

Review: Over the River and Through the Woods (East Side Players)

Mooney on Theatre

By [Ryan Kerr](#)



If you have yet to venture [Over the River and Through the Woods](#) to historic [Todmorden Mills](#), you have good reason to now. [The East Side Players](#) have put together a heart-warming evening at [The Papermill Theatre](#) which was clever, funny and touching. My father and I both laughed heartily while pondering playwright Joe DiPietro's eternal question: how do families weather the storm of relocation, ageing and the future without losing the common threads that bind them?

[The East Side Players](#) tout themselves as a community theatre company, but given the calibre of [Over the River and Through the Woods](#), I would never have known. Several of the cast members have won awards, while the set – a deconstructed New Jersey Italian living room complete with flooring, wallpaper and family photos – brought the story to life. Director Harvey Levkoe made great use of the space, while emphasizing the importance of moments between dialogue to propel the plot forward. You'll know exactly what I mean when the cannoli comes out.

Sheila Russell's eccentric, jittery portrayal of Aida struck the perfect balance between comedic and genuine. I'm sure all of the audience could relate to her overly enthusiastic colour coordination courtesy of costume designer Carmen Anni, and to her nosey, but well-intentioned provocations. (Who doesn't have a crazy Aunt So-and-So?)

Daryn Dewalt's portrayal of Grampa Frank was weary yet proud, as he tenuously held onto his independence while Matthew Domville played the eager 29-year old protagonist considering a career move that would threaten the routine of the Italian Family Dinner. As the family considers the ramifications of Nick's decision, many hilarious and sometimes painful truths are revealed over dinner.

Watching this group navigate the challenges of modern family living was hysterical and thought-provoking. While [Over the River and Through the Woods](#) provided no concrete solution to the uncertain path of growing pains, it demonstrated that beyond patience and respect for each character's unique mode of expression, lies a deep love, shared by every generation.