THE NIGHT ALIVE. LYRIC THEATRE, BELFAST

The Night Alive, written and directed by Conor McPherson, is a one act, one set play, with no interval, lasting one hour and forty five minutes. It stars Adrian Dunbar as Tommy, Frank Grimes as Uncle Maurice, Laurence Kinlan as Doc, Kate Stanley Brennan as Aimee, and Ian Loyde Anderson as Kenneth.

All activity takes place in a messy Dublin bedsit that Tommy rents from his Uncle Maurice who lives upstairs.

On the left of the stage there is a bike at the bottom of a staircase leading to Maurice’s flat above, and a front door to the left of the stairs in a dark hallway.

Centre stage there is a dirty patterned mat, on which sits a four legged, square pine table with a drawer, around which much of the play unfolds. There are two seats at the table, one a round seated stool, and an antique straight backed chair draped with Tommy’s blue jacket. There are unwashed cups and a bottle on the table. Empty pizza boxes litter the floor near the table, along with two black bin bags of rubbish, tied at the neck. The room interior is grimy and strewn with litter of all types.

In the background is an entrance, referred to as “a window”, but which looks like a patio door opening onto a balcony leading to Maurice’s vegetable garden below. The door has a broken pane of glass in the upper section, held together, and fixed in the frame by tape. A dirty net curtain is draped from the ceiling to the floor against the glass patio to one side. In front of this net is a coat stand draped with jackets. Beside this is a small lamp with a shade, and to the left is a small cubicle that has been built to house a loo. The outer wall of it has a hand basin with a mirror where Tommy brushes his teeth and shaves. A shelf spills over with toothbrushes, deodorants and items for personal hygiene. A poster for Finland is stuck to the loo door. The top of the loo has a flat roof piled high with boxes and items that obscure a stained glass window.

To the right of the stage and the patio door, is a wall with another poster of Finland, above which is a meter box, reached by a set of short ladders. There is a curtained window above a rudimentary set of kitchen units, with a built in sink. The work surface is entirely littered with dishes and bottles. A table set at an L shape to the units provides another small work surface overflowing with items, the most visible being a massive box of Bonio dog biscuits.

There are two beds, one at each side of the bedsit. On the left is a camp bed with a Candlewick cover, with a pile of old newspapers at the foot it, while at the head is a pile of old paperback books. On the right is a wooden single bed with a blue and white geometrical design cover. Both the beds have dirty clothing dumped on, and spilling around them, while underneath are trainers, suitcases, boxes, holdalls, bottles, and food containers.

Uncle Maurice, played by Frank Grimes, is an elderly man, medium height, slightly podgy, with a shock of white hair and a neatly shaven beard and moustache. He uses a plain wooden walking cane in his right hand which he uses to indicate his annoyance and to point. He is neatly dressed in a woollen zipped cardigan, with a design and two pockets where he sometimes keeps his newspaper and later a bottle of whiskey. He has flannels and clean shirt without a tie. He wears leather shoes and sometimes slippers with stripped pyjamas. He looks very dapper when he dresses up in a double breasted jacket, flannels and a red tie when he visits his solicitor.

Tommy, played by Adrian Dunbar, is tall and handsomely rugged with a slight paunch. He is about 40 and has fair hair that flops over one eye, and a balding patch at the crown. He is clean shaven. He mostly wears jeans, frayed at the bottom, loafers on his feet, and a T shirt with the words Jimi Hendrix on the front. He shaves before a mirror wearing saggy Y-fronts, and long black socks. The right sock is always hanging down. The only time Tommy dresses formally in a navy suit, white shirt and tie is towards the end of the play. His other clothing includes a blue bomber jacket with chevron designs on the sleeves, a black leather motor cycle jacket and zipper boots. He has two motorcycle helmets, one an old fashioned Biggles type one, and a more modern one.

Aimee, played by Kate Stanley Brennan, is tall, slim, and pretty with high cheekbones and shoulder length dark hair that is in a top knot when she first arrives at Tommy’s flat. Her round necked jumper has lace trim and is blood soaked when we first meet her. She has tight leggings and white trainers. She stays at Tommy’s flat and later appears there with her hair tied up in a towel and wearing only a blue T Shirt that shows her shapely long legs and painted toe and finger nails. She wears a ring on the third finger of her right hand. All her belongings are in a large black shoulder bag which she stashes under the camp bed for the duration of her stay at Tommy’s. She looks very attractive in bedtime array wearing stripy pyjamas and a black tight vest top. Tommy buys her a lovely grey boxy type coat that she often wears. She has a variety of fleeces to keep her warm.

Doc, played by Laurence Kinlan, is Tommy’s best friend and work mate. He’s a simple sort of bloke, aged about 34. He is small and a little overweight, with a round innocent boyish face and a turned up nose. His dark hair is medium length and he has a permanent “five o’clock” shadow on chin and upper lip. He wears a purple V-necked jumper with a black T shirt and grubby, light coloured loose track suit bottoms, with a pocket on the back. His footwear is black trainers, and when working with Tommy he wears a navy long sleeved boiler suit, zipped at the front.

Kenneth, played by Ian Lloyd Anderson, is introduced as Aimee’s boyfriend. He is never named in the play and throughout the audio description is referred to as ‘the man’. He is tall, slim and quite handsome with reddish short cut hair and a trimmed red beard and a moustache. He is sharply dressed in an off-white suit that has strange brown marks on the jacket at the back of the shoulders and the bum. He wears a shirt and matching trousers and brown loafers.

The music score, meticulously planned by Conor McPherson and Sound Designer Gregory Clarke, enhances the action of the play and the twists and turns of the plot are both funny, challenging, and at times shocking.