

QPAC Passport Series

## TEACHERS NOTES

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Ross Mollison and Queensland Performing Arts Centre

in association with the Sydney Opera House

present

# ALONE IT STANDS

By John Breen

Directed by Wayne Harrison

Playhouse, QPAC

1 – 18 October 2003

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## INTRODUCTION

### **A word from QPAC's Artistic Director**

The Queensland Performing Arts Centre encourages creative potential and enriches the cultural life of Queensland by creating and delivering extraordinary events and experiences.

Art and sport are being considered more closely related than ever before. The media, government bodies and the public are drawing cultural similarities between the experiences. It is certainly clear that Australians are passionate and excel in both areas. We are thrilled to be co-presenting *ALONE IT STANDS* with Ross Mollison Productions and have timed the Brisbane season to coincide with the Rugby World Cup. The perfect combination of art and sport!

*ALONE IT STANDS* is being presented through the Passport Series here at QPAC. The Passport Series gives all QPAC patrons a passport to the world of performance and cultural experiences through a wide range of international and national productions. To this end, *ALONE IT STANDS* fits perfectly offering us a view into the world of Irish folklore, Irish sporting history, New Zealand's sporting culture and all presented by an outstanding Australian cast in the Playhouse.

We hope you enjoy *ALONE IT STANDS* and that you can get swept up in Rugby World Cup fever both on and off the stage.

John Kotzas  
Artistic Director

**How to use these notes**

Your decision to bring your students to see *ALONE IT STANDS* indicates that you appreciate the educational value of enabling students to have face-to-face interaction with the work of mature artists in an in-theatre context.

The purpose of these notes is to provide you with some ideas that you may choose to use to increase the value of this experience. The suggestions range from informal pre-performance discussion starters to more developed ideas suitable for whole-lesson activities following the performance.

**The nature and content of this play make it an experience suitable for Secondary students. There is some use of language in the context of the play.**

## BACKGROUND

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### Synopsis

In 1978 the tiny Irish province of Munster and its amateur rugby team challenged New Zealand's unbeatable World Champion All Blacks. The unthinkable happened. Munster won the match 12-nil, and one of the last great folk memories was born. An account of the lives surrounding the game weaves the facts into fiction: audiences meet players on both sides, fans from various social classes, and a group of children who are only interested in Halloween celebrations.

Through all these stories, *ALONE IT STANDS* brings this inspiring story of the triumphant underdog to the stage.

## Glossary

Thrun down	Worn out.
Tippin' away	A term used generally in Ireland but has its roots in agriculture. It means working away gently, without breaking a sweat.
TK Red lemonade	Cheap soft drink. TK stands for Taylor Keith.
Murphys	A stout brewed in Cork.
Smithwicks	An ale brewed by Guinness.
Blackbush	Ireland's leading deluxe whiskey.
Mead	Alcoholic drink made from honey and water fermented with yeast, often with added spices.
FCA	Forsa Cosanta Aitiuil – Second Line Reserve of the Army.
RTE	Radio Telefis Eireann - the Irish National Public Service Broadcasting Organisation.
The Guards	The police in the Republic of Ireland are called the Gardai; a garda is distinguished from the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) policeman in Northern Ireland.
Granada	Big old Ford.
Consulette / Major	Popular brands of cigarettes.
Bite, boot & bollock	To give everything you've got, in a sporting context. No frills, clear whatever's in your way, out of your way.

Grubber kick	A kick that intentionally runs along the ground.
Rawmeish	Bullshit. It comes from raw meat – a very strong Limerick accent of old would pronounce meat with a sh sound for t.
Great crack (craic)	Fun, good times. Good conversation, especially in a pub.
Jammy	Useless or lucky.
The Gaeltacht	The name given to parts of Ireland where Irish (Gaelige) can still be heard as an everyday language.
Montenotty	Upper class area in Cork City.
Krupps	(Engineering Ltd). Established in 1964, the German white goods plant was Limerick's oldest company and only closed in 1999.
Mattersons	A bacon and canning factory in Limerick. In the heyday of the city's bacon industry, Mattersons' workforce would rise to over 400 at peak periods when over 1,000 pigs a day were killed.
Hurley	The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was founded in 1884 to promote indigenous Irish sport and discourage British influences. One intriguing GAA game is hurling – a fast and physical field sport played with sticks (a hurley) which is said to have originated in ancient Celtic.

