

# Lively, Rollicking Melodrama in 'The Shaughraun'

**Villains, maidens, heroes and Irish wiles on comedic display in 'The Shaughraun'**

**By JENNIFER FARRAR**

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In 1867 Ireland, knowledge of all the hiding places near one's village was essential for evading the authorities. In "The Shaughraun," a Victorian Irish melodrama full of humor and wit, coastal cliff top chase scenes abound as one nefarious Irish villager in County Sligo greedily plots against his neighbors.

Charlotte Moore, artistic director, has created a thoroughly enjoyable, rollicking comedic revival of the 1875 play, now performing at the Irish Repertory Theatre. Her clever staging sets a lively pace, with characters popping in and out of windows and doors as the slapstick action unfolds in quick scenes.

Playwright Dion Boucicault, a popular, Irish-born writer and actor who had a major influence on Victorian drama, here good-humoredly mocked the animosity between the Irish and their English rulers. His imaginative plot contains humorous disguises, convenient coincidences and even kidnappings.

Patrick Fitzgerald spiritedly portrays the titular shaughraun (pronounced SHOCK-rawn, meaning vagabond), named Conn Kelly. Fitzgerald is quite likable and even heroic at times, as fantastical storyteller Conn proves to be a good-natured, loyal friend, despite being a gambling, boozing poacher.

Two well-born but now impoverished damsels are in distress, threatened with eviction by an odious, thieving squire.

Allison Jean White is delightfully comical as fiery Claire Ffolliott, now sharing a small cabin on her ancestral land with the fiancée of her falsely imprisoned brother, Robert. Katie Fabel sweetly portrays the patient fiancée, Arte O'Neal.

As dastardly villain Corry Kinchela, Sean Gormley twirls no mustache, but he has great fun with his gloating character. Gormley makes sneering asides to the audience as Kinchela forms diabolical plans to destroy the Ffolliotts. Tim Ruddy is perfectly weaselly as Kinchela's mewling sidekick, Harvey Duff.

Handsome British captain Harry Molineux, played with stalwart decency by Mark Shanahan, arrives in Ireland to hunt for a fugitive. Upon meeting Claire, he promptly falls in love, which mortifies them both. Shanahan is quite funny as the lovesick, fair-minded officer. Claire is conflicted by her fond feelings for an Englishman, which White artfully enacts, repeatedly waving him away with graceful motions that beckon rather than dismiss.

As beloved hero Robert Ffolliott, Kevin O'Donnell is full of brio and derring-do. Having escaped from prison with Conn's help, he visits Arte and now the chase is on.

Geddeh Smith plays it straight as kindly parish priest Father Dolan, while Emma O'Donnell is pertly feisty as Moya, Conn's adoring girlfriend. Terry Donnelly chews up the scenery as Conn's widowed mother, unleashing torrents of Gaelic made comprehensible by her demeanor. Gwenfair Vaughn is also memorable as a wailing professional mourner at a lurid funeral wake.