

COLM MEANEY DEREK JACOBI

SHAKES VERSUS SHAW

by George Bernard Shaw



SCREEN IRELAND / FÍS ÉIREANN AND RTÉ WITH COIMISIÚN NA MEÁN IN ASSOCIATION WITH CABOOM PRESENT COLM MEANEY AND DEREK JACOBI PERFORMERS RONNIE LE BREW COLIN PURVES CLAIRE ROI HARVEY
IN A FILM DIRECTED BY DAMIAN FARRELL AND CERRY HOBAN BASED ON A PLAY BY BERNARD SHAW SCREENPLAY BY CERRY HOBAN FILM EDITOR FERNANDO DE JUAN MUSIC COMPOSER GILES PACKHAM DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD KENDRICK
PRODUCTION DESIGNER FIONA CUNNINGHAM MASTER PUPPET COLLIER DARRYL WORREY SOUND DESIGNER SHANE O'TOOLE PRODUCED BY DAMIAN FARRELL ELAINE CALLAGHER MARTHA MOLONEY

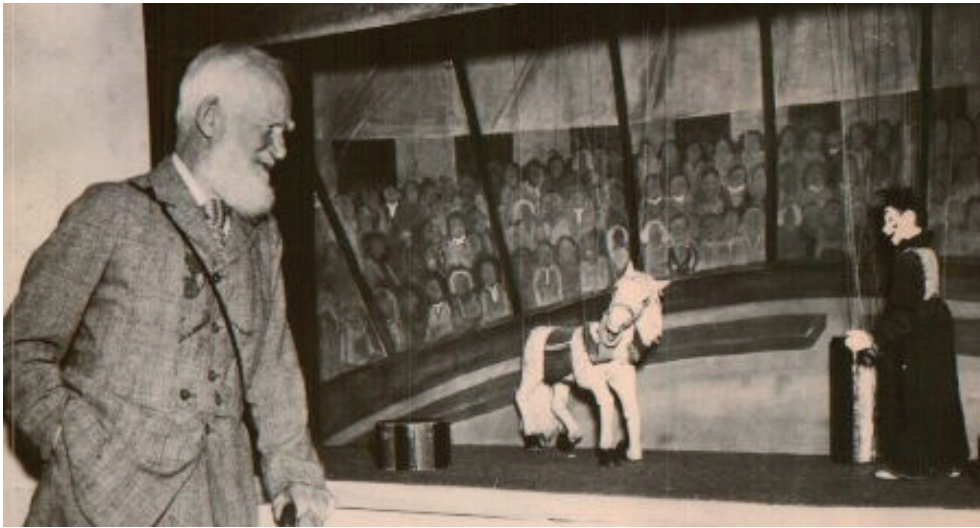


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SHAKES VERSUS SHAV

... a madcap puppet film featuring the voices of **Colm Meaney** as George Bernard Shaw and **Derek Jacobi** as William Shakespeare, has been produced by Irish production company, Caboom.

This new Irish short is based on the last play completed by legendary Irish playwright and Nobel Prizewinner, **George Bernard Shaw**. In a knockabout Punch & Judy style, Shaw himself battles it out with William Shakespeare in a war of words to decide who is the greater writer.

