

# Edinburgh Festival Fringe REVIEW - These Halcyon Days

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**These Halcyon Days by Deirdre Kinahan – Landmark Productions.**

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According to Ovid, the beautiful Alcyone was transformed into a kingfisher. Out of pity and guilt her father, God of winds, Aeolus, calmed the winter storms to cradle her egg-laden nest. Nowadays we look back with nostalgic fondness to our happier, Halcyon Days. First opening at the Dublin Theatre Festival, 2012, with a spell touring Ireland and a New York performance, this is its Edinburgh and UK Premiere.

A near capacity Rainy Hall audience brought a Fringe-full of great expectations to this touching, poignant and thoroughly life-affirming production from playwright Deirdre Kinahan. They were mightily rewarded. Frail, wheelchair-bound, Sean is drawn from his isolation by the insistent, chatty Patricia. It seems their 'secured' retirement/hospice residence is the twilight of the godforsaken.

Their initial sparse dialogue echoes Pinter as they parry and probe each other's lives. Sean declaims the Agincourt speech from Henry V – almost perfectly – but stumbles on 'Gentlemen now abed...' Was he really the film-star he claims to have been? Patricia wishes to believe it. Both Stephen Brennan, as Sean, and Anita Reeves, as Patricia, are magnificently immersed in their characters. No creaking, clichéd postures or doddering

affectations. You feel for Sean's creaking bones and Patricia's terminally damaged liver. There's little plot to unravel but for the characters' revealing incremental, painful truths, frustrations and aching desperation. Sometimes Sean's tart comments can be devilish, sometimes he fears they are invasive dementia.

Scene transitions work seamlessly with music atmospherics and lighting tastefully avoiding sentimentality or mawkishness. The language is pithy, witty and vibrant with idiomatic lyricism and reassuring turns of phrase. Two old people talking for seventy minutes seems a tall order but this production deftly embraces the unique universality of the human spirit – often bruised but never broken.

No denouement-spoilers in this review. Just you go and see it – a hot-ticket prediction on this reviewer's part. This play thoroughly deserves to bask in the twinkling brilliance of each of its five twinkling stars

Assembly Hall, Rainy Hall, Mound Place. Venue 35. Until August 25.