

# Chronicle Theater Review



## Well-tuned Company Makes For Funny, Acerbic 'God Of Carnage'

by Ellen Petry Whalen

The title, "God of Carnage" is surprisingly weighty and simultaneously intriguing for a dark comedy centering on the aftermath of a playground fight; but when it comes to parents defending their children, expect the unexpected. Elements Theatre Company makes full use of the farcical situation to produce a high-tension comedy, where the awkward, pregnant pauses reveal more than the well-scripted dialogue.

The 2009 Broadway show, written by the French playwright Yasmina Reza, won a Tony for Best Play, along with the cast's four famous actors (James Gandolfini, Jeff Daniels, Marcia Gay Harden and Hope Davis) being nominated for Best Actor, and Marcia Gay Harden winning.

Inspired by a true story, "God of Carnage" begins with Alan and Annette, the parents of the 11-year-old perpetrator, Freddie, sitting awkwardly in the stylish Brooklyn living room of Michael and Veronica, the parents of the victimized Bruno. They are carefully choosing their words to discuss what happened after "a verbal confrontation" where, "armed with a stick" in the "haven" of Cobble Hill Park, Freddie struck Bruno, knocking out two teeth.

Right from the start, playwright Reza brings the audience into the very uncomfortable situation by having Bruno's parents explain, "If we were this child's (meaning Freddie's) parents we would want to be told" what happened, which automatically begs the question wouldn't you, if confronted with the same problem? This device makes the play



Danielle Dwyer and Rachel McKendree in Elements Theatre Company's "God of Carnage."

This honest, acerbic, and at times profane dialogue flows naturally (just like the top-shelf rum the couples drink), as a wide range of controversial topics are touched upon. However, the conversation is always reined in by the pressing question of how to deal with "the altercation." As blame is thrown about, and the idea that boys will be boys is considered, surprisingly, alliances shift, and the seemingly stable marriages begin to show their cracks.

As the exacting hostess and writer Veronica, Rachel McKendree is a tightly wound taskmaster who sees herself as "a custodian of the world," trying to hold everyone to her high moral standards, but ultimately ends up feeling "humiliated" by the whole experience.

Playing her husband, the professional wholesaler Michael, Chris Kanaga starts out as the amiable, non-confrontational host, but as the evening heats up, admits he is not a "liberal" but "fundamentally uncouth." He proceeds to make himself more comfortable by removing some of his restrictive attire and reveals his belief in the "idea of John Wayne virility" just like Freddie's dad

reveal their true selves through their many cutting remarks, which briefly hang in the air after spoken, wreaking their emotional havoc and then figuratively cover the living room floor, symbolic of the carnage in the title.

Alan.

Brad Lussier is the unscrupulous pharmaceutical lawyer Alan, who believes we only care about ourselves in the end. He claims his son was just defending himself, since Bruno called him a "snitch" and wouldn't let him join his "gang." Through the father's many insensitive actions, it appears the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

As wealth manager Annette, Danielle Dwyer starts out very defensive. Veronica even describes her as a "phony," but after having her share of drinks, she becomes much more approachable, and as the dynamics once again shift displays raw and unbridled emotion.

Directed by Dwyer, the 75-minute drama has no intermission, which maintains the characters' high stress levels and keeps the laughter, albeit nervous at times, rolling. The well-tuned actors gradually drop their initial pretenses and good manners, as each dramatically loses control physically and emotionally, and afterward proclaims "This is the unhappiest day of my life."

The beautifully adorned yet cozy living room, designed by Sarah Allen and Annemarie Norman, helps to make the audience feel at ease while disarming them at the same time.

Elements Theatre Company is known for their well-chosen and stellar productions, and this one is no exception. However, the exacting troupe only produces two or three shows a year locally, so act now, if you don't want to miss out. Plus, they have a lovely wine and cheese reception after the performance.

### Details:

"God of Carnage"

At Elements Theatre Company,

Rock Harbor, Orleans

Through Nov. 23

Information and reservations: 508-240-2400