



Four Rivers presents

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
DEAR ALICE
by Bernard Farrell

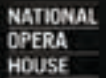




LIGHTS OUT

by Hannah McNiven
directed by Ben Barnes

Wexford Arts Centre October 27 - Nov 5
Tickets www.wexfordartscentre.ie





Happy Birthday Dear Alice - On Tour

Theatre Royal, Waterford, May 12-14

Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire May 17-21

Everyman Theatre, Cork May 26-28

National Opera House, Wexford June 1-2

St. Michael's Theatre, New Ross June 4

Glor, Ennis June 8

Lime Tree Theatre, Limerick June 9-10

Watergate Theatre, Kilkenny June 11



Irish theatre's immaculate craftsman

Jimmy: *Oh Mona is a god-send at any bereavement – even down at the Undertakers they say she has a great way with corpses.*

Alice: *Oh she has.*

Jimmy: *I noticed that about her when we first met: she's not good with people, but show her a corpse and she comes into her own.*

(from *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* by Bernard Farrell)

Bernard Farrell's relationship with Irish theatre spans the course of a lifetime: when he was a chap, he would take the number 8 bus with his family from Glasthule into Dublin to visit the Abbey Theatre. Though imperceptible at such a young age, he began to develop a good ear for dialogue and a keen eye for stagecraft, thereafter sharpened by his parents' astute analysis of each play. This early grounding in the theatre would evolve into what Jim Nolan, playwright and director of the first professional revival of *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* by Four Rivers, has described as Farrell's 'innate understanding of what an audience expects from a play.'

The long and winding road between Farrell's school boy jaunts on the number 8 bus to the Abbey and his return as a fully-fledged playwright (*I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell*, in 1979) was segued by a pensionable job with Sealink, which Farrell took the courageous, some might say foolhardy, decision to walk away from at a time of crippling unemployment in order to write full time. After the critical and commercial success of *I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell*, neither Farrell nor the Abbey looked back: play after play, twenty-one

in all, were premiered predominantly at the Abbey and also at the Gate Theatre, the Laguna Playhouse in California and at the Theatre Royal in Waterford with Red Kettle, where the story of *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* begins.

The catalyst for the engagement of Farrell and Red Kettle was another play by another writer, Martin Sherman's *Bent*, which Farrell saw at the Schiller Theatre in Berlin. Red Kettle, which had staged a staggering twenty-five plays in seven years, beginning with a trilogy by Jim Nolan, had chosen *Bent* as their summer production in 1991. Farrell saw it again and was intrigued by this production. 'Someday, if I get the chance,' he remembered, 'I would like to write a play for Red Kettle.' In six months he wrote *Forty-Four Sycamore*, which was premiered by Red Kettle in 1992 and directed by Paul Brennan.

The Brennan-Farrell connection had a long history. When *Dr. Fell* was premiered by the Abbey at its experimental stage, the Peacock, over a decade earlier, Brennan was the director. He astonished the cast at an early reading in a Kildare Street café by prophesying that *Dr. Fell* would be 'a thumping, great success.' He wasn't wrong, and overnight, Farrell became associated with a new and exciting wave of emerging playwrights at the Peacock, including Neil Donnelly, Graham Reid and Frank McGuinness.

The working relationship between Farrell and Brennan in the years ahead was sporadic until Red Kettle commissioned *Forty-Four Sycamore*. Two years later, with Brennan again at the helm, *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* followed. In Farrell, Red Kettle had a writer of meticulous craftsmanship, whose grasp of comedy generated from his audiences the particular laughter of recognition.



Bernard Farrell and Ben Barnes at the first reading of *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* by the cast at the National Opera House in April

At this stage in his career, Farrell and his Bic biro were a prodigious conveyor belt, averaging a stage play a year while also writing for television (*Lotty Coyle Loves Buddy Holly*) and radio (*Gliding With Mr. Gleeson*). Between 1980 and 1994, he wrote eight full length plays, six of which were premiered at the Abbey, and two by Red Kettle. Ben Barnes, Artistic Director of Four Rivers and director of many of Farrell's premieres, has identified Farrell's 'immaculate structure, the tightly written unpretentious prose, the hilarious but ruthless outing of pretension and the merciless unmasking of those who set themselves up to be something they are not.'

Farrell's titles (*Stella by Starlight*; *Kevin's Bed*; *The Spirit of Annie Ross*) mirror the Dickensian skill of never being hamstrung by an inappropriate name. Names are the first step in his identification with the eponymous character, an intimacy between the playwright and the titular role consolidated – and the characterisation of Alice is a good example - by the heroic of the everyday ordinary under occasionally trying circumstances. For Alice, the past and the present ebb and flow in concert.

