

BACKSTAGE

February 20, 2008

In Billy Roche's play, the second in his Wexford Trilogy, the town of Wexford, Ireland, is buzzing on the Friday evening prior to the All-Ireland Hurling Finals. (Hurling is like hockey on acid, an ancient Celtic game played only in Ireland.) In the local betting shop all the excitement is dedicated to the Wexford team and Saturday's game, to which almost everyone with a pound in his pocket and a big thirst is heading.

The voluble Joe (a charmingly loquacious Kevin Kearns), bubbling over with past triumphs, is joyfully educating Georgie (an earnest, carrot-topped Christopher Carley) with tales of his scurrilous past, spent mostly in the company of Wexford's celebrated bad boy, Danger Doyle, who, it's rumored, is back in town after a 10-year forced leave of absence in England. Pity poor Eileen (lovely, sweet-faced Kate Steele), who runs the betting shop for her dad, Steven (a sadly fine Michael O'Hagan), whose wife, Eileen's mother, ran away with Doyle 10 years ago. And heaven help Molly (Joanne Whalley in a richly sour performance), when she finds out Doyle is back, and she's not got him -- again. Before the game, a reformed Doyle (an authoritative Andrew Connolly) comes to take Eileen to her mother in London, breaking the hearts of Steven and the Eileen-bewitched Georgie, and exploding a few long-held myths. Of course, by this time, everyone is happily or miserably drunk -- after all, this is an Irish play -- so the resolution won't become clear until after the hangover is celebrated.

Director Wilson Milam, obviously in his element with this material, has gathered a superb national and international cast; all the actors are excellent and very well-tuned in the Gaelic rhythms of the dialect, so much so that to a "foreigner" who may gather what they're up to, it's not always crystal-clear what they're saying about it. (Fortunately, the woman sitting behind me gave her husband a complete recap during intermission.)

Laura Fine Hawkes is pitch-perfect in her set design of a rundown betting parlor, well-lighted by J. Kent Inasy. Designs also include May Routh's well-coordinated costumes and Eric Snodgrass' sound.