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COLUMNS

Comedy Tonight: *Yes, Prime Minister, Neva, Dead Man's Cell Phone, Bob*

by Don Shirley | June 17, 2013

I caught only one Hollywood Fringe Festival production over the weekend, but at more than two hours (with an intermission!) it's surely one of the longest shows in the mostly short-form Fringe fare. And it sounds as if the new Good People Theater Company that's behind this musical at the Lillian Theatre is determined to continue producing in LA, in contrast to many of the other Fringe offerings.

It's the LA premiere of a musical, *A Man of No Importance*, which was created by the same team of Stephen Flaherty, Lynn Aherns and Terrence McNally that turned out *Ragtime*. This musical is much smaller and well, of less importance, than *Ragtime*, but it tells a story that gets more interesting as it goes along — in contrast to, say, *Dead Man's Cell Phone* and *Bob*.

Set in 1964 Dublin, the title character is a middle-aged bus conductor who lives with his sister. The joy in his life revolves around the plays he directs in a church hall with amateurs, but his decision to stage Oscar Wilde's *Salome* sets him on a rocky road that eventually opens the door of his gay closet — with a number of grim results, although the ending feels somewhat artificially pumped up with feel-good sentiment.

While it isn't a great musical, it's consistently absorbing, and Janet Miller's staging is powered by what sounds like an authentic four-piece Irish band (Corey Hirsch is the music director). Although there was an apparently last-minute substitution in one role, most of the Good People on stage are good enough to treat the tale with the respect it deserves.