

# The Berkshire Eagle

## Neil Simon shines in Oldcastle's "Broadway Bound"



**Anthony J. Ingargiola as Eugene and Sarah Corey as his mother, Kate, in a scene from Oldcastle Theatre Company's production of Neil Simon's "Broadway Bound."**

**PHOTO PROVIDED BY OLDCASTLE THEATRE COMPANY**

### **THEATER REVIEW**

Broadway Bound" by Neil Simon. Directed by Eric Peterson

With: Sarah Corey, Richard Howe, Anthony J. Ingargiola, Robbie Rescigno, Amy Gaither Hayes and Jason Asprey

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BENNINGTON, Vt. — Few playwrights have written about family dynamics as insightfully and with such compassion as did Neil Simon in his Pulitzer Prize-winning "Lost in Yonkers" (1991) and even more specially in his 1987 "Broadway Bound," which is being given a deeply affecting, movingly funny, richly memorable production at Oldcastle Theatre Company under the knowing directorial hands of OTC's producing artistic director Eric Peterson and a cast of veteran actors who are each at the top of their form.

"Broadway Bound" is the third play in Simon's semi-autobiographical "B" trilogy, which includes "Brighton Beach Memoirs" and "Biloxi Blues." Through an alter-ego named Eugene, the plays chronicle Simon's growth from his hormonal teen years in his parents' home in the seaside Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn through his service in the Army and now, in "Broadway Bound" his post-war life at home where he and his brother, Stan (a sublimely frenetic Robbie Rencigno) are developing their skills as an incipient comedy writing team with the aim of moving out of their parents home and into a place of their own in "the city" — Manhattan.

The year is 1949. The brothers are from solid, honest working class stock, living in a solid working class neighborhood in Brooklyn, only a few blocks from the ocean

Eugene (a thoroughly captivating Anthony J. Ingargiola) works in the stock room of a music company. Stan is the manager of boys' clothing at Abraham & Strauss, where their father, Jack, is a clothing cutter.

Opportunity has come knocking, The young men have been asked to submit a sample comedic sketch to CBS for possible use on one of their hit radio shows and the deadline is imminent.

Stan's near constant state of hysteria is, in a sense, emblematic of a family that is on the verge of imploding, especially around the relationship between their mother, Kate (a luminous and touching Sarah Carey), and Jack (Jason Asprey in a beautifully constructed, fully nuanced performance), who is rekindling a relationship with a woman with whom he had had an affair that ended one year earlier. He is feeling the weight of what he perceives as the failure of his life; falling short not only of his ambitions but his own expectations.

There is a residue of pride. "I made the best of what I did," he tells Kate. "Maybe to some people I didn't accomplish anything important, but as a cutter, I'm one of the best. One of the most respected, ask anybody."

But, after 33 years in the trade, raising two sons and making a home for his family, it's not enough. "I've stopped feeling for everything," Asprey's Jack says with quiet, subdued, wrenching recognition. "Getting up in the morning, going to bed at night. Why do I do it?" It's a rhetorical question and the absence of any answer that makes sense, indeed, any answer at all, is weighing Jack down.

For her part, Kate, ever the unassuming stoic, holds her impatience, anger, deep pain and resentment as she prepares meals for the family; looks after their good and welfare until she can hold it in no longer and she and Jack have it out in a charged scene that leaves them, and us, emotionally drained and ashen.

Corey's Kate is resourceful, efficient, pragmatic, finds her own strength in her own way. She does not suffer fools, or liars, gladly. She holds the memory — without mawkish sentiment and only when she allows herself — of the time she danced with actor George Raft in a local ballroom which she recounts for Eugene with measured grace. And, in one of the evening's more sublime moments, choreographed by Ron Ray, Eugene responds by asking her to dance with him, which they do, taking the measure of the living room (part of a magnificently designed set by Carl Sprague) with effortless ease and style, as if they were familiar dance partners who have been at this for years; who know each other's every move without exchanging a word or false step or turn. It's an indelible moment in an indelible production.

Also living with Eugene and Stan is their grandfather, Ben (Richard Howe in an exquisite, smartly calibrated performance of a man whose faculties clearly are in decline but who is, at the same time, neither anyone's fool nor unwilling to take on his responsibilities as the family patriarch.

But he is not beyond blemish. He is visited by his other daughter, Blanche (a fine turn by Amy Gaither Hayes) who, after the death of a husband she still loves, remarried, this time into money. She has come to Ben to persuade him to step up to the plate as a husband and move to Florida with his ailing wife, who lives with Blanche and is under a doctor's orders to move south. There is unfinished business between Ben and Blanche and it fuels the telling scene between them.

With all the work that preceded "Broadway Bound" and all the plays he wrote after, including the untidy, often unwieldy "Lost in Yonkers," this is Neil Simon at his very best and this Oldcastle production more than rises to the occasion.

Peterson originally scheduled Peter Shaffer's potent psychological drama, "Equus," for this season-ending slot but it was postponed because of a casting conflict. A loss, perhaps, but the gain is immeasurable.