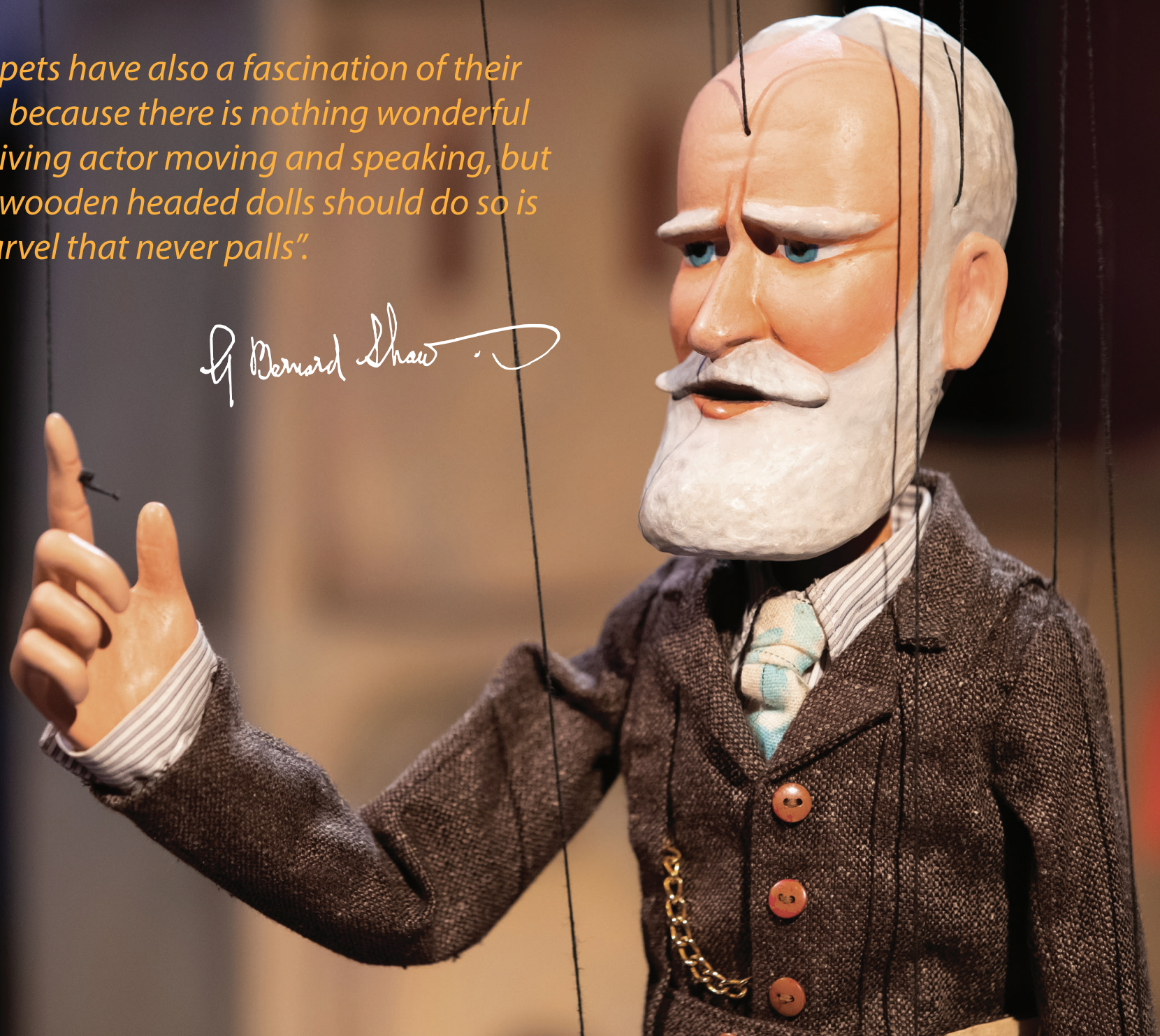
Written barely a year before he died in 1950 at the grand old age of 94, 'Shakes Versus Shav' was a final opportunity for the great GBS to celebrate his work and legacy, while taking a sly swipe at what he saw as Shakespeare's overblown reputation. The film is true to Shaw's original play: both funny and poignant, with laugh out loud slapstick moments, flashes of genuine drama and scathing wit. It's a fresh and fitting tribute to two of the greatest writers in the English language ... with strings attached.

Released to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the play's publication, 'Shakes Versus Shav' is co-directed by puppeteer Damian Farrell (Star Wars, Jurassic World, Dark Crystal) and documentary-maker Gerry Hoban. The film grew out of a previous collaboration between the two while working with Gabriel Byrne on the IFTA Award-winning documentary about George Bernard Shaw, "My Astonishing Self".

