

Theater Review: South Boston not all bad in 'Good People'

The themes throughout the play strike a chord with anyone who has struggled.

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The song "Dirty Water" reverberated through the Public Theatre in Lewiston on Friday night as the stage lights dawned on an alley and a black trash bag leaning against a plastic trash bin. The set was simple and nondescript, but the classic lyrics completed the image perfectly. Playwright David Lindsay-Abaire was about to tell a story about his town, South Boston.

It's a rough neighborhood that hasn't changed much in the nearly 50 years since "Dirty Water" was written. The Charles River, thieves, frustrated women and cool people – it's all still there. "Good People" tells the everyday story of one frustrated woman, Margaret (Janet Mitchko).

She hasn't had an easy life. Margaret is a middle-aged, single mother of an adult disabled child. As the play opens, life is once again throwing her a figurative gutter ball, this time in the back alley of her employer, the Dollar Store.

This job is just the latest in a long list of jobs she has been fired from due to hiccups in life that include child-care issues and transportation delays. Despite her pleas and offer to take a pay cut, Margaret is once again fired. And, adding insult to injury, the hatchet man is Stevie (Blake Segal), the son of her deceased friend.

Margaret's support system is limited to her unreliable landlady, Dottie (Sharon Alexander), and her big-hearted, mouthy friend, Jean (Laurie Dawn).

Desperate to find employment, Margaret takes Jean's advice and pays a visit to her ex-boyfriend, Mike (Joe Gately), who's now a "lace curtain" doctor living in affluent Chestnut Hill.

Mike escaped the neighborhood, but are he and his wife, Kate (Christina Gordon), happily living the American dream?

The drama delivers a hard-luck look at life in South Boston. Alcoholism, violence and poverty are prevalent. For Margaret and her friends, bingo is the biggest source of fun and excitement.

Mitchko nicely captures her character's frustration over her derailed life and uncertain future.

True to life, the play also mixes in humor. The audience laughed Friday as Dottie and Jean traded barbs. And everyone found amusement poking fun at Dottie's handcrafted bunnies.

Alexander provided an entertaining dose of self-preservation as Dottie, and Dawn memorably portrayed Jean as a brazen spitfire, championing her friend.

Although a more minor character, Segal's Stevie provided great contrast to Gately's "altruistic" character, Mike, recalling the age-old adage about judging a book by its cover.

Gordon added further depth as the rich-born wife, faced with her own life challenges.

"Good People" is undoubtedly setting-specific, with plenty of inside Southie jokes, but the themes throughout the play strike a chord with anyone who has struggled.

Who are the "good people" in life? And when all is said and done, is hard work all it takes to succeed, or does success hinge on the cards one is dealt by life?

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