

Cultural Daily

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Marin Ireland Is a Latter-Day Blanche DuBois in *Blue Ridge*

David Sheward · Wednesday, January 16th, 2019

Few actresses can wring as many variations on self-indulgent despair as Marin Ireland. This Obie winner has created incisive portraits of a party-girl spoiled royal in *Marie Antoinette*, a narcissistic bisexual activist in *In the Wake* and a self-destructive immigrant worker in *Ironbound*. That's just to name a few. Now she is a disgraced high school teacher, sucking up oxygen and wrecking lives in Abby Rosebrock's *Blue Ridge* at Atlantic Theatre Company. Alison is the newest resident at a Christian half-way house in the mountains of North Carolina. When her abortive affair with her married principal goes south, she takes an axe to his car and must submit to a work program and Bible study. Ireland manages to make this dangerous bundle of nerves a charismatic charmer, gathering attention and even love while wrecking havoc.



Marin Ireland and Kristolyn Lloyd in *Blue Ridge*.

Credit: Ahron R. Foster

Her interactions with her fellow participants and the group's facilitators form the backbone of Rosebrock's prickly and moving drama. The dialogue crackles with authentic flavor delivered with intense conviction by Ireland and the ensemble, directed with a feel for empathy by Taibi Magar. There are a few holes in the plot and the denouement feels more than a bit forced, complete with a "out of nowhere" revelation. But *Blue Ridge* delivers a satisfying insight into the irresistible paths of dysfunction.

Channeling Blanche DuBois, a legendary Tennessee Williams character she quotes from liberally, Alison feeds on her neurosis and can't seem to stop screwing up her life and those around her. Ireland gives her a vital, almost irresistible sparkle. Hugging two pillows for support and barely continuing her ferocious energy, Ireland expresses Alison's physical desperation without turning her into a tornado of terror. It's understandable why friends and lovers are drawn to her.



Kyle Beltran, Peter Mark Kendall (lying down), Kristolyn Lloyd, Nicole Lewis, Marin Ireland, and Chris Stack in *Blue Ridge*.

Credit: Ahron R. Foster

There is also fine work from Peter Mark Kendall as the damaged Cole, the latest target of Alison's obsessive adoration. He appeared to be a reticent Southern-fried macho guy, but roiling with insecurities within. On his first entrance, he barely speaks but each monosyllabic response carries weight. Chris Stack is equally silently eloquent as Hern, the strong, quiet minister running the

program while Nicole Lewis is buoyantly vibrant as his co-leader Grace. As Alison's fellow residents in the program, Kristolyn Lloyd and Kyle Beltran also slowly reveal centers of disquietude beneath seemingly sober surfaces.

Adam Rigg provided the homey group-living environment which evokes institutionalism, the church, and a woodsy motel. In the play's final moments, Rigg's set opens up to reveal gorgeous winter mountain scenery, just as Ireland exposes Alison's aching interior.

Jan. 7—26. Atlantic Theatre Company at the Linda Gross Theatre, 336 W. 29th St., NYC. Tue 7pm, Wed 2pm & 8pm, Thu—Fri 8pm, Sat 2pm & 8pm, Sun 2pm, Running time: two hours including one intermission. \$65.50—\$86.50. (866) 811-4111. www.webovationtix.com

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