

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

InHouse Theater presents *The Weir*

Charity Hume · Wednesday, November 4th, 2015

Last week, I lucked into a site specific showing of Conor McPherson's Olivier Award winning play, *The Weir*, and took my seat at a table in Hutchinson Cocktails and Grill, an Irish bar in West Hollywood, and waited for the play to unfold around me. Yes. I said, "Bar." InHouse Theater Company uses site specific locations to create an immersive theater experience for the audience: *Our goal at InHouse is to create site-specific productions that confront our audiences with the realism of film in an immersive live theatre setting. We perform in houses, lobbies, bars & restaurants, backyards – all in an effort to give patrons a theatrical experience of such immediacy and electricity that entertainment becomes clandestine observation.*

Co-directed with confident expertise by Elizabeth Schmidt and Mark Sullivan, the muted realism of the actors' ensemble showed profound humanity and exquisite timing. The quality of clandestine observation heightens because the audience is seated inside the "set." The absence of the "fourth wall" created a 3D reality that gives the play much more intimacy, and I was soon transported by the seamless and convincing Irish dialects, the unforced realism of the acting, and the language of the play to a rural village in Northern Ireland. The actors take the set further, and we soon sense we're deep in the country, listening to tales of fairy roads, the ghost stories of the village, a place steeped in folklore. As the actors immerse us in their world, we become witnesses to the soul baring evening ahead.

The play begins with Jack, played by [Tim Redmond](#), stumbling in out of the cold and attempting to draw from a broken tap, but forced into the bottles... not the stout he was looking for. As members of the audience nurse their own stout purchased on the way in, Jack's banter with Brendan ([Bryce McBratnie](#)), reveals Jack's essential solitude. He's a hard-working man who owns a garage in the town, and counts his change, even as we know he bets his wages on the horses to a fault. As each of five characters wanders into the pub, the ancient ritual of story telling begins. We're in Ireland; it's cold outside; there's the question of the broken tap, and then there's village gossip. But why is this night different from all the others?

We learn that Valerie, played by [Caroline Morahan](#), a single woman, has just rented a long empty house. Curious about what a single woman would want with a life in the boonies when she'd been in Dublin most of her life, Valerie's arrival soon awakens old rivalries. Jack and Brendan are soon joined by Jim, ([Rob Welsh](#)) who philosophizes on the mysteries of betting as the news of the day trickles in. The men complain about another mate, Finbar, ([Drew Rausch](#)) who will soon be joining them. Rausch gets us to feel the sting of Finbar's easy road; he has the nerve to chide his old friends with his success by extolling his own merits, missing the point that an inheritance gave

him a crucial head start that others have missed. On top of the financial competition he represents, Finbar rankles Jack because he has the bad taste to be the one bringing in the only single woman seen in town in years, though he's a married man.



Tim Redmond as Jack and Bryce McBratnie as Brendan in *The Weir*. Photo Daud Sani

Jack's a talker, and begins with complaints that show he's been humiliated by life, as he and Finbar exchange barbs that salt the wounds of small failures to grasp opportunities that could have been. In Jack, we can see our own inability to seize the moment, and feel haunted by false starts, and inevitable mistakes that could have turned our destiny in a different direction, had we known then, what we know now. Redmond's take on Jack takes us by surprise, as his understated portrayal of a wounded ego gradually reveals a man we grow to respect and like, as we share a pint and find who he is under the layers of his years stuck in the same old place. Tim Redmond's virtuoso performance as "Jack," shows a subtle paradox of character that results in the audience admiring something in Jack we recognize in ourselves. He's failed to make it big, and failed to take a chance on a long lost love who married away from him. By his own account, he mistreated her and never deserved her. So he's here and he's alone.

But as Valerie unveils the reason for her flight from Dublin, it is Jack who gives her, and the audience, the refuge of his identity, from his pissed off banter and complaining, to his openness to a good joke, to the time he'll take listening to a yarn that grows deeper and closer to the nerve of the true sorrow in another's soul. Secrets can only surface when there's a good listener. Valerie is a new audience for the regulars at the pub, and as each man welcomes her with a bit of local gossip, the village tales of ghosts and supernatural mysteries provide the evening's entertainment as the drinks go round. Gradually, the play leads each character to reveal the stories of the ghosts that live inside them. Caroline Morahan's performance gives validity to a supernatural tale of grief that will haunt her forever. Valerie's transition from the new woman in town, to someone who has earned a place among the regulars, occurs as Morahan portrays her character's mysterious experiences with direct, and believable poetry.

While the play tells us of loss, in its many forms, the redemption hidden in this play is that on occasion, there is someone there we can trust with our secrets and sorrows. In an unexpected turn where Valerie shares her own "ghost" from the past, something springs to life in Jack, and in all of us. There's consolation for our suffering when we can take the time to talk it out over a pint. Each of us has a ghost, a story of a missing person. There's no one of us could not have taken a turn in the round. *The Weir* speaks of a spiritual hunger to acknowledge and live with our ghosts. Despite logic, our missing loved ones still live and breathe inside us. In travelling through time to stories of loss and grief, the characters show us a way to unburden our souls of the invisible weight of grief we've carried within. The paradox is that like the characters in *The Weir*, by the end of the night, by acknowledging our sorrows, we head out into the night with a deeper trust in our fellow travelers, and a lighter heart.

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