

Meet The Family

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Jo Mangan talks about Lizzie Lavelle and the Vanishing of Emlyclough

Lizzie Lavelle and the Vanishing of Emlyclough

We did it! We put a play on in the open, in the windiest, rainiest part of Ireland, in the worst summer in living memory. "You're not serious" my own father mused when I told him of our plans for this year. "Sure no body will come!" The confidence of one family member was only outdone by that of a friend who was convinced we'd have to cancel all performances due to weather conditions. Then there was the justifiably worried production and design team, who imagined digging whirling sand out of equipment that would obviously fail the test of the elements. It was a much smoother ride than they or indeed I thought. The get-in was ok, really. Ok it rained occasionally, but we were prepared, umbrellas, wet gear, crisps and bottled water kept us busy when we had to stop for a weather break. It was quite like being on film shoot in that regard. The main thing about Belmullet is you can literally see the weather rolling in so you can to some degree prepare (even if it only gives you five minutes). Yes the wind whipped up to such an extent at times that our beautiful flags with which we adorned the top (100ft up) of the crater/bunker/amphitheatre got fluttered, as did one of the tents we borrowed from the scouts. But considering what could have gone wrong, we really got on great.

Our audience filtered to the meeting point - a golf club, where they got tickets and free ice-cream cones to set them up for their 10-minute walk to the actual site. They had to ask for gorm or bui ones. Our production was partly in Irish and we set the tone with Jackie (the actual local ice-cream man) with whom the audience first interacted.

The walk itself was punctuated by the broadcast of our frenzied commentator over radios along the route. We wanted to set it up like going to the match and I think that the commentary filtering in and out of earshot as the audience walked towards our bedecked stadium helped that.

Once they reached the summit of the climb, they had the most beautiful view across to the Iniskea islands, which so inspired all the artists who were involved in our development week in 2006. Then down to the performance space they went. The audience was seated on benches that emerged from the sand, wonderfully conceived by Sinead O'Hanlon as part of her design, which was simple and effective as it conjured up the buried townlands of Emlycolough North and South for us.

Once settled the game started. Our community cast and our by this stage incredibly fit actors ran down the 100 foot sand cliffs in chase of the ball (an large Swiss exercise ball suitable decorated for our imaginary ballgame) and the game was on. I won't go through the whole plot, but it was a kind of Romeo and Juliet tale and involved multi-role playing and lots of laughs. The audience were wonderful each show, jumping to their feet at the end of the performance. Once they left the space they were serenaded by 2 (mar dhea) minstrels playing a song about the play they had just seen. It helped make the walk back more palatable! Well we sold out our first weekend and all went great. It did bucket rain on the last weekend and our full audiences had to be alternatively accommodated. On the Friday we did a "parish hall style version" in the club house as the gale whipped up around us. We convinced anyone who could come back the following night to do so, but we had folks from as far afield as Wexford, Dublin and Galway who were only there for that night. It was bizarre but great fun. I did the narration and tried to visualize for the audience the setting and where everyone was in it and the action of some of the dramatic entrances etc. They really appreciated our efforts and seemed to love it, and our gang were on a bit of a high from the stop and start are we doing it/aren't we doing it, of the day. Unfortunately Saturday proved to be a wash out too, but we did a matinee on the Sunday for anyone who could come back and pretty much every one did. Our great Perf Corp team wanted to stay on and do an extra days work for our audience, I just love those guys!

Jo Mangan