'Shakes Versus Shav' has been produced by Damian Farrell, Elaine Gallagher and Martha Moloney for Caboom, and is funded by Screen Ireland/Fís Éireann, along with RTÉ, Coimisiún na Meán and Section 481.

"Puppets have also a fascination of their own, because there is nothing wonderful in a living actor moving and speaking, but that wooden headed dolls should do so is a marvel that never palls".

G. Bernard Shaw



What is the background to the film? From his childhood days in Dublin, George Bernard Shaw had a lifelong love of puppets – he semi-jokingly wrote that they were much easier to work with than actors. His good friend Waldo Lanchester was one of the great English puppet-masters of the time, and had made two exquisite marionettes of Shaw and Shakespeare; so he asked Shaw to write a play for them... which he did! It was the last dramatic work Shaw completed before he died, and 2024 marks its 75th anniversary.

Where did the idea for the film come from? While working together a few years ago on a documentary about George Bernard Shaw (the IFTA award-winning 'My Astonishing Self') we found and restored the original puppet of GBS, made for his 1949 play 'Shakes Versus Shav'. Once we'd uncovered this little wooden man wrapped in tissue paper in Shaw's old home outside London, it was a natural and inevitable conclusion that we would try to reunite him with Shakespeare and make a film of the play.

What is it about? This is a proper, old-style end-of-the-pier Punch and Judy Show: two angry old puppets slugging it out to see who is the greater! There are a few actual punches thrown, but mostly it's a rapid-fire war of words between the two great writers, both of them eager to preserve and protect their legacies. They verbally joust with each other, quoting their best lines, wielding their finest phrases, proudly blowing their own trumpets... You have to remember that this was written when Shaw was 93 years old – frail and ageing and barely a year before he died. He was obsessed with his legacy, and afraid that nobody would remember him or his "piffling plays", especially when overshadowed by the constant presence of Shakespeare and his body of work. Although laugh out loud funny, there are moments that are achingly sad as they both ponder mortality and life's "brief candle".

Why is it called "Shakes Versus Shav"? Shaw was constantly annoyed that Shakespeare had his own adjective – 'Shakespearian'; so he invented one for himself: 'Shavian'. So that's why it is Shakes versus "Shav"... In fact, Shaw was so infuriated at the amount of adulation shown to Shakespeare that he even came up with his own name for it: 'Bardolatry'.

Why did you cast Colm Meaney & Derek Jacobi? George Bernard Shaw was born and raised in Dublin, and we knew we wanted a great Dublin voice to 're-imagine' Shav as a cheeky, streetwise smart Alec: Colm fitted the character so perfectly and so well. For Shakespeare, we knew we had to persuade one of the great British Shakespearian stage actors to come onboard and we were honoured when Derek agreed to take part. In the midst of all of the pandemic restrictions, it was an important part of our plan to have both actors in the room together while recording their parts; it also helped that Derek and Colm had played opposite each other before, on Broadway in 1987.

Why did you decide to use puppets? Shaw wrote the play specifically for puppets: exquisitely-detailed marionettes built by Waldo and Muriel Lanchester. The show was performed a handful of times at various festivals in the early 1950s, where the puppets mimed along to a recorded gramophone track of actors performing the dialogue. We very much wanted to follow in Waldo and Muriel's footsteps as we set out to bring these puppets to the big screen. Our master puppet builder Darryl Worbey and his team used a combination of traditional and digital techniques to recreate the puppets including photogrammetry and 3D printing, as well as wood carving and clay sculpting. In a world of hyper-real VFX and CG characters, there is a beautiful simplicity to marionettes who have no moving facial features and no moving mouths yet still deliver an engaging performance thanks to our amazing puppeteers.

