IRISH REPERTORY THEATRE

JAKI McCARRICK’S

BELFAST GIRLS

DIRECTED BY NICOLA MURPHY
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ON THE FRANCIS J. GREENBURGER MAINSTAGE

BELFAST GIRLS

BY JAKI MCCARRICK
DIRECTED BY NICOLA MURPHY

with AIDA LEVENTAKI, LABHAOISE MAGEE, MARY MALLENN, CAROLINE STRANGE, and SARAH STREET

OPENING NIGHT: MAY 19, 2022

CAST

Molly Durcan ................................................................. Aida Leventaki
Ellen Clarke ................................................................. Labhaoise Magee
Hannah Gibney .............................................................. Mary Mallen
Judith Noone ................................................................. Caroline Strange
Sarah Jane Wylie .............................................................. Sarah Street
Understudy (Molly, Ellen, Hannah, Sarah) .......................... Owen Laheen
Understudy (Judith) .......................................................... Brooklynn Morgan

SONGS

Sliabh Gallion Brae
A Lark in the Clear Air
Mo Ghile Mear
Rare Willie

All songs are traditional Irish folksongs

TIME & PLACE

1850
At sea, from Belfast to Australia

Running Time: 2 hours and 10 minutes, including a 15 minute intermission

Please note, this production contains partial nudity and violence.

SPECIAL THANKS

Meg Hennessy, Sarah Ryan, Jo Barton

FOLLOW #IRISHREPOLINE
A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I have an innate awareness of “An Gorta Mór” (the Great Hunger) or, more aptly “The Great Starvation,” yet I knew little about the Orphan Emigration Scheme. We have learned, even in our own time, that the way history is documented for future generations depends greatly on who is holding the pen. We know that Ireland’s population fell about 25% during "the Starvation," due to both death and emigration and has not, to this day, recovered from that loss.

*Belfast Girls* focuses on the Orphan Emigration Scheme, established by Earl Henry Grey in the 1840s — a long-neglected period of Irish history. The scheme was set up — unbeknownst, we must assume to the 4,000 girls that left Ireland for Australia — to relieve Ireland’s overcrowded workhouses from the ravages of the Great Famine - and to provide ‘new blood’ for the colonies — wives, servants, and workers. These young women endured the worst of the great starvation and were, like all emigrants, seeking a better life when they boarded ships like the Inchinnan.

The girls from Belfast were the most notorious and riotous of all the ‘orphan girls’ who took passage on these ships. They are, as Jaki McCarrick has written them; courageous, hopeful, determined, tough, and unashamed — women who found a way to survive. They have given me a deep sense of gratitude for my own ancestors who undoubtedly endured and survived similar experiences.

The liminal zone on board a ship like the Inchinnan allows them time to reflect on the traumas they hope to leave behind and the dreams they hope to build for their futures. The characters feel both historical and contemporary, which is a stark reminder that female perspectives like this are rare and important. It is a great honor to be giving voice to these women who are complex, raucous, and unapologetic— and I am reminded of Ellen’s line, which feel like a call to action not only to the Belfast Girls, but to us all; “Who knows what dreams were born on the Inchinnan, huh? If it’s not us who will have those freedoms you talked of... then maybe our daughters will. That’s the important thing.”

— Nicola Murphy
AIDA LEVENTAKI (Molly Durcan) is a Scottish/Greek actor based in New York City. She has worked extensively across the UK at The Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, The Lyceum in Edinburgh, The National Theatre in London and with BBC Radio. She wrote and starred in ‘BOOZE’ directed by George C. Heslin at the Churchill on E 28th Street. Other theatre credits include Lysistrata Jones (Ophelia Theatre Company) & To Wong Foo (Douglas Carter Beane). She was recently featured in a commercial alongside Andy Cohen & appeared on ‘Power: Raising Kanan’ (STARZ). She is excited to be making her Irish Rep debut! Training: American Academy of Dramatic Arts (3 year Acting program) ATCL Knightswood (2 year Musical Theatre program).

