

Majestic Theatre, West Springfield, MA
Moonglow, Written and Directed by Jack Neary.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“You can blame it on the war. I blame it on you.”

It’s 1967. A devoutly religious, Roman Catholic man teaches music to Catholic School children under the supervision of nuns, and assisted by a woman with a sullied reputation. He is, according to his priest, a married man based on a one-night relationship with a woman he met on the night before he entered the army in 1942. According to the church he is still married to her in spite of her 1945 divorce. This church-based philosophy has screwed up his life in Jack Neary’s comedy, “Moonglow” now playing at the Majestic Theater in West Springfield, Massachusetts. This is a play you laugh at, but it makes you think, which is a combination of effects that proves effective and sometimes difficult to reconcile. It is a good play delivered by a cast of players who know how to make it pay. Or pray. Or play.



Stephanie Carlson, B. Brian Argotsinger; Photo: Rick Teller

Ray is played by B. Brian Argotsinger, an actor who makes intelligent thought as loud as any sentence he utters. Ray considers everything he says before he speaks. He is careful and precise weighing his responses as though they were newly cut meat and he was a frugal butcher.

Though his style seemed odd at first, as his character grew before us the logic of Ray's personal style soon emerged full-blown, and he became a fascinating example of the type of man he is meant to be. Devout and true to the tenets espoused by his priest, Father Hackett - played with a delicious, sincere wickedness by Rand Foerster - Ray has no options in his life. He *must* live along the proscribed lines that have been dictated by Father Hackett.



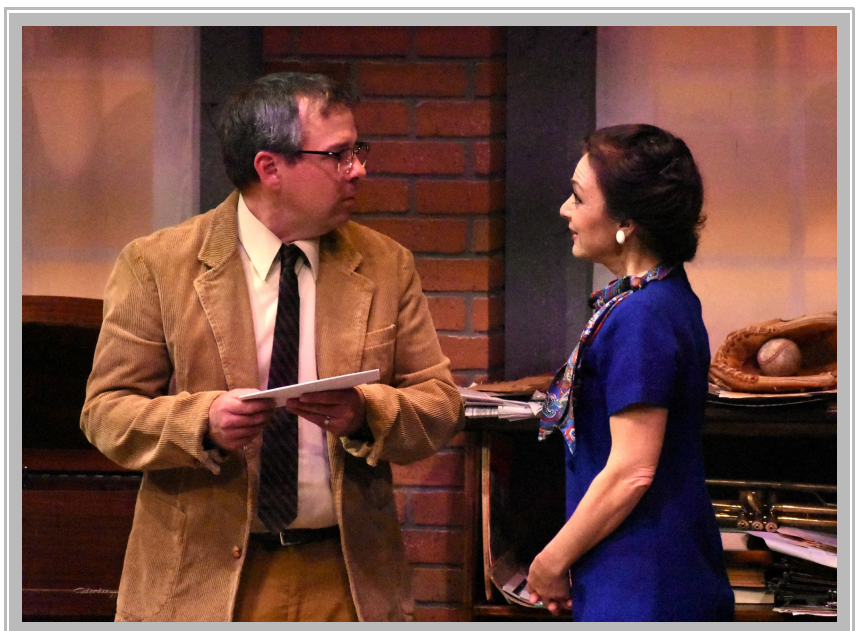
Nora Streeter, B. Brian Argotsinger;
Photo: Rick Teller

Ray's trumpet student Dorothy, played by Nora Streeter, is a typical child of the late 1960s: smart, officious, older than her age, obsessively rude and maddeningly self-centered in every way possible. Streeter plays her quite convincingly. Her mother, Margaret Reilly Streeter plays her mother Linda. Linda is a seductive, sly widow who makes her intentions all too clear, all too quickly and her reactions to a logical rejection are as smarmy as her daughter's new-found interest in Sally Field's Flying Nun.

It is - first, foremost and finally - the two women who most closely charge Ray's intellect and his heart that rule the drama in this comedy. His bride, but never really his wife, Clancy (or Susan if you really knew her) controls his mind, She is his obsession. The lovely Stephanie Craven plays Clancy beautifully and sensitively. It is easy to see why

his obsession with her feels so very real and important. She is someone no man would want to give up on easily.

In a freak streak of casting the other woman in Ray's life, his secretary, Arlene, who has wanted him for a long while, is played by another Stephanie C., Stephanie Carlson. While the two actresses are not alike, they share an intensity that makes them both overly attractive to Argotsinger's Ray. Watching her take over a man's conflicted imagination made the play's two hours fly by. Her slowly revealed past was as interesting as his uneasy present and left doubts about their future.



B. Brian Argotsinger, Stephanie Carlson; Photo: Rick Teller

I often have doubts about playwrights directing their own works. Neary pulled it off, weaving the twenty-two year jumps in time easily and steadily with the subtle assistance of lighting designer Daniel D. Rist who also created the beautifully crafted three part set. Dawn McKay's costumes were attractive and appropriate.

Producing Director Danny Eaton has brought another fascinating play to life on his West Springfield stage. His subscribers should be pleased to have him at the helm steering the course of mid-state theater. I know I am.

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Moonglow plays at the Majestic Theater at 131 Elm Street, West Springfield, MA through December 3. For information and tickets call 413-747-7797 or go to majestictheater.com.