## REVIEWS

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<http://www.culturevulture.net/Theater2/AloneItStands.htm>

Dublin June 30, 2001

Harvey O'Brien

In 1978 the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team toured Ireland. They had already demolished national and regional sides from all over the British Isles and seemed unbeatable. On October 31st they met Munster, a provincial outfit made up of players from clubs in the west and south. The All Blacks looked set to add another annihilation to their perfect record but, as legend would have it, the unthinkable happened. On that Autumn afternoon in Thomond Park, not only did Munster defeat the All Blacks, the latter did not even score, which had not happened in decades. A stunned local crowd watched the match which playwright John Breen describes as "the last great folk memory". It was not even televised. It was the finest moment in the history of Irish rugby, and only a few thousand people saw it first hand. All that remains of it now is the mythology.

## **Drama Theatre, Opera House**

Reviewed by Bryce Hallett

Sydney Morning Herald, July 29, 2002

"A good tackle is truthful and honest. It is devoid of ego. A hard tackle is carried out for the team. Play till your hearts break..." entreats the Munster coach Tom Keirnon in the high-spirited *ALONE IT STANDS*.

The six players in John Breen's tale of the underdog take heed. They're quick on their feet, put on a good show and deftly tackle any number of characters that come their way.

In the course of the play, the actors conjure about 50 people of one kind or another, including coaches, players - both All Blacks and Munster - the bonfire kids Spider, Jasper, Ferrett and Dandy, as well as two babies and a nurse. There's also a dog called Sinbad.

With great gusto, from the rousing haka at the start, the close-knit ensemble juggle the sundry parts with tactical flair. Before too long a tapestry is imaginatively woven of the lads and their loved ones, and the invincible enemy in their midst. The choreography combines mime, slow-motion sequences and the quick-thinking, below-the-belt tactics you get on the field.

The muscular rhythms and lyrical pitch of Breen's writing are forcefully summoned in Wayne Harrison's simple and entertaining staging in which the actors, not the sets, costumes or gimmicky effects, convey "the love of the game".

The story is simple: us against them. It could do with a deeper emotional undertow and more insights in the family tragedy it sketchily depicts, but the true magic of the rip-roaring yarn lies in the telling.

The inspiration for the drama comes from a rugby match in 1978 in Thomand Park, Limerick, when the amateur team of Munster took to the field against the all-conquering All Blacks. The team - with their fatalistic Irish streak and introversion tempered by resilient pride - didn't rate their chances highly against the All Blacks, not even when victory was near. How they came to thrash the All Blacks 12-0 remains something of a mystery and the joy of *ALONE IT STANDS* is that it makes winners of us all. Like Jess, who dreams of being a footballer in *Bend it Like*

*Beckham*, and the battler lads of *The Full Monty*, the keenly observed passions and quirks of these unlikely heroes gets the audience cheering them on.

This being an Irish yarn also means there's a touch of the blarney. You wonder if the story is true or whether some lesser event has rolled down the mountain of history and gathered unstoppable force to render it so. Memory and exaggeration are a close fit but the beauty of myth is that our hearts convince us of what's true. The appeal of Irish storytelling is that it can ignite the spectators' imagination in a stream of words and gestures, with need for little else. It bears close kinship to the bush yarns and folklore Australians love to hear and tell, and to the humour, charisma and honesty of much indigenous theatre.

The energy and wile of Travis McMahon, Rupert Cox, Scott Johnson, Steve Rodgers, Damian Rice and Susan Prior get *ALONE IT STANDS* spectacularly across the line. The episodic form is swiftly handled by Harrison and the actors fall on a whole bag of tricks - silly voices, effeminate gestures, rousing chants, knock 'em dead tackles and the odd show tune here and there. The comedy works best.

