

Weil and Mazziotti Gillan Evoke **Emotion at Poetry Event**

By DEVON YANVARY

FANWOOD - As is custom, the Carriage House Poetry Series held another wonderful poetry reading Tuesday night to two longstanding professionals in the field. Joe Weil and Maria Mazziotti Gillan took the podium in honor of their most recent publications: A Night in Duluth and What Blooms in Winter (respectively).

Mr. Weil started the night off with a fun-loving poem entitled "In Memory of Tony Gotta Dance." In this piece, Mr. Weil describes the life and influence of his late bookie, who always sang the same song, wore three-piece suits to work and captured the quintessential essence of formality. In this poem, Mr. Weil speaks in a tone saturated with nostalgia of times past and times present, of childhood memories, and a longing to preserve a moment for a bit; at times, both funny and self-

Mr. Weil continues with "A Story," in which he discusses his favorite uncle's way of telling amazing, yet impossible, stories. Mr. Weil explores human nature, and again the audience is struck by the passing of time, of how fleeting we are, despite our best attempts. With lines like: "men become the air" and the "real worth of love is invisible and thankless," the piece evokes a feeling of mystery and urban legendry.

The next poem, the longest of the set, truly captures the overall spirit and style of Mr. Weil's writing. A prelude to the reading, Mr. Weil informs the audience he is a "mal-practicing Catholic," to which the room laughs. However, the piece that follows is full of spiritualism, love and existentialism. Written from the perspective of a man who is awake before the rest of his family, the poem discusses all the things in which he is happy about: nature, people who are in love, even fear. for these things and to enjoy them as well, capturing an overall sense of innocence and youth versus wisdom and adulthood.

Mr. Weil ends on a poem in which he describes the (humorous) struggles of being the lone artist in a family of non-believers of art, ending hiss segment with a standout line: "Who knows what has value."

A Night in Duluth is Mr. Weil's fifth poetry collection.

Maria Mazziotti Gillan opens her set with a crushing poem about the realities of exclusion. In this piece, we experience (albeit briefly) the pain, self-realization and otherness that comes from growing up in an Italian-American home in a world that took pride in being the stereotypical 'all-American.' She accentuates the difference by referring to her life as being "my America," while discussing how her accent, her expressions and even her clothing set her apart from her peers, regardless how hard she tried otherwise. Sadness, humiliation and outsider-ness radiate from this piece in a very tangible way.

Mrs. Gillan follows this with "Trading in the VW Bus," a slightly more humorous poem with a parallel message. In this, she describes the time she sold her beloved Volkswagen Bus for a Ford Pinto which she says with distain—in order to better fit into her new neighborhood. While there is a veil of humor in the way she describes the practical Ford, there is a sadder theme of discarding what you love in order to gain the approval of others, and the implication that that is part of adulthood.

Mrs. Gillan carries an overarching themes of loneliness, longing and family in each of her poems, and the room is silent between readings.

This is the case in her poem "Italian Summer" in which Mrs. Gillan describes going to Italy with her granddaughter, only to find out the things her children say about her behind her back. Mrs. Gillan recalls, with a tone of betrayal and immense sadness, that her granddaughter's words made her cry, and tainted the trip.

Similarly, her next piece, "My Gillan Pot Roast," describes her own daughter's writing process. In this, her daughter remembers the family pot roast recipe, which included letting the pot roast cook for over ten hours. In this, her daughter compares her writing process to the pot roast, in that she must take her time otherwise the book won't be perfect. While it shows a passing of the torch, it also displays the strength and connection of family and the value and hope of traditions.

Other poems dedicated to family include one for her father, a perpetually smiling and loving man, for her mother and for her husband (all of whom have passed), as well

as one for her son. The poem for her father demonstrates hopefulness in the face of (historical) adversity, while the poem for her husband ("It's Been a Week") reads with tear jerking sadness, the most powerful of which is "I hope you can feel me missing you." Meanwhile the poem for her son reveals a troubled relationship and a yearning to rekindle a love once shared.

