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# Shining City takes the rocky road, but ultimately arrives in style

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## Shining City

Rating: ★★★★★

With the arrival of St. Patrick's Day, Playhouse Tulsa's Irish Repertory kick off their double header of Irish plays with Conor McPherson's critically acclaimed *Shining City* at the [Tulsa Performing Arts Center](#). At the heart of *Shining City* is a ghost story, but in many respects each of the characters are themselves displaced souls trying to find a place to belong. Each character is in transition and essentially homeless, living in a bed and breakfast, in a relative's house, on the street or at the office and each is trying to come to terms with themselves, their past and their lives.

The action takes place in the office of a former priest Ian, who has recently set himself up as a therapist. With Ian the axiom 'Doctor, heal thyself,' was never more true as he struggles to come to terms with leaving the Church, his crisis of faith, a girlfriend and mother of his child whom he wishes to be rid of and his own struggles with his sexual desires. His first patient, John, is recently widowed and in a state of panic as he has begun seeing the ghost of his dead wife. John is plagued by guilt over an affair he had, bringing to the front the theme of unwholesome sexual encounters which runs throughout the play. This is echoed in Ian's own story as he tries to split with his girlfriend Neasa, who reveals her own unfulfilling sexual encounter with another man. As the play moves towards its conclusion, deeper secrets are revealed leading up to the plays memorable climax.

*Shining City* poses many challenges for performance, not least of which is that the play is essentially a series of duologues. The danger of *Shining City* descending into a mere talking heads exercise is very real as there is very little on-stage action, running the risk of it being theatrically uninteresting, even if dramatically engaging. However, Playhouse Tulsa's production avoids this pitfall with some excellent direction by Courtney Sanders and some fine performances.

Chris Crawford brings immense honesty to his portrayal of Ian, revealing his awkwardness and vulnerability with heart breaking conviction. Cody Daigle as John, who functions for a large part as the plays story teller, keeps the audience engaged with a wonderful pitched performance which

encapsulates both the manly exterior and the frightened interior of the character. Brittany Wilson as Neasa manages to make convincing her characters desperation in what is essentially a walk on role. As does Jonathan Schrader, who brings a warmth and calmness to the character Laurence in one of the plays pivotal moments.

While the cast successfully deliver convincing performances, the decision to run with Irish accents is unfortunately not always as successful. There are momentary lapses where stage Oirish creeps in and the rhythmical inflections of the Dublin accent were patchy. This affected the pace by frequently slowing it down, a situation not helped by the length of the scene changes. However it was the mispronunciation of several common curse words and place names which showed an uncharacteristic lack of attention to detail and suggested that, at times, the cast were not entirely comfortable working with an Irish accent though excellent in all other areas.

In producing *Shining City* Playhouse Tulsa are to be commended for taking on a challenging and demanding play and making a success of it. *Shining City* is deeply engaging, wonderfully performed and contains the most original and startling ending which you don't so much see as experience. For that alone, and so much more, *Shining City* is well worth seeing.

*Shining City* runs at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, March 18th and 19th

*Howie the Rookie* by Mark O'Rowe, the second in the series of Irish plays by the Irish Repertory, runs at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, March 17th and 19th



**Chris O'Rourke**  
Tulsa Theater Examiner

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