LABHAOISE MAGEE (Ellen Clarke) Labhaoise’s recent theatre credits include: Bloody Sunday: Scenes From the Saville Inquiry (Origin Theatre), Round Room (Origin Theatre), Pumpgirl (Irish Rep), Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood (U.S. National Tour), Dancing at Lughnasa (Everyman Theatre), Macbeth (International Tour), I Once Knew A Girl (Theatre of Witness). Film credits include: Wetware (Kingdom County Productions), The Far Side of Revenge (Besom Productions). A proud member of AEA, Labhaoise is also a Stage Manager with credits including, The Classical Theatre of Harlem, The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center and La MaMa Experimental Theatre. Education: Sarah Lawrence College and Kings College, Cambridge University. Many thanks to everyone at the Irish Rep. Love and gratitude to Aidan, Mum, Dad and Hannah.

MARY MALLEN (Hannah Gibney) Mary is thrilled to be back at Irish Rep, where her previous credits include the 2013 production of Juno and the Paycock (Mary), Donnybrook! the Musical (Esme), and The Silver Tassie (Jessie). UK work includes: The Veil, written and directed by Conor McPherson (National Theatre, London), A Life (Finborough), The Cement Garden (National Theatre Studios), Company (Vanbrugh), A Lie of the Mind (Gielgud). Film credits include Kenneth Lonergan’s Academy Award-winning Manchester by the Sea. Mary is a classically trained vocalist and has performed for audiences all over the UK. She resides in Brooklyn with the loves of her life, her fiancé Alex and
their hound dog Sebastian. Training: BA (Hons) Acting, RADA.

CAROLINE STRANGE (Judith Noone) Caroline is an Alaskan-born actress, singer, writer, and “parent” of many plants and a baby corn snake. She is committed to social justice, constant change, and radical relationships, as well as being as queer as possible. New York credits include: London Assurance (Irish Rep), Meditations on a Magnetic North (The Tank). Regional credits include: Lady Macbeth in Macbeth (Redhouse Arts), The Bluest Eye (Guthrie Theatre), Tiny Beautiful Things (Merrimack Rep), Tempest, Metamorphoses, Into The Woods, We Are Proud To Present..., Cinderella, The Diary of Anne Frank, A Christmas Carol (People’s Light), The Legend Of Georgia McBride (Hippodrome Theatre), Beauty and the Beast, I Do, I Do!, Steel Magnolias, Once Upon A Mattress, (RedHouse Arts). Commerical film and television credits include: Convene, Value City Furniture, Austedo, Microsoft, CVS. Training: MFA, UNC-Chapel Hill Professional Actor Training Program. BA Music, Western Connecticut State.

SARAH STREET (Sarah Jane Wylie) is thrilled to be back at the Irish Rep, and honored to be performing in her second Jaki McCarrick play! Recent credits include: Inside Amy Schumer (Season 5) Afterwards, written and directed by Enda Walsh (Irish Arts Center), Skylight (Palm Beach Dramaworks), Dublin Carol, The Plough and the Stars, Juno and the Paycock, Rebel in the Soul (Irish Rep), Alone it Stands (59E59), The Love Parts (The Poor Mouth Theatre), The Naturalists (The Pond Theatre Co. at Walkerspace), Dyin’ for it (Origin Theatre’s First Irish Festival), Muswell Hill (The Barrow Group), Subprime (New Jersey Theater Center), and Abigail’s Party (The Barrow Group/The Pond Theatre Co). Sarah also works in Film, TV, Voiceover, and is co-founder of The Pond Theatre Company. Learn more at Sarahstreet.me.

