

An Introduction to the set and staging of Under Milk Wood:

Part One.



To begin at the beginning. The world is drained of colour, dark as the night time, a row of houses sits centre stage. All of the cast enter the stage in their base costumes, which are pale nightclothes stained with a deep blue that fades up from the bottom of their costumes. Some carry lit lanterns. The cast move dreamily, and create the images described in the text physically on stage. In moments like this where we use visual language, the action is rooted within the text, and the images created physically represent the words being spoken. In this production, all of the actors share the lines of 'first voice', with actors typically narrating moments that are about the characters they themselves play. At the end of the prologue, there is a movement sequence where the cast repeat the images described in the prologue to

music. At the end of this sequence, the houses fly out, as if on a crashing wave, and we find ourselves in the dreams of Captain Cat, who dreams of his long-lost shipmates, now deep underwater. From here, we go into the minds of the sleepers and see their dreams.



When Mog Edwards and Myfanwy Price dream of each other, we see them enter with houses for heads and sit side by side. Myfanwy's house is a sweet shop, and Mog's a draper's shop. As their scene reaches its peak, confetti and ribbons come flying out in a small explosion from their chimneys.



Evans the Death brings on his small house, he is dreaming of his childhood in the snow. He opens his top hat to reveal a tiny doll of himself, which he removes from his hat and dances over his little house as snow falls down, sprinkled by another actor. He runs the doll up the actor's arm, and she carries it away. This action is captured on video, and projected onto the back wall of the set.



Mrs Ogmores Pritchard dreams of her two dead husbands, who lie ghostly on either side of her. Two white bedsheets are brought onto the stage, behind the first are Mr Ogmores, Mrs Ogmores-Pritchard, and Mr Pritchard. Directly in front of their counterparts, behind the second sheet, sit the performers who play the Ogmores-Pritchards in BSL. The scene is performed by all 6 actors. This show uses integrated British Sign Language (BSL). So sometimes you might find that one actor is speaking the text whilst another signs next to them. But often the BSL branches into a more creative visual metaphor. We also use Visual Vernacular throughout the show. Visual Vernacular is a physical form of storytelling, rooted in BSL but not tied strictly to it. It creates images in the space that are distinctly different from sign language or dance, but occupy a world adjacent to both of those forms. It is used in Under Milk Wood to create paintings of the text. For our visually impaired audiences it may be useful to know that when we use V.V. It is a repetition of the words that have just been spoken, and it is accompanied by music designed to take you on a journey that is reflective of the movement.



Mr and Mrs Floyd the cocklers are not performed by actors, but instead by two small puppets who appear from a small sardine tin, and as with Evans the Death, they are projected onto the back wall.

The principality of the sky lightens now,



As the dawn inches up, the world fills with colour and we find ourselves in a glowing spring morning, the back wall flies out and we discover a tumble of brightly coloured houses occupying the back of the stage.

It is from these houses that the cast appear, spreading out over them, and perform a subtle movement section, creating the images described in Eli Jenkin's morning poem. They take on the personalities of the rivers, before becoming one giant river. They are the legendary mountains standing old and proud. All from their seated positions atop the houses.



In this section, the town is slowly waking, we leave the dreamworld behind and step inside the imaginations of the townspeople. The town is brought to life, described by blind Captain Cat from his bedroom window. More costumes are introduced, and actors appear wearing headscarves, hats, and jackets, small suggestions of their characters who are coming to life as the sun rises in the sky. Quick changes happen onstage as a part of the action. Willy Nilly removes his postman's bag, taking a dirty tea towel from it which he slings over his shoulder to become Sinbad Sailors. Captain Cat becomes Waldo by holding a bowler hat over his flatcap. As the town fills up on stage, a clock flies in, which rings, signifying the end of this act, and the end of the morning.

Part Two.



When we return for part two, spring has truly come to life on stage. The set is the same, but giant flowers now occupy the edges of the stage. The act begins with a clog dance, where we see different members of the town dancing together in a celebration of Spring. As the stage becomes brighter and more full of life, so do the day dreams of the characters. In this section we see their imaginations become more vivid in style and more passionate, and this is reflected in their more elaborate costuming. We are also introduced to characters with darker fantasies.



We find Mr and Mrs Pugh in School House, sat beneath a giant portrait of themselves, created by performers who come to life and narrate the scene in BSL. Mr Pugh's dark fantasies of dancing through a laboratory, mixing poisons that will finish off his wife, are performed physically onstage by the actors playing the portrait. The scene culminates with Mrs Pugh being fed a venomous porridge unknown to toxicologists and Mr Pugh being thrown back out of his fantasy, and finding himself sat once more at the breakfast table, with a non-the-wiser Mrs Pugh.



squats down alone to a dogdish, marked Fido,
of peppery fish-scraps

We find Lord Cut-Glass alone in his kitchen full of clocks. Lord Cut-Glass lives in a house and a life at siege, always waiting for the worst to arrive. The sides of the stage close in, creating a small portal where Lord Cut-Glass sits alone, eating from a dog bowl. His clocks are embodied by the rest of the company who are spaced tightly around him, ticking and twitching.



As the sun begins to set, and the dusk settles in, the colour begins to drain from the stage. As night approaches, the performers shed their costumes, returning to their base layers with just a hint of costume. In the same style as the prologue, they perform the images of the ending of the day. The row of the houses from the opening are flown back in. Everyone returns to their positions behind the houses, as if we were about to begin again. We are left with the lights in the houses illuminating an otherwise dark stage.

A Note on the Creation of the Show:

This show has been designed with multiple access points, but we come at the work from a place of humility. We hope that the world of the play is rich enough to provide an immersive and comprehensive experience for all of our audiences, but we recognise that no two people will access the show in exactly the same way. For our deaf audiences, their main access point might be through the BSL and visual language of the show, for our visually impaired audiences, the world has been enhanced with music and additions to the text for clarity of storytelling, for our hearing and seeing audiences they will get the sound and visuals of the show, but not be able to access the BSL storytelling. Some people will rely heavily on the captions and projections, so miss the physical performances. We hope your experience is unique, and we hope that you come away with a new understanding of the story and the world we've tried to build.