

Jeff A. Pierce and Darragh Kennan in *Stones in His Pockets*



CLIFF COLES

## Some Boys

Actors trump script and set in *Stones*

**J**ust in case you don't notice that the two actors in the Marie Jones play *Stones in His Pockets*, now playing at the Willamette Rep, perform a gazillion roles apiece, director Kirk Boyd makes sure to point it out in the director's notes. "If you go home talking about the costumes, scenery, staging and lighting," he writes, "then we have somehow failed."

At the second preview performance, no one left talking about the set — at least no one I could hear. Instead, people murmured their appreciation and awe, saying things like, "I can't believe they didn't get confused!" and, "They had to change so fast!" And the two men playing the leads (and also performing everyone else) in this tale of Hollywood come to Ireland, Darragh Kennan and Jeff Pierce, indeed switch among accents, body language and tiny costume indicators with the greatest of speed and ease. By the second act, in which the characters have been established firmly in the audience's mind, the two occasionally play two or three people in such rapid succession that it does seem a miracle they don't confuse themselves.

The play, set in a small Irish town in County Kerry where a movie is filming, starts out with two of the extras on the set meeting near the cafeteria line. The two, Charlie Conlon (Kennan) and Jake Quinn (Pierce), exchange short life histories and establish a friendship based on their recognition of each other's sense of resignation and remaining hope. Kennan and Pierce must then play a total of 13 other characters as well, including the movie director, an assistant director and the movie's star (all Kennan) or, for Pierce, an elderly man, the AD's AD and a depressed teenager. The actors deal nimbly and admirably with the changes.

Boyd, having directed enough Shakespeare to know all the tricks of gender switching, has made some curious choices for his actors in their women's roles. Kennan as movie star Caroline Giovanni minces and tuts and juts his hip more like a young nelly boy than like a supposedly sensual adult woman. And until the second act, when the character settles a bit, Pierce's Aisling-the-assistant-to-the-assistant also seemed more ef-

feminate man than young woman. On the other hand, Kennan's depiction of a Scots bodyguard couldn't be more hilariously well played, from the thrusting of the chest to the exaggerated but wonderfully Scottish vowels. And Pierce's Mickey, "the last remaining extra from the set of *The Quiet Man*," works as well as his hoodied Sean, the depressed boy.

But the script, which is both too long and not sufficiently focused, winds through humor and tragedy only to wind up as a combination creaky postmodern commentary on the creative process and happy clasp-of-friendship finale. One plot point, what *New*

one has to believe it is supposed to serve only as a backdrop for the actors, almost like a blue screen for their word-painted special effects. Still, when Kennan or Pierce gestures upstage and talks about the forty shades of green or the sea, the awkward sketchiness of the set trips up the hard-earned suspension of disbelief. But along with the lighting, lightning-quick and simple costume changes and the judicious use of smarmy movie music provide vital moments of audience laughter and recognition. After all, the movie set and the movie discussion reputedly refer to the strained Irish scenes in *Far and Away*, with landless peasants resenting the landlord class

*York Times* critic Ben Brantley called a "thudding tragic center," steals so bluntly from the life of Virginia Woolf that any Woolf fans in the audience will be thrown out of what should be an emotional moment in the play. That, and the scene's too-sudden tragic feel, are the playwright's fault, but part of the dulled impact comes from Kennan. He has eight characters to play in all, so it's no surprise that the character who announces the tragedy isn't totally distinct or convincing.

Director's notes aside, critics leave theaters thinking about sets and lighting, music and costumes. The lighting works wonders for establishing scene in the midst of a set that's so staid

## Opening Nights

### **The Fantasticks**

Opens Friday, April 13 at the Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove.

"Try to remember the kind of September when life was slow and oh so mellow ... try to remember, and, if you remember, then follow ... " OK, it's April; we don't want to think about September, but point is, the music (even the not-so-funny "Rape Song") romps. And the narrative arc of idealistic love burnt out, chastened and re-formed? Who wouldn't want to watch that? "Follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow ... follow ... " Show dates are April 13-15, 20-22, 27 & 28. Go to [www.cottagetheatre.org](http://www.cottagetheatre.org) or call 942-8001 for tix.

and a romance blooming between an upper-class lady and a peasant-class man. That makes for, well, precious moments in which the script makes fun of American ideas about Ireland (including a Riverdance moment so speedy there's barely time for the belly laughs it produces). Despite the script's longeurs, its whipcrack character changes and message of friendship and hope combine with the actors' skill to produce a pleasantly interesting evening. **EW**

*Willamette Repertory Theatre's production of Stones in His Pockets runs through April 22 at the Hult Center. Go to [www.hultcenter.org](http://www.hultcenter.org) or call 682-5000 for tix. \$15-\$35.*

## Dying to Help

Portrait of a Northwest idealist

**W**alking into the Seattle Rep's production of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, I get leafletted and talked to, but in a dispirited, rainy, PNW kind of way. "We want you to be aware of the situation," the man from the American Jewish Committee says. "We're pro-play; they're anti-play," says another man; he delivers a glossy brochure with a list of Palestinian children killed by the Israel Defense Force. But they're both polite and calm. Even the guy walking up and down the rivulet-streaked street with a "Jimmy Carter: YES!" placard seems practically somnolent. But come on, who wrote the propaganda (both in my hand and in a paid ad in the playbill) that says "*My Name Is Rachel Corrie* does not tell the whole story" — Hello? Really? A play created out of the emails and diary entries of a 23-year-old from Olympia doesn't depict all of the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? I'm shocked.

Outside controversy aside, the play, an intense one-woman show for Marya Sea Kaminski, who's onstage approximately 89.5 of the play's no-intermission 90 minutes, leaves room for complex emotions and reactions. Kaminski looks and acts too mature to play the callow young Rachel at the beginning, but by the second half, when Corrie's intensity and terror mount, the actor's strengths emerge. The script, edited together from Corrie's diaries and emails by Katherine Viner and Alan Rickman, presents a surprisingly seamless picture of Corrie, basically a young Evergreen activist with a kid's goofiness and messy contradictions wedded to an incredibly deep desire to make the world better. Though the early babblings of a self-involved young woman are hard to take, Corrie, through Kaminski, becomes more compelling when she starts sending emails from Gaza. The climax, a long cry of pure anger and frustration that the world isn't paying enough attention, underscores just how important the play would have been to Rachel Corrie. If you can spare the time and dollars (tix are \$10 for people under 25, \$26 for seniors), the play will leave you thinking and talking both about the life of Rachel Corrie and the complexities of the conflict in the Middle East. Maybe you'll start learning more about the histories and hopes of those involved in the conflict — and that's something people on all sides of the issue could use.

*My Name Is Rachel Corrie* has extended its run through May 6 at the Seattle Repertory Theatre. Tix at [www.seattlerep.org](http://www.seattlerep.org) or 877-900-9285. \$10-\$40. — Suzi Steffen

Mrya Sea Kaminski in *Rachel Corrie*



CHRIS BENNION