

Bridge Street Theatre, Catskill, NY
GRISWOLD by Angela J. Davis. Directed by M. Burke Walker..
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Lift up...”

In 1978 the Supreme Court brought in a decision favoring Estelle Griswold and the Planned Parenthood of New Haven’s decision to offer contraceptives and advice on a woman’s right to determine her sexual future and her right to abstain from childbirth. A long-ignored historic battle, it led the way to Roe v. Wade and all that followed for same-sex rights as well. This play tells Griswold’s story and documents her long history of standing up for human rights. It covers nearly sixty years in a brief one hundred-three minutes with a ten minute coda that is little short of thrilling. Landmarks often go unexamined and unrewarded, but this play does all that it can to rectify that situation while also entertaining us beautifully.



Leyla Modirzadeh, Andre G. Brown, Margo Whitcomb; Photo: John Sowle

Margo Whitcomb gives a brilliant performance as Estelle Griswold, She also narrates the story while playing scenes from it, making the transition in styles with ease and beauty. Even after death, Griswold makes her points and, as many already believe, death does not change her very much. She remains herself, true to herself and to her beliefs in what is right for women and men then and in the future. In a political year where so many of those rights have come into question this is a most important play making statements that must not be ignored.

Whitcomb is supported by two actors playing many roles each and playing all of them to perfection. Leyla Modirzadeh makes each of her vbatious roles unique and distinctive and when she returns to one of them we recognize the person she is playing instantly. Her voice, her posture, her movements are devoted to one character, then to another. It is beautiful work. Much the same, but not quite, can be said of Andre G. Brown. His characters have a human overlap that makes them harder to initially distinguish. He has a strong and distinctive voice that gives him the upper class demeanor that many of his roles demand This is an ensemble that makes this nearly thirty character play work so very well.

John Sowle's flexible set brings us from the humble, one-room office to the Supreme Court with ease. His effective lighting design helps the transitions and enforces the moods of the play. Simple costumes by Michelle Rogers serve the actors rather than their characters. This play is not about the look of things, but rather about ideas. Carmen Borgia's sound design was sometimes confusing.

If history and humanity are among your interests, this is definitely the play for you. If essentially wonderful acting is high on your list, I also recommend this play. If you want to be emotionally touched by a reiteration of facts, this play will do that. I guess it's the play for just about everyone who liked good theater, for that is what Bridge Street is offering here.

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Griswold plays at Bridge Street Theatre. 44 West Bridge Street, Catskill, New York through August 18. For information and tickets go to <https://bridgest.org/>.