

Chester Theatre, Chester, MA
BIG BIG SKY by Tom We4ls. Directed by James Warwick.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“So I now say sorry to your face.”

We’re in a modest pub in Kilnsea in Northeast Yorkshire, England in the spring of the year. Angie, who owns the establishment and Lauren, who works part-time for her are cleaning up for the day when her father comes in, complaining about a stranger who ultimately enters and even more ultimately changes all their lives. He is a vegetarian, a foreigner, a man of many solid interests, particularly the sanctity of the small birds, Terns, that populate the region. According to Wikipedia, “Terns are long-lived birds and are relatively free from natural predators and parasites; most species are declining in numbers due directly or indirectly to human activities, including habitat loss, pollution, disturbance, and predation by introduced mammals.” Terns have nested on the nearby beach and become an obsession for the stranger, Ed.

He also obsesses on Lauren, to her father, Dennis’s disgust. When the two younger people move in together, the plot thickens. and the play alters into a domestic drama. James Barry was scheduled to play Dennis, but illness took its toll and he was replaced on opening night by Joel Ripka who played the role using a script and still managed to give an expert and moving performance. The challenge of professional acting is met with talent and clarity.



Meghan Maureen McDonough, Abuzar Farukh;
Photo: Maura Harty

As his daughter Lauren, Hero Marguerite drew a portrait of a discontented young woman seeking purpose in an almost aimless life. Her work in this play is exemplary, her thoughts playing clearly on her face and her intentions remarkably correct for such a foreign role. We like her very much, Lauren that is, and we appreciate everything that Marguerite brings to the performance. The play covers a year in the lives of these people and it is quite a year for Lauren who is left to deal with some extreme challenges.

Angie is played by Meghan Maureen McDonough. This actress brings depth to the most mundane dialogue and raises the level of the play to sweet melodrama with potential for a lasting impact on her audience. She is kept busy with her work in the pub, but Angie is conscious and

aware of everything going on around her. A mother of a long-dead infant, her instincts are both caring and concerned, and the finale of the play gives her a chance to appreciate the future in ways that never occurred to her. I really like McDonough's work very much.

Still, at the center of the play is Ed. Abuzar Farukh brings him to vivid life by underplaying most of the time. Farukh makes the plain-spoken, plain-looking character into a definitive focal point of the play. His concern for all thing alive, including the Terns, and Lauren is beautifully rendered. I could almost believe I was a fly on the wall witnessing reality.

James Warwick has done a fine job with this small, almost inconsequential play. He moves his actors without artifice, both physically and emotionally. This is not destined to be my favorite play of the year, but his work heightens my interest and holds my attention nevertheless.

There is a decent set designed by Ed Check, appropriate costumes by Christina Beam and perfect lighting by Lara Dubin.

This is the final season entry by Chester Theatre and it is an unusual play, worth seeing if good theater is in your genes, or even just of interest. It may change your mind about man's dedication to nature or it may just fascinate you for 95 minutes. You will talk about it for a while, that is certain, and what else is good theater about, anyway.

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Big Big Sky plays at Chester Theatre in the Town Hall Theater at Chester Town Hall through August 18. For information and tickets call 413-354-7771 or go to chestertheatre.org/