

LT OF INISHMORE

BERKELEY REP

MAY 29, 2009

THE PATRIOT GAME

There are two Inishmores in Ireland, a land of eternal duplicity. This is good to know before attending Berkeley Rep's latest offering from playwright Martin McDonagh, who supposedly composed all seven of his award-winning plays within one eighteen month period.

The first Inishmore of memory is a small town in County Cavan off of the N3 about three kilometers from the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland.

The second Inishmore is more well-known to tourists as it is the largest of the Aran islands, and is a noted tourist attraction. Population of both towns is about 900.

This duality is very much the nature of a country in which every single place enjoys two names -- one English and one Gaelic -- and where double meanings run rife through everyday speech.

Berkeley Rep has staged a sanguine production of McDonagh's Lieutenant of Inishmore, a fairly brutal comedy that ramps up from animal cruelty to torture and human slaughter, with a final act that is literally drenched in blood as characters dismember murdered corpses on stage with saws and clippers.



(l to r) At Berkeley Rep, James Carpenter and Adam Farabee star in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, another bloody comedy from Obie Award-winning director Les Waters and Oscar-winning writer Martin McDonagh. Photo courtesy of kevinberne.com

For those of us who have actually lived through some of this, its a bit off-putting to say the least. But this is Theatre, where everything is larger than life. McDonagh spares no visual in his savage indictment of IRA and its splinter groups tactics in his brutal farce which begins with a character lifting a battered dead cat from a kitchen table, its brains dripping down.

That's only the first few ounces of what the Rep claims to be a total of about 13 gallons of stage blood spilled, spattered, smeared and splashed during the roughly 120 minutes of *Grand Guignol* that takes place during the Irish "Troubles".

The story begins with the rather thick and fey Davey (played by a wonderfully daffy Adam Farabee) finding the corpse of a battered cat in the road as he rides his pink girl's bicycle.

He brings the body back to the cottage where he lives with the equally obtuse omadauen Donny. The two plot an improbable scheme to conceal the death of the cat, concerned that Padraic, Donny's son, will fly into a murderous rage when he finds out his beloved "Wee Thomas" has died violently.

Padraic is the title's Lt. of Inishmore, a head of an IRA splinter group that calls itself the INLA, and is known for his murderous tendencies.

Donny calls Padraic on his cell phone and the scene shifts to the interrupted session in which Padraic has been torturing a known petty drug dealer with razors and pinking shears. Donny tells Padraic (played by Blake Ellis) that "Wee Thomas is feelin' poorly", but not so poor that he need rush on home.



(l to r) At Berkeley Rep, Daniel Krueger and Blake Ellis. Photo courtesy of mellopix.com

The drug dealer (played by a durable Daniel Krueger who hangs upside down for most of his scene) manages to talk his way out of further punishment by giving a tip on curing ringworm in cats, and so Padraic rushes on home, thus provoking the seemingly endless round of violence that permeates the play.

As one character notes -- while sawing through the backbone of a dismembered corpse next to a pile of body parts, "When will this ever end?"



(l to r) At Berkeley Rep, James Carpenter, Blake Ellis and Adam Farabee star in The Lieutenant of Inishmore. Photo courtesy of mellopix.com

Indeed, as the previous evening with Alice Walker indicates, it never does. In life or on the stage.

At the end of the play, when a real live cat appears and two surviving characters, dripping with blood, draw their guns to kill it, but hold back -- for now - - there is a momentary hint of potential mercy, however another surviving character has left with the angry and sinister promise, "I'll be back in the mornin' to conduct an investigation as to just how this happened."



(l to r) At Berkeley Rep, Danny Wolohan and Blake Ellis star in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Photo courtesy of mellopix.com

This is one of McDonagh's most movie-like plays, calling for rather spectacular special effects as heads are severed, brains are spattered against walls upon gunshot and genuine firearms are discharged on stage. The scenes

are multiple and short, almost like Scorsese-style editorial jumpcuts from cottage to torture cell to open road and back to cottage again.

For a while one could not go down O'Connell Street in the Republic without running into not one or two but several men walking with canes and a stiff leg that had been "capped" up north by the IRA as punishment for this or that infraction. The IRA ran its own police operation in Belfast and other areas, and so lacking proper jails, would break the legs of perceived criminals. For more serious offences, they would break a man's knees, then chain him to a bomb-filled car that would be pointed toward a police barracks or a British checkpoint. Others, they would simply shoot in the head.

The Troubles only came to an uneasy truce in 1991 when the Northern Ireland counties were all given the theoretical right to vote for self-determination by the British. By then, over 3,500 people had been murdered, as a conservative estimate, with unknown thousands more maimed for life. So far, the largely Protestant North has refused to join with the Republic of Ireland to the south.

There is no mention of the equally as violent Protestant UDF, and other paramilitary forces who fought the Ira, but the play is not about politics. Its about presenting violent men and violent women as thick-head imbeciles.

The world is a violent place where it seems the "hard men" get exalted and glorified. This was true during the Troubles in Ireland and it certainly seems true in the Middle East, where misplaced sentiment for relatively unimportant things unseats human compassion. To the end of our days we will never forget

an IRA man pounding the table in a meeting while shouting "We don't want peace; we want Justice!"

"When will this ever end?" is a good question.

As Louis MacNeice, another Irishman, commented long ago in his *Autumn Journal*,

*Nightmare leaves fatigue:
We envy men of action
Who sleep and wake, murder and intrigue
Without being doubtful, without being haunted.
And I envy the intransigence of my own
Countrymen who shoot to kill and never
See the vicim's face become their own
Or find his motive sabotage their motives.*

The play is being held over through May 24th.

PERSONAGES

Martin McDonagh, Playwright
Les Waters, Director
Antje Ellermann, Scenic Design
Anna R. Oliver, Costume Design
Alexander V. Nichols, Lighting Design
Obadiah Eaves, Sound Design
Dave Maier, Fight Director
Lynne Soffer, Dialect Coach
TolinFX, Special Effects
Karen Szpaller, Stage Manager
Amy Potozkin, Casting
Janet Foster, New York Casting
Mina Morita, Assistant Director
Mark Huang, Assistant Sound Design

ACTORS

James Carpenter, Donny
Adam Farabee, Davey
Blake Ellis, Padraic
Daniel Krueger, James
Molly Camp, Mairead
Danny Wolohan, Christy

Rowan Brooks, Brendan
Michael Barrett Austin, Joey