

'The Best Brothers' pairs longtime theater buddies

By Bridgette Redman
For the Lansing State Journal

It's not that big of a leap to go from best friends to best brothers, at least, not if you spend your life in the theater.

Within the walls of Williamston Theatre, John Lepard and Tony Caselli have built a theater with Chris Purchis and Emily Sutton-Smith over the past nine years. Now in 2015, they're appearing on stage

together at that theater in the title roles of "Best Brothers."

Opening in previews this week, "Best Brothers" is a two-person show relating how two very different brothers deal with their mother's funeral — and try to figure out how they could have possibly come from the same parents.

"It's really funny and people will really connect to it, too," Director Lynn Lammers said of the play. "It's about this sibling relationship. We don't



Tony Caselli



John Lepard

choose our family and a lot of us find ourselves with a sibling who has the same biological parents as us, but is just nothing like us. It has to do with that special relationship."

Lammers said it has been a joy to direct the two friends and Williamston Theatre partners. Rehearsals have been filled with giggles and touching moments.

"It's great," she said. "They have a ton of chemistry and affection for each other. They're a little like brothers in real life. They work together and they have a very playful relationship and also a lot of respect for each other. All of that comes through in their

performances."

She also said that while it could have been intimidating directing such veteran actors with a long history together, that they've been easy to work with.

"There were no barriers to get through," Lammers said. "They have really given themselves over to my direction, and they have a huge amount of respect for the process and

See THEATER, Page 3D

Theater

Continued from Page 1D

protocols and how this whole thing we call theater works. They adhere to that really well."

Written by Canadian playwright Daniel MacIvor, the play brings Kyle and Hamilton Best together after their mother dies in a freak accident at a gay pride parade. They argue over everything, perhaps revealing why mom may have loved the dog the most of the three of them. But the play isn't linear in nature or steeped too deeply in realism.

"The other thing I

really love about this play is how theatrical it is," Lammers said.

"There is a surrealness, an other-worldliness. We're dealing with the death of a parent, and there is an element of kind of existing at a different plane. Tony and John each play a second character that kind of takes this play into an after-life kind of space. This play floats in time and space. I love that about it — the transformation."

Lammers said one brother has his life together in a very traditional way and perceives the other brother as being a mess and not meeting social expectations.

"What we discover is that the other brother maybe isn't as much of a mess as we thought," Lammers said. "It's really about acceptance and love and that differences among us don't mean we can't find a way to come together and love and respect each other."

Lepard plays Hamilton, the brother who has it together. Lammers said Lepard is very much a straight man in this show.

"I think John's ability to be really subtle but impactful of reactions to what Kyle is doing really packs a wallop," Lammers said. "John knows how to very subtle, not in a hammy, but in a true, honest way to react to

what is going on and double the laughs of whatever Kyle just did. Kyle is doing something silly and ridiculous and with Hamilton's reaction to it, what John brings is just gorgeous."

Caselli plays the cheerful Kyle, and Lammers said Caselli's energy is incredible. Anyone watching the rehearsal, she said, would not believe he was in a coma just a year ago.

"The man has more energy than everyone else in the rehearsal room put together," Lammers said. "Kyle has this buoyancy, this cheerfulness to his life and Tony has no trouble at all being high energy and

bouncy. There is definitely that physicality in his performance."

It is in part because of Caselli's recovery that the rehearsal process has been such a touching one for the artists involved.

"This feels really special," Lammers said. "We are seeing Tony come back after a really serious illness — and he is in full force. He is just unbelievably, belly-laugh funny. It is also really special after nine years of running a theater together to see the two of them on stage and how much real love, respect and affection there is between the two of them."

It has been, she said, a

IF YOU GO

» **What:** "The Best Brothers" by Daniel MacIvor

» **Where:** Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam St., Williamston

» **When:** 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, 3 p.m. Saturdays (starting Feb. 7) and 2 p.m. Sundays, Jan. 29 through March 1

» **Prices:** \$15-\$27, student tickets \$10, seniors and military get \$2 off regular pricing.

» **Contact:** 1-517-655-7469 or www.williamstontheatre.com

very special process.

"And a special process makes for a special show."