

MICHAEL BOYD: THE TRON YEARS

LARGE PRINT ANNOTATIONS

MICHAEL BOYD: THE TRON YEARS

MACBETH [1993]

In the 1993 Macbeth, Michael and designer Tom Piper also made the most of Tron as an old church, using the church architecture and stained-glass windows, and creating a world suspended between Christianity and the supernatural; one that was just waiting for Macbeth's descent into Hell as a fallen angel.

Iain Glen played Macbeth in this highly acclaimed production, which saw Jimmy Chisholm's Porter as Satan presiding over the hell mouth, and all the dead returned as ghosts to haunt Macbeth alongside the child-witches.

"Glen is a moving Macbeth, pitiful and dependent as his mind fills with scorpions, bent double with remorse before Banquo's ghost. The onset of his resolution is frightening to behold."

[The Observer, Michael Coveney]

"The production, set to somber playing by three all-seeing cellists, is brimful of stunning devices that eschew familiarity and force a radical re-examination of the play. The final sword fight between Macbeth and Peter Mullan's Macduff is a breathtaking and stomach-churning clash for survival and revenge."

[The Scotsman, Richard Mowe]

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Written by **William Shakespeare**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Tom Piper**

Original Score by **Craig Armstrong**

Lighting Design by **Nick McCall**

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GOOD [1992]

“the most important Scottish production this year...”

[The Guardian, 1992]

A good son to his mother, who has dementia; a good husband and father to his wife and children; liberal professor; John Halder appears to be a kind human being with sound morals. He is unremarkable in every way, apart from the imaginary band that plays in his head, particularly at moments of high emotion.

When his book exploring euthanasia for elderly people and his lectures on the delicacy of German literary culture begin to draw attention from the Nazi Party, they see him as a very desirable acquisition.

In small rationalised steps Halder is absorbed into the Party, rising through the ranks until he is directing the death camps, a transformation all the more chilling because it does not seem dramatic, until the last horrible resounding note of the play.

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DUMBSTRUCK [1994, 1995]

“When singer Johnny Ramone meets easily manipulated magician and part-time mercy killer Herman Katz murder and mayhem ensues. A farce affectionately exploring the dark underbelly of Scottish Variety Theatre; a world where nobody is who, or indeed what, they appear to be.”

[David Kane]

“This is a right good laugh. A do wop, Variety, 25 Cromwell Road of a black farce by David Kane, with shades of Arsenic and Old Lace meets Herman's Hermits: The Movie. It works up a euphorically sadistic pace, goes head bashing amnesiac halfway through in a hilarious Pinteresque parody, works up a lather in song and gags and doesn't even need surtitles... you could never anticipate the perverse delights of Kane's twisting, loop-the-looping plot, or the fun director Michael Boyd has in synchronising the slamming of doors that abound in Tom Piper's seedy boarding house set design. Every element coheres beautifully.”

[The Herald, May 1994]

Written by **David Kane**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Tom Piper**

Musical Director **Gordon Dougall**

Lighting Design by **Nick McCall**

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ENDGAME [1996]

The central character in Samuel Beckett's favourite play is a glorious creation: barnstorming actor meets depressed Hamlet, meets King Lear hammering everyone around him into the ground, in his own bid to keep the story going.

“Hamm is also Oliver Hardy to his stage partner Clov's Stan Laurel, and he curses his parents Nagg and Nell, in the famous dustbins, for bringing him into this fine mess. Hamm is physically dependent on Clov and, as always between minder and charge, there is an element of mutual sadism between them. A grim double act.”

[Tron Brochure, 1996]

“Performing an endgame of his own, outgoing director Michael Boyd has put together a magnificent, thoughtful, funny and despairing production...Tom Piper's turret of a set, its pale blue walls reaching up from a mound of backstage debris, is revealed and concealed by a string of front-of-house curtains, drawing out the theatrical without detracting from the desolate...a highly rewarding finale to Boyd's 10-year residency.”

