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Rick Perkins highlights beguiling 'Saints'

By ALAN JENKINS
American Statesman Staff

"'Tis better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all," wrote Alfred Tennyson. This philosophy of gain and loss is dealt with by John Synge in his play, "The Well of the Saints," albeit from a different viewpoint than the one expressed by Tennyson.

Friday night at The Theatre in the Rye, Synge's not-always-funny comedy received a thoroughly interesting, if not a totally absorbing, interpretation.

Examples of "mixed blessings" are legion, and the idea for the "Well of the Saints" was not as conceived by Synge but one that he borrowed from a 15th Century French farce by Andrieu de la Vigne.

However, Synge changed the story somewhat and filled it with the nonsense, superstition, poetry and earthiness of Ireland's peasants.

Two scruffy, married beggars — Martin and Mary Doul, played by Rick Perkins and Louise Richardson — have their blindness cured by a saint. Up until that time they had been reasonably content with their lot, believing that the other was a fine figure of the species, an understanding fostered by people who knew them, and who

could see and therefore knew better.

But when they beheld each other's miserable appearance they started to fight — and what play could possibly reflect the ways of Ireland without a fight or two? — and then went separate ways.

Eventually they both lose their sight again and come to terms with each other, only to receive another visit from the saint, anxious to impart God's blessing on them a second time.

Naturally, since the play is set in Ireland, there is plenty of amusing blarney and rustic action. What is particularly interesting, however, is the skillful way Synge uses

folklore to both describe the characters and steer the action.

Perkins as blind Martin was quite excellent. He looks the part and acted well. In fact, he was the catalyst for the entire production, which might well have become a little tedious had it not been for his spark.

The rest of the cast gave rather uneven performances. Certainly no one else demonstrated the kind of presence exhibited by Perkins on stage.

Nevertheless, the overall effect was enjoyable with the play itself thoroughly beguiling. Performances will take place at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays through May 25.

review