

LCC STUDENT PRODUCTIONS ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

COMPANY

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY STEPHEN SONDHEIM BOOK BY GEORGE FURTH



JANUARY 31, FEBRUARY 1-2, 8-10, 14-16 - BLUE DOOR THEATER - LCC BUILDING 6
4000 E 30TH AVE - ALL SHOWS 7:30 - 2:00 MATINEE FEBRUARY 10
TICKETS: \$13 GENERAL \$10 STUDENT/SENIOR
\$2 DISCOUNT WITH TWO CANS OF FOOD FOR FOOD FOR LAKE COUNTY
BOX OFFICE: 541-463-5761 ONLINE: WWW.LANECC.EDU/TICKETS

Oregon Contemporary Theatre

Next To Normal

music by Tom Kitt
book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey
directed by Craig Willis · music direction by Nathan Alef

Now In Our New Theatre
@194 W Broadway

The Tony
& Pulitzer
Prize Winning
Musical!

Don't Miss The Show That
Audiences & Critics Are Raving About!

Tickets @ www.octheatre.org
or at 541.465.1506

January 25 - February 16

At The Lord/Leebrick Playhouse




MORE THAN NORMAL

Oregon Contemporary Theatre's *Next to Normal* wows at Lord/Leebrick Playhouse

“That was the best play I’ve seen in Eugene,” I hear one audience member say. “It’s like something you’d see in Ashland,” another woman comments. Oregon Contemporary Theatre (OCT) opens a new theater and a new era with *Next To Normal*.

Suffering from bipolar disorder, beset with hallucinations, Diana (Susannah Mars) is only declared stable when she is so deeply buried in medication that she can no longer feel anything at all. Her family attempts to operate around her illness, but that becomes impossible after Diana creates the “happiest septic tank on the block,” disposing her medicine down the drain, staring down the painful journey of mental illness.

Diana’s husband, Dan (Brian Haimbach), is desperate to return his wife to the woman he fell in love with. With his excellent intentions and rose-colored glasses he stifles his own grief as he ministers to her disease. Their daughter is desperate to be seen and learns from example to mourn her own lost childhood, first in zealous over-achievement, then in self-medication. Like bipolar itself, this play has no easy answers. Diana’s medications are mixed and modified, the best psychotherapy is attempted and finally electroconvulsive therapy. The ending is satisfyingly unresolved.

OCT, formerly known as Lord Leebrick, opened the new space and celebrated a new name with one hell of a show. This is professional theater. In Eugene, we accept the often-cast actor with a well-worn bag of tricks, along with the miscasting of a nice person in a role they are really not ready for. We overlook the crackling sound system and the costumes that are very close to period, and that’s cool; we can appreciate the beauty in a less-than-perfect play. But *Next to Normal* is a complete work. The script, music, lights, set, cast, direction, sound and theater itself are all top quality.

Portland actress Mars is spectacular as Diana. It is a wild rollercoaster of a role, and she rides it for all its worth. It takes a terrifically strong actor to portray the husband, who is at once a selfless and selfish martyr. Brian Haimbach slowly unveils this nuanced character throughout the play, opening up entirely only in his final scene.

Evan Marshall is powerful as Gabe; he moves so swiftly and his strong voice cuts right to the soul. Evynne Hollens is brilliantly cast as Natalie, the ultra-perfect and passionate daughter that no one seems to notice, except the endearing stoner boyfriend, Henry, sweetly played by Tyler Ankenman. Gene Chin’s Dr. Madden resonates with the audience while exasperating us, as an educated man with no real answers.

Next to Normal is only one of eight musicals to win a Pulitzer. Much of its power lies in the ability of the music to lodge Diana’s madness straight into our hearts. Musical Director Nathan Alef cultivates a raw and rockin’ band to facilitate the power of the score.

Jeffrey Cook’s set echoes the structure of the play, with transparent layers of platforms and shelves giving way to dark places, stairs rising and descending in unexpected ways. Some audience members complained that all the new lights, used to a chilling effect by Michael Peterson, made the theater too warm. I was not bothered by it; Oregonians dress in layers.

Director Craig Willis carefully selected this show to open the new theater. “It was the perfect bold piece of contemporary theater needed to launch the next stage of our company’s trajectory,” he says. And he is right. I don’t know how they are going to top this production, but I am keenly looking forward to the rest of the season. ■

Next to Normal runs through Feb. 16 at Lord/Leebrick Playhouse.