

# A MAN of NO IMPORTANCE

Show Guide

# WELCOME

We're delighted to share this Show Guide for *A Man of No Importance*, which gives you a deeper look into this production.

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# A NOTE FROM JILL RAFSON

## CSC PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

*A Man of No Importance* premiered Off-Broadway 20 years ago – a number that doesn't seem quite big enough to express the societal shifts that have taken place in that time, particularly in the areas central to this piece.



Our story is set in 1960s Dublin, and yet many obstacles that were true for our hero Alfie Byrne, a closeted man seeking refuge in the theater, remained equally present when this tale originated on film in 1994 and when the musical was first seen in 2002.

It was not until 2015 that Ireland became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage by popular vote. And it took until 2017 for Queen Elizabeth II to pardon one of our story's central inspirations, Oscar Wilde, along with tens of thousands of other gay men convicted of "gross indecency" over the course of more than a century of the criminalization of homosexuality.

While great progress has been made in the intervening years, we are also watching this piece at a moment of great uncertainty. How does it feel to encounter *A Man of No Importance* today, with the specter of our own country retreating from some of the forward steps that have been gained? One can't help but wonder how Alfie would fare today, with his rights coming and going as power passes from one hand to the next.

I have to believe that Alfie would still find solace in the theater and in the beautiful community that theater creates. Whether onstage, backstage, or in the audience, theater invites us all into a circle together, asking us to take leaps of imagination, embrace a spirit of generosity, and sit in dialogue with art and with our neighbors.

No matter what happens in the world, live storytelling has always acted as a way of bringing us together, creating conversation about the questions of the day and offering new perspectives for us to consider. *A Man of No Importance* is not a new musical, but I do think we will watch it with new eyes today.

# PODCAST PREVIEW

## A CONVERSATION WITH STEPHEN FLAHERTY & LYNN AHRENS

On a recent episode of the CSC Podcast, Producing Artistic Associate Zuhdi Boueri and Director of Marketing & Communications Phil Haas spoke to composer Stephen Flaherty and lyricist Lynn Ahrens about *A Man of No Importance* and their extraordinary contributions to theater. Below is an excerpt from their chat. For the full interview, check out the CSC Podcast, now available on all streaming platforms.



Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens.

### PHIL HAAS

Can you talk about how the piece originally came together, and how you decided to take it on? It was a film first, right?

### STEPHEN FLAHERTY

Well, this is a response to the first piece that we had done with Terrence [McNally], which was *Ragtime*, and the experience of working on that was wonderful. And we had wanted to work with him again, and we realized that after *Ragtime* you cannot get larger... And he had come across a small independent British-financed film called *A Man of No Importance*... And it was about a man and his love for his theater, and a love for his friends. And he's a closeted gay man in '64 in Dublin. And all of those things sounded really interesting. So, we began to talk to Terrence about how this might be the basis of a stage musical. And that was the early days of how we began our discussions about it.

## **LYNN AHRENS**

It took almost a year, if not more than a year for us to actually figure out how to write the show, because... it was such a kitchen sink movie. You know, it was very simple, real; there was no fantasy. There were no overt moments of passion. Everyone in the movie is very withheld, and those are not musical characters, and that's not a musical situation. And it took a long time. And all of a sudden one day Terrence presented us with about maybe four pages of –

## **STEPHEN FLAHERTY**

...but this is like a year into it, a year of sweating before we got those pages...

## **LYNN AHRENS**

...he kept wanting us to do it and we couldn't figure it out. And finally he wrote a few pages and he invented the character of Oscar Wilde. And suddenly Alfie Byrne had someone to talk to. And it was like a key that unlocked the whole show and enabled us to find musical moments. And particularly for Alfie because he's such... a covered character, so withheld, but he can be himself with Oscar and his poetry.

...

## **ZUHDI BOUERI**

What was the social climate like when you started *A Man of No Importance* [in 2002] versus now as we bring it back for its first revival?

## STEPHEN FLAHERTY

It's like any piece that you write; it becomes a new piece when it's mirrored by the times. I had seen a production of the piece a number of years ago. And it was right when marriage rights for gay people were coming out. And there's a scene where Alfie's sister is talking about how he could never marry. And the audience was crackling because that was in the air, it was something that had not been a possibility that was about to be a possibility in our country.

## LYNN AHRENS

You know what, once people see it now, what could be more topical? Hello? Our rights are being peeled back now. And, you know I love to get the song, the tune first... And I remember this was the melody first and I found that line "you just have to love who you love," and it seemed as if it floated in through the window. And I felt like it had never been said before in a song, and I'm probably wrong about that. But to me it felt as fresh as a daisy, and that's the nugget of the show that I love the most. And I think that it will have a whole new resonance now.

## PHIL HAAS

It's so interesting because even a year, two years ago... I think it would've had a different resonance. Two years before that, you know, I think things have just changed so much.

## LYNN AHRENS

Absolutely. You know, now it's going to feel a little like a protest.



Listen to the full conversation on The CSC Podcast

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# TERRENCE McNALLY: A TIMELINE



Terrence McNally. Photo by Fred R. Conrad, *The New York Times*, 2014.

Described as the “Bard of the American Theater,” Terrence McNally redefined American playwriting for six decades and was the recipient of five Tony awards. Here is a timeline that features some moments of his life and career, including writing the book for *A Man of No importance*.”

**1938**

Terrence is born on November 3, 1938, in St. Petersburg, Florida, to Hubert Arthur and Dorothy Katharine (Rapp) McNally. After relocating several times, the McNally family ultimately settles in Corpus Christi, Texas. During his high school years in Corpus Christi, Terrence finds an early mentor in his English teacher Maurine McElroy. Mrs. McElroy recognizes his talents and encourages him to write.

**1956**

Terrence moves to New York City to attend Columbia University. After years of admiring and voraciously attending live theatre, Terrence begins putting pen to paper when he writes for Columbia’s annual “Varsity Show” alongside Edward Kleban. The show is directed by Michael P. Kahn.

**1957**

Terrence begins a romantic relationship with Edward Albee during which time Albee writes *The American Dream* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

**1961**

Nobel Prize-winning novelist John Steinbeck hires Terrence to tutor his two teenage sons while the Steinbeck family travels around the world.

**1965**

At age 25, Terrence’s first major play, *...And Things That Go Bump in the Night*, opens on Broadway at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre (formerly the Royale). One of the first of its kind, *Bump*’s honest and empathetic portrayal of an openly gay man is viciously panned by the critics. After the ticket prices are dropped to \$1, the remaining two weeks of performances play to sold-out houses, giving Terrence crucial time to learn from his audiences. Steinbeck notably writes Terrence a letter addressing his frustrations with the critical reception and encouraging him to keep writing, reminding him: “if you ain’t been throwed, you ain’t rode.”

**1966**

Terrence receives his first Guggenheim Fellowship. He receives his second in 1969.

**1967-  
1973**

Bruised but not broken, Terrence writes ferociously and prolifically. In this period, he pens several one-act plays: *Tour* (1967), *Botticelli* (1968), *Witness and Sweet Eros* (1968)—performed together—*Cuba Si!* (1968), *Bringing it All Back Home* (1970), and *Let it Bleed* (1972). Each of these plays explores themes of loneliness, political atrophy, paranoia, love, anger, existential dread and human connection—themes that will go on to become pillars of Terrence’s work.



## 1973

Terrence's one-act play *Whiskey* opens off-Broadway. This satirical indictment of consumer entertainment, told through five drunken performers (and their horse), showcases Terrence's ability to deftly balance comedy and tragedy.

## 1971

*Where Has Tommy Flowers Gone?* opens off-Broadway at the Eastside Playhouse featuring Sally Kirkland, Robert Drivas, and a young F. Murray Abraham—beginning a decades-long friendship and collaboration with Abraham.

## 1969

Terrence's lifelong love affair with his actors begins with *Next*, a sharp, provocative send-up of the Vietnam War and the U.S. Military draft. Written for actor James Coco and directed by Elaine May, *Next* is Terrence's first major critical and commercial success.

## 1968

*Noon* opens at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre (formerly known as the Henry Miller Theatre) as part of a trilogy of plays alongside Israel Horowitz's *Morning* and Leonard Melfi's *Night*. This marks a steady shift in critical reception, most specifically the acknowledgement of Terrence's unique ability to wed acerbic wit and farcical comedy.

## 1974

*Bad Habits* opens at Manhattan Theatre Club—marking the first of many collaborations with the institution—and eventually transfers to the Booth Theatre. The play is directed by Robert Drivas and features F. Murray Abraham and Doris Roberts. Roberts goes on to say that it is the play that put her on the map. It wins an Obie Award for Distinguished Play.



*The Ritz*, a subversive farce set in a gay bathhouse, opens at the Longacre Theatre. Starring F. Murray Abraham, Jerry Stiller and Rita Moreno, the play is a hit. It runs for 400 performances, and lands Rita Moreno a Tony Award for her iconic portrayal of Googie Gomez. *The Ritz* simultaneously shocks and thrills audiences, and goes on to

## 1975

become a "gay classic". Again, Terrence's portrayal of a gay man as a fully three-dimensional human being (in this case, the voice of reason), is considered seminal in the history of representation of gay characters in the theatre.

## 1976

*The Ritz* is the first of Terrence's plays to be adapted for the screen. Much of the original cast, including Abraham, Stiller, and Moreno, reprise their roles.

## 1978

*Broadway, Broadway* opens out of town in Philadelphia starring Geraldine Page. It closes soon after and Terrence takes time to revisit the text.

## 1981-2001

## 1982

Terrence serves as Vice President of the Dramatists Guild of America.

Terrence gets sober after a gentle and eye-opening conversation with Angela Lansbury.

