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POOR BEAST IN THE RAIN BETS ON LOVE

The Los Angeles premiere of playwright Billy Roche's emotionally-wrenching "Poor Beast in the Rain" contains excellent acting as it reveals the visceral consequences of abandonment. The regulars of a local betting shop in the provincial Irish town of Wexford root for their hurling team until word spreads that Danger Doyle (Andrew Connolly), town bad-boy, is returning. Time and embellished stories revive a long-faded past for Danger's ex-flame Molly (Joanne Whalley), threatening everyone's future.

Roche's writing flows with natural rhythm, humor, and depth, aided by director Wilson Milam's skillful staging.

Milam draws fine performances from the talented cast, who maintain lilting Irish accents throughout. Kevin Kearns brings a charming boisterousness to the nostalgic, middle-aged Joe. Michael O'Hagan richly underplays the role of cuckolded husband Steven with heartrending expressiveness. As the damaged, bitter Molly, Whalley explodes with anger and passion.

Milam also inspires marvelous work in the production staff, with finely layered sound work by Eric Snodgrass, beautiful lighting by J. Kent Inasy, and a richly detailed set from Laura Fine Hawkes.

A story of people looking for love and connection, "Poor Beast in the Rain" reveals the devastating consequences of living with ghosts of bygone days.