

# musicals IN LA

Celebrating Theatre in Southern California

Saturday, June 15, 2013

## Hollywood Fringe Review: A Man of No Importance



Dominic McChesney as Alfie and Audrey Curd as Adele Rice

Fringe shows run the gamut. You'll see everything from hastily rehearsed vanity projects to edgy original pieces, and works-in-progress of all kinds. Each one is worthy of a look for there are hidden jewels everywhere and you never know exactly where you'll find one. Happily, I can tell you where you can see one right now. At the Lillian Theatre in Hollywood. There, a brand new L.A. theatre company is making its debut by presenting *A Man of No Importance*, a handsomely staged Irish musical written by Terrence McNally, with music & lyrics by Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens.

It is directed & choreographed with exceptional skill by Janet Miller who presents a beautifully polished production in every regard. The attention to detail is exemplary and, from the very first notes of the penny whistle and a proper Irish band, it allows one to simply sit back and drink in the essence of the world being created upon the stage.

Based on the 1964 film starring Albert Finney, it is the "Tragedy/Comedy of Alfie Byrne (Dominic McChesney)," and tells the simple story of a man whose only dream is to bring beauty and art to the world. During the day he does it by reciting poetry to his fellow passengers and friends on their daily bus ride to work. At night he leads them as the director of St. Imelda's Players, a community theatre group that is the embodiment of all the artistic sensitivity in his heart.

On the day a newcomer steps onto the bus – a lovely, young woman (Audrey Curd as Adele Rice) who comes from a neighboring town – Alfie knows that he has finally found his leading lady to star in the one play he has not yet been able to produce. She will be his Princess in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and dance the Dance of the Seven Veils. It will be his greatest achievement. It is also a role that in any other era and time Alfie might well have played himself, but that here can only be expressed behind a locked door where he is free to transform himself with the aid of makeup and his imagination. But secrets are a heavy burden to carry and only lose their power once they see the light of day.

Eventually Alfie realizes that he can no longer deny his heart and, though it be in search of the "love that dare not speak its name," he is ready to take the consequences of being seen for who he truly is. Though not everyone accepts him, and much of his world falls apart along the way, those who do rally around him show him that life, like art, is a collaboration, and they intend to be there to help him create another day.

McChesney was born to play Alfie. Much rests on his ability to be likeable, natural and present in every moment as he is the heart of the piece. Perhaps it is because I somehow sat where I could always see his eyes that I found him to be deeply connected to what he was saying. He inhabits the role with a simplicity and grace that goes beyond the words.

Shirley Anne Hatton plays his spitfire of a sister, Lily, who is determined to find Alfie a good wife and won't marry until she completes her task. She's a terrific singer who belts out two of the best numbers in the show, proving her skill with comedy in "The Burden of Love" and letting loose her frustrations in a bitterly poignant "Tell Me Why." Of course, it helps that the material itself is so well-written. Flaherty & Ahren's songs are rich with life and always enhance the storytelling by vividly capturing the spirit of a moment.

Another great example is Robbie's "The Street of Dublin," in which he sings of his beloved city while trying to get Alfie to come out to the pub with him. Robbie (Keith Barletta), the tall handsome young bus driver, is Alfie's secret object of affection and Barletta is charming as all get up. He has an easy manner and sparkling eyes that light up the stage and is one among many excellent casting choices that Miller has made.

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The cast of A Man of No Importance

David Gilchrist offers two distinctly different characters as the gruff butcher-turned-actor Carney and as Alfie's silent inspiration, Oscar Wilde, complete with cape and carnation. Curd's Miss Rice is appropriately timid at the start, and though she has troubles of her own, she becomes an integral part of Alfie's transformation while Matt Stevens' sweet graveside remembrance of his wife, "The Cuddles Mary Gave," is sure to melt the stingiest heart.

Miller gives her ensemble multiple opportunities to shine throughout the show as she highlights their individual quirks to create a thoroughly entertaining amateur theatre company filled with characters we all can recognize. And they, in turn, throw themselves in with a joyful exuberance that infuses everything they do, bringing humor and hope to a world that never contains enough of either one.

Corey Hursch's musical direction is impeccable down to the last detail of the singers and onstage band. The dialect work, an element that is critical to the success of this type of musical, is expertly handled by coach, Jill Massie, and carried out beautifully by the cast. Design elements – most particularly Katherine Barrett's lighting and Kathy Gillespie & Barbara Weisel's costumes – easily furnish the look of Dublin in the 60's.

This musical, like the good people who are presenting it, is the real deal. Full of heart and sensitivity, it is a class act all the way around and its company handles its coming out party with an abundance of colloquial charm. For those who create art, and for those who enjoy the fruits of their labor, it is a triumph. "Life goes on and so must we artists," says one of Alfie's actors as the lights fades. I hope these Good People continue to go on for a very long time.

#### A MAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

Good People Theater Company

Through June 30, 2013

Lillian Theatre

1076 Lillian Way

Tickets: [www.goodpeopletheaterco.org](http://www.goodpeopletheaterco.org)

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