

Review: 'Seagull' a satisfying search for morsels

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We go to the theater to pluck satisfying morsels from what is offered.

For some, it's emotional involvement with the story and the characters. For others, it's all about surface entertainment, and still for others, it is to see their favorite performer succeed in yet another challenging role.

All that could be had on Friday night at the Warehouse Theatre's opening of Anton Chekov's tragicomedy "The Seagull."

The audience, seated in arena style, faces a rough-hewn stage.

It is built for a one-time-only performance by a self-destructive young playwright, Konstantin Treplev (Matthew Merritt), who represents resistance to the old order.

He's trying to impress his glamorous actress mother, Irina Arkadina (Monica Bell), a vain, narcissistic character, trying to stave off the twin horrors of aging and becoming irrelevant.

She couldn't care less about her son's efforts.

The action takes place at Konstantin's Uncle Sorin's (Ray Lee), country estate situated near a large lake where seagulls swoop to scavenge, much as the inhabitants of Chekov's play do.

With eternal longing, the characters pick and peck at each other while they seek love in all the wrong places, or rather, from all the wrong faces.

Konstantin loves Nina the ingenue actress (Emily Pote), who loves the best-selling author Boris Trigorin (Shawn Parr), who is the lover of Arkadina and eventually will betray Nina.

Masha (Jennifer Weinreich), a vodka-swilling village girl, loves Konstantin, and on and on as trivial happenings and inconclusive dialogues draw us into these seemingly hopeless lives.

We can't help it.

Chekov's language is mesmerizing. He uses this play as his vehicle to ask, "What is art?" "How and why do we make art?" His characters reveal the incessant self-doubt and pain that goes into the creative process. How can you not become engaged in such conversation?

Director Matthew Earnest's production is a living proof of why we go to the theater.

Bell, as Arkadina, is another. She is a persuasive actor in full command of her craft.

And she's not alone -- Pote, Marritt and Parr also give riveting performances, supported by a fine team of actors.

"The Seagull" plays through Feb. 9. For tickets, call 235-6948.