

# REVIEW – Stones in his Pockets – Dragon Productions Theatre Company

There's a prevailing self-deprecating humor that tends to resonate in certain cultures that have had a particularly rough go at it. A history of political or religious turmoil, extreme socioeconomic challenges, even just harsh weather can bring out a unique survival instinct I like to call the "Chuckle, Oh Wow, Sad...Smile" or "COWSS" factor. The Irish I have decided are among these cultures that seem to embrace COWSS and Dragon Production Theatre's latest project *Stones in his Pockets*, set in Ireland, is a fine example of how this COWSS factor is applicable both to the characters of and to a play itself.

So what is COWSS? Let me explain more fully so that you might grasp the layers of the experience that awaits you at Dragon. COWSS starts with what appears to be a sincere joke which induces an initial heartfelt **Chuckle**. Upon further examination, usually even before the chuckle completely dies out, the chuckler (and even the chucklee sometimes) discovers the joke or situation to actually be quite sad. This commonly produces a somewhat awkward and reflective "**Oh, Wow...Sad**" or comment from a similarly tragic family. Those unaccustomed to this phenomenon might stop right there to dwell in melancholy, but those more attuned to a disparaging sentiment, realize if you don't laugh you will cry and what's the point in all that fuss, thereby concluding the process by surrendering a submissive **Smile** and by doing so bringing the COWSS factor back home, if you will.

This play is a real workout for the actors (and directors and audience members too) mentally, physically and even emotionally. It's a dream acting vehicle as it consists of just two actors playing several parts, genders, ages and requiring different accents with minimal costume, props or script cues to help with character definition. As you may well be aware by now, I'm not a super-fan of this gimmick, the exception being if it's done well. It helps that two of my absolute favorite local actors make up the entire cast of this production and they're inexplicably compelling to watch. I'd probably pay to watch them paint rocks or do laundry, they're just that good. Indeed, they excel at the craft of creating complex, multi-dimensional characters and telling the stories of those characters extremely well. I get the sense that they are exceedingly invested in these characters and genuinely immersed in them rather than seeking to somehow cathartically express themselves through these characters. It seems to be about the characters and not the actors and that make a huge difference in how this multi-character device is accepted from the audience perspective. The buy in is easy and coming from me, that's says

something.

Most endearing perhaps is how the characters in the play take care of each other much like the actors take care of each other on stage. Chemistry and comrodérie, mutual respect and staying in the moment are crucial to any cast, but those rules are doubly important for these guys. Eye contact, adjusting paces on the fly for any costume challenges, constantly being synchronized is so key and the blocking capitalizes on this synchronicity. The staging is really more like choreography and it was executed nearly flawlessly.

The movement is logical, consistent, fluid and a good fit for the stage space. This intimate acting space is particularly metaphorical with regards to this play as the action takes place predominantly on a movie set. With the intimacy of the Dragon theatre you're almost treated to the close up acting more frequently associated with film than on stage and it's a nice compliment to the piece. You'd do well to treat yourself to the front row so you don't miss a single wink, lip purse, eyebrow raise, arch of spit, bead of sweat or calculated sniff. But even from the back you are in for a treat.

As for the COWSS, be warned, though there are plenty of laughs in this play, the topics do turn heavy, heavy as the Irish accents and quick dialogue that thrust you directly into the deep end from the words "turn of your cell phones." A fresh well-rested, focused brain on the night you attend will ensure you enjoy this piece to its fullest. I heartily recommend this piece and gladly give it 4 out of 5 jewels in the tiara. *Stones in his Pockets* plays through [December 4th at the Dragon Theatre in Palo Alto](#).