## 1984

## 1985

Terrence collaborates with John Kander and Fred Ebb for the first time, writing the book for the Broadway musical *The Rink*, starring Chita Rivera and Liza Minnelli. This also begins a lifelong personal and professional relationship with Chita.

Never precious and ever a rigorous editor, Terrence rewrites *Broadway, Broadway* and renames the backstage comedy *It's Only A Play*. In 1985, *It's Only A Play* premieres off-Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club, directed by John Tillinger and starring Christine Baranski, Joanna Gleason, and James Coco.

## 1987

Terrence's enduring theme of the importance of connection finds perhaps its most profound expression in *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*.

## 1989

Originally starring Kathy Bates and F. Murray Abraham, *Frankie and Johnny* premieres at Manhattan Theatre Club before transferring to the Westside Theatre. In 1991, Terrence adapts the play into a film starring Michelle Pfeiffer, Al Pacino, and Nathan Lane, titled *Frankie and Johnny*.

*The Lisbon Traviata*—a darkly-comedic, vividly rendered ode to opera with a sinister twist—becomes an off-Broadway hit. Nathan Lane gives a legendary performance as Mendy, a passionate opera lover and a devoted disciple of Maria Callas. This marks the beginning of Terrence's lifelong collaboration and friendship with Lane.

## 1993

*A Perfect Ganesh*—a spiritual meditation on faith, prejudice, and loss—becomes a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The production, directed by John Tillinger and starring Frances Sternhagen, Zoe Caldwell, Dominic Cuskern, and Fisher Stevens, opens at Manhattan Theatre Club in the summer of 1993.

## 1993

Based on the Manuel Puig novel, the musical *Kiss of the Spider Woman* reunites Terrence with John Kander and Fred Ebb. At the center of the production is Chita Rivera's dazzling performance as Aurora. Featuring a queer character in the leading role, the show's sophisticated storytelling and serious themes break new ground in the world of musical theatre. Terrence wins his first Tony Award for his book.

## 1992

Terrence receives the title of Literary Lion from the New York Public Library.

## 1992

Terrence is one of the founding board members of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS.

## 1991

As Terrence grapples with the devastation of AIDS in America, he examines the effect of the pandemic on a community that has not been directly politicized: straight couples. This approach, which is both compassionate and unflinching in its cultural critique, leads to *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*. The play premieres at Manhattan Theatre Club starring Swoosie Kurtz, Anthony Heald, Nathan Lane and Christine Baranski and receives critical acclaim, as well as Drama Desk and Lucille Lortel Awards for Outstanding Play.

## 1990

Terrence wins an Emmy Award for writing *Andre's Mother*, which premieres on PBS's American Playhouse. Starring Richard Thompson and Sada Thompson, it depicts a mother who has lost her son to AIDS and, in her grief, struggles to come to terms with her son's sexuality. *Andre's Mother* is one of television's first attempts to deal with AIDS. This is part of a larger cycle of works addressing the human need to connect amidst the trauma of AIDS that includes: *The Lisbon Traviata*, *Frankie and Johnny*, *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*, *A Perfect Ganesh*, and *Love! Valour! Compassion!*

## 1995

Terrence's Chekhovian exploration of friendship and mortality, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* transfers to Broadway after a wildly successful run at Manhattan Theatre Club. Terrence's commitment to uplifting young talent leads him to Joe Mantello, who directs the production. It features many of the great McNally interpreters, including Nathan Lane, Anthony Heald, John Glover, Stephen Bogardus and John Benjamin Hickey. The play is celebrated for its ensemble of richly drawn gay men, and for its poignant response to the ongoing impact of AIDS. Terrence wins the Obie, Drama Desk, New York Drama Critics Circle and the 1995 Tony Award for Best Play.

## 1996

Terrence is inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame.

## 1998

Even after winning four Tony Awards in five years, Terrence refuses to play it safe and becomes the center of a national discussion on censorship in art with his play *Corpus Christi*, which compassionately reimagines Jesus and his apostles as gay men in Texas. Manhattan Theatre Club initially chooses to cancel their production after receiving massive blowback from conservative and religious groups. In the end, they reinstate *Corpus Christi* after many other playwrights threaten to withdraw their own plays from MTC's season. When the play is first performed in London, a fatwa is placed on Terrence by the "Defenders of the Messengers of Jesus."

## 1996

*Master Class*, an intimate portrait of legendary opera diva Maria Callas, opens on Broadway. From a deceptively simple premise, Terrence spins a profound and deeply moving meditation on the transformative power of art. The production features an indelible performance by Zoe Caldwell as Callas, and marks Terrence's first collaboration with Audra McDonald. Caldwell and McDonald both earn Tony Awards for their performances, and Terrence wins a consecutive Drama Desk Award, along with his third Tony Award—the 1996 Tony Award for Best Play. Since its premiere and publication, *Master Class's* musings on art, talent, and dedication have become a bedrock of values for the theatre community.

## 1997

*Ragtime*, a musical adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's novel, premieres at the Shubert Theatre. This marks Terrence's first collaboration with Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty as well as choreographer Graciela Daniele. It's also his first collaboration with life-long friends Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, and the second with Audra McDonald. Terrence wins his fourth Tony Award for his book, concluding a historic run of four Tony awards in just five years.

## 1998

In recognition of his contributions to the theatre, Terrence is awarded an honorary degree from the Juilliard School. He had previously revived the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at Juilliard with fellow playwright John Guare.

## 2002

Joe Mantello and Terrence collaborate again on the first Broadway production of *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, starring Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci.

*A Man of No Importance*, another Ahrens and Flaherty musical for which Terrence writes the book, premieres at Lincoln Center Theater under the direction of Joe Mantello. It goes on to win the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Musical.

## 2001

Terrence meets Tom Kirdahy, at the time an activist and public interest lawyer, at an event organized by Kirdahy.

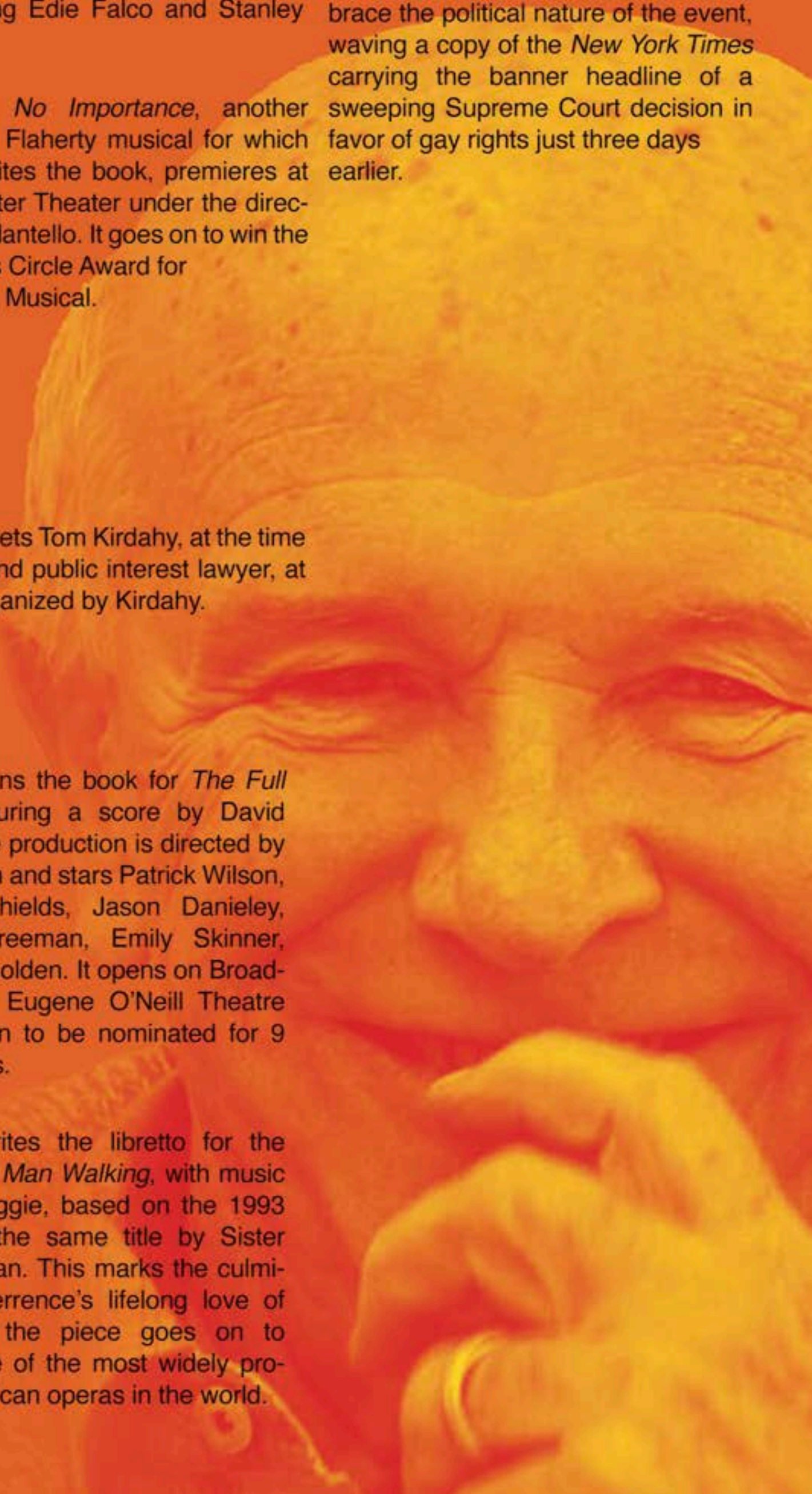
## 2000

Terrence pens the book for *The Full Monty*, featuring a score by David Yazbek. The production is directed by Jack O'Brien and stars Patrick Wilson, Andre DeShields, Jason Daniele, Kathleen Freeman, Emily Skinner, and Annie Golden. It opens on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre and goes on to be nominated for 9 Tony Awards.

