

## ***“Rose’s Dilemma” Regales with Neil Simon Wit at Sierra Madre Playhouse***

**By Fran Syverson**

Rose Steiner has two dilemmas, actually. Living virtually in isolation in her seaside home in the Hamptons, she’s running out of money. She can’t face up to that, as she’s always been a best-selling author. She tries to keep on with the life to which she’s long been accustomed. Not even cautionary advice from a young companion, Arlene (Elizabeth Gordon), who is trying to help Rose budget, phases her.

That’s not all. Rose’s other dilemma is that she simply cannot let go of her late lover, Walsh (Don Savage.) “Late” is right; Walsh has been dead five years! He does, however, hang around. Rose sees him, talks to him, even leads him up the stairs to her bedroom. His sometimes-eerie portrait graces the cottage wall.

Both are (or in Walsh’s case were) writers. But Rose now has writer’s block. She’s not been able to produce anything new in years, not, in fact, since Walsh suddenly died. And that is what’s led to her financial brinksmanish.

As handsome a ghost as one might like to have haunting them, Walsh also offers clues whereby Rose might redeem both her income and her professional ranking. He confides he has a nearly completed manuscript gathering dust in a drawer. At his insistence, Rose engages Gavin Clancy as a ghost writer to finish the last pages.

Enter Clancy, the essence of a down-and-out crime writer. Shirt-tails dangling, knees peeking through holey jeans, Clancy is brash, sassy, and unkempt. (We might even say “diskempt,” if there were such a word!) Played by Norman Dostal, the young man emanates with ease a balance of chutzpa and deference. He brings new exuberance into Arlene’s life, and we watch as his charm grows on her.

Rose’s bearing is that of a woman accustomed to being deferred to—a demeanor she maintains even in her reduced circumstances, only occasionally letting down her façade and acknowledging her vulnerability. The fantasy world in which she lives with Walsh blurs, until she’s uncertain herself how much of it is “real,” and how much of her own imaginative making. She’s superbly played by Margaret McCarley. On opening night, one of her earrings dropped bouncily to the stage floor. Missing nary a beat, “Rose” commanded Clancy to “pick it up.” The ad lib, and its accompanying gestures (to a round of applause) were so good that it wouldn’t be surprising to find them in upcoming performances!

Managing the tangle of lines between those who can hear Walsh (Rose and us) and those who cannot, takes a master’s touch. Therein lie many possibilities for misunderstood comments, and for double entendres. Playwright Neil Simon pulls it off convincingly.

While *Rose’s Dilemma* with its comedic situations affords us a few hours of escape from our world, it also brings some more somber moments of a surprising, touching reconciliation.

Roxanne Barker directs the play, and Ward Calaway is producer. Emilie Brazeau is stage manager, assisted by Louisa Brazeau. Jerry Marble designed the set, and Aimee Brazeau its interior—a charming beach house with bamboo furnishings and starfish as decor. Costumes are by Lois Tedrow, with Rose’s costumes by Margaret McCarley, who wears them. Lighting designer is Jonathan Acuna. Bob Postelinik, Steven Shaw, and Barry Schwam tend to the sound and lights. Carpentry and construction are by Calaway and Marble, and properties are handled by Anne Marie Atwan. John Johnson is responsible for poster art and photography, and, with Calaway, for program design. Philip Sokoloff is publicist. House manager is Orlando Mendosa.

Rose and her friends will be seeking solutions to her “dilemma” weekends through Sept. 27. Curtain time is 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. for Sunday matinees. Admission is \$20 general, \$17 for seniors (65+) and students, and \$12 for children 12 years and under.

The Sierra Madre Playhouse is located at 87 W. Sierra Madre Blvd., Sierra Madre. Free parking is available in city lots. Nearby restaurants on Baldwin Avenue and Sierra Madre Boulevard offer pre-theater dining for every taste. For reservations or more information, phone (626) 256-3809, or visit the website, [www.sierramadreplyhouse.org](http://www.sierramadreplyhouse.org), for information or for online credit-card sales.