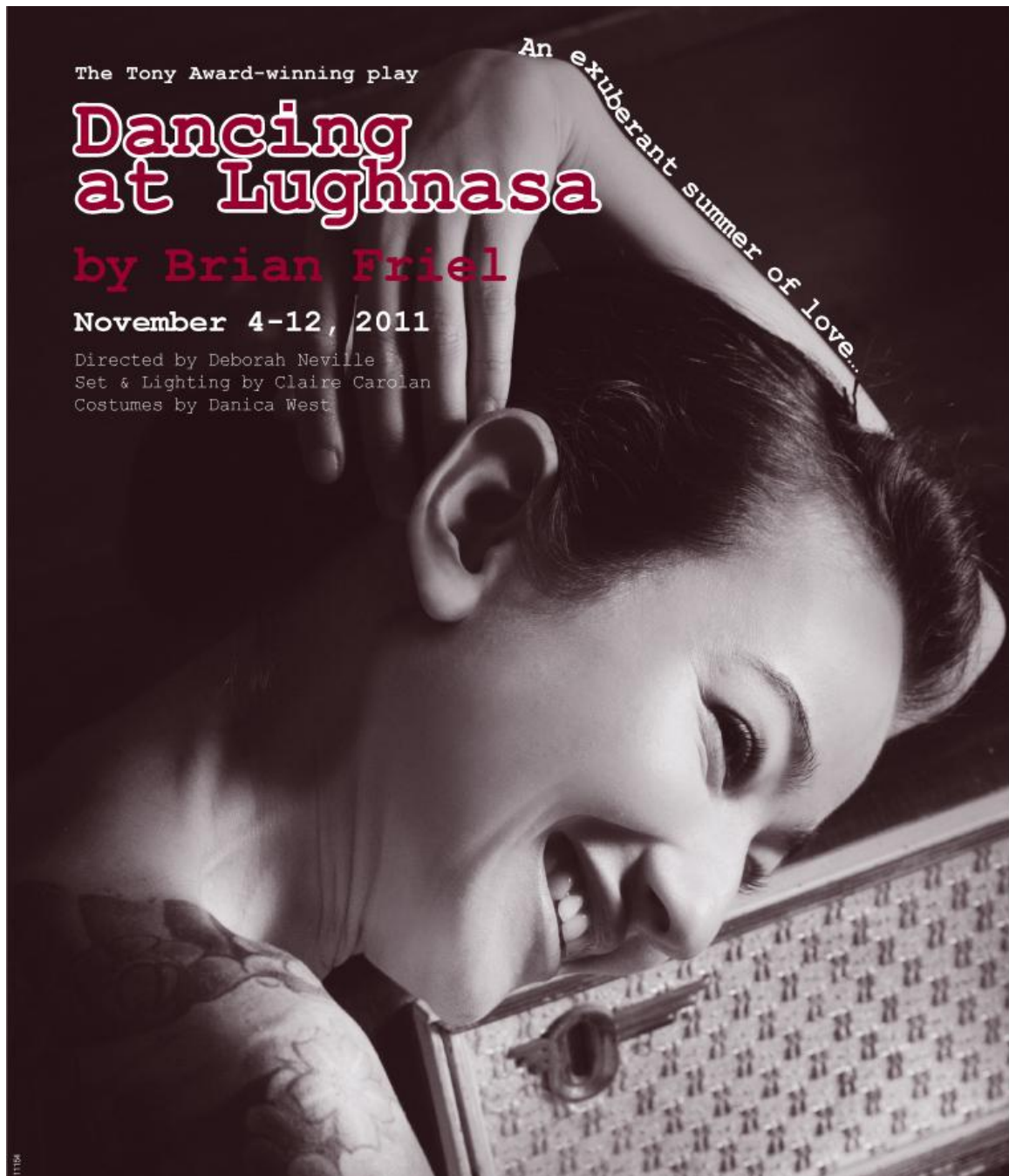


Resource Guide

for educators, students and lifelong learners



Dancing at Lughnasa

By Brian Friel

Creative Team

Directed by Deborah Neville
Set and Lighting Design by Claire Carolan
Costume Design by Danica West

Introduction

This guide is created to augment your theatrical experience and to provide greater insight to our production. Although it is intended primarily for teachers and students we offer it to our other patrons who may be interested in further exploration of the play.