OWEN LAHEEN (U/S Hannah, Sarah, Molly, Ellen) is delighted to be making their Irish Repertory Theatre and Off-Broadway debut. Other credits include City On A Hill (Showtime), and LaMaMa Umbria’s NEXT Generation Residency. Graduated from SUNY Purchase with a BFA and has also
BROOKLYNN MORGAN (U/S Judith) is an actress from Atlanta, GA. She began studying Film at Georgia State. Looking to dive deeper into performance art, film and theatre, she completed her studies at AADA where she first was given the chance to embody Judith Noone. At the Academy she played Andra West (Cry Havoc), Adelle Alexander (Maybe, Tuesday), Ginny Merrill (Goodbye, My Fancy!), and Hotspur (Henry IV). She is currently learning the Chubbuck Technique created by Ivana Chubbuck, a technique based on the actor’s primal need to win. She is taught by Jermaine Boswell and Jonna Johnson and has recently helped produce and direct a film based on a true story with other local artists that is in post-production. She is grateful to be apart of Belfast Girls and hopes you enjoy the show.

JAKI MCCARRICK (Playwright) Jaki is an award-winning writer of plays, poetry, and fiction. A winner of the Papatango Prize for New Writing for her play Leopoldville, her play Belfast Girls was developed at the National Theatre Studio in London, and was shortlisted for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and the 2014 BBC Tony Doyle Award. Belfast Girls premiered in the US in Chicago in 2015 to critical acclaim and has since been staged many times internationally. Her play The Naturalists premiered at Soho Repertory Theatre, New York, in 2018 to rave reviews. Jaki’s plays have been published by Samuel French, Routledge, and Aurora Metro. Her debut short story collection, The Scattering, was shortlisted for the 2014 Edge Hill Prize. The collection includes her story The Visit, which won the Wasafiri Prize for Short Fiction. Longlisted in 2014 for the inaugural Irish Fiction Laureate, she is currently editing her second collection of short stories and her first novel, The Bright, Bright World.

NICOLA MURPHY (Director) Directing credits include: A Girl is a Half-formed Thing (NY Times Critic’s Pick), Pumpgirl (NY Times Critic’s Pick) and The O’Casey Season Reading Series at Irish Repertory Theatre; the premiere production of Stop/Over by Gary Duggan at The Chocolate Factory Dublin as part of FRINGE 2018; the premiere production of RENT at Cas Di Cultura, Aruba’s National Theatre; the World Premiere of Beef by Michael Musi at The Box Theatre in Toronto; The Events by David Greig at The Lir Academy; and Mighty Atoms, Dancing at Lughnasa, Belfast Girls and Be My Baby at The American Academy Of Dramatic Arts. Assistant Directing credits include Katie Roche at The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, Silence is Requested at The Lir Academy, Trans-Euro Express at Irish Arts Center and an assistantship placement with Neal Street Productions.
WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST

on the hit UK Show *Call the Midwife* (BBC & PBS). Film credits include *FLOAT* (co-written & directed with Katy Wright-Mead), and *Reemergence: A Queer Visual Album*. MFA in Directing from The Lir Academy, Trinity College. Artistic Director at On The Quays and Artistic Associate at Irish Repertory Theatre. nicolacmurphy.com

CHIKA SHIMIZU (Scenic Design) is a NY-based scenic and projection designer. Her design credits include *The Great Wave* (Berkeley Rep), *The Great Leap* (Portland Center Stage), *Another Dream*, *Un(re)solved* (Ado Ato pictures, 2022 SXSW Innovation Award), *The Winning Side* (Epic Theatre Ensemble), *Awake* (The Barrow Group), *The Naturalists* (Pond Theatre Company), *Vietgone*, *Tiger Style!* (TheatreSquared), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Yale Rep, CT Critics Circle Award Nom), and a number of dance theatre. She is a recipient of Donald and Zorca Oenslager Fellowship Award in Design. MFA in Design from YSD. She is a faculty member of NYU Tisch School of the Arts. chikashimizu.com

CHINA LEE (Costume Design) designed *Autumn Royal*, *Two By Friel*, *New Girl In Town* (The Irish Repertory Theatre), *Skintight* (Geffen Playhouse), *The White Chip* (Merrimack Repertory Theatre), *A Little More Alive* (Barrington Stage Company), *Winner Take All* (The NY Fringe Festival), *The Tenth Floor* (NY Musical Festival), *Sin* (The Rose Nagelberg Theatre/Baruch Performing Art Center), *Breath Boom* (Yale Repertory Theatre). Associate design credits include Broadway productions: *Company, Ink, Angels In America, The Present, China Doll, Doctor Zhivago, Honeymoon In Vegas, The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time, Mothers And Sons, No Man’s Land/Waiting For Godot, Orphans, Glengarry Glen Ross, Newsies, Merchant of Venice, Jersey Boys, and Julius Caesar.*