Additional poignancy and romance wouldn't go astray and for some reason no time is spent savouring the victory in the predictable, yet still vigorous, second half.

For its comedy and craft, *ALONE IT STANDS* proves a winner - a play as charming as it is ballsy.

## CLASSROOM CONTEXT

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### Themes

A number of short episodes are woven together in the spirit of storytelling, resulting in a community's ongoing mythology. The historical theme of a David and Goliath battle - a tale of ordinary people achieving the extraordinary - provides opportunities to explore self esteem, social stereotypes and constructs of power.

Drama students will see highly physical theatre, inventive stagecraft and exhilarating choreography on display with six actors tackling 62 roles. Lightning fast scene changes, switches in accent, and a style at once cartoonish and balletic portrays the players, the coaches, the fans, the families, Sinbad the dog and even the Bunratty medieval singers.

For rugby aficionados, tactical complexities of the game are also woven into this work.

## Related topics for discussion and investigation

- Universal relevance of David and Goliath stories

The story of David and Goliath can be thought of as a timeless tale of good versus evil and the fact that to win does not always go to the strongest or biggest, it goes to the most determined or strong willed.

The story is a tale still told in the modern day...it signifies the fact that the winner...is the one who intellectually finds a way to make use of the resources that are available to gain triumph.

David and Goliath

*Story of the Israelite David who fought the Philistine Goliath.*

*From EZ Essays.com.*

- The role of the 'underdog' in European Australian mythology

Australia won the America's Cup

September 21, 1983 at 11:46am, Australia II won the America's Cup from being down 3 -1 in the best of seven series. John Bertrand's was a race for mental domination of the America's Cup, of one challenger's discovery that the prize was fastened to the New York Yacht Club not by steel and bolts but by the powers of the mind. A kid from Melbourne chose a destiny to rise against all odds to win the biggest prize in the racing of sail... "take a look at what you've done. You thought you were racing sailboats...and you've changed a nation".

Heroes remind us of our dreams and of our destinies. In their thousand ways, they remind us of who we are.

*From Foreword, Bertrand - Born to Win as told to Patrick Robinson*

*By Richard Bach, Author of Jonathon Livingston Seagull*

- New Zealand's quest for the Melbourne Cup

Australians have become accustomed to 'dark horses' from New Zealand winning at lucrative odds. In 1883 Martini-Henry became the first New Zealand-bred horse to win the cup. The lead actor in a play at the Sydney Opera House announced the win at the end of the first act and the dress circle led the audience in ringing cheers.

With other legendary winners such as Carbine (1890) and Phar Lap (1930), New Zealand took its place in Australian racing history. In 1985, the 125<sup>th</sup> running of the race, of which only 32 had been won by New Zealand-breds, What a Nuisance, a seven year old without real pretensions to class... carried off the Cup.

Demands on a horse's 'moral' qualities of backbone, thrusting spirit and willingness to see out the 3,200 metres to the bitter end... these are some of the prime attributes of the Melbourne Cup.

From Introduction to *November Gold*  
by Max Lambert

## The origin of nicknames

The word 'nickname' was originally 'ekename' or extra name and its use has changed over the centuries. At first each man only had one name but it eventually was necessary to make identifications more precise. So John became John (the) Smith or John (the) Baker. These second names were called in Middle English 'ekenames' which evolved into 'nekenames' and finally 'nicknames'.

A nickname is no less than an attempt at instant biography. Although a nickname such as *Shortie* may not tell it all, it certainly imparts helpful information about its referent. Most likely it refers to someone of short stature, but it could also be applied facetiously to someone who is very tall. Nicknames are often prime examples of perversity. Some are merely descriptive and others are honorific, affectionate, neutral, vulgar, mean, biting or pejorative. Certain nicknames may be worn as badges of honour by their owners as they celebrate some laudatory real or imaginary accomplishment.

