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THEATER REVIEW: 'The Realistic Joneses' by Kevin Kelly



Through Sun 2/14

There is a clue in the picture above. I didn't get it until the end of the piece. A beautiful backdrop of mountains provides a cascading stream that gently splits the stage in pieces of territorial life. It is amazing what fragility is hidden by beauty and the appearance of strength.

You would think by that description, that the tale of the Joneses would be a bit heavy, and the visual effect is the fabric of life being ripped apart. Well, it does break open for moments of intensity and absurd realness, but the overall treat of this show is that it might break open your gut, because it is fucking hilarious. This fascinating material is handled by four deft actors who display a master class of their craft. They do it by discharging witty, rapid fire, quick witted, beautifully timed dialogue that makes me think I am watching the most dysfunctional verbal badminton game ever.

Dobama is serving up a delicious theatrical tasting for the audience. We are greeted by the maitre'd, artistic director Nathan Motta, who explains that we will be enjoying a fascinating play *The Realistic Joneses* written by Will Eno. The play was produced on Broadway in 2014, and received accolades from the Drama Desk Organization, *USA Today*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *Time Magazine*, to name a few.

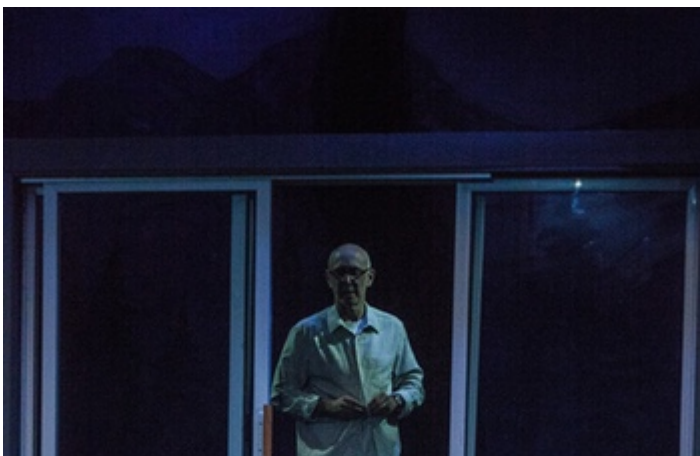
Mr Motta has chosen one of the finest theatrical directing connoisseurs in the business, and that would be Shannon Sindelar. Her record of directing tremendous bodies of work at Dobama has led audiences and this reviewer to be incredibly excited to see her name listed on the program. Once again, Sindelar brings her fantabulous directing skills to create a swift-paced, funny, introspective creation of live entertainment. Scenes move swiftly, as if we are watching a Snapchat version of life, diving in and out of normal life, which is never what you think it is, or where it will go. Beautiful job of creating this tricky piece of theatricality served with perfection.



She is aided by superb sommeliers. Scenic designer Laura Carlson Tarantowski brings her A-game to the tapestry of the evening and provides a beautiful design and highly functioning set. Marcus Dana adds effective mood lighting for the evening, as to highlight the evening's meal by enhancing the effervescence of emotion running throughout the piece. Costume designer Ina Blatch-Geib dresses the evening with comfortable realness, providing a visceral taste of real life to help us relate. Sound designer Jeremy Dobbins, props designer Rocky Encalada, technical director David Tilk and stage manager Joel Rathbone add their immeasurable talents to round out the staff.

With superb direction in hand and a staff that has been given a solid vision to prepare the evening festivities, we are presented with a theatrical flight of impressive offerings.

Our first is an Abboccato Tracee Patterson as Jennifer Jones. Patterson provides a full-bodied performance with an appealing measure of sweetness strewn among her fight for understanding and love. She is the most relatable for those of us who want the best in life and strive to focus on what is right. As usual, her performance is brilliant, and by saying "usual," I don't want to take away from the work that this professional does for every role. She is a mentor to all actors and provides inspiration for our craft every time we see her execute an emotion. Her sense of humor runs wild and she is the "straight man" for many jokes. She cracks me up with her delivery, and her nuanced double takes of "WTF did you just say?"





Then there is Joel “Garrafeira” Hammer as Bob Jones, Jennifer’s husband. He is a hoot and definitely suffers some blunt language that no doubt comes from extended aging in the barrel and bottle. I found his underplay and deadpan delivery a revelation of fun. Excellent timing – you could imagine him being in the next Robert DeNiro film, *Dirty Grandpa II*. I would pay big money to see those two on a roadtrip. Hammer and Patterson had tremendous chemistry and underlying heart with each other. He is a damaged soul, but with Hammer’s talents, you never lost sight of the embattled good and inner strength from facing life challenges. He can nail a line for days.

