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'night, Mother @ Mainline Theatre

March 19, 2008
By: Carey

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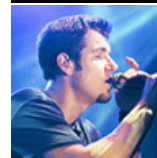
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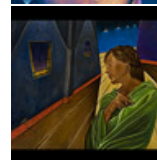
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'night, Mother Preview
March 19-30, 2008 @
Mainline Theatre



311 Concert Preview
March 19, 2008 @ Metropolis



Artferia @ Festivalissimo
March 2-April 12, 2008 @
Tour Xerox - Alexis Nihon



Festivalissimo Preview
March 12-27, 2008

Stage lights shine on a set of your average lower-middle class kitchen when a middle-aged woman walks out and draws a clock with the time of 8:00 on a wooden door in white chalk. It's a signal to all who are watching that time is of the essence in this play.

Now, many know the story of the play, which won writer Marsha Norman a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in the early 1980s, but for those who don't I'll catch you up. "night, Mother" is a story of a middle-aged woman named Jessie (played by Alexandra Valassis) who tells her mother just after 8 p.m. one evening that she is going to kill herself that night. Her mother Thelma (played by the perfect for the part, Sandy Ferguson) first believes her daughter is joking, then wants to know why now as Jessie, who suffers from epilepsy, is feeling better physically than she has in a long while and then wants to know how she can talk her out of it. All fairly normal reactions of a mother who's just been told by her daughter that she is going to commit suicide. Jessie, however, has a list of things she wants to go over with her mother and do before locking herself in her bedroom and shooting herself with her deceased father's gun. She wants it to be a typical evening despite what she has planned. The play, which unfolds in real time, covers the 85 minute discussion the mother and daughter have before the planned suicide.

While watching the night unfold for these two women you can understand why Jessie has decided to commit suicide as her life is obviously devoid of anything but a few household chores. Despite the fact that they live together the mother and daughter don't really know anything about each other. Jessie feels her life has not amounted to anything, it is not going to change and she wants to control the only thing she feels she truly has control over – whether she lives or dies.

At times the play is hard to watch, but in a good way, and Norman's script never lets it become maudlin for too long as there is plenty of humour (intended or otherwise) thrown in to make it bearable. The characters are fleshed out beautifully and you never really feel sorry for Jessie, as we all know people who have had it worse. That is not the point though, we are not supposed to feel any sympathy for her as it is awful to give up on life. We are supposed to feel sorry for those left behind, in this case Jessie's mother.

The play totally depends on its two actresses and both come through for it. Sandy Ferguson skillfully depicts a woman desperately clinging to what she knows and Alexandra Valassis never lets you doubt who is going to win in the end. Director Jesse Corbeil writes in the program that this is the first play he has directed that was not a comedy or quirky. Well, he shows that he has an understanding of the material and how to serve it by allowing the two characters be the total focus.

The emotional stakes are high in this play and we would not want it any other way due to the subject matter. It is treated with the respect it deserves. Take in this play or you'll regret it! Though the character Jessie says that she feels as if she wants to get off the bus, I guarantee that you never will. The play continues until March 30 at the Mainline Theatre on St. Laurent.