



Deirdre's fortunes change in a New York minute

Last year Deirdre Kinahan lost funding for her theatre company Tall Tales but all was not lost. It was also the year she wrote her play *These Halcyon Days*. It was written for The Dublin Theatre Festival and was nominated for Best New Play at The Theatre Awards.

A nationwide tour is about to begin, but that's not all; the play recently had its New York premiere at The Irish Arts Centre where it will run until June 2. The reviews have been generally positive with comments such as... "Both actors are outstanding, as is the chemistry between them" (*Times Square Chronicles*). This is definitely a good news story for Kinahan and the cast.

Before taking off to New York, Deirdre took a break from working on her first feature film screenplay to chat to me in her garden and was thrilled at the prospect of taking her play to the Big Apple.

"If you don't take up that offer for New York immediately, the momentum falls away," she says. She knew she had to act fast but the problem was

that she no longer had a theatre company with which to tour this play.

Enter Anne Clarke's Landmark Productions, one of Ireland's leading theatre producers, which came on board. A touring grant from The Arts Council followed and Culture Ireland made the New York run happen. Happy days.

"You are seeing a road opening up and to follow through, I needed Landmark. We really need people like Anne Clarke because the independent theatre companies have dried up — 24 theatre companies have gone in four years," says Deirdre.

I saw *These Halcyon Days* during the Dublin Theatre Festival and it's easy to see why it has been garnering such attention. It's a bitter-sweet play with just two characters. Seán (Stephen Brennan) sits alone in a nursing-home conservatory, abandoned to his memories. Patricia (Anita Reeves) is a feisty woman, full of life, who underneath it all is fairly devastated to be there. There is heartbreak

but also moments of great humour.

"People are capable of humour in particularly stressful or distressing situations — laughter and tears are two sides of the one coin and I knew while writing it that there was an opportunity for two fabulous performances for senior actors."

Deirdre was part of the casting process and was thrilled that Reeves and Brennan signed up early in the writing process and were both very encouraging as she handed them early drafts of the play.



NYC here I come: Deirdre Kinahan

Brennan's character was inspired by Deirdre's uncle Seán and his journey through dementia. "Seán in his heyday was a joy to be around, charming and funny and what makes it sad is the disintegration of this character that you see on stage; he has given in to his fading," Deirdre says.

However, she recalls clearly when her uncle would re-emerge from the cocoon and she would get glimpses of his brilliance. "You know that there will be people sitting in the audience who are living this today, now."

Deirdre believes that there are all sorts of emotions around nursing homes and sometimes they are the best place for people when they can't be cared for adequately at home.

"I didn't want to pass a judgment on that; I wanted to show two people who are there under very different circumstances and for different reasons."

While the character of Seán has in some ways given up and is content to be in the nursing home, Patricia is a woman who has found herself with a physical disability that means that she can no longer live on her own and this is her living nightmare.

She is in denial and her journey through the play is accepting her plight and facing her fear.

These Halcyon Days is at the Olympia from June 12-15. See www.olympia.ie. Nationwide tour from June 17 — details from www.landmarkproductions.ie

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