



Jacqueline Mulhallen as Sylvia Pankhurst

## Who was Sylvia?

“Great is the work that is yet to be accomplished”, said Sylvia Pankhurst in 1928, reflecting that women over 21 had finally been granted the vote. Her spirited declaration, its undertones rumbling ominously down the next 70 years, ends *Sylvia* Jacqueline Mulhallen’s absorbing 40 minute one-woman play charting the Suffrage movement’s dogged yet exhilarated struggle up to the end of the First World War.

Drawing freely from Pankhurst’s own writings - *The Suffragette Movement* and *The Home Front* - it’s set against a constantly-moving backdrop of a London clattering with horsedrawn buses and lethal factories employing women at a penny an hour.

Mulhallen brings to life the young woman reared among the bustling

*mélange* of Marxists, anarchists and fabians streaming through her parents’ Manchester household, who travelled to Venice and wanted to be a socialist artist but ended up abandoning her art to campaign for the rights of working women. She followed in the footsteps of her mother Emily and sister Christabel who’d formed the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 in response to their local branch of the Independent Labour Party ban on women members.

But Sylvia’s energy and commitment to socialist ideals far outstripped her own family’s cautious class snobbery. Clashing with her sister Christabel’s ideal of a struggle promoted by the well-heeled intelligentsia, she quit the WSPU to form the East London Federation of working women in Bow,

rousing huge demonstrations and processions to force Prime Minister Asquith to receive a deputation of East End working women.

Although she sacrificed her dream of becoming a socialist artist, Sylvia left a legacy of William Morris and Blake-inspired badges, banners and emblems - which gave an inspired dimension to this theatrical study of her campaigning life. Combining original slides of early, gas-lit London with new, contemporary photos of Manchester, Venice and Switzerland alongside those of her own paintings of working women, an animated slideshow of over 250 slides, sensitively collated and presented by William Alderson, provides a perfect counterpoint to the drama.

Directed by Simone Vause, the show is presented by Lynx, a new group taking plays and poetry to schools and colleges. The show, with its own projection equipment is easily portable and can set up in a classroom.

Background historical notes on the shockingly primitive and powerless status of women during the 1880s are provided with programmes hand-printed on an early Arab printing press.

Salutary to remember that it was Sylvia who established cost price restaurants, a toy factory, a Montessori school, day nursery and mother and infant welfare centres alongside campaigning for peace, equal pay for women and better allowances for the families of soldiers and sailors. Fascinating as docudrama, *Sylvia* is a gripping reminder of our own - very recent - past.

*The Times Educational Supplement, 3.6.88*

## History is brought to life on city stage

WHEN one hears the name Pankhurst it conjures up thoughts of suffragettes chaining themselves to railings, prison, hunger strikes and of one woman throwing herself under the hooves of a race horse.

Last night a small but appreciative audience saw Jacqueline Mulhallen of Lynx Theatre and Poetry act out the story of “Sylvia” - founder of the Suffragette movement - against a rapidly changing background of 250 slides.

Her presentation brought to life the pain and suffering of women being force-fed in prison, because of their bid to improve conditions for themselves and their families.

Jacqueline also examined the other side of “Sylvia” who was an artist of note having won three art scholarships

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including one to Venice.

It was moving to think that this artistic woman had been instrumental in forcing Asquith, the Prime Minister, to have second thoughts about women’s voting rights.

The poetry of Jacqueline Mulhallen’s speech was history brought to life in this unusual form of theatre.

But there were times during the more poignant moments that I wished the mighty roar of Sidbury traffic didn’t penetrate the thin Commandery walls!

AH

*Worcester Evening News, 6.7.90*

## Satisfying lunchtime theatre fare

Review: DECLAN HASSETT

WHAT a pity Cork has slipped out of the habit of lunch-time theatre, once nurtured at the former Ivernia. Everyman Palace, to its credit, has wasted no time in re-developing the idea of pre or post-prandial theatre and had the excellent Lynx Theatre’s *Sylvia* on stage at 1 p.m. yesterday, and it’s there again today

Jacqueline Mulhallen has researched, written and per-

forms this fascinating account of the struggles of Sylvia Pankhurst, the woman who chipped at the rock of male supremacy and sculpted a more equitable social form.

Again, Lynx uses the device of some 250 slides to give the words a context. This was particularly effective when we are brought to Venice where Sylvia is studying art. Here the slides

are from old canal scenes and modern shots interspersed with her own paintings of canals, overhung by vine covered Venetian buildings.

Sylvia foresakes what she perceives as the luxury of her art to defend her working women of East End London, without voice, vote or rights.

Sylvia is a stimulating forty minutes; a satisfying, work-aday pause.

*Cork Examiner, 10.4.90*