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LOS ANGELES

by Sharon Perlmutter

A Man of No Importance

To tell you the honest truth, I've always loved *A Man of No Importance*, and wished this chamber musical had more success than it did. The tale of Alfie Byrne, a bus conductor in 1964 Dublin, desperately hiding his homosexual feelings from everyone and filling the void in his life with an amateur theatrical company at his local church, is a sweet and deeply moving one. As part of the Hollywood Fringe Festival, it is getting its first fully staged production in Los Angeles, in the freshman outing of the Good People Theater Company. Having not seen the show, or listened to its cast recording, in a number of years, this production feels like the welcoming embrace of an old friend.

"Embrace" is the word, really. Director Janet Miller sometimes plants a few members of the ensemble behind the audience, so that you feel encompassed by the music, and subtly a bit more included in the show.

But what really makes this production isn't actually the singing. The singing is certainly sufficient – you hear no wrong notes or audible straining. But the singing doesn't go beyond solidly serviceable – nobody blows the roof off the place with vocal gymnastics; there is no chance you would mistake one of these performances for something on *American Idol*. Instead, the production puts its focus on the acting and the creation of characters and relationships.

Thus, when Robbie, the bus driver who is the secret object of Alfie's attention, sings "The Streets of Dublin," a rousing paean to the working man, it doesn't jump out of the show (as it very nearly did at Lincoln Center); instead it fits comfortably in place. What is more memorable about Keith Barletta's performance, however, is how he conveys, with body language, facial expressions, and very few words, the driver's genuine appreciation of, and camaraderie with, his somewhat quirky conductor. The same can be said for Audrey Curd, as Adele Rice, the young woman whose appearance prompts Alfie to attempt to stage Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. She does not let loose with a soaring soprano when Alfie suggests that she play a "Princess." Instead, her rendition of the song is small and sincere, full of all of Adele's insecurities.

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At the center of it all is Dominic McChesney, who gives Alfie an affable, eager personality – there’s no doubting that his bus is the most fun in Dublin. McChesney is also straightforward with Alfie’s nearly painful naivete. And when Alfie’s world begins to collapse around him, it’s easy to understand how the destruction of this man’s universe pushes him into a new one.

A fully-staged production of a musical – particularly this one (with a fifteen-member cast, most on the far side of 40, and a Lincoln Center pedigree) seems an odd choice for the Fringe Festival. But quality is quality, wherever you stage it, and Good People’s character-driven production is beautiful, heartfelt, and a welcome addition.

Good People Theater Company presents *A Man of No Importance* -- Book by Terrence McNally; Music by Stephen Flaherty; Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens. Produced and Directed by Janet Miller. Corey Hirsch, Musical Director; Janet Miller, Musical Staging; Katherine Barrett, Stage Manager/Lighting Designer; Kevin Williams, Scenic/Props Designer; Kathy Gillespie & Barbara Weisel, Costume Designers; Chris A. Flores, Sound Designer; Jill Massie, Dialect Coach.

Cast:

Dominic McChesney – Alfie Byrne
Terrence Evans – Father Kenny
Mary Chesterman – Mrs. Grace/Kitty Farrelly
Marcy Herrera – Miss Crowe
Gail Matthius – Mrs. Curtin
Matt Stevens – Baldy O’Shea
Michael Loupé – Rasher Flynn/Carson
Michael Wallot – Ernie Lally
Melina Kalomas – Mrs. Patrick
Bret Shefter – Sully O’Hara
Matt Franta – Peter/Breton Beret
Shirley Hatton – Lily Byrne
David Gilchrist – Carney/Oscar Wilde
Keith Barletta – Robbie Fay
Audrey Curd – Adele Rice

A Man of No Importance runs at the Lillian Theatre as part of the Hollywood Fringe Festival. For tickets and information, see www.goodpeopletheaterco.org