

'Good People' propelled by fascinating characters, powerful drama

David A. Sargent/ Special to the Sun Journal

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LEWISTON -- One after another, the six fascinating characters in "Good People" present some powerful drama seasoned with humor and provocative ideas.

The play, currently on The Public Theatre stage, questions whether luck or hard work decides a person's success. For Margaret, who has just lost her Dollar Store cashier job, it seems there's no escaping her tough South Boston neighborhood. On the other hand, an old flame, Mike, escaped and became a well-to-do doctor. Or did he?

The lead role of Margaret is played to perfection by Janet Mitchko, whose versatility and skill in both comedy and drama is well known to TPT patrons. Mitchko, co-artistic director of TPT, has appeared in dozens of the theater's productions since the early 1990s.

The first act introduces Margaret's numerous trials and tribulations at the low end of the economic and social ladder. Everyone agrees she's "a nice person," yet all the odds in her life seem to be stacked against her.

Margaret's release from her job comes from Stevie, a nice-enough guy who's the store manager. He has overlooked Margaret's chronic tardiness as much as his bosses would allow.

Stevie is played by Blake Segal. His role seems minor at the beginning, but it becomes apparent in unexpected ways that he's a key element in the drama's dynamics. Segal plays Stevie in a low-key and appealing manner as he evolves into a surprising multi-dimensional character.

As the scene moves to Margaret's kitchen, the audience meets her friends, Dottie and Jean.

Sharon Alexander portrays Dottie, Margaret's good-natured landlady with an endearing, ditsy twist. Anyone who sees this show is doomed to giggle whenever reminded of a line (not to be divulged here) that she repeats a few times.

Jean, a brassy Southie, is played by Laurie Dawn. She and Dottie are important in holding Margaret's difficult life together. Jean lends never-ending support in a rather back-handed manner. Dottie is always there to watch Margaret's grown, but mentally-challenged daughter while Margaret battles the challenges of life in South Boston. For all of them, the church-basement Bingo game is an important routine.

At wit's end, Margaret decides to visit Mike in his office, hoping he can lead her to a job. As Act One ends, she wheedles an invitation to the birthday party being thrown for him at his Chestnut Hill home.

In Act Two, Mike's plush suburban home, and his attractive and intelligent wife, are seen in contrast to the run-down atmosphere of the South Boston. It's here that the drama of "Good People" moves into high gear.

Mike, played by Joe Gately, and Kate, his wife played by Christina Gordon, are having marital problems, and Margaret's appearance with her disturbing memories of the old neighborhood stirs things up.

The excellent and powerful performances by both Gately and Gordon balance the humor and the struggles of South Boston life.

All the actors except Mitchko are new to the TPT stage. They have a wide range of experience including stage and television.

Director Christopher Schario, TPT's executive/artistic director, brings out the best from the entire cast.

There's also plenty of talent backstage. The bare-bones set design of Act One and the opulent Chestnut Hill living room are by set designer Judy Staicer. Lighting design is by Bart Garvey and costumes by Jonna Klaiber. Lisa Bragdon is stage manager.

"Good People" was written by David Lindsay-Abaire, whose critically-acclaimed play "Rabbit Hole" won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

There's some mature language in "Good People."

Remaining performances of the show are at 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday, March 20-21; 8 p.m. Saturday, March 22; and at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 23. There is an added Saturday matinee at 2 p.m. March 22.

For tickets call 782-3200 or visit www.thepublictheatre.org for more information.