

Berkshire Theatre Group. Stockbridge, MA
The Weir by Conor McPherson. Directed by Eric Hill./
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“It’s the principle of the thing.”

The Weir refers to a hydroelectric dam,,built on a local waterway near the Pub where this play is set. The dam has only a brief reference to the water pressure in the bar. But it is the word itself, with its sound, so close to the word weird, that makes a difference. Three older Irishmen who congregate in the pub, tell a newcomer ghost stories about the house she has moved into and about their own experiences with the weird aspects of their lives. Their openness allows her to tell her own “weird” story, about her daughter’s death and her marriage. The stories are all interesting and illuminating about the men themselves. Brendan, the barkeep, doesn’t have much to add, but his calming presence signals hope and possibility in the future life of Valerie, the newcomer. The play is oddly romantic and basically a means to tell stories that might not otherwise figure into a play.



Stephanie Jean Lane, Philip Themio Stoddard, Harry Smith, Sean Bridgers, Joey Collins; ;
Photo: David Dashiell

While the play’s action is rather static its emotional impact steadily grows through Valerie’s personal story, after which it slowly slides into an oblivion that is startling. Finbar’s (Harry Smith) second and more personal tale is anticlimactic though the actor tells it well. Eric

Hill's direction of the play keeps it commonplace and ordinary, denying Valerie (Stephanie Jean Lane) the difficulty in relating her truly emotional story. This should be the highlight of the play, a chance for her character to emerge from the crowd, but instead she becomes just one more storyteller in a play about stories.

The cast, under the vocal charge of dialect coach Jennifer Scarpetis, bring us very genuine rural Irishmen which is all to the good. Their deep accents cause us to listen very carefully to every word spoken and playwright McPherson uses a load of local slang in this play.



Stephanie Jean Lane, Harry Smith; Photo: Caelan Carlough

Harry Smith's Finbar, the more sophisticated man, does an excellent job. He is easy to understand and fascinating to watch as his sitting position tells a story all its own about the man. Sean Bridgers' Jack is dynamic and compelling as he tells his ghost story. Joey Collins' Jim spend most of his time distracting the others and he does it with small glasses of beer and a style that reminds us of Barry Fitzgerald and othe Irish actors of the 1940s.



Philip Themio Stodard;
Photo: Caelan Carlough

Philip Themio Stoddard displays a sweet nature that is as compelling as his pretty face and his character's charm. He seems to genuinely like Valerie where the others see her as a person who will find their stories to be of interest. For all of the play's well written interactions there is no romance, except for Brandon's late interest in the woman in his bar.

Lane's Valerie is the most compelling character as she says very little until she tells her story. I wish she had a slight sense of hesitation about relating the incidents of her

tragic tale, but Hill has, instead, given her a compulsive nature at this point in the play. It is all very weird.

The excellent set, designed by Randall Parsons, gives us a feeling of actually being there, and the lighting designed by Matthew E. Adelson is perfect for the telling of ghost stories. Amy Avila's costumes are perfect. As sound designer Scott Killian maintains his wind storm throughout the play this atmosphere surround keeps the show grounded in its intensity, something the play needs from first to last.

The Weir is fascinating in its hour and forty-five minute one-act format. Time does fly by and that's a good thing. Storytelling is an art-form that the Irish have perfected and McPherson's play takes deep advantage of that. This production requires your attention. You may find yourself leaning forward a lot, in order to take in every word. Ultimately it's worth the trouble to watch a new relationship develop its shallow outset. That alone is something different and worthwhile.

+ 09/29/2024 +

The Weir plays at Berkshire Theatre Group's Unicorn Theatre on Route 7 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts through October 27. For information and tickets go to BerkshireTheatreGroup.org or call 413-997-4444.