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Chronology of Ireland and Brian Friel

1919

Beginning of the Irish War of Independence, a guerilla war against the British Government in Ireland by the Army of the Irish Republic (the 'Old IRA').

1920

The Government of Ireland Act separates the island into Northern Ireland, based on six north-east counties, and Southern Ireland, based on the remaining 26 counties.

1921

Irish and British governments call a truce to the war and sign the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Irish Free State is created.

1922

Beginning of the Irish Civil War between anti-Treaty and pro-Treaty supporters.

1923

IRA orders volunteers to dump arms, effectively ending the Irish Civil War.

1929

Brian Friel born near Omagh, County Tyrone.

1932

Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil party wins the general election.

1935

Public Dance Halls Act is passed by the Irish Government

1936

Year in which *Dancing at Lughnasa* is set.

Irish volunteers go to Spain to fight on both sides of the Spanish Civil War.

1937

The Constitution of Ireland is approved in a referendum. It replaces the Irish Free State with a new state called Éire (or Ireland in English).

1939

Friel family moves to Derry.

1948

Brian Friel graduates from Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth.

1948

The Republic of Ireland Act abolishes the remaining roles of the British monarch in the government of the Irish state.

The British Government refuses a request to change Northern Ireland's name to Ulster.

1949

The state is formally declared the Republic of Ireland and leaves the British Commonwealth.

1950-2008

Friel begins his career as a teacher and writer encompassing many published works including short stories, radio plays and nearly 30 stage plays

1990

Dancing at Lughnasa (Abbey, Dublin).

1991

Dancing at Lughnasa opens on Broadway.

The London Vertigo (after Charles Macklin; Andrew's Lane, Dublin).

1992

Dancing at Lughnasa receives eight Tony nominations and wins three, including Best Play.

1999

Friel receives a Lifetime Achievement Arts Award on the occasion of his 70th birthday. The Friel Festival of eight plays takes place.

Synopsis

Act 1

It is August, 1936. Seven year-old Michael lives with his mother Christina and her four sisters – Kate, Maggie, Agnes and Rose – in a humble cottage just outside the village of Ballybeg in County Donegal.

Michael's uncle Jack has returned to Ireland having spent 25 years working in the village of Ryanga, Uganda, as a missionary in a leper colony. Though only 53, Jack is in poor health and suffering from memory loss as a result of malaria.

The play opens with Michael making kites in the garden and Maggie, Agnes, Rose and Chris working in the kitchen. The sister's sing, dance, and joke as they perform various household chores and knit gloves. Rose, who has a learning disability, talks about Danny Bradley, a married man who has given her a trinket and whom she loves, but her sisters are worried that he wants to take advantage of her.

The eldest sister Kate returns home from shopping for provisions in Ballybeg. She is a school teacher, and the only wage earner of the family. Kate reports that in Ballybeg everyone is very excited about the forthcoming harvest dance. Her sisters beg to be allowed to go, but Kate forbids it as she thinks that as unmarried middle-aged women they'd be seen as a laughing stock.

Kate has brought back a battery for the radio set which the sisters have recently acquired. Maggie begins to move to the céilí music on the radio, and one by one the other sisters join in until they are all dancing with wild abandon.

Gerry Evans, Michael's father, unexpectedly arrives at the house to see Chris after an absence of over a year. Gerry tells her that he's planning to go to Spain to fight in the civil war with the International Brigade. The temperamental radio starts up of its own accord, and before he leaves Gerry dances Chris down the lane, watched by Michael from behind a bush.

Jack talks about his time in Ryanga, and steps out into the garden where he performs a strange ritual dance, accompanying himself with a rhythm beat out on two sticks.

