

Tempers flair and words cut deep in Elite's 'God of Carnage'

Elite Theatre drama eloquently revealing

By Rita Moran



Alexandra Reynolds/Contributed photo Veronica (Kimberly Demmary, center) lashes out at Michael (Jack Impellizzeri, left) as Alan (Scott Blanchard) tries to hold her back in "God of Carnage."

"God of Carnage" is a comedy of missed manners. Yasmina Reza's peek beneath the veneer of civility uncovers seething tensions that wrench a serene upscale setting from its moorings and throw it into the mud of a battlefield.

The French play, translated by Christopher Hampton, stirs

audiences as much with its spot-on revelation of civilization's undercurrents as its piercing look at modern foibles, and fables. Good manners are no sure sign of good hearts, serene surfaces can shield churning emotions.

To make the quick-witted play work requires a quartet of adept actors who can turn on a dime, or even a penny's worth of irritation.

Elite Theatre Company's production in Oxnard, under the direction of Tom Eubanks, has recruited just such a team in Kimberly Demmary and Jack Impellizzeri as hosts Veronica and Michael, and Kathleen Bosworth and Scott Blanchard as Annette and Alan, the parents whose son, Benjamin, has hit the hosts' son, Henry, with a stick causing two teeth to be damaged. The parents have come together to resolve the friction in a genteel, humane way. At least that's the plan.

As restrained as Veronica and Michael seem to be, and as pained as Alan and Annette say they are, they view the situation through different lenses. The wounded son may lose both teeth and could, Veronica says darkly, face further dire complications. Nonsense says Alan, who as a high-powered attorney knows how to calm waters. It was just a playground squabble and everything will solve itself. Kids will be kids, Alan says.

It turns out it's not only kids who will be kids. In this show, adults can be just as unrestrained and childish once their own equilibrium is jarred. The rest of the 75-minute play is a series of thrusts and parries, mostly verbal but occasionally physical.

As the conversation tenses, we find that Michael, a successful wholesaler, had put the family hamster out on the curb in its cage, opening the door in hopes that the little critter will run away so that he won't ever have to touch the creepy varmint. So much for his decent, patient facade. Veronica, a writer who is working on a book about Darfur, doesn't have to be scratched too deeply to reveal an entire forest of suppressed feelings.

Annette, who is in "wealth management," is as internally knotted as they come, which results in one of the play's silliest surprises and source of ongoing laughs.

Alan, a self-important attorney dealing with pharmaceutical companies, jumps up at crucial points to deal with his constantly interrupting cellphone calls. It seems that a new product is causing more problems than it solves, with death a possibility. Alan advises getting out in front of the problem and creating reams of deniability. Something of that approach has obviously rubbed off in his response to the boys' scuffle. Michael, it turns out, has an ailing mother who just happens to be taking the questionable medication. He's repeatedly on the phone with her, warning her not to take it.

As the parents move from some form of tame beverage to the hard stuff, their behavior takes the same trip, until all defenses are down and all illusions of civility burst like a series of toy balloons. The pairs fight internecine frays, then it's men against women, women against men and, hey, the kids couldn't have done it any more fiercely.

Reza's revealing barrier breaker is funny, sad and frightening. Most of all, it's a quick burst of theater energy that delivers a thought-provoking buzz.

'God of Carnage'

Yasmina Reza's drama, about two pairs of parents discussing a recent physical altercation between their children, is being performed through May 19 at Elite Theatre, 2731 S. Victoria Ave., Oxnard. Performances are at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, with additional 2 p.m. matinees May 11 and 18, and a special Actor's Night show at 8 p.m. May 2 for \$10. Regular tickets are \$18 general admission, \$15 seniors and students. Call 483-5118 or visit <http://www.elitetheatre.org/>.