Terrence writes the libretto for the opera *Dead Man Walking*, with music by Jake Heggie, based on the 1993 memoir of the same title by Sister Helen Prejean. This marks the culmination of Terrence's lifelong love of opera and the piece goes on to become one of the most widely produced American operas in the world.

## 2003

Terrence is invited to be the grand marshal of the NYC Pride Parade alongside Cherry Jones. They embrace the political nature of the event, waving a copy of the *New York Times* carrying the banner headline of a sweeping Supreme Court decision in favor of gay rights just three days earlier.



## 2003

Terrence enters into a civil union with Tom Kirdahy in Dover, VT.

## 2004

*The Stendhal Syndrome*, an erotic rumination on art and its effect on those who view it, premieres at Primary Stages. This is the inaugural production at 59 E 59 and proves to be a hit in the new space. The production is directed by Leonard Foglia and stars Richard Thomas and Isabella Rossellini.

## 2005

Lynn Ahrens, Stephen Flaherty, and Terrence collaborate again for *Chita Rivera: A Dancer's Life*, which premieres at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre after a run at the Old Globe. Graciela Daniele choreographs.

*Dedication or the Stuff of Dreams*, starring Nathan Lane and Marian Seldes, premieres at Primary Stages. The production breaks box office records.

## 2007

*Some Men* premieres off-Broadway at Second Stage Theatre, directed by Trip Cullman. This marks the first time a major New York play features a gay wedding ceremony.

Terrence's comedy *Deuce*—directed by Michael Blakemore and starring Marian Seldes and Angela Lansbury (in her first onstage performance in twenty years)—premieres at The Music Box Theatre.

## 2009

*Unusual Acts of Devotion* opens at La Jolla Playhouse and reunites Terrence with director Trip Cullman, as well as veteran McNally actors Doris Roberts and Richard Thomas.

2014

Terrence returns to the Schoenfeld Theatre with a revival of *It's Only a Play*, directed by Jack O'Brien and starring Nathan Lane, Matthew Broderick, Megan Mullally, Micah Stock, Stockard Channing, F. Murray Abraham, and Rupert Grint. The production is a smash hit, breaking the all-time box office record at the Schoenfeld Theatre.

*Mothers and Sons*, the Tony-nominated sequel to *Andre's Mother*, opens on Broadway. The play—which chronicles the seismic changes that have occurred in the lives of gay people in the last few decades—marks the first time a legally married gay couple appears on a Broadway stage. *Mothers and Sons* is directed by Sheryl Kaller and stars Tyne Daly, Frederick Weller, and Bobby Steggert.

2013

Terrence and Tom attend the historic Supreme Court hearings on the Defense of Marriage Act at the invitation of their friends, plaintiff Edie Windsor and attorney Roberta Kaplan.

2013

*And Away We Go*, an affectionate and expansive exploration of theatrical history, opens at the Pearl Theatre. The play is written specifically for the Pearl—which Terrence believes holds distinct cultural relevance within the theatre community—and is a poetic tribute to all theatre-makers. The production is directed by Jack Cummings III and stars Dominic Cuskern and Micah Stock, marking the first of several collaborations between Terrence and Stock.

2013

Terrence returns to his alma mater, Columbia University, to address the graduating class on their Class Day. His speech reflects on the changes in American gay life and social consciousness since his own graduation in 1960.

2011-  
2020

Terrence serves on the Board of Directors for the Dramatists Guild of America.

2011

Terrence collaborates with Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman on *Catch Me If You Can*, the musical adaptation of the 2002 movie of the same name. It opens at the Neil Simon Theatre and stars Norbert Leo Butz and Aaron Tveit. In Tveit's 2021 Tony Award acceptance speech, he thanks Terrence for taking a chance on him early in his career.

2011

Terrence receives the Dramatists Guild Lifetime Achievement Award.

2010

The Kennedy Center honors Terrence with *Terrence McNally's Nights at the Opera*, a staging of three of his opera-based plays—*The Lisbon Traviata*, *Master Class* (starring Tyne Daly as Callas), and *Golden Age*—simultaneously.

2010

After the District of Columbia declares gay marriage legal, Terrence and Tom marry under a cherry blossom in the shadow of the Kennedy Center. Their marriage makes national headlines.

## 2014

Terrence speaks at the annual AIDS Walk New York, which is the largest AIDS fundraising event in the world, having raised more than \$132 million for HIV programs and services in the tri-state area since 1986. In his speech, Terrence says, "I'm always startled when I'm asked why I chose to write about AIDS. There was no choice. An artist responds to their world and tries to make sense of it." He also mentions that he walks for Bobby Drivas and Gary Bonasorte—two partners who died from the disease.

## 2015

Terrence collaborates with Jake Heggie again, writing the libretto for the opera *Great Scott*. It premieres at the Winspear Opera House in Dallas, featuring renowned mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, a lifelong friend of Terrence's. Ruth Bader Ginsburg notably flies to Dallas to attend after being inspired by The Kennedy Center's *Terrence McNally's Night at the Opera*.

## 2017

Terrence works with Ahrens and Flaherty once again, writing the book for the Broadway musical *Anastasia*. The production opens at The Broadhurst Theatre directed by Darko Tresnjak and starring Christy Altomare, Derek Klena, Mary Beth Peil, Ramin Karimloo, Caroline O'Connor, and John Bolton. The musical goes on to be a global success.

## 2018

Terrence is inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, widely regarded as the highest recognition of artistic merit in the United States.

## 2015

Terrence receives the Lucille Lortel Lifetime Achievement Award.

After almost 15 years of development and several productions, *The Visit* opens at the Lyceum Theatre. In another collaboration with Kander and Ebb, Terrence writes the book for this rich, atmospheric musical of passionate revenge. *The Visit* is directed by John Doyle, choreographed by Graciela Daniele, and stars Chita Rivera and Roger Rees as tragic former lovers. It earns five Tony Award nominations.

To celebrate the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which makes gay marriage legal in all fifty states, Terrence and Tom renew their vows on the steps of New York's City Hall.

## 2016

The Lotos Club, one of the oldest literary clubs in the United States, honors Terrence at a State Dinner. Past State Dinner honorees include such luminaries as Gilbert and Sullivan, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Leonard Bernstein, Robert Frost, and Angela Lansbury.

## 2018

*Fire and Air* opens at Classic Stage Company, reuniting Terrence with John Doyle. The play features performances from Terrence's friends and expert McNally interpreters Marin Mazzie and John Glover as well as Douglas Hodge, Marsha Mason, James Cusati-Moyer, and Jay Armstrong-Johnson. *Fire and Air* is Marin Mazzie's final collaboration with Terrence and ultimately her final onstage performance.



## 2021

A New York Cultural Medallion in Terrence's honor is placed on the building where Terrence lived with Tom Kirdahy for 20 years.

Philadelphia Theatre Company renews its Terrence McNally New Play Award. Playwright Donja R. Love is the 2021 recipient of the award.

## 2021

At the 74th Tony Awards, Matthew López pays homage to Terrence, describing him as the “spiritual godfather” of his now Tony Award-winning play about intergenerational communion, *The Inheritance*.

## 2020

Terrence passes away at the age of 81.

## 2019

Terrence is hailed as “the bard of the American Theatre” by the *New York Times* and enjoys a respected place as a cultural icon and Greenwich Village mainstay.

Terrence's final play, *Immortal Longings*—an intensely poetic meditation on death, love, and creative ambition—receives its world premiere at the Zach Theatre in Austin,

## 2019

Terrence receives a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre.

Terrence receives an honorary doctorate from New York University.

The documentary *Terrence McNally: Every Act of Life* (dir. Jeff Kaufman), which explores Terrence's life and career, airs on PBS as part of its award-winning *American Masters* series. It is nominated for an Emmy.

Terrence receives an honorary doctorate from Chapman University.

Terrence celebrates his 25th production on Broadway with a revival of *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, directed by Arin Arbus (in her Broadway debut) and starring Audra McDonald and Michael Shannon. In 2020, *Frankie and Johnny* earns Tony Award nominations for Audra McDonald and for Best Revival of a Play.

## 2018

In honor of Terrence's 80th birthday, New York City Mayor de Blasio declares November 3rd “Terrence McNally Day.” The official proclamation praises McNally for having served “as a civil rights activist, championing marriage equality and tackling issues that impact the LGBTQ community and people with HIV/AIDS.”





**October 30, 2022**

*A Man of No Importance* opens at Classic Stage Company. The production is directed by CSC's departing Artistic Director John Doyle.

“And that is Wilde’s great achievement. To take the crude clay of real life and to transmute it into art.”

- *A Man of No Importance*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING WILDE: A LOOK INTO THIS CLASSIC WRITER’S LIFE

*A Man of No Importance* is a musical that tackles the challenge of acceptance, the possibility of hope, and the joy of witty poetry. The protagonist, Alfie Byrne, is a bus conductor and amateur theater director who dares to put on a production of *Salome* in his conservative Irish town, despite condemnation from a local church. *Salome*, a biblically-inspired play written by Oscar Wilde during his time in Paris, was itself similarly attacked upon its premiere in 1891.

So what draws Alfie to the long-gone Wilde? A look into the legacy of Wilde illuminates deep connections between the two.



Illustration of Oscar Wilde published in *The Evening Herald* (Dublin), 1895

Born in Dublin, Ireland on October 16, 1854, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde's path to fame was already paved significantly by his parents, William and Jane Wilde, who were independently prominent in Dublin society. His mother was a particularly major influence on young Oscar. As he grew older, Jane started what would become an iconic cultural event called Speranza's Saturdays. She invited poets, novelists, singers, musicians, and other artists of the moment to discuss art and the state of Ireland, all who profoundly inspired her son as he embarked on one of the most infamous artistic journeys in Western history.

