

“How to Pray” is a challenging, worthwhile watch

[Amy Durant](#) | Tuesday, September 19 2017



Faith is individual to everyone, and a journey we take throughout our lives – what to believe (or not to believe), whether to worship publicly, privately or not at all, whether or not – and how – to pray. *How to Pray* at Bridge Street Theatre takes one woman’s journey and wraps it up with messy modern life, and the result is heartbreaking, yet affirming.

Faith (Susan Slotoroff) has been asked by her brother and sister-in-law to be a surrogate for them. What should be a somewhat straightforward transaction becomes complicated beyond belief, and the people (and animals) in her life (portrayed, in multiple roles, by Steven Patterson and Morgan Hooper) are the only ones to help her make life-changing decisions, as she’s lost her faith and ability to pray, years ago.

The cast that director John Sowle has assembled for this piece has no easy feat – Hooper plays six roles and Patterson plays four, with many quick changes between scenes – yet it comes off without a hitch. Slotoroff’s Faith is a truly modern woman – layered, intelligent, self-aware – and has the audience rooting for her from the beginning. Both Hooper and Patterson are so fluid in their changes and so utterly enjoyable to watch that each scene is a treat. Hooper is especially darling playing a young boy, while it’s hard to choose where Patterson shines the most – all of his characters are true standouts. His work as Judi, a volunteer at a food bank where Faith works, is both heart-wrenching and humorous, while his turn as both of Faith’s pets had the audience in stitches.

Sowle’s set design is perfect for this show – very spare, with a rotating bed in the center used for a variety of purposes and a screen where projections and photos are displayed for different scenes, allowing the rest of the stage for smaller scenes and acting space. This gives the actors plenty of room to move while making a clear delineation between scenes and making the show seem new and fresh throughout.

The show itself was a bit of an enigma, through no fault of the direction or acting. I'd like to have known more about Faith's decision-making process, somehow. The reasoning behind her choices wasn't clear to me, and it seemed that was perhaps left for the audience to decide, but without a background with which to make the decision, we're lost.

However, that small criticism aside, the set, acting and direction are fine work; some of the scenes hit home in such a way that it makes you a bit uncomfortable (which is the way you know a playwright's words are doing their job) and some other scenes were touching enough to bring tears to your eyes. This is a show that's new to me, which is also a treat – new work is always appreciated – and it will appeal to a wide variety of theatergoers. This show is more of an experience than something you sit back and watch – and I'm glad I got to experience it.

“How to Pray,” Bridge Street Theatre, 44 West Bridge St., Catskill, through September 24, \$25-\$10, Run time: 2 hours, 10 minutes with a 10-minute intermission, bridgestreettheatre.org. Photo by John Sowle.