

WILLCALL FOR THEATER AND RESTAURANT REVIEWS



Eve Danzeisen, Luke McClure, Susan Wilder and Eric Curtis Johnson in *Boxing Lessons* photo: Jeannine Wisnosky Stehlin

BOXING LESSONS by John Bunzel

Hello, Sports Fans! You like to see bloody noses and black eyes? Sorry, wrong show. The boxing lessons here deal with a family that comes together to box up the belongings of their late father, a very successful and famous author whose biggest success was a provocatively titled Christmas book. Now the New York Times wants to publish an obituary. The “boxing” reference is quite misleading but, I guess, “Daddy’s Dyin’ (dead), Who’s got the Will” was already taken. This is one of the most stimulating and original plays and if we were still using the star rating, I’d hand them the Milky Way.

This daddy had a secret hideaway cabin on Puget Sound, presently inundated with smoke from a Canadian wildfire. The air inside the cluttered room (set design by John Iacovelli) is almost as polluted by this bunch who detest one another. The daughter Judy (Eve Danzeisen), a tough cookie, is dressed for cleaning out a garage (costumes by Florence Kemper Bunzel). This girl knows more about dear, old dad than all the rest of them put together. The ex-wife, Meg (Susan Wilder), plays it wonderfully brittle and sarcastic. You will love her in spite of her bitchy attitude. This woman shouldn’t even be allowed to celebrate Mother’s Day! One of her sons, the kvetshy Ned (Luke McClure), who lives in Iowa, is anxious to get back to the Midwest but isn’t happy there, either. Her third child, the unpredictable Steve (Stephen Tyler Howell) is autistic, sort of an idiot savant who refers to himself in the third person, has a sonorous voice and is mesmerizing. The last to

friend, who is anxious to take care of the post mortem business and finances, since the work of famous writers become even more valuable dead than alive. In the midst of it all is the local Sheriff Bob (Eric Curtis Johnson), not the usual tough, obnoxious cop but a sensitive guy who considers himself part of the mourners.

This is the line-up of fascinating characters (a shout out to Casting Director Victoria Hoffman). They will entertain you, amaze you with their acting skills and astonish you with their personal relationships. This story reveals more secrets than *The National Enquirer* but with razor-sharp wit. Questions and answers regarding intimacies, paternity and sexual orientations are tossed around like fresh popping corn. The brilliant playwright, John Bunzel’s sparkling dialogue will have you hanging on every word. The inspired direction is by New American Theatre’s Artistic Director Jack Stehlin, celebrating their first year in this new location. This premiere should now travel triumphantly around the stages of America and the world.

The New American Theatre 1312 N. Wilton Place, between Sunset & Fountain, Hollywood 90028. Friday & Saturday 8 pm Sunday 5/26 and 6/2 only at 3 pm . \$35. No intermission. Call theater for parking availability at the High School across the street. (310) 424-2980 or www.newamericantheatre.com ends 6/2/19

REVIEW BY INGRID WILMOT