What type of puppetry is used in the film? We used a variety of puppetry techniques in the film including marionettes, rod, miniature and shadow. The puppets are performed live by our puppeteers to a guide voice track. The animation starts out loose and fun but becomes more considered as the drama intensifies. Our puppeteers Ronnie LeDrew, Colin Purves and Claire Roi Harvey have decades of experience behind them covering all forms of theatre, TV and film puppetry.

How did you work together as co-directors?

Damo: For the past number of years a lot of my time has been as principal puppeteer and creature performer on large-scale Hollywood films and TV projects including Star Wars, Jurassic Park and Dark Crystal. Having my own animation production company, Caboom, has also allowed me to develop more personal projects, so when Gerry contacted me about restoring a unique 1940's marionette of an Irish literary legend handmade by one of that era's finest puppet-masters for his documentary, it really was a no-brainer.

Gerry: My background is in factual TV and documentary-making. Having worked with Bob Geldof on a film about WB Yeats (the IFTA winning 'A Fanatic Heart'), I directed Gabriel Byrne on a similar project about George Bernard Shaw. While on a recce in Shaw's old home in Hertfordshire, I came across the original 1949 Shaw puppet in a storage room and knew I had to incorporate it into the documentary. And to get it restored and working, there really was only one person I could call: Damo!

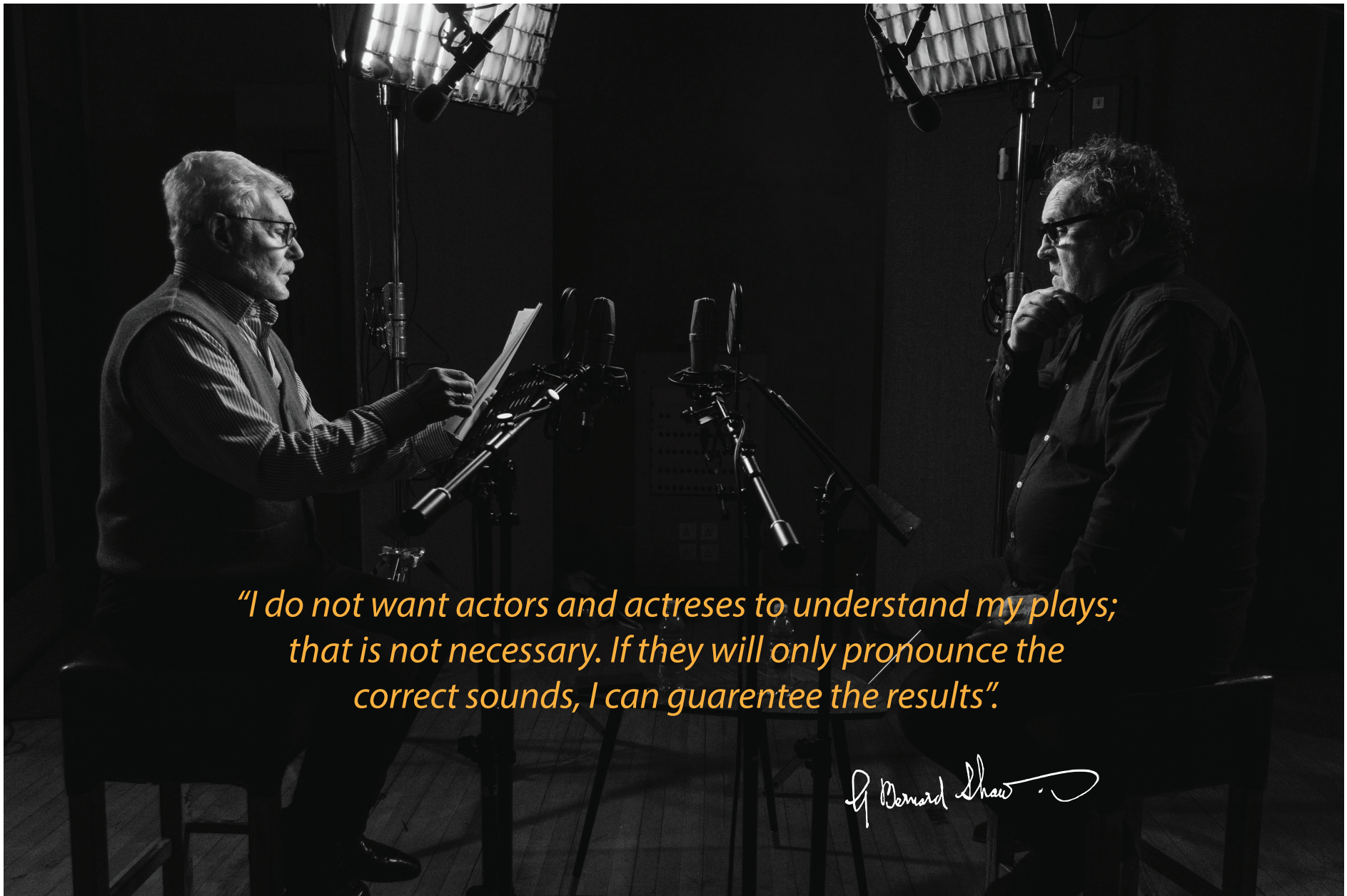
Both: So, we've known each other for years and collaborated before: our different backgrounds in puppetry and documentary-making seem to blend naturally; it also helps that we share a similar sense of humour. The key to working together is to have a shared vision that we are both aiming towards, so a lot of the heavy lifting was done up front with the script and the animatic. It is also creatively beneficial to be able to bounce off someone else to help land on the best idea for the project. In its own way the original play is completely ridiculous, random and theatrically ramshackle: we both wanted to buy into that unhinged madcap world completely and unapologetically!

