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Annegret Reimer acts in the scene "Hangover" as part of the Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe's "Scenes From American Life" being held at the Gloucester Stage Company's Gorton Theater. Wicked Local Staff Photo / Kirk R. Williamson

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Annegret Reimer acts in the scene "Hangover" as part of the Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe's "Scenes From American Life" being held at the Gloucester Stage Company's Gorton Theater. Wicked Local Staff Photo / Kirk R. Williamson



By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Feb. 8, 2016 at 1:41 PM

GLOUCESTER

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GLOUCESTER

If you go...

WHAT: Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe presents. A.R. Gurney's "Scenes from American Life"

WHERE: Gorton Theatre, 267 East Main St., Gloucester

WHEN: Thursday and Friday, Feb. 11 at 12 at 8 p.m.; and Saturday, Feb. 13 at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.

TICKETS: \$15, \$10 student, \$5 under 19. Reserve tickets by email at cast2008@prodigy.net

That mink Muffy's still wearing has gotten a little threadbare, and Skippy's Pierce-Arrow has a few too many miles on it. Tinky's backhand isn't what it used to be. Tootsie and Snoozer have just got to do some work on the beach house.

Time passes, and things once held near-and-dear no longer cut the mustard, sport. A.R. Gurney's "Scenes from American Life," his 1971 send-up of the verities of WASP-ish values, seems these days as old-fashioned as the values it lampoons.

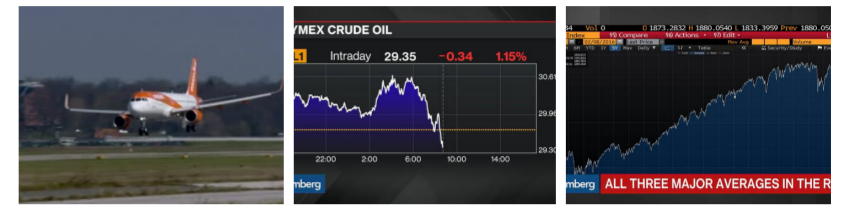
Which doesn't mean it can't provide good entertainment. The Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe, directed by Ray Jenness, does a chin-up job bringing Gurney's satire to life. The play, on view at the Gorton Theatre through Saturday, features a versatile, enthusiastic cast of nine who invest Gurney's narrative-through-collage farce with unrelenting energy.

The palpable fears that Nixon-and-the-pigs would bring about a police state in America, which the young all understood and the untrustworthy over-30s just couldn't comprehend, never really happened. Terror is terror, and that still resonates. But when Gurney portrays anti-establishment collegians trying to explain to their parents that they have to flee the police state — well, right now that sounds as unrealistic as needing a security clearance to travel from Connecticut to Vermont, which also happens in "Scenes."

That darkness has dissipated. But Gurney's generational flash-forwards and backwards work splendidly. All the actors play not only parents but children, and then children as parents, in a



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succession of brief, sometimes dizzying tableaux. The fears seem dated, but the onstage energy that Gurney creates is not.

Jenness has done a smart job making sure that the concerns sound believable, and don't become the butt of jokes. The surface of "Scenes" stays remarkably placid — parties, outings, club meetings. Small groupings of the cast move from one upper-middle-class "difficulty" to another, while other members of the cast sit in sullen judgment along the borders of the stage.

The presence of silent actors onstage, watching the petty conflicts unfold, cast a noire pallor over the action. The clever use of an onstage pianist (nicely played and wordlessly performed by Laura Fillmore Evans) dated each scene with songs from an era. This way, the action moved seamlessly from the Depression to Hitler to McCarthy's 50s to Vietnam and back again, without over-explaining itself.

Perhaps the central trope — that the kids get it, and the adults just can't — is the most dated aspect of "Scenes" in all. That gambit worked great back in the 70s, man, but now enlightenment — and delusion — seems to have embraced multiple generations.

The players deserve great credit here. There were very few hesitant deliveries, and believable pantomime, required to make most of the action work, was the norm. Several scenes stood out: Alison Landoni's declaration of how the security fence won't work — aesthetics of course, and think of the dogs — was a tour-de-force. Ken Stoeffler as the sinister Viennese dance instructor was a marvel.

Annegret Reimer, shuffling out in her dressing gown to explain to her psychiatrist that she'll just have to "beat this drinking thing on my own" — her deshabelle sharply contrasted with the sexy "Girl from Ipanema" playing in the background — was a hoot. Lauren Ashly Suchecki, Ariel Sargent, Nick Neyeloff, Kevin Lee and Jeph Ellis all made scenes shine in this democratically cast production.

Squeaky, Honey, Skipper, Tootsie, Muffy, Tinky and Snoozer (all actual characters) hope you'll join the fun before next Saturday. It definitely won't last, and so there's an extra old-fashioned waiting for you on the veranda.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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Free adult education classes						8:30 am
Wellspring House						
Income Tax Advice						1:15 pm
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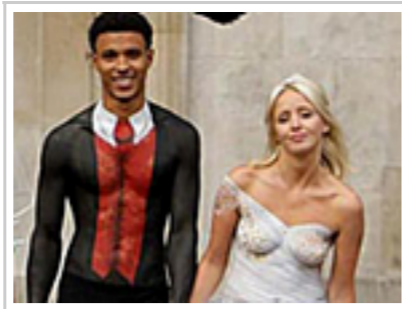
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