[Glasgow Herald, March 1996]

Written by **Samuel Beckett**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Tom Piper**

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Michael Boyd was a visionary and innovative director. He made exciting work that people wanted to see, marrying bold theatricality with political and psychological depth. His productions established the Tron's artistic reputation, both nationally and internationally. Michael was appointed Artistic Director in 1985, having already gained a reputation as a highly imaginative director down South. He had trained in Moscow, where he had learnt to take himself seriously as a theatre artist.

Michael also made sure he took Scottish writing, Scottish talent and Scottish audiences seriously. He knew the Tron needed a much broader audience base, pulling from the Tron's East End roots as well as from the more established theatre-going audiences. From the outset, he commissioned and produced new Scottish plays by Peter Arnott and Alasdair Gray, as well as drawing from the indigenous tradition of Scottish variety **“to find a contemporary and accessible Scottish theatrical voice”** [Michael Boyd].

A new tradition of alternative Tron pantomimes by Peter Capaldi, Craig Ferguson, Alan Cumming and Forbes Masson emerged, laying the ground for new Scottish comedies by Iain Heggie and David Kane.

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Michael nurtured Scottish theatre artists, championing the early careers of actors, designers and composers, for example, Peter Mullan, Siobhan Redmond and Craig Armstrong. Mirroring the Russian tradition of creating an ensemble of actors, Michael built a pool of Scottish actors he worked with consistently over his ten-year tenure.

Alongside this crucible of Scottish talent at home, Michael looked internationally to build collaboration and cultural exchanges with Ireland, Russia and Quebec. By 1989, the Tron was punching above its weight at International Festivals as well as producing a major season of Russian work, *New Beginnings*. He was instrumental in bringing the work of Quebecois writer, Michel Tremblay to Scotland. Working with contemporary Scots translations by Bill Findlay and Martin Bowman, Boyd directed Scottish premieres of *The Guid Sisters* (1989) and *The Real Wurld?* (1991) setting in motion a Scots/Quebecois cultural exchange that continues today.

Michael was a wonderful director; he was also a wonderful man whose kindness, wit and generosity inspired love and loyalty from everyone he worked with. This photographic retrospective of his work at the Tron is a celebration of everything he achieved here.

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Curated by **Caroline Hall & Tom Piper**

Graphic Design by **Jamie Byars** at thisisjamhot.com.

Photographers: **Jennifer Black, Sean Hudson, David Liddle, Peter Ling, Martin Shields, Ken Wishnia & Alan Wylie.**

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MACBETH / MACBETH POSSESSED [1985]

MACBETH

Michael Boyd arrived at the Tron intent on making “**gothic, nightmarish theatre**” [Sheila Fox, Plays Vol 1 1984]. Macbeth was his first production at the Tron, and he directed the play twice here in 1985 and 1993.

In both productions, the most striking aspect was Michael’s decision to cast the Witches as the restless spirits of Macduff’s children, whispering prophecies that would herald their own destruction by Macbeth.

Designer Peter Ling used every nook and cranny of the Tron building to evoke an atmosphere of pervading gloom like a dank Scottish castle.

MACBETH POSSESSED

Macbeth Possessed by Stuart Delves reimaged the classic tragedy, offering a fresh perspective on it by bringing back to life the spirits of 12th Century King Macbeth and Queen Gruoch, who are wretched and in psychological turmoil as result of being savagely maligned by Shakespeare.

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Macbeth and Macbeth Possessed were played in repertoire with the same cast.

Macbeth by **William Shakespeare**

Macbeth Possessed by **Stuart Delves**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Peter Ling**

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TERRESTRIAL EXTRAS [1985, 1986]

Marcella Evaristi and Elaine Collins as two creatures from outer-space who have been given extensive training in earthly language and movement. They intend to visit Washington, USA as “ordinary males” and have been extensively trained in old American movies. Researched and programmed “All American Male” they land in Glasgow, have female bodies and a suitcase of women’s clothing.

“Terrestrial Extras is a superb and painful comedy of misconception. A brilliant black cabaret”

[Sunday Times]

Written by **Marcella Evaristi**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

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MUIR [1986]

"A lot of people asked in 2014 where the Scottish Independence Play was. We thought this was it in 1986. It tells the story of the radical lawyer Thomas Muir transported to Australia in French Revolutionary times for sedition... the democratic movement he built in the first story from modern, (post-Jacobite) Scotland... and his early adventures as an exile... No one came, but we thought it really mattered..."

