

Peninsula Players Brings Ireland to Door County with 'Outside Mullingar'

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By Gary Jones

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Peninsula Players' current show transports the audience across the sea to Ireland. Playwright John Patrick Shanley, who received a Pulitzer for his play *Doubt*, offers here a comic tribute to his own heritage after taking a trip with his father to the family farm near the village of Killucan located *Outside Mullingar*.

While listening to people talk in his cousin's farmhouse kitchen, Shanley felt that he had made a connection with his family in the old country, and when he wrote the play, he borrowed the names of his uncle Tony and cousins Anthony and Rosemary for three of the four characters.

The result is a production that charmed those who attended a recent performance at the Players. Typical of many Irish plays, language is delightful: the lilting rhythms of the dialog, the quirky figures of speech that enliven conversation, and above all else, the imaginative stories. When *Outside Mullingar* begins, we feel as if we are sitting in the Reilly kitchen, getting to know our hosts bit by bit. But then we become caught up in the story and held fast for the remainder of the show.

The situation involves land and love, two catalysts that quickly bring family matters to a head. Tony Reilly, with his adult son Anthony, owns one farm, while Aoife Muldoon, with her adult daughter Rosemary, owns a second that is adjacent to it. Tony, who feels he is not long for this world, is reluctant to will the land to his bachelor son as he wants the farm to be handed down through future generations as it has in the past.

Aoife, who has just become a widow when the story begins, intends to leave her land to her adult daughter, hoping she will manage as best she can.

The solution seems to lie in true love, but as we all well know, the course of true love never did run smooth. The possibility of the painfully shy Anthony and aggressively abrasive Rosemary falling in love seems remote, but mishaps and misunderstandings have a way of working themselves out in romantic comedies.

One especially delightful aspect of the play is the use of the Irish folksong "Wild Mountain Thyme" for its evocative imagery as well as its beautiful tune. This lyricism is a pleasant contrast to the broad strokes with which the tale is sketched, often with farcical results.

The four actors offer strong performances and the settings of the two kitchens provide detailed visual appeal.

If the play has a shortcoming, it might be its resolution. While the sustained tension amused the audience, at the same time it seemed an extension of its natural life span.

Outside Mullingar is excellent light summer theater fare, humorous and life affirming. The show runs through Sept. 6. For information and tickets call 920.868.3287 or visit peninsulaplayers.com.

An award-winning freelance feature writer, Gary Jones is a poet who makes his home near Sister Bay with his wife of many years. Jones enjoys books, gardening, and silent sports.



Father and son, Tony and Anthony, preparing for a visit from their neighbors in John Patrick Shanley's prickly Irish love story, "Outside Mullingar," now on stage at Peninsula Players through Sept. 6. From left are William J. Norris and Jay Whittaker. *photo by Bruce Mielke*