



## Howie the Rookie by Mark O'Rowe

Naked in the Wings presentation of a play in two acts by Mark O'Rowe. Directed by Natalie Van Doren.

The Howie Lee - Mark Byrne

The Rookie Lee - John O'Callaghan

By [JULIO MARTINEZ](#)

**TV helmer Natalie Van Doren ("CSI: Miami") is making her legit debut with the L.A. preem of Irish scripter Mark O'Rowe's searing tale of two damaged souls lost in the gangster-ruled underbelly of Dublin. O'Rowe, who scripted recently released Colin Farrell starrer "Intermission," possesses a keen ear for the colorful language of the Dublin streets. Van Doren wisely keeps a restraining hand on her two her capable thespis, Mark Byrne and John O'Callaghan, allowing O'Rowe's thickly accented, image-strewn tale to build slowly in fervor and intensity. The end result is a memorable, cathartic journey into a nightmarish world of awe-inspiring gutter humor, horrific violence and intense sorrow.**

The story of "Howie the Rookie" is told in two interconnected monologues. Sensitive but highly psychotic Howie Lee (Byrne) takes the stage first, relating the misadventures of his journey into the night to do physical damage to dapper lowlife Rookie Lee (John O'Callaghan), who may or may not have infected a friend's mattress with the "scabbies." The tragic consequences of this relatively harmless caper completely alter Howie's life.

After an intermission, the always preening Rookie, who prides himself in his ability to "break hearts and hymens," continues Howie's narrative from his own perspective. Having suffered an efficient but not life-threatening battering from Howie, he is now confronted by a more dire situation. The Rookie is in debt to dangerous criminal Lady Boy, and he must pay up tonight. The Rookie is dumbfounded but highly grateful when Howie comes back into his life, this time as his savior.

O'Rowe populates the two monologues with a menagerie of seedy folk who inflict both pain and pleasure on the two lads. Particularly memorable is Avalanche, the hefty sister of one of Howie's mates, weighing in at 16 stones (224 pounds), with an insatiable sexual appetite and "an arse enough for three barstools." In this sordid world of unrelenting despair, the sex is as casual as the violence and just as meaningless.

The performances of Byrne and O'Callaghan are extraordinary. Each exhibits a flawless facility for the language and a deep understanding of the emotional instability of their characters. The actors use no props, playing out their tales in front of the Lorien Kranen/Zac Murphy expressionistic, garbage-laden setting that serves as whatever environment is needed. Neither actor attempts in-depth portrayals of the various characters that cross their paths, but they still manage to create vivid images of these disparate personalities that are all so desperate to prove they are alive.

The production is further enhanced by the evocative lights and sounds of Nathan Matheny and Aaron Vattano, respectively.

Sets, Lorien Kranen, Zac Murphy; lights, Nathan Matheny; sound, Aaron Vattano. Opened March 19, 2004; runs until April 10. Reviewed March 27. Running time: 90 MIN.