

HUXLEY

(<http://huxley.press>)

LET'S CELEBRATE & ELEVATE TOWNSVILLE'S MUSIC, ARTS & CREATIVE CULTURE

/ February 28, 2019

REVIEW – THE WEIR

by Nathan Toll(<http://huxley.press/author/nathan-toll/>)



Townsville has played host to incredible marvels of technical theatre recently: from *Shrek's* six-metre-high trees to *The Graduate's* vertical bed scene and Theatre iNQ's use of multiple storeys in *A Comedy of Errors* and *First Born*. While they add another layer to each

performance, it's always great to be reminded that our locals can still leave us speechless without towering sets or special effects: just actors, their stage, and you.

The Weir does exactly this.

Theatre iNQ's current offering showcases their smallest cast in some time, with just five of the company's actors, however the quintet is all that is required to deliver the hour-and-45-minutes of pared-back theatre.

I say pared-back, but on reflection there's nothing simple about it: the soundscape alone was seamless with eerie notes mixed perfectly with a howl of wind every time someone entered or exited the pub and deeper crackles from the fireplace each time its grille was opened. Silences were equally golden, with the focus solely on each actor during their monologues.

In *The Weir*, Valerie (Terri Brabon) has just moved from Dublin to rent a home in the Irish countryside. The play is set at the local pub, with publican Brendan (Ron Pulman), businessman Finbar (Bernie Lanigan) and riff-raff Jack (Brendan O'Connor) and Jim (John Goodson) sharing local stories with Valerie. The subject of these stories is left for you to find out.

Vocally, there was no mistaking we were in the depths of rural Ireland thanks to accent coaching by Catherine and Michael Doris – with extra 'tanks to Dublin's Carol Lanigan for recording lines from across the pond producing a noticeable difference in dialect for Valerie.

I will admit, the pace of the opening scene did worry me – would this play go anywhere? While you never progress from the pub and never truly see character resolutions, the journey that you are taken on in the stories told is so raw; written and performed in such a way that you would feel as if the scenes spoken of are being lived out before your very eyes either way. The dialogue within the production is of such a casual nature too that it was impossible to tell where lines were forgotten and where [writer] McPherson had scripted pauses or thought changes.

The absolute standout was Terri Brabon as Valerie. Very little is given away about her character, as all we know is what other pub patrons have heard about her – but when she finally stops the men and tells her own story, it's impossible to look away. The only time I lost sight of Terri was as my eyes began to water, and as the lady next to me attempted to cover up her very audible sob with a

shuddered breath. Terri's performance will break your heart and has the potential to bring you to tears – it's the first time I've cried as an audience member, and it sounded like I was not alone.

Brendan O'Connor's Jack and John Goodson's Jim are a duo that I was sure could have passed for regulars at the Commonwealth Hotel next door – and indeed could very well have been plucked out of any pub around the world. Their banter, taunting, and gradual decline into alcohol-induced vulnerability was all impeccable and had me questioning whether the tap beer and bottles of Guinness and Jameson were real. We are given the opportunity to see Brendan's character in particular open up more throughout the performance with monologues both early and late in the piece.



Bernie Lanigan's Finbar is a perfect reflection of any successful friend – still part of the group, still happy for a pint and a 'small one,' but constantly reminded of choosing money over his small-town life. Along with Valerie, he is seen not to fit so perfectly in this Irish pub, with his body language and positioning at the end of the bar reflecting that. But following his monologue, these gaps close and mutual supernatural experiences reconnect friends. Ron Pulman as the publican Brendan, despite being the only character without a monologue, still maintained a strong presence on stage and left us longing for him to settle down with someone before joining Jack and Jim on the other side of the bar in a few decades.

One of my favourite parts of Theatre iNQ shows are the tiny details – in this case the flowing beer taps, the increases in volume whenever the pub door or fireplace were opened, and the photos and noticeboards all making us feel like we were nestled in a real Irish pub. And in this case, that was all that was needed to create an incredibly powerful piece of theatre: a simple but beautiful set, a perfectly-timed soundtrack, and five extremely talented actors.