

Shakespeare & Co., Lenox, MA

The Islanders, by Carey Crim. Directed by Reggie Life.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

Two Souls Play at Life.

In Carey Crim's play, now on stage at Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, two very different people form a relationship that becomes threatened by each of their oddly undisclosed ailments. His is physical; hers is mental. There are clues to each one's problems but when things flare up the other one always faces difficult choices. How they deal with one another in those moments is the crux of the conflict in this play.



Michelle Mountain, "ranney"; Photo: Nile Scott Studios

Michelle Mountain plays Anna, a long-time resident of Beaver Island, located off Michigan's great lakes shore. Divorced, alienated from her daughter, highly independent and free-living, she masks, expertly, her bigger problems. When her hidden truth surfaces Mountain makes everyone in the audience as uncomfortable as "ranney's" character Dutch.

Dutch has his own physical problem that Anna comforts him and works him through when he has an attack. It is possible that his health issue triggers hers. In my experience, however, Anna is a traditional sufferer who often doesn't take her medication as instructed. It is that personal choice that causes her tiny tragedy.

Dutch may be the warmest character "ranney" has ever played and he is so warm and so pleasant he seems to be another person altogether. He is marvelous in the role. He brings great depth to it and what comes out of it is a very human being. Both actors seem ideal for their characters and for the arc of this play.

Reggie Life has directed this play with a sensitivity and delicacy that makes the peculiar human interactions realistic, honest and tolerable. There isn't a moment that doesn't feel true and honest, realistic and human. I don't know if the script crafted by Carey Crim indicates that Dutch is a black man and Anna a white woman, as they are in this production, but nothing feels wrong about their presentation in this production. They are people, plain and simple people who fall into an unexpected friendship that blossoms into a romance that revolves on its own axis through time and space. Life is a master at creating these interactions between dissimilar people. Here he works his characters' evolution into something tender and beautiful, even when self-recrimination and guilt creep in to spoil the beauty.



“ranney”; Photo: Nile Scott Studios



Michelle Mountain;
Photo: Nile Scott Studios

He has the help of a fine design team and an expert stage management crew under the supervision of Hope Rose Kelly. The island set has been designed by Cristina Todesco. The lighting which does so much for this show is created by Deb Sullivan. The character defining costumes are the work of Esther Van Eek. Sound design is by Brendan F. Doyle. Kevin G. Coleman has created the violence choreography of which there is a-plenty.

This is a fascinating little play about the genuine problems of older folk in our world today. As one of them I can say that it felt as real as could be. And I loved it.

+ 07/28/2024 +

The Islanders plays on the Tina Packer Playhouse stage at Shakespeare & Co., 70 Walker Street, Lenox, Massachusetts through Aighist 25. For information and tickets go to www.Shakespeare.org or call

