

Ref No. 1517/008

Date Digitised: 2/10/2019

EXEUNT

THURSDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2011 | EST. MMX

Like

298 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

REVIEWS

FEATURES

NEWS

BOOKS

NEW YORK

PODCASTS

ABOUT

DUBLIN :: 5 OCTOBER 2011

SHARE & SAVE

The Speckled People

AT GATE THEATRE DUBLIN, 29TH SEPTEMBER - 5TH NOVEMBER 2011

★★★★☆

BY SHARAE DECKARD



A family affair. Photo: Pat Redmond

"When you're young, you don't know who you are." The opening lines of *The Speckled People*, are repeated three times—first, in English, by the child, Hanni; second, in German, by his "Mutti" Ingmar; and third, in Irish, by his father, Seán—thus foregrounding the play's central preoccupations with language, family and identity.

The new play by Hugo Hamilton, adapted from his fictionalized memoir of the same title, is set in the Dublin seaside suburb of Dún Laoghaire in the 1950s, and narrates the coming-of-age of young Hanni Ó hÚrmloltaigh, a child born to a German mother and an Irish father. Forbidden to speak English by his severe father, an obsessive advocate of the Irish language, Hanni grows up between languages, swimming vertiginously between Irish and German within the household and feeling as if every time he walks out the front door he is "emigrating into English." Language is both a realm of possibility and a prison-house for the young boy, who is barred from friendship with English-speaking children, like an exile in his own country. He is a living incarnation of "speckled" identity, mixed-up, "Irish on top, and German on bottom," like the incongruous outfit of Aran sweater and lederhosen he wears on their beach-side rambles.

Most of the play's conflict derives from the father-son clash over language, and the ways in which the politics of cultural identity, nationalism, and translation speak to larger historical conditions. The spectres of WWII and of colonialism haunt the personal identities of Hanni's parents, nightmares of history that tragically shape the family and saturate Hanni's own dreams. In the second act, the family secrets that come tumbling out of the closet (in a clever use of an on-stage wardrobe) prove crucial to Hanni learning who his father and mother really "are," and thus who he is himself.

DIRECTED BY

Patrick Mason

WRITTEN BY

Hugo Hamilton

CAST INCLUDES

Stephen Brennan, Denis Conway, John Cronin,

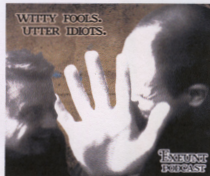
Tom Hickey, Julika Jenkins, Tadig Murphy,

Marion O'Dwyer, John Kavanagh and Jonathan

Delaney Tynan

LINK

Gate Theatre



DUBLIN



The Speckled People at Gate Theatre

OWE & FRINGE



Phaedra's Love at Arcolla Theatre

DUBLIN



Juno and the Paycock at Abbey Theatre



Terrible Advice at Menier Chocolate Factory

DUBLIN



Peer Gynt at O'Reilly Theatre



The Tempest at St Giles' Cripplegate

DIGEST

Tadhg Murphy infuses the role of Hanni with a kinetic, antic energy which aptly captures the "strange, big-eyed, scary shape of childhood" in the physicality of his performance, though the rationale to cast an adult for the part is not entirely clear. The rest of the cast deliver accomplished performances: brooding insecurity from Denis Conway as the father; brittle brightness from Julika Jenkins as the mother, and a vivacious comic turn from Marion O'Dwyer as Aunt Eily.

The set design is delightful, transforming the stage into a "memory room." The construction of a second proscenium creates an intimate, domestic space in which a child's bed is central, with evocative murals in blue-green pastels drawn across white walls in a child's naïvely exuberant scrawl: leaping fishes, joyful waves, rocking boats, but also on two darker panels, images of mass emigration, bomber planes, and fire. It thus stages the whole spectrum of the child's imagination: from the exhilaration of seaside play, to the queasiness of diaspora and the violence of war. The lighting design deploys deep aqueous blues to suggest submarine secrets and currents of memory and the crashing of the "big-bellied" waves.

The rather generic translation from memoir to play is not always convincing; the reflective lyricism permeating Hamilton's prose does not lend itself as well to drama. The play comes most alive during the ensemble set-pieces, but can feel stilted during the numerous flashbacks and monologues. However, as a whole, this is a fine production, cleanly executed, stylishly performed, and full of lyrical insights into the nature of identity shaped through language and history.

Part of the *Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival*. For more information, visit [the festival website](#).

LATEST FEATURES »	LATEST REVIEWS »	LATEST NEWS »
 <p>Max Hoehn by Julia Rank</p> <p>On creating a 'Punkie fantasia'.</p> <p>Saving Southwark Playhouse by Tracey Sinclair</p> <p>The campaign to secure the theatre's future.</p> <p>Scratch Performance by Laura Jane Dean</p> <p>Speaking out loud.</p>	 <p>The Speckled People by Sharae Deckard</p> <p>Irish on top and German on the bottom.</p> <p>Juno and the Paycock by Jane Grogan</p> <p>This play is in our DNA.</p> <p>Entitled by Christine Twite</p> <p>Quarantine explores the spaces between and before.</p>	<p>4 OCTOBER 2011 Launch of World Stages London</p> <p>New work by Knechtges and a stage version of <i>Wild Swans</i>.</p> <p>30 SEPTEMBER 2011 Launch of Suspense Festival 2011</p> <p>Rubbish and politics: 30 shows, 11 venues, 10 days.</p> <p>27 SEPTEMBER 2011 Suchet to Star in Long Day's Journey</p> <p>Laurie Metcalf and Kyle Solter to Co-Star.</p> <p>27 SEPTEMBER 2011 Launch of Globe to Globe Festival</p> <p>Shakespeare's plays to be performed in 27 different languages.</p>

Exeunt is an online theatre magazine for quality criticism, news, features and reviews. Est. MMX. © Exeunt. All rights reserved.

Archive Collection: T26. Joe Vaněk Archive.
 Ref No. T57/2/008
 Date Digitised: 02/10/2019

One Man, Many Playwrights
by Simon Thomas
The Theatre of Carlo Goldoni.