Wilde received an elite education, most famously at Trinity College, and later with a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford. During his studies, he was inspired by The Aesthetic Movement, which coined the phrase "Art for art's sake."



Photo of Oscar Wilde by Napoleon Saron, 1882

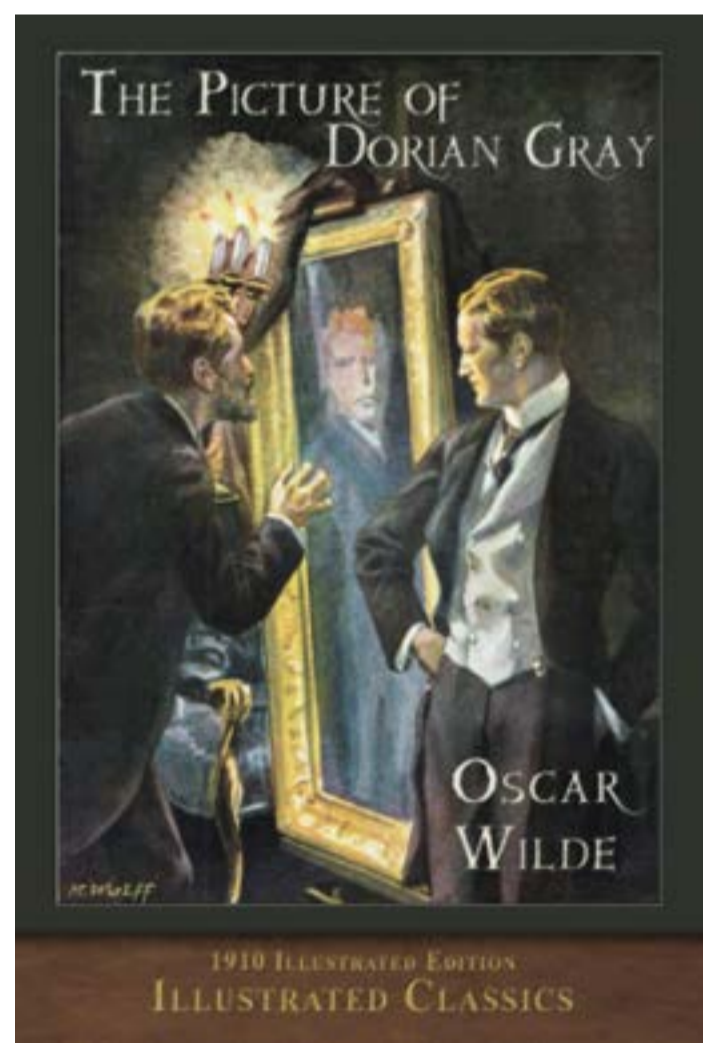
Wilde embodied this idea both inwardly and outwardly. His knee-length britches and white silk stockings became staples, as did his fondness for any extremely out-of-date clothing, including the kind of gold amulets favored by the brightly dressed 17th-century royal Prince Rupert.

In the book *Libertine Fashion*, Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas write, "[Wilde] had a dream, he said, in which a ghostly personage appeared in a coat of a shape and color that somehow reminded him of a violin. On waking, he hastily sketched out what he had seen and brought the drawing to his tailor. The coat was cut to meet the dream specifications: in some lights it looked bronze, in others red, and the back of it resembled a violin." He would also cover his hands in colorful rings, which, according to him, was a way of "paying homage to the eighteenth-century dandies."

To Wilde, aestheticism was not just a modern artistic perspective; it was a way of life. To further promote himself and aestheticism globally, Wilde went on an American lecture tour, beginning in New York City in January of 1882. American reporters were so eager to get the first quote from the eccentric-looking Irishman that many of them hopped on a launch boat to greet Wilde before his ship, the *Arizona*, was even able to fully dock. After a reporter asked, "What do you declare?" Oscar Wilde allegedly replied, "I have nothing to declare but my genius."

In 1884, Wilde married an Irish writer, Constance Lloyd, with whom he had two boys, Cyril and Vyvyan. And while the couple publicly became a sensational literary duo, Wilde was involved in a secret affair with Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas. Bosie, a poet in his own right, was Wilde's muse through the most consequential decade of his life.

In that time, Wilde wrote his most widely celebrated works, including *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), his only novel, which tells the story of a man's obsession with youth and beauty. Then came Wilde's drawing room plays. His first West End production was *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), followed by *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and finally, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), described by some as Oscar Wilde's comic masterpiece, which continues to carry the same wit since opening over a century ago.



The cover for the 1910 edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Illustrations by Eugene Dete and Paul Thiriat.

At the height of *Earnest's* success in 1895, Wilde's life took a shocking turn. Bosie's well-connected father, the Marquess of Queensbury, physically assaulted his son in a crowded street for his relationship with Wilde. Soon after the public spectacle, the Marquess of Queensbury left a card at Oscar Wilde's Club that read "For Oscar Wilde, posing Somdomite [sic]." In response, and at Bosie's request, Wilde decided to sue the Marquess for defamation and take him to court, which was a significant mistake. In what became a legendary courtroom drama, Wilde was unexpectedly presented with evidence of "gross indecency" against him for same-sex relations, was found guilty by a jury, and sentenced to two years of hard labor in prison. Constance Wilde immediately took their two children, fled Ireland, and changed their last names to Holland in an attempt to save her inheritance.



The front page of *Illustrated Police News*, 1895

Once released from prison in 1897, a bankrupt Oscar Wilde would receive a small annual check from Constance. She believed Wilde might return to her one day, but it was never to be.

Wilde began using an alias, Sebastian Melmoth, and wrote pieces about prison and ways to reform it. His close friend and ex-lover, Robert Ross, became one of Wilde's only allies. They wrote to each other often, with one infamous letter from Wilde expressing the outrage he felt towards Bosie in a 50,000 word manifesto dubbed "De Profundis," meaning "from the depths" in Latin.

Wilde later admitted to missing Bosie and asked to see him. Soon after their reunion, Bosie and Wilde moved to Naples and rented an apartment together in September of 1897, despite bitter objections from friends and family. In November of that same year, threats from Constance and Bosie's family to financially cut them off became too much of a risk. Bosie decided to leave Naples and return home. Wilde decided to move to France alone in 1898, where he published his final work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

Wilde became ill and died of meningitis at the age of 46 on November 30, 1900, in Paris with Robert Ross by his side. There were immediate efforts by many to minimize Wilde's contributions to art and society in response to what was revealed at his trial. Constance's family worked to destroy as much as they could of Wilde's belongings and reputation.

The press wasn't eager to celebrate his legacy either. That December, a British newspaper, *Cannock Chase Courier*, wrote, "The melancholy end to a career, which once promised so well, is stated to have come in an obscure hotel of the Latin Quarter. Here the once brilliant man of letters was living, exiled from his country and from the society of his countrymen. The verdict that a jury passed upon his conduct at the Old Bailey in May, 1895, destroyed forever his reputation, and condemned him to ignorable obscurity for the remainder of his days."



Actors in The Lyric Hammersmith Theater's revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Photo published in *The British Newspaper Archive*, 1930.

It wasn't until 1930 that Wilde would be given a second chance, when the Lyric Hammersmith Theater in London produced a revival of his seminal *Earnest*. In the press, there would be no mention of Wilde's trial, his troubled ending, or his sexuality. Instead, his wit and charming humor were put

front and center again. Ever since, his reputation blossomed anew, and Oscar Wilde would eventually become one of the most remembered artists of all time, inspiring the Alfies of the world to continue the fight towards a more accepting society – all while passionately celebrating the power of art, beauty, and love.

# SYNOPSIS OF SALOME

In *A Man of No Importance*, The St. Imelda's Players are putting on a production of Oscar Wilde's biblically-inspired play, *Salome*. Here's some background on the play.



**"Salome receives the head of John the Baptist" by Bernardino Scapi (1525)**

*Salome* was written entirely in French during a visit to Paris in 1891. The play centers around a young woman named Salome, the stepdaughter to King Herod.

During a drunken ball thrown by King Herod and her mother, Queen Herodias, Salome escapes to the terrace where the captain of the guard sees her and is hypnotized by her beauty. Salome is not interested and warns him not to stare, but he cannot resist.

While on the terrace, Salome hears the voice of Jokanaan (John the Baptist) and immediately falls madly in love with him. To Salome's surprise, Jokanaan does not return her affections. She promises that she will kiss him despite his rejection. Meanwhile, the guard, devastated that Salome doesn't love him, ends his own life.





**"The Dance of Salome" by Benozzo Gozzoli (1461-62)**

King Herod also falls in love with Salome, despite Queen Herodias' warnings. He desperately wishes to see her perform the Dance of the Seven Veils. After convincing Salome that he will give her anything she wants in exchange for the dance, she finally agrees.

Following the dance, she unexpectedly demands the head of Jokanaan, and the king orders the beheading. Once Jokanaan has been executed, Salome blames Jokanaan for driving her to madness. She holds his decapitated head and kisses Jokanaan's lips, finally getting her wish.

# WHO WROTE IT? OSCAR WILDE OR TERRENCE McNALLY

Below are seven lines that characters have said in works by Terrence McNally and Oscar Wilde – two masters of wit working about a century apart from one other. Can you guess which author wrote which words? The answers are below.



Portrait of Oscar Wilde  
by Napoleon Sarony (1882)



Terrence McNally

## WILDE OR McNALLY?

“I just want to act like Saturday night really is a Saturday night.”

“I never approve, or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd attitude to take toward life.”

“I’m not surprised you don’t like opera. People like you don’t like life.”

