

Review from Blogcritics

Theater Review (NYC): *Trad* by Mark Doherty (American Premiere)

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It can be difficult to drag oneself out the door on a Monday evening to a night at the theatre. There's a reason why theatres are dark on Mondays. But I'm very glad I did some dragging last night. If I hadn't, I would have missed one of the highlights of the 1st Irish 2009 Theatre Festival, Mark Doherty's *Trad*.

Trad, shortened from traditional, is a term referring to music and an adherence to memories. *Trad*, the play, is a wonderful, humorous satire on Irish drama. It manages to both skew traditional themes of Irish theatre, and be a poignant part of it.



Trad's entertaining story portrays two old men in the present-day west of Ireland: Father (Charlie DelMarcelle, left) and Son (Mike Dees). Their ages are fabulous, in an Aesopian way. Thomas the son is 100 years old. His father, Joe, is obviously older, but who's counting when the years have piled on so? One day, Thomas just happens to mention that he fathered a son 70 years ago. Joe insists that they travel to find the last remaining successor in the family line. An absurd journey motif springs up around the pair's undertaking, although "journey" may be an ambitious term for a old man with one arm and an older man with one leg.

Taking a road they've rarely travelled out of their village, Joe tells Thomas stories that on the surface are funny, even silly. In the spirit of Flann O'Brien's *An Beal Bocht (The Hungry Mouth)*, Joe spins the tale of the great Olive Crisis, the story of the day he moved a mountain because it blocked the sun, and the time they had no oxygen, reminiscent of O'Brien's protagonist who was so poor "there never was any air in his house." All these stories are unsubtle references to darker stories of Ireland's past poverty - bad stories of a hard life, but it never did anyone any good to "stand still and face backwards" as Joe says.

For all the humor, the stories are eventually useful for Thomas. The anecdotes are not merely a unique communication between father and son. Thomas is a stranger in his own strange land. He constantly asks to turn around, go back home, abandon the quest, which his centenarian-plus father will not let him do. In this way, albeit a tad late, the father is preparing the son for life. In a most traditional way.

On the road, this Crosby and Hope (contemporaries, see?) encounter stock Irish figures, most clichéd but no less funny for it. Jared Michael Delaney (below) plays both Sal, an old Irish woman who snarls at modernity, and the hard-drinking Father Rice.



In a talkback after last night's show, Mr. Doherty said that Sal was based upon a neighbor who always had the most bitter rejoinder to any morning pleasantries. The stooped figure of Sal embodies the prejudice in Ireland's past and present. The drunken Fr. Rice, rejected by Thomas, is the archaic figure of a weakened church. But all in a Father Ted sort of way, mind you.

And speaking of Father Ted, Mr. Doherty knows his drunken priests. He was Father Alan on Father Ted, the hugely successful comic characterization of Irish Catholicism with

terrible canned laughter. You can see the playwright in the final episode, "Going to America," also starring Brian Eno as, you guessed it, Father Brian Eno.



Mr. Doherty, playwright, first conceived *Trad* as a short radio play, winning the 2004 BBC Radio Drama Award. It has grown with a life (and hard work) of its own into the fine one-act it is now.

Under Tom Reing's direction, the physical comedy is broad, the verbal comedy is sharp, and the staging is appropriately stark. Mr. Reing, artistic director of Inis Nua, described patiently waiting for the opportunity to present *Trad* in its American premiere. His patience was rewarded. Inis Nua, a Philadelphia-based theatre company that dedicates itself to contemporary works from Ireland, Scotland and Wales, now presents *Trad* in its American Premiere. This was a most welcome addition to the 1st Irish.

In and of itself, *Trad* is a theatre festival, offering the full range of Irish theatre, from Yeats and his broken old men in search of a miracle in "The Cat and the Moon" to Beckett and his famous vagabonds in search of Godot. The funny, sweet and ultimately bittersweet play is one of this month's great successes. *Trad*, at the Manhattan Theatre Source off Washington Square Park, closes tonight, 9/22/09.

Photos by Katie Reing.