

Over the River and Through the Woods

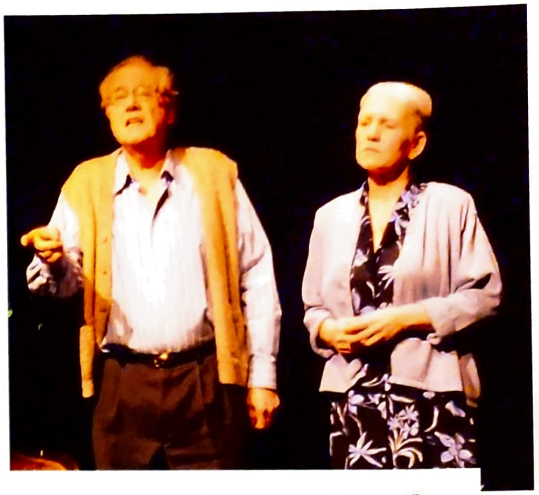
by Joe Di Pietro

Directed by Rosemary Keneford

CAST

NICK CRISTANO	Stewart Wheeler
FRANK GIANELLI	Brooke Keneford
AIDA GIANELLI	Mary Holmes
NUNZIO CRISTANO	Jim Holmes
EMMA CRISTANO	Susan Monaghan
CAITLIN O'HARE	Kareen Lively





EODL and Theatre Ontario Festivals Named Best Actor in a Supporting Role





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THEATRE REVIEW

Exceptional comedy rises from solid base

BY BRUCE DEACHMAN

Kanata Theatre has unearthed the gem of its season (so far) with *Over the River and Through the Woods*, a well-paced and well-acted comedy that knows exactly when to pull the humour down before it gets too farcical, and when to lift the sentimentality up before it turns to syrupy mush.

Written by Joe DiPietro and smoothly directed by Rosemary Keneford, the play tells of Nick Cristano, a 29-year-old New York advertising executive, and his exasperating yet close relationship with his four well-meaning, meddlesome, Hoboken, New Jersey, Italian-American grandparents.

Nick dutifully visits them for dinner every Sunday night, but when he announces that a coveted job promotion will relocate him to Seattle, the four set to matchmaking in an effort to make him change his mind. As a second-generation American, Nick's decisions in life seem perfectly normal to him, but to his Old World grandparents, for whom *famiglia* is everything, his choices are perplexing and disappointing.

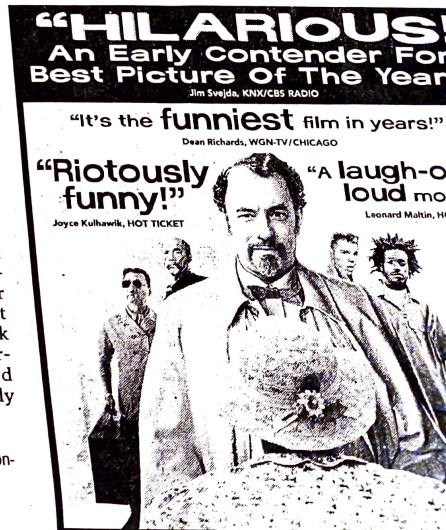
The half-century gap between Nick and his grandparents provides many of the laughs for Kanata's two-hour performance, and they're all so deadpan and wonderfully timed that you'll likely miss one or two because you're still wheezing at an earlier one. Stewart Wheeler delivered a first-rate performance as Nick last Friday night — sort of the George Costanza character in *Seinfeld* — while Brooke Keneford, Susan Monaghan and Jim and Mary Holmes brought the grandparents' idiosyncrasies to the fore with great adeptness, energy and warmth.

Kareen Lively's portrayal of Caitlin O'Hare, the love interest foisted upon Nick, was at times stiff, though, in the only role that playwright DiPietro put little life into.

Underscoring the play's hilarity, and what lends it its weight, is the bittersweet line upon which tread the expectations, traditions and values of its characters. There's no saccharin ending with a pretty bow, no grand resolution that gives everyone what they're after. Instead, there are choices that have repercussions, and from those, life continues.

Over the River delivers something that too many productions only strive for: exceptionally strong comedy built on a solid base of real human emotion. Audiences will spend the greater part of two hours laughing, yet still have something to think about afterwards. Friday's performance brought the packed house to its feet, and deservedly so.

Over the River and Through the Woods continues from today to April 3 at Ron Maslin Playhouse. Tickets and times, 831-4435.



Kanata Theatre wins two Ontario awards

Kanata Theatre's recent production *Over the River and Through the Woods* claimed a pair of 2004 Theatre Ontario Festival Awards this week. Rosemary Keneford was named outstanding director, while Jim Holmes was selected as best male in a supporting role.

The ceremonies, held Sunday in Sault Ste. Marie, featured the best of Ontario's community theatre productions, singling out one from each of the province's five "drama regions."

Richmond Hill's Curtain Club took the award for best production, for its treatment of Joan Burrows' *Staff Room.*

Over the River, which ran two months ago at Kanata's Ron Maslin Playhouse and told of a young man dealing with his aging grandparents, was one of three finalists for best production. Other Kanata finalists were Brooke Keneford, also for best supporting male actor, and Stewart Wheeler for best male in a leading role.

As well, Douglas MacMillan won an adjudicator's award for his lighting design on *Over the River.*

ARTS

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Kanata Theatre represents Eastern Ontario in festival

Kanata Theatre will represent Eastern Ontario at the Ontario Drama League Festival May 18 to 23 in Sault Ste Marie.

The community theatre group's production of *Over the River and Through the Woods* by Joe DiPietro won top honours this past weekend at the annual Eastern Ontario Drama League Spring Festival, held at the Ron Maslin Playhouse.

Kanata Theatre was competing against theatre groups from Kingston, Peterborough and Haliburton.

In addition to winning the award for best play, Kanata Theatre took several acting awards. Stewart Wheeler was named best actor in a major role and Mary Holmes and Jim Holmes each won awards for acting excellence. Kanata's Rosemary Keneford was named best director.