



**LAY ME DOWN
SOFTLY**

BY BILLY ROCHE



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LAY ME DOWN SOFTLY was premiered by the Abbey Theatre at the Peacock on 14 November, 2008.

The Play was subsequently produced by Wexford Arts Centre in 2011, and transferred to the Tricycle Theatre, London.

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LAY ME DOWN SOFTLY was premiered by the Abbey Theatre at the Peacock in Dublin, Ireland, opening on November 14, 2008. It was directed by Wilson Milam; the set and costume designs were by Ferdia Murphy; the lighting design was by Paul Keogan; the original music and sound design were by Philip Stewart; and the stage manager was Tara Furlong. The cast was as follows:

THEO	Gary Lydon
PEADAR	Lalor Roddy
DEAN	Barry Ward
JUNIOR.....	Joe Doyle
LILY.....	Aisling O’Sullivan
EMER.....	Ruth Negga

CHARACTERS

THEO

PEADAR

DEAN

JUNIOR

LILY

EMER

PLACE

We are in a rough-and-ready boxing booth in Delaney's Travelling Roadshow. A boxing ring is erected in a marquee tent and there is a raised platform-cum-dais of sorts in the stage right corner at the back wall of the tent where the heavy boxing bag dangles; the other corner is piled with stacked-up benches for the bystanders and a wheeled handcart stuffed with stuff — ropes and canvas and spit buckets and a big bass drum and an old battered accordion, etc. A small table and chair is positioned close to the ring. A sturdy wooden chest stands upstage left and this is where the gloves and mitts and gear are stored. A large sign saying, "ALL COMERS" looms overhead. There are several exits that seem to open up onto the green area outside where the carnival is situated. Downstage left there are a few steps leading up to a covered-in wooden kiosk with a turnstile for the punters. A transistor radio is close at hand. "The Academy" is emblazoned in back-to-front writing above the entrance. There is a rough wooden floor with tufts of grass growing up through it in places. Through the flaps and the odd chink in the tent's canvas we snatch a glimpse now and then of the other fair-ground attractions — lights around the rifle range perhaps and the corner of the merry-go-round and whatnot.

TIME

The play is set in the early 1960s, somewhere in Ireland.

LAY ME DOWN SOFTLY

ACT ONE

Lights rise on the boxing booth. A song comes from the transistor radio (Del Shannon perhaps). It is Wednesday morning and Dean, in a lather of sweat, is skipping close to the punch bag. Peadar is working inside the ring, dismantling the ropes and testing their durability and looking underneath the ring for replacements, etc. Theo is busy inside the wooden kiosk. The benches are stacked on top of each other out of the way.*

THEO. (*Off.*) Peadar, you might take a look at this aul' turnstile for us out here when you get a chance, will yeh? (*Peadar is an over-the-hill ex-boxer who moves with the grace and poise and quiet dignity of a man who has nothing left to prove.*)

PEADAR. Yeah, right ... Why, what's wrong with it? (*Theo, glasses on, enters with account books and a cash box, etc. He is a big, rough, fierce, commanding middle-aged man.*)

THEO. (*Testing the turnstile.*) Nothin', as far as I can see. (*He turns off the radio and closes the door of the kiosk.*) Lily says it was stickin' on her last night. The punters had to climb in over it, she said, which was all very well until some big fat one got stuck and put the kybosh on it all. They had to come in through the side flap in the end I believe.

PEADAR. I was wonderin' why they were comin' in that way.

THEO. Huh? ... What's goin' on?

PEADAR. His nibs! ... He wants them tightened he said.

THEO. Tightened?

PEADAR. Yeah. (*He grimaces.*)

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

DEAN. (*Quenching his thirst.*) They're too loose, Theo. I mean there's no what-do-you-call-it in 'em — snap. And that floor is scandalous too, I don't mind tellin' yez.

THEO. The floor as well be God, hah.

PEADAR. Madison Square Garden he wants.

DEAN. What?

THEO. Put a bit of powder on it why don't yez. 'Til we all have a bit of a dance.

PEADAR. I know.

THEO. Hah? (*He sings.*) “Da da da da da da da da da ...” (*“The Blue Danube.”*)

DEAN. Did yeh see your man last night, Theo?

THEO. “Da da da da da da da da da ...”

