



Theater Review: Strong acting, plenty of dark laughs satisfy in 'A Skull in Connemara'

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ADDISON — Playwright Martin McDonagh has built a career on mayhem. Blood runs in rivers — or sometimes just in rivulets. But the laughs flow just as surely, and nowhere more than in *A Skull in Connemara*.

On Friday, Second Thought Theatre opened the Dallas County premiere of the lightest play in McDonagh's Leenane trilogy. It centers on Mick Dowd (John R. Davies), who makes extra money every fall by digging up bones that have spent seven years in the local graveyard to make room for new bodies. This time it's different, though: It's the turn of Mick's late wife to be exhumed.

Mick's relationship with a neighbor family is complicated. Maryjohnny Rafferty (Carolyn Wickwire) frequently drops in for a drop of alcohol on her way home from bingo. The new priest has given her ruffian grandson, Mairton (Drew Wall), the assignment of helping Mick with his digging. Mairton's bumbling policeman brother, Thomas (Ian Sinclair), voices the town's suspicions that Mick's wife's death may not have been what it seemed.

One thing that has made McDonagh's plays so popular over the last decade is their clever plot turns. As much fun as they are, they make it hard to talk about specific scenes without giving away secrets. They probably also make these pieces less fun on second or third exposure — but the first time around, at least, is always a roller coaster ride.

In Second Thought's *A Skull in Connemara*, each of the four actors has extraordinary moments. Davies is beautifully unstaged and convincing as Mick, though he lacks the creepy menace other actors have brought to the role.

Wall goes all-in as Mairton, racking up the laughs with idiotic looks and double-takes and outbursts of violence. Sometimes the Irish brogue falls away, though, and the intensity just becomes too much.

Wickwire previously did her role at Fort Worth's Stage West, but this performance feels much more specific and focused. Thomas is probably the hardest role to bring off, but Sinclair doesn't miss a trick. He's a whole precinct of Keystone Kops rolled up into one.

Director T.A. Taylor gets high marks for the strength of the acting, but take points off for some clumsy blocking and problems with overall pace. The first act occasionally limps along, but the explosive, outrageous second yields enough laughs to start the theatrical year off in dark-hearted glee.