MICHAEL O’CONNOR (Lighting Design) Irish Rep: Two by Syne, A Girl Is A Half-formed Thing, Little Gem: A Performance on Screen, Lady G, Pump Girl, Yes! Reflections of Molly Bloom, Little Gem, Two by Friel, Off the Meter, On the Record, The Pigeon in the Taj Mahal, It’s a Wonderful Life, A Celebration of Harold Pinter, My Scandalous Life. NYC: #CRWN (The Apollo Theater,) Imagining Madoff (Theatre Row), Long Run (Skirball Center), Star Spangled (AADA), Hal and Bee (59e59), Ibsanity (The Pope Theater), Loveless Texas (Sheen Center), Gregorian (Soho Rep), Monte Cristo (Urban Stages), This is Mary Brown (La Mamma). Regional: The Fulton Theater, Kennedy Center, Penguin Rep, Fringe Arts Philadelphia, 7 Angels Theater. Dance: BAM, NY City Center, The Joyce, Abbey Theatre Dublin, The Kitchen, NYLA. Michael is the resident lighting designer for New Light Theater Project, AADA NYC, and Tere O’Connor Dance.

GREGORY GRENE (Music Consultant) first encountered Irish music growing up on a small farm in Cavan, Ireland. He composes, sings, and plays accordion with the Prodigals, a band that he has led for 25 years, producing their 10th album this year. With them, he has played venues ranging from Lincoln Center to Webster Hall, the House of Blues Las Vegas to Dolan’s Warehouse in Limerick, and his compositions have been used in major film and TV. He worked for a decade as a music producer in advertising, recording reggae in Jamaica, and orchestras in Prague. Prior to that, he worked as an actor, training at Mike Nichols’ Conservatory in Manhattan, and culminating in a Broadway run with the Roundabout Theater. He currently teaches English literature in Greenwich, and is the US Director of the Andrew Grene Foundation (andrewgrene.org), a public charity that works with education and microfinance in Haiti. A decades long admirer of Irish Rep, he is thrilled to be a part of the wonderful team that has created *Belfast Girls*, and grateful to the wonderful musician community in Ireland and the US who have contributed their rich talents to the show.


LEANA GARDELLA (Fight & Intimacy Director) is a NYC based Fight Director, Intimacy Director, and Performer. She
has directed and coordinated in both indie film and theater for the last 5 years, and she is overjoyed for her first Off-Broadway production with Belfast Girls. Recent and upcoming projects include Fight and Intimacy Direction for a Columbia MFA thesis production of Blanche & Stella, Barefoot Shakespeare’s outdoor production of Lear, a developmental reading of a new work at the Chain Theatre, The Great Hunger at The Tank, and As You Like It and Two Gentlemen of Verona at the Department of Drama's New Studio on Broadway. She recently Intimacy Coordinated a Gracie Giffune Film entitled Bubbling Up and Stunt Coordinated Sunstrike Pictures’ latest Short Film Be Not Afraid! She last acted in Exquisite Corpse Company’s NY Times Critic’s Pick Zoetrope. Leanagardella.com

ERIN O’LEARY (Movement Director) is delighted to be working with the cast and production team of Belfast Girls, supporting the work of Irish Rep, and is grateful to Nicola to be brought aboard. After training in acting (MFA University of Tennessee, Clarence Brown Theatre) she became a certified Alexander Technique teacher working primarily with actors in rehearsal and performance. She is a Guest Artist and Alexander Technique coach at Juilliard and The Eugene O’Neill Theater Center. Erin is currently the Interim Department Head of Movement at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York. Member: Actors’ Equity Association, The National Alliance of Acting Teachers, the American Society for the Alexander Technique, and the Association of Theatre Movement Educators. consciouscoordination.com.

