

Swing State Review

By Angela Rosendo

I went to watch *Swing State* on September 16 at 7:00 p.m. It was performed at the Minetta Lane Theatre (a venue where Audible Theater produces its shows). Despite the theater's name, I didn't expect it to be down an actual lane so I enjoyed the ambiance of the theater's location because it was very different from the bright lights I see whenever I watch something on Broadway. And somehow this cozy lane matched the play entirely.

On the exterior, the major conflict of *Swing State* (written by Rebecca Gilman and directed by Robert Falls) was Peg's (Mary Beth Fisher), deceased husband's missing toolbox and gun. Sheriff Kris and Deputy Dani, played by Kirsten Fitzgerald and Anne E. Thompson, are then concerned for the safety of their small Wisconsin neighborhood and make it their job to find the gun. Because of the topic of the play, it maintained a warm yet serious tone, with the occasional break of laughter for satirical jokes about a small town that would make any New Yorker laugh. But when you delve even deeper, the play is also about the loss and loneliness that the characters experience.

Anne E. Thompson, Kirsten Fitzgerald and Mary Beth Fisher in Rebecca Gilman's *Swing State*. Photo Credit: Liz Lauren

The creative team only used one set to make this warm feel of a Wisconsin small home on a prairie. This set (scenic design by Todd Rosenthal) included a kitchen with "antiques," a personal library with a wall of books, and a rocking chair with a blanket on top of it, all of it practically shouting, "PEG!" It would have been nice to see more of the prairie than the one tree branch that was peeking through Peg's window near the ceiling of her house, but I am glad that they didn't include it. The characters described this prairie as a mystical place, even though the life on the prairie was decreasing because of pesticides from neighboring farms and climate change, it was clear that it was flushed with greenery and animals—an effect that I can't imagine on stage without removing the enchanting essence of a real-life prairie. The front door to the home acted as a portal between the two worlds that the characters lived in and allowed the whole story to be told in one house because the characters would constantly walk in and out, whether invited or not.

My favorite character to see walk into the house was Ryan, played by Bubba Weiler. He seemed to be fresh out of school and often cursed in front of Peg, but from the beginning of the show, their relationship was obvious. It was like mother and son, and I believed that's what they were until we found out that Ryan was ignored by his parents and that Peg and her late husband had kind of taken him in as their own to help him. There was a moment in the play where Ryan was talking to Deputy Dani about an experience he had with Peg about

the prairie, and I remember wanting to cry because he remembered everything about what she had told him. Weiler did an amazing job at conveying a child-like wonder that he had received from his “mom.” As Peg, Fisher also did a great job at expressing a range of emotions through her eyes- when she was sorrowful they teared but in the last scene when they were glassy it was because she was excited to start living again.

Bubba Weiler in Rebecca Gilman’s *Swing State*. Photo Credit: Liz Lauren

In the last scene of the show, Peg walks out with a sun cap on, fit for work under the sun. I think that the costumes (by Evelyn Danner) did a good job of considering the setting of the play. There wasn’t anything too flashy like in *Moulin Rouge* or *Chicago*, but that was mostly because there didn’t need to be. Sheriff Kris and Deputy Dani were seen mostly in their work uniform, and so was Ryan because they’d mostly pass by on the job or after it. The only wardrobe I wish was a little different was Peg’s; they can't possibly expect us to believe that a woman who works on a prairie every day has that clean of clothes! I know that it could’ve been freshly washed, but even if it was you’d expect it to look more worn, especially since Peg didn’t peg (see what I did there?) me as the type to buy new clothes just because the other one has a tiny hole in it. She's the kind of woman who would wear the same shirt until she has to get a new one.

Overall, I thought that the play was wonderful; it was nice to step away from the city and be transported into a small town. Even still, I saw my world represented on stage where climate change, politics, and suicide are issues. The play was real and it tackled these hard topics beautifully. Usually, I go to plays to escape from all of the terrors that the real world has to offer, but after watching *Swing State* I don’t think I have to run anymore.