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## On Theater: This 'Stock' packs a barrel



Melanie Lora and Rob Nagle in South Coast Repertory's "Of Good Stock."

(Ben Horak / April 8, 2015)

By Tom Titus

*April 8, 2015 | 2:31 p.m.*

World premieres have been a stock in trade for South Coast Repertory, particularly during its spring Pacific Playwrights Festival, and the title of its current production slyly understates its value — Melissa Ross' crackling dramatic comedy about sibling rivalry (and revelry), "Of Good Stock."

The "Stock" in the title refers to the surname, Stockton, of the three sisters at the center of this vortex, specifically in a Cape

Cod house willed by their late literary lion father to the eldest, Jess, who's battling cancer, and her husband, jolly food writer Fred. Her inheritance doesn't sit well with the other sisters — Amy, a tightly wound bundle of exposed nerve endings, and Celia the rebellious youngest who'll be the first to inaugurate

the next generation.

Under the meticulous direction of Gaye Taylor Upchurch, the sisters brawl and bond under the influence of a celebratory bottle of Scotch while the menfolk endeavor to stay out of their way. One, the middle sis' fiancé, even bolts midway through the first act, never to be seen again.

Ross' animated creations have tilled fertile soil for outrageous antics, and the SCR cast takes full advantage. The show brings to mind Beth Henley's "Crimes of the Heart," down to the eldest sister celebrating a birthday — No. 41, though the actress in this role easily could pass for 21.

The most completely realized of the sisters is Melanie Lora's Jess, the eldest and most "rational" member of the trio as well as the most articulate. Her struggle with cancer hasn't dimmed her radiance or joy of living (at least publicly), and Lora plays these qualities to the hilt in a radiant performance.

Kat Foster's middle sister, Amy, comes across as a witch with a capital "B." She's obsessed with planning her wedding and gives little thought to the others' issues. Ross has decreed that Foster continuously talk over the others, giving the show an accurate resemblance to TV's "The View."

As Celia, the 31-year-old "baby" of the three, Andrea Syglowski strives to make herself noticed and to surpass Amy in outrageousness. Her character plays against the grain of the others, and she also springs the surprise of her pregnancy — not exactly a spoiler, since it occurs about halfway through the first act.

Among the men, Rob Nagle as Fred is the most fully developed — an oversized teddy bear whose bulk dwarfs the slender Lora but who manages to convey the deepness of his love.

Corey Brill as Amy's intended, Josh, appears reticent to joining the camaraderie of the others and chafes under his lady's harsh demands. **Todd Lowe** is roughly engaging as Celia's lover, Hunter, who charms his way into the family circle by matching the sisters' boisterousness.

Producers of "Of Good Stock" should immediately contact the Guinness Book of World Records to claim an entry — the most frequent use of dialogue in the key of F during one theatrical scene. It occurs when the three sisters convene drunkenly on the estate's dock to vent their spleens against men, cancer, parents and life in general. A lively sequence, if a bit overlong.

The Stockton estate is a beautifully designed setting by Tony Fanning, which divides and retreats when outdoor action is prescribed. Also impressive are the costumes of David Kay Mickelsen and the lustrous lighting effects of Bradley King.

"Of Good Stock" is fully ready for prime time and should enjoy a successful run on Broadway as well as a hit movie version along the lines of "August: Osage County." It's yet another jewel in South Coast Repertory's crown.

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Orange Coast College is offering a series of short plays by comedic playwright Rich Orloff this weekend. The six-play program will be presented Friday through Sunday at 8 p.m. in the college's Drama Lab Studio.

The shows are being staged by the OCC Repertory, a student-run theater company that stages shows exclusively produced, acted and directed by its members. Tickets are \$5 in advance and \$7 at the door. More information is available at [occtickets.com](http://occtickets.com).

**TOM TITUS** reviews local theater for the Daily Pilot.

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### **If You Go**

**What:** "Of Good Stock"

**Where:** South Coast Repertory, Segerstrom Stage, 655 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays through April 26 (no evening performance on April 26)

**Cost:** Starts at \$22

**Information:** (714) 708-5555 or [scr.org](http://scr.org)