[Peter Arnott, 2025]

Written by **Peter Arnott**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Peter Ling**

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PADDY'S MARKET [1990, 1991]

Tony Roper's first play since *The Steamie*, *Paddy's Market* looks at Glasgow's now defunct flea market through the eyes of two stallholders, played by comedy legends, and real-life couple, Una McLean and Russell Hunter, who were joined by Dorothy Paul and Jan Wilson. Set over the course of one day, Roper's slice of life comedy dives into the heart of Glasgow's working class trying to make ends meet and make the best of whatever life throws at them.

Written by **Tony Roper**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Kenny Miller**

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THE BABY [1990]

“Rome, 78 BC. Sulla the dictator dies. When the heroine Macu leads the city’s band of professional mourners in a boycott of the funeral, her daughter is killed in reprisals, and she is forced to mourn the hated dictator. In her subsequent madness she gives birth to a stone...can she journey back from insanity?”

[Chris Hannan]

“...a period epic complete with all the trappings you would expect from the great Elizabethan and Jacobean classicists who wowed their audiences with heightened language, earth-shattering emotion, lowbrow comedy and disturbing bloody tragedy.”

[Scotland on Sunday, 1990]

Written by **Chris Hannan**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Rae Smith**

Lighting Design by **Nick McCall**

Composer **Craig Armstrong**

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PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME [1987]

Fed up with his uncommunicative father, his humiliating job and unrequited love for Kathy Doonan, Gar O'Donnell has accepted his aunt's invitation to emigrate to Philadelphia. On the eve of his departure, he is not happy to be leaving Donegal; despite his fantasies of success, wealth and love awaiting him in the States, one word of affection from his father or from Kathy, one word of genuine understanding from his friends, might well hold him back.

Written by **Brian Friel**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Peter Ling**

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THE REAL WURLD? [1991]

The Real Wurld? is a dark, powerful and disturbing look at family life. The central character, Claude, has written a devastating play about his family, which he decides to show to his mother, Madeleine.

Like The Guid Sisters, the play moves between the domestic and heightened theatricality. In his central conceit, Tremblay superimposes scenes from Claude's play into the action, creating both the real family and the fictional family on-stage simultaneously, so we see these two parallel universes co-existing. It offers us the chance to compare the two different versions of each character and invites us to find our own version of 'the truth' lying at the heart of this family.

The production played Mayfest and then toured to the International Theatre Festival in Stony Brook, New York.

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“The Mayfest show that impressed me the most was Michael Boyd’s production of The Real World? for the Tron Theatre. I came out with a physical reaction, shivering and trembling.”

[Glasgow Herald, May 1991]

“The weight of the play and the powerful production struck a note with an America in which threats to the stability of family are regarded as a central political issue and trouble the national psyche. Standing ovations followed the opening performance.”

[Glasgow Herald, June 1991]

Written by **Michel Tremblay**

Scots Translation by **Bill Findlay & Martin Bowman**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Michael Boyd** and **Marek Obtulowicz**

Lighting by **Nick McCall**

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SALVATION [1990]

In 1990 Glasgow was European City of Culture. With extra funding available, the Tron was able to produce an unprecedented nine shows that year. The autumn season premiered three new Scottish plays; Salvation opened the season.

“An attempt at a stage thriller, dark corners, debatable sexuality and the advent of mobile phones as a plot device. Something of the nightmarish as a series of ritual murders are explored by a detective in a third world country who comes to suspect he is being played and manipulated. This being a thriller, of course he is...”

[Peter Arnott]

Written by **Peter Arnott**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Rae Smith**

Composer **Craig Armstrong**

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THE FUNERAL [1988, 1989]

The Funeral is the sequel to The Sash [1973]. Both plays examine Glaswegian sectarianism through the family of staunch Orangeman Bill McWilliam. In The Sash, the central relationship is Bill and his son, who rejects his father's values.

In The Funeral, Bill has died, and all his family are gathering together for his funeral. The Funeral struck a huge chord with Glaswegian audiences. A revised version of the play was produced in 1989 to coincide with the Tron going public, which played the Glasgow Pavilion.

