



Friday, April 2, 2004

Irish born playwright Mark O'Rowe laces his play "Howie the Rookie" with gallows humor of a peculiarly Irish sort.

Life is a serious business indeed for these impoverished, uneducated and unemployed young Dubliners, mired in hopelessness and always teetering on the edge of violence.

O'Rowe's play consists of two solo monologues separated by an act break. The first monologue is delivered by the Howie Lee, an inarticulate young man who is bent on a ludicrous mission of vengeance. It seems that a distant acquaintance, the Rookie Lee, unintentionally gave Howie's good mate the scabies. Now Howie's out to redress the wrong by tracking down and beating up the Rookie Lee.

It's an absurd situation, sufficient to galvanize tragedy. The second act, a monologue by the Rookie Lee (John O'Callaghan). While ferociously itching his scabies, the Rookie Lee blunders into a tank of Siamese fighting fish owned by a local mobster, who demands a huge sum for the gaffe. However the Rookie Lee finds an unlikely champion in his former nemesis the Howie Lee, who is reeling from his own devastating loss and has nothing to lose.

Director Natalie Van Doren's effective muted staging, the intense Byrne and the comical/tragical O'Callaghan unearth the plays underlying humanity.

F. Kathleen Foley.