

GOOD FOR OTTO

BY DAVID RABE

BASED UPON MATERIAL
FROM *UNDOING DEPRESSION*
BY RICHARD O'CONNOR



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

GOOD FOR OTTO
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The world premiere of GOOD FOR OTTO was produced and presented by the Gift Theatre in October 2015. It was directed by Michael Patrick Thornton, the set design was by Courtney O'Neill, the costume design was by Stephanie Cluggish, the lighting design was by Charles Cooper, the sound design and original music was by Christopher Kriz, and the stage manager was Corinne James. The cast was as follows:

DR. ROBERT MICHAELS	John Gawlik
MOM	Brittany Burch
JEROME	Kenny Mihlfried
MRS. GARLAND	Donna McGough
JANE DRYSDALE	Alexandra Main
JIMMY	Paul D'Addario
EVANGELINE RYDER	Lynda Newton
TIMOTHY ARCHER	John Kelly Connolly
ALEX	Jay Worthington
FRANNIE BASCOME	Caroline Heffernan
NORA MEYERS	Darci Nalepa
BARNARD	Rob Riley
TERESA GILCHRIST	Patricia Donegan
DENISE	Justine Serino
MARCY SMITH-McMILLAN	Cyd Blakewell

CHARACTERS

Some doubling is possible and all right if necessary.

DR. ROBERT MICHAELS—a therapist in his mid-forties.

MOM—a figure in her early thirties.

JEROME GARLAND—a patient in his thirties.

MRS. GARLAND—Jerome's mother, in her late forties.

JANE—a patient in her forties.

JIMMY—Jane's son, in his late twenties to early thirties.

EVANGELINE RYDER—a therapist in her early forties.

TIMOTHY—a patient in his late forties/early fifties.

ALEX—a patient in his early thirties.

FRANNIE BASCOME—a patient, twelve years old.

NORA MEYERS—early thirties, a foster mom hoping to adopt Frannie.

BARNARD GILCHRIST—a patient in his seventies.

TERESA GILCHRIST—married to Barnard, seventies.

DENISE—secretary in her mid-thirties.

MARCY SMITH-McMILLAN—an insurance-company case manager in her thirties.

SETTING

The play takes place in a theatrical space that is sometimes literally a mental health center, at other times it's a surreal space—Dr. Michaels' psyche or imagination.

GOOD FOR OTTO

ACT ONE

Set: The main playing area holds two office chairs on wheels positioned toward the center, while a piano stands along one side. A pile of books, a stack of folders, a bottle of bourbon and several glasses stand atop the piano. A door, the entrance from the hall outside and reception area of the Mental Health Center occupies the opposite side with two chairs to indicate a waiting room.

There are five stations around the main playing area. Each contains furniture that defines the characters who will occupy them. Jimmy and Jane in one. Jerome and Mrs. Garland in another. Frannie and Nora another. Barnard and Teresa in another. And Mom alone and elevated.

At the start, the characters enter and go to their stations. The last to arrive is Dr. Michaels, who looks things over, and then hums a note, or perhaps plays a note on a pitch pipe. All the characters join with him in humming a wordless, harmonious note. They settle in their places, and he addresses the audience:

DR. MICHAELS. The Town of Harrington sits near the Berkshire Mountains and along the Mohegan river. There are numerous lakes and ponds. Open fields, wooded areas and farmland are plentiful, and the mountains harbor abundant, picturesque hiking trails with names like Owl Mountain and the Arrowhead Trail. We have a Congregational church, an Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic, and a Jewish Temple just across the New York state line.

Beat.

Now. Imagine me in bed, if you will, on a morning just before dawn, any morning, an average morning. Imagine me awake thinking, hoping for a little more sleep. Imagine a blue down comforter, a late-fall day. I live fairly close to the Northwood Mental Health Center, where I am a counselor and chief administrator. It's a short drive, or a pleasant walk if I'm not too busy, which isn't often. We see a great many people in the community, but others who could benefit refuse to come by, or don't know we exist, and many of those who do come are embarrassed. They take precautions not to be seen leaving our doors. That's what I'm thinking about, laying there. Because in spite of the bucolic countryside, in spite of the sky, the trails, the lakes, pain is plentiful here. Twenty-first century Americans in the land of plenty. But there's money problems; family and work pressure. Autism. O.C.D. Alcohol and drug abuse, sexual abuse. Being young. Getting old. It all sits hidden in our little world of bright skies, bright lakes, and tall trees. And then finally, of course, there's simply and always the problem of being human.

Jerome calls from his setting of piled up boxes.

JEROME. I have all these boxes, Dr. Michaels. I don't know how many. A great number of boxes. A great number of very important boxes... (*Taking out a strange random object.*) ...because in these boxes are the projects for my future.

DR. MICHAELS. (*To Jerome.*) I know you're having trouble with all the boxes, Jerome, and I'm thinking hard about what we can do to help you. I promise. But our appointment isn't until ten thirty, and I'm not fully awake. So you understand if I haven't figured it out yet. I haven't even had my coffee. I'm actually still in bed.

JEROME. But there seem to be more boxes. More and more. The piles are getting higher.

DR. MICHAELS. That's not possible Jerome, unless you're adding boxes. Are you adding boxes, Jerome?

JEROME. I didn't add many.

DR. MICHAELS. (*Back to the audience.*) I wake early most mornings with the sun pawing at the edge of the drawn blinds, and lying there in that twilight of neither sleep nor complete wakefulness, I

sometimes see my dead mother, her eyes fixed on me with an enormous, questioning look.

Mom stands in faint light looking down on him. She's young, as she would have been when he was nine.

Or sometimes in the middle of the night she's floating outside in the dark air, which appears quite detailed with moonlight, stars, though, as I said, the blinds are closed. She committed suicide when I was nine years old.

