

The Irish Echo

Masterful Kinevane's ghoulish tale glitters

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Pat Kinevane in "Underneath" at the Irish Arts Center.

By Orla O'Sullivan

The opening of Pat Kinevane's latest solo show, "Underneath," is thrilling. In fact, "Thriller," Michael Jackson's influential, zombie music-video plus the show's appropriateness around Halloween were among the

associations that flashed through my mind as the lights went down on the blackened background, the wind whipped, the fog came up, and so did Kinevane – from a coffin, center stage.

Kinevane is dressed in ragged black, to convey the decomposition of his body, his “carbon” skin. He wears gold make-up on his lips and eyelids that further make his expressive features pop against the all-black background. With a half-shy, half-sly smile, he says in a friendly Cork voice, “You never know what’s around the corner, do ya?”

“You’re all very welcome,” he continues, engaging with audience members in the front row, inviting them to recompose themselves after the shock of being addressed by a corpse.

It all seemed classic Kinevane, having witnessed similar elements in his last self-composed solo show at The Irish Arts Center, a couple of years ago, “Silent.” I expected a mood-changing laugh to dispel the tension of the opening. I knew the “fog” was dry ice. But I flinched and I laughed on cue.

Kinevane is a master performer, as much mime as actor, and a fine singer, too, it emerges from this show.

Under Jim Culleton’s perfect direction Kinevane changes mood on a razor’s edge, whether bottling corrosive emotion with an emphatic “anyway” or being deadpan, almost distracted about catastrophe. The segue into his life is, “Before the maggots, ehmmmm…” His hometown, Cobh, is introduced as the departure point for the Titanic “before the big glug glug.”

He plays a seeming non-entity, a character who is never named, explaining how she came to be in an unmarked grave after a bloody death. Disfigured in childhood by a near deadly freak accident, “Queen Nefertiti” – in her brightest imaginings – avoided the public’s gaze and its casual cruelty.

The black of the set is broken by a few gold elements that Kinevane uses to evoke such fantasies. All that glitters is not gold, however. He slams the unfair and arbitrary privilege that good looks and inherited wealth bestow. It’s most effective when he uses humor, parodying our image-obsessed, celebrity-referenced culture, whether dubbing the make-up-“embalmed” fashionistas drinking in the overnight residents’ bar of the hotel where he works as “the real knacker Kardashians” or mocking the raft of television shows featuring couples on a quest for their dream home.

In the meandering style of some stand-up comics, Kinevane works in anecdotes, asides, the origin of Irish nicknames that put everyone in their place, and jokes (Why did the Polish fella cross the road? Because he was taking the chicken's job).

As Kinevane spins his yarn, he knits an enormously oversized scarf of glittering gold for no apparent purpose. There's something similar in the writing. The central thread is a bit of a stretch. As with "Silent," the pivotal scene features a major coincidence. Without revealing all, let's say if this visit was deliberate, it made no sense. If it was accidental, why would a john visiting a brothel not be readily tracked? And would a murderer risk traveling 150 miles with the corpse?

Ultimately, however, you don't much care if stitches are dropped because Kinevane's yarn is so dazzling.

"Underneath" is at IAC (www.irishartscenter.org) 553 West 51st St., N.Y., N.Y., until Sunday.

"The Flood"

On Wednesday and Thursday, the three-year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, Daniel McCabe's play "The Flood" will have two special performances in the Cell tTeatre on West 23rd St. in Manhattan (www.thecelltheatre.org).

The play, inspired by Sandy's devastating impact on the East Coast, is to make its Irish debut next month in Belfast's renowned Lyric Theatre.

Jane McCarter, known to many as the arts and cultural director of the New York Irish Center in Long Island City, Queens, outside of that role, is co-producing ""The Flood" and bringing it to Belfast from Nov. 4 – 8.

"We are planning on two performances before we leave to build a bit of momentum and cover costs,"

McCarter told the Echo.

Donations from kickstarter.com funded the play's first run in the New York fringe festival in summer 2014.

The author, from Woodhaven, in Queens, is the son of former NYPD detective and Echo contributor Brian McCabe.