Student from Regis College

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*“Our Day Will Come”* Review

A plethora of musicals are available in the world, from mega-musicals to rock operas. People constantly revive and celebrate popular musicals, such as *Rent* and *Cats*! There are also famous modern musicals, like *Hamilton*, and *Heathers*. However, a gem hidden from the vast array of famous musicals is *Our Day Will Come,* a brand new musical written and composed by two students at Brandeis University: Composer Marek Haar, and writer/researcher Shoshana Finkel (with several actors co-producing it). Sunday, December 5th, 2:00 PM marked its closing performance at Brandeis’s Spingold Theatre. This show was a spectacular, professional-level, mind-blowing experience, turning a minimalistic set into a grand, epic tragedy full of meaning and symbolism.

*Our Day Will Come* takes place during the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. It opens with the story and dance of Eriu, the physical embodiment and spirit of Ireland, portrayed by a ballerina. After this, the musical follows a kind, selfless young man named Rory Byrnes, as he navigates his own violently divided country (British against Irish, and Catholic against Protestant.) His mother, Maura, loves her country, and does not want him protesting, but he is upset about the loss of his brother, Brenden, who was shot by British police. When Rory’s boss, Donovan, promises to fill the void of Rory’s lost brother and offer him comradery in exchange for joining his rebellion, Rory finds himself wrapped up in a violent rebel group, where he meets his love interest: Rosemary, who is a fanatic rebel herself. Meanwhile, we are introduced to Samuel Ward, a British police officer. Although we see him as cruel and selfish initially, we are shown another side to him: He is the father of a young child, and part of a loving family (We also see the loving families of the rebels). Samuel arrests Donovan, and the two have a heated debate through song, both trying to understand one another’s perspectives, and convince one another to understand their own, but without success. Soon, this tension breaks into tragedy. When Samuel is out dancing with his wife, Donovan, Rory and the rebels accidentally shoot her. Regretful and heartbroken over having killed an innocent woman, Rory vows to achieve his goals nonviolently, only to be shot and killed by Samuel as vengeance for his lost wife. In a fury, Rosemary declares violence the only answer on public radio. Samuel captures her, and breaks down, agonized over the loss of his wife, leading Rosemary to tearfully shoot him. Maura grieves over her son, and refuses to let Rosemary see Rory’s body, blaming her for his death. In a final scene, every character lines up, carrying guns. On one side of the stage (where there is a projector) we see picture frames of Maura’s loved ones who have died. On the other side of the lineup, is a single gun, the symbol of violence. Maura ponders over the gun, with the ballerina (and symbol of Ireland itself) Eriu, silently begging her not to take it. Maura runs to the other side of the stage, but the picture frames of her loved ones shatter. Maura slowly walks over to the gun. Eriu pleads with her not to take it, and the musical ends, her decision left ambiguous.

Conceptually, “Our Day Will Come” has a few similarities to Stephen Sondheim’s *Pacific Overtures*, in that it follows the political and cultural status of a country (in this case, Northern Ireland) throughout a time of turmoil, focusing on multiple storylines. However, *Our Day Will* come has a linear storyline. Instead of vignettes, it utilizes its subplots to bring us on a journey through each character’s unique perspective as their ideologies clash. No character is portrayed as a villain, and yet no character is portrayed as a hero either. We meet almost every character’s family, and we see a positive side of each of their personalities. However, we also see every character’s fall to the darkness of violence and radicalism. At the end of the play, the cast and crew talked about the musical’s making, and answered questions. Marik Haar and Shoshana Finkel described each character as a metaphor for the various ways people fall into radicalism and violence. Rory is looking for comradery and purpose, Rosemary is a strong believer in her cause, and Samuel is driven by vengeance. Having lost everything and everyone she cares about, Maura is left with a choice: The call of violence, or the love of her country that drives her throughout the musical. The play is a reminder that human conflict is a very complicated thing, and everyone has reasons for their actions. Those reasons can clash and lead to the tragedy of losing their morality, if they are not careful.

