

Sharon Playhouse, Sharon, CT
Our Town by Thornton Wilder. Directed by Andrus Nichols.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“So, this is our town. . .”

I am one of those rare people: I don't love Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town." I've seen dozens of productions and only fell under its spell once, in a community theater production. This time I found myself enjoying the play, it's people and it's lack of anything *theatrical*. Andrus Nichols' excellent production at the Sharon Playhouse lets the play come through without being messed up by acting. She has just let the people be people and actions do speak louder than words. This is as it should be.



Jane Kaczmarek as the Stage Manager; Photo: Aly Morrissey

The play's single narrative voice belongs to the Stage Manager, played by actress Jane Kaczmarek, as the author envisioned it. She is honest and gives truth a chance to show itself honestly. Wilder has ignored the tenets of playwrighting, giving his cast of characters no real opportunity to show off what they can do with a role, but letting them be the people in this small New Hampshire town 122 years ago.

Kaczmarek sets the tone and the company fall in behind her. It's a beautiful sight.

Two families, the Gibbs and the Webbs, live next door to each other, are friendly and neighborly and both have professional men, obedient wives and two children. Ultimately George Gibbs falls in love with Emily Webb and marries her. They have nine years of contentment and success and then tragedy befalls them. That is the story, the plot, the outline of the play. If it was simpler nothing at all would occur. Wilder gives us a photograph of people in a time not our own, a simpler time when human frailty controlled our outcomes. There is nothing in this play that could offend a single soul. This is "Our Town."

Eric Bryant plays George Gibbs. In Act One he barely exists. In Act Two he marries the girl he loves with a flashback showing their first "date," an ice cream soda during the walk home from high school. Bryant has a natural charm that makes this awkward scene effective. In Act Three he moved the audience without uttering a single word. This is excellent work by an actor.

Emily Webb is played by Samantha Steinmetz who smartly endows the girl with a



Eric Bryant, Kennadi Mitchell;
Photo: Aly Morrissey

stylized portrayal of girlishness and whimsy. She is sad sometimes, pensive sometimes and hostile for a moment in Act Two. Her chance to shine comes in Act Three when Emily has an opportunity to do what Billy Bigelow does in “Carousel,” return to live a day in her life. She is as unsuccessful as Bigelow and Steinmetz shows us the impact of this wonderfully.

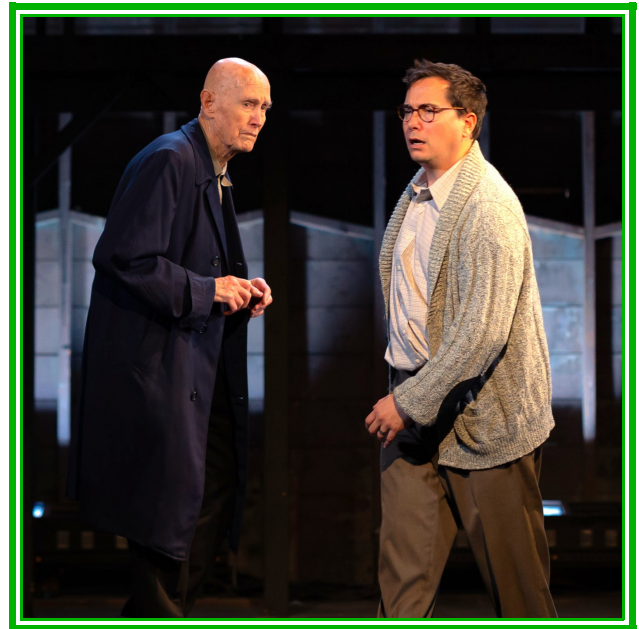
Their parents are also well portrayed: Dawn Stern and Dick Terhune as the Webbs and Marinell Madden-Crippen and Deron Bayer as the Gibbs. All four give stellar performances in this play without stars. Their other children are played by Kennadi Mitchell and Vincent Valcin. Mrs. Soames has a few moments of comic reality as played by Lori Evans. Nichols entire company, including Kevin Michael Baldwin and Jim Flaherty, Darius Sanchez and Katherine Almquist

manage to live their roles in mime and line and the play is all the better for it.

The unusual structure of this play, without sets, with only a few props and a few chairs to physically create this small town, has been managed by the team of designers hired for this show. T. J. Greenway’s scenic design is marvelous, with staircases, playing levels and and a cross-over platform that gives both shape and scope to the place we’re observing. Kathleen DeAngelis’s costumes are pure Americana without holding us to a particular period in time. Kate McGee’s lighting design keeps us watching the right things at the right time and the excellent sound design work of Daryl Bornstein fills in the physical blanks of the production. Dan Koch’s music lightly touches the actors’ movements which have been settled by Kimiye Corwin.

Melissa A. Nathan, the Production Stage Manager, called a perfect show on opening night which kept the odd magic of Wilder’s script alive and present.

I recommend this production to anyone interested in a classic American play. It is more than worth your time.



Jim Flaherty, Michael Kevin Baldwin;
Photo: Aly Morrissey

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Our Town plays at the Sharon Playhouse, 49 Amenia Road, Sharon, CT through September 24. For information and tickets go to sharonplayhouse.org or call 860-364-7469.