A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre Production.

Originally commissioned and produced by the Sherman Theatre.

CAST

Effie Sophie Melville

CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION TEAM

Writer Gary Owen
Director Rachel O’Riordan
Designer Hayley Grindle
Lighting Designer Rachel Mortimer with Hayley Grindle
Sound Designer Sam Jones
Associate Designer Toots Butcher
Associate Sound Designer Lorna Munden
Assistant Director Tyler Holland
Company Stage Manager Claire Bryan
Deputy Stage Manager Beth Dixon
Lighting Programmer Matt Turnbull
Lighting Operator Matt Turnbull / Daniel Miller
Sound Operator Daniel Ronayne / Lorna Munden
Set Build Lyric Workshop
Audio Description Ruth James / Alison Clarke
Open Captioning Miranda Yates
Artwork photography Jennifer McCord
Artwork design Greg Bunbury
Publicity Kate Morley PR

This production of Iphigenia in Splott is kindly supported by Roger de Freitas.
A note from Rachel O’Riordan

*Iphigenia in Splott* was first commissioned in 2015 by the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff when I was Artistic Director. It has since played all over the world to great acclaim, a true testament to the power of Gary Owen’s writing.

The reaction to this play has always been visceral; never did I think, seven years after the play’s premiere, its relevance would be sharper now than ever before.

*Iphigenia in Splott* is a call to arms. It presents the impact of austerity and social injustice, and of the devastating impact cuts make on those who have little to lose. It gives a platform to the voices of people who are demonised by society, who are not given the opportunities in life to thrive. Iphigenia, or ‘Effie’ as she is called in the play, is extraordinary. Yet, her life could easily be seen by some as less valuable and what this play does is make her the hero. And in doing so, asks us to question our assumptions and to interrogate our judgements.

This is the largest stage *Iphigenia in Splott* has played and will be the last time we come together as a creative team to bring this work back to life. My thanks to Sophie for her incredible performance, to Hayley, Rachel and Sam for their dynamic designs and to Gary for his ferocious story. To the Sherman team for our first, bold outing; to the Lyric team for their embrace of this work.

We hope you enjoy the show. I hope you are furious.

Rachel O’Riordan
Artistic Director and CEO
Q&A with Gary Owen

What's the relevance of the play to audiences now?

I think plays that are recent but not contemporary are maybe the riskiest to revive. They’re not old enough to read as being of another age, so there’s a danger they’ll read as being contemporary, but oddly out of touch.

That being said, this play is one of the most personal and local I’ve written – it’s based on people in the street I lived on in Splott, and on things that happened to our family around the birth of our second son. But it’s resonated with people beyond Splott and beyond Cardiff, and by now it’s been produced all over the world.

The play was written very much in response to the austerity policies of David Cameron’s government, which slashed public services while pushing the message that we were ‘all in it together’, and all suffering equally from painful cuts to welfare and health, for the good of the nation as a whole.

In the last year or so the play’s been picked up in Mexico and Argentina and Uruguay – where battered UK public services might seem generous or even luxurious – and I’ve asked the theatre makers there why the play resonates with them. And the answer they give me is that whenever governments cut back, the pain is not equally shared. The most vulnerable suffer the most. The poor suffer the most, as ever. And that’s true across societies, even when specifics differ from one country to another. And I think it’s certainly true for us in the UK now.

Our NHS has been under-funded for a decade. The pandemic has brought it to a point of collapse faster than we might have expected; but that collapse was always coming. And people will suffer because of that collapse. Not wealthy people, because they will be able to look after themselves. But people will suffer. And the message that will be pushed to us is that the only people who are suffering are people have it coming. People who have brought it on themselves. People who are their own worst enemies. People who are our worst enemies. People who don’t look like us, or talk like us, or love like us. People who are ugly, or who smell. People who say appalling things, or think appalling things. People whose suffering we don’t really need to worry about, because they are probably not really sensitive people like we are, who suffer like we do – because if they were, how could they possibly say the appalling things they say, or think the appalling things they think?

What the play tries to do is portray someone who is obnoxious, and offensive, and aggressive, who doesn’t help herself, who is a nightmare to live next door to – and then it presents her suffering. And it dares us to say that her suffering doesn’t count. If we can.

And that’s the most relevant thing the play does.
What's it like to work with Rachel O’Riordan and Sophie Melville again on the play?

We put this show on at the Sherman in Cardiff for a couple of weeks in 2015, with no expectation we’d ever get to do it again. After that run sold out, we brought it back later that year and took it to Edinburgh. The following year it was on at the National Theatre. The year after that, we recorded it as an audiobook for Audible. Then we started the process of remounting it for the Lyric after the first lockdown — which of course was cancelled as Covid entered its second wave.

So Rachel, Sophie and I have been coming back to this play over and again through the past seven years. What’s special about coming together to put it on now is that we know it’s the last time we’re going to do it. So it’s really bittersweet. It’s great to put the show on again, and great to have it in as beautiful a theatre as the Lyric. But there’s a sadness in knowing we’re saying goodbye to a piece that’s been a really important part of all our lives.