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Kulturkupeen

Review by Ulla Strømberg, 2026.

Stones in His Pockets at That Theatre Company

In Copenhagen's theatre scene, it is more than rare to come across a contemporary, well-crafted play. But in the Anglo-Saxon world, the tradition is very much alive, with such plays still being refined and frequently performed to perfection. And right now, audiences can experience just such a play at That Theatre Company in Østerbro, Copenhagen.

When That Theatre Company, under the direction of Ian Burns, first opened its doors back in 1997, it did so with a play by Marie Jones.

Now she is back in the company's programme with an intriguing work from 1999, which walks a fine line between comedy and deadly seriousness.

The two actors, Kevin Kiernan-Molloy and Jefferson Bond, handle the verbal tour de force brilliantly. It must be exhausting, though, as each of them has to play more than five different characters, switching in a split second between physical postures, costumes and, above all, dialects – somewhere between Irish, more readily understandable English and American accents. They also have to switch between genders.

The story is an interesting one, and perhaps has echoes of the past. There was a time when people in Denmark also talked about Ireland as a tax haven, attracting, among others, rock musicians who moved there to avoid paying American income tax, which was not particularly high to begin with.

Stones in His Pockets tells the story of a Hollywood film production that descends upon a small Irish town. Initially, the local population is enthusiastic and starstruck. They are happy to serve as background extras in the film and receive both a fee and a couple of meals in return. The local pubs also benefit from the visit – or invasion – as do the younger residents who harbour their own dreams of working in film or theatre.

But the mood soon changes. One of the locals, an old friend of the two central characters, is a drug addict and feels physically humiliated by the outsiders. So what does he do? He simply fills his pockets with stones (hence the title) and walks out into the water.

Grief now descends upon the small community, and its fascination with American glamour gradually fades away.

Ian Burns directs with a precise, effective and thoroughly impressive sense of rhythm. It is remarkable what the two actors manage to conjure up in terms of imagery through simple shifts in pitch, rhythm and choice of words. Simply turning a cap around creates an entirely new character, while slipping off a tweed jacket transforms one of them into a Californian diva.

The small playing space, with its green grass and a backdrop depicting a bare Irish landscape, works impeccably well.

At first, the audience needs time to adjust to the dialects and the rapid delivery, but after a couple of hours everything becomes perfectly understandable, as well as both intelligent and engaging. And there is something charmingly traditional about seeing two young men in tweed jackets, waistcoats and little caps.

The pace remains high throughout, with the actors constantly switching between the many characters from the local community – extras and long-time residents alike. They mingle with the American crew, where the director and script supervisor, together with the diva, are running the show.

There is an amusing point here, particularly given that the play was written in 1999. The diva takes a fancy to one of the young Irishmen, seeing him as a potential conquest, and invites him back to her hotel room. It is perhaps a reversal of the #MeToo scenario, but since he is a man, he manages to wriggle his way out of the situation.

The Irish predicament is, in fact, not quite as exotic as it might seem. Danish towns and seaside resorts are also invaded by foreigners and tourists who, while praising the unique character of these places, end up destroying precisely what makes them special simply by being there.

Stones in His Pockets can therefore be viewed from several different perspectives, while at the same time offering an interesting insight into the British and Irish acting tradition.

So whether you are young or old, a student looking to brush up on your English, or simply someone who appreciates good theatre with something to say, a visit to the intimate theatre space at That Theatre Company in Krudttønden, Østerbro, is well worth your while.

www.that-theatre.dk

Performances run throughout November.

PLAYWRIGHT: Marie Jones
DIRECTOR: Ian Burns
SOUND: Mark Jones
LIGHTING: Julian Simpson
CAST: Kevin Kiernan-Molloy and Jefferson Bond