

Sidhe

The Road Theatre Company at the Road Theatre

Reviewed by Dany Margolies

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Taking place in Chicago, with two Chi-town and two Irish characters, Ann Noble's play rings of Conor McPherson and Sam Shepard. We humans continue to be haunted: by love, death, revenge, family ties, alcoholism, our misdeeds no matter the justification, our need for human contact of all forms. But, here, the haunters are the mythical "faery-folk," known as the sidhe.

Louise, the landlady of an illegally rented seedy apartment above her apparently unsuccessful bar, asks the couple about to rent the apartment, "On the run?" The pair dances around the question for the remainder of the play. We run from danger, we run from memories, we run to hope. Louise and her brother-in-law Vernon deal with the violent death of her sister, his wife. Tenants Conall and Jackie seem to be dealing with the aftermath of violent retributive acts back home.

Noble plays Louise as a steadfast, powerful heroine suffering her past but open to all possibilities. Jeanne Syquia beautifully shapes her portrayal of Jackie. At first Syquia seems improbably young, even a preteen. Slowly, we begin to see Jackie as menacing, monstrous, and then wretchedly pitiable. Patrick Rieger's Conall is brutal and gentle. A sense of humor seems to lurk around the edges, giving the character heart even in heartless situations. Rob Nagle creates a cuddly cop in Vernon, a sturdy Midwesterner trying to do right. Vernon downs glass after glass of Jameson, and Nagle accurately shows the effects.

Darin Anthony directs beautifully, making the audience feel as haunted as the characters. His blocking looks natural and works exceptionally well with the set. Both acts begin with the drawing of a downstage curtain to let light into the apartment; for Act 2 the curtain hides a major change to the apartment. The set, by Stephen Gilford, includes a bar that is, yes, haunted by bottles of drinks past. David B. Marling's sound design is arresting, mysterious, and subtly disturbing.

Is this disquieting play fully comprehensible on first viewing? That depends on the viewer's powers of observation. Even after seeing it and reading the script, we still might not glean all that is dreamt of in Noble's philosophy. But we have hints of what may be when Jackie swiftly, deftly, vaults over the bar, as stagecraft and imagination come together.