

REVIEW

THEATRE

BALLYTURK

BLACK BOX THEATRE, GALWAY

The curtain slowly peels back on *Ballyturk*, Enda Walsh's latest play, to reveal a room where the walls are covered in layers of pencil drawings, furniture is at odd angles, red balloons are scattered, everything is askew. There are two men in this room and they explode.

The programme tells us that they are 1 (Cillian

Murphy) and 2 (Mikel Murfi). Three (Stephen Rea, pictured) is also listed. We are also told that this is set in no place and at no time, and yet the play is called *Ballyturk* and a giant backdrop sign tells us we are in Ballyturk.

Ballyturk is unsettling, it is chaotic. Ferocious physical slapstick comedy is interspersed with heartbreakingly tender and delicately poetic explorations of the soul. It throbs with searing poignancy at times, is riotously funny at others. This shouldn't work and in lesser hands it wouldn't.

One and 2 are working out

long rehearsed routines, they rely on the safety of the familiarity of the parts they play, the only escape being to pretend to be someone else.

Their relationship is unexplained but there is an intimacy and compassion between them. There is also a shared desperation, a tacit understanding that this room is all they have and therefore vital to keep rehearsing.

We, the audience, may be asking why are they here, but they are also asking the same question. One is more troubled, his distraught unravelling more obvious. Two has a more resigned



acceptance, like a Beckett character he just wants to keep going on. But maybe

today's the day Godot finally turns up.

In the world premiere of this co-production by Landmark Productions and Galway International Arts Festival, Jamie Vartan's wonderful set is full of surprises and beautifully lit by Adam Silverman. Directing his own play, this strangely surreal world has Enda Walsh's fingerprints all over it, his poetic words and crazy visions brought to the most perfect life by his cast of three.

As the catalyst for change, Stephen Rea's performance is more restrained than he has

been in recent times and all the more powerful for that. Mikel Murfi's gombeen slapstick almost deceives from the depth and responsibility his character carries. And Murfi is matched by Cillian Murphy at his most intense, most connected, his performance a remarkable achievement.

There are moments when the writing is almost overwhelmed by physical force and visual gags. But the words' power and stillness ultimately triumph and they echo long after the final moments of bleak desolation.

SOPHIE GORMAN