

# DUBLIN



## **Dylan Tighe IETM text for Shared Spaces session The Trailer of Bridget Dinnigan**

**(was edited slightly in delivery)**

My project The Trailer of Bridget Dinnigan involved co-creating a new version of Lorca's 'The House of Bernarda Alba' with the 11 Irish Traveller women in collaboration with two organizations, a local Traveller group in Dublin and Irish Traveller Movement- a national organization representing Travellers

*Travellers are an indigenous minority who, historical sources confirm, have been part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers long shared history, cultural values, language, customs and traditions make them a self-defined group, and one which is recognisable and distinct. Their culture and way of life, of which nomadism is an important factor, distinguishes them from the sedentary (settled) population.*

Irish Travellers are an indigenous ethnic group, numbering approximately 40, 000, who are still being denied ethnic minority status in the Irish Republic, despite having that status in the United Kingdom.

The project's central artistic vision was to explore and challenge modes of representation and perceptions of Travellers through a transposition of Lorca's text. But in order to do this I felt that the participation and collaboration of Travellers was essential. However, I didn't know any Travellers and so I set about getting to know Travellers and initiating a process which finally led to new text being created, some new alliances being created and to a series of performances.

The project proposed a collaboration between Irish Traveller women and Theatre artists to create a performance which would open up a social space where Travellers and non-Travellers could collaborate and congregate as equal citizens - something which is extremely rare in Irish society

Ireland has a long history of racism when it comes Irish Travellers- Ireland's oldest minority group. This racism has often taken a theatrical form, in so far as Irish Travellers have so often been represented on stage without their consent or involvement. It is still considered acceptable for Irish theatre companies to stage works depicting Travellers without any involvement of Travellers themselves. This always seemed to me to be deeply wrong.

This project demanded Traveller women to be present on stage, as opposed to actors representing Travellers, in order to challenge the artistic orthodoxy of Travellers being represented in performance by non-Travellers. Aside for denying Travellers the control of their own representation, this practice also denies the performative power which only real Traveller women could attain in this project. This project is as much about the real women involved as about the Text they are interpreting, and this

duality can only be attained through the participation of Traveller women themselves.

This piece, aimed artistically, and through the full participation of Travellers themselves to fully subvert the prejudices against those outlined in the 9th ground for discrimination.

"The Traveller community ground: People who are commonly called Travellers, who are identified both by Travellers and others as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, identified historically as a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland"

It became clear to me that rather than imposing a process of theatre-making that it would be best to create a process from zero which would take into account the obligations and schedules of the women and some of their particular needs in terms of literacy. Therefore I began on open -ended process, and I set myself no time limit for its completion. In order to develop the necessary confidence and material, the work was developed in stages, each culminating in a public work in progress. All in all the process took 2 years to complete, from first meeting, to premiere of the work.

The project also aimed to 're-design the audience' for theatre, to escape from the often middle-class ghetto of theatre, and to bring a community into the theatre who have often been excluded from it, both in terms of representation and misrepresentation, and in terms of institutional discrimination and to challenge stereotypical and hysterical populist views of this minority group which are prevalent on TV and film.

Ireland, like many other places, is now in a position of unprecedented crisis. But this is a crisis primarily of values, of ethics, not of economics. I believe this is the challenge of theatre today not to simply replicate the conditions of capitalist production and the relations which these generate but to propose in our working methods and economies of production new and inspirational parallel models of collective organization and action which can redress the gross ethical imbalances at the heart of the political and social crisis. In my work I want to move *beyond* representation, to enact alternatives rather than simply describing them.

**Dylan Tighe, Extract from Director's Programme Note:**

"Tonight's performance is a work of art and is not intended as a documentary about Travellers. It is not meant to give an impression of how all Travellers live or think, no more than any one play about the settled community can possibly define what it means to be a settled person. Culture and tradition are in a process of constant change, adaptation and redefinition and this play touches on merely some of the views and experiences within the Travelling community. However, within this work of fiction, many cultural and linguistic details relating to Travellers emerge which it was essential to represent as accurately as possible [...] As important as the details of the story within the play is the live act of performing this work and the story which that in itself tells, both on and off the stage. It is my belief that a work of art has the power to uncover and illuminate truths about the human experience beyond any commercially-motivated media image, and at best, can help to replace that image with a new truth, one that admits the complexity of human life, offers a way forward and suggests new possibilities."