PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Notes from the director ...........

When John Millington Synge (1871-1909) was visiting the island of Inishmaan off the west coast of Ireland in 1904, he jotted down the following in his journal:

Another old man, the eldest on the island, is fond of telling me anecdotes of things that have happened here in his lifetime. He often tells me about a Connaught man who killed his father with the head of a spade when he was in passion, and then fled to this island and threw himself on the mercy of some of the natives. . . . They hid him in a hole and kept him safe for weeks, though the police came and searched for him, and he could hear their boots grinding on the stones over his head. In spite of a reward which was offered, the island was incorruptible, and after much trouble, the man was safely shipped to America. This impulse to protect the criminal is universal in the west of Ireland. It seems partly due to the association between justice and the hated English jurisdiction, but more directly to the primitive feelings of these people—who are never criminals yet always capable of crime—that a man will not do wrong unless he is under the influence of a passion which is as irresponsible as a storm on the sea. If a man has killed his father and is already sick and broken with remorse, they can see no reason why he should be dragged away and killed by the law. Such a man, they say, will be quiet all the rest of his life, and if you suggest that punishment is needed as an example, they ask, "Would anyone kill his father if he was able to help it?"

Synge was a keen and tireless observer of Irish peasant life. The most remarkable and spectacular feature of his plays is his use of language. He was able to absorb the rich and colorful expressions he heard around him and transform them into vivid paintings and tapestries of eloquence that have only been equalled in English dramatic literature by William Shakespeare.

When The Playboy of the Western World was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1907, it created a sensation. Irishmen somehow wanted the outside world to go on thinking of them and of their womenfolk as a charmingly quaint, innocent and lovable people, long-suffering and deeply religious, natural saints and scholars all. The picture of the Irish peasantry that Synge, an Anglo-Irishman of the ruling class, presented to them did not exactly meet with their approval. At each performance of the play, 500 policemen had to be stationed inside the theatre (audience capacity at the Abbey only amounted to about 500) to quell the inevitable riots that erupted.

Producing The Playboy of the Western World today continues to be a sensational experience, for somewhat different reasons. Getting into the primitive and eloquent dialect of turn-of-the-century Western Ireland has presented a thrilling challenge, and one which I believe the cast has risen to with eagerness and enthusiasm. As one cast member was overheard to remark recently, "If you try to read the play in American, it makes no sense at all. But just read it aloud with the Irish, and everything falls into place!"

Just in case our audience can't "read along with us in the Irish," you will find at the end of the program a few unfamiliar terms that are used over and over again in the play. We hope their meanings will dispel any Irish mist, and get you all off to a grand and flying start! Good Show!

Maureen F. Synge
THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
by J. M. SYNGE

CAST
Christopher Mahon        Mark Rosewell
Old Mahon                Paul Taylor
Michael James            Perry Guzzi
Pegeen Mike              Deborah Little
Widow Quin               Teresa Cook
Shawn Keogh              Geoff Dave
Philly Cullen            Scott Hauman
Jimmy Farrell            Paul Richardson
Sara Tansey              Karen Fuller
Susan Brady              Natalie Williams
Honor Blake              Judy Wardlaw
Nelly Ryan               Lisa Moody
Molly Ryan               Allison Alter
Old Blind Woman          Suzanne Wilcox
Old Man (Shenachie)      Bob Berger
Farm Women               Jill Hayhurst
Fishermen                Kari Stanfield
Bellman                  Dan Merrill
Tramp                    Scott Thompson
Young Girl               John Hallum

SCENE
The action takes place near a village, on a wild coast of Mayo. The first act
passes on an evening of autumn, the other two acts on the following day.

There will be two 10-minute intermissions.

The next production will be William Shakespeare's THE TAMING OF THE SHREW, April 4-7, 9-12, 1979.

Directed by Patricia Cook

Setting Designed by WILLIAM SHERRY
Choreography (Irish reels & jigs) by RUTH S. BELEW

PRODUCTION STAFF
Stage Manager             D. Bruce Pate
Set Master                Tom Simmons
Light Mistress            Annette Brashear
Make-Up Mistress          Emily Riddle
Sound Mistress            Elizabeth Rape
Costume Mistress          Sandra Hofland
Prop Mistress             Missi Miller
House Mistress            Diana Spilman

CREWS
Set—Danny Ball, Stephanie Hardy, P. J. Hicks, Barbara Spottswood,
Kevin Stanfield, Stephen Kelly, Kenn Franklin, Stephen Euday
Light—Mark Gale, Dean Kendall, Vicki Lacy, Ben Britt, Sarah Swearingen
Make-Up—Lise Brown
Costume—Linda Allor, Cinda Goode, Peggy Pharr, Lynn Lockhart, Debbie
Nobles, Diane Leitch
Prop—Kass Prince, Dustye Winniford, Kari Kennedy, Ken Surley
House—Lois Wood

Entr'acte entertainment co-ordinated by Elizabeth Rape.
Performances February 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 1979.
Playboy—The word has Hugh Heffner connotations for us now. A playboy is a fellow whose main interest in life is the pursuit of pleasure... but to an Irish audience at the turn of the century, the word also meant “trickster,” someone who pulls the wool over people’s eyes.

Western World—The words have a double connotation here. Generally speaking in the play, the term refers to the west of Ireland, but it can also have a larger geographical significance, stretching across the Atlantic to include America as well. America to these people was the land of milk and honey, the only escape route left open to them, should the harvest fail, or the long arm of the law be closing in on them.

Red petticoat—The peasant women of Ireland wore several red woolen petticoats, made of their own wool, and stained with a brilliant red or madder dye which they brewed themselves from the root of the madder plant. These “petticoats” were not things to keep hidden under a skirt, nor “slips” as we think of petticoats. They were skirts in their own right. Several of them were worn simultaneously, and the women would take off one or two in public, to wrap a child in, or put over their heads in place of a shawl.

Poteen—Pronounced “potcheen,” illegal Irish whiskey brewed in a still; moonshine.
polis—pronounced with the accent on the first syllable; police.
sky—spade
porter—dark brown bitter-tasting beer.
awlet—a switch, with the twigs and leaves peeled off it, that has been broken off a tree in passing.
scree—twenty
spuds—potatoes
cake—Irish soda bread made with flour, baking soda and buttermilk.
pot-boy—an apprentice lad might be taken on at the local pub to rinse out the glasses, lift the barrels of porter and do the heavy work.
shebeen—country pub or tavern in Ireland

Turf—sods or blocks of peat dug out of peat bogs and used as fuel.
awake—ostensibly the all-night vigil kept over the body of a deceased person, but in actuality, a grand excuse to have a wild party and get blind, roaring drunk.

Boreen—a narrow, one-lane, unpaved country road in Ireland, lined on each side with high, stone walls.