

Forgiveness & Family Dynamics: INCIDENT AT OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP

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Lewiston's Public Theatre Presents
Bittersweet Comedy About Growing
Up Catholic



Katie Forgette's bittersweet memory play about a Catholic childhood in the 1970s takes the stage at The Public Theatre in Lewiston in a gently funny and touching production directed by Janet Mitchko. *INCIDENT AT OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP* focuses on the O'Shea family, a prototypical middle class Irish-American Catholic family, who grapple with the daily struggles of making ends meet, raising two daughters, and caring for each other within the context and constraints of their Catholic upbringing and community. The universality of the characters, and their quest for compassion and forgiveness gives the work its heart.

Forgette structures the work as a memory play seen through the eyes of the eldest daughter Linda, who acts as narrator and orchestrates the telling of her story. The device, while valid, becomes a bit cumbersome, especially in the first act exposition. Forgette's skill lies principally in her fresh, incisive dialogue and her ability to land some trenchant observations about very universal dilemmas that resonate with the audience.

Janet Mitchko directs with a sure hand, keeping the pace moving and building to some truly engaging scene work in the second act. Jennifer Madigan creates an appropriately simple and worn-looking interior of the O'Shea household with 1970s décor. She is aided in recreating the period with the warm, pastel lighting of Lighting Designer Florence Cooley, the soundtrack of the era (Scott O'Brien, Sound Designer), and the colorful, casual clothes of the 1970s designed by Anne Collins.

The five-person cast works as a closely-knit ensemble. Kelsey Peterson, as Linda, projects an air of quiet revolt, as she stands poised to break the bonds of her Catholic upbringing and go out in the world to forge a new life. Cate Damon, as her long suffering mother Josephine, does a fine job of incarnating the quiet, pent-up frustration of a life filled with drudgery and disappointment in the first act, only to rise to the occasion of a crisis and a new hope with subtle heroism in the second. Allison Briner-Dardenne provides a colorful foil as her more outspoken, tough-talking sister, Theresa, who has also endured her own share of disappointment which she confronts in a very different way. Scarlett Thomas plays the younger sister, Becky, with a cooky charm that somehow balances the family equation. As the gruff, paternalistic, dictatorial father, Mike O'Shea, Doug Rees is convincing in his combination of bluster and vulnerability. Rees also plays two other characters: the sanctimonious, hard-hearted Father Lovett and the meddlesome church lady Betty – both of which he does with flair.

INCIDENT AT OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP strikes empathetic chords with the Public's audience, who warmed to the play's message of family dilemmas, ultimately resolved by forgiveness and familial love.

It is also noteworthy that this production marks the first under the aegis of the new Executive Director Ray Dumont. As Dumont acknowledged in his gracious curtain speech, he has "big shoes to fill" in succeeding the beloved Christopher Schario, but the energy and optimism Dumont projects bodes well for the company's future.