Written by **Hector McMillan**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Kenny Miller**

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CROW (1990)

Michael's first adaptation of Ted Hughes' narrative poem, *Crow*, was in 1976 when he was at Edinburgh University. He adapted, directed and starred in the Bedlam Theatre production, alongside Marcella Evaristi, who later became his first wife. In 1990, when Glasgow was European City of Culture, he returned to it. Michael and designer Graham Johnston transformed the Tron's tiny rehearsal room, The Changing House, into a miniature proscenium arch theatre. *Crow*, with Peter Mullan and Douglas Henshall, was thrilling, inventive and highly theatrical. It quickly became the hottest ticket in town and a theatrical highlight of the year.

Written by **Ted Hughes**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Graham Johnston**

Composer **Craig Armstrong**

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THE GUID SISTERS (1989, 1990, 1992)

When Germaine Lauzon wins a million Green Shield stamps, she invites her women neighbours and relatives to a stamp-pasting party. The temptation to pilfer the stamps is irresistible, and an enormous fight breaks out.

Michael Boyd on reading The Guid Sisters for the first time:

“..here was this magical script that brought everything together we were trying to achieve at the Tron: the raucous, shared comedy of recognition, the farcical mayhem and direct address of Scottish variety, together with high poetic drama and a sophisticated theatricality, not to mention the cultural politics of a people looking to speak in their true voice. It was utterly true to the Scottish experience while also escaping the claustrophobia of a small nation by coming from Quebec. I knew immediately I wanted to stage it, and soon, and that working on it would make me, and fifteen Scottish actresses very happy.”

[Foreword from Michel Tremblay Plays in Scots Vol 1 edited Bowman, Association of Scottish Literature, 2023]

Written by **Michel Tremblay**

Translated into Scots by **Bill Findlay & Martin Bowman**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Kenny Miller**

Lighting Design by **Nick McCall**

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THE TRICK IS TO KEEP BREATHING

(1993, 1995, 1996)

The Trick is to Keep Breathing began as a workshop at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire [then RSAMD] and was developed into a showcase in Autumn 1993. This was so successful it became a full production in 1995 and was revived in 1996 for a National and International tour.

“Seldom or never have I seen inner turmoil evoked with such theatrical resourcefulness”

[The Times, June 1996]

“Michael Boyd’s stunning stage adaptation of The Trick is to Keep Breathing, the Janice Galloway novel that takes you on a painful, often wildly funny journey into a mental breakdown suffered by Joy, a thirtysomething Scottish teacher after the accidental death by drowning of her married lover.”

[The Independent, June 1996]

“...the central character herself, Joy Stone...is divided into three. Her physical self is played by Jennifer Black. She has a shadow on stage, Siobhan Redmond, her witness, her emotional self. And there is a dream self, a psychic voice, played by Eddi Reader...It is evocative, disturbing and stunning.”

[Glasgow Herald, October 1993]

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“Of the many recent theatrical adaptations, Michael Boyd’s dramatisation of Janice Galloway’s award-winning novel is by far the most striking and innovative, faithful not only to atmosphere and characterisation but also to stylisation...creating a robust theatrical language. Arresting images are created and dissolve, characters appear among the audience – an imaginative use of space which makes this intensely personal story seem at once both epic and intimate.”

[Glasgow Herald, October 1995]

Dramatised and directed by **Michael Boyd**

from the award-winning novel by **Janice Galloway**

Designed by **Graham Johnston**

Lighting Design by **Nick McCall** and **Stewart Steel**

Composer **Craig Armstrong**

Musical Director and Additional Music **Gordon Dougall**

Sound design by **John Harper**

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MCGROTTY AND LUDMILLA (1986)

A hilarious and nightmarish political satire that follows the fortunes of clumsy, talentless Mungo McGrotty being swallowed up by the corridors of power in Whitehall, until he encounters the Harbinger Report, political dynamite of the first order, that threatens to bring down not just the British Government, but much, much more besides.

McGrotty and Ludmilla coincided with the publication of Alasdair Gray's novella, *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*.

