

EastLine Brings “Angels” to Long Island

FIN By Fire Island News

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Photo by Anthony Noto

By Cindi Sansone-Braff ~ “Angels in America” is more than a play. It is a journey that asks the audience to enter the story, witness it, and become a part of it. [EastLine Theatre](#) is a non-profit theatre company celebrating their 10th anniversary in a big way by taking on the Herculean task of presenting Tony Kushner’s award-winning epic “Angels in America” at the Babylon Citizen’s Council on the Arts in Lindenhurst (BACCA Center).

The BACCA Center is the perfect venue for a revival of this timeless masterpiece as this intimate setting allows the audience to get deeply engrossed in the theatrical experience because they are seated within arm's reach of the actors.

"Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes" is a two-part play, "Millennium Approaches" and "Perestroika", set in New York City in 1985. The EastLine Theatre decided to produce the entire show because both parts have never been performed on Long Island. Part One and Part Two run for more than seven hours and will be performed alternately throughout each weekend, with an option to see the entire drama in one day, with a break in-between shows.

Saturday night's enthralling production of "Millennium Approaches" effectively captured the fear, denial, and uncertainty the characters experienced because of the AIDS crisis, the political climate of divisiveness, and the sorry state of their lives. This play has an abundance of humor, pathos, angst, and anger. These emotions seem raw and palpable as you sit just a few feet from the action. Mr. Kushner purposely wanted his play to be done with a minimalistic set and sparse scenery so that the scenes could seamlessly flow into each other, allowing the sheer scope and size of the issues this play tackles to take center stage.

The entire cast is top-notch, and no one misses a beat. The energy remains consistently high throughout the show. Many of the actors portray a whole host of characters, and they all did a stellar job of juggling these many roles.

Gary Tifeld was outstanding as Roy Cohn, the slick, greedy, power-hungry lawyer dying of AIDS while lying to others that he has liver cancer. Mr. Tifeld's riveting performance was fierce and frightening. His facial expressions were menacing, and his booming voice, exploding with rage, sent chills down my spine.

As Belize, the ex-drag queen turned nurse, Justin Steele brought humor, intelligence, and warmth to this charismatic character, who is the play's moral compass.

Logan Clingan gave a heartrending performance in the physically demanding role of Prior Walter, a young man dying of AIDS who faces death with honesty, humor, and courage.

Joe Raik was riveting in the role of Louis Ironson, a narcissistic and neurotic gay man who selfishly abandons his long-term lover, Prior Walter. One of the show's highlights was Louis's rambling, comedic monologue espousing all that is wrong with America, even going so far as to say, "There are no gods here, no ghosts and spirits in America, there are no Angels in America."

Eric Clavell gave a nuanced performance as Joe Pitt, a diehard Republican and Mormon grappling with his faith and sexuality. Thea Kraus was believable as Harper Pitt, Joe's valium-addicted wife, who spends most of her days lost in drug-induced hallucinations in a futile attempt to distract from the truth that her marriage has been a sham from day one.

Melanie Lipton was excellent in the many roles she portrayed. She aced the part of the Rabbi, who opens the show by delivering a eulogy at Louie's grandmother's funeral, reminding us to remember the ancestors on whose shoulders we stand. Ms. Lipton was also remarkable as the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, who comes to haunt Roy Cohn because he was the lawyer who prosecuted her for espionage and lobbied for her execution.

Julie Fergus is a versatile and talented actor and took on many roles in this show. I especially loved her portrayal of the angel who looms larger than life at the end of "Millennium Approaches."

Lynn Adler-Ciorciari's fabulous costumes, both the authentic 1980s styles and the fantasy ones, including ghosts from bygone eras and an angel, added to the overall success of this show. I loved watching Louis strut around in his Fire Island sweatshirt! The lighting and sound design were excellent and helped create the show's many dark, somber, and terrifying moments.

Brilliantly and beautifully staged by [Danny Higgins](#), you don't want to miss the EastLine Theatre's electrifying production of "Angels in America." It's no wonder the audience was up on their feet, giving a rousing standing ovation during the curtain call.

Running now through February 26, you can purchase tickets via their website: <https://eastline.ludus.com/passes.php>. Due to its mature themes and content, this production is recommended for those at least 16-years of age.

Cindi Sansone-Braff is an award-winning playwright. She has a BFA in Theatre from UCONN and is a member of the Dramatists Guild. She is the author of “[Grant Me a Higher Love](#), Why Good People Can’t Leave Bad Relationships”, and “Confessions of a Reluctant Long Island Psychic.” Her short play, “No Rest of a Soul,” is in the [Think Fast Theater Project Festival](#).

[Learn more about EastLine Theatre's visit to Fire Island Lighthouse last summer.](#)