

# MARTY'S BACK IN TOWN

## Tugs at Family Ties

Written by Lisa Panzer.



Shamus Hunter McCarty (left) as Daniel, and Dana Kreitz (right) as Lexie. (Photo credit: Victor Miller)

Norman Shabel tells a story about a family who struggled to leave the poor side of town, and who are still struggling with that past thirty years later, even after living on the rich side of town and achieving the American dream. This history is dredged up for the family when their estranged "black sheep" attempts to return to the fold. Each member reveals various, and divergent memories of what they felt happened, and how it affected them and others. Who is right and who is wrong? Accusations, arguments and tempers take flight, as the bond of blood is put to the test. Will it hold? This tale is all too 'familiar' and real including its moments of hilarity and tragedy, hostility and home-coming, in-laws and out-laws.

Shabel's extensive use of dialogue around the family table and living room, manages to keep the audience riveted as they are drawn into this dysfunctional family's drama as the author's memoir is reflected through his character conduits. Much is heard about the estranged Marty during family discussions in Act I, seeming to make him loom larger than life and building up the suspense for his eventual appearance in Act II, and a feeling of "let's meet this Marty character already!". Act I is unconventionally shorter than Act II, which contains more physical action, adding an interestingly different tempo to the overall play.

A dynamic cast of actors, as directed by Barry Brait, give heart and sparkle to MARTY'S BACK IN TOWN. Sylvia Kauder reigns as Mama, the family matriarch. Her delivery is natural yet precisely timed, attuned to her fellow actors, and her energy and presence remain even after she has left the stage; Sylvia Kauders is 'at one' with the theater. Kenneth McGregor steps up to meet challenges in his role as Ronnie, the driven successful lawyer, little brother, husband, father and son, and succeeds via his ability to add nuance and depth to his character. Joan, Ronnie's wife, family touchstone and sanity barometer, is given a warm voice, sweetness, and a fabulous wardrobe by Cindy Starcher. Ronnie's sister, Susan is endowed with excellent facial and physical expression by Kirsten Quinn. Ronnie's college aged son, Daniel receives life-like touches such as sitting at the table sans shoes by Shamus Hunter McCarty, and is well paired with Dana Kreitz as his spunky sister Lexie. Ethan Lipkin as Marty gives a commanding performance, as he towers over all, yet also exposes the need for understanding and acceptance from his estranged family. The physical juxtaposition of Marty and Mama is also quite comedic. Chris, Marty's loving wife, is skillfully played by Kathy Robinson, and while Val Uff may not have had many lines as the long lost father, Sam, his silent performance speaks volumes.

The sturdy attractive set, with the dining room table at the center of the action within the intimate

Skybox space impart a sense of being right there with the family. Though the front door was slammed there was no perceptible movement in the flats. Lighting was apt and changes were subtle.

Though MARTY'S BACK IN TOWN frames the tale of one family, shake many a family tree and you'll likely find the same nuts...

**MARTY'S BACK IN TOWN**

**by Norman Shabel**

**Directed By Barry Brait**

**November 14- December 2, 2012**

**The Skybox Theatre at the Adrienne**

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