

Wilbury's Caretaker Is Astounding

Communication is complicated. These days, we try to fit everything into 140-character statements rather than engaging each other in dialogue. We choose to post on social media rather than sitting down to catch up in person. The number of choices we have to communicate prevents us from really getting to know each other. Instead, we can carefully curate an online persona and pass it off as an authentic personality. Our daily relationships suffer breakdowns under the weight of constant misinterpretation or distrust of others' stories due to our own misrepresentation of ourselves. Harold Pinter wrote *The Caretaker* nearly 60 years ago, exploring the same theme of distrust and loss of communication. The Wilbury Theatre Group opens their new space with an outstanding production of *The Caretaker* that explores all of these themes with an undertone of this morning's headlines. The misogyny, racism and classism that are prevalent in the language recall our current political climate, making this the type of edgy conversation-starter Wilbury is known for.

The team that created this production deserves the standing ovation given by the audience the night I attended. Steve Kidd's direction was phenomenal. Kidd moves his actors around the stage in a way that never gets boring, which is a feat considering it's only three men on stage telling stories. There isn't much new action that happens as the audience watches, but the audience remains riveted.

Kidd's job is eased by the talent on stage. All three actors are incredibly strong in their craft. Richard Donnelly is perfectly disagreeable and shifty as Davies, a homeless man who is never satisfied with anything and changes his alliances several times during the action of the play. Real life brothers Joe Short and Josh Short play the brothers Aston and Mick. Aston saves Davies from a bar fight and shows kindness throughout the play by giving Davies a place to stay and finding him new shoes. Joe Short brings us one of the most poignant moments of the play at the close of Act 1. He quietly tells the story of talking too much to people and being sent away for electroshock therapy. There were audible gasps from the audience as he described how his thoughts slowed down after that. Mick is presumably consumed by work and aspirations of having a beautifully decorated flat. At times, Josh Short is so high energy, he could be unhinged. He keeps the audience on their toes.

Each of these three actors are individually strong presences on stage, but together they create one of the most solid ensembles seen on a Providence stage. They've clearly worked hard on maintaining believable accents. They vary the level of emotion and volume in ways that keep the audience surprised and engaged in the storytelling. The fight choreography is so natural, it's hard to believe someone isn't actually being hurt. The simple physical comedy during an argument over whose bag Aston brought in is hilariously absurd. The energy created by this magical combination of actors is palpable and engaging, never faltering.

The one drawback to this production is the acoustics of the space. The Wilbury Theatre Group's new home is in an open cinderblock warehouse space. During times of high emotion, the echoes sometimes get in the way of understanding the words. However, even this one minor drawback adds to the sound effect of occasional drips into a bucket. The leak falling into a metal bucket becomes a minor character, coming in at just the right moment to change the energy. In this space, the effect is never missed. In fact, it is enhanced by the slight echo caused by the open room.

The set design by Josh Christofferson incorporates existing elements of the building, such as an old

ventilation fan and the concrete floor. He adds a lot of set dressing to a minimal design, which is reminiscent of the way the characters create their personas. Each man is wearing a different waistline height in their costume, which becomes a distraction for those us in the audience who are sticklers for establishing a specific time period through dress. Nevertheless, quick changes are made easy through the careful planning of Erin Meghan Donnelly. With simple additions and removals of a sweater or tie, time changes are clearly established.

The design most likely to be overlooked, but most important to this show, is the lighting. The lighting design for this production is incredible. Andy Russ has created such subtle lighting shifts that audience members might not notice. However, the lighting directs the eye to the storytelling, focusing in on the important points and adding to the poignancy in Aston's monologue.

The Wilbury Theatre Group has once again brought audiences an astounding production. They are doing everything right in *The Caretaker*.

The Caretaker by Harold Pinter is running through October 7 at The Wilbury Theatre Group's new space at 40 Sonoma Court in Providence. To purchase tickets, visit thewilburygroup.org.