

# Playing Nasty

Parenthood turns ugly in the Lord Leebrick Production of *God of Carnage*

**W**here do your loyalties lie? With your spouse? Your sex? Your child?

When an 11-year-old boy gets a few teeth smashed out by a stick-wielding playmate, the appropriate thing for his conscientious parents to do is to invite the offender's parents over for a conversation, maybe some clafouti and a drafted statement of the incident. In this comedy-of-no-manners, the polite conference quickly devolves into a rum-soaked battle of ego where well-heeled family folk are exposed for the flesh-eating Neanderthals they really are.

Veronica (Laura Robinson) loves a victim and is nearly salivating with pleasure as she describes her son's lost teeth and

partially exposed nerve. She doesn't want compensation; all she wants is a complete and clear acknowledgement of herself as a superior parent, intellect and human being. Finally pushed to his tipping point, her neat and attentive husband (Russell Dyball) unleashes his inner caveman right in the middle of his tastefully decorated living room.

Shannon Coltrane's Annette is somewhat more sympathetic, as she's just a rich, skinny, pretentious lady involved in "wealth management." It's her corporate-lawyer husband Alan (Chris McVay) we hate the most as he relentlessly answers his cell phone, interrupting the proceedings as he attempts to get his pharmaceutical clients out of hot water for pushing

dangerous medications.

In *God of Carnage*, playwright Yasmina Reza makes it clear that playground altercations aren't limited to childhood, and *Lord of the Flies* can apply to all of us. It won a 2009 Tony award for Best Play.

Director Fred Gorelick stages a darker production of *Carnage*, with less slapstick and more guttural sighing than one might expect. The missed opportunities for humor would have gone a long way towards courting audience buy-in. *Carnage* is a short 80 minutes, but even that felt tedious as the characters unfolded one bad behavior after another.

On the other hand, when it becomes apparent 20 minutes into the play that neither couple really cares about their

kid, it's pretty damn hard to laugh at anything. The script didn't tap into the primal parenting instincts that turns us into she-wolves, but was more concerned with the lengths we will go to in protecting our image. While I am sure our town has its share of pretentious parents, these characters are so over-the-top it is unlikely they'll strike a chord of self-recognition.

It's a treat, though, to get to see a staging of Reza's play. The provocative French playwright has been at the center of controversy since her love-it-or-hate-it runaway success *Art*. She is lauded for weaving deep, philosophical themes into plays for the masses, while simultaneously accused of being a "boulevard entertainer in highbrow drag." Lord Leebrick Theatre gives you the opportunity to check out *God of Carnage* and decide for yourself. **EW**

*God of Carnage* runs Sept. 14-Oct. 6 at Lord Leebrick Theatre; \$18-\$24; \$12, 25 and under.

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