

## Theater review: Friel play receives masterful handling from Albany Civic

By Matthew G. Moross

ALBANY – Few modern playwrights have mastered the fine art of storytelling as well as Irish writer Brian Friel. Cleverly cutting to the core of human emotion with a deflective lift of brogue and humor, his tales prove profoundly moving and wistfully delicate all at once.

### 'Faith Healer'

**WHERE:** Albany Civic Theater, 235 Second Ave., Albany

**WHEN:** Through Nov. 20

**HOW MUCH:** \$15-\$10

**MORE INFO:** 462-1297 or [www.albanycivictheater.org](http://www.albanycivictheater.org)

Any anguish or discomfort that lie underneath his deceptively simple stories bubble to the surface in a lively moment of fury but just as quickly dissipate, leaving little burn or scald, just a memory and a vision affirming existence and connection.

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Albany Civic Theater is presenting Friel's masterwork of monologue, "Faith Healer," providing area audiences a golden evening of storytelling at its finest.

By turns funny, profound, spiritual and deeply moving, it is the story of Frank Hardy, a traveling "faith healer" who, during his visits to remote and desolate Welsh and Scottish villages, lays his healing hands on the crippled, deaf and barren.

Assisting him with his "art" are his bitter but still loving wife, Grace, and his energetic manager Teddy, who gave up his career to promote Frank. Subtly unfolding the story of a tragedy through four connected monologues, things seem straightforward and simple, but underneath Friel plants an emotionally complex and explosive story of the human need to connect and how demons and doubt can force us to abandon facts and believe fictions.

### Skillful trio

"Faith Healer" is a delicate, elusive piece of theater that demands keen attention and excellent actors, which Albany Civic supplies. Joan Justice is beautifully desperate as Grace and Garry Maggio splendidly finds all of Teddy's entertaining moments as well as the poignant ones. There is little that is charismatic or flash in Patrick White's take on the supposedly magnetic miracle man Frank. Instead the focus is placed on maintaining the facade of a man who is lost in a world where fiction and fact have collided.

Frank's life has become twisted into such a tangle that an unraveling is futile and acceptance is the only option. But what exactly should he accept? White relates Frank's story cleanly and without apology, allowing the small moments of question to become more believable as they organically appear, while revealing the flaws in the man and the cracks on the mask. It's an unapologetic performance told without artifice and it works. White proves a master storyteller and his powerfully presented monologues, nicely bookend the evening.

## Clean connection

This trio of theater vets is skillfully guided by Carol King's finely tuned direction. Allowing for the pauses and discovery without slowing the action, King's touch is light and perfect, never overplaying or pandering, allowing Friel's words and fable to bloom.

With no big set or intricate lighting, the production is simply presented, keeping the connection between actor and audience unencumbered and clean.

At the end of the evening, nothing has been wrapped up neatly. The audience is left to make their own decisions about what has really happened. Left to reflect on our own self-authentication and how we are responsible for creating our own life and placing our experiences into what we take to be fact and what we need to believe to be fiction. And how each of those choices can torture and each can heal.