

THEATER in the NOW

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Tuesday, July 7, 2015

Review: The Mean Streets of Brooklyn

Returning home doesn't always result in the cheery homecoming you dream of. The return may not be by choice but necessity. In Tim Errickson's *The Firebird*, Danny returns to the mean streets of Brooklyn after escaping and bettering his life in hopes of saving the lives of those he once loved.

The Firebird is a homecoming story of dramatic proportions. Playing like a Scorsese drama, *The Firebird* follows Danny as he returns to Brooklyn after his second mother Irene suspects some shady business from her son and husband. What's uncovered are secrets that could break apart a family as Ricky tries to be the hero in a world he can't save. Errickson's piece is a gritty family drama that tackles familiar themes. Errickson does a phenomenal job structuring his play. The order of flashbacks informs the action. The way he layers clues and subtle jabs at the future are smart. Though the play suffers from some repetition that easily be eliminated, the drama plays well. As far as the plot is concerned, the characters have strong objectives. The only character that comes off as selfish and ill intended is, shockingly, mamma Irene. Irene calls upon Danny to help get Ricky out of the gutter and save the family. But when the plot takes a turn for the worst, Irene instantly blames Danny, who's been gone for years, for the demise of her child. Though he respects and cares about her regardless, you wish he would retort with a "it all comes from parenting, Irene!" Sometimes starting toward the end and jumping back in time allows intrigue and great anticipation. The play begins with a sound prologue. It seems ambiguous to the audience but it's a clue to what is to come. We learn that at some point there is a fight that causes the first scene. Had this sound cue not played, the mystery of Errickson's script would have been heightened greatly. This cue set the tone of the play and it may have hurt it more than helped.

Leading *The Firebird* ensemble is Gabriel Wright as Danny. Though his delivery was occasionally forced, Wright brought great determination and soul to the role. Wright's Danny genuinely cared about the people he was there to save, regardless of how they now felt about him. Michael Romeo Ruocco and Andrea Cordaro as Ricky and Marci get lost in characterization. They're portrayal of the Brooklyn Italians appear better suited in a sitcom world than a deep drama. They are over-the-top and lack believability. Sadly, this hurt the dramatic depth Ricky required.

Director Brian Gillespie did a wonderful job at keeping the stakes high and the action moving. Gillespie ensured that the beats were hit and the necessary plot points were highlighted. The set by Jak Prince remained on stage throughout. It allowed the many scene changes to be quick.

While Prince, who also served as lighting designer, couldn't isolate the areas of the stage, some of the actors leaned on, physically and metaphorically, items that did not live in the specific scene. With a nonlinear structure, storytelling is key. Finding ways to aid in the time jumps are crucial. Costume wise, Oona Tibbetts did nothing. No adding or subtracting items. Had some sort of costume exploration been done, it would have been beneficial to the production. The final flashback that concluded the show featured Danny in a shirt and tie. As this is not a memory play, this costume in that moment did not work. Sound designer Ian Wehrle incorporated an interesting array of hip hop music for the scene shifts. His standout moment was the climatic sound cue that appeared multiple times. The essence and drama of the clip was lost as it sounded like a built cue rather than a moment in time.

The Firebird is an interesting piece of drama. Errickson's script keeps the audience on the edge of their seats and may long to be preserved in film form. Though there are elements that could use some reworking, *The Firebird* is in a good place.



photo courtesy of David Anthony

Posted by [Michael Block](#) at 2:24 PM



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