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### Historic return to Derry stage

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FIELD Day Theatre Company has made a historic return to the Derry stage at the city's Playhouse Theatre after an absence of nearly 20 years.

In the first of several performances commissioned for Derry's City of Culture year, the company - established in 1980 to produce Brian Friel dramas - premiered two short plays on Monday night.

Penned by up-and-coming Antrim playwright Clare Dwyer Hogg and directed by and starring Field Day founder Stephen Rea, *Farewell* addresses the issues of death and betrayal.

The play is set during the Troubles and tells the story of IRA informant John Farewell (Rea), haunted by ghosts from his past.

Farewell is forced to confront his demons and come clean with wife Anne (Brid Brennan) who is ignorant of the full truth of his guilt.

The play opens dramatically with a total blackout, setting the scene for the arrival of ghosts Mark (Eugene O'Hare) and Patrick (Charlie Bonner) to the front room of a rural cottage.

Bob Crowley's sparsely furnished set and low lighting add to the sense of the main character's isolation.

Dwyer Hogg had a deadly silent audience at the sold-out opening night hang on every word of her finely crafted script. Rea and his co-stars delivered outstanding performances.

*Half a Glass of Water* took an even darker turn, bringing to the fore issues of rape and bigotry.

The stage was stripped right down to only two chairs, a table and a glass of water.

A raw piece with often crude dialogue of friends Eli (Rea) and Whitney (Conor MacNeill), the drama attempts to lay bare the mindset of both rapist and victim as they come to terms with violence and abuse.

Despite the heavy topic, award-winning writer David Ireland raised a few laughs from the audience with a first-class script.

Worthy of Field Day of old, the productions are appropriate heralds of the feast of drama audiences can expect during Derry's City of Culture year.

*Farewell/Half a Glass of Water* runs at the Playhouse until Saturday.

**Sinead Harkin**

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**Friday, 7 December 2012**

[Review: Si's Sights and Sounds \(Simon Fallaha--Online Blogger\)](#)

**THEATRE REVIEW: Farewell/Half A Glass Of Water**

**Stephen Rea brings his considerable screen skills to the Derry stage in a pair of dialogue-driven, character-based thrillers**



***The cast and crew of "Farewell" and "Half A Glass Of Water". Also included are Culture Company CEO Shona McCarthy and David Alderdice, Director, British Council Northern Ireland. Photo: [www.cityofculture2013.com](http://www.cityofculture2013.com).***

Much has been made of Field Day Theatre Company's "historic" return to the Derry Playhouse this week, and with very good reason. Their most recent productions, *Farewell* and *Half A Glass Of Water*, are an exceptionally edgy pair of plays, sometimes humorous but never flippant and always focused. They primarily seek to examine the underestimated effects of denial, and how one attempts to come to terms with his or her mistakes in an increasingly demanding and troublesome social landscape. They're plays both for our time and the ages, featuring men who find themselves prisoners both in a cell (sometimes, literally so) and out of it.

The central characters in each play, John in Clare Dwyer Hogg's *Farewell* and Eli in David Ireland's *Half A Glass Of Water*, strongly resonate thanks to the efforts of Belfast's own Stephen Rea, who also directs *Farewell*. An astonishingly subtle and forceful actor, capable of dissolving into any role, Rea is the sort of performer we are fascinated by no matter how many riddles his characters talk in or how reprehensible they seem.

And we immediately sense that there's plenty of the latter in *Farewell*, when he enters to something even more haunting than the sound of silence; the ghosts of Paddy (a creepily understated Charlie Bonner) and Mark (Eugene O'Hare, coming across like a less in-your-face [Red Hand Luke](#)). We realise that he has murdered both men, and is facing having to deal with the prospect of telling his wife Ann (a dynamic Brid Brennan) the whole truth about his violent past, all while contemplating its negative impact on his fatherhood. There's far more to this than your run of the mill "daddy issues" – when John expresses regret, you genuinely feel it. It's a tribute to Rea and his cast that John's constant wallowing in self-pity is interesting, rather than tiresome.

The performances and direction give *Farewell* an extremely intense feel – in

particular, I applaud the decision to have John turned away from the audience while Paddy is lecturing him about the ghosts of his past, as we can tell it's almost too much for John to bear – but I must also credit Dwyer Hogg's strong scripting. The dialogue and characterisation consistently keep you guessing: who is the "farewell" of the title really intended for, John's victims, John's son, John's wife, or John himself? And she's done it without offering any one of her characters the pat closure they are clearly looking for.

Similar things can be said of *Half A Glass Of Water* (hereafter *Half A Glass*), but if Dwyer Hogg has successfully grounded her play in a contemporary, local, familial reality, David Ireland has gone for a seemingly more minimalist, but no less rich, approach.

As with *Farewell*, one's perception of the two-person *Half A Glass* consistently changes as it moves along. We initially side with Rea's Eli as he is forced to deal with twenty-year-old Whitney (the excellent Conor MacNeill) and his inconsistent, naive, wrong-headed ramblings. Eli's not only trying to teach Whitney about the inappropriateness of the words he uses – the young man talks in a blackly funny manner that's even quite disturbing at times – but also about his actions. It is thus a relief to hear Eli's wise, world-weary words of wisdom: "What you say and how you say it says a great deal about you as a person", but he has a shocking revelation in store for us that almost entirely turns the tables. What we have here is an exceptionally clever "opposite sides of the same coin" dynamic where we never know if the metaphorical glass of water is half full or half empty for our characters. Like *Farewell's* John, Eli and Whitney have created a criminal past laden with demons that they may never be able to put to rest.

Both *Farewell* and *Half A Glass* are clever illustrations of how one man's selfishness (John claims he is out for the good of his family, Eli puts it down to frustration) can have more of an impact on the society around him than he may have bargained for. The misconceptions of Ann and the naïveté of Whitney are no less compelling and fascinating than the shame of both John and Eli.