



Monday, November 26, 2007

Theater Review: Theatre Three's *Season's Greetings*

By [Mark-Brian Sonna](#)

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Season's Greetings

- **When:** Monday, Nov. 26, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
- **Where:** Theatre Three, 2800 Routh Street, Dallas
- **Cost:** \$22 - \$30
- **Age limit:** Not available
- [Full event details](#)

[Theatre Three](#), in their basement space Theatre Too, is presenting Sir Alan Ayckbourn's *Season's Greetings*. This madcap play follows the interwoven lives of four couples and the family patriarch over four days: Christmas Eve through December 27th. Much of what happens is silly and non-consequential yet it rings of such truth that the laughs elicited are far more profound. All these characters are recognizable, and though each may have differing shadings than my family members, I can honestly say my family was on that stage. From the strong positive reaction and hearty guffaws from the audience, it seems that all those attending recognized these people too.

The action takes place in Neville and Belinda Bunker's home. Theirs is a typical middle class home. Greg Forshay and Emily Gray play these characters with aplomb. They have been married long enough to be able to trade barbs without truly hurting each other's feelings. They are bored with each other even though they truly love one another. This boredom tends to get them into trouble. While Neville would rather work on trifling projects like repairing a broken toy, or going to a pub, Belinda finds herself falling for the charms of an invited house guest Clive, played with true honesty by David Fluitt. Clive is

a writer of dubious success who is there to spend the holidays with his new quasi-girlfriend Rachel, which was overplayed slightly by Sara Lovett – though a very talented thespian, I wished her performance had been more nuanced and not so over-the-top. Sara is as neurotic as they come, and it becomes evident why Clive's affections turn toward her sister Belinda. Belinda and Clive end up in flagrante beneath the Christmas tree and are caught by the entire household. The comedy here is that everyone pretty much chooses to ignore it, and their affair ends on the spot.



Adding to the absurdity of it all are Pattie and Eddie played by Julie Painter and Stephen Levall. She's bursting-at-the-seams pregnant; he's as dumb as a box of rocks. The casting here couldn't be any better. It's easy to see why Pattie fell for Eddie for he is quite attractive, so much so you are willing to forgive his lack of intellect. Pattie is so desperate for attention and overwhelmed with their numerous kids she resorts to candy for solace and comfort. Though it would be easy to play these characters as stereotypes, the two actors find nuances and shadings that ring true. Even when Eddie farts, the moment is so genuine that it caused gales of laughter, so much so the ensemble had to hold for a bit for the audience to recover.

Bernard and Phyllis round out the couples. Bernard is a talentless doctor and an even more talentless puppeteer. Phyllis is maniacal and drinks too much. Stan Graner is so wonderfully awkward as Bernard, that even though you laugh at his bumbling ways you feel sympathy for his character. Phyllis is played with much relish and zeal by Leslie Turner. Her late night drunken scene was perhaps the funniest scene I've seen in a play in ages. The dialogue was witty enough on its own but it was her comic delivery and timing, as well as having the most infectious laugh that stole the show.

Lastly, there is Harvey, who was played by Cliff Stephens. Mr. Stephens stepped in for Jerry Haynes for the performance I attended, and did a wonderful job. It didn't dawn on me he was a replacement -- he was that good.

The production team headed by director Kerry Cole, did their jobs confidently and professionally. Then again, this is a [Theatre Three](#) show, so it's to be expected. There

were only a couple of minor glitches in this area: a gun that didn't go off properly and a light that must have a short in it because it flickered. I'm sure by the second performance they will have been worked out. Outside of these shortcomings the only other negative comment I'd make is that on a couple of the performers, the British accent slipped in and out near the end of the play.

The performance I attended was the first preview. I normally do not attend previews to review because the actors need their time to grow into their roles. Because of various conflicts this was the only time I could attend the show. This preview performance was wonderful, I can only imagine how much better the show will be after the show opens and runs. Theatre Three has given us a confectionery treat, one that is worth indulging in.

[*Season's Greetings*](#) will be running through December 16 at [Theatre Three](#). Purchase tickets [online](#) or by calling 214-871-3300.