

No's Knife

Welcome to this introduction to No's Knife at the Old Vic Theatre, a 'selection of Samuel Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*, conceived and performed by Lisa Dwan'.

The audio described performance will be on Wednesday 12 October at 7pm.

There will be a touch tour at 6pm, and we will repeat these notes live in the auditorium at 6.45. The performance runs for just over an hour, with no interval. It will be audio described by Alison Clarke and Eleanor Margolies.

Touch tours are completely free and last about 20 minutes. They give you an opportunity to explore the set and handle some of the props. There will also be an opportunity to meet some members of the production team who bring the play to the stage. It is essential to book, so please call 020 7981 0981 to reserve your place. If you're coming to the tour on your own we can arrange for a member of staff to accompany you. Please also let the box office know if you'd like to bring your guide dog into the auditorium and we will try to offer an aisle seat if one is available. The Front of House staff will be happy to take care of your dog during the performance if you would prefer.

The programme for No's Knife includes a note on the texts by Fintan O'Toole, Literary Editor of *The Irish Times*. He writes: 'When Beckett wrote his *Texts for Nothing* in French in the early 1950s, the idea of annihilation was hardly

abstract: the world was barely on the far side of the great abyss of fascism, the Holocaust and the second world war. [...] The philosopher Martin Heidegger claimed that the most basic question of all is: why is there something and not nothing? Physicists and biologists and cosmologists would agree.'

O'Toole continues: 'we humans are strange creatures. To us, the dead are not gone. The figments of our imagination may not exist but they are real. [...] As in these texts, even when we are utterly alone, we are in a crowd of the dead and the imaginary. The mind creates people who do not exist and they talk back at their creator.'

O'Toole goes on to say that Beckett himself, when supervising a recording of the texts with Patrick Magee in 1974, suggested that the actor should imagine 'a person looking out from a window into a street with people passing just a few yards beyond the window pane but feeling as if it were 10,000 miles away'.

This performance takes place in a setting that evokes a rocky, coastal landscape. Geological forms - both towering cliffs, and contorted, eroded boulders - emerge from thick mist and cloud that swirl against fathomless black. The performance is divided into five sections by blackouts. These allow time for the set changes to be described live, so we will only describe the opening setting here. Please note that due to the predominately verbal nature of the performance, the description will be minimal during the spoken sections. There is one performer, Lisa Dwan.

When we come into the auditorium, the stage is concealed by a sheet of rippling silk that entirely fills the opening framed by the theatre's proscenium arch. A black and white projection fills the whole width, some six metres across. The projection shows a hugely enlarged eye in extreme close up, the eyelid closed. The skin around the eye is deeply creased with broken veins and freckles and the lashes are thickened by mascara. Water seems to pour down the silk cloth, as part of the projection, and the silk billows with a breeze from behind, adding to the sense of movement.

When the silk cloth disappears, a massive slab of rock, some 8 metres tall, is revealed. It is a monumental rectangle, with a sheer wall facing us. The stone is a dark reddish-brown, rough in places and in others eroded into smoothness, with a narrow crack running from top to bottom. It stands isolated in darkness. In the centre of the slab, wedged into a cleft about halfway up, stands a young woman. Her position up on the rock puts her about two metres above the stalls audience.

The woman has sharply defined features, with high cheekbones and a pointed chin. Her blonde hair is pushed back off her face and falls loose to her shoulders. Her skin is pale, her eyes outlined in black and her lips reddened, accentuating her white teeth. She wears a closely fitting slip dress in brown silk, with narrow shoulder straps, leaving her neck, arms and shoulders bare. Underneath, her tight leggings are brown, and stained with dark red wet patches – suggesting

mud and blood. Though her feet rest on a protruding ledge, the lower half of her body is motionless and dimly lit, as if it is part of the surrounding rock. Her upper body is free to move and her slender, muscular arms sometimes rest on the rock, sometimes gesticulate, sometimes stretch wide to the sides; at other moments she leans her head back and seems to sink into the rock. White light falls on the prominent ribs of her upper chest, her arms and face.

Cast and Production Credits

The Performer and co-director is Lisa Dwan, with co-director Joe Murphy

Designer Christopher Oram

Lighting Hugh Vanstone

Sound Mic Pool

Video Andrzej Goulding

Movement Lucy Hind

That's the end of the introductory notes for No's Knife. To book for the touch tour please contact the Old Vic's accessible booking team on 0844 871 7628.