Written by **Alasdair Gray**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Peter Ling**

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THE WITCHES OF POLLOK (1990)

Michael Boyd commissioned Anne Downie to write this “dramatic, Gothic tale” based on the Scottish witch trials. She was drawn to the story both as a “Caledonian Crucible” and because of its contemporary resonances with intolerance.

In 1677, a young servant girl, Janet Douglas mysteriously arrives at the Pollok estate at the same time as the Laird, Sir George Maxwell of Auldhouse has suddenly become seriously ill. Presenting as mute, Janet “miraculously” regains the power of speech and accuses six people of the witchcraft that has caused the Laird’s sickness. Douglas claims that the tiny community of Polloktoun has cursed the Laird. A full-blown witch-hunt begins tearing the community to pieces.

In 2010, Anne rewrote the play as her debut novel of the same title.

Written by **Anne Downie**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Rae Smith**

Lighting by **Nick McCall**

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CLYDE NOUVEAU (1989)

Clyde Nouveau is about the activities of a group of confidence tricksters who set up a bogus film studio. Clyde Nouveau was part of a season that included *The Guid Sisters* by Tremblay in a Scots translation by Findlay and Bowman, and *Cinzano* by L. Petrushevskaya in a new translation by Edwin Morgan.

Cinzano was a collaboration between Scotland and the Soviet Union and was directed by Russian director Roman Kozak.

By 1989, Michael had quadrupled the box office and was ready to leave the Theatre Club status behind. This was the first season of the newly public Tron Theatre and captured Michael's artistic vision for the Tron: new indigenous voices, looking beyond Scotland to international work and work that married bold theatricality with political and psychological depth. *Clyde Nouveau* opened at the Tron and then toured to Edinburgh Festival.

Written by **Iain Heggie**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Graham Johnston**

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LOSING ALEC (1988)

“Contemporary Glasgow, a ghost story in full light. Stage debut of Peter Mullan and Craig Armstrong’s first dramatic score. Laying to rest the ghost of Labour Glasgow, Alec is wheeled on in his coffin...but the old boy won’t let lie down, rising again and driving his family to near destruction over a long, haunted weekend... ‘til burying him again (this time successfully) at the end of the show.”

[Peter Arnott]

“This fine, subtle play allows us to see those things not appreciated by the luckless characters, and perhaps to understand and forgive. the work uses a fantasy situation to dissect reality in a way realism never could, offering a dissection of the inadequacy if the emotional vocabulary in use in Scotland and voicing a protest against those responsible for that situation. And if it is set in Scotland, its resonances can be felt far beyond.”

[The Scotsman, Joseph Farrell]

Written by **Peter Arnott**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Graham Johnston**

Composer **Craig Armstrong**

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TRON PANTOMIMES [1986 - 1994]

“When I first started work in 1985 as the first full time Artistic Director with the fledgling Tron Theatre in Glasgow, we looked first to the indigenous tradition of Scottish Variety of Stanley Baxter, Rikki Fulton and Walter Carr in an attempt to find a contemporary and accessible Scottish theatrical voice. Craig Ferguson, Peter Capaldi, Alan Cumming and Forbes Masson wrote and performed in a seminal series of Tron alternative pantomimes that renewed the template of Scottish theatrical comedy.”

[From Michael Boyd’s Foreword to Michel Tremblay: Plays in Scots, Vol 1, ed. Martin Bowman, ASL 2023]

SLEEPING BEAUTY [1986-1987]

Written by **Peter Capaldi** and Craig Ferguson

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Peter Ling**

BABES IN THE WOOD [1987-1988]

Written by **Alan Cumming** and **Forbes Masson**

Directed by **Hamish Glen**

Designed by **Peter Ling**

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PETER AND PENNY'S PANTO [1989-1990]

Written by Alex Norton

Directed by Michael Boyd

Designed by Rae Smith

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK [1991-1992]

Written by Forbes Masson

Directed by Michael Boyd

Designed by Tom Piper

CINDERELLA [1992-1993]

Written by Forbes Masson

Directed by Michael Boyd

Designed by Tom Piper

SNOW WHITE [1993-1994]

Written by **Forbes Masson**

Directed by **Michael Boyd**

Designed by **Mark Leese**