
Arts & Culture

Cast of 'Boys Next Door' emphasizes characters' humanity over disabilities



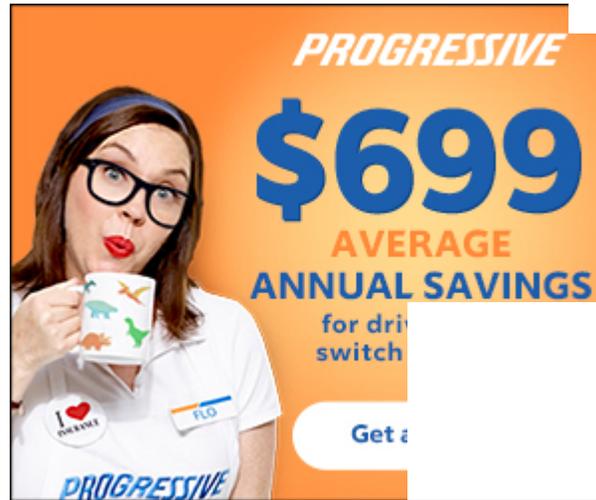


Tricia Owens Kenny | Some Theatre Company
Tricia Owens Kenny as Fremus comforts Logan Bard as Barry Kelmper in Some Theatre Company's production of "The Boys Next Door."

By **Judy Harrison**, BDN Staff • August 30, 2017 1:15 pm

As the social worker at a group home for four disabled adults, Jack has her hands full.

Arnold keeps threatening to run off to Russia. Lucien, who functions at the level of a 5-year-old, has lost his benefits. Norman keeps eating the doughnuts at the shop where he works. And Barry, who doesn't really belong at the house, thinks he can teach people to be golf pros.



That is what's happening as Tom Griffin's two-act play, "The Boys Next Door," opens. Written in the 1980s, the show, being presented by **Some Theatre Company** in Orono this weekend, is more comic than tragic. It sheds a gentle light on the lives of people rarely portrayed.

Director Elaine Bard expertly has her cast walk a thin line that allows the characters' disabilities to be accurately portrayed but prevents them from slipping into caricature. Her casting of experienced actors was a wise decision. She has created a fine ensemble.

The residents of the home each have their own challenges and physical tics. Arnold (Shayne Bither) slaps at his right ear like a dog with an itch. Norman (Daniel J. Legere) constantly plays with a set of keys — when he's not wolfing down doughnuts. Barry (Logan Bard) chews on his thumbnail. And Lucien (Jason Wilkes) practices his speech to a legislative committee ad nauseum.



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By **The Primary Market**

Each actor emphasizes his character's humanity over his disability. None can be singled out as giving a better performance than the other, but each deserves kudos for not relying on stereotypes or those tics to portray men facing challenges most audience members don't truly understand.

Barry's father (Ryan Jackson) swaggers onstage with a beer belly, an accent that screams South Boston and a heart far too small to offer anything other than a broken chocolate heart and a pittance of love to his delicate son.

Jackson's explosive scene with Bard's Barry stops the show and makes theatergoers hold their breath until it's over. Jackson, who played Norman in 2010 in a University of Maine production of the play, does not quite steal the show, but that scene stands out because of the actor's intensely brutal performance.

Bither delicately balances Jack's frustration with her job and her commitment to helping them navigate in society. The part was written for a man but Bither's performance proves the part is gender neutral. She makes Jack's dilemma over whether to leave the job or not one the audience understands and relates to.

Jenny Hancock (Sheila) is delightful as Norman's girlfriend. Their nervousness around each other feels familiar to every audience member who's been on a first date. Tricia Owens Kenny and Conor Kenny are equally good in multiple roles.



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By **Obsev**

With “The Boys Next Door,” Bard firmly establishes Some Theatre Company as the best amateur group in Greater Bangor.

“The Boys Next Door” will be performed at 7:30 p.m Friday and at 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Keith Anderson Community Center, 19 Bennoch Road, Orono. For information, call 356-6501 or visit sometheatrecompany.org.

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