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Asheville, North Carolina
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Delicious staging shows off 'Beauty Queen'

JIM CAVENER • PUBLISHED OCTOBER 23, 2009 1:25 PM

Often, the performance space at North Carolina Stage Company is spare and minimalist, but not so with the season-opening powerful production of "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," directed by Angie Flynn-McIver.

The production's quality is obvious from the first sight of Rob Bowen's atmospheric setting. The stage is filled with a detailed, realistic and convincing interior of a rural West Irish cottage. The special effects of the firing up of a propane cooking stove, an actual working kitchen sink and a burning cast iron heating stove are technical wonders.

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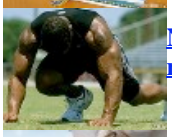
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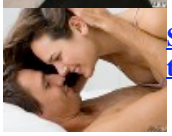
Sex pheromones are bending the laws of attraction

Part of the marvel is the sound design with splendid, natural sounds accompanying stage action. Jason Waggoner is credited as sound designer, and both composed and performed the highly evocative music which sets the mood before and after specific scenes, Using keyboard and computer, Waggoner generates brooding, moody and totally appropriate sounds that emulate acoustic instruments. It's most impressive.

The completely linear, old-fashioned script is brilliantly fashioned into a high drama vehicle with several surprise twists. Playwright Martin McDonagh has crafted a suspense show that could keep the attention of a hardened theater veteran. This is acute suspense with all the elements of a "Wait Until Dark." Pathos is rampant, but in the midst of all the familial conflict and crisis, an opening night audience was rife with guffaws which felt genuine and not simply from mounting tension. Mixing such tense situations with heavy humor is a tricky skill, but McDonagh has pulled it off.

The small cast is uniformly excellent. The 'beauty queen,' Maureen Folan, is given by Anne Thibault, often seen at NCSC, although living in Alaska as associate artistic director of Fairbanks Shakespeare Theatre. Her range of emotion on stage is awesome.

Maureen's mother is Mag Folan, rendered by Carol Mayo Jenkins, a veteran of London, New York and Los Angeles theater, film and TV. Her performance at NCSC is commensurate with this pedigree.

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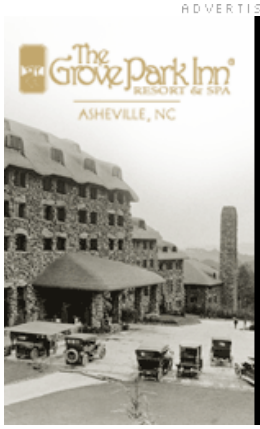

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Michael MacCauley's name, alone, would indicate an appropriate casting for this Irish story, but his stage presence confirms the wisdom of Flynn-McIver's choice. MacCauley does the struggling neighbor, Pato Dooley with great competence and compassion.

His second act soliloquy is moving and well delivered. Young Casey Morris is a senior at UNCA. His Raymond Dooley is delightful, and offers both light aspects of the script and some weighty moments, as well.

Deborah Austin gives us fine costuming, lighting design is by Hallie Gray. But the star of the technical aspects of this show is that delicious set.

Jim Cavener reviews theater for the Citizen-Times. Email him at JimCavener@aya.Yale.edu.

IF YOU GO

What: "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" by North Carolina Stage Company

Where: 15 Stage Lane, next to Rankin Street Garage, off Walnut Street.

When: 2 p.m. Sundays, 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays, through Nov. 8.

Tickets: $16-$26, 239-0263 or www.ncstage.org.

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