



The Wakefires

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Written and Directed by Louise Lowe

Producers: Lynnette Moran and Matt Smyth
Composer: Sinead Diskin
Lighting Designer: Ciaran Bagnall
Set Design: Maree Kearns
Costume Design: Saileóg O'Halloran
Design support: Owen Boss

Production Manager: Stephen Bourke
Company Manager: Rebecca Roche
Stage Manager: Leanna Cuttle
Assistant Stage Manager: Alison White
Second ASM: Ali Keohane
Chief LX: Alan Mooney
Props: Dylan Farrell
Paper Props: Pai Rathaya
Assistant Director: Eftychia Spyridaki
Costume Assistant & Maker: Muireann Doyle
Costume Assistant: Beth Baker
Scenic: Jenny Whyte
Make-up and effects: Kevin Murnane
Promotional image credit: Pato Cassinoni

Artistic Directors for ANU:
Louise Lowe and Owen Boss

Producers for ANU:
Lynnette Moran and Matt Smyth

ANU Board
Kelly Fitzgerald (Chairperson)
John Egan
Gaylene Gould
Ali Grehan
Fionn Kidney
Elaine McGrath
Stephen O' Leary
Brian Singleton
Oonagh Young

Cast

Kate Finnegan

Ella Hyland

Úna Kavanagh

Gillian McCarthy

Sarah Morris

Matthew Williamson

Alex O'Neill (understudy)

In 80 minutes, Louise Lowe and her team brilliantly, ethically, and emphatically take us on the emotional journey towards understanding the experiences and legacies of the violence endured by women during the Irish Civil War. While the 'brother against brother' trope has dominated Civil War narratives, the histories of political and militant women demonstrate that it was also a brutally contentious time for them. Dependent on which side they too, pro or anti, treaty, women were attacked by all sides, Irregular Republicans or the pro treaty National Army. For the State, anti-treaty women were 'die-hards', 'furies', and 'republican bitches' who needed to be controlled and contained. For the Irregulars, pro treaty women were traitors to their oath to the Republic. Similarly the women were divided with the anti-treaty Cumann na mBan viewing the pro treaty women with deep suspicion, and the pro treaty Cumann na Saoirse women seeing the anti-treaty women as 'wild women'.

During these months of 1922-1923 over 600 anti-treaty women were arrested and imprisoned in Kilmainham and Mountjoy jails, and in the North Dublin Union (NDU). There they were held in damp, dirty, unsanitary conditions, often mistreated by the warders and enduring multiple hunger strikes. During the transfer of the women from Kilmainham and Mountjoy to the NDU in Spring 1923, they were stripped, kicked, beaten, and assaulted by warders, soldiers and Cumann na Saoirse women. In other parts of the country anti treaty women were often arrested and held for days in local barracks where they suffered what they referred to as indignities. This obtuse language covers what were sometimes serious physical and sexual assaults. The later military pension application files of many these women indicate that their mental, physical and/or emotional health was seriously, sometimes permanently damaged by these experiences.

Outside of enduring long brutal imprisonment, pro and anti-treaty women also experienced physical and emotion trauma. Their homes were raided, their property destroyed, their former comrades turned against them, often ostracising, deriding, or condemning them. Many had to deal with the aftermath of execution, ambush, and massacre, prepare the oftentimes mutilated bodies of men they knew for burial, organise religious and republican rites and continue on afterwards in their fight for the 'cause', if indeed, they could! This layering of trauma on trauma, the constant impact of everyday violence, the disruption of their ordinary lives, the hate that remained for generations – all of these experiences are brilliantly and affectingly captured in *The Wakefires*. No more can the Civil War be regarded as a national tragedy of brother against brother, it was also a tragedy with generational, long lasting, emotional, and socio-political impacts for their sisters.

Dr. Kelly Fitzgerald

*Head of School, UCD School of
Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore*

Traditionally, summer in Ireland begins on the first of May, Bealtaine. Hence, what would now be scientifically recognised as the summer solstice and a change in the season is referred to as 'Midsummer'. Devotion to St John along with his festival was not a native Irish event until the Anglo-Norman and post-Anglo-Norman period but over a millennium it has adapted and conformed to the necessities of the Irish landscape and vernacular culture. In Ireland the evening before the actual day is when the festivities begin. Most importantly, preparations for the *tine chnámh*- literally a 'bone fire' and what we now refer to as a bonfire. The bonfire site would be set close to the parish graveyard, and prayers for the dead were always included in the ceremonies of the night. After St John's Eve, the ashes from the fires were thrown on the fields to fertilise them, or live coals were carried over the fields to prevent blight. Where possible the fire was lit where the smoke would be carried by the wind over the more important crops. People would immerse themselves, and especially their children, and cattle through the smoke, and drive the smoke towards the orchards and the crops. They might also take burning cinders from the fires and carry them through the houses in order to cleanse and bring luck into the homestead. The ashes of the bonfires are also reputed to possess beneficial properties; hence in some places people rubbed their hair or their bodies with them. In some places they thought that by leaping over the fires they rid themselves of all misfortune, and that childless couples thereby obtain offspring, for example. This night will be the final festive occasion before the community enters into the most difficult time of the year, 'Hungry July' as this is the end of the old year before the new harvest arrives in the beginning of August, Lúnasa.

