

## *'Over the River and Through the Woods' delights at Shadowland*

Shadowland Stages is a hidden gem in Ellenville. I've been lucky enough to see a few shows there with my parents and when I got the opportunity to review "Over the River and Through the Woods" by Joe DiPietro I jumped at it.

"Over The River and Through The Woods" starts out as a bit of a screwball comedy centered around 29-year-old Nick (John Caliendo), whose lived his entire life by both sets of Italian grandparents: Frank & Aida (Ray Faiola and Peggy Cosgrave) and Nunzio & Emma (Jon Freda and Marine Re). Nick's parents and sister have moved and during one of his weekly trips to Sunday dinner Nick tells them he too is moving across the country. The grandparents scheme to set him up with a young lady, Caitlin O'Hare (Kate McMorran) to get him to stay near them. And just when you think the show is a romantic comedy it transforms into something more: a show about the love between a grandchild and his grandparents, and his opportunity to get to know them as more than just a bunch of old people.

I, like Caitlin in the show, lost all of my grandparents by the time I was 16, but this show made me smile and tear up. Nick's character gets the opportunity to learn about his grandparents in a way many of us do not and while I know it was fictional, I got a bit jealous.

The art of this show was that I felt like I was sitting in Frank & Aida's living room. I felt like I was part of the show. The set design was brilliant and detailed from a crucifix over the hallway door to catalogs strewn about in various catchalls. From the moment you step into the theater you were welcomed into a home.

John Caliendo was terrific as Nick, who struggles with anxiety and a touch of fear about leaving his family. His asides to the audience were funny and at times heart-breaking. His Nick was the epitome of many young people: we don't want the older generation to tell us how to live our life, but we also want their approval. His Nick believes he can have it all, and Caliendo didn't shy away from portraying how hard that can sometimes be.

There would be no show without Nick's scheming grandparents. Their number one rule is "tengo familia" a catchall phrase to encompass one's responsibility to their

spouse, children and grandchildren. Ray Faiola as Frank was a firebrand with his zinging one-liners, but also pulled at your heartstrings in sentimental moments. I loved his scene with Nick when he recounted his stories of his own father.

Peggy Cosgrave was the epitome of the doting Italian grandmother. Her character smothers those she cares about in food and nurture. Cosgrave was lovely and funny, and reminded me of my own grandmother with her pride in her husband, and grandchild.

Nick's passionate maternal grandparents may have stolen the show for me. Jon Freda, as Grandpa Nunzio, illustrated how hard it is to let go of one you love even when you know it's the right thing to do. While he was terrific with his comedy, I think the moments that impressed me most were his stories of wooing his wife and his goodbye to his grandson at the end of the show. Marine Re was loud, comedic and vivacious as Emma. The pushy Italian grandmother to the T.

And Kate McMorran was a lovely addition as Caitlin O'Hare bringing a touch of those who never get the chance to really know their grandparents. She was sweet and lovely in her scenes with the entire cast at dinner.

It's very hard to write a glowing review with a word count. I could write about this show for pages and pages. It was a funny, heartfelt coming-of-age story, and it was real. It's a wonderful play with a wonderful cast that highlights an ever constant in our world: how do you reach across a generational gap and talk to those you love before they're gone. You could replace the nationality of the family in the play and it could fit into any time period. And ultimately it will leave you asking the same thing Nick does: How much do you owe someone who cares for you? Maybe you owe them the chance to listen to a story just one more time, and then look back on it with fondness.

"Over The River and Through the Woods" is playing at Shadowland Stages at 157 Canal St. Ellenville. The show will run through September 8th, Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased through the Box Office, by phone at 845-647-5511, or online at <https://shadowlandstages.org/>.