What is your ambition for the film?

Gerry: I feel Shaw is a little under-appreciated in the country of his birth – perhaps because he had the temerity to leave Dublin at the age of 20! He wrote 'Shakes Versus Shav' the year before he died, in an attempt to reclaim some of his legacy in the overbearing shadow of Shakespeare: hopefully this little film will help solidify that immortality he yearned for... and earned!

Damian: At a time when digital creatures and highly sophisticated animatronic puppets are so commonplace in film-making, we really wanted to see if we could create something with very 'rudimentary' puppets that could deliver an endearing performance on a big screen to remind audiences how fascinating puppets can be.

Both: We're both quite stubbornly proud that we've shown Shaw's last completed work its due respect: we have made a 'definitive' version of the play, despite the fact that there are some bizarre, obscure and downright baffling passages in it; in fact, we only dropped one word from the original text... let's see if the Shavians can spot it!



*"I do not want actors and actresses to understand my plays;
that is not necessary. If they will only pronounce the
correct sounds, I can guarantee the results".*

Derek Jacobi

Derek Jacobi (Shakes) and Colm Meaney (Shav) recording the voice for 'Shakes Versus Shav' at Metropolis Studios, London.

CAST

Colm Meaney (Shav)

With a career spanning over thirty years, Colm Meaney has appeared in a wide variety of acclaimed films, ranging from 'Con Air' and 'Kings' to 'Get Him' to 'The Greek'. More recently, he was seen playing Martin McGuinness in 'The Journey' opposite Timothy Spall's Ian Paisley, opposite Nicholas Hoult in biopic 'Tolkien', and in 'Seberg' opposite Kirsten Stewart. Recent theatre credits include Big Daddy in Benedict Andrews' critically acclaimed 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' on the West End, and the Tony-nominated Broadway production of 'The Iceman Cometh' opposite Denzel Washington. Meaney can currently be seen in 'Gangs of London' (Sky), 'The Banker' (Apple), 'The Singapore Grip' (ITV), and feature film 'Pixie' (Paramount). He has most recently worked with Liam Neeson and Diane Kruger on Neil Jordan's 'Marlowe'.

