
 BY PHILIP BRANDES

'Inishmaan' at Antaeus Theatre

The essentials: Antaeus Theatre Company revives Martin McDonagh's early black comedy about a desolate, claustrophobically insular island community in Galway Bay, where the inhabitants' only relief from the harsh conditions and unending boredom lies in their genius for elevating mean-spirited taunts and put-downs to heights of Irish poetic eloquence. Set in 1934, the play is a fictionalized historical portrait based on the arrival of a Hollywood movie crew filming Robert Flaherty's famed "Man of Aran" — itself a fictionalized documentary about the hardships of survival in that barren region.

Why this? Though it lacks the shocking physical violence that often accompanies the mordant satire in McDonagh's later plays and hit films ("In Bruges," "Seven Psychopaths" and "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri"), this early work still sports his garrulous misfits' outrageously funny psychological brutality and twisted morality. Yet even its cruelest characters find their way to surprising moments of empathy and generosity. Director Steven Robman follows the Antaeus tradition of double-casting productions from the company's stable of first-rate classical actors; the alternating lineups are listed on the website in case you have particular favorites, but both seem safe bets.

Details: An Antaeus production at the Kiki & David Gindler Performing Arts Center, 110 E. Broadway, Glendale. 8 p.m. Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays; ends March 11. \$35. (818) 506-1983, antaeus.org



Geoffrey Wade Photography

ANNE Gee Byrd, Stephen Caffrey grin and bear it in "The Cripple of Inishmaan."