

One man's trash knowledge no treasure in 'Garbologists'

By LYNN MARTENSTEIN
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Theatergoers may end up talking trash after seeing "The Garbologists," now at Cape May Stage.

"Mongo," for example, is trash collector-speak for finding something of value in people's garbage and keeping it. The practice has a leading role in the play.

Cape May Stage's latest production takes a deep dive into the lives of two sanitation workers in New York City as they make their rounds, house to house, collecting trash. Although the duo shares a route, they appear to have little else in common.

Marlowe is a black, Ivy League-educated woman on her first day of work at a new job when the audience

meets her. Having easily aced the city's training program, she is eager to prove her mettle at work.

Danny is a white, blue-collar man who has hauled trash for the city for nine years and is anxious to impart his knowledge and street "creds" to his new partner. Predictably, things go badly from the start, and their pairing seems destined for the trash heap.

Much of their sparring match plays out in the cab of the 19-ton Mack truck they share on their route and on stops they make along the way. A special "mongo," however, changes their dynamics and the trajectory of their journey together.

Serena Ebony Miller is superb as Marlowe as she stands up to know-it-all

Danny, and, ultimately, stands down when they look past their differences and find common ground. She is also hugely expressive, often speaking volumes without saying a single word.

"The play teaches us that the most valuable moments and things in life can come from the most unexpected places," she said.

Michael Basile is brilliant as Danny as well. He has something to prove when the play opens, but he has proof of something of far greater value by the time the play ends. He is also a physical comic whose bursts of exercise and sudden dance moves are truly amusing.

Much of the dialogue is fast and furious. The partners' timing is impeccable as they sling zingers back



Provided

Two mismatched sanitation workers must find a way to work together as they pick up trash on New York City's streets in "The Garbologists" at Cape May Stage.

and forth while lobbing trash bags into the truck's compactor. They never miss a beat — or a bag.

Audiences should note that Danny uses foul language at times, and finds a couple of R-rated items in the trash, so parents may not want to bring young children.

Cape May Stage welcomes Basile back to its fold for his sixth role at the theater. He appeared in "Double Play" last year, "Chapter Two" in 2018, "Barefoot in the Park" in 2016, "Mistakes Were Made" in 2014 and "The Woolgatherer" in 2011. He also has extensive TV credits, including a recurring role in all five seasons of NBC's hit series "New Amsterdam."

Basile strongly identifies with the character he plays in the show, having served as a firefighter in Brooklyn for the last 19 years.

"I have a lot in common with Danny, as do a lot of guys I've worked with and observed over the years at the department," he said.

Miller is a newcomer to Cape May Stage but has performed extensively at several venues in New York City, including The Public Theatre, Soho Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, The New School and The New Ohio. She also is an accomplished musician, which Cape May Stage audiences will be able to attest to after seeing the show.

One could argue that there is a third "character" in this play — the set — that provides a vehicle for Marlowe and Danny to sort out their differences.

Alex Dannecker, the show's set designer, has created a large garbage truck on the stage, using a grill, mirrors and lights from assorted vehicles he

found on dumpster dives to both the Department of Public Works in Cape May and Dave's Trash Removal in Cape May Court House.

Playwright Lindsay Jolley's interest in garbology — the study of a community by analyzing its trash — was sparked after reading a book about the field by Robin Nagle in 2016.

She began her own literary journey with garbage three years later when she met friends for a getaway weekend and one of them turned out to be a sanitation worker. She later asked him to lunch to learn about his job.

Ultimately, she met with sanitation crews across the country, rode with them on their rounds and learned to operate the compactor on a trash truck.

"Many of the sanitation workers I met felt that they became invisible to people once they put on their uniforms, and that people sort of tuned them out entirely," she said.

Her play, "The Garbologists" premiered in 2021 at the Philadelphia Theatre in Philadelphia and City Theatre in Pittsburgh.

"Our play gives a human face to what we've come to recognize and appreciate, especially during COVID, as this country's 'essential workers,'" said Roy Steinberg, the theater's producing artistic director. "It's an enlightening, funny and profound play, and we are pleased to shine a spotlight on their dedication and service."

"The Garbologist" runs Oct. 13-22 at the Robert Shackleton Playhouse. Visit capemaystage.org or call (609) 770-8311 for ticket information.

Over

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was logic-based, she said.

You may not be familiar with the term "cozy mysteries," which tend to be on the lighter side with no sex, very little violence and no profanity. Reade has authored seven cozy mysteries with the first six books in a Gothic style, she said.

She describes them as suspenseful and atmospheric but avoiding the occult.

Where did Reade's sense of mystery originate?

"Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Trixie Belden — I started with those books and just progressed through more mature mysteries as I got older," she said.

Write every day if you wish to become a published author and get in the habit of producing material, Reade advises.

"I don't know if I'd be writing right now if it had taken me 300 rejections to get that first book sold," she said.

There are other options to avoid a "publishing gatekeeper," Reade said.

On a stormy South Jersey night, grab one of Reade's books and transport yourself back 300 years to a county that had no Wawas, parking issues or beach tags but may have murder and intrigue.

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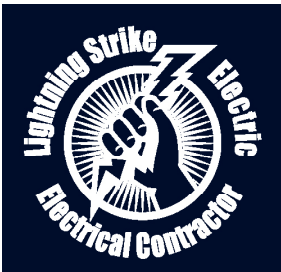
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