GOOD PEOPLE

Now playing in the Kreeger
February 1-March 10, 2013
written by David Lindsay-Abaire
directed by Jackie Maxwell

“You can’t blame me for your life, you know.”
–Mike

“You got lucky. One hiccup, and it could've been you looking for work instead of me.” –Margaret

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THE PLAY

Like many Americans, Margie Walsh’s life is hanging by a thread. Then she loses her job at the dollar store because of her chronic lateness, and she is closer to disaster. She can’t pay her rent and has an adult, disabled daughter to care for.

Her landlady, unreliable babysitter and “friend,” Dottie, is ready to kick her out. Margie’s other friend, Jean, is convinced that Margie’s issue is that she is just too nice. Jean tells Margie that their old high school friend, Mike, is now in town. She pressures Margie to go ask Mike if he knows about a job – especially since he “did good,” got out of their neighborhood (“Southie”) and became a doctor.

Times are desperate. So Margie takes a gamble to see if Mike still has that “Southie-pride” and is willing to help out an old friend. When Margie barges into Mike’s office, worlds collide. Though they both grew up in the projects of Boston, their lives have become very different. What determines our fate? Regardless of where you start or end up, what does it mean to be “good people”?
Good People is the first play David Lindsay-Abaire wrote about the neighborhood where he grew up. In an interview with Boston Theatre Scene, the playwright discussed tackling this challenge.

“If I was going to write about Southie, I wanted to do it responsibly and respectfully. These are my friends and relatives after all... I grew up in the Lower End, which was mostly regular, working class people who were trying to make good lives for themselves and for their families. They were salt of the earth people, and lots of us were struggling, but no one I knew really fit the Southie stereotypes. Part of writing the play was my responding to those stereotypes —most of which are 30 years old and weren’t even accurate 30 years ago.”

These stereotypes include the racist, the low-life, the Irish drunk, the drug addict, the welfare mom, the mobster. Some of those stereotypes come from the movies and books about Southie, some of them come from the front page of The [Boston] Globe.”

He said, “Mostly what’s onstage is the version of South Boston that I remember, and that I know still exists in at least pockets of the neighborhood.”

Activity: Write a speech or essay describing your neighborhood. Consider its stereotypes. How accurate are they? What don’t people understand about your neighborhood? What would surprise them? What is the risk of writing about where you are from?
In the last presidential election, the “99 percent” and the “1 percent” were buzz words. News stations are regularly reporting the national unemployment figures. Good People is set in the midst of these issues.

Here are some of the employment statistics from the United States Department of Labor for Dec. 2012:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF UNEMPLOYMENT</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>7.8% of eligible workers</td>
<td>12.2 million</td>
<td>Unemployment has been at or near this rate since Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Unemployment</td>
<td>39.1% of unemployed persons</td>
<td>4.8 million</td>
<td>Those jobless for 27 weeks or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary Part-Time Workers</td>
<td>5% of eligible workers</td>
<td>7.9 million</td>
<td>Those working part time b/c hours have been cut or they cannot find full-time jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginally Attached</td>
<td>1.6% of eligible workers</td>
<td>2.6 million</td>
<td>Those able and willing to work but had not searched for a job in the last 4 weeks b/c of family or education circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouraged Workers</td>
<td>42% of marginally attached persons</td>
<td>1.1 million</td>
<td>Those who have not looked for work b/s they believe no jobs are available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good People shows us our current economy as a person (Margie) and a story, not just a statistic.

“Last time I got fired it took me seven months to find something, and that was when things weren’t so bad. Now? Forget it. I won’t be able to find anything.” – Margaret

ACTIVITY: Imagine you were to lose your job today. Look through the job listings in the newspaper and online. What positions are available? Which fields have the most job openings? How many positions are full time versus part time? For what jobs would you apply? What would you do if you didn’t get the job?
THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

“If I write about the old neighborhood, the subject of class will inevitably bubble to the surface because it’s so present to the community.”
–David Lindsay-Abaire, playwright

Margie believes she never had a chance to get out of South Boston. Why does she feel trapped? Mike suggests her choices sealed her fate. She bristles at this idea, claiming that he was just “lucky.” Who is right? Was Margie’s life predestined or does Mike’s success debunk this notion of the “cycle of poverty”? Consider the idea that there may also be a “cycle of wealth.” If your parents are rich, does that make it more likely that you will be too? How much does your parents’ or grandparents’ wealth or poverty impact your social mobility? What role do choices play in determining socio-economic status?

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
Visit the restroom before the show starts.
Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
Enjoy the show!

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

ONE
What happens when you leave where you are from and then return?

TWO
What does it mean to be “good people”?

THREE
How much do you believe in The American Dream?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS
Fuddy Meers by David Lindsay-Abaire
Rabbit Hole by David Lindsay-Abaire

ON THE WEB
American Theatre Wing Interview with David Lindsay-Abaire:
americantheatrewing.org/downstagecenter/detail/david_lindsay_abaire
Huntington Theater Company Study Guide:
www.huntingtontheatre.org/PageFiles/1238/GoodPeople-CurriculumGuide.pdf

FILMS
Good Will Hunting: Lionsgate, 1997
Gone Baby Gone: Lionsgate, 2007
Southie: Lionsgate, 1999

Written by Noelle Viñas
Edited by Rebecca Campana
Special thanks to the Huntington Theatre Education department for generously sharing their curriculum materials, text and research.

Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.