also meet the boy's unmarried father, a Welsh charmer who drops in from time to time for a few flirtatious moments with Michael's mother. These visits excite the women in the household. They always hold back — except on one occasion, when the Mundy sisters give in to the primal impulse and burst into frenzied dancing.

The result is a lyrical tale backed up by a "sometimes working wireless radio playing "Anything Goes."

We see the Mundy sisters hold on to moments of joy, as we realize their sadly unfulfilled possibilities.

Professor Rona Meehan directs the OSU Theatre Company in this rich dramatic production. The five sisters will be played by faculty members Joy Reilly and Janesha Thomas, and student actors: Anne Hansen, Maggie Ashok, and Emily Bash. Line Condlon is cast as Michael.

See cover story and calendar listings for more information.

Wed., May 17, 7:30 p.m.
Fri.-Sat., May 19-20, 8 p.m.
Thurs.-Sat., May 21-23, 8 p.m.
Sat., May 20, at 2 p.m.
Brian Friel's
Dancing at Lughnasa
Directed by Rex McGraw
The OSU Theatre Company
Thurber Theatre
Tickets:
$9.50 (OSU Community discounts available)
$10.50 Fri. & Sat. eve.
(no discounts)
Ticket Box Office, 292-2295
Tickets go on sale May 8
Audio description is available for the May 20 matinee with 8 days advance reservation.
See cover story and highlight above.

Wed., May 17, 8 p.m.
School of Music
Performing Ensemble Series
University Chorus
Conducted by James Major
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
Thurs., May 18, 7:30 p.m.
School of Music
Performing Ensemble Series
Jazz Ensemble
Directed by Hank Marr
Sullivant Hall
ve 292-2300 or 292-3007
APPENDIX F

SELECTED RESEARCH
A LONELY INDEPENDENCE is still the rule in remote regions of the land.
The Ohio State University
Department of Theatre

presents

Brian Friel's

Dancing at Lughnasa

Thurber Theatre
May 17-20 & 23-27

Photo: © 1994 Ted Rice
Brian Friel's
DANCING AT LUGNASSA

Place: Home of the Mundy family 2 miles outside of the village of Ballybeg, County Donegal, Ireland.

Time: Act I  A warm day in early August, 1936
Act II  3 weeks later

There will be one fifteen-minute intermission between Act I and Act II

Production Staff

Producer
Kathleen F. Conlin
Director
Rex McGraw
Scenic Designer
Fereshteh Hough
Costume Designer
Linda Pisano
Lighting Designer
Carolyn J. Sarkis
Technical Director
Jim Knapp
Sound Designer
Dan Seymour
Choreographer
Ellen Newman
Stage Manager
Shelley Riggs
Assistant Stage Managers
Denise A. Daugherty
Elizabeth Miller, Mark R. Woods
Dramaturg
Carl D. Skorepa

The Cast (in alphabetical order)

Rose  Margaret Anich*
Chris  Emily R. Bach*
Michael  Louis Cavallari*
Maggie  Anne Hannon**
Gerry  Stephen Horvat*
Jack  Joey Landwehr**
Kate  Joy Reilly*
Agnes  Jeanine Thompson*

*Member of OSU Theatre Company. The OSU Theatre Company is comprised of advanced graduate students (Anich and Cavallari) and selected undergraduates (Bach and Horvat), joined by faculty (Reilly and Thompson) and/or guest artists who form the core acting company for three major plays per season. Together these performers develop an ensemble approach to acquiring new skills, encountering challenging dramatic repertoire, and performing before the public.

**Actors appearing courtesy of Actors Equity Association.

Produced by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

The Department of Theatre is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre and is a member of the University/Resident Theatre Association.
Program Note

"It began very modestly," says Brian Friel, when reminiscing about his inspiration to write *Dancing at Lughnasa* (pronounced LOO-na-sa, as in lunacy). "I was at a play at the National Theatre (in London) with playwright Thomas Kilroy. We walked across the Waterloo Bridge and along the Thames River. It was about eleven-thirty at night, and there were homeless sleeping in the doorways. Tom said, 'If you talked to those people, I am sure many of them are Irish.' And I said, 'I had two aunts, who, I think, ended up something like that.' He said, 'Why don't you write about that? So that's how it began: backwards.' Friel, whom some have compared to Sean O'Casey and Tennessee Williams, has frequently written autobiographical plays such as *Philadelphia, Here I Come*, *Translations*, and many others. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which is Friel's greatest success to date, is "In memory of those brave Glenties (Ireland) women." The five brave women are Friel's mother and aunts with whom he lived during the summers as a youth.

*Lughnasa* is the Celtic harvest festival held on August 1st in honor of *Lugh*, a powerful pagan god who promised a fruitful harvest if people would assemble to worship him. The suffix -nasa refers to "games" or "meeting." *Lughnasa* Festival events include temporary marriages, which are lightly entered into (with no binding contract), animal auctions, bonfires, and garlands woven from flowers and bilberry vines. Friel remembers the festival with these ideas: "There is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me often. I think of it as dancing..." For the characters in the play, the central conflict is a spiritual battle of whether to remain steadfast to the Christian religion or to yield to their internal pagan desire to dance. Michael Billington, critic for *The Guardian* in London, describes the play's theme as "the wisdom of acknowledging the passions that lie beneath the hard crust of religious orthodoxy."

Friel skillfully and unobtrusively weaves dance into every fiber of the play to underscore the pagan forces and vitality of the Mundy family. Michael, the narrator, reminisces and relives his memories of a seven year old boy living with his mother and four aunts in the isolated village of Ballybeg. As the play progresses watch how dance and its various connotations are interlaced within the plot and commingled in Michael's recollections. Margaret Spillane, critic for *The Nation*, describes the play: "In *Lughnasa*, dance emerges as a force both seductive and terrifying, and with rich multiplicity of forms and meanings as language itself."

*The New York Times* critic Frank Rich comments on the theme of transcendence in this play, when he writes that *Lughnasa* "does exactly what theatre was born to do, carrying both its characters and audiences aloft on waves of distant music and ecstatic release that, in defiance of all language and logic, lets us dance and dream."

Carl D. Skorepa
Dramaturg

Study Guides for *Dancing at Lughnasa* are available at the Will Call Table in the lobby.
Crew

Scene Design Adviser
Scene Studio Supervisor
Properties Assistant
Scene Studio Teaching Associates
Scenic Artist
Scenery Construction Crew

Scenery Run Crew
Costume Studio Supervisor
Costume Studio Teaching Associates
Wardrobe Mistress
Costume Construction Crew

Costume Run Crew
Master Electrician
Assistant Master Electrician
Lighting Board Operator
Lighting Studio Teaching Associates
Lighting Crew

Sound Operator
Acknowledgements

Publicity and Front of House

House Managers
Box Office Manager
Box Office Staff
Box Office Associates
Promotion Associates

Benjamin Coyle, Clare Tannenhill
Jos. F. Scharrer
Brandon Brown, Susan Davis, Melvin Harris, Tracy Longstreth, Ruy Lopez, Teresa Maier
Jeanne J. Andres, Liesel Friske
Inbal Aharoni, Jon Arndt
LIST OF REFERENCES


