

Great Barrington Public Theater, Great Barrington, MA
Dog People by Leigh Strimbeck. Directed by Judy Braha.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Make sure they know who’s boss.”

Two brilliant physical comedians, a brilliant actress/playwright, a brilliant stage director and brilliant movement director have concocted one of the funniest shows you are likely to see this year, Leigh Strimbeck’s “Dog People” staged by Judy Braha with movement supervised by Ryan Winkles starring Sheila Bandyopadhyay and Chris Tucci. Read on. I promise not to write the word brilliant again. I promise. Woof! This is a truly genuine original in its world premiere production in the black box theater at Simon’s Rock College of Bard. If you’ve never been in this space before the thrill is waiting. I guarantee you’ll never get closer to the fun than you will with this play.



Chris Tucci, Sheila Bandyopadhyay; Photo: Kat Humes

Tucci and Bandyopadhyay play two people who bump into one another in an urban park, Jesse and Avery, while walking their dogs, Betty and Atila. The fun in this situation is that the two actors play the people and play each other’s dogs as well. In Strimbeck’s vision of life, the dogs have deeper and stronger personalities than their owners. They tend to reflect each other’s humans. Avery’s dog, Betty, is aggressive, angry and obnoxious while Jesse’s dog, Atila, is gentle, complacent and acceding. What is initially obvious about these four characters shelters secrets that the author reveals slowly over the 86 minutes of the play. This is a “pay attention” piece of theater that not only commands attention, it makes it a condition of enjoyment.



Bandyopadhyay as Betty, Tucci as Atila; Photo: Kat Humes

Both Tucci and his cohort, Bandyopadhyay, are superb in the physical comedy and equally persuasive in the sensitive dialogue. The author has given them many simple challenges in playing Jesse and Avery. These two people have secrets and they release them at the oddest moments. Their dogs have nothing to hide and they develop a very special friendship that seems to surprise them both equally. It is the sudden awkward shifts of character that infuses the play with at least half of its fun. Both actors handle this extremely well.

This play has come out of the Berkshire Voices workshop, an organization that has also produced works by Jessica Provenz and me. With this one the group has hit a home run. The resulting presentation has had the advantage of Judy Braha's keen observation as she staged the work for its maximum impact. With a strange sound effect, provided by designer, Jacob Fisch, a bell, the dogs and ultimately their people ring true with very similar gestures that aid the fun in the play.

The set by John Musall and the costumes by George Veale do their best to define place and "people". Matthew E. Adelson's lighting was excellent taking us through a long day into a romantic night with dancing, tickling and the good humor of old lovers and new ones also.

This a grand season opener for the company and for the region's summer shows. Try to see it. Woof!



Tucci as Atila, Bandyopadhyay as Jesse; Photo:Kat Humes

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Dog People plays at the Liebowitz Theater at Simon's Rock through June 16. For information and tickets go to GreatBarringtonPublicTheater.org.