

# “Next to Normal” at CCP

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reviewed by Ken Klingenmeier

Carmel Community Theatre concludes its 2015-16 season with an excellent choice – *Next to Normal*, the reflective 2009 Tony and 2010 Pulitzer Prize winning rock musical by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey. This thought-provoking story depicts a mother’s trials with bipolar disorder and explores the effects it has on her family and her future.

CCP’s production is directed by Carlo Nepomuceno, with musical direction by Levi Burke. Both do a remarkable job, especially Nepomuceno, whose staging and emotionally correct leadership of his cast results in a devastatingly effective presentation of a significant study of our human condition. The exceptional cast of 6, all possessing well developed vocal skills – so necessary in a show that is about 95% singing – simply knocks this one out of the park.



Georgeanna Teipen’s portrayal of Diana Goodman, leads the way in excellence. Ms. Teipen is perfect as the troubled mother, portraying the angst and delusion of her disorders in just the right measure, never wavering from an unsureness that reaches out to the audience. Likewise, Russell Lee Watson, as her husband Dan, comes through with a stirring depiction of the troubles of the faithful and loving spouse of a disordered person – unfailingly patient and hopeful of getting his stable partner back.



The cast of “Next to Normal”: (from left) Daniel Hellman, Kyle Mottinger, Sharmaine Ruth, Georgeanna Teipen, Russell Watson and Bradley Kieper.

Three adroit, young performers – Kyle Mottinger as lost son Gabe, Sharmaine Ruth as much ignored daughter Natalie, and Daniel Hellman as Natalie’s somewhat slacking boyfriend, Henry – add to the talent laden cast. All three have well honed singing skills and handle their various roles in the story arc with clarity and polish. Their talents fill the stage and Hellman’s and Ms. Ruth’s romantic interplay never fails to be believable and on the mark. Mottinger’s nearly ghostlike rendition of the dead son is precisely crafted as antagonistic without being overdone.

Bradley Kieper takes two lesser roles as Dr. Fine and Dr. Madden and makes them memorable merely through the

power of his singing. He is an excellent vocalist and makes the most of a rare comic bend in the script.

The set design by Nepomuceno and Bill Fitch is imaginative and utilitarian, costumes “managed” by Pat Dorwin are always correct for mood and character, and the 4 piece band led by Levi Burke is consistently bright and well-toned, although at times a bit more “powerful” than perhaps is necessary as the musicians occasionally overtake the vocals – my only criticism to what is truly an amazing music production.

Bottom-line: Carlos Nepomuceno has once again provided us with an entertaining musical that carries with it a heart-rending story of our frailties and challenges. He (and CCP) is to be congratulated on a presentation that is striking in both it’s wealth of talent and it’s universal message. This community theatre endeavor is much like any professional offering in town. It is a “must-see”.

Carmel Community Player’s *Next to Normal* continues at their Clay Terrace venue through August 21. To learn information about times and dates visit



Diana confronts her delusions in a scene from CCP’s “Next to Normal” with (from left) Kyle David Mottinger, Georgeanna Teipen and Bradley Kieper.



A scene from CCP’s “Next to Normal” with (from left) Daniel Hellman, Sharmaine Ruth and Russell Lee Watson.

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- – Photos provided by Carlos Nepomuceno

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