



## **Banbury Cross Players**

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And the second Review is in!

"...impressive ..."

Inishmaan is the smallest of the Aran Islands in Galway Bay on the west coast of Ireland. This tiny settlement is the backdrop of Martin McDonagh's powerful yet comedic play, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*. Leave all your preconceptions and Political Correctness at the door otherwise you will be in for an uncomfortable ride I can tell you.

How can a playwright make a comedy out of a play dealing with topics revolving around the poor guy of the title? Well Mr McDonagh does just this and Banbury Cross Players brought the whole thing to life with their usual style.

Set in the 1930's, the play is the final production of BCP's 2017-2018 season and is directed by Chrissie Garrett. In her programme notes she states the audience should consider themselves as flies on the wall as they bear witness to the drama unfolding before them. She is correct as there is no real plot, but that doesn't matter the piece is basically interplay between several different yet strong characters who live cheek by jowl in this tiny outcrop of Ireland.

The set is superb. Congratulations to decorators Richard Ashby and Peter Bloor and to designer Chris Garrett. It is a split design incorporating the village shop and the beach. The shop stocks everything but mainly peas, and is managed by Kate (Clare Lester) and Eileen (Janice Lake). Terrific performances from both ladies. They were the strong earthy characters round which the rest of the cast revolved.

Both women have adopted their nephew; orphan Billy (the cripple in the title). They are harassed by a succession of customers with daft questions, not least young Bartley, played by Jonas Bal, whose constant yearning for American sweets Kate & Eileen import but are usually out of stock provided some amusing scenes. Pity he hadn't a yearning for tins of peas. Jonas played his part well and it's always refreshing to see a young person perform with the confidence and ability of Jonas, although I did miss some of his lines, I'll put that down to it being the opening night.

Bartley was constantly ear and physically bashed by his sister the delightful Helen. She being the Island's pretty young thing that got her way with everyone and everything by dishing out kisses and hugs. Clare Primrose was Helen and again a youngster gave her all on stage, self-assured, and as far as I could make out, word perfect. I particularly liked the attention to detail with her dress, the petticoat showed a good four inches in places below the hem. I am assuming it was meant.

With the strong Irish dialogue, coming and going of the characters, highly amusing script and the heat of a hot summer's night building up in the auditorium my fly on the wall felt as though it had been hit with a swat. There were only around fifty in the audience due, I guess, to England's World Cup clash. Shame.

On with the play. Enter Johnnypateenmike played by Nik Lester. This comical character's role in life was to dispense news-of-the-world to island inhabitants in return for goods, meat, eggs, tins of peas, you get the idea. Nik was excellent as the quick talking Johnnypateenmike who issued his news bulletins one at a time for maximum effect, bit like Radio 4. True to character I met Nik briefly after the play and amusingly (I thought) asked if he had any more news, and he informed me England were out the World Cup! Johnnypateenmike's Mammy (Lynn Cowley) did like a drink, (there didn't seem much more to do on Inishmaan) and provided some humorous moments throughout the production. A nice cameo performance from Ms Cowley, steady on the booze Lynn.

The plot such as it was involved an American film company arriving on a neighbouring island to shoot a film and several folk wishing to get a ride on Babbybobby's boat to try and make their fortune. Babbybobby was truly convincingly portrayed by Dave Candy. A surly, untidy, tall and menacing character that took exception when cripple Billy a conned lift across the water in his boat.

Now Joe Deakin as Billy was exceptional. Having to remember to shuffle when he walked, speak in an Irish accent and recite a massive amount of dialogue, especially in the second half was truly inspirational. His coughing alone in Act 2 convinced me he should see a doctor after the show.

Luckily however there was a doctor in the cast line up played by Andrew Whiffin. Good choice, nice bed side manner, I nearly asked him to have a look at my back.

So that's it. A full evening of Irish comedy and language dispensed by a very able group of BCP players who deserve much credit. No negatives at all 'cept the occasional lapse of Irish brogue but hardly a prompt, impressive for an opening night. Can't wait for November and the start of BCP's new season. Well done all.

Lance Bassett  
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