

Collections • **Opening Night**

## Daughter shines in South Camden Theatre Company's 'Misbegotten'

May 02, 2011 | By Howard Shapiro, Inquirer Staff Writer

Josie Hogan is the go-to character in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* - she takes no grief from her widowed and drunken father, she secretly sends her brothers off into the world with his money, she keeps the shack in one piece on their tenant farm in Connecticut. She's comfortable as a battle-ax or a nurturer, and sometimes the two are the same.

She's also shut in - in their small village and in her own larger-than-life self. You get all those dimensions from Susan Jami Paschkes, whose eyes are especially expressive in South Camden Theatre Company's production of Eugene O'Neill's final play, which opened Friday.



Camden Theatre Company's "A Moon for the Misbegotten" stars Susan Jami Paschkes...

She's the best thing about this *Misbegotten*, a workable if unremarkable production directed by Randy Petersen, who focuses on the plot without eliciting the early-on passion. In fact, the production is *Misbegotten: The Friendly Version*.

The first act is essentially a habitual nasty-mouth sparring between the old man (Eric Pedersen) and his daughter, a chance for the audience to witness their relationship. At the company's Waterfront South Theatre, it plays out on Robert Bingaman's apt farmhouse set, with a removable facade to reveal the action inside during the second act, like a duel with rubber swords.

So we get the story without all the character building, and by the time we're in O'Neill's overwritten, too-long third act, when Josie tries to scam their landlord only to find she herself is being duped, the sudden passion appears as melodrama.

This is not entirely the fault of the director, Paschkes, or Kevin Doyle, who plays the unsuspecting landlord. Even ardent O'Neill fans might agree that the playwright needed an editor to smooth out Act 3, with its waffling motivations in a drunken haze.

But you run with what you've got, and the production ambles instead toward the end, although Doyle gives it his all. This long, moonlit scene wasn't helped much on opening night by the lighting design of Jim Guckin and Randall McCann, where the illumination suddenly shifted just before dawn in a way that might make sense to an audience in, say, the Aleutian Islands, but not Camden.

*Misbegotten*, which also was staged midwinter by the Arden Theatre Company, has lots of juice in it, and a plot soaked in alcohol. South Camden's production gives us the alcohol, for sure, not overdone but not at the constant high level the text suggests, either. It gives us the plot, too; this story is told plain and clear. The juice remains to be squeezed.

*A Moon for the Misbegotten*

Presented by South Camden Theatre Company, 400 Jasper St., Camden, through May 15. Tickets: \$15. Information: 1-866-811-4111 or [www.southcamdentheatre.org](http://www.southcamdentheatre.org)

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