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**GAY L.A. / THEATER REVIEWS**

**Theater Review: A Man of No Importance**

Les Spindle  
6/14/2013

**A Man of No Importance**

Lillian Theatre | 1076 Lillian Way, Hollywood

Through June 30 | [goodpeopletheatre.org](http://goodpeopletheatre.org)

The intimate 2002 musical, *A Man of No Importance*—an Outer Critics Circle Award winner and Lucille Lortel nominee—proves to be an astute choice for the debut offering of the Good People Theatre Company. The new organization's Producing Artistic Director Janet Miller produces, directs, and provides musical staging for a memorable production of this subtly profound musical.



This slice-of-life tuner, based on a 1994 film starring Albert Finney, offers themes resonant to the gay community as well as universally pertinent observations on mankind's struggle to balance life's mundane and difficult circumstances with our efforts to fulfill our most fervent hopes and desires. The musical spins a flavorful Gaelic tale of joy and repression in a provincial Dublin community in the mid-1960s. The distinguished team who created this musical includes librettist Terrence McNally (*Ragtime*, *The Full Monty*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Love! Valour! Compassion*), and the songwriting team of composer Stephen Flaherty and lyricist Lynn Ahrens (*Ragtime*, *Once on This Island*). The lovely score mixes heartfelt ballads and reflective character-driven songs with lively group numbers.

The lyrical soul of Oscar Wilde meets the gritty reality of humdrum working-class life for bus-conductor Alfie Byrne (Dominic McChesney). Directing Wilde's *Salome* for a scrappy community theater company situated in a Catholic church, Alfie encounters objections from Father Kenny (Terrence Evans), who views the subject matter of the classic play as vile. A hammy but closed-minded butcher, Carney (hilariously played by David Gilchrist, who is also terrific as the spirit of Oscar Wilde) causes further trouble. The earnest but generally overwrought amateur thespians make their best efforts to achieve high theatrical art. Yet Alfie's efforts to fulfill his artistic dreams seem futile. Meanwhile, he secretly carries a torch for charming bus driver Robbie (Keith Barletta), while Alfie's meddlesome sister Lily (a superb Shirley Anne Hatton) is determined to match her sibling up with the perfect wife. What's it all about, Alfie? Indeed.

Miller elicits extraordinary ensemble work, in the joyously entertaining group song-and-dance sequences, as well as in the funny and simultaneously touching efforts of the overzealous amateur performers to savor their individual moments in the spotlight. Dialects (coached by Jill Massie) are credible throughout, and the actors convincingly convey the distinctive characteristics associated with the Irish culture. Atmosphere is further enhanced by Kevin Williams' scenic design and props, costumes by Kathy Gillespie and Barbara Weisel, and lighting by Catherine Barrett.

A hallmark of McNally's book—and Miller's treatment of the material—is the way it strikes a perfect balance between the rueful and the buoyant. The zesty spirit of the Irish culture is evident throughout, and the actors meet the challenges of their roles—large or small—with skill and strong conviction. In the lead role, Byrne's multi-shaded turn as the hopeful but troubled protagonist is masterful. He captures the suppressed anguish as well as the resilient spirit of the working-class gentleman.

Music director Corey Hirsch elicits fine efforts from the four-piece band and the strong cast of actor-singers. Among other members of the cast are Mary Chesterman, Marci Richmond Herrera, Gail Mathius, Matt Stevens, Corky Loupe, Michael P. Wallot, Melina Kolomas, Bret Shefter, Matti Franta, Keith Barletta, and Audrey Curd.

—Les Spindle

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