Our Szamorodni for the evening is Chris Richards, who plays John Jones, the new neighbor. I say “Szamorodni” as a compliment to the character that he created and defined with beautiful creative and fierce acting choices. His character is funny and entertaining, but there is a dark side that swirls within. This type of wine means “as it comes,” describing a wine with a mixture of healthy and botrytis-infected grapes. Also, Richards healthy side is hilarious and fractured, but there is a flaw buried within that enables Richards to stop the play with an outburst that stops our breath. To make an audience laugh, and then in one powerful moment, stop time, is the power of an accomplished artist. Bravo, you silly funny dramatic man.



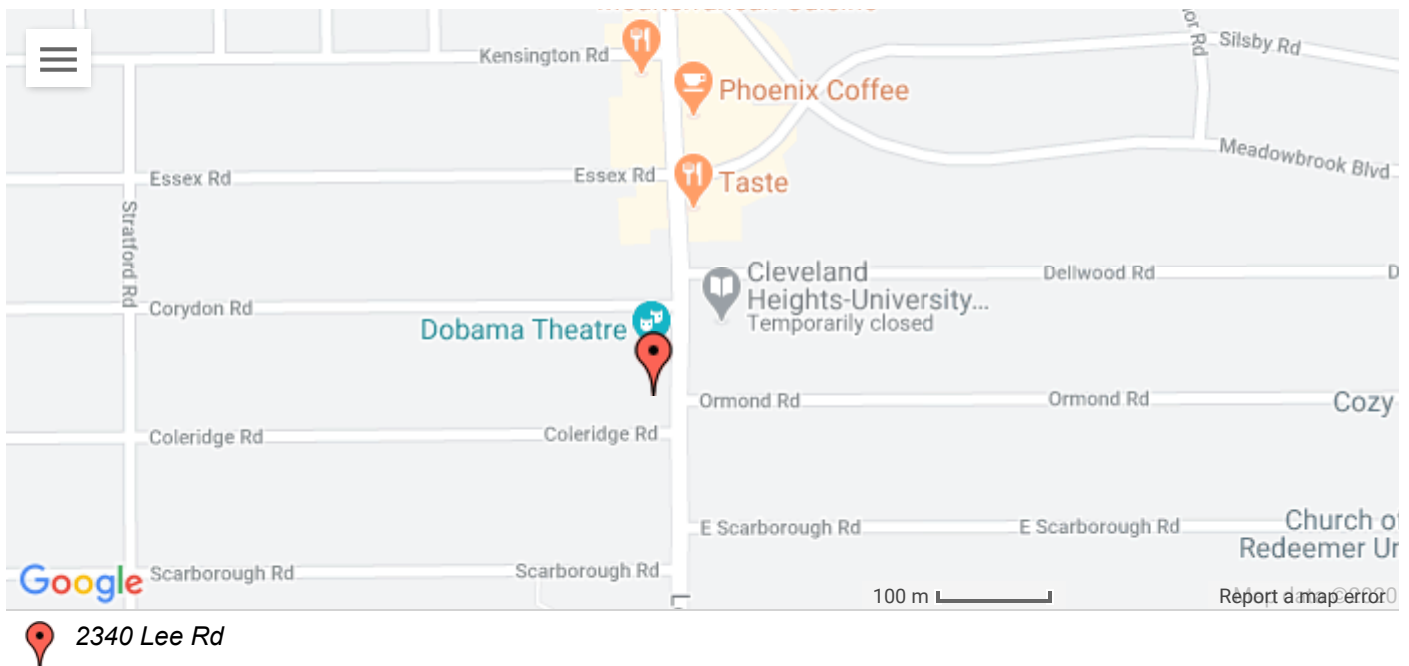
Our last offering is a Clairet. It’s a French term for a wine that falls between a light red wine and a dark rosé. And this fearless actress creates light and darkness. Rachel Zake, who plays Pony Jones, wife of John Jones, returns to the area with a welcomed presence on the stage. Possibly the most damaged of the four, Zake has created a character who is complicated, ditsy, hyper, but also houses a thirst for desire that is almost devoid of emotional consequences, but true to the piece, adds comedic beauty to this soiree of craziness.

You have to be on your toes to follow everything that is happening, and in the beginning, there is a touch of not being able to understand the lines, whether that is due to diction or positioning on stage. But it does not last for long. For as we connect with the talented actress, we find ourselves immersed in her perceived arc. But then, don't do that too much, because this one is has more layers than a trifle. Beautiful work, and I am sure we will be seeing you often.

