

Entertainment

Odd Jobs brings order and harmony

Odd Jobs
Theatre Network
till November 10

review by Gilbert Bouchard

Order and harmony. For the last several hours that's what I've been stewing over: the order in which I'll string the words in this review in, and trying to get my ideas in some tiny little harmony.

Theatre Network and Catalyst Theatre's co-production of Frank Moher's *Odd Jobs* is also struggling with order and harmony, but unlike this poor little review they manage to grace their play with a heck of a lot more class.

Odd Jobs' two protagonists, Tim (played by Eric Kramer) and Mrs. Phipps (Mary Monks) are trapped in lives robbed of meaning, and stripped of order and harmony. Tim, an unemployed welder, is forced to try and hustle odd jobs around his neighborhood (at his wife's urgings we're led to suspect) and try to salvage some dignity and get on with life the best he can. Tim, the provider, is now Tim the provided for and he and his wife Ginette struggle to make ends meet on her less than adequate salary from Sears, where she works at the complaints desk.

Mrs. Phipps, on the other hand, is a retired and widowed math professor. The order provided by her work and her husband are both long dead: her husband is dead physically, and her work is being eroded by a sense of futility. She was originally drawn to math by her desires to find (or impose) some order on the universe, but she now doubts that she'll ever find any order or harmony through her calculations (Phipps has been searching for the invisible matter that holds the universe together), hence she begins to wonder if perhaps her whole life's work — 55 years worth of calculations — wasn't for naught.

Tim is just trying to find meaning for his life in a more physical way: he's just trying to keep busy. Finally the two discover that they can help each other cope, and Phipps hires Tim fulltime to keep her busy and to do odd jobs around the house. She gains someone to talk to and ground herself in reality, while he gains a reason to get up in the morning.

Everything goes along nicely till Tim's wife gets a better paying job in Regina and forces Tim to move out of Edmonton and Phipps' life — the only thing complicating matters is that Tim doesn't know if he wants to step out of Phipps' life.

I suppose that if the play has any one message it would be that work shouldn't be the only thing that provides meaning to one's life, but that meaning has to come from



Eric Kramer and Mary Monks in *Odd Jobs*: touching all the bases of the human condition

photo Bill St. John

within one's self. Work for most of us is the easy out, it's the quick definition of our persons, and the majority of us use our jobs to impose an order to our lives because we're too lazy to do so on our own. Most of us have trouble keeping ourselves meaningfully occupied over our two days off.

Odd Jobs manages to pass on an awful lot of insight into work and the meaning of living without preaching. It's a strong simple story rich in symbol and emotion told in the most straight forward of ways.

Credit must go to director Jan Selma and her cast for a spectacular job of interpreting the script. Eric Kramer in particular shines as the unemployed welder. Eric — a tall all-American giant — oozes a warmth and charm coupled with tremendous power. We get the feeling that his character is on the constant verge of dismantling the stage at any moment. Kramer manages to bring an elemental emotional nature to Tim that balances the frail intellectual Mrs. Phipps perfectly, just as Christine MacInnis creates the

perfect foil for both of them in the form of Tim's practical French-Canadian wife. Tim is all emotion, Phipps is all brains, and Ginette plays the practical force in all of us that has to keep the balance between emotions and brains.

Just as the characters touch all the bases of the human condition, so does the play appeal to the sensibilities of the audience. *Odd Jobs* is a good story told by likeable characters in an intellectually stimulating fashion.

Translations opens at Studio Theatre

Ireland's fight for self-assertion

Translations
Studio Theatre
till November 15

review by Suzette C. Chan

As the play *Translations* opens, the teacher of a hedge school in 19th century Ireland is coaxing one of his pupils to speak.

The pupil, Sara, seems to be near autistic. Apparently, she has not had the confidence to learn speech although she is in her teenage years. But finally, after tense moments of inner struggle, Sara utters a few

words in Gaelic: "My name is Sara."

The simple act of self-assertion is symbolic of the struggle Ireland endured on its way to becoming a distinct nation. However, the lesson was incomplete by the time Britain claimed Ireland as part of its kingdom.

Translations is set in 1833, when the Irish had to cope with cultural upheaval. Just as it was finding its own voice, the British arrived to change the rules.

The problems of a people watching its culture being pronounced redundant are encapsulated in this play by the struggle

between Gaelic and English. *Translations* is particularly relevant to Canadians with inescapable parallels to the French-English dichotomy which at once has threatened to divide Canada while becoming an integral part of the definition and culture of our country.

The dramatic challenge built into Brian Friel's script asks the actors to "speak" Gaelic in English translation while keeping it distinct from the Queen's English spoken by characters in the British army. Thus, director Jim DeFelice places great emphasis on the accuracy of the accents used by the actors. The result is a clear, non-confusing "translation" (if I may) of the play, although a few dramatic moments are sacrificed as this troupe of talented third-year BFA students concentrate more on technical tricks of the tongue.

Dressed in rustic, earth-tone costumes that underline their indigeneness to the land, the "Irish" cast was convincing most of the time.

Particularly impressive are: Scott Gibson as Manus, the bilingual (Gaelic and English) school teacher who would ultimately be shown as an uncompromising Irish nationalist but who is probably most aware of the reality of the future; Jan Wood as Sara and Eileen Flood, as Moire, the girl who dreams of being in the new world, ready to renounce her "backward" culture.

As their foil are Jeremy Hart (a professional actor) and Jeff Haslam, as the soldiers sent from England to Anglicize Irish place-names. Haslam is charming as the summary of British uptightness, country-side romance and failed upper-middle-class youth.

While *Translations* is successful — to the point of didacticism — at showing the anguish of a people whose language is being pronounced dead, the script doesn't go far enough. Other important cultural components and conflicts are not even mentioned. Most noticeably absent is the religious struggle, the "tithe war", that Britain conducted during the time the play is set.

Translations is playing in repertory with *Ashes* until November 15.

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