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"Made in China" is no cheap knock off

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Rex Ryan, Neill Fleming and Edwin Mullane in *Made In China*
Orla Kischen

Made In China by Mark O'Rowe produced by The Corps Ensemble

Rating: ★★★★★

As Hughie tries to come to terms with his mother's failing health and his own personal choices, Paddy, an inept criminal wannabe trapped in a wet anorak and a weak disposition, calls around so they can watch some Kung Fu movies together. But Hughie has a prior commitment, one he can't say no to, one which the psychopathic Kilby insists he attend. In Hughie's absence Paddy and Kilby strike up their own relationship as the gullible Paddy falls under Kilby's influence. When a one legged fortune teller and her lover instigate a series of strange events, things begin to spiral out of control culminating in a life and death face-off, where death might be the preferable option as truths and secrets emerge and something long forgotten rises to the surface.

In Mark O'Rowe's excellent '[Made in China](#),' first produced in 2001, a self-proclaimed martial arts

expert, a one of a kind jacket and an appointment to break someone's legs all hold their secrets. As in O'Rowe's multiple award winning 'Howie The Rookie,' masculinity is centre stage and is all the rage, and it is raging violently, wreaking havoc on the lives of three male criminals with their twisted codes of honour, respect and loyalty. Imbued with O'Rowe's viscerally vivid language, 'Made in China' marries linguistic and imaginative ingenuity to hilarious and horrifying effect. In this, their inaugural production as Company in Residence at the Viking Theatre, The Corps Ensemble's take up the challenge of bringing this modern classic to life, acquitting themselves admirably, for the most part, and delivering some powerful performances in the process.

If 'Made in China' still packs a powerful punch, references to pagers, Chuck Norris and Bruce Lee movies give it a dated feel in places, and what might have been shocking pre 'Love/Hate' appears, unfairly, to be going over old ground here, for it was O'Rowe who went over the ground in the first place. Director Jed Murray deftly ignores all this, refusing to bind the action to a specific era or over emphasise the graphic nature of the script. Rather, he cleverly keeps focus on both characters and on the play's deeply evocative language and the production is all the better for it, although pace does slacken in one or two places. Katie Davenport's set design, while having some delightful touches such as the hanging chair and water running down glass, struggled to come to terms with the Viking's unique requirements and felt cramped and claustrophobic. Sightlines also suffered in some significant places, particularly the final scene. As a result, fight direction by Ciaran O'Grady struggled with both pace and space, feeling like a fight in a narrow corridor, being convincing if not necessarily compelling.

Where this production truly excels is in the calibre of its excellent cast who deliver three stunning performances. Edwin Mullane as pretty boy Hughie is utterly engaging, capturing Hughie's sense of menace and conscience. Rex Ryan as the lost soul Paddy is riveting throughout, delivering a wonderfully nuanced performance. Neill Fleming as the martial arts psycho Kilby is outstanding, exuding a wonderful sense of understated danger just ready to explode. Together all three craft a powerful night of theatre, one that crackles and bristles with a palpable energy.

This production marks something of a watershed for both The Corps Ensemble and The Viking Theatre. It was a brave decision by The Viking Theatre to bring in a young, energetic and fearless company as their inaugural company in residence, one whose work and spirit of discovery may not necessarily appeal to patrons who don't share their passion for pulling no punches. But surely theatre has room for all kinds of works and all kinds of patrons. The Viking Theatre certainly has. And on the evidence of The Corps Ensemble's 'Made in China' the future is certainly promising, exciting and looking much richer for all patrons, both old and new.

Made in China by Mark O'Rowe produced by The Corps Ensemble runs at The Viking Theatre, The Sheds, Clontarf until Saturday, February 20th

Show begins 8.00 p.m. Tickets €12.00

For more information, visit [The Viking Theatre](#)



Chris O'Rourke
Theatre Examiner

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