

The IRISH NEWS

Howie the Rookie by Mark O'Rowe.

Naked in the Wings Productions.

Directed by Natalie Van Doren.

The Howie Lee - Mark Byrne. The Rookie Lee - John O'Callaghan.

By Eileen McCormack

The story of "Howie the Rookie" is told in two monologues not unlike Conor McPherson's "Rum and Vodka" (which was a sold out hit here last year performed by the talented John O'Callaghan).

Dark but sweet Howie Lee (Mark Byrne) takes the first Act, telling the tale of his flight into the night to beat up the self proclaimed scheming lothario Rookie Lee (John O'Callaghan), who may or may not have infected a friend with the "scabies." The tragic result of this act alters the Howie's life forever.

After an intermission, the sexy and self-absorbed Rookie, who boasts of his ability to "break hearts and hymens," continues the story. Having suffered a "not too bad" battering from the Howie, he is now confronted by the possibility of another one by the Lady Boy a man rumored to have an ingrown flute and three sets of teeth (enhanced by a Jaws like sound effect). The Rookie owes him money, and he must pay up tonight.

O'Rowe's monologues are poetry. Storytelling at it's finest with characters that inflict both pain and pleasure all at the same time. It is a roller coaster into the unknown. The performance of Byrne is intense and compelling; playing the tough guy with an alluring innocence and pathos that transcends his tragedy.

O'Callaghan takes the second act in a whole new direction. Amazingly engaging, he shows us the arrogant, swaggering and self-assured Rookie and knows exactly how to milk the riches of O'Rowe's language with his perfect comic timing. Both actors are Dublin natives and show a deep understanding of the emotional inner life of the souls they portray.

Natalie Van Doren makes her directing theatrical debut with this production of Howie the Rookie. She masterfully handles the material, evoking the both the hilarity and grittiness of the two scallywags lost in the seedy underbelly of working class Dublin. O'Rowe's writing can also be experienced in the movie "Intermission" starring Colin Farrell and Colm Meaney, where yet again you will be taken on a rollercoaster ride which will leave you breathless.

If you have missed this run, keep your fingers crossed and let's hope you get a second chance to see this fine production.

Sets, Lorien Kranen, Zac Murphy; lights, Nathan Matheny; sound, Aaron Vattano.