



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2019

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

THEATER: "Pump Girl" Finds A Gusher At Irish Rep

PUMPGIRL out of ****

IRISH REPERTORY THEATRE

A strong, satisfying production of a strong, satisfying play and precisely the sort of work that makes The Irish Rep so important. Take this and their acclaimed O'Casey Cycle earlier this season and you've got reason enough to support this company for years to come.

The 2006 drama *Pumpgirl* and Irish playwright Abbie Spallen are both new to me. The story centers around three people we slowly realize are interconnected. They alternate monologues addressed to the audience, but the overlapping plots and rising tension keep the story pulsing along. These aren't set pieces that stand alone so much as lonely voices that slowly merge into one confused cry of pain and need.

It begins in a gas station in the North, but only just, as the program notes put it. Pumpgirl is a tomboyish woman who works there, dealing with obnoxious regulars but waiting for visits from her pal Hammy. Our second character is a man who competes at the local motor raceway when not avoiding the burden of his wife and kids. And the third is a woman who dreads the moment each night her drunken husband comes home, ping-ponging up the stairs and then slipping into bed beside her, a bed with barbed wire strung right down the center.

The wife cheats on her husband with some random man at a local market. Pumpgirl goes off with Hammy for quickies in his car. And the cocky but lost lad who competes as a race car driver when not cleaning out bird shite at the local chicken farm (off the books of course, so the dole doesn't know) is both the husband and the "mate." He's the central, empty fact in both their lives amnd no happier on his own then with either of them.



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The cramped little theater at the basement level of the Irish Rep is made full use of here. Set designer Yu-Hsuan Chen ably creates three distinct spaces for each character, with the gas station brought to life via a counter crammed with junk food like Tayto's and a diesel pump. Hammy has a car seat for his racing scenes and the many times he takes Pumpgirl for a ride or just tries to escape his screwed up life. And propped against the wall stage right is the marital bed of Sinead. This combines very well with the just-right costumes of Molly Seidel, the crucial lighting of Michael O'Connor and the sound design of Fan Zhang, who smoothly works in everything from the music of Glenn Campbell to bar sounds, a terrifying dream, the sounds of racing and much more.

Full credit to director Nicola Murphy for marshalling that talent in service of the text and a superb trio of actors. Labhaoise Magee is heart-rending as Pumpgirl, still hoping to hang out with her friend after he's abused her trust in the most shameful way imaginable. Clare O'Malley is equally good as the stronger Sinead, a woman who wakes up to her needs only to be blindsided by a husband who suddenly wants to mend his ways. What the bloody hell is up with that? Did her cheating subliminally stir his guilty conscience. And Hamish Allan-Headley is an ideal Hammy, just good enough to be the handsome stud of a small town without being so good-looking you can't quite buy it. He nails Hammy's conflicted combination of bad choices, regret, shame and yearning to maybe, maybe get something right for once. I look forward to seeing all three of them again, soon.

Towards the very end, the play gets quite a bit darker. For me, the stakes were already high enough so I resisted this, even though nothing was out of whack with what came before. It's a small reservation about *Pumpgirl* itself, not the sterling and loving presentation it's been given here.

THEATER: "The Crucible" Is
Bedlam In Every Way

THEATER: "Einstein's Dreams"
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THEATER: Good Intentions No
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THEATER: "Richard III," A
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THEATER: "Enchanted April" --
The Charming Tale Th...

THEATER: To Delete or Not To
Delete, That Is The D...

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THEATER OF 2019

Frankenstein: Under The Radar Fest at the Public ** 1/2
Minor Character: Under The Radar Festival at the Public ***
Ink: Under The Radar Festival at the Public ** 1/2
Choir Boy ** 1/2
White Noise ** 1/2
Kiss Me, Kate ***
Ain't No Mo' *** 1/2
Ain't Too Proud **
The Cradle Will Rock * 1/2
Mrs. Murray's Menagerie *** 1/2
Oklahoma! (on Broadway) ** 1/2
Socrates **
The Pain Of My Belligerence *
Burn This **
Hadestown *** 1/2
All My Sons * 1/2
Tootsie ** 1/2
Ink ***
Beetlejuice **
Estado Vegetal ***
Hans Christian Andersen * 1/2
Cirque du Soleil: Luzia ***
BLKS ** 1/2
Moulin Rouge ** 1/2
Bat Out Of Hell **
Unchilding **
Sea Wall/ A Life ** 1/2
Harry Potter and the Cursed Child ***
Betrayal *** 1/2
Fifty Million Frenchmen ** 1/2
Freestyle Love Supreme ** 1/2
Derren Brown: Secret ***
(A)loft Modulation * 1/2
The Great Society **
I Can't See *
Heroes Of The Fourth Turning ** 1/2
Chasing Rainbows: The Road To Oz ***
The Glass Menagerie (dir Austin Pendleton & Peter Bloch) **
Terra Firma (debut of The Coop theater company) **
Forbidden Broadway: The Next Generation ***
Dublin Carol ** 1/2
Soft Power **
The Decline and Fall of The Entire World As Seen Through The Eyes
Of Cole Porter ***
For Colored Girls ** 1/2
Scotland, PA **
The Sound Inside *** (great cast, clumsy ending)
User Not Found **
Enchanted April **

[DruidShakespeare: Richard III](#) * 1/2

[Broadbend, Arkansas](#) **

[Einstein's Dreams](#) * 1/2

[The Crucible](#) (by Bedlam) *** 1/2

[Pump Girl](#) ***

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