

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
DRAMA

Conor McPherson
Port Authority

Performed by

Jim Norton • Stephen Brennan • Éanna MacLiam

A Gate Theatre Production



NA224312D

1	Kevin	5:45
2	Dermot	3:05
3	Joe	4:18
4	Kevin	5:04
5	Dermot	8:27
6	Joe	3:13
7	Kevin	4:55
8	Dermot	4:30
9	Joe	5:13
10	Kevin	5:54
11	Dermot	9:21
12	Joe	5:41
13	Joe	3:49
14	Kevin	9:58
15	Dermot	5:35
16	Joe	6:13

Total time: 1:31:12

Conor McPherson Port Authority

Cast List

Kevin: Éanna MacLiam
Dermot: Stephen Brennan
Joe: Jim Norton

JIM NORTON AND THE PLAYS OF CONOR MCPHERSON

Having premiered three key roles, Jack in *The Weir*, Joe in *Port Authority* and Father Matthew in *Come On Over*, Jim Norton has an established relationship with the work of Conor McPherson. 'I knew about his work before, of course, because I saw Brian Cox in the one-man play *St Nicholas* – I went back to see it three times,' explained Norton. 'I was blown away by it – here was a really original voice able to raise everyday speech to poetry.

'And when my agent sent me *The Weir*, I knew I had to do it. I felt instinctively that everything I knew about acting, and the little I knew about life, was encapsulated in the part of Jack.

'Conor has a great ability to write about loneliness and the human condition. Not just about loneliness in a small village in Ireland, but with a universality that covers people in small communities everywhere.

The loneliness that we all suffer from.'

The Weir had been commissioned by The Royal Court and, early in 1997 Norton went to see Ian Rickson, who was directing. 'We talked, and I wasn't expected to read, but I said I wanted to – I insisted. I really wanted to demonstrate that I could hear Jack. I read his closing story, and we were all in tears.' By the time he arrived home, there was a message offering him the part.

The Weir went on to be one of the most successful new plays of the closing years of the 1990s, with runs in London, Dublin, Belgium, Toronto, London again, and then Broadway. 'It was my life for two years,' explained Jim. He then went back to Broadway for a production of *Juno and the Paycock*.

Such an intense period of theatre is exhausting, and Norton was determined to go back to television and film for a while. But then *Port Authority* landed on his

doorstep. 'I read it, and I could not believe that he had done it again. I was hooked.'

Joe, in *Port Authority*, has similarities to Jack in *The Weir*, Norton admits. 'It is a variation on a theme, the theme of lonely, lost men. Conor has a particular ability to highlight this; but in his confessional theatre, he is saying: we all die alone, but let's get together and make it a more bearable process.'

Port Authority is very different from *The Weir*, not least because its three characters never interact. Their stories are interlinked but, as Norton put it, 'they are in a bubble of their own.' He continues, 'It is a dream play. Are they really live characters, or are they in a kind of limbo between life and death?'

'Conor once said to us that three men are summoned to the stage by God to give an account of their emotional lives. That is *Port Authority*. He also said to me in rehearsal: "You are here to tell the truth, and you cannot leave until your character has told the truth." He goes on a very convoluted journey, telling other stories, but in the end he has to say the truth – that here was someone with enormous potential and he let the moment go by.'

Port Authority, commissioned by the Gate Theatre, Dublin was a hit in both London and Dublin. It was rehearsed over four

weeks in Dublin – it was a Gate Theatre Production – the Gate's director, Michael Colgan, had asked the playwright himself to direct. Unusually, for the first three weeks, the actors rehearsed individually with McPherson; only in the last week did they come together.

'Conor sat quietly, smiling beatifically, doing good by stealth. He is the kind of director who waits and watches and gives actors their head. But the text is king. One of the greatest compliments I had was someone who commented on the effectiveness of 'improvised' bits. But nothing was improvised. Every *i* is dotted and *t* is crossed.

Port Authority opened in the New Ambassadors Theatre in London and then opened at the Gate in Dublin. It was an instant hit and played to full houses, and only organisational complications prevented an immediate return to London's West End and its transfer to Broadway. 'In a way it was a more intense and demanding experience than *The Weir*, declared Norton. You have to keep totally concentrated by yourself, because you cannot rely on the interaction with the other actors.'

Norton went on to premiere a third play by McPherson, *Come On Over*. He finds it particularly rewarding to work with

playwrights – he has also premiered plays by Frank McGuinness, Sebastian Barry and David Storey. ‘With the writers sitting in on the rehearsals, you can ask them directly what they mean.’

