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# Dispatches from The Fringe - Death of The Tradesmen is brave but flawed

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Death of The Tradesmen  
*Talking Shop Ensemble*

## Death of The Tradesmen

Rating: ★★★★★

Talking Shop Ensemble's production of Shaun Dunne's brave, if ultimately flawed *Death of The Tradesmen* tries hard to blend two intriguing stories together. On one hand there's the story of Willy, 54 year old carpet fitter and Dunne's own father, who is without a drop of work or a nixer. Willy is avoiding going to the Social Welfare Office to ensure his claim is not affected, much to the frustration of Willy's wife, and Dunne's mother, Linda. This story is all smoke and mirrors however, behind which the real story unfolds. This story concerns Willy and Linda, a loving married couple from a forgotten Dublin, seeing the fractures in their marriage widening as they slowly begin to drift apart.

With the primary focus of contention between Willy and Linda centering on a Social Welfare letter, there was not enough going on to uncover the deeper issues between these characters that lay

underneath. *Death of The Tradesmen* looked uncomfortable going there and to lots of other places too. While the dialogue sparkled, interactions were far too brief and words generally served to report information or function technically as verbal motifs designed to reinforce theme and character. Throughout, the writing showed a little too much reverence for the writing course and the academically correct, and Dunne was at his best when he showed two fingers to that and trusted his own voice. More of that raw honesty was needed, for information and motifs kept the bubbling, emotional undercurrent firmly at bay.

Perhaps because of Dunne's close proximity to the material, when emotions touched the surface scenes almost immediately collapsed. Just as you were being drawn in, the spell was broken and you were again hurled safely behind the wall of the safe, repeated motif. As a result, the sense that Dunne, in playing his own father, was far too close to his material, dominated, with Dunne seeming more at ease when addressing the audience directly. But his casting choice of Lauren Larkin was a stroke of genius. Larkin shone as the long suffering Linda, giving a master class performance as the frustrated housewife wanting more from life and her husband. Throughout, production values were high with a clever set design by Ciaran O'Melia which seemed to focus on copies of Bill Cullen's, *It's A Long Way From Penny Apples* and Arthur Miller's, *Death of a Salesman*.

Talking Shop Ensemble wish to make work that pushes the definition of theatre. Certainly they succeeded in speaking about what is lived here and now and deserve to be applauded for that. But in *Death of The Tradesmen* the sense lingers of two, powerful stories not being done justice. Dunne, at 23 is potentially a serious talent for the future. And while his ambition is admirable, his decision to write, stage and perform *Death of The Tradesmen* resulted in all three being weakened. Hopefully Dunne and Talking Shop Ensemble will take a second peek at *Death of The Tradesmen*, which has the potential to be a play that packs one powerful, powerhouse of a punch.

*Death of The Tradesmen* is currently running at The Project Arts Centre, Cube as part of the Dublin Absolut Fringe Festival. Doors open at 7.00 p.m. and tickets range from €12.00 - €14.00.



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