



Irish plays have a great week
on streaming platforms

Description

Outstanding performances from both the Gingold Theatre Group and the Irish Repertory Theatre

By **Byron Toben**

In our new normal of live entertainment being streamed to us culture consumers, two presentations stood out this past week. One was the **Gingold Theatre Group's** rendition of **G. Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman***, replete with 11 actors. The other was a one-man show presented by the **Irish Repertory Theatre** featuring **Bill Irwin** in ***On Beckett/In Screen***.

Both shows reconfirmed my oft-repeated dictum that with a good script and fine actors, you don't need spectacular sets and amazing costumes to enjoy the show. Your own imagination fills the gap.

Man and Superman, based on the Don Juan legend, was written in four acts. It is often performed without the removable third act, ***Don Juan in Hell***, which is a dream sequence. Indeed, that scene was omitted in the play's debut in 1905 and the entire play was not performed in its entirety until 1915. The dream sequence later became a great hit on its own in the late 1950s when leading actors of the day – Charles Laughton, Charles Boyer, Cedric Hardwicke and Agnes Moorehead – performed it on stage which led to their version being released as an LP album.

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Listening to that album years later was my own introduction to and still abiding interest in Shaw. He took in part Nietzsche's theme that Mankind is evolving toward an Uber Mensch through natural selection and blended that with his own championing of a "life force" that is still evolving. All this philosophical speculation is made palatable to the audience by Shaw's great wit.



The basic plot is that a young lady whose father had recently died is placed by his will under the co-guardian ship of an old fogey lawyer and a radical youth. Add to this mix a touring automobile driven by a cockney who drops his "Hs", a Spanish brigand leader who is half Jewish, an Irish American ex-pat, a practical mother, a secretly married sister and a spurned lover and you have a stew of wonderful types and wordplay. This abridged version does include the dream sequence, but being cleverly edited, reduces the 4-hour playing time to a mere 2 ½ hours.

Man and Superman was streamed until November 20.



The online reading of *Man and Superman* – Image: courtesy of Gingold Theatre Group



On Beckett/In Screen was a live rerun of The Irish Repertory Theatre's popular hit of 2018. The reprise featured the same wonderful clown/actor **Bill Irwin** miming and reciting many lesser-known works of **Samuel Beckett** as well as much from his most famous ***Waiting for Godot***.

Hard for me to picture anyone else handling this delivery of nuances requiring Irish, Irish-American and Irish-French accents. With his clown background, Mr. Irwin was adept at making the most of Beckett props like bowler hats, baggy pants, super baggy pants, and shoes. Much was drawn from Beckett's ***Texts For Nothing***.

Some influences mentioned were the "Stage Irishman" (a cliché hated, by the way, by Shaw) and the clown variety shows frequented by Beckett during his Paris years. Irwin pointed out, at the more academic end, Beckett's familiarity with both English Milton and Italian Dante. He reminded us that Beckett used no periods or question marks (great info for trivia contests).

'The highlight of the show was when Irwin plunged into *Waiting For Godot*, a play in which he had performed many times in different roles.'

Irwin also told of his own propensity to add or change a word here or there because it seemed better in a spoken delivery but had to be careful as the Beckett estate was very fierce against variations.

The highlight of the show was when Irwin plunged into *Waiting For Godot*, a play in which he had performed many times in different roles. He noted that American audiences stress the second syllable (go dough), whereas European audiences preferred the first (god dough). This reminded me of how Montreal playwright **Colleen Curran**, in her ***Waiting for Godot at the Coconut Grove***, had her Florida theatre staff member smugly affirm that it is "go dot" (as in period).

Lots of attention to capitalist Pozzo and rope bound slave Lucky who interact with clowns Vladimir and Estragon here.

On Beckett/In Screen ended on November 22.

Feature image: frame from publicity trailer for On Beckett/In Screen, courtesy of Irish Repertory Theatre

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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