

The Wire

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The gripping and lurid "Ghosts of Ocean House" premieres at Players Ring

by Scarlett Ridgway Savage

Early May at the Player's Ring can only mean one thing: the production of the F. Gary Newton Annual Playwrighting competition. Meant to honor one of the most prolific artists of the area, it continues his vision of bringing new writers to the Seacoast.

This year's selection is a haunting (in more ways than one) drama entitled *Ghosts of Ocean House*, by Michael Kimball, a local author, whose work includes such chilling novels as *Green Girls* and *Mouth to Mouth*. Kimball knows how to make you shake in your seat, all right; and while you're shaking, he makes you feel, and while you're shaking and feeling, he makes you think.

The tale begins at the Ocean House, which is a Victorian mansion once owned by a couple who died in a murder-suicide, at the father's hand. The house has been left to three siblings under a very strange codicil: that the siblings Martin (Will McDonald), Patsy (Julie Arensman), and Sunshine (Kate Kirkwood) spend one week a year, every year, at Ocean House, together, with their spouses in tow, for ten years.

The tale begins with at the beginning of the week of the tenth year. The ever-bouncy Darlene, wife of Martin (Kate Bossi), comes bursting onto the scene; she is difficult not to adore, but she also had a horribly scarred past from which Martin has rescued her, and for which she worships him. In fact, he's taken her off her psychiatric drugs and out of therapy, and the result is screaming nightmares, both waking and asleep. Still, at this point, he has somewhat regretted his decision, and now his eye is only on the ball of getting his inheritance.

It's clear from the outset that there are tensions among the siblings. The extremely ironically named Sunshine is angry at many events her childhood, which is why she went into psychotherapy as a profession (however, due a recent 'failure' with a patient that ended with the patient committing another murder-suicide, she is now retired). Sunshine is also fixated on one detail of the death scene of her parents: the very last phone call made on the phone was to a local pizza place, at 4AM. Since the pizza place was obviously closed at that hour, the call was clearly made to cover up the tracks of the call before that. To whom did their father place his last call, after killing his wife, and before turning the gun on himself? And why did he do it? Did it have anything to do with the legend of the sea captain's wife, who, driven mad by her lonely hours in the huge house, smashed her husband's skull in with a candlestick? Many times their mother would claim to see the lady ghost, forlornly stalking the halls that had once been hers. The sudden appearance of candlesticks, not to mention a blow to the head received by Martin, has everyone feeling like keeping the lights on.

This tale is beautifully acted, each actor working with each other as a true ensemble cast; Kate Bossi especially charms and then devastates as the details of her past come pouring out. But the

true allure of this piece is the masterful invention of the tale itself. It's built carefully, layer upon layer, each crumbling to reveal the one beneath it, until the entire tale is before you...and he leaves just a few loose ends to make you wonder if you really know what you think you know.

This production is selling so quickly that when I arrived without a reservation, I had to wait on a list to be admitted; I suggest calling and securing your tickets immediately.

Ghosts of Ocean House runs through June 4th at the Player's Ring at 105 Marcy Street, Portsmouth. Showtimes Friday, Saturday 8PM, Sunday at 7PM. Ticket prices are \$10. Call 436-8123 for reservations.