You need to get out to Dobama and see this show. It offers a lot of laughs, fabulous acting and a story line and dialogue that will have you wanting to say "Come again....?" every couple of lines or so. Ha! It is THAT trippy and fun.

The Realistic Joneses runs Thursdays @ 7:30pm, Fridays and Saturdays @ 8pm and Sundays @ 2:30pm through Sun 2/14. Tickets are \$10-\$28. Call 216-932-3396 or go to dobama.org.

[Written by Kevin Kelly]



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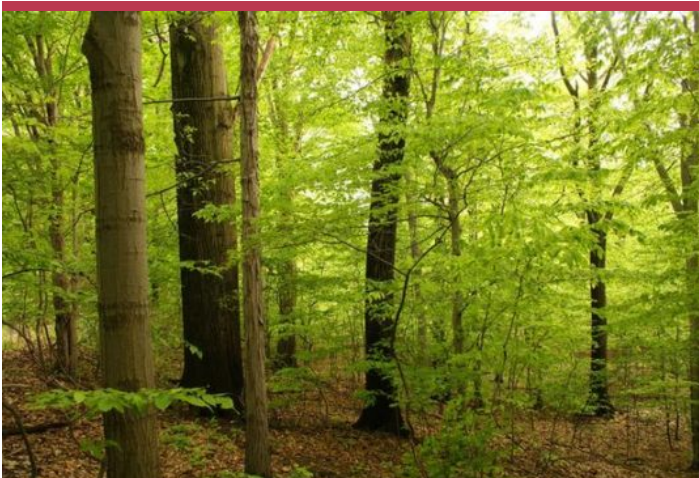
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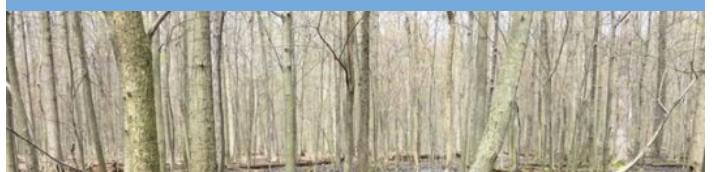
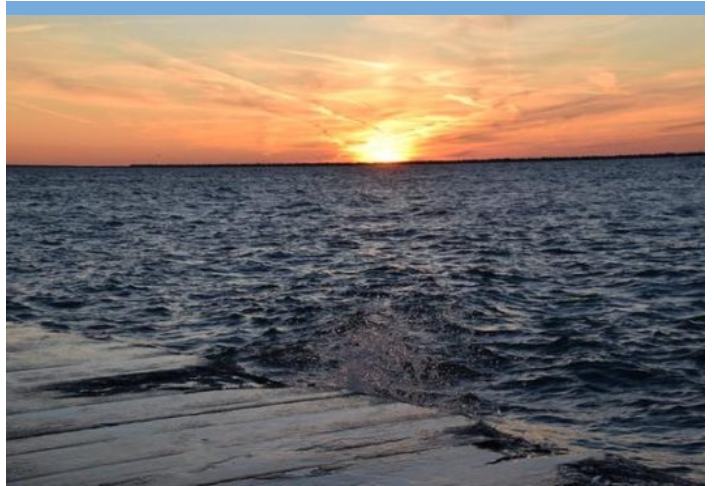
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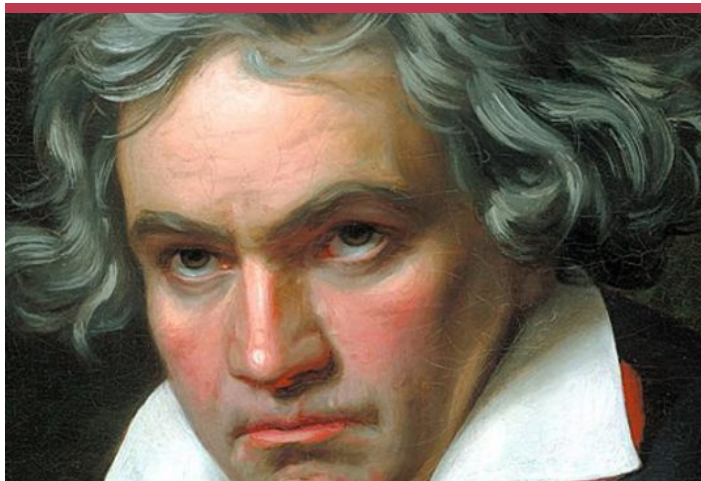
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