



Chrystal McConnell Emerald

Tony award-winning 'Dancing at Lughnasa' combines humor, family dynamics and Irish culture to create a warm and nostalgic mix. Above, Gerry (Andrew Beck) and Chris (Katie Rogers) discuss their future together.

A BIT O' THE IRISH

Robinson Theatre produces "Dancing at Lughnasa," a warm and funny tale of hope, Irish style

BY LISA GRIFFING PHOTOS BY CHRYSYAL McCONNELL

Get ready for Irish step-dancing, Irish tunes, a little of the brogue and a detailed story involving a poor Irish family from Donegal, Ireland.

The Tony award-winning play "Dancing at Lughnasa" by Irish playwright Brian Friel will open Jan. 26.

University professor and director Joseph Gilg said he identifies with the play partly because of his Irish heritage.

"This play was chosen because of the reputation of the playwright and the complexity of the roles," Gilg said. "Because I have some Irish background, I have always had that connection to Irish plays and music. Friel is a very fine playwright. He romanticizes poverty in this particular play. He shows the characters' will to live and their positive outlooks for the future."

"Dancing at Lughnasa" depicts the five Mundy sisters, their older brother who has recently returned home from an

African mission and the son of one of the sisters, as well as her lover.

"It's a memory play," Gilg said.

Although the family has its differences, they struggle to stay together through arduous circumstances. The main themes are that "family works together, romance [and] whether people take the chance and embrace it or turn away from it. Also, cultural clash," Gilg said. "This is a sweet story, typical of Irish — a lot of Irish humor and it reveals nostalgic messages of hope. People will be entertained."

"Life can be pretty depressing sometimes, so this play reveals a sense of hope," said University student and actress Jocelyn Fultz.

"Dancing at Lughnasa" explores the role of women in a changing society in the 1930's. Women's roles are still shifting, so this topic resonates today. "It is universal," Gilg said.

"Part of the challenge

in directing 'Dancing at Lughnasa,'" Gilg said, "was asking the company to work with the Irish dialect."

Fultz, who plays wise Agnes Mundy, agreed. "The dialogue is tough," she said. "It's hard to configure my mouth."

The costumes worn in "Dancing at Lughnasa" convey a sense of poverty. The '30s-style costume design includes sweaters and cardigans — heavy layers with dissimilar shades of pink, brown and green hues. This adds a realistic aura.

"None of the patterns really match," Fultz said.

The Irish melodies in "Dancing at Lughnasa" play a powerful role. The period big band and Irish music will be used to "underscore various scenes and under-layer the nostalgia," Gilg said. "It's exciting."

"The setting is very interesting. The audience will see inside the home as well as the yard outside at the same time," Gilg said.

"The most intriguing part of 'Dancing at Lughnasa,'" Fultz said, "is the relationships among the characters."

Two years ago in Dublin Ireland, Heather Charlton who is a sophomore at the University, watched "Dancing at Lughnasa." "It was an interesting story, because it portrayed naturalism. It didn't gloss anything over," said Charlton.

"Dancing at Lughnasa" will be performed Jan. 27, Feb. 1-3 and Feb. 9-10 in Robinson Theatre at 8 p.m. On Feb. 4 at 2 p.m., the show will be performed as a benefit for WomenSpace, a domestic violence service. Tickets for the show are \$10 for the public, \$8 for University faculty, staff members and senior citizens, and \$5 for University students. For the Feb. 4 matinee, tickets through WomenSpace are \$20 and \$12 for students. For further information, browse <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~theatre/>.