“I chose to make the world a more beautiful place. It’s a noble calling that requires ignoble means to succeed.”

“I don’t actually know who I am by birth. I was... well, I was found.”

“I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love.”

“I am obsessed with who people really are. They don’t tell us, so I must know their secrets.”

### Answers:

- 1) Terrence McNally, from *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*
- 2) Oscar Wilde, from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- 3) Terrence McNally, from *The Lisbon Traviata*
- 4) Terrence McNally, from *Fire and Air*
- 5) Oscar Wilde, from *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- 6) Oscar Wilde, from *An Ideal Husband*
- 7) Terrence McNally, from *Love! Valour! Compassion!*

"Ah, you come out with me  
And you'll see what you're missin' in life  
On the streets of Dublin!"

- "The Streets of Dublin," *A Man of No Importance*

## THE SETTING



The Streets of Dublin. Photo by Harrison Forman, 1964

**WHERE** Dublin, Ireland

**WHEN** March 1964

**WHO** The characters of the play include:

## THE BYRNE FAMILY



**Alfie Byrne**

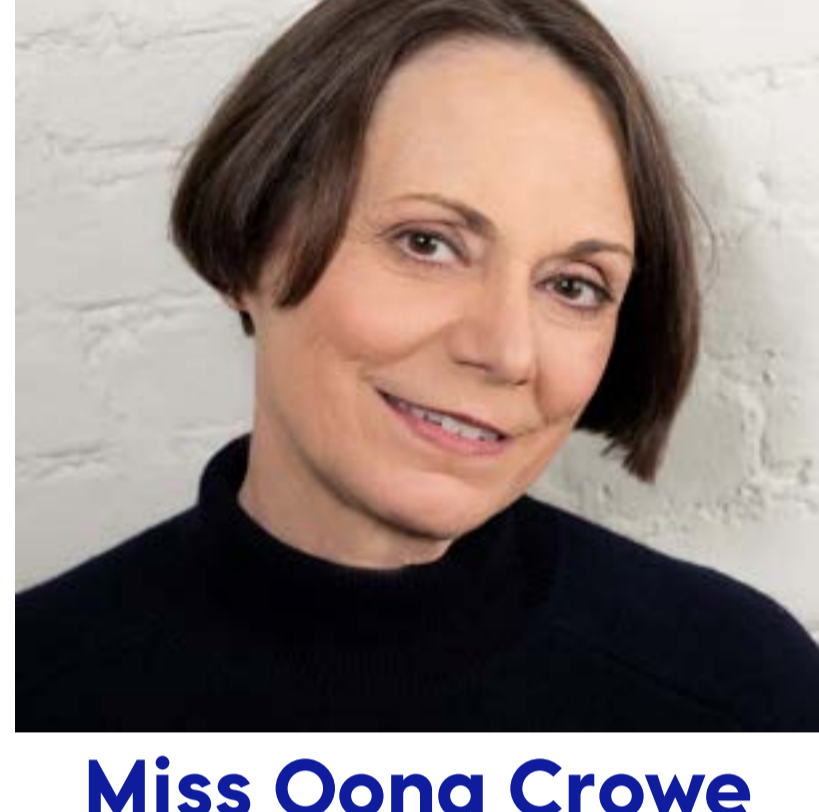
A bus conductor and the director of The St. Imelda's Players



**Lily Byrne**

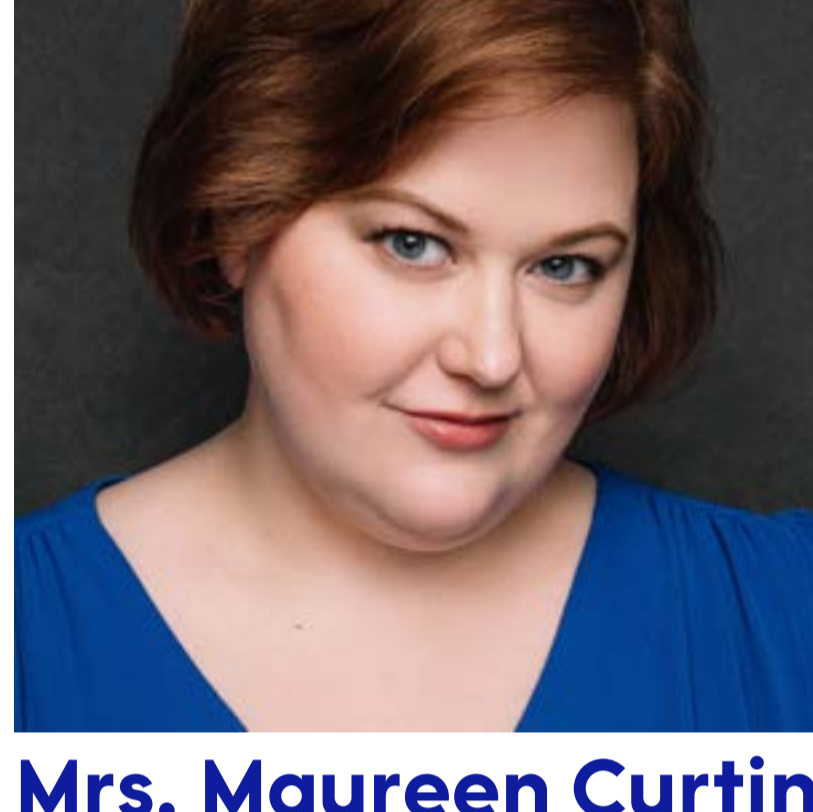
A devout Catholic and Alfie's older sister