Act 2

It's now early September, three weeks after the date of Act 1. Michael is writing a letter to Santa asking for a bell for the bicycle which he believes his father is going to buy him.

Jack's health is getting better, and his English vocabulary is coming back to him. To Kate's alarm, it becomes clear that even though he was a Catholic missionary in Uganda, he embraced local pagan customs such as animal sacrifice, ritual ceremonies, and the use of medicine men.

Gerry visits again to say goodbye before leaving for Spain, and is recruited into climbing the sycamore tree to mend the radio aerial. In Ballybeg, Chris has bumped into the knitting agent, who tells her that she'll no longer be able to buy gloves from Agnes and Rose since a new knitting factory has opened in Donegal Town.

Agnes returns from gathering bilberries, expecting to find Rose back at the house. Agnes left her by the quarry three hours ago, but Rose still hasn't returned home. Worried for her safety, the sisters are about to go and search for Rose when she arrives home, after having spent the afternoon with Danny Bradley up in the back hills, where at this time of year ancient pagan Lughnasa rituals are practiced.

As the sisters prepare for dinner, Jack changes into his old army chaplain uniform, and he and Gerry act out a Ryangan exchange ceremony in which they swap hats. Then Gerry admires the kites that Michael has made, decorated with fierce primitive faces.

We learn what happened to the characters beyond the point where the play ends. Jack never returned to Ryanga, but died of a heart attack a year later. Agnes and Rose left the cottage and went to London, where they died in abject poverty. Gerry returned from Spain wounded, and for a few years occasionally visited Ballybeg, until war broke out. He died with his "other" family – a wife and three children – in Wales. Kate lost her post as a school teacher and was unemployed for several years before getting a job as a private tutor. And Chris, Michael's mother, spent the rest of her life working unhappily in the knitting factory in Donegal Town.

Background

Ireland 1930's (Muckross Research Library)

Ireland in the early 20th century was a poor country. The levels of poverty in many isolated rural areas were exceptional by western standards. In 1930, the total population was just under three million. The great majority of the people were living in the countryside, or in country towns and villages. Dublin, the capital city, had a maximum population of about half a million people.

Within rural Ireland there was a pattern of late marriages and a very high birth-rate within marriage. The rate of emigration, especially for single women, remained high during the 1930s and 1940s, with England the main destination. There was also a movement into urban centres from rural areas. By the 1940s it appears that a general discontent with their conditions was becoming evident among the rural population. On the family farm, the woman of the house was usually responsible for the care of the small livestock, the poultry, pigs and calves. She would also attend to the vegetable garden and to the growing of fruit. Usually there was no running water or electricity, sanitation was poor and there were few modern conveniences. Few women worked

outside of the home and they usually lost their jobs on marriage. For instance, women teachers, who qualified after the 1st January 1933, were obliged to retire when they married. From the early 1940s on, sympathy was growing for the woman in the home and the difficult conditions under which she had to labour.



CHANGE: 1930s Ireland a Decade of Change

'The whole thing is so fragile it can't be held together much longer. It's all about to collapse.' Kate Mundy

Dancing at Lughnasa take the form of a memory play, told from the point of view of a narrator who was once part of the narrow world he describes, but who has since escaped. It is set in 1936, a time of peace for Ireland and America, yet one that was poised on the cusp of great change.

Referring to 1936, Tennessee Williams wrote:

'Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden [the Nazi's mountain retreat], caught in the folds of Chamberlain's umbrella. In Spain there was Guernica. But here there was only hot swing music and liquor.'

This description could just as easily apply to the Mundy sisters in County Donegal. With references to Abyssinia and Gerry's joining the International Brigade, Friel points to the troubles brewing abroad, while at home the sisters' energies are focused on domestic matters and the output of the temperamental new radio.

CHANGE: The Radio

In Michael's memory, the arrival of the family's first ever wireless set and the homecoming of Father Jack are inextricably linked: the shock at Jack's shrunken appearance is tempered by the awe and delight at the 'sheer magic' of the radio.

