

THEATER | REVIEW

At the Gamm, family dynamic has feel of something real

By RICK MASSIMO
JOURNAL POP MUSIC WRITER

"This is the party that never ends," says the hapless Paul near the end of "Festen," the play that opened Monday night at the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre. And sure enough, the play, an adaptation of the 1998 Thomas Vinterberg film, is structured as an interminably painful family gathering that's blasted to pieces by painful revelations.

The theater implores critics not to reveal any of the major plot points or revelations. OK, fine. But really, they're not all that surprising. What hits like a hammer is the family dynamic, and the denial, that follows the revelations made by Christian at the party for his father, Helge's, 60th birthday with the whole family in attendance.

Christian, played by Steve Kidd, is troubled from the minute the play starts, and the assorted crazies in his family, particularly his obnoxious brother, Michael (Alexander Platt), don't really help. You can tell that something's about to go down, and even though you can probably predict Christian's bombshell regarding the recent death of his twin sister, Linda, it's no less powerful when it lands, thanks to his almost casual delivery and the long, pin-drop silence that comes afterward.

From there, the family

tries to sort out and deal with the reality of Christian's accusations, and the reactions range from violence to sneering vivacity to chilling patronization. Helge, played by Will Lyman, brings a chill to the theater not by denying the charges but by essentially asserting that Christian is unworthy of bringing them. And Casey Seymour Kim, as the matriarch, Else, Sandra Laub manages to hold a hostess-worthy radiance at the same time as a hurtfully maternal disdain.

In between, the party careens from these confrontations to equally painful attempts by the family and friends to unhear what they've heard — attempts that are no less painful for their being laugh-out-loud funny, especially coming from Kerry Callery as Paul, Tom Oakes as the senile grandfather and Richard Noble as the determined family friend charged with being master of ceremonies.

The singing and dancing throughout the play become more and more desperate as it continues, becoming near the end suitably ragged and appropriately ghastly.

The film "Festen" (released in the United States as "The Celebration") was made under the rules of



The large cast of "Festen" at Pawtucket's Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre deals with confrontations that are no less painful for their being laugh-out-loud funny.

PETER GOLDNER

the Dogme 95 movement, a collection of cinema techniques and aesthetics that heralded naturalism above all — no artificial light, sound or music, handheld cameras and location shooting only, not even any props that weren't already on location when the film crew got there. Theater can't replicate those techniques, of course, and the theatrical version of "Festen," written by Englishman David Eldridge, doesn't try. Though it sticks closely to the story of the film, it adapts with theatrical techniques such as

an introductory scene in which three pairs of people converse around one bed, with flirtation, marital strife and family secrets all giving way to the haunting truth of Linda's death.

But while this production can't deliver naturalism, it can deliver honesty. And it does that to powerful emotional effect throughout — so mercilessly so that "Festen" while formally pretty straightforward, feels like something new — something like the way the original, revelatory realism of Ibsen must have felt. In

less skilled hands it all could have been unforgettably melodramatic, but director Tony Estrella and the large cast always go for the least affect, the most direct approach, the straightest line.

Estrella has been calling this a "modern tragedy," and in a way it is — mainly because, just as life goes on, "the party that never ends" does in fact end, and the play culminates with a wrung-out family picking through a morning-after breakfast. Michael's young daughter (played by Emeline

Herreid) caps the simple, nearly wordless ending. And that last moment, like "Festen" in total, is neither a downer nor a moment of uplift — it merely evokes the quiet, powerful impression of having seen something real.

"Festen" runs through Feb. 12 at the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, 172 Exchange St., Pawtucket. Call (401) 723-4266 or go to gammtheatre.org for tickets and more information.

rmasimo@providencejournal.com
(401) 277-7206

ON STAGE

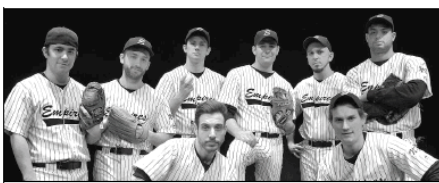
OPENING

"In Conflict," Imagine Productions, University of Rhode Island/Feinstein Providence Campus, Peet Theatre, 80 Washington St., Providence. 461-3813; cdfr.org. Play features individual stories of mostly college-age Iraq War

veterans presented in their own words, taken from audio transcripts of actual interviews. Fri-Sun 7:30 pm. Admission is pay-what-you-can. Closes Jan. 29.

