

# A Gleeson triumph

**E**NDA Walsh has come a long way since 2006, when Druid commissioned *The Walworth*

*Farce*. But even then, his extraordinary, one might even say weird, talent was making a huge international impact, after he had burst on the theatre world with *Disco Pigs* and followed it with *Bedbound*. Walsh's world is dystopic, obsessive, and usually psychotic, his younger generation characters destroyed by the varying levels of unique horror imposed on them by one or other parent, the older generation a long parade of sinister misfits and perverts.

Larger than life, out on a psychological limb, *The Walworth Farce* needs no gimmicks to win a production place. So while it seems like a gimmick by Landmark and MCD to stage it with the familial cast of Brendan Gleeson and his actor sons Domhnall and Brian as father and sons, it becomes on stage a brilliantly devised piece of theatre backed by massive box-office flair.

Dinny, mysteriously exiled from his native Cork to a grotty flat on London's Walworth Road, lives behind locked doors, imposing a reign of fantasy terror on the sons who have joined him there. Sean is merely retarded, and is allowed out each day to buy "supplies" which feature in the rituals, well scripted and fanatically repetitive, which the trio act out daily; but Blake is well on the road to a psychosis that matches his father's.

In his twisted mind, Dinny is keeping his boys "safe" by imposing a memory of family life with aunts and uncles

Emer O'Kelly  
**THEATRE**

waking their dead mother with only a few average rows over money. That he imposes his fantasy by means of his belt, if glimmers of ghastly truth start to come into their clouded minds, is beside the point.

And then Hayley knocks at the barricaded door, the Tesco checkout girl with whom Sean has struck up a conversation. The real world has broken through.

The piece is violent, insane, and in the hands of the Gleesons and their director Sean Foley, mesmerising. It was not written for them, but it might have been, their wild emotional thrust never getting theatrically out of hand, their physical co-ordination breathtaking, the empathy terrifying in the underlying context of brutal suppression and abuse. If it were not so funny, you would have to say it's not for the faint-hearted; and even with the comedy, it's strong stuff.

Leona Allen, in what is apparently her first professional role, manages to match the combined talent of the Gleesons, while Alice Power's crazy ramshackle set lit by Paul Keogan, with sound by Ben and Max Ringham, are perfect backdrops. And special mention must go to Alison de Burgh's fight direction. *The Walworth Farce* is at the Olympia in Dublin.

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THERE is an awful lot "going on" (as they say in food reviews nowadays) in Oliver McQuillan's play *The Puffin's*



**A BRILLIANT PIECE OF THEATRE:** Domhnall Gleeson as Blake, Brian Gleeson as Sean and Brendan Gleeson as Dinny in 'The Walworth Farce' by Enda Walsh, at the Olympia Theatre. Photo: Patrick Redmond

*Nest*: too much for it to work, despite obviously heartfelt determination to make a point about the sometime venality of the male psyche.

Harold is a (fairly) successful cartoonist who drinks too much, and lives a very comfortable life thanks to the bounty of his wife's inherited money. He's a free-thinker; wife Jane is an ex-protestant (well, fairly ex), the point being laboured in the text for no manifest dramatic reason. Their daughter is an unsuccessful actor, coming home after announcing that she is pregnant.

For some unfathomable reason, Harold immediate-

ly decides that the father is black. And suddenly, he starts being haunted by the sight and spirit of an American ex-girlfriend whom he only spent one evening with. Cut to a whole lot of sub-Stephen King horror, with lake-side isolated cabins in Vermont, man-traps, and lurid psychotic killings, all of them revealed post-mortem: Harold's post-mortem, because he too becomes a ghost in the second act.

Jane has her secrets as well, having been dumped at the altar, literally, by her true love, and having settled for Harold as a very poor second. There's a loony, uncaring guardian

aunt with a house full of cats thrown in along the way as well.

McQuillan's play tries very hard but it's unwieldy, over-long, and is as badly in need of a dramaturg (long soliloquys replace dialogue) as this Corpus Production at the New Theatre in Dublin is in need of a director (at least there is no credit for one...and the apparent lack shows.)

Ann Russell and Tom Laidlaw make good fists of Jane and Harold, but Barbara Dempsey is dramatically overwhelmed as the ghostly Minerva, and Ellen Cloncy lacks any real conviction as the mixed-up daughter.