

Of Good Stock

Ben Miles [Reviews](#) - [Theater](#)



Celebrity novelist, Mick Stockton, has died quite some time ago; he has left his three adult daughters the patriarchal abode in Cape Cod, purview over his still much-in-demand bibliography, and many familial loose ends to be sorted out among the daughters.

The men in the lives of this trio of feminine descendants struggle to comprehend the Stockton family's complex legacy, and to blend into it. The protagonist, Jess (Melanie Lora in a most naturalistic characterization), hasn't even dropped her maiden name. At one point her devoted husband, Fred (Rob Nagle in a winning portrayal), sarcastically inquires as to whether he ought to take Jess's surname as his own.

The three-sister paradigm has existed in drama since Shakespeare's *King Lear* had his tragic encounters with the tripartite distaff of his loins. And it's been more than a century since Chekov used a similarly inspired template in his play, *The Three Sisters*. Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* follows the three-sister motif into the 1970s; and, in 1993, Wendy Wasserstein's comedy, *The Sisters Rosenweig*, takes the sister trilogy into the 1990s.

Swiftly directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch, Melissa Ross's *Of Good Stock* follows a rough outline laid out by her predecessors. But the sister-women in this world premiere staging at Costa Mesa's South Coast Repertory takes the idea into current times. The play is infused with topical tumult suited to our era of the 21st century: life in the after burn of fame, heightened suspicions, and deadly

It's almost time for Jess to turn 41 years-old. In celebration of this

birthday – a particularly important marker in Jess's life, which will become apparent as the plot unfolds – the three siblings gather at the Cape Cod house in honor of this event, as well as the upcoming nuptials of middle sister Amy (Kat Foster in an emotional rollercoaster of a performance). Though Jess and husband Fred are already there when the story starts, soon Celia (Andrea Sygłowski, handling the foul-mouthed requirements of this character with good cheer) arrives at the Massachusetts locale and is readily criticized by the decade-older Jess for her misuse and vulgarization of the English language. Celia has no compunction about dropping the F-bomb as an interjection, nor is her use of the term "dude," confined to the male gender, a practice that drives Jess to complain and correct.

When Amy arrives with her fiancé, Josh (Corey Brill in a charismatically quirky interpretation of the role), it's evident that this middle-born sister is absorbed by three entities: her, herself and she. When Josh suddenly realizes that life with Amy will be exemplified by the behaviors that are exhibited at this gathering, he's drawn into an existential crisis.

And though tardy in his arrival, Celia's boyfriend of a couple of months, Hunter (Todd Lowe, finding much humor amid the pathos surrounding his character), at last arrives. Subsequently, a bombshell revelation is made. Complications ensue, and unexpectedly we in the audience find an emotional resonance in the circumstances that are as powerful as they are surprising. The issues brought forth by this three-sister tale are simultaneously unique and universal.

After all, we all are facing the inevitability of demise, not only of ourselves but of our loved ones; we all must make the most of the family we have and the relationships we create; and we each must deal with our particular set of circumstances as best as we are able. This would happen ideally with the support of loved ones, whether they fully understand our plight or not.

Of Good Stock is well supported by the unsurpassed quality of stagecraft that we've come to expect from SCR. Of particular note is Tony Fanning's scenic design, which ingeniously recreates both the interior and exterior of a Cape Cod residence.

Of Good Stock continues on SCR's Segerstrom Stage through April 26. SCR is located at 655 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa. Evening performances are Sundays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. On Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays the show starts at 8 p.m. Matinees are Saturdays and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. For reservations,

call (714)708-5555. For online ticketing and further information, visit www.scr.org.