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XX **HOME THEATER - DECEMBER 3, 2003**

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## All of the hype aside, 'Philadelphia' is one fine play

'By TOM HELMA

With all the understandable pre-production hype noting that this would be the final Lansing performance of local theater icon John Peakes — in a play directed by the incomparable Judith Peakes; starring John's son, Ian Merrill Peakes, and Jim Wisniewski as the two faces of the central character; and featuring Karen Peakes as well — a key aspect of BoarsHead Theater's "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" almost got overlooked. This is a damned fine play.

Irish playwright Brian Friel has put together a coming-of-age story that portrays intimate emotional conflicts that are at the heart of any young adult's leavings, of all that is familiar as he or she faces the excitement and anonymity of moving out of the family nest and on to an entirely new world. Using the device of a private and a public persona for central character Gareth O'Donnell, Friel provides rich dialogue and deeply conflicting feelings for Wisniewski as the public O' Donnell and Peakes (Ian) as the private O'Donnell.

Is there a second time in our lives when we face, once again this same



Ian Peakes (from left), Jim Wisniewski and John Peakes give fine performances in "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" at BoarsHead.

### 'Philadelphia, Here I Come!'

BoarsHead Theater production continues through Dec. 21. Shows are at 7 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets - \$8-\$29 - are available at 484-7805. The theater is at 425 S. Grand Ave. in

uncertainty and ambiguity of emotions? You bet. It's at retirement, when we uproot ourselves one last time, leaving a public path wherein we may likely have experienced, as John Peakes has, a generation of accolades, and we begin to explore a

downtown Lansing.

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potential "second life" in an entirely new locale. This parallel intensifies the experience of watching the play and in no way detracts from the coming-of-age theme of the core story.

Peakes the elder (John) has a most challenging role as the patriarch S. B. O'Donnell, a man of few words and concrete emotional limitations. The elder Peakes does a fine job portraying this character mostly by smacking his lips, sucking his teeth and staring off into space for pregnant moments while his character struggles and fails to put into meaningful words the impending deep sense of the loss of his son.

BoarsHead veteran character actor Carmen Decker has a fine and significant role as Madge and adds a depth and humor to the play that holds everything together.

In a lesser featured role, another BoarsHead veteran, Buck Schirner, brings a tender nuance to his character Canon Mick O'Byrne. In the end, however, this is Gareth's story. Wisniewski and Ian Peakes shine oh-so-bright in this shared starring role.

Surrounding this rich ambrosia of fine acting and well-written words is Kirk Domer's multi-hued set of browns and golds, a simple shanty Irish cottage that speaks words in and of itself.

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