

Thoughtfulness, meaning found in 'Translations'

Stanford Summer Theater has mounted an exciting production this month of Irish writer Brian Friel's magical play "Translations." If you're a fan of thoughtful and well-produced drama, don't miss this one.



**JOHN
ANGELL
GRANT**

THEATER REVIEWER

Set in a small Irish village in 1833, "Translations" looks at differences between indigenous Irish culture and the encroaching dominance of British imperialism. Much of the conflict plays out in a battle over language.

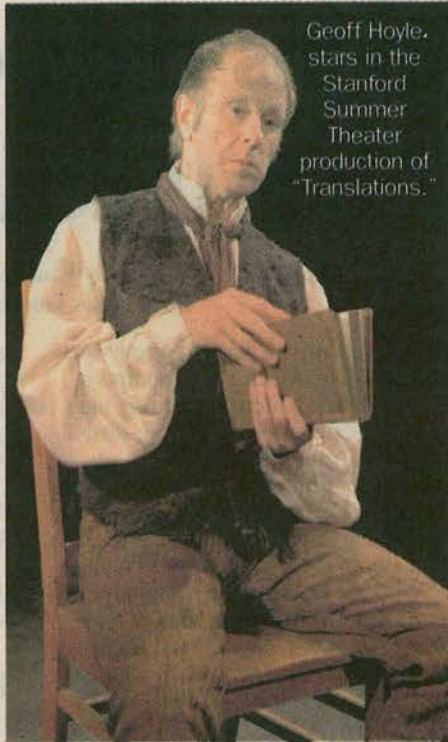
Renowned Bay Area actor Geoff Hoyle, the former rubber-legged clown of Pickle Family Circus fame, anchors this unusual show in a relatively subdued and realistic performance as a feisty, irresponsible and pompously charming over-the-hill alcoholic schoolteacher.

Into his village come two British Army surveyors to map and rename the country's geographical landmarks. The surveyors are essentially advance troops in an ongoing intelligence war.

The locals view the surveyors with skepticism. The village's strong and beautiful young women are restless.

Language comes alive in Friel's play like a paranormal force. The playwright offers many examples of the power of language.

In one story strand, a young autistic



Geoff Hoyle stars in the Stanford Summer Theater production of "Translations."

Photo by Katie Pfeiffer

woman (Roselyn Hallett) struggles to speak her name and other simple pieces of information. Occasionally she is unexpectedly successful, creating charged moments of emotional surprise in the world around her.

Elsewhere, a middle-aged tramp with a happy heart (played wonderfully by Troy Johnson) attends the local hedge school where he revels in a passionate connection to Homer and Virgil. The gods and heroes of epic antiquity come alive as real personae in his life.

Most striking, in "Translations" some characters "speak" Irish and some English. Though the actors onstage are all speaking English, their characters struggle and some-

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times fail to understand each other's language. It's a complex and repeatedly rewarding story.

Stepping back from the centuries-old conflict between the Irish and the English, "Translations" asks larger questions: How can a small village enter the modern world without losing its identity? What is the relationship between local tradition and cultural imperialism?

If "Translations" has a limitation, it's a first half weighed down by ambitious ideas. The play's emotional second half quickly shakes off that limitation.

Director Ed Sylvanus Iskander's smooth

At a glance

What: "Translations"
When: Through July 27
Where: Pigott Theater,
Memorial Hall, 551
Serra Mall, Stanford
Tickets: \$10-\$20

production contains many nice touches. Opening the show, a pair of hand-palm shadows press up against a white backlit scrim. The scrim falls to the ground and

becomes merely a bed sheet wound into a laundry basket by the autistic woman whose hands were pressed against it.

All the actors do a good job. Asher Arnold and Will Brill make strong contrasting contributions as a young local schoolteacher and his prodigal brother returned home from the big city and now working as a translator for the British Army cartographer.

Will Lindemann and Maggie Mason offer a charming romantic illustration of the possibilities for love between two young people who don't speak a common language.

The design work is excellent. Scenic artist Fred Kinney's starlit night sky transforms quickly into a field bivouac tent when a large frame of wooden slats tips forward from upstage. Lighting designer Andrew J. Hungerford smoothly shifts our experience from outdoors to indoors.

"Translations" reminds us that language is an artful human creation. In this play, what's not translated also proves a gateway into a world of magic. This show is a real cultural treat. Don't miss it.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

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