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BLOG CITYBLOG

The Adventures of EditorCop the Superbailiff and LogicMan

Wait a sec. I thought judges were supposed to be all reasonable and logically consistent and, you know, judgey and stuff. That's why this little nugget low in today's Review-Journal story about EditorCop the Superbailiff who yesterday illegally detained a herd of reporters to let Michael Jackson's former physician Dr. Conrad Murray get away after [...]

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BLOG VARIOUS THINGS AND STUFF

Oh, that's going to be awkward

Apparently, former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin mentioned no one from the ranks of Nevada conservatives in her new book, *Going Rogue*. That is going to make for a very awkward time during the Costco book signing slated for next month in Reno.

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Stage

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You can't go home again

Nostalgia is the motif of a pair of family dramas

BY DAVID MCKEE >> AE@LVCITYLIFE.COM

Hoboken, N.J. may not be the garden spot of the Garden State but, for the Italian-American families of Joe DiPietro's *Over the River and Through the Woods*, it's the entire world. Every Sunday, upwardly mobile young Nick (Michael Morfey) has dinner with both sets of his grandparents. It's a ritual the elders would like to maintain in perpetuity, but Nick's got a job opportunity in Seattle. The grandparents try everything to dissuade him, even throwing a comely Irish-American lass (Stephanie Claydon) into his path -- although Nick makes such heavy weather of his big announcement, you think he's about to come out of the closet.

Refreshingly, the expected romantic complications do not ensue, as a contrivance-laden first act gives way to a quieter and character-driven second. From sitcom predictability, *Over the River* progresses to slice-of-life naturalism and ultimately to pathos. Along the way, it's replete with the wonderfully pointless, free-associative conversations families are inclined to have. DiPietro's play is inconsequential but fun and Theatre in the Valley's production passes one's time agreeably.

It's difficult to believe Rick Bindhamer's staging is meant for touring, judging by the big, unsightly set, jammed with heavy furniture. While the clunky chairs, sofa and tables bespeak a family decades out of step with the times, it traps the cast in congested traffic patterns and forces much sitting around.

That general immobility reinforces the cast's tendency to inhabit discrete bubbles, not interacting but awaiting their cues. As grandfather Nunzio, Irv Atkins exudes believability and his off-the-cuff performance is the evening's funniest, but Charles Addison's Frank, the other grandpa, belabors an unpersuasive *pasta fazool* accent. As their respective wives, Susan Breene's Emma generally keeps pace with her Nunzio, while Marilyn Atkins' cooking-obsessed Aida is simply and quietly adorable.

Claydon's Caitlin O'Hare also gets high marks for naturalism and appeal, but Morfey's spastic protagonist is problematic: a distraction where a fulcrum is needed. Rather than serving as the lens through which we perceive his extended family, Nick comes off as hyperactive and gratingly solipsistic. One cares what happens to Nick's grandparents, but his Big Dilemma is a non-event.

UNLV three-fer

A TRIO OF MFA CANDIDATES from University of Nevada-Las Vegas is enjoying the platform afforded by Nevada Conservatory Theatre this month. Full-length works by Neil Haven, Jeremiah Munsey and Elizabeth Leavitt hit the stage in succession during the New Plays Festival. Already having run their course are Neil Haven's *Pink Champagne* (about the attempted reconciliation of an aging gay man and his family) and Munsey's *The Way It Has to Be*, reviewed at Nov. 15's closing performance. Leavitt's seaside comedy, *Whales, Save Us!*, opened Nov. 18 for a six-performance stint.

The Way It Has to Be draws upon Munsey's West Virginia roots, although the mood is closer to a profane version of Chekhov. Like the protagonists of *Three Sisters*, the disintegrating nuclear family of *The Way It Has to Be* is transfixed by a vision of life back "on

Over the River and Through the Woods plays 7:30 p.m. Friday in Sun City MacDonald Ranch Desert Willow clubhouse, 2020 W. Horizon Ridge Parkway, Henderson, and 3 p.m. Sunday in Sun City Anthem Freedom Hall, 2450 Hampton Road, 558-7275. Tickets: \$6-\$12.

Whales, Save Us! plays 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday in the Black Box Theatre at University of Nevada Las Vegas, 895-2787. Tickets: \$13.50-\$15.



PHOTO: BILL HUGHES
From left, Marilyn Atkins, Michael Morfey and Susan Breene in the Theatre in the Valley production of *Over the River and Through the Woods*.

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MANDALAY BAY

the mountain" as much a chimera as the idea of going to Moscow in Chekhov's classic.

Having just lost a son to heroin, matriarch Tabitha (Stephanie Start) has dissolved into a wraith-like Oxycontin haze -- a situation her daughter Norma (Chelsea Lockie) enables and her remaining son, Lefty (Thomas Tobin), hopes to exploit. He vies for the loyalty of fellow layabout Chin (Robert Burgess) with sister Siobhan (Nicole Unger), newly returned from Oklahoma with a thick roll of cash ... and suspiciously minus her skanky boyfriend.

The urgent, communicative give and take of Nevada Conservatory Theatre's cast, directed by Kenn McLeod, couldn't have been further removed from the stately, disjointed pace of *Over the River*. Lockie and Unger were sisterly standouts, going at each other with memorable ferocity. McLeod kept the action flowing through Heather Caliguire's convincingly inhabitable set, its walls stippled with scraps of paper and its forestage strewn with autumn leaves.

The Way It Has to Be warrants additional productions ... and sets a high bar for Whales, *Save Us!* In a time of so much structural collapse in the local arts scene, the New Play Festival is a greenhouse well worth preserving.



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