

Majestic Theater, West Springfield, MA

**Incident at Our Lady of Perpetual Help** by Katie Forgette. Directed by Rand Foerster.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“A forty year relationship with my calendar.”*

In this genteel family sitcom, a “memory play” we are told far too often by the narrator, Linda O’Shea (played by Jenna Burns) the laughs are genuine and the situation, though ordinary, is of interest to an audience that remembers the 1970s. For those who don’t the narration is extensive and clues younger audience members into the facts of the times. It is also that lengthy narration that bogs down the play. Unlike other memory plays, such as *The Glass Menagerie* in which three lines complete the setup, this play dwells on the concept for nearly fifteen minutes which is far too long...and is brought up far too often. We get it!



Sandra Blaney, Jenna Burns, Cate Damon, Maggie Hamel; Photo: Kait Rankins

Jenna Burns handles all this repetitive narration as well as anyone possibly could and she also handles the drama in the comedy with appropriate angst and amazing grace. This Irish-Catholic family faces the traumas in their lives as well as any family could, with the possible exception of Dad (Mike) played to perfection by John Baker. Linda has told us that her father

was able to imitate lots of other folks well and so Baker's Mike assumes two other roles, the parish priest and the parish gossip. In a cast of five he is the performance star but, regrettably, no photos of him have been supplied.

Mom (Jo) is nicely played by Sandra Blaney with all the aplomb of a woman who filters life to the point where there is no bad news even with mother-in-law in a bedroom upstairs trauma. Her own physical welfare makes the show's finale as much fun as anything else in the play and Blaney plays this scene to an ideal level.



Jenna Burns  
Photo: Kait Rankins

Burns plays Linda as well as anyone could, her twin roles of modern narrator and 70's teenager similar enough to recognize and yet as different as time might allow. Burns is easy to listen to in both roles and she manages to keep up our interest as Linda and doesn't fail to engage as the narrator. Unfortunately the perspective sense of looking back forty years doesn't play as well as it should. The nearly sixty year old Linda is still the girl she was at nineteen.

Her six-year younger sister, Becky, played by Maggie Hamel, emerges as a true thirteen year old, vaguely aware of the facts of life and oddly not eager to know too much. There is truth in this dichotomy and Harner plays the difficulties as well as the revelations extremely well. There is true comedy in her playing of this role.

Cate Damon plays Aunt Terri, seemingly also a resident (at least a constant presence) at the O'Shea home is the least well-developed character in the play. We love her tone and her language, but it takes a long time to understand her place in the world. Her sad and difficult marriage is finally exploited in the second act but it is too late for us to care about her. Damon delivers Terri as well as can be expected. She is at least a different voice and a different opinion on things. She takes over the story and it's about time.



Cate Damon, Jenna Burtins;  
Photo: Kait Rankins

But still, it is John Baker who gives the play its true sense of comedy. As Linda and Becky's father, he is allowed to question his own portrayals of Pastor Lovett and the gossipy Betty. He plays both roles with appropriate fervor and comments on them with equal energy. I truly enjoyed his work in this play.

Director Rand Foerster has kept this play moving as well as anyone could. He uses the author's fervor and the characters' needs in paramount fashion. He has the visual aid of Costume Designer Dawn McKay and Scenic Designer Matthew Whiton who deliver the early 1970s very

nicely. Kudos to the sound designer as well for his or her off-stage voices.

This may not be anyone's favorite play of the year, but it satisfies on a cold winter night. If you need a laugh, this is your best choice. I guarantee you'll never forget the bird and the bees dialogue and that may just be enough to satisfy anyone.

+ 01/22/2025 +

**Incident at Our Lady of Perpetual Hope** plays at the Majestic Theatre, 131 Elm Street, West Springfield, Massachusetts through February 16. For information and tickets call 413-747-7797 or go to their website: [majestictheater.com](http://majestictheater.com).