

The Broadway Critic



Theatre Review: "The Weir" @ SJ Repertory Theatre, 01/29/10

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There's no wonder why Rick Lombardo, Artistic Director of San Jose Repertory Theatre, picked *The Weir* as their January/February slot. Lombardo first directed this production in 2000, in its New England premiere. In his program note he asks, "...what could be better on a dark mid-winter night than spending an evening in a pub listening to a few ghost stories?" I can't think of much. And, Friday night, at the opening of *The Weir* it was, indeed, a dark and stormy mid-winter night.

I've never really thought that San Jose Repertory Theatre was an intimate space, by any means, but when I walked into the theatre Friday night, it definitely felt intimate. The set, creatively designed by Annie Smart, was forced down-stage with only a few feet from the walls of the pub to the edge of the stage. It instantly took me back to the [The George Inn](#) in Lacock, England, which I had visited last November. The George Inn is a pub that's been around since 1361 and the set had so many similarities: the tables/chairs, artifacts on shelves and even the old pictures on the wall. The sense of wear and tear of this Irish pub wasn't necessarily present in Smart's set but it had all the right elements (including a strand of Guinness flags draped across the front of the bar).

The Weir is a collection of ghost stories told at a neighborhood bar in rural Ireland. When Jack (Robert Sicular) first enters the vacant bar, he's quite familiar around the place as he walks behind the bar and pours himself a drink. Brendan (Alex Moggridge), the bartender/owner, enters a few minutes later and the two start to converse about work and family. Brendan's interest peaks when Jack mentions that Finbar (owner of most of the town) is showing a new woman, Valerie (Zillah Glory) around town, as she's interested in moving to the small community. As they are talking about this, Jim (Mark Anderson Phillips) enters the bar. Everyone is drinking at this point (including the bartender). There's more talk about work – Jack employs Jim sometimes for odd jobs around town, family – Jim is taking care of his Mom by himself, and bachelorhood – they don't understand why Finbar, a married man, is escorting a woman around town instead of a single man, like themselves. Finally, Finbar (Andy Murray) and Valerie shelter themselves from the brisk, windy night and grab a couple of drinks at the bar — white wine for Valerie, of course.

The stories start once the alcohol enters into their bloodstream and each ghost story becomes more harrowing than the last. Each story shows the desperate isolation of each of the character's lives. As the stories went on, I felt myself getting more cozier and believing that I was actually in an Irish pub. Chills went through my spine as Jim told his story about his

meeting with a stranger in a graveyard. While it was sometimes easy to get lost in the story-telling because of the thick Irish accents and talk of Sidhe (Faerie folk), Banshee (Faerie woman) and Changelings (children in Faerie land), my attention was usually redirected rather quickly throughout the story so that I understood what was happening. The only story that captivated me, start to finish, was Valerie's heart-breaking story about her child. Valerie's beautiful narrative was so well acted that I didn't even realize that my eyes were tearing up; it broke my heart. Each of cast's performances were strong and quite believable. Robert Sinclair's volatile Jack was the most interesting of the bunch. You could see the loneliness in his eyes and the depth he brought to the character was phenomenal.

The Weir is ultimately a dramatic tale of treasured friendships, loneliness and isolation (even though there are a few comedic moments throughout — the bartender's lack of knowledge about white wine was hilarious). You'll leave this Irish pub feeling a little hungover but not from the alcohol, but from the emotional baggage of your five new friends.

Head to San Jose Rep's *The Weir* for a night of Guinness beer, old friends and ghost stories – a perfect way to spend a cold, wet winter's night.