

Ourselves Alone

Playwright: ANNE DEVLIN

Running Dates: March 5th- April 10th.
Fridays and Saturdays at 8pm
plus two Sundays, March 28th
and April 4th at 2:00pm


Theatre Address:

THE GARDNER STAGES

1501 N. Gardner Street,
Hollywood, CA 90046

Reservations: 310•583•2633

Tickets: \$15. Group rates available



Josie (Elise Robertson), Donna (Kathleen Dunn) and Freida (Laura Niemi) struggle to live and love amidst the political turmoil of 1980's Belfast in Anne Devlin's "Ourselves Alone"

OURSELVES ALONE

at the Gardner Stages



Reviewed by Terri Roberts

Irish dramas whose plotlines incorporate the violence in Northern Ireland tend to focus either on some specific aspect of the long-running Catholic/Protestant hostilities or on the men involved in them. But Anne Devlin's play, set in West Belfast in 1985, recasts those elements as a backdrop against which she examines the lives of three women caught up in the conflict for varying personal reasons. It is the inevitable result of the choices they must make that provides Devlin's script with its all-too-apt title.

Frieda (Laura Niemi) is the rebel of the trio, a wannabe singer who, much to the disgust of her controlling father, Malachy (Joseph Whipp), is associated with the Worker's Party. Malachy stands firmly on the side of the Republican movement and is supported in that stance by Frieda's sister, Josie (Elise Robertson, also credited with the scenic design), who is a courier between Republican commanders—one of whom is her married lover, Cathal (Kelly Boulware). The girls' sister-in-law, Donna (Kathleen Dunn), who has a child from an early forced marriage, is awaiting the return of Liam (Jack Mungovan), soon to be released from prison after serving a five year sentence.

The political aspects of the show are obviously critical and are fairly presented without bias, but they are not the heart of the story. Devlin is taking a look at how women survive in a culture of war—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—and the effect of such brutal circumstances on families. The fractured state of the country itself is reflected in the thorny family dynamics of Malachy, his children, and his daughter-in-law, and is further enhanced in this production by Danny Schurr's appropriately severe lighting and director Steve Friedland's dramatic environmental staging.

In Ireland's Catholic neighborhoods, British-built roadblocks shut down all but a single roadway; Catholics turned this to their advantage by barricading the path with old cars, construction materials, and whatever else was handy to protect themselves from British invasions. Friedland and Robertson expand on this defensive image by creating a basic barricade of crates and car pieces and barbed wire on the intimate Gardner stage, and then adding or removing couches, tables, and other set pieces as needed during set changes.

The barricades also serve as a physical metaphor for the guarded hearts of Frieda, Josie, and Donna. Love is not a gentle thing in Devlin's play, and following its path under such dangerous circumstances can lead to harsh consequences.

Strong performances and effective staging are further underscored here by Adam Donshik's original Irish tunes and the recurring use of onstage musicians (Jake Alston, David Lane, and Mungovan) to enliven certain scenes, shift focus during transitions, and support a potent, and poignant, ending.