Happy Birthday Dear Alice was inspired by the sad but necessary reality of the playwright having to contemplate a nursing home for his mother, Elizabeth. At the time Red Kettle wanted a Farrell play that would be engaging but entertaining for its audience, and he delivered the quintessential dark comedy, bringing light to darkness. 'On the first night on the Waterford stage, the last line spoken by Alice, as she opens a bubble jar and a blower, 'I'm forever blowing bubbles...' could not be heard because the audience immediately began to sing the song,' he recalls. 'Jim Nolan came up to me with his arms open. 'Thank you, Bernard,' he said. He knew it would be a hit. *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* ran for over a hundred consecutive performances.

Revisiting the production almost quarter of a century later, Nolan describes the play as an affirmation of aging. 'I witnessed the visceral connection between the play and its first audience. The song that *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* sings is an eternal song.' (Tom Mooney)



Cast of *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* during intensive rehearsals under the direction of Jim Nolan at the National Opera House.



Four Rivers

Four Rivers is a new initiative for the South East of Ireland. It is a professional theatre company based in Wexford but serving theatres throughout the region in Waterford, Kilkenny and Carlow.

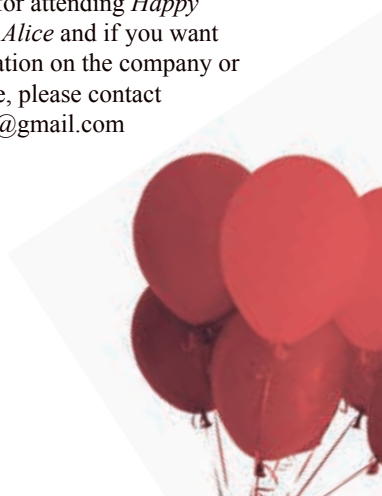
The company is committed to developing and producing work from writers and employing artists, creative teams and back up personnel from the South East in order to build up a professional theatre resource within the region.

Four Rivers is supported by the Arts Council, Wexford Council and partners with Wexford Arts Centre and the National Opera House.

Its partner theatres in the region are Theatre Royal and Garter Lane in Waterford; Watergate in Kilkenny; Visual in Carlow; National Opera House and Wexford Arts Centre in Wexford.

In 2021 the company presented acclaimed and well attended productions of Martin Mc Donagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and *Blackbird* by David Harrower. This year we are staging Bernard Farrell's much loved comedy, *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* and a new play, *Lights Out* by Wexford writer, Hannah Mc Niven which will premiere at Wexford Arts Centre from October 27th as part of the Wexford Festival Opera 2022.

Thank you for attending *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* and if you want further information on the company or our programme, please contact heather4rivers@gmail.com





Bernard Farrell

(Playwright)

Born in Sandycove, Co. Dublin, Bernard Farrell worked for Sealink until 1980, when he resigned to write full-time for the theatre. Most of his 21 stage plays have been premiered at either the Abbey Theatre or the Gate Theatre in Dublin or at Red Kettle Theatre in Waterford. These include *I Do Not Like Thee, Doctor Fell* (1979), *Canaries* (1980), *All in Favour Said No!* (1981), *All The Way Back* (1985), *Say Cheese* (1987), *Forty-Four Sycamore* (1992), *The Last Apache Reunion* (1993), *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* (1994), *Stella by Starlight* (1997), *Kevin's Bed* (1998), *The Spirit of Annie Ross* (1999), *Lovers at Versailles* (2002), *Many Happy Returns* (2005) and *The Verdi Girls* which was specially commissioned by The Laguna Playhouse, California and premiered there in 2007. He has also written television drama for both RTE and BBC and his radio plays have been widely broadcast and have represented Ireland at the Prix Italia.



Many of his stage plays are in translation and have been performed extensively in North America, Europe and Australia. He is a recipient of The Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, the Sunday Tribune Comedy of the Year Award, the Dublin Theatre Festival award for Best Irish Production and his *Kevin's Bed* was nominated for Best Play of 1998 in the Irish Times/ESB Theatre Awards. He has been Writer-In-Association with the Abbey Theatre, served on the Advisory Council of the Abbey and, for eight years, was a Director on the Board of the Abbey. He lives in Greystones, Co. Wicklow.



