

That Good Night



A death in the family has always provided grist for revealing, emotional confrontations, and Andrew Dolan's *That Good Night* is no exception. Told with a big dose of humor, the world premiere that concludes the Road Company's 2011-12 season, layers the disparate anxieties of the O'Dwyer siblings when their father falls into a coma, and the family gathers, ready for his presumptive

death. To describe any more of the plot would give away some of the more delicious twists and turns of this dark comedy.

Dolan has an affectionate ear for this typically American Irish family. And he writes with clear favorites in mind. The matriarch, Millicent (played by Judith Scarbone until July 13th) is a typical worrying, controlling presence. She is nurturing her youngest, Sean (Bernie Zilinskas), who lives at home between sporadic gigs as a clown. Her husband, Jim (Leon Russom) begins the play in a coma, and ends it... well, that's the surprise.

On hearing of their father's imminent demise, the three remaining siblings – copywriter Alice (Elizabeth Sampson); newly separated Chuck (John Cragen) with his new love interest, Louise (Keelia Flinn); Danny (Chet Grissom) with wife, Gretchen (Melissa Kite) – converge.

The ensemble, most of them members of the Road Theatre Company, generally works together with fluidity to create the sense of a family that is just slightly off-kilter. Notable among them are Keelia Flinn as the lone outsider and Bernie Zilinskas who shows damage with gentle appeal. Although their love story is never fleshed out, one senses there is yet another play in this relationship.

Richness of characterization must have been the appeal for the Road to produce Dolan's play in the first place. Yet, as noted, there is more than one plot struggling

to breathe free in *That Good Night*. The first act, composed of a number of “getting to know you” set pieces, feels over-ripe with revelation. In the second, the plot finally begins to churn in unexpected twists, leading to the final “shaggy dog” ending. Despite Scott Alan Smith’s serviceable direction and the admirable investment of the cast, Dolan’s maiden play might profit from a strategic re-kilter.

The production gets a big boost from Stephen Gifford’s sit-com perfect setting; Jeremy Pivnick’s always competent lighting and Mary Jane Miller’s 2000-era dressing (can it be?). Set dressing and props by Linda DeMetrick and ambient sound design by David B. Marling complete the picture.

The Road Theatre Company’s *That Good Night* performs at the Lankershim Arts Center, 5108 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00 pm, and Sundays at 2:00 pm through July 21st. All seats, \$25.00, but Economic Stimulus tickets available July 10th and 17th (\$10.00). Phone (866) 811-4111 or online at www.roadtheatre.org.