## THE ST. IMELDA'S PLAYERS



**Miss Oona Crowe**

A seasoned actor and costume designer



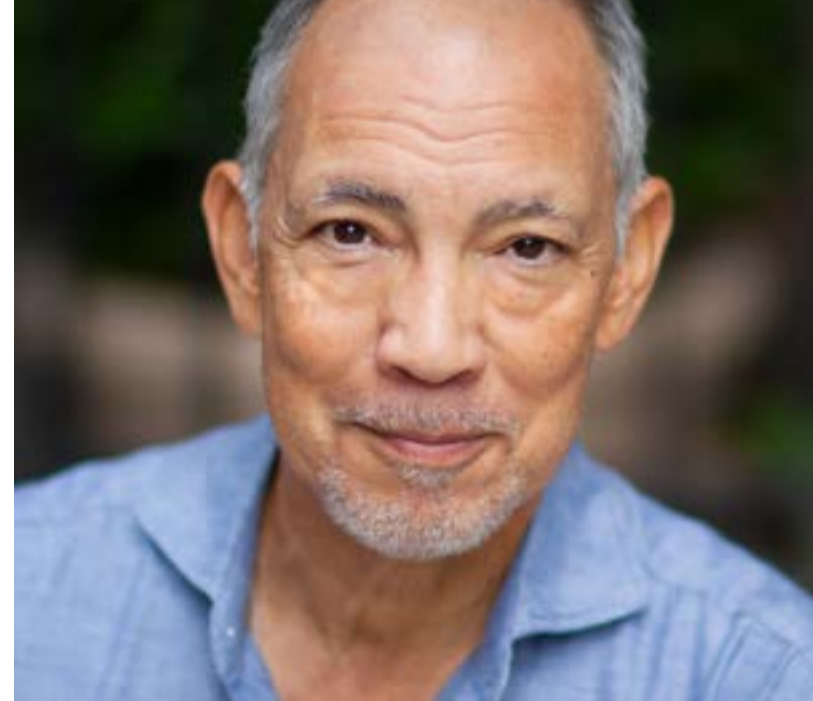
**Mrs. Maureen Curtin**

A former child star and choreographer



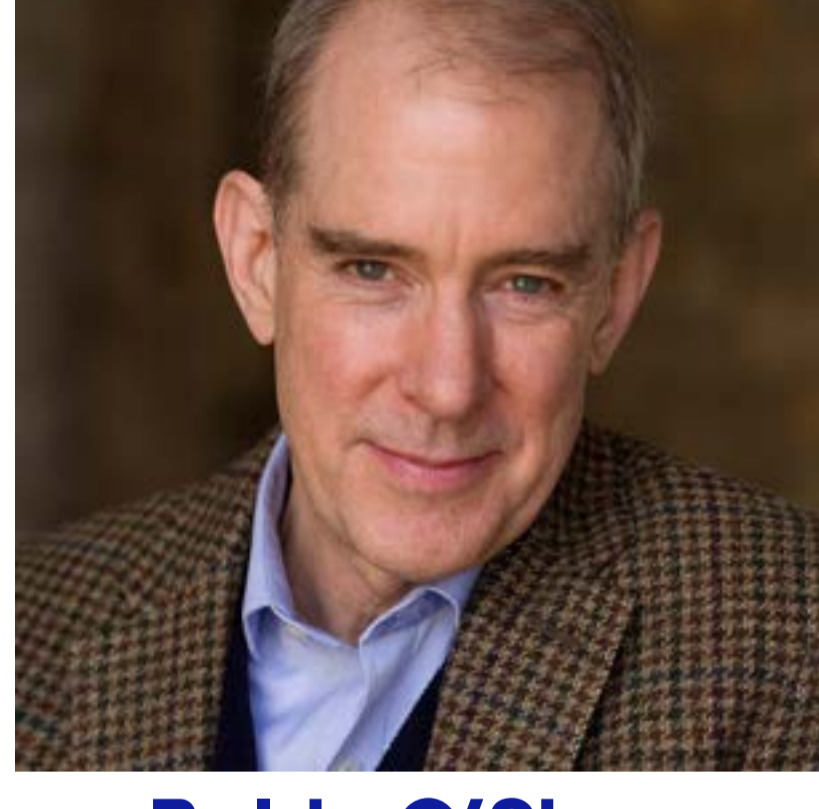
**Mrs. Margaret Grace**

The grande dame and a visual artist



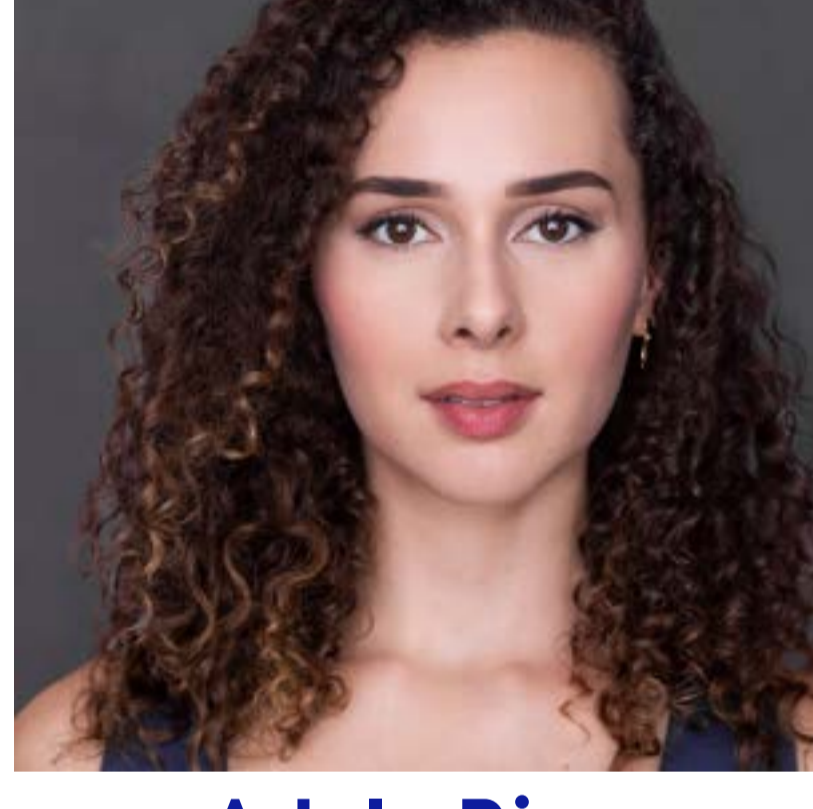
**Mr. William Carney**

The leading man and the local butcher



**Baldy O'Shea**

The stage manager



**Adele Rice**

The newcomer



**Ernie Lally**

An actor and props master



**Mrs. Patrick**

A congregant and housewife

## ON THE STREETS OF DUBLIN



**Breton Beret**

A bar patron



**Robbie Fay**

Alfie's close friend and colleague



**Father Kenny**

The priest of the local parish

# THE WORLD OF THE PLAY



Dublin, 1964. Photo by Richard Tilbrook.

## ALFIE BYRNE'S DUBLIN

In March 1964, Alfie, a single man in his 40s, collects fares and issues tickets as the conductor of a Dublin motorbus. To brighten his day and his riders' commutes, he reads poetry aloud, especially work by the iconic Irish writer Oscar Wilde.

Alfie shares a small apartment with his older sister Lily, an unmarried woman who is engaged to Carney, the butcher next door. Carney is not just a butcher, though – he is an enthusiastic amateur actor and a leader at the Sodality, a Roman Catholic association and community moral authority.

Alfie's Ireland centers conservative values and viewpoints. Abortion and contraception are both illegal, and so is homosexuality ("the love that dare not speak its name").

Alfie works diligently to live within the narrow, socially-acceptable confines of life, traveling the same route every day, keeping his true identity secret in order to survive. The St. Imelda's Players, the theater troupe he founded and leads as artistic director, provides him with a key outlet for his passion.

# IN MARCH 1964 IN DUBLIN, IRELAND...

## POPULATION



709,000 people

## BUS FLEET



Approximately 800 buses

## PREDOMINANT RELIGION



Catholic (nearly 95%)

## TOP SONGS



"Needles and Pins"  
The Searchers



"Anyone Who  
Had a Heart"  
Cilla Black



"Bits and Pieces"  
The Dave Clark Five



"I Love You Because"  
Jim Reeves

What were Americans  
listening to in March 1964?

"She Loves You" and  
"I Want to Hold Your Hand,"  
both by The Beatles.



### Did you know?

Out of the 26 top singles on the 1964 Irish Singles Chart, 6 slots were held by Irish acts: Dickie Rock (twice), Eileen Reid, Brendan Bowyer, The Bachelors, and Butch Moore. While the U.S. charts clearly favored rock and roll, Irish showbands offered more diverse fare, playing pop and country numbers as well.



Dublin Bus, 1960

## THE DUBLIN TRANSIT SYSTEM

Public transportation in Ireland began with horse-drawn omnibuses. First invented in France in the 1600s and limited to the aristocracy for the next two centuries, omnibus usage expanded massively in the early 1800s and found its way to Dublin in 1836. Unlike private horse-drawn carriages, omnibuses picked up paying passengers across the city and dropped them off by request along fixed routes.

The Tramways (Ireland) Act of 1860 first legalized trams on public country roads and was extended to permit trams in Dublin in 1872. Over the next decade, routes extended across the city. Beginning in 1896, Dublin trams were electrified, but they still did not serve every neighborhood – especially new developments. Enter the motor bus.

The first buses were not sleek and comfortable like the buses of today. They were small, seating just 14 passengers, and were powered by petrol engines. The bus industry was new and unregulated; manufacturers were constantly experimenting, and bus types cycled in and out of service as technology developed and passenger needs were better understood.

The first double deckers arrived in 1937 and came to dominate the Dublin bus fleet because they could serve more passengers simultaneously, maximizing both profit and efficiency. By 1964, less than 1/8 of buses in the fleet were single deckers.

In the mid-1960s, changes in bus design favoring front-entry would lead to the elimination of the need for a conductor, since operators could both drive and oversee the fare collection process.

**“Mass transit is the antidote to climate change.”**

**- New York MTA Chairman and CEO Janno Lieber**

Today, Ireland joins the rest of the environmentally-conscious world in racing to create a zero-emission bus fleet. In 2021, they were proud to introduce three hydrogen-fueled buses to their line.

Meanwhile, the NYC MTA currently operates a 6,000-bus fleet, of which 1,300 buses are hybrid gas-electric, and less than 100 are all-electric. If you'd like to ride one of the new electric-powered buses, hop the M14 crosstown bus one block north of CSC at Union Square.



Gay Pride March in Ireland, 1983. Photo by Thomas A. O'Shea, courtesy Irish Queer Archive/National Library of Ireland.

## LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS IN IRELAND

Homosexuality in Ireland was formally criminalized under British colonization with the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act, a Victorian-era British law punishing men convicted of participating in same-sex sexual relationships with hard labor and life imprisonment.

Queen Victoria authorized the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. The law was sometimes called the "Labouchere Amendment" because its greatest advocate was journalist and politician Henry Du Pré Labouchere, a staunch opponent of homosexuality. Punishment was particularly important to Labouchere, who advocated for Section 11, which sentenced "sodomites" to up to two years' hard labor. (Labouchere, in fact, advocated for seven years' hard labor but was overruled.) The act did not specify exactly which homosexual acts were prohibited, and it was often used for blackmail, earning the nickname "The Blackmailer's Charter."

Of note: the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, Section 11 only criminalized same-sex relationships between men. Some sources state that this was because Queen Victoria did not believe women participated in same-sex relationships. In 1921, a proposal in Parliament to specifically name lesbianism as a misdemeanor was ultimately tabled due to false concerns that doing so might inadvertently awaken more women to the world of same-sex relationships.

It was the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, Section 11 that led to Oscar Wilde's imprisonment. Following two years of hard labor, Wilde was released and spoke of the needed path to repeal the discriminatory law as a "road long and red with monstrous martyrdoms."

Members of the Irish LGBTQIA+ community fought for equality for generations. Assuming Alfie lived into his 60s, he would have seen visible progress for the first time in the 1980s, although it came at a high cost. In September 1982, Declan Flynn, a gay man, was killed in Dublin's Fairview Park, where gay men were known to gather. His murderers were found guilty in court yet allowed to walk free by a sympathetic judge. This verdict led to Ireland's first Pride in March 1983, which brought attention to violence against the queer community in Ireland.



Homosexuality was not decriminalized in Ireland until 1993, following Irish scholar and Senator David Norris's 14-year battle for equal rights. This ruling was ultimately made not by the Irish High Court or the Supreme Court, which both upheld the constitutionality of criminalization of homosexuality, but by the European Court of Human Rights, which argued that criminalization of same-sex sexual activity violated the individual right to privacy as set forth in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

**"I wanted full civil and human rights for gay people. I was outraged by the existence of the criminal law: I thought it was indefensible."**

**- Irish Senator David Norris, 1988**

In 2007, Ireland was also found to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights due to its lack of legal recognition of transgender identities. As a result, the Gender Recognition Advisory Group was established.

In 2015, Ireland was the first country to legalize gay marriage by popular vote after 62% of Irish voters affirmed it in a referendum. Irish deputy prime minister Joan Burton celebrated by quoting Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in U.S. history: "Hope will never be silent." The same year, Ireland passed the Gender Recognition Act of 2015, which allows citizens aged 16 and up to apply to legally change their gender.

