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## Theater review | At New City Theater, a director well-suited to Beckett

By Tom Keogh  
Special to The Seattle Times

### Theater Review |

When all the lights go off inside Capitol Hill's Shoebox theater, you really know you're in the dark.

Sitting in an inky void for what seems an eternity before the start of two Samuel Beckett one-act plays — "Rockaby" and "Footfalls" — your pupils open as wide as a back door onto the night sky.

Suddenly, a spotlight falls on what appears to be the disembodied head of an old woman. The image shocks and mystifies before the eyes can adjust: the chalky head is actually sitting atop a woman in black, who is seated, seemingly on the brink of death, in a rocking chair.

Though the picture gets clearer, it is no less comforting. We are indeed in Beckett territory, where the end of life for the Irish playwright's isolated characters is a timeless patchwork of conflated memories, and every opposite — birth/death, to/fro — comes together in actual, emotional and spiritual completeness.

Yet this unsettling, if deeply humanist, New City Theater production is also the artistic province of its director, Janice Findley. Best known as an inspired filmmaker, the Seattle-based Findley's much-honored works are subconsciously stirring pieces, between waking life and dreams.

In both short plays, Findley proves an ideal interpreter of Beckett's ghostly dramas, in which memories course to an end or are trapped in endless replay. Each piece features accomplished Seattle actress and New City co-founder Mary Ewald, first as the rocking-chair senior mingling her last recollections and perceptions



Jyh-Lurn Chang

Mary Ewald in Rockaby.



in "Rockaby"; then in "Footfalls" as a spookily tattered woman endlessly pacing a short-length of stage while in a dialogue with her dead mother (Leticia Jaramillo, heard but not seen).

"Rockaby" and "Footfalls" were originally written for British actress Billie Whitelaw, who described the latter as "a whole different art form. I felt we were working with smoke, or weaving a sweater out of cobwebs."

That's precisely how Findley and a couple of her longtime film collaborators — costumer Kooch and producer-composer (and Findley's husband) Paul Hansen — plus lighting designer Lindsay Smith and production designer Timothy Siciliano go at this project: as a visionary if almost unclassifiable work of a writer's and director's complementary sensibilities.

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Mary Ewald in Footfalls.

**Now playing**  
**"Rockaby" and "Footfalls"**

By Samuel Beckett, plays Fridays and Saturdays through March 14 at New City Theater in the Shoebox, 1404 18th Ave., Seattle; \$15 (800-838-3006 or [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com), or cash at the door).