

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15, 2011

THEATER REVIEW: *Night, Mother* @ New City Stage Co.



Twenty minutes into **New City Stage Co.**'s production of Marsha Norman's ***Night, Mother***, one of the play's two central characters announces she is going to kill herself before the end of the night. Heavy stuff. At 90 minutes with no intermission, *Night, Mother* offers a candid portrayal of suicide and family drama. Theatergoers looking for light entertainment, beware — **this is not for the faint of heart.**

Night, Mother, directed by **Rosey Hay**, takes place in a farmhouse somewhere in rural Pennsylvania. The play unfolds in one act and revolves around the dialogue between a mother, Thelma (**Cathy Simpson**), and a daughter, Jessie (**Wendy Staton**), after Jessie finds her father's gun, and states — matter-of-factly — that she plans to take her own life at the end of the night. Simpson and Staton give strong performances and seem well-matched as mother and daughter, with neither actress overshadowing the other. As a daughter determined to end her own life, Staton exudes self-assuredness, broken only by occasional moments of self-doubt, making audiences wonder **whether Thelma will be able to persuade her daughter to rethink her decision.** For her part, Simpson delivers a convincing portrayal of a mother on the brink of losing a child, alternating between moments of disbelief, hope and despair.

One of the most interesting elements of *Night, Mother* is the stage design and **the characters' interaction with their environment.** Made to look like the interior of a living room and adjoining kitchen, the set is meticulously

constructed, with enough small, decorative touches — like the gallery of family portraits carefully hung on the wall behind the couch — to make it seem as though a real family inhabits the space.

Simpson and Staton take full advantage of the set to add interest to their performances. Both actresses appear at home on stage, and move through the two rooms performing a variety of mundane tasks throughout the evening. After telling Thelma that she intends to kill herself, **Jessie sets to work accomplishing a checklist of household chores** — refilling the candy jars, leveling off the sugar container and washing the dishes. It seems both natural and disturbing that she would continue to perform such routine tasks on this particular night. Staton's use of space, in particular, makes her character seem more believable and even ordinary.

The sense of banality achieved through the interaction of the characters with their surroundings subtly but powerfully reminds the audience that **this could be any family**. Safe inside our cozy homes, we all have demons to struggle against.

Night, Mother runs through July 3 at the Adrienne Theatre, 2030 Sansom St., newcitystage.org.

Posted by Clare Foran @ 9:00 AM [Permalink](#) | [Post a comment](#)

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