

The Gingerbread Lady
Review by Richard Connema

Someone once said that drama and humor do not mix, but Dragon Productions Theatre Company has been able to mix both with success in their presentation of Neil Simon's *The Gingerbread Lady* at their theatre on Alma Street, Palo Alto.

The Gingerbread Lady centers around Evy Meara (Diane Tasca), a rehabilitated drunk returning home after a twelve week dry-out period in a sanatorium. Her best friend Jimmy Perry (Martin Gagen), an out of work gay actor, prepares her apartment for her return. Also on hand to welcome Evy back is her best friend Toby (Carolyn Power), a 40-year-old who focuses on making certain of her everlasting beauty through cosmetics.

Evy looks forward to having a life without alcohol but things are not going too well for her without a drink in her hand. Her teenage daughter Polly (Vivian Cook) decides to live with her somewhat as a nurse. Evy's ex-boyfriend Lou (James Allen Brewer), an unemployed musician who walked out on her for an Indian maiden, now wants back into Evy's life.

Things wrong as Evy plans a birthday party for her best friend Toby. Toby confides that her husband is divorcing her. Jimmy has just been fired from an Off-Broadway show just two days before it is set to open. These traumas cause Evy to hit the bottle pronto. Evy has an evil tongue when drinking to excess. She lashes out at Toby, Jimmy and her innocent daughter. There is hope as the play ends that Evy will get her act together and not go back to the bottle.

Dave Sikula gets solid performances from the six actors. Diana Tasca is excellent as Evy. She plays the role as a highly intelligent person who is trying to go straight. She delivers some of the best Neil Simon comic zingers throughout the drama.

Carolyn Power is outstanding as Toby, who is determined never to be old by using a lot of make-up. Her second-act dissertation on her life is well done. Vivian Cook gives a good account of herself as the teenager Polly. Martin Gagen gives a great performance as a gay actor who can't seem to find or keep an acting job. He tends to go over the top in his role several times. However, his retort on how got fired by the young director is hilarious.

James Allen Brewer as Lou gives a focused and thoughtful performance in his one scene with Evy. He portrays a man who is very self-centered and a bit of a flake. Rounding out the cast is Alex Fiore as Manuel; he is effective in a small scene at the beginning of the play.

Cy Eaton has devised an excellent detailed set of the living room of Evy's apartment in this jewel box of a theatre. The lighting and sound, also by Eaton, are very good. Kelly Ground designed elegant dresses for the principals.

Director Dave Sikula keeps the play moving with scenes that contain both drama and humor. It is a good evening's entertainment.

Neil Simon's *The Gingerbread Lady* runs through May 13th at their theatre located at 535 Alma Street, Palo Alto. For tickets call 650-493-2006 or go to www.dragonproductions.net.

Their next production will *As Bees In Honey Drown* by Douglas Carter Beane, opening on June 8th and running through July 1.