

Majestic Theater, West Springfield, MA

A Moon for the Misbegotten, by Eugene O'Neill. Directed by James Warwick
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

"I can't bear to have you ashamed you wanted my love to comfort your sorrow!"

"Misbegotten" refers to the people at the bottom of society, Josie Hogam and her father Phil are just such people. She is a big woman, overpowering in many ways. Even so, she is poor and unimportant even in her small world. She supports the concept of moving her brothers out into the world away from the nearly barren farm her family lives on with a father who prefers his pigs to his own children. The only one he can handle is his daughter who maintains that she isn't a virgin but isn't a whore. She truly loves their landlord, James Tyrone, Jr., a man without a life who mourns his mother's death and ignores the success of his father. Both men are actors, an occupation that allows them to pretend they are not what they are.



Jay Sefton, Sue Dziura; Photo: Kait Rankins

O'Neill's play is a sonnet, thirteen lines of emotional poetry that transports us in its four acts through the emotional recognition of what Jamie and Josie mean to one another. It's two hour and twenty minute presentation takes us through three quarters of a day in their lives and allows us to witness the difficulties of love and the ecstasoes of misunderstandings. Bonded Bourbon and moonlight mix to create emotionally expressive confidences that give these two people their only opportunity to unite emotionally. The question the playwright leaves us with is

“was it all worth it?” In this production at the Majestic Theater in West Springfield the answer is yes. Jay Sefton and Sue Dziura make it very worthwhile.



Sue Dziura, John Thomas Waite;
Photo: Kait Rankins

Sefton starts out weak but that is the character and not the actor. He is an over-confident man whose power comes from his social status and his lack of confidence in the presence of a peculiar woman for whom he feels a strange attraction. What he feels is her power, her strength, but he doesn't know how to deal with it. As he grows more intimate with Josie his own sense of self grows more definite and powerful and he comes into his own. Watching Sefton's Jamie mature in a matter of hours is ultimately what this performance is about.

Dziura gives Josie her own journey. She develops a maturity and defines her character through the conversations she has with James and with her father, played by John Thomas Waite. Waite is very good as Phil Hogan, but is not Dziura's equal. Like her character the actress is supreme. I have always thought of this play as Josie's show

and here the company proves the theory. No one is her equal. O'Neill may have been writing about himself as James but he has given the play to his lady friend. From start to finish she is the one you watch, she is the one you listen to and wonder about and pray for. That her night with Jamie is not the night she desires matters less when she shows us that she has gotten more than she expected, or perhaps was entitled to have.

As her brother Mike Caleb Chew delivered a very fine performance. It was clear from his physical relationship with Dziura that Mike adored Josie and was very grateful to her for all she does for him in the first act.

As T. Steadman Harker, the rich neighbor who covets the Hogan farm, Tom Dahl realized the



Sue Dziura, Caleb Chew; Photo: Kait Rankins

author's intent. He was unpleasant and yet funny in his vehement fulminations.

Played in two acts with one intermission this edited edition of the play works nicely. Director James Warwick has done a fine job keeping the play moving inexorably toward the author's intended revelations. He uses every element of Greg Trochil's set, perfectly ugly as is appropriate for this misbegotten clan. Warwick understands the Irish-American speech patterns and rhythms in O'Neill's characters and makes them speak as they must. James McNamara's moody lighting works well for the play and Dawn McKay's costumes, especially Josie's dress, gives each character the look they require.

As the couple next to me proved this is not a play for everyone. But, if you are intelligent and patient and can appreciate the sensibility of O'Neill's special, verbose language it is a beautiful play well worth your time and attention. Go for the romance of a degenerate and a whore and discover the beauty that exists in self-defeating people who discover what love really is about and what it is for. See *A Moon for the Misbegotten* and define for yourself what that really means.

+ 10/31/2024 +

A Moon for the Misbegotten plays at the Majestic Theater, 131 Elm Street, West Springfield, Massachusetts through December 1. For information and tickets go to .info@majestictheater.com or call (413) 747-7797.

