

**AISLE SAY San Francisco****THE SEAFARER****By Conor McPherson****Directed by Kimberly Mohne Hill****Presented by San Jose Stage Company****At The Stage****490 S. First St., San Jose, CA / (408) 283-7142****Reviewed by Judy Richter**

It's the day of Christmas Eve in a small Irish town. The setting is an unkempt home after a night of drinking by its residents and a friend. Much more drinking and perhaps a transformation or redemption lie ahead in **Conor McPherson's "The Seafarer,"** presented by **San Jose Stage Company.** The home is occupied by the heavy drinking, demanding and sometimes disgusting Richard Harkin (**Julian López-Morillas**). Blinded by an accident when he was drunk (he's rarely sober), he has recently been joined by his brother, "Sharky" (**Randall King**), who has lost yet another job and is trying to stop drinking. Their guest is Ivan Curry (**Colin Thomson**), who stayed overnight because he was too drunk to go home. Later in the day, they're joined by another townsman, Nicky Giblin (**Donald G. Emmerich**), who brings with him a stranger he met while bar-hopping.

This stranger, Mr. Lockhart (**Kevin Blackton**), is much better dressed and better spoken than the other men. He joins them in a night of poker and drinking that has far higher stakes than anyone except Sharky knows. Mr. Lockhart has come to claim Sharky's soul in return for a major favor done some 20 years ago.

Although the poker becomes a focal point, the more interesting aspect is the emotional path that Sharky must follow, along with insights into Richard's and Mr. Lockhart's characters. The demanding, cantankerous Richard nevertheless has a cheerful streak that makes him more and more likable. He also begins to allow his neediness to show through, thus giving Sharky a chance to overcome some of his own self-loathing. Finally, even Mr. Lockhart, who's the devil in human disguise, must accept a dose of humility, thanks to what might be seen as an accident of fate or the intervention of a higher power.

**Kimberly Mohne Hill** directs the well-balanced cast in this fascinating play. López-Morillas, who also played Richard in **Marin Theatre Company's** production a year ago, is terrific. The most memorable portion of the two-act play is Blackton's delivery of Mr. Lockhart's eloquent description of hell. In the process, Mr. Lockhart reveals his own agonies of being in that hell.

**Michael Palumbo** has designed the set, which works quite well in San Jose Stage's intimate setting. The lighting is by **Michael Walsh** with costumes by **Jean Cardinale.** The sound by **Rich Miller** is notable for its Irish music and its eerie wind.

"The Seafarer" doesn't fit the usual description of the light-hearted fare served by most theater companies during the holidays, yet its ultimate message of hope and caring is appropriate.