Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Give Me Your Hand Combines Art, Theater and Poetry

David Sheward · Saturday, October 17th, 2020

The Broadway League recently announced that the hiatus for all of its member theaters has been extended until June of 2021. That means at least seven more months of no live performances on New York stages. Fortunately, many Off-Broadway companies are filling the gap with Zoom and virtual performances. The Irish Repertory Theater has been cleverly adapting performances pieces to the new media with actors filming from separate locations or acting in a properly socially distanced space. Their latest offering, *Give Me Your Hand*, places two actors in an empty, intimate London theater, combining theater, poetry and painting for a refreshing reminder of the importance of these arts while we are given limited access to them.

Dearbhla Molloy in *Give Me Your Hand.*

The program is made up of verses by Irish poet Paul Durcan, read by the versatile Dermot Crowley and Dearbhla Molloy, against a backdrop of paintings from the National Gallery which inspired the poems. Each piece is introduced with a bit of background on the artist and the history of the painting. Durcan takes the concept and setting of each work, whether Renaissance, Impressionist or Contemporary, and transposes them to a mesh of the contemporary and traditional. Gainsborough's portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Andrews becomes a duel view of a couple with suppressed fury as the wife imagines murdering her husband against a "fetching" landscape. Reuben's Samson and Delilah are now a pair of clashing lovers with commentary by an American barber.

Both actors deliver a gallery full of diverse characters. Molloy is particularly delightful as the haughty, sexually liberated Madame du Pompadour playfully teasing Crowley's randy, pompous King Louis XV. They are equally affective as the snobbish Arnolfini couple in Van Eyck's famous portrait of the middle-class pair, exemplifying bourgeois values.

Dermot Crowley in *Give Me Your Hand*.

Molloy's intriguing cameos also include a pair of diametrically opposed versions of the Virgin Mary. In Van der Werff's "The Rest on the Flight Into Egypt," Mary is recast as a mother tenderly caring for a son dying of AIDS, while in di Buonacarso's "The Marriage of the Virgin," she is a spirited Irish lass, embarking on her nuptials with an elderly Joseph with no illusions. Molloy gives both Marys an intense emotional veracity, playing her both as a symbol and a real woman. Crowley delivers a drunken, effete Cardinal Richelieu from as well as the entire cast of Degas' "The Young Spartans Exercising." In the latter Durcan has cast the ancient Greek youths as

awkward teenagers on a trip abroad, chaperoned by dithering parents and a charismatic parson. Crowley gives life and individuality to each character, both as youngsters and their older selves, looking back on the brink of maturity.

This small gem of a two-hander is directed with wit and economy by Jamie Beamish who also provided the atmospheric original music. *Give Me Your Hand* makes us long for the hand we can sit in a theater or stroll through an art museum again with no fear of infection.

Give Me Your Hand is available through Oct. 18.

This entry was posted on Saturday, October 17th, 2020 at 8:40 pm and is filed under Theatre, TV, Visual Art
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