

British Theatre Guide

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Roaches

Eavann Mallon

Sanctuary Theatre, Belfast

30–31 May 2025

Eavann Mallon's *Roaches* at Belfast's Sanctuary Theatre finds three women in their mid-twenties navigating the fallout of a failed Friday night and unexpectedly confronting what lies ahead for them.

Laced with peak-era Madonna chart hits—the set-piece staging of *Like a Prayer* a comic highlight of the evening—*Roaches* is the latest offering from a new wave of writers exploring the female experience of living in a narrow-minded society stubbornly marked and marred by hidebound masculinity.

Born four days after the Good Friday Agreement was signed, Mallon is part of a generation for whom the Troubles are learned history rather than experienced memory. Spared the trauma endured by their parents, they even so face challenges of their own. The retro soundtrack notwithstanding, *Roaches* is squarely about the here-and-now rather than the past.

Retreating to a claustrophobic bedroom after a disastrous night out, her three protagonists lick their wounds and re-open others as secrets and truths are confronted. While hampered in places by overwritten lines and Mallon not yet seeming fully comfortable with long-form work, its verve, its heart and its shading of humour and drama mark her out as a writer of interest.

The raised stage and faux proscenium arch of the Sanctuary Theatre (a former Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church) is not the most conducive space for a piece that relies so much on intimacy. Also in evidence is the clearly slender resources of the uncredited producing company.

With a playing time of 60 minutes, it feels rather wordy, especially in the confessional monologues of the trio of friends. Too much is told, not enough shown. When it works—in fizzy, feisty exchanges between the sisters-in-arms and the ratcheting up of poignant drama in the latter half—Mallon reveals a keen feel for situation and an alert ear for character.

She is less secure on stage as Reece, whose imbibed religious guilt about coming out and declaring her love for Niamh McAuley's Emma is rendered somewhat awkwardly, albeit in a performance that grows in confidence and sureness.

McAuley's understated Emma, the level-headed glue holding the trio together, nurses her own secret, the revelation of which turns the night upside down.

Live-wire Juniper, as emotionally knotted as the congealed blood on her lip from an earlier fracas, is played with winning gusto by Annie McIlwaine.

Hannah Reilly's front-on direction shows signs of inventiveness but never quite accommodates the space nor bites on the promise in Mallon's script, too often leaving actors as statuesque onlookers.

Roaches will next be seen at Belfast's [Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich](#) as part of the city's Féile an Phobail on August 8.

Reviewer: [Michael Quinn](#)