

FROM

Arbutus  
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## Students make 'Inishmaan' a vigorously Irish evening

Theater Review

By Mike Giuliano

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*(Enlarge)* Sean McComas and Katie Hileman star in "The Cripple of Inishmaan" at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County Theatre.

Everybody has the gift of gab in the Irish village in Martin McDonagh's "The Cripple of Inishmaan."

The characters talk about both current love affairs and ancient scandals that remain of fresh interest. They even talk about how a goose just bit a cat.

While we're talking about them, spread the word that the assured UMBC production of McDonagh's 1996 play is worth seeing.

The play is set in such an isolated village in 1934 that the villagers have little direct contact with the modern world. Their rural world is centered around the general store run by the gossip-collecting Eileen (Katie Hileman) and Kate (Katie Kopajtic), who also take care of an orphaned and crippled young man, Billy (Sean McComas). His physical disability makes the women feel very protective, but others make fun of

him.

In a symbolic sense, Billy is the most isolated person of all in this place. That's why he responds with such excitement when he hears that the American documentary film director, Robert Flaherty, is shooting "Man of Aran" nearby. Although it's an ethnographic non-fiction film about traditional Irish life, to Billy it represents all the glamour of Hollywood. Billy obsessively talks about how he would love to visit the film's location and ultimately go to Hollywood. Sean McComas does a fine job showing how Billy's mood swings between his anticipation of life in Hollywood and his despair at his desperate condition.

You can't blame Billy for wanting to get away. He's up against the likes of a human gossip machine known as Johnny Pateen Mike (Josh Kemper), and also a young woman, Helen (Erin Hanratty), so brassy she'd make any man feel insecure. Other villagers (David Brasington, Keilyn Durrel Jones, Brad Widener and Sara Ross) also tend to make Billy feel like an outcast in his own hometown.

There isn't much action to speak of in "The Cripple of Inishmaan," but the conversational flow is lively. It's also intriguing to eavesdrop on all that gossip, because you finally have to make up your own mind on such subjects as the truth behind the drowning deaths of Billy's parents.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County production directed by Eve Muson really benefits from the student cast's comfort with Irish accents. These characters seem at home on Elena Zlotescu's spare set. Its sharp-sided, dark-hued platforms reinforce the stark rural setting. Video projections behind the set include excerpts from Flaherty's film, so you see enough waves crashing against a rocky shore to make you realize nature is as harsh as it is beautiful.

Further bringing this Irish setting alive are the musicians seated to one side of the stage: Michael Winch on fiddle, Bobby Canner on bodhran, Owen McCusker on guitar and Sharada Shantharam on flute. It's a vigorously Irish evening.

*"The Cripple of Inishmaan" continues Thursday-Saturday, April, 29-May 1, 8 p.m. and Sunday, May 2, 4 p.m., at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County Theatre (1000 Hilltop Circle, Catonsville). Tickets are \$10 general and \$5 for seniors and students. Call 410-455-2476 or go to [www.umbc.edu/theatre](http://www.umbc.edu/theatre).*

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