

Dorset Theatre Festival, Dorset, VT

Thirst by Ronán Noone. Directed by Theresa Rebeck. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Our job is to step up in station, defy their perceptions of being shanty Irish and lead a good, moral, righteous existence.”

In a kitchen in a coastal Connecticut home in August, 1912, three servants, the cook, the 2nd girl, the chauffeur, confer on their present situations, their futures and their dreams in this semi-classic melodrama set in the home of the Tyrone Family made famous in Eugene O’Neill’s “A Long Day’s Journey Into Night.” Grasping the finer points of the play is made easier if you know the O’Neill drama, but it really isn’t necessary to come to grips with the three characters of Ronán Noone’s world premiere production at the Dorset Theatre Festival in Vermont.



David Mason, Kathy McCafferty; Photo: Joey Moro

beaches, liquor, work, work, and work. It is a singular problem with this new play, the incessant, unrelenting talk. Still, the play takes place on one of the finest sets created anywhere this season, designed by Christopher and Justin Swader. This team continue their stream of reality-based scenic design that you feel you could live in if you chose. The room is inhabited by Bridget Conroy, played handsomely by Kathy McCafferty, the Tyrone’s cook. Bridget is in search of a present she can live in comfortably. She is drinking her way through a platonic affair with the chauffeur, Jack Smythe, a Connecticut native played by David Mason with a fine mixture of humor, angst and charm as he searches for a future. He wants it with Bridget.

Finely staged by playwright Theresa Rebeck, the play is a no-brainer; you can predict the ending before the play is half over and you can come to grips with the heavy Irish accents after about fifteen minutes of keenly listening to the women jabber on about this, that and the other thing: boyfriends, sons, views, the



David Mason, Kathy McCafferty;
Photo: Joey Moro

Bridget's niece, Cathleen Mullen, newly arrived from Ireland via the ill-fated ship, *Titanic*, is desperate to forge a past that can stand up to the new challenges of a life in America. She has drive and ambition, but little common sense and she is living a new reality having lost her fiancé to a girl with property. Played by Meg Hennessy, her nervous drive is perfectly suited to the ambitious young woman who is determined to make good and to live the new American dream of climbing the ladder of success. She and McCafferty speak with heavy Irish accents which sound perfectly authentic and which often obscure their lines which is unfortunate as they frequently say things of great importance to the minimal plot of the play.



Kathy McCafferty, David Mason, Meg Hennessy;
Photo: Joey Moro

Rebeck keeps her characters almost constantly on the move which works well for them and their inherent nervousness concerning their situations in life and work. It is an excellent job for this play which takes anxiety to new heights.



Meg Hennessy, David Mason; Photo: Joey Moro

The technical team has worked wonders. In addition to the Swaders fine set the costumes by Fabian Fidel Aguilar are perfect for the period as is lighting designer Mary Ellen Stebbins' use of practical lamps. Fitz Patton makes a major contribution with his fine sound design work. While this will most certainly not be my pick for best new play of the season it is a period piece that strikes many intriguing chords. Go see it.

+ 08/20/2022 +

Thirst plays at the Dorset Theatre Festival through September 3. For information and tickets call 802-867-2223 or go to www.dorsettheatrefestival.org.

