

Irish drama at Carleton

IRELAND'S struggle for independence and the women's right to vote was the backdrop to a moving production at Carleton High School.

'Rebels and Friends', an acclaimed play by the Lynx Theatre and Poetry company, tells the story of two extraordinary sisters who battled for change through those turbulent times.

Jacqueline Mulhallen, who researched and wrote the play from numerous writings, took on the role of Constance Markievicz.

In the 1900s, Constance ran a soup kitchen for the poverty-stricken Irish, encouraged Lancashire mill girls to fight for equal pay and became one of the organisers of the 1916 Easter Uprising.

Pontefract and Castleford Express, 10.5.90

Lynx Theatre cast a bright light

Review:
DECLAN HASSETT

THE breadth and depth of research apparent in *Rebels And Friends*, which opened at the Triskel Theatre, Cork, last night, underpins this quite remarkable Lynx Theatre London production based on the lives of sisters Constance Markievicz and Eva Gore Booth.

There is a documentary sweep to Ms Jacqueline Mulhallen's work which lifts it above mere theatre and unfolds history in quite the most absorbing fashion. It deals with the labour and birth pangs of this terrible beauty, Ireland, with great feeling, but also with the dispassion of documented evidence.

Ms Mulhallen as Constance and Suzy Fry, her sister Eva, are the only two on stage for some two hours, but so effective is the use of slide and off-stage voice material (Nicole Argy), that there is the sense of the broader canvas of their contrasting but inextricably linked lives unfolding before the audience.

This might have been an arid journey through the letters which the sisters wrote to each other, mainly when Constance was jailed in England or Ireland (Cork) and when pacifist Eva was defending the working class in England, but the author Ms Mulhallen and director Norma Cohen manage to present them in an absorbing conversational form.

Because we are being reminded this week of the sporadic bombing of Campile and Dublin, and the more devastating destruction of Belfast by the Germans in World War Two, the destruction of Sackville Street in 1916 and later on, the burning of Cork by the Tans, all have a strange and unsettling immediacy when flashed on the big back of the stage screen.

Rebels and Friends continues tonight, but ends its short run in Cork tomorrow night (Wed) and I do believe that anyone with the remotest interest in those troubled times might care to view them through the eyes of those two quite remarkable sisters.

Cork Examiner, 5.9.89

Honiton
Allen Saddler

Rebels And Friends

THE first Honiton Arts Festival has provided a surprise.

The town that boasts the largest Tory majority in Britain invited the Lynx Company to put on a theatre piece about the notorious Countess Constance Markievicz, one of the leaders of the 1916 Irish rebellion, and her sister, Eva Gore Booth, who campaigned for women's rights in the Lancashire cotton mills and inspired Christabel Pankhurst to join the suffragettes.

Rebels And Friends has a well-researched, seamless script based on correspondence, dialogue, music, and Gore Booth's poetry, which has been assembled by Jacqueline Mulhallen.

It has the style of a television documentary, the story being illustrated by slides shown on a big screen.

Many of the slides are from newspaper photographs, showing the dead and injured, the parades, and the arrival of the Black And Tans with their quaint habit of bayoneting hay carts for escaping rebels.

The speeches of Connolly and Larkin are relayed by tape, and Dominic Behan's rebel songs celebrate and mourn past battles. This slice of Irish history is fascinating.

The Gore Booth sisters were a power and a strength on behalf of conscientious objectors. The sisters were dedicated and sincere, but not dull.

Early on, Constance notes that Irish women "live on bread and margarine, while the men have beefsteak and beer".

There is an air of self-improvement, the idealistic socialism of Robert Blatchford's Clarion cyclists and the socialist Sunday school.

The Countess (she married a Polish count) starts the Fianna, Ireland's version of the Boy Scouts.

There is a naive nobility about the sisters' rebellion. Eva writes while travelling the arts trail in Italy, while her sister Constance spends a lot of time in gaol. Eva was a pacifist, Constance, a military leader.

Rebels And Friends is an effective piece of theatrical campaigning.

I thought it was a little long for its format. Some more dramatic incidents would have helped to sustain interest.

It is well played by the writer, Jacqueline Mulhallen as the militant Countess, and Suzy Fry as Eva. William Alderson's prodigious research into the visual material gives an old technique a new dimension.

The Guardian, 28.5.90

Story of a rebel and a friend

Review: DECLAN HASSETT

DOMINIC BEHAN gives forth with the rebel song *Rosscarbery*, there is a slide shot of fire-scarred Cork, and, on stage, Constance Markievicz and Eva Gore Booth correspond between Ireland and Italy. This scene represents best the sheer sweep of this two-hander docudrama at the Everyman Palace, Cork.

I reviewed this Lynx Theatre London production on its first visit to Cork in September, and, while I believe that the smaller Triskel venue was more suited to this type of theatre, the breadth and depth of research is once again apparent. History comes to life, transcending mere scholarship.

There are two other

important elements which lift it out of the lecture hall and give it soul. These are the lovely contrasting, yet complementary performances of Jacqueline Mulhallen as Constance, the indefatigable rebel, and Suzy Fry as Eva, pacifist, writer and confidante.

Rebels And Friends is directed by Norma Cohen and William Alderson has the unenviable task of devising, directing and operating the 500 slides on cue and this had to be done in front of stage, between audience and performers. Ms Mulhallen, who is Sylvia Pankhurst in the lunchtime offering, *Sylvia* at the same theatre

We are moved through Easter 1916; a World War, the Treaty and Civil War in this theatrical newsreel of events which would shape this nation.

Rebels and Friends continues tonight and tomorrow night at 8.15.

Cork Examiner, 10.4.90