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## 'Over the Tavern' now on stage at Kavinoky Theatre

By DOUG SMITH pollyndoug@hotmail.com Sep 17, 2014



BUFFALO — Without the Tonawandas and Niagara County, Buffalo’s Curtain-Up might stick at half-staff. Kavinoky Theatre “Over the Tavern” director-playwright Tom Dudzick cut his playwriting teeth in North Tonawanda. Star Samuel Fesmire calls the Lumber City home. Beleaguered bread-winner Steve Jakiel teaches at St. Joe’s, with a lengthy rap sheet at Ellicott Creek Playhouse. And Jackson Mysliwy, as special-needs Georgie, can claim not only a Tonawanda home but a Niagara University pedigree.

Against the competition of the Bills’ home opener, the 300-seat Kav was packed Sunday afternoon, most rising as if witnessing a winning touchdown. Downward trends in Catholic education have made 20-year-old “Tavern” a bit of a period piece, which bothered the throng not a whit.

The story concerns Rudy Pazinski, 12 or so, and his challenge to religious rote. Young Fesmire looks so cherubic as to almost demand a halo, and delivers his lines with an easy, innocent pace, especially his down-to-earth, let’s-make-a-deal address to one of the Holy Trinity. He’s a facial match to brother Georgie (Mysliwy), who gets the most out of a dozen-or-so words and is never out of the scene.

Caroline Schletter is a muddle of ungainly adolescence as sister Annie, Connor Graham a package of fury as mid-teen Eddie with his memorable “moving out” shoutdown of his father. Jakiel crafts a justifiably angry barman Chet and Brigitt Markusfeld brings delicious sentiment to her consoling the guilt-ridden, anxious Annie.

As Sister Clarissa, representative of a vocation whose time has regrettably passed, Ellen Horst paints a picture of holy certaintude. Anyone who's ever worn the cloth would fall to her knees.

It's serious stuff with a light touch, and while it speaks of blasphemy, the devout will "get it" far more than the doubters, through Oct. 5 in the European-style playhouse at Porter and Prospect.

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