Happy Birthday Dear Alice

by Bernard Farrell

Cast in order of appearance:

Alice Catherine Byrne
Jimmy..... Mark Lambert
Barbara..... Sarah Madigan
Barry Andrew Macklin
Cormac..... Mark Fitzgerald
Sandy..... Elishka Lane

Creative Team

Director Jim Nolan
Set and Lighting..... Brian Mitchell
Costume Mae Leahy
Sound Design..... Jamie Beamish
Stage Manager Clare Smith
ASM..... Dara Jane O Sullivan
Construction..... StageIt
Photography Colin Shanahan





For Four Rivers

Artistic Director Ben Barnes
Producer Heather Hadrill
Production Mark Redmond
Marketing Tom Mooney
Social Media Jennifer Pitt

Place: The action takes place in the kitchen of Alice’s House.

Time:

Act 1: Alice’s Birthday in 1993

15 MINUTE INTERVAL

Act 2: Alice’s Birthday One Year Later

Cast:

Catherine Byrne (*Alice*)



One of Ireland's best loved actors, Catherine Byrne (*Alice*) trained at the Abbey School of Acting and has spent the past forty years working in theatre, television and film, including *Eat the Peach*, *The Tudors*, *Inspector Jury* and *The Last Right*. Appearances at The Abbey include *The Field*, *Yerma*, *Whistle in the Dark* and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (West End and Broadway), *Wonderful Tennessee* and *Give Me Your Answer Do*. She has appeared at The Gate in *Twelfth Night*, *Aristocrats*, *A Month in the Country* and *Molly Sweeney* (*London and New York*). In recent years she returned to the Abbey in *Unmanageable Sisters*, *In Our Veins* and *One Good Turn*.

Mark Lambert (*Jimmy*)



Mark Lambert was recently seen on stage in the leading role in *ISLA* by Tim Price at Theatre Clwyd and has just completed filming it also for the BBC. Before the lockdown Mark played Judge Turpin in *Sweeney Todd* with Theatre Orchestra in Switzerland and also completed 400 performances of *The Ferryman* on Broadway and The West End and a production of *The Phlebotomist* at Hampstead Theatre London. Numerous productions at The Abbey include: *The Great Hunger*, *The Gigli Concert*, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, *Barbaric Comedies* (Irish Times Theatre Award nomination) *The School for Scandal* and *Aristocrats*. Previous Theatre includes: *Juno and The Paycock* at The Albery (Olivier Nomination for his Joxer) *The Memory of Water*, Vaudeville Theatre.

Dancing at Lughnasa, Phoenix Theatre and Garrick, *Our Country's Good* at The Garrick and Royal Court, *All's Well That Ends Well*, R.S.C and Gielgud Theatre. *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Comedians* at The Young Vic. He is well known for his television and film roles, including *Red Election*, *The South Westerlies*, *An Crisis*, *Single Handed*, *Raw*, *Fair City*, *No Tears* (RTE) *Bloody Sunday* (Channel 4) *The Tudors*, *Borstal Boy*, *Champions*, *Kidnapped*, *The Tigers Tail*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, *Durango* and *Prayer for The Dying*.

Sarah Madigan (*Barbara*)



Recent stage appearances include *Tarry Flynn* (Livin' Dred), *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Four Rivers), *Translations* (National Theatre London), *The Unmanageable Sisters* and *Jimmy's Hall* (Abbey Theatre). Other credits include *The Play That Goes Wrong* (Mischief Theatre Company, West End), *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (Jermyn Street Theatre), *Out of the Cage* (Park Theatre, London/Rose Theatre, Kingston), *Roisin* (Old Red Lion Theatre), *Duck* (Out of Joint) and *Celebration* (Gate Theatre, Dublin). Film and television: *Unwelcome* (Rococo Films), *The Syndicate* (BBC One), *Doctors* (BBC), *Maru* and *Saor Sinn O Olc* (TG4). Voice-over credits: *Fox & Hare* (Submarine), *Strangeness in Space* (Clare Eden Productions) and several video games, including *Spellforce III*, for Pitstop Productions.

