

INTERVIEW: Michelle Pawk stars in marriage-centered play in NJ

[John Soltes](#) January 31, 2019



Photo: Andre Braugher and Michelle Pawk star in Tell Them I'm Still Young. Photo courtesy of Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade / Provided by Press Play with permission.

Tony winner Michelle Pawk is no stranger to the stage. She has built a successful career on Broadway for several years, bringing to audiences touching, dramatic and comedic portrayals of a variety of characters.

Whether it was her Tony-winning turn in *Hollywood Arms* or her musical

additions to *Hairspray*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Chicago* and *Seussical*, Pawk's many roles have been varied and diverse. Her latest project is *Tell Them I'm Still Young*, a dramatic play by Julia Doolittle.

Pawk stars opposite [Emmy winner Andre Braugher](#), and the show continues through this weekend at the South Orange Performing Arts Center in South Orange, New Jersey. The production comes courtesy of American Theater Group, for which Pawk serves as chairperson of the board.

Pawk and Braugher signed on the dotted line after a successful reading of the play at Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York City.

"We all were so inspired to try and find a way to work together again and help Julia develop this play and give her a platform to work it out and see it and realize it," Pawk said in a recent phone interview. "She's a young, new writer and just incredibly talented, so we were just anxious to work on it together."

In the play, Pawk portrays a woman grieving the loss of her child. Braugher is her husband, and their marriage is tested as they work their way through the bereavement process.

"There were things about it that I immediately connected with," she said. "We find her in a moment in her life where she's of a certain age. The work, the career that defined her for decades no longer works for her. She's a poet, and she's not been able to write for several years now. The two of us, Andre and I, we share and suffer the tragic loss of our daughter. It's really a great love story for this 35-year-old marriage and these people who generally really do love each other. It's about the two of them trying to find one another again through the midst of this grieving process."

Although the description makes *Tell Them I'm Still Young* sound sad and tragic, there's a great deal of humor and poignancy in the telling of this tale.

The two-hander is also interrupted by two younger characters who help the leads through the grieving.

“I will say there are parts of her, the artist part of her, I identify with,” Pawk said. “I also identify with being a certain age and feeling like things are a little bit out of my grasp and out of my control. The loss of the child part ... that’s the one thing you spend your life trying not to experience.”

Pawk called the play rich and layered, and she is impressed by Doolittle’s realistic writing of a married couple who have been together for 35 years. To help her sell this relationship on stage, Pawk and Braugher both rely on their own respective marriages.

“I’ve been with my husband for 25-26 years, something like that, and I know Andre has been married a long time,” she said. “There’s a shorthand that comes with that. There are assumptions, good and bad, that people make when they’re together that long, and yet also it resonates in this play how much effort it takes to allow somebody to grow and to change and to just be there for them in that sort of way. It’s very, very complicated and yet really universal I think the story. I think anybody anywhere will be inspired by it. It’s beautiful.”

There is hope from those involved in the production that this limited run of *Tell Them I’m Still Young* will attract the right producers or theater owners in New York City for a return engagement across the river.

“We’re only half an hour from the city, so it should be easy for other producers or theater owners to come out and take a look at it,” Pawk said. “I believe that’s the hope. I’m always a little skeptical to talk about anything in the future because you just never know. I want to make sure that I enjoy what we’re doing right now because I’m really, really grateful for the experience.”

Pawk added: “I like to think of the whole run as an exploratory process. ... I think the play is so rich, and these characters are so rich, that we’ll continue to mine things and find things all the way through the process. I don’t know that I ever feel like, oh, I got it. I always feel like there’s always room to grow, and there’s always more to find. ... The play starts, and you kind of get on a ride. You get on a ride and hope you make it out safely on the other end.”

By John Soltes / Publisher / John@HollywoodSoapbox.com

Tell Them I’m Still Young, starring Andre Braugher and Michelle Pawk, runs through Feb. 3 at the South Orange Performing Arts Center in South Orange, New Jersey. The production comes courtesy of the American Theater Group. Click [here](#) for more information and tickets.