

## Theater Review

# In *Rest*, Rising Star Samuel Hunter Continues to Find Moving Stories in the Margins of Society (GO!)

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Photo by Debora Robinson/SCR

Sue Cremin, Rob Nagle and Libby West in *Rest*

Playwright Samuel Hunter writes about the overlooked, everyday common people in the margins of society, where most of us live. His ability to make his characters' struggles resonate as much as those of kings and drug addicts makes his voice unusual indeed.

Questions of impending death loom large over his new play at South Coast Repertory, *Rest*, as they did in *The Whale*, his acclaimed 2013 play at the same venue. Also as in that earlier play, *Rest's* structure is straightforward and the plot simple. But don't be misled: There is nothing easy or obvious about Hunter's characters.

A nursing home in a small town in Idaho is closing. Only three residents, two staff members and the director, remain. A 20-year-old, born-again Christian has just been hired to serve as cook for three days.

Disappearance is a throughline in the play, both on its surface and in deeper layers. The disappearance of an elderly patient, Gerald (Richard Doyle), in the midst of a terrible blizzard is the obvious one. But most of the characters, with the exception of fellow patient Tom (Hal Landon Jr.), either fear disappearing or yearn for it. Ginny (Libby West) is afraid of disappearing into a foundering marriage; her best friend, Faye (Sue Cremin), fears disappearing into grief. Jeremy (Rob Nagle) fears disappearing into an empty, purposeless life. Conversely, Gerald's wife, Etta, yearns to reinvent herself by moving back to her hometown, and Ken (Wyatt Fenner) wants to lose himself in the rapture of religion.

Hunter's masterful accomplishment is that he allows these people to discover one another. No one is fundamentally changed at the end of the play, but the sense of their collective humanity makes even these ordinary people stand out.

South Coast Repertory, 655 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa. Through April 27. (714) 708-5555. [scr.org](http://scr.org).

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