JULIE FOH (Dialect Coach) is a CT-based voice and dialect coach. Coaching credits include: A Child’s Christmas in Wales, Charley’s Aunt, and Shakespeare in Love (The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey); Mlima’s Tale (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis & Westport Country Playhouse); Ride the Cyclone and Sleuth (McCarter Theatre Center); As You Like It and King Charles III (Colorado Shakespeare Festival); Sherwood: The Adventures of Robin Hood (Cleveland Play House); Pygmalion (BEDLAM); Familiar (Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company); Good Men Wanted and Fingersmith (New York Stage and Film); Trans Scripts (American Repertory Theatre); An Ideal Husband and Eurydice (American Players Theatre); The Tallest Tree in the Forest (Tectonic Theater Project at BAM); Murder for Two, The Tutors, and Modern Terrorism (Second Stage). Faculty at University of Connecticut. MFA from the ART Institute, Harvard. BA from Duke University. juliefoh.com

RACHAEL GEIER (Hair & Wig Design) is making her Irish Rep debut with Belfast Girls. Broadway Credits include: Hamilton, Anastasia, The Band’s Visit, The Lifespan of a Fact, Torch Song, and The Cher Show.
WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST

**AVERY TRUNKO** (Production Stage Manager) Broadway: Les Liaisons Dangereuses; Off-Broadway: The Confession of Lily Dare (Primary Stages); Hangmen, On the Shore of the Wide World (Atlantic Theater Company); Privacy, Julius Caesar (Public Theater); This Space Between Us, Molly Sweeney (Keen Company); Dropping Gumballs on Luke Wilson (The Working Theater); Uncle Vanya (Hunter Theater Project) By the Way Meet Vera Stark (Signature Theatre); Eureka Day (Colt Coeur); Superstitions, The Ding Dongs, Is Edward Snowden Single? (The Pool Plays) Select Regional: The Heart of Robin Hood, Rip Van Winkle (Hudson Valley Shakespeare); The Moors, Elevada (Yale Repertory Theatre); Avery holds an MFA from Yale School of Drama, and a BFA from Hofstra University.

**MARY GARRIGAN** (Assistant Stage Manager) is honored to be making her debut at Irish Rep with such an incredible company. A graduate of Marymount Manhattan College 2020, she received a BA in Theater Arts with a concentration in Producing & Management. Most recently, Mary has worked with the New York Company of The American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Credits include: Moment, Gloria, The Tempest, Marie Antoinett, Luck of the Irish, Electra, and Theatre Smash!.

**CHARLOTTE MOORE** (Artistic Director) Recent directing assignments: Two by Synge, The Streets of New York, Meet Me in St. Louis., Love Noël, Molly Sweeney, (Performances on Screen,) London Assurance, Love, Noël: The Songs and Letters of Noël Coward, The Plough and the Stars as part of The O’Casey Cycle, On a Clear Day You Can See Forever, Three Small Irish Masterpieces by W.B Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge. New York premiere of Brian Friel’s The Home Place, World premiere of Larry Kirwan’s Rebel in the Soul, Finian’s Rainbow, The Phyllis Newman Women’s Health Initiative gala, Truman Capote’s A Christmas Memory, and Juno and the Paycock and Dancing at Lughnasa. New York stage appearances include A Perfect Ganesh, Meet Me in St. Louis, The Perfect Party, Morning’s at Seven, Private Lives (with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton), and many performances with the New York Shakespeare Festival. Ms. Moore has received two Tony Award nominations, the Outer Critics Circle Award, the Drama Desk Award, the Drama League Award, the Irish America Top 100 Irish Award, The Eugene O’Neill Lifetime Achievement Award, and the 2008 Irish Women Of The Year Award. She is the recipient of the St. Patrick’s Committee in Holyoke’s John F. Kennedy National Award, and has thrice been listed as one of the “Top 50 Power Women” in Irish America Magazine. Charlotte was named “Director of the Year” by The Wall Street Journal in 2011.
Charlotte has been inducted into the Irish America Hall of Fame and awarded the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for the Irish Abroad in 2019 by President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins.

