



# CurtainUp

The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings

## A CurtainUp Review

### A Good Farmer

[A Good Farmer](#)

By [Simon Saltzman](#)

*Mother's advice: Don't fall in love with a farmer—* Bonni



Photo l to R: Ariel Woodiwiss and Janice Amaya (photo credit: Lianne Schoewiesner)

Notwithstanding a poor title, the American Theater Group has picked a fine new play for its inaugural production in their new location at the South Orange Performing Arts Center. While the press release uses the quaint phrase "ripped from today's headlines" to draw our attention to what is indeed topical and timely, playwright Sharyn Rothstein uses pungent humor to draw the audience into a forthright story that has become

increasingly politicized. How do members of a small New York State farming community respond to the struggle to survive of a farmer who they suspect is employing undocumented immigrant labor?

"Mick Jagger died, the bull not the rock star," Bonnie Johnson (Ariel Woodiwiss) tells us in earnest while standing in front of the sprawling cabbage patch on her farm in Elba, New York (nicely tiered by set designer Lianne Arnold). This also allows for the quick assembling of a kitchen and other locations.

The loss of the bull on her farm is significant, but not nearly as devastating as was the death of her husband David seven years ago leaving her with an infant son to raise and a farm to run. At the start of the play Bonnie has actually been keeping the farm going for the past seven years with the help of Mexican immigrants, one of whom, Carla (Janice Amaya), has become a live-in friend since the two pregnant women first meet at the local hospital. Unseen during the play are Carla's husband, child, and other Mexican farmhands.

The playwright does a little disservice to two other characters who impact the lives of both Bonnie and Carla early in the play by making them close to caricatures. Becoming part of the community and serving on various school functions isn't easy for Carla who has to contend with the smug patronizing of a town resident and busybody Rosemary (Brenda Withers) who suspects that Carla is not here legally.

When Carla tells Rosemary she is not able to help with a school rally or a bake sale because she needs to work, a blatantly condescending Rosemary responds with "You people are the laziest people." Rosemary is not above letting the immigration authorities follow up on her suspicions. The other trouble maker is Gabe DuBay (Todd Lawson), a brawny and belligerent out-of-work alcoholic who Bonnie would be nuts to hire. He threatens to burn down the barn in revenge for her not hiring him.

**Search *CurtainUp* in the box below**  
[Back to \*Curtainup\* Main Page](#)

### PRODUCTION NOTES

A Good Farmer by Sharyn Rothstein  
 Directed by Kel Haney

Cast: Brenda Withers (Rosemary Devlin, Lu, Officer Shirley Sender), Janice Amaya (Carla Gutierrez), Todd Lawson (Gabe DuBay, David Johnson, Rich Parks), Ariel Woodiwiss (Bonnie Johnson)

Set Design: Lianne Arnold

Costume Design: Summer Lee Jack

Lighting Design: Daisy Long

Sound Design: Emily Auciello

Production Stage Manager: Stephanie M. Holmes

Running Time: 2 hours including intermission

South Orange Performing Arts Center

<http://www.sopacnow.org/good-farmer>

Tickets: \$25 to \$45

From 01/24/18 Opened 01/27/18 Ends 02/04/18

Review by Simon Saltzman based on

performance 01/27/18

### REVIEW FEEDBACK

Highlight one of the responses below and click "copy" or "CTRL+C"

- I agree with the review of A Good Farmer
- I disagree with the review of A Good Farmer
- The review made me eager to see A Good Farmer

Click on the address link E-mail:

[esommer@curtainup.com](mailto:esommer@curtainup.com)

Paste the highlighted text into the subject line (CTRL+ V):

**Feel free to add detailed comments in the body of the email. . .also the names and emails of any friends to whom you'd like us to forward a copy of this review.**

For a feed to reviews and features as they are posted at <http://curtainupnewlinks.blogspot.com> to

Although *A Good Farmer* has only one intermission it is structured in three parts with Act Two taking place seven years before Act One. In it, we see Bonnie's tender caring for the dying David (also played by Lawson) and the helpful hospital nurse Lu (also played by Withers) convincing Bonnie she needs to take on help although there is apparently little money. Except for the overly broad strokes that define Rosemary and Gabe, other characters they portray are more believable, cleverly introduced and smoothly integrated into a plot that involves an investigation by immigration officials. The acting on the whole is splendid throughout.

Amaya is standout as Carla, a woman who, with her makeshift family, lives with the fear of exposure and deportation. Woodiwiss is excellent as the resilient and courageous Bonnie whose reliance on Carla deepens into a bond as well as a friendship. Director Kel Haney has also beautifully guided both Withers and Lawson through their multiple roles as he also steers this provocative play to a satisfying and surprising conclusion.

©Copyright 2018, Elyse Sommer.

**Information from this site may not be reproduced in print or online without specific permission from [esommer@curtainup.com](mailto:esommer@curtainup.com)**