

## TWO RIVER LIFESTYLES

## Back on Stage NJ Rep Presents 'The Promotion'

By Mary Ann Bourbeau

The world premiere of Joe Giovannetti's play, "The Promotion," began its run at New Jersey Repertory Company March 5, 2020. Like everything else though, the show shut down shortly after it started due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The play was originally set to return in September 2021 but was pushed back once again out of safety concerns. It is finally ready to reopen Jan. 27 through Feb. 20, with most of its original cast returning to their roles.

"We started rehearsals on Jan. 11 and it was so weird," said Sophia Lucia Parola, who returns in the role of Trish. "Everything is still intact, in the exact place we left it. It feels like we were just there yesterday but it's been two years."

"The Promotion" revolves

around Trish and Josh, who are coworkers and good friends. Trish is a single Black woman who is responsible for taking care of her ailing mother. Josh is a married white man who is the sole breadwinner for his family. When both of them are up for the same promotion, their competitiveness pushes them to their limits. The play ponders the notion of how far people are willing to go to get ahead. It's a comedy, albeit a slightly dark one, about surviving in the dog-eat-dog world of business.

John Caliendo, who hails from Point Pleasant, and Phillip Clark are returning to their roles, but now Anja Lee has replaced Chantal Jean-Pierre in the show, directed by Evan Bergman.

"It's like life," said Parola. "It's dark, but you find ways



COURTESY NJ REP  
Phillip Clark, Sophia Lucia Parola and John Caliendo appear in "The Promotion" at New Jersey Repertory Company Jan. 27 through Feb. 20.

to laugh about it. These are the things people struggle with in real life."

"The Promotion" marks Parola's NJ Rep debut.

"It's an honor and a privilege to do theater again af-

ter everything we've been through," said Parola.

The Manasquan resident began acting at Brookdale Community College under longtime theater professor John Bukovec, whom she

credits with much of her skill.

"I took a theater appreciation class and then an acting class, and I fell in love with it," said Parola. "He didn't like musicals much; he wanted us to be actors. I took private lessons with him and it helped me build my résumé."

After majoring in journalism and acting at Brookdale, Parola studied radio and television and earned a degree in communications from Monmouth University. She feels honored to be among such a talented cast in a play that mirrors the issues and struggles that people face in real life.

"My character is a woman of color, but it's not just about that," said Parola. "It's about a woman in business trying to fight for equal pay and what she believes in. My character is taking care of her sick

mom. I grew up taking care of my mom, who was paralyzed when I was 9. I really relate to the character's burden."

Parola is grateful to be acting again, especially at a theater that emphasizes new and original works.

"I love the energy here at NJ Rep," she said. "They really welcomed me. It feels like family. I'm honored to be among people who are so talented and make me better."

Tickets for "The Promotion" are \$50 and can be purchased by calling 732-229-3166 or visiting njrep.org. Masks are required as well as proof of COVID vaccination and booster. If not vaccinated because of a doctor-approved medical exemption, audience members need to present a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the performance date.

## RESTAURANT REVIEWS

## Dinner With Bob

By Bob Sacks

## DRIFTHOUSE By David Burke



BOB SACKS  
A unique presentation, the Pretzel-encrusted Crab Cake was sandwiched with pretzel sticks.

When we envision a neighborhood restaurant, the frequent image is a small, casual, warm and cozy little spot on a street corner, or a storefront in a small shopping mall. Then how can a large beachfront restaurant in Sea Bright, with floor-to-ceiling windows displaying expansive ocean views, and a lively, extensive bar area, manage to capture that intimate "Cheers"-like setting?

I'm still trying to sort that out, but indeed, DRIFTHOUSE by David Burke, at the Driftwood Cabana Club, pulls it off with ease. The combination of the lighting, food, music, and service made it feel very homey and

welcoming, not at all large and impersonal. The menu offers some Burke signature dishes, such as Clothesline Bacon and Short Rib with Cavatelli as well as modern renditions of a number of other Italian-Mediterranean foods. To this end, Burke hired Executive Chef Toni Charmello, who is the only female chef to lead one of his kitchens, of which there are now more than a dozen. She brings a strong background in Italian foods and wines, and her influence on the menu is readily apparent.

