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Pocatello

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Jen Pollono, Rebecca Larsen, Anne Gee Byrd, Matthew Elkins, and Rob Nagle

Pocatello, Idaho, population just under 55,000, is the not-so-nice setting of Samuel D. Hunter's family drama, "**Pocatello**," which is somewhat of a misnomer. While his Pocatello may be as dreary as he makes it, or not, it is where these disintegrating families are historically from and where they live at the moment, as well as where the playwright is from.

Warm and intriguing, the play is set in an unfortunate Italian restaurant, one of a couple of down-scale eateries in the town that appeal to a strong subset of diners: the ones who don't care

that their ethnic food is ersatz. The manager, Eddie (Matthew Elkins), quietly gay in a town that isn't that broad-minded, has invited his brother, Nick (Rob Nagle) and wife, Kelly (Rebecca Larsen) to come stay a few days as they live out of state, and to have dinner there with their widowed and vile mother Doris (Anne Gee Byrd).

The workers at the eatery have not been apprised of the fact that HQ will be shuttering their workplace in a couple of weeks. Troy (Justin Okin) and Tammy (Tracie Lockwood) -- nearing a divorce -- make their 17-year-old daughter, Becky (Eden Brolin), crazier than any teen needs to be. But she doesn't help by dropping out of high school, dating some kind of sleazeball, turning vegetarian by exaggerating the "evils" of meats, both fresh and processed, and generally being as disagreeable as she can. And her granddad, Max (Trevor Peterson), is now on the failing end of senility, which makes him erupt in unexplained rages.

In addition, Cole (Mark L. Taylor) is not winning his life's lottery while still abusing drugs and sleeping occasionally with another worker, Isabelle (Jen Pollono). All these people are decent enough, but without greater ambitions which lead them to stay in a town without prospects.

Hunter's play is compelling, if, ultimately, rather slight. He has a grand ear for dialogue and the smaller end of Chekhov territory, but with his writing, he has allowed director John Perrin Flynn the ability to make it all alive via casting (something Flynn is noted for). His entire cast, especially Elkins, Nagle, Byrd and Taylor make the play easy on the ears and the eyes.

The simplistically lackluster restaurant setting was well thought out by designer Stephanie Kerley Schwartz (all in various shades of dull beige) and the realistic lighting plot is by Ric Zimmerman.

Alive with the drama of life, it is in Hunter's last scene between sad Eddie and his disappointed mom, Doris, that everything the playwright needed to say about missed connections and family secrets, is revealed, in a quiet and heartbreaking denouement. Ultimately a lovely evening.

"Pocatello" plays through April 10 at the Rogue Machine's new home, the Met Theatre, 1089 N. Oxford Avenue, Los Angeles, 90029. For tickets and information, call 855-585-5185 or visit www.roguemachinetheatre.com.

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