



April 4, 2006

The Force of Change

(McCadden Place Theater; 50 seats; \$20 top)

A Closet Space Theater presentation of a play in two acts by Gary Mitchell. Directed by John Swanbeck.

Bill - Barry Lynch
Caroline - Peggy Goss
Mark - John Montana
David - Kevin Kearns
Stanley - Rick Crawford
Rabbit - Brandan Halpin

By TERRY MORGAN

Closet Space Theater's U.S. premiere of Gary Mitchell's "The Force of Change" is a potent and compelling production of a thought-provoking play. It gains even more relevance upon learning the playwright and his family were forced into hiding due to threats issued by the Ulster Defense Assn., the play's subject. While the first act is a bit dry and there's at least one speech too many in the second, its overall dramatic impact is undeniable. Director John Swanbeck keeps the tension at a slow simmer that eventually boils over, brought to visceral life by a terrific cast.

The life of a Belfast cop in Northern Ireland is currently a confusing and frustrating one for ambitious Caroline (Peggy Goss). She needs to get a confession out of maddeningly silent UDA thug Stanley (Rick Crawford) before they have to release him, and her interrogation partner, Bill (Barry Lynch), is no help at all.

Two other officers, Mark (John Montana) and David (Kevin Kearns), are questioning the far more voluble Rabbit (Brandan Halpin) to try and pin something on the more important target, Stanley.

Things become dire, however, when a compromised cop gives out information that endangers the lives of Caroline and her family.

Goss gives a spirited and nuanced as Caroline, a combination of tough humor and

bitter anger. She brings to life this strong woman working in a male-dominated profession, dealing not only with institutionalized sexism but the daily threat of terrorist violence.

Lynch glowers effectively as the pugnacious Bill, and a speech wherein he describes how the peace process is really just one corrupt group negotiating power from another is a bravura piece of acting.

Kearns is excellent as David, and his ardent defense of the police and his rage at the UDA combine into a formidable one-two punch of a perf. And Montana is quietly first-rate as the anguished Mark, who is trying to do the right thing against increasingly overwhelming odds.

Crawford makes the most of a largely wordless part, his expressions showing Stanley's contempt for the proceedings, and Halpin is amusing as the overmatched Rabbit, although his Irish accent comes and goes.

Russ Borski's slate-grey police interrogation room set is composed of monolithic walls, successfully evoking a sense of imprisonment for both the criminals and the police, not to mention the symbolic resonance of a country imprisoned in a violent cycle of endless retribution.

Sets and lighting, Russ Borski; costumes, Karen Murk; production stage manager, Becky Harrison. Opened, reviewed April 1, 2006; runs through May 7. Running time: 2 HOURS, 5 MIN.