Derek Jacobi (Shakespeare)

Derek Jacobi, is a prominent British actor with an illustrious career spanning numerous decades in television, film, and on stage. Notable TV projects include his acclaimed role as Emperor Claudius in the BBC series 'I, Claudius' (1976), earning him a BAFTA award. In film, Jacobi made an early impact in Laurence Olivier's 'Othello' (1965) and later featured in 'The Day of the Jackal' (1973), 'The Odessa File' (1974), and received critical acclaim for his role in 'Gladiator' (2000). On stage, Jacobi's career is marked by his founding membership in Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company. Standout performances include Benedick in 'Much Ado about Nothing', earning him a Tony Award, and memorable portrayals of historical figures like King Lear (2010) and Ivanov. His stage career also includes directing Kenneth Branagh in 'Hamlet'.



Puppets of Shakes and Shav, built by Darryl Worbey, inspired by the work of Waldo & Muriel Lanchester from the short film 'Shakes Versus Shav'.
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DIRECTORS

Damian Farrell

Damian Farrell, has over thirty years of experience in television and film as a director, puppeteer and animator and serves as the creative director at Irish production company, Caboom. His portfolio includes award-winning work in scripted comedy, puppet series, animation, and hidden camera shows for BBC, CBBC, RTÉ, Disney, and Nickelodeon. A former animation artist with Don Bluth and a Jim Henson-trained puppeteer, Damo's breadth of experience across many different media has seen him work as a principal puppeteer on the 'Star Wars', 'Dark Crystal', 'Muppet' and 'Jurassic World' franchises as well as projects with LucasFilm, Bad Robot, Disney, Sesame Workshop, BBC, CBBC, The Jim Henson Company, ITV and Double Z Enterprises (home to Zig and Zag, Podge and Rodge, and Dustin the Turkey).

He has directed the BAFTA-winning series of 'Gigglebiz' for CBeebies and the original series of CBBC's 'Class Dismissed'. Damo has also produced the multi award-winning stop-motion short film 'Second To None'. He has recently completed directing his third series of the RTS Award-winning Irish comedy series 'Storybud' for Kite Entertainment and RTÉ Jr.

Gerry Hoban

Gerry Hoban is a highly-acclaimed Irish documentary director & writer with more than 25 years of international experience. He has earned a reputation for working productively with onscreen talent, and is an acclaimed creator of powerful narratives which vividly bring major social, historical and cultural themes to life. Most recently, Gerry has directed a haunting look back at Ireland's worst air disaster at Tuskar Rock; a feature-length reappraisal of the death of Michael Collins; a three-part series on former State Pathologist, Marie Cassidy; an exploration of 100 years of Northern Ireland with Miriam O'Callaghan; a seriously enjoyable examination of the Irish love of swearing with Ardal O'Hanlon; and was story editor on the acclaimed 'Let The Rest of The World Go By', following the life, loves & tragedies of best friends Matt & Michael.

Gerry won awards and universal critical acclaim for A Fanatic Heart – Bob Geldof's exploration of the life and work of WB Yeats, and My Astonishing Self – Gabriel Byrne's thoughtful and impassioned piece on George Bernard Shaw. He also helmed the major international historical documentary Countdown to Calvary - a forensic investigation into the final week of the life of Jesus, presented by Hugh Bonneville; and Joe Duffy's poignant tributes to the children that died during both The Troubles and The Easter Rising.

Currently, Gerry is in production on two BAI/CnM documentary projects, focusing on the decline in the priesthood in Ireland, and the work of stained glass artist, Harry Clarke.

PRODUCERS

Damian Farrell (as above)

Elaine Gallagher

Elaine Gallagher is a writer, director and producer. Her eclectic CV spans comedy, drama, documentary and animation. Elaine's filmography includes the Screen Ireland dance short, "An Rinceoir" (writer/director), which is currently on the Irish language curriculum in Irish secondary schools; and the groundbreaking children's TV show, "Dizzy Deliveries" (staff writer). Her work as a producer includes the comedy short, "A Fistful of Coupons", which was short-listed for the British Comedy Guide Talent Awards 2020; the Caboom animated short, "The Suffragette Spirit – The Laura Lennox Story", produced as part of the Herstory series for RTÉ; and the multi-award winning feature documentary, "North Circular".

