

The Last Stand theatre review: Radio phone-in gets personal in funny, audience-pleasing gem

Wexford Arts Centre until Saturday, June 17



Morgan C. Jones as Tom Hooks in The Last Stand. Photo by Colin Shanahan



Katy Hayes

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Starved as we are for new Irish playwriting in the capital, I made a 260km round trip to Wexford for a show — and it was well worth it.

Dominic Palmer's neat 80-minute play is set in a grubby studio where comedian Tom Hooks (Morgan C Jones) live-broadcasts his podcast accompanied by his producer and tech manager Brendan (Dylan Kennedy). The format of the podcast is a discussion of contemporary hot-button issues with a phone-in. Hooks throws out topics, baits his callers and picks arguments with them. One subject is a recent homophobic attack on a gay couple that has left a young man in hospital.

Via his girlfriend Sarah (Fiona Browne), we learn early on that Hooks has received some bad news from the doctor; she phones him live on air and shares his diagnosis with his listeners. Then she pops up in the studio, goes on air and things get more confrontational and emotionally challenging. She does not let Hooks off the emotional hook, so to speak.

Palmer's writing is spirited. There are plenty of funny one-liners, and it attacks its themes with a full-on directness. The play is about how we face up to death, and about the purpose of being alive. It takes a tour around contemporary issues, including Covid and online trolling, and provides an analysis of the function of comedy.



Dylan Kennedy, Fiona Browne and Morgan C. Jones in The Last Stand. Photo by Colin Shanahan

Jones plays Hooks as a feisty self-assured machoman, adjusting to the contemporary moment with complexity. Browne makes an earnest and grounded Sarah. And Kennedy is the cautious voice of a twenty-something, buried under his beanie. There are a number of phone-in callers: Sharon Clancy as Carol from Limerick is very funny as she gets an attack of the giggles.

Director Ben Barnes for Four Rivers steers it all in a straight-up direction. This is regular old-fashioned dramaturgy, unfolding in real time, emotional developments gently piling up one by one. It's a thinkpiece with a lot of heart and a slick, gaggy style. The Wexford/Waterford theatre axis has a history of producing audience-pleasing gems, and this is definitely one of them.