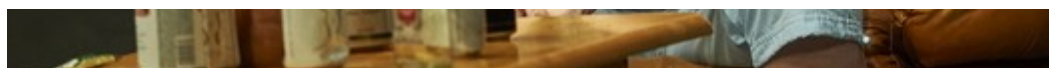


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The best lies beneath the surface in "Tina's Idea of Fun"

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Hilda Fay (Tina) in *Tina's Idea of Fun* by Sean P. Summers. Directed by Conall Morrison
Ros Kavanagh

Tina's Idea of Fun by Sean P. Summers

Rating: ★★★★★

Tina's putting heroin behind her, having once chased the dragon even if she never banged it into her arms. She may be replacing it with drink, cigarettes, weed and cocaine, but these too feed into her shame and anger. Then there's her teenage son, Aaron, who lives with his Nan. Tina is sentimental as hell when it comes to him, being riddled with guilt over being a bad mother who made poor choices. As Tina and Aaron strive to reconnect in their ghettoised world where police choppers hover overhead, a soft spoken, Republican activist, Paddy Longlegs, invites teenage males like Aaron into his flat for cans of beer and talk of leering at women. Paddy may be creepy, maybe not, but in Tina's deeply volatile mind he's guilty till proven innocent. That's enough justification for her to set about dealing with him in her own inimitable way. If Sean P. Summers' latest play, 'Tina's Idea of Fun' is a love poem to contemporary Dublin, it's a strange kind of love to

a reductively unpleasant Dublin. Riddled with clichés, 'Tina's Idea of Fun' often feels like an episode of 'The Jeremy Kyle Show,' following its car crash of a family as they drink, smoke and vomit while arguing Irish patriotism over beer and some deeply disturbing sandwiches.

Stylistically owing much to 'The Royal Family' and 'Shameless,' Sean P. Summers' cartoonish slice of Dublin life revolves around a number of residents living in the flats near Ballybough during the visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 2011. Running as part of The [Abbey Theatre](#)'s 'Waking The Nation' programme, Summers' script seems more like a screenplay and skates over the surface of barely sketched characters reduced to vomiting, smoking, drinking, drug taking and casual violence, where their greatest asset might well be their medical card. There's references to a possible talent in art, a protest march against the royal visit and of people waiting on hospital trollies, but essentially it's vomit, drink, smoke, eat, argue and repeat. In between, catch a sci-fi movie or get your hair extensions done. Granted Summer's is not alone in perpetuating the modern cliché of the drunken, reprobate Dublin working class, it's just that in this case, if you scratch the surface, there's an interrogating intelligence at work in 'Tina's Idea of Fun' which promised more. One which posits thought provoking questions in its juxtaposition of a failed Republicanism and the failure of the people it fought for. If Paddy, beyond the creepiness, harks back to notions of dignity and decency, as well as evoking those who gave their lives for the Irish republic, Tina and her modern tribe, whose only sense of Irish identity arises during football matches, ask where exactly did it all go wrong?

Sarah Bacon's busy set design pushes everything to the front with its sliding screens trying to keep up with the scripts constant shifts. Under Conall Morrison's direction, everything moves along at a snappy pace, but transitions between scenes are sometimes clunky. Where Morrison truly excels is in the calibre of the performances he elicits from his excellent cast, with several young cast members making their Abbey debut. A surge of opening night adrenaline was obvious across the board, but Josh Carey as the gullible young Bundy and Sarah Morris as the loudmouth Edel were both wonderfully engaging. Keith Hanna as the limping layabout Dave and Ruth Hegarty as Tina's mother Fran were also convincing. Andrew Connolly as the soft spoken, if slightly discomfiting and slightly odd Paddy, delivered a deeply moving and thoughtful performance. As did Hilda Fay as the deeply self-centred and volatile Tina, who was always mesmerising. Scott Graham, making his Abbey debut, was outstanding as the conflicted young Aaron, lighting up the stage and announcing himself as a serious talent for the future.

'Tina's Idea of Fun' is an aspiring production of a three-star story redeemed by some four star performances. With some incredibly funny and deeply moving moments, under the surface its questioning of Irish identity bravely raises some deeply disturbing questions.

'Tina's Idea of Fun' by Sean P. Summers runs at The Peacock Stage at the Abbey Theatre until May 14th

For information on times and tickets, visit [The Abbey Theatre](#)



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