

'Dead Man's Cell Phone' answers call for comedy in Cape May

By CAROL R. EMMENS
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — "Dead Man's Cell Phone," a comedy opening at Cape May Stage, makes mobile phones the means to explore the mysteries of life and death while we laugh at the surreal and mundane events as they unfold.

Sitting in a café, Jean is irritated, like us, when a cell phone rings and rings and rings because the owner, Gordon, is not answering it. Finally she approaches him and finds he is not ignoring it intentionally — he's dead.

Jean hesitates and finally answers his phone, and the audience is introduced to the first of his eccentric callers, who include his mother, an estranged wife, a mistress and a brother. Jean, described in the stage directions as insular, is indeed a lonely woman; she takes answering Gordon's cell phone as an opportunity to connect with his callers by telling them about his last moments. But she tells them lies.

Starring as Jean, Abby Royle said she tells "little white lies to make them feel better. Her loneliness and her lack of connection lead to her desire to connect in a very unusual way."

But her lies do not work. "She makes up stories that couldn't possibly be true," Director Roy Steinberg said. "She tells Gordon's mother he wants her to have a spoon from the café because she is such a good cook. Everyone freezes; it's obviously a fam-

ily secret that she's a horrible cook."

Out of her lies arises the question: Is it best to always tell the truth? Or on occasion isn't telling a lie necessary in order to take the high ground?

Although the characters in the play are quirky and make us laugh, Steinberg said he views them as "poetic. They are metaphors; for example, Gordon's brother Dwight works in a stationary store and deals with paper in a paperless world. He writes old-fashioned letters and uses obsolete technology, so he represents what we've left behind."

The set of "Dead Man's Cell Phone" consists of enormous gray and white cell phone panels. Steinberg described how the monochromatic panels are used to add dramatic effects.

"The panels are lit from behind, so they are translucent and we can project colors on them, primarily splashes of red that give us different scenes like the one in the church," he said.

The set was designed by Shawn Fisher, who is also a playwright.

Now in rehearsal, the cast is discovering both how funny the play is and how much it makes viewers ask questions about ethics, romance, connection and disconnection.

"The play is filled with juxtapositions that are very funny, like a 'New Yorker' cartoon," Steinberg said. "Yet we are doing a play that resonates and that makes you



CAPE MAY STAGE/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The cast of 'Dead Man's Cell Phone,' including Abby Royle, Marlena Lustik and Sheffield Chastain, rehearses for the dark comedy, which will be performed by Cape May Stage beginning Sept. 10 at the Robert Shackleton Playhouse on Lafayette Street in Cape May.

think even after you've left the theater. It makes you want to come back and see the play again."

The 2015 season is devoted to plays written by women; "Dead Man's Cell Phone" was written by Sarah Ruhl,

whose work typically blends the blunt and the bizarre. The characters are real yet eccentric and they do the unexpected; for example, at her son's funeral, Gordon's mother does not read a psalm from the Bible. Instead she

reads a passage from Charles Dickens novel "A Tale of Two Cities" about the secrets we take to our grave.

Marlena Lustik plays the role of Gordon's mother and commented that her character "blurts out whatever

is in her head and she is insensitive and judgmental. Her comments are often so absurd they make you laugh out loud."

The play lends itself to actors playing more than one character. Jennifer R. Terrell, who has performed in scores of regional theaters, plays the roles of Gordon's widow and the Other Woman/Stranger, while Sheffield Chastain, who has appeared on Broadway and Off Broadway, plays Gordon and Gordon's brother Dwight.

Chastain said he enjoys playing two characters because they are very different. "Dwight is nerdy and not experienced. Gordon is assertive and gets what he wants. During rehearsal, you work on how each looks, stands and speaks, and once you have it down, going from one to the other is instantaneous," he said.

For an evening of fun, "Dead Man's Cell Phone" is worth going to the theater and turning off your cell phone. And when you leave, decide the answer to this question: Who do you want to answer your cell phone when you are gone?

The preview for "Dead Man's Cell Phone" is Sept. 9 and it opens Sept. 10. The show starts at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday and 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday through Oct. 9. Tickets are available online at capemaystage.org or at the Robert Shackleton Playhouse, 405 Lafayette St. in Cape May. Call (609) 770-8311.

Grand jury indicts 18 in major narcotics ring

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — A Cape May County Grand Jury returned an indictment in connection with the "Operation Dreamchaser" investigation Aug. 25, a several-months-long large-scale narcotics investigation initiated in January 2015 by the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office Gangs, Guns and Narcotics Task Force, culminating in the execution of numerous arrests and search warrants throughout Cape May County in May.

According to county Prosecutor Robert L. Taylor, the indictment charges the following: Javier Alicia-Garcia with leader of a narcotics trafficking network.

Javier Alicia-Garcia, Ariel Rodriguez, Gadiel J. Santiago and Melissa Lyston with distribution of a controlled dangerous substance.

Gadiel J. Santiago with possession of a firearm while committing a certain controlled dangerous substance crime, certain person not to have weapons and prohibited devices.

Gadiel J. Santiago, Vicente Alicea-Garcia and Rafael Delgado with distribution of a controlled dangerous substance.

Javier Alicia-Garcia, Vicente Alicea-Garcia, Ariel Rodriguez, Gadiel J. Santiago, Melissa Lyston, Michael Kendrick, David Fessler, David A. Butler,

Shawn M. Peterson, Joel Candelaria, Rafael Delgado, Janelle B. Lyston, Mario Pagan-Perez, Norman A. Rosario-Mastache, Juan Rodriguez-Roman, Christine V. Pagan and Alvin Mercado-Osorio with conspiracy to distribute a controlled dangerous substance and conspiracy to possess a controlled dangerous substance.

Shawn Peterson and David Fessler with possession with intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance and Jamie L. Krail with possession of a controlled dangerous substance. Leader of a narcotics trafficking network carries a mandatory penalty, if convicted, of life imprisonment with a 25-year period of parole ineligibility.

As a direct result of this investigation, about 21.5 ounces of heroin, which is the equivalent

of more than 20,000 bags with a street value of in excess of \$305,000, and about 4 ounces of cocaine with a street value of about \$5,600 were seized.

A total of \$348,903 in U.S. currency was also seized. In addition, 10 firearms, three of which were handguns, were

seized along with 25 vehicles and two residential properties, 2724 Route 9 in Ocean View and 211 Apple Blossom Road in North Cape May. Complaints will be filed in the Superior Court of New Jersey seeking forfeiture of the cash, vehicles and residences.

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Date	High		Low	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
2	11:28	11:53	4:59	5:36
3		12:24	5:51	6:36
4	12:52	1:25	6:47	7:40
5	1:54	2:30	7:47	8:47
6	3:02	3:36	8:50	9:53
7	4:10	4:40	9:54	10:54
8	5:12	5:36	10:54	11:48
9	6:06	6:25	11:48	

MOON PHASES
Last Quarter, September 5 • New Moon, September 13

Cape May Star & Wave

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