

Rest



Landon, Jr., Milgrim. Photo by Debora Robinson.

For such an existentially unnerving play, Samuel D. Hunter's latest drama has a simple and rather benign title, *Rest*. As its premise, *Rest* displays a small cadre of characters – both employees and residents – who work and reside at a Northern Idaho facility for elder care. Said facility is on the cusp of a permanent close down. When a 91 year-old ward is thought to have wandered out into a severe snowstorm, the place and its people are tossed further into crisis mode.

Now in its world premiere at Costa Mesa's South Coast Repertory, through April 27, *Rest* is sensitively directed by SCR co-founder Martin Benson. With a cast of seven consummate performers, *Rest* plays as if we are witnessing life unfold at its own desperate pace. Etta is a longtime resident of the retirement manor (a marvelously realistic Lynn Milgram). Along with Gerald, a victim of acute dementia (a most credible portrayal by Richard Doyle) and Tom (Hal Landon Jr. in a perfectly revelatory turn), Etta is the last of the fulltime occupants of the facility.

But the residents here aren't the only ones facing a challenging transition in life. Four employees also must deal not only the closure of the facility but also with how to handle the missing resident. Jeremy is the high-strung manager of the venue; he's living on the edge of his own panic and anxiety (Rob Nagle provides comic relief as well as a rounded and humane

characterization). Also there's Faye (a contoured interpretation by Sue Cremin) and Ginny (Libby West in a most naturalistic assaying of character). As a subplot, we have this twist: Faye is pregnant and acting as the surrogate mother for Ginny's unborn baby, carrying the fetus to term on Ginny behalf. Additionally, there's a young new cook, Ken, who's just been hired by the facility. The problem is that Ken is also subject to panic attacks (Wyatt Fenner lets loose in his most volatile scenes).

The scenic design by John Iacovelli is a replica of every dreaded and dreary convalescent facility there is. What's more, the harsh weather is also replicated to the point of verisimilitude. Further, the costuming by Angela Balogh Calin is representative of the quotidian attire one might expect to see in such an environment. Additionally, the lighting by Donna Ruzika and the original music and soundscape by Michael Roth also underscore the bland, despairing ambiance of the facility.

Though full of surprises and surprisingly entertaining, *Rest* also gives us a bird's eye view of a most pressing social issue: the rapidly growing elderly population and how they (we) are to be cared for as that future arrives on a daily basis.

Rest continues at South Coast Repertory, through April 27. SCR is located at 655 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Performances on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays are at 8 p.m. Matinees are at 2:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. The show last one hour and fifty-five minutes (with one intermission; there is no evening performance on Sunday, April 27 evening). For reservations, call (714)708-5555. For online ticketing and further information, visit www.scr.org.