Andrew Macklin (*Barry*)



Theatre includes: *An Inspector Calls* (UK & American Tour), *The Baleful Lie* (Tristan Bates Theatre), *Jane Wenham: The Witch of Walkern* (Out of Joint/Arcola

Theatre and UK Tour), *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Curve Theatre), *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (Chipping Norton Theatre), *The Mercy Seat* (York Theatre Royal), *King Lear*; *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Three Sisters* (Abbey Theatre), *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* (Southwark Playhouse), *Brighton* (Garter Lane Arts Centre), *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Watford Palace), *I'll be the Devil* (RSC), *All Over Town*, *The Irish Curse* (Project Theatre, Dublin), *24 Hour Plays: Lucy's Brief Guide to Being Human* (Old Vic), *The Cure at Troy* (Floodtide Theatre Company and Delphi, Greece), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Bath Theatre Royal), *Markings* (Attic Theatre Company), *A Passionate Woman* (Mill at Sonning). Television includes: *The Holiday*, *Doctor Who*, *Doctors*, *Jubilee Nurse*, *Mr Selfridge* and *Fair City*.

Mark Fitzgerald (*Cormac*)



Mark recently appeared in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, directed by Ben Barnes. He worked on *Abbey Calling*, produced by the Abbey Theatre. He

performed in the remount tour of Verdant Productions' *A Holy Show* and has been in several productions for Second Age, including *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* as well as playing *Hamlet*. Mark trained at the Drama Centre London and at Ecole Philippe Gaulier in Paris.

Film/TV credits include:

Recently appeared in Valhalla (Netflix), *The Northman*, *Little Women* (BBC), *Muse* (Fantastic Films), *My Mother and Other Strangers* (BBC), *Vikings* (MGM) & *Loving Miss Hatto* (BBC).

Theatre credits include:

The Family Sex Show (Theatre Royal, Bath), *Copperface Jacks: The Musical* (The Olympia Theatre), *Alone it Stands* (Verdant), *Break* (Hot for Theatre), *Plough and the Stars* (Abbey Theatre), *Still, the Blackbird Sings* (Derry Playhouse), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Storytellers Theatre Company), *Bacchaefull* (Dirty Market).

Elishka Lane (*Sandy*)



Elishka Lane is an actor and theatre-maker from County Wexford. She is a recent graduate from Drama and Theatre Studies at Trinity College

Dublin. She is a founding member of Gift Horse Theatre Company. Her recent theatre credits include *Tender Napalm* (Smock Alley Theatre), *Clowns Not Dead* (Corcadorca SHOW), *Wexford Playwright Readings* (Wexford Arts Centre), *The Hamlet Review* (Theatre Royal Waterford), *CHARMS! Supermoon*, (Samuel Beckett Theatre) and *Twelfth Night*, *Tess* (Gift Horse Theatre).



Creative Team:

Jim Nolan (*Director*)

Jim Nolan was the founding Artistic Director of Red Kettle Theatre Company for whom he directed more than twenty productions. He is a former Writer in Association at the Abbey Theatre and Theatre Artist in Residence at Garter Lane Arts Centre. His plays, including *Moonshine*, *The Salvage Shop*, *Blackwater Angel*, *Sky Road*, *Brighton*, *Dreamland* and *Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye*, have been presented throughout Ireland, in the UK, the US and Canada. Jim has worked as a writer and director with some of Ireland's leading theatre companies, including Field Day, Rough Magic and the Abbey Theatre. Jim has won several awards for his work, including Sunday Independent Play of the Year for *The Salvage Shop* and Irish Times Theatre Awards Best New Play nominations for *The Salvage Shop* and *Dreamland*. Jim's most recent play, *The Red Iron*, opened at Garter Lane Theatre in November 2019. Jim is delighted to renew his association with Four Rivers Artistic Director, Ben Barnes, who directed five of his plays and with Bernard Farrell, from whom, as Artistic Director of Red Kettle, he commissioned *Happy Birthday*, *Dear Alice* in 1994. He is a member of Aosdána and his plays are published by Gallery Press.

Brian Mitchell (*Lighting and Set Designs*)

Brian has recently graduated with a Master's Degree in Stage Design from The Lir Academy, Trinity College, Dublin. In his role as Assistant Technical manager in the Everyman Cork, he oversaw the technical requirements for hundreds of national and international award-winning shows. In his role as designer his credits include *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, *Levin and Levin*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Crowman*, *Seahorse* and *Bluffers Guide to Suburbia*. Brian is co-founder of For The Birds Theatre Company: established in 2016, the company has toured nationally both of their original productions *Sisters of the Rising* and *Seahorse*.

