

# 'Madagascar' unstuck in time

By **MICHAEL ECK**

Special to the Times Union

GLENS FALLS — "People disappear all the time," says a young blond woman. Her name is June.

Her brother's name is Gideon, but she calls him Paul.

He is the main character in J.T. Rogers' "Madagascar" — on view at the Adirondack Theatre Festival — but he never appears.

Gideon, you understand, is gone. "Madagascar" is a knot.

June, to begin with, speaks to the audience a few days in the past; her mother, Lillian, from five years ago; and Nathan, a family friend, from the present; all of them, mind you, from the same Rome hotel room overlooking the Spanish Steps.

In some ways, "Madagascar" is simply an examination of the brutal detritus of a middle-aged affair. Nathan, you see, usurped Arthur Doyle in the lecture hall and in the bedroom, taking over his work in economics while slipping into his wife's bed.

In other ways, "Madagascar" is much more. It is about the economics of family, the finances of romance and the diminishing returns of time.

Rogers' construction of the play is simply brilliant, with the trio's monologues weaving in and out of

## THEATER REVIEW

### 'MADAGASCAR'

■ **Performance reviewed:** 8 p.m. Saturday

■ **Where:** Charles R. Wood Theater, 217 Glen St., Glens Falls

■ **Running time:** 2 hours 10 minutes; one intermission

■ **Continues:** 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday

■ **Tickets:** \$25

■ **Information:** 798-7479

■ **Web site:** <http://www.ATFestival.org>

each other and tense adroitly. The stagecraft of the script is compelling, and so is Gus Reyes' direction — the two have collaborated on plays for 20 years.

But brilliant and compelling have limits. Some stretches of the play wear. Some of Rogers' humor feels forced. And the play, simply put, should be a long one-act, instead of an overly long full-length.

Given that, "Madagascar" still has its delights for fans of inventive theater.

As noted, Reyes knows what to do with Rogers' stuff — let's hope so after two decades of working together.

While the script lags, the rhythm never does, even during the deliciously pregnant pauses Reyes asks for, and receives, from his talented cast.

Mary Beth Peil starred in "Wit" for ATF a few seasons back, and she brings a similar bearing to her role as Lillian. She's stately, smart and sexy — a mother and more. She manages to be loving, ruthless and overbearing all at once. And when she cracks, it's still with strength. Nice.

Sherri Parker Lee plays June, a woman devoted to and finally undone by her brother. She has revelations — all the characters do — and none are telegraphed. In addition, she reveals her layers with precision. Her portrayal is a bit cool, a bit calculated, but still strong.

Noted film actor Larry Pine finishes the cast as Nathan, an intellectual who is clinically unable to reduce his thoughts to simple terms. Pine is always measured, but so is Nathan, and his quiet masculinity balances out the play.

"Madagascar" is recommended, with some reservations about its length, but few about its craft.

► *Michael Eck, a freelance writer from Albany, is a regular contributor to the Times Union.*