

Under Milk Wood

By Dylan Thomas

Theatre Royal Plymouth Lyric Theatre

Saturday 31st May 2014 2.30pm

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Sylvia and I am your audio describer for Act 1 which lasts for 47 minutes, after a fifteen minute interval my colleague Denise will be describing Act 2 which is 50 minutes

Welcome to this introduction of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. Clwyd Theatr Cymru's new production is directed by Terry Hands. This year marks the centenary of the author's birth and the 60th anniversary of the play's British premiere.

Dylan Thomas was born in 1914 in the uplands area of Swansea, the youngest of two children. His father was a senior English master at Swansea Grammar School where Dylan received his secondary education. On leaving school, with no major qualifications, he was a reporter on the South Wales Daily Post for some eighteen months. At the age of twenty he had his first collection of poetry -18 poems - published. Dylan was a prolific poet at this time and wrote at least twice as much poetry up to 1934 as in his remaining years, though he chose not to publish the greater part of it.

He soon moved to London where a bohemian literary life alternated with creative visits to Wales. In 1937 he married Caitlin Macnamara and the following year they moved to Camarthenshire for the first time. During the second world war he wrote scripts for the ministry of information films, before embarking on a successful career as a broadcaster on the newly formed BBC third programme. By now he had three children and was living in Oxford, but had a strong desire to return to Wales.

Under Milk Wood, with Dylan himself as first voice, and six other actors playing the 50 roles, received its first performance in the Poetry Centre, New York in 1953. The performance received a standing ovation and 14 curtain calls. This was a play that had created a magical world of words and images unsurpassed in Welsh dramatic literature and was undoubtedly the world's greatest radio play, it was Dylan's masterpiece. Six months later he sadly died a premature death in New York having never heard his play being performed.

Under Milk Wood is a play for voices, the voices of 50 of the inhabitants of a small Welsh town by the sea. The principle narrators are the first and second voices, who introduce the many other characters of this small community. There are eleven actors in total, all of whom are on stage for the entire duration of the play. Nine of them play constantly changing roles, switching backwards and forwards from one person to another, which will be very difficult to describe without talking over the dialogue, so description will be kept to a minimum.

The set, designed by Martyn Baynbridge, is a large circular raised platform some eighteen inches off the ground. It has two solid wooden ramps, the one on the left has a gradual incline leading to three steps, at the top a rocking chair and propped against the inner curve a set of wooden stairs. The right hand ramp reaches the same height but does not join the other, forming a horseshoe shape structure with a number of chairs in the central space. Behind, hung like a picture, a 3D relief depicting the woodland, town with fishing boats in the harbour of Llareggub. Subtle shades of blues and greens depict the sky and countryside with rows of brown box shaped houses. An orange sunburst sun traverses over the village as time passes from the first light of dawn through the long slow afternoon til nightfall.

There are no actual props, so everything is mimed by the actors with exaggerated movements, flamboyant gestures some of which are vulgar simulating sexual activities. Much of the laughter is in response to these movements and the contorted expressions on the actor's faces when taking on the part of some personalities.

THE CAST

FIRST VOICE played by Owen Teale, is dressed as Dylan would have been, in respectable trousers, polished brown shoes, a white shirt with a loosened reddish brown tie, light brown buttoned up waistcoat with a brown tweed jacket

SECOND VOICE played by Christian Patterson wears a narrow blue striped white shirt sleeves rolled back to the elbow loosened red tie, machine knitted navy sleeveless cardigan and dark brown corduroy trousers kept up by a thick brown belt and brown shoes

The rest of the male actors are all dressed in the same style of open neck shirts, rolled up sleeves, some with ill-fitting waistcoats, brown trousers of various shades held up with braces or thick leather belts. **Ifan Huw Dafydd** as Captain Cat and Mr Waldo has a bushy grey black beard and unkempt hair.

The women are dressed in fifties style shirt waister dresses, in plain kharki brown or pale green. Their long hair worn loose. Both men and women are bare foot.

As the audience take their seats the curtain is already up, the actors file in through the darkness and sit on the chairs or lie down upon the ramps; all except **FIRST VOICE**, who stands, his face spotlighted.

Welcome back everyone to Act Two of *Under Milk Wood*.

I am Denise your audio describer for Act Two which lasts for 50 minutes. I do hope you are enjoying this journey down to the little fishing village populated by sublime, eccentric and enchanting characters.

As with Act One the cast take on more than one character and there are no costume changes. As both First and Second Voice describe much of what is happening, or about to happen, I will provide limited additional description to avoid talking over the dialogue.

Act Two begins as The Narrator/First Voice claps and the lights come up on the same set with all the cast present. The bright orange sunburst sun is now at 12 noon on the large 3-D image of the fishing village which acts as the constant backdrop throughout the play.

First Voice tells the audience that they are now in Mrs Organ-Morgan's general shop where women gossip about the townspeople.

Their gossip reveals many tales including those of Willy Nilly and his wife, Mrs Dai Bread Two and Mrs Dai Bread One and a crystal ball, whilst Polly Garter sings about her past paramours.

Meanwhile Children play in the schoolyard and Gwennie urges the boys to "kiss her where she says or give her a penny".

During dinner, we see a glimpse of Lord Cut-Glass's insanity in his "kitchen full of time". Captain Cat dreams of his lost lover and Nogood Boyo fishes in the bay.

As night begins the citizens of Llareggub return to their dreams again.

So settle down to the final part of this enchanting production exploring the lives, hopes and thoughts in the dreams of a night and the rhythm of the day.
