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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE BAY AREA PREMIERE OF THE  
DRUID THEATER COMPANY OF GALWAY PERFORMING TWO WORKS  
BY JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE WEDNESDAY–SUNDAY,  
OCTOBER 8–12 AT THE RODA THEATRE**

**BERKELEY, September 29, 2008**—In its Bay Area debut, the renowned **Druid** theater company of Galway, Ireland will bring back-to-back productions of two **John Millington Synge** controversial, comic masterpieces. Both *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy of the Western World* caused bitter name calling, arguments and even rioting when they were first staged over a century ago due to their subject matter: Irish nationality and character, blatant violence and sexuality, tortured relationships between the sexes, and other topics that don't necessarily lend themselves to comedy and that remain hot buttons today. No riots are expected, however, during the Cal Performances engagement when both plays are presented at Berkeley Rep's **Roda Theatre Wednesday–Sunday, October 8–12.**

Druid (the company's official one word name) founder and artistic director **Garry Hynes**, the only woman to win a Best Director Tony Award, stages this double bill. The two works are drawn from Druid's groundbreaking *DruidSynge* marathon of plays, which Hynes conceived and directed. *DruidSynge* was a daylong presentation of the six plays that Synge wrote in his truncated career (he was a playwright for just six years and died at age 37). It was described as "one of the greatest achievements in the history of Irish theatre" by the *Irish Times*. Druid and Hynes are irrevocably bound to Synge; indeed, *Playboy of the Western World* was the first play presented by the company when it began as a summer theater in Galway in 1975, and Hynes has joked that Synge is Druid's "house playwright." The production at Cal Performances is presented in association with Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

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## THE PLAYS

*The Shadow of the Glen* is a 30-minute one-act play set in “the last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow.” Considered the first of the Irish “realist” dramas, the play tells the story of Dan Burke and his young wife Nora: Dan puts a curse on Nora, fakes his own death, and exposes Nora’s infidelity with a neighbor man and their designs on his estate. The work is built out of folk tales that Synge collected in 1898 while on Inis Meáin, one of the primitive Aran Islands off Ireland’s west coast, where he spent many months steeped in traditional Irish culture. *The Shadow of the Glen* was first performed on October 8, 1903, at the Molesworth Hall in Dublin. The audience that night hissed at the play, and the prominent Irish nationalist Arthur Griffith condemned the work as “a slur on Irish womanhood.” In spite of the dark themes and the bold reaction the play engendered, it is considered a comedy.

After intermission, *The Playboy of the Western World*, considered Synge’s great comic masterpiece, will be performed. The two-hour play tells the story of Christy Mahon, a man who becomes a sought-after romantic figure and celebrity in County Mayo when he claims to have killed his father. When Christy’s story is repeatedly proven false, the townspeople—including the sharp-tongued barmaid Pegeen Mike, who had pursued Christy—turn on him violently. The story grew out of two real-life incidents Synge had heard in his travels in western Ireland. When first presented in January 26, 1907, at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, audience members, reacting to the frank language and provocative subject matter, rose from their seats in the middle of the second act and began shouting catcalls. William Butler Yeats, Synge’s friend and mentor, took to the stage to calm the crowd, but by the third act the police had to be summoned to maintain order and protect the actors. The disastrous evening was later dubbed the “Playboy Riots.” Once again, Griffith was scathing in his criticism, calling the play “a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform.” Synge, who had studied literature at the Sorbonne, saw the play this way: “On the French stage you get sex without its balancing elements; on the Irish stage you get the other elements without the sex. I restored sex and people were so surprised [that] they saw the sex only.”

## JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

Irish playwright **John Millington Synge** was born in 1871 in Rathfarnham, south of Dublin, Ireland. His father died when he was a year old, and as a child Synge was sickly. A violinist, he earned a degree from Trinity College and a scholarship to the Royal Irish Academy of Music. He went to Germany to play and compose, but was unsuccessful; in 1895 he moved to Paris to study literature at the Sorbonne. In Paris he met Yeats, who was there founding the Irish League, an organization for Irish nationalists. Synge joined the league but soon parted company, resolving to go to Ireland's rugged, primitive Aran Islands and "live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression."

