

Hearth and heartache in Acme Theater's 'Independence'

By Margaret Smith

GateHouse News Service

Posted Nov 18, 2008 @ 03:41 PM

Maynard —

Messed-up families continue to reign as the troubled muses of many playwrights, novelists and short story writers.

And, in recent times, messed-up families in the Midwest have really come into their own, both on the page and on the stage, whether your hard-beset brood is in Knock Em Stiff, Ohio, or Independence, Iowa.

The latter is the home of Evelyn, to all outward appearances a put-together woman of elevated position in her community. She even volunteers at the local mental health center, bless her.

And why not — it's a place she knows all about, after eldest daughter Kess escorted her there for a three-month hiatus after finding mom huddled in a blanket. At least in that episode, she wasn't throwing ceramic plates in the garage, or hurling one of her daughters' graduation photos at another daughter's boyfriend, or using a can of soup to smash a family heirloom.

All this she did once she was back home.

Home, with its tidy sitting room and lovingly arranged keepsakes, is the epicenter of Evelyn's volcanic relationship with her three daughters: Jo, sprightly, optimistic, but chafing at her own passivity; Sherry, a nasally-talking, hair-flipping waitress, and the family fulcrum, Kess, the oldest, who has committed the dual crimes of being a lesbian and moving away to Minneapolis.

But none of the characters in this play are simply the recognizable types they appear to be: Evelyn is more than a maternal tyrant and is possessed of a chilling dignity that masks a fear of abandonment. Jo wants to break free not only of her entangled bond with her mother but her need for love and acceptance even by friends and boyfriends who are less than reciprocal. Kess is poised and controlled, but comes close to destroying all she's struggled for as her own fears rush to the surface. Sherry may be the overindulged baby, but burns with a desire for art and beauty and is often the play's most brutally honest voice.

With an entirely authentic set that avoids cliché ideas the east coast often espouses about the Heartland, Acme Theater's production is streamlined, sensitive and a charged conduit to the play's unadorned power.

And just perhaps, to the wounded hearts of some audience members who despite the darkness visibly winced or gripped their companions' hands.

But when a great performance sits uncomfortably close to real life, terrible and wonderful things can come to light.

If you go

'Independence,' by Lee Blessing, directed by Mark Baumhardt, with performances Friday and Saturday, Nov. 21 and 22, 28, and 29, Sunday, Nov. 30, and Friday and Saturday, Dec. 5 and 6 at Acme Theater, 61 Summer St., Maynard. All shows at 8 p.m. except for the 3 p.m. matinee on Nov. 30. Tickets \$15 for standard tickets, and \$13 for students and senior citizens.

For more information or to reserve tickets call 978-823-0003 or visit www.acmetheater.com.

Margaret Smith is Arts and Calendar editor at Community Newspaper Company's Northwest Unit. E-mail her at msmith@cnc.com.

Copyright 2008 The Beacon-Villager. Some rights reserved

Comments (0)

Login or register to post a comment:

Login

Username:

Password:

[Forgot password](#)

Login

Register

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

I agree to the terms of use

I am over 13 years of age

NOTE: Your inbox must accept emails from "no-reply@gatehousemedia.com"

Register

1 Tip of a flat belly: Cut down 3 lbs of your belly every week by simply using this 1 weird tip. ➤

[Contact us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) |

The Beacon-Villager | Maynard, MA 01754

Copyright © 2006-2010 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons](#) license, except where noted.

SEO by eLocalListing | Advertiser profiles | Cherrp Local | Maynard Real estate | Find your Wicked Local Town