

# Adk. Theatre Fest's 'Madagascar'

## Show puts her in mind of 'Three Tall Women'

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What *Madagascar* reminded me of, more than anything else, was *Three Tall Women*, what I consider one of the highest points in the 11-year history of the Adirondack Theatre Festival in Glens Falls.

*Madagascar*, ATF's current production, which closes this company's summer season this week, lacks, finally, the emotional payoff of *Three Tall Women*, but that was Edward Albee's Pulitzer winner, by gosh.

This one comes close in terms of excellent structuring and poetic writing.

Set in a fine hotel room overlooking the Spanish Steps in Rome, the play sets three characters — Lilian, a middle-aged woman, her grown daughter June, and Nathan, a good friend of the family — into one space, but at different times.

Each is there at a particular time, however — five years ago, three days ago, and today — and for a specific reason. They speak in monologues, but as they remember back into the past, the other actors step forward briefly to play themselves or other characters — a lady on a bus, a taxi driver. The ebb and flow of this is nicely navigated.

The play unwinds its secrets gradually, but it is more than simply a puzzle for the audience to solve — just as ATF's earlier offering of the season, *High Dive*, was so much more than an audience-participation show, although



**Three voices** — Sherril Parker Lee, Mary Beth Peil and Larry Pine in *Madagascar*, by J.T. Rogers.

it used that element to great effect.

"People disappear," is the theme of the first monologue of the prologue, and any viewer worth her salt will figure out soon enough how the pieces of the puzzle probably fit together. What I found, rather surprisingly, was that the exact details felt less important to me than the overall emotional/literary impact of the piece.

In fact, playwright J.T. Rogers leaves as many questions as he answers by the end of the show.

Now, what made *Three Tall Women* a great piece of literature, to my mind, was the stunningly cathartic and resonant final scene, when the three characters stand together, as one, melding time, space and spirit.

This show, for all its artistic elements, never crosses beyond the purely literal, in terms of the characters' experiences. What we are left with, however and most winningly, are questions about how people relate to one another, what makes a family, what makes the truth, secrets and mysteries — and

what makes good theater.

Is it enough, finally, to lay these three characters on the table and examine them, their relationships, their lost loves and lost moments? Is it enough to see, finally, how three lives ravel and unravel at extreme moments? Is it enough to have listened in at these critical moments in the three characters' lives, and to have heard their thoughts on life and love and what is lost?

What I especially loved was the literary experience of the play, how words and phrases and even whole scenes curved and snaked around themselves, in and out of different characters' mouths, as in a particularly fine novel or poem.

All was enhanced by a thoughtful production, beginning with director Gus Reyes, a longtime collaborator of the playwright, and the set design by Eric Renschler, which included a gorgeously evocative tile floor for the actors to variously clomp, pad or tread onto in sandals, bare feet and sturdy shoes.

Lighting, too, by Les Dickert, was critical to the evocative mood of the piece.

Mary Beth Peil, as the patrician mother, brings a clipped reserve, a wounded heart but sharp edge to the role. Sherril Parker Lee, as the daughter, June, was luminous in a white night shift, yet glowed with a sadness, too that put her slightly out of reach.

Larry Pine, to my mind, was the find of the evening. A familiar face on screen and television, here Mr. Pine brought to bear a warm masculine voice, a much appreciated counter to the two female voices, and a face so expressive that you could fall into it. "Craggy" is the cliché I was reaching for, though his demeanor was hardly weather-worn. He's something of a usurper, we learn, finally, yet his was the stable voice of the evening.

*Madagascar continues at the Adirondack Theatre Festival tonight, Thursday, July 28, through Saturday, July 30, at 8 p.m. at the Charles R. Wood Theater in downtown Glens Falls. Tickets cost \$25. Box office: 798-WOOD.*