Radio was not just a new experience for the Mundy household – it was a relatively new experience for Ireland. Though broadcasting from Dublin began in 1926, most Irish people were unable to receive the weak 1.5 kilowatt signal. It was not until a high-powered transmitter was built in Athlone in 1932 that Radio Athlone (Radio Áth Luain in Irish) could be received across the whole country.

Yet even though the signal was now in everyone's reach, owning a set was not. The arrival of the costly and uncommon Marconi is, then, a major event for the Mundys, bringing new voices, ideas and music into their lives. As might be expected from the national broadcaster of a post-independence Ireland, traditional Irish dance music and céilí forms a part of the programming.

But the radio also broadcasts an assortment of international songs: 'The Isle of Capri' made famous by Gracie Fields; the American big band number 'Dancing in the Dark'; Cole Porter's 'Anything Goes'.

As Brian Friel noted:

'It's music from a different culture that liberates [the Mundy sisters]. They haven't absorbed it into their life and into their culture and tamed it. It's still slightly exotic.'

In the exotic lies intrigue, but also threat. When the radio first arrives, Maggie jokingly attempts to recognize its power and magic by naming it Lugh, after the pagan god of harvest. Kate, the voice of Catholic rectitude in the household, forbids the plan, saying that it is 'sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god'.

Later, when the radio has (again) stopped working, she exclaims 'Peace, thanks be to God! D'you know what that thing has done? Killed all Christian conversation in this country.' The radio comes to symbolize the threat of paganism to Irish Catholic values, a central concern of the play.

CHANGE: Paganism and Christianity

Just as the radio is a partly foreign and potentially corrupting influence in the Mundy cottage, so the homecoming of Father Jack brings with it alien and challenging ideas and behaviour.

Jack, for years a source of great pride as Ballybeg's 'own leper priest', has transgressed his role in Ryanga and 'gone native'. He has come to accept and even embrace the traditional rituals and way of life which seem to work well for the Ryangan villagers. And within this acceptance is an implicit critique of the Catholic missionary model, an understanding that it would fail to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of the community of lepers.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Kate comes to reconcile her strict Catholic beliefs with her brother's behaviour by classifying it as 'his own distinctive search'. The rest of the community, however, is less forgiving. The local priest, who is also Kate's employer, sacks her from her job as schoolteacher, ostensibly because of falling class sizes, but in

reality as a punishment for Jack's renegade behaviour. In doing so he plunges the entire Mundy household into deepening poverty.

Father Jack's Ugandan experiences are not the only source of paganism in the play. At Lughnasa time, the back hill locals of Ballybeg practice a ceremony involving dancing, fire, and animal sacrifice, just like Jack's African rituals.

Maire MacNeill's book *The Festival of Lughnasa* explores Celtic and pre-Christian harvest rituals and how they continued in Ireland into modern times. While there is no evidence of goat sacrifice in the 20th century – as Rose dramatically describes – the practice of large groups gathered to sing and dance on hilltops is well documented.

Yet in the 1920s and 30s – the early years of the new Irish Free State – even such seemingly innocent and traditionally Celtic activities came to be frowned upon by an increasingly conservative church and state, and would not long survive into the century.

In the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin there is a remarkable collection of manuscripts from County Galway, part of a large scale project in 1937 and 1938 in which hundreds of school children wrote down the oral stories and remembrances of neighbours and relatives.

The accounts in the archive paint a picture of an entirely different world from the one we now know, a world where woolen charms were used to heal the sick and where leipreacháns could be tricked into giving up gold.

In one essay, a boy records the story of a local witch. When the priest rode out to her house to urge her to renounce her dark arts, she refused, and so he gave her a 'merciless flogging'. On leaving her house he found his horse dead. Knowing it was the fault of her magic, he went back inside and tried to strike a deal with her: if she would revive his horse, he would leave her in peace. She did so, and the priest never bothered her again.

Christianity is strongly present in these stories, but sometimes sits alongside or is seen in conflict with traditional Celtic or pagan ways.

The archive records the final decades of the old way of life in rural Ireland, before technology and industrialisation would change things forever.

