

Article published Jul 23, 2015

'Outside Mullingar' is a romance — an Irish romance

By [Jim Lowe](#)

Staff Writer

John Patrick Shanley's intimate comedy "Outside Mullingar" is an Irish romance — a decidedly Irish romance.

"I can't believe how much it takes me by surprise — even though I know it. I went to opening night on Broadway," explained John Gould Rubin, who directs the Dorset Theatre Festival production.

"I actually told Shanley before I came up here, 'It's terrible, I start weeping before the end of the play.' And he said, 'You know, the actors love that,'" Rubin said. "It's really very Irish — which is a real achievement because it's written by an American."

Dorset Theatre Festival will present "Outside Mullingar" July 30 through Aug. 15 at the Dorset Playhouse. Shanley is the Academy Award-winning writer of "Doubt" and "Moonstruck."

"Outside Mullingar" premiered on Broadway Jan. 23, 2014. Charles Isherwood, in The New York Times, called it "Mr. Shanley's finest work since 'Doubt.'"

Anthony and Rosemary are two middle-aged introverted misfits. Painfully shy, Anthony has spent his entire life on a farm in rural Ireland. Rosemary lives next door, as she always has, determined to have him.

With Anthony's father threatening to disinherit him and a border dispute brewing between their families, Rosemary has every reason to fear an unhappy conclusion to her dreams of romance. But these awkward would-be lovers struggle toward some kind of happiness.

"I think it's a love story — and a really beautiful, mythical kind of love story," Rubin said. "It's epic, it's romantic, it's sentimental and very affecting."

The Irishness comes from Shanley creating the perfect obstacle.

"He sets up such a strong set of needs for each of them that are oppositional, from not wanting to go to the other to wanting to go together, that, as an audience member, you are going, 'Go! Go!' — and at the same time, you understand why that they don't," Rubin said. "So that when they do, you sort of collapse in this empathic joy."

The challenge is making this wall of emotion credible.

"I'm lucky I've got good actors," Rubin said. "I've got Mary Bacon and Michael Hayden and they're just great. I think Mary has really wanted to do this play. I think it's part of her heritage and her heart."

Bacon, in her fourth season at Dorset, who has appeared in Theresa Rebeck's "Mauritius" and "The Scene," plays Rosemary Muldoon. Hayden, who plays Anthony Reilly, was Billy Bigelow in the Royal National Theatre/Lincoln Center production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel," earning him Theatre World and Drama League Awards, along with nominations for the Olivier, Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk Awards.

"Michael is just one of the greatest actors of his generation. He's just really, really gifted," Rubin said.

Jonathan Hogan and Jennifer Harmon play their parents. Hogan, who plays Tony Reilly, recently starred in the hit Netflix series "House of Cards" opposite Kevin Spacey. Harmon, who portrays Aoife Muldoon, has performed on Broadway in "The School for Scandal," "The Sisters Rosensweig," "Rumors," "Blithe Spirit," "The Dinner Party" and "The Glass Menagerie."

"I've really got a cast of the same quality they had on Broadway," Rubin said.

One challenge, though, is staging the multiple settings of the play without the technical resources of Broadway.

"I think it gives me an opportunity," Rubin said. "I can't do each of those settings literally — so it compels me to look at the world of the play and look for a way that the forces can live in, in a more suggestive way."

Rubin is an accomplished and prolific director, having directed, among many other productions: "Hedda Gabler" and "Playing with Fire" for The Private Theatre; "Peer Gynt" at the International Ibsen festival in Oslo; "The Cherry Orchard" at The Actors Studio (featuring Ellen Burstyn); "The Seagull" at Harold Clurman LAB; and "Little Doc" at Rattlestick. He is founder and artistic director of The Private Theatre.

"So my focus has been on the spirituality of the Irish — the world of the Irish," Rubin said. "It comes out of, in my view, something that has to do with the land and the earth, and the hardscrabble lifestyle — something we, in the United States, identify with in an earlier part of our history."

Dorset's special programming for this production includes a post-show talk-back with the cast and creative team following the matinee on Aug. 1, and the second "Get Your Play On" event featuring special discounted tickets and café fare, including microbrewery beer, for members of young professional organizations throughout the region, on Aug. 15.

Dorset Theatre Festival

Dorset Theatre Festival presents John Patrick Shanley's "Outside Mullingar" July 30-Aug. 15 at the Dorset Playhouse, 104 Cheney Road in Dorset. Performances are at 8 p.m. July 30-Aug. 1; 3 p.m. Aug. 2; 3 and 8 p.m. Aug. 5; 8 p.m. Aug. 6-8; 3 p.m. Aug. 9; 8 p.m. Aug. 11; 3 and 8 p.m. Aug.12; 8 p.m. Aug. 13-15. Tickets are \$20-\$40, \$20 for students, and \$8 for 12 and younger; call 802-867-2223, or go online to dorsettheatrefestival.org.