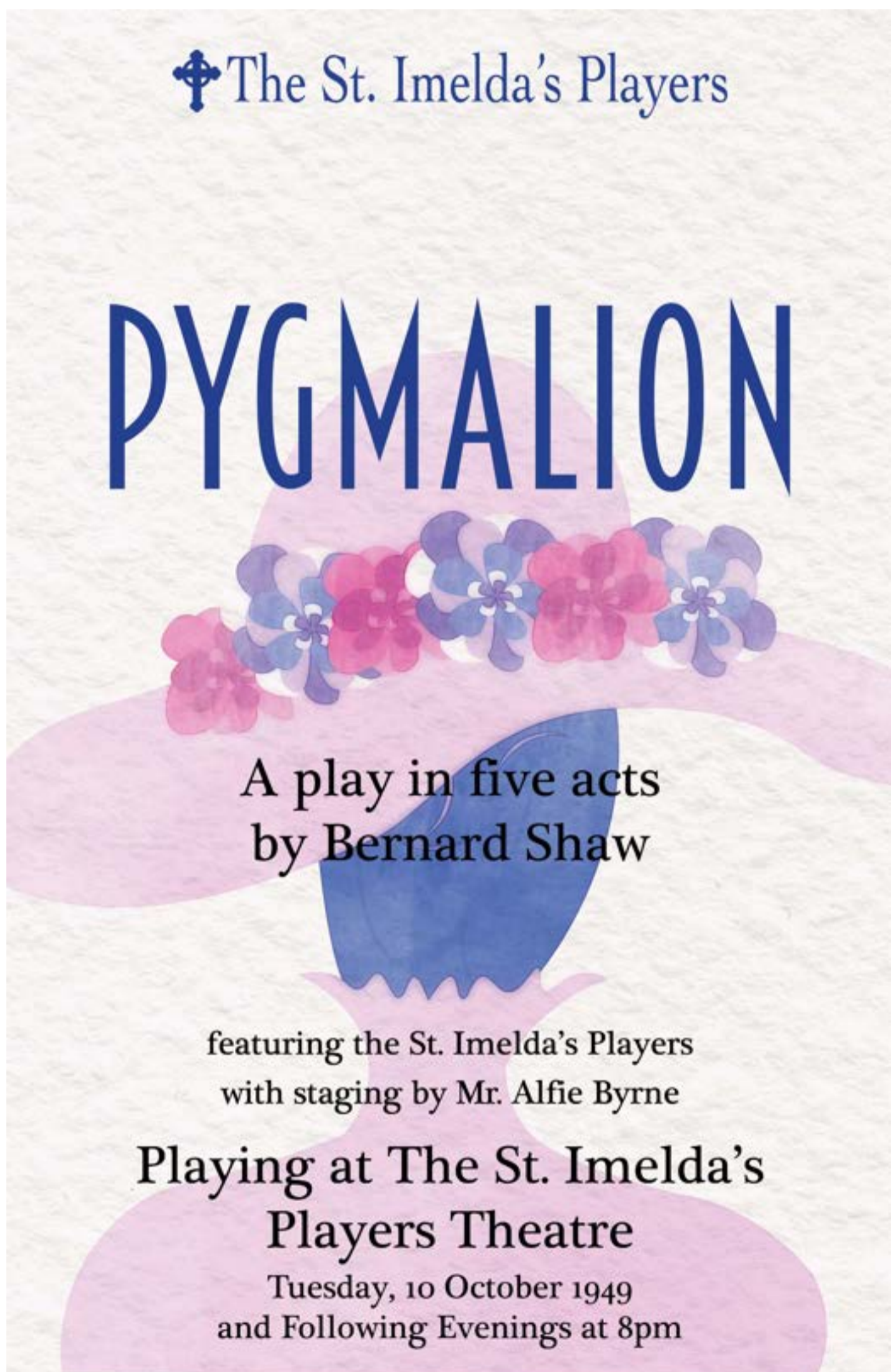
In 2017, Queen Elizabeth II pardoned Wilde and 75,000 other gay men convicted under Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. The same year, Leo Vradkar became Ireland's first openly gay Prime Minister. In April 2021, anti-gay teaching materials were finally removed from Irish schools.

“In creating a poster for this production, I did not want to do the obvious.”

- Mrs. Margaret Grace, The St. Imelda's Players in-house poster designer

# POSTERS FROM THE ST. IMELDA'S PLAYERS ARCHIVES

CSC Digital Marketing Associate, Rachael Langton imagined what the past posters of the St. Imelda's Players may have looked like from their inaugural production of *Pygmalion* to their latest production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



## PYGMALION

For the St. Imelda's Players inaugural Production, Mrs. Margaret Grace highlighted her watercoloring skills by painting the famous hat Eliza Doolittle wears to the races.

✠ The St. Imelda's Players

# Peter Pan



by J. M. Barrie  
featuring the St. Imelda's Players  
with staging by Mr. Alfie Byrne

Playing at The St. Imelda's  
Players Theatre

Tuesday, 12 May 1953  
and Following Evenings at 8pm

## PETER PAN

To highlight the whimsical spirit of Mrs. Oona Crowe's performance as Peter Pan, Mrs. Margaret Grace created a poster of whimsy, featuring Peter Pan's hat and multiple stars. If you look closely at the second star to the right, you may see Mr. William Carney as Captain Hook fighting Peter Pan in Neverland.

✠ The St. Imelda's Players



# HAMLET

by William Shakespeare  
featuring the St. Imelda's Players  
with staging by Mr. Alfie Byrne

Playing at The St. Imelda's  
Players Theatre

Tuesday, 23 August 1955  
and Following Evenings at 8pm

## HAMLET

For this iconic Shakespeare tragedy, Mrs. Margaret Grace heightened the drama (while minimizing the printing budget) in this daring monotoned rendition of Yorick's skull.

✠ The St. Imelda's Players

A  
*Midsummer  
Night's Dream*

by William Shakespeare

featuring the St. Imelda's Players  
with staging by Mr. Alfie Byrne

Playing at The St. Imelda's  
Players Theatre

Tuesday, 20 September 1960  
and Following Evenings at 8pm

## **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**

This spritely poster features the Queen of the fairies (who was played by Mrs. Margaret Grace, herself) watching over the production behind a vibrant watercolor sunset.

✠ The St. Imelda's Players

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

BY OSCAR WILDE

PLAYING AT  
THE ST. IMELDA'S  
PLAYERS THEATRE



TUESDAY,  
15 MAY 1962  
AND FOLLOWING  
EVENINGS AT 8PM

FEATURING  
THE ST. IMELDA'S  
PLAYERS  
IN A CHARMING  
PLAY IN THREE ACTS!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The latest production poster was not designed by Mrs. Margaret Grace, as she was on a temporary leave of absence due to her husband's condition. Therefore, Mr. James Michael "Baldy" O'Shea stepped in and created this title treatment, featuring block letters and a top hat.

# EDUCATION SECTION

## FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

This section was developed by CSC Education Manager Marella Martin Koch to help students and teachers prepare to see *A Man of No Importance*. Feel free to share this section with your students.

This section contains spoilers!

# SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY



Jim Parsons as Alfie Byrne in *A Man of No Importance*.  
Photo by Julieta Cervantes.

Alfie Byrne, a middle-aged Dublin bus conductor and theater director, is preparing to clear out of the church where he and his amateur theatrical group, the St. Imelda's Players, have produced a series of plays over the years. Alfie and the company are being kicked out due to their attempt to stage Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, which Alfie views as high art and Father Kenny and the members of the Sodality view as grossly immoral due to an "immodest" dance of the seven veils performed by the title character. The members of the St. Imelda's Players take the stage to tell the story of what happened to Alfie, their director, who is otherwise a man of no importance.

We turn back time. Alfie takes tickets and reads poetry to his morning passengers on the bus. Enter Adele Rice, a shy new arrival to Dublin. Alfie believes Adele would be perfect in a production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and shares his excitement with his sister Lily. Lily mistakes Alfie's enthusiasm for romantic interest and is ecstatic because she has been waiting a lifetime for him to find a nice girl to marry so that she can stop taking care of him and marry her own sweetheart, Mr. Carney the butcher. Alfie affirms that his interest in Adele is purely artistic, which Lily finds annoying.



Undeterred, Alfie begins to assemble a cast for *Salome*. He starts with Lily's beau Mr. Carney, who is also one of the company's lead actors. Mr. Carney is a member of the Sodality, a community moral authority composed of members of the Roman Catholic Church. Alfie's intention is to flatter Mr. Carney into participating in a production he might otherwise condemn by offering him an important part. The plan seems to work, and Mr. Carney and the rest of the St. Imelda's Players joyously begin to prepare for their next production.



**Shereen Ahmed as Adele Rice and the Company of *A Man of No Importance*. Photo by Julieta Cervantes.**

The next day, Adele is late for the bus, and Alfie delays departure, which frustrates Carson, his supervisor. When Adele arrives, Alfie quotes lines from the play, but Adele believes she is being teased. Alfie apologizes and clarifies his intention: to offer her the role of Salome. Adele, who is not an actress, is initially reluctant to join the production. However, after reflecting on her small-town upbringing, she decides to accept what she realizes may be her only opportunity to play a princess.

Alfie hopes his charismatic bus driver, Robbie Faye, will play John the Baptist, but his attempts to cast Robbie in the role are unsuccessful. In fact, Robbie manages to convince Alfie to join him for a night out at the pub instead. Alfie does not fit in at the

pub, a fact several other people seem to notice, including a young man named Breton Beret, who propositions Alfie, causing Alfie to flee the pub and return home. Alone in his room, Alfie is visited by the spirit of Oscar Wilde, prompting Alfie to quietly confess his love for Robbie. Meanwhile, Mr. Carney has read the script for *Salome* and finds the content seriously objectionable. He and Lily read lines together and are scandalized. Alfie's love of puppets, his extensive personal library, and his locked bedroom door make Lily and Mr. Carney increasingly concerned for Alfie's soul.



