

‘Still’ scores with ‘delicate balance’ between humor, drama at Lewiston’s Public Theatre

The off-Broadway hit offers ‘remarkable’ writing, ‘brilliant’ acting in a story about second chances.

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Arts & Entertainment | Feb 4, 2026

Imagine a second chance with the one that got away. Suppose a lifetime has passed in the interim, with all its successes, failures, families, illness and loss. Are you reconnecting with the same person? Or are you looking at a stranger? Can this be a fresh start? Or will past hurts resurface? And what if ideological differences seem insurmountable?

These themes are explored with sensitivity, depth, and humor in “Still” by Lia Romeo playing at The Public Theater in Lewiston.

The opening set is simple, a hotel bar with a view of the city. A man and a woman, in their 60s, Mark and Helen, have a drink and catch up on old times. The story starts as a slow burn. We learn that they know each other from a long time ago. She lives in the city and he is in town on business, or so he says. They knew each other in their 20s and are catching up after many years.

We learn that she is an author and he is a recently divorced businessman. He has two daughters, she has no children. It’s all very ordinary, two old friends sharing a drink and a conversation. For the first half-hour or so, the audience might wonder where this is heading. After all, who hasn’t experienced small talk with an old friend? There is truly nothing special here.

This is when things take a turn. The conversation deepens and secrets are revealed. The connection shifts from casual to intimate. The set changes from a hotel bar to a hotel room. This is where we learn who they were in their 20s and who they are now. The story soon becomes an emotional rollercoaster where the past collides with the present, old wounds are revealed and points of view clash.

The story progresses with a mix of tenderness, intensity and humor. Writer Romeo has an amazing ability to weave humor into her writing even at the toughest moments. A delicate balance between humor and drama can be a challenge to navigate and this playwright seems to have perfected it.

“Still,” which was an off-Broadway hit and the Outer Critics Circle nominee for Best New American Play, showcases Romeo’s remarkable skill weaving humor into the fabric of intense, dramatic moments using dialogue, timing and even a flying avocado. The characters are likable, complex and relatable.

Directed by Mark Routhier, who has worked with the NOLA Project in New Orleans, Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, Magic Theatre in San Francisco, and the National New Play Network, the story unfolds at just the right pace and the audience becomes quickly immersed in the story of Helen and Mark.

The role of Helen is brilliantly played by Janet Mitchko. Mitchko is well known to The Public Theater audiences as an actor, director and the theater’s artistic director. As Helen, she shows a remarkable ability to be tough, sharp-



The off-Broadway hit "Still," starring Joe Gately and Janet Mitchko, is currently in production at The Public Theatre in Lewiston. (Kaitlin Toto for Public Theatre)

witted and headstrong, while still retaining her vulnerability. She convincingly conveys the internal conflict of being torn between her own moral compass and the chemistry she still shares with Mark. The audience can so easily empathize with her situation, her past choices and her current circumstances.

Joe Gately, whose long professional resume includes both stage and screen, portrays Mark as straightforward, no nonsense and kindhearted. He has clearly held on to his feelings for Helen, and he manages to exude those feelings, even in moments of intense anger. Gately, as Mark, is stubborn yet sentimental. He is at various times intense, vulnerable and has just the right amount of humor. Gately expertly reveals the many aspects of the character in a touching and very human way.

There are aspects of "Still" we can all relate to. Whether it be past regret, struggling with "what ifs," confronting political differences, or just plain nostalgia. You will absolutely be taking something with you when you leave the theater.

Performances are Thursday and Friday, Feb. 5-6, at 7 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 7, at 3 and 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, Feb. 8, at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$35 for adults, \$15 for ages 13-18.

The Public Theatre is at 31 Maple St. in Lewiston. For more information or tickets call (207) 782-3200 or go to thepublictheatre.org.