ISCENE

★★★★★☆ Stones in His Pockets charmingly delivers its sharp observations

By Anne Liisberg

That Theatre Company is **always a guarantee of high-quality English-language theatre. *Stones in His Pockets* is no exception. With its Irish dialect and critique of imperialism, the production is a tour de force for its two performers, Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy, who deliver the goods under Ian Burns' masterful direction.**

The sky is blue, dotted with fluffy clouds. The grass is green. Gentle hills roll into the distance. Two flight cases stand at the front of the stage. At the back, a perfectly straight row of shoes represents the many extras on the film set, where *Stones in His Pockets* primarily takes place. A handful of these extras are played by Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy, who now leap into action, dressed in brownish clothes that match Hollywood's traditional portrayal of Irish farmers and working-class folk.

The leading roles in the film are, of course, not played by Irish actors, but by Hollywood stars themselves, who struggle with the Irish accent, much to the amusement of the extras. "There have been so many Hollywood stars here that they think we all talk like that," they laugh at diva Caroline's attempts to twist her tongue into the right sounds. The tone is jovial, but beneath the apparent amusement at the expense of the stars lies a sadness about selling oneself – and, by extension, the Irish soul – to the film industry, whose image of the country has supplanted the real Ireland: its landscape, culture and people.

A sex object with an accent

But before we get that far, the plot needs to get underway in this tragicomic two-hander, featuring two actors and many more characters. It is perhaps the best-known work by Irish playwright Marie Jones. That Theatre Company has chosen its moment well in bringing the play to Denmark, at a time when we are asking new questions about our dependence on the USA, which won us over, not least through the soft power of its culture. The story therefore resonates directly with our fragile present, where uncertainty about who we are looms large.

But *Stones in His Pockets* is more than a timely critique of imperialism. It is also a tour de force for the performers, who remain on stage throughout, moving seamlessly between characters. Each transformation is marked by a cap, a hunched back, a subtle shift in tone, a change of pace or a glance. At the heart of the story are Charlie Conlon and Jake Quinn. Two extras who meet on the film set and who both fall victim to the exploitation that the film industry represents, both literally and symbolically.

Kevin Kiernan-Molloy's Jake is initially flattered by Caroline's interest when she turns up at the local pub and later invites him back to her place. But he eventually realises that he is nothing more than a "sex object with an accent". It was his accent she wanted to learn from him. More devastatingly, however, she also manages to humiliate Sean, a drug addict, in the pub, resulting in him being thrown out in front of everyone. Sean is Charlie's cousin, played by Jefferson Bond, and the two shared a childhood fascination with the American film machine. How desperately they

wanted to be part of it. But Charlie now sees its darker side, while Sean is banished from Paradise for good. Overcome by shame, he drowns himself – with his pockets full of stones.

Settle down

The tone darkens, even as the performance continues to bubble along playfully through the constant shifts between the central characters, Jake and Charlie, and the supporting cast. With nothing more than a turn of his body, Kevin Kiernan-Molloy transforms from Jake into the frantic assistant Ashley, who repeatedly calls the set to order with his eternal refrain: "Settle down." Simply by slipping his jacket down over his shoulders like a shawl, Jefferson Bond turns Charlie into the flirtatious Caroline, who will probably never understand her own role as an oppressor.

Moving in and out of roles that also include the weary producer, the self-important director, an older extra with plenty to say, a teacher and the doomed Sean, Bond and Kiernan-Molloy maintain a flow that looks effortlessly playful but demands extraordinary precision. They hit the mark every single time under Ian Burns' masterful direction, which keeps the comic pace brisk while giving each character razor-sharp definition. The grief and desperation of the tragedy are woven into the performance too, glimpsed in an anguished look or a slumped shoulder.

What a treat to watch two outstanding performers

Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy make a brilliant pairing. They complement each other beautifully, with Bond's Charlie – for much of the time – more optimistic and rounded, set against Kiernan-Molloy's sharper-edged Jake. What a treat, though, to watch two such accomplished performers, both working at full stretch and bringing to life a story packed with nuance, drawing on their outstanding comic abilities.

Stones in His Pockets is another accomplished and beautifully curated production from That Theatre Company, which is always a guarantee of high-quality English-language theatre. The tradition of sharp, witty English dialogue is no longer quite as strong on Danish stages – although *The Mousetrap* has made its way onto the stage at Folketeatret this year – but Ian Burns and his team never fail to deliver the real thing.

Playwright: Marie Jones. **Director:** Ian Burns. **Sound design:** Mark Jones. **Lighting design:** Julian Simpson. **Set design:** TTC Team. **Costumes:** Hanne Mørup. **Stage technician:** Angelique Giroir.

Cast: Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy.

Stones in His Pockets runs from 31 October to 28 November 2026 at Krudttønden, Copenhagen.