

## Someone Who'll Watch Over Me



October 4, 2008

[Baron's Court](#)

29 September - 18 October ★★★★★

Between 1975 and 1990, a harrowing number of Western civilians were captured and held hostage in Lebanon. Given the state of the world, Frank McGuinness' play, which follows the imprisonment of three such men, makes for a timely revival. Thankfully, Oliver Baird's production doesn't preach or draw explicit connections to the present, instead leaving it to the audience to make the leap on its own and focusing on the rich, human drama.

Life can be cruel. One moment you're shopping, the next you're chained alongside two strangers in a nameless basement. You don't know why. You don't know for how long. But apparently it's your fault because you have the wrong accent.

Mirroring the warped logic of the situation, the Irish hostage holds his English opposite accountable for the entire catalogue of Anglo-Irish troubles and the American fantasises killing an Arab to justify the catch-all hatred he receives when people hear his accent. Faced with an impossible situation, the men do their best to make sense of chaos. They tell stories and act out films under the noses of their unseen captors. And when one of their number is executed, they use the same imaginations that set them free to imagine a proper burial for their friend.

The battleground, then, is the imagination. Culture is often a casualty of war, illustrated here in the hostages struggle to cling on to the memories and cultural signifiers that define them. The Irishman's eyes light up as he recites the names of Irish train stations. The Englishman clings to language, reciting Middle English poems and begging the other two to stop swearing. The American kicks back and sings "Amazing Grace" from start to finish. The observation is that war cheapens language, destroys landmarks and wipes out entire peoples.

Crucially, none of these men are soldiers. The overarching conflict is not discussed save for the observation that Noel Chomsky has "disappeared up his own arse". Given the difference between a faculty office at MIT and a windowless cell in Lebanon, you can see their point.

**The actors are uniformly excellent, each giving his character a rich inner life and tangible hopes and dreams.** Indeed they make the best of an uneven script that oscillates between incredible beauty and moments of episodic clunkiness. Sadly, McGuinness has a tendency to over-explain himself: having seen it enacted so well, we don't then need one of the trio to muse that if they don't stop arguing, they could end up killing each other before their captors have the chance.

My only gripes with Baird's production are the time it takes to find its stride and its apparent fear of onstage silence. But those are small complaints and ones that will no doubt be ironed out as the run continues. All in all, this is a well-played and timely hymn to resilience, co-operation and imagination.

-Russ Hope