

## Lewiston Public Theatre Opens Season with World Premiere of PAINT NIGHT

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**Carey Crim's play explores the angst of contemporary women.**

The Public Theatre in Lewiston opens its 2023-24 season with the world premiere of Carey Crim's latest work, PAINT NIGHT, a heartfelt exploration of the complexities and conflicts that confront mothers and daughters in our contemporary world. The six-character play, directed by Janet Mitchko, strikes some familiar chords and appears to resonate with the theatre's audience.



*From left to right – Jessica DiGiovanni as Bree, Jeri Marshall as Gwen, Jane Abernethy as Vera, Susan Craves as Fern, Kate Udall as Miriam, and Jessica Mosher as Lolly*

Crim sets her work in an art studio where five intergenerational women have gathered to celebrate the forthcoming marriage of one of their group in an evening devoted to “creativity with a cocktail.” As the wine and martinis flow and the women paint under the tutelage of the studio's owner, they begin to express themselves not only on the canvasses but in the confessional revelations they share.

Crim's strength is naturalistic dialogue, quiet humor, and creating a sense of identification between audience and actors. Her best writing emerges in the second act when the simmering resentments, secrets, and conflicts erupt into some cathartic conversations.

Mitchko directs efficiently, though the construct of the setting limits what action she can conjure up in the staging. Kit Mayer provides the attractive, brick-walled, utilitarian décor, while Betty Faul-Welfare designs the naturalistic interior lighting. Anne Collins costumes the women in quirky, individualistic attire that is both colorful and characterful. Adam Blais serves as the capable stage manager.

The casting is completely convincing. Kate Udall as Miriam lends a voice of quiet, suppressed tension and desperation. Jessica Mosher, as her daughter Lolly, sweetly conveys the youthful Zen state-of-mind so foreign to her elders. As Gwen, Jeri Marshall, captures the fears and frustrations of an African-American mother seeking to raise her children and return to the workforce. Susan Craves' Fern embodies the bewildered (and latent) bigotry that battles with familial love, and Jessica Di Giovanni, who gets some of the best moments as Bree, conveys strength, determination, and courage facing the unforeseen identity crises in her family. As Vera, the owner of the paint studio and facilitator of the evening, Jane Abernethy acts as a voice of detached reason, handling her charges with a gentle, bemused air, until she is drawn into the confessional mode herself. The chemistry and camaraderie of the cast is notable.

If the play's material does not necessarily challenge the viewer, it does foster a sense of identification – of being part of the story – and of understanding the emotions and the universe of these characters. And with that understanding comes the catharsis so vital to a good theatrical experience.