

Majestic Theater, West Springfield, MA

Native Gardens by Karen Zacarias. Directed by James Warwick.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

"I mean . . . there has to be a compromise."

It doesn't take too long for new neighbors Tania and Pablo Del Valle in a historical Washington D.C. neighborhood to launch themselves into a near-tragic fight with their nearest neighbors, Virginia and Frank Butley. It starts with flowers and progresses to property lines in this comedy by Karen Zacarias, directed by James Warwick at West Springfield's Majestic Theater where it plays through February 12. What the company does with this situation on a stunning set by Greg Trochlil is certainly worth the trip down Route 20 or the turnpike.



Tina Sparkle, Mikey Perez, Sara Linares, and Michael Graham Morales;

Photo: Kait Rankins

The cast of seven players (two couples and three gardeners) swiftly moves the play through the final weeks of Tania's pregnancy, a physical and emotional complication that adds to the humor of the situation the two couples find themselves in. Pablo has discovered that the Butleys have been gardening on a portion of his land, and he wants the land restored to his own property. Zacarias, in writing this play, had given us the legal situation in all of its possibilities, the idea of youth versus seniors, Republicans versus Democrats, and natives versus immigrants, all in one amusing evening of tsouris (that's Yiddish for troubles and a funnier word for it). Her writing is clever, very human, and both funny and emotionally engaging making this a fine play, a good way to get through an evening in the theater.



Peter Evangelista,
Sara Linares;
Photo: Kait Rankins

Sara Linares is a wonderful Tania. Her emotional swings are sensational and her most charming moments are absolutely endearing. Peter Evangelista as her husband brings a solid sense of humanity to his role as he swerves between his desire for things to be “right” and his wife’s instability in all things.

Ellen Barry as Virginia has a ball as the old-style suburban matron who wants to be generous to the



Ellen Barry, John Thomas Waite;
Photo: Kait Rankins

strangers and still maintain tight control of her environment and lifestyle. As her husband Frank, John Thomas Waite has his finest moments in the midst of bluster and its attendant disastrous effect on everyone around him.

James Warwick has captained this ship of fools into port and landed them safely and securely where they all should be - happily on stage in West Springfield. His excellent production has costumes designed perfectly by Dawn McKay and lighting designed by Daniel D. Rist who brings us seasonal daylight and moonlight that feel just right.

Good new comedies are rare and deserve to be cherished. Our audience laughed in all the right places and occasionally gasped where that was appropriate. Their applause at the end of the show indicated their approval of the work. It didn’t require standing, or whistling to let the company know how delighted folks were with the play. This is good, old-fashioned theater at its best and certainly worth the two and a quarter hours it took to present it.



Native Gardens plays at the Majestic Theater, 131 Elm Street, West Springfield, MA through February 12. For information and tickets call their box office at 413-747-7797 or go on line to: www.majestictheater.com

The Cast; Photo: Photo: Kait Rankins