



TALK OF THE TOWN: Georgia Engel, James McMenamain, & Michael Park in the disappointing 'Middletown.' Photo: Vineyard Theatre

Theater Review

A visit to *Middletown* makes us yearn for Grovers Corners, NH

Middletown

Written by Will Eno

Directed by Ken Rus Schmoll

Vineyard Theatre

108 East 15th Street

(212-353-0303), www.Vineyardtheater.org

By David NouNou

The single bright moment in Will Eno's *Middletown* occurs in the very beginning of the show, when the Public Speaker comes to address us, the audience, similar to the opening of Thornton Wilder's brilliant play *Our Town*, when the Stage Manager comes to address the audience and describes Grover's Corners, NH, a lovely town to visit for a few hours. However, here the speaker is addressing us, all people: past, present, future, with ailments, and without, with problems and without. Well, you get the picture, and we the audience are sitting like Estragon and Vladimir in yet another brilliant play, *Waiting For Godot*, waiting for something to happen—*anything* to happen.

Like *Our Town*, *Middletown* is set in a small town in the USA. However, unlike that show, there is not one person here of any interest or that we could care about. There is a cop who has a temper and would choke someone with his night stick if he caught them having a drink on the park bench; there is the mechanic, who has become a drinking drifter of the town and gets chocked by the cop and says that brilliant line "I was a beautiful baby." There is Mrs. Mary Swanson, who wants to have a child, gets pregnant, and has a baby, but her husband is never there, and asks the equally brilliant question, "Does it hurt when you are born?" There is the astronaut in space, talking to Houston, describing the blueness of the Earth. There is the town lonely man, John Dodge (also the handyman), who goes to the library to get a book about gravity but never reads it; he instead wonders what suicide would be like and has the other brilliant line, "What does it feel like to die?" Since I wasn't given a copy of the script, these three quotes were the closest I could make of my notes. There is also the lovable, ever-helpful, dotty librarian who tacks what she feels are witty sayings on her wall. These are some of the more colorful members of the community. The rest are even drearier.

A lot of words are thrown around, but nothing that is cohesive. Thought-provoking big words are used such as: life, death, happy, lonely, baby, adult, rock, garden, love, birth, married, single. All these words are used by the different characters in the play in short vignettes describing their lives and what it would be like living in a small, simple American town.

Heather Burns of *Miss Congeniality* fame plays Mary Swanson; Linus Roache is John Dodge; David Garrison is the Public Speaker; Johanna Day is the Female Doctor; and Georgia Engel is the Librarian. They are all gifted actors, which got me looking forward to seeing this play. Then that came to an end. Drearily directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, who directed The Vineyard's bar none, worst production ever, *The Internationalist* in 2006, has given his actors nothing to do but enter, say their lines and exit. Plenty of that is going on.

If you ever wondered what happened to Georgette Franklin, the ditzy, lovable character that married Ted Baxter on the brilliant sitcom "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," well...wonder no more. She is a widow and a librarian living in *Middletown*.

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