



New Lamarre Comedy 'Gray Matters' Showcased at Mystic Art Center and Hartford's Charter Oak Cultural Center

Story and photo

by Don Church and Tony Schillaci

Connecticut playwright Jacques Lamarre's new comedy, "Gray Matters" was one of thirty plays that premiered at the 11th annual Midtown International Theater Festival in New York City in July. This Equity approved showcase then went directly to Mystic Art Center from August 6th through the 8th-

The play is a production of the Emerson Theater Collaborative in Colchester and its producer, Camilla Ross.

The four well-cast and talented actors in "Gray Matters," members of the Actors Equity Association (AEA), are April Woodall as acclaimed actress Sarah Gray, Steve Sherman as aspiring actor Scott Leeds, Jen Anaya as ingénue Deja Smith, and Kathryn Kates as tough show-biz agent Miriam Burger. All four gave powerful and memorable comedic performances under the capable direction of Joshua Lee Ramos.

The story revolves around Sarah, who collapses onstage during a play--within-the-play performance, and is rushed to a hospital with a serious brain disease. She has no money and no insurance, and no prospects of future work, because she cannot memorize lines. In fact, much of her short-term memory is damaged, too, so even her moment-to-moment existence is compromised. Sounds like a great premise for a comedy, huh?

Enter high-voltage, prospective paying roommate Deja; enthusiastic but dumb-as-a-stump fellow actor Scott, and tough-as-leather agent Miriam, all of whom try to cheer Sarah while at the same time encourage her to get back to acting.

The antics of these well-written characters bring laughter and sympathy to Sarah's predicaments that add



From left: Playwright Jacques Lamarre, Producer Camilla Ross, and Actor Steve Sherman

weight to the play and explore the timely themes of loneliness, isolation, ageing and professional crisis. With a trio of crazies as her main support system, she should be better in no time at all. Right?

Jacques has a keen understanding of women's issues, and writes insightfully for female characters - he especially understands the challenges, both in showbiz and in "real life" facing women of a certain age. The zingers are fast and furious, the inside show business jokes are some times a bit too inside, but references to 'hot flashes,' Disney's Broadway shows, and other topical woes strongly resonated with the audience.

This work in progress has great potential. A few tweaks and a slowing of some of the dialogue delivery and a bit of tightening will no doubt improve the

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talented Mr. Lamarre's often laugh-out-loud play.

He's definitely a playwright to watch because his plots, characters, themes, believable dialogue truly reflect his keen understanding of human nature, including its follies and foibles - a true and funny reflection of our times.

If laughter is the best medicine, we're ready for another dose of Lamarre.

The show will play Hartford through Sept. 12 at the Charter Oak Cultural Center. Performance information and tickets be can be obtained by visiting www.EmersonTheaterCollaborative.org. Tickets are \$25 (\$23 for students and seniors).

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