

# BACK STAGE

1515 Broadway • New York, NY • 10036

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## THEATRE REVIEWS

### RUM AND VODKA

REVIEWED BY

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The U.S. premiere of "Rum and Vodka," an 80-minute non-stop monologue, written by one Irishman and performed by another, is surely one of the most moving of the 144 offerings of the 12-day International Fringe Festival, recently held in downtown Manhattan. Though "Rum and Vodka" covers well-worn terrain, it does so with such solid writing and delivery, that the journey is thoroughly satisfying.

Playwright **Conor McPherson** and actor **John O'Callaghan** explore three dizzying days in the life of one young man, a poor bewildered loser who represents Everyman. Trapped in a dead-end job, dull marriage, and the demands of fatherhood, he escapes from his dreary existence only through wine and women (or more accurately, beer and broads). Carousing with his cronies is the only alternative to a life which offers no exit, no rosy future.

Playwright McPherson follows the grand tradition of Irish poets and playwrights who have written about drunken binges, with stories that invariably focus on the pub. McPherson, too, is master of the written/spoken word, as his hero staggers from bar to bar—from the Norseman to the Stag's Head to the Olympia—overcome with remorse and nausea between inebriated bouts. It's all there—the humor, pathos, and poetry—a world made vivid through the telling.

"Rum and Vodka" is enacted most endearingly by O'Callaghan in a performance that rushes headlong from scene to scene. One ends up sympathizing entirely with the character, despite his lies, betrayals, thefts, moochings, and overall lack of integrity. O'Callaghan hardly pauses for breath, as he piles one hilarious, farcical incident upon another. Pacing is flawless here under the deft direction of **Ed Sahely**.

*Presented by Naked in the Wings, at The Red Room, 85 E. Fourth St., NYC, as part of the NY International Fringe Festival, Aug. 19-29.*