But, for Jim Norton, working with McPherson has now become an unforgettable part of what was already a rich and varied career – four busy decades in radio, television, film and on stage. ‘Someone once remarked that Conor writes like an Irish Recording Angel,’ smiled Norton.

‘One of his special gifts is that he leaves space for audiences to bring their own experiences into play. He seems to be able to give people a licence to reveal their most intimate thoughts and to talk about experiences which have deeply affected them. I have lost count of the number of times people have come up to me, after *The Weir* or *Port Authority*, and said, “Well, what happened to me was...”’

Interview by Nicolas Soames

Conor McPherson – Writer/Director

Born in Dublin in 1971, Conor attended UCD where he began to write and direct. He co-founded Fly by Night Theatre Company to produce new plays which included *The Good Thief*, which won him the Stewart Parker Award. He became writer in residence at the Bush Theatre, London, where he directed *This Lime Tree Bower* and *St Nicholas*, which transferred to New York. *The Weir* was written for the Royal Court in 1997, transferred to the West End and ran for over two and a half years, winning numerous awards including the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Play. It then played in Dublin at the Gate Theatre before transferring to Broadway where it ran for nine months.

Dublin Carol opened the newly rebuilt Royal Court in February 2000. The Gate Theatre’s production of the play premiered during the 2000 Dublin Theatre Festival.

Conor McPherson’s film work includes the screenplay for *I Went Down*, for which he won the IFTA Award for Best Screenplay and the Best Screenplay Award and Jury Prize at San Sebastian. He wrote and directed *Saltwater*, which has also received numerous awards. He directed Beckett’s *Endgame* starring Michael Gambon and David Thewlis. In 2002 he wrote and directed the film *The Actors for Company of Wolves/Miramax/Film Four*. It stars Michael Caine and Dylan Moran.



Jim Norton, one of Ireland's leading actors, worked extensively in Irish Theatre, TV and radio before coming to London. His many West End credits include *Comedians*, *The Changing Room*, *Bedroom Farce* and *Chorus of Disapproval*. For Naxos AudioBooks he has also recorded *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*, *Dubliners*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Active on both sides of the Atlantic, he has become particularly associated with the plays of Conor McPherson, playing a leading role in the world premieres of many plays, including *The Weir* and *Port Authority*. He has since also recorded *Port Authority* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Éanna MacLiam's stage work includes *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Stella By Starlight* and *A Tale of Two Cities* for the Gate Theatre; Covey in Sam Mendes' production of *The Plough and the Stars* at the Young Vic. His film work includes *My Left Foot*, *Angela's Ashes*, *The General* and *The Commitments*. Television credits include *The Bill*, *The Ambassador*, *Amongst Women* and *Fair City*.



Stephen Brennan has worked almost exclusively at the Gate Theatre since 1988. His appearances there include *An Ideal Husband*, *Private Lives*, *Waiting for Godot* (which toured to Seville, Chicago, New York and London) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His film work includes *Eat the Peach*, *Stolen Minds* and *The General*; his TV credits include *Ballykissangel*, *Father Ted* and *Mystic Knights*.



The Gate Theatre was founded in 1928 by Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir, and became internationally renowned as one of the most adventurous and far-sighted playhouses in Europe.

Under the direction of Michael Colgan, the Gate maintains a high profile overseas while pursuing a standard of excellence in producing new Irish plays and Irish and European classics at home.

The Gate is especially proud of its association with Conor McPherson, having presented *The Weir* (1998, with the Royal Court) and the Irish premiere of *Dublin Carol* (2000). In 2001 the Gate presented the world premieres of both *Port Authority* and *Come on Over*.

Conor McPherson Port Authority

Three men, Kevin, Dermot and Joe, stand and tell their stories on a bare stage. They never meet. Or do they? From this simplest of dramatic devices emerges a rounded tale of Irish life across the generations, accurate and poignant and therefore unforgettable. The poetry of ordinary life. In this premiere recording, made with the original cast directed by the playwright, the unique talent of Conor McPherson, one of Ireland's leading dramatists, is presented.

The Gate Theatre, Dublin production of *Port Authority* by Conor McPherson, starring Éanna MacLiam, Stephen Brennan and Jim Norton was premiered at the New Ambassadors Theatre in London on 22nd February 2001. The production was presented in association with The Ambassador Theatre Group and Old Vic Productions.

Cast List

Joe: **Jim Norton**
Dermot: **Stephen Brennan**
Kevin: **Éanna MacLiam**

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