DANCING

A boom of boots on stone

Perspectives on public dancing

Anxiety about the corrupting nature of public dances preoccupied the Irish clergy in the 1920s and 30s. Perceived as a catalyst for immoral behaviour, and often credited with the increase in illegitimate births, Catholic bishops pressed for the strict regulation of dances as a matter of national urgency.

The Public Dance Halls Act was passed by the Irish Government in 1935, requiring the licensing of all dancing venues and effectively bringing to an end the custom of crossroads (outdoor) and night dances.

The creation of the Act was an indication of the Church's significant influence on Irish policy making, and a sign that the new nation would be distinguished less by its Celtic traditions than by its conservative Roman Catholicism.

The following three accounts provide different perspectives on public dancing in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s.

Dal gCais (extract)

by Junior Crehan, 1977

The way of life at Markham's Cross and the country house dance was rooted in our traditions and culture. But this way of life was ended in the mid-1930s by a number of events; and while it is hard to say that it would have continued in the same way for much longer, it is safe to say that its end was quickened by those who, for different reasons, wanted to put an end to it.

In 1934 both Church and Government dealt a severe blow to country life. For a long time the Church had been against the country-house dance. They put forward many reasons for their attitude. They claimed that the house dances were places of misconduct, that there were no proper sanitary conditions and they seemed to be fearing greatly for our morals.

In 1934 [sic] the Dance Hall Act was passed. The Act banned the house dances and anybody holding such a dance after this was brought to Court and fined. The Dance Hall Act had closed our schools of tradition and left us a poorer people. In addition to this, in the 1940s, the rate of emigration increased rapidly. The youth saw nothing in their own country but poverty, and Government and Church collected their Dance-Hall dues from a falling population. The countryside was once more going through that terrible silence which it had suffered after the Famine, the silence of a departing people and a dying of music and song.

The Evils of Dancing (extract)

Statement of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland issued at their Meeting in Maynooth on 6 October, 1925

We have a word of entreaty, advice and instruction, to speak to our flocks on a very grave subject. There is danger of losing the name which the chivalrous honour of Irish boys and the Christian reserve of Irish maidens had won for Ireland. If our people part with the character that gave rise to that name, we lose with it much of our national strength, and still more of the high rank we have held in the Kingdom of Christ.

Purity is strength, and purity and faith go together. Both virtues are in danger these times, but purity is more directly assailed than faith. The danger comes from pictures and papers and drink. It comes more from the keeping of improper company than from any other cause; and there is no worse fomenter of this great evil than the dancing hall.

We know too well the fruits of these halls all over the country. It is nothing new, alas, to find Irish girls now and then brought to shame, and retiring to the refuge of institutions or the dens of great cities. But dancing halls, more especially, in the general uncontrol of recent years have deplorably aggravated the ruin of virtue due to ordinary human weakness. They have brought many a good, innocent girl into sin, shame and scandal, and set her unwary feet on the road that leads to perdition.

Given a few frivolous young people in a locality and a few careless parents, and the agents of the wicked one will come there to do the rest, once a dance is announced without proper control. They may lower or destroy the moral tone of the whole countryside.

Amusement is legitimate, though some of our people are over given to play. What, however, we condemn is sin and the dangerous occasions of sin. Wherever these exist, amusement is not legitimate. It does not deserve the name of amusement among Christians. It is the sport of the evil spirit for those who have no true self-respect.

To say nothing of the special danger of drink, imported dances of an evil kind, the surroundings of the dancing hall, withdrawal from the hall for intervals, and the dark ways home have been the destruction of virtue in every part of Ireland.

It is no small commendation of Irish dances that they cannot be danced for long hours. That, however, is not their chief merit, and, while it is no part of our business to condemn any decent dance, Irish dances are not to be put out of the place, that is their due, in any educational establishment under our care. They may not be the fashion in London or Paris. They should be the fashion in Ireland. Irish dances do not make degenerates.