This reading by Mrs. Gillan was a true honor, as her next collection, What Blooms in Winter is not set to release until October this year. This will be her 21st publication.

Madrigals Available For Community Shows

 $CRANFORD-The\,Cranford\,High$ School Madrigal Choir has become a fixture in the community during the holiday season, singing carols at various events and for numerous com-

munity organizations. To book the choir for a caroling performance this year, contact Cranford High School Choral Director Anthony Rafaniello at (908) 709-



NOT QUITE THE BIG BANG THEORY...In Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre's latest production of *The How and the Why* by Sarah Treem, evolutionary biologist Rachel Hardeman (Jessica O'Hara-Baker) expounds on her unique theory of female cycles to Dr. Zelda Kahn (Harriett Trangucci). The fascinating play runs for the next two weekends at the Oakes Center on Morris Avenue in Summit.

Evolution and Emotion Mix in Dreamcatcher Production

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY ılly Written for The Westfield Leade The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SUMMIT-The dreaded "thoughtprovoking" label. Does that mean overly deep, or confusing, or psychologically weird? Last weekend, The Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre produced Sarah Treem's play, The How and the Why, a work that is thoughtprovoking in the best sense of the

Set in the present time, two women meet for the first time in the Cambridge, Mass. office of the older one, Dr. Zelda Kahn (Harriet Trangucci), a well-known scholar. The young woman, Rachel Hardeman (Jessica O'Hara-Baker, is a graduate student in biology. Awkwardness rests in the room like fog sitting on a lake before sunrise. Then the air sizzles with questions and answers that lead both of them to more questions. It doesn't take the audience long to see that they have much in common - they both won prestigious awards before the age of 30. The individual research of both of them has or will change everything in the way the world looks at menstruation. Yet it's not just their academic research in the female reproductive system that brings them

together.
Zelda is astonished that the path Rachel has chosen, evolutionary biology, is eerily similar to her very

own life's path. They spar – is there academic envy afoot? Is one trying to prove something to herself or to the other one? Despite their differences in age and experience, they are very much alike. Suspiciously alike, thinks Rachel who was adopted at birth. Rachel and Zelda discuss their views, and Zelda reinforces the way science is supposed to work: constant re-examining of hypotheses in light of evolving evidence.

Throughout, Rachel longs for answers about her roots as well as academic recognition. Help from Zelda seesaws back and forth with the two of them gingerly dancing around important issues. Then the conversation edges on the personal. Why has Zelda never married? Why does Rachel feel the need to share credit for her insightful hypothesis with her boyfriend Dean? "Who wrote the abstract?" Zelda demands repeatedly to no avail. Rachel's theory just might make her famous. "Your work could be the fountain of youth for you," Zelda projects. She, of course is holding up a reflective mirror of her own life.

Director Laura Ekstrand, one of the co-founders of Dreamcatcher, has nuanced a magnificent performance from her actresses. Visually interesting direction is matched with an emotionally powerful pace. The impactful ping pong dialogue amazes. And the scientific jargon and allusions can be followed easily even by medical novices. In fact, at the Sunday afternoon talkback, a number of audience members mentioned that the two hypotheses were not off putting or confusing to a story that maintains two distinct levels. Ms. Trangucci's emotional impact is palpable – her character's tough exterior cracks to reveal credible vulnerability. The physical reality that Ms. O'Hara-Baker brings to her character is subtle and spot-on perfect.

The impressive set, designed and lit by Zack Pizza, gets repurposed cleverly in Act II.

Playwright Treem is a veteran of three seasons of HBO's psycho-therapy series, "In Treatment." She co-wrote TV's "The Affair" and was a writer/producer of the inaugural season of "House of Cards." So she knows a bit about dialogue and natural conversation. An intriguing twoperson play, it ultimately isn't just a story about science and family, but about what it means to be human.

Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre, an Equity Theatre, is in residence at the Oakes Center, 120 Morris Avenue in Summit, a delightful space that was once a church. The pews are padded and there is a small parking behind the theatre. For tickets for the show that runs weekends through October 9, call 1-800-838-3006 or order online at www.DreamcatcherRep.org



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