CIARÁN O’REILLY (Producing Director) Favorite directing credits include: A Touch of the Poet, Autumn Royal, A Touch Of The Poet: A Performance on Screen, The Weir: A Performance on Screen, Lady G: Plays and Whisperings of Lady Gregory, Dublin Carol, The Shadow of a Gunman, The Seafarer, The Dead, 1904, Shining City, Off the Meter, On the Record, The Weir (Calloway Nom.), Banished Children of Eve, The Emperor Jones, (Callaway Award, O’Neill Credo Award, Drama Desk, Drama League, and Lucille Lortel Nom.), The Hairy Ape (Drama Desk Drama League and Callaway Nom.), Philadelphia, Here I Come! (Drama Desk Nom). Irish Rep acting roles include Da, Juno and the Paycock, Dancing at Lughnasa, Molly Sweeney, Candida, Aristocrats, A Whistle in the Dark, The Shaughraun, and The Irish and How They Got That Way. He appeared in the Roundabout Theatre Company’s production of A Touch of the Poet with Gabriel Byrne. He has appeared at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and made his Broadway debut in The Corn is Green. Films include The Devil’s Own (starring Harrison Ford), “Law & Order,” “The Irish...and How They Got That Way,” “Third Watch,” “Bored to Death” and “The Knick.” Ciarán has recently been inducted into the Irish America Hall of Fame and has been awarded the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for the Irish Abroad, 2019 by President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins.

IRISH REPERTORY THEATRE Founded by Ciarán O’Reilly and Charlotte Moore in 1988, Irish Repertory Theatre opened its doors with Sean O’Casey’s The Plough and the Stars, and is now in its 33rd Season. Irish Rep is the only year-round theatre company in North America devoted to bringing Irish and Irish-American works to the stage. Recognized with the Jujamcyn Theatres Award in 2007, a special Drama Desk Award for “Excellence in Presenting Distinguished Irish Drama,” in 1992, the Lucille Lortel Award for “Outstanding Body of Work,” in 2005, and a 2013 Outer Critics Circle Special Achievement Award for 25 years of producing outstanding theatre. Irish Repertory Theatre is proud to present the very best in Irish theatre, from the masters to the new generation of Irish and Irish-American writers who are transforming the stage. Located in the heart of New York’s Off-Broadway community, Irish Rep offers an engaging perspective on the Irish and their unique contributions to the world of drama. In May 2020, Irish Rep began presenting full-length digital productions as filmed during the COVID-19 pandemic as Irish Rep Online, welcoming new audiences from around the globe.
**PRODUCTION STAFF**

Production Manager ............................................. Josh Allen  
Associate Production Manager/ TD ......................... Meghan McVann  
Master Electrician/ Programmer .......................... Megan Peti  
Wardrobe Supervisor .......................................... Dan Bass  
Production Stage Manager .................................. Avery Trunko  
Assistant Stage Manager ..................................... Mary Garrigan  
Assistant Director ............................................... Liam Prendergast  
Production Assistant/ COVID Safety Manager .......... Siarra Donna  
Set Construction ................................................ Hillbolic Arts & Carpentry  
Scenic Crew ..................................................... Stephen Shore, Molly Siskin, Meghan McVann, Paul Birtwistle  
Scenic Charge .................................................... Kelsey Abberger  
Run Crew ............................................................. Amber Riggle  
Key Art .............................................................. Muireann Lalor  
Photography ....................................................... Carol Rosegg

**RECORDED MUSIC**

Music Direction & Accordion ..................... Gregory Grene  
Recording & Engineering ............................ Patrick Derviaz, Mark Dann  
Guitar ................................................................. Colin Forhan  
Singing .............................................................. Clare O’Malley  
Singing, flute, guitar ................................. The Selkie Girls: Alli Johnson, Jayci Skidmore, Dave Ervin  
Singing & Guitar .............................................. Mary Courtney  
Singing & Bodhrán ............................................. Peadar Mac Gabhann  
Uillean Pipes & Whistles .................................. Ivan Goff

**PRESS REPRESENTATION**

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Hillbolic Arts & Carpentry  
Lighting Equipment Provided by Hayden Production Services

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ACCESSIBLE seating is available, by reservation, for patrons with disabilities. Infrared hearing assistance devices are available at the box office.  

