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# Dispatches from The Fringe – A Pilgrim's Progress Through 9/11

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Pilgrim by The Gonzo Theatre Company  
*Ste Murray*

## Pilgrim by The Gonzo Theatre Company

Rating: ★★★★★

Say 9/11 anywhere in the world and people will instantly know to what you're referring. Stories of that day are of shock, horror and loss, but also of courage, generosity and bravery. As the years pass more stories have begun to emerge. *Pilgrim*, written by Philip Doherty and produced by The Gonzo Theatre Company, is one such story.

As events unfolded on 9/11, air space over America was immediately closed to civilian airlines and all flights grounded. To support its neighbor in its time of need, Canada initiated Operation Yellow Ribbon, diverting 255 aircraft to 77 locations across Canada. Flights were stuck for days as America came to grips with what had happened. In the small, Newfoundland town of Gambo, its population of 2,000 welcomed 1,160 stranded "plane people" into their homes and halls, offering food, clothing, showers and access to international phone lines all free of charge.

In *Pilgrim*, Christy, a drunken, Irish reprobate on his way home to face his pregnant, childhood sweetheart, finds himself stranded in Newfoundland's Noah's Ark of nationalities. Five months previous Christy had headed for the wild pleasures of California leaving hearth and home behind. Angry, prone to violence when drunk, quick to take advantage, Christy doesn't much like the world and the world doesn't much like him. Stuck in Gambo's shantytown of shacks and huts, Christy goes too far one night in a drunken stupor. As he comes to terms with his actions amongst the people of Gambo, Christy slowly begins to ask questions as he tentatively seeks the rocky road to redemption.

Written by Philip Doherty, *Pilgrim* is a meticulously crafted piece of writing, expertly evoking the shock of 9/11 and Christy's search for meaning. At times reminiscent of the rapid fire, staccato style of Mark O'Rowe's, *Howie The Rookie*, Doherty weaves evocative images through language rich and textured, honed by sharp attention to detail. In Christy, Doherty has created a cynical everyman wonderfully realized by Rex Ryan's energetic performance. Never shying away from Christy's reprehensible qualities, Ryan always manages to reveal the damaged soul underneath. Kate Moylan's simple yet evocative set design, along with an incredible lighting scheme and soundscape by Eoin Winning and Alan Darcy respectively, brought depth and dimensions to both Christy's inner and outer worlds. With many things happening at once, it never felt busy or distracting and director Aoife Spillane-Hicks married all the ingredients seamlessly. If at times transitions were slow and pace slackened on occasion, throughout, production values were of the highest order.

*Pilgrim* tells an old story, dealing in timeless themes of love and redemption. Yet Christy's redemption story about a boy growing up is only part of a larger story in *Pilgrim*. In *Pilgrim*, 9/11 doesn't simply serve as background. Rather 9/11 speaks to the unspeakable that man is capable of. *Pilgrim* responds, not with fear or hatred, but with a heaving love, stubborn faith and infinite hope in man's humanity towards his fellow man, exemplified by the plain people of Gambo. In telling their story *Pilgrim* offers an uplifting and inspiring response to man's capacity for hatred, one capable of redeeming even a drunken, degenerate Irishman and of delighting the audience in the process.

*Pilgrim* by The Gonzo Theatre Company runs as part of The Tiger Dublin Fringe at [Smock Alley Theatre](#) until Thursday, September 18th

Doors open 6.30 p.m.

Tickets €16.00 Concessions €14.00

For more information go to <http://fringefest.com/festival/programme>

*Pilgrim* is over 18s, containing strong language and adult themes

**Chris O'Rourke**  
Tulsa Theater Examiner



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