



Talkin' Broadway's ***Broadway Reviews***

Long Day's Journey Into Night

Theatre Review by [Matthew Murray](#)
- May 6, 2003

Long Day's Journey Into Night by Eugene O'Neill. Directed by Robert Falls. Set and Costume Design by Santo Loquasto. Lighting Design by Brian MacDevitt. Sound Design by Richard Woodbury. Cast: Vanessa Redgrave, Brian Dennehy, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Robert Sean Leonard. Also with Fiana Toibin.
Theatre: Plymouth Theatre, 236 West 45th Street

Running time: Approximately 4 hours including two 15 minute intermissions.

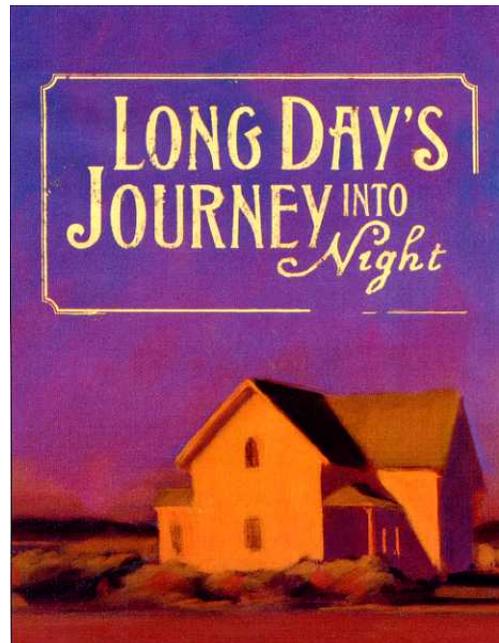
Audience: Children under the age of 4 are not permitted in the theatre.

Schedule: Tuesday through Friday at 7 PM, Saturday at 1 PM and 7 PM, Sunday at 3 PM

Ticket price: \$101.25, \$86.25, \$61.25. Premium Seating at \$151.25 per ticket is also available by calling the Telecharge Premium Desk at 212.239.6270.

Tickets: [Telecharge](#)

Student Rush: Student Rush tickets at \$26.25 are available at the Box Office only on the day of the performance. Limit two per valid Student ID. Student Rush Tickets Subject to Availability.



You know a play has succeeded at enrapturing its audience when, in its most climactic moments, a wave of heat sweeping from the stage controls not your breathing, but your very blood. In the entrancing moments of theatre at its richest, the hearts of a thousand audience members beat as one, uniting those onstage and those in the audience in a singular, memorable way. That sense, of a new life form being created from the stalled pulses and breaths of a thousand people in transported captivation, is one that occurs more than once during the searing revival of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the Plymouth Theatre.

Though nothing in this production can quite match the breathless final moments

of the show, in which the conflicted Mary Tyrone (Vanessa Redgrave) confronts the ghosts of her past in a morphine-fueled torpor, Redgrave achieves nearly as much success when she rounds on her youngest son, Edmund (Robert Sean Leonard), the act before. Watching her reduce Leonard's character from a vital adult to a frightened, ashamed toddler in the course of seconds is the observation of the type of keen, instantaneous metamorphosis that no art can achieve more successfully than the theatre. The decades of pain - at one son's failure, another's illness, her husband's unwillingness to give her the home she's long dreamed of - prove the most powerful weapons anyone can wield, and Ms. Redgrave does so, time and again, with fiery effectiveness.

Redgrave's performance is shattering, a glimmering deconstruction of addiction and compromise and the effects both have on those around her. Wasting away before your very eyes over the course of the single day the play follows, Redgrave destroys herself as much of Leonard's constitution must be built up. The symbiotic relationship between the two - she became addicted to morphine after Edmund's birth, and now his being stricken with tuberculosis threatens to separate them yet again - is so cleanly delineated and enacted by the expert performers, it's no surprise that the finest scenes each has is with the other. The give and take between the two is remarkable, almost as if they're creating a single performance.

Neither Brian Dennehy nor Philip Seymour Hoffman, as the senior and junior James Tyrones, mine quite the same revelatory performances from the text. Dennehy, in working overtime to plumb the depths of his vanished matinee idol character, remains nonetheless successful, if still paling in comparison to Redgrave and Leonard. With a barely noticeable (yet alcohol-soaked) brogue and patriarchal sense of obligation buried deep beneath his miserly tendencies, he's a father who still believes in his family and their ability to make it through even the darkest times. As a role model, he's perhaps subverted, and perhaps incapable of controlling all he should, but Dennehy frequently succeeds at holding together the world collapsing around him.

Dennehy's one missed opportunity is that he never truly connects with Hoffman, though no one else does either. Hoffman, only occasionally moving beyond his barely-subverted simmering to meet Redgrave and Leonard on their own level, rises to the challenge when faced with the more destructive aspects of Jamie's personality. Luckily, this works for him more than half the time, though his dry, disinterested portrayal dilutes the effects of the slowly uncovering relationship between him and Edmund the same way he covers up his own alcoholism (and avoids his father's watchful eye) by mixing water in the liquor bottles.

Reining in these performances while keeping O'Neill's words and meaning at the forefront is no easy task; the playwright himself described the work as "written in tears and blood," and as a mostly autobiographic chronicle of

O'Neill's own life, it's not hard to see why. The play is one where each character's knives (in the form of words) are being sharpened when not being leveled at, or skewered through, another family member.

Director Robert Falls tackles the problem of endless and occasionally repetitive dialogue through a muted, yet continuous, dramatic build, bringing the text down to earth while exalting it with unstated subtlety. (Santo Loquasto's soaring set, stretching infinitely to the heavens, and simple, second-hand-like costumes, as well as Brian MacDevitt's lighthouse-inspired lighting, also play into this.) Falls's solution is less radical than speedily overlapping dialogue or judicious cuts in the text (both of which have been attempted in other incarnations), but while Falls does not eschew a few excisions, the aching heart and fog-drenched bleakness of the play remain at the forefront.

The characters burn through that fog like the first rays of morning sunshine, though the gloom surrounding them won't stop coalescing and accumulating until the final, devastating conclusion. That's the one that stops the heart and lungs cold, though any control over such concerns you will have long since ceded over to the director and his actors. Earthly breath and blood are no match for the ethereally theatrical reality-altering substitutes Falls and his company provide in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, one of the most arresting - and necessary - four hours to ever pass in a single heartbeat.

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