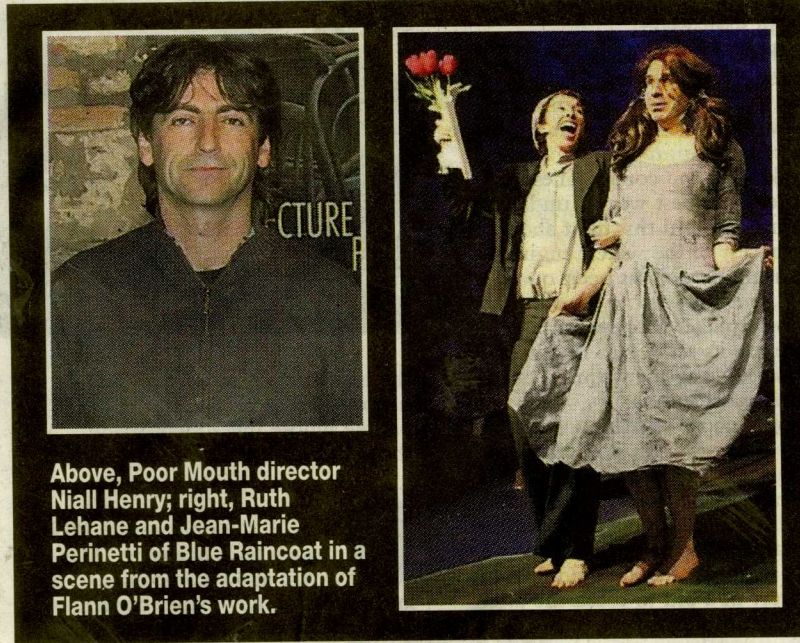


Putting a Blue Raincoat on Flann

The Sligo company's adaptation of *The Poor Mouth* opens in Dublin next week, reports **Padraic Killeen**

amount of beauty in his imagination," he says. "That has been really great to work with theatrically. It's as true in *The Poor Mouth* as it is in *At Swim Two Birds*, and it's particularly true of both *The Poor Mouth* and *The Third Policeman*. While *At Swim Two Birds* is a great novel, it can be a bit scholastic in terms of the formal play. It's a genius intellectual work but, for me anyway, the soul is a bit



Above, *Poor Mouth* director Niall Henry; right, Ruth Lehane and Jean-Marie Perinetti of Blue Raincoat in a scene from the adaptation of Flann O'Brien's work.

stronger in the other two." The *Poor Mouth*, says Henry, is simultaneously very funny and a very insightful analysis of Irish culture.

"Ostensibly, *The Poor Mouth* is a satire on the appropriation of the Irish language by what O'Brien called 'the gaelgeoirs', by which he meant the Celtic revivalists," says Henry.

"But in actuality the book satirises Irish culture and our in-

ability to embrace what is true to ourselves and true to our own culture. I suppose that's a thing that has gone on for hundreds and hundreds of years. And that's what the story is really about, and it's told in a comedic way, obviously, but in a very poignant way as well."

Blue Raincoat are a reasonably unique company in that, at their core, is a fixed ensemble. It is this

that has allowed them to tour and re-tour their successful O'Brien productions, in recent years. This production of *The Poor Mouth* is already set to travel to Scotland next year and then go out on an Irish tour in 2014.

"We're able to do that because the key people in the productions are on hand," says Henry.

The other striking thing about Blue Raincoat is that, being based in Sligo, the company has for over a decade now enjoyed success without being at the epicentre of Irish theatre production — Dublin. "I like being in the West of Ireland because I'm from here," says Henry. "But the disadvantage of not being in Dublin is more noticeable in a time of recession. What happens is the country centralises in terms of funding agencies and things like that. Recently a huge amount of theatre companies have closed down. Luckily, we haven't been one of them.

"But these are the most difficult times to be not at the centre, because the centre is going to mind itself above anything else. It's not the fault of Dublin. It's just human nature. So from a practical point of view this is the most dangerous time to be in the West of Ireland. But from a human and artistic point of view I wouldn't be anywhere else."

■ The *Poor Mouth* runs at Project Arts Centre Nov 12-24

SLIGO'S Blue Raincoat theatre company have toured the country in recent years with acclaimed versions of Flann O'Brien comic literary masterpieces, *At Swim Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*. Adapted by Jocelyn Clarke and directed by Niall Henry, the company's latest engagement with O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth*, opens in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, next week.

The Poor Mouth (An Béal Bocht), O'Brien's masterpiece in his native tongue, debuted in Sligo last year and, according to Henry, will be the last of the company's excursions into O'Brien country.

Flann O'Brien's literature is famously difficult, full of inspired flights of fancy and surreal scenarios that should really make it impossible to stage, yet Blue Raincoat have somehow managed to find a way in. The theatre company were already well-regarded for their productions of Eugène Ionesco's absurdist theatre, so O'Brien seemed right up their street.

"O'Brien's work has plenty of fantasy in it and that suits the kind of theatre that we like and that we think we're good at," says Henry. "We're very lucky in that we've got a very good adapter in Jocelyn Clarke. Jocelyn has been able to tread through the books and draw out a good dramatic structure.

"There is an extraordinary