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# Dublin Theatre Festival 2013 - An anti epic to an American Everyman

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Neutral Hero  
New York City Players

## Neutral Hero by Richard Maxwell

Rating: ★★★★★

Writer and director Richard Maxwell's, *Neutral Hero*, is an epic tale set in an epic landscape, exploring epic themes from epic poetry while borrowing heavily from Epic theatre. The result: a neutral stage with neutral performances in a deliberate attempt to avoid entertaining, manipulation and overt communication. If not to everyone's taste, *Neutral Hero* is a brave experiment that questions the idea of the epic and one of the best examples of post dramatic, meta-theatre in recent times.

Set in an unnamed, small town in the American Midwest, an unnamed hero sets off on a quest to find his father. Along the way he meets some dangerous people, falls for a beautiful woman and sleeps with another before the happy, unhappy family are reunited and an ordered disorder is

restored. In the tradition of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the hero may be drawn from myth, but he is an everyman bound by the everyday. Yet is this the mythic in the mundane? Is this a romanticized projection of myth onto the mundane? Or is it just mundane? The choice is the viewers as Richard Maxwell strips away any attempts to evoke a given response, aspiring instead to a notion of neutrality.

Played by a cast of twelve on a minimalist set comprised of twelve chairs, an array of musical instruments and a pair of masks, Maxwell's actors, members of the New York City Players, never lose themselves to character but always remain present. Delivery is flat, deadpan, punctuated by long pauses in an effort to curtail any attempt at emotional immersion. Even the musical interludes create a sense of detachment, allowing the audience to be always present, always aware of the theatricality on display and free to make their own judgment.

Yet *Neutral Hero's* creative palette is not always as neutral as it would suggest. Our freedom to interpret is tempered, and therefore manipulated, by the boundaries within which *Neutral Hero* is contained. Its pared back text, movements and music are already preloaded with cultural associations, values and meanings undermining its own neutrality. *Neutral Hero's* real strength lies in Maxwell's excellent script. The meticulous descriptions of the town and of the trip to the cinema conveyed a true sense of the epic in the mundane in language that felt fresh and new. Language elevated these details into a verbal landscape rich in suggestion on its own terms.

By Maxwell's own admission *Neutral* theatre is an impossibility. What is being attempted is an approximation at neutrality. The post show discussion illuminated the difficulties this poses for Maxwell and the audience, with words like boring and banal being set against praise like moving and touching. What is clear is that Maxwell isn't afraid to experiment and *Neutral Hero* comes nearest to achieving neutrality through the directness and simplicity of its language.

For those who like their theatre rich in drama and emotion, *Neutral Hero* is apt to leave you with something akin to Post Dramatic Stress Syndrome. For those who like their theatre to explore and experiment with form as well as content, *Neutral Hero* is likely to be a much more rewarding experience, even if it doesn't always live up to its own aspirations. For those in the middle, *Neutral Hero* is a brave, intelligent experiment that communicates without attempting to communicate, manipulates while trying not to manipulate and is an experience of and in itself that repays investment with much food for thought.

*Neutral Hero* runs at The [Project Arts Centre](#) until October 12th.

Doors open 7.30 p.m. Matinee: Saturday, October 12th at 2.30 p.m.

Tickets €25.00 - €30.00

For further information please see the following link <http://projectartscentre.ie/event/neutral-hero/>



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