Mae Leahy (*Costume Designer*)

Mae is a designer and director based in Dublin. She graduated from Trinity College with a degree in Drama and Theatre Studies in 2021. She is a founding member of Gift Horse theatre, an outdoor theatre company interested in environmentally conscious work. She is also a member of Broad Strokes improv troupe. Recent costume design work includes *PRISM*, in collaboration with Waterford Spraoi and Faoin Spéir, *Blackbird*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Four Rivers), *Twelfth Night*, *Tess* (Gift Horse Theatre), *Grianstad* (DU Players) and *Supermoon* (Samuel Beckett Theatre). Mae was artist in residence with Garter Lane's Little Room in January 2022, where she directed and co-devised a work in progress titled *I'm Getting Coffee, Do You Want Anything?* Other recent directing work includes *Children* (Scene and Heard 2022) and *Bedtime Stories* (Samuel Beckett Theatre 2020). Mae was awarded an Arts Council bursary in 2021 for a mentorship in design led practice.

Jamie Beamish (*Sound Designer*)

As a composer and sound designer, credits include original songs for TNT’s television series *Will* and theatre productions at Theatre Royal Waterford, Little Red Kettle Theatre, Spraoi, Wexford Arts Centre and more. In the United Kingdom he has worked at Jermyn Street Theatre, Theatre 503, The Old Red Lion, Leicester Sq. Theatre, Oxford School of Drama and more. With Richard Hardwick, Jamie co-authored *Cat* (the play) which has been performed at The Edinburgh Fringe, Leicester Curve, Belfast Baby Grand, Theatre Royal Waterford and was presented in the West End at The Ambassadors Theatre. He also co-wrote (with Anne O’Riordan), composed and sound designed the new Waterford play *Ghosting* which premiered at the Theatre Royal in 2019, and was streamed live from there in 2021 and subsequently picked up and broadcast by the Irish Repertory Theatre in New York as part of their online theatre season. As an actor Jamie has performed in seasons at the RSC, National Theatre, Donmar, Almeida, Globe, West End and many more.

Clare Smith (*Stage Manager*)

Clare’s academic life has centered on art history and heritage and she has completed a Masters Dissertation on the works of Martin McDonagh. She has enjoyed a love of theatre for many years and has gained an appreciation and experience of theatre craft from working both on and off stage. Her work as a professional stage manager began with Four Rivers on their opening production of David Harrower’s *Blackbird* in 2018. Subsequent stage-managing credits include *Macbeth* (2019), *Hamlet* (2020) and a filmed production of *King Lear* (2021) for the Shakespeare Review at the Theatre Royal, Waterford. Last year Clare enjoyed the challenge of working as stage manager on the successful run of Four Rivers’ production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by Martin McDonagh.

Darajane O’Sullivan (*Assistant Stage Manager*)

Darajane O’Sullivan has worked in theatre and event production since 2012. Darajane has been a part of the production team for many shows including Waterford Panto (Theatre Royal), The Green Room Awards, *Hairspray* (Theatre Royal), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Garter Lane), *In The Heights* (Theatre Royal), *Assassins* (Garter Lane), *Chicago* (Garter Lane) and *Steel Magnolias* (Garter Lane), to name but a few! Darajane recently won a Green Room Award for Best Stage Management for Waterford Pantomime Society’s production of *Sleeping Beauty*. Darajane has worked in Event Management, Social Media Management and PR for years with companies such as EveryEvent, Spraoi, The Parlour and Waterford Co. Council. Darajane is part of the Four Rivers Mentorship Programme.



There are famously no jokes in

My first encounter with the work of Bernard Farrell was as an audience member for his ground-breaking play, *I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell*. It was a dazzling debut bearing all the hallmarks of Bernard's subsequent work - the immaculate structure, the tightly written unpretentious prose, the hilarious but ruthless outing of pretension and the merciless unmasking of those who set themselves up to be something they are not. Given that Bernard subsequently became the supreme exponent of satirising Irish middle class mores it is perhaps ironic that among his early targets should be a pretend American in *Dr. Fell*, the flashy but ultimately vacuous 'therapist' Suzy Bernstein from Texaleto in the state of Utah (and not Arizona, as she claims). Her mantra, 'relax, relate, communicate' immediately entered the lexicon of great lines from the Irish canon.

Having worked as a young assistant director on the premiere production of *Canaries*, Bernard's savage dissection of the Irish on holiday, I had my first experience of directing his plays when I staged the world premiere of *All the Way Back* at the Abbey in the mid 1980's. It was to be the beginning of a fruitful working relationship between us at the national theatre which saw subsequent premieres and long runs of *Say Cheese*, *The Last Apache Reunion* and *Kevin's Bed*. The work extended out to the other main Dublin theatre, The Gate, where we first staged the award winning *Stella by Starlight* and *The Spirit of Annie Ross*.

