



## The Fun Palace

*Agnes Bernelle*

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## **The Fun Palace** Agnes Bernelle

Agnes Bernelle, one of Ireland's best-loved stage performers, was born Agnes Bernauer in Berlin in 1923, the daughter of a renowned Jewish-Hungarian theatre impresario. In this sparkling, intimate memoir she recounts her early years in Germany, her family's flight to London after Hitler came to power, her anti-Nazi broadcasts to the land of her birth, her turbulent loves and family life and the blossoming of her career in film and theatre - from wartime refugee cabaret to the West End. In 1943 she married Irish Spitfire pilot Desmond Leslie, cousin to Winston Churchill, on the first day of peace. Inventive and resourceful, Agnes performed impromptu cabaret in Barcelona, befriended cat burglars, summered in Cannes and received the affections of, among others, Claus von Bulow and King Farouk. In 1956 she became the first 'non-stationary nude' in London theatre. Her original satirical cabaret, based around the work of Brecht and Weil, became the first solo show at Peter Cook's Establishment in Soho, and later had a three week run in the West End. In 1963 Agnes and Desmond moved finally to Ireland, where they found themselves facing into a troubled decade. 'She brings to us what seems a full century's worth of inimitable anecdote: theatre, politics, social contretemps, the joys and miseries of an "open" marriage, the miseries and joys of life in Weimar Germany, Hitler's Germany, England in World War II, the Riviera and (of course) Ireland. How many of us know how exiled German theatre-folk practised their art in London during the 1940s? Or have heard of the way young actresses were slotted into the war-effort by the U.S. military? Or can guess what it was like to try to finance stage-shows and films in the post-war years of austerity? Agnes knows: she was there, and she did it. ... In short, the widest-ranging, most instructive, most appealing theatrical/personal memoir one could possibly imagine.' - John Arden 'An expansive tale spanning both the most turbulent years of our century and an intensely personal odyssey. - Stephen Dodd, Sunday Independent 'What comes across is the warmth and generosity of her personality and a wonderful capacity for survival.' - Fergus Linehan, The Irish Times

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