

The Sharon Playhouse, Sharon, CT

The lifespan of a fact by Jeremy Kareken & David Murrell and Gordon Farrell

Directed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“I take liberties with telling the story.”

Journalism requires truth-telling. Fiction and its derivatives just won't satisfy. In this fascinating play, on stage at the Sharon Playhouse in Connecticut, those facts, those honest statements take center stage as three people, an editor, an author, and a fact-checker come to grips with the concept and how to live with it. The author, John D'Agata, has written an essay about a teen-suicide in Las Vegas that he wants published exactly as he wrote it. His editor/publisher, Emily Penrose, want the facts verified before she uses it; she has already scheduled its publication in her next magazine issue. The young man she hires to proof the piece and to fact-check it, Jim Fingal, takes his job very seriously and hands in 130 pages of corrections on the twelve page essay. The battle is on!



Reynaldo Piniello as Jim, Jonathan Walker as John; Photo: Aly Morrissey

This play is a mind-blower. Its title made no sense until I saw the play and then it seemed to be not enough. Facts abound in this script, some of them are real, some are based on reality, and some are totally the invention of a writer who is systematic, mathematical, and profound.

That profundity is stretched to the breaking point and director Marcia Milgrom Dodge does her wonderful best keeping the opponents in constant disarray. With Tyler Miranda as her fight choreographer she has staged a never-ending battle of wits in a seemingly ever-present battle of bodies, all three of them.

Jim, played with verve and vim, and vivid vituperation by Reynaldo Piniella, is the over-active, overly attentive young apprentice who has moved into a position of authority and honesty. He is almost irrepressible. This actor is blessed with multiple strengths, physical and oral and visually intense. He plays the honesty of his character with depth and with honesty, a living interpretation of what a fact should be in any journalistic effort.



Reynaldo Piniella as Jim, Jennifer Van Dyck as Emily;
Photo: Aly Morrissey

John D'Agata, the author of the piece is vain and egoistic and very serious about the value of his work which he considers sacrosanct. He will not be convinced that any small distortion on his part needs to be corrected or even corroborated. He is a creative writer and wants to be regarded as such. He has not written an "article;" he has created an "essay" based on the facts of the case. Jonathan Walker delivers an ecstatically simple and straightforward edition of this man. His John will be believed and nothing can convince him otherwise. He and Jim are

totally at odds and this provides much of the comedy of the play while delivering much of the drama as well. Walker says things simply and directly without interpretation and the honesty of such delivery makes his character work wonderfully. This play, after all, is about honesty and truth and he gives us a character who honestly believes his version of the facts is reality, just because he says so.



Jennifer Van Dyck as Emily;
Photo: Aly Morrissey

If there is a "star" in this play, and there really isn't, it would have to be Jennifer Van Dyck as Emily Penrose.

Her character lives within her professional intentions and hides behind her unrelatable secrets. Emily is presented with strength and purpose and she never lets an insult or a challenge go by without an equally aggressive response. Van Dyck has the voice of authority when she speaks and the gestures of command when her inner General emerges. Emily admires talent and wants it laid at her feet by both of the men she is working with to prepare this “essay” for publication. She admires the writing and the writer; she grows to admire the fact-checker she has brought up from some mailroom-type job to take on more difficult work. Discovering that she has two monsters on her hands, two men with individual missions to complete, leaves her with a technical army of misgivings to sort. Van Dyck plays this inner confusion with unrelenting conviction. It is a brilliant job of acting.

The clever set has been designed by TJ Greenway who takes us from place to place without hesitation. The costumes by Kathleen DeAngelis define the characters easily and well. The lighting design by Hailey O’Leary helps to define places and moods. David Bullard’s sound design work is fine until it becomes hilariously perfect. Technically, Director Dodge could not have asked for a better crew of theater technicians to work with on this remarkable play. She and her assistants have wrought a wonderful one-act event with this play. Time flew by as the story played on; the characters grew before our eyes. Dodge has given the Sharon Playhouse a remarkable hit show with which to end their season.

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The Lifespan of a Fact plays at the Sharon Playhouse, 49 Amenia Road, Sharon, Connecticut through October 15. For information and tickets go to sharonplayhouse.org or call 860-364-7469.