

'Whit's End' at Lewiston theater a 'fast-paced, laugh-a-minute romp'

Jon Bolduc – Special to the Sun Journal
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Public Theatre's premier production of "Whit's End" by acclaimed Canadian playwright Norm Foster is a fast-paced, laugh-a-minute romp that could sometimes use a little bit of a breather.

The production's run continues Thursday-Sunday at the theater at 31 Maple St. in Lewiston.

The plot is pretty straightforward. Whit, a widower in his 60s played by Dale Place, and Nikki, played by Sheila Stasack, have found love and are planning the next phase of their lives.



Mike Anthony, Dale Place and Jessica DiGiovanni in Whit's End

Should be simple enough: They plan to sell Whit's family home in Winnipeg and retire to Kelowna, British Columbia. (For those unfamiliar with Canadian geography, it might be good to glance at a map before coming to see this show.) However, there's only one fly in the ointment: Whit's two adult children, both a bit eccentric in their own way, have yet to meet Nikki, or give their blessing for the move.

What follows is a very funny story of moving on from the past, opening new chapters, and becoming a family again with well-crafted, relatable characters and amazing comedic chops from the quartet of a cast. The core comedic formula works great: Whit is a kind of everyman with some very, well, witty zingers who always manages to say the wrong thing and is constantly pushed into exasperation by the eccentricity of his family. [Jessica Digiovanni](#) plays Erica, Whit's adult daughter, and serves as the comedic engine of the show. Digiovanni is a superb physical actress; from the moment she comes onto the stage, flailing around, convinced that Whit has summoned his family to announce a terminal illness, she acts as a true comedic force. And by the end of it all, Whit's connection and love for Erica is one of the sweetest bits in the show.

Mike Anthony plays Whit's adult son Steven with less of a madcap energy, but a more calm and calculated delivery that hits some of the funniest notes of the show. Stasack plays Nikki, who has a rather rocky introduction to the family, with a mix of the same eccentricity of her castmates with a bit more of a grounded core. The audience was extremely responsive to the hilarity of the show, and sometimes, the actors on stage did not pause lines or "ride out" the laughs, leading to some sentences and other jokes being lost. And underneath the hilarity, there is a bit of emotion that could have been captured with a little bit more care. Whit is a widower, and the memory of his first wife and his children's mother is captured by a few one-liners and mentions. However, the plot moves so fast that those emotional notes are a bit lost.

Also, at the end of the show, Nikki is trepidatious about her future and moving forward with potential new family: a few pauses or beats would have made the audience a bit more invested in her decision. But these notes do not take away from quality of the performance.

All and all, this is a very funny production with very strong cast showings. The set looks absolutely gorgeous. [Set Designer Zachary Ahmad-Kahloon](#) did wonderful work constructing the sole set piece, which looks like the real interior of a family home; Public Theatre continues its reputation for New York-quality sets.

"Whit's End" will be performed Thursday, March 26, at 2 and 7 p.m., Friday, March 27, at 7 p.m., Saturday, March 28, at 3 and 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, March 29, at 2 p.m. Tickets and other information can be found at thepublictheatre.org/.