



Wyong Drama Group Inc presents

Harp on the Willow

by *John Misto*
directed by *Ron Baker*

August 2010
Wyong Memorial Hall

In cooperation with Camerons Management Pty Ltd
61 Marlborough St. Surry Hills NSW 2010 ~ info@cameronsmanagement.com.au

The Cast

in order of appearance

Sister Miriam/Mary O'Hara	Rose Cooper
Tyrone Kane	Brad Talbot
Mother Raphael	Julie Bailey
Richard Selig	Rohan Smith
Young Mary O'Hara	Tamara Abbott

Voiceovers: Millie Sampson, Duncan Mitchell, Barry Sampson

Setting

Time: The 1970s with flashbacks to the 1950s
The '70s scenes move from Stanbrook Abbey in the English Midlands to Tyrone's London 'digs' and Decca Recording Studio.

The '50s scenes move from London to various locations in New York.

The Playwright

John Misto is a prolific and multi-award winning writer who has been writing for the theatre, film and television for almost two decades. Originally trained as a lawyer, Misto has been working as a full-time writer since 1981.

Harp on the Willow had a sell-out premiere season at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre in 2003 and was joint winner of the Rodney Seaborn Playwright's Award for Best New Play. His one-man play, *Sky* (1992), written for actor Henri Szeps, was nominated for the Sydney Critics' Award for Best New Play of the Year. Probably his best known play, *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* (1995), has been performed many times throughout Australia and in London.

Television credits include AFI award winners *The Damnation of Harvey McHugh* and *The Day of the Roses - The Granville Story*. John was co-writer of the mini-series *Palace of Dreams* and *The Last Frontier*. He has also written two popular, award-winning telemovies, *Natural Causes* and *Peter and Pompey*. His screenplay for *Heroes Mountain - The Rescue of Stuart Diver* won a gold plaque at Chicago International Television Awards.



Writers Note

The story of Mary O'Hara is both fascinating and threatening. It is fascinating because of her elusive quality, a singer who gives stunning concerts, and then disappears, who touches the heart of her audience, then vanishes.

Her story is threatening because it teaches us some lessons we don't want to learn. At 25, Mary possessed all the "gifts" we spend our lives pursuing - money, fame, success, beauty - but she found them to be meaningless. In most show business stories, stars turn to drugs or alcohol for comfort. Mary entered a monastery. She abandoned a world of glitter and noise for silence.

Her life and career have been shaped by love, often spectacular, often painful, always triumphant. So it seems very appropriate that in one of her books is this quote from Louis Evely - "Be of love a little more careful than of anything else."

In an era obsessed with all sorts of love, these are wise words indeed.

A Note from the Director

I was very fortunate to see *Harp on the Willow* at The Ensemble Theatre, Sydney, in 2003 and was most impressed with the performances and playwright John Misto's script. It was breathtaking to watch the story of famous Irish folk-singer and harpist, Mary O'Hara, unfold at the hands of such a talented cast, which included Marina Prior and Christopher Stollery. That night happened to be a Forum Night where the audience had the opportunity to question the cast after the show. John Misto was also present so, without hesitation, after question time I made a beeline for him. He explained that the play was currently committed to professional performances and couldn't say when it would be released for amateur companies.

Every few months I checked the availability of amateur rights which were finally granted in 2009. The script was still in unpublished form. I was fortunate to be able to make direct contact with John Misto who has never hesitated to respond to my questions and requests. Subsequently, much to our surprise, the Group received an email from Padraig O'Toole, Mary's second husband - what a buzz! Since then I have been in regular contact with John and Padraig and Mary who have been most generous with their time and information.

It was suggested that a visit to the Benedictine Abbey at Jamberoo would be of benefit. Rose, Julie and I travelled down and had the opportunity to meet with Sister Ancilla who had spent time at Stanbrook Abbey (the play's setting in England) and had corresponded with Mary O'Hara for a time. She was able to answer our questions and provide extra insight into procedures and restrictions that were in place at the time (1962-1974).

It is very sad that my dear friend and mentor, Bonnie Bryant, passed away before I could put the play on. When visiting her, all she ever wanted to talk about was theatre and what plays I was planning to do. Bonnie would have loved this play about a fellow Irishwoman. She had also been a singer and would have found plenty to talk about with Mary O'Hara.

Sincere thanks to all who played a part in helping to bring this delightful play to Wyong's stage.

Ron Baker

Special Thanks

Rose Cooper-What? E-News, The Village Grapevine, Hunter iMag monthly, Multi-Arts Confederation (Margaret Hardy), Lakes Mail, Central Coast Express Advocate, Pelican Itch, Newcastle Post, ABC Radio Central Coast (Scott Levi, Yianni Johns, Caroline Perryman), Radio 50+ (June Roberts), NBN Community Noticeboard, Fusion Arts, Central Coast Radio, Wyong Shire Council, XtrAct Drama Academy

Albert's Café (Wyong), Brisbane Water Historical Society (Data Projector, assorted props), Peter Deane (sourcing music), Julie Taylor/John Craig (telescope), Shellee King/Pollyanna Forshaw (special props), Rosemarie Wood (loan of harp), Jan Chapman (organisation of harp backing), Cliona Molins (harp backing music), Scott Daniel (setting of Data Projector).

