

## Public Theatre's world premiere of 'Paint Night' is a 'brilliantly hued feather in the cap'

By Rob Tukey, special to the Sun Journal  
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**Review: In playwright Carey Crim's premiere at Lewiston's The Public Theatre, 'six terrific actors bring their characters to bright, realistic and compelling life.'**

A world premiere is big news! And The Public Theatre of Lewiston and its community of theater lovers are tremendously fortunate to have the world premiere of the seminal theatrical production "Paint Night," a brilliantly hued feather in the cap of all parties concerned.

Carey Crim is the gifted playwright ("Morning After Grace," "Never Not Once" and others) who has crafted this wonderful play. It allegorically paints a group portrait of six women who embody many issues and concerns important to womankind. Crim calls it "Paint Night" and it appears to hold a duplicate value in its title.

Brushes and booze are the intended focus for a "paint and sip" get-together to celebrate the coming nuptials of Lolly, the young, free-spirited and slightly irresponsible daughter of Miriam. Miriam is a noticeably distracted woman of a certain age. The other members of the troupe are all connected by blood and long-term relationships, the one exception being Vera, the owner of the art studio where all the action takes place. And action is the refrain as six terrific actors bring their characters to bright, realistic and compelling life.

The second intention for the title highlights the playwright's bold brush strokes as she creates a canvas of characters that we all either know well or recognize in part in ourselves. And she chooses a daring palette of issues that are some of the most human, and most often shared by women. This colors the characters as they are set in motion.

Miriam, played by Kate Udall, is outstanding as the frustrated and also preoccupied mother of Lolly, played by Jessica Mosher. Before we meet Lolly, she is described by Miriam as having had a checkered past of several beaux. Most recently, Lolly has suddenly returned home from an ashram in India with a fiancé whose penchant for silent meditation for days on end exasperates Miriam. We learn more of Miriam's absorbed attention elsewhere as the evening progresses. When Lolly finally arrives, late as usual, she spars with her mother. Mosher's portrayal of Lolly is contrary to Miriam's description; she gives the impression of a breath of fresh air, free-spirited and a new age lover of life. She lives up to this initial perception as the evening progresses, to Miriam's consternation.

Susan Craves as Fern, Miriam's former college roommate and longtime family friend, is delightful, cheery and comfortable in her conservative values. But as they have matured, their friendship has changed, as have their once-shared values. These changes have created frictions that bend but cannot break their shared history of closeness.



*On the set of The Public Theatre's current production of "Paint Night" are, from left: Jane Abernethy as Vera, Jessica DiGiovanni as Bree, Kate Udall as Miriam, Jeri Marshall as Gwen, Susan Craves as Fern, and Jessica Mosher as Lolly*

Fern and her daughter, Bree, played by Jessica DiGiovanni, who is married with a family of her own, have come to paint night to share in Lolly's celebration. DiGiovanni's Bree is a vivacious, energetic, social creature with a sharp tongue and quick wit. While she seems to be centered, she has a troubling concern about her son that surfaces later in a contested discussion with Fern.

Jeri Marshall is Gwen, an old friend of Bree's. Recently returned to the area, Bree is the mother of twins. She is seriously annoyed by a recent job interview. Gwen fears her absence from the job market to raise a family has relegated her to "entry level" openings that slight her age and fail to recognize her work experience. Marshall's character is strong but tentative in light of her current state. But her self-assuredness and humor carry her forward on solid footing.

Once the group has gradually assembled, with Lolly lagging behind of course, catty and frequent ribald conversation follows. The taut, clever, witty dialogue quickly authenticates the familial and generational dynamic of individual personalities, relationships and concerns. Into this amalgam comes Vera, as played by Jane Abernethy, who, in the eyes of the group, is merely an art coach, but who soon displays a vast array of wisdom, knowledge and expanded experience that manifests itself in a "bibbity-bobbity-boo" kind of modern fairy godmother charm. Intimate details revealed in a series of tete-a-tetes among the mothers, daughters and friends finds Vera frequently acting as a group counselor.

A striking thing to observe while the various pairs' discussions unfold is the experienced acting that takes place among the bystanders. Unobtrusively but realistically, subtle shades of reaction, facial expressions and gestures give weight to the proceedings and depth to the characters. These indirect and restrained nuances maintain a connectedness to the group while the spotlight is on only two.

Directed by Janet Mitchko, this ensemble of superbly skilled actors conveys the electricity of the intelligent and piercing dialogue that Carey Crim has written. In their hands the conversations are truly authentic. The obvious care and love the actors have for their characters brings them to convincing and meaningful life. One soon feels matching admiration and appreciation, first for the characters pouring out their souls, second for the actors who are so immersed in their parts.

In a brief span of 90 minutes or so, "Paint Night" rolls through a series of sensitive issues that affect women. It is a patchwork painting that ranges in topic from breastfeeding to religious hypocrisy, from frustrations with talk-texting to the battle of generations, from old wounds to new love, old values to new acceptance, tantric yoga and philosophical enlightenment. The interactions between the feminine factions fairly crackles with sarcasm, humorous cultural references, intellectual debate and personal disagreements. Along the path of roadblocks, potholes and solutions there emerge secrets that each woman bears. Vera holds things together with the acumen of a group therapist, adding touching revelations of her own.

There is a universality to the finished canvas of "Paint Night." Each amateur artist learns her painting may not be perfect but, though she may not be completely satisfied, she has accomplished something of value. It is a simple truth that life and relationships reflect this, and these women represent an avatar of some part of each of us.