The islands proved important to Synge's work. From 1898 through 1901, he visited the islands for several extended stays, collecting folk tales and anecdotes that became the seeds of *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, and the tragedy *Riders to the Sea*, as well as his book *The Aran Islands*. The book was not well received. Synge's subsequent plays also received mixed receptions at best.

Along with Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, a leading Irish writer, playwright and folklorist of the day, Synge became co-director of the Irish National Theatre Society in 1905, and together the three founded the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. At the Abbey, Synge's *The Well of the Saints* was performed in 1905 and met by rage among Irish nationalists. After *Playboy*, Synge wrote *The Tinker's Wedding*, which was not produced for fear of further rioting; it was not presented in Ireland at all until Synge's centenary in 1971. The playwright died of Hodgkin's disease in 1909; a sixth play, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, left unfinished at his death, was presented posthumously in 1910.

Although he only wrote six plays and died at the age of 37, Synge's mark on global theater is vast. Playwrights, including Samuel Beckett, Eugene O'Neill, Federico García Lorca and Derek Walcott, have acknowledged his influence, and Synge's plays are regularly read and staged worldwide.

## DRUID

**Druid** was founded in Galway, Ireland, in 1975. The first professional theater company in Ireland outside of Dublin, for three decades Druid has been at the forefront of Irish theater both within the country and internationally, through performances in London, Edinburgh, Sydney, Perth, Washington, D.C., New York and Tokyo.

At the Galway Arts Festival in 2005, Druid Theatre Company did the unprecedented: it produced all six plays of John Millington Synge on the same day, in a production called *DruidSynge*. The production has since toured to Dublin and Inis Meáin, Ireland; Edinburgh, Scotland; Minneapolis and New York, where it was heralded as “the highlight not just of my theatregoing year but of my theatre-going life” by Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times*.

Druid presents both classic and new dramatic works, drawing heavily from the Irish dramatic repertoire. It has worked with celebrated contemporary Irish playwrights as well. In 1996, Martin McDonagh’s debut play, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, saw its premiere in Galway in a joint production between Druid and Royal Court Theatre. The play subsequently was presented in London, Sydney, Dublin and on Broadway, where it won four Tony Awards including a Best Director award for **Garry Hynes**. Hynes was the first woman to win the award.

Garry Hynes was the founding artistic director of Druid and served in that role through 1991, when she became artistic director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. She returned to Druid in 1995 and has served as artistic director ever since. She has also directed plays in London, New York City and Washington, D.C. In addition to her Tony Award, Hynes has received the Irish Times/ESB Irish Theatre Award for Best Director, a Special Tribute Award for her contribution to Irish Theatre, and a National Council for Education award. Hynes holds honorary doctorates from the University of Dublin and the National University of Ireland. She was born in Ballaghadereen County, Rosecommon.

## TICKET INFORMATION

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Tickets for **Druid** theater company on **Wednesday–Friday, October 8–10 at 8:00 p.m.;** **Saturday, October 11 at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.;** and **Sunday, October 12 at 3:00 p.m.** in **Roda Theatre** are priced at \$75.00. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at [www.calperformances.org](http://www.calperformances.org); and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens, other students and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$5 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988 or visit the Cal Performances web site at [www.calperformances.org](http://www.calperformances.org).

For select performances, Cal Performances offers UCB student, faculty and staff, senior and community rush tickets. Rush tickets are announced two hours prior to a performance and are available in person only at the Ticket Office beginning one hour before the performance; quantities may be limited. Rush ticket sales are limited to one ticket per person; all sales are cash only. Rush ticket prices are \$10.00 for UCB students; \$15.00 for UCB faculty and staff (UCB ID required) and seniors age 65 or older; and \$20 for all other community members. Information is available at (510) 642-9988, press 2 for the rush hotline, two hours prior to a performance only.

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**CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:**

**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS**

**Wednesday-Friday, October 8–10 at 8:00 p.m.**  
**Saturday, October 11 at 2:00 p.m. & 8:00 p.m.**  
**Sunday, October 12 at 3:00 p.m.**

**Roda Theatre**  
2025 Addison St., Berkeley

*Theater*

**Druid**

**Garry Hynes**, Director

**Program:**

Druid theater company from Galway, Ireland, will perform two comic masterpieces *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Shadow of the Glen* by Ireland's great playwright John Millington Synge.

**Tickets:** \$75.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at [www.calperformances.org](http://www.calperformances.org); and at the door.

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