

'The Weir,' ghost stories at San Jose Rep

[Robert Hurwitt, Chronicle Theater Critic](#)

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The Weir: Drama. By Conor McPherson. Directed by Rick Lombardo. With Zillah Glory, Robert Sicular, Andy Murray, Alex Moggridge and Mark Anderson Phillips. Through Feb. 21. San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose. One hour, 55 minutes. \$21-\$74. (408) 367-7255. www.sjrep.com.

There's nothing like an evening of good ghost stories to chase away a winter chill. It's even better when the stories build upon each other as skillfully as they do in Conor McPherson's "The Weir," each tale exposing another layer of naked emotional truth among the folk gathered in a rural Irish pub.

Rick Lombardo's San Jose Repertory production, which opened Friday, takes a little longer than most to work its way through and open the floodgates of "The Weir." But if it runs a little long, the exposed heart of McPherson's ghostly tale still throbs with gripping emotion.

McPherson may be the theater's leading practitioner of narrative-filled dramas with a supernatural edge, as he's demonstrated often in such plays as "Shining City" and "The Seafarer." "Weir" is remarkably simple in its setup - an attractive woman walks into a bar and the men compete telling stories to impress her - and complex in its impact.

Lombardo has staged it before, for its New England premiere in 2000 (the same year the Aurora Theatre introduced it to the Bay Area). He's not only reprising it for his first full season as San Jose Rep's artistic director but he also has brought along an actor from his previous gig running the Boston-area New Repertory Theatre, Zillah Glory, making an impressive Bay Area debut.

Glory plays Valerie, a Dublin woman who's just bought a long-vacant house in the small town. She's being shown around by her Realtor Finbar (Andy Murray), who brings her into the makeshift farmhouse bar run by Brendan (an empathetic Alex Moggridge). Brendan and the regulars - garrulous loner Jack (Robert Sicular) and awkward, tongue-tied handyman Jim (Mark Anderson Phillips) - don't like the money-grabbing Finbar and distrust his motives.

Then the stories begin. Sicular commands the stage with a tale that suggests supernatural problems with Valerie's new abode, as does Murray, revealing weaknesses Finbar would rather hide. Phillips' shy Jim inadvertently tops them with a much creepier account. Which prompts Valerie to explain why she left Dublin, and Glory stops time and hearts with her harrowing tale.

Lombardo, who also designed the pitch-perfect whistling-wind soundscape, stages the play handsomely with Annie Smart's well-detailed set and character-revealing costumes. The laid-back pace he sets unfolds naturally but seems too uniform, as if each aria conformed to the same tempo. As their emotional content breaks through, though, McPherson's "Weir" works its considerable charms.

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