

# ANGELA'S ASHES

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## THE MUSICAL

### INTERVIEW WITH AMANDA MINIHAN

The first major musical adaptation of Limerick writer Frank McCourt's Pulitzer prize-winning story *Angela's Ashes* will premiere this July at the Lime Tree Theatre. The memoir will be brought to the stage in an emotional telling of a childhood in Limerick and beyond, and will feature unforgettable songs and melodies, with the story being told with lyricism and with a warm, inimitable sense of humour that made the book and the famous film a classic.

For those not familiar with the famous story, the novel takes us into the world of young Frank and his family. As his parents struggle to provide for him and his brothers in 1940s Ireland, we follow Frank's escapades and experiences in a Dickensian landscape peopled by a drunken father, a put-upon mother, pompous priests, bullying schoolmasters, money-lenders and dancing teachers, culminating in Frank's defiant escape to a new life in America.

These complex and often dark themes may seem a big challenge to bring to the musical stage, but if the likes of *Oliver!* can become a beloved and enduring production for the ages, there's no reason that *Angela's Ashes* can't succeed in a similar way. The haunting score will add to the emotional impact and humour of the story. Much like when reading the book, audiences can expect to be laughing out loud one minute and holding back tears the next.

This is the biggest commercial production Lime Tree Theatre has taken on since it opened, and excitement is already building ahead of the first show on 6th July. The musical is produced by Pat Moylan, directed by Thom Sutherland with music and lyrics by Adam Howell and book by Paul Hurt. We were lucky enough to chat to one of its cast, Amanda Minihan, who will play Frank's wry and formidable Grandma.

Amanda is a Limerick actor who has spent the last 17 years in London working in the West End. When Amanda heard about the production through friends, she was itching to be a part of it. "I still have my ear to ground of what's happening at home - you don't leave to not go back and work at home at some point. There were whispers about it happening so I looked into it and ended up meeting with the producer and director here in London. They offered me the part of Grandma, and I was absolutely thrilled. It actually feels strange to be able to talk about it as I've had to be hush-hush about it for a while! It's great to be part of a Limerick-based piece; it's going to be very special."

Being from Limerick and a lover of great characters and stories, Amanda is looking forward to exploring Frank McCourt's writing again. "I read his books some time ago and have seen the film, so I need to revisit the story and delve in. I'm working on something completely different right now so my mind is elsewhere, but I am very excited about researching the role."

How does Amanda hope to approach her character? "I think women depicted in that time come across very hard; they tend to show their emotions through harshness.

They struggle, and their manner and language is hard, but their hearts are soft. It would be lovely for the director and I to work to show that softness, alongside the comedic element. There's lots of wit in McCourt's writing, so I'm looking forward to seeing script to see where we can play on the harshness and softness. In all roles I like to show layers of characters in all my parts." Does Amanda see any similarities between the McCourt family and other characters she has played? "Oh for sure, the characters are universal, aren't they? I was part of the original cast of *Pigtown* with Island Theatre, and I remember sitting with my parents as part of the research to find out about their time as kids in the city. They told me stories about my grandparents did and how they lived, things I never would have known before. So I am really looking forward to getting back to those stories and finding out more about that time."

Amanda's last theatre performance in Limerick was with Wildebeest Theatre's *On The Wire*, a site specific production at The Sailor's Home that was nominated for the Irish Times award for best production. Amanda has carved out an incredibly varied and successful career in London's West End, with major roles in *The Producers*, *Sister Act*, *Everyman* and many, many more.



What have been her favourite parts to date? "I've been very blessed with my CV, and every show I've done I love; you always find little part of yourself you can bring into it. I loved *The Producers*, which I did for two years on the West End and one year on tour.

I played eight featured parts in it, all different, so it was very busy, but a great variety of roles. I also enjoyed doing *Merrily We Roll Along* at the Harold Pinter Theatre immensely, as I adore Stephen Sondheim. *Blood Brothers* was my first ever London audition, and probably remains my favourite - I had seen the play about 12 times before auditioning. *London Road* and *Everyman* are my most recent productions, they were mind blowing, particularly *Everyman*, it's so different to what I've done before."

Amanda says the sense of being part of the Limerick acting community is still strong with her. "I started out with The Cecilian Musical Society and Limerick Musical Society, and when it came to looking to take the next step professionally, the support was overwhelming. I had to raise money to study post-grad at the Mountview Academy at Theatre arts. My parents had seen me through art college so I didn't want to rely on them. Limerick people really showed their true colours; they knew how much I loved acting, and through their support with fundraising concerts I managed to raise almost the whole amount, I will never forget it. When Limerick actors come here to London we are always here to offer support and advice where needed. The community is strong and with a Limerick-rooted show like this I hope that it continues to let actors thrive. As Frank McCourt said: Sing your song. Dance your dance. Tell your tale."

*Angela's Ashes* will run at Lime Tree Theatre from 6th-15th July. Tickets are currently available via the theatre website.

Article by: Kayleigh Ziolo