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COVID-19 only individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 will be allowed to enter. Learn more about our protocols at irishrep.org/covid19

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The actors and stage managers employed in this production are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.
Five feisty women sailing out of famine-ridden Ireland towards the new land down under.

Each has a story to share with her ship mates, and before they dock, we will know them well.

We will learn of dubious government schemes that promise much but will deliver naught. We will hear of struggles and circumstance that bring these vibrant souls together.

Cutting through the choppy waves, they find conflict and they find love and we thank Jaki McCarrick for her words that infuse life and hope into their journey.

We are proud to have this story told.

Love,

Charlotte Moore, Artistic Director
Ciarán O'Reilly, Producing Director
The Great Famine (An Gorta Mór in Irish) decimated Ireland’s population, resulting in over one million deaths and two million emigrants forced to flee starvation. Ireland was left in poverty, and many walked the streets begging for work. Across the world in Australia, the emerging British colony was struggling with a gender imbalance, populated by male convicts and emigrants fleeing war and famine in Europe.

To encourage emigration to the new land and due to overflowing work and poor houses in Ireland, Earl Grey, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, arranged to kill two birds with one stone by "facilitating emigration" for impoverished and kinless Irish women. They were required to be orphans, “imbued with religion and morally pure,” of the ages 14-18, in good health, and ready and skilled to work. “Suitable” girls were recruited throughout the 32 counties of Ireland and sent to the ports in Dublin, Cork, or Belfast, where they boarded ships for a 3-month journey to Australia. This became known as the Earl Grey Orphan Scheme.

4,175 women were brought over in ships such as the Lady Kennaway (departed Sept., 1848, arriving in Port Phillip, Dec., 1848), the Inchinnan (departed Nov., 1848, arriving in Sydney, Feb., 1849), and the Elgin (departed May 1849, arriving in Adelaide, Sept., 1849) and were provided with petticoats, stockings, night-gowns, shoes, and Bibles in wooden cases. Upon arrival, many suffered exploitation and abuse from employers, and others turned to sex work to survive. However, the majority of women managed to quickly build new lives, finding employment and marrying husbands who they met at the ports.

Sarah O’Malley (pictured, left) was 17 when she left Ireland aboard the Pemberton, arriving in Melbourne, on May 14th, 1849. Ship records showed Sarah was a Catholic from Limerick who could read and write, unlike many of the other women. She married an Englishman in 1850 and they settled in Victoria countryside. She raised 7 children and lived until she was 80 years old. Her story has been recorded by her great-great-granddaughter.

The scheme ended in 1850 as funds for the assisted emigration ran out and many Australians were unhappy with the ‘type’ of women arriving on their shores. Lack of domestic skills and “morality” were cited as issues, as well as the anti-Irish and Catholic sentiment growing with the arrival of each ship. It is estimated that over 30% of Australians have Irish blood, and many of this is owed to the young women who left their home in search of a better life.

Browse the database of orphan women who arrived in Australia and learn more about the Earl Grey Orphan Scheme thanks to Dr Trevor McIlaughlin and The Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, Sydney, by visiting IrishFamineMemorial.org.

Sources: The Female Orphan Scheme to Australia in the 1840s by Shelly Mitchell, Women’s Museum of Ireland; The story of the Irish Famine orphan girls shipped to Australia by Siobhan O’Neill, The Irish Times; Irish Famine Memorial Sydney - irishfaminememorial.org.
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Angela’s Ashes author, Frank McCourt, & his widow, Chair of the Legacy Circle, Ellen McCourt

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Learn more here: irishrep.org/legacy

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Bill Schmidt
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Music by Paddy Moloney
Directed by John Keating

Performed by Aedín Moloney

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