



The Wake

by TAMMY RYAN directed by JOHN J. WOOTEN

playing **July 11-28**

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Arts & Entertainment

The Wake at Premiere Stages Explores Family and Environment



SISTER TIME...Kelley Rae O'Donnell as Maggie and Kathy McCafferty as Rosemary in the Premiere Stages production of *The Wake* by Tammy Ryan, on through Sunday, July 28, at the Bauer Boucher Theatre Center at Kean Univ.

By GRETA FRONTERO
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

UNION—Last Friday marked opening night for the 2019 Premiere Play Festival Winner *The Wake*, a thought-provoking piece put on by Premiere Stages at Kean University. The play explores the themes of family, grief, and the changing nature of man's relationship with the environment.

Written by Tammy Ryan, the show follows the story of Maggie and Rosemary—sisters who rent a beach house in Florida to scatter the ashes of their late sister, Colleen. Disaster strikes when the sisters and their respective partners get caught in a severe hurricane. A

series of odd encounters with wildlife suggests the storm is only a side effect of deeper changes in the environment.

Under the direction of Premiere Stages Producing Artistic Director John J. Wooten, *The Wake* tells a compelling story, while maintaining the authenticity of a real-life family. The dialogue between the characters feels genuine, as if you are gazing into the lives of real people as they cope with the loss of a sister.

The complexity of Maggie and Rosemary's relationship is effectively portrayed by Kelley Rae O'Donnell and Kathy McCafferty, respectively. Their dynamic on stage reminds us

that sometimes relationships must be stripped to their core before they can be rebuilt. The duo demonstrates raw human emotions—grief, frustration, anger, love, forgiveness—which allow each interaction to be equally relatable and captivating.

James Gushue as Maggie's partner, Doyle, serves as a constant reminder of the underlying "Man vs. Nature" theme of the show, as his character's passion for wildlife reflects a sort of widespread anxiety regarding human impact on the environment. However, Mr. Gushue's performance brings a lightness to the character as well, offering comedic relief to balance the more troubling themes of the show.

Finally, Wayne Maugans as Rosemary's husband, Ed, successfully captures the unfortunate complacency of many Americans in the destruction of the environment. Mr. Maugans' character acts counter to Mr. Gushue's, and each actor enhances the other's performance as the audience observes the complicated dynamic unfold.

The production of the show, from lights to costumes to props, and every detail in between, creates a foundation in which the actors can shine on stage. Although the characters are the focal point of the performance, the talent and professionalism of the crew should not be overlooked.

The intimate setting of the Bauer Boucher Theatre Center makes visible every detail of the set and every movement of the actors, and the entire cast and crew truly delivered to put on a solid show.

Ms. Ryan has also had work appear

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It's Not the Size of the Role, but the Passion in the Production

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SOUTH ORANGE — When Mia Pafumi, of Westfield, saw the Light Opera of New Jersey's production of *Hunchback of Notre Dame* last summer, she was so impressed, she went back to see it a second time. Auditions were announced by Director Jeffrey Fiorello six months ago for this summer's production of *Ragtime* and she decided she wanted to be a part of it, no matter the size of the role. Ms. Pafumi is a 2008 Westfield High School graduate and Montclair University graduate. She's an area vocalist and although her wheelhouse is opera, she said she knew she had to be a part of this iconic musical theatre production. The show runs July 19, 20, 26 and 27 at 8 p.m. and July 21 and 28 at 2 p.m. at the South Orange Performing Arts Center.

For Ms. Pafumi to be in a musical is a surprise for her since she is usually a featured operatic soloist. In fact, in 2015, she sang with the New Jersey Festival Orchestra and recently she was a soloist with the New Jersey Youth Orchestra in *Carmina Burana*, performed at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Because she is in awe of the talent of the *Ragtime* director, choreographer and cast members, she accepted the small role of Henry Houdini's mother and is thrilled to be included as part of the ensemble. "Truthfully, I was amazed that I made the dance cut!" she enthused. "This show is so relevant to so many issues in today's world," she said in a phone interview. "Politically and socially, the issues from the turn of the 20th-century America are echoed in our world right now. A bonus is I've sung a number of the songs from this show over the years with friends from Westfield, so I am thrilled to be a part of it in any way."

