

'Through the Woods' will keep you laughing

By Ken Glickman

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Christmas is never mentioned in Williamston Theatre's current offering, Joe DiPietro's

Review

"Over the River and Through the Woods," but this heartfelt story is all about the warmth of family togetherness which is the centerpiece of any holiday.

The play is simple, direct and predictable but that doesn't prevent it from also being deeply affecting and keeping you laughing from beginning to end; because you've seen all of these situations in your own family — Italian or not.

We first meet Nick Cristiano (Andrew Faber) as the narrator and the protagonist.

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Grandpa Nunzio (Arthur J. Beer) and Nick (Andrew Faber) have a chat about leaving in the Williamston Theatre play. CHRIS PURCHIS

Theater

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This 29-year-old business-type goes to his grandparents' house in Hoboken each Sunday for dinner along with his other grandparents.

The two elderly couples proceed to smother him with love, food and their own version of worldly wisdom.

"Through the Woods" is like "Brighton Beach Memoirs" for Italians.

Faber hits the mark perfectly as the grandson. He's age appropriate, charming, and knows when to play the straight man to the prickly lines of the elders, but steps up for his own home runs when needed. Faber makes the entire plot believable.

The flow of conversation and jokes is seamless and brimming with realism.

Director Tony Caselli sets the rhythm up perfectly. The five main characters toss the dialogue to each other with the fluidity of a Final

Four basketball game.

When the five characters play the board game Trivial Pursuit, it's a scene you'll never forget. Also lots of funny gags like the three men squeezing on the couch together, with Nick in the middle.

The old folks are set in their ways and proud of it and preach the importance of "tengo familia" (love of family), food and faith. So when Nick announces that he's moving to Seattle for a better job, it is met with anger and

sadness.

All four elders are excellent, but Arthur J. Beer and his wife, Mary Bremer Beer, touch a special chord as Nunzio and Emma Cristano.

They are great actors and their sensitivity to each other on stage is something rarely seen.

It would have been nice if the grandparents looked and acted a bit more Italian. The body language and accents were uneven at best.

Lansing favorite Gloria Vivalda is wonderful

as Aida (and authentically Italian), the grandmother who solves all problems by serving food to everyone in her home. Her performance is subtle, warm and real.

The Italian living room, beautifully designed by Daniel C. Walker is impressive with its attention to detail.

Looking for a play the entire family will enjoy and laugh at for the holidays?

"Over the River and Through the Woods" is just the ticket.