

# Twice Told

*Local theaters offer comedy Shakespeare*

BY CAISSA WILLMER



PHOTO PROVIDED

MARC GOLDHABER PLAYS NICK, THE GRANDSON WHOSE GRANDPARENTS — INCLUDING SUZAN PERRY AS GRANDMA AIDA — CONNIVE TO KEEP HIM IN HOBOKEN.

*"OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS," BY JOE DIPETRO, DIRECTED BY BERT BERNARDI, SET BY SCOTT ARONOW, COSTUMES BY JIMMY JOHANSMEYER, PROPERTIES BY DAN CONRAD, LIGHTING AND SOUND BY JOEL RAND PAPE, FOR CORTLAND REPERTORY THEATRE, THROUGH AUG. 20*

**C**ORTLAND Repertory Theatre hits stride with Joe DiPietro's *Over the River and Through the Woods*, a

gently satiric, often hilarious story of the wiles and stratagems Italian grandparents will use to keep family together. Young Nick (Marc Goldhaber) arrives excited and apprehensive for Sunday dinner with paternal grandparents Frank and Aida in Hoboken, N.J., where maternal grandparents Nunzio and Emma dine too. He's been promoted and is being sent to Seattle. Hearing this, the older people connive to keep him in

Hoboken, bringing a lovely young woman to dinner one Sunday, debating whether to tell him that Nunzio may be dying of cancer and wracking their brains to "Tengo la famiglia," i.e., "hold the family" (together).

Director Bert Bernardi has set a smart pace and makes much of the situational jokes, like when Aida plies Nick with food: just a little snack, she declares, bringing in a monumental sub. Frank's reminiscences are touching: at 14, he was put on an Italian ship with a Hoboken address in his pocket only to find the relatives had moved without a trace. Still, he built a better life for his children and so on. The reminiscences are vivid. The give-and-take among the elders is often very funny.

Suzan Perry's Aida's gestures are delightful as she expostulates with her grandson, calling on the saints and putting her fingers on a religious figurine. Claus Evans' hefty Frank is a quiet force. Bill Coughlin gives the best performance I've seen him give as Nunzio, inwardly debating whether to tell about his cancer, deciding not to when he realizes what the move means to Nick. Jean Liuzzi enjoys herself as Emma, the loud mouth. Sonya Cooke is luminous as Caitlin, the young woman brought to dinner. Marc Goldhaber's Nick projects a sweet anguish as well as a stubborn determination to live his own life.

Designer Scott Aronow created a handsome home, with dining room, cozy living room and an outdoor approach. Properties

designer Dan Conrad had great fun with the period furnishings, plus a back wall adorned with family photos, a crucifix, a photo of the Pope and one of Frank Sinatra.

The costumes — especially Emma's dresses and Nunzio's sports jackets — reflect designer Jimmy Johannmeyer's humor, too; everyone contributed to the sweetly comic fun with a tinge of nostalgia. The opening night audience rose to applaud with shouts of approval.

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