Martha Moloney

Martha Moloney is an award winning documentary producer with over fifteen years' experience working across a wide variety of genres. Having worked on diverse documentary projects from intimate observational (Life on the Inside/You, Me and Surrogacy), factual historical series (The Irish Revolution) to creative portraits of Irish writers (My Astonishing Self, Gabriel Byrne on George Bernard Shaw), her focus is on creative and thought provoking story-telling with a universal appeal.

Caboom (Production company).

Working in live-action, puppetry and animation, the company draws on almost thirty years of experience to produce award-winning work. Caboom's work is broad and varied from animation and puppetry series to live-action commercials for leading consumer brands, from animated sequences and elements for apps / games to comedy series for broadcasters. Caboom offers a range of animation and puppetry services for tv and film projects.

Clients include Disney, TBS, RTÉ, CBBC, BBC, Fox, Warners, American Greetings, Mattel and The Jim Henson Company.

More information available at www.caboom.ie

PUPPETEERS

Ronnie Le Drew

Ronnie Le Drew started his Puppetry career at the famous Little Angel Theatre, in London, becoming John Wright's second apprentice. Studying all forms of puppetry, including Marionettes which John Wright was famous for. Film and Television work followed working as an additional puppeteer on Jim Henson's film's Labyrinth, Muppet Christmas Carol, Muppet Treasure Island, and for Frank Oz, Little Shop of Horrors. And most recently Dark Crystal Age of Resistance. Which included a marionette sequence. Ronnie was Tom Hanks' double working 'Pinocchio' in the Disney live action film where he operated the Pinocchio marionette in the workshop sequence. Ronnie is perhaps most well known for his performances as Zippy on the British preschool kids series; 'Rainbow' for 20 years.

Claire Roi Harvey

Claire Roi Harvey is a puppeteer and performer in film, television, commercials and theatre.

Previous projects include 'Jurassic World: Dominion' for Universal, Star Wars: 'The Rise of Skywalker', Star Wars: 'The Last Jedi', 'Solo: A Star Wars Story' for Disney, 'The Dark Crystal: Age of resistance' for The Jim Henson Company & Netflix, 'The Tear Thief & Macbeth' for Little Angel, Cbeebies 'Feeling Better', and 'Doctor Who' for the BBC. Her work in theatre includes performing, puppet design & building, & puppetry directing/consultation.

Colin Purves

Colin Purves has been a principal puppet performer in many blockbuster movies, such as the last two Jurassic Park World films, and the last five Star Wars movies. Hailing from a family of famous Scottish puppeteers, Colin has worked in theatre and on screen since he was able to hold a puppet. His formative years were spent perfecting his craft in front of audiences while touring around the UK and abroad. As a result, his skill set covers all forms of acting and puppetry: Animatronics, Rod Puppets, Glove Puppets, Shadow Puppets and Marionettes. Colin and his family run a traditional, Victorian styled theatre in the Scottish Borders, where they frequently present marionette productions; 'Purves Puppets'. Amazingly, Colin's father saw the original production of Shake's vs Shav when he was a boy!

MASTER PUPPET BUILDER: Darryl Worbey

Darryl's professional career started in 1985 as an animatronics puppeteer on the sci-fi movie 'Hyper Sapiens'. He was then invited to join the Jim Henson Company working on many projects, including 'The Storyteller', 'Dinosaurs' and 'What's up Doc?'.

As a contributing designer / supervisor he worked on feature films: 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 1 & 2', 'The Flintstones' and 'Neverending Story 2', 'The Muppet Christmas Carol', 'Muppet Treasure Island' and 'Disney's Muppets Most Wanted'.