It is most appropriate for ANU to carry out this production towards the end of their work on the Decade of Centenaries as The Wakefires confronts some of the most difficult atrocities that need to be recognised and acknowledged. It is only by examining ourselves as a nation that we can emerge and benefit from the harvest we would reap through the resulting transformation.

“

*Again and again and again to the Wakefires I go
A part of myself to go back to or find.
Memory, releases in packets, in flashes in short bursts
I stumble amongst the smouldering ashes.*

”

In revolutionary Ireland, outrages against women were commonplace and serious atrocities against women were committed by Anti-Treaty, Pro-Treaty and British forces in the 1922-1923 period. 100 years on this trauma, still raw, is revisited in a scorching new work from acclaimed artists ANU, presenting their work in Cork for the first time.

ANU, established in 2009 by theatre director and film-maker Louise Lowe, visual artist Owen Boss, creative producer Lynnette Moran and creative producer Matthew Smyth, pioneer a hybrid of art forms, creating a brand that is gaining worldwide recognition.

ANU, established in April 2009, is led by Theatre Director and film-maker Louise Lowe, Visual Artist Owen Boss, Creative Producer Lynnette Moran, and Creative Producer Matthew Smyth.

Pioneering a hybrid of art forms that places the audience at the centre of their practice, together they have created 40 seminal works, including public art commissions, gallery installations and museum interpretations, creating a brand that is gaining a worldwide reputation.

Building a global reputation for creating transformative experiences in unusual locations, the company continues to challenge theatrical conventions by blurring the lines between immersive and site specific practice. ANU places the audience at the very centre of the experience to create autonomous and meaningful exchanges with them. Their aesthetic represents the independent and the experimental, creating a new kind of multi- disciplinary model – a daring new hybrid art at the forefront of Ireland’s cultural landscape.

Their studio enquiry, led by multi-disciplined artists, forensically builds to spatial immersion and finally to direct communion and engagement with viewers.

As a company they are constantly exploring new genres and formats. Their productions are epic performances in large scale sites, but their practice stretches beyond this to encompass new technologies such as Radio frequency identification that uses the mise-en-scene of real spaces as its backdrop. On top of this, their enrichment programme transforms community settings as cultural spaces of inquiry.

ANU has played to over half a million people at home and abroad across 11 years, having produced over 40 shows in that space of time, and winning 3 audience choice awards, 2 special judges awards, 5 Best Production Awards, and numerous nominations in Irish and UK Theatre award ceremonies.

Their most recent productions include Book of Names (Dublin Theatre Festival 2021); The Secret Space (Project Arts Centre 2021); The Party to End All Parties (Dublin Theatre Festival 2020); CANARIES (commissioned by Dublin Port) and THE PARTY TO END ALL PARTIES (commissioned by Dublin Theatre Festival), the multi award nominated and critically acclaimed FAULTLINE (co-production with the Gate Theatre and the Irish Queer Archive for Dublin Theatre Festival), SCRAPEFOOT, an immersive visual art adventure for children at The Ark, THE ANVIL, a series of fifteen city wide commissions for Manchester International Festival, and BEYOND THESE ROOMS (at TATE Liverpool).

Previous Press

★★★★

A charged, immersive experience... It's intense and immediate for the audience... There's muscular choreography throughout, thumping dance routines, and vigorous movement

– **Irish Examiner**

★★★★★

ANU are responsible for the most searing and provocative works of the past decade and delivered some of the most ambitious and thrillingly intimate theatre in living memory

– **Peter Crawley, The Irish Times**

★★★★★

ANU Productions bring audiences into private spaces for intimate confrontations with the dark corners of history. Their work manages to be both abrasive and beautiful. The Monto Cycle may be the most significant series of works the city has witnessed since the emergence of Brian Friel and Tom Murphy

– **The independent**

A rare thing, a genuinely site-specific, scorching production. My highlight of the Dublin Theatre Festival

– **Lyn Gardner, The Guardian**



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