*From The Dictionary of Historic Nicknames*

*by Carl Sifakis*

## Sporting nicknames

- There was a particular cricketer called 'Pothole' because everyone tried to avoid him.
- A soccer striker by the name of Mark Green is called 'Jigsaw' because he went through a spell where "every time he got in the box he fell to pieces".
- In Sydney, a rugby coach is known as "Sunset" because he always talked about "at the end of the day".
- Matt Hilder from the Cronulla Sharks is known as "Waltzing".
- A notable incumbent All Black is called "Beer Bottle" by his team mates because he is empty from the neck up.
- A footballer lost a few fingers in a work accident and pals at his footy club nicknamed him "Clock" because he had a big hand and a little hand!
- A Sydney jockey from the 1970s is still known as "Autumn Leaves" as he seemed to be always falling to the ground.

*From The Wisdom and Wit of Nicknames*

*by Peter FitzSimons*

*Sydney Morning Herald May 24, 2003*

On occasions we also put the Irish 'O' or 'Mc' – both mean son of – in front of a player's surname. As I recall it was first used with Paul Sackey (O'Sackey). This is a hard-won award, for bravery above and beyond the call of duty on the field of play. A bit like earning colours or stripes.

*From Player Nicknames 2002/3 season*

[www.londonirish.org](http://www.londonirish.org)

## RESOURCES

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### **Playhouse, QPAC**

The newest and most modern of our theatres was officially opened in August 1998.

The Playhouse theatre will seat a capacity of 865 people, (549 in the stalls, 316 in the balcony). It has an orthodox proscenium arch with an opening that is 12 metres wide and 9 metres high and is 25 metres deep to the back of the rear stage and 38 metres wide from the counterweights to the wall of the side stage. There are 70 ropes situated on the right side wall and the fly tower is 70 feet high (approx. 25 metres). The stage has a full counterweight system including flying lines over the forestage and the theatre has a full complement of state of the art sound, lighting and communications equipment.

The leading edge lighting system utilises the latest digital technology with over 600 dimmers controlled by a new generation lighting control desk offering designers maximum flexibility in their lighting designs.

The communication system is a PC based assignable paging system incorporating many features to allow the Playhouse and associated spaces to be used in a variety of modes of operation.

The Playhouse has an orchestra pit, which is made up of three independent lifts so that either the centre or sides can be raised or lowered to create different configurations for additional seating, orchestra pit or forestage. There is accommodation for up to 50 musicians in the orchestra pit together with an orchestra warm up room.

Technical specifications and seating plans for the Playhouse are available on the QPAC website.

## **Online**

[qpac.com.au](http://qpac.com.au)

[munsterrugby.ie/info\\_general\\_history](http://munsterrugby.ie/info_general_history)

[nzrugby.com](http://nzrugby.com)

## **Print**

*Sport in Australian Drama* by Richard Fotheringham,  
Cambridge University Press 1992

## HOW TO GET THE BEST OUT OF VIEWING A LIVE PERFORMANCE

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The experience of being in an audience for a live performance is unique. Unlike film, video or electronic productions, the particular performance you see can never be repeated. It is a one off!

It is therefore critical to the performance and your enjoyment that there are no interruptions from:

- Mobile phones (including use for SMS)
- Flash bulbs
- Video cameras
- Long conversations, or
- People moving around after 'house lights' go down.

Equally, as these things can disturb you, they will also distract the artists on stage who can see and hear everything that you can! Front-of-house staff act as safety officers during a performance and may ask patrons to refrain from disruptive activities at any time.

As a further workplace health and safety precaution, food and drinks are not allowed in the auditoriums. Food containers, glass or cans could prove a risk in an emergency evacuation procedure. Large bags should be checked into cloakrooms attached to each theatre for patron comfort and safety.

An audience in front of a live performance has a relationship with the artists on stage. In buying a ticket, you enter an 'agreement' to journey with them for the duration of the performance.

On behalf of your fellow patrons and the artists working to entertain you, thank you for your consideration. Enjoy the performance!

Your feedback on the usefulness of the material in these notes is valued. If you would like to pass on any comments, please contact:

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