

Everything comes together in a delightful little chamber comedy with tragic undertones. English-language theatre at its best.

★★★★★

We are fortunate that Copenhagen has a fair amount of English-language theatre on offer throughout the season. And right now, audiences can enjoy a real gem of a production at Krudttønden in Østerbro, where That Theatre Company is performing the tragicomedy *Stones in His Pockets*.

It is a delightful chamber comedy set in a small community in County Kerry, Ireland. A large Hollywood film crew has descended on the area to shoot a movie, hiring local people as authentic extras for £40 and two free meals a day. The play explores the encounter between the superficial, commercial world of American filmmaking and the down-to-earth Irish locals, who, as it turns out, have dreams and ambitions of their own.

In their own way, everyone exploits everyone else. The filmmakers take advantage of the locals, but the locals are not easily fooled and know how to turn things to their own advantage, too. Everything goes on as usual until tragedy strikes the village, with consequences for everyone involved.

All 15 roles, if I have counted correctly, are played by just two actors: Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy. With a handful of small but remarkably effective gestures, they switch between characters with extraordinary ease. A cap tilted at an angle, a jacket slipped off one shoulder, a quick change of coat, a hunched posture, and so on, combined with an impressive command of accents and linguistic nuances, means that we are never in any doubt about who is who or where we are. It is quite extraordinary acting, and Ian Burns' direction is nothing short of superb. Burns is himself an excellent actor and has led That Theatre Company for the past 29 years.

Stones in His Pockets was written by Marie Jones and premiered in Belfast as far back as 1999. It subsequently opened in London's West End in 2001 and, among other accolades, won the prestigious Olivier Award for Best New Comedy – the British equivalent of Denmark's Reumert theatre awards. Marie Jones is no newcomer, either. She has written numerous plays and television films and, as an actress, played a major role in *In the Name of the Father*, the IRA drama starring Daniel Day-Lewis, which received seven Oscar nominations.

Stones in His Pockets was her breakthrough as a playwright, and it is a wonderful comedy in which our constant chuckling is eventually challenged by a deeply tragic event. The suicide of a young man causes cracks to appear both in the working relationship on the film set and among the friends themselves.

Ian Burns' sensitive direction brings out all the nuances of the script, while Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy are utterly virtuoso in their portrayal of the extensive cast of characters.

First and foremost, they play the two central characters, Charlie and Jake. Both are employed as extras on the Hollywood production *The Quiet Valley* – yet another film project, we gather, in which Hollywood commercially cashes in on Irish authenticity. One of the play's many wonderful lines goes something like this: "*So many Hollywood stars play the Irish that people think that's really how we sound".*

Charlie dreams of writing screenplays, while Jake has tried to pursue his dream of becoming an actor in the United States, only to return home to Kerry, disillusioned. From their place among the ranks of extras, they both cast longing glances towards the film star Caroline Giovanni, who is struggling to get her Irish accent right. This gives Jake an opportunity to *get a little closer to her.*

Among the extras is old Mickey, the only surviving extra from *The Quiet Man* (the classic film starring John Wayne). But there is also young Sean, who has dreamed of becoming a film star since childhood, only to fall on hard times through drug addiction. To make matters worse, he is thrown out of his local pub for *bothering* the film star Caroline Giovanni. This has fatal consequences and becomes the tragic turning point of the play.

We meet a self-absorbed film director, a grieving friend, their former schoolteacher, and various assistants and local characters. Every single one is portrayed with crisp precision and wonderful comic characterization, all within the simplest of sets. There are just two flight cases, moved around to serve a variety of purposes, while the back wall features a photograph of the beautiful Irish countryside. Lighting, sound and the simple costumes come together beautifully, and everything seems to fall into place for the entire team, on stage, behind the scenes and in front of it, in this thoroughly accomplished production.

English is a wonderful language for theatre, and there is no need to be intimidated by it. Although some of the Irish dialects and expressions may not be familiar to everyone, *Stones in His Pockets* is very accessible and deserves a large audience at the intimate Krudttønden, where the production runs until 28 November.

Stones in His Pockets by Marie Jones.

Director: Ian Burns. Set design: TTC Team. Costume design: Hannah Mørup. Lighting design: Julian Simpson. Sound design: Mark Jones.

Cast: Jefferson Bond and Kevin Kiernan-Molloy.

Running time: Approximately 2 hours (including interval).

Venue: Krudttønden, until 28 November.

Reviewed: 3 November.

Photo: Sara Lica