The Dance Halls (extract)

by Flann O'Brien in *The Bell*, 1941

The dancing itself is of the most perfunctory order. If the hall is small and the crowd enormous (and this is the normal situation) the parties quickly lock themselves into a solid mass and keep shuffling and sweating for ten minutes in the space of a square foot, like a vast human centipede marking time. If the hall is roomy and the crowd small, the dancers shuffle about in great circles and can travel a considerable distance in the course of an evening. If a lad cycles 20 miles to a dance and 20 miles home and does another ten miles in the hall, he is clearly in earnest about his dancing.

Just as the success of a dear dance depends on the extraterritoriality of the band, no cheap dance can be said to have succeeded if the door of the hall can be readily opened from without after the first half-hour. The crowd inside must be so dense that an entire re-packing and re-arrangement of the patrons is necessary before even the blade of a knife could be inserted through the door. When you do enter, you find yourself in air of the kind that blurts out on you from an oven when you open it. All about you is an impenetrable blue tobacco haze that is sometimes charged with a palpable fine filth beaten up out of the floor. Whether standing or dancing, the patrons are all *i bhfastodh* (ie, 'in a clinch') on each other like cows in a cattle truck, exuding sweat in rivers and enjoying themselves immensely. Nobody is self-conscious about sweat. It rises profusely in invisible vapour from all and sundry and there is no guarantee that each cloud will condense on its true owner.

Irish dancing is a thing apart. There is perhaps one céilidhe held for every 20 dances. The foxtrot and the Fairy Reel are mutually repugnant and will not easily dwell under the same roof. Very few adherents of the 'ballroom' canon will have anything to do with a jig or a reel. Apart from the fact that the Irish dance is ruled out in most halls by considerations of space or perspiration, there is a real psychological obstacle. It is a very far cry from the multiple adhesion of enchanted country stomachs in a twilight of coloured bulbs to the impersonal free-for-all of a clattering reel. Irish dancing is emotionally cold, unromantic and always well-lighted.

Some district justices have a habit of taking leave of their senses at the annual licensing sessions. They want Irish dancing and plenty of it, even at the most monster 'gala dance.' They believe that Satan with all his guile is baffled by a four-hand reel and cannot make head or tail of the Rakes of Mallow. I do not think that there is any real ground for regarding Irish dancing as a sovereign spiritual and nationalistic prophylactic. If there is, heaven help the defenceless nations of other lands.

Pagan Offerings, The origins of the Lughnasa Festival

Largely taken from *The Festival of Lughnasa* by Maire MacNeill

Throughout the whole of Ireland and in parts of Great Britain and France, a festival celebrating the beginning of harvest was held every year in early August. In Ireland that festival was called Lughnasa after Lugh, the pagan god, who had once more provided the rich crops. (Lugh's counterpart was the Roman god Mercury, and the Greek god Hermes.)

Even as late as 1962, when Maire MacNeill first published her definitive study *The Festival of Lughnasa*, she claimed: 'We have found the survival of Lughnasa at 195 sites in Ireland ... Lughnasa was celebrated until recently on 95 heights and by ten lakes and five river banks.' Mountain tops were favourite sites for the festival, sometimes involving a journey that took hours. Wells, river banks and lakes were also chosen as sacred areas for the primal rites.

The festival varied from place to place and from generation to generation. The sacrifice of animals seems to have disappeared early in its evolution in Ireland, but many elements remained constant throughout the centuries. There was always a solemn first cutting of the corn or wheat which the head of the family or the chief man of the community would offer to Lugh.

'From the Hebrides,' MacNeill tells us, 'there is the impressive and detailed description of the father's ceremonial reaping of the first sheaf, his waving it thrice above his head, the chant said while doing so, in which a blessing is invoked, and protection sought from the ills which threaten the crops'. Also in Scotland, cakes for each member of the family were made from the hastily winnowed and ground grain; and in Ireland, where potatoes had taken the place of bread as the main food, a special meal from the first digging was eaten on La Lughnasa, the first day of the festival.

