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## East Side Players production of Over the River and Through the Woods a delight

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By Maria Tzvaras



If you are born to an immigrant family, whose grandparents or parents arrived with their cultural individualities in tow, East Side Players' final show of the season, Over the River and Through the Woods, is one you will want to see.

But even if you aren't one such offspring, this funny and heartwarming story is sure to remind you of your own family, each of which have their own narrative and memories as rich and individual as the story told in this play.

Written by Joe DiPietro and inspired by his own grandparents, this story is simplistic but powerful, and centres around a larger-than-life Italian family including Nick (Matthew Domville), who at 29 still has Sunday dinner with his grandparents in Hoboken, New Jersey.

But this week, Sunday comes early for Nick who arrives on Thursday to grandpa Frank and grandma Aida's (Daryn DeWalt, Sheila Russell) house to tell them, and grandpa Nunzio and grandma Emma (George Bertwell, Jane Hunter), he may be moving to Seattle for work.

For Nicky, as they affectionately call him, this news is met with devastation as both his parents and sister have already moved away from the family fold, and also disapproval because why on earth would you want to leave your family for career advancement?

Frank explains early on, and often, that family is the most important thing in the world. Work is for supporting family and both he and Nunzio worked for decades doing so with jobs, not careers. While they did this, the women of the house created a loving home, using food to bring the family together.

So the always talking, always eating grandparents decide they must convince Nicky to stay, and their big attempt involves inviting Caitlin (Alison Dowling), a lovely girl over for dinner in the hopes a love match is made and he will stay.

She is gracious in the midst of the blatant set-up, complete with embarrassing questions and repeated offers of veal despite being a vegetarian. But a funny thing happens; while Nicky is mortified, she is endeared by his grandparents and to top it all off, he actually likes Caitlin.

Nicky's conflict of what to do is a thread throughout this show, because while he was raised in this world where family is everything, he's a young man who longs to find his own happiness, reflecting the values of today's world of success first, family second.

Domville plays Nick with humour and a quiet resolve that, if you come from this type of family, you will completely relate to. But regardless of your family's cultural background, the strength in this show is how

relatable it is. The fierce love and disappointment you are doomed to create regardless of your choices, is something you will recognize and appreciate.

Convincing and realistic performances are given by all the “grandparents.” You will love them and their love for each other. From their mannerisms, enthusiasm and reactions, there are both laugh-out-loud moments as well as touching scenes of recollections of the past.

Thought-provoking in the best way, I dare you not to share in Nicky’s contemplation of deciding the line between what you owe the ones who love you versus finding your own way.

Over the River and Through the Woods runs until June 8, 8 p.m. at the Papermill Theatre, 67 Pottery Rd. Tickets are \$22. Call 416-425-0917 or visit [eastsideplayers.ca](http://eastsideplayers.ca)