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## Theater review: 'The Lyons' at SART

Posted on August 12, 2019 by Jeff Messer



FAMILY AFFAIR: From left, Chelsey Mirheli, Maximilian Koger, Michael Mattison and Callan White star in SART's production of 'The Lyons.' Photo courtesy of SART

Ben Lyons faces his final days in a hospital dying from an aggressive cancer. His dutiful wife, Rita, remains the vision of dedication. Their children rush to his side. It's a classic American scene: a family gathered in unity in the darkest hour. These are also the moments when dysfunction rears its head, threatening a peaceful passing with angst and brutal honesty. It is also darkly funny. Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre's final summer season offering — Nicky Silver's slightly jaded and twisted comedy *The Lyons* — runs through Sunday, Aug. 18, at the Owen Theater on the Mars Hill University campus.

A stellar cast gives this show brilliance under the tight direction of Tyler Adcock. The script itself is a bit of a peculiarity. Act 1 takes place entirely in the hospital room and exposes the darkest corners of the family dynamic. The first act ends in a way that makes one think it could be a funny yet powerful one-act play. Act 2 diverges onto paths that are unexpected and pull focus away from all the drama and comedy that Act 1 so deftly delivered.

Callan White is riveting as Rita, who rambles on nervously about the impending doom befalling Ben (Michael Mattison). She talks in a nearly run-on sentence about her plans to redecorate their home. She also has the most room to grow through the show, giving several tour de force performances. Mattison, meanwhile, is irritable and pivots from bitter to morbidly funny, having accepted his fate, but grumbles and roars his way through the vast array of unresolved family issues that beg to be dealt with before he passes.

Chelsey Mirheli plays daughter Lisa. She's a struggling single mom, dealing with two kids and an ex whom she's still attracted to, despite his abusive tendencies. Maximilian Koger is Curtis, her brother, who is something of an outcast. His father disapproves that he is gay and rebukes his given name, Hilly, named after his "man's man" grandfather (as revered by Ben). As siblings, Mirheli and Koger give the kinds of performances that are so seamless you can't tell where the actors end and characters begin.


As Nurse Jeanette, Shannon Dionne has little to do in Act 1 but shines in a powerful scene with Koger in the second act. Brandon Harmon's Brian has a small but pivotal role that exposes some of Curtis' deepest secrets in a rather unseemly way.

The show is a brave choice for SART, as it's a bit edgier than the company's typical fare. But it's also funny enough that the darker edges are blunted a bit, though the emotional impact is inescapable and is certain to hit close to home with anyone who has lived through similar situations. There's a universal truth or two that confronts us through the clever dialogue and well-placed gallows humor.


**WHAT:** *The Lyons*  
**WHERE:** Owen Theater, 44 College St., Mars Hill, [sartplays.com](http://sartplays.com)  
**WHEN:** Through Sunday, Aug. 18, Thursday-Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. \$25

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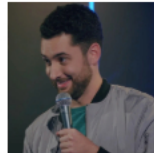



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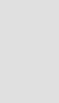


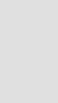
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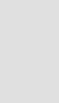

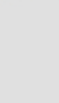
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