DEAN. He went down like a bag of shit, boy. Oh, the tingle! (*He snaps out a punch.*)

PEADAR. Yeah, we all saw that, didn't we, Theo?

THEO. Witnessed it. We all witnessed it.

PEADAR. That's it. That's the very word I was ... how-would-you-put-it-now ... searchin' for. (*Theo is sitting at the table, books open.*)

DEAN. What's that supposed to mean? (*Peadar hisses and turns away.*) He was givin' me impudence. Theo. “You're not hurtin' me,” says he to me when I hit him the first time. “I can't feel a thing,” says he. “No?” says I. “No,” says he like that. “Nothin'.” “Here,” says I to him when the time was right, “Feel this.” Wham! ... Teeth and blood flying in all directions. Oh dear me.

PEADAR. A terrible stupid thing to do if you ask me.

DEAN. Come again.

PEADAR. No need for it.

DEAN. That's a matter of opinion ... Anyway, it's good for business.

PEADAR. That's just the point, it's not.

DEAN. Not what?

PEADAR. Good for business.

DEAN. Yeah well, I've a reputation to think of, pal: unlike the rest of yez. So let the word go forth. That right, Theo?

THEO. Huh?

DEAN. I say let it be known, boy.

THEO. Yes, powder for little twinkle-toes.

DEAN. How's that?

THEO. (*Menacing.*) Yeh what? (*Slight pause.*)

PEADAR. Was your man alright after, Theo?

THEO. Yeah, he was alright. A bit groggy, that's all.

DEAN. (*Cockney.*) Groggy? Not 'alf! I'll say. Eh?

THEO. I got Junior to drop him home in the truck.

DEAN. All heart, boy.

THEO. (*Licking his fingers and counting the money.*) That's me all over. Theodore Delaney. Blessed are the blessed for they shall be humble and pure at heart. One hundred and fourteen smackers. Henceforth and forthwith! (*He writes it into his ledger.*)

PEADAR. And was he alright did he say?

THEO. Yeah ... As I say ... he was *guroggye*.

DEAN. (*Taking off the old fellow's tipsy swagger.*) I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new of the year. Cuckoo! (*Junior enters, a lame, handsome young man with a laconic nature and the slow heartbeat of a slightly washed out prize fighter. Sits on the wooden chest.*) Junior there'll back me up on that now, won't yeh Junior?

JUNIOR. What's that?

DEAN. Those ropes.

JUNIOR. What about them?

DEAN. I say they're too slack. (*Junior makes a face.*) And the floor. Tell him what you said about the floor, Junior. What you said to me the other day there. Go ahead. (*Junior sighs and shakes his head.*)

THEO. Any sign of Lily yet?

JUNIOR. Yeah, she's talkin' to Rusty out there.

DEAN. *Again!* You'd want to keep an eye on that fella, Theo. That's a whoremaster goin' around, that lad is. I wouldn't mind but they say he's hung like a horse too. (*He neighs.*) Junior, gives us a hand here, will yeh. (*Dean indicates the set of boxing gloves.*)

PEADAR. How was your man last night after, Junior?

JUNIOR. (*Going to help Dean with the gloves.*) Who's that?

PEADAR. The aul' lad?

DEAN. He wasn't an aul' lad, Peadar.

JUNIOR. Alright, I think.

DEAN. He was about your age.

PEADAR. Hey.

JUNIOR. I mean I just dropped him off, like.

DEAN. You didn't go in for the sup of soup then, no?

JUNIOR. I did in me hat. I dropped him at the door and got out of there. 'Cause he was fairly shook up, yeh know.

DEAN. Yeah well, now he knows. Tie it tight, will yeh.

JUNIOR. Hold still then. A rough enough part of town too.

DEAN. (*Rising.*) The Bowery be Jaysus, hah? Or old Skid Row! (*He laughs — a distinctive sound . . .*) That's better . . . Yes, hung like a horse, he is . . . He has women all over the place, yeh know? — Rusty! Some of the lads were sayin' he has two or three on the go at any given time.

PEADAR. I heard that alright.

JUNIOR. It's a good job he's not good-lookin' — he'd be dangerous.

DEAN. He has it where it counts though, lads. (*He whistles to indicate.*)

PEADAR. I suppose. When all's said and done, like!

