

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
Reviewed by Macey Levin
Berkshire On Stage

Terrence McNally is one of America's foremost yet underrated playwrights. The Tony Award winning author of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Master Class* as well as *The Lisbon Traviata*; *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*; *Ragtime* and many others has a penchant for realistic dialogue that makes an audience feel as if they were eavesdropping. This is the case with the deeply moving and extremely funny production of *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* at Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill, New York.

This is a story of a man and a woman who experience a lifetime in one night. Frankie, a waitress, and Johnny, a cook in a small restaurant in Manhattan, start with what is supposed to be a simple one-night stand. As the early morning hours creep up they reveal themselves as lonely, scarred people whose lives are empty and whose early aspirations have been destroyed. He (Steven Patterson) admits that he's been watching Frankie (Rita Rehn) and declares that he is in love with her. If this is actually so or an attempt merely to bring a partner into his life, it is the platform he uses to confess to the loneliness that surrounds him. Not willing to be the one to fulfill his needs, Frankie retreats behind a wall that slowly crumbles as the full moon that lights the interior of her small apartment gives way to the morning sun.

These are people who have experienced the harshness of life but who keep on going because they have to live. What they have learned is how to protect themselves from being hurt again. Johnny is more forthcoming in revealing his pain and defining his needs while Frankie parries his confessions of love with doubt and avoidance.

Patterson and Rehn play off each other with nuance and assurance. They are real people who sound like real people... some times articulate, some times at a loss for insightful expression. Their reactions to the other's revelations are either sympathetic or minimizing, underlining the pain of their own lives and their respective inability to empathize with the other's needs. Though the dialogue revolves around their emotional defects, McNally infuses their conversations with comic one-liners that either relieve the tension or exacerbates it. The actors seamlessly incorporate the humor into the arguments and romantic moments.

Director Sara Lampert Hoover keeps the production moving and nicely shaded where even the silences are significant. Her staging around designer John Sowle's fittingly cluttered set with a working kitchen is effective and real. Many of her stage pictures and their emotional content are subliminally dramatic. Sowle's lighting design is subtle, as fits the characters' needs, though one of the corners of the stage is a bit too dark. Michelle Rogers' costumes fit the characters' personalities, especially with Johnny in his shorts for most of the first act.

Frankie and Johnny... is one of McNally's best-loved plays. This production's insights, humor and drama brings the play to life with its warm and affecting appeal.

Please note, there is a bit of nudity and more than a bit of rough language.

The Bridge Street Theatre has built a reputation for doing intelligent work of provocative plays. For those who travel miles to Berkshire County's major theatres you will be surprised at how close this company is and how charming Catskill has become.

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune by Terrence McNally; Directed by Sara Lampert Hoover; Cast: Frankie (Rita Rehm), Steven Patterson (Johnny), Caedmon Holland (Radio announcer); Sets and lights: John Sowle; Costume design: Michelle Rogers; Sound design: Carmen Borgia; Stage Manager: Caedmon Holland; Running Time: two hours; one intermission; Bridge Street Theatre, 44 W. Bridge St., Catskill, NY; From 3/29/18; closing 4/8/2018