Rhode Island Black Storytellers, 421-7427; rhobest.org. **"The Family Storytelling Concert,"** YWCA Northern Rhode Island, 34 Blackstone St., Woonsocket. 789-7489. 6:30 pm. Free.

Sat. Free Family Playdays, Providence Public Library, 150 Empire St. 455-8000. Storytelling workshop with Lyn Ford, 12:30-2 pm. Family Storytelling Concert, 2:30-4 pm. Free.



RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

"Take Me Out," a passionate and patriotic look at "The Great American Pastime," is at Warren's 2nd Story Theatre through Feb. 12.

Sat. Storytelling Concert, RISD Auditorium, 17 Canal St., Providence 709-9400; artlist.com. Marketplace doors open at 7 pm. \$10 advance, \$15 door.

Sun. Family Storytelling Concert, Martin Luther King Center, 20 Marcus Wheatland Blvd., Newport. 346-4028. 2 pm. Donations accepted.

"Talking With..." Little Theatre of Fall River, The Firebarn, Prospect Street and Highland Avenue, Fall River. (508) 675-1822; littetheatre.com. Jane Martin monologues feature idiosyncratic characters that amuse, move and frighten, always speaking from the depths of their souls. They include a balloon twirler, a fundamentalist snake handler, an ex rodeo rider and an address willing to go to any length to get a job. Thu 7:30 pm; Fri-Sat 8 pm; Sun 2 pm. Closes Jan. 28.

CONTINUING
"Festen," Sandra Feinstein Gamm Theatre, 172 Exchange St., Pawtucket. 723-4266.

For more theater listings, go to ThingsToDo@providencejournal.com and click on "Performing Arts."

"3 One Acts," S.A.L.T. (State Actors Live Theater), Black Box Theatre, Artists' Exchange, 50 Rolfe Square, Cranston. 480-9475; artists-exchange.org

"Crazy Girls," "Moby Food" and **"That Other Person"** by David Lindsay-Abaire and eight new monologues by Kevin Broccoli. Fri-Sun 7:30 pm. Pay-what-you-can preview dress rehearsals Thu for guests with reservations. \$15 students/seniors \$10. Closes Jan. 29.

"The Sugar Bean Sisters," The Community Players, Jenks Auditorium, Division Street, Pawtucket. 726-6860; thecommunityplayers.org. A comedy by Nathan Sanders. Fri-Sat 8 pm, Sun 2 pm. \$15, students through high school \$12. Closes Sun.

"Take Me Out," 2nd Story Theatre, 28 Market St., Warren. 247-4300; 2ndStoryTheatre.com. Richard Greenberg's passionate and patriotic look at "The Great American Pastime" reveals a peek into that most exclusive of boys' clubs: the locker room of a major league baseball team. Thu 7 pm; Fri-Sat 8 pm; Sun 3, 7 pm. \$25, under 21 \$20. Closes Feb. 12.

BLESSED SACRAMENT SCHOOL
240 REGENT AVENUE, PROVIDENCE, RI

OPEN HOUSE and REGISTRATION for the 2012-2013 SCHOOL YEAR

Thursday, January 26th... 4:30 pm - 6:30 pm
Friday, January 27th... 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
Sunday, January 29th... 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

SO MUCH TO CHEER ABOUT

**PRESCHOOL AGES 3-5
FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN
and GRADES 1 to 8**

Quality Catholic Education • Academic Excellence
Before and After School Extended Care

ACCREDITED BY THE NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Visit our website: www.blessedschoolpvd.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION CALL **401-831-3993**

©2011 Vera Bradley Design, Inc.

Vera Bradley

zero WAMPUM

New! Spring 2012 Colors & Styles
The latest collections have just arrived!

Shown: Laura in Camellia, Ellie Blue, Island Blooms & Rosy Posies

161 OLD TOWER HILL RD., WAKEFIELD, RI • 401-789-7172