

San Jose Rep spends an evening with Irish tale tellers in 'The Weir'

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STORY TIME: Valerie (Zillah Glory) tells her tale of woe as Brendan (Alex Moggridge) listens in 'The Weir.'

is Valerie (played by Zillah Glory—what a name), and she has moved from Dublin to rural Ireland to escape some traumatic past events. As pint after pint gets poured, and the drinking buddies vie for the young woman's attention, it comes to light that Valerie has recently moved into an old house considered by local folk to be "haunted." Sinister mysteries and old wounds are revealed as spine-chilling stories start making the rounds.

As the play's tension and action rush to a climax, the most shocking tale of woe comes from Valerie herself in a superbly delivered, tear-jerking soliloquy that had members of the opening-night audience dabbing their eyes long before her speech was finished. Under the eye of San Jose Rep artistic director Rick Lombardo, this production certainly has no weak performances from its five main actors. Sicular's clever, petulant Jack and Phillips' jittery but warmhearted Jim were entirely convincing. Glory, for all her first-class acting, needs to work on her accent.

Kudos for the subtle but effectively dramatic lighting by Dawn Chiang and the down-to-earth scenery and costume designs by Annie Smart. In the end, not much negative can be said about the San Jose Rep's production of *The Weir*: it's a strongly written, enjoyable, haunting tale that stays true to the Irish tradition of hospitality, not to mention it's an excellent way to spend a dark, rainy midwinter night.

THE WEIR, a San Jose Repertory Theatre production, plays Tuesday at 7:30pm, Wednesday at 8pm (plus 11am on Feb. 3), Thursday–Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 3 and 8pm and Sunday at 2pm through Feb. 21 at the Rep. 101 Paseo de San Antonio. Tickets are \$35–\$57. (408.367.7255)

ON A BITTER, windswept night in the Irish countryside, there is nothing more welcoming than the glow of a busy Irish pub, the communal place where locals of all occupations and creeds come together to enjoy a frothy pint of Guinness by the crackling fire. With characters warming their cold bones with drink and telling tall folktales to pass the time and loneliness, rural Irish pub culture sets the stage for acclaimed Irish playwright Conor McPherson's award-winning drama *The Weir*. Playing through Feb. 21 at the San Jose Repertory Theatre, *The Weir* is an utterly haunting dramatic piece that bubbles with emotion while bringing together the real world and the supernatural.

Set in a village by the sea in northwest Ireland, the play focuses on a group of isolated souls who happen to come together at the local watering hole, the Weir, only to discover new aspects of each other through the telling of eerie ghost and fairy stories. The first person to wander into the cozy, realistically worn bar set is Jack (Robert Sicular), a cantankerous longtime bachelor who loves being contrary and starting arguments. Jack has already poured himself a bottle of Guinness when bar owner and straight man Brendan (Alex Moggridge) shows up to serve the whiskey and beer that is the lifeblood of this downtrodden group of country folk. Finally, Jim (a convincingly twitchy Mark Anderson Phillips), the last regular, arrives to take his well-worn perch at the bar as the town's lovable alky handyman.

The three get to talking, and discover that Finbar (Andy Murray), the slimy local rich-boy-turned-big-city-real-estate-agent, has been showing around the town's newest resident, and he's made a promise to bring her to the Weir that evening. The woman's name