**Happy Days**

**by Samuel Beckett**

**Audio Described Introduction for Live Streamed Performance, Olympia Theatre, 30 January 2021**

Welcome to the introductory notes for **Happy Days** by Samuel Beckett, produced by The Olympia Theatre and Landmark Productions. The production is directed by Caitríona McLaughlin, with set and costume design by Jamie Vartan. Lighting design is by Paul Keogan and sound design is by Sinéad Diskin.

The total duration of the play is 2 hours, including a 15 minute interval.

**About the Play**

**Happy Days** centres around Winnie, a woman buried up to her waist in a mound of dirt.

She goes about her daily routine as her aloof husband, Willie sits with his back turned to her, infrequently answering her questions. And yet, she proclaims, ‘this will have been another happy day’.

Defiant, determined and fiercely resilient, Winnie greets each day with humour and boundless optimism, and lives as best she can between the bell for waking, and the bell for sleep.

**Happy Days** was written by Samuel Beckett in 1960, and first performed in New York in September 1961.

**About the Set**

The set resembles a desolate wasteland, with gentle, symmetrical slopes of scorched earth which have breached the confines of a finite space encompassed by three black walls. Two undecorated, rectangular archways, like doors, stand mirroring each other on either side of the stage, with a third wider opening at the back of the stage, resembling a wide window looking into the horizon. The slopes converge at the centre of the stage, where we find **Winnie** buried to her waist in a tall mound of earth. The earth is a light brown colour, with a texture akin to silt or rough sand.

At the front of the stage, we can see strata of earth, as if someone has cut into the mound with a knife, revealing layers of earth and debris.

To **Winnie’**s right is a deep, sharp canyon. This is the space that **Willie** occupies.

The colour of the earth is contrasted by a bright blue, cloudless sky, visible beyond each of the three archways.

Scattered sparsely throughout the slopes are items from **Winnie’**s past, such as handbags, hairbrushes, glasses, and medical equipment that have been covered over by dust and debris over time. They are the colour of the scorched earth upon which they are found. Directly to the right of **Winnie** is a capacious, worn, black bag, as well as a black collapsed parasol directly in front of her.

After the interval, we find **Winnie** buried up to her neck. It appears as if the mound of earth has grown, as the top of the archways are closer to the earth, and the strip of sky, once expansive, is much smaller.

Her bag and parasol are as before, with a revolver additionally placed to her right on the mound.

**About the Cast & Costumes**

**Winnie**, played by **Siobhán McSweeney**, is buried to her waist in a sloping mound of scorched earth. Winnie has a short blonde bob. She is wearing a black, sleeveless, square neck, corseted top, as well as a pearl necklace and pearl earrings. During the first act, she puts on a black headpiece adorned with black feathers, crimson lipstick, and glasses. During the first act **Winnie** takes a number of props out of her black bag.

**Willie**, played by **Marty Rea**, is a tall man, positioned with his back to Winnie, only visible from the shoulders up. His beard is grey and his head is mostly bald, except for a ring of grey hair that circles his head just above his ears. Willie wears a sleeveless, white mesh vest. As the first act progresses, he places a white handkerchief on his head, followed by a straw boater hat decorated with a black ribbon band. At various points in the first act **Willie** reads from a broadsheet newspaper, and at one point he produces an old postcard that is then passed to Winnie.

After the interval, **Winnie** is buried to her neck in the mound of earth and can no longer turn, nor bow. Her hair is messy, as if she has been unable to take care of it, and she is wearing her black feathered headpiece. **Winnie** is no longer wearing the glasses or red lipstick that she put on in act one. She faces front throughout the act.

Later in the act, **Willie** appears. He is on all fours, dressed in a black morning coat, black pinstripe trousers, a black tie and waistcoat, a black top hat, and a white shirt. He is wearing black patent leather dress shoes and carrying a pair of white gloves. When he appears, **Willie** climbs up the back of the set, across the mound on the left of the stage, and around to the front where he pauses on top of the strata of earth that we can see. He makes an effort to climb up the central mound where **Winnie’s** head emerges from the ground, and reaches towards her.

This concludes the introductory notes for this production of **Happy Days** by Samuel Beckett.

We hope you enjoy the show.