

SON AND BROTHER
By John F.X. Delaney
Generic Theatre
July 10-19, 2009
For tickets: 757-441-2797

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

We can pick our friends. We're stuck with our family. And yet, the deeply embedded bonds of familial love or connection, however they may manifest themselves, never leave us. These facts are very much a part of this play.

When we enter the theatre, we are struck by a cut in half boat with a corpse neatly laid out in it. A middle aged man and a much older man who looks exactly like the corpse are viewing the body. The program does not give us the time or place of the action. The room has chairs arranged for a gathering of some sort. There are military posters on the wall and the American flag and a Marine Corps Banner are displayed along side them. We gradually gain intriguing information.

The action of this absorbing drama evolves ever so slowly. It unravels as if one were peeling an onion by painstakingly removing each layer. There is mysterious confusion and wonderment. It's an effective device for dramatic writing and Delaney utilizes it with subtle skill.

We learn that the old man we see moving around is seen only by us. It turns out he is the omnipresent dear departed... He is Malachi by name and is the father of Mickey the other man. Mickey, especially well portrayed by Fran Peterson, is highly agitated, and drinking generous amounts of good Irish whiskey kept in the rather bizarre coffin. They are awaiting the arrival of the younger son and brother, Desmond, (David Adams) who suddenly left home for a far country to escape the Viet Nam war many years ago. Mickey has taken care of the parents and the family construction business which the boozing father was letting slide, and another matter or two, in his brother's absence. Brother Desmond has a family in Sweden and is a professor of philosophy. The brothers are direct opposites. They've come together with festering hostile memories for the funeral and wake of their father. As you may have gathered by now, the story is a variation of the Biblical parable of The Prodigal Son set in modern day Hampton Roads.

There is a young priest, performed with competence by Luke Crownover, whose background is a bit complex. Suffice to say, there are close connections between him and Desmond. They have a very important confrontational scene in which the two actors do not reach the emotional depth the circumstances seem to warrant. The problem exists in part because David Adams, who has many good, believable moments, also has an annoying habit of covering his face with his hands at times of crisis. As a result, he conceals any painful conflict and inner suffering that may be going on.

The patriarch Malachi is quite simply splendid. He's like an alcoholic Santa whom I've encountered a few times in years gone by.. He presides over the proceedings with an intense yet hazy, boozy inner life and creates a keen awareness of both past and present family strife that the brothers unfold.

Jane C. Dewberry directed this overall very good cast with restraint, simple truth and honesty. The result is a most satisfying evening in the theatre.

In Delaney's telling of the tale of the two brothers, the lost are now found. At least for now. The future seems to be on fragile ground.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.