The Cast

Rose Cooper (Sister Miriam Perpetua Selig/Mary O'Hara)



Rose has performed with many local companies including Gosford Musical Society, Woy Woy Little Theatre, Mad Cow Theatre Co, Laycock St Theatre, The Wild Party and took part in two fundraising productions of *The Vagina Monologues* in 2007/8. Last year she took out the Best Supporting Actress 'Woscar' at Central Coast TheatreFest. A freelance journalist by trade (she produces on-line theatre newsletter 'WHAT E-NEWS') Rose is also a budding playwright having been shortlisted in five *Short and Sweet* Festivals around Australia. In 2009 her play *Double Take* (in which she also acted) won the local festival's People's Choice Award and was also performed in Sydney's Top 100 in February. *Harp on the Willow* is Rose's fourth production with WDG and she is thrilled to work alongside Julie Bailey who directed her in *Inheritance* last year. Rose adds: "When Ron told me about this play in 2008, I was completely hooked: when I finally read it, I cried. I'm still pinching myself that I got this role. There's no way I can hope to emulate the extraordinary gifts and grace of the real Mary O'Hara – but I do understand grief and hope audiences will connect with Misto's beautiful story. Rose would like to dedicate her performance to "All who die before their time".

Tamara Abbott (Young Mary O'Hara)



Tamara is a Year 11 student at Hunter School of Performing Arts. In 2007 she was one of only six high school students accepted into Wesley Institute's Sydney production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. She has been singing for 11 years and has been involved with many musicals both at Wyong Musical Theatre Company and Gosford Musical Society including ensemble roles in WMTC's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and GMS Juniors' *Aladdin*. Tamara has been a student of Xtract Drama Academy for 5 years. She played Brianna and Young Girlie in WDG's *Inheritance* in 2009. Tamara is delighted and humbled to be playing the heartbreaking role of Young Mary O'Hara.

Julie Bailey (Mother Raphael Walker)



Julie has been an active member of WDG for 25 years and has enjoyed a variety of roles both on and off the stage. She was last seen as Lily Chatterton, Labour MP, in Ray Cooney's comedy *Two Into One*. Last year Julie directed Hannie Rayson's great Australian play, *Inheritance*, a most challenging task. There was nothing else for it but to 'get thee to a nunnery!' But instant elevation to Mother Abbess? Now, there's a challenge. Julie was privileged to see the Ensemble Theatre's 2003 world premiere of this play and to meet the playwright, John Misto. Loving plays which are at once moving, humorous, thought-provoking and entertaining she was enthralled by the production. Julie is thrilled to be part of such a great team in such a delightful play.

Brad Talbot (Tyrone Kane)

While Brad's always had a fondness for 'acting up' and a passion for classic cinema and Hollywood legends like Al Pacino and Sylvester Stallone, the acting bug never really sank its fangs in until relatively recently. Earlier this year he started dabbling in a bit of film work and experimented with improvisation and realised that acting was indeed something about which he felt very serious indeed. In April he went along to an adult drama class with Xtract Drama Academy when the teacher (WDG member, Pam Campbell) told him that auditions for *Harp on the Willow* were happening in the next room and he "should really go in there and try out". Due to his age and the character description, he initially read for the part of Richard, but the maturity and confidence in his delivery caught Ron's attention and he asked him to read for the 'older' part of the brash, train-wreck character of Tyrone and it was clear from the outset that – in spite of his tender years - Brad was ideal for the role. He took this as a very encouraging 'sign'. WDG are very pleased to introduce Brad to the world of theatre - and we're confident we'll all see more of him in the future.



Rohan Smith (Richard Selig)

Rohan studied drama at school but his first foray into community theatre was in the cameo role of Lucky Joe in WDG's *Inheritance* last year. He has gone on to do shows with both Wyong Musical Theatre Company and Jopuka Productions. Rohan has been praised for his role of Sonny in *Grease*, which was very well received. Rohan is ecstatic to be returning to WDG to play such an important role. He hopes you are entertained by his portrayal of Richard Selig in this moving play.



Mary O'Hara

Mary O'Hara was born in County Sligo, Ireland, on May 12 1935, the daughter of a civil engineer and a pianist.

After early prizes for music and drama, she made her first broadcast on Radio Eireann at age 16 and by 18 was being heard regularly on radio all over Ireland, singing traditional songs while accompanying herself on the harp.