With all these plays and productions our modus operandi rarely altered and became honed by experience and knowledge of each other's working methods. Bernard is intensely private about the writing of the play and is sometimes aghast at other writers' propensity to discuss the earliest

drafts of their work. He will worry away at the script until he is sure that it is as good and as sharp as it can be and only then will he submit it to the eye of the director. At this point we always had frank and, sometimes, difficult discussions. We debated any changes that needed to be made or 'mentally bracketed' anything we thought suspect or bogus and which we needed to be vigilant for in rehearsal. Like all good playwrights, Bernard realises that a play only becomes theatre when it is put up on its feet in a rehearsal room and subsequently in front of an audience.

And it is in rehearsal and in previews when he is at his most creative. We have spent many happy hours in rehearsal and during preview performances fine tuning a scene or sharpening the comedy of a given situation. And that is one of the keys to Bernard and his work - the comedy emerges entirely from character and situation. There are famously no jokes in a Bernard Farrell comedy. The audience, nevertheless, frequently roll in the aisles and I don't mean that exclusively in a figurative sense. On one occasion a man at a performance of *Say Cheese* at the Abbey fell out of his aisle seat with laughter and had to be helped back in by an alarmed usher. It was touch and go for a moment but he finally recovered himself. I can think of worse ways of departing this life than dying of laughter at a Bernard Farrell comedy.

How does he do it? Well usually there is a situation where an insecure character sets out to impress friends or colleagues whom he or she secretly despises but is in awe of on the surface. Usually there is a reluctant accomplice - I am thinking of Deirdre in *The Last Apache Reunion*, Stella in *Stella by Starlight* or Maureen in *I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell*.

a Bernard Farrell comedy

The protagonists Jimmy, Dermot or Peter carefully choreograph a situation - a reunion, a dinner party, an encounter group - to impress or conceal. We all then watch with horror, dismay and high merriment as everything that can go wrong, does go wrong, before the poor 'gobshite' - a favourite Farrellism - is redeemed by realising that what he put so much store by is ultimately unimportant and that those whom he regarded as more fortunate, gifted or resilient are just as battle scarred, insecure and human when the chips are down. It is a compelling but hardly novel scenario which works again and again because of the seamless artistry that Bernard Farrell brings to it. Having worked with Tom Stoppard (whom I know Bernard admires) on the Irish premiere of *Arcadia* I can say that he is a writer to whom I would compare Bernard in this regard: they are both great technicians of the theatre and structure their plays with the glittering precision of a mathematical proposition which their art renders unnoticeable and effortless. Of the hundreds of hours I have spent in a rehearsal room with Bernard, the most frequent interjection from him would go along the lines of 'we need to have that mentioned clearly in scene one and again in scene two if we want it to have the payoff in act two'. Sometimes it's a seemingly minor point, painstakingly but unobtrusively or casually dropped, but the pay-off is usually devastating and hilarious. It is all in the precision of the placing and the deadly accuracy of the time release mechanism towards the explosion. This is the understated genius in the writing of Bernard Farrell.

I am indebted to Bernard for his friendship down the years (he is god father to our daughter Elishka) and for our collaborations in the theatre. In a career with more than its fair share of tragic

operas and weighty Irish drama from O'Casey and Synge to Friel and Murphy, Bernard has opened a window for me on the mores and foibles of the Irish middle class in the last decades of the twentieth century. He has given me the great gift of laughter. Laughter in his kitchen and mine, laughter spreading out into the rehearsal room and eventually engulfing the theatres of Ireland and the world with its cathartic power. The power of laughter at and with each other. It is, indeed a great gift. And one which I was privileged to be part of for over quarter of a century.

Now all these years later, coming out of a two year pandemic and with war once more casting its shadow over Europe, the release of laughter could never be more timely and hence this revival of one of Bernard's best loved plays, *Happy Birthday Dear Alice* with a stellar cast directed by our mutual friend and colleague, Jim Nolan. RTE's John Creedon once said 'anyone who has ever had a mother will enjoy this show'. I couldn't put it any better. Enjoy!

Ben Barnes has directed the premiere productions of six of Bernard Farrell's plays. He is the Artistic Director of Four Rivers and a former Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre.



Irish National Opera Presents
Maria Stuarda - Donizetti

Sunday 19 June 8PM
Tickets: €15 - €80



Druid Presents
The Cavalcaders

21 - 22 June 8PM
Tickets: €23 - €30



Music Network Presents
Camilla George Quartet

Sunday 26 June 8PM
Tickets: €17/€15