The music in this play is somewhat minimalist, not in its tune, but in the small number of instruments used. The pit orchestra was not visible, and contained only two people: Joel Stenhouse and Milo Rosengard. This musical uses its small assortment of instruments expertly, relying mostly on piano, and saving the more intense-sounding instruments for the more intense parts. The first section of the musical has almost all piano, with a drum beat every so often. However, once the rebellion army gets riled up, and they shoot Samuel’s wife (the first character death shown) we hear violins and even an electric guitar. When the rebels are frantically discussing this event, the music sounds almost rock opera-like. We’re also given what sounds like traditional Irish music at the dance club where his wife is killed, with what resembles cheerful bagpipe music. There is a song in which Rosemary and Samuel are arguing, and when Samuel sings, he is accompanied by an electric guitar with piano, while when Rosemary sings, she is accompanied by only piano, highlighting Samuel’s anger. *Our Day Will Come* is excellent at knowing when to utilize its orchestra for the perfect moments, and also when it is not needed. Before Samuel and Donovan’s musical debate, the scene opens with Donovan in prison, with a single spotlight shining on him; This part is completely silent, immersing the audience in the silent loneliness of his cell. It was also a surprise to see the use of a double song in this musical (to portray Maura’s ideological differences to one of Rory’s coworkers), as they are likely difficult to compose, and this student composer did an excellent job at creating one that was seamless. The transitions from speaking to song were also smooth, with the piano often softly playing through dramatic lines, carrying them into music. Songs were well placed, at the most heightened and emotional spots when a character was clearly bursting with things to say. The use of Irish dance, and ballet also set the atmosphere, and established the setting. The first ballet dance doubled as interpretive dance, as we learned about the spirit of Ireland as a character. Not only was it beautiful, but it also gave some characterization to a non-speaking role, which became super powerful during the musical’s end.

The acting in this musical may have been the most astounding aspect, with its intricate subtleties. There are two parts in which the rebels are gathering in a circle, and Samuel is present. None of the other rebels see him, as their backs are turned, but upon a close look, one can see Rosemary catch a glimpse of him, and do a double take, proceeding to turn her head away from the circle and glare at him, foreshadowing their showdown at the end. The actors were fantastic during the heavier, most tense scenes, but the one who stuck out the most was Jesse Rips, the actor portraying the role of Maura. There is a song called “Maura’s Aria,” in which Maura grieves the loss of Rory. Jesse combined agonizing sobbing and singing in a flawless combination that was absolutely heartbreaking and extremely impressive. Anika Hahn (who played Rosemary) and Nicholous Kanan (who played Samuel) presented a heart wrenching scene when Rosemary shoots Samuel, who is also grieving. The audience can feel the loss and suffering from every character, and can sympathize with every single one, which makes it all the more painful when they all become driven to murder one another, displaying the fact that violence only brings more death and destruction, and that it isn’t a solution. Anika Hahn also had a great, light-hearted scene with Alex Ross (the actor of Rory) during the song in which Rory and Rosemary realize they are in love with one another. There is a lot of bashful awkwardness, and overall the scene is adorable. In the middle of the song, there are moments when both Rory and Rosemary walk to separate sides of the stage, and privately make faces of astoundment, as if to say: “Oh my gosh, this is really happening!” It was relatable, quirky, and did a good job of adding weight to the tragedy later in the play. Despite the tremendous acting, all of the actors did have naturally American accents, and, although the Irish accents were well performed considering this, there were some unavoidable moments in which the actors slid back into American accents briefly, and it was slightly obvious that the Irish accent was not their native accent. This did not impede on the acting, though, and, at times, the accents sounded highly natural. This shifted from moment to moment, but was not distracting.

This newly written musical has the quality of famous classics, and greatly deserves to be performed more than this one time at Brandeis. It has the depth and musical beauty to pave the way for other productions of itself, and to wider audiences. The cast, set, musicality and script were a marvel and a privilege to attend.