In 1990 Darryl formed 'Darryl Worbey Studio', creating and designing high quality bespoke puppets and characters for the entertainment industry. The studio's work has featured in films, television and on stage globally. In 2015, his client of 25 years – international ventriloquist Paul Zerdin – won season 10 of NBC's America's Got Talent, opening his own Las Vegas residency at Planet Hollywood with puppets built by DWS.

In 2016, Darryl was invited to join Neal Scanlan's Creature Effects Department on the new Star Wars anthology for Disney; 'Rogue I' and 'The Last Jedi'. His work included the fabrication of a variety of creatures where he was tasked with building a new Yoda puppet for the legendary Frank Oz.
Director Of Photography

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Richard Kendrick

Richard Kendrick is an Irish Director of Photography. Richard has worked for over 20 years in the industry, with a broad and diverse range of experience that gives him a refreshingly engaging team approach and a unique eye. As a Director of Photography, Richard has created an impressive international portfolio of award-winning drama, documentary, and commercial work.

Best Cinematography - Galway Film Festival 2018 - Song of Granite
EMMY Nomination 2017 Outstanding Lighting - Barbarians Rising
3 x IFTA (Irish Film Television Academy) Best Cinematography nominations:
Song Of Granite – Pat Collins Harvest Films/Roads entertainment
In Good Hands - Frank Delaney GMTV
Two for the Road - Alan Gilsean Yellow Asylum Films
16 x IFTA Nominated documentaries (10 awards)
3 x Celtic Film Festival awards
1 x Radharc Award

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Fiona Cunningham

Fiona originally trained as a Fine Artist and then studied Production Design with Percy Harris at Motley in London. She has worked extensively in television, theatre and film in Ireland, UK, Europe and Australia. Fiona has worked extensively in Television and recent credits include Dancing With The Stars, Ultimate Irish Playlist, Last Singer Standing (RTE), The Six O'Clock Show (VMTV).

As art director on Modern Love for Amazon Prime where her experience in virtual production and screen imagery was required to film complex set and screen setups.

Sustainability is a major consideration in Fiona's work. The Six O'Clock Show was the first fully sustainable set design and construction for Virgin Media.

COMPOSER: Giles Packham

Giles Packham, a seasoned composer and multi-instrumentalist, boasts a two-decade career in the global music, film, and TV industry. Specializing in scoring for documentaries and animations, Giles has an impressive portfolio, including projects like the Smithsonian Network's "Aerial Greece" (2021) and the award-winning "I, Dolours" (2017). Noteworthy contributions also include RTE's "The Zoo TV Series" (2009-2016) and the acclaimed short animation "Paperman" (2013). In animation, he scored series like "Jessy & Nessy" (2020) and "Filly Funtasia" (2020).

Giles is a key figure in the Screen Composers Guild of Ireland, championing the role of original music in Irish audiovisual industries. His educational background includes an MPhil in Music & Media Technologies from Trinity College Dublin, and further studies in Film Music Composition at UCLA/Screen Training Ireland. Mentored by Hollywood and Irish composers, Giles brings a rich and diverse musical expertise to his craft.


FILM EDITOR: Fernando De Juan

Fernando de Juan is a TV and film editor based in Dublin since 2007. He attended Film Studies at Centre d'Estudis Cinematografics de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain. He has worked on a wide range of documentaries, factual television series and short films both in drama and experimental.

Some of Fernando's credits include the documentaries "Ireland's Dirty Laundry", "The Honorary Irishman", "Water Rising" and "Tackling the All Blacks". He has also worked on award winning projects such as the documentary film project series "Ghost Empire", the observational documentary "The Dream of the Baobab" and the short films "The Swing", "Expulsion", "Spirit Level" and "Shakes Versus Shav".



The puppet of William Shakespeare, built by Darryl Worbey, inspired by the work of Waldo & Muriel Lanchester from the short film 'Shakes Versus Shav'.
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