

'night, Mother



From left: Sandy Ferguson and Alexandra Valassis.

Staged by Altera Vitae Productions

Modern-day Persephone myth revisits Mainline Theatre

No mere chance that mother, **Thelma (Sandy Ferguson)** dresses in vibrant red silk slippers and house-coat, whereas daughter **Jessie (Alexandra Valassis)** wraps herself in some shapeless loose-fitting grey. On this fateful evening, the overt contrast between mother and daughter only intensifies as the moments tick away, dispassionately recorded by the old-fashioned clock, hooked to the kitchen door.

As immortalized by the ancient Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter, this modernist tale of a hard-up, working class family speaks of certain dark places where parents, although agonizing, may not follow their children.

Having reached her forties, for a long list of valid and futile reasons, Jessie has decided she simply won't make the effort to go on any more: time for her to 'step off the bus,' as she puts it. Her calm, even-handed decision to warn her mother of her intentions ahead of time becomes the tinderbox that sparks the ensuing drama.

It provokes a tense, fearful tug-of-war between opposing forces: the determination to preserve life at all costs versus its deliberate dispassionate inverse. The dialectic is compelling; it comes across in both actors' naturalistic performances and the script's hyper-realistic vernacular, sprinkled with graveyard humour—revealing a last-ditch effort by Thelma to gain precious time, stave off the threat and thwart the terror

It also establishes the natural love between the two women, expressed by Jessie in her bizarre logic of concern for Thelma's future well-being, after her own passing. As for Thelma, she tries every imaginable whim and wile to dissuade her daughter from carrying out this 'sick joke' or patently lunatic act.

All theatre productions have their challenges, but the staging of **'night, Mother** must have exacted a great deal of fortitude all around. Gripping and chilling, infused by an ongoing premonition of dread and macabre spectator fascination, this drama was originally penned 25 years ago by playwright, **Marsha Norman**, and is currently being directed at the Mainline stage by **Jessie Corbeil**.

It purposefully examines an 'untouchable' subject, one traditionally relegated to secrecy and denial, involving, as it does, humanity's final taboo: a person's willed and self-orchestrated suicide.

Prepare yourself for a gut-wrenching experience. **'night, Mother plays at Mainline Theatre until March 30**