

## **BWW Review: An Everyman's Journey: MIDDLETOWN at The Public**

by Carla Maria Verdino-Süllwold  
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The Public Theatre's production of Dan Clancy's *MIDDLETOWN* proves a clever way to maneuver the company back into production after the pandemic pause. The four-character comedy-drama, designed to be performed without scenery or costumes by actors who read from scripts at podiums, requires a minimalist production and asks the audience to concentrate only on the characters' journey from kindergarten to old age. That story, as directed by Janet Mitchko, is sweetly funny and warmly heartfelt.

The play traces the interconnected lives of four friends living in the appropriately named suburb of Middletown, New Jersey, from their school days to their lifelong friendship that encompasses, marriage, children, loss and loving support. The events that constitute these very ordinary lives are so easily recognizable as to be banal - until the reassuring rhythm of the ordinary begins to change halfway through the play. Tragedy strikes in the form of September 11 and terminal illnesses, while conflicts like accepting a son's sexual orientation and marital infidelity jar the steady paths of the two couple's existences. Throughout it all the friendship endures and the message of our common humanity is celebrated.

Joyce Cohen and Craig Bockhorn as Peg and Tom exude an easy warmth and caring while Allison Briner Dardenne and Douglas Rees as Dot and Don provide a gentle contrast as the quirkiest couple. Despite their being restrained behind podiums, their excellent timing as an ensemble and their natural delivery of the script keeps the audience totally engaged.

The costumes by Debra Susi are simple and appropriately contrasting, providing dashes of color for the women and neutral sports jackets for the men. Michael Reidy's lighting is warm and subtle, sound by John Morrison is well balanced. Amber Callahan provides the spare décor.

As theatre slowly returns to Maine, we can be happy to welcome back Lewiston's Public Theater to the roster of 2021-2022 live productions. And *MIDDLETOWN* with its message about the importance of connections and friendship is the perfect tool for healing.

*MIDDLETOWN* runs from October 15-24, 2021, at The Public Theater, 31 Maple St., Lewiston  
[www.thepublictheatre.org](http://www.thepublictheatre.org) 207-782-3200