

## 'Ripcord' a Rip-roaring Laugh Riot at The Public Theatre

By David A. Sargent

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LEWISTON -- They were rolling in the aisle ... or close to it ... in delight at the hilarious on-stage antics seen at Friday's opening night performance of "Ripcord" at The Public Theatre.

It's the New England premiere of the newest play by acclaimed playwright David Lindsay-Abaire. Under the direction of Christopher Schario, TPT's executive/artistic director, this show is a rip-roaring tour-de-force of one-upmanship. All-out war erupts between two mismatched roommates at a senior living facility. Incessantly crabby Abby and her infuriatingly chipper new roommate, Marilyn, are battling each other for occupancy of the most desirable room in their retirement home.

With battle lines drawn, the two women make a bet with each other with winner to get the living situation of their choice. One claims she is never scared; the other says she never gets angry. The stunts they pull in the dead-serious competition soon escalate to a level that could have tragic consequences. If there is one characteristic they share, it is stubbornness.

It's no-holds-barred as Abby and Marilyn spar for the upper hand, all to the constant dismay of Scotty, an aide at the home who regularly delivers meds along with pleas to tone things down.

Abby is played by Cecilia Riddett, who appeared as Aiofe in TPT's production of "Outside Mullingar" three years ago. Maura O'Brien portrays Marilyn. She was seen about eight years ago in TPT's "Last Mass at St. Casimir's" and "Secrets of a Soccer Mom." Both ladies are excellent in the demanding and totally different roles. Michael Anthony, as Scotty, is also very good in a role that calls for sincere concern for his charges. He was seen in TPT productions of "The Sunshine Boys" and "Moonlight and Magnolias."

Turning in equally-able performances are Torsten Hillhouse, Heather Dilly and Rob Cameron. They portray the younger generation of the battling roommates. They also double as other characters including a zombie, a masked man, a clown and a spooky woman in white.

The efforts of the fine cast are backed up by TPT's talented backstage crew. Their contributions include a remarkable transformation of the sunny retirement home quarters to a macabre Halloween spook house, an airplane offering sky-diving, and the wild, blue yonder.

Handling those critical staging duties are Amber Callahan, set designer; Jim Alexander, lighting designer; Michelle Handley, costume designer; and Lisa Bragdon stage manager.

"Ripcord" is the kind of TPT comedy that is especially popular with L-A area audiences. This one is likely to win standing ovations with every performance.

Schario said this show "is a celebration of strong older women and it reminds us to connect with the people in our lives." He said watching each woman get pushed beyond her comfort zone and bouncing back even stronger is a valuable reminder that we're never too old to keep growing and learning new things about ourselves.

"Ripcord" playwright David Lindsey-Abaire is the Pulitzer prize winning author of "Rabbit Hole." He wrote two other plays that had very popular TPT productions in recent year. Those shows are "Fuddy Meers (2001-2002)" and "Good People (2013-2014)."

The Public Theatre's annual silent auction is being held in the lobby during the run of the production of "Ripcord." The Wine-Down Thursday performance features a free pre-show wine tasting.