She continued, "This is a very special production with about 50 cast members. I don't know if I have ever worked with a group that's so hard-working.



Susan Myrill Dougherty for The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
RAGTIME REHEARSALS...Area actors Mia Pafumi of Westfield and David Christopher of Cranford are a part of the grand cast of *Ragtime* that opens on Friday, July 19, at the South Orange Performing Arts Center.

During our 'down time' we work on harmonies and dance steps."

Director Fiorello is amazingly organized, she said. "Before we even met to rehearse, he gave us historical background and character analysis right from the very beginning, which helped us catch his vision for the show," Ms. Pafumi said. Then Mr. Fiorello encouraged the cast to develop their own character's backstories.

Another area actor, David Christopher, of Cranford, is a part of the production. "I'm terribly excited to be a part of this show," he explained. Mr. Christopher, a multi-decade-long acting teacher in his hometown has held leads in musicals and plays especially in Plays-in-the-Park (PIP) in Roosevelt Park in Middlesex. He's known in the acting community throughout Union County and has served as director of innumerable plays and musicals. (In fact, he directed this writer in the role of Irene Molloy in *Hello, Dolly!* at PIP more than a decade ago.)

He's accepted the small role of the grandfather of the New Rochelle fam-

ily in this production, but switches clothes and wigs to become a part of the ensemble in other moments in the show. After one of the special rehearsals, recently, he posted pictures on Facebook with the caption: "The sitzprobe for *Ragtime* today was one of the most thrilling afternoons I've ever spent." For Mr. Christopher to make that statement is really saying something since he has been performing for almost 60 years. In opera and musical theatre, the German word 'sitzprobe' is defined as a rehearsal where the singers run through the music with the orchestra, focusing attention on integrating the two groups.

Based on the novel by E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*, an award-winning show, is the story of three families in the pursuit of the American Dream. It echoes a time period that shows prejudice, unrest, yet hope amid an America that is stretching its wings in accepting and integrating on multi-levels.

For tickets for this memorable musical, call (973) 313-2787 or order online through www.sopacnow.org.

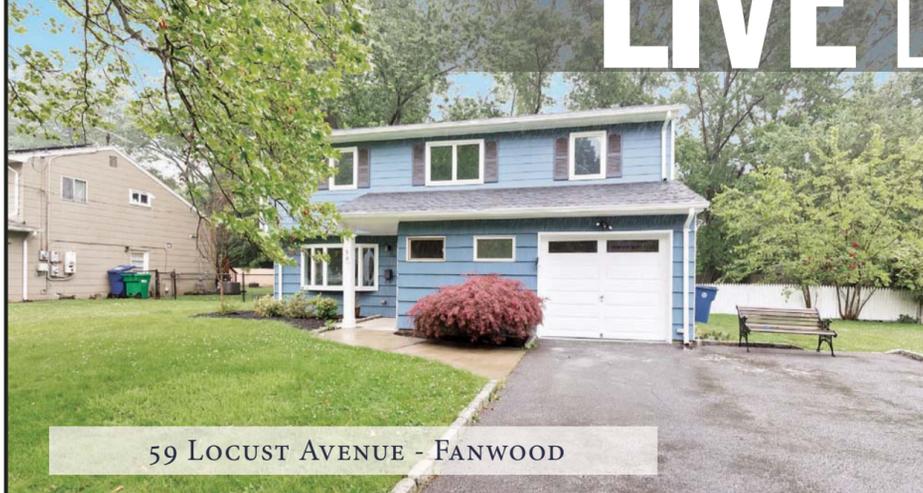
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