In return for these hill-top offerings, Lugh gave his people another kind of first-fruit, the small, dark blue bilberries growing wild on the hillside. No Lughnasa custom has been more lasting than the picking of bilberries; they were looked on as an earnest of the earth's fruitfulness and the bounty of the deity. It was important that everyone should eat them, and that some should be brought home to the old and the weak who were unable to climb the hill.

But in all the records and recollections of the Lughnasa festivities in Ireland, dancing is the most prominent and persistent element. In Kerry, for example, the best dancing couple was chosen on the hilltops of Drung Hill and Cnoc na dTobar. Lughnasa dancing competitions were held, too, on the Playback Mountain in County Leitrim, on the Blackstairs in Wexford, and on Slieve Bloom between Leix and Offaly. And at Ganiamore in County Donegal the prize for the best male dancer was his choice of bride from among all the female contestants.

The Lughnasa festival was so important in the lives of the people, and so involved with their notions of welfare, that Christianity had to adopt it or permit it to survive. 'It could

not crush it as it may have crushed observances at the other quarterly feasts,' MacNeill says. 'It succeeded in turning the most important assemblies into Christian devotions ... but in taking them over it took over inevitably some of the old stories, altered only in making a saint, not a god, the people's champion. If – as seems certain from our survey – it left a great number unconverted to Christian devotion, it succeeded in suppressing specifically pagan customs.'

Lilting, bilberries and bracelets: an oral account of Lughnasa from County Donegal

As I remember it, I heard people say that it was on the first Sunday of the month of Lughnasa they used to have a great day on the tops of the hills about here looking for bilberries. The Sunday was set out specially for the young people, to go off to the hills as soon as the mid-day was eaten, and they would not return again until twilight had fallen. Those nearer Beltany went to the top of that hill and in the same way people living near Carn Treuna went there. Indeed the young boys used to go whichever place their girls would be.

After reaching the top of the hill they would sit and eat their lunches. They used to bring flat cakes of oatmeal and milk for the day. Then they would go here and there over the hill looking for bilberries. Sometimes they would scatter in pairs – boys and girls – and other times they would go in groups.

When they returned from their gathering of bilberries they had a strange custom. They all sat down on the hill-top and the boys began to make bracelets of bilberries for the girls. They had brought short threads in their pockets for the purpose. Each man would then compete with another as to which would make the best and prettiest bracelet for his own girl. When that was done a man, or maybe a girl, would be named to sing a song. The melody would begin then and go round from one to another, and anyone who had a note of music at all in his head would have to keep the fun going.

After the singing they would begin the dancing. According to the old talk, they had no instrument for music at all; they had to make do with lilting. In those days boys and girls were good at lilting, and they would make enough music for those who were dancing.

When all was over then and they were preparing to go home, the girls would take off the bilberry bracelets and leave them on the hilltop. Whatever meaning there was to that, none of the old people were able to tell me, but they all knew it and they heard from their elders that it was customary for them to do that. They would all come down then and go home.

This oral account in 1942 from Gortahork, County Donegal, is in the archives of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin.

Industrialisation

The industrial revolution came late to Ireland. In the first phase of the revolution, beginning in England in the mid-1700s, the reason was logical: there was a scarcity of the necessary raw materials. The coal, iron, and other minerals required for fuel and manufacturing could be found in abundance in the North and Midlands of England and the lowlands of Scotland, but were not readily available in Ireland.

By the end of the 19th century, however, advances in commercial shipping and the creation of an Irish rail network offered the possibility of freeing up this direct dependency between the local availability of minerals and industrial production. Yet still almost the entire country remained agricultural.

The reasons for this lay in the part Ireland played in the larger economy of Britain. With huge portions of Irish land owned by English landlords, agriculture was a profitable business and an important source of imported food for mainland Britain. It was only Ulster – geographically well placed for links with Liverpool and Glasgow – that developed industries in shipyards and linen manufacturing.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the opening of the knitting factory in Donegal Town doesn't occur until 1936; almost 200 years after the birth of similar factories in England.

