

The News Herald ([news-herald.com](http://www.news-herald.com)), Serving Northern Ohio

---

Life

## Review: Chew on 'Scenery,' a delightful, insightful backstage comedy at Cleveland Play House

### Production at Play House supports coming season of Cleveland Shakespeare Festival

Friday, January 28, 2011

By Bob Abelman

[Correspondent@News-Herald.com](mailto:Correspondent@News-Herald.com)

---

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more."

Shakespeare wasn't the first playwright to find parallels between life and the theater, but he was certainly the most eloquent. Ed Dixon, a contemporary dramatist whose "Scenery" is on the Brooks Theatre stage at the Cleveland Play House, is quite likely the funniest.

His play offers us a glimpse behind the curtain, past the scenery, around the corner and into the cluttered dressing room of Richard and Marion Crain, prominent thespians at the dramatic decline of their careers, good looks and marriage.

"Scenery" gives voice to those who make a living speaking for others by allowing Richard and Marion to rant about thoughtless audience members, rail against drunk, deranged or — worse — disinterested critics and bemoan the state of an art that has reduced theater icons to doing really bad productions of really bad plays. Our play takes place before, during intermission and immediately after the opening night production of the ghastly "The Anniversary Wake" at an old theater in New York City.

The playwright has been there and done that, having made a living as a character actor, including an unfortunate and unsatisfying stint in the national tour of the musical "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas." Dixon's depiction of actors' bizarre superstitions, petty jealousies and crippling insecurities, and their contemptuous relations with costumers, directors and stage managers, are as revealing as they are hilarious.

So too is the light he sheds on life and the interesting paths we take. In the case of Richard and Marion, their marriage is as much a façade as theatrical scenery and the roles they play as husband and wife are woefully miscast. Dixon's employment of theater as allegory is handled with grace (such as Richard's reflective recitation of the very "Macbeth" quote that opens this review), tenderness (such as when Marion's concern that her seams are not straight pertains to her plastic surgery rather than her wardrobe) and a non-stop barrage of pithy yet poignant one-liners.

Yes, the play gets a bit heavy-handed toward the end, but the fine and subdued performances by Robert Hawkes and Anne McEvoy in this two-person play nicely offset these overly dramatic moments. In fact, Hawkes and McEvoy — very talented, experienced and prominent local thespians in their own right — are an absolute delight to watch. Their comic timing is impeccable, their pathos as adoring but sadly unsuitable spouses is palatable and the two of them are consistently charming and endearing.

Director Tyson Douglas Rand has a good feel for the material and facilitates a thoroughly enjoyable evening of theater. He keeps the pace lively and allows Hawkes and McEvoy to find the correct tone and temperament for this piece.

"Scenery" also offers a very important evening of theater, for all the proceeds from the production go toward supporting the

upcoming summer season of the Cleveland Shakespeare Festival. This season will offer the bard's "Othello" and "Love's Labours Lost" and, as usual, it will be offered free, outdoors and, like this production of "Scenery," very well done.

*"Scenery" continues through Jan. 30 at the Cleveland Play House's Brooks Theatre, 8500 Euclid. For tickets, which range from \$12 to \$15, e-mail [tickets@cleveshakes.org](mailto:tickets@cleveshakes.org).*

---

URL: <http://www.news-herald.com/articles/2011/01/28/life/nh3562376.prt>

© 2011 news-herald.com, a Journal Register Property