**Mare Winningham as Lily Byrne and Thom Sesma as Mr. Carney in *A Man of No Importance*. Photo by Julieta Cervantes.**

At rehearsal, Miss Crowe, Mrs. Curtin, Mrs. Grace, Ernie, Baldy, and the rest of the company rehearse with Alfie and Adele. Mr. Carney is noticeably absent. Lily arrives at the end of the night to pursue Adele on her brother's behalf, offering her gifts and an invitation to dinner, claiming her brother is romantically interested but too shy to invite her himself. Lily then forces Alfie to walk Adele home. On the walk, Adele and Alfie confirm there is no attraction, and Adele confesses she is in love with a man back home. Alfie encourages her to "Love who you love." In the darkness, Alfie finds Breton Beret, who propositions him again. Oscar Wilde encourages Alfie to yield to temptation, but Alfie does not.



**Nathaniel Stampley as Father Kenny in *A Man of No Importance*. Photo by Julieta Cervantes.**

After the morning service, Alfie considers confessing his homosexuality to Father Kenny but decides against it. Instead, he channels his identity into the production. But Adele breaks down in rehearsal and reveals to Alfie that she is pregnant. Moments later, Alfie is summoned to an emergency meeting of the Sodality, and the play is canceled by the Archbishop on moral grounds.

A stunned and saddened Alfie retreats to the bus depot, only to stumble upon Robbie and Mrs. Patrick making love. Alfie questions their affair (since Mrs. Patrick is married and a mother of three children), and Robbie, feeling judged, condemns Alfie for living a life without love. Crushed, Alfie decides to follow Oscar Wilde's example and yield to temptation. He dresses up, applies makeup, and heads to the pub to find Breton Beret for a cuddle. Unfortunately, Breton Beret was only propositioning Alfie to confirm his homosexuality so that he and a group of his friends could attack Alfie. Police intervene, but because homosexuality is illegal in Ireland, Alfie cannot press charges. He is returned, humiliated and exposed, to his sister Lily. Lily feels angry and betrayed, but after initially expressing judgment and disgust, she relaxes into the truth: she loves him just the same.

The following day, Carson taunts Alfie, telling him Robbie Faye asked to be transferred to another bus line after learning Alfie was gay. Adele arrives with a suitcase and says goodbye to Alfie: she is moving to England to start a new life with her child. Alfie returns to the church after work to say goodbye to his former theatrical home and is surprised to see Robbie, who announces that he was forced onto a new bus line by Carson, but he wants to continue his friendship with Alfie and be an actor in his company. Lily arrives with stolen refreshments from Mr. Carney, and Baldy brings news of another church that will host them in their space.

Much in Alfie's life remains uncertain. The play has a sad ending, and he remains a man of no importance, but at last he is now known by those he loves for who he is, and is loved in return.



**Jim Parsons as Alfie Byrne and The Company of *A Man of No Importance*.  
Photo by Julieta Cervantes.**

# A GLOSSARY OF SOME IMPORTANCE MATCHING GAME

*A Man of No Importance* tells the story of a Catholic community in 1960s Dublin. While many of the words are commonly used today, there are quite a few you may not have heard before! Can you match the word to its definition?

## TERMS

- |                  |                             |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| A. malice        | G. snooker                  |
| B. odious        | H. folderol                 |
| C. quench        | I. immodest                 |
| D. thespian      | J. salaciousness            |
| E. thwart        | K. the pub                  |
| F. unadulterated | L. Dance of the Seven Veils |

## DEFINITIONS

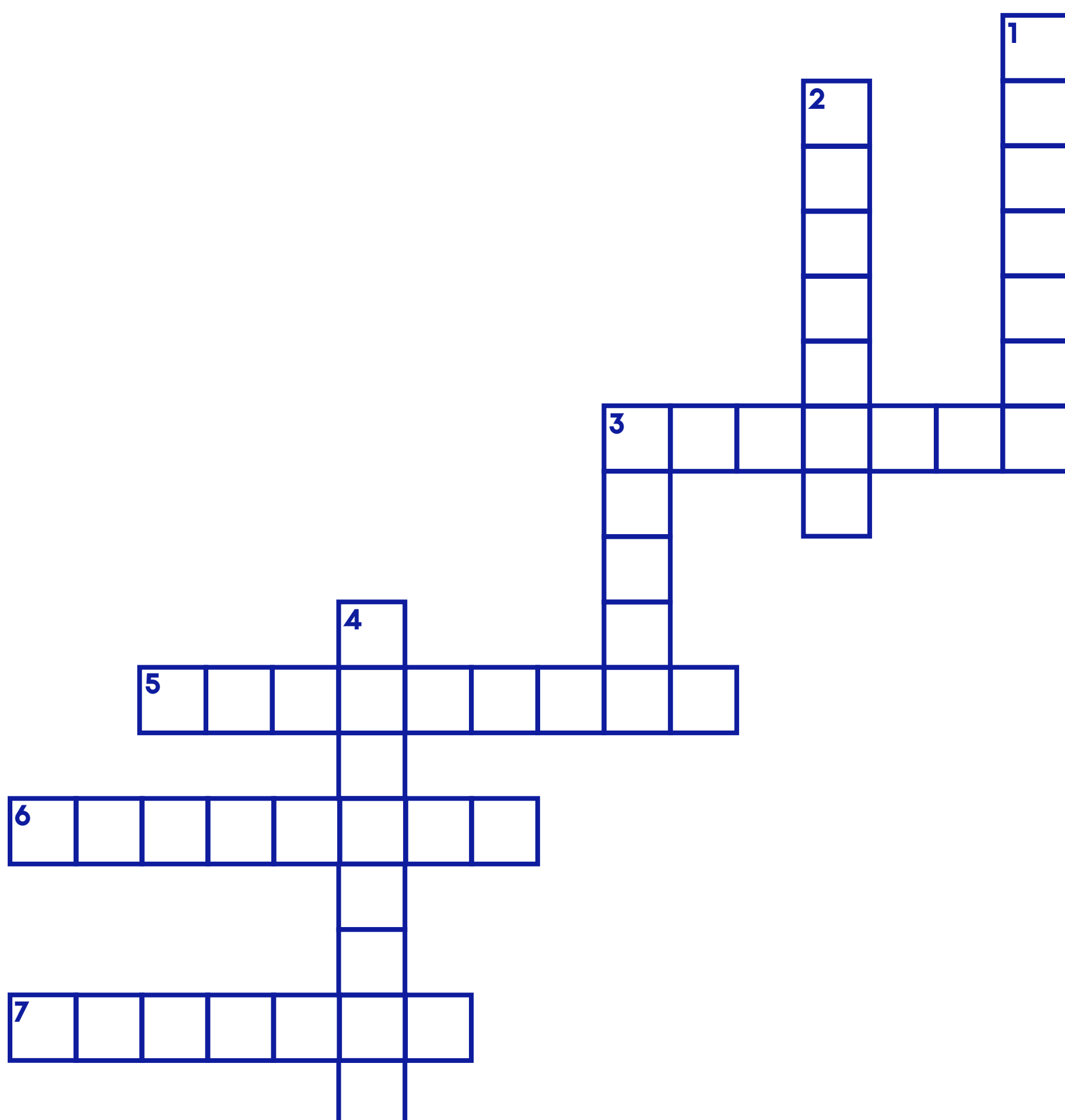
1. to slake, satisfy, or allay (thirst, desires, passion, etc.)
2. desire to inflict injury, harm, or suffering on another, either because of a hostile impulse or out of deep-seated meanness
3. a tragedian; an actor or actress
4. not modest in conduct, utterance, etc.; indecent; shameless
5. highly offensive; repugnant; disgusting
6. utter; absolute
7. a variety of pool played with 15 red balls and 6 balls of colors other than red, in which a player must shoot one of the red balls, each with a point value of 1, into a pocket before shooting at one of the other balls, with point values from 2 to 7
8. mere nonsense; foolish talk or ideas
9. A dance performed by Princess Salome for her stepfather King Herod in exchange for the head of John the Baptist
10. to oppose successfully; prevent from accomplishing a purpose
11. obscenity, indecency
12. a bar or tavern

# A CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Lily Byrne has spent her entire life looking after her younger brother Alfie. After years of patiently waiting for him to find a wife so she can marry her sweetheart Mr. Carney, she is beginning to lose hope.

Can you solve the crossword puzzle of Lily Byrne's Concerns?

Complete the Puzzle Online



## ACROSS

3. the occupation of Lily's fiancé Mr. Carney
5. a sauce made with tomatoes, minced beef, garlic, wine, and herbs
6. a legal, consensual relationship between two adults
7. replicas of people or animals, controlled by hand

## DOWN

1. a male sibling
2. a state of concealment, hiding
3. paperback or hard-bound reading material
4. a Roman Catholic brotherhood and community moral authority

# A POETIC GUIDE TO THEATER ETIQUETTE

Hi!

Hello.

Welcome to CSC.

We are so happy you can join us for the show.

Music has been written.

Words are waiting to be heard.

The stage manager is set to call the cues.

The musicians are in tune.

The crew is their corners.

The set's been built.

The lights are lit.

The actors cannot wait to play their parts.

All we need now is you:

your eyes, your ears, your hearts.

This is your moment

to turn off your cell phone,

because whoever's texting you

does not want you to miss this show!

And as you watch the play,

remember:

it is so okay to laugh!

Or to be sad.

Or both.

People respond to things differently,

and that is okay.

Just be respectful,

since we are all watching this together,

and everyone up there onstage

can see and hear you.

So please, no side conversations.

And one more thing:

take a deep breath

and thank yourself for being here.

Every play needs an audience.

You are our audience today.

We thank you.

And we hope that you enjoy this performance  
of *A Man of No Importance*.

# SOURCES

## FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING WILDE

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[cmgww.com/historic/wilde](http://cmgww.com/historic/wilde)

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[“Here’s a short history of the battle for LGBT rights in Ireland” by Hayley Halpin](#)

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