

STAGE NEWS

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Patrick McCabe's strange novel plays out like Goodbye, Mr Chips deep-fried in death and battered by bog Gothic.

Two teachers, representative of old and new Ireland, cross paths in a Dublin school sometime in the seventies. A field trip tragedy leads one to alcoholism and the other to insanity, teaching imaginary pupils in his own 'dead school'.

A dense novel set over the decades, it may not be the obvious choice to leap from page to stage but this exuberant Irish company attack the material with such verve we're quickly bowled over by their invention.

Seizing on McCabe's absurdist tendencies, all the action takes place on an extraordinary surreal set - part decaying classroom, part expressionist fantasy - from which characters in the duo's history pop out, over and

through as we follow first the older, dour Raphael Bell (a monumental Sean Campion) and then the cooler, rebellious Malachy Dudgeon (Nick Lee) before their worlds collide.

Slicker than Brian O'Driscoll side-stepping yet another tackle, the five-strong cast are drilled to within an inch of their lives and there is stirring work from Carrie Crowley, Gemma Reeves and Peter Daly, who play a variety of obnoxious school kids, feisty lovers, wives and randy farmers to keep the action bubbling along.

One particularly chilling character is the little beggar man. Representative of death, he enters through the bin-bag blackened window, dressed in top hat and frayed tails with a blooded pig's face to obscure his face, to remind us of the constant frailty of life, often at its most exhilarating.

Production information

The Dead School, Tricycle, London

O:

February 22-March 13

Author:

Patrick McCabe, adapted from his novel

Director:

Padraic McIntyre

Producer:

Nomad Theatre Network in association with Livin' Dred Theatre Company

Cast:

Sean Campion, Nick Lee, Carrie Crowley, Peter Daly, Gemma Reeves

Running time:

2hrs 25mins

Production information can change over the run of the show.