

Derry Journal

The Playhouse celebrates two 'Field Days' with Stephen Rea

Actor and director Stephen Rea photographed during rehearsals with 'Farewell' playwright Claire Dwyer Hogg. Farewell opened at The Playhouse last night and runs until Saturday. (0412 Im 01)

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This week sees the much anticipated return of Field Day Theatre Company to The Playhouse.

The ground breaking production company will this week stage two plays - 'Farewell' by Clare Dwyer Hogg, and 'Half a Glass of Water,' by David Ireland. Directing both, is Hollywood star and Field Day founder Stephen Rea.

"I know I shouldn't say it but this work is at the very highest level," he enthused.

"From the first time I read the 'Farewell' script I thought that it was muscular, intense and moving. That has to be a given for me in any kind of writing. Field Day was always involved in language plays and that is still the case in this instance.

"These two writers have found the correct language for the circumstances we are in. These are two very different plays and two very good plays."

Field Day Theatre Company was established by Rea and Brian Friel in 1980. The company policy of encouraging political and social discourse within the cultural framework of the theatre soon won them fans and respect far beyond the Irish theatre circuit. That and of course, the many artistic merits of their output.

Rea recognises that this weeks offerings are a continuation of that Field Day tradition. "Yes I see it as that. I'm not a great believer in tradition for tradition's sake," he adds measuredly.

“We’re not in the Guildhall (originally home to the company) now, but we are in the Playhouse and it is a great venue. We are placing the first toe in the water for the City of Culture preparations and we’re confidently embarking on the work ahead.”

Those works are a chance for Stephen to return and rekindle his love affair with Derry. Having spent much of the 1980s in the city he says: “I’ve always loved Derry.

“It is strange to be back and strange to see Derry so quiet. Strange to see the growth, apparently the answer to the Troubles was commerce,” he adds with a wit, equal parts dry as incisive.

“It is a new time for Derry. When I was last here it was all hungerstrikes and helicopters but just because we don’t have those troops here it doesn’t mean we don’t have issues to address.”

Recalling a performance of Checkov’s ‘Three Sisters’ Stephen said: “The British Army helicopters flew over the Guildhall and drowned out our performance, no one could hear us. Those were very difficult times.”

With the 2013 celebrations almost upon us the cultural as well as perhaps the political landscape has changed completely from then.

Not that the ‘Brits’ or those helicopters adversely affected Rea’s career longterm. The star of ‘V for Vendetta’, ‘Michael Collins’, ‘The Butcher Boy’ and of course ‘The Crying Game’ has in fact directed both instalments of this Field Day double header.

“We needed to do it. Claire’s play (‘Half a Glass of Water’) didn’t seem as if it was going to be done. That is the most important thing about a first play - to get it done.”

Asked if he approaches the creative process differently as a director than as an actor, Rea admits: “I’m not a great person for directors.

“In terms of directing myself it means I have one less person to negotiate with. I don’t like the hierarchical structure of productions, I believe it is more of a circular creative process where everyone has an equal input. Everyone is free to contribute, no-one can claim ownership of it.”

The author of ‘Farewell’ Claire Dwyer Hogg, admits she is happy to hand ownership of her ‘baby’ over:

“It feels like a real privilege to just be having the play staged but to have people like Stephen involved is a little like a dream come true. It is a joy every day to watch them turn on the magic machine and turn my words into action.

“I don’t think they are easy plays as such there is plenty of food for thought in them.”

Field Day Theatre Company’s production of ‘Farewell’ by Clare Dwyer Hogg, and ‘Half a Glass of Water’ by David Ireland will run at The Playhouse until Saturday 8th December at 8pm each evening.

Tickets are priced at £20. To book contact The Playhouse on (028)71268027 or visit www.derryplayhouse.co.uk.