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Maisy Daly's Rainbow Solstice Arts Centre, Navan

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Maisy Daly's Rainbow provides young audiences with a window into an exotic past that resonates with familiar situations.

Written by Deirdre Kinahan, the 70-minute play is set in 1940s Navan, where schoolboy and "henboy" Johnny delivers eggs to residents and dreams of a life away from grim, grey Ireland. Inspired by a summer-shower-painted sky, Johnny (Gus McDonagh) sets out to make a rainbow with his new friend, Jenny (Emma Meehan).

The pair are guided through a steep learning arc by the crazy and fabulous Maisy Daly (Clare Barrett), who helps them deal with difficult emotions as they are presented with the various challenges of childhood. As she uses the colours of their feelings to mix the paints, the pair hope that their project will cheer up Johnny's poor widowed Mammy (Sorcha Fox). It is this metaphor that provides the play's most engaging imaginative and educational motif: by identifying emotions with colours – the blue is made from Johnny's tears, the indigo by blackberries and reconciliation – Kinahan provides the audience with a visual expression for both negative and positive feelings.

Pictures and poems from workshops held by Tall Tales Theatre Company hang in the Solstice Arts Centre and testify to the effective communication of this message.

Both the adult and children's roles are played by professional actors, whose truthful performances encourage the young audience to suspend disbelief. Muirne Bloomer's fluid choreography sculpts physical movement from naturalistic gestures, and when director Veronica Coburn allows the movement to develop into full-blown dance scenes the effect is wonderful, especially in the final scene where the dance slows into a beautiful closing tableau. Mark Galione's lighting, meanwhile, provides a palette which uses the many colours of the rainbow for atmospheric as well as tonal effect.

The historical background remains largely undeveloped and, especially for older children, Kinahan's play could have been more revealing of the time – the second World War and the Spanish Civil War are the most obvious contexts for development.

However, *Maisy Daly's Rainbow* explores a variety of themes – making friends, bullying, grief – with commendable sophistication, and a young audience will be sufficiently challenged as well as consoled. Until Fri, then on tour to Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise (Dec 15-17), Droichead Arts Centre (Dec 18), Roscommon Arts Centre (Dec 20), and Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray (Dec 29-30)