MOM. And yet I am always near. Robert.

DR. MICHAELS. That's not really her.

MOM. It is, too.

DR. MICHAELS. No, Mom. You're long dead. Long gone.

MOM. Then why are you talking to me?

DR. MICHAELS. You're a thought. A memory. I'm thinking. That's all.

MOM. Look at me and say that.

DR. MICHAELS. You're not there. You nuzzle in my thoughts. Nose around, poking in and out to insinuate your points, sometimes in your own name, but at other times anonymously, or...pretending to be me. But you're not really there. I don't actually see you.

JEROME. *(Somewhat assertive.)* We have got to do something about all the boxes, Dr. Michaels! So I can move into my new apartment.

DR. MICHAELS. I know, Jerome. It's important and I got a little distracted. But it's only about six hours until our appointment and we'll work on it then.

JEROME. It's five hours and seventeen minutes, Dr. Michaels.

DR. MICHAELS. *(To the audience, his back to Jerome.)* Jerome lives with his mother and step-father. His real dad ran off when Jerome was small. He wasn't as smart as Jerome, I suspect, and so Jerome got a beating or two.

JEROME. *(Interrupting.)* Dr. Michaels?

DR. MICHAELS. Yes.

JEROME. What are you thinking about?

DR. MICHAELS. Well...you, Jerome.

JEROME. Are you really thinking of me? Really?

DR. MICHAELS. Yes. About how to help you.

JEROME. Now? Right now?

DR. MICHAELS. Yes.

JEROME. And before that?

DR. MICHAELS. Yes. A little bit.

JEROME. Are you always thinking of helping me, Dr. Michaels? Always?

DR. MICHAELS. Not always.

Distant gunshot. Everyone looks. Jane and Jimmy sit side by side, both in work clothes, Jane in a baseball cap, as she addresses the audience.

JANE. Whenever I think of Jimmy, I get this terrible headache. It's terrible. I mean, not with every thought of him, but it feels like it. It feels hard and dangerous to think of him and so I don't want to do it, but of course I do want to think about him. Because he was my son, and I knew he was in trouble off and on, but he was thirty-four, you know. I mean, a grown up, and he'd been a troublemaker and had a few arrests, but all minor stuff. Sometimes he didn't live with me, but stayed with friends. But on this night, he was living with me, and he came home late. It was about midnight. Just a little past midnight and I got out of bed when I heard him and went out in my pajamas, because I had to get up to go to work at six in the morning—he was reading a motorcycle magazine, sitting on the couch with a beer. I could see the photographs of the engine part of this big black motorcycle, and I asked him if he needed anything and he said no. He seemed his regular self, as far as I could tell, but I stood looking at him for a few seconds, watching him turn the page, and then he looked up at me and he—he looked right at me and he said—

JIMMY. (*Looking at her.*) I'm fine, Mom. You go back to bed. You look tired.

JANE. Okay.

JIMMY. 'Night, Mom.

JANE. Good night, Jimmy.

Pause.

So I went back to bed and he got up at some point and went into his bedroom and shot himself in the head while I was sleeping. In the room right next door.

JIMMY. I was fine, as far as I knew. I was drunk, a little, and you know some shit had happened. But when doesn't it. There's always shit of one kind or another. I don't think I was thinking about anything special or unusual, but just going to bed until I saw the shotgun in the corner. It stopped me in my tracks is the way I would put it. It was like it spoke almost, called out from the corner, "Hey, I'm over here; don't forget about me."

JANE. I learned later that he'd been drinking quite a bit, and that at the local hangout earlier in the evening he'd run into his ex-wife, Susie, and that when he went up to her and tried to talk Susie had gone out of her way to be really snotty to him. That's the report I got. "Susie was really snotty to him." So Jimmy had left the bar to get away from his snooty ex-wife and had gone to a different bar in the hopes of—I don't know what—fun, or a chance to drink in peace, and who does he run into there but his idiot father who was totally shitfaced. Just stupefied. I say "stupefied" because an eyewitness to their encounter told me that Marty, my ex-goddamn-husband, was so drunk he didn't even recognize Jimmy at first. He didn't even understand that this nice young man who'd come up to him and was talking—that it was his own son. So as far as bars were concerned that was two for two in the bad luck department for Jimmy. I guess he came home not long after that. When he looked up and told me he was fine and said "Good night" I was tired and had to get up at six and I didn't know any of this stuff that had happened, and I went to bed.

Having left his area, Jimmy wanders the main playing area.

JIMMY. So I'm undressing; the beer empty, the gun in the corner talking. But I'm going to get some sleep, and dream maybe about the motorcycle engine I'd been reading about. The thing about a motorcycle—which I love to ride them—is the speed and the wind in your face and the way it just blows your thoughts right out of your head, the noise of it in your ears, or even magnified bigger and bigger by the ear holes in the helmet if you're wearing a helmet, and it's like this wind going into your brain and through your brain just taking

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6M, 9W

A psychologist tries to keep the health center he runs in rural Connecticut afloat, battling insurance companies and his own demons, while ministering to the distressed souls who find their way to his door.

“Mr. Rabe’s moving drama [has] a symphonic quality... As exciting as it can be to discover fresh new voices, it can be just as heartening to see a veteran playwright return to powerful form, as Mr. Rabe unquestionably does in this sprawling drama about mental illness. ... Mr. Rabe digs into his subject with a depth that almost feels bottomless.” —**The New York Times**

“... [a] remarkable, three-hour opus by the great American writer David Rabe... who has now penned as comprehensive, heartfelt and even-handed a theatrical look at the issues surrounding mental illness in America as you ever are likely to see.”

—**Chicago Tribune**

Also by David Rabe
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