DEAN. (*Makes his way to the heavy boxing bag.*) That's what I say. (*Laughter.*)

THEO. (*Privately fuming.*) Are you goin' to take a look at that aul' turnstile out there for me or not, yeh or no? — like I asked yeh.

PEADAR. What?

THEO. Instead of fuckin' around with that thing for him there. The ropes were alright they way they were. Lave them be, be fucked. You'll be puttin' powder on the floor next.

PEADAR. Junior, come on, you're better at this lark than me.

JUNIOR. What lark?

PEADAR. The turnstile is stickin' — apparently.

JUNIOR. Yeah?

THEO. (*Half to himself.*) The whole thing dismantled be Jaysus. For what? Bullshit!

PEADAR. (*Muttering.*) Here we go again.

JUNIOR. What?

THEO. Never mind mutterin' there at all.

PEADAR. Yeh what?

THEO. I said less of your aul' guff there.

JUNIOR. Probably just needs a drop of oil or somethin'.

THEO. Tightened!

JUNIOR. Show us.

THEO. One of yez do it. You don't need the two of yez to . . . I mean what am I runnin' around here anyway — Butlin's Holi-fuckin'-day Camp or somethin'?

PEADAR. (*Coming away from there.*) Alright.

JUNIOR. (*Bewildered.*) What?

THEO. (*To Dean.*) Two of them to put a drop of oil on a bit of an aul' rag and what-do-you-call-it . . . I don't know.

PEADAR. Alright I said. Now lave it, will yeh.

THEO. Yeh what?

PEADAR. Jesus Christ tonight man, give it a rest, will yeh.

THEO. There's enough people restin' around here already as it is I think without me startin'. Yes, Butlin's Holiday Camp you must all think you're in, the lot of yez. *(Theo blatantly watches Peadar — who is tempted to mimic him — going about his business. Junior checks the turnstile and then goes to get his toolbox from under the platform as Lily enters.)*

LILY. Mmn ... I love that smell. Sweat and dust and leather. And what-do-you-call-it. *(She teases the air.)*

PEADAR. Rope. *(Junior chuckles nervously.)*

THEO. *(Suspicious.)* What?

DEAN. Well Lily, how's Rusty gettin' on out there?

LILY. Rusty?

DEAN. Yeah. Is he alright?

LILY. Rusty's alright, yeah, why?

DEAN. Nothin' ... We were just ... yeh know ... talkin' about him here. We were just sayin' what a popular fella he is and that.

LILY. Yeah?

DEAN. Yeah. Don't yeh think?

LILY. I don't know ... I suppose so.

DEAN. What? *(Pause as she throws Junior a dirty look.)*

THEO. What have you got for me?

LILY. *(Putting different bags of money on the table.)* These are mostly last night's now. The rifle range, the bumpers, the swing boats, the ... which one is that? *(She reads the sticker.)* ... Oh yeah, the Helter-Skelter. That's today's alright.

THEO. Which one's Rusty's?

LILY. The bumpers ... He owes yeh two nights he said: last night and the night before.

THEO. Oh I know that. Don't worry about that ... Let's see ... what's in here ... Yeah ... *(He looks in a ledger.)*

DEAN. Did little Ernie tell yeh about your man winnin' all before him at the rifle range last night, Lily?

LILY. Yeah.

DEAN. Hit the bullseye every time, boy. Bing bang boom ... Must be in the F.C.A. or somethin', lads — this fella. Cleaned the place out so he did — every doll and teddy bear and ornament in the shop. Hard set to carry it all home, I believe.

LILY. I know. I had to follow him down the lane and buy it all back again, sure.

LAY ME DOWN SOFTLY

by Billy Roche

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Set in rural Ireland in 1962, LAY ME DOWN SOFTLY takes us into the burlesque world of the boxing booth of Delaney's Travelling Roadshow, affectionately known as "The Academy." We dip down the shadowy, ropey avenues to the sound of the churning calliope, where we encounter the play's cast of dangerous characters: Theo, the charismatic, jealous, and violent ringmaster; his Carmen-esque lover, Lily; Peader, Theo's old, tired, and not-so-trusted sidekick; the vain and boastful prize-fighter Dean; and the limping, Adonis-like Junior. Into this world comes Emer, a wounded waif of a girl who has come in search of her long-lost father. Her presence and the arrival of a professional boxer threaten to upset the already shaky equilibrium.

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