In 1930s Ireland, improvements in energy technology and in the transportation of materials and goods were making the rural industrialization of the country easier. But there was also a bigger political picture behind the developments. It was only after independence in 1922 that Ireland could begin a process of de-specialization, actively embracing the change from an essentially agricultural focus to a more diverse capitalist economy.

Attendant on change is loss, and in *Dancing at Lughnasa* this is poignantly charted by the collapse of the cottage knitting industry that had provided a living – albeit a meager one – for Agnes and Rose.

Summary

The opening of the textile factory in the play forms part of a complex of events which portray the Mundy's world at a moment of seismic change, a tipping point where the old is about to break irrevocably into the new.

At its broadest level, the play points to changes occurring across the whole of Europe: references to Mussolini and the Spanish Civil war highlight the rise of fascist dictatorships and the brewing clouds of the Second World War.

At home in Ireland, Maggie's parodic ditty 'Will you vote for De Valera, will you vote?' reminds us that Eamon De Valera's Fianna Fáil party will be up for re-election in 1937, and that the country is on the point of ratifying its new Constitution –criticised by

feminists and liberals for its restrictive articles on the role of women, the family and divorce.

In 1936, the political revolution of Irish independence has for the time being been won, and the conservative, Catholic-dominated social revolution will allow no room for heretical pagan beliefs or practices. Even social dancing falls under the moralistic thumb of clergy and state legislators.

The industrial revolution in the young Free State is just beginning, part of a wider insinuation of new technologies, as witnessed in the play: the knitting factory in Donegal, the cinema Rose loves, the car that Gerry arrives in, and the gramophones he sells.

But it is the radio which is the most potent symbol of change in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. With its mix of the traditionally Irish and the exotically international, the old and the new, its music is for the Mundy sisters both a source of liberation and a portent of massive change ahead.

Themes

- Change
 - Irish Government
 - New Constitution
 - The Public Dance Halls Act
 - Religion, Paganism to Christianity
 - Industrialization
 - Knitting factory
 - New Technology
 - Cinema
 - Automobile
 - Radios and gramophones
 - World Events
 - The coming of WWII
 - Nazi Germany
 - Spanish Revolution
- the role music played in society
- women's opportunities and rights, then and now
- freedoms in society
- family
 - Roles
 - Responsibilities
 - memories

Post Show Exercises and Discussion Topics

1. The radio brings traditional Celtic music and new music from Europe and America into the Mundy sister's home.

Why is the radio so important to the Mundy sisters? What does it represent in their lives and in Ireland in the 1930's?

Does music still impact us the same way now?

What bigger theme from the play does this address?

Explain how the radio comes to symbolize the threat of paganism to Irish Catholic values.

2. In the 1930's the people of Ballybeg, Ireland, according to Celtic tradition, collected on hilltops to sing and dance at special times of the year.

Why did the New Irish Free State, in accordance with the Catholic Church, frown upon this outdoor gathering of people and the dancing that occurred?

Should groups of people be allowed to gather to celebrate or protest or share information freely and without threat?

Do you think the government/church should have the right control public celebrations? If so, how much government control is needed or is appropriate?

Should sports fans be allowed to gather to watch sports?

Are there examples in Canadian history where the government or religion changed or condemned existing public celebrations? (ie. Pot Latch ceremonies)

3. When industrialization moved into Ireland people were employed in factories rather than working on the farms.

What were women's roles in the industrialization?

How did industrialization affect family life?

4. Technologies such as the knitting factory, the cinema, the automobile and the radio were introduced by the industrial revolution.

Explain how each these technologies changed people's lives.

Cast List

Alexa Carriere	Agnes Mundy
Larissa Sampson	Kate Mundy
Claire Pollack	Maggie Mundy
Shawnali	Ogle as Rose Mundy
Emily Zaporozan	Christina "Chris" Mundy
Joshua Martin	Michael Mundy
Jake Gillespie	Gerry Evan
Joshua Milad	Father Jack

Thank you to the Old Vic Theatre in London for allowing us to use material from their Play Guide of Dancing at Lughnasa in this educational resource.