From the extensive appetizer list, we chose Grilled Flatbread (\$18); a pizza-like base topped with wild mush-

rooms, caramelized onions, Gorgonzola cheese, thyme, and a splash of truffle oil, made for an interesting spin on bruschetta. The savory topping was very enjoyable. One for the table is a must!

Pretzel Crusted Crab Cake (\$22), with tomato jam, orange and chipotle aioli was innovative. We had expected a crushed pretzel coating on the crabcakes, so we were surprised to see a raft of pretzel sticks sitting across the top and bottom of the generous mound of mostly solid crabmeat. The use of the pretzel sticks not only created a very tasty combination of flavors and textures, but also provided a flashback to one of my favorite childhood snacks.

A more traditional presentation, the Tuna Carpaccio (\$20), which arrived as a circle of paper-thin slices of raw tuna with lemon, olive oil, strips of fennel and dotted with halves of Kalamata olives, was a light and tasty appetizer.

From a selection of pastas, we chose the Vegetable Lasagna (\$28) just because it sounded more unusual. Eggplant, zucchini, spinach, carrot, three cheeses, and a rich, savory tomato sauce, dished-up as a large serving, resulted in a very satisfying middle

course. Indeed, it would be more than adequate for an entrée for one diner as well.

David Burke is justifiably famous for his roast chicken, so it was a must to order the Organic Chicken Entrée (\$33) This is served with Farrotto (risotto made with faro instead of rice), Tuscan kale, root vegetables and chicken jus. Of course, when dining in one of Burke's restaurants, one should always expect the unusual or some sort of culinary reinvention, and this dish did not disappoint. The chicken breast, thighs and leg were presented as a single pyramid-like object, rising from the center of the plate. These parts were encased in a crispy skin, further enhancing the illusion that this was all one single piece. The chicken was juicy and moist and a favorite dish.

The other entrée, Shrimp and Octopus Veracruz (\$38), seemed rather tame both visually and flavor-wise, compared to the drama of the preceding chicken. Plated with tomato, olives, capers and broccoli, this was a bit underseasoned, and would have benefitted from more shrimp and octopus and less broccoli.

A large side dish of crispy Brussels Sprouts (\$10) with

horseradish cream, was crunchy and tender, the piquancy of the horseradish setting them off perfectly.

A Lemon Tart (\$12) with fresh raspberries and crispy meringue kisses and a scoop of raspberry ice cream made for a light and sweet finish to the meal. If you plan ahead, and can save room, Executive Pastry Chef Stuart Marx offers some iconic desserts to be shared by two or more diners: Cheesecake Lollipop Tree (\$18) and Chocolate Cake "baked in a tin" (\$24).

In addition to the regular menu, there are special menus and live music on most other nights of the week. Tuesday is \$7 Burger Night, Wednesday offers half-price sushi and sake specials, Thursday is Date Night with Chef Toni's Italian specialties and a prix fixe, three-course menu at \$39 a person, and Sunday is Lobster and Oyster Night with no corkage fee for the first bottle of wine.

There is an extensive wine list, with many interesting Italian choices in addition to other regions of the globe. For dessert, a choice of a port flight of three, or a riesling flight of three, sweet and fortified wines, a broad selection of ryes, scotches and bourbons provide numerous other options.

In addition to the warm, friendly vibe exuded by DRIFTHOUSE by David Burke, there are so many dining choices that on any night of the week you can eat a well-priced burger or sandwich, on another sushi, or explore the regular menu as well. Indeed, there is something for everyone here and it's offered up in such a way that it will make you want to become a regular.

Bob Sacks, longtime food and wine buff, writes about food, wine and restaurants in this column. Follow him on Instagram @dinnerwithbob.

**SHREWSBURY  
FRIENDS MEETING  
QUAKERS**  
ORGANIZED 1672  
[www.ShrewsburyQuakers.org](http://www.ShrewsburyQuakers.org)

Are you celebrating an  
engagement or wedding?

Share your good news with our readers  
by announcing your celebration  
in The Two River Times

\$100

Includes an announcement and color photo in The Two River Times and posting on [tworivertimes.com](http://tworivertimes.com)

Call 732-219-5788 or email [editor@tworivertimes.com](mailto:editor@tworivertimes.com)  
to place your announcement today.

