

'Odd' man out

Before stepping into a revival of "The Odd Couple," Nathan Lane is taking an off-Broadway role in "Dedication or The Stuff of Dreams."



Finearts

'Beauty' spans comedy, horror

Keegan Theatre show channels Alfred Hitchcock

BY DOUG KRENTZLIN
Special to *The Examiner*

The line between comedy and horror is a very thin one indeed. Think of it this way: A guy is walking down the street. He slips on a banana peel and falls down. If he does a pratfall and the only injury is to his dignity, that's funny. If he lands on his head, killing him on the spot, with his life's blood flowing all over the sidewalk — well, that's kinda light on laughs.

Some of the world's most talented writers and directors, such as James Whale, Jim Thompson, John Guare, Clive Barker, Joss Whedon and the greatest filmmaker of all time, Alfred Hitchcock, have spent their entire careers exploring this paradox. Therefore, it is meant as the highest of compliments to say that Irish playwright Martin McDonagh's "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," which is currently being performed by the Keegan Theatre, would have made a terrific Hitchcock picture.

The first part of McDonagh's Leenane Trilogy — which also includes "A Skull in Connemara" and "The Lonesome West" (presented earlier this year by Keegan) — "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" has some very funny dialogue, which only makes what happens in the second act all the more frightening.

Mothers and daughters

The main character is Maureen Folan (Nanna Ingvarsson), a lonely, middle-aged spinster who lives with her hypochondriac mother, Mag (Linda High), on a small chicken farm in rural Ireland. Mag is in reasonably good health for a woman her age, but to hear her tell it, she is a help-



Photographs by Ray Gniewek

Linda High, left, as Mag, and Nanna Ingvarsson as Maureen in Martin McDonagh's "The Beauty Queen of Leenane." Below: Joe Baker as Ray.

less invalid. Consequently, she is determined to prevent her daughter from having anything resembling a social life for fear of Maureen getting married instead of waiting on Mag hand and foot for the rest of her life.

Maureen is well aware of her mother's machinations and, as a result, they both detest each other and bicker endlessly. About the only thing they can agree upon is that neither of them would mind being killed by a homicidal maniac as long as the other one was a victim as well.

In this case, the old cliché about being careful what you wish for turns out to be all too true. Before the play is over, one of the two women will be murdered in a particularly gruesome manner.

The turning point comes when Maureen learns that her childhood friend, Pato Dooley (Scott

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Graham), has returned from London and is throwing a party. Defying Mag's orders, Maureen treats herself to a new dress and attends the affair. Reunited after several years, Maureen and Pato fall in love and spend the night together. (The play's title comes from Pato's affectionate nickname for Maureen.) Unfortunately, Maureen's one night

of happiness sets into motion a chain of events that end in tragedy.

Another Keegan success

Brilliantly directed by Mark A. Rhea, "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" features the kind of first-rate acting that audiences have come to expect from Keegan. Joe Baker is extremely amusing as Pato's slacker kid brother, Ray, who finds himself unexpectedly fascinated by the Folan's fireplace poker whenever he visits them.

Graham, who played a jazz musician in Keegan's "Side Man," gives an equally wonderful performance here as Pato. High succeeds in making Mag both malignant and pitiful. Ingvarsson again demonstrates why she is considered to be one of Washington's finest actresses with her electrifying portrayal of Maureen.

The set, a meticulous rec-

IF YOU GO

"The Beauty Queen of Leenane" runs through July 23 at the Church Street Theater, 1742 Church St. NW, Washington. Performances are at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sundays. Tickets are \$20 to \$25. Call 703-527-6000 or visit www.keegantheatre.com.

reation of a rundown Irish farmhouse, is the work of George Lucas, who may well be the area's best set designer. His sets aren't as breathtaking as the ones that grace the shows at the Shakespeare Theatre, but they are much more impressive, considering that Lucas is working with a fraction of the Shakespeare's budget.

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