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Having attended Theatre by the Sea's *The 39 Steps* last season, I had high hopes going into *God of Carnage* last weekend. *The 39 Steps* was expertly crafted and delivered, and though I remember thinking it felt a tad bit long, it left me wondering if the next season at Theatre by the Sea would deliver another great comedy.

God of Carnage absolutely lived up to my expectations. Unlike *The 39 Steps*, *God of Carnage* even had a tidy 90-minute running time (there's no intermission), and the play didn't feel tedious or overdone.

The play centers on two couples, both with 11-year-old sons. The boys, we learn, had a fight involving a stick that ended with one of them losing two teeth, and so, the responsible and civilized parents have decided to meet to talk about the root of the problem.

But responsibility and civility soon fly right out the window, and boy is that funny to watch.



(from left) Marianne Ferrari and Kevin Kraft as Annette and Alan Raleigh, try to intervene as Veronica, played by Lisa Ann Goldsmith attacks her husband Michael, played by Robert Ierardi photo by Mark Turek

The play is set at the Novak home, where Veronica Novak (played by Lisa Ann Goldsmith) and Michael Novak (Robert Ierardi) offer their guests everything from apple and pear clafoutis to Cuban cigars. The visitors are Annette and Alan Raleigh (played by Marianne Ferrari and Kevin Kraft) and are a stark contrast to the Novak’s liberal sensibilities. The Raleigh’s are sharp dressers; he’s a lawyer and she’s in wealth management. He’s got a tie and she wears her hair in a harsh black bob. Conversely, the Novak’s have no need for pinstripe suits and pointed-toe boots – she’s just written a book on Darfur and he sells frying pans. She’s got short red curls and wears a gauzy African inspired frock; he’s got a pullover on and doesn’t seem to know how to even tie a tie. The contrast between the couples sets up some delicious conflict.

And there is a lot of conflict. When the play first began, I wondered how the Raleigh’s would manage to stay in the Novak home for the entire 90 minutes. Would there be other scenes? Certainly we wouldn’t meet the children – this is a cast of four adults. But soon, the Raleigh’s were making for the door, and then again, coats on, coats off, a struggle over whether to stay or go. Once the action gets moving, it doesn’t seem overly improbable that this couple would throw common sense to the wind and stay at the Novak home long past their welcome.

There are lots of laughs along the way. Despite its strange, dark-sounding title, this play is comedy. The dialogue is loaded with true comedic gems, and the actors add nuanced beats to the script that always landed a laugh. But the most uproariously funny moment of the night is when Annette gets sick, and vomits on stage. Yes folks, a rare treat in live theater! Actually, it’s hard to say what’s funnier: Annette puking or Michael cleaning it up. (It’s a must see.)

The cast of four, under the direction of Amiee Turner, did a masterful job in their roles, and each succeeded in maintaining some shred of likeability despite their outward and obvious flaws. The set was wonderful, a stunning but simple design by Weston Wilkerson and Marilyn Salvatore’s costumes added to each of the character’s distinct personalities.



God of Carnage is a nice change of pace; it isn’t long, it isn’t preachy and it isn’t obvious. At the end of the play, a speech made by Goldsmith’s character even managed to choke me up. Sure, I was still laughing, but it tugged at my heart strings, too. And I think that’s what playwright Yasmina Reza wanted. It’s a comedy, but it makes you think. I was certainly thinking when I left the theater, especially since the ending seemed so unresolved. After watching these four lunatics for 90-minutes, what was I supposed to take away? I’ll let you decide what you take away from it for yourself.

So go see *God of Carnage*. In addition to it being a fun and thought-provoking night of theater, it’s also Ocean State Theatre Company’s last production in the space (and a great finale, too.)

God of Carnage runs until Sept. 16 at Theatre by the Sea in Matunuck. For tickets and information call 782-TKTS or visit www.theatrebythesea.com.

Kim Kalunian | Contributing Writer

Kim Kalunian is a local singer, dancer, actress and comedienne whose talents have taken her around New England and New York. She is also a journalist and theater critic. Follow her on twitter @Kimkalunian. For more information on Kim, visit her site [here](#), or email her at kimberly_kalunian@yahoo.com.

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