At the height of her early fame in Ireland and Britain, and aged 21, she met and married Richard Selig, an American poet studying at Oxford, returning with him to New York. After her husband's premature death only 15 months later, much of the zest had gone out of life for Mary.

However, for four years she continued travelling the globe, appearing on radio and TV and giving concerts (including, in 1959, a successful tour of Australia and New Zealand), before deciding to accede to the call she had felt for some time to enter the monastic life. In 1962 she joined a Benedictine Order at Stanbrook Abbey in England, where she remained for 12 years.

In 1974, after leaving the Abbey, mainly due to a breakdown in health, Mary resumed her singing career.

While "away" her recordings had continued to sell with great success and she was soon, once again, travelling the world performing at famous venues, such as London Festival Hall, the Sydney Opera House and Carnegie Hall, to sell-out audiences.

In 1985 Mary married Pdraig O'Toole, a "kindred spirit" - teacher, historian and journalist. They spent 6 years in Africa, where Pdraig was teaching, before returning to live in Berkshire.

Although Mary retired from performing in 1994, she is still invited to give talks and lectures around the world.

She has recorded 23 albums and written 3 best selling books. Her autobiography, *The Scent of the Roses*, has sold over a million copies.

"I am not, I think, a folk singer as the purists understand it. What I try to do is interpret traditional songs with the skill and respect given to art songs, simply by singing them with all the understanding I possess.

..... I also love Elizabethan lyrics and some modern poets' verses and prose poems, which sing to me, so I set them to music." Mary O'Hara

The play *Harp on the Willow* is a dramatisation based on certain actual episodes in the life of singer, harpist and author, Mary O'Hara.

Sources: maryoharaharp.blogspot.com
www.maryohara.co.uk

About Richard Selig

Richard Selig was born in New York City in 1929, the son of a Wall Street corporation lawyer. After studying a variety of subjects at colleges and universities in Los Angeles, New York, Washington DC and The Sorbonne, he attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar from 1953 to 1956. In 1956 he wooed and married Mary O'Hara. He died October 14, 1957.

In her autobiography, *The Scent of the Roses*, Mary quotes Richard as saying "I have never met anyone who is more intelligent than myself"

FROM THE SIXTEENTH FLOOR
Pardoning this borough for its evil,
I look past the tops of buildings, to where
The sky is. Remembering that man's malice,
That man's fate: the former's cunning,

The latter's jeopardy—seeing the sky,
Placid in spite of soot and heartache,
I am reminded to pray. Redemption,
Like our janitor, comes as we go home:
A stooped man turning out the lights.
Richard Selig

Crew

Director	Ron Baker
Assistant to Director	Ros Ellis
Production Manager	Jenny Newman
Stage Manager	Ian Abbott
Stage Hands	Barry Sampson, Charles Styles, Duncan Mitchell, Fred Roome
Props	Barry Sampson, Charles Styles
Prompt	Millie Sampson
Musical Director	Greg Derry
Wardrobe	Wendy Potter
Makeup	Helen Schumann, Tiarne Radburn
Lighting	Kahli Meredith, Ron Baker
Sound	Paul Ractliffe
Set Design	Ron Baker, Ian Abbott, Barry Sampson, Fred Roome
Set Construction/Painting	Barry Sampson, Charles Styles, Ian Abbott, Fred Roome, Ros Ellis, Julie Bailey, Jenny Newman, Helen Schumann
Scenic Artist	Peter Hack
Harp Coach	Ian Bourke
Projection Design	Justin Stafford, Kahli Meredith
Data Projector Operator	Kahli Meredith
Program Design/Printing	Ron Baker, Julie Bailey, Ros Ellis, Graham Vale, SNAP Printing
Photography	Matthew Richards, Julie Bailey, Ted Edwards
Publicity	Julie Bailey, Howard Oxley
Front of House	Jenny Newman and WDG Members
Box Office	Robyn Weidlich/Rose Cooper
Kitchen	Jenny Newman, Rita Crabtree and WDG members



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Wyong Drama Group holds meetings on 1st Tues / month at 7.30pm.

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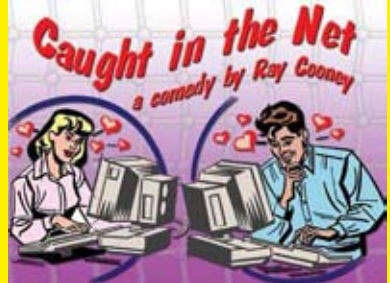
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Our next play



Caught in the Net

by Ray Cooney
 Directed by Peter Deane

**11th - 20th
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**Bookings open
18th October**

4353 . 4353

The play is the sequel to another Ray Cooney Farce (Run for your Wife) which was presented by Wyong Drama Group in April 2003.

We know you will love this play. "Cooney gives you a master class in the art of farce, the perfectly potty plot is a precision-built laughter machine

★ XtrAct ★

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