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# Review: Over the River and Through the Woods

BY KATHRYN GREENAWAY, THE GAZETTE APRIL 23, 2009

Gianpaolo Venuta (centre) holds ground with Frank Savino (left) and Bernie Passeltiner in Over the River and Through the Woods at the Segal Centre.

**Photograph by:** Randy Cole, Segal Centre



Over the River and Through the Woods should be required viewing for all whippersnappers considering acting as a career.

The Joe DiPietro comedy is at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts at the Saidye until May 10, and judging by the reaction of Wednesday's crowd, the run won't be long enough. A good laugh is a welcome thing these days.

What's interesting at first glance is that four of the six cast members are senior citizens. What's interesting after all is said and done is that they also happen to be veteran actors who are brilliant at their craft.

Real-life husband and wife DeAnn Mears and Frank Savino play Aida and Frank Gianelli. Doreen Brownstone and Bernie Passeltiner play Emma and Nunzio Cristano. The four are grandparents to Nick, played by Gianpaolo Venuta. Diana Donnelly plays Caitlin O'Hara, a young woman drawn into the family comedy of errors not entirely against her will.

Director Steven Schipper asked Mears, Savino and Passeltiner to come up from New York and Brownstone to come from Winnipeg to do the play. He'd worked with them all before and no doubt knew just how good they would be working as an ensemble.

Right he was.

It's New Jersey, 1994, and Nick eats Sunday dinner with his grandparents every week. (Great comfy-brownstone set by Michael Gianfrancesco.) They drive him crazy with their incessant chatter about the importance of family and their inability, or stubborn refusal, to get with the times. When Nick is offered an attractive job promotion that would require him to move to

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30 MINUTES AGO
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**Closing arguments in Vincent murder trial**
On Aug. 14, 2007, Sylvain Vincent loaded a sawed-off rifle inside his Laval home, packed it into a bag, made the short drive to his former supervisor's house.

Seattle, the grandparents concoct a plan to introduce him to the perfect woman so that he will fall in love and stay put. They can't bear the thought of him disappearing from their lives.

DiPietro's story touches a nerve. The jokes work no matter the nature of your roots, be it Italian, Irish or Jewish. That's because his make-believe family isn't make-believe at all. It is your family and my family and the family down the street. We all laugh because we all know someone just like Aida or Frank or Emma or Nunzio.

But what really brings the jokes and fears alive is the magical way Mears, Savino, Brownstone and Passeltiner slip into their roles like comfortable cardigans. Making it look that easy and that real isn't really that easy, but they make it so. Watch and learn, youngsters. Watch and learn.

It's no easy task for Venuta to stand his ground in the face of such a powerful quartet, but he does and makes himself memorable in the process. A talent to watch for. And Donnelly handles her role as the possible love interest with natural charm, making you hope she'll walk through Grandpa and Grandma Gianelli's front door just one more time.

The tortuous debate – should he stay or should he go – verges on becoming a bore in the second act, but yawns are stifled with tears and then laughter when the characters reveal, in the final moments, what happens to each family member after Nick makes his decision.

Go see the pros in action.

***Over the River and Through the Woods*** *is at the Segal Centre for the Performing Arts at the Saidye, 5170 Côte Ste. Catherine Rd., until May 10. Tickets are available at the box office, 514-739-7944 or at Admission, 514-790-1245 or at www.admission.com. For information, go to www.segalcentre.org.*

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parked outside and waited more than 10 minutes for Yves Couture to arrive.
45 MINUTES AGO

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2 HOURS AGO
COMMENTS (0)

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2 HOURS AGO
COMMENTS (0)

Tamil protest could cause traffic chaos
2 HOURS AGO

INSIDE THE GAZETTE



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