



# New York Theatre Wire<sup>sm</sup>

Theatre Dance Performance Art Music  
Alternative and International Theatre

## "Good for Otto"

**Glenda Frank**

### GOOD FOR OTTO

**"Good for Otto," by David Rabe, directed by Scott Elliott**

**Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42 St., NYC.**

**March 8-April 15, 2018.**

**Tues.-Fri at 7:30; Sat. at 2; Wed., Sat. and Sun. matinees at 2 PM. Tickets starts at \$85.00.**

**To purchase tickets call Ticket Central at 212-279-4200 or visit the box office. Information at [www.thenewgroup.org](http://www.thenewgroup.org)**

**Reviewed by Glenda Frank**

The New Group has given "Good for Otto" -- a new play by David Rabe ("Sticks and Bones"), based on the book "Undoing Depression" by Richard O'Connor) -- a star-studded production on a small stage, a rare treat in any theatre season.



Ed Harris, Laura Esterman, Kenny Mellman in David Rabe's *Good for Otto*, directed by Scott Elliott. Photo by Monique Carboni.

The play comes to us through the mind of Dr. Michaels (Ed Harris), who runs a mental health center clinic in a rural neighborhood in Connecticut. He is haunted by the daily problems of his patients and by guilty memories of his mother (Charlotte Hope), who committed suicide when he was a boy. Later the play opens not only into the stories of his many patients but also into the therapy treatment by his colleague Evangeline Ryder (a charismatic Amy Madigan). The actors (and some audience members) sit on the stage and flow into action when needed. Director Scott Elliott (Artistic Director of The New Group) keeps up a lively pace and the many characters are clearly depicted, but at three hours the play could use some trimming and focus.

The most poignant story is of a foster mother (Rhea Perlman) whose 12-year old ward (Raleigh McDonald) keeps returning to her addict mother and cutting herself. Both the courts and the insurance company (personified by Nancy Giles, a corporate double-talker) are unreasonably, maddingly obstructive. There are quasi-comical sessions with a hairy hoarder (Kenny Mellman) and his mother (Laura Esterman), who says she wants her grown son to move out of her house but is an enabler.

Evangeline Ryder's patients are the most familiar. F. Murray Abraham has fun with Barnard, a retired depressive, who sparks to life when he meets a friendly young saleswoman. Maulik Panchoy plays Alex, a self-destructive young man trying to come out of the closet. As the most mysterious character, he becomes the most engaging.

Mark Linn-Baker's Timothy is the star of the play. The casting is counter-intuitive since Baker plays it sweet although Timothy terrifies the people he approaches. The narrative plays against the performance, an intriguing choice. Timothy, mentally challenged, has a best friend, Otto the hamster, who must undergo abdominal surgery. Spoiler alert: Otto survives.

Dr. Michaels, frustrated by reality, dreams that his patients come together to sing old-fashioned songs: "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and "On Moonlight Bay" among others. Despite the musical interludes and the assembled talent, the play rarely hrises. There is no dramatic through line